

Literary routes-cultural entrepreneurship and sustainable development starting from Asia Minor

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Abstract

Literature is a powerful cultural resource that can make a decisive contribution to an alternative development of the tourism sector. The sustainable development of tourism businesses through literature requires a holistic approach, including cooperation between public and private stakeholders, the creation of thematic itineraries, education, digitisation of literary archives and promotion of cultural activities. The article discusses the fact that Greece has a wealth of literary heritage that can be exploited in tourism planning, developing cultural entrepreneurship also in areas with particular historical references to Asia Minor such as the islands of the North East Aegean Sea.

Keywords: Literary Tourism; Asia Minor; North East Aegean Islands; Entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

The concept of sustainability in tourism refers to the balance between economic growth, preservation of the cultural and natural environment, and social well-being (Hall, 2019). Literary tourism is included in special and alternative forms of tourism and is a subcategory of cultural tourism. Literary tourism, as an alternative form of tourism activity, contributes to the promotion of cultural heritage while also promoting local economies.

Through literature, a destination acquires narrative value as tourists experience through the eyes of literary heroes and authors (Hoppen et al., 2014). This practice is not recent, given that, as early as the 19th century, travellers visited the homes, graves and favourite places of famous authors. Examples of successful applications of literary tourism can be observed in England, such as Stratford for Shakespeare and Hogworth for the Brontë sisters (Manola, 2019). Literary tourism offers multiple benefits to the regions where it is developed as it enhances cultural identity but more importantly attracts tourists throughout the year. [UNWTO, 2021; Tsatalmpasoglou al, 2024]

1.1.1. The main manifestations of literary tourism include

- visits to authors' birthplaces or residences: many tourists wish to see up close the homes where their favourite authors lived and created.
- Tours of places mentioned in literary works: Travelers visit places that were the setting for famous novels or poems.
- Participation in literary festivals: Events that celebrate literature and attract readers and writers from around the world.
- Literary tours: Organized tours that follow in the footsteps of an author or the locations of a work.

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Educational dimension: offering visitors the opportunity to learn more about the life and work of important writers and to connect the place with history. (Manola et al., 2020) (Manola et al., 2020a).

In Greece, literary tourism is in a developmental stage. Despite the richness of Greek literature, the organized promotion of this form of tourism is limited. However, there are important initiatives. Recent surveys show the potential, for example, of Kazantzakis' works in Heraklion and, in recent years, the impetus given by Islop's 'The Island' to an already visited site, Spinalonga, because of its history. But also in other areas involving more specialized forms such as travelogues or detective literature [Manola & al, 2022; Manola & al, 2023; Tsatalmpasoglou & Manola, 2024a; Tsatalmpasoglou & Manola, 2024b]. One of the important benefits of literary tourism is the fact that it can engage areas that are not particularly developed in terms of tourism and in a sustainable way that has only positive things to offer to the inhabitants.

2. Greek writers from asiaminor and literary routes

Asia Minor was a source of inspiration for many Greek writers, who, through their work, recorded the historical, social and cultural changes of the region. Thus, the exploitation of local writers can be a powerful tool for the development of tourism in the North-Eastern Aegean islands that communicate with the opposite Asia Minor coast. Asia Minor was the cradle of a flourishing Greek civilisation, which gave birth to important writers. Their experiences in this region, as well as their links with islands such as Lesvos and Chios, and two islands that today belong to Turkey, namely Imbros and Tenedos, are reflected in their works, offering valuable testimonies to the time and place. Some of the authors are briefly presented below [Beaton, 1996; Kostelenos 1979] together with indicative activities that could be developed to promote their works for tourism.

2.1. Elias Venezis

Born in Kydonia (Aivali), Asia Minor, Elias Venezis lived first-hand the tragic experience of captivity and uprooting during the Asia Minor Catastrophe. These dramatic experiences were captured in his first novel, "The Number 31328" (1924), where he describes with intensity and realism the hardships he suffered in the "labour battalions". In his work "Aeoliki Land", Venezis brings to life the peaceful coexistence of Greeks and Turks before the catastrophe, while in his novel "Galini" he describes the difficulties faced by refugees when they settled in Greece. His mother, a native of Lesbos, links the author to the island, where he lived after his release from captivity.

Literary Route: "Journey to Mytilene and Aivali - The Path of Elias Venezis"

- Guided tour of the areas described in "Number 31328" and references to the historical events of the Asia Minor Catastrophe.
- Visits to museums and cultural centres dedicated to the Asia Minor Catastrophe, where evidence of the life and work of Ilias Venezis is exhibited, as well as testimonies of the events of the period.

2.2. Dido Sotiriou

Her work "Bloody Bodies" (1962) is one of the most important books on the Asia Minor Catastrophe, depicting the life of Greeks in Asia Minor and the refugee experience. The inclusion of all and greater tourist flow to the two islands now belonging to Turkey could strengthen the memory not only of the expatriate Imbrians and Tenedites but also provide a history lesson

Literary Route: "Journey to Imbros and Tenedos. In search of the roots of Dido Sotiriou".

- A tour of the villages of the Greeks of Imbros.
- Storytelling workshops on the theme of "Bloody Bodies".

2.3. Giorgos Theotokas

A literary journey: "On the trail of the Greek bourgeoisie in Constantinople. The city of George Theotokas".

- A walk in Peran and the old Greek schools.
- Reading excerpts from "Leonis" in historical cafes.

2.4. Stratis Doukas

Born in Moschonisia, Stratis Doukas recorded his experience of captivity and uprooting in his work "Story of a Prisoner" (1929). This book recounts the captivity of a Greek soldier during the Asia Minor Catastrophe and his adventure until liberation.

Literary Route: "From Moschonisia to Mytilene" The source of inspiration of Stratis Doukas

- Guided tour of the points that inspire the narrative in "Story of a Prisoner".
- Discussion on the refugee identity of Lesbos.

2.5. Maria Iordanidou

In "Loxandra", she presents the story of a Polite housewife, highlighting the culture and traditions of the Hellenism of Asia Minor and engaging the vast wealth of Asia Minor's culinary tradition.

"Everyday life in Istanbul".

- Pilgrimage to the churches of the city mentioned in 'Loxandra'
- Courses in the Polite cuisine

2.6. Giorgos Seferis

George Seferis (1900-1971), one of the most important Greek poets and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1963, was born in Smyrna, Asia Minor. The traumatic experiences of the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the pain of uprooting permeate much of his work. In his collection "Strosi", Seferis captures the grief and inner search caused by the loss of his homeland. His poem "Helen" is a philosophical exploration of the futility of war, using the ancient myth of Helen of Troy to comment on the needless sacrifice of people and cultures on the altar of conflict.

Literary Journey: "The Poetry of Uprooting - Following Seferis from Smyrna to Chios"

- Reviving George Seferis' journey from Smyrna to Chios, combining the geography of Asia Minor with the reference points in his poetry, as he describes the sense of loss and nostalgic longing for the lost homeland.
- A visit to museums and cultural sites that commemorate the Asia Minor Catastrophe and uprooting, with an emphasis on the poet's experiences and how he conveyed them in his literature.
- Presentation of Seferis' work through poetry readings, highlighting his strong criticism of the war and his anguish for human destiny.

2.7. Kosmas Politis

The lost Smyrna. In his masterpiece novel "Stu Hadjifragou" (1962), Kosmas Politis masterfully captures life in Smyrna before the catastrophe of 1922. Through the pages of the book, the author recreates the cosmopolitan character of the city, its colourful neighbourhoods, and the harmonious coexistence of different nationalities, while at the same time lamenting the impending loss of this magical world. The atmosphere of Smyrna, with its smells, sounds, and images, emerges as a paradise about to be lost forever, creating a feeling of nostalgia and melancholy for readers. The title of the area "Hadjifragou" becomes the symbol of this lost homeland and the popular quarter where the plot of the novel develops.

Literary Route: "Smyrna - In the footsteps of Kosmas Politis"

- A visit to the Smyrna waterfront: The visitor stands in front of the historic waterfront of Smyrna, where key events of the city took place. The words of Kosmas Politis emerge in the mind: 'And here came the sea before me, great, vast as the past' from 'Stu Hadjifragou', suggesting the connection between the sea and the past, memory and loss.
- A tour of the Hadjifragou district: The Hatzifragou district, which gives the novel its name, is the center of the tour. A walk through the narrow streets and the ruins of old houses revives the sense of the multicultural life described in the book.

2.8. Fotis Kontoglou

Fotis Kontoglou (1895-1965). After the disaster of 1922 and his uprooting from his homeland, he fled to Lesvos and later to Athens, where he continued his creative process, developing his own artistic language. In his works, such as "Ayvali, my homeland", he depicts with nostalgia and tenderness his homeland, Ayvali, which no longer exists. The memory of the city and its people, as well as the reference to the daily life and customs of the place, give his works an air of authenticity and vitality.

Lesvos, where Kontoglou settled after the disaster, provided him with a new canvas to develop his creativity and recreate the memories of Ayvalik.

Literary Route: "From Ayvalik to Lesvos"

- A visit to Ayvalik: The first stop on the "Literary Route" is Aivali, Kontoglou's birthplace. Despite the fact that the town was destroyed during the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the revival of its image through the works of Kontoglou offers a unique opportunity for visitors to experience the earlier life and values of the town.
- Tour of Lesvos: Here, visitors can visit churches and monasteries where Kontoglou's hagiography resonates and comes alive through his iconography and the themes that influenced his painting.
- Discussions and comparisons between literature and cinema: Many of Kontoglou's works, such as "Ayvali, my homeland", have been transferred to the screen, giving visitors the opportunity to discuss the adaptation of literature to film art.

3. Entrepreneurship in tourism and literature and the Role of Internet and Digital Technologies

Cultural entrepreneurship refers to the creation and operation of culture-related businesses, as well as the promotion of goods and services with cultural significance, which can also provide economic benefits [Maniou, 2024; Maniou & al, 2024]. A typical example of this activity is the development of cultural routes in a city or region, which enhance tourism, contribute to local development and support sustainability. Entrepreneurship in tourism is one of the most important factors of economic development, and literature can play a key role in fostering it. Cultural tourists, according to Maniou & al (2025), seek self-actualization, personal enrichment and self-expression, which makes it critical to understand their needs in order to develop successful cultural destinations. Success depends on creativity in design, combined authenticity and interpretation, as well as sustainable structures and easy accessibility of these destinations [Zhou & al, 2017]. At the same time, cultural entrepreneurship contributes significantly through investments in human, economic and social capital, promoting authentic experiences and enhancing the economic and social development of destinations. Among the benefits of this practice are the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage, strengthening the local economy, creating new jobs, and more. Literary tourism, as a specialized form of tourism, links the creative book industry with tourism development, utilizing literary sites, authors and narratives as a means of attracting visitors (Herbert, 2001). Maniou, 2023),(Maniou, 2024b),(Maniou et al.,2024b).

Finally, we underline the importance of all digital technologies in education domain and for cultural entrepreneurship training and education. ICTs support education for everyone, give new methods for efficient teachers training, improve the knowledge retention, encourage collaboration, improve transparency, create learner-centered approaches, invent new teaching methods, and accelerate the knowledge acquisition. Moreover, provide new tools for knowledge representation and endorse the education activities and methods via virtualization, mobilization, artificial intelligence, and through new learning environments- worlds. More specifically in entrepreneurship training ICTs are very productive and successful, facilitate and improve the assessment, the intervention and the educational procedures via Mobiles which brings educational activities everywhere [31-32] and through various ICTs applications which are the core supporters of education [33]. The exploitation of AI, STEM & ROBOTICS raise educational procedures into new levels of adaptability, innovation and performance [34-35], while games transform education in a multisensory, very friendly and enjoyable interaction [36]. Additionally, the adoption, enhancement and combination of ICTs with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation and emotional intelligence cultivation [37-43] brings the mental abilities to the core of the education procedures and policies, and accelerate and improve even more the educational practices and results, especially in business and new entrepreneurs training [44-50].

3.1. Literary routes and business opportunities

The route from the North-Eastern Aegean islands to Izmir, Ayvali to Imbros and Tenedos can be an alternative proposal for literary tourism. Proposed actions based on the above literary routes include:

- Thematic guided tours based on the works of the Asia Minor writers, with visits to sites mentioned in the books.
- Digital applications that will allow visitors to discover information about the authors through interactive maps.
- Creation of literary cafés in central locations, with libraries and discussions on Asia Minor literature. The city of Mytilene with its rich literary tradition, but also the whole island and the existence of special cafés, such as the former "Panhellenion" mansion and others, can support such efforts.
- Creative writing workshops for visitors to connect their own experience with the place and history.
- Collaborate with local businesses to promote products related to the Asia Minor tradition, such as gastronomy and folk art.
- Organising literature festivals in Chios and Mytilene.
- Creation of podcasts with narratives and analyses of literary works.
- Integration of educational programmes for pupils and students.
- Collaboration with hotels and local businesses for thematic tourism packages.
- Promotion of tourist itineraries including Imbros and Tenedos and their inclusion in holiday packages for those visiting the islands
- Linking literary tourism with other forms of alternative tourism as the islands are particularly rich in culture and natural beauty.

The implementation of these actions can potentially boost the local economy of the North East Aegean islands.

4. Research results

In the survey conducted in December 2024, 102 people participated who were not originally from Istanbul, the Asia Minor regions or the North-Eastern Aegean islands. The aim of the survey was:

- To explore tourists' views on their intention to visit areas associated with Asia Minor
- To ascertain the attitude of a tourist towards the potential of a book on the sustainable development of a tourist destination
- To ascertain the interest of tourists in visiting the islands of the North-Eastern Aegean.

Some of the results are reported below.

4.1. QUESTION 1

"Do you think that literary tourism is developed in Greece?"

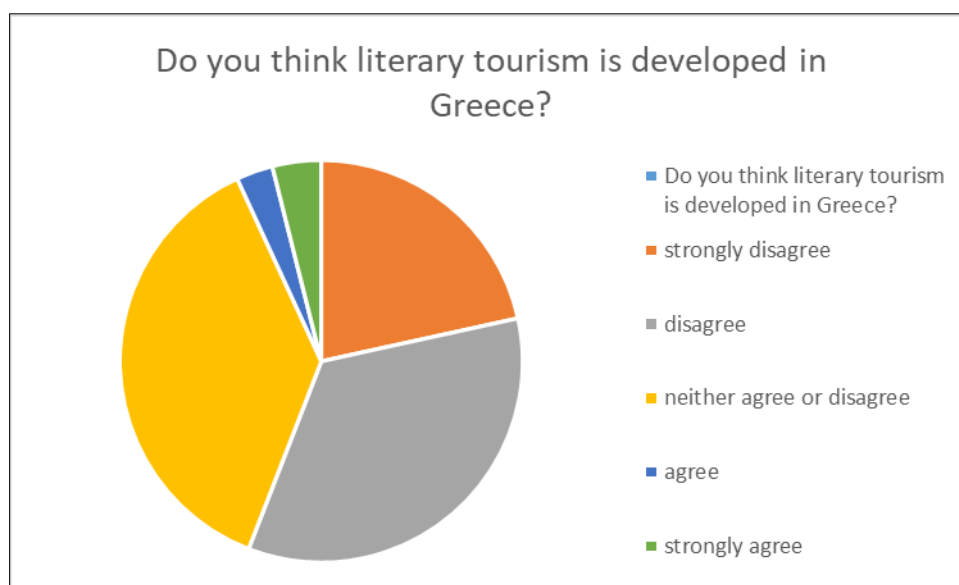


Figure 1 Do you think literary tourism is developed in Greece?

According to the responses of the participants, 22 people state "strongly disagree", 35 "disagree", 38 of them "neither disagree nor agree", 3 agree and 4 "strongly agree"

4.2. QUESTION 2

"Have you visited areas because of an author, book or literary work that has been brought to the small or big screen?"

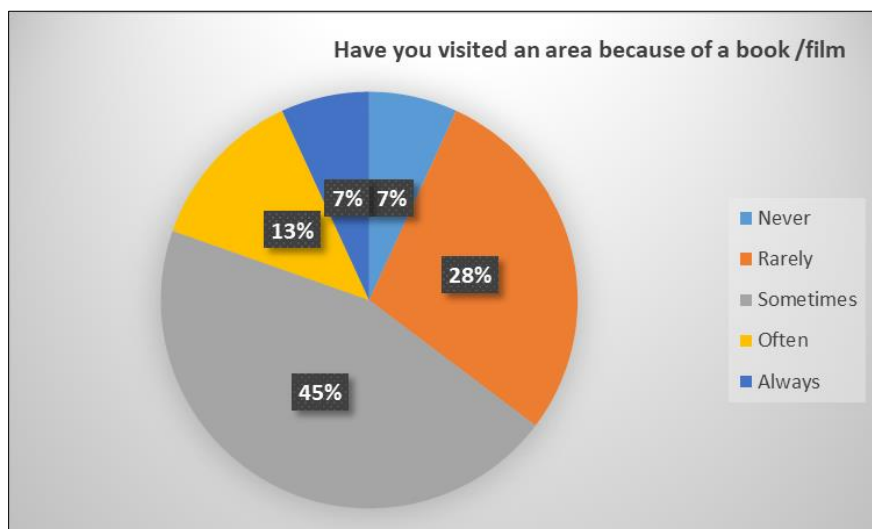


Figure 2 «Have you visited an area because of a book/ film? »

According to the responses of the participants, 7 people answered "never", 29 people answered "rarely", 46 people answered "sometimes", 13 people answered "often" and 7 people answered "always"

4.3. QUESTION 3

"Reading literary works about Asia Minor could increase my desire to visit the regions concerned."

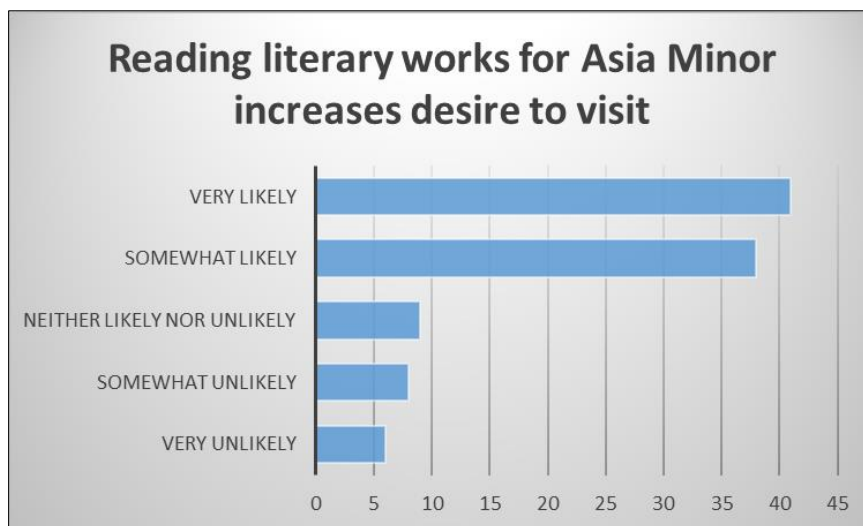


Figure 3 «Books for Asia Minor increases desire to visit Lesvos & Chios»

6 people answered "not at all", 8 people answered "a little", 9 people answered "moderately", 38 people answered "a lot" and 41 people answered "very much"

4.4. QUESTION 4

"I would be interested in participating in a literary trip that includes visits to places in Chios and Lesvos connected to Asia Minor."

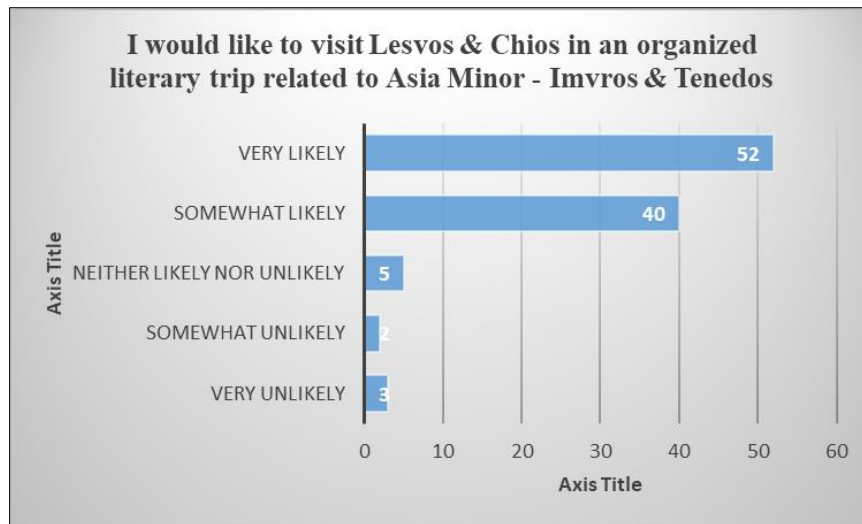


Figure 4 «I would like to visit the islands in an organized trip»

In the question, 3 people chose "not at all", 2 people chose "a little", 5 chose "moderate", 40 chose "a lot" and finally 52 chose "very much".

4.5. QUESTION 5

"In your opinion, which of the following are the key skills and knowledge that need to be cultivated for the effective development of literary tourism?"

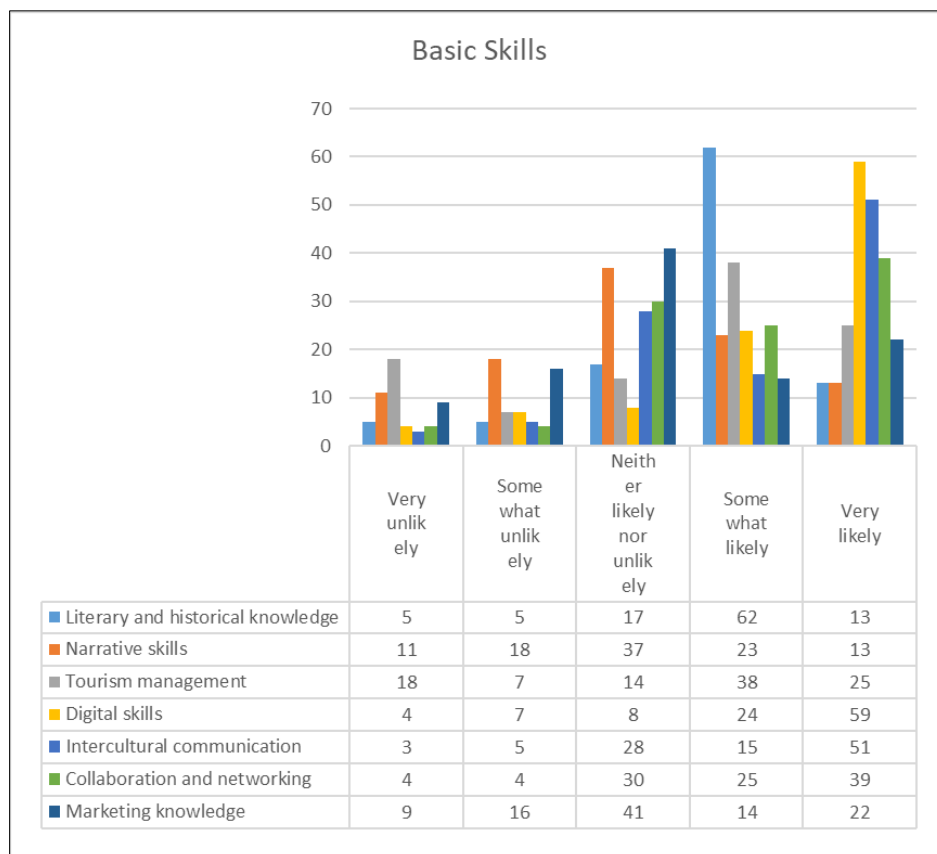


Figure 5 «Basic Skills of a literary destination»

The above table shows the skills that should be developed in order to cultivate literary tourism in order of preference 62 people answered "very much" to historical memory and literature as the answer to "very much" is digital applications with 59 people, followed by "intercultural communication with foreign languages" with 51 answers, 39 chose the ability to use, 38 answered "very much" to tourism management

4.6. QUESTION 6

"How do literary narratives influence tourists' perception of a destination?"

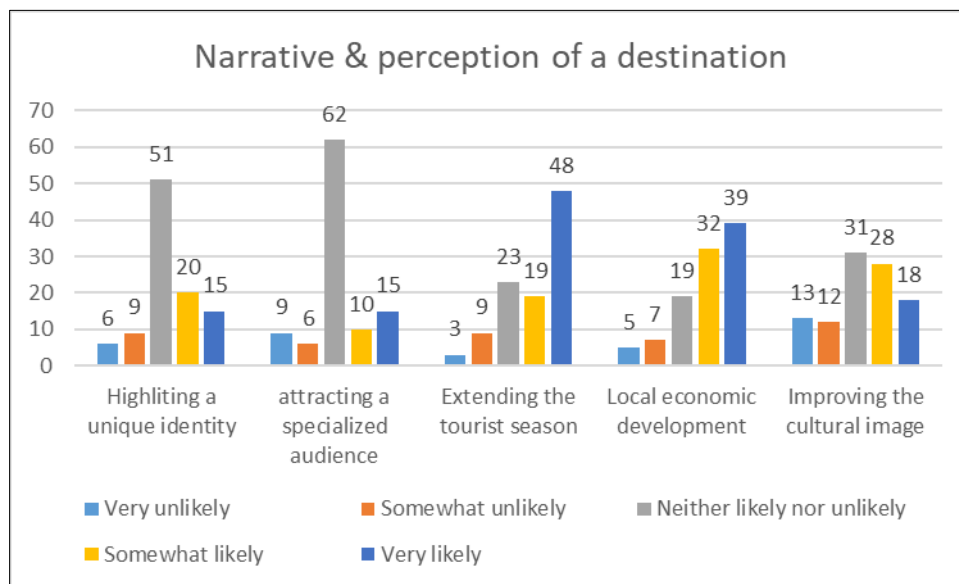


Figure 6 «A book and perception of a tourist for a destination»

48 respondents answered "very much" regarding the extension of the tourist season, 39 about the promotion of the local economy, 18 on improving the cultural image of the region, and 15 responses were given for attracting a specialized audience and highlighting the uniqueness of the destination.

5. Discussion of results

From the above results, it seems that the relationship between the islands of the Northeastern Aegean and literary works of tourism dedicated to Asia Minor, Imbros, and Tenedos can bear fruit if factors such as awareness of the opportunity, knowledge of the subject, proper preparation of future tourism professionals, and adequate training are taken into account. The narratives of travelers or authors create images and emotions that can attract tourists to specific locations [Brown, (2018); Tsatalmpasoglou & al (2025)]. According to Urry (2019), literary tourism can serve as a tool for destination differentiation, attracting visitors who seek cultural and spiritual experiences. Technology and digital media, which appear from the research results to be of primary importance to tourists, can also enhance the sustainability of literary tourism by enabling interactive experiences through augmented reality applications and virtual tours [Poria et al., (2006); Tsatalmpasoglou et al (2024)]. The digital presentation of books, the digitization of museum spaces, and the ability to use applications are some examples of the ongoing evolution in the field of computer science. Technology can also significantly contribute to improving educational methods by utilizing the possibilities of informatics. This can be achieved in various ways, such as enhancing metacognition and emotional intelligence (Bravou & Drigas, 2019). Particularly, tourism professionals and regional leaders should invest in knowledge to benefit from it. Awareness and proper education to ensure the correct management of tourism services are two of the factors that can improve the local economy by extending the tourist season and highlighting the uniqueness of destinations.

6. Conclusion

Literary tourism in Greece, despite its benefits, faces significant challenges. A primary issue is policy development, as the lack of it limits the full potential of this sector. Additionally, many literary sites remain unknown to the general public due to insufficient promotion and publicity. To address these challenges, the development of a national policy that will outline a strategic plan for promoting literary tourism is essential. At the same time, literature can function as

an educational tool, enhancing the understanding of the culture and history of destinations. There are various actions that can support the development of entrepreneurship by strengthening the local economy on the islands of the Northeastern Aegean. An interdisciplinary approach combining literature and tourism can decisively contribute to the sustainable development of the sector by merging entrepreneurship in tourism with the works of Asia Minor authors.

Compliance with ethical standards

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The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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