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# e-Participation Model for Sustainable Cultural Tourism Management: a Bottom-Up Approach

Aline Chiabai<sup>1,\*</sup>, Krassimira Paskaleva<sup>2,3</sup> and Patrizia Lombardi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Basque Centre for Climate Change BC3, Bilbao, Spain*

<sup>2</sup>*Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis, Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe GmbH, Germany*

<sup>3</sup>*Herbert Simon Institute, Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, United Kingdom*

<sup>4</sup>*Dipartimento Casa-Città, Politecnico di Torino, Italy*

## ABSTRACT

The paper presents a 'bottom-up approach' for cultural tourism management, based on the development of an e-participation website for an Italian city, where the stakeholders are placed at the centre of the decisional process. The analysis provides an indication on how to personalize and differentiate the cultural tourism offer according to the stakeholders' perspectives and to specific territorial characteristics. Innovative techniques of stakeholders' engagement are offered by information and communication technologies tools that can play a vital role in today's cultural destinations. However, the study shows that the Web is yet to be utilized as an effective tool in stakeholders' participation processes. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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**Keywords:** action–research cycle; bottom-up approach; cultural heritage; e-participation; e-services; ICT — information and communication technologies.

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable cultural tourism is often seen as a key generator of the resources necessary to preserve and enhance cultural heritage

(EC, 2000; DigiCULT, 2002). During the past decades, the concept of cultural heritage and its management has expanded while becoming more complex in a globalized world. The rapid economic changes and the consequent urban development have indeed contributed in diversifying the tourist offer. The tourism industry can be described nowadays as a network of partnerships that create the tourism product (Bramwell and Lane, 2000). These alliances, taking many different forms and operating with different objectives (Reid *et al.*, 2008), should be taken into account for a sustainable management of cultural heritage. In this context, existing top-down approaches (where policies are defined by the government or central administrations) have failed to accomplish their purpose as they do not consider many stakeholders' views and the vast diversity of local assets that go far beyond the 'objectively recognized heritage'. On the contrary, bottom-up approaches, based on stakeholder participation, can be successful as they allow jumping from administrative-oriented organizations towards user-oriented organizations (Torres *et al.*, 2006). One of today's main challenges for tourist destinations is to engage all relevant stakeholders into the participation processes and develop efficient and effective models providing solutions that can reflect stakeholders' needs and expectations in a democratic way.

Before analysing how this can be achieved, it is important to define the stakeholders in the context of cultural heritage. As generally described by Freeman (1984: 46), stakeholders are 'any group that can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization's objectives'. This definition can be adapted to the cultural

\*Correspondence to: A. Chiabai, Basque Centre for Climate Change BC3, Alameda Urquijo 4, 4<sup>o</sup> - 1<sup>o</sup> | 48008 Bilbao, Spain.  
E-mail: aline.chiabai@bc3research.org

heritage context in which stakeholders are the groups that can affect cultural heritage management or are somehow affected by it, directly or indirectly. These groups include tourists, citizens, local communities, local infrastructures, public services, tourist agencies, information centres, and central administrations.

Innovative techniques are needed to design participatory processes as relationships between stakeholders are becoming more and more complex in today's world (Buhalis, 2003). As Brohman asserts (1996: 251), 'participation has been given multiple meanings and has been connected to multiple methods of implementation in the last few decades'. Different techniques are available providing different levels of involvement, ranging from 'passive participation', where the stakeholders simply receive information to 'active participation', which empowers the stakeholders to take part in the decision-making process (Pretty, 1994). Techniques can also be classified according to the timing (ad hoc or continuous permanent debates), to the audience (broad or restricted) and to the level of interaction (limited or extended). As regards the specific tool to employ, there are many possibilities and combinations according to the specific objective to achieve (see OECD 2001 for an extensive discussion). Innovative techniques of stakeholders' engagement might be offered by information and communication technologies (ICT) (OECD 2001), which in fact play a vital role in this regard, due to their increasing adoption by a high percentage of local destinations.

Results from a recent EU FP6 project ISAAC (*Integrated e-Services for Advanced Access to Heritage in Cultural Tourist Destinations*; <http://www.isaac-project.eu>) show indeed that tourist cities and communities can ensure the promotion and management of their cultural heritage by adopting innovative ICT in association with a high degree of cooperation across sectors, research disciplines, and borders.

This paper presents some of the main results of the above project and an application of the participatory approach within a specific case study for an Italian cultural city (Genoa). In particular, the paper shows the development of an e-participation website for cultural tourism management, where the definition of cultural

heritage originated around the shared vision of its importance for local identity.

The model proposed is designed for an 'active participation process', where stakeholders play an active role in decision-making about conservation and promotion of cultural heritage. The model uses ICT tools to develop the participation process together with focus groups and survey questionnaires, as discussed in detail in the next sections. The proposed participatory process aims at replying to three key research questions: (i) identifying the most important cultural sites in the City of Genoa as perceived by the various stakeholders and their territorial intangible values; (ii) analysing the proposed actions for improving their accessibility; and (iii) identifying the e-services that could valorize them, while improving cultural tourism management.

The results obtained for the City of Genoa show how innovative ICT tools and methods can be used towards this goal in other cities and communities.

The paper is structured as follows: The next section introduces some theoretical background by (i) defining cultural heritage, tangible and intangible assets, as well as intangible territorial values; (ii) discussing the essential role played by stakeholders in identifying, promoting and managing cultural heritage; and (iii) explaining how ICT tools can help in promoting local cultural heritage on one hand and in designing the participatory process on the other hand. Section 3 presents the case study and illustrates the framework adopted for e-participation in the Italian city. Section 4 reports the main results for the three identified research questions. Section 5 discusses the results with their main implications for decision-making, reporting major conclusive remarks and the direction for future research.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### The definition of cultural heritage and its 'intangible territorial values'

Cultural heritage is generally defined as the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the

present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations (Copeland and Delmaire 2004).

When speaking of physical or 'tangible cultural heritage' we refer to buildings and historic places, monuments, artefacts, and others that are considered worthy of preservation for the future. 'Natural heritage' is also an important part of a culture, encompassing the territory, countryside and natural environment, including flora and fauna. These kinds of heritage sites often serve as an important component in a country's tourist industry, attracting many visitors from abroad as well as locally. The 'intangible cultural heritage' comprises social values and traditions, customs and practices, aesthetic and spiritual beliefs, artistic expression, language and other aspects of human activity. Naturally, intangible cultural heritage is more difficult to preserve than physical objects. In cities, tangible and intangible heritage is interwoven with the urban fabric, society and lifestyle through time and across space and is seen as concretely territorial.

Besides the tangible and intangible components of cultural heritage as described above, the meaning placed upon them, their representation and personal interpretation is also important. This adds either cultural or financial value (Ashworth *et al.*, 2007). Cunnell and Prentice (2000) refer to 'tangible and intangible criteria' to evaluate museums, where the intangible is related to thoughts, judgments, emotions, visitor interest and learning, which can significantly contribute to understand the visitors' experience.

Literature on environmental and cultural economics has highlighted the ability of heritage to produce intrinsic and extrinsic 'territorial values' (Kolstad, 2000; Fusco Girard and Nijkamp, 2009), which are intangible aspects referring to the existing relationships between cultural heritage and the (urban) space which gives tourism an intra-generational importance. According to Valtieri (2007), the concept of value implies an appreciation and a judgment that can be subjective, as it depends on the personal background of the stakeholder (education, personal beliefs, interests, knowledge of the cultural heritage), his role, functions and responsibilities. The appreciation of the value can also vary according to the society

of a particular historical period (cultural, tourism, historical, economic values, to mention a few).

In this paper we focus specifically on tangible cultural heritage and its interpretation in terms of intangible values as defined above, including historical, cultural, tourist, social, environmental and emotional appreciation.

The process of recognizing the 'territorial value' of cultural heritage is central in the ISAAC case study of Genoa and is focused on the concepts of 'uniqueness' and 'diversification'. As regards uniqueness, the key question is related to the identification of the material irreplaceable things and characteristics of cultural tourism resources. In this perspective, the value of a territory is related to its perceived distinctiveness from the many stakeholders having an interest in cultural heritage use and management. The concept of diversification relates to the necessity of creating a diversified cultural tourism offer based on the sustainable valorization of the many cultural resources present in a certain territory (Dematteis and Governa, 2005), which can be associated with different perceived 'territorial values'. For this purpose, in the ISAAC case study, different stakeholders are involved in a debate to identify the most significant local cultural sites and their associated territorial values.

### **The role of stakeholders in identifying, promoting and managing cultural heritage**

Cultural heritage and its safeguard is a major concern around the world. In order to establish identities, as well as attract visitors, cultural heritage has to be identified, protected, conserved, managed and interpreted by communities, regions and nations. In cities, cultural heritage is intrinsically linked to other urban sectors, such as art, history, archaeology, ecology and tourism, and has political, social and economic connotations (Howard, 2003). Because of its nature and mission, heritage is considered a demand-led activity, involving a wide range of public and private stakeholders, including local authorities, public agencies dealing with tourism, heritage or environmental quality, local businesses, hotels, travel agents, development agencies, transport operators, as well as local residents and ubiquitous tourists.

These stakeholders play a crucial role in the identification of cultural heritage and 'territorial values' on one hand and in its sustainable management on the other hand. First, territorial values are per se something very strongly related to the stakeholders' positions and functions, and each of them describes places using his/her own interpretative categories, as discussed in the previous section. Taking into account these different interpretations allows equilibrium to be reached between a standardized vision of the city and the image that the different stakeholders have of their own territory. These multiple interpretations of the territory represent the first step in recognizing the existing cultural diversity and cultural identities. In this sense, cultural heritage is not anymore a 'static and objective' heritage, which is commonly inserted in the traditional tourist circuits, but it can be represented in a dynamic temporal and spatial process involving all the relevant stakeholders. The case study discussed in this paper is an attempt to address this challenge.

Second, involving the main stakeholders in the participatory processes is an essential step to guarantee a sustainable management of cultural heritage and cultural tourism, addressing many of the challenges that cultural destinations are facing. These include a more effective and efficient management of cultural heritage, the promotion of intangible heritage that has proved to be difficult (Paskaleva-Shapira and Azorin, 2009) and the maximization of benefits in local communities (Svensson *et al.*, 2005). Each stakeholder category can address specific issues and problems regarding cultural heritage and can promote the fulfillment of one type of measure. Participatory processes among stakeholders can also help in promoting communication between different institutions, which is often lacking, such as public transport, museums and tourism information offices. Improved communication will later result in improved services to the visitors.

For the purpose of the case study, four main categories of stakeholders are analyzed: residents, tourists and local and external service providers. Each of them is expected to have different views in identifying the main cultural heritage of the city and the associated territorial values, as well as in promoting this heritage

within a sustainable management plan. Residents and tourists are both users of cultural heritage, but their view might differ significantly, as they have different interests. Residents experience the city day after day, and their needs are mostly related to improving their urban living conditions. Tourists usually stay in the city for a relatively short period of time, and their expectations are in the direction of improving the tourist offer. On the other hand, service providers can be analyzed from the supply side as suppliers of the service and not as users. As a consequence, their main objective is to meet the demand of the different categories of users, within a long-term vision of the cultural tourism sector and its development within the urban context. Service providers usually seize the importance of a cultural resource for its indubitable historic, artistic and cultural value.

Considering that host communities are positively capable to better cope with endogenous cultural heritage problems at the city level (Innes and Booher, 1999), giving citizens a voice in decision-making, particularly on cultural tourism aspects, is of vital importance to keep a well-balanced urban, social, cultural and environmental local development. Enhancing the level of participation can help overcome the overall negative socio-cultural impacts on tourist destinations (Sigala and Leslie, 2005).

For the above reasons, in the systematization of the tangible cultural resources in the ISAAC case study, the adoption of a 'stakeholder participatory approach' (Bayley and French, 2008; OECD, 2001) is extremely important, requiring the active engagement of urban public and private actors. This is based on a 'bottom-up' participation process (OECD, 2001), involving residents, tourists and service providers in a discussion about cultural heritage identification, promotion and management.

A similar tool has been developed in Montreal in 2007 with the objective of encouraging sustainable tourism choices, increasing local incomes and producing economic incentives for cultural sites preservation. The tool is known as the Montreal Geotourism Map Guide, and it is built on stakeholders' engagement and motivation (<http://www.montrealgeo.com/?cat=10>, accessed 24 February 2011).

### **The role of ICT in promoting local cultural heritage and stakeholders' participation processes**

ICT can be used to promote and safeguard cultural heritage, local identities and territorial values, as defined in the previous sections. In addition, it can help in promoting stakeholders' participation processes.

Promotion of local heritage can be greatly enhanced by using the Internet and related e-services. These latter can be employed to improve the diffusion of information about cultural heritage for both tangible and intangible resources, to interpret the visitors' experience of local assets and to support communication with service providers (Mitsche *et al.*, 2008). At the city level, these tools should allow citizens 'to contribute their own story to the cultural memory, which is in line with a diverse, multicultural and multilingual cultural heritage vision' (European Commission, 2002). Interactive maps, virtual tours, journey planner and personal profiling are all examples of e-services that can be used before, during and after the visit, to disseminate information, to plan the trip and, in general, to promote and enhance enjoyment of cultural heritage. Specifically, the provision of cultural tourism e-services is based on an interactive information exchange with the satisfied customer, underlining a strong customer focus (Rust and Kannan 2003; Baida *et al.*, 2004).

ICT can also help in promoting active participation of citizens, tourists and stakeholders in general in the management of cultural heritage (Go *et al.*, 2003). The effective engagement of the stakeholders depends on many factors, such as the establishment of a two-way relation between the central or local administrations (responsible for cultural heritage management) and the stakeholders, the accessibility of information through the Web, the possibility of enhancing the people's capacity for listening and engaging in discussion, the improvement of public awareness, the 'assured listening' to the different voices and the need for transparency and accountability (OECD 2001, 2003). ICT tools can efficiently help in these domains. Tools supporting a two-way relationship between the central administration and the stakeholders can take the form of 'solicited' or

'unsolicited feedback'. The latter includes 'letter boxes' for suggestions and complaints, information management software packages for collecting quantitative and qualitative information, and analytical reports including the commitment of the central administration. On the other side, 'solicited feedback' includes both online and more traditional 'off-line' methods, such as focus groups, surveys, workshops and conferences (OECD 2001). Focus groups and surveys can be set up online using the Web, unlike workshops and conferences. Focus groups consist of a group of people gathered in one specific place (physical or in the Web) to discuss and exchange ideas on some issues. During focus groups, workshops and conferences, it is possible to provide the participants with all the relevant information, ask them specific questions and initiate an open discussion. Surveys are used to interview a larger sample, which should be representative of an entire population.

ICT tools can also improve accessibility of online information using, e.g. search engines, software for style checking and online glossaries, which improved the intelligibility of texts and documents. Before identifying the specific tools to be used, however, it is important to analyze user needs and expectations and assess their ability for data searching. In this perspective, ICT tools can help in collecting the stakeholders' opinions and suggestions, using, e.g. online discussion forums, online mediation systems, ICT supporting traditional 'face-to-face' focus groups and surveys.

The case study presented in this paper focuses on issues closely relevant to the above debate. A cultural tourism e-participation website is designed for the City of Genoa, where a public debate is promoted among different stakeholders through e-forums, e-blogs and focus groups. The identification of specific e-services that could facilitate enjoyment of cultural heritage was one of the objectives of the study. A specific tool is used for this purpose, the 'blended focus groups' (Chiarullo and Rocca, 2007). This tool was created in the context of waste management within the project PANDORA (PARTicipatory Networks and Databases fOR sustainable Research and Assessment), developed by FEEM in cooperation with the City of Venice). It aimed to design a

participatory and interactive platform to engage citizens in a debate to express their views, needs and concerns about waste management in the City of Venice. This tool has been adapted to the specific context of the ISAAC case study for cultural heritage management; it consists of face-to-face activities supported by a questionnaire and integrated with online discussion among stakeholders. The method is discussed in detail in the next section.

## THE CASE STUDY: THE E-PARTICIPATION MODEL FRAMEWORK

### Action–research cycle

The methodology used to design the e-participation model in the pilot study of Genoa is anchored to the ‘action–research’ (A–R) recursive cycle that is a ‘learning-by-doing’ approach characterized by a spiral of steps; each one composed of a loop of planning, action and revision (Varisco, 2002). This is a ‘systematic form of inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry’ (McCutcheon and Jurg, 1990: p. 144). The process begins with problem identification and the development of some key research questions, which are answered through structured and semistructured interviews, questionnaires, collective debate in focus groups, etc. The plan is continuously evaluated and systematically revised during its implementation, taking into account the results obtained in each step. An important aspect of using this methodology is the involvement and participation of different stakeholders as active and legitimate subjects in the changing process, which is therefore defined as a bottom-up approach. The approach for applying the A–R recursive cycle in the ISAAC case study is an integrated two-steps approach combining ICT tools with specific focus groups techniques. The first phase consists of designing a user-friendly geo-referenced Web system ([www.issac-genovaculture.eu](http://www.issac-genovaculture.eu)) as a tool to facilitate participation processes, using e-blogs and e-forum instruments with privacy security. The second phase aims at effectively activating the participatory process using the website realized in the first phase and involving the stakeholders. This latter phase is achieved using the

‘blended focus groups’ methodology, which integrates face-to-face activities with online discussion.

The two phases described above are monitored and fine-tuned using satisfaction and SERVQUAL analysis (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990; Tyran and Ross, 2006) (Figure 1). This latter is a quantitative survey that measures the appreciation of quality by assessing the gap between expectations and satisfaction of the service provided. It is used in the ISAAC case study to test the Web portal usability and functionality.

The next sections report the results obtained in the two phases described above, while the SERVQUAL and satisfaction analysis are described in Chiabai *et al.* (2008a).

### Blended focus groups: application

Four main groups of stakeholders are involved in the process: residents, tourists, local and external service providers. The first are considered as the everyday direct ‘users’ of cultural heritage in the city, holding a non-written knowledge of the city and its assets. The second category refers to national as well as foreign tourists. Finally, service providers are qualified experts in cultural heritage services with different competences. Local service providers, tourist agencies, cultural associations, museums and the municipality, have specific knowledge of

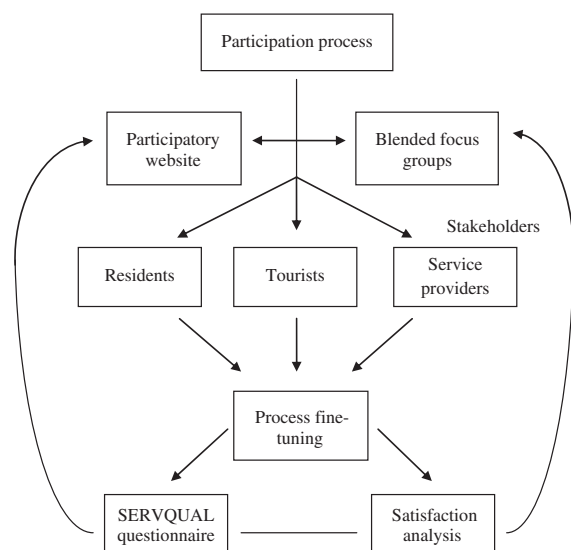


Figure 1. Action–research recursive cycle (adapted from Chiabai *et al.*, 2008a).

the territory and its resources. External service providers, IT providers, associations for the conservation of historical and artistic heritage, are nation-players with wide competences for improving tourism and cultural heritage offers. Because external service providers constitute a broad category of experts, it was not possible to have a representation of all the groups included in this category. Therefore, service providers are analysed as one single category, which includes both local and external providers.

The blended focus groups were structured in face-to-face activities and online debates. Face-to-face activities were aimed at providing an answer to the first two research questions mentioned in the introduction using a short questionnaire: identifying cultural sites and territorial values and suggesting actions to improve their accessibility. After giving some time to the participants to read and answer the questions, a facilitator started a working group discussion about the issues touched in the questionnaire.

The online activities were organized in a room with PC facilities where a facilitator described the e-participation system through website navigation. They aimed to answer to the third research question: identifying the e-services that could valorize cultural heritage and improve cultural tourism management. Participants were asked to start the online debate, moderated by the facilitator, using the reserved area of the geo-referenced participation website. At the end of the session, participants were invited to continue the online discussion from their home. The participation website represents therefore a scaffolding to sustain and extend debates that have been started in a previous face-to-face discussion. The questions asked and the issues discussed during the focus groups are presented in the next section.

Four blended focus groups, one for each stakeholder category, were administered in the FEEM Cultural Factory of Genoa in the period April 2007–February 2008, each involving 8 to 11 participants.

## RESULTS

The main topics discussed in the blended focus groups activities can be categorized into three

main sets corresponding to the key research questions initially identified: (i) which cultural sites are perceived as important by the different stakeholders and their territorial values; (ii) which are the proposed actions for improving accessibility to cultural heritage; and (iii) which e-services should be promoted to valorize the identified sites, while improving cultural tourism management and the visitors' experience in general. In the selection of the sites, participants were asked to consider the tangible local heritage and assign to it a territorial intangible value. As regards the third topic, a definition of *e-services* was presented by the facilitator to the participants using a guide list, and a discussion was initiated about practical examples available on the Web. Results for each topic are reported in the next subsections.

### **Perceived cultural heritage as a source of local territorial values**

Altogether, 58 urban sites were identified by the participants. Besides the most traditional and renowned sites, commonly associated with the city's history and culture (historical centre, museums, palaces and churches) and usually inserted in the tourist circuits, respondents also mentioned less renowned sites (such as small squares, parks and little ports in the neighbourhoods), which are perceived as relevant for their social, environmental and/or emotional values. The latter are particularly linked to the visitor's personal touching experience and can be also associated with the individuals' sense of belonging.

The 58 identified sites can be grouped into three main homogeneous categories, namely, (i) buildings (churches, monuments, palaces, etc.); (ii) urban districts (the historical centre, the ancient port, specific squares with small shops, bars and cafes, attracting different kind of people, etc.); and (iii) districts with natural areas (parks within or outside the city, places with panoramic views and beautiful sightseeing, walls and fortresses around the city, little quaint fishing villages near the city and quarters located outside the urban areas in general). Results are presented here below for the three site categories above mentioned. The analysis of the territorial values confirms that the stakeholders perceive cultural heritage linked to



specific territorial attributes that are relevant to local identities. Respondents were asked to assign a territorial value to each identified site, in terms of historical, cultural, tourist, social, environmental, and emotional values. In order to analyse the answers, we calculated first how many times each single territorial value has been associated with a specific site category (absolute frequency of preferences reported) and, second, the percentage of preferences attributed to each territorial value (by site category) on the total number of responses. Results can therefore be analysed in terms of territorial values revealed by site category and stakeholder group. Figure 2 reports the overall breakdown among territorial values in each stakeholder group, while Tables 1, 2 and 3 show how territorial values are distributed among site categories for each stakeholder group. The most important findings of this analysis are discussed here below.

**Residents.** Figure 2 shows that social values are the most relevant for residents, representing 34% of the total preferences attributed, followed by environmental values that correspond to 25% of the total. The other territorial values are given much less importance, ranging from 8% to 12% of total attributed

preferences. Detailed results in Table 1 show that 53% of the abovementioned social values are reported for urban districts and 26% for districts with natural areas. As a matter of fact, residents attribute great importance to social life and meeting places, urban districts and environmental sites being the most appropriate for this purpose. The great majority of environmental values (89%) are mentioned for districts with natural areas. The small percentage of emotional values (8% in Figure 2, residents) is mainly associated with environmental areas (60%).

**Tourists.** The values that were important for residents are not relevant for tourists anymore, who are more focused on the intrinsic historical/cultural/tourist value of a site, aside from the emotional factors associated with their visit, as shown in Figure 2. For them, cultural, tourist, emotional and historical values are all important, recording respectively 25%, 21% and 19% of the total attributed preferences.

Historical, cultural and tourist values are recorded approximately with the same percentages for buildings and districts with natural areas (Table 2: 37% and 44% of historical values, 45% and 34% of cultural values, and 35% and 38% of tourist values). Districts with

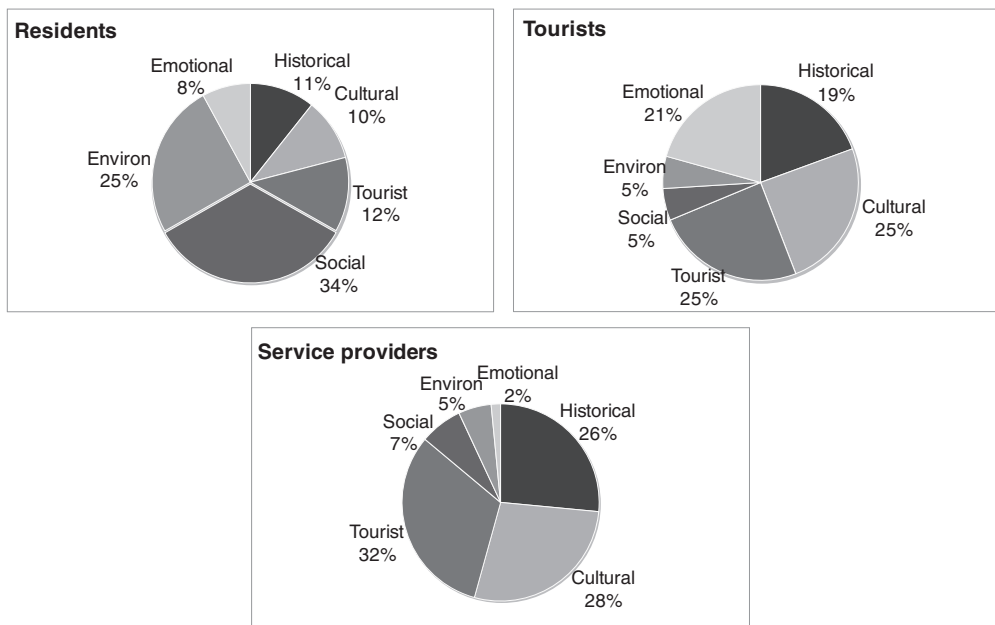


Figure 2. Territorial values by stakeholder group (% on total).

Table 1. Territorial values by site category: residents (% of preferences on total)

Site category	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Cultural</i>	<i>Tourist</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Environ</i>	<i>Emotional</i>
Buildings (monuments, churches, etc)	39%	41%	19%	21%	0%	7%
Urban districts	13%	20%	27%	53%	11%	32%
Disctricts with natural areas	48%	39%	54%	26%	89%	60%
TOT	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 2. Territorial values by site category: tourists (% of preferences on total)

Site category	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Cultural</i>	<i>Tourist</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Environ</i>	<i>Emotional</i>
Buildings (monuments, churches, etc)	37%	45%	35%	56%	41%	19%
Urban districts	18%	21%	26%	20%	11%	17%
Disctricts with natural areas	44%	34%	38%	24%	48%	64%
TOT	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3. Territorial values by site category: service providers. (% of preferences on total)

Site category	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Cultural</i>	<i>Tourist</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Environ</i>	<i>Emotional</i>
Buildings (monuments, churches, etc)	48%	53%	33%	42%	28%	15%
Urban districts	11%	16%	22%	39%	8%	30%
Disctricts with natural areas	41%	31%	45%	19%	64%	55%
TOT	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

natural areas show a slightly higher percentage of historical and tourist values because this category includes wall and fortresses built in the past, which have an enormous relevance from a tourist and historical point of view. Cultural values are predominant for buildings (45%), such as museums, monuments and churches, as expected. Emotional values, equally important for tourists, are mentioned most of all for environmental districts (64%). It is interesting to note the high percent of environmental values registered for buildings (41%). This finding can be explained by the inclusion of the Aquarium of Genoa in this category, which surprisingly has been associated with environmental values. Last, the small percentage of social values (5% in Figure 2, tourists) is mainly attributed to buildings (56%), which probably represent meeting places for tourists.

*Service providers.* Service providers focused mainly on the traditional values usually associated with cultural heritage appreciated for

its historical, cultural and tourist relevance. As shown in Figure 2, historical, cultural and tourist values are the most mentioned, representing respectively 26%, 28% and 32% of total preferences. The answers given by residents and tourists show, nevertheless, that service providers should put more attention on other values as well, which are practically not considered in the current conventional cultural tourism offer (social, emotional and environmental values).

As regards the breakdown among site categories, historical and cultural values (48% and 53%) are revealed primarily for buildings (monuments, churches, etc.), as shown in Table 3. Tourist values are mentioned more frequently for districts with natural areas (45%).

The few environmental and emotional values mentioned by service providers (recording only 5% and 2% of the total, Figure 2) refer especially to districts with natural areas (Table 3).

Finally, it is interesting to note the distribution of emotional values among the three site

categories in each stakeholder group. After the environmental districts, which gather the highest percentage of emotional values for all stakeholders, urban districts are in the second position, while buildings reveal the lowest percentage, except for tourists who attach more emotional values to buildings as compared to urban districts. This is probably due to the scope of their visit, which is more oriented to visit cultural and historical sites.

The analysis shows that investigating the stakeholders' perceptions about the city can clearly help destination decision-makers to define a shared vision of the city that appeals to the various social actors concerned. Therefore, site-specific territorial values from the different stakeholders should be taken into account by local administrations and heritage managers in the sustainable management of the sector.

#### Heritage site analysis and actions for improvements

Respondents have identified four main groups of actions to be taken to improve accessibility to the cultural sites, with differences recorded among the different stakeholders: (i) actions to improve the quality and quantity of tourist/cultural/historical information about the city; (ii) actions to improve and valorize the tourist offer (encouraging cultural events and exhibitions); (iii) actions to restore old buildings; (iv) actions to promote tourist economic activities (incentives to support young entrepreneurship); and (v) actions to improve urban services (strengthening transport connections, promoting a cleaner city, improving safety and security, valorizing multiethnic potentials). Table 4 summarizes the results for each stakeholder group, based on the qualitative responses obtained.

Specifically, with regard to the first line of actions, a critical aspect that was often

mentioned by all the stakeholders is the poor quality and quantity of the information about the city. For example, the need for better lighting and informative panels in the historical buildings is common to the three stakeholder groups. This line of action is therefore strongly requested and should be given some kind of priority, as well as the last action emphasizing the need for improving urban services. Both represent a fundamental basis for an improved management of cultural sites.

The other actions were suggested only by one or two of the stakeholders' categories. In this sense, they are less strong but nevertheless important as they manifest specific point of views. There is a need for improving the tourist offer by promoting diverse itineraries to discover the city, especially the less famous sites, organizing more cultural events/expositions and initiatives to show off the marine history and tradition of the city. This suggestion was emphasized by residents and tourists only, while service providers did not mention these possibilities. The suggestions provided represent opportunities to improve the tourist offer, recommending a range of solutions to the suppliers of the services, based on actual users' needs and expectations.

Restoration of historical buildings and incentives to tourist activities were mentioned only by the service providers, who are more focused on the development of the tourist offer within a medium-long-term perspective. As a matter of fact, many buildings yet need to be restored, and appropriate maintenance should be considered to protect and conserve cultural heritage against air pollution in the long run.

Clearly, the perceptions and the proposed actions represent a significant material for decision-makers and managers for defining priorities of intervention and new action programs for sustaining the cultural heritage in the city.

Table 4. Identified actions of improvement

Actions	Residents	Tourists	Service providers
Improved information	√	√	√
Improved tourist offer	√	√	X
Restoration of historical buildings	X	X	√
Incentives to tourist economic activities	X	X	√
Improved urban services	√	√	√

## **Proposed e-services**

Finally, respondents were asked to suggest a set of e-services that could help in valorizing the previously identified sites, improving cultural tourism management and the visitors' experience. The e-services proposed by the respondents can be classified into informative, communicative and participative e-services. In the first group, the user has a passive presence, only receiving information without interacting with other users or the service providers. The communicative e-services require an active attitude of the user because a dialogue is established among users and with service providers. The participatory e-services, lastly, require the user to be involved in the cultural heritage management at various stages of the decision-making process. Table 5 provides a categorization of the e-services included in each of the three groups.

The rapid and widespread growth of e-services raises the question about which of the three categories should be supported and promoted and whether people are ready to be involved in the e-participation processes. For this purpose, respondents were asked to state which e-service category they think has the highest priority for each type of cultural site. Multiple answers were therefore recorded by each respondent. Figure 3 reports the categorization of e-services for the three stakeholder groups, beyond the site categories, while Figures 4, 5 and 6 show the distribution of e-service priorities within each site category. Results are reported in terms of percent of respondents prioritizing, for each site category, information, communicative and participative e-services respectively.

Overall results show that information e-services are felt to be the most important by the majority of stakeholders (44% of residents, 56% of tourists and 45% of service providers) (Figure 3). Communication e-services are in the second position with a somewhat lower percentage (37% of residents, 44% of tourists and 39% of service providers), while participative e-services are given the lowest priority. About 19% of residents and 16% of services providers see them as a priority, while tourists do not mention them. Tourists probably do not notice for themselves any direct

benefit from participation services. These results suggest that people are still sceptical about the use and contribution of participative e-services.

*Residents.* Residents feel that many cultural sites are lacking of accurate and comprehensive information. As a matter of fact, information e-services are judged to be a priority for buildings (museums, churches, etc.) and districts with natural areas by 63% and 50% of residents respectively. For the same sites, communication e-services are considered a priority by a lower percent of residents (25% and 39% respectively), while participative e-services reveal a much lower appeal (13% and 11% of residents indicate them as a priority).

As far as urban districts are concerned, results show a different pattern. About 43% of the residents identify communicative e-services as the most important; information and participative e-services follow with a lower percentage (29%). The percent of residents mentioning participative e-services as a priority (29%) is however quite high, especially if compared with the responses obtained for the other two site categories (13% for buildings and 11% for natural areas). This might be explained by the need arising from the increasing problems that urban districts are facing, which is partially related to some of the actions identified in Section 4.2. These include the necessity to promote tourist economic activities and urban services, such as transport, safety and valorizing multiethnic diversity. Residents seem to be aware of the fact that the establishment of an active participatory process might be functional in this case.

*Tourists.* Tourists have a different perception of e-services priorities (Figure 5). Information e-services are judged to be a priority for buildings and urban districts by the large majority of them (75% and 57%), while communicative e-services are the most relevant for districts with natural areas (for 60% of the interviewed tourists).

Participative e-services are not mentioned at all, which might be due to the fact that they are felt as irrelevant for their needs.

*Service providers.* Service providers' perceptions are somewhat different from the other two

Table 5. Categories of e-services

e-Services	Description
<i>Informative</i>	
Web information	Web pages including historical/cultural/tourist data and other information about traditions, habits, etc.
Profiling	Allowing the users to identify themselves with a specific 'profile' and to access selected information, avoiding information overload.
Interactive map with virtual tours	Offering tourist itineraries according to users' requests, together with virtual tours of the main attractions or particularities along the itinerary and cultural/historical/tourist information as well.
Video, photo and audio downloading	Materials and multimedia documents downloadable on PC, cell phone and palm.
Promotional spot	Updates about tourist/cultural attractions sent using SMS by a local telephone operator during the visit.
Virtual games	As an opportunity to explore the city as a cultural destination and/or to use the city as a set for popular online games.
Journey planner	Software that makes it possible to plan a trip to any tourist destination, by downloading maps, guided tours, means of transportation, etc.
<i>Communicative</i>	
Blogs and personal promotion	The user becomes the author of the Web content and is therefore at the same time a broadcaster and a receiver. He can upload and share personal photos, videos and other materials about the visit and converse with other users.
e-Communities	Groups of users exchange information and dialogue on specific issues, using Web forums, chat rooms, instant messaging programs, such as MSN Messenger. This makes it possible to form virtual communities of people interested in a common subject.
<i>Participative</i>	
e-Participation	The citizens are involved at a lower stage of the decision-making, as they are asked to provide suggestions and opinions about some specific issues, which might become useful inputs in the decision-making process.
e-Governance	The highest level of interaction with the decision makers as the citizens is directly involved in the decision-making for local actions. In this sense, the citizens have the legitimate right to enter the decision-making process.

groups of stakeholders. About 50% and 73% of them perceive informative e-services as a priority for urban and environmental districts respectively (Figure 6). These site categories are clearly felt to lack some basic information services. For buildings (churches, monuments, museums, etc), communicative e-services are judged to be the most important (58% of them consider them as a priority). During the focus groups, service providers revealed that these e-services should be specifically promoted for historical buildings, where the visitor should be able to exchange information with other visitors and express his suggestions for improving the tourist experience.

There is however a mismatch between the service providers' responses and those of residents and tourists in this regard. As shown in

Figure 5, only 25% of residents and tourists (compared to 58% of service providers) perceive communicative e-services as a priority for buildings (monuments, churches, etc.). This suggests that further analysis should be done before taking any concrete action to investigate more in detail about this discrepancy of opinions. A possibility is to organize a focus group involving all the three categories of stakeholders to discuss this specific issue and find a common solution. This is beyond the purpose of the case study presented, which aims to show how a participative process among stakeholders could work.

As regards participative e-services, a quite high percent of service providers propose them for urban districts (30%), in line with what we found for residents (29%). This might be

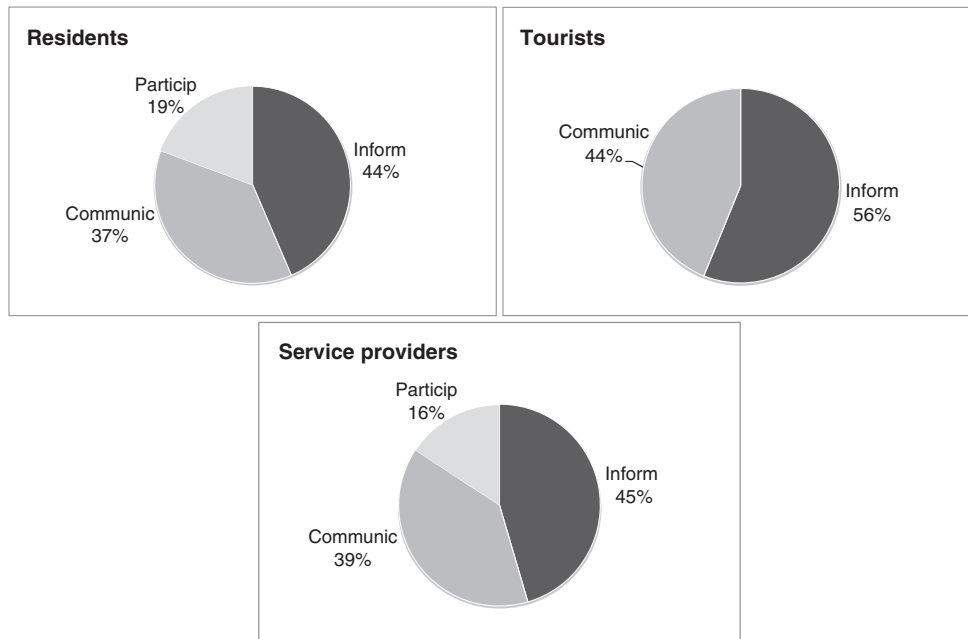


Figure 3. e-Services priorities by stakeholder group (% on total).

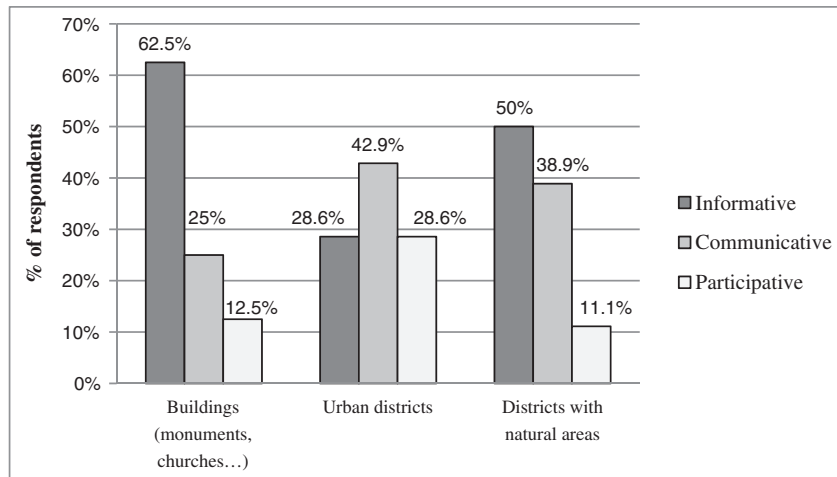


Figure 4. e-Services priorities for residents by service and site category.

explained by the increasing difficulties arising in urban districts, as already discussed.

#### CONCLUSIONS, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper asserts that in the digital era and in the midst of highly connected urban communities,

using participatory tools can significantly enhance the sustainable management of cultural tourism. This would require that the different stakeholders are systematically involved in the decisions about cultural heritage preservation, in order to develop a user-centric approach for sustainable management. This is quite innovative with respect to cultural heritage, which exhibits properties of a common good (see e.g. Frey and

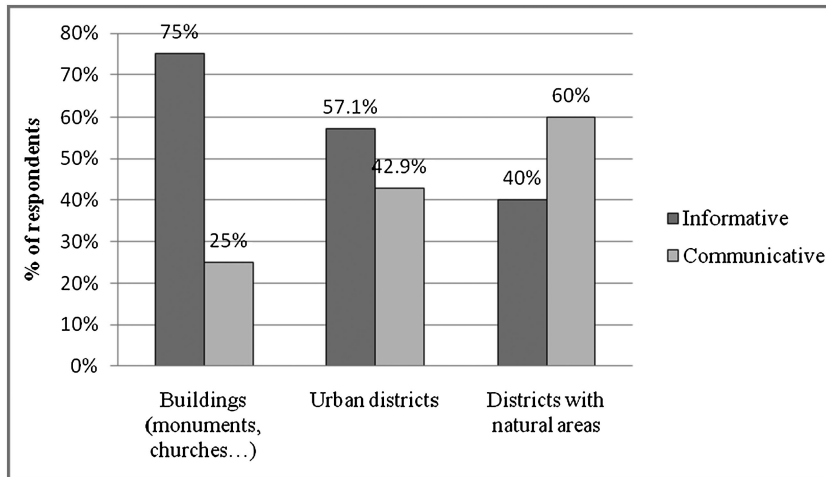


Figure 5. e-Services priorities for tourists by service and site category.

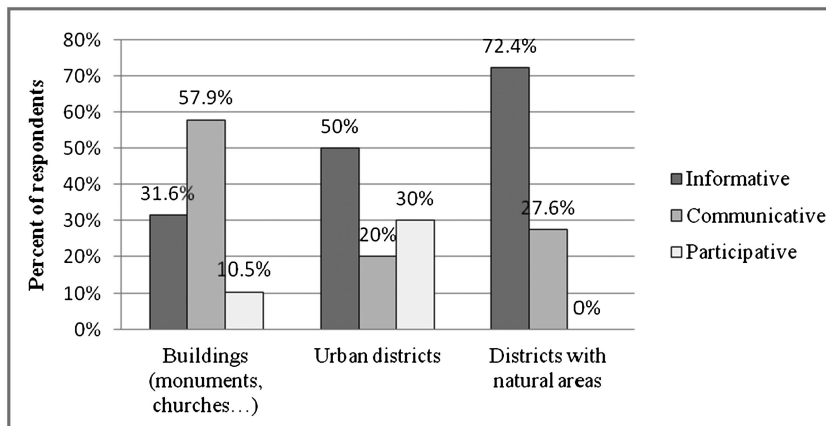


Figure 6. e-Services priorities for service providers by service and site category.

Pamini 2009), and is, therefore, not usually subject to a user preference analysis. This latter is typically performed for private goods instead. We report in the following section the most relevant results that have emerged from our analysis, together with some recommendations for decision-making and indications for future research.

The Italian case study delineates how participatory processes can help in defining territorial values and local identities. It compliments and reinforces recent research findings (Dematteis, 2002; Dematteis and Governa, 2005), suggesting first of all that each stakeholder describes

places using his/her own interpretation and that considerable research is necessary to make explicit individual and collective territorial description and understand the hidden values of the many stakeholders concerned.

The results obtained show that, besides the most traditional territorial values usually associated with cultural heritage (historical/cultural/tourist), other values emerged as vital as well, such as social, emotional and environmental values. However, the latter are yet to be considered in the cultural tourism offer. Service providers, representing the supply side, were in fact more oriented towards the

traditional values, while residents and tourists tended to capture other values as well, corresponding to other interpretations of the territory.

Tourists revealed the importance of emotional values (specifically for environmental and natural sites), besides the most traditional historical, cultural and tourist values. The next research question should investigate on how to expand the tourist offer by improving the emotional experience of tourists in these sites of Genoa (e.g. Lanterna, Nervi Gardens, etc.).

Residents, on the other side, perceived mainly the environmental and social values of the sites, while the traditional cultural/historical/tourist values were felt as much less important. This is explained by the fact that they experience the city in their daily and social life, and their interests (more related to the urban living conditions) are quite different from those of tourists whose expectations focus mainly on increasing and improving the tourist products. Environmental values were attributed mainly to natural sites (parks, natural areas, etc.), while social values were assigned primarily to urban districts; these latter values embrace many meeting places, giving the opportunity to meet and exchange with people (the historical centre, the ancient port, specific squares with small shops, bars and cafes).

The analysis provides therefore an indication on how to personalize the services related to cultural heritage according to the stakeholder category and to the specific characteristics of the territory. The study suggests also that service providers should include other values in their interpretation of the territory if they want to enhance the users' personal experience of cultural heritage. Higher attention is required to the demand side (as affirmed by Torres *et al.*, 2006), as well as to the differentiation of the tourist products (Buhalis, 2000).

Another important result of this study is related to the e-services suggested as a priority by the various stakeholders. Participative e-services received the lowest priority compared to informative and communicative e-services. Tourists did not even mention them. Residents are the category with the highest sensibility towards these services, which were proposed especially for the urban districts of Genoa, characterized by a heterogeneous group of sites

having diverse and mixed necessities (the historical centre, the ancient port, meeting places, etc). Service providers mentioned them as well but with a somewhat lower percentage.

In this perspective, further research is needed to investigate possible ways to achieve a wider acceptance of participation e-services and increase their accessibility, both on the demand and supply side. The reasons why tourists do not 'recognize' the utility of e-participation services for them should also be further investigated.

These results confirm that it is still difficult for host cultural heritage communities to get involved in the cultural tourism debate and urban sustainable conservation through e-participation processes (Chiabai *et al.*, 2008b, Ciborra and Lanzarra, 1999). Torres *et al.* (2006) assert that local governments normally utilize the Internet only to provide information to citizens rather than using it as a two-directional communicative medium, resulting in non-interactive (at the e-service level) and non-participative tool (at the e-democracy level). Still, the few Internet applications meant to provide interactive heritage presentation are mainly focused on conservation and designation of cultural sites rather than on raising awareness, creating empathy for place and amenities or boosting community involvement (Torres *et al.*, 2006).

Future research should focus on the direction of understanding cultural heritage e-participation as a process through which culture, heritage and tourism come together. As suggested by Keskinen (1999), tools aiming to improve public participation should enhance the genuine dialogue, allowing citizens to monitor decision makers' actions, which could subsequently add accountability to the participation process. This calls for more research, policy and actions by the science and urban community that can raise the awareness and knowledge of the citizens on one hand and enhance decision-making and best practices in the cultural tourist destinations on the other hand.

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