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# Civita di Bagnoregio, Italy: towards a people-centred heritage branding approach

Mohamed Amer [a], Manal Ginzarly [b] and Maria-Francesca Renzi [c]

[a]PhD Researcher in Heritage Marketing and Sustainable Cultural Tourism, Roma Tre University, Roma, Italy; [b]School of Architecture and Design, Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon; [c]Department of Business Studies, Roma Tre University, Roma, Italy

**ABSTRACT**

The valorization of the UNESCO WHC emblem as a brand icon overlooks the marketing statement of local heritage sites that are not designated as world heritage. This practice leads to competition rather than collaboration which could result in endangering the intangible cultural heritage expressions and authentic cultural knowledge. Moreover, the tourism market deals mostly with the cultural landscape as a semi-customized product valorizing the role of publicity which might have a high negative impact on the conservation statement of the cultural asset. Consequently, this research investigates the interconnection between the fundamentals of branding and conservative management to enhance the outstanding values of cultural identity manifestations. It is an empirical study that reviews the branding statement of the Italian cultural landscape of Civita di Bagnoregio. It applies an integrated method that combines qualitative and quantitative analysis. It assesses 20 interviews with the key site stakeholders and more than 7000 social media posts. The findings of this study draw a proposal for a people-centred heritage branding approach that seeks to generate a lifelong learning memory for the community and a long-term brand image for the visitors' mentality.

## Introduction

Existing branding approaches mostly create narratives about people's cultures, intending to target various segmentations by satisfying their needs and wants (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Such customer-centric approaches involve reconstructed representations of heritage heavily changed for commercial tourism purposes (Hughes & Carlsen, 2010), and thus cannot be adopted in heritage sites (HSs) given their complex historic layering of tangible and intangible attributes and values. Going beyond a customer-based approach to heritage branding (HB), that mainly links marketing strategies to the so-called outstanding heritage value, this research adopts a people-centred approach that acknowledges the community as a generator of cultural identity (CI) and integrates it as a fundamental pillar that contributes to a site's 'genius loci' and 'sense of a place.' In this framework, and in line with the Burra Charter (2013) and Faro Convention (2005), CI encompasses the tangible heritage forms, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) expressions, and the autochthonous/indigenous/local community. Thus, applying a people-centred approach to HB might sustainably safeguard and transmit the living heritage manifestations of the communities, not only in the lifelong learning memory of the future generations but also, in the long-term memory or nostalgia of the visitors.

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**CONTACT** Mohamed Amer ✉ mohamed.amer@uniroma3.it

The majority of scholarly articles that have proposed models or approaches for branding tourism attractions have primarily recognized HSs as semi-customized products (Muzeza & Van Zyl, 2018; Yusof et al., 2019). Although many studies have discussed and investigated the valorization of the UNESCO World Heritage (WH) emblem as a brand icon (Adie, 2017; Hassan & Rahman, 2015; King & Halpenny, 2014; Ryan & Silvanto, 2014), few have addressed the brand image and its significance for local HSs, which are not designated as WH, and its impact on their conservation statement.

To achieve its aim of examining how HB might disseminate and sustainably manage the cultural knowledge of HSs, especially urban spaces and rural or cultural landscapes where the communities still live, this research adopts a grounded theory approach. The latter is employed as an iterative tool to collect data that describes the main phenomenon of the research (Creswell, 2007) – which in this study relates mainly to developing a conceptual framework clarifying the main dimensions of the people-centred HB approach. Grounded theory constructs and validates the emergent theory by employing participants' experiences as data (Seyfi et al., 2019) and facilitates the study of cultural tourism using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis (Hardy, 2005; Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017).

For the above-mentioned purpose, this investigation combines data from two data sources and applies an integrated analytical framework. The qualitative analysis scans the real conservation statement of the HS, the directions, and future planning through direct observation for one month and 20 in-depth individual interviews with the key site stakeholders. The quantitative analysis reviews the visitors' perception and their interaction with the brand image through some statistical data of the municipality and the analysis of more than 7000 posts shared on social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, and TripAdvisor. Both analyses employ an interpretive-constructivism paradigm to provide a systematic hierarchy of branding HSs and enhancing their image in the memory of both the community and the visitors.

Accordingly, this research proposes a people-centred HB approach that is based on a critical appraisal of applied branding models. It builds upon a theoretical framework that critically reinterprets the Brand Knowledge Model (Keller, 1993), Customer-based Brand Equity Model Pyramid (Keller, 2009), and the Russian Museum of Ethnography (RME) Branding Structure for Visitors (Kovaleva et al., 2018) in heritage studies. The approach is examined through the lens of a case study that provides insights into the negative and positive impacts of massive branding.

This paper is divided into five sections. We begin by establishing a framework that balances the visitors' memory and expectations and the lifelong learning memory of the community. Then, we subsequently present the applied method and the case study. The review of the case study shows the current condition of the cultural landscape and its conservation statement regarding the positive and negative impacts of the implemented branding actions. Then, the results of the qualitative and quantitative data analysis are presented. The last section draws on the results to reflect on their implication for the application of a people-centred HB approach.

## Theoretical framework

In this section, we build our theoretical framework by revisiting multidimensional models in branding studies, including Brand Knowledge Model, Customer-based Brand Equity Model Pyramid, and RME Branding Structure for Visitors. By doing so, first, we address the fundamentals of branding HSs with a focus on urban and cultural landscapes. Then, we promote the people-centred approach representing the brand image of HS and auditing its sustainability.

### *Contextualizing a branding approach regarding the heritage sites' context*

The negative impact of mass tourism and heritage consumption on HSs and communities has been detailed in many studies from city planning, environmental protection, and socio-cultural

perspectives (Chong, 2020; Saufi et al., 2014). In this regard, UNWTO defined cultural tourism as a tourism activity that doesn't only include consuming tangible heritage and ICH assets but also the socio-cultural experience of visitors at HSs and the meanings they ascribe to it (UNWTO, 2019). In this connection, heritage tourism studies have acknowledged HB as a new guiding philosophy that (i) enhances the long-term image of HSs influencing tourists' loyalty to the destination and perception of its quality (Saeedi & Heidarzadeh-Hanzaee, 2018), (ii) fosters identity and a sense of belonging (Di Pietro et al., 2018), and (iii) generates the lifelong learning memory and the behavioural cultural mentality for the visitors and the future generations of a site's community (Jian et al., 2019; Montera, 2018). In this setting, HB can contribute to the 'sense of place' and 'place attachment.' To address HSs management in relation to a cultural tourism market, the following reviews the aforementioned branding models.

Reviewing the first two models 'Keller's Brand Knowledge Model' (1993) and Keller's Customer-based Brand Equity Model Pyramid (2009), the branding of HSs might be structured around brand equity, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand association/image.

**Brand equity** concerns itself with the interaction between the brand and the visitor. To strengthen this interaction, brand equity should be inspired by the integrated interactive marketing communication, meaning the macro-marketing 'MACROM' (Keller, 1993; Shimp, 2010) as a set of decisions. MACROM deals with the communication tools raising the awareness of the community, enriching the visitors' knowledge, and upgrading their loyalty level.

Within the urban branding concept, **brand awareness** upgrades the visitors' skills to recognize the brand name/logo/slogan and distinguish it among others of the same category. Therefore, it creates a unique, favourable and strong brand image of HS, prompting the visitors' decision-making (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019; Shimp, 2010). It sets the lifelong learning memory of the site's community and the visitors' mentality and other stakeholders. Thus, compiling among the stakeholders' needs and wants, HS should reformulate the interpretation methods of its CI manifestation representing its cultural, ethical and social system (Di Pietro et al., 2014). Subsequently, brand awareness may contribute to the evaluation of the marketing performance and the brand familiarity by repeated experiences and may help in reformulating the long-term marketing programmes (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019; King, 2011).

**Brand loyalty** can be affected by visitors' interaction with the tools and methods of heritage interpretation (Robertson, 2015). A well-known and trustworthy brand encourages the visitors and the site's stakeholders to position HS in their priority set through a strong emotional and nostalgic rapport (Aaker, 2013; Keller & Swaminathan, 2019; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Thus, brand loyalty might create a well-established baseline for the brand uniqueness and competitive factors *offering traditional and cultural services that meet the additional visitors' needs, so as to increase visitors' numbers and the related incomes* (Di Pietro et al., 2014; Keller & Swaminathan, 2019).

**Brand association/image** is responsible for determining the visual or verbal expressions in relation to HS values and CI that were characterized by the site's attributes and perceived by the visitors (Aaker, 2003; Heding et al., 2020; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). The dimensions of brand association and image are: (1) the identity, (2) the place, (3) the period (present, temporary or future) and (4) the uniqueness (general or exceptional) (van der Aa, 2005).

Concluding the former structure, brand values can be presented throughout various factors: (1) the pricing policy generating a long-term beneficiary relationship with the distribution channels (especially the private sector), (2) the balance among the visitors' needs and wants, (3) the conservation criteria, (4) the risk preparedness, and (5) the community-based interpretation methods (Kotler & Pföertsch, 2006; Keller & Swaminathan, 2019; Shimp, 2010). Therefore, these factors might ensure the possibility of brand extension, and the effectivity of heritage marketing programmes with various target groups in the cultural tourism market (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

The added value of the third model, namely RME Branding Structure for Visitors (Kovaleva et al., 2018), is that it intercommunicates between the visitor's mentality, needs, wants, and the perception of HS brand image. Considering the national identity and the 'glocalized' understanding of

cultures, the model stresses the necessity of matching between the community and their cultural heritage (CH). The RME model aims to review the manifestations of cultural diversity among the Russian empire's provinces and disseminate knowledge about national heritage to foster tolerance among the locals (Kovaleva et al., 2018). The model considers effectively the method of perceiving the brand by visitors pointing out that 'the operationalization of brand perception of ethnographic museums has particular features owing to the museums' connections with national self-consciousness and identity, state cultural policy and the management of cultural heritage' (Kovaleva et al., 2018, p. 129). It aims to valorize the marketing position and build a positive experience throughout developing an organizational brand. The branding values, in this model, were generated by the context, behaviours, and lifestyle of the visitors. These values might be displayed through the interpretation methods referring to the museum objects, exhibitions, the historic building or the heritage action/event itself. In the RME model, the symbolization of the brand value was concluded in the name 'the Russian Museum of Ethnography.'

In sum, the identity/sense of place should be addressed as the core category of place branding and the latter should be the result of interaction among various stakeholders, especially local communities, and not an imposed phenomenon. In the following section, we address the people-centred model as a tool to balance between the branding characteristics and its consequences and the conservative management of HSs.

### *Auditing the branding approach at the heritage site: people-centred thinking*

According to the twenty-first-century value-based marketing approach (Donner & Fort, 2018; Doyle, 2008), the site's community is the representative and generator of CH value. Today there is an increased emphasis on community participation in tourism planning and heritage tourism development (Dragouni & Fouseki, 2018). Recent recommendations and conventions for the conservation and management of HSs as well as for the sustainable development of heritage tourism have called for the application of a people-centred approach to ensure the engagement of local communities to grasp the different cultural values associated with HSs, including but not limited to: Faro Convention (2005), UNESCO HUL Recommendation (2011), Larrakia Declaration on the Development of Indigenous Tourism (2012), UNWTO Recommendations on Sustainable Development of Indigenous Tourism (2019), Larrakia Declaration on the Development of Indigenous Tourism (2012), Recommendations on Sustainable Development of Indigenous Tourism (2019), and OWHC Guidelines for Sustainable Cultural Tourism (2020). In compliance with the value-based approach to CH management, this research proposes a people-centred approach to monitoring the sustainability of HS branding.

Nearly two decades ago, Mowforth and Munt (2003) drew attention to the importance of developing sustainable cultural tourism through the involvement of the host community. Meanwhile, according to Smith and Ripp (2020), local communities are stewards and custodians of the heritage destination and it is essential to carry out different actions to emancipate the level of their involvement, such as: (1) establishing formal or informal interagency delivery partnerships; (2) operating a tourism forum to facilitate an ongoing dialogue with the host community; (3) employing local guides and volunteers from the local community; and (4) taking steps toward people-centred heritage conservation, local entrepreneurship, and people/creativity-centred tourism.

Following the value-based marketing approach (Doyle, 2008), this research suggests enhancing the cultural assets and addressing the unique values of CI by representing it in the marketing mix, applying a holistic marketing strategy. As shown in Table 1, this approach balances the requirements of the visitors and the community by covering the Ps of marketing – such as product, price, place, promotion, and people – in each branding phase. Table 1 summarizes the different marketing strategies that might be adopted in CH contexts (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Guzijan & Cvijic, 2018; Kotler & Keller, 2006) and the interplay of the marketing mix elements and involved stakeholders within the different branding phases.

**Table 1.** Matrix of marketing strategies in the heritage context.

| Branding Phase | Marketing Mix (Ps) | | Site Stakeholders |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1. Governmental Bodies and Public Institutions<br>2. Civic Society (NGOs)<br>3. Private Sector<br>4. Community Members<br>5. Scientific Institutions<br>6. Visitors |
| Brand Value | Product | The manifestations of the Cultural Identity / Cultural Assets | 1 & 4 |
| | Purpose | Cultural Tourism | 2 & 3 |
| Brand Association | Promotion | To raise the awareness of the surrounding local community | 1, 2, 3 & 5 |
| | Persuasion | To provide various programmes regarding the segmentation of the site's visitors | 1, 2, 3 & 4 |
| | Packaging | To provide a points-based package especially during the low flow-based seasons | 1, 3 & 4 |
| | Positioning | To create the marketing action in out-in approach from the transition zone to the core zone. | 1, 2 & 3 |
| Brand Awareness | Paradox | To invest the general urban, architectural, or geological frame to generate an official logo | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6 |
| | Prop | To reach the most unique cultural values, colours, names of the site that probably have a great effect on the visitors' mind and which through, to generate the long-term name and slogan. | |
| Premium Price | Price | To classify the pricing policy recognizing many categories (e.g. Geographic, Demographic, Psychographic, Socio-economic and Cultural) | 1, 2 & 3 |
| Financial Value | Performance | To create variety in the marketing methods in cooperation with the proposed distribution channels (e.g. co-branding) | 1, 3 & 5 |
| Turn on Investment | Payments | To diversify the purchasing tool (e.g. cash, credit card, online payment, collecting points)<br>To encourage the visitors to do some stock market shares especially in the heritage-based projects by the local community / entrepreneurs | 1 & 3 |
| Brand Attributes | Programme | To invest the musealization method as a high intensive heritage interpretation action | 1, 3 & 4 |
| Brand Ambassador | People | The autochthonous / indigenous / local Community | 4 |
| | Personal | Visitors | 6 |

Source: Mohamed Amer, Manal Ginzarly and Maria Francesca Renzi – Guided by Black and Veloutsou (2017), Guzijan and Cvijic (2018), Kotler and Keller (2006).

## Methodology

This study combines data from two data sources and applies an integrated analytical framework. First, it applies a traditional survey method, namely in-depth individual interviews with the key site stakeholders. Then, it integrates social media data mining and analysis.

### *Interviews with the key stakeholders*

The interviews were collected during the peak of the tourism season between August and September 2021. Key site stakeholders were interviewed, including (1) members of the indigenous/local community who are doing entrepreneurial actions inside their properties; (2) St. Donato Church Father; (3) the director and assistant of Geology and Landslides Museum; (4) local investors; (5) Bagnoregio municipality members; and (6) Casa Civita association for the public tourism development and management. Twenty in-depth individual interviews were conducted in English and Italian, according to the interviewees' preferences. The interview included 49 open-ended and close-ended questions and aimed to (1) estimate the interactive and cooperative relations among the

different stakeholders regarding the marketing level and the safeguarding and preservation of CI and heritage assets and (2) assess the territorial branding approach that was implemented to promote Civita di Bagnoregio in the heritage tourism market. Thus, the interview covered the following eight dimensions:

(1) Cultural Identity (7 Questions): It estimates the resilience of CH transformation (i) recognizing the socio-cultural requirements of the community associated with the cultural landscape and (ii) enhancing the link between the historic buildings and other ICH expressions of their practices (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Dastgerdi & Luca, 2019).
(2) Cultural Interpretation (10 Questions): It explores the methods of sharing Civita's cultural knowledge and its contribution to create the best memory for the visitors (Cojanu, 2014; Guzijan & Cvijic, 2018).
(3) Engagement Level (8 Questions): It discovers the main responsibility for making decision of branding Civita and from which perspective: cultural asset-based branding or City/Urban branding (Cojanu, 2014; Guzijan & Cvijic, 2018; Szabo & Ward, 2015).
(4) Conservation Statement Regarding Adaptive Economic Activities (5 Questions): It clarifies the conservation settings regarding the marketing actions and the adaptive-reuse or rehabilitation activities inside the historic buildings (Ramezani et al., 2019; Ryan & Silvanto, 2014).
(5) Investments and Cultural Assets-based Entrepreneurship (4 Questions): It gives more supportive indicators, to the dimensions (1), (4) and (8), securing the sustainability of the unique identity and mitigating or controlling the customization approach (Herget et al., 2015).
(6) Brand Creation: *Long-term Image or Lifelong Learning Memory* (11 Questions): Considering dimensions (3) and (5), it identifies the main factors of generating a brand image among the visitors either in a long-term image for those who already visit the site (one time or many) or in a lifelong learning memory for those who didn't visit the site (Heding et al., 2020; Kotler & Keller, 2006; Kovaleva et al., 2018).
(7) Brand Awareness (4 Questions): This dimension explores the ways of sharing and discovering the brand image, and its impact (Heding et al., 2020; Kotler & Keller, 2006).
(8) Brand Association – *Inter-Exchanged Image by Stakeholders/Beneficiaries* (3 Questions): Guaranteeing an effective sustainability process with three statements (Social, Development and Respect of a Cultural Diversity), it estimates how the author operationalizes transdisciplinary brand image or in another word, an inter-exchanged image among the stakeholders or beneficiaries. In addition, it estimates their interest to sustain the brand and its impact on their socio-economic requirements (Heding et al., 2020; Kotler & Keller, 2006).

In every addressed dimension, some questions were directed to all stakeholders, while others were addressed to a specific stakeholder. Interviews were tape-recorded and then manually transcribed for extended qualitative analysis. The interviewer took notes during the interviews to reflect on the ideas being discussed. Interviews lasted from 50 to 60 minutes. The data were then analysed through interpretive-descriptive analysis that departs from efforts to build an understanding of the level of application of the above-mentioned dimensions associated with the people-centred approach to heritage branding. The analysis was carried out manually through the process of organizing, sorting, grouping, categorizing, and interpreting the data. The applied analytical approach has some deductive and inductive characteristics. The descriptive analysis followed deductive reasoning as it inferred from the theoretical conceptualization of the eight investigated dimensions. However, the interpretation of data was built on the narratives and personal experiences of research participants, which gives an inductive nature to the research. For instance, when addressing the third dimension, namely the engagement level, stakeholders were asked whether they joined the decision-making processes of the UNESCO World Heritage nomination and, if yes, at what stage they were involved. Nine out of fifteen interviewees asserted that they participated and were consulted by the municipality. Respectively, researchers highlight that there is a

lack of engagement and cooperation among the key stakeholders. As when it comes to brand creation, the stakeholders were asked whether, in their opinion, the site has been branded in a time-generated image (word-of-mouth) by the local community or with a governmental plan. Then, the municipal representative and Casa Civita were asked if the site has been branded by the local community and how did the community coordinate the marketing actions with them as a governmental body. Interviewees' answers to these two questions allowed a comprehensive understanding of how different practices, including the 2015 municipality plan marketing Civita and individual actions by community members and investors, contributed to brand creation. In sum, using the theoretical lens of the eight investigated dimensions to frame how stakeholders reasoned about the implemented branding strategy, this study proposes a more nuanced approach that is people-centred and based on the local community and its cultural identity.

## Social media data analysis

To explore the different attributes and values of tangible and ICH that contribute to the visitors' perception, a content analysis was applied to SM data. Given that different platforms have different demographic characteristics, the data were retrieved from multiple social media (SM) applications, including Instagram, Twitter, and Trip Advisor. The aim is to draw, from the digitally-mediated heritage practices, a collective perception of communal experiences and lifelong learning memories associated with cultural and natural heritage assets. Accordingly, all posts related to the hashtags #civitadibagnoregio and #lacittachemuore and all reviews related to Civita were collected for the time period January 2018–November 2021. Two distinct phases of data analysis were required: (1) data collection and pre-processing; and (2) data processing.

## Social media data collection and pre-processing

Posts and their embedded metadata were downloaded using WebHarvy, a web data crawling software, and combined into one dataset. More than 7000 posts were retrieved of which 5000 were from Instagram, 1875 from Twitter, and 389 from TripAdvisor. After removing the duplicates, the number of analysed posts was reduced to 4664. Afterward, the data were imported into RStudio software and the textual data was pre-processed by removing stop words and other elements that don't have any impact on semantic meaning. Subsequently, the textcat package was used to specify the language of posts. Finally, the posts were translated using google sheets.

## Social media data processing

The comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of tags comprised two stages: (1) the unsupervised classification of tags to identify distinct topics that reflect the perceived heritage attributes and values in the dataset and (2) the cognitive–affective nature of the visitors' perception. In order to perform topic modelling on SM textual data, the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model was used. LDA is the most widely used topic modelling algorithm (Kapoor et al., 2018). To estimate the optimal quantity of topics, we applied the ldatuning package. Results revealed that the optimal number of topics is three. This result is interesting because it shows that despite the variety of SM platforms under study and the amount of analysed data, the content of online shared posts is not diverse. After identifying the number of topics, the LDA function from the *topic models package* was applied to create a three-topic LDA model for the dataset.

Consequently, we differentiated between cognitive terms, related to thoughts and fact-based understanding of a heritage asset (i.e. medieval, nature, landscape, bridge, tower, castle, and erosion); and affective terms, reflecting experiential perspectives and feelings about a heritage asset (i.e. beautiful, inspiring, peaceful, pleasure, outstanding, and happy) to extract (1) perceptions of the attributes of CH and (2) the emotional responses derived from CH tourist experience. To

avoid bias in the documentation of affective terms, we referred to the NRC Emotion Lexicon (Mohammad & Turney, 2013).

## Case study: the cultural landscape of Civita di Bagnoregio

The Italian Code on Cultural Heritage and Landscape (2004) emphasizes the economic potential of CH through a group of innovative provincial development strategies (Di Pietro et al., 2014). Additionally, the Lazio region in Italy focuses only on the level of visitors' satisfaction, especially during peak seasons, while it should focus on visitors' cultural mentality (Di Pietro et al., 2012). Taking Civita as a case study, this research assesses the branding statement, then develops tools to balance positive long-term memories and the sustainability of CI manifestations.

### Site values and cultural significance

In 2017, Civita was nominated on the tentative Italian list for inscription as UNESCO WHS (Ufficio Stampa, 2021) based on criteria III and V. According to UNESCO's statement of outstanding universal value (OUV) (UNESCO WHC, 2017), this cultural landscape illustrates the interaction between people and their environment over time and conveys OUV because of its geological and geomorphological characteristics that embed (ecological value), unique record of the evolution of landscape (socio-historic values), exceptional scientific and technical landscape interventions (scientific value), and the urban and architectural quality of medieval village that integrates into the natural environment (historic, aesthetical, and scientific value). Because of its geological situation and other human-induced impacts, Civita was listed on the World Monuments Fund among the most 100 sites in danger and demand of a conservation and tourism management plan (Cercato et al., 2020). In Table 2, we break down Civita's WH nomination to identify the 'official/designated' values associated with the different tangible heritage assets.

### Civita's branding statement and its positive impacts

Due to its location, Civita was nicknamed 'The City in the Sky.' As a result of clay erosion, frequent landslides, seismic hazards, and demographic degradation, Civita was called by a slogan 'The Dying City' and in Italian 'La Città che Muore.' This slogan was mentioned by the Italian writer Bonaventura Tecchi in a documentary 'Tuscia minore' by Istituto Luce (1951) (Cercato et al., 2020). This slogan was printed later in capital letters as a sign of Civita and was shared in many reports on national and international TV channels and newspapers. The official Italian guidebook calls the site, for its foggy nature in the winter season, 'Surrounded in a Fog of Unreality,' 'an Island in Our Memory,' and 'Hidden Pearl in the Heart of Lazio.' There is an extensive effort to transform Civita's slogan to be 'Fighting to Live City' (Devane, 2020). Following territorial marketing, the urban-architectural skyline (picturesque) of Civita was taken as a logo for many touristic facilities, amenities, businesses and services e.g. Acqua di Civita.

Since 2017, 400 business activities were generated including tourism services, facilities and amenities, for instance, the hotels, B&B and Airbnb, cafes, restaurants, and parking areas among others. Moreover, Viterbo province has become the first, in the Lazio region to represent 41% of the agritourism businesses. Regarding the 2021 municipality report, only in Bagnoregio, there are 30 registered agritourism businesses out of 1286 registered regional agritourism businesses (R. Pomi, personal communication, October 20, 2021).

From the first step, Bagnoregio municipality seeks to place Civita as a competitor to other touristic attractions (Cappelli, 2020). For instance, Civita was rated officially as one of the Most Beautiful Villages in Italy and one of the 20 Most Spectacular Italian Cities Carved from Rock. Civita is one of the unique sites which might represent a long timeline of Italian and international cinema and TV programmes such as the report 'Un paese che scompare' (a town which disappears) (1953); Japanese Cartoon 'Laputa, the Castle in the Sky' (1986); Brazilian Opera 'Terra Nostra' (2003); and Rai 1 TV script 'Pinocchio' (2009). Additionally, there are many advertisements (i.e. Santa Rosa Jam

Table 2. Values assessment of Civita di Bagnoregio.

| Site Attributes Values | 1 Masonry road (old) / Pedestrian Bridge (modern) | 2 Porta Santa Maria/ Porta Cava/ Porta del Cassero | 3 Piazza San Pietro / Piazza Colesanti | 4 Piazza / Church San Donato | 5 Geological & Landslides Museum | 6 The Hill Body | 7 Residential settlements | 8 Poet 's Garden | 9 Antica Civitas Museum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 **Historic** | × | × |  | × | × | × | × |  | × |
| 2 **Aesthetic** | × | × |  | × |  |  |  | × |  |
| 3 **Social** | × |  |  | × |  |  | × |  | × |
| 4 **Economic** |  |  | × |  |  |  |  |  | × |
| 5 **Architectural** | × | × | × | × | × |  | × |  |  |
| 6 **Urban** | × | × | × | × |  |  |  | × |  |
| 7 **Cultural** | × |  |  | × |  |  | × |  | × |
| 8 **Religious** |  |  |  | × |  | × |  | × |  |
| 9 **Scientific** |  |  |  |  | × |  |  |  |  |
| 10 **Geographical** |  |  |  |  |  | × |  |  |  |
| 11 **Natural/ Geological** |  |  |  |  |  | × |  |  |  |

and Nutella) that use Civita as a location (Cappelli, 2020; Devane, 2020). Moreover, it was the main context of the child story (an animated illustration): 'Il museo geologico e delle frane: Civita di Bagnoregio' (Belisario & Rossi, 2011). Thus, we can understand that the branding approach of Civita was focusing on the aesthetical value of the landscape more than other values.

Currently, 40% of the historic settlements are owned by rich foreigners and Italian public figures, like GUCCI's Creative Director. Today the entrance fee has increased from 1.50€ in 2013 to 5€. The entrance fee is used to fund the restoration project and the permanent maintenance. Also, it decreases the local taxes and the (municipal) household expenses-based financial support (Cappelli, 2020).

### Negative impacts of Civita's branding

Civita's settlements suffer from the customization approach because most activities are commercially focusing only on the economic impact without considering the conservation and sustainability of CH or the main local identity. Moreover, the marketing statement adopted by the municipality considers HS as a semi-customized product. The site faces three main threats: lack of community conservation, over-tourist flow, and human-induced impacts.

First, the site faces a great gap in the cultural integrity factor 'due to the abandonment of the traditional agrarian lifestyle' (World Monuments Fund, 2008). The indigenous community was degraded to only 10–15 inhabitants who are mostly aged over 100 years old. The current community, which owns and/or invests in these historic settlements, is not originally from Civita or at least lives permanently there. Thus, the site is losing its human capital and associated cultural and social values (Cercato et al., 2020). Unfortunately, there are no sustainable transmission methods for sharing the inherited cultural knowledge and raising the awareness of the community or visitors.

On the other hand, the number of tourists is increasing exponentially growing from 450 thousand in 2014 to 600 thousand in 2016 and up to one million in 2019. The 2015 indications asserted that there was a great number of tourists from the Asian states, especially China, Korea, and Japan (Attili & Sordilli, 2015). The direct observation (15 August–30 September 2021) asserted that although the majority of visitors nowadays are mostly Italian, there is a percentage of Asian, European, and international visitors – e.g. from Germany, France, the USA, and Thailand – with no visitors from the Middle East or Africa. The dominance of national visitors might be related to Covid-19 travel restrictions. Considering the carrying capacity of the urban layout, some places are filled with a high number of visitors while other places are empty.

On-site, there is no interpretation itinerary regarding the available cultural assets. The existing mobile application for the site is not commonly used by visitors because the mobile network is very weak at the site. During our site visits, we did not note regularly the existence of tour guides who take their groups beyond the main street. The visitors are not well-interested in what they hear from those guides by the audio devices. Tour guides don't give unique information about the buildings/spaces or the old practices that were taken place inside. The visitors come just to walk and enjoy some moments with the surrounding natural views. There is no emotional rapport between visitors and the site's components. They take photos of Calanchi Valley and the bridge. Moreover, there are no seats for visitors, so they sit on the external terraces that were constructed from the ruins of the historical buildings. Although the infrastructure might be permanently maintained, the type of tourism in Civita is mass tourism, not cultural tourism, which represents high pressure on the conservation statement.

In addition, the official statistics (2017–2019) indicate that the outflow of the site revenues is probably higher than its inflow, especially on the weekends and the festivals (see Table 3). The amounts and percentages of the revenues indicate that the required budget for conserving and restoring the site attributes is probably higher than the site income. As a result, the site, from a long-term conservation perspective, should develop its tools to mitigate these pressures. In the following, we will address both the positive and negative impacts of site branding.

For the human-induced impacts, Civita's CI manifestations face the risk of demise. Focusing on marketing and brand management, the majority of publicities just show the geological nature while they don't present its long historical timeline since the Etruscan era. Consequently, the locals and

the visitors will have a shortage or a lack of heritage knowledge about Civita's cultural and natural assets. Regarding the climate change issue, there is a high number of cars and motorbikes which enter in depth from Bagnoregio, so its carbon emissions will gradually contribute to changing the surrounding weather.

## Results

### Interviews

The analysis of the interviews with key stakeholders draws on the eight dimensions introduced in the methodology section. In what follows, direct quotes are not original but translated, and all have been edited for clarity.

When addressing **cultural identity,** the interviewees referred to different issues as drivers for the loss of CI manifestations. Actually, 7 out of 8 interviewed community members raised three main concerns: (1) prevailing socio-cultural conflict between different community groups, namely between natives and non-natives, (2) demographic degradation, and (3) loss of intangible heritage related to religious traditions and practices:

> Interviewee (1): We have mostly bad memories with the neighbours [..] they called us "non-Civitonico, meaning strangers who don't belong to Civita" [..] Currently, most community members are not locals, their main association with the site is related to business.

> Interviewee (3): The houses were all inhabited by people (around 1000 inhabitants) who were born here. It was indeed a country that lives by tradition [..] agricultural craftsmanship was a main social practice [..] my parents and ancestors used to go to the farm to cultivate wheat and pick vineyards and olives.

> Interviewee (8): In the past, this was a place of pilgrimage. People came to pray. This place was a passage for people who moved from Tyrrhenian to Adriatic crossing Italy.

While community members were more concerned about socio-cultural issues, the municipality and Casa Civita mainly acknowledge (1) the economic impact of tourism development as a driver for reviving the interaction between people and their cultural landscape and a tool to address demographic degradation, and (2) the WH nomination as insurance for sustaining the site's authenticity and balancing destination development with the qualified transmission of heritage knowledge:

> Interviewee (13): UNESCO's candidacy obliges the government to mitigate the mass tourism pressure out of the core zone delivering its flow to the surrounding rural areas such as Bagnoregio.

When it comes to **cultural interpretation**, all interviewees asserted that the museum is only responsible for clarifying Civita's historic layers and there is no clear strategy regarding how to interpret the site's authentic values, including the natural landscape, the manifestations of the Etruscan era and Medieval Ages as well as the time-generated traditional lifestyle of the indigenous community:

> Interviewee (14): The site is not interpreted and few visitors are aware of its diverse heritage values.

As a result, some community members try to transmit to visitors a deeper knowledge of local heritage values. While some prioritize social practices, others focus on historical values or the landscape aesthetic value:

**Table 3.** Annual revenues (in particular during the weekends and festivals revenues) (2017–2019).

| Year | Annual Revenues | Weekends & Festivals Revenues | Percentage of Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2017 | 691,690.50 € | 292,410 € | 43.27% |
| 2018 | 2,050,975.00 € | 678,480 € | 33.08% |
| 2019 | 2,379,541 € | 2,377,840 € | 99.93% |

Source: Comune di Bagnoregio and Casa Civita (2021).

Interviewee (14): I like to take visitors to my property to show them how life was.

Interviewee (3): I like taking visitors to St. Donato church, the most important place in Civita, because of its history, architecture and art [..] then, after panorama, they can go down to Calanchi farms, a fantastic landscape full of ancestors' memories, [..] visitors can see a very tight road where, in the past, people walked on foot or travelled on a donkey to the surrounding villages.

Interviewee (15): I like to show the visitors St. Pietro Belvedere overlooking the valley's panorama [..] they can [see] a picturesque natural landscape.

Many scholars have addressed diverse and sometimes conflicting interpretations of heritage resulting from attaching different significances to heritage attributes and different weight to cultural values by stakeholder groups, and have shown how these interpretations raise alternative narratives to the official heritage discourse (De Cesari & Dimova, 2019; Ginzarly et al., 2019). Our results feed into this discussion. In fact, in the absence of a participative interpretation strategy that could stimulate tourists' creative expression, sense-making, and experience creation, many memorable spaces – that might, in the long-term, provide lifelong learning memory – are not explored by the visitors as they are centralized in specific low carrying capacity spaces.

Despite the few attempts to transmit local heritage values, the community is concerned with its own businesses more than presenting its cultural assets. There aren't enough NGOs that might promote this knowledge for both visitors and the community.

As for the **engagement level**, 15 out of the 20 interviewees pointed out that the main activities of marketing and branding Civita were initiated by the municipality using the territory branding approach without taking into account all stakeholders. Results showed that there is a lack of communication and coordination and 7 out of 8 community members clarified that they knew about the decision of UNESCO nomination through SM and TV shows:

Interviewee (1): There is no direct engagement. In some cases, we try to suggest how to safeguard the buildings or solve managerially some issues.

Interviewee (12): The "Comune" didn't consult us or, at least, inform us about their nomination of Civita to UNESCO WH. We suddenly knew by social media posts.

While the community is less involved in decision-making processes at the national and international levels such as WH nomination, local decisions are more likely discussed with the businesses' owners:

Interviewee (3): The "Comune" asked some questions about how to improve the place to avoid some problems [..] in 2013, they came up with the decision of implementing entrance fees. Businesses' owners were worried thinking that it will decrease the number of tourists [..] after discussing with us, they agreed to test its impact for one month [..] ticket fees are important to save Civita and protect the valley from erosion [..] the ticket's impact was incredible, the visitors kept coming. It was a very important step by the "commune".

Concerning the **conservation statement regarding adaptive economic activities,** the majority of interviewees' responses (11 out of 14), especially community and local investors (10 out of 12), agree with UNESCO's statement. In parallel, our direct observation revealed that the site's attributes are reused as restaurants, hotels, cafes, and other touristic amenities and facilities:

Interviewee (3): The premises of the priest's house, comune and the elementary school all were almost reused as B&B hotels or restaurants.

Interacting with the result of the second dimension, namely **cultural interpretation**, interviewees asserted that there are many spots that the visitors did not explore. Moreover, if there are empty spaces, some of them suggested rehabilitating adaptively the site with cultural events, exhibitions, and traditional social practices and craftsmanship:

Interviewee (1): Empty buildings might provide a space or workshop for pottery makers and local artists.

> Interviewee (15): I would use empty buildings to clarify Civita's history because there are many activities but there are no places where the history is explained and where visitors can know about the community that was once there, its crafts, shops, and agricultural activities.

Moreover, UNESCO WHC conservation standards are encouraging the municipality to initiate different interventions to conserve the site, e.g. creating a technical office to address the negative impacts of mass tourism. The nomination will offer new programmes to increase the visitors' spending time and support the local economy. Some proposals include increasing ticket prices, the use of prior reservations, and the application of an electronic ticketing system to control visitors' flow (one of UNESCO's site management plan actions).

Regarding **investments and cultural assets-based entrepreneurship**, 6 out of 8 interviewed community members indicated that they share their memories of their families with the visitors by showing them old photos or furniture; however, there isn't an official place where visitors can be exposed to the history of the site and its CI:

> Interviewee (15): I will use empty buildings to communicate Civita's history because there are many activities but there are no places where the history is explained to show how local communities lived here, their crafts, shops, and agricultural activities in the valley.

In addition, 13 out of 14 interviewed stakeholders indicated that some young people are investing in the farmhouses and they shed light on wine production and how small businesses around the territory market this product. They suggested the possibility of investing in ceramic craftsmanship and its production. However, they asserted that given the absence of logistics and other public services, it is challenging to invite new residents to settle in the site.

> Interviewee (1): There are no new people who can come here because the buildings are so expensive, especially for young couples.

> Interviewee (3): If there are abandoned houses, it is so difficult to attract young couples, especially if they have children, because of the lack of public services and they have to go down and up the bridge around five times a day.

> Interviewee (13): There is a positive trend of young people who are investing in farmhouses; there is a return to agriculture.

Reviewing traditional food as a current entrepreneurial investment, the majority of restaurants present common Italian food and not Civita's traditional food. Nevertheless, some business owners try to maintain the gastronomic identity:

> Interviewee (14): Our restaurant is not a restaurant, but it is Bruschetteria [the Civita's traditional food Bruschetta]

Investigating the statement of local investors, few businesses valorize the site's uniqueness factor in marketing their productions. As a good instance, 'Acqua di Civita' was created as a brand using the high value of ICH expressions such as the typical or handmade cosmetics and perfumes that are purely natural from Civita and Calanchi valley (e.g. donkey milk-related cosmetics).

As for **brand creation**, in comparison with other Italian heritage icons, e.g. Vatican Museums, Civita has its unique impression and experience which attracts a high number of visitors that reached around 2000 daily visitors in 2019. The municipality created Civita's image in 2015 when it issued the pricing policy and presented Civita at Milan Expo and EATALY food mall as well as other commercial advertisements, TV shows, reports, cartoons, films and articles by national, regional and international press agencies.

> Interviewee (1): The experience that the visitors gain here is very strong, especially when they talk to people. Visitors promote this place by sharing their experiences.

> Interviewee (5): Civita is at a similar level to Milan cathedral and Vatican museums, and probably has visitors more than them, because of its uniqueness.

Interviewee (11): Civita's brand becomes so marketed and well-known for the world because of appearing in the advertisements.

Since 2012, the museum plays a great role in delivering Civita's image as a unique geological site. However, 7 out of the 8 interviewed community members indicated that they are not satisfied with the slogan and seek to change it. The municipality intends to change its slogan to 'Terre di Civita – Civita Lands.'

Interviewee (7): I don't like the current slogan (Dying City) and hope they change it.

When it comes to the WH nomination, the municipality and Casa Civita are anticipating the positive impacts of this step. They think that UNESCO standards make business activities a domain for achieving sustainable development and promoting the core zone, the whole territory, and other cultural spaces in the buffer zone. Respectively, it is strategically considered the appropriate tool for reviving the interaction between people and their surrounding environment, thus transmitting cultural knowledge.

Interviewee (13): Nowadays, according to the current situation under the UNESCO title "del Paesaggio Culturale di Civita di Bagnoregio", we broaden the marketing direction promoting Bagnoregio together with Civita and other cultural spaces in the buffer zone. We work on a new concept from just being a landscape to being Terre di Civita [Civita Lands] that represent the whole surrounding areas, subsequently interlinking between the core and buffer zones.

Concerning **brand awareness**, visitors' number is recognized as an estimation tool and the propaganda lately valorized Civita's brand image. Moreover, Chinese regional ministers investigated Civita as a successful rural tourism model. Regarding the UNESCO WHC emblem, the municipality invested in this step indicating the quality of conservation, hospitality, and touristic offers at the site. While 15 out of 19 interviewees, including community members, the museum, and the local investors, are already participating in the customization approach, they reject completely the brand concept of merchandising a culture and describe Civita as the most unique cultural place for humanity. In contrast, 3 out of 4 interviewed local investors expressed their interest in creating a unified logo and slogan which through, the whole site might be marketed. Developing a sustainable brand logo, the municipality proposed many logos for Civita in the publicity while the most common one is Casa Civita's logo.

Interviewee (7): The brand for me is mostly commercial.

Interviewee (13): An inspiration to cartoon and cinema movies and a model for rural tourism.

Finally, when it comes to the **brand association**, 18 out of 20 interviewees indicated that if the site loses its tangible heritage because of the long-term human-induced impacts, the branding will not contribute to the sustainability of Civita's CI manifestations in the national, regional, and international memory. They make an exception for the local memory because it is their history and cultural roots.

Interviewee (11): If Civita disappears due to environmental impacts [..] it will remain in the memory of some people.

Interviewee (14): If an earthquake destroys Civita [..] the brand will remain a symbol, an identification of the place, of how this place was.

Interviewee (15). If no cultural action is carried out and everything is centred around tourism, the historical memory will be lost [..] there will be no memory. Culture is important for a place to be remembered. It will become just a park-like Disneyworld.

The municipality and Casa Civita asserted that the community recognizes the site's value and the importance of (i) conserving the local identity and traditions and (ii) transmitting this knowledge to future generations. Regarding the high conservation standard of UNESCO WHC, they consider the inscription of Civita as guidance to solve the expected problems and develop suitable interventions.

However, feedback from the museum indicates that there is no evidence of such guidance. The municipality postponed the consolidation project of Civita's landslides, settling it for the technical committee which includes the most professional geologists and engineers in Italy. Three out of four interviewed local investors appreciated the positive impact of Civita's brand image on the surrounding areas that remained economically undeveloped for a long period.

## Social media data analysis

In this section, first we identify visitors' nationalities based on SM data. Then we compare results with the national records. Afterwards, we elaborate on the different CH attributes and values as perceived by the visitors.

The analysis of posts languages identified 36 languages in the dataset with Italian being the most frequent (75.5%) followed by English (16%), Romanian (2.5%), and Spanish (1.5%). Six languages, including Portuguese, Basque, Scots, Japanese, Danish, and Malay, appear more than ten times. Whereas 26 languages appear between once and less than ten times in the dataset. It can be concluded from these results that most of SM users sharing their visit experience are national tourists. These results have similarities and differences compared to the national records. Municipal records on visitors' numbers and nationality show that in 2019 around 64% of visitors were Italian, followed by Chinese (10%), Japanese and American (around 5% each), and Taiwan visitors (4%). Overall, SM data and official records show that more than half of the visitors are national tourists, nevertheless Chinese tourists are not visible on SM, most probably because these platforms are not commonly used in China where other platforms, such as WeChat and Weibo, are the most popular SM.

## Heritage attributes and values as perceived by the visitors

The LDA model identified three main topics in the SM dataset. As shown in Table 4, the first topic is 'natural scenic landscape' in terms of the scenic beauty of the landslides at Calanchi Valley. Within this topic, the perception of natural landscape features is mainly associated with the pictorial aesthetic value / picturesque. The second topic is 'built and natural heritage' in terms of tangible heritage attributes and associative values. In other terms, this topic incorporates the HS's natural context and built environment that are, according to the visitors' attitude, associated with aesthetic, historic, and social values. The third topic is 'gastronomy.' This ICH attribute appears as an element within visitors' perceived value of HS.

In Table 4, we identify the different cognitive and affective dimensions for each topic. The majority of Instagram and Twitter posts are in a hashtag form. Therefore, the perception is not expressed through online narratives and storytelling but through terms and emotional expressions.

Even though the online shared experience in the first topic is centred on landscape scenery, visitors go beyond 'beautiful' and 'beauty' to incorporate the affective terms of 'happiness,' 'adventure,' 'discover,' 'marvellous,' and 'wonder.' In the second topic, the visitors' perception is the results of the interplay between different elements, including (1) tangible elements such as the built landscape and architecture through terms like 'church,' 'castle,' and 'streets'; (2) activities like 'walk' and 'discover'; and (3) emotions such as 'freedom,' 'enchanted,' 'breathtaking,' 'joy,' 'happy,' and 'magic.' In topics (2) and (3), the visitors refer to culture, heritage, and UNESCO.

According to the literature, two types of online shared tourism experience could be identified (Su et al., 2021). The first is 'desirability sharing' and is rooted in tourists' intellect and aftertaste interrelated to a deeper meaning of tourism activities (Ferguson & Veer, 2015). The second is 'feasibility sharing' and focuses on the description of the scenery, food, or the travel process (Brochado et al., 2019). Our results pointed that both types of shared tourism experiences are reflected in the dataset. Although, in the first topic, the visitors are mostly concerned with the scenery's description, in the second and third topic, the visitors describe the different elements that contribute to their perception such as scenic beauty 'picturesque,' gastronomy, and built heritage assets but at the same express meanings and values.

**Table 4.** The most used hashtags and the cognitive and affective dimensions for each topic.

| Topic | Hashtags | Cognitive Dimension | Affective Dimensions |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Natural Scenic Landscape** | #picoftheday; #travelphotography; #picoftheday; #photooftheday; #landscapephotography; #Beautifuldestinations; #instapic; #Wonderfulplaces; #Landscapelovers; #middleagevillage | landscape, nature, skyline, panorama, view, bridge, alley, history, inhabitants, sunset, sky, erosion, flowers, people, hill, hilltop, uphill | love, beautiful, beauty, amazing, memories, love, good-vibes, happiness, discover, summer-vibes, marvellous, discover, ancient, wonder, silence, adventure, picturesque |
| **Built and Natural Heritage** | #beautifulview; #Relaxtime; #beautifulplaces; #Awayfromthecity; #awayfromthecity; #fairytales; #todisappear; #togetlost; #medievalcity; #medievalarchitecture | discover, church, castle, walk, pedestrian, streets, architecture, geology, door, tower, century, stories, inhabitants, UNESCO, alleys, heritage | freedom, enchanted, stunning, marvellous, memories, spoiled, atmospheric, beautiful, joy, breathtaking, fantasy, happy, fairy tales, magic, romantic |
| **Gastronomy** | #Italianfood; #ricottacheese; #Italianlandrink; #Instafood; #Bestoftheday; #Culturalheritage | food, wine, ice cream, poetry, olives, culture, dinner, restaurant, local, heritage. | smile, exploring, beautiful, discovery, enjoy, beauties, beautiful, happy, heritage, pretty, love, inspiration |

## Research findings & conclusion: people-centred heritage branding approach

This research proposes a people-centred HB approach that does not only focus on creating a group of integrated financial resources among the site's stakeholders but also upgrading the life standards and minimizing the demographic degradation level. Its actions aim to extend beyond the core zone to encompass the buffer and transition zones. It provides new public spaces and raises local public awareness. By realizing the CH-based entrepreneurship aspect, it encourages the youth generation to stay in the heritage context as CI generators. Eight dimensions were addressed when interviewing key site stakeholders revealing different perceptions.

Considering CI dimensions, the proposed approach interlinks the tangible forms and ICH expressions. At the same time, it valorizes the value of emancipating community engagement in the management and marketing plan. Realizing the site's outstanding values and regarding the updated socio-economic requirements of the new generation, the research recommends monitoring regularly the modification level either in the buildings, urban layout, or in practicing ICH expressions. The approach might contribute to (1) creating a lifelong learning memory for the local community, transmitting effectively and smoothly the cultural knowledge to the upcoming generation with a low percentage of losing, (2) generating a group of long-term images for one HS, and (3) setting the visitors' mindset as to valorize the positive impacts of Word-of-Mouth image. Thus, the stakeholders might generate socio-economically a group of creative/innovative rehabilitation and adaptive-reuse-based cultural tourism actions and other entrepreneurial projects.

For marketing the people-centred values of HSs, we recommend the use of the heritage interpretation tool 'Musealization,' as an interactive edutainment socio-cultural tourism activity, to share the living heritage expressions with the community and visitors. Adopting after Amer( 2019), we recommend three steps, in sequence, applying the musealization dimensions to safeguard the local CI and enhance the transmission process:

Step (1): To create participatory/interactive strategies: the stakeholders contextualize the people-centred approach to preserve the local values and re-represent its manifestations.
Step (2): To use the outstanding local cultural resources: the cultural tourism market provides national and international opportunities treating the lack of socio-economic infrastructure.
Step (3): To valorize CH space's values and renovate it in future generations' memory.

After reviewing the results of data analysis and the case study, the research presents its main finding 'the people-centred heritage branding approach' which consists of four phases:
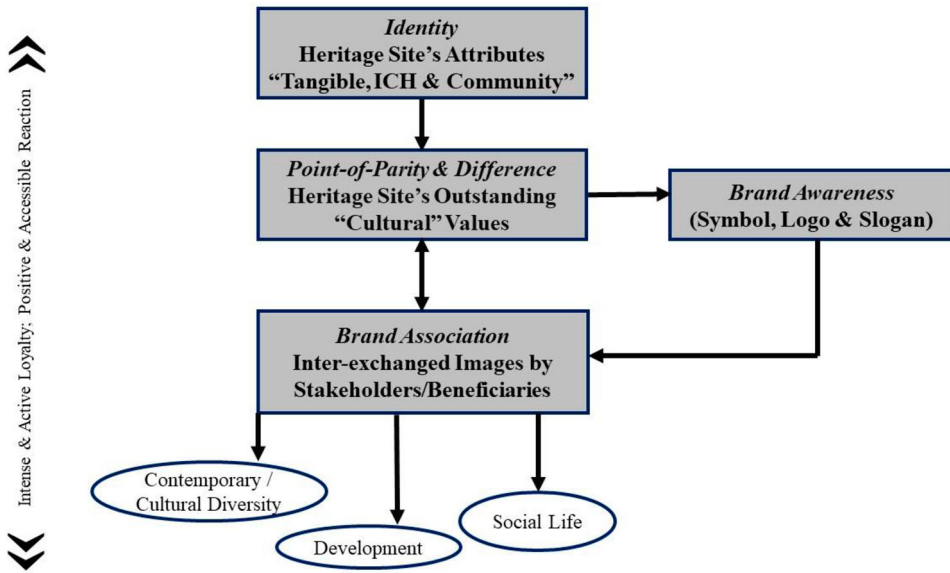
**Figure 1.** People-centred heritage branding approach.

A. **Brand Identity:** Realizing the attributes of the cultural landscapes, the urban spaces, and the high carrying capacity-based historic structures, it (1) reviews the cultural values interlinking the tangible heritage and ICH manifestations, and (2) investigates the outstanding/interactive outcomes and the cultural diversity factors by the cultural representatives of HS's attributes especially the autochthonous/indigenous/local community as a main generator and representative at the living heritage context.

B. **Brand Proprietary Assets:** the former step contributes to create here Point-of-Parity or the Difference factor valorising the most outstanding/uniqueness cultural values (either the transmitted or contemporary values).

C. **Brand Awareness:** These uniqueness values directly design the main features and characteristics of a site logo (name, colours and frame), symbol and slogan. This step shares a particular message with the visitors' mentality generating the long-term image.

D. **Brand Association:** Interacting with steps (B) and (C), it supports the conservation statement within the inter-exchanged images among the site stakeholders and/or the beneficiaries (the community members, the local entrepreneurs and investors, the management team of HS 'as a moderator,' and the governmental body and other public institutions 'as a monitoring and evaluation'). Thus, integrating with step (A), it generates, at the living heritage context, multiple 'contemporary' cultural values and images.

Finally, the outcomes of this approach are presented throughout three dimensions: (1) Social Dimension: e.g. the reduction of the local taxes percentages and the household expenses-based financial support, (2) Regional/territorial development dimension, and (3) Dimension of maximising the tolerance and the respect of the cultural diversity: to valorize the 'sense of the place' factor or an intense and active loyalty, so it guarantees a positive and accessible reaction sustaining the cultural knowledge.

In sum, by realizing the 'Few Visitors, High Revenues' approach (Lansky, 2020) and the public-private partnership (Garzillo et al., 2018; Gravagnuolo et al., 2021), the people-centred approach ensures the effectiveness of financial resources which might cover the long-term conservation and management projects. The brand funds and promotes the surrounding HSs creating new

cultural itineraries and services. Additionally, by increasing the spending time, the visitor experience will be well-precepted for the authenticity factors. At the same time, it might guarantee good quality for the local environment with lower cultural impacts (Figure 1).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

*Mohamed Amer* is a PhD researcher in Urban Heritage and Mass Tourism at the architecture department, Roma Tre University, Italy. He obtained his M.A. in Heritage Conservation and Site Management from BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg, Germany. He has a multidisciplinary innovative research background in heritage management (tangible and intangible), urban heritage development, community engagement and cultural identity, visitor management and interpretation, heritage marketing and sustainable cultural tourism. In his research, he adopts a people-centred approach valorising dynamically the socio-economic role of a community as a part of decision-making stakeholders in the urban, rural, and/or cultural landscapes. He is a member of ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee. For more information, you can review a LinkedIn profile: www.linkedin.com/in/mohamedbadryhcsm/

*Manal Ginzarly* is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Lebanese American University. She obtained her M.S. in Urban Design from the American University of Beirut and her PhD in Engineering Sciences and Technology from the University of Liège, Belgium. Her inquiry is multidisciplinary. It combines urban governance, sustainable development, heritage management, and tourism management. In her research, she focuses on people's construct and definition of heritage and on the co-production of heritage knowledge. She develops novel methods that integrate traditional and innovative tools to grasp the range of cultural values attributed by the different stakeholders – including locals, tourists, and decision-makers – to the historic urban landscape. She works on methodological approaches dealing with social media to foster civic engagement in heritage management and to provide additional knowledge on the diversity of heritage places and attributes.

*Maria Francesca Renzi* is a full professor in the Department of Business Studies at Roma Tre University. She teaches quality management, corporate social responsibility and quality systems. Her areas of interest involve quality management in the public and private sectors, service quality, quality and environmental management systems, and corporate social responsibility. In these fields, she has published 92 scientific contributions. She serves as coordinator of many national and international research projects related to TQM diffusion. She is involved in several national committees as quality assessor. She is part of the NetMuse network and a member of the Italian Academy of Commodity Science.

## ORCID

Mohamed Amer 🔵 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1471-3856
Manal Ginzarly 🔵 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3693-9258
Maria-Francesca Renzi 🔵 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9187-8243

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