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Cultural entrepreneurship and painting heritage: The case of Athens in cultural tourism

Fotini Maniou ^{1,*}, Roudo Mitoula ¹, Maria Manola ², Ioanna Maniou ³ and Ioannis Diannis ⁴

¹ Department of Economy and Sustainable Development, Harokopion University of Athens, Greece.

² Department of Tourism Management, University of West Attica Greece.

³ School of Medicine National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Greece.

⁴ Department of Informatics and Computer Engineering University of West Attica Greece.

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamic relationship between cultural entrepreneurship and the valorization of Athens' painting heritage within the context of cultural tourism. Through quantitative research conducted on a sample of visitors who engaged with the works of prominent Greek painters, the study analyzes levels of artist recognition, information-seeking patterns, and degrees of engagement with relevant cultural spaces.

Keywords: Cultural Entrepreneurship; Painting Heritage: Athens; Cultural Tourism

1. Introduction

In contemporary times, cultural heritage serves not only as a vehicle for historical memory and cultural identity but also as a key driver of sustainable development, social cohesion, and innovative entrepreneurship ([12] Dragoumis, 2019; [10] Venizelos, 2019). Cultural entrepreneurship aligns with this framework by promoting the creative management of cultural resources to boost local economies and encourage community participation, particularly within the realm of cultural tourism ([19] Kalogeropoulos, 2015; [21] Kasimati, 2011).

Beyond its renowned archaeological and historical legacy, Athens possesses a rich artistic heritage, reflected in the work of iconic painters such as Parthenis, Moralis, Gikas, and Tetsis ([6] Vasileiadou, 2004; [7,8] Vasileiadou, 2005; [20] Kalogeropoulou, 2011; [28] Lambrini, 2010). This tradition is preserved in a network of museums and visual art spaces—from the Athens School of Fine Arts to small galleries and historic cafés that once fostered artistic creativity [1] ([1,2] Alexiou, 2013; [11] Georgiou, 2010; [24] Konstantinou, 2005). However, this painting heritage remains largely undervalued and underutilized, both as a tourist asset and as a cultural experience ([3] Anagnostakis, 2017; [5] Vasileiadis, 2012).

This study aims to capture visitors' perceptions, awareness, and experiences related to Athens' painting identity. Using a quantitative methodology, it records data on the recognition of major painters, primary sources of information, and frequency of visits to relevant cultural sites. The analysis seeks to highlight visitors' cultural interests and inform strategies for cultural planning that interconnect art, tourism, and cultural entrepreneurship ([16, 17] Karagianni, 2011; [15] Zoras, 1994; [13] Dimakopoulou, 2016).

The goal is not merely to promote Athens' painting heritage, but to position culture as an active agent of development—a means of enriching the tourist experience, enhancing the educational dimension of cultural engagement, and

* Corresponding author: Fotini Maniou

creatively mobilizing local communities ([26, 27] Kouzakis, 2006). A cultural management approach centered on the city's painting tradition can contribute significantly to shaping a contemporary cultural identity for Athens—one that holds international appeal while delivering tangible benefits to the local population..

2. Cultural Entrepreneurship and Painting Heritage

- Cultural entrepreneurship is emerging as a contemporary development model that combines the valorization of cultural heritage with innovative practices, reinforcing both the economic revitalization and cultural identity of local communities ([31, 32] Maniou, 2023; [29] Manola et al., 2023; [30] Manola et al., 2025). Within this context, painting heritage is not merely a static historical relic but can serve as dynamic cultural capital with the potential to be integrated into tourism, education, and entrepreneurial strategies.
- Of particular interest are examples from the Greek experience in cultural entrepreneurship, such as the utilization of artistic heritage in remote areas like Imbros and Tenedos ([32] Maniou, 2023b), as well as in the Aegean islands ([33] Maniou et al., 2025), which can act as valuable models for urban environments such as Athens. Moreover, technological innovations successfully implemented in Greek-speaking villages in southern Italy and in cultural hubs across Sicily [29, 30] (Manola et al., 2023; 2025) provide practical examples for harnessing local cultural production. Notable initiatives include experiential routes following in the footsteps of Theophilos and Homer ([30] Manola & Vekri, 2021), as well as the development of cultural synergies between Lesbos and Smyrna ([29] Manola & Michopoulou, 2021).
- Contemporary cultural entrepreneurship goes beyond the mere preservation of heritage, aiming instead at its sustainable reinterpretation through community engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and the adoption of new technologies ([39] Papaioannou et al., 2023; [34] Maniou et al., 2024). Painting, in particular, can serve as a foundation for educational, experiential, and tourism-related activities. Through interactive exhibitions, virtual reality applications, and digital documentation, painting can be linked to creative tourism and incorporated into urban cultural strategies—as has occurred with literary festivals and socially engaged art events ([33] Maniou & Mitoula, 2025).
- Additionally, the repurposing of industrial or abandoned buildings on islands such as Lesbos and Lemnos underscores the importance of reinterpreting both tangible and intangible heritage through cultural programming (Maniou et al., 2025). Painting heritage may be included in similar initiatives, whether through permanent installations and cultural spaces or via mobile interventions utilizing virtual or augmented reality technologies ([35] Maniou et al., 2024).
- In summary, when embedded within a multi-level cultural entrepreneurship model, painting heritage can act as a catalyst for sustainable local development, social cohesion, and the promotion of cultural participation. Greek and European experiences demonstrate that the integration of art, local identity, and cultural strategy is not only viable but essential for advancing a new, participatory model of cultural development.

Concluding this section, The Internet, digital technologies, Painting and culture all improve a place's capacity to communicate its identity to wider audiences and draw tourists. Both education and digital marketing are used to accomplish this. As we wrap up this section, we emphasize the use of digital tools for training in cultural entrepreneurship and in the educational field. Information and communication technology (ICT) makes education easier for everyone, introduces new ways to train teachers effectively, improves knowledge retention, encourages teamwork, makes things more transparent, encourages learner-centered approaches, develops new teaching methods, and speeds up learning. Additionally, through mobility, virtualization, artificial intelligence, and new learning environments, they enhance educational activities and procedures and provide new ways to portray information. In particular, during entrepreneurial education, through a variety of ICT applications [43-47], which are essential to education, and mobile devices [40-42], which allow educational activities to take place anywhere, ICTs have demonstrated their efficacy in enhancing assessment, interventions, and instructional processes. While gaming turns education into a multimodal, captivating, and joyful experience, the use of AI, STEM, and robots [48-52] raises educational processes to new levels of adaptation, innovation, and efficacy. Incorporating and improving ICTs with theories and frameworks of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation, and the development of emotional intelligence [53-65] also elevates mental capacities in educational processes and policies, which further improves educational practices and results, especially in business and training for aspiring cultural entrepreneurs.

3. Methodology – Research Sample

This study adopts a quantitative research methodology, selected to enable the generalization of findings and the systematic investigation of relationships among variables within a defined population. Although quantitative research

can involve time-intensive data collection, it provides the advantage of analyzing a large number of observations, thereby increasing the statistical reliability of the results.

The sample selection focused on targeting visitors interested in cultural tourism, specifically those motivated by thematic cultural routes, such as itineraries inspired by the lives and works of painters. This methodological approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for the collection of diverse data related to the intersection of entertainment and experiential learning through cultural tourism.

The research sample consists of 130 questionnaires collected in Athens during the first half of 2025. Initially, simple random sampling was employed, without rigid systematization, targeting tourists through travel agencies and on-site distribution at the National Gallery. Due to the practical limitations of covering all Greek cities with comparable cultural characteristics, the snowball sampling technique was also utilized.

Specifically, two frequent travelers personally known to the researcher were the first to complete the questionnaire. Subsequently, the tool was distributed electronically to a central tourist agency in Athens. The agency's representatives promoted the survey to their clients, expanding the sample size. Nevertheless, most responses were collected through in-person distribution, enhancing the representativeness and reliability of the findings.

4. Sample Demographics

Gender: The sample consists of 50% women, 45% men, 2% who identified as "Other," and 3% who preferred not to answer.

- Age: The majority of participants (76.9%) belong to the 18–24 age group, reflecting the high proportion of students in the sample. The remaining respondents are mainly distributed across the 25–34 (11.5%) and 35–44 (6.2%) age groups, with minimal representation from older demographics. Notably, there were no participants over the age of 65, underscoring the youthful profile of the survey.
- Education: Half of the respondents (50%) have completed tertiary education, while an additional 25% hold a master's or doctoral degree. Twenty percent have secondary-level education, and only 5% have completed only compulsory education. The high level of education supports the validity and reliability of the opinions gathered.
- Occupation: Students make up the majority of the sample (76.9%), followed by civil servants (7.7%), private-sector employees (6.2%), and freelancers (5.4%). Retirees and unemployed individuals are minimally represented.
- Permanent Residence: Sixty percent of participants reside in the region of Attica, 35% live in other regions of Greece, and 5% are based abroad. This geographic spread reflects a broad interest in the study's subject matter beyond the capital city.

Table 1 Sources of Knowledge about the Work and Life of Greek Painters

Source of Information	Percentage (%)
Social Media / Internet	50%
School Education	45%
Visits to Museums or Galleries	35%
Books / Articles	25%
Television / Documentaries	20%
Other	5%
I am not familiar with any works	3%

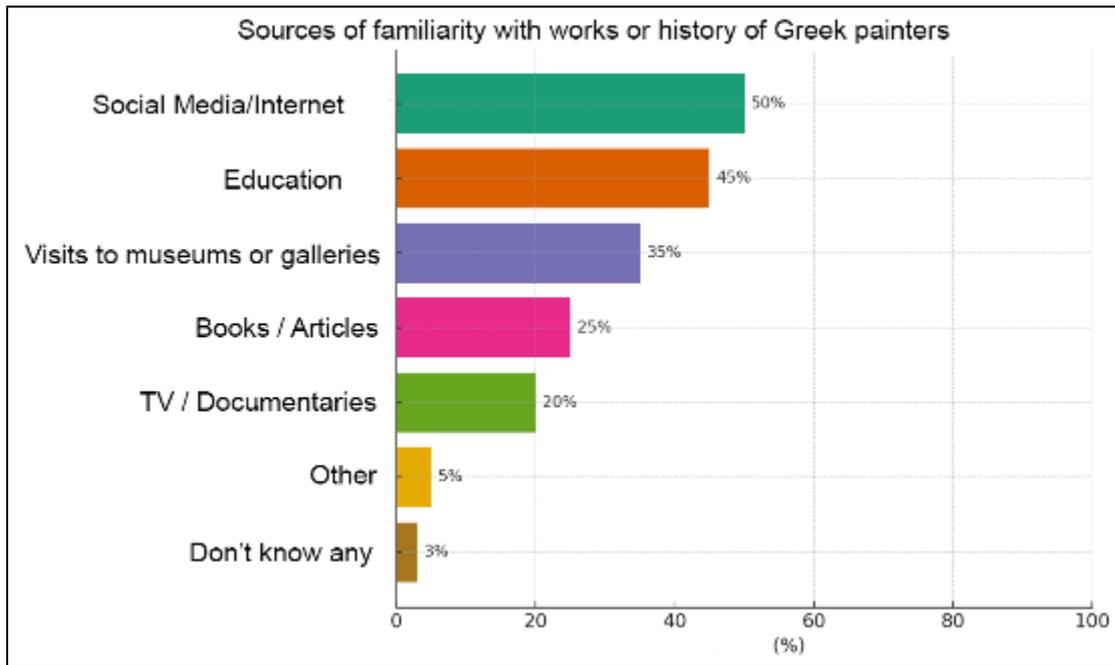


Figure 1 Sources of Familiarity

The survey results indicate a diverse and multi-dimensional landscape of information sources regarding Greek painters. Digital media hold the dominant position, with social media and internet use accounting for 50% of responses, confirming the leading role of technology in the dissemination of art. School education follows at 45%, reinforcing its enduring role in shaping cultural literacy. Visits to museums and galleries (35%) highlight the importance of direct, experiential engagement with art. Television and documentaries, cited by 20%, reflect the declining influence of traditional media, while books and articles (25%) continue to appeal to more specialized or academically inclined audiences. The very low percentage of participants unfamiliar with any artworks (3%) reflects encouraging levels of artistic awareness. Overall, a multimodal informational environment emerges—one in which digital, physical, and educational channels coexist and reinforce one another, offering fertile ground for strengthened cultural strategy.

5. Recognition of Greek Painters in Athens

Recognition of artists serves as a key indicator of cultural literacy and the visibility of painters in the contemporary cultural sphere. The recognition levels of specific artists surveyed are presented below:

Table 2 Recognition of Greek Painters

Painter	Percentage (%)
Yannis Tsarouchis	85%
Konstantinos Parthenis	75%
Dimitris Mytaras	68%
Spyros Vassiliou	63%
Nikolaos Lytras	40%
None of the above	5%
Other	3%

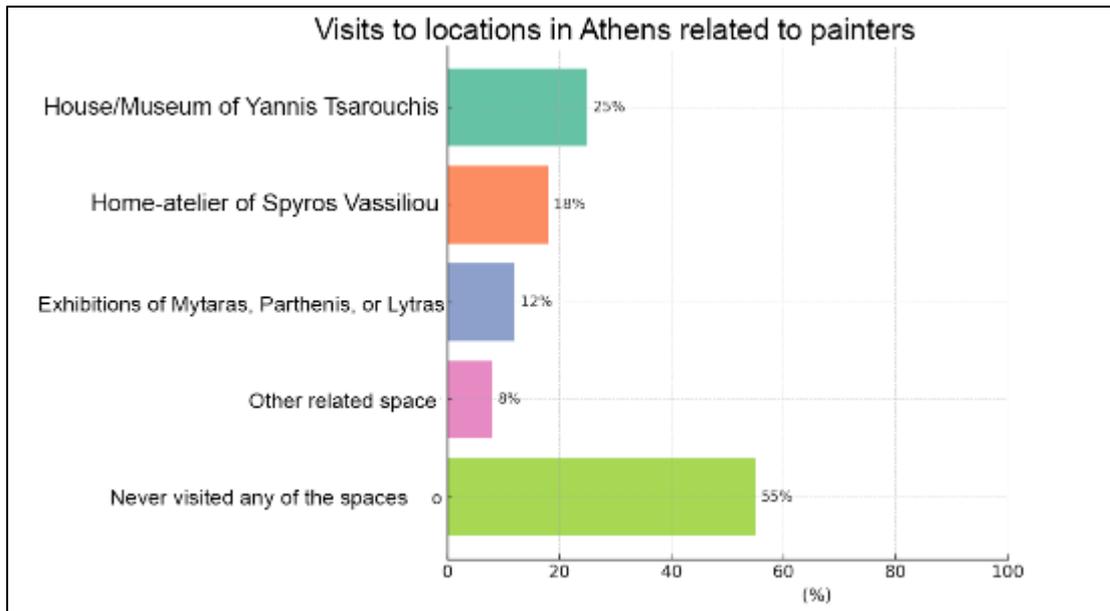


Figure 2 Visits to Locations

The high recognition of Yannis Tsarouchis (85%) confirms his deep integration into the collective cultural consciousness of modern Greece. The broad public visibility of his work through exhibitions, publications, tributes, and media likely explains the public's extensive familiarity with his oeuvre. Similarly, Konstantinos Parthenis (75%) and Dimitris Mytaras (68%) enjoy strong recognition, reflecting their prominent presence in public cultural education and promotion.

Spyros Vassiliou's recognition (63%) suggests moderate familiarity, while the significantly lower awareness of Nikolaos Lytras (40%) points to the need for more targeted promotion of lesser-known yet important figures of Greek modernism. The low percentage of participants unfamiliar with all listed painters (5%) affirms the existence of substantial artistic awareness among the public—a solid basis for further cultural programming and education.

6. Analysis of Results – Development Prospects for Athens

The survey findings reveal a notable disconnect between theoretical interest in Greek painters and actual visits to related cultural sites in Athens. Specifically, 55% of participants reported that they had not visited any locations directly connected to the lives or works of these painters, despite expressing familiarity with or interest in their art.

This gap suggests, on the one hand, inadequate public awareness or promotion of such cultural sites, and on the other, a substantial opportunity to develop cultural routes and artistic engagement activities. Conversely, 18–25% of respondents indicated having visited museums, workshops, or other relevant venues, revealing the presence of an active—though limited—audience for painting heritage.

These results highlight a potential for growth in visitor engagement. The development of thematic routes centered on key painters, the inclusion of educational programs, and the strategic promotion of related cultural spaces through both digital and physical media could significantly enhance the visibility of Athens' painting heritage and its integration into the visitor experience.

The dominance of digital sources (50%) for artistic information underscores the shift toward technological platforms in cultural engagement. School education (45%) continues to play a central role, reinforcing the need for a hybrid model that combines traditional and contemporary educational methods. Despite the high public recognition of artists like Tsarouchis, Parthenis, and Mytaras, the lack of direct contact with the spaces that host their work (55%) reveals a cultural gap in experiential art engagement.

Encouragingly, the low percentage of cultural ignorance (3%–5%) indicates a solid foundation for future initiatives. The proposed creation of painter-themed routes introduces an appealing cultural tourism option. The integration of virtual tours and digital applications could further attract younger audiences, while in-person visits remain essential for

immersive experiences. Cross-disciplinary programs in schools and cultural institutions could enrich artistic literacy and awareness. Simultaneously, artists such as Nikolaos Lytras could gain visibility through targeted campaigns.

Ultimately, art functions as a powerful educational and cultural tool. Strengthening Athens' artistic identity through strategic cultural planning can support its rebranding as a dynamic, contemporary cultural destination.

7. Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between tourists and the artistic heritage of Athens, with a particular focus on levels of cultural awareness and visitor engagement. Employing a quantitative methodology and drawing on data collected from city visitors, the research revealed a notable disparity between the high recognition of prominent painters—such as Yannis Tsarouchis and Konstantinos Parthenis—and the relatively low rate of visits to relevant cultural sites. Specifically, 55% of respondents reported not having visited any spaces associated with these artists, a finding attributed primarily to a lack of information and limited accessibility.

Digital platforms, including the internet and social media, emerged as the primary sources of information, while schools and museums continue to play a significant—though secondary—role in shaping cultural literacy. Overall artistic familiarity among participants was high, yet the results highlight the untapped potential for promoting lesser-known painters and enhancing engagement with visual arts heritage.

The study recommends the strategic expansion of digital communication tools, the development of thematic cultural routes based on artistic heritage, and the implementation of integrated educational initiatives. These actions can foster deeper public engagement, broaden access to painting heritage, and contribute to positioning Athens as a vibrant and contemporary cultural destination.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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