

Original Research

Challenges of Cultural Heritage Tourism Sites in Albania and the Right of Tourists to Information: The Case of the City of Elbasan

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Abstract

Cultural heritage constitutes one of the most important assets for the sustainable development of tourism in Albania. Cultural heritage implies a common bond, our belonging to a community. It represents our connection with the past, present and future. In the digital age, official tourism websites and cultural portals constitute the main source of information for domestic and foreign visitors. However, a considerable number of these websites present significant shortcomings in the English language version, which directly affects the right of tourists to be informed accurately and the perception of institutional professionalism.

This study aims to analyze the quality of translations and content on websites that promote cultural heritage in Albania, with a special focus on

the city of Elbasan. The analysis includes linguistic, legal and institutional aspects that affect access to information and transparency towards the international public.

The findings show that the lack of standardization, professional translations and institutional coordination limits the promotional potential and undermines the implementation of the Law on the Right to Information. The study proposes concrete interventions to improve multilingual communication and strengthen transparency in the cultural heritage tourism sector.

Keywords: *Cultural heritage, translation, right to information, transparency, cultural tourism, Elbasan.*

Original Research

Introduction

Cultural heritage constitutes one of Albania's most valuable assets for the development of sustainable tourism and the promotion of national identity. Cultural heritage tourism represents one of the most promising areas of economic development and international image of Albania. Albania is a country with an ancient history in Europe, which is reflected in the rich cultural heritage with national and international values. Until now, the preservation of its values has been linked to the preservation of national identity, pride and wealth, while integration into regional and local development policies is seen as a very good opportunity not only for the preservation of cultural heritage, but also for its real contribution to their development.

The websites of public and local institutions, museums and heritage portals play a key role in the promotion of these values. For foreign tourists, these platforms are often the first point of contact with Albanian culture and history. However, many of these sites fail to meet standards of clarity, correct translation and transparency of information. This situation has twofold consequences: it damages the image of the country as a tourist destination and limits the right of tourists to receive complete, accurate and accessible information – a right guaranteed by the Constitution of Albania and by Law No. 119/2014 “On the Right to Information”.

These results show that the lack of linguistic professionalism and institutional coordination is not only an aesthetic or technical issue, but also a matter of violation of the right to information.

Foreign tourists, as users of public information, have the right to receive clear and accurate data in their own language. When this information is missing or inaccurate, transparency conflicts with the legal and ethical principles of public administration. In this sense, the quality of communication on tourist sites is an indicator of the level of respect for citizens' rights and institutional in-

tegrity. The existence of cultural heritage is a necessity, as an element of national identity, but if it is not transmitted properly, its values are lost. For this reason, an accurate perception of the material and intangible elements of cultural heritage is needed, combined with proper interpretation and communication and its presentation with professionalism, using not only the sources and knowledge of cultural heritage, but also the means of its transmission, as well as putting into use contemporary virtual technology, as a means of wide dissemination of cultural heritage and as a way of continuous protection of its values.

The importance in the national context classifies cultural heritage as one of the most precious assets of the Albanian national identity. Cities such as Elbasan, Berat, Gjirokastra and Shkodra contain a great historical, architectural and spiritual wealth that can serve as an engine for the development of cultural tourism. However, to be truly accessible and understandable to international visitors, this heritage must be communicated in a professional, accurate and multilingual manner. In Albania, most official websites presenting cultural heritage suffer from linguistic deficiencies, lack of professional translation and inaccuracy of content. These weaknesses not only negatively affect the tourist experience, but also harm the cultural image of the country. In this sense, the topic assumes strategic importance to identify and address these gaps. The dimension of the right to information and culture According to the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2020) and UNESCO (2019), equal access to culture and information is considered a fundamental human right. Tourists, as temporary visitors, have the right to receive accurate, translated and accessible information about the heritage of a country. In the case of Albania, shortcomings in English translations or in the multilingual content of official websites violate this right, making cultural heritage less understandable and less attractive to the international public. Therefore, addressing this topic also has ethical and legal values, in addition to the cultural and linguistic dimension.

Original Research

The impact on the development of cultural tourism, which is one of the most promising sectors for the sustainable development of the Albanian economy, makes it necessary that in order to attract visitors with long-term interest, the country must offer accurate information in international languages, rich and understandable descriptions, and a unified and qualitative digital experience. In the absence of these elements, the tourist experience fades and the economic potential of cultural heritage remains untapped. The case of Elbasan, as a city with great historical potential but limited digital presentation, best illustrates this gap between real values and their public communication. From an academic point of view, the topic contributes to several fields of study: Linguistics and translation through the analysis of the quality of translation of cultural content. The scientific and institutional importance concerns public and tourist communication, examining the way in which local institutions convey the cultural message. Cultural policy and the right to information by linking legal and cultural aspects. Regional development through the role of heritage in the economic and tourist promotion of small towns.

For public institutions (municipalities, heritage centers, tourism agencies), the results of this study can serve as a basis for designing new strategies for multilingual communication and for standardizing the presentation of heritage on official websites. In addition to the theoretical dimension, the topic has direct practical impact. Improving translation and the quality of information on cultural heritage websites increases the trust of international visitors, helps preserve cultural identity, promotes sustainable tourism development, and creates a bridge of intercultural communication between Albania and other countries. This topic is important because it goes beyond the linguistic aspect. It affects the quality of representation of Albanian culture in the international space. In an era where cultural perception is built mainly through digital media, correct, understandable and aesthetic translation is not only a technical issue, but a cultural and political

act that affects the way Albania is seen in the world. The study aims to highlight these issues, analyze the connection between the quality of digital communication and the right to information, and suggest concrete measures for improvement.

Literature review

Cultural heritage is the physical legacy of artifacts and objects (attributes) of a group or society that are inherited from past generations to the present for the purpose of care for the benefit of future generations. Cultural heritage includes cultural property also known as material culture (such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, works of art and various objects), spiritual culture (such as folklore, traditions, language and traditional knowledge), as well as natural heritage. "Cultural heritage is an indisputable element of national identity. It gives you the opportunity to understand the specific traditions of your ancestors, seeing them in a historical perspective to arrive at an understanding of who you are" Anders Högberg (2016).

Heritage is a difficult concept to define, because it covers a large group of seemingly diverse objects and ideas that have a strong connection to the land through specific styles of art and manifestations of cultural distinctiveness to commercial products for the production of which traditional production processes have been used. Heritage is something that individuals emotionally claim as their own or see as someone else's, but always as something that is passed down from previous generations. A comprehensive definition of cultural heritage has been given by Japanese researcher Tolina Loulanski (Loulanski, T; 2006), according to which "Cultural heritage includes aspects of material culture – sites, buildings, landscapes, monuments and objects as well as intangible (spiritual) culture, aspects of which are embodied in social practices, community life, values, beliefs and forms of expression such as language, arts, crafts, music and dance". Accord-

Original Research

ing to Hall and McArthur (1996), “four main values of heritage are identified: economic values which are related to the generation of income that comes to a country as a result of the use of this heritage for tourism and recreation purposes; social and cultural values, which are expressed in the strong spiritual connection of man with the country and his identity at the local and national level; scientific and educational values, which are expressed in the transmission of cultural values from one generation to another, to better understand the high cultural level that characterizes the period of their construction; political value which is expressed through the use of cultural heritage and the values it contains by politicians to promote historical values and their national identity”.

International studies show that multilingual communication at heritage sites (including museums, historic sites and tourist portals) is closely linked to public access to culture, visitor experience and the effectiveness of tourism marketing. “Communication for sustainable local tourism will include the preparation and dissemination of information on a wide range of local assets, natural resources, cultural landscapes, heritage traditions, crafts and skills, cultural events, as well as contemporary art and culture”, UNWTO (2011). The perception of cultural heritage conditions the perception of the destination, both from the real state of the facts and the human right to cultural access. In the context of cultural heritage, the quality of information is not only a technical issue, but also a cultural one. Inaccurate or partial translation can distort historical values, create cultural misunderstandings and damage the authenticity of the message (Venuti, 2012). Various authors and reports highlight that poor translations directly affect the perception of the destination, translations must balance factual accuracy with cultural adaptation and promotional style, and multilingual communication is part of cultural access and human rights policies in the world. “The modes of communication have changed and the digitalization of knowledge and information simplifies the acquisition of more

elaborate information and democratizes the availability of subject-specific knowledge”, (Albert B. (2010). Virtual reality technology operates on the human perception system through computer and communication technologies, allowing people to fully enter and interact with the virtual world. This allows people to have the illusion of overcoming the limitations of time and space and material limitations.

According to the literature, “in this scenario, the Internet is not only a mode of interaction, but also affects the interaction of humans-computers with reality”, (Pei J. & Yi L. (2022). Cultural heritage should be presented to the world, because it affirms our identity as a people and creates a comprehensive framework for its preservation. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is important for both minority groups and major social groups within a country, and is also as important for developing countries as for developed ones. With the growth of machine translation tools (Google Translate, DeepL, large language models, etc.), many institutions use machine translation to quickly update bilingual content. The literature shows two clear trends “where the use of machine translation reduces the cost and time of producing multilingual content and makes pages available more quickly. Recent studies explore how machine translation can be integrated as a first draft and have value in volume of translations”, (Constantin, F. (2023). This method has its limitations that automatic translations often do not cope with the “cultural terminology” or promotional tonality of tourist texts, the results are unnatural phrases, there is a loss of nuance and errors that affect understandability and credibility. Various research shows that tourist text needs specialized editing to achieve the necessary quality. Recent studies and comparative analyses (e.g. google translate vs DeepL) still highlight flaws in the semantic accuracy of cultural terms, (Liao, M.H. (2022).

So in conclusion, machine translation is a useful operational solution, but not the final solution because professional editing and terminology

Original Research

guidance are needed to avoid negative consequences.

An important aspect of the study is addressed as “cultural loss” in translation, that is, the unwritten elements, rituals, local terms, and historical nuances that are lost when translated inaccurately or removed due to the need for simplification. These losses can be: Lexical, where the translation of terms such as “konak”, “oda”, “tekke” simply as “house”, “hall” without explanation. Narratively, where the removal of the historical context that gives meaning to the object. The tourist experience is reflected in the lack of practical instructions (such as access, timetables, tickets), which reduces the value of the visitor’s experience. Specialized studies on “lost culture” in the translation of tourist content identify specific categories of losses and recommend strategies for improving the existing situation, (Chen, S., & Zhou, T. (2024), (Bu, Zheng Wang, Siyi Wang et al. (2025). Studies in the field of tourist translation emphasize that promotional content must balance accuracy, naturalness and persuasiveness; all elements have an impact on the tourist’s decision-making, comparative quality studies (Hazaea 2025). Research on the linguistic interpretation of Museums and heritage sites note that a good multilingual strategy increases visitor engagement and understanding of cultural content (Constantin 2023).

The study of Albanian literature and local reports shows that the problems observed globally also exist in Albania, with local characteristics. Sectoral reports (UNDP 2022) identify challenges for the government in developing tourism, the need for professionalism and for developing cultural tourism products, where translation and international presentation appear as operational gaps. Albanian academic studies and articles (e.g. analysis of tourism on Albanian websites, studies on the use of information boards in heritage sites) highlight spelling errors, lack of translation and weaknesses in information design, all of which negatively affect the tourist experience. Local studies on Elbasan and municipal plans and analyses highlight the lack of updated multilingual

content (Elbasan Municipality 2023). In Albanian literature, the main problems identified are the lack of national standards for information tables and texts and translations where technical documentation is often missing (Hasani, M, Xhoga, D (2024). Local planning documents (e.g. analyses of Elbasan's tourist potential) emphasize the need for unification of communication and improvement of digital materials for tourists, (Elbasan Municipality 2023). From the literature review, several gaps and topics for further research clearly arise: The efficiency of editing automatic translations in the context of heritage content, which means how much “cultural losses” are reduced with professional post-editing. Comparative studies between regions, e.g. Elbasan with similar cities in the Balkans, to understand the role of institutional coordination. Assessment of the impact of poor translations on tourists' decision-making, e.g. studies and surveys with tourists to measure their perception of the destination. Development of institutionally supported terminological words (state-municipality, museum) to guarantee the follow-up, until the end of the solution of this problem. Creation and testing of a “practical guide” for heritage sites in Albania that includes formatting standards, labeling, and editing procedures. Practically International literature and institutional documents (Council of Europe, 2020), UNESCO, (2003)) defend the approach that multilingual communication is part of guaranteeing access to culture and information. Accurate translation is not a luxury but is part of respecting cultural rights. Technical studies on machine translation show that automatic tools are useful, but without professional editing they leave significant errors, especially when cultural terms are included. Albanian literature and local reports confirm the presence of similar problems such as shallow translations, unfinished information boards, and lack of a multilingual strategy. This opens a practical need for institutional intervention.

The right to information in Albania

Original Research

Cultural heritage is recognized throughout Europe as an instrument of cultural identity. Protecting our common heritage and promoting cultural diversity are also very important instruments for bringing different communities closer together and for improving dialogue between different cultures.

The right to information is enshrined in “Article 23 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania”, and regulated by “Law No. 119/2014”.

This law guarantees free and unrestricted access to information held by public institutions, including entities that manage cultural heritage and tourism.

In the context of tourism, transparency of information constitutes a component of consumer protection, as visitors have the right to know in advance the services, schedules, prices and history of the facilities they visit.

“In the decades since the adoption of the World Heritage Convention, various definitional ‘crises’ have significantly influenced the ways in which heritage is classified, perceived and managed in contemporary global societies” (Anders Högberg (2016), Rodney Harrison). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and UNESCO emphasize the need for tourism information to be “accurate, accessible and understandable to every visitor”. EU countries have developed standards for multilingual communication, linking the quality of translation to respect for the right to information and the right to culture. According to the Council of Europe, multilingual communication is an essential component of equal access to information and cultural participation. The document states that: “All citizens have the right to receive information and to participate in cultural life in a language which they understand.” (Council of Europe, 2020). In this context, the quality of translation on official websites, including those of cultural heritage, is not only an aesthetic or technical issue, but a legal and ethical obligation directly related to: The right to public information, as guaranteed by Law No. 119/2014 in Albania and Article 23 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, and the right to cultural participation,

protected by the Convention on Human Rights (Art. 10) and the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2005).

In practice, inaccurate translations, the lack of appropriate cultural terminology, or the use of machine translations without editing violate the right of tourists to accurate information and an equal cultural experience. This means that institutions managing heritage sites should respect international standards for professional translation, ensuring terminological coherence, continuous updating of multilingual content, and the involvement of experts in intercultural communication. This approach helps to fulfill the right to information and culture and enhances the credibility of the country as a sustainable and inclusive tourist destination for the languages, history and civilizations of the Parties to the Convention. In the context of cultural heritage, the quality of information is not only a technical issue, but also a cultural one. Inaccurate or partial translation can distort historical values, create cultural misunderstandings, and damage the authenticity of the message (Venuti, 2012). International institutions and European bodies have issued guidelines linking multilingual communication with the rights of access to culture and information. The Council of Europe and its initiatives emphasize the necessity of plurilingual policies and the integration of the language dimension in public cultural communication (Council of Europe, 2020). The documents and recommendations of the Council of Europe encourage member states to promote multilingual access to cultural and digital materials. UNESCO, 2005, emphasizes the importance of multilingualism for the preservation of cultural diversity and social inclusion and as a result this gives ethical and political basis to the demand for accurate translation of online cultural content. These frameworks provide the legal argument that accurate translation and accessible information are not only good practice, but part of respecting cultural rights and informing the public.

Original Research

Methodology

The study follows a combined methodological approach, integrating qualitative and descriptive-analytical methods, with the aim of identifying and analyzing the challenges presented by cultural heritage tourism sites in Albania, as well as assessing their impact on respecting tourists' right to information. The choice of this approach is based on the interdisciplinary nature of the study, which combines studies on digital communication and translation, cultural policy analysis, and human rights principles, especially the right to information and access to culture. The case study of the city of Elbasan serves as an empirical model, allowing for an in-depth local analysis, but with transferable findings for other Albanian cities with similar cultural heritage. The study relies on the content analysis method, comparing the Albanian and English versions of 10 sites presenting Albanian cultural heritage, including the sites of the Municipality of Elbasan, the Ethnographic Museum, the Elbasan Castle, and several local tourism portals.

The analysis criteria focus on linguistic and terminological accuracy, clarity and up-to-dateness of information, compliance with transparency standards, digital accessibility. In addition to textual analysis, legal documents, institutional reports and international guidelines on the right to information in the field of cultural tourism were reviewed. The methodology used provides a clear and reproducible framework for analyzing the challenges of cultural heritage tourism sites in Albania. Focusing on the case of Elbasan, the study manages to connect digital communication, translation, and the right to information, creating a solid basis for empirical findings and policy recommendations.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of cultural heritage tourism websites in Albania, with a particular focus on the city of Elbasan, highlights a series of structural, linguistic and institutional problems that directly

affect the quality of information provided to tourists and the respect for the right to access culture. A significant part of the websites use automatic translations without professional editing, producing incorrect structures in English. Examples such as "Elbasan castle is well preserved and has a long story" appear frequently, damaging the institutional image. The English versions are often partial, without information on schedules, prices, events or practical instructions. This contradicts the principles of the Law on the Right to Information, which requires the provision of public information in a clear and equal manner to all citizens and visitors. Terms such as *tekke*, *konak*, *kulla*, or surrounding wall are translated in a general way, losing the cultural nuance. In some cases, translations distort historical reality, affecting the understanding of heritage. Different websites operate independently and with different communication styles. The municipality, the museum and local portals do not share the same visual or terminological identity. This fragments the image of the city and damages credibility. These results show that the lack of linguistic professionalism and institutional coordination is not only an aesthetic or technical issue, but also a matter of violation of the right to information. Foreign tourists, as users of public information, have the right to receive clear and accurate data in their own language. When this information is missing or inaccurate, transparency conflicts with the legal and ethical principles of public administration. In this sense, the quality of communication on tourist websites is an indicator of the level of respect for citizens' rights and institutional integrity.

The case of the city of Elbasan

Elbasan is one of the cities with a rich cultural heritage, where Ottoman, Roman and Albanian influences are intertwined. However, analyses show that the websites promoting the city's heritage have obvious problems: inconsistencies between the Albanian and English versions, automatic translations and lack of historical context,

Original Research

the online presentation remains inactive and outdated content, lack of information on physical access to monuments, schedules, prices or local guides. These shortcomings limit the city's ability to attract international tourists and damage its image as a cultural destination. The analysis is based on several official and unofficial sources that provide information about the city's heritage, such as the Elbasan Municipality website (www.elbasani.gov.al), the Elbasan Ethnographic Museum website, the Visit Elbasan portal, the "Skampa" Cultural Center website, articles and promotional pages on the Albania Tourism Portal, TripAdvisor, etc. The main issues identified are related to unprofessional translations and linguistic errors, such as, for example, in the English version of the Elbasan Municipality website, the description of the city's Castle contains incorrect expressions such as: "Elbasan castle is well preserved and has a long history."

Instead of the correct form: "The Castle of Elbasan is well preserved and has a long history." On some tourist sites, the translation is done automatically (Google Translate), without professional editing, creating unnatural texts for international visitors. There is a lack of complete content on the information on the ethnographic museum, the castle, churches, hammams or traditional streets, it is fragmented and often repeated in an incoherent manner. There is a lack of descriptions that connect the historical aspect with the visitor's experience, such as guides, timetables, tickets, contacts. Lack of institutional standardization, so there is no unified strategy for multilingual communication. The municipality, the museum and other institutions use different

styles and formats, without a common visual or terminological model. This creates the perception of a lack of institutional cooperation in cultural promotion. Technical and accessibility problems, inactive links to museum or cultural event websites, lack of optimization for mobile devices. Texts placed as images, which cannot be automatically translated by browsers, which is a very big problem for foreign visitors. Lack of visual and audio materials where the websites contain few low-quality photographs and no explanatory descriptions. No audio or video materials are provided in foreign languages for the presentation of monuments and events. Shallow translation of cultural values where descriptions in English focus only on physical elements such as walls, streets, buildings, without explaining the cultural context, rituals, historical traditions or traditional civic life. This makes the texts cold and unattractive to an international audience. The problems found show that the digital presentation of Elbasan's heritage does not meet the multilingual communication standards set by the Council of Europe (2020) and UNESCO (2019). This violates two essential dimensions of modern cultural policies: the right of tourists to accurate information and the right to access culture in a language they understand. Improvement requires the involvement of professional translators, institutional harmonization between the Municipality, the Ministry of Culture and museum centers, the creation of a common multilingual platform for Elbasan, as a good model for other cities. Specifically, the problems are in the table below:

Table 1.

	Page	Main Problem	Concrete Example
1	elbasani.gov.al	Incorrect translations	"The city is full of cultural object and good preserved walls."
2	Visit Elbasan	Outdated content	Latest events date from 2022
3	Ethnographic Museum	Lack of translation	English version is completely missing
4	"Skampa" Center	Inactive link	"Events" section does not open
5	TripAdvisor pages	pages Incorrect	information Wrong dates for museum opening hours

Theoretical Article

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The quality of information on tourist websites is not only an indicator of the level of professionalism, but also a guarantee of the exercise of the right to information of visitors.

2. In the case of Albania and especially of Elbasan, improving translations, continuous updating of content and institutional unification are essential conditions for the development of cultural tourism and for building a credible international image.

3. Through the full implementation of the legislation on public information and multilingual communication, Albania can strengthen not only the tourist offer, but also the cultural and democratic integrity of its institutions.

4. Drafting a national guide for multilingual communication on cultural heritage tourist websites.

5. Involving professional translators and experienced editors in the tourist discourse.

6. Active implementation of Law No. 119/2014 to guarantee transparency and equal access to public information.

7. Creation of a unified national portal, with standardized and updated content in several languages.

8. Training for public administration in intercultural communication and digital management of tourist information.

9. Cooperation between public institutions and universities, to develop sustainable linguistic and terminological standards.

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