5000 Years of Cycladic Identity, Now for Sale: Economic Development, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Access in Greece's Mythical Paradise

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Abstract

What happens when an entire landscape becomes a product and its people collateral losses? In the Cyclades, decades of tourism development have not only shifted the local economy but also renegotiated the boundaries of memory and belonging. The seasonal rhythms of return, founded on the basis of familiarity and modesty, echoed patterns of continuity that trace their roots to the 5,000-year-old history and culture of the Cycladic Civilisation, have been renegotiated under the logic of extraction. Landscapes are transformed into assets, access is determined by purchasing power, and tangible and intangible heritage and practices are repackaged as attractions or concealed altogether. This thesis explores how tourism, influenced by post-crisis development, has accelerated the cultural and spatial commodification of the Cycladic landscape, as well as how these shifts have affective and social consequences. The main question underlying the research is how modern tourism development standards reconfigure perceptions of belonging, access and memory, as well as the sociocultural implications of these shifts. Explored through semi-structured interviews with Greek and foreign visitors, the study presents reflections around the erasure of informal tourism practices, the decline of local culture and the effects of commercialised and seasonal economy. Nostalgia and feelings of loss emerge as expressions of resistance to the cultural and environmental erosion of the Cyclades, the rupture of generational communal rhythms and access to what was once considered a common good. The Cyclades are more than a case of uneven development; they demonstrate the emotional and cultural costs of a tourism model that prioritises profit over participation. Therefore, focus on continuity and inclusion is a fundamental element of the reimagining of tourism in the Cyclades and Greece as a whole.

Keywords: tourism, commodification, emotional geographies, Cyclades, right to tourism, neoliberalism

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To my parents, who introduced me to the beauty and luminosity of the Cyclades.

Contents

1 Introduction

"For us, Greece is these lands burnt by the sun, and these blue seas with their foaming waves. It's the dark-haired or chestnut-blonde girls, it's the small whitewashed houses and the little taverns, and the songs at night under the moonlight by the seaside or beneath some plane tree." (Elytis, 1979)

In this nostalgic evocation of the Greek landscape, Elytis, one of the most important contributors to the country's literary canon, encapsulates a collective imaginary: one of light, warmth and simplicity. Greece, and the Greek summer in particular, exists not as merely a destination, but as a realm of radiance, stillness and echoes of lived memory. These elements described are not just metaphors, but emotional axes, deeply embedded in the lives of those who seek them out every year. When talking about Greece and the Cycladic Isles, recollections of stillness against modernity, simplicity and luminosity come to mind.

Plenty has been written about the Greek summer, the beauty of the Aegean islands, the crystal blue seas and the scorching sun. From renowned poets to films inspired by its essence, to modern-day odes on social media, summer in Greece, particularly in the Cyclades, has become a powerful depiction of leisure and escape. For many Greek nationals and long-time foreign visitors, this was a time of simplicity and small, quiet luxuries – of long afternoons next to the sea, under the shade of tamarisk trees and the sound of cicadas, of salt-drenched, sunburnt skin and of spontaneous get-togethers with old and new friends. These were summers marked not by carefully planned and curated itineraries, but rather by an ease of being, characterised by homemade meals shared over courtyard tables, laughter reverberating through cobblestone alleys, and a sense of timelessness that blurred the limits between days and nights. But rarely do places remain untouched. What was once viewed as ordinary can feel distant. The Greece that many return to annually may look the same on the surface, but it has entered the ever-growing tourism economy, which brings to the fore new rhythms, expectations and tensions. These landscapes of memory are gradually redefined through the prism of economic growth and the changes that result from it.

Tourism has indisputably emerged as one of the world's fastest-growing industries, accounting for 9.1% of the global GDP in 2023 and with approximately 10.7% of the world

population employed in tourism-related activities, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council (2025). Many nations rely on it to generate substantial profits that contribute to their economic growth, with Greece being one of them. According to the Institute of Greek Tourism Confederation (INSETE), tourism-related activities generated an estimated €21.7 billion in 2024, accounting for 13% of the country's GDP (Ikkos et al., 2025). With arrival numbers rising exponentially, with arrivals almost doubling in the span of 15 years, from 17 million inbound arrivals in 2008 to over 35 million in 2024 (Ikkos et al., 2025; Pegkas, 2022), it is no surprise that the national and local governments aim to capitalise on this momentum.

However, this momentum comes at a price. Continued reliance upon the classic "sun-and-sea" tourism product, indisputably one of – if not the most – successful and marketable products of Greece, further pressure is applied on popular destinations, such as the Cyclades islands. Years of unregulated expansion and ad hoc development, coupled with the promotion of narratives depicting Greece as an idyllic realm of white-washed houses, blue shutters and eternal sunshine, have resulted in what Terkenli and Coccossis (2024) call an "imaginary country". This romanticised portrayal of the country conceals the very real pressures that these islands face: poor infrastructure, seasonal congestion and disruptions in the daily lives of their residents, signs of a broader failure of coordinated planning and management (Prokopiou et al., 2018; Terkenli & Coccossis, 2024; Spillius, 2024).

As tourism continues to soar, so does the worry and frustration about what the future holds among business owners, as well as younger and older generations, who observe a gradual transformation of the Greek summer they once knew and enjoyed into a commodified, luxury experience (Anagnostopoulou, 2024; Magra, 2024). As foreign arrivals increase, accessibility for Greek nationals declines, with approximately 50% of people unable to take a vacation in Greece (Konti, 2024). This exclusion has sparked a general sense of loss and a wave of nostalgia. Across Greece and beyond, people are reminiscing about the holidays with their families, friends and loved ones before the onslaught of mass tourism and the skyrocketing prices. This is situated within the international scene where a return to unpretentious, slower-paced vacations, reminiscent of those of childhood or early adulthood for many, is desired (Southan, 2024).

This research aims to highlight how economic development in Greece, both before and after the 2008 crisis, has transformed the tourism sector, often turning the culture and

traditions of the Cycladic islands into a commodity. Simultaneously, it aims to highlight how the transformation of tourism landscapes over the years has produced affective responses in individuals, reshaping the way they interact with the islands and the extent to which they ultimately have access to them. Thus, this research is prompted by the following research question and sub-questions:

- How has post-crisis tourism development in Greece, particularly in the Cyclades, contributed to the commercialisation of culture and space?
    i. How have processes of commodification and economic progress affected Greek nationals' emotional attachments to Cycladic islands, through experiences of loss, memory and nostalgia?
    ii. To what extent do social tourism schemes in Greece facilitate access to travel in the Cyclades, and what do they reveal about the practical limitations of the right to tourism?

Current research on tourism in Greece focuses on its role in the country's economic recovery, development, tourism flows, and cultural branding. While a lot of studies have been conducted on commodification and its material effects on culture and environment, few have focused on the intersection with affective attachment to place, everyday memory and rights to place, while even fewer question how Greek nationals, particularly those not engaging in tourism-related activities, interpret and emotionally process the shifts stemming from the rapid development and commodification taking place.

Additionally, in Greece, the concepts of social tourism and the right to tourism remain largely unexplored. While policy-centric literature touches upon the issue of subsidised holidays (Kakoudakis and McCabe, 2018), these initiatives and their effectiveness have not yet been empirically measured. By combining multiple in-depth interviews, with both ordinary citizens and experts in the field, and a theoretical framework that looks at the Greek economic development, commodification, emotional geographies and nostalgia, as well as social tourism and the right to tourism, this research offers a more nuance and multi-layered approach on how tourism in the Cyclades is experienced, not only on an economic development level but also on an affective one.

The research follows the following structure. ***Chapter 2*** presents the theoretical background related to the research question and sub-questions. The economic development of Greece throughout the years, as well as the role of tourism, is discussed, followed by discussions on the phenomenon of commodification and how that relates to the case of the Cyclades. Additionally, the theoretical framework is anchored in the exploration of theories of emotional geographies and nostalgia, as well as social tourism and the right to tourism. ***Chapter 3*** outlines the research design, strategy, and process adopted to explore and provide answers to the research question and its sub-questions. Following that, ***Chapter 4*** introduces and discusses the findings derived from the conducted interviews. This section is divided into four main parts, each with its respective subsections. The first section analyses the economic development of Greece and the way it was experienced by participants throughout the years. The following investigates the cultural and spatial commodification taking place and its implications. Then, the affective responses to the socio-spatial changes are discussed. Finally, this section explores themes of social tourism, accessibility, and perceptions of entitlement to leisure. ***Chapter 5*** presents future potential recommendations on both academic, policy and societal levels.

2 Theoretical Framework

This section introduces the theoretical lens, which serves as the foundation of the thesis, following four interrelated axes. The first one pertains to economic development before and after the 2008 financial crisis, as well as the centrality of tourism as a form of recovery, based on the literature of neoliberal restructuring and post-crisis investment. The second axis considers the role of commodification, particularly in the context of culture and landscapes, which turns experiences and local elements into consumable products. The third deals with emotional geographies and nostalgia, exploring how tourists attribute meaning and attachment through affective relations to space. The final axis focuses on social tourism principles and the right to tourism as a potential remedy to exclusionary forms of development and as a tool for social equity.

Within the Greek context, tourism, leisure and travel have deep historical roots. Some of the earliest documented travelers were Herodotus, who journeyed around the Mediterranean around the 5th century BC (Sharpley, 2018), and Pausanias, whose *Periegesis Hellados* (Description of Greece) in the 2nd century AD can be considered as one of the first travel guides, describing myths, rituals and the geography of various Greek regions (Elsner, 1992). Travel in ancient Greece was primarily for religious, athletic, intellectual, and civic purposes: pilgrimages to sanctuaries like Delphi and Olympia, attendance at festivals and sporting events such as the Olympic Games, or studies under renowned philosophers, like Plato and Socrates, in Athens. These mobilities were not merely utilitarian, but rather imbued with cultural capital and acts of memory. In later times, specifically during the Enlightenment, Greece became a defining site for Western elites undertaking the Grand Tour, who were interested in classical heritage, history, and whimsical landscapes. This evolution of travel, from sacred and intellectual journeys to cultural pilgrimages, demonstrates, according to Sharpley (2018), broader transformations in tourism related to class, meanings, and emotions. These historical precedents act as a foundation for understanding that tourism was and remains a deeply affective, stratified and politicised sphere in contemporary Greece.

2.1 A Tale of Greek Economic Development: Pre and Post the 2008 Crisis

Greece has a long and complicated history of economic development, enjoying both significant highs and lows. Before the 2008 global financial crisis, the country was

experiencing substantial economic growth, driven by investments, European Union funding and a booming service sector, particularly in the tourism industry (Vergopoulos, 1987). During a conference in 2019, Poul Thomsen, Director of the International Monetary Fund, details that Greece's integration into the Eurozone in 2001 facilitated access to inexpensive credit, which in turn led to augmented borrowing both in the public and private sectors, thus contributing to overall economic prosperity and investments in infrastructure (Thomsen, 2019; Tsakloglou, 2017). Subsequently, the 2004 Olympic Games hosted by the country further accelerated the country's economic development, particularly through ameliorating infrastructure, transportation within the country, tourism infrastructure and urban development. In turn, this growth led to increased foreign interest and investments in sectors such as real estate, tourism, and hospitality (Dritsakis, 2004). Complimentary to this economic growth, the country saw a rise in employment and spending, hence a 4% GDP growth was experienced, with scholars such as Petrakis (2012), however, underlining that the economic development at the time was fueled by external borrowing and consumption, rather than a balanced domestic economic activity, ultimately making Greece vulnerable and prone to external economic shocks.

Even before the global financial crisis hit, the Greek economy was already burdened by immense public debt, which exceeded 100% of the country's GDP (Petrakos et al., 2015). Its fiscal system grew increasingly inefficient, further weakening its public economy, which also became heavily reliant on imports, as well as government spending rather than industrial productivity. When the crisis hit the already vulnerable country, it entered a period of prolonged socio-economic hardship, with the GDP declining by over 25% between 2008 and 2014. Unemployment amongst the population reached an all-time high of 28% in 2013, with more than half of the younger population being out of job, thus enabling a significant brain-drain, as more and more skilled workers migrated in other European countries in search of a better future (Petrakis, 2012; Petrakos et al., 2015).

In the years that followed, until 2015, the country entered a period of austerity, characterised by cuts in wages and pensions, tax increases, and layoffs of public and private employees, to meet the terms set by the International Monetary Fund to secure a loan of €290 billion for the country. Subsequently, these measures led to further economic stagnation rather than prosperity, social inequity and political instability and unrest, with widespread protests taking place around the country (News 24/7, 2012). Ultimately, as Petrakis (2012)

argues, the measures, although intended to correct financial imbalances, were unsuccessful in fostering further investments and instead exacerbated an already severe economic stagnation.

By 2015, the financial situation had commenced to stabilise, supported by structural reforms, debt restructuring policies and increased – compared to the previous years – investor confidence. Throughout the years of crisis, tourism, which continued to grow, emerged as one of the most critical factors in the country's economic recovery. Greece remained an attractive tourism destination for international visitors, thus progressively boosting its GDP and employment, extending to different sectors of the economy (Dritsakis, 2004). As of 2023, tourism amounts to approximately 13% of the country's GDP, welcoming more than 32 million inbound visitors (INSETE et al., 2024). Its benefits spread to various areas, both geographically and financially, with a significant revitalisation of island and coastal economies, as well as substantial foreign investments being made around the country (Petrakis, 2012). Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for sustainable and diversified economic development, as the over-reliance on a single sector exposed significant vulnerabilities in the Greek economy and led to substantial financial losses.

To address the devastating impacts of the economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Greek government implemented the Greece 2.0 National Recovery and Resilience Plan, financed through the EU's NextGenerationEU funds (Ministry of Finance Recovery and Resilience Facility Agency, 2024). Its primary aim was to promote sustainable and resilient development within the country across various sectors, including tourism, culture, education, and healthcare. The most significant investments in the field of tourism were channeled towards luxury hotel renovations, developing gastronomy tourism, and other experiential packages, which essentially repackaged tradition and locality as marketable products, rather than reforming the sector's structural weaknesses.

From this perspective, there is a stark contrast with earlier forms of tourism in Greece, especially before the 1990s, which were characterized by smaller-scale, family-run businesses deeply embedded in local economies. Tourism offered a more authentic and slower-paced experience, directly benefiting local livelihoods and preserving cultural diversity. These community-based models, prevalent in both island and continental Greece, fostered deeply meaningful and sincere exchanges between locals and visitors, contrasting

with the current status quo promoted by the Greece 2.0 scheme, which emphasises growth, competitiveness, and profitability.

Thus, while framed as “sustainable”, such development largely reinforces structural weaknesses. Sustainability in this sense is used as a pretext rather than a transformative vision, while resilience is limited to the ability of the tourism industry to recover from crises without changing its basic rationale. Ultimately, Greece 2.0 exemplifies a neoliberal recovery logic, wherein sustainability is instrumentalised and resilience signifies a guised return to the “business-as-usual” model.

2.2 Commodification in Tourism

The phenomenon of commodification is frequently observed in tourism studies and discourse, particularly in regions where tourism development is widespread. Commodification or commoditisation within the tourism industry refers to the process through which cultural and natural elements, traditions and experiences take on a new role as products and marketable attractions. While these experiences and goods are presented as authentic, this notion is often contested within tourism discourse and subjected to different interpretations based on various perspectives (Coşkun, 2021). While the demand for authentic experiences gradually increases, acting as a conduit for travel, it also paradoxically leads to the commodification of these products, ultimately creating a vicious circle. MacCannell (1973) introduced the notion of “staged authenticity, " which contributes to understanding how tourism can lead to artificial representations of culture and engagement with them, rather than genuine interactions. He further argued that tourists are motivated by the desire for authentic experiences, which in turn leads to tourism actors commodifying them, thus providing staged experiences and ultimately corroding authenticity.

Additionally, scholars like Cohen (1988) suggest that the impact of commoditisation is not inherently culturally degrading. In his work, he acknowledged that the phenomenon could lead to false and inauthentic representations and experiences, but has, however, the ability to revitalise and preserve cultures and cultural elements. Coşkun (2021) also suggests that commodification has a dual role, providing economic incentives that aid in cultural preservation while simultaneously endangering the integrity of cultural practices due to its management and regulation.

Discourse in tourism literature often refers to the dangers that commodification poses for intangible heritage, reducing its depth to surface-level value and aiming for financial gain. In her work, Ballengee-Morris (2002) condemns this phenomenon as it diminishes deeply meaningful cultural symbols, representations and practices into commercial products for tourists to consume. Similarly, scholars such as Young and Markham (2019) emphasise the socio-cultural tensions arising from commoditisation. In their work, emphasis is placed on both the economic benefits that can accrue to host communities through the generation of income and employment opportunities within the sector, as well as the potential depletion of practices, traditions, and places that are transformed into commodities. Additionally, attention is drawn to problems surrounding land allocation and resource use. Drawing upon this, heritage tourism is particularly affected, as historical sites, monuments and museums are transformed into commercialised experiences rather than highlighted for their intrinsic cultural value. Hewison (1989) argues that this process overshadows the historical narratives and accuracy of these spaces represent, leading tourists to misinterpret historical and cultural heritage. In turn, this can also affect how host communities interact, understand, and portray their identities, collective memory, and heritage in favour of financial gains.

In recent years, commodification has been accelerated by technological, economic, and social factors, such as globalisation, capitalism, and the emergence of social media as a significant force in tourism, further complicating discussions around the authenticity of heritage and culture. Coşkun (2021) highlights how social media has altered the perception of authenticity, leading to idealized or false representations of destinations. These portrayals shape how tourist motivations and expectations are formed, resulting in discrepancies between expectations and actual experiences, which further confound traditional notions of authenticity. In addition, the literature suggests that tourists are increasingly seeking more authentic experiences that showcase local realities, rather than commercialised ones.

This quest for authenticity, however, actively clashes with the nature of commodified products, which provide tourists with comfortable and digestible experiences over less-polished aspects of local conditions, therefore illustrating an essential element within tourism studies: the rising tension between tourists' desire for authenticity and the economically driven workings of local tourism actors (Picard & Di Giovine, 2014). In Greece, this tension is often manifested in images that claim to portray "authentic Greek life," such as white-

washed houses with blue shutters, artisanal restaurants and food experiences, or folkloric performances. As these representations circulate on social media, they become embedded in tourism marketing, therefore constructing what Reijnders (2021) coins “imaginative heritage”, which shapes how visitors engage with destinations. In doing so, imaginative heritage not only creates symbolic representations of places but also exerts pressure on local actors to reproduce these visions, oftentimes at the expense of cultural complexity. This results in blurring the lines between cultural preservation and commercialisation, as the experience aims to fulfil mediated expectations rather than correspond to and empower local realities.

These discussions around commodification are particularly relevant to the case of the Cycladic islands, wherein the phenomenon emerged after the 2008 crisis. As the Greek economy relied heavily on the tourism industry in its recovery efforts, local culture, traditions, and practices became commodified, used as a strategy to attract more international visitors and stimulate the economy. Academics like Guduraš (2014) and Liagouras (2019) underscore how the tourism sector in the Cyclades has heavily prioritised economic recovery and benefits, oftentimes to the detriment of culture and its expressions and community interests, ultimately prompting tensions around resource usage, the depletion of cultural practices and community displacement. Within the Greek and Cycladic context, these tensions are palpable: tourists seek out the “authentic Greek life”, while simultaneously opting for pre-packaged experiences that replicate what is promoted as genuine, thus reinforcing this vicious circle between the quest for authenticity and further commercialisation of practices and space that ultimately diminishes space for local expression.

2.3 Emotional Geographies and Nostalgia

In tourism studies, the relationship between place and emotion has become a focal point, giving way to the exploration of the concept of emotional geographies. Emotional geographies investigate how spaces are charged with affective meaning, how emotional experiences connect individuals to places, and aim to understand how tourists attach meaning and importance to spaces and social interactions, in a highly personal manner (Anderson & Smith, 2001). Moreover, as Urry (2007) discusses in his work, the concept offers important

insights into how memories, identity processes, and feelings of belonging play a vital role in the act of place-making by tourists, rather than space being perceived as an element with static meaning. It is thus evident that tourism mobilities, within the scope of emotional geographies, are not simply physical movements but instead are charged with affect, whether it be a sense of belonging, longing, or nostalgia.

Tuan (1977) underscores that "place" is constructed in pause, where mobilities give way to deeper emotional processes, such as reflection, attachment and investment. Within the context of travel, this pause is materialised and understood through ritualistic acts such as returning to familiar places, photographing sites, or indulging in actions emotionally reminiscent of previous experiences. Affective interactions yield what is termed as "sense of place", wherein emotional attachments are formed both individually and collectively towards specific spaces.

Emotional geographies often intersect with memory politics and issues of representation. Emotions experienced by visitors are frequently the byproduct of media narratives, historical and cultural imaginaries related to the destination (Haldrup & Larsen, 2009). However, these imaginaries often clash with local experiences, presenting idealised or romanticised aspects and realities, therefore demonstrating the power of tourism to blend personal afflictions with socio-cultural histories and circumstances. In addition to this, tourists oftentimes experience destinations through nostalgic lenses, shaped by family histories and earlier visits, similarly affecting their emotional responses and place-making processes (Wang et al., 2007).

These interactions within tourism mobilities often inform themes of nostalgia within existing literature. Nostalgia (stemming from the Greek word *nostos*-, meaning "homecoming" and -*algos*, meaning "pain") is often understood as the psychological state wherein tourists frequently seek emotional comfort, cultural rootedness, or escape from modernity (Stephan et al., 2012). One of the main elaborations of nostalgia within tourism studies originates from Boym (2001), who distinguishes two forms: restorative and reflective. The former aims to recreate lost themes and homes and recover what were considered to be "golden ages" of the past, most often associated with heritage-driven discourses. By comparison, the latter centres around melancholy and self-awareness, oftentimes mourning pasts that cannot be recovered, but the affect remains in present times.

While both forms can be traced in tourism, the way they are manifested differs. In terms of restorative nostalgia, prevalent in heritage tourism, it involves efforts to recreate historical experiences within the present, whether through architecture, festivals, or other traditional rituals. On the other hand, reflective nostalgia is more frequently observed in return tourism or sentimental visits to places of emotional significance, focusing less on historical accuracy and more on reconnecting with memories (Marschall, 2014). Nevertheless, both forms of nostalgia shape the way tourists interact with destinations, as well as their perceptions and emotional responses related to them.

Nostalgia is not only a significant theme in itself, but it also transcends broader socio-cultural and political environments, responding to shifting historical contexts. Pickering and Keightley (2006) argue that nostalgia becomes a valuable resource in times of crisis and difficulty, as people tend to summon positive emotional recollections to navigate uncertain social circumstances. This is particularly relevant to the Greek context, where the trauma of the economic crisis and its subsequent consequences triggered a shift to nostalgic images that yearn for simpler times and experiences prior to the crisis (Zestanakis, 2025). Such reactions are often socio-politically charged, as they aim to counterbalance the effects of neoliberalism, globalization, and sociocultural homogeneity. Travelers to the Cycladic isles are often after an idealised image of Greece, which can be traced back decades – an image that offers an "authentic" experience. Paradoxically, their presence intensifies the very transformations and images that they seek to evade, contributing to the commodification of both memory and place.

The concept of nostalgia becomes more nuanced when it encompasses domestic and diasporic forms. The former involves a navigation within the Greek reality and appreciation of collective landscapes and social practices that reinforce a common identity in the face of the imminent dangers posed by the global tourism industry, while the latter concerns emotionally charged visits to familiar places, which conceal memories - pleasant and unpleasant - and act as spaces of cultural reunion (Theodoropoulou, 2019). Both forms reinforce emotional attachments to destinations and shape motivations and perceptions, but do so in different terms and temporalities.

Emotional and nostalgic attachments with places are never formed in a vacuum; they are deeply embedded in the processes of commodification and exclusion. As local landscapes become commodities to be sold, a subsequent marginalisation of those who once could connect profoundly with these destinations occurs. As these phenomena evolve, questions of access and equity loom large, forcing an inevitable confrontation with issues of participation in the tourism industry.

2.4 Social Tourism and the Right to Tourism

Social tourism finds its roots in broader debates around equity, social justice, and sustainable development, aiming to provide fair and equitable access to tourism and its products to marginalised groups traditionally excluded based on financial, social, or cultural factors. This form of tourism recognises that travel is not purely a consumable good but rather an element that contributes to the general well-being of individuals. Social tourism emerged in European states around the 1930s, where access to holidays became institutionalised as a right (Bélanger & Jolin, 2011; Haulot, 1981). Haulot (1981), in particular, emphasised the value of leisure time, not solely for its central role in human welfare but also for democracies themselves, framing it as a means of fostering and strengthening community ties and identities. Hunziker (1951) was one of the pioneering scholars who coined the term "social tourism", defining it as "the relationships and phenomena in the field of tourism resulting from participation in travel by economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged elements of society" (McCabe & Qiao, 2020). While his research initially focused on the financial aspects and support provided by social tourism, it gradually evolved to encompass a more comprehensive understanding and application of planning policies and mobility infrastructures (Bélanger & Jolin, 2011). Minnaert (2004) suggests that this form of tourism aligns with the general sentiment of distributive justice and welfare rights, viewing it as a means for mitigating the marginalisation of individuals and groups as well as a conduit for ameliorating the quality of life, life satisfaction and overall participation of demoted communities.

Social tourism's theoretical underpinnings also lie within Sen's (1974) "capability approach", further elaborated in her work "The Quality of Life" (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993), underscoring the importance of reinforcing individuals' freedoms to achieve long-term personal fulfilment and embark on meaningful life projects. As such, tourism – and in this

context, social tourism – can actively contribute to capabilities such as leisure, social interaction, and emotional well-being, which are essential components of prosperity. Similarly, academics like McCabe and Johnson (2013) emphasise that the psychological benefits stemming from tourism, such as an improved sense of self-respect, enhanced social and familial ties, and overall improved mental state, serve as the foundation of a cohesive and strong sense of community and individuality. From this perspective, tourism is not viewed as a mere commodity or luxury, but rather as a vital element in broader community well-being and cohesion. Complementary to the theoretical frameworks discussed, empirical examples from Cisneros-Martínez et al. (2017) illustrate how social tourism can have a direct impact on local communities through the extension of the tourism season, contributions to medium and small enterprises, and regional development. This, in conjunction with the mental and structural benefits of social tourism, illustrates how it can serve as both a social and financial policy tool.

Closely related to the notion of social tourism is the discourse surrounding a right to tourism. Rooted in international human rights law, particularly in Article 24 of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 7.d of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a right to tourism entails access to rest, leisure and paid holidays (United Nations, 1948; United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, 1966). While these documents serve as a strong theoretical base, their function strays away from purely abstract ideas. Instead, it sets the foundations for implementable frameworks to safeguard the accessibility of individuals to holidays. These provisions are essential, particularly in areas heavily impacted by tourism, both on a collective level, in terms of economy, and on an individual level, guaranteeing the well-being of local communities (Breakey & Breakey, 2013). Though international human rights law recognises a right to tourism, its practical recognition and application are often hindered by neoliberal systems, which largely centre around the commercialisation of leisure activities. Under this scope, tourism is viewed as a privilege based on market access rather than a universal right, thereby challenging the fundamental values of equity and social inclusion.

Scholars call for a more expansive and nuanced understanding of this right. Breakey & Breakey (2013) propose a comprehensive and multi-layered framework that views tourism as more than just an economic activity, but more so as a human right comprising of five layers: the right to access mobility, the right to leisure as a detrimental element of labor

conditions, protection against discrimination, elimination of exploitation and intersectional accessibility – whether financial, physical or cultural. These rights intersect various areas of civil society and connect tourism to broader discourse around equity and dignity, straying away from legal debates and instead linking the right to tourism to socio-political and economic ones.

In parallel, contemporary debates advocate for more modern approaches, contextualising the right to tourism within broader cultural, economic and institutional frameworks. Centering tourism as a common good, accessible to all individuals, promotes social inclusion, cohesion and democratic participation, with scholars like Bélanger and Jolin (2011) indicating that this idea harmonises with the International Social Tourism Organization's (ISTO) mission for "tourism for all", which entails the use of tourism as a means to achieving social cohesion and equity, particularly with the contribution of state-supported initiatives and funding. Moreover, the ISTO initiatives for widespread access to tourism promote this message through the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (World Tourism Organisation, 1999), emphasising its function as a common good within welfare and development policy frameworks. In turn, such initiatives challenge traditionally exclusionary and commodifying forms of tourism, promoting governance structures that are inclusive and socially just. From a critical perspective, the right to tourism encompasses both positive and negative obligations for states and private actors: democratising mobility through the eradication of restrictions, providing infrastructure accessible to tourists, and protecting both tourists and local communities from exploitation. Materialising these obligations mandates transitioning from neo-liberal, profit-driven governance to more participatory, equity-oriented governance that ultimately views tourism as a public good (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2005).

A compelling example of the successful implementation of social tourism policies comes from the region, particularly from Yugoslavia's post-war social tourism model. Rooted in socialist ideology, access to tourism was institutionalised as a right, allowing pensioners, youth, and workers to go on state-funded holidays. This, in itself, was a hallmark of an institutional infrastructure that viewed leisure not only as a collective right but also as a means of reinforcing solidarity, health, and community identity (Hall, 2022). In contrast, contemporary Greek initiatives appear heterogeneous and market-dependent, straying away from principles of inclusion and towards short-term relief.

Within this context, Greece poses an interesting case study in terms of social tourism policy. After the 2008 financial downturn, austerity measures severely impacted public welfare programs, including social tourism initiatives (Papadopoulos & Roumpakis, 2012). Nevertheless, public actors such as the Public Employment Service (DYPA – formerly OAED) and the Organization of Welfare Benefits and Social Solidarity (OPEKA – formerly OGA) have actively tried to maintain initiatives that favour economically disadvantaged groups of Greek society, such as low-income families, pensioners, and unemployed individuals, and allow access to the tourism sector. The name changes of these institutions are not purely for administrative reasons, but more so reflect broader efforts to modernise and align Greek institutions with EU standards, through the optimisation of efficiency, market responsiveness, and digitalisation (Hellenic Republic, 2023). DYPA's restructuring, for example, was part of Greece's 2023 National Resilience Plan, wherein efforts to align employment with labour market needs were increased. These programs include subsidies and financial aid, aimed at both high and low-season travel and stimulating demand for lesser-known destinations, serving a dual purpose and reflecting social tourism's objectives – inclusion and sustainability (Kakoudakis & McCabe, 2018). Nevertheless, these reforms, partially funded by EU recovery schemes, are part of a broader neoliberal governance that prioritises cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and competitiveness over social cohesion and accessibility, and therefore does not necessarily align with the principles and aims of social tourism.

Zooming in on the Cyclades islands, the contradiction between mass tourism and the aim of social tourism becomes more discernible. As a destination, the islands are increasingly becoming subject to international investors, luxury development, and short-term rentals, thus becoming increasingly inaccessible to the average Greek citizen (Karagianis & Thomakos, 2020). As demonstrated by Prokopiou et al. (2018), tourism expansion within the Cyclades has resulted in infrastructural pressures, such as limited airport capacity, unequal distribution of accommodation, seasonal congestion, and underdeveloped environmental provisions. In addition, the marginalisation of local communities and lower-income visitors in favour of international tourists further exacerbates existing social inequalities and material constraints. Kakoudakis and McCabe (2018) note that, despite the potential of social tourism in alleviating such problems, its implementation remains somewhat limited and underfunded, particularly in regions such as the Cyclades, where market forces determine development.

3 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology employed to explore the lived experiences and memories of tourism in the Cyclades, covering themes such as the economic shifts in Greece, cultural and natural commodification taking place on the islands, the role of nostalgia and shifts in access to leisure. In this context, the study employs a qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews to elicit the affective, social, and economic aspects of tourism and the way it has been experienced by a variety of individuals who have engaged with the islands over prolonged periods. This chapter, therefore, discusses the research design, data collection methods, operationalisation of central concepts, sampling strategy, and analysis procedures, as well as the ethics and some limitations of the study.

3.1 Research Strategy and Design

The research adopts a qualitative approach to investigate how tourism, commodification, nostalgia, and social aspects of tourism intersect in the Cyclades. According to Bryman (2016), qualitative methods enable an in-depth and nuanced exploration of participants' lived experiences, memories, and perceptions within the specific socio-cultural settings examined. In this case, it involves understanding how the economic hardships and later development of the Greek state were experienced by the interviewees, the meanings and emotions they attach to the islands, as well as their views on the commodification that is taking place.

The choice to focus on the Cycladic islands stems from the islands' longstanding role as a pillar of history and culture, and a representative image of Greece as a sea and sun destination, coupled with their central role in debates around commodification, overtourism, and tourism justice. Additionally, the evolution of the islands' character and essence presents an opportunity to explore the rich cultural and emotional geographies connected to them, as places that people have visited, remembered, yearned for, and, in present times, mourned.

The research therein aims to understand how different individuals from various backgrounds, ages and proximities to tourism respond to changing landscapes and interpret the phenomena taking place on these islands. Theoretically, it is informed by concepts from the literature, such as the commodification of culture, emotional geographies, nostalgia, social tourism, and the right to tourism, with the intention of empirically grounding how people experience and articulate these transformations in the Cyclades.

3.2 Method and Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method to gather data, assessing how participants make sense of their experiences and emerging developments in the field of tourism in the Cyclades. This approach provided access to personal and intangible experiences and observations (Bryman, 2016; Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). It elicited conditions for exploring recollections and observations, between emotional and critical points of view, offering textured perspectives on the evolution and engagement with the Cycladic islands. Unlike methods such as surveys or structured interviews, this method allowed participants to lead the conversations and articulate their thoughts and feelings in a way that was more comfortable and tailored to each one individually. As such, the uncovering of deeper sentimental aspects, critiques, and observations that would otherwise remain uncovered was rendered possible.

The interview guide was designed based on the theoretical groundings of this research, which generally steered the conversations through key themes such as the economic development and changes, the cultural and spatial aspects of commodification, nostalgic and emotional sentiments, as well as questions of access in tourism. Nevertheless, it also allowed flexibility around the issues discussed, approaching them not as isolated themes, but interconnected elements. Participants were presented with open-ended questions, allowing them to express themselves freely, and were encouraged to share personal experiences, jokes, memories, and observations from all the years interacting with the islands. Nine interviews were conducted, each lasting 35 to 80 minutes. All interviews were conducted remotely in either Greek or English, via video or phone call, allowing participants to express themselves more comfortably and freely. Transcriptions were performed with the aid of online software, Turboscribe, and later refined manually.

This dialogic method overall contributed to the construction of not only informative but also affective narratives, which were marked by changes in tone, rhythm, and pauses, signifying both yearning and loss.

3.3 Operationalisation

This study is based on Bryman's (2016) deductive approach, which involves converting theoretical concepts into empirical indicators to structure the interviews. These concepts are as follows:

Theoretical Concept	Brief Definition	Example Question
Economic Development in Greece	Structural changes in regional and the national economy, partially brought about by investments, tourism flows and economic recovery policies (Dritsakis, 2004)	"Can you describe how the 2008 crisis transformed the tourism industry in Greece?"
Commodification	The process of turning local culture, traditions and landscapes into consumable products for tourist to indulge in (MacCannell, 1973; Urry, 2007)	"Do you think that tourism has led to a "selling off" or commercialization of local culture or traditions? How has the natural environment been affected?"
Emotional Geographies	How emotions affect and are affected by a given spatial context as one feels, recalls and treads through places (Anderson & Smith, 2001)	"How does being in the Cyclades make you feel, and has that changed over time?"
Nostalgia	A sentimental longing for a past understood through elements of memory, emotion and narratives as a response to change (Boym, 2001)	"When you think about your first visits to the Cyclades, what do you remember most vividly?"

Social Tourism and the Right to Tourism	The concept of access to tourism as a fundamental human right, centering around state responsibility and social justice within leisure discourses (Breakey & Breakey, 2013; McCabe & Johnson, 2013)	"Have you ever felt / know of some people are excluded from enjoying the Cyclades because of rising costs or development standards?" "Have you seen or experienced forms of tourism that seem more equitable, inclusive or community-oriented? What were they like?"

3.4 Sample and Units of Analysis

After determining the questions based on the theoretical concepts, the following step was to identify potential contributors. Selection prioritized participants who could provide rich and diverse perspectives on these themes. Therefore, the research employs a mixed sampling approach, consisting mainly of purposive and convenience sampling, whilst also recruiting two participants through snowball sampling. This strategy enabled the careful selection of individuals with diverse and rich knowledge and views on the development and evolution of tourism in the Cyclades, as well as their implications on a socio-economic and cultural level (Bryman, 2016). A total of 9 participants were interviewed, with variations in terms of age, ranging from 26 to 64 years old, employment status, and level of engagement with the islands. An exploratory interview was conducted to test the efficacy of the questions and their relevance to the literature and research questions.

The majority of older participants commenced visiting the islands around the 1970s and the 1980s and thus provided the research with rich narratives and recollections of how the tourism industry evolved throughout the years, as well as the changes that became more noticeable with time. Additionally, they were able to reflect on how these changes have personally affected their vacationing habits, their relationships with the islands, and the

sentiments that emerge due to the rapid transformations they have undergone. Younger participants in their twenties and thirties, though less experienced with tourism before the economic crisis and its effects, were able to provide valuable insights and reflections into contemporary issues and behaviours surrounding tourism, affordability and access to tourism as well as how they have come to engage with the Cyclades as young adults in antithesis to how they did so as children.

In addition to regular visitors and part-time residents of the islands, two participants were selected based on their professional expertise and activities in fields directly relevant to the research. These individuals are active in the fields of tourism, tourism activism, cultural policy, and tourism studies, and were expected to offer their accounts from a much broader and substantive perspective on relevant policy shifts, developments, and transformations in the tourism industry. These experts, therefore, complement the experiential aspect of the research with more macro-level issues and policy implications.

In their majority, participants were of Greek origin, except for one, which enabled the research to investigate localised differences in views and experiences, as well as the extent to which they relate and are preoccupied with the issues at hand. Achieving a relative balance in gender representation was desired, as was promoting background diversity in socio-economic and tourism aspects. Interviews were anonymised and the use of pseudonyms was employed to protect the privacy and safeguard confidentiality, as participants expressed views on issues and examples that might be perceived as politically colored. This aligns with Saunders et al.'s (2014) stance on the necessity of anonymisation as both a practical and ethical obligation of researchers in qualitative approaches, which mandates a careful management of data against issues of confidentiality.

3.5 Data Analysis

Following the conversations with participants, a rich pool of data emerged, thus prompting the process of interpretation. Thematic analysis, as introduced by Braun et al. (2008), was employed, which facilitates the identification of patterns and themes across the entire database, rendering it suitable for examining the nuanced and multi-layered narratives

in qualitative research. The analysis followed a six-step process: familiarisation with the data, followed by the generation of codes, searching for themes and reviewing them, defining and naming them, and ultimately producing the final report. It is worth noting that during the coding process and the subsequent definition of themes, the coding software ATLAS.ti was utilized.

The familiarisation process was initially executed through a thorough review of the interview transcripts, which were later revisited to note initial ideas, quotes, and analytical insights. During this process, both an inductive and a deductive approach were employed, wherein the former yielded new insights, and the latter involved associating excerpts with the pre-existing conceptual framework developed around Greek economic development, commodification, nostalgia, and social tourism.

Codes were grouped into broader themes such as “tourism-induced change”, “economic precarity and resilience”, “commodification of space and culture”, “emotional responses to transformation”, “nostalgic recollections of space” and “perceived exclusion”. Each theme was then refined to maintain consistency and clarity, with particular emphasis placed on how emotions intersected with narratives. Especially concerning personal histories and socio-cultural recollections of the Cyclades.

Thematic saturation was reached when no new codes or insights emerged during the final interviews, indicating a level of adequacy in the dataset, capable of supporting analysis. The results of thematic analysis shaped the structure of the findings to ensure coherence between the research design, analysis, and interpretation.

3.6 Limitations

While the analysis generated rich insights into the emotional and socio-economic dynamics, there are limitations to be acknowledged, as they may have contributed to the construction of the findings. Firstly, the research includes a relatively small sample size (9 participants), which inherently limits the generalizability of the findings to the general population. Furthermore, the data, while rich in insights, captures a limited range of perspectives and realities in terms of social, economic, cultural, and geographical contexts, thus reducing their reach. Secondly, the sample predominantly consisted of Greek nationals,

which may include some cultural or national bias towards the tourism experiences, particularly concerning more subjective facets, such as collective identity and nostalgia. This results in a lack of representation of non-local and international perspectives. Thirdly, the choice of employing a convenience and purposive approach, while relevant to the study, suggests that all respondents were more well-versed in the issues affecting the Cyclades than the average Greek citizen. As such, interviewees were predisposed to reflect deeply on the transformations but also to exhibit opinions that are more likely to be critical or nostalgic than those who consider themselves infrequent or casual visitors.

While the inclusion of experts enhanced the findings, it directs the discourse toward more policy-oriented arguments and interpretations of tourism phenomena, which may not fully align with the general discourse. It should be mentioned that during several interviews, participants displayed emotional distress, particularly when talking about the Greek financial crisis and how it reshaped their feelings and connections to the islands. These reactions underscore the emotional weight these socio-cultural transformations carry, as well as the existence of trauma connected to them. The research in this context is not meant to provoke negative feelings. Still, it acknowledges that such reactions and feelings are in themselves rich forms of data, the interpretation of which is treaded carefully.

Nevertheless, the study's approach and the insights gained from the interviews enable the identification of general patterns and themes that may potentially apply to other tourism destinations. The depth of both emotional and socio-economic details captured partly compensates for the relatively limited scope of the study, thus making it a meaningful input for discourse around tourism and the changes it can produce around culture, space and emotional landscapes.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Approval of the interview guide was obtained before data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, and consent was secured verbally before the interviews. Their anonymity was preserved by assigning pseudonyms. Interviews were stored in a secure environment and used purely for academic purposes. This research adheres to the ethical guidelines of Erasmus University Rotterdam.

4 Findings & Discussion

This chapter presents the core findings of the research, drawing on insights from semi-structured interviews. The content is arranged thematically, reflecting recurring patterns, shared concerns, and contradictory points expressed by participants, while connecting them to the broader socio-economic landscape that affects tourism in the Cyclades. This chapter not only provides a descriptive account but also engages critically with the findings, connecting empirical insights to the theoretical framework previously discussed. Through this, the research highlights how local realities and experiences intersect with global dynamics, and how individual perceptions of place, memory, and belonging are simultaneously shaped by and opposed to dominant tourism paradigms.

4.1 Greek Economic Development: Views on Change, Crisis and Adjustment

The course of the Greek economic development up until the 2008 financial crisis, and its later results on the livelihoods of many Greek families, is characterised by periods of prosperity and modernisation, followed by collapses and recoveries. Through conversations with participants, narratives and experiences reflect not solely the broader socio-economic shifts triggered by the crisis and actively recorded in literature, but also subjective experiences that can only be articulated through memory, personal events, and intergenerational comparison.

4.1.1 Pre-Crisis Growth and Perceptions on Development

During conversations with participants, critical reflections on the period before the country's economic calamities revealed increased wealth and institutional trust. These perceptions were rooted in the improvements in public sector employment, alongside links to European Union funds that further enhanced development and quality of life, primarily through investments in public infrastructure, healthcare, and access to education. However, while integration in the EU and the Eurozone was widely associated with perceptions of prosperity, it also introduced increased reliance on external funding and compliance with broader neoliberal models, which were later weaponized against the country in the form of austerity measures and disciplinary economic policies once economic instability in the country began. In effect, Greece, along with other countries in a similar position, such as

Spain, Ireland, and Portugal, was penalized for structural weaknesses that were, in part, cultivated and exacerbated through the mechanisms of EU integration.

Nevertheless, employment in state-funded sectors, such as public services, teaching and construction projects, was described as the means to ensure stability, with Interviewee #6 underscoring that employment in these fields, coupled with property acquisitions and transfers, allowed Greeks to "secure a home, support children's and retire with dignity". This is not to be understood purely as material wealth, but rather as a factor of economic stability and normalcy for many Greek households. The predominant mode of thinking for those who came of age at that time was informed by the perception that work equated long-term security, which at the time, was highly interlinked with the public sector, traditionally understood as the only safe employment option. Interviewee #6 noted that "even if the salary wasn't high, it was stable and people could plan their lives around it."

It should be noted however that, the growth of the Greek economy was not perceived to be substantial, as many interviewees described it as "superficial" or "not real", underlining that it was supported by external borrowing and foreign investments, rather than generated internally, ultimately rendering the Greek economy less competitive and vulnerable to external shocks (Petrakis, 2012). As one participant, Interviewee #5, remarked, "The economy grew, but it wasn't based on anything solid. We were spending more than we earned."

Furthermore, as the literature suggests, Greece's integration into the European Union and the adoption of the euro were initially seen in a positive light, as a step towards a more modernist approach, but were retrospectively recoined. The relatively easy access to cheaper credit following the country's entry into the Eurozone was widely perceived as a determining factor in land speculation and investments in tourism infrastructure, particularly in coastal areas and islands. Several observed that during this time, there was a rapid expansion of roads, housing, and construction developments as well as second-home construction, in what was previously known as modest towns, thus transforming them into overbuilt spaces, with severely altered social and physical landscapes. One participant referred to a period of "cheap loans and unsubstained optimism" that in essence captures the notion that there was disproportional growth taking place and a weakened governance that was incapable of absorbing these profits, ultimately mirroring what Petrakos et al. (2015) described as a time

during which EU mechanisms encouraged short-term benefits instead of long-term regional resilience.

To further add to this, Greek nationals experienced a cultural shift towards consumerism, characterized by an increase in car ownership, imported goods, and holiday spending, all of which were ultimately described as illusions of prosperity and economic stability. This dichotomy between the perceived stability and the actual situation was, for many interviewees, a defining characteristic of the pre-crisis years, as the economy was slowly crumbling beneath the illusion of material comfort and public investment.

4.1.2 Point Zero: The Crisis, the Collapse of Expectations and the Race to Stability

The years that followed the 2008 economic crisis were marked by the distinct disruption of the aforementioned stability that many amongst the interviewees had identified with prior to it. What was once viewed as the status quo in terms of stability had quickly collapsed under the weight of austerity measures. Interviewees across different age groups recall how imminently the changes occurred, with household incomes being cut in half, if not more, in the matter of a few months. Older generations, particularly pensioners, had to sustain their children and grandchildren, whereas younger ones resorted to seasonal contract work, particularly over the summer, rather than full-time positions and saw reduced work opportunities, thus being highly dependent on market trends. According to Papadopoulos and Roumpakis (2012), the Greek middle class was in increased jeopardy during this era, with many families relying on single incomes or informal financial assistance.

On the social side of things, several respondents saw the crisis as a “rupture”, a pivotal point wherein their financial and social expectations were utterly shattered. Distrust in institutions, such as banks, public health, and local governance, further exacerbated uncertainty. The social welfare state faced significant pressures, forcing Greeks to rely more on their social networks to weather the shock (Papadopoulos & Roumpakis, 2012). This overall state of uncertainty forced Greeks to turn to tourism, which presented itself as a viable solution to ensure their financial stability. This, however, can be viewed as forced reliance on tourism, rather than an organic development. As employment in other sectors weakened, involvement in tourism activities was not the byproduct of careful government planning but

rather a last resort for many, due to relatively high demand and relatively low access barriers. Participants perceived this shift as a pragmatic survival strategy rather than an optimistic advance, which ultimately deepened dependence on seasonal tourism flows and economic and consumer trends.

The crisis was not experienced in the same way throughout Greece; in island contexts, such as the Cyclades, social and spatial inequalities were exacerbated. Already frail sectors, such as healthcare, local infrastructure, transport networks, and the workforce, were further diminished, rendering local populations even more vulnerable. Several participants observed a significant decline in municipal maintenance works, with unfinished construction, lack of waste management, and shuttered community spaces shaping the post-crisis landscape. This physical deterioration was accompanied by a general sense of scepticism towards the future, as uncertainty became ingrained in people's quotidian lives (Petrakos et al., 2015).

While tourism was an important sector of Greek financial life before the crisis, its role became even more critical, reshaping not only the economy but priorities as a whole. For some individuals, it became the last resort for financial stability, whereas for others, it embodied a spirit of adaptation. Almost unanimously, respondents associated its dominance and development with the lack of alternative options, thereby further cementing the idea that, in essence, the crisis was not overcome but rather diverted into dependency on another single sector. As established by Dritsakis (2004), tourism was long considered a strategic sector for economic growth, which, contextualised within the crisis recovery, acquired predominant significance, often replacing previous, traditional forms of employment and development structures, specifically in areas that had the potential to become widely known tourist destinations. In practice, this has led to the formation of tourism as a monoculture, particularly in tourism-heavy destinations like the Cyclades, leaving little to no space for other productive sectors, such as agriculture, craftsmanship, or other smaller-scale businesses that contribute to economic diversification and long-term sustainability and resilience of local societies.

4.1.3 Post-Crisis Recovery and Tourism as the "Light at the End of the Tunnel"

In the years following the crisis and as tourism gained traction as Greece's heavy industry, its effects spread to the Cycladic isles as well, which saw a rise in short-term rentals,

boutique hotels, and seasonal employment opportunities, providing local communities and Greek households with a lifeline. Even before the financial problems, a notable number of people possessed summer homes on islands, and family-run businesses were the norm for the majority of the islands. Throughout the recovery period, progressively more business owners and regular people capitalised on the rising popularity of many of the islands, thus establishing more businesses that could sustain them. For others, particularly those who already resided on them, renting out a portion of their homes, primarily through platforms like Airbnb or Booking, became a viable way to supplement their income, as Interviewee #6 details, "AirBnB offered a sense of independence and a means to keep us afloat during the crisis". Despite heavy criticism surrounding short-term rentals and their contribution to rising housing and accommodation prices in both island and continental areas, shared by a large number of participants, Interviewee #6's insights showcase that they can provide valuable financial solutions when managed and regulated.

Nevertheless, the recovery came with a great deal of limitations. Tourism indeed generated income for many, but the benefits were spread unevenly. Richer individuals and large conglomerates owned numerous lands, houses, and businesses, leaving little room for local growth and severely limiting access to financial benefits. Those with no access to such resources were – and still are – relegated to the precarious end of the tourism labour force, with younger generations forced to spend their summers on the islands working to make ends meet the rest of the year (Magra, 2024). Throughout the conversations carried out, a common belief emerged that tourism development is largely motivated by capital interests and investments rather than community planning. Large hotel chains, booking platforms, and foreign investments have greatly altered the islands' character and economies, serving the interests of a wealthy upper class rather than the locals themselves, while simultaneously limiting the options for long-term accommodation and transforming residential areas into tourism hubs (Guduraš, 2014; Petrakis, 2012).

This has created issues for people employed in non-seasonal sectors, such as doctors or teachers who are sent to the islands year-round and face a housing crisis during the summer months. This situation is not based on speculation. Every year, teachers and essential workers assigned to the Cycladic islands, such as Paros and Mykonos, face growing housing pressures due to the dominance of short-term rentals and tourism accommodations during the

summer months (OLAFAQ, 2024). This ultimately leads them to sleep in cars, abandon their posts earlier than anticipated, or seek alternative housing solutions, as available housing is often prioritized for tourists. This grim reality showcases

In addition to this, the phenomenon of cruise tourism and all-inclusive resorts, which have long been part of the tourism landscape, are viewed as forms of extractive tourism. The economic leakages of such modes of tourism are significant, as the majority of expenditures stay within operators or foreign investors, rather than benefiting local economies (MacNeill & Wozniak, 2018). Several participants expressed frustration at how such tourism overshadows local services and businesses, while simultaneously increasing congestion, generating waste, and rising costs. This echoes Karagianis and Thomakos (2020), who underscore that internationalized tourism in the Cyclades favors the few global factors, drawing away local communities from benefiting from tourism expenditure.

Despite growing frustrations, in many conversations, tourism was often dubbed a "necessary evil." Interviewee #3 argued that "tourism is a tool, but when it becomes the only way to survive, it also becomes a trap". This statement perfectly encapsulates a pragmatic approach shared by many: tourism provides a source of income for locals. It is a means of sustaining the economy, yet it also limits their autonomy in pursuing economic diversification. In a way, these societies are cornered into relying on tourism in an attempt to navigate and survive within the competitive neoliberal system, which renders both businesses and individuals expendable.

The COVID-19 crisis exposed the vulnerabilities of the Greek economy and its reliance on tourism for profit maximization, which led to significant economic downturn (Milesi Ferretti et al., 2021) Therefore, as development in the country evolves, calls are being made by participants for more inclusive planning, equitable benefit distribution and structural support for economic diversification. As Interviewee #8 remarked, "When everything is done for the tourist, you lose the meaning. We become spectators on our own islands". This reflects a broader consequence of the tourism monoculture that exists on the Cyclades: spaces that once held collective significance are compromised and "sold off" to serve external interests. This sense of exclusion, where residents and nationals, in general, are reduced to being service providers or priced out of their lands, signifies a larger shift. Instead of shaping tourism in their way, residents are confronted with highly curated environments, where their

identities are contested and their everyday lives are either aestheticized or marketed. Tourism dependency, therefore, aggravates the cultural and spatial commodification taking place on the Cyclades, transforming lived experiences into goods for consumption.

4.2 Commodification and The Effects on Greek Culture and Landscapes

"Everything is for sale now, but who gets to buy it?" (Interviewee #5)

As tourism in Greece continues to expand, rendering it one, if not the most important, sector of the economy, its effects on local culture have started to show. In island regions, such as the Cyclades, an active reshaping of local customs, traditions, and overall culture has transformed them into consumable goods for tourists to enjoy. On Santorini, for instance, the village of Oia, arguably the most iconic image of the island, has transformed into a spectacle, where tourists queue for hours at a time to snap pictures of the sunset in this renowned location. Similarly, in Mykonos, the fishing houses in Little Venice, once integral to local life, have been transformed into luxury cocktail bars and restaurants, offering visual appeal, thus disregarding the embedded history and utilitarian nature they once held.

This is not solely a problem of physical and spatial transformation and use but also of representation. These iconic destinations in the Cyclades, like Mykonos and Santorini, are diminished as "Instagrammable" backdrops or symbols of status, given their luxury character, obscuring their centuries-long history and significance. Santorini, a volcanic caldera, is deeply rooted in history: the eruption of the volcano in the Bronze Age, or the ruins of Akrotiri, inspired Plato's myth of Atlantis as far back as the 4th century BC. Similarly, Mykonos is adjacent to Delos, one of the most important mythological and archaeological sites in the Aegean and Greece as a whole. Yet, little promotion or incorporation of these mythological elements and history is being done, and these layers of meaning are often obscured in the face of visual appeal and marketability.

Such changes can be contextualised, however, within a broader socio-economic context, wherein the crisis intensified pressures on local societies, which struggled to remain afloat. As islands and their communities started to adapt to visitor expectations, cultural

activities and practices – whether music, food, or local architecture – changed in character to become more digestible and marketable to serve tourists' expectations.

4.2.1 Commodification of Culture and Marketisation of Identity

Symbolic rearrangement of culture transpired in the visual presentation of the Cycladic Isles. Aesthetic continuity, particularly the blue-and-white colour schemes of the buildings on the islands, as well as traditional decoration, are highlighted in ways to promote the "Greek Island" image. This, however, is the price paid against historical and regional diversity, as, according to participants, the islands have gradually lost their characteristics in favour of a homogenised, attractive visual template. Façades, interiors, and public infrastructure aim to adhere to an image that aligns with tourist expectations rather than maintaining their architectural integrity. To this extent, this entails painting the houses, shops, and public buildings in the distinctive blue and white colors, redesigning the fronts to resemble "authentic" settings, and eliminating the characteristics that do not appeal to the tourist eye (MacCannell, 1973). While this uniformity is not negatively perceived by all participants, the perception that it marginalises and endangers local diversity, history, and each island's unique characteristics was prevalent. In this regard, this homogenization serves both as a marketing strategy for Greece, portraying it as an idyllic destination with white-washed houses, and as an erasure of place-specific history, as it endorses a digestible version of the country. As a result, the emerging imagery of the islands, while visually appealing and commercially successful, contributes to a curated authenticity, shaped by external imaginaries rather than enduring traditions, echoing broader concerns around cultural homogenization and commodification of culture (Coşkun, 2021; Guduraš, 2014).

This aesthetic standardisation coincides with the decreasing prominence of tangible culture, which, unless easily turned into a commodity, tends to be erased within the tourist landscape. Several interviewees highlighted that elements such as local stonework, crafting techniques, and the overall spatial arrangements of island life, including village squares, parks, and communal gathering spaces, fade into the background unless they are reshaped in ways that fit the tourism narrative. One participant lamented, "We have so much culture here [on the islands], but unless it can be sold, no one shows it". On a similar note, another

explained it in more raw terminology: “Everything is about what looks good to the tourist. The real things we live with – our history, the details – they disappear.” These views suggest that the visual marketing of the Cyclades not only dilutes but also erases parts of living material heritage. The phenomenon of commodification has severely affected the representation of culture, which is based on market criteria and what tourists want to see, thus attributing value to it. As a result, local identities, historical and cultural elements are drowned out by commercial aesthetics, which define what ought to be preserved (Coşkun, 2021).

In addition to the physical and aesthetic changes the islands have undergone due to tourism, intangible cultural heritage has also been severely affected. Participant accounts detail an erosion of practices, values, and collective experiences that have been part of the islands’ cultural identities for decades. These include, for example, oral histories of the islands or local celebratory songs, that cannot easily be transformed into consumable products appealing to tourists and are thus either fading into oblivion or translated into more digestible versions. As a result, younger generations of Greek people become increasingly deprived of older communal practices or traditional trades, as they are no longer part of everyday life and do not fit into the dominant tourism narrative. In terms of the occupations in particular, there is a decreasing interest in traditional modes of employment in sectors such as agriculture and livestock farming as progressively more island residents – both older and younger, turn to tourism activities to sustain themselves. Naturally, this, coupled with the environmental degradation caused by tourism on the Cyclades, has severely disrupted the production and supply of agricultural products (Lialios, 2024). This is a development that affects not only the islands and their economies, but the entirety of Greece, as a weakening of primary sectors would signify the need for imports of products from abroad, severely disrupting the entirety of the Greek food system.

In the agricultural sector, this danger is imminent. One notable example is Naxos, an island renowned for its PDO-certified potatoes. The severe water crisis on the island, a byproduct of both infrastructural weaknesses and climatic conditions, has resulted in the drying up of the local water reservoir, allowing saltwater to seep into the tubewells and thus reducing the potato harvest. Local farmers have reported a free fall in terms of production, with 6.000 tons produced in 2022 to less than 1.800 in 2024 (Koutantou & Misinas, 2024; tovima.com, 2024). Similarly, on the smaller island of Donousa, which was once known for its unique

onion variety, production has completely halted as more and more locals engage in tourism activities rather than agriculture. These changes are not only representative of a general decline in occupation; they pose severe risks to the cultural and ecological continuity of Greece, which, if left unaddressed, could lead to a general destabilisation of the country's food ecosystem.

This shift in participation has, as Interviewee #3 details, elicited a "corrosion of culture from within", defining the perceived loss of authenticity and community in cultural expression on a quotidian level. Everyday vocabulary, little anecdotes, local slang expressions and dialects, as well as the informal communal get-togethers, have slowly begun to be replaced by more neutral and tourist-friendly alternatives. Attributed to this is an erosion of human connection and hospitality, one of the key values associated with Greece, which local communities experienced as a whole by long-time visitors and tourists. Interviewee #5 reflects on a past sociality:

"[In the past] we were all together, one big group. Even if you didn't know someone, you'd sit next to them, talk, and ask where they're from. There was no distance. [The locals] knew who you were, and they asked about your family. They wouldn't just serve you and walk away."

His remarks highlight the existence of reciprocity and connection, where hospitality was not purely transactional but instead based on genuine interest. Such interactions are gradually subjected to alterations dictated by a transactional logic, wherein economic imperatives shape human interactions.

Within this context, cultural expressions, such as food, language, and local festivals, have been recalibrated to meet tourist expectations. Menus at traditional tavernas are becoming increasingly uniform, adapted to generic tourist preferences and international palates, at the expense of local dishes. Local cuisines, traditionally rooted in seasonal and local traditions, are increasingly being replaced by international cuisine and restaurants. One participant expressed disdain over the existence of a Chinese restaurant in Donousa, a small Cycladic island, which, for years, only served local delicacies. Changing norms on the islands also include carefully curated wine lists, luxury restaurants, and imported ingredients, partially due to rising costs and deficiencies in local production. While there is a common

perception that this constitutes a necessity for the survival of the islands and their residents, many viewed it as a loss of uniqueness that characterised local Greek food, an intrinsic part of Greek identity. In this sense, the commodification process, as described by Coşkun (2021), illustrates a paradox: it may benefit the economic survival of destinations, but it disconnects them from their roots.

The topic of local festivals and their reconfiguration to attract more tourists emerged during several interviews. Traditional "πανηγύρια" (panigiria), landmarks of religious life and seasonal transformation, have been subjected to significant changes, partially attributed to commodification. Once characterised by impromptu music, food sharing, and local dances, they have increasingly transformed into visual spectacles for tourism, particularly during high season. One interviewee recalls how, in the past, these events took place with live orchestras and often featured locals with musical skills. Nowadays, they include paid musicians, often on tour, playing the same songs on all islands, thereby erasing the uniqueness and significance that these festivities once held for local communities. Another one noted that "it's not for us anymore. It's for the visitors to take photos". The once immersive and intensely local and spiritual experience of panigiria is increasingly viewed as what MacCannell (1973) would refer to as "staged authenticity", fragmenting them to cater to tourist trends and consumption.

Nevertheless, while the commoditization of culture is often viewed as an inherently negative phenomenon, some aspects are seen in a more positive light. The revenues from tourism have enabled the support, and in some cases, the revitalisation of some elements of local cultural heritage that would otherwise disappear, particularly due to a lack of governmental support. These include, but are not limited to, traditional crafts, folklore, music genres, and community events, such as the aforementioned panigiria, which are, to an extent, sustained through tourism contributions. One participant mentioned that "we didn't have the money or the people before. Now, at least there is a reason to keep some of it going". In this regard, tourism and the commodification that stems from it are viewed as a "necessary evil" in the face of complete extinction of some of these cultural elements, reflecting the dual and paradoxical nature of the latter: tourism alters the way culture function and is perceived, but it can also assist in its survival, providing some agency to local actors in the way it is presented and performed (Cohen, 1988; Coşkun, 2021).

4.2.2 Spatial and Environmental Commodification: From Dry Stone Walls to 5-Star Hotels

Besides the commodification of tangible and intangible cultural heritage on the Cyclades, tourism development has brought to the fore an added issue: the commodification of space and environment. This phenomenon has had material implications and consequences on islanders' quotidian lives, as it has added further pressures on the landscapes, which have not only been affected in form but primarily in their everyday function. In the past, spatial arrangements were made with everyday collective use and ecological considerations in mind. Conversely, nowadays, this is being contested by large investments and seasonal overuse. With the exponential rise of tourism, particularly over the last decade, the islands are gradually experiencing not just an architectural transformation, but more importantly, disruptions to their infrastructural and environmental equilibrium.

The commodification of the Cycladic landscape has a significant economic impact, further supported through participants' accounts. One considerable change noted by Interviewee #5 is the eclipse of traditional dry-stone walls historically used to delineate fields, manage water flow and prevent soil erosion; "Now, they dig them up to build swimming pools", he said, pointing towards an gradual shift away from sustainable land-use practices and towards infrastructure aimed at accommodating short-term tourism flows. These constructions facilitate terraced farming, protect local biodiversity, and embody local environmental knowledge in their very existence (Kapetanios, 2024). Their removal and the lack of expertise nowadays create an active disruption in local ecosystems, rendering them more vulnerable to external shocks, and simultaneously signify the erasure of traditional practices that were once in tune with the landscape. The installation of structures, such as private amenities for tourism, underscores how unplanned development often takes precedence over sustainable land use on the islands. In this context, their erasure is both literal and symbolic: it uproots traditional knowledge systems, embracing commodified and dismal aesthetics.

This loss extends beyond symbolism, being part of a general shift in how space is valued. Agricultural fields on the islands, once used for livestock farming and cultivation, are

now being defaced and sold for the development of hotel units and luxury accommodation. Footpaths, traditionally connecting one village to the other, are now either fenced off as private driveways or becoming parts of larger transportation networks. Coastal areas once public and shared, providing access to all visitors, are gradually privatised into beach bars, becoming part of hotel complexes or riddled with sunbeds, thus stripping locals and less affluent visitors of the possibility of enjoying the beaches. In such instances, tourism development is not viewed as merely an intervention in the landscape, but rather an alteration of it.

Several participants noted that this land alienation is becoming more and more prominent, with communal or inherited spaces being sold off to investors. While local populations have agency in determining who is allowed to purchase land, the state often facilitates this process. Interviewee #8 remarked that "even the hills [on the islands] have been turned into private property", stressing the phenomenon of a growing number of private enclosures that restrict access to public lands. A notable remark is that the vast majority of these developments remain empty during the winter months, turning the local settlements into ghost towns, while they apply significant pressure on island infrastructure during high season. This aligns with overall concerns around the hotels and accommodation projects that clash with local continuity, tradition, and spatial arrangements. One resident on the island of Paros underlined that "they don't fit the landscape, not in size, not in style" (Interviewee #6). She explained that there is an active disruption of the visual harmony of traditional housing and building arrangements on each island, while also disregarding regional planning and architectural norms. The designs implemented refer more to imported aesthetics, not taking into consideration the local communities' economic and cultural contexts.

On an infrastructural scale, these developments place an enormous burden on the environmental capacity of the islands, most evident in water and waste management. The Cycladic isles, particularly those smaller in size, have been suffering from water shortages even before the unprecedented tourism development, with a plethora of them being supplied with it by tankers in the summer. In recent years, the emergence of larger hotels and villas, with many of them boasting swimming pools or other similar arrangements, puts a significant strain on the islands' water supplies but has also created discourse around the misuse of municipal resources, primarily aimed at meeting the needs of the islands and their inhabitants and not exclusively those of tourists. Two participants brought up the case of the small island

of Donousa, detailing that “in the summer, the water runs out. There isn’t enough for everyone.”, demonstrating that the overdevelopment on the islands has direct impacts on vital infrastructure systems.

In terms of waste management, the islands are becoming progressively more overwhelmed as development and high-season tourism evolve. One participant described that during high season, “the bins fill up and overflow”, alluding to the failure of local collection services to cope with the augmented needs of the temporary population on the islands (Karagianis & Thomakos, 2020). This reveals a mismatch between the level of tourism development and the limits of local infrastructure in waste disposal. Complementing this is the general lack of formal arrangements, such as landfills, which would be able to manage waste disposal in a sustainable manner. Many smaller islands thus rely on either outdated sites or period transport of waste to bigger facilities, leading to said delays and overflows. The lack of long-term sustainable planning and investment in such systems has resulted in a temporary solution, incapable of tackling demand pressures. Hence, the widespread accumulation of waste and its ecological and aesthetic consequences have become a visible sign of overdevelopment and commodification of space, coupled with a growing infrastructural neglect and governance failure.

Underlying these infrastructural weaknesses is the gradual shift occurring at a governmental level. Local communities have progressively less agency in land-use and development decisions, which are determined based on investor priorities. The lack of regulatory order increasingly favours private interests. As Interviewee #6 details, “Things get approved that would never have been allowed here”, further explaining how planning norms on the islands are disregarded or altered to meet external expectations and interests that do not align with community priorities. Within this context, commodification is not merely an economic implication but more so a political one. The capacity to afford use or free access to spaces on the islands oftentimes depends on capital, which undermines public interest in pursuit of market efficiency. This can be understood through the lens of neo-feudalism, wherein access to land, housing, and livelihood is dictated by ownership and capital investment. Higgins-Desbiolles (2005) and Patelis (2024) describe this phenomenon as the rescaling of public life around private interest, determined by market status. This is not a hypothetical model in the Cyclades. Still, rather a lived reality, where environmental

resources are depleted, aesthetic consistency is compromised, and spatial ties are subordinated to speculative investment.

4.3 Remembering the Islands: Emotional Geographies, Narratives of Nostalgia and the Emotional Impact of Change

"I miss the simplicity we used to have. Now everything is standardised" (Interviewee #7)

The overall development and commodification taking place on the Cyclades not only have economic impacts for Greek nationals but have also significantly altered their emotional relationships to the place. Underlying the discussions around the commodification of space and culture, as well as the effects of economic development, is a more profound emotional dislocation, a loss of familiarity, and, in some cases, an all-pervasive sense of grief for a place that still physically exists but no longer feels the same. These reflections were not articulated in abstract terms, but rather through descriptions of everyday life on the islands during the participants' summer holidays: the rhythm of summer days, the depth of conversations with locals, and the quality of human connection. What emerges through participants' accounts is that memory is not purely an act of recollection but an emotional anchor through which the present is negotiated. Their responses to the transforming environments of the islands demonstrate that there is a duality in the process of space, both spatial and emotional, which is facilitated by memory, repetition, and attachment (Tuan, 1977; Urry, 2007).

Many of the conversations began with recollections of the past, wherein older participants, in particular, spoke from a perspective of warmth and clarity. Attachment to the islands was not created solely by being physically present, but rather through emotional and sensory memories, which weave their emotional geographies; smells, sounds, and personal gestures among some of them. These memories were often tied to a slower pace of living, informal encounters within shared spaces, and hospitality, all of which lacked the element of transaction. As Interviewee #1 recalled, "Back then it was different. We all ate together, there was a sense of company, of warmth. Now everything feels colder". This remark captures not only the sense of closeness which was a prevailing and vital element of the summer holidays, but also the density of emotions and the intimacy that occurred within these destinations. The

landscape was not a neutral space but riddled with profound emotions and memories (Haldrup & Larsen, 2009).

Beyond the emotional fragmentation, significant changes in the emotional atmosphere of the islands emerged. Several interviewees reveal that summer, previously a time of coming together, reconnection, and emotional replenishment, is evolving towards the opposite direction, where noise, disruption, and labour prevail. This holds special meaning to those who either moved to the islands in search of that connection and serenity or return yearly, who now no longer feel the same level of ease and belonging. Even more minor, seemingly trivial shifts, such as the absence of quiet mornings on the beach, the disappearance of familiar presences, and the conversion of public spaces, like beaches, into commercial zones, add to the general sentiment of dislocation. Such affective ruptures underline that commodification and unplanned development not only interfere with infrastructure but also emotionally disorient and disconnect individuals from their attachments to place in less evident, yet still notable ways (Theodoropoulou, 2019; Zestanakis, 2025).

Emotional fatigue is another symptom of the current situation on the islands. Overexposure to tourism, rapid development, and an unruly high season play a detrimental role in the connection to space, gradually wearing it down. The ever-growing pressure to keep up with the rhythm of tourism, even in simple tasks such as booking accommodations months in advance, which was once unusual for Greeks and long-time foreign visitors, clashes with what summer on the Greek islands once was: a time of rest and relaxation. Many older participants detailed how, in the past, the need to reserve accommodation beforehand was redundant; most of them boarded the ferries and were able to find lodging upon arrival, thus allowing a certain degree of spontaneity and ease. As holidays are now controlled by coordination and careful planning, the emotional expectations attached to the destinations are heavily eroded. These transformations are not viewed as merely a decline but rather as a form of estrangement from what was once familiar and comforting. While the overall landscape may remain relatively similar, interviewees expressed noticeable disquiet at how returning to familiar places left them feeling emotionally adrift. While the material changes were not entirely perceived as negative, they have nonetheless disrupted the emotional continuity associated with them, thus creating a chasm between past meaning and present uses.

This sense of alienation is also experienced by younger generations. In this case, memory functions as a projection of what will be grieved before it has disappeared. The concern that future generations will no longer be able to enjoy the summers they once had the privilege of enjoying, as kids, teenagers, and young adults, was prevalent. The saturation of space to meet external demands creates the fear that the identity and essence of the islands, as well as the feelings associated with them, will fail to be sustained in the future, depriving the coming generations of the privilege of serenity. While the majority remained pessimistic over the outlook for tourism in the future, some expressed hope that future visitors will be able to attach meanings and emotions to the islands, which will be interpreted differently, corresponding to the given circumstances. It can be argued that a form of anticipatory nostalgia is present: there is a mourning for something not yet lost but appears probable (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). Nostalgia in contemporary settings is oftentimes manifested to map what's at risk, and not only what has changed. This reflective projection was palpable among many of the participants, who openly pondered what the islands would be able to offer in ten or twenty years if the emotional and cultural continuity continued to be eroded.

Within this landscape of loss, there are active efforts to preserve what remains, particularly through traditional practices and rituals, such as cooking traditional food, visiting local restaurants that serve Greek cuisine, and maintaining a distance from tourism-saturated spaces. These actions, however big or small, are ways to safeguard whatever emotional and cultural elements remain. Some visitors make the conscious choice to visit lesser-known islands, engage in low-season travel, and return to those that feel familiar and have not yet been as affected by tourism flows. Nostalgia in this sense is a form of resistance to the alterations that the Cyclades are undergoing, as well as a way of emotional care, by honouring their experiences and memories, thus acknowledging that places transform, but their emotional value does not evaporate; it is continually being renegotiated.

4.4 Social Tourism and The Right to Tourism: Exclusivity and Marginalisation

Beyond the financial and emotional aspects explored in previous sections, access to the Cyclades is gradually becoming increasingly limited for various groups within the Greek population. As tourism and the economy have become intertwined, the transformation of these islands into high-demand, luxury destinations in the international market has coincided

with and contributed to the decline of affordable and less commercial forms of holidays. A common sentiment among participants was that the islands once belonged to everyone, thus making access easier and more facilitated.

Several recalled islands like Donousa and Anafi, which, up until the last decade, belonged to what the Greeks colloquially called the “barren line”, primarily due to the scarcity of tourists and infrequent ferry connections. On these islands, coexistence and community defined their holidays, and sleeping under the stars was an everyday practice, which was not looked down upon or criticized for being “cheap”. Interviewee #3 details his arrival on Kato Koufonisi, a small island in the Cyclades, with no running water or electricity, with nothing but a tent and a bag, describing it as “freedom in its purest form”. Such recollections showcase that access to tourism was not about affordability but about a profound sentiment of the right to belong, to spontaneously and freely experience the islands as parts of their emotional geography.

Yet today, these very islands have become prohibitively expensive due to their rebranding as luxury remote destinations. The bonds that once connected visitors to these places are shattered, and leisure is no longer viewed as a seasonal right but as a class-bound privilege that excludes many of those who considered the islands their second homes.

Holidays of the past aligned with what McCabe and Qiao (2020) and Minnaert (2004) described as social tourism, characterized by equitable access to leisure and travel, regardless of income or social status. Domestic tourism in Greece was particularly strengthened, characterized by informal sharing, modest salaries, and affordable public transportation, allowing individuals and families to sustain their holidays. Ferries, although not always in optimal condition, were not yet priced according to international standards. Accommodation, as mentioned before, was often arranged upon arrival, and prices on the islands corresponded to the general economic status of the country, thus creating the impression that they were more spatially open to domestic visitors. Older interviewees recalled a sense of freedom in movement, which allowed spontaneity and a general sense of escape. However, in recent years, a sharp change from these ideals is observed, best captured in the quote by Interviewee #4: “In the past, everything used to be simple. A ticket and a towel were enough. Now even 500 euros won’t get you far.”. Advance planning, significant disposable income, and limited time are some of the requirements to travel to the islands, which some are unwilling or unable to undertake. One participant remarked that “just getting there costs more than a week

abroad", underscoring the increasing ferry and accommodation prices. Furthermore, lower-income individuals and families are not able to bear the costs, thus making travel to the Cycladic Isles prohibitive. These shifts correspond to broader critiques of investment-led growth over equitable access, as elaborated by Breakey and Breakey (2013), which in turn has created a sentiment of internal exclusion amongst Greek nationals in their own country.

This exclusion is also articulated in spatial terms. Public spaces, particularly beaches and coastal areas, are now increasingly commercialized, limiting the ability to engage in leisure activities without consumption. Beaches, traditionally public areas filled with sunbathers, are taken over by sunbeds, bars and in some cases privatised by luxury resorts, creating exclusive spaces for those willing to pay the price. One noted, "You can't just put your towel wherever you want anymore. Everything's taken, and if you sit down, they tell you to leave" (Interviewee #6). This loss was repeatedly expressed with sadness and frustration, particularly amongst older interviewees who had spent their summers as young adults and later with their families in a more carefree manner. In this regard, the right to tourism, contextualised within international legal discourse as a combination of mobility, leisure and non-discrimination (United Nations, 1948; United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, 1966), is hindered by the effects of economic inequality and spatial limitations.

One of the main topics that were brought up throughout many of the conversations was the eclipse and criminalisation of free camping on almost all of the islands. Formerly a popular and favourite form of tourism for many of the Greeks, free camping is viewed by many as a democratic, affordable and participatory tourism model, enabling access to space and unmediated contact with nature. Several participants defined it as a catalyst in their youth. For some, it was the first experience in communal spaces, setting up tents in remote locations and relying on minimal infrastructure. It was during these holidays that many participants met lifelong friends, significant others, and developed a love and respect for nature. These memories are not only charged with nostalgia but also with political significance – it is a loss that is connected to the eclipse of non-commercial and community-based forms of tourism and values. As one recalled, "We used to go to be with our group, to live the summer simply. It wasn't about luxury or hotels." (Interviewee #7).

Nowadays, free camping is prohibited on the majority of islands and in continental Greece and is subject to hefty fines. Although free camping was technically prohibited, grounded in environmental and safety concerns, it was part of an informal island culture and was therefore widely tolerated on the majority of them. Thus, this shift is questioned by many, as the timing, implementation, and severity of measures against it coincide with the expansion of resort developments and the type of tourism that is promoted, suggesting that the crackdown on free camping is not related to sustainability but rather the protection of interests.

Shifts like these correspond to what many academics refer to as "neofeudalism" in modern neoliberal systems, characterized by increased control over space, exclusion from historically common goods, and hierarchies of entitlement (Patelis, 2024). The crackdown on free camping is not a standalone phenomenon, but part of a broader process of enclosure, which is transforming what was once public and free into private property or subject to state control, mirroring principles of feudal control over land and movement. As a result, the democratic essence of leisure and access to nature is severely undermined, as tourism adopts an exclusionary model. Such dynamics align with general critiques in literature around state regulations, which favour private sector growth to the detriment of inclusive access to tourism and leisure (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2005). The ban on free camping on the islands is thus viewed as more than just the disappearance of leisure; it signifies the effacement of a profound relationship to place, one that is based on simplicity, social and environmental proximity.

Discussions around the changing positions within tourism were also prominent. Some who had originally experienced the islands as visitors in their youth now participate in seasonal tourism activities as workers, landlords, or caretakers due to their financial situation. In the past, summer was a time for holidays, when people would take breaks from their everyday lives and work. Given the current financial circumstances, summer work poses a viable but nevertheless strenuous and exploitative way for individuals to secure the necessary funds in order to sustain and support themselves for the remainder of the year. This is a lived reality for many Greek nationals, who sacrifice the summers they once knew to make ends meet. Summer is no longer a time of leisure but rather an extension of the rest of the work year. This new status quo, which has transformed the participants into providers, is viewed with a level of frustration and ambivalence. On the one hand, tourism provides the economic

means to secure a livelihood, but on the other, it has disrupted seasonal rhythms and individuals' modi vivendi.

The culmination of these shifts has affected those who were once regular visitors to the islands but now find themselves financially unable to do so. Several did, in fact, describe themselves as searching for new places to visit, intending to find alternative, less commercialized destinations, reminiscent of what the Cyclades used to be. Some have, regrettably, given up on the islands altogether, turning to mainland destinations or skipping summer holidays as a whole due to rising costs. In this light, the right to tourism – conceived as a socially supported entitlement to rest and travel by Bélanger and Jolin (2011) – was recalibrated as a loss, not of a legally protected right but of a cultural one. This is also partially justified by the diminished effectiveness of social tourism schemes. While institutions such as DYPA (formerly OAED) and OPEKA still run subsidised holiday schemes for low-income families, individuals, and pensioners, none of the participants have made use of them, and only a handful possessed any insights into their operation, which demonstrates the limited reach of such programs in the general population. Those who were knowledgeable regarded them as limited in scope or inaccessible, partly due to the bureaucratic nature of the process. It should be noted that these programs encourage tourism in low-development areas, rather than high-demand destinations such as the Cyclades, thus stripping their beneficiaries of the possibility of choice and the right to access them.

Overall, participants showed a strong willingness to partake in alternative tourism models that might re-establish a sense of equitable access. These included cooperative and regulated forms of accommodation, as well as low-season travel and thematic tourism. One of the respondents observed that "This type of tourism isn't sustainable. If it keeps functioning only for the rich, it will collapse. It can't last like this." (Interviewee #6), indicating a broader sentiment that in the long-term, sustainability of tourism on the islands, and in Greece as a whole, is not just a choice but a necessity. The future of tourism in these regions depends on how tourism is developed and for whom it is designed.

5 Future Outlook

The outlook for tourism development in the Cyclades calls for further critical reflection on the findings presented thus far. While tourism is viewed as a significant driving force in economic recovery and growth, its adverse effects on local communities, environments, and identities raise essential questions around its long-term resilience. The loss of traditional economic sectors in the Cyclades, like agriculture, fishing, and traditional crafts, marks a detrimental shift. Issues surrounding environmental degradation, cultural dilution, and social exclusion further complicate the situation, serving as a cautionary reminder that this moment marks a critical juncture for the future of the Cyclades. The following section presents recommendations that integrate academic and policy-oriented perspectives to propose a more comprehensive, just, and sustainable model of tourism, one that not only mitigates past and present issues but also actively preserves the remnants of the local fabric.

5.1 Directions for Future Academic Research

One of the critical elements to be further investigated in the future is the role of economic development in changing emotional landscapes, particularly in areas heavily impacted by tourism, such as the Cyclades. While existing literature tends to focus more on measurable factors, such as economic benefits, commodification, and spatial transformation, less emphasis is placed on the emotional and affective dimensions, which actively redefine perceptions of place, identity, and belonging. The study of emotional geographies, which analyses how people attach meanings and form connections to places (Anderson & Smith, 2001), provides a fruitful framework to examine the complex and multi-layered relationships between economic benefits and emotional loss, particularly within the scope of tourism development. Yet, further investigation of this needs to be empirically and theoretically grounded. In practice, this could be applied through participatory models, such as workshops, and intergenerational dialogue to make sense of this transformation and its effects.

In addition, the concept of place-making, wherein communities actively shape their environment, offers further insights into how residents interpret and redefine emotional and

spatial boundaries in response to tourism flows. Traditions and practices that have been an integral part of Greek identity for centuries are not only part of heritage but also serve as anchors for identity and emotions. Their preservation in the face of commercialisation would create crucial spaces wherein sustainable tourism is at their core, and culture is a living and dynamic element of being. Future studies could employ comparative frameworks to explore how other Greek and international destinations utilise different tourism models, prompting investigation into strategies and approaches that strengthen community cohesion and cultural continuity. A profound understanding of the dynamics behind this complex relationship contributes to further discussions on the development of inclusive and sustainable tourism. It reinforces the importance of preserving both the physical heritage and all the emotional and cultural layers embedded in a place.

The topic of social tourism and its benefits has been thoroughly researched across different locations, but it has not been adequately contextualised within the Greek reality. While programs and subsidies, like those administered through DYPA and OGA, exist, little is known in terms of the extent to which they are applied and the benefits they bring for both beneficiaries and local communities that welcome tourists through them (Kakoudakis & McCabe, 2018). Considering Greece's ongoing regional and income disparities, particularly after the post-crisis period, such gaps are crucial. Applied and participatory research needs to focus on evaluating the various emotional, social, and economic impacts of these programs. Examining region-specific case studies, involving interviews with beneficiaries and stakeholders or cross-sector collaboration between researchers, tourism professionals and local authorities could provide a profound understanding of how tourism may function not only as an economic and redistributive asset, but also as a catalyst for well-being, equity and a sense of belonging, especially for those historically excluded from such narratives.

Moreover, an assessment of social tourism's contribution to the alleviation of high seasonality could also be fruitful. By promoting off-season travel and the reinforcement of small businesses, particularly in less developed Greek destinations, scholars can explore whether such a model can provide solutions to congestion and infrastructural pressures on popular destinations, as well as foster economic resilience and sustainability, thus ensuring that tourism benefits are spread equally. This, however, would require a collaborative effort from multiple factors within the tourism landscape. Regional and local authorities can contribute by identifying eligible areas within their jurisdictions and offering incentives to

promote them. Private sector actors, such as hotels and tourism operators, can be engaged in designing off-season and low-cost packages.

In contrast, civil society organisations can serve as mediators and supervisors to warrant the accessibility of such schemes. Additionally, comparative analyses of established social tourism models will provide valuable insights into the structure of implementation, funding frameworks, and collaboration between stakeholders. Integrating the findings within the Greek system will further reinforce the implementation of a viable social tourism program that guarantees spatial justice, economic resilience, and overall sustainable development.

5.2 Societal Insights and Policy Recommendations

Although academic investigation plays a paramount role in unpacking the complex dynamics of tourism development and its multi-layered consequences, meaningful change is based upon the translation of insights into practice. The findings of this research underline the need for structural shifts that transcend theory and adopt grounded, actionable strategies. This section presents key societal directions and policy recommendations that direct efforts towards promoting a more inclusive, sustainable, and community-centric model of tourism in the Cyclades and Greece as a whole.

5.2.1 Economic Diversification and Revitalisation of the Primary Sector

The islands' dependency on tourism revenues has rendered them economically vulnerable, particularly in times of global economic calamity, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The mitigation of such precariousness requires strategic public investments in different sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, which are traditionally relevant to island economies. The decline in agricultural products, such as potatoes in Naxos, resulting from both climatic and occupational factors, reflects a broader, unsustainable shift towards a tourism dependency. Therefore, agricultural cooperatives and other primary sector businesses require government support to ensure the continuity of traditional production methods, employment, and self-sufficiency in both island and continental Greece.

Simultaneously, introducing vocational schemes that engage youth is equally important, providing younger generations with training and skills in craftsmanship, entrepreneurial activities, and agriculture that are pertinent to the islands' culture and

traditions. Targeting the youth through these initiatives and equipping them with the appropriate skills fosters an environment of sustainable entrepreneurship and employment, which in turn could combat the brain drain phenomenon prevalent in the country by encouraging the youth to remain or return to the islands. Apart from providing them with a viable alternative other than seasonal work related to tourism, such initiatives build economic and community resilience through the creation of new opportunities for younger generations.

5.2.2 Addressing Seasonality and Congestion

As the tourism season peaks in the Cycladic islands around mid-July and mid-August, severe infrastructural pressures and congestion on the islands exert additional stress. Extending the tourism season through targeted infrastructural changes, such as improved and reliable year-round transport, diversified accommodation choices, and accessibility, is deemed necessary. International case studies in Scandinavia and the British Isles have showcased that such strategies, combined with the promotion of off-season events, contribute to a more even spread of economic benefits throughout the year, thereby sustaining cultural activities and the livelihoods of local communities (Baum & Hagen, 1999). Greece and the Cyclades do not boast culture and events exclusive to summer, but rather a plethora of them that can be enjoyed year-round, which remain underexplored due to limitations in transportation and access, resulting in decreased interest. For instance, the Olive Picking Festival in Naxos in the beginning of each yea, the Naxos Raki Festival in October, or the festival of Trata in Paros in early September, which celebrates the island's fishing history (Greeka, 2025; Paros Secrets, 2025), are some of the events that celebrate centuries-long traditions and practices, yet remain underpromoted both nationally and internationally, partially due to limited off-season travel and infrastructural support.

In addition, when examining the dominant vacation pattern for many Greek workers in Greece, one can observe that a vast majority is only able to go on vacation during the aforementioned time frame, attributed mainly to enterprises closing or approving days off around then. Encouraging staggered holiday periods could provide solutions to congestion by distributing tourism flows and providing workers with greater flexibility in planning their vacations. Within this context, programs like "Tourism for All" could be extended throughout

the year, thus enabling Greek nationals to discover destinations according to their preferences and schedules. As Butler (1998) has suggested, institutional patterns, such as the closure of businesses that coincide with holiday calendars, are the principal causes of seasonal congestion. Revising these structural arrangements could assist in the alleviation of peak-season pressures and the support of a more balanced tourism rhythm.

5.2.3 Community-Owned Initiatives for Inclusive and Sustainable Development

To tackle the uneven distribution of tourism revenues, special emphasis and strategic shifts must occur in the development and promotion of community-owned enterprises. Informed by international practices, such as the Mondragón cooperative movement in the Basque Country (Peeters & Schouteten, 2024), initiatives like these provide flexible mechanisms that guarantee revenues remain within local communities through democratized ownership structures, participatory models of decision-making, and local employment generation. Complementary to government subsidies, financial incentives and policy mechanisms are required to be implemented to operate effectively, thereby reducing economic leakages, empowering local communities, and fostering social cohesion.

In the Greek reality, similar examples exist, albeit on a smaller scale. On the island of Ikaria, for example, the Women's Cooperative of Christos Raches, established in 2009, offers an example of community-led entrepreneurship. Formed by local women in the area, the cooperative produces traditional delicacies, operates a café, and promotes the island's gastronomic identity (Taste Ikaria, 2018). Similarly, on the island of Lesvos, the Women's Cooperative of Petra constitutes a prime example of sustainable rural tourism that is operated by and for the community. Besides producing local goods, the cooperative facilitates workshops, manages its own accommodation, and promotes cultural exchange, reinvesting the profits into the community and the preservation of traditional practices (Women's Cooperative of Petra, 2011). These examples demonstrate that community ownership is not just vital for the economic resilience of a region, but can also be culturally sustainable and inclusive.

Beyond economic empowerment, preserving local culture, heritage, and traditions through the communities themselves provides a genuine, authentic, and therefore meaningful experience for tourists. Idem, it creates conditions for direct participation of the affected

communities in tourism planning, narratives, and management, thus meeting local expectations and interests.

5.2.4 Preserving Architecture and Introducing Strict Construction Regulations

One of the main concerns highlighted in the findings is the rapid and uncontrolled development of tourism in the Cyclades, which has compromised their architectural integrity and overall infrastructural capacity. Several participants voiced concerns about the dilution of uniqueness they once possessed, as more and more islands opt for structures of commercial interest rather than traditional form. To counterbalance this, Interviewee #2 gave the example of Sicily, stating that "you can't change the façades or the way a town looks. There are strict laws because it's not just a house, it's a piece of shared heritage". Such places apply strict planning controls that prevent alterations of historical and traditional architecture, thus maintaining their cultural continuity and restricting ecological and visual deterioration (Martínez & Turco, 2025).

These frameworks reflect a profound philosophy that considers architecture not only as a visual and functional aspect of daily life but also as an element deeply embedded in life and communal identity. In the Cycladic context, although some restrictions have been implemented, uneven enforcement and increasing investor interest have led to a fragmented development. Some islands, such as Astypalaia and Kea, have recently rejected significant development proposals on cultural and environmental grounds, showcasing local resistance to the alteration of the islands' character (eKathimerini, 2025; Lialios, 2024).

Enhancing existing policies, legal protections, and efforts is necessary to ensure that new developments do not disrupt the already fragile balance between built heritage and the landscape. These, coupled with limits in new accommodation and development permits, regular environmental impact assessments and promotion of adaptive reuse, as is being done in the case of Tinos and its eco-lodge, which has restored abandoned stone agricultural buildings to function as a sustainable tourism accommodation (Ecofriendly Tourist Destination, 2025), or the Albergo Diffuso concept of village rehabilitation in Italy (GFHS, 2021) (GFHS, 2021), would align with degrowth-centric tourism models, which support

social justice, cultural sustainability and long-term sustainability of the co-existence between tourism and everyday life (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

5.2.5 Diversification of the Tourism Product, Degrowth and Free Access for All

Tourism diversification tackles the geographic imbalance of tourism concentration in the Cyclades. The promotion of alternative forms, such as culinary tourism, enotourism, agritourism, or nature tourism, in less-visited continental areas of Greece, including Epirus, the Peloponnese, and Northern Greece, is an attractive prospect for promoting spatial equity, even distribution of tourism flows, and long-term sustainability. For instance, overlooked regions like Zagori in Epirus, which is offered for agritourism, and the Wine Roads in Northern Greece have successfully rebranded themselves as destinations offering alternative, underexplored, and culturally rich tourism (Visit Greece, 2025; Winemakers of North Greece, 2025).

While the “sun-and-sea” paradigm will likely remain dominant in the country’s portfolio, promoting travel in these areas, which embody a tremendous amount of cultural, historical, and natural capital, can alleviate stress from already saturated destinations, spreading benefits more evenly. If approached carefully and in collaboration with local actors, these initiatives can contribute to local potential, safeguard heritage and identity, and resonate with degrowth principles of low-impact and decentralized tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

Concurrently, the reinstatement of free camping, under a degree of regulation, should be considered as a tourism alternative based on democratic access to space and low environmental impact. Following Sweden’s example, where the Right to Public Access is protected by law, camping in nature is allowed and regulated by a set of laid-out rules, public awareness and education campaigns as well as cooperation with local governance (Visit Sweden, 2024), Greece can profit from a similar framework, with designated zones and environmental guidelines, thus offering a realistic and inclusive alternative. Reinstating free camping would then be a response to rising financial limitations and a revival of travelling that is simple and communal, aligning with social equity and sustainable travel goals.

Ultimately, the future of tourism in the Cyclades and Greece as a whole is largely dependent on fundamental shifts in how tourism is conceptualized, governed, and

experienced. These recommendations see beyond an extractive growth paradigm and call for a participatory, place-based, and socially just model that places communities at the forefront. Preservation of cultural and ecological richness is just as important as the right to access to leisure. What is propositioned is a redirection; a shift that reclaims tourism as a common good instead of a mere commodity.

6 Conclusion

The development of tourism in the Cyclades is more than just a case of economic evolution; it reflects deeper patterns of how space, identity, and value are contested within the post-crisis Greece. Tourism is more than just a spatial phenomenon; it transforms places, renegotiates access, and influences how they are remembered. When landscapes turn into products, the social web around them begins to shift. What was once a common good becomes a luxury commodity, and what was once familiar is fenced in.

Increased tourism flows and inadequate support have accelerated erosion of tradition and severely altered the Cycladic landscape. Commodified space gives way to the transformation of everyday life, practices and traditions, which trace back thousands of years, into packaged, consumable experiences for the tourist gaze. Elements deeply embedded in community and space are now selectively simplified, sold or hidden away. In this sense, tourism is not purely a matter of physical movement, but rather a powerful actor that contributes to how culture is perceived, appreciated, and how space is rearranged, as well as who the intended recipients are.

These are not purely neutral developments. Rather, they are the outcome of socio-political choices that prioritise short-term growth and visibility over equity, cultural, and affective continuity. Informal and affordable variants of tourism are being sidelined and the terms of participation in tourism activities are gradually becoming more exclusive. Those unable to meet the high demands of the existing system are subjected to ostracism, not only spatially, but more so from the symbolic possession of identity and cultural belonging.

Through the conversations with the participants, this exclusion is not articulated only in economic terms. There is a deep sense of dislocation between them and their special places in the Cyclades, places which felt like a second home during the summer months. It is in this sense that tourism has the power to shape, reshape, and occasionally, erode emotions, histories, and identities. Hence, in this respect, the nostalgia that is so deeply felt is not purely a sentimental retreat to what was once familiar but rather a sociocultural response to rapid change and exclusion. It is both a critique and an act of resistance against profit-centric tourism models and a call for a return to the core values of older versions of tourism, centred around clarity, reciprocity, and inclusion. Recalling the continuous physical and mental return

and engagement with the islands does not necessarily signify a yearning for the past but rather a refusal to accept the present circumstances as inevitable. Nostalgia is, therefore, an expression of political memory, an effort to resist erasure and envision alternate futures.

The policy responses to the changing landscape of tourism in the Cyclades have demonstrated fundamental limitations. While social tourism schemes aim to increase access, they remain structurally weak, limited in reach and ultimately detached from the neoliberal framework that is the driving force behind the exclusion taking place. Without challenging the dominant tourism model, these programmes can only offer surface-level remedies to the growing problem of exclusion.

Nonetheless, tourism's trajectory in the Cyclades, and Greece in general, is not a fait accompli; it is the result of choices, which, in turn, leaves space for contestation. A more just model is not only plausible, but can also be found in the memories, values, and experiences of participants, thus making alternative futures possible. Tourism has to be reclaimed as a symbiotic space, not one of extraction or control. A positive restart would require the return to its very core: from quantity to quality, from spectacle to substance, and from profit to participation. It necessitates decentralized development to achieve decongestion in saturated destinations, protection of environmental, cultural, and architectural heritage through firm legislation, support for alternative models of employment to reduce overdependency on tourism, and a significant reform of social tourism schemes to support and facilitate effective access to travel and leisure. Above all, participatory governance must be placed at the forefront, ensuring that those with past, present, and future affective ties to the islands can continue to shape their future.

In the words of Elytis (1998):

"*If you deconstruct Greece, you will in the end see an olive tree, a grapevine, and a boat remain. That is, with as much, you reconstruct her*."

What remains is not relics but foundations; fragments which hold the potential to reorient tourism in Greece towards what it once stood for: reciprocity, simplicity, and belonging. These elements remind us that even in the face of rupture, alternative futures are still possible.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide

Part 1 – General Demographic Questions:

1. Can you tell me what your age & employment status is?
2. What are your travelling habits (how many times a year do you travel now, how many vacations, what type)
3. Can you explain how you are connected to the Cyclades?

Part 2 - Economic and Tourism Development and Commodification:

1. Can you describe how the 2008 crisis, in your opinion, transformed the tourism industry in Greece?
2. When did you start to notice a change in the type of tourists visiting the islands or in the type of tourism promoted?
3. What changes have you noticed over the years in how tourism is organised or experienced on the islands and how you vacation now?
4. How do you think tourism is developed in Greece?
    a. Do you think that tourism has led to a "selling off" or commercialization of local culture or traditions? How has the natural environment been affected?
    b. What could be done to avoid over-tourism and how Greek tourism on the islands can be made more sustainable, protecting the islands' character?

Part 3 – Emotional Geographies & Nostalgia

1. Do you think tourism on the Cycladic islands is beneficial? Why?
2. When you think about your first visits to the Cyclades, what do you remember most vividly and how do those early experiences compare to how you feel when you visit the islands today?
3. Are there particular places, customs or everyday details that you feel have disappeared or changed significantly? How does this make you feel?
    a. Do you think the Cyclades still represent the same "idea" or "feeling" of Greece that they used to represent?

b. Do you think that younger generations of visitors can connect with the same feelings or meanings that you experienced in the past?

Part 4– Social Tourism and Right to Tourism

1. Do you know of people or have you felt that some people are excluded from enjoying the Cyclades because of rising costs or development standards?
   a. Do you think that tourism on the islands is designed with the needs of everyday people (locals and visitors) in mind?
   b. From what you have seen, do islanders have a say in how tourism is developed?

2. In Greece, can we talk about tourism becoming a right, so that future generations can also enjoy what you were able to before? What would this require?

3. Have you seen or experienced forms of tourism that seem more equitable, inclusive or community-oriented? What were they like?

4. What alternative forms of tourism can be promoted to preserve this local element and maintain a balance?

Part 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

1. How do you imagine the future of tourism in the Cyclades and Greece in general?
   a. What do you think are the biggest problems or risks that the islands will face due to tourism in the coming years?
   b. Do you think that there is still time for a "reset" of tourism in the Cyclades? What would this reset look like for you? What would this require?

Appendix B – Code Book

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Code
Tourism-induced transformation	- spatial restructuring - temporal rhythms	- infrastructural expansion - seasonality and congestion	- new lodgings and utilities for tourism - landscape reshaping - overcrowding in high-season, winter emptiness
Economic adaptation and dependency	- Tourism as monoculture - Profit flows	- Economic fragility - uneven Distribution	- Dependence on single-sector income, erosion of alternatives - Accumulation by external actors, limited local benefit
Commodification of culture and landscape	- Aesthetic branding - Staged culture	- Symbolic packaging - Performative authenticity	- Use of Cycladic imagery and tradition for marketing purposes - Reproduction of rituals, architecture, or lifestyle for tourist appeal
Governance and structural power	- Development logic - Policy priorities	- Neoliberalism /Neofeudalism - State-led commodification	- Investment-driven planning, privatised access, elite capture - Focus on tourism growth, neglect of social equity
Affective entanglements with place	- Emotional responses - Enduring attachments	- Loss and frustration - Emotional belonging	- Feelings of grief, anger - ambivalence about changes - continued connection to space despite transformation

Nostalgia	- Memory and identity - Temporal rupture	- Reflective nostalgia - Discontinuity	- Evocations of past rhythms, values, and landscapes - Awareness of intergenerational loss
Perceived exclusion and marginalisation	- Socio-economic barriers - Cultural alienation	- Access inequality - Symbolic displacement	- Exclusion from spaces due to pricing, social status - Feeling of disconnection, space no longer reflective of local identity

Appendix C –Anonymised Interview Overview

Respondent – Gender	Age	Occupation	International Background	Duration of Interview
Interviewee #1 (F)	56	Physical Education Teacher	GR	50m 1s
Interviewee #2 (F)	68	Retired Teacher / Feng-Shui Consultant	IT	49m 49s
Interviewee #3 (M)	26	Teacher / Philologist	GR	58m 41s
Interviewee #4 (M)	28	Private Sector Employee	GR	44m 3s
Interviewee #5 (M)	67	åEngineer / Employee at the Ministry of Culture	GR	1h 10m
Interviewee #6 (F)	64	Retired Teacher / Entrepreneur / Activist	GR	1h 16m
Interviewee #7 (F)	52	Public Sector Employee	GR	33m 56s
Interviewee #8 (F)	55	Homemaker	GR	50m 59s
Interviewee #9 (F)	56	Freelance Leadership Trainer and Coach	GR	1h 12m