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**HERITAGIZATION OF CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX
PAINTED CHURCHES**

**In Search of Visitor Agency and the Dialectics of Heritage
Management at Cypriot World Heritage Sites.**

A PhD Thesis

July 2024

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Drawing on Critical Heritage Theory and Critical Realism, the thesis delves into the dissonance and contestation that emerges during the management, curation, and conservation of Cypriot historic religious sites. The latter opens a window for the examination of how policymakers, clergy, and visitors negotiate the materiality of religion. The thesis explores the cultural processes hidden behind the material-focused and expert-driven, 'Authorised Heritage Discourse' in an effort to unpack the agendas, interests, and experiences of social agents involved in the heritagization process. Drawing on the various conceptualisations of authenticity (objective, constructivist, postmodern) that expand the ways in which individuals form connections with heritage, the thesis aims to deepen our understanding of how discursive and institutional structures and their mechanisms influence the conservation of Cypriot rural religious sites. In doing so, the thesis fleshes out embedded power relationships and shifting ideologies and seeks to identify areas of convergence and divergence between policymakers, church's representatives, and heritage users.

The thesis draws on Smith's theory of Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD), providing a lens to understand how heritage users reproduce and challenge hegemonic discourses. To overcome issues of nominalisation and reductionism associated with AHD, the thesis draws on (critical) realist social ontology. The originality of this study is that it provides the empirical framework to examine the dialectic relationship between the discursive (AHD) and the extra-discursive conditions that constitute AHD-led practices, the dominant form of conservation in Cyprus.

The research is structured as a multi-method qualitative comparative case study examining two Cypriot UNESCO churches, St. Nicholas and St. John, inactive and active worshipping sites. The thesis builds on primary data, including semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (16) and visitors (40) and archival documents. Findings demonstrate that over the years, a centralised decision-making system has been maintained in Cyprus that limits polyvocality perpetuating AHD-driven strategies (i.e., 'preserve as found' strategy). However, evidence of reconciliation between AHD and living tradition was found, challenging the current assumption that considers objective authenticity (anti-restoration) and living religious tradition as antithetic practices. The study also found that visitors demonstrate higher levels of immersion in a church that looks both 'active' and 'worn.' Suggestions are provided for improving the conservation/management and tourism engagement strategies.

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Abbreviations

- **AHD:** Authorised Heritage Discourse
- **CCS:** Comparative Case Study
- **CHT:** Critical Heritage Theory
- **CR:** Critical Realism
- **DoA:** (Cypriot) Department of Antiquities
- **GT:** Grounded Theory
- **ICOMOS:** International Council on Monuments and Sites
- **NCU:** (Cypriot) National Commission for UNESCO
- **OUV:** Outstanding Universal Value
- **WH:** World Heritage
- **WHS:** World Heritage Status

1. Introduction

1.1 Personal Statement

This PhD project is a product of my personal, professional (as an archaeologist) and academic interest in the field of heritage and religion. During my bachelor's degree in 'History and Archaeology' at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece between 2010-2014, I developed a great interest in Byzantine culture manifested primarily through ecclesiastical buildings. During my postgraduate master's at 'Heritage Studies at Newcastle University between 2014-2015, I was introduced to the symbolic dimension of cultural heritage and the various ways it is operationalized to support ever-changing political and social agendas. The East Roman Empire, what we call today, Byzantium, made great strides in temple-building architecture and medieval hagiographies bequeathing to the world works of unparalleled beauty for medieval standards. As a Greek Cypriot, growing up in a traditional and religious family, I have always been intrigued by the longevity of Christian tradition and how firmly it is connected with contemporary collective memory. Thus, the mysticism of religion and its cultural impact today has always been a great inspiration for me.



Figure 1 Painted Churches UNESCO Cyprus – St. John Monastery (Zairon 2017 CC)

1.2 Introduction to the Thesis

This PhD study investigates the dialectics developed during the heritagization of ecclesiastical heritage and how opposing discourses and processes authorise certain management and conservation practices as opposed to others (Thouki 2022). The closure, abandonment, and repurposing of religious sites across Europe, following the decline of the congregation within an increasingly secularised continent, and the difficulty of dioceses to fund conservation projects have generated widespread interest. Thomas Begrich, head of finances for the Evangelical Church of Germany, stated that between 1990 and 2010, 340 churches had been closed, while he predicted that 1,000 more buildings would follow between 2010-2020 (Schulz, 2013). At the same time, the Church of England closes 20 churches per year (Bendavid 2015), while hundreds more churches will close in the Netherlands over the next decade (Van De Kamp, 2019). Meanwhile, heritagization, a cultural process that ascribes new uses and values to living heritage sites, is often driven by a preservationist agenda that inhibits devotees from executing their traditional practices, such as venerating and burning incense (Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes, 2016). Regarding historic churches that retain their living character, which is the focus of this PhD thesis, management strategies demonstrate a great diversity varying from those taking a business model on the one extreme to those adopting more modest strategies that prioritise revitalisation over commercial development (Di Giovine, 2010).

‘Living heritage’ is a term that has been linked with local communities (Wijesuriya, 2018) and their rights to shape and modify their cultural heritage based on their evolving beliefs and practices (Chapagain, 2013; Liu et al., 2022). The key attribute of living heritage is the notion of ‘continuity’ manifested through the continuous physical presence of a community associated with a site, the continuity of the activities (i.e., practices, rituals), and the traditional methods of maintenance (Poulios, 2010). Understanding the importance of religious heritage in modern Europe and communicating its values is difficult, especially in a shifting world where religion has lost its supremacy (Harding, 2019) and aesthetics are elevated as a prominent ‘cultural sphere of value’ (Habermas, 2002, p. 84). To understand whether the current conservation and curatorial strategies meet visitors’ expectations, it’s important to understand and evaluate what meanings and connections tourists and pilgrims create with religious destinations; there are any differences and similarities, and how ‘church’s representatives’ perceive and deal with religious tourist development (Wang 1999; Willson et al. 2013).

Due to the political, symbolic, monetary (boost for local economies), cultural (feeling of belonging and social cohesion) and religious capital these sites generate, the need to develop sustainable, inclusive cultural heritage policies that respect the multiple values attached to these monuments has become the focal point of much of heritage scholarship in recent years. Issues of conservation and authenticity are considered key elements in developing logical and well-informed decisions about the historic environment and reconciling the needs, values, and expectations of those who protect, use and visit it (Historic England, 2008). According to UNESCO, authenticity as an ‘essential qualifying factor concerning values’ shaping conservation and restoration planning (2021, p. 97) requires a continuous understanding that captures its relationship with materials, identity, dynamic sites, and stewardship. Despite the growing scholarly interest in religious heritage, what we know about the ‘heritagization of religious sites’ comes predominantly from religious tourism scholarship, which has focused on examining the impact of the commodification of living religious sites underscoring their hybrid semi-secular and semi-sacred character (Thouki, 2022). However, few researchers attempted to examine issues of conservation and authenticity from both producers’ and consumers’ points of view.

Thus, empirical studies that document the perceptions of clergy and tourists on issues including the curation and conservation of sensitive interior (such as religious murals see also Spaarschuh and Kempton, 2020) are underrepresented, especially in European context. The limited research in this area perpetuates practical and theoretical ambiguities related to curating and conserving living religious sites. This PhD study aims to provide new insight into the dissonance and contestation that underlies the conservation of living religious heritage. The thesis provides the framework for our understanding of how certain heritage practices retain their hegemony and how certain conservation decisions impact religious tourism experience and satisfaction. The research driving this thesis is: ‘What are the (causal) relationships between the current conservation strategies in Cypriot rural religious sites and discourses around religious tradition and authenticity?’.

This question seeks to investigate the dialectics occurring during heritagization, which, as Bianchi (2009) maintained, could shed light on how certain discourses retain their hegemony and why certain cultural practices are favoured over others. In these conceptual boundaries, this study seeks to understand the power dynamics underlying conservation assemblages in Cyprus and how visitors (pilgrims and tourists) respond to the existing strategies. These two interrelated topics address two sides of the same coin: the production (decisions regarding

conservation, management, and curation) and consumption (referring to visitors' reflecting thinking of these decisions) of religious sites, which is the focus of this PhD study. In other words, the relationship between religious tradition and 'secular' management strategies that often turn sacred sites into spectacles adapted to tourists' demands (Zhu, 2020; Rico, 2021), and secondly, who visit religious sites, what are their motives, what meanings they craft and how site managers can improve their experience. What ideas do fragmented wall paintings evoke. Should object-based authenticity be considered redundant? What conservation and curatorial strategy is best suited for (in)active rural churches. Realistic conservation and sustainable policies can be achieved by gathering enough evidence and understanding of a place's shifting cultural significance and understanding each's relative contribution (Historic England, 2008; Burra Charter, 2013). Thus, considering conservation as an ongoing process, this thesis asks who values the place, how these values relate to the fabric, how associate objects contribute to these values and how these sites compare to others that share similar values (Historic England, 2008).

The Cypriot-painted Byzantine World Heritage (WH) sites are a less represented category of religious monuments in the international literature, while regarding professional context, heritagization is still in an embryonic stage on the island. This author believes that the neglected Cypriot churches and its less-known Orthodox Christian tradition could provide new data to understand the heritagization of living religious sites. This phenomenon sits at the heart of Critical Heritage Theory (CHT), which considers who is excluded during heritage making, whose interests are marginalised, and how identities and other social and cultural values influence conservation (Winter 2013). As Harrison stated, heritage is 'constantly chosen, recreated and renegotiated in the present' (2013, p. 165). Emphasising the need for sensitive conservation policies that would acknowledge intangible heritage and community-based approaches (Smith, 2006; Winter, 2013) CHT could help this thesis to explore this ongoing dialogue (or process) with the past occurring around the rights to control expressions of identity and sovereignty (Smith, 2006) and propose conservation practices that conservation professionals are often reluctant to acknowledge (Winter, 2013). These monuments receive close patronage from the Cypriot Orthodox, denoting the continuity of traditions as well as their World Heritage Status (WHS), and provide a fertile ground to explore how different regional, national, and global ideologies are negotiated and operationalised (Young, 2021), and how living tradition 'survives' (Wijesuriya, 2018).

1.3 Problem Statement and Research Strategy

Academic and grey literature on issues of cultural heritage management, especially ecclesiastical heritage, is still embryonic in Cyprus. This PhD study is a response to these scholarly and professional gaps, and it has been conceptualised in such a way as to answer pending questions regarding the management of living religious sites. Drawing on informal discussions with priests and archaeologists in Cyprus before and during the initial stages of the fieldwork and in situ observations, two areas have been identified as problematic and require further examination. The first is the absence of a clear management structure and the blurring of boundaries between the Dioceses and the Department of Antiquities (DoA). This confusion between ‘owner’ and ‘guardian’ to this day perpetuates various controversies, such as the conservation of frescos with certain bishops pushing for aesthetic re-integration, as well as other micromanagement problems such as closed hygiene facilities, shortage of guidebooks and interpretive infrastructure, deficit of trained guides, difficulty in operating safety alarm systems among others. Secondly, little is known regarding visitor response and satisfaction towards the current conservation and curatorial heritage strategies, how, for instance, visitors perceive the incompleteness of wall paintings and the ‘emptiness’ of rural churches. Thus, there is ambiguity about whether the existing conservation policy planning is an agent of protection or a barrier to change and an impediment to development. As a result, questions such as who defines, controls and benefits from the current strategies are central to this investigation (Pendlebury, 2013). Thus, this study aims to decipher the relationship that has developed over the decades between authorities (policymakers and practitioners) that apply material-focus conservation strategies, the local bishoprics that are concerned about living religious tradition and heritage users, pilgrims, and tourists, who perform religious practices and experience the sacredness of the place. The term ‘church’s representatives’ refers to local dioceses which are the legal owners of the churches and responsible for the day-to-day activities, liturgical and tourist related. This term ascribes agency to bishoprics and draws attention towards the ways the latter benefits from religious tourism, how it resists to secular policies, that may disempower local bishoprics and change the original function of religious sites, and even how the last stage churches to look more authentic (Joseph and Kavoori 2001; Půtová, 2018).

In this framework, this PhD aims to *deepen our understanding of how discursive and institutional structures and their mechanisms influence the conservation of Cypriot rural religious sites and identify areas of convergence and divergence between policymakers and*

heritage users. Developing an understanding of the dialectics occurring during the conservation of religious sites in Cyprus, this study opens a theoretical window to understand key debates on AHD and the supposed contrast between pilgrimage and tourism. To operationalise this aim, three steps (research objectives) were undertaken. The first objective refers to the macro level (or policy planning) and, in particular, how structural forces, new social actors (UNESCO), discourse and agency influence the institutionalisation and conservation of these sites. Whose ideas prevail, how social actors internalise external discourses and respond to various social mechanisms (lack of funding, expertise, statutory control, etc.) that frame religious sites as heritage. The second objective explores visitors' views and experiences to understand whether 'heritage users' are constrained or enabled by management practices, particularly the current conservation ethos that 'freezes' religious sites. What ideas do visitors bring with them, and what ideas are generated during the interaction with the historical religious sites, and are there any differences and similarities between tourists and pilgrims? The third objective discusses the strategic implications of the current conservation practices. It seeks to explain why visitors are aligned or unaligned with the existing conservation and presentation strategies. This comparison could contribute to better managing Cypriot historic churches and ensure that conservation, maintenance, and presentation are sympathetic to the owners (Church of Cyprus), guardians (DoA) and 'heritage users'.

This study is designed as a multi-method, comparative qualitative study that collects contemporary (semi-structured interviews) and historic (archival research on minutes, reports, and letters) primary data. One of the benefits of this approach is that it captures social actors' lived experiences and reflections towards the heritagization of religious sites, capturing shifting discourses around religious heritage. Furthermore, the archival research provides a historical depth that examines how policies developed over time that help the researcher to grasp social interaction, transformation, or reproduction (Delbridge and Edwards, 2013). To create a robust, well-informed argument that will help local bodies protect and develop Cypriot churches, this study explores the key issues (i.e., conservation, curation) and key stakeholders involved. The two rural churches selected, St. John of Lampadistis (Village of Kalopanagiotis), an active worship site and St. Nickolas of the Roof (Village of Kakopetria), an inactive church, share both similarities, such as the rich painted interior and differences, such as their positioning and presentation strategies. This comparative analysis helps this study to facilitate a better understanding of how particular programmes or policies work, emphasising comparisons

within a context (Goodrick, 2014). The study draws on 16 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, 40 semi-structured interviews (20 in each church) with visitors and archival research of past conservation projects and decisions.

To understand better the dialectics occurring during the conservation and consumption of historic religious churches in Cyprus, the study draws on the theory of Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith, 2006). This theory is helpful in this context for two reasons. Firstly, it draws attention towards a professional discourse that privileges expert values (Smith, 2006) and is manifested through international conservation conventions, bequeathing to professionals a set of ‘validated’ conservation values, narratives, and meanings about heritage (Waterton *et al.* 2006; Waterton and Smith, 2010). These narratives, such as the adherence to a ‘modernist’ conservation dogma that considers value as innate (rather than associative) tied to materiality under the strategy ‘conserve [or preserve] as found’ (Smith, 2006; Pendelbury, 2013), are institutionalised in heritage practices (Parkinson *et al.* 2016). Secondly, it draws attention to the unequal power relationships sustained between ‘authorises’ (Feintuch, 2007), embracing AHD and perpetuating discriminatory heritage policies and those ‘outsiders’ that are not legitimised as ‘experts’ (Pendelbury, 2013). As Di Giovine (2008) argued, AHD brought dissonance and dialectics to the centre of investigation.

To overcome the nominalisation of AHD (Skrede and Hølleland, 2018), a linguistic transformation that obscures underlying processes and competing voices (Billig, 2008), turning verbs and processes into nouns, the thesis draws on CR philosophy. For critical realists, discursive structures (a ‘cohesive ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorisations’ Epstein, 2008, p. 2), alongside material structures, have intelligible powers and liabilities (Fairclough *et al.*, 2002; Elder-Vass, 2011), exerting an influence on agency by constraining and enabling individuals in different ways, such as moral obligations (McAnulla, 2006). However, while semiotic/discursive structures (see AHD), which predate individuals, have a relative autonomy they ‘are dependent on actors for their reproduction’, thus social practice should not be reduced to semiosis (Fairclough *et al.*, 2002, p.3). In other words, the emphasis should be shifted away from treating discourse as an exclusively self-referential entity (Pendlebury, 2013) and an actor that enforces its values about the nature and meaning of heritage, to the extra discursive, the agency of policymakers and practitioners that internalise and operationalise this discourse (Skrede and Hølleland, 2018).

Within the epistemological margins of CR, to avoid any form of reductionism, the study draws on analytical dualism to decipher the dialectics developed between the discursive and extra-discursive aspects of social reality (Fairclough et al., 2002). In other words, the ways organisations, institutions, and social groups reflect, internalise and dispute AHD as a set of beliefs (i.e., innate value, original material, monumentality, aesthetics) and AHD-led practices (i.e., ‘preserve as found’ strategy), manifested in the conservation of religious sites. Thus, to understand how existing power structures perpetuate AHD-led strategies, this study explores the cultural processes hidden behind AHD (Skrede and Hølleland, 2018), unpacking how social actors (i.e., institutions and social groups) reflect, dispute, and internalise AHD and living religious tradition (or religious discourse). This approach opens a theoretical window to understand ‘why hegemonic discourses, such as the material focused and expert-led AHD, retain their supremacy during the conservation of (living) heritage’. In other words what are the extra-semitic mechanisms that are responsible for the retention of AHD as the leading set of ideas that influence the conservation of living religious sites. And secondly, are ‘heritage users’ always in opposition to AHD-led practices?

This study postulates that the infiltration and eventual operationalisation of non-material and other counter-hegemonic discourses (see traditional religious practices) in conservation practice is related to how centralised the decision-making process is in a particular context and how (in)dependent and resilient the institutions carrying certain discourses are. However, the thesis also found evidence of reconciliation between a core value of AHD, the authenticity of original material (or objective authenticity) and living religious tradition. For a large number of social actors (certain clergy and the majority of tourists), the ‘preserve as found’ strategy does not override the values of living tradition. This was particularly evident when most visitors saw benefits in certain AHD-led practices to provoke a highly immersive and reflexive experience that triggered escapism and nostalgia.

The findings of this study provide space for reflection and reassessment of the conservation and tourism engagement strategies at Cypriot rural churches, as well as recommendations to improve issues related to planning and management. The study proposes institutionalising site-specific managers and urges future conservation and curatorial programs to consider objective authenticity and living tradition complementary rather than antithetic conservation practices. The thesis concludes that, in future conservation and interpretation strategies, ‘evidence of time’ should be considered a salient quality of ‘heritaged’ churches.

Table 1 Research Question, Aim and Objectives

Research Question	<i>What are the (causal) relationships between the current conservation strategies in Cypriot rural religious sites and discourses around religious tradition and authenticity?</i>
Aim	<i>This PhD thesis aims to deepen our understanding of how discursive and institutional structures and their mechanisms influence the conservation of Cypriot rural religious sites and identify areas of convergence and divergence between policymakers, church's representatives and heritage users.</i>
Objective 1	<i>To investigate what discourses are institutionalised in the policy and operation of Cypriot religious sites and why.</i>
Objective 2	<i>To explore how visitors respond to the conservation and curation of Cypriot religious sites and whether there are any differences and similarities between tourists and pilgrims.</i>
Objective 3	<i>To what extent do visitors align themselves – or not – with the current conservation and presentation strategies?</i>

1.4 Research Significance and Originality

The originality of this research is evident in three interrelated areas: knowledge (literature gaps), theoretical, and methodological/epistemological.

Knowledge gap: The literature review chapter demonstrates that the literature is particularly strong around issues of commodification, hybridization and desacralization. This thesis offers a new empirical qualitative study that provides insight on how traditional clergy and visitors (shifting) perceptions toward the materiality of religion evolved in an Eastern Orthodox country. For example, how discourses regarding the appropriate treatment of wall paintings clash with continuous maintenance and how curatorial decisions impact living practices at Cypriot rural churches. This thesis builds on DeSilvey's and Harrison's (2020) thesis, which urged future research to understand how communities deal with the inevitability of cultural loss and how this becomes a creative opportunity to generate new meaningful relationships with material heritage.

Theoretical understanding: Building on Skrede and Hølleland's (2018) position to 'unpack what is hiding under the concept of AHD' (p. 91) and the ontological and epistemological assumptions of Critical Realism, this empirical study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of *why AHD retains its hegemony in the conservation of living religious heritage*. Unpacking the dialectical relation developed between discourse (i.e., AHD) and extra-discursive conditions/entities (i.e., structures/mechanisms and social agents), the study surfaced power relations embedded within Cypriot conservation assemblages and shifting ideological positions among social agents. The thesis concludes that the perpetuation of AHD-led practices is a combination of two coexisting processes: Firstly, a centralised decision-making process systematically maintained by authorities that capitalise on the liabilities of other institutions, and secondly, a shifting religious discourse that internalises ideas of material authenticity, expert values, and objectivity.

Methodological contribution: As has been argued, however, CR is a philosophy in search of method and its methodological application is still under development (Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017). Equally, while CR has been discussed within heritage studies, it has not been applied yet in an empirical study. This study provides a step-by-step demonstration of how the epistemological considerations of CR can help scholars investigate issues related to the macro and micro level of cultural heritage phenomena, such as the conservation of living religious heritage. Building on a growing body of literature applying retroductive analysis, this thesis

goes one step further to incorporate the notions of ‘discourse’ (as ideational structures with their own causal powers) and ‘social practices’ (considered as mediating entities between structures and events) (Fairclough, 2005), within retroductive analysis. This methodological approach helps future studies to move away from the ‘imperialism of discourse’. Approaching discourse as one element of a laminated social life this study avoids treating practitioners as a grey mass and envisages to flesh out the agency of social actors involved in the conservation of heritage.

1.5 Study Area and Historical Background

The establishment of DoA in 1935 was another step taken by the English colonial government for the protection of the Cypriot cultural patrimony that had already started in the late 19th century when the smuggling of antiquities from the island was a prevalent tactic. This marked two important changes still evident in the island's heritage policy. Firstly, they abolished the previous committee (comprising the British High Commissioner and three religious leaders) and ran the Cypriot Museum with a more centralised system, making cultural heritage management a governmental matter under the jurisdiction of the newly established governmental department (DoA Web 2023). The second change was introducing the new '*antiquarian law*', which introduced the concept of 'listed monuments'. In Cyprus, there are two categories of listed monuments. The first consists predominantly of archaeological sites, which are considered property of the state. The second refers to monuments with owners, such as churches, obliging owners to refrain from altering the character of ancient monuments without permission from the DoA (DoA Web 2023). Despite these changes in Cyprus, the Cypriot church, comprising parishioner priests, archimandrites, and bishops, is considered the owner of these places and according to the current legal framework (and cultural tradition), they are responsible for their operation and curation.

A critical moment in the history of the two churches under consideration was their listing as ancient monuments during the colonial area (1878-1960). According to archival research, the then governor of Cyprus, in collaboration with British antiquarians, decided to declare the church and the monastery (lodgings) of St. John as an ancient monument in 1936, under the 2nd Antiquarian Law of 1935. Around the same period, the church of St. Nickolas appears to have received the same status. Listing the two churches as 'ancient monuments' resulted in a co-ownership between church and state (DoA) that unbalanced the traditional custodianship due to two important tenets related to listing. The first is that no structural interventions can be made without the explicit consent of the DoA, and the second is that the owner, the Church of Cyprus, is responsible for contributing 50% of the cost of conservation projects, with the state contributing the other 50%. Apart from the Church, the owner of religious monuments and the Ministry of Culture, in Cyprus, there are three regulatory bodies appointed to protect national patrimony: DoA, ICOMOS and the Cyprus National Commission for UNESCO (NCU), a representative body of UNESCO in Cyprus. Today in Cyprus, AHD is featured as the prominent rhetorical justification and institutional logic. Through the interviews with institutional actors, archival research and consultation of the official DoA website,

conservation policy is largely driven by the ‘archaeological law’ rooted in colonial times. This is also demonstrated on the official DoA website (DoA Web, 2023), where UNESCO’s and ICOMOS’s documents that outline conservation guidelines and principles, such as the Burra Charter and Nara Document, are conspicuously absent.

Ten painted churches were inscribed as UNESCO sites in 1985. Located in a cluster in the Troodos mountain range, these churches demonstrate the remnants of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine artistic cultural tradition on the island between the 11th and 16th centuries. Two representative examples have been selected in this case study. The first is the church of St. Nickolas, and the second is the Monastery of St. John. Their unique architectural characteristics, evident through steep-pitched wooden roofs protecting masonry domes and vaulted forms in certain cases, are determined by endemic to Cypriot conditions, including the geography, history, and climate over a period of 500 years. Likewise, their rich inscriptions provide unique evidence for recording the chronology of Byzantine paintings. Regarding the internal decoration, the monuments present wall paintings of exceptional artistic qualities (UNESCO Web, 2023). The reasoning behind the selection of these two churches was determined by two major issues. Firstly, their high visitation (located close to rural residential areas) would enable the sourcing of research participants and secondly their distinct liturgical function with the church of St. Nickolas being an inactive church without religious furniture and the church of St. John an active religious site (see Table 1 for similarities and differences).

The 10 Cypriot churches meet three (out of six) UNESCO’s cultural criteria:

- **Criterion II:** Important interchange of human values over a span of time within a cultural area. These are demonstrated through East-West artistic exchanges demonstrated through iconographical relationships between Byzantine and Western Christian art that provide answers to the complex relation between two Christianities.
- **Criterion III:** They bear an exceptional testimony of Byzantine civilization in the island especially during the time of the Comnenes.
- **Criterion IV:** The refinement of their décor in contrast to their unique but simple external structure represents an outstanding example of vernacular rural architectural design of Byzantine period.



Figure 2 Map of Cyprus / Location of the two churches (Ikonact 2012 CC)

The church of **St. Nickolas of the Roof** is built on the west bank of the river Karkotis/Klarios, approximately two kilometres southwest of the village of Kakopetria, at the heart of the Troodos mountain range. The church is under the jurisdiction of the diocese of Nicosia. This standalone church (Catholicon/monastery church) remains from an earlier monastery that flourished in the 11th century in the area. Its architectural design is typified as a doomed cross-in-square structure. The narthex and the timber steep-pitched roof were added in the 12th and 13th centuries, respectively, thus the name ‘of the roof’ (tis stegis), while later additions in the original building resulted in the destruction of its interior decoration. The church's wall paintings belong to various periods, spanning more than 600 years. The oldest paintings date back to the 11th century and are considered some of the most crucial wall paintings surviving on the island. The paintings include scenes from the life of Jesus, the Raising of Lazarus, the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, and other scenes such as the 40 martyrs of Sebaste. Some areas, such as the apse, were redecorated in the 14th century. The later paintings were transferred and exhibited in the Byzantine Museum (DoA) (UNESCO Web, 2023).



Figure 3 Church of St. Kakopetria Village (Author ©)

The monastery of **St. John Lampadistis** is also located in the central area of Troodos in the valley of Marathasa. It is built on the east bank of the Setrachos River, opposite the village of Kalopanagiotis. The monastery is under the jurisdiction of the diocese of Morphou. The founding date of the monastery is unknown. However, the monastery church, dedicated to St. Herakleidios, dates back to the 11th century. The monastery functioned until the early 19th century, while a 15th-century inscription describes the church as the principal parish church of the village, something that remains the case today. In the mid-19th century, a monastery section was used as a classroom for the children of Kalopanagiotis and nearby villages. The church comprises three different churches: the church of St Herakleidios, a domed cross-in-square structure; the chapel of St. John Lampadistis added to the north (middle church) in the 12th century above the saints' tomb; and the vaulted 'Latin chapel' added to the north in the mid-15th century. A narthex to the west and a pitched roof was added in the same century, giving the external image of a single church. Its wall paintings, dating to the 11th to 14th centuries, preserve some rare representations, such as the depiction of the Holy Handkerchief. Influences from Constantinople and Italy (renaissance elements married with Byzantine art) can be found in the church, indicating the coexistence of artistic traditions. Also worthy of mention is the oldest wooden templon screen found in Cyprus, dating to the 13th -14th century (UNESCO Web, 2023).



Figure 4 St. John Monastery, Kalopanagiotis Village (Enric 2010 CC)

**St. Nickolas (Kakopetria village) and
St. John Monastery (Kalopanagiotis village)**

Similarities

- Overall state of preservation very good in both churches.
- The survival and condition of the wall paintings in both churches are at the same standards. Approximately 70% of the wall paintings survive in very good condition in both churches.
- The conservation strategy at the two churches, especially the historic material fabric, is shaped by the DoA.
- The core stakeholders at both churches are the same: Church of Cyprus, Department of Antiquities and UNESCO.
- Both are considered ‘rural traditional churches’.

Differences

- Under the jurisdiction of different Dioceses
- Built at different locations with St. John being in the centre of the village while St. Nickolas a few miles outside.
- The two churches demonstrate different presentation strategies. St. Nickolas is empty, and no liturgies take place. St. John is maintained as an active church where weekly liturgies are held.

Table 2 Similarities and Differences Between the Two Churches

1.6 Thesis Structure Overview

This PhD thesis comprises eight core chapters divided into several sections. Illustrations and tables are provided throughout the thesis to clarify further some of the complexities of this study:

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter where the significance and originality of the research are presented to the reader. The chapter introduced the conceptual, theoretical, and epistemological underpinning of this PhD thesis, the research design, and the background of the two case studies. The section discussed some management problems identified at Cypriot religious sites and communicated to the reader how the specific comparative case study envisages contributing fresh data and new perspectives on some unexplored areas regarding the ‘heritagization process’ of living religious sites, as well as refining Smith’s (2006) theory of Authorised Heritage Discourse.

Chapter 2 presents the results of the integrative-synthetic literature review performed in this study and is divided into three sections. The first addresses relevant theoretical debates in heritage studies including a review of the theory of Authorized Heritage Discourse. The second provides an in-depth review of the studies addressing various aspects of the heritagization of religious sites at both the macro and micro levels. The third addresses the issue of the presentation and interpretation of historical objects with particular emphasis on the presentation of religious sites.

Chapter 3 presents the conceptual framework of this study. This chapter functions as a melting pot, communicating to the reader how real-world problems, literature review gaps, theoretical positioning, research philosophy, and methodological choices form a coherent research design and inform the Aim and Objectives of this study.

Chapter 4 forms the ‘Methods Chapter’ and discusses how ontological and epistemological assumptions of Critical Realism (CR) shaped this qualitative comparative case study (CCS) and provides a detailed step-by-step explanation of how the data were collected and analysed. Ethical concerns and quality criteria are also discussed.

Chapter 5 presents the results of this study. The first section addresses the policy planning process, providing empirical evidence of stakeholders’ perspectives, goals, and values. The analysis concludes that four core mechanisms and two main discourses (AHD and Living Religious Tradition) influence the management of these churches. The interaction produces

five practices: minimal re-integration, merchandising, exhibition strategies, preserve as found (frescos) and centralisation. The second part of the chapter showcases how visitors respond (constrained or enabled) to the causal powers of these five practices. Tables and Figures provide insight into data analysis.

Chapter 6 forms the ‘Discussion Chapter’ and discusses the dialectics of heritagization in Cyprus through the lens of Critical Heritage Theory (CHT). The chapter is divided into three sections. The first outlines how DoA has established and maintained a centralised cultural heritage management by targeting the liabilities of other institutions. While Cyprus AHD retains its hegemony, strong evidence suggests reconciliation between ‘AHD and ‘living religion’ that allows a new hybrid discourse to emerge. The second takes a closer look into the ‘visitors’ gaze’ highlighting areas of convergence and divergence between visitors and the heritage practices adopted. Findings suggest that most visitors embrace two central tenets of AHD, objective authenticity (and material stasis) and expert-led conservation that spark nostalgia and feelings of security respectively. Section three aims to refine Smith’s (2006) theory of AHD. In light of these findings, it is suggested that the perpetuation of AHD-led practices is a multifaceted phenomenon resulting from two coexisting processes. Firstly, a centralised decision-making process systematically maintained by authorities that capitalise on the liabilities of other institutions, and secondly, a shifting religious discourse that internalises ideas of material authenticity, expert values, and objectivity.

Chapter 7 provides practical recommendations to overcome the problems identified at the study's outset. The first sub-section discusses a new model named, ‘non-intrusive development’ that considers the particularities of Cypriot context to improve cultural heritage policy related to rural religious sites. A vital recommendation this thesis makes is the introduction of site managers at the world heritage sites. The second sub-section provides curatorial recommendations for presenting rural religious sites that fell in disuse. The section concludes with recommendations on how future research should be conducted. The third sub-section discusses limitations and future research.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion of this thesis. The chapter overviews the current research design, it summarises the main findings, theoretical contribution, and the main points of agreement and disagreement with existing scholarship.

2. Literature Review

Overview:

The literature review commenced for this PhD study was structured as an integrative/synthetic review (Torraco, 2016; Snyder, 2019). Considering the multifaceted character of heritagization (including issues of conservation, curation, and management) and the limited empirical work on issues of conservation and authenticity at European religious sites and especially the Eastern Orthodox Churches, this research reviewed a broad body of studies without any strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, to combine perspectives driven by tentative rather than firm review questions aiming to combine perspectives and create new theoretical models (Edgley et al. 2016; Snyder 2019). Unlike systematic reviews that are most suited to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of particular policies (Saunders et al. 2016), synthetic reviews aim to delve into the literature and weave existing literature with broader theories and patterns and researcher intimate knowledge (Torraco 2016, p. 6). Unlike other types of literature reviews, synthetic focus on integrating concepts and perspectives from various sources that generate new conceptual frameworks that focus on core issues to provoke new questions that could give new direction in the field and new thinking (Torraco 2005, 2016). This encourages researchers to engage with a broad body of literature without strict inclusion or exclusion criteria, aiming to combine perspectives and create new theoretical models (Edgley et al. 2016; Snyder 2019). This strategy is suitable for a thesis that investigate a phenomenon such as the ‘heritagization of religious sites’ that comprises many integrated areas conservation, curation, interpretation, authenticity, commodification, and world heritage among others.

To make this review manageable and meaningful, it is focused on single nodal sacral sites such as monasteries and churches. Natural sacred sites in wild locations such as springs, caves, and mountain peaks have not been included as they are not directly compatible with management and conservation. Therefore, the study avoids homogenizing a diverse phenomenon such as ‘sacred sites,’ which, as Carmichael et al. (1994) argued, is best to examine within the broader environmental preservation issue. The advantage of this approach lies in its synthetic character that helped the researcher examine various problems, debates and controversies that coexist during the heritagization of religious heritage. By comparing and contrasting these works and discussing major trends (see the commodification of religious sites), debates (authenticity, tourist, and pilgrims dichotomy, etc.), theories (AHD), and

methods of analysis (domination of quantitative techniques), the synthetic approach open a window to understanding the politics between the interests and visions of major stakeholders, real problems in the ground and how visitors experience these sites. The broad scope of the literature review is also a limitation. In an effort to address the multiphase character of heritagization the thesis, some particular areas might have not been deled with in depth. As Figure 5 demonstrates conservation related journals are underrepresented. While the snowball technique was used following citations of prominent papers in the field to find relevant studies, future researches are recommended to make greater use of conservation and curation related journals.

Regarding the methodology applied, the papers reviewed were predominantly English-language peer-reviewed journal articles (Figure 5 and Table 12 Appendices), monographs, and edited books. The selection of keywords aimed at covering a broad range of terms associated with four interrelated fields of study: (religious) heritage, religious tourism, heritage conservation, and heritage interpretation. The literature was predominantly retrieved through Google Scholar, while Web of Science and SCOPUS were consulted. The keywords and phrases used are the following: ‘religious/ecclesiastical [cultural] heritage,’ ‘religious tourism,’ ‘management,’ ‘living religion,’ ‘pilgrimage,’ ‘interpretation,’ ‘conservation’ and a combination of those terms using Boolean operators (and, or and not) (Thouki, 2022). The review focused primarily on papers published in reputable academic journals (preferably 1st and 2nd quartile) to ensure the academic integrity of the thesis.

This chapter is subdivided into three sections. Section one, ‘Issues of Heritage Studies,’ provides a context for the present study; it reviews relevant debates within heritage studies and major questions and debates relevant to this study. Particular emphasis is given to the theory of AHD, its contribution, and its limitations. Section two, ‘Heritagization of Religious Sites,’ forms the bulk of the review, providing a concise and critical analysis of relevant work done within the field of ‘religious heritage.’ The sections evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of previous studies on three interrelated topics: management issues and conservation, policy planning, and visitors’ perspectives. Olsen’s (2006) distinction between internal and external management issues has been recruited as a ‘tentative’ framework to investigate how previous scholarship has explored social actors’ lived experiences and perceptions towards the practices comprising ‘heritagization.’ Section three addresses the area of ‘*Interpretation and Presentation*.’ Considering the limited literature that addresses church curatorial strategies,

museum scholarship provides research inquiries regarding the treatment, display, and interaction with sacred objects.

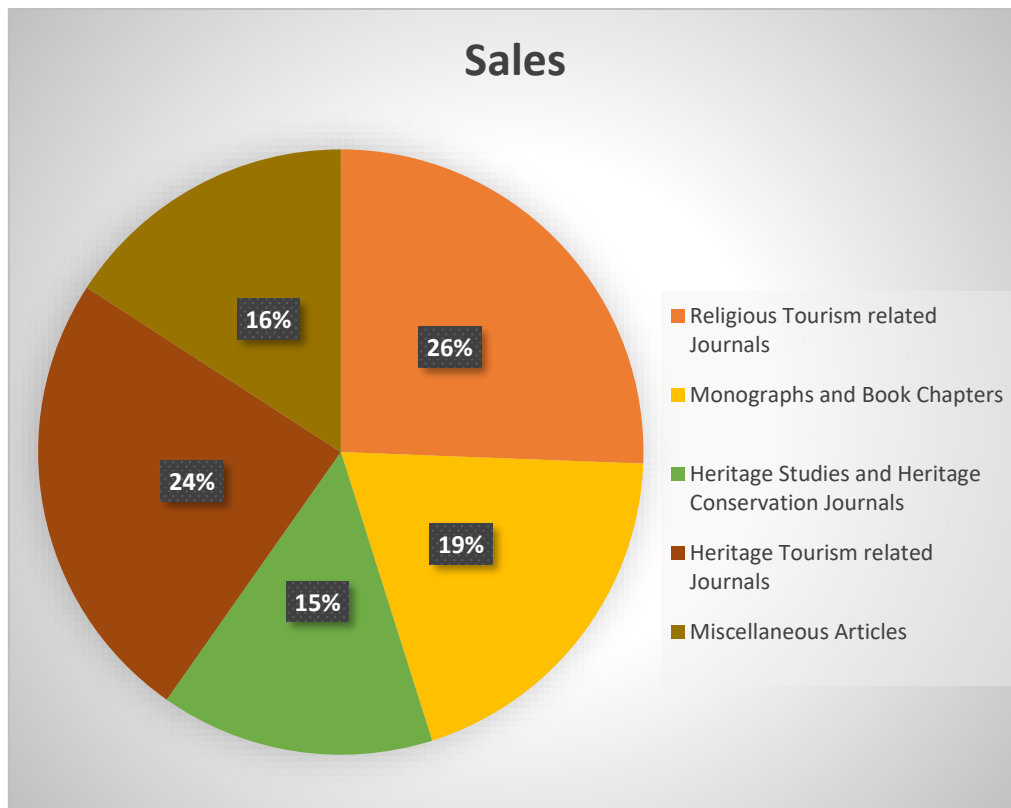


Figure 5 Journal Distribution of Empirical Studies Reviewed in this PhD Thesis.

2.1 Issues in Heritage Studies

According to Zoltán *et al.* (2015), ‘heritage’ is a subset of culture, and it refers to those tangible and intangible ‘remnants’ of the past individuals and groups upheld in the present to forge links with history. Culture and heritage are malleable terms and have been used in different contextual forms. Culture refers to the ‘totality of a society’s knowledge’ (Zoltán *et al.* 2015, p. 307); it comprises intellectual (social practices, art, tradition, morals, and knowledge) and material heritage; it functions as the cornerstone of identity and ensures the cohesion and survival of human community (Zoltán *et al.* 2015). The term ‘heritage’ has French origin and initially referred to the property or heirlooms passed on from ancestors to the following generations (Davison, 2008). However, this understanding of ‘heritage’ was enriched over time, and new categories have been introduced (Saengphueng, 2011). Heritage or cultural heritage refers not only to monuments, building complexities and sites bestowed with historic or scientific value (Feilden and Jokilehto, 1998) but to anything that evokes individual or collective memories. Heritage encompasses any artistic or cultural productivity ranging from physical survivals of the past (material culture) to the heritage of slavery (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996), and it is closely related to legacy, ownership, and the feeling of responsibility towards something people want to save (Howard, 2003). This ‘broad and slippery’ (Harrison, 2013, p. 5) definition denotes a creative interaction with the past during which people assemble objects, assets, landscapes, and practices which are linked with a set of values and concerns communities aim to reinforce to benefit current and future aspirations (Feilden and Jokilehto, 1998; Harvey, 2001; Harrison, 2015).

2.1.1 Heritagization of Living Heritage

The term ‘heritagization’ was introduced in the late 20th century to signify a transformative and historically contingent process through which historical objects, landscapes and traditions are institutionalised, displayed, and valued to underpin present agendas (Harvey, 2008; Harrison, 2013). The critique towards the institutionalisation and appropriation of the past emerged in the late 1980s’. At that time, Wright (1985), Hewison (1987) and Walsh (1992) argued that practices aiming to underscore historical continuity eventually homogenise and beautify culture into marketable national themes, transforming the real historic space into tourist attractions. Today, ‘heritagization’ is recruited to understand how societies use the past to underpin various cultural expressions and identities (Smith, 2006, 2007). Over the last decades, the notion of heritagization escaped the boundaries of commodification and has been recruited to investigate various complications associated with preventive conservation,

sustainable development and living communities and instrumentalization of traditional practices to support national narratives (Thouki, 2022).

The effects of heritagization have been a ‘hot’ topic among scholars over the last decades. These include the impact the ‘standardisation’ and ‘touristification’ on historic places has on inhabitants (Högberg, 2012; Said *et al.* 2013; Chapagain, 2017; Silva, 2019), the effect of over-management and commodification to turn historic landscapes into theme parks that freeze sites to a single perspective (Strange and Whitney, 2003; Orbasli and Woodward, 2009; Harrison, 2013), as well as the heritagization of the natural world, dark heritage (places of mass death) and tangible practices (food practices) (Fontal and Gomez-Redondo, 2015; Milan, 2017; Mentec and Zhang, 2017; Tena and Garcia-Esparza, 2018; Dabezies, 2018; Gómez-Redondo, 2019; Guan *et al.* 2019; Becker, 2019). Overall, these studies highlight the need to develop ethical management policies orientated towards sustainable economic development to address local peoples’ well-being and social and cultural capital. In summary, two paradigms are discernible: the first, ‘conservation as preservation,’ regards heritage as an urgent matter of protection (experts), while the second, ‘conservation as heritage,’ advocates for a firm brand name and marketing opportunities (locals) (Ashworth, 1997; Kaushal, 2019).

Living heritage is a term that has been linked with local communities (Wijesuriya, 2018) and their rights to shape and modify their cultural heritage based on their evolving beliefs and practices (Chapagain, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2022). The key attribute of living heritage is the notion of ‘continuity’ manifested through the ongoing physical presence of a community associated with a site, the continuity of the activities (i.e., practices, rituals), and the traditional methods of maintenance (Poulios, 2010). Seven decades since it was first mentioned in modern Western cultural history (Venice Charter 1964 and World Heritage Convention 1972), and despite efforts to expand this concept (Narra Document 1992), authenticity remains a highly malleable and debated concept intertwined with notions of truthfulness, originality, and tradition. Thus, the authenticity of ‘professionals’ (preservation of physical remains), ‘religious groups’ (referring to the living teaching and practices), and ‘tourists’ (viewing experience) is not necessarily the same thing (Poulios, 2019).

Regarding conservation, the emphasis is given to what is considered authentic, what people value most, and what meanings the heritage environment should communicate (Vinas, 2002). The conservation of ‘living heritage’ surfaces the difficulty in balancing contradicting values and vested interests, especially when they play a significant role in people's well-being,

social relations, and their collective vision of the future (Jokilehto, 1999; Miura, 2005). Contemporary conservation theory is based on a ‘communicative turn in conservation,’ also known as ‘value-based conservation,’ in which objectivism is replaced by intersubjectivity (Vinas 2002). Thus, the value of the object or place does not rest on its physical or material attributes’, but rather authenticity can be found in a broader sense, including values of an intangible nature, such as function and spirit, that require a balanced judgment between conflicting values (Orbasli, 2008; Araoz, 2013). However, critics (Stovel, 2007; Munasinghe, 2005; Orbasli and Woodward, 2009; Poullos, 2010; Konsa, 2015; Winter, 2014b) have questioned the feasibility of value-based conservation due to its ambitious scope to protect all values and satisfy all stakeholder groups. This is particularly evident at religious sites where material-driven concerns aim to ensure that authenticity (the ability of a property to convey its significance over time) and integrity (the ability of a property to secure or sustain its significance over time) (Stovel, 2007, p. 21) freeze the organic evolution of historic religious sites into a single perspective (Smith, 2006).

The premise that heritage fabric is not a renewable resource creates forms of discontinuity with a site’s ‘living reality’ (Poullos, 2010). Studies addressing how much influence ‘host communities’ (i.e., religious groups) exert on the conservation of their sacred heritage provided some valuable insights. On the one hand, studies such as those of Karlström (2005) and Byrne (2008, 2011) in Thailand demonstrate how the popular Budish religion, shaped by animistic beliefs around the notions of decay, rebirth, and ceremonial destruction, clashes with Western authenticity criteria, emphasizing the protection of the material fabric (Byrne, 2008; Peleggi, 2012). Equally, Ieronymidou and Rickerby (2010) showcase how local authorities in Cyprus prohibit the restoration of wall paintings as they consider such actions to be intrusive practices that would conceal local cultural history, including iconoclasm and talismanic practices. Similar findings were reported by Winter (2007) and Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes (2016), who highlighted how conservation strategies in Sudan and Angkor Wat temple complex make spiritual monuments susceptible to modernization, while Su et al. (2019) reported how China adopted and developed its own AHD, that favours the religious life of the Shaolin monks over the local community whose experience and emotions are neglected. In this context, some (Byrne, 2004; Skeates, 2004; Saengphueng, 2011; Araoz, 2013) have noted that professionals rarely discuss and cite the Nara Document.

One the other hand, a different picture is provided by other scholars who reported how expert-led conservation practices, that in the past ignored embodied and intangible aspects of

religious environment to enforce preservation agendas (Miura, 2005; Wharton, 2008; Quang, 2022), over time, become more dialectic, allowing intangible ideas to coexist with professional aspirations (Miura, 2005). Such cases include the conservation of the monasteries of Mount Athos in Greece (Alexopoulos, 2013), and the Holy Tomb in Jerusalem (Poulios, 2019). Discussing stakeholder involvement in the conservation of living secular and religious heritage, (see Stein and Trampedach, 2002; Orea, 2002; Dhar, 2006), Henderson & Tanya Nakamoto (2016) concluded that stakeholders are more likely to be consulted on the initial appraisal of the project and information gathering while when it comes to treatment conservators 'are more likely to fall back on their own technical authority' (2016, p. 67). A characteristic example is the conservation of wall paintings in Norway. As Stein and Trampedach (2002) informed us while the aesthetic restoration was a prevalent strategy in 19th and early 20th century, in 21st century that marked the increasing involvement of conservation professionals resulted in minimalist interventions that restricted to consolidation. This controversy raises the question of what are those forces that constitute AHD the hegemonic set of beliefs in certain cultural contexts while other assemblages appear more inclusive, allowing traditional methods to influence conservation.

2.1.1.1 Conservation of Wall Paintings

In many parts of the world, particularly in Europe, the painted interiors of churches are subject to fragmented maintenance due to the prevalent 'preserve (or conserve) as found' conservation strategy. Criticized for ossifying heritage development (Di Giovine, 2008), this strategy is rooted in objectivism, which considers authenticity as inherent to the originality of toured objects and measured with objective criteria (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006) and ideas of immutable heritage value (Smith, 2006). Decisions regarding the treatment of wall paintings are particularly difficult since they are subject to many factors, including authorship, age, the degree of deterioration, and the values (i.e., symbolic) attributed to them (Brajer, 2015) and can shed light on power relations and (shifting) ideologies embedded in the conservation of living religious heritage (Spaarschuh and Kempton, 2020).

Regarding the conservation of wall paintings, three broad trends have been identified in this literature. The first, termed 'minimal re-integration,' considers damage, both physical (patina) and anthropogenic (i.e., deliberate damage of eyes, a concurrent theme in Byzantine churches), an integral part of the history of the church. This strategy is the dominant approach in Europe, and it is evident in places such as Cyprus (Ieronymidou and Rickeby, 2010), Turkey (Tucker and Carnegie, 2014), UK (Suggett, 2021), Switzerland (Vapheides, 2019) among

others. Despite its commonality, this approach was criticized for disguising the assumptions of the restorers while the artwork embodies a single uncontested history (Villers, 2004). Usually, the damaged parts are treated with only one colour (*neutral reintegration*). It also needs to be noted that the minimalist approach, such as the ‘neutral’ gap filled with a pinkish colour, has also been criticized for its impartiality. Scholars such as Villers (2004) and Sweetnam and Henderson (2022), argued that minimal intervention (or minimal re-integration) is an incomplete statement that hides the agenda and bias of the conservator as through a slow, detail to detail intervention conservators cast their own interpretation rewriting the historic of the object.

The second technique is that of *aesthetic reintegration*. This ‘deceptive’ camouflage technique has been inspired largely by the modern (or classic) conservation theory and, in particular, the theories of Cesare Brandi and Gestalt’s psychology. This approach aims to rebuild the image, making it more legible and creating an illusion of completeness when seen from a distance (Grenda, 2010; Brajer, 2015). The umbrella term used for this category is ‘reintegration’ comprising various techniques including variations of the *tratteggio* technique and its variance including *rigatino* (vertical lines) *selezione cromatica* (small lines/hatching directed according to the image in a similar hue with the original) and *astrazione cromatica* (Grenda, 2010; Jazbec, 2020). This technique has been witnessed in various European countries, including Denmark (Brajer, 2008, 2015), Slovenia (Kavčič, 2020), and Italy (Mladenovic, 2020), among others.

The last technique is that of ‘*contemporary chromatic integration*’. This retouching often takes the form of mimetic reintegration, imitating the original mural, making the distinction between original and treated areas difficult (Jazbec, 2020; Muršič, 2020). This intervention favours the filling details that have significant spiritual importance whenever possible based on historical and archival research. Evidence of this approach has been encountered in Romanian (The Wood Monastery) (Ostrovscă, 2020), and in some Danish churches (Brajer, 2008, 2009;) and the church of Santos Juanes in Valencia (Spain) (Ros *et al.* 2007; Ceccarelli *et al.* 2015). Although existing scholarship has been informative on how practitioners (Ieronymidou and Richeby, 2010; Spaarschuh and Kempton, 2020) and visitors (Brajer, 2008) experience the ‘preserve as found’ strategy, more case studies needed especially from the Greek Orthodox world to understand how policymakers, clergy and visitors negotiate the materiality of religion in the third decade of the 21st century.

Table 3 Key Terminology in Conservation Used in the Study

Terms	Definition	Source
Aesthetic value	Derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place. It tends to be specific to a time and cultural context, but appreciation of them is not culturally exclusive.	<i>Historic England - Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance, 2008</i>
Aesthetic re-integration	It contributes to minimising the visibility of damage and should primarily be carried out on non-original material. <i>Retouching and reconstructions</i> should be carried out in a way that is discernible from the original. All additions should be easily removable. Over-painting must be avoided.	<i>ICOMOS Principles for the Preservation and Conservation/Restoration of Wall Paintings, 2003</i>
Conservation	All the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance.	<i>The Burra Charter 2013</i>
Evidential value	Derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity. Physical remains of past human activity are the primary source of evidence about the substance and evolution of places, and of the people and cultures that made them.	<i>Historic England - Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance, 2008</i>
Freezing	A term used by scholars to describe a 'preservationist desire to freeze the moment of heritage and to conserve heritage as an unchanging monument to the past'. The term is used to criticise strategies that underscore material authenticity and downplay the intangibility of heritage.	<i>Smith, 2006, pp. 5-6</i>
Historical value	Derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. It tends to be illustrative or associative.	<i>Historic England - Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance, 2008</i>
Maintenance	The continuous protective care of a place, and its setting. It be distinguished from repair which involves restoration or reconstruction.	<i>The Burra Charter 2013</i>
Material stasis	Stasis in oxford dictionary means 'stagnation'. It is used in this thesis to indicate a conservation ethos that 'seeks to stabilise built fabric' and is considered in this thesis as the opposite ethos of living conservation practices such as regular maintenance. It is closely related with the term 'preserve as found'	<i>Bryne 2019, p. 7</i>
Mimetic reintegration	It is a retouch that imitates the original wall painting. After the application, it is difficult to distinguish between the original and the treated parts, which is why this method is avoided in contemporary restoration.	<i>Jazbec, 2020</i>
Minimal re-integration	It is confined to toning losses in which there are no surviving paint layers. This policy respects the multi-layered nature of paintings, where losses in upper paint layers typically reveal significant underdrawing.	<i>Ieronymidou and Rickerby, 2010</i>
Preserve (or conserve) as found	A 19 th century conservation ethos that aims to protect the historic fabric and the inherent (aesthetic) values it contained. Conservation is reduced to the minimum just to prevent decay. Considered sites as something to be looked upon and passed unchanged on to the future. Thus, active interactions and engagements with heritage is considered as problem.	<i>Smith, 2006, p. 19, 32, 36</i>
Preventive conservation	All measures and actions aimed at avoiding and minimizing future deterioration or loss. These measures and actions are indirect – they do not interfere with the materials and structures of the items. They do not modify their appearance (i.e., appropriate measures and actions for handling, packing and transportation, security, and environmental management).	<i>ICOM-CC Terminology for conservation, 2008</i>
Reconstruction	Returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material.	<i>The Burra Charter 2013</i>
Restoration	Returning a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing elements without the introduction of new material.	<i>The Burra Charter 2013</i>
Spiritual value	It attached to places can emanate from the beliefs and teachings of organised religion or reflect past or present-day perceptions of the spirit of place. It includes the sense of inspiration and wonder that can arise from personal contact with places long revered, or newly revealed. It is often associated with places sanctified by longstanding veneration or worship.	<i>Historic England - Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance, 2008</i>



Figure 6 St. John Monastery Narthex (Zairon 2017 CC)

2.1.3 The Authorised Heritage Discourse

Scholars working within the margins of CHT (see Smith 2006, 2009 and Waterton, 2010) advocated that the heritage should be understood as a ‘discourse’, focusing on how heritage strategies and policies are a result of multiple coexisting and often contrasting discourses. As Waterton (2010) further clarifies the idea of ‘heritage as a discourse’ emphasises how heritage consist of a set of created ideologies that change over time and have the power to influence (constrain) human practices. This processual understanding of heritage shifts the focus from what heritage is to what heritage does (Smith, 2006).

Smith’s theory has been particularly influential within heritage studies over the last two decades. Smith (2006) argued that there is a dominant heritage discourse, product of Western world, shaping or ‘authorizing’ the way people think and talk about heritage as well as the ways they deal with certain social problems around identity and management (Smith, 2006). According to Smith (2006), it is the case that often, those having power over cultural resource, such as archaeologists, conservators, architects, and other relevant national and international heritage bodies, privilege a certain type of elitist discourse. Smith (2006) described this discourse as ‘authorized’ an adjective that derives from the centralized and discriminatory nature of this discourse that legitimize certain bodies of expertise. Smith reached this conclusion by examining various case studies in UK and commonwealth. According to Di Giovine (2008b), Smith’s critique is summarized in three issues. Firstly, a critique towards the strategy preserves as found to ‘ossify’ heritage development, secondly it grants agency to heritage users to challenge hegemonic discourses and thirdly brings the dissonance and dialectics to the centre of investigation.

Some of its main tenets include the privilege of grand, old, and aesthetically pleasing sites, a legacy of Romanticist philosophies, it’s capacity to define what heritage is by marginalizing non ‘relevant pasts’ and privileging national narratives, and its adherence to a ‘modernist’ conservation dogma that considers value as innate (rather than associative) tied to materiality privileging minimum intervention under the strategy ‘conserve [or preserve] as found’ (Smith 2006, 2009, 2011). Apart from defining what heritage is, according to Smith (2009) AHD is also ‘self-referential’ continually validating approaches, knowledge and values that contribute to its dominance by legitimizing and de-legitimizing a range of cultural and social values. This ‘elitist’ discourse considers communities subordinate and passive recipients due to lack of resources, expertise and the title of ‘expert’ reaffirming the status of AHD (Smith

and Waterton, 2009). The analysis of Burra and Venice charters revealed that AHD underpins the conservation guidelines and cultural practices found in these international documents bequeathing to professionals a set of ‘validated’ conservation values or ideas about heritage (Waterton *et al.* 2006). In these margins scholars found AHD particularly useful to firstly grant agency to heritage users and secondly, examine how hegemonic and monolithic discourses guide heritage practices and how certain values and definitions of cultural heritage are favoured and endured/controlled over others (Di Giovine, 2008a; Pendlebury, 2013; Pendlebury, *et al.* 2020). As Feintuch (2007) put it Smith’s work is about those discourses that contrast and conflict around heritage, and the ‘portion of society that does the constructing is the key to understanding heritage and its uses’ (p. 181).

Empirical studies working within the semantic margins of AHD is divided into two broader categories. The first discusses competing discourses between key stakeholders (including local communities) within conservation assemblages. The second how AHD, manifested through conservation, management, and interpretation, is apprehended, and received by the visiting public.

2.1.3.1 Key Stakeholders and AHD

Critical heritage scholars (see Smith 2006, 2009 and Waterton, 2010) advocated that heritage should be understood as a ‘discourse’ shifting the focus from what heritage is to what heritage does (Smith, 2006). Examining various case studies within the UK and the commonwealth, Smith (2006) maintained that there is a dominant elitist heritage discourse (embraced by national and international ‘experts’), ‘authorising’ (an adjective that derives from its discriminatory nature) the way people think and talk about heritage and deal with social issues around identity and management. Some of its central tenets include the privilege of grand, old, and aesthetically pleasing sites, its capacity to define what heritage is by marginalising relevant pasts, its adherence to a ‘modernist’ conservation dogma that considers value as innate (rather than associative) tied to materiality (Smith 2006, 2009, 2011). According to Di Giovine (2008), Smith’s contribution is summarised in two main areas: a critique of the ‘preserves as found’ strategy to ‘ossify’ heritage development, and it grants agency to heritage users to challenge hegemonic discourses, bringing dissonance and dialectics to the centre of the investigation. Empirical studies examining how AHD-led practices impact primary stakeholders offer contradictory findings and are summarised in four areas:

The first discusses cases where AHD retains its hegemony as the dominant set of beliefs that guide conservation praxis. Studies such as those of Wells (2010) in South Carolina (US), Hammami (2015) in Sweden, Su et al. (2019) and Zhu (2021) in China, Corsale and Iorio (2014) in the Romanian village of Viscri, highlighted how AHD-driven policies privileging fabric-based strategies, gentrification and touristification of historical places, constrain locals from having a comfortable life making local life affordable, their houses dysfunctional, preventing simultaneously spontaneous conservation. Others (Pálsson, 2012; Zaban, 2017; Dewi et al., 2018; Apaydin, 2018) discussed how authorities silenced particular pasts, including remnants of the Cold War, natural disasters, and minority heritage as a strategic solution to ease the dissonance perpetuated by unresolved social and political conflicts.

The second group of studies reported evidence that AHD loses its hegemonic status allowing ‘suppressed voices’ to influence heritage policies. Mydland and Grahn (2012) in Norway, Parkinson et al. (2016) in Ireland, and Ludwig (2016) examining English conservation planning, all maintained that what started as an elitist discourse prioritising grandeur and monumentality has shifted into the local context, underscoring the industrial, post-war vernacular heritage context emphasising intangible values. While these authors highlighted evidence of democratisation and inclusivity, they also maintain that such initiatives are drowned in technical language and criteria set by professionals. Characteristically, Pendlebury (2013) maintained that conservation planning in England slowly changes under the pressure of other elites (politicians and developers), making tactical responses that eventually internalise and institutionalise other discourses advocating for regeneration and economic development.

The third group reports evidence of coexistence and compromise between AHD and local stakeholders’ interests. Studies from Greece (Katapidi, 2021) and China (Xia, 2020) show how local communities develop a binary and flexible relationship with AHD, resulting in co-production where locals enrich local heritage by merging material concerns with oral tradition and intangible practices. Equally, studies such as those of Maags and Svensson (2018) and Wu (2023) in China showed how local communities internalise AHD to reap the benefits of top-down ‘political narratives’, including tourism growth and local pride through celebrating local identities and traditions. As Feintuch pointed out (something also acknowledged by Smith 2006), AHD is not monolithic, it does embody disagreements and variations and ‘is more subject to change than her general characterisation initially appears to allow’ (2007, p. 181).

The fourth group reported evidence of resistance towards AHD. Alexopoulos (2013), Hammami and Uzerb (2018) and Kenny (2020) reported how monastic communities of Mount Athos in Greece (enjoying legal autonomy) and local initiatives in the Swedish town of Gårda and Brussels favoured traditional practices over experts' advice and prevented the demolition of historic buildings respectively. Furthermore, three studies in China (Chen, 2021), the Netherlands (Knippenberg et al., 2020), and Cambodia (Fauveaud and Esposito, 2021) discussed how groups contest and ignore AHD-driven conservation practices either because they do not value such recognition or because it restricts them from gaining political, economic, and social capital.

Returning to the outset of the thesis, the reason why in some counties authorities appear more inclusive and democratic, allowing intangible ideas to coexist with AHD varies on many contextual factors (or mechanisms) including legal, economic (such as austerity) and even the power of emotions to steer a sense of place and collective memory. However, empirical studies investigate how traditional actors (clergy) and religious visitors internalise AHD and the impact of the 'preserve as found' strategy on perceived authenticity are underrepresented.

2.1.3.2 'Heritage users' and AHD

As Urry and Larsen stated AHD is not applied only to excluded communities but to cultural tourists alike, explaining how the exposure of tourists to certain images and information systems (primarily through media), create an institutionalized voyeurism enables many to adopt different styles and standardize experiences, making of 'seductive images' (2011, p. 173). A growing body of literature examines people's emotional attachment to heritage that often is not recognized by official narratives. Hammami and Uzerb (2018) and Kenny (2020) discussed how locals emotional attachment to heritage provoked successful resistance prevented the demolition of the Swedish town of Gårda and historical radio Art Deco building in Brussels, underscoring the importance of emotional links people create with heritage highlighting the power of emotions to steer a sense of place and collective memory. Examining Humble Administrator's Garden WH site in China, Zhang *et al.* (2021) found that physical elements such as the beautiful scenery (design and ornamentation) create a special emotional connection expressed through poetic ways and is more emotional and powerful than UNESCO narrative. The emotional engagement of tourists with heritage is also stressed by Zhang and Smith (2019) and Zhang *et al.* (2021) who maintained that feelings and emotions are indicative of the agency of locals and tourists who questioned practices that focalize heritage into 'theme parks' obscuring living character of heritage.

Another body of studies examined how responses towards AHD are driven by deep personal interest including economic gain and identity building. Such expressions of agency include instances of personal gain (Corsale and Iorio, 2014) and embody attachment (Apaydin, 2018). Investigating the heritagization of Viscri, a Romanian village in Romania, Corsale, and Iorio (2014) argued that locals satisfaction and the degree of involvement in the restoration depends on the perception locals have towards the touristification of their village, that shifted the traditional economy. Equally, at Ani, a medieval site in eastern Turkey, Apaydin (2018) discussed how Turks and Armenians living around the site hold different meanings and attachment from the national driven official narratives that overshadow personal sense of place.

Scholars have also investigated how AHD-led practices compromise tourist experience and in particular how this discourse, manifest itself in tourist interpretations propagating national narratives. Mason and Istvandy (2018), Ross (2020), Figueira (2021), Martinez (2021), Clarke and Brozek (2021) and Roppola *et al.* (2021) examining the interpretations provided in Philippines (Fort Santiago) and in Australia 1st WW memorial and convicts centre among others. The researchers found that authorities, present controversial histories about sites of martyrdom, suffering, injustice and imprisonment within a national narrative underscoring in this manner a patriotic state that conceals, simultaneously, alternative interpretations of the past about just society, violence, and multicultural society.

The last two decades heritage scholarship has witnessed the growth of numerous studies investigating how AHD driven heritage practices constrain, even suffocate alternative narratives, that emphasize the living and evolving nature of heritage. An area however that has received less attention is those instances when heritage user' judgment is aligned with the values of AHD. According to Smith (2006) AHD considers heritage users as passive recipients. However, in her nominal book 'Uses of Heritage' Smith (2006) provides various instances where users can align themselves with AHD. These include visitors at English manors whose visit offers a sense of comfort, social and cultural security and belonging that reaffirms the sense of a middle class and a patriotic stance. Another case is non-Indigenous colonists Australians who drawing upon native myths and spiritual beliefs, reaffirm a connection with the land demonstrating that AHD can be mutable and deployed in flexible ways to legitimate certain narratives and claims over the land and its resources. However, this 'alignment' demonstrated by Smith (2006) has not been pursuit from subsequent scholarship. Furthermore, Smith as well as the subsequent scholarship following this theory, have failed to examine how heritage users critically reflect on one of the most characteristic attributes of

AHD, the emphasis in material stasis manifested through the strategy of ‘preserve as found’. The absence of studies examining how AHD influence the conservation of living religious sites underscore the need for more research in this direction.

2.1.4 Critique towards AHD and Critical Realist stance on ‘discourse’

The previous two sections highlighted two unanswered questions about AHD. The first is why some conservation assemblages appear more inclusive and democratic, allowing AHD to coexist with intangible concerns while, in others, AHD retains their supremacy. The second is in what instances ‘heritage users’ can be aligned with AHD-driven strategies; in other words, are AHD-led practices as suppressive as they have been portrayed? The difficulty in answering these two questions is partially due to issues of ‘nominalisation’ (Skrede and Hølleland, 2018) and ‘reductionism’ (Pendlebury, 2013) associated with the concept of AHD.

More recent developments in the field have heightened the need to overcome issues of reductionism associated with AHD. Drawing on the concept of ‘nominalisation,’ a process that erases agency and obscures underlying processes and competing voices (Billig, 2008), such as ‘who the agents are’ and ‘who did what to whom’ (Fairclough, 2008, p. 813), Skrede and Hølleland (2018) maintained that a ‘nominalised entity’, such as AHD, obscures the picture making it difficult to unpack the motivations, interests, and agendas of social actors involved during conservation treating them as a grey mass. Thus, nominalisation makes it difficult to challenge AHD and bring clarity to heritage assemblages by hiding the agency of other sub-AHDs and eventually covers essential differences such as ‘who the agents are’ and ‘who did what to whom’ (Fairclough, 2008, p. 813). Another problem with nominalised concepts is that they retain ‘unequal power relations’ and ensure that those utilising these concepts think and write in particular ways, reproducing social inequalities (Billig, 2008, p. 786). This was particularly evident in the second gap identified in this review where ‘heritage users’ are usually positioned in opposition to AHD-led practices (preserve as found). Pendlebury (2013) professed a similar critique, arguing that AHD is not self-referential but in a constant struggle with other sub-AHDs. According to the author, future research should consider heritage management as an ‘assemblage’ (a perspective also shared by Harrison, 2013), a helpful way of understanding the complexities and competitions within AHDs. Other scholars professed a similar critique. Di Giovine (2008a) questioned the methodology used by Smith, as a qualitative approach (ethnography) and more vibrant document analysis could flesh out better the agency of visitors and practitioners to ratify AHD. Equally, Harrison (2013) questioned

Smith for not exploring what lies beyond AHD, urging scholars to unpack the riddle of contested heritage by exploring further the entities involved in heritagization and their interaction. Other scholars saw Smith's complicated language and unfamiliarity with its epistemological approach as obstacles for practitioners whose practices are criticised (Feintuch, 2007; Lennon, 2007).

Building on this criticism this research aims to overcome these 'epistemological' problems by drawing on CR ontological and epistemological assumptions. CR's stance towards discourse as a social structure, alongside the distinction of structure and agency (analytical dualism), could help us overcome 'nominalisation' and 'reductionism'. As Banta (2013) argued, 'discourse might be studied as but one causal thing among myriad possible others' (p. 380). Unlike social constructivism, which embraces the view that social phenomena are constructed (reproduce and transform) through reproducing people's concepts (Fairclough, 2005), CR's ontological assumption about the social considers discourse as a 'discursive structure'. It keeps it analytically distinct from the extra-discursive dimension of social reality.

. According to Flatschart (2016), the best definition of discourse for CR is the following:

'discourse is a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed to give meaning to physical and social relations' (Hajer 1995, p.40).

To overcome issues of 'nominalisation' (Skrede and Hølleland, 2018), and 'reductionism' (Pendlebury, 2013) associated with AHD, the thesis draws on Critical Realism philosophy. Critical Realists distinguish semiosis as a discursive structure - a relatively stable way of representing the world' - from semiosis as activity, the everyday intersubjective production of meaning (Newman, 2020, p. 445). From a critical realist point of view, there are material and ideational (or discursive) structures, and both influence agency by constraining and enabling individuals in different ways, such as through physical penalties and mental guilt (McAnulla, 2006). Thus, an investigation of the extra-discursive conditions/entities responsible for the operationalization of certain discourse leads us to the ways in which social agents select strategies that privilege certain discourses (Fairclough et al., 2002) and the relationship between discourse and other contingent entities (i.e., nation-states) and their mechanisms (Flatschart, 2016). Within the margins of 'analytical dualism,' the role of social scientists is to explore the dialectical interaction between the causally related but ontologically different structure (including discourse) and agency (Archer, 2010; Edler Vas, 2011). By investigating

the ways agents interact with the context in which they find themselves researchers can understand social change (Porpora, 2013). This non-reductionist/non-conflationist approach could further clarify how institutions and social agents internalise discourses without being reducible to them (Fairclough et al. 2002), how agents (see traditional clergy) are constrained by the structural arrangement, how they reflect on the influence of discourses (Elder-Vass, 2011), and even recognise new opportunities for action (Delbridge and Edwards 2013, p. 936).

2.1.5 Authenticity

Discussions around authenticity and conservation can contribute to decision-making processes (Taylor, 2001; Yi *et al.*, 2018) and could illustrate whether managers' and visitors' expectations are contradictory or aligned. Within heritage conservation, authenticity as a condition validates statements of cultural value and significance (Boccardi 2019), while integrity refers to the condition of the asset to posit all the necessary elements to be considered authentic (Boccardi, 2019). Thus, authenticity 'should be seen as the quality of being authentic, real or genuine' (Dai *et al.* 2021, p. 2) or the 'original as opposed to counterfeit' (Jokilehto, 1999, p. 296). Thus, authenticity provides an avenue to understand how contemporary societies negotiate heritage conservation and how certain discourses gain more authority than others (Alberts and Hazen, 2010; Boccardi, 2019; Gao and Jones, 2021). For instance, analysing 106 nomination dossiers, Labadi (2010) found that only nine interpreted authenticity as a dynamic process (reflecting the different historical changes), while most linked authenticity with original and genuine design frozen in time.

One of conservation's biggest challenges is maintaining authenticity and integrity at cultural heritage sites without compromising the needs of host communities through strict conservation measures (Alberts and Hazen, 2010). According to Boccardi (2019), the Nara Document broadened the definition of authenticity and the epistemological frameworks, such as the standards applied to establish the truth of a proposition and is usually portrayed as a challenge to the Venice Charter (Cameron, 2019). In this postmodern framework, the relativisation of authenticity has provoked heritage practitioners to consider the multiple ways we conceptualise authenticity, such as the intangible attributes of heritage, including craftsmanship, rituals, and customs (Gao and Jones, 2021). According to Scott (2015), the diversity of voices highlights the need to examine authenticity as fragmented, based on different, even disparate sources and elements; secondly, contested, debated and power-laden driven; and thirdly, performative, an integral part of the communication process. A similar

stance was taken by Karlström (2015), who argued that both constructivist and object authenticity have failed to acknowledge how other worldviews found in Non-European religious practices perceive authenticity, arguing that a new approach is required, termed ‘performative authenticity’, the emphasis embodied experience. As Farrelly *et al.* (2019) and Ly and Tan, (2023) noted, the role of the producer in heritage-making is conceptually underdeveloped, primarily in how authenticity is understood from the producer’s perspective.

Authenticity is also central to tourism studies as it is considered a driver of the tourist experience (Smith, 2006). While there is a growing literature regarding the different conceptualizations (or types) of authenticity as defined in the works of Cohen (1995), Wang (1999), and Reisinger and Steiner (2006) (Table 4), there is still considerable controversy over whether objective authenticity remains a relevant concept in the study of tourism and a motivation for tourists to travel to distance places (Chhabra, 2012). Or, as Reisinger and Steiner (2006) argued, object authenticity should be made redundant due to the failure to reach a consensus as a result of multiple personally constructed realities (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006). MacCannell’s (1973) ‘static’ position over authenticity that deems tourists search for originality as contaminated has sparked considerable debate over the years (Dai *et al.*, 2021). More recent empirical studies have found that authenticity is a creative, contextual, personal, negotiable, embodied, and flexible notion (Park *et al.*, 2019). To date, the conclusions reached by scholars about objective authenticity have been inconsistent (Rickly (2022). Mkono (2013) and Rickly-Boyd (2012) found that materiality, such as the artistic beauty of cultural performances and their original place, is an essential component of perceived authenticity. Scholars take a critical stance towards the postmodern theory that has ‘dismissed object authenticity prematurely’ (Mkono, 2013, p. 211). To this end, Belhassen *et al.* (2008) and Moufahima and Lichrou (2019) maintained that authenticity is manifested in a hybrid manner a reciprocal relationship between objects and perceptions, underscoring the embodied and two-way interaction between physical settings and human experience. For Chhabra (2010), objective authenticity is in demand within heritage tourism, and a large group of people are captivated by frozen and static cultures; whereas reflecting on Spanish abandoned industrial heritage, Arboleda and Rosa (2023) maintained that ‘ruins’ can trigger a highly immersive, sensory, and reflective experience.

Another influential way to examine authenticity was introduced by Wang (1999), who provided a three-model conceptual framework of authenticity. For Wang (1999), there are three approaches to authenticity: ‘objective’, ‘constructive’ and ‘existential authenticity’ that draw

upon three different paradigmatic approaches the objectivist, constructivist, and postmodernist respectively (Wang, 1999). Information regarding the definition of authenticity were retrieved from the works of Cohen (1995), Wang (1999), and Reisinger and Steiner (2006) (Table 4),

Table 4 Three Ideologies of Authenticity in Tourism Experience

Objective Authenticity	It assumes that authenticity is inherent in the originality of toured objects and attractions and can be measured with objective criteria. The criterion is whether the objects or practices were enacted by local people according to their traditions.
Constructivist Authenticity	Authenticity is a socially constructed and contextually determined notion projected on a toured object, not an objective, measurable quality. Objects are constructed as authentic in terms of points of view, beliefs, and perspectives.
Postmodern Authenticity	Tourists are less concerned with the authenticity of the toured object as long as the last brings the enjoyment they are looking for or satisfies other concerns, such as the protection of fragile cultures. Tourists are more concerned with how well the toured object is staged (looking authentic). Postmodern authenticity paves the way for existential authenticity.

Authenticity has also been investigated vis a viz with the concept of nostalgia. Nostalgia has been termed as a sentimental longing for the past (Wildschut *et al.* 2006) associated with ‘themes of selfhood, sociality, fear of loss, redemption, and ambivalent’ (Sedikides *et al.* 2008, p. 305) or as Davis (1979) put it ‘the search for continuity amid threats of discontinuity’ (p.35). Nostalgia infiltrated the field of heritage in the 1980s within the debates of the ‘heritage industry’ (see Robert Hewison) to criticise heritage policies favouring the return to a safer past, which was connected with elitist and conservative groups that prevented progressive actions (Smith and Campbell, 2017). Scholars highlighted how nostalgia could be a push factor, an inner motivation for visiting historical sites, such as the desire for escapism from the present (Goulding, 1999; Guan *et al.*, 2019). Others highlighted how nostalgia can emerge through the interaction with historic places. Thus, visitors’ positive or negative emotions (feeling of disappointment), particular objects and (rural) environments, social reasons such as adversities (see Covid-19 pandemic), and interaction with authentic historical places can all be ‘triggers’ factors for nostalgia (Meng *et al.* 2019; Prayag and Chiappa, 2021; Chark, 2021). Either as motivation or as an outcome, scholars agree that nostalgia helps people to escape their daily routines (high-tech lifestyle, modernisation and urbanisation) that fill people’s lives with anxiety and future uncertainty (Meng *et al.*, 2019; Han and Bae 2022) or as Pickering and Keightley (2006) put it a ‘longing for what is lacking in a changed present’ (p. 920).

In heritage tourism literature, two main branches of nostalgia emerged: personal, referring to personal identity and memories such as community and family (Stern, 1992; Batcho, 1998) and historical, referring to people's desire to return to an idealised version of the past beyond lived experience that is considered superior to the present (Christou *et al.* 2018; Adie and De Bernardi, 2020). However, according to Smith and Campbell (2017), nostalgia is not always harmful or reactionary. Still, it can be progressive, providing a sense of pride and highlighting the good values of the past (hard work and community camaraderie) that are worth preserving for the future. On the same note, Pickering and Keightley (2006) encourage future researchers to consider nostalgia as the search for ontological security that recognises aspects of the past that could answer the uncertainties of the present. Some characteristic empirical studies include Meng *et al.* (2019) and Gao and Jones (2020), who found a strong correlation between constructive authenticity (expectation of finding an original authentic rural environment that represents peace and traditional values) and nostalgia (Christou *et al.* 2018). Other scholars (Verma and Rajendran, 2017; Park *et al.*, 2020; Gao *et al.*, 2020; Tang and Liang, 2022; and Chi and Chi, 2022) discussed how staged authenticity (ranging from on-site music, costumes, performances, and virtual reality) could spark nostalgic feelings, revisit intentions and loyalty among visitors and be a strong selling in heritage tourism in general. In line with Meng *et al.* (2019), this study argues that further research into the relationship between authenticity and nostalgia is needed at religious destinations, especially the relationship between object authenticity and nostalgia.

2.1.6 World Heritage and the 'shift' towards intangible values

The 'globalization' of heritage has created new dynamics within cultural heritage management, creating an integrated system and relationships beyond national boundaries (Lee, 2004). In 1972, the WH Convention was initiated to identify and provide an institutional framework for protecting and appropriately managing cultural and natural sites of 'outstanding universal value' (OUV). Parties are expected to provide sufficient information to prove acceptable levels of authenticity and integrity and meet some criteria referring to its OUV (UNESCO 2021). These include a management framework for protecting nominated sites, delineating boundaries, assessing vulnerabilities, and legislative and regulatory measures (UNESCO, 2021). In the early decades of the WH convention, UNESCO's practices were characterized by an elitist spirit, prioritizing expertise, and knowledge and downplaying communal values (Cameron and Mechtild, 2013; Brumann, 2018). Equally, community participation was actively discouraged before 1992 during the nomination process based on

maintaining the objectivity of the evaluation process (Cameron and Mechtild, 2013). Through the years, WH has contributed to a more democratic and egalitarian notion of cultural heritage (Brumann, 2018). In the last decades, UNESCO has strengthened international dialogue and cross-cultural cooperation among nations, mainly due to the shifting of global politics towards the East (Silk Road) and the rise of east-west geopolitical relations (Winter, 2022). Some of the positive consequences of WH designation include ethnic recognition, support of struggling national economies, introduction of neglected heritage such as cultural and pilgrimage routes, new paternities, initiatives for the preservation of cultural memory (including technical advice), and legal protection of natural and cultural sites (Shackley, 1998; Leask, 2006; Frey and Steiner, 2013; Meskell, 2013; Willems, 2014; Meskell and Brumann, 2015; Brumann, 2018).

Through the years, international heritage agencies, charters, and guidance on heritage practice have been initiated by UNESCO to protect cultural heritage and develop and facilitate practices worldwide. These charters and guidance have been particularly influential in this direction. Signed by most parties, these documents exert particular influence on the states that signed them. The most prominent of these include ‘The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historical Monuments’ held in Athens in 1931, and the ‘International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites,’ known as the Venice Charter (1964), which set the principles of modern conservation. In 1979 (rewritten in 1999), the Burra Charter was adopted as an answer to the failure of the previous two charters to address issues of intangible cultural significance, the multiplicity of values and heritage communities (Burra Charter, 1999). However, the most influential of these (Venice and Burra) have been criticized for their commitment to AHD, characterized by an expert language, inevitable values around monumentality, historical value, and historical content linked to the physical fabric (Waterton *et al.* 2006).

The World Heritage Convention has also received considerable criticism. Broadly speaking, literature is split between those assessing how the World Heritage Convention functions at the highest level between the bureaucracy of UNESCO and state parties and, on the other hand, how these policies are received and negotiated on the ground and eventually influence heritage policies. In the first category scholars discussed the effectiveness of the compliance procedures and mechanisms (Hølleland, 2014; Hamman and Hølleland, 2023), how expert knowledge is crafted and maintained through UNESCO’s authoritative regulatory practices (James and Winter, 2017), the power of lobbying in the inscription of properties (Liuzza and Meskell, 2023), the lack of legal enforcement and international tribunals that

would constitute UNESCO states accountable in times of crisis (Meskell and Brumann 2015). The lion's share is occupied by those addressing the failure of state parties to recognise the rights of indigenous during the designation and conservation of sites prioritising their agendas at the expense of international regulations and at the expense of other ethnic minorities whose rights are ignored (Vrdoljak, 2018; Brumann, 2018), or how the 'at risk' framework and the declaration of sites as vulnerable should be considered as an extension of 'AHD' that limits participation (May, 2020). Centralization of decision-making is evident in the relationship between UNESCO, the state, and marginalized communities. To ensure that the goals of integrity and authenticity are maintained, UNESCO expects state members to ratify sufficient regulatory and legislative policies to safeguard the listed monuments, relying heavily on state parties' support (Alberts and Hazen, 2010). Considering UNESCO's policy to ensure the authenticity and integrity of listed sites through periodic reporting, UNESCO received significant criticism of how 'democratic' its procedures are, with scholars (Singh, 2014; Caust and Vecco, 2017) criticizing its authoritarian strategies to give 'marching orders' to members states where the local interest is substituted to international interest. Worthy of mention is that the marginalization of local communities is not evident only in settler countries with indigenous populations (America and Australia) as in both European and Asian countries, local communities are equally ignored in decision-making (Willems, 2014). Analysing how UNESCO's policy documents (nomination files and management plans) discuss and approach indigenous rights, Verschuuren *et al.* (2022) and Stimac (2022) found that there are no set guidelines or operational protocols from either states or UNESCO to engage local communities that perpetuate power struggles related to rights and sovereignty.

The second group of scholars scrutinise the implications of the politics mentioned above on the ground. Several scholars (Meskell, 2013; Singh, 2014; Jimura, 2014; Caust and Vecco, 2017; Brumann, 2018) raised the question of whether WH is a 'boon' in the sense that it attracts funding, investments, international reputation, and tourists' streams or a 'bane' suppressing developing and or threatening the ecosystem. The growth of domestic and global tourism at WHS brought forward issues of economic and environmental sustainability. The unprecedented growth of tourism at sites of natural and cultural significance puts considerable pressure on the environment, endangering the degradation of both natural and cultural sites as tourists could cause extensive wear and tear to gracile heritage resources (Singh, 2014). Another issue raised by other scholars (Jimura, 2011; Caust and Vecco, 2017) observed that the UNESCO brand creates increased revenue for local communities and economic prosperity,

leading to a co-dependence between the host community and tourists, with the first cannot survive without the former. To this end, scholars have discussed how, in an era of austerity and shortage of public resources, non-state actors (NGOs) could play an essential role in raising funds for the preservation of cultural heritage and monitoring international cultural law (Josselin and Wallace, 2001; Vadi, 2018), while others argued that the how limited coordination between local stakeholders and lack of tangible economic incentives limits public engagement (Seyfi et al. 2019). On this note, other scholars highlighted how conflicting agendas (economic development vs conservation of cultural and natural resources) inhibit sustainable and inclusive management strategies (Nicholas and Thapa, 2013). For example, Boland et al. (2022) discuss how powerful local stakeholders are willing to risk the World Heritage status to boost economic growth and regeneration, enhancing the position of places (such as Liverpool) in the global marketplace, with the UK's conservative government unable or unwilling to amend this. Regarding the impact of WH designation in the life of local people, a growing number of studies examined how WH designation freezes the organic development of cities and monuments (Creighton, 2007).

To rectify the criticism the World Heritage Convention received from its adherence to material authenticity, UNESCO introduced the Nara Document to broaden the concept of authenticity to include non-western approaches (ICOMOS, 1994, p.2). The most recent operational guidelines of UNESCO (2021), although underscore the difficulty for intangible attributes such as spirit and feelings to find practical application (p. 31) they also highlight on several occasions that authenticity cannot be judged with fixed criteria and requires a contextual understanding and the consultation of various sources including design, function, and tradition. The value of the place now does not rest on its physical or material attributes', but authenticity can be found in a broader sense, including values of intangible nature (Araoz, 2013). This informational content changes through time; thus, the 'biography' of the object demands reconstruction (Jokilehto, 2006; Konsa, 2015). One step further was the introduction of 'The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICHC). ICHC was introduced in 2003 and operationalized in 2006 as a measure for protecting intangible forms of cultural tradition, especially from countries whose heritage is expressed in living form rather than monumental, including sacred knowledge and rituals (Aikawa-Faure, 2009; Marrie, 2009). For some, this convention was seen as an attempt to challenge the western AHD, emphasizing aesthetically pleasing sites and monumentality and an opportunity to empower

communities to manage and transmit their culture, limiting state control (Smith and Akagawa, 2009; Aikawa-Faure, 2009; Blake, 2008) simultaneously.

However, other scholars have seen little change in the ways WHS are conserved. For Di Giovine (2008b), Labadi (2010), , Poullos (2011) and Deacon and Smeets (2013), Nara Document has not challenged the ethos of object authenticity and treatment of tangible heritage. According to these accounts, while UNESCO has developed its policies to become more inclusive and democratic, it has failed to impose its inclusive vision. This is due to anxiety towards the relativity and decentring of the meaning of authenticity, the lack of overseen mechanisms to enforce agreed policies while the definition of 'community' remains abstract and at the mercy of authorities. In these margins, scholars such as Byrne (2004), Skeates (2004), Saengphueng (2011), and Araoz (2013) argued that the Nara Document is rarely discussed and cited by professionals.

2.1.7 Section Summary

This section addressed the theoretical grounding for this PhD thesis and explored various debates relevant to the conservation of living religious heritage. These include the criticism 'value-based conservation' received for its inclusive character, the different types of perceived authenticity and whether object-based authenticity should be considered redundant, how nostalgia and authenticity are manifested within religious sites and how UNESCO's involvement and in particular conservation guidelines and charters influence and destabilise traditional conservation assemblages. The review has highlighted an inconsistency with heritage studies. On the one hand, while scholars seek to understand the multitude of narratives, values and discourses related to the historic environment, considering heritage as a diachronic and historically contingent process (Harvey, 2001; Smith, 2006), on the other hand, AHD, has been criticised for concealing these dialectics. In particular, epistemological problems, such as 'nominalisation' and 'reductionism', appear responsible for perpetuating considerable ambiguity around two issues. What are the extra-semitic mechanisms that are responsible for the retention of AHD as the leading set of ideas that influence the conservation of living religious sites. And secondly, are 'heritage users' always in opposition to AHD-led practices? Such question could open a new window to investigate what hinders inclusivity and why traditional practices and beliefs are not favour during conservation To overcome issues of 'nominalisation' (Skrede and Hølleland, 2018), and 'reductionism' (Pendlebury, 2013) associated with AHD, the paper draws on Critical Realism philosophy.

This study aims to avoid reducing the complexity of heritage conservation to two competing discourses, the professional discourse concerned with the authenticity of the original material and the religious discourse favouring religious beliefs and traditional practices of maintenance. The ‘clash of discourses’ treats policymakers, host communities (see monks), and, in general, heritage users as a grey mass, concealing disagreements, hindering a clear understanding of the extra-discursive conditions (or entities) responsible for enduring AHD-led practices.

2.2 Heritagization of Religious Sites

While heritagization constitutes churches as hyper-meaningful sites and self-aware of their broader values (Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes, 2016), at the same time they remain, most of them, ritually effective without losing their religious significance (Isnart and Cerezales, 2020). Preventive conservation, alongside museological approaches, introduces secular practices in religious settings that spark tensions between traditional religious functions and modern practices that more often than not turn rituals into displays for tourists' gaze (Zhu, 2020; Rico, 2021). Thus, scholars have been particularly interested in management challenges raised from this hybridization, which Bremer (2001) referred to as the 'duality of space' (p.3), underscoring managers' efforts to retain these sites' self-sustained, hybrid spiritual and cultural destinations.

The following literature review covers three main areas of heritagization namely, *Operational Management* addressing day to day challenges managers face to mitigate the impact of secular tourism, *Policy Making* managing the institutional dynamics at play during conservation and value stratification, and *Visitors' Perspectives* addressing the way pilgrims and tourists interact with the religious environment and negotiate their meanings. In line with Olsen (2006), this segmentation aims to flesh out how existing scholarship has explored the agency of institutional actors, to influence heritage strategies, and the agency of heritage users to reflect and respond to heritage strategies.

2.2.1 Operational Management

The ontological and phenomenological transformation of sacred sites (Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes, 2016), underscoring the mingling of secular and sacred activities in the same space, sparks several managerial issues. As this section demonstrates, this 'new' hybrid status of religious sites does not raise only challenges for traditional clergy but also new opportunities. Some of the issues discussed include commodification, preventive conservation, and management expertise.

The commodification of religious build heritage refers to the process during which 'religious groups commodify their doctrines, customs, and beliefs for economic gain' (Olsen, 2003, p. 101). As Bremer noted, 'all things, all places, all experiences, become potential commodities in the tourist economy, and religion is no exception' (2004, p. 6). Within this fast secularisation (manifested through objectification, commodification and aestheticization) of religious sites, managers (usually traditional clergy) are called to launch mitigation strategies

to preserve the sanctity of the place (Shackley, 2002; Timothy and Olsen, 2006). This is taking flesh through two distinct strategies. The first promotes the repurpose of religious material culture into shops, markets, theatres, or restaurants, ‘creative materials in the sphere of art... as a valuable source to be remembered’ (Meyer, 2020, p. 65), while the second follows a different path where a semisacred and semi-secular usage is promoted based on the commodification and aestheticization of religious sites to accommodate the diverging needs of religious tourism (Meyer, 2020). This review discusses the second issue as the issue of desacralisation and repurposing of religious sites falls beyond the scope of this PhD thesis.

Religious tourism has been a vital source of revenue for both churches and local economies (Woodward, 2004; Rotherham, 2007; Shackley, 2008; Olsen, 2003). According to Vukonic (2002), this ‘symbiosis’ (p. 64) has become the *modus vivendi*, allowing these two conflicting philosophies to coexist peacefully complementing each other and providing much-needed financial revenue (Olsen, 2003; Woodward, 2004; Rotherham, 2007; Shackley, 2008; Wiltshier and Griffiths, 2016). Religious tourism projects have been initiated in many countries with a positive impact on the local infrastructure, reducing urbanisation and assisting towards national and international outreach, promotional activities through mass media, facilitation of transportation services, and new work opportunities and the capacity to revitalise myths, festivals, and conservation initiatives at rural traditional religious destinations (Carlisle, 1998; Uriely *et al.* 2003; Isnart 2008; Kilipiris and Dermetzopoulos, 2016; Aldyan, 2020; Olsen and Elspin, 2020; Tapia 2020). This economic industry generated around religious sites was described by Singh and Rana (2022) as ‘reverential development’ that combines worship, sacredness and spiritual growth with local cultural and economic agendas.

However, mass tourism also creates various problems for religious and spiritual destinations, including issues of safety and security (crowd management), planning and infrastructure needs (tourist facilities and parking) and ‘spiritual disturbance’. According to Shackley (2001), merchandising activities including commercial activities and admission fees blur the dividing line between sacred (religious space) and profane mundane world (society) running the risk of deviating the visitor from his spiritual journey. Consequently, religious authorities often find themselves in an uneasy position to deal with commercial issues and treat their visitors as customers and their rituals as tourist services (Shackley, 2005). It has been assumed (Shackley, 2005; Bremer, 2005; Timothy and Olsen, 2006; Damari and Yoel, 2016) that once the borderlines between the sacred and profane world are merged, the spiritual journey is contaminated, the church runs the risk of losing its character as the ‘spiritual

otherness' becoming an extension of the mundane world. Empirical studies on this issue demonstrated that traditionally consider such 'monetary' exchanges as Vukonic (2002) argued a necessary 'symbiosis' rather than spiritual digression, or as Irvine put it, a necessary intrusion in the sacred business of church' (Irvine, 2005, p. 27). Drawing on interviews with religious host communities, scholars such as Irvine (2005), Curtis (2016) and Wiltshier and Griffiths (2016) found that traditional clergy consider financial revenue essential in executing their missions. Other scholars including Coleman (2019), who investigated the management of English Cathedrals explained that heritage tourism and religious practices coexist and complement each other with cultural capital (heritage significance) providing the necessary financial support for liturgical needs while entrance fees are often justified due to the quality of experience these places offer, including their inspiring scale. This 'enterprise culture' is evident at Japan's Koyasan Mountain temple complex where monks provide a 'temple stay experience' (Yanata and Sharpley, 2021).

Nevertheless, the commodification of religious sites raises new challenges to traditional clergy who strangle to keep up with the fast pace of the heritage industry. According to Olsen (2009), beyond finance, the difficulty of religious sites in managing the adverse effects of tourism comes down to a lack of tourism management expertise. Religious sites are usually undercapitalised and run by religious leaders with no interest or knowledge to get deeper into product development or strategic planning (Shackley, 2008; Olsen, 2009). Occasionally, religious authorities are divided between those embracing a more radical approach condemning the negative social and cultural impact of tourism refusing to see themselves as business-like managers (Pavicic *et al.* 2007), as they take place at the expense of their cultures and environments, and those embracing a more pragmatic stance towards site management and interpretation, prioritising fundraising, and catering especially at the absence of adequate institutional framework in dealing with religious tourism (Shinde, 2012; Vukonic, 2002). Nevertheless, although professional clergy often embrace heritagization as it provides a vital source of income, they are placed within a hierarchy of values where cultural values are considered subordinate to spiritual ones (Coleman, 2019).

Preventive conservation strategies emphasising the preservation of material fabric go hand in hand with institutionalising religious sites as a part of their broader protection. These efforts though necessitate a new ethos of engagement as visitors are often discouraged from executing their traditional practices such as incense burning (Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes, 2016). Thus, maintaining a balance between spiritual reverence and secular values is a

headache for managers. An increasing number of scholars (Eade, 1992; Shackley, 2002, 2005; Digance, 2003; Feldman, 2007; Winter, 2007; Rotherham, 2007; Olsen, 2009; Stausberg, 2011; Curtis, 2016; Chadha and Onkar, 2016) discussed how the proliferation of tourists at sacred sites, looking for a ‘quick fix spirituality’ becomes a threat to the sanctity of the place. According to these authors, tourists’ unconventional behaviour (dress and behavioural codes), as well as admission fees, access, and ‘secular’ usage, are considered for many a threat to the spiritual and cultural resources as they jeopardise the quality of pilgrims’ devotion and increase the maintenance cost. Some of the measures reported in the literature include the prohibition of commercial activities around the sacred periphery, such as the case of Lourdes in France (Olsen, 2003), the installation of perimeters queue controls, and temporary closures (Pavicic *et al.* 2007; Stausberg, 2011; Wiltshier, 2015; Wiltshier and Griffiths, 2016; Curtis, 2016). However, as Alberts and Hazen (2010) noted, unoccupied churches are usually more accessible to be conserved. For instance, in those instances where religious services are held once a week, visitors are excluded from particularly vulnerable parts, a strategy that hardly ever arouses controversy (Alberts and Hazen, 2010).

2.2.2 Policy Planning

Heritagization and institutionalisation are complementary processes, with the first underscoring the renewed cultural interest at religious sites while the second an increasing interest in their protection and preservation. The proliferation of groups demonstrating an interest in heritagization mirrors their substantial symbolic (political), cultural, spiritual, and economic capital. However, this coexistence is marked by two opposing forces: the professional aspirations of modern conservation ethos and living religious tradition (Hammer, 2017; Zhu, 2020).

The premise that heritage fabric is not a renewable resource creates forms of discontinuity with a site’s ‘living reality’ (Poulios, 2010). However, there still uncertainty with regard to how much influence ‘host communities’ (i.e., religious groups) exert on the conservation of their sacred heritage. On the one hand, studies such as those of Karlström (2005) and Byrne (2008, 2011) in Thailand demonstrate how the popular Budish religion, shaped by animistic beliefs around the notions of decay, rebirth, and ceremonial destruction, clashes with Western authenticity criteria, emphasizing the protection of the material fabric (Byrne, 2008; Peleggi, 2012). Equally, Ieronymidou and Rickerby (2010) showcase how local authorities in Cyprus prohibit the restoration of wall paintings as they consider such actions to be intrusive practices that would conceal local cultural history, including iconoclasm and

talismanic practices. Similar findings were reported by Winter (2007) and Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes (2016), who highlighted how conservation strategies in Sudan and Angkor Wat temple complex make spiritual monuments susceptible to modernization, while Su et al. (2019) reported how China adopted and developed its own AHD, that favours the religious life of the Shaolin monks over the local community whose experience and emotions are neglected. In this context, many (Byrne, 2004; Skeates, 2004; Saengphueng, 2011; Araoz, 2013) have noted that professionals rarely discuss and cite the Nara Document. On the other hand, a different picture is provided by other scholars who reported how expert-led conservation practices that in the past ignored embodied and intangible aspects of religious environment to enforce preservation agendas (Miura, 2005; Quang, 2022), over time become more dialectic, allowing intangible ideas to coexist with professional aspirations (Miura, 2005). Such cases include the conservation of the monasteries of Mount Athos in Greece (Alexopoulos, 2013) and the Holy Tomb in Jerusalem (Poulios, 2019). This controversy raises the question of why AHD retains its hegemony in certain cultural contexts while other assemblages appear more inclusive, allowing traditional methods to influence conservation. Often, case conflict could arise when the development taking place at religious sites is considered a threat to the sanctity, such as in the case of the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel (Kreiner *et al.* 2015) or when the agenda of the government clash with the vision of clergy such as the case of Hungary where the government-led religious tourism initiatives raise conflict between secular and religious stakeholders over the direction of spiritual tourism development (Clarke and Raffay, 2015). In a different study in the village of Rocamadour in France, Weibel (2022) demonstrated how 'communitas' and 'contestation' coexist, shaping management strategies. The author maintained that conflict is not limited to the powerful and powerless but between groups with different agendas and visions, such as local managers, dioceses, employees, nuns and even visitors between them that diverge from conventional Catholicism. Other examples are the recent conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque disregarding the spiritual attachment of the international Orthodox Christian community (Aykaç, 2018; Rico, 2021) and the Western-driven interventions in the religious landscape of Bodh Gaya in India, where Western conservation practice converting a multireligious site (comprising Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist shrines) to a Buddhist (Ray, 2012).

Another body of literature addresses the dynamics between managers and religious groups, highlighting converging policies. In these studies, scholars assert that heritagization could be a cultural bridge between contested parties (Astor *et al.*, 2017; Oliveira and Luzia,

2020; Coleman and Bowman, 2019; Behat, 2019). Such cases are evident in Naples (Italy), where a co-management strategy developed where forty individuals from different socioeconomic groups were responsible for coordinating various cultural activities and conducting visitors' studies, training, and promoting involvement. According to Presti and Petrillo (2010), this approach provides sustainable co-management in Naples easing the relevant problems that emerge from the religious and lay use. Behat (2019) and Oliveira and Luzia (2020) recruited the concept of palimpsest to deepen their understanding of the multiple and concurrent meanings and uses attached to religious sites, arguing that embracing rather than suppressing dissonant historical layers could contribute to a richer historical consciousness for the local community initiating new dialogue with its multifaced past. Khaksari *et al.* (2014) found that government authorities and religious leaders share the same vision, aiming to preserve the fundamental social and cultural values of national and Islamic values in tourist development. Examining governmental reports between 1988 and 2000, Harding (2019) noticed that the merging between secular and spiritual worldviews under the banner of a unified contemporary Swedish cultural identity signals a transition from conventional denominational Swedish Church to becoming the sacred objects of a post-Christian / post-Lutheran general religiosity. Common to these studies is the belief that a complex and inclusive organisational system between secular and religious stakeholders could craft a mutually beneficial cultural system that overcomes social tensions and enhances social cohesion.

In this line of thought, religious sites must demonstrate a great degree of adaptability. Coleman and Bowman (2019) argued that the uniqueness of English Cathedrals is their ability to adopt new regimes of values and thus perpetuate their tradition. In these margins, investigating China's spiritual sites, Zhu (2020) discussed how this instrumental use of religion manifested through commodification provides economic incentives and new opportunities for engagement for local groups such as monks, entrepreneurs, and tourist organisations. Equally, studies from Luang Prabang (Laos), the Buddhist Gompa (monastery) in Lo Manthang and the village of Rocamadour in France demonstrate how living tradition coexist with commodification and touristification where locals and religious host communities adapt to the needs of secular tourist economy (Singh, 2004; Byrne, 1995; Berliner, 2012; Weibel, 2022). Often, such financial revenue becomes the new norm and an opportunity for locals to restore their sacred sites (Levi and Kocher, 2012; Shepherd, 2013). These studies demonstrate how locals can turn their sacred sites into commodified objects without denying their divine nature

(Thouki 2022). However, a different picture is given by Bunten (2008), who drew on the native heritage of Alaska and argued that although promoting local heritage fosters cultural reproduction and economic regeneration, self-commodification leads to self-alienation, leaving little room for resistance. This calls to mind what Howard (2003) highlighted: once the local economy is primarily based on the commodification of local heritage, it is not easy to stop.

2.2.3 Visitors' Perspectives

Up to this point, the review focused on how religious and secular stakeholders responded differently to internal (operational management) and external (policymaking) issues. This section focuses on studies that examined visitors' and locals' responses towards the hybridisation of religious sites. Two topics dominate this group of studies. The first envisages deciphering whether commodification impacts perceived authenticity in visitors' eyes and how visitors' profiles (demographics, motivations, etc.) influence behaviour and satisfaction.

The last two decades have witnessed a growth of studies that envisaged understanding the causality between commodification and perceived authenticity. Drawing on a survey of 176 visitors at Clonmacnoise monastery, McGettigan and Burns (2001) found that standardised marketing is one of the most significant threads of heritagization, which could lead to further commodification of heritage as something invented and trivialised. Similar results were found by Levi and Kocher (2012) and Dora (2012), who examined the perception of sacredness by Western tourists at Thai Buddhist sites and the Greek monastic complexes of Meteora and Athos. The scholars found that visitors enjoyed the opportunity to observe the monks, but equally, their experience was compromised by tourist-related commercial activities, overcrowding technology, and modernisation. Other studies, including those of Joseph and Kavoori (2001), Griffiths (2011) and Nyaupane *et al.* (2015), reported evidence of annoyance towards misbehaving tourists and tourists' observing congregations. Others such as Di Giovine (2010) and Su *et al.* (2019), drawing on case studies from Pietrelcina (Italy) and the Shaolin temple in Zhengzhou in China, reported discontent among locals towards 'staging' and commodification driven by Western conservation criteria¹ that disempower locals. However, Andriotis (2009) provides a different picture, arguing that commodification and authenticity

¹ The term western conservation criteria refer to a western heritage conservation discourse, affirmed in the Venice Charter (1964). The four parameters that defined authenticity were design, material, workmanship, and setting all related to the tangible material of heritage (Jokilehto 2006).

should not be considered a simple causality. Still, authenticity is a broader state influenced by personal experience, including socialisation, learning and the natural environment.

Other scholars explored how visitors' motivations, religious beliefs and expectations influence their experiences. Executing a survey based on 199 randomly selected visitors, Nyaupane *et al.* (2015) found that social distance between different faiths varies with Hindus and Christians, who tend to see Buddhism spiritually closer to their faith than Muslims. Also, the study found that faithful people visiting sacred sites of their own are motivated by concentric reasons (spirituality, education), while tourists for eccentric (sightseeing, recreation). In a different study, Uriely *et al.* (2003) found that religious affiliation influences locals' attitudes towards tourism. Using a questionnaire technique, Uriely *et al.* (2003) found that local Muslims' support towards Christian tourist development in Israel is weaker compared to those locals identified as Christians, with the first being less favourable towards economic gain that would disadvantage their position in the power balance between the two faiths. Several studies have demonstrated the importance of religious affiliation in influencing pilgrimage patterns. These include preferences towards non-institutional sacred sites for protestants in Israel (Bailey and Sood 1993; Fleischer 2000), experience satisfaction with religiously motivated visitors demonstrating higher levels of overall satisfaction compared to secular tourists, such as the case of Montserrat in Spain (Canoves and Prat Forga 2016), and different behavioural characteristics, such as the case of St Mary's house in Turkey, where Muslim and Christians demonstrated higher levels of respect. In another interesting study that addresses the recent pandemic of Covid-19 at Mount Athos in Greece, Tsironisa *et al.* (2022) found that spiritual gains from such visits outweigh possible health problems that might arise among faith-driven pilgrims. While pilgrims welcomed protective measures, they were reluctant to accept ritual changes. Lastly, Terzidou *et al.* (2018), following a social constructivist philosophy based on the notion that particular worldviews, such as Greek Orthodoxy, shape worldviews, found that motivations emerge, develop, and change throughout pilgrimage based on how successfully pilgrims achieved their ends, such as unfulfilling or broken vows making pilgrims question the sacredness of the site. One gap within this scholarship is that it has neglected to investigate how visitors' religious dispositions and worldviews influence their perception towards conservation strategies.

Another body of literature has focused on spiritual tourism. Spiritual tourism may or may not have an affiliation with religion. It is inspired by a set of ideas which may be found in religion but also in non-institutional beliefs emphasising self-wholeness, culture, search for the

meaning of life, and nontheistic cosmology, among others (Timothy and Conover 2006; Zwissler 2011; Heidari *et al.* 2018). According to Zwissler (2011), the ‘new religious movement’ travels to spiritual places traditionally held by others to experience the spiritual power and embedded energy of ruins and ancient landscapes created by ancient (spirituality) advanced people. As Timothy and Conover (2006) noted, the technologically advanced and fast-paced consumeristic society brings people into a burned-out state, while the dissatisfaction with organised religion makes people seek alternative spiritual gateways. Thus, alongside the rejection of a secular society, New Age pilgrims demonstrated an aversion towards institutional faith (Bailey and Sood 1993; Fleischer 2000; Digance 2003; Verter 2003; Beek 2017; Kujawa 2017). However, this is not happening only in the spiritually charged pilgrimage routes crossing the plains of Spain. Heritaged Cathedrals have also become ‘open spaces of spiritual possibility in which exploration and development of emergent spiritualities are made possible’ (Theos 2012, p. 55). According to Coleman and Bowman (2019), this new role of Cathedrals produces interesting contrasts between tradition and change that reflect broader trends, including the spiritualisation of heritage during which secular visitor is seduced into a spiritual world where ritual activities occur. In this line of thought, Voase (2009) and Astor and Mayrl (2020) use the terms ‘fuzzy fidelity’ and ‘culturalized religion’ to describe a new type of religious ‘affiliation’ and expression that is primarily cultural in character and detached from dogmatic beliefs and participation in rituals.

Visitors’ demographics and personality traits have also received significant attention in the literature, especially from those executing surveys (Fleischer, 2000; Uriely *et al.*, 2003; Abbate and Nuovo, 2013; Nyaupane *et al.*, 2015; Banica, 2016; Irimias *et al.* 2016; Kocyigit, 2016; Öter and Çetinkaya *et al.* 2016 among others). For example, Irimias *et al.* (2016) and Banica (2016) found variations in interests and expectations between young and senior visitors, with the latter leaning towards learning and national narratives. Following a quantitative analysis based on a questionnaire, Abbate and Nuovo (2013) found relevant differences between ages and genders with men, characterised by an energetic personality, focusing on the need for discovery, while women’s aggregable and cooperation personality traits favoured socialising and openness to other people. In this line of inquiry, beyond nationality, age, and gender, other scholars (Francis *et al.* 2008, 2013; Kocyigit, 2016; Öter and Çetinkaya *et al.* 2016) have included in their study aspects such as educational background, job and psychological profiles. Kocyigit (2016), using a survey at the Konya Museum in Turkey to understand how visitors create destination images (perceptions of individuals related to a

place), concluded that both cognitive and affective components influence the destination image (Kocyigit, 2016, p. 36).

The existing literature has two limitations, one methodological and one conceptual. The literature addressing visitors' perspectives is heavily driven by surveys applying quantitative techniques. Surveys focusing on regularities between variables fail to investigate the context-dependent nature of consciousness and how preconceived ideas influence perceptions and responses (Sayer, 1992; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Maxwell, 2009). The problem with this quantification of human experience is that it runs the risk, as Smith (2006) pointed out, of considering heritage visitors as passive recipients perpetuating dominant narratives around hybridisation and commodification of religious destinations, simultaneously reducing the multivocality taking place at religious sites. These positivist-driven studies conceal visitors' agency to express alternative views and retrieve meaningful subjective lived experiences. Similar concerns were raised by other researchers, such as Griffiths and Korstanje (2021) and Singh *et al.* (2021), who argued that religious studies are dominated by a meta-discourse that considers tourists' feelings and experiences as less critical information, such as how they understand and practice spirituality. Regarding the thematic distribution, issues around commodification and service quality have received the lion share of research interests. More research is needed to understand how conservation and curatorial decisions influence living tradition and visitors experience. As Mariani and Guizzardi (2020) noted, such inquiries could shed light on visitors' consumption patterns and assess the relationship between visitors' demands and the services provided by hosts.

2.2.4 Anthropological Study of Pilgrimage

While our understanding of the sacred (mystery and hierophany) and profane (contamination and objectification) has not significantly changed since the nominal works of Durkheim and Eliade (Goodnow and Bloom, 2017), the discussion around the similarities and differences between pilgrims and tourists, has been the centre of academic debate for more than forty years (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). The comparison between pilgrims and tourists has been the centre of attention for more than forty years among anthropologists. As Bailey and Sood (1993) and Heidari *et al.* (2018) suggested, the pilgrim and tourism dichotomy can provide a deeper understanding of how religion influences behaviour and consumption patterns, developing a keener awareness of potentially sensitive preferences. From a management point of view, understanding the motivations, needs and interests of pilgrims and tourists, their spiritual and practical needs, as well as the emotional, physical, and intellectual ways they

engage with sacred sites (Olsen 2009; Collins-Kreiner 2010; Hughes et al. 2013) site managers could provide more personalised management arrangements that address specific issues that have passed unnoticed.

Until the 1970s the field of tourist studies barely existed while pilgrimage and tourism were considered as two separate activities (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Initial de-differentiation between tourism and pilgrims began in the 1970s with scholars such as MacCannell (1973), Graburn (1977) and Turners (1978) arguing that the two bear more significant similarities, including a search for authenticity and self-transformation (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Since then, three traditions of thought have dominated the scene of religious tourism studies:

- **Converging approach**

The first has been termed the de-differentiation stance, influenced by postmodern thought. This approach considers pilgrimage a form of tourism and vice versa, rejecting the clear-cut between the two (Damari and Yoel, 2016). Adherents of this approach claim that there are no apparent dichotomies between the two and that 'sacred' should not be restricted to pilgrimage as tourism can be a compelling and spiritually meaningful experience (Nola and Nola, 1992). MacCannell (1976), Turners (1978) and Graburn (1989) elevated tourism as a spiritually rewarding activity providing a voluntary uplifting experience while symbolically and functionally being comparable to other institutions individuals use to give meaning to their lives. For MacCannell (1973), sightseeing as a respect towards society has a ritual dimension and has absorbed some elements of religion. MacCannell asserted that tourism should be considered an escape from the mundane world and a modern substitute for religion, a 'modern ritual' driven by a new morality announcing that certain things 'must be seen' (MacCannell 1976, p. 42). Discussing the malleable character of identities in the postmodern world, Bauman (1996) maintained that tourism is the successor of pilgrimage in the sense that the current postmodern world reverses the routine (structured) order, reshaping the figure of pilgrim by favouring tourists who are characterised by freedom and unpredictability to go wherever they want constantly in move seeking for new experiences (Bauman, 1996).

More recent scholarship that follows this theoretical trajectory found various ways to blend the two connotations. Heidari *et al.* (2018) argued that although tourists and pilgrims may be motivated by different reasons, pilgrims are always in danger of becoming a tourist (p. 5). For instance, Cohen's (1992) research in Thailand demonstrated that the direction of the journey influences travellers' formality, where pilgrim becomes more tourist-pilgrim if the

centre is farther from home. It belongs to a different religion, culture and society. Equally, Liebersohn (1996) and Collins-Kreiner (2010) argued that the term ‘secular pilgrim’ should denote those motivated by educational, social, scientific, and aesthetic appreciation of the cultural and natural world. Margry’s (2008) ethnographic study found that the non-secular character of secular pilgrimage (such as veterans’ annual visit to memorials or graves of famous people), arguing that like traditional pilgrimage towards a sacred centre, where people venerate objects with healing and other powers, secular pilgrimage can demonstrate elements of veneration and idolatry within the realm of spirituality and death to settle existential uncertainties. Similar views were expressed by Knox and Hannam (2014) and Yoo *et al.* (2022) who argued that the distinction between pilgrims and tourists is shifting towards the former (Yoo *et al.*, 2022).

- **Diverging approach**

Other scholars saw conflict and contestation over *communitas* (Di Giovine, 2011). According to Smith (1992), beliefs and worldviews are the primary reason for de-differentiating pilgrims and tourists. While Smith (1992) considers ‘religious tourist’ as a type that combines characteristics of the two types, he positioned pilgrims and secular tourists at opposite ends of a travel continuum. Others (Turnbull, 1981; Blackwell, 2007; Singh, 2009) support the view that although tourists can find personal fulfilment in their hedonistic journeys, the pious pilgrim embarks on a journey of self-transformation, motivated by true faith in a divine seeking ultimate transformation and self-discovery. For these scholars, touristic spirituality is of a particular kind, different from pilgrims who seek higher and more authentic experiences, including even hardship. Thus, while pilgrim seeks supernatural spirituality to please God and acquire spiritual status (Levin 1979), within the margins of ritual and doctrinal beliefs, tourists' search is driven by humanism, solidarity, and cosmopolitanism (Singh 2009).

A seminal work in this approach is that of Eade and Sallnow (1991), who challenged the notion of *communitas* on the basis that pilgrimage is characterised by competing discourses criticising Turner based on downplaying the complex character of pilgrimage imposing a spurious homogeneity, ignoring contestation and conflict. Examining pagan pilgrimage, Zwissler (2011) challenges the notion of *communitas* because New Age or Pagan pilgrims attract people worldwide with differing theological interpretations and explanations about old sacred places. Eade (1992), Fleischer (2000) and York (2002) found variations between pilgrims and tourists regarding expectations, activities, and what is considered authentic

practices, concluding that pilgrims are more organised with more apparent intentions than tourists, with more profound spiritual conviction, including penance and austerity. In this vein, examining Muslim pilgrimage, Luz (2020) maintains that keeping the two categories apart helps distinguish those executing obligatory and official pilgrimages such as the Hajj ritual, which follows a Quranic creed, and religious tourists who undertake voluntary voyages to graveyards, shires among other destinations.

- **Performativity and Agency in Religious Tourism**

A more recent third approach seems to support a reconciliation between the diverging and converging approaches, advocating that distinguishing the two is impossible. In this scholarship, pilgrimage is understood as an evolving identity determined by the interaction of pilgrims with their pilgrimage environment (Di Giovine 2011). Advocates (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Di Giovine, 2011; Olsen, 2014; Damari and Mansfeld, 2016) of this stance underscores the socio-cultural evolution of pilgrimage, from the pre-modern societies characterised by a strict social stratification to the modern environment, where the experience was contaminated by industrialisation and secularisation and an increasing blurring of boundaries with growing societal dynamics, exclusion, polarity, insecurities, and uncertainties. In this framework, Kim *et al.* (2020) maintained that the key to understanding the evolving nature of pilgrimage is to explore their motivation, behaviours, and interaction with their experiential environment. The study concludes that more research is required to understand religious tourism interaction with the infrastructure of religious destinations to decipher the ‘progressive shift towards secularisation, individualisation, and pluralism’ (Kim *et al.* 2020, p. 200). For instance, Terzidou (2020) examined how sacred objects found at religious sites ‘enable or overshadow’ spiritual experience, discussing how objects can be ‘vessels of religion’ having the power to prolong sacredness.

Di Giovine (2011) maintains that the pilgrimage-tourism structure should not be approached through the traditional binaries of tourists/pilgrims. Still, it should be closed as a field comprising multiple interacting groups whose identity is subject to particular forms of knowledge those groups possess and produce. For example, the stance that deep spiritual motivation and religious convictions appear to be the main attribute distinguishing the two is held predominantly by various religious organisations who understand tourists as vacationers and pilgrims as religious devotees (Shackley, 2001, 2002; Timothy and Olsen, 2006). Thus, depending on the stakeholders’ mission, varying from spiritual to standardised consumption

patterns, religious and secular stakeholders formulate their narratives of what pilgrimage is or should be to promote their agendas (Olsen, 2003; Olsen and Esplin, 2020; Stausberg, 2006; Di Giovine, 2011; Aldyan, 2020). In these margins, drawing on Coleman, Iliev (2020) maintained that the distinction between the two is futile and that scholars will never agree on precise and universally applicable criteria. Thus, research should focus on understanding pilgrimage behaviours as personal and relational multi-layered experiences.

2.2.5 Section Summary

This section provided an overview of the dialectics occurring at both the macro and micro levels of heritagization. The segmentation of the literature between operational issues, policy planning and visitors' perspective, demonstrated that the literature is extensive and rich on how stakeholders and visitors negotiate, challenge, and often embrace the new hybrid status of 'commodified' churches. However, qualitative empirical studies investigating how conservation decisions, such as the 'preserve as found' strategy, and curatorial decisions impact (constraining or enabling) tourists and pilgrims experience at Cypriot churches has received less attention. Thus, the shifting and evolving relationship people develop with the materiality of religion remains unclear. The neglected eastern Orthodox churches of Cyprus, where an ongoing debate exists regarding the treatment of wall paintings, broaden current knowledge regarding the 'conservation' and 'consumption' of religious sites. The literature review surfaced that more empirical work is needed to understand how hosts (church's representatives) and tourists, negotiate, and experience and relate to the conservation and curation of Cypriot churches. In other words, how the material and immaterial related values attached to historic churches are negotiated, evolved, and revised in Cyprus. In this way research can surface how hegemonic discourses, such as AHD, retain their supremacy during the conservation of living religious heritage and how the AHD-led 'preserve as found' practice, which seemingly 'freezes' religious sites to a single perspective, impacts visitors' perceived authenticity and experience at religious sites.

2.3 Interpretation and Presentation

Choosing appropriate interpretation and presentation strategies is not straightforward, particularly for sites with solid symbolic and ideological connotations (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998; Charman, 2013). ‘Museological endeavours’ alongside the preventive conservation are considered two important factors influencing the secularisation of religious sites (Di Giovine and Garcia-Fuentes, 2016). Museums and historic churches share similarities and differences that shed light on how museum practices infiltrated religious sites and how they impact visitors’ experiences. Similarities such as the exhibition of sensitive objects, an understanding of what is valued and the religious, cultural, and other bonds people build with religious objects, and how they should be presented, what subjects should be included, whose voices should be heard and how much room there is for alternative voices (Gazi, 2014). Furthermore, studying differences such as the way visitors respond to the exhibition of sacred objects in museums a place that it is outside of their natural space (i.e., concentrated ground or temple) can sensitize the researcher on how the impact secularisation and museumification that often accompanies the heritagization process may have on visitors experience and spiritual development (Robson, 2010).

2.3.1 The Postmodern Turn in Heritage Interpretation

Museum strategies are in constant fluctuation, reflecting political, cultural, and social developments, something evident in the historical development of museums from the cabinets of curiosity to the first national museums in 19th century (Hooper–Greenhill, 1992; Mason, 2006). During the second half of the 20th century, Tilden’s ideas (1957) were particularly influential in the Western world, becoming an instrument of visitors’ management firstly for the natural environment and later for the built environment. These strategies were based on the idea that interpretation should take the form of provocation rather than instruction to stimulate visitors to create meanings for themselves (Light, 1991; Roppola, 2012). Tilden’s ideas of revelatory and provoking interpretation were used to raise concerns about protection, pro-conservation behaviour and attitude change leading to appreciation, protection, and even awaking to the world around them (Uzzel, 1989; Light, 1991; Beck and Cable, 2002; Locker, 2011; Whitehead, 2012). Thus, the emphasis was placed on the educational role of museums (Kodi, 1998; Mason, 2006), emphasising heterogeneity and intercultural enrichment instead of authoritative exhibitions favouring didacticism (Bauman, 1992).

Today, the emphasis on learning falls within the margins of ‘New Museology’ or the Constructivist Museum influenced by postmodernism cultural theory, postcolonialism and educational constructivism (Roppola, 2012; Jenkins, 2019). The ideological shift of museums towards social inclusion has seen older narratives of empire, class, race, and science inappropriate for a multicultural society (Roppola, 2012; Ross, 2004), while its more enormous ambition is the new relationships museums envisage to develop with their audience, termed as the collective community endeavour (Ravelli, 2006; Fritsch, 2011; Whitehead, 2012). In this vein, the publicly accountable and socially responsible museum aimed to challenge culture's monolithic presentation towards a more ethical representation of the past (Ross, 2004). New Museology criticised the modern perceptions of truth and reality. It aimed for a bottom-up approach to engaging communities for ‘cultural empowerment’ and ‘dialogue’, targeting a wider audience, including the underrepresented minorities (Ross, 2004; Hein, 2006; McCall and Gray, 2014; Jenkins, 2019; Yuan, 2019).

New Museology has been the subject of much criticism (Hutcheon, 1994; Meszaros, 2006; 2008; McCall and Gray, 2014; Jenkins, 2019; Janes and Sandell, 2019), with scholars questioning the successfulness of this initiative on the basis that postmodern discourses on community access and involvement have not reached the expected outcomes. As Hutcheon (1994) argued, postmodern museums do not resolve controversies in cases where minorities claim different representations such as postcolonial exhibitions. McCall and Gray (2014) believe that the difficulty in implementing these ideas is down to tensions between managers and curators and the bureaucratised museum that limits creativity and the conservative values of the museum that hinder the promotion of more inclusive and dialectical policies (McCall and Gray, 2014). In this line of thought, Jenkins (2019) locates the problems of New Museology on the facts that museum professionals are highly resistant to change, committing to objectivity and reacting to those challenging its authority (p. 65). Lastly, influenced by post-structuralist ideas Meszaros (2006; 2008) questioned the success of New museology arguing that it postulates the ‘whatever interpretation’ (Meszaros, 2006, p. 12), which encourages visitors to craft a narrative that may have nothing to do with the indented messages.

Museums have been criticized for desacralizing and sanitizing religious objects by separating them from their natural settings (Paine, 2013). To remedy this, museums have invested significant research in the exhibition of sacred objects (Ariese, 2021) to discover the best ways these objects' artistic, cultural, and religious significance are communicated to a

diverse audience. For instance, Berns (2016) concluded that ‘protective barriers’ do not necessarily stop the holy power of sacred objects (or sacred radiation), with visitors accepting the physical limitations raised by the museum. The author urges us to consider the many elements that hinder immersion at religious sites, including labels, lighting, and other visitors, as well as the absence of certain actors (priests and choirs) the visitor expects to see. Others, such as Paine, discuss how augmented reality could be a strategy to help managers communicate these places' religious and cultural meanings. At the same time, he also raises the question of who is better to curate these objects (2013, p. 15). Within the margins of postmodernism Freudenheim (2017), Mairesse (2019) and Ariese (2021) reasoned that museums should encourage visitors to question, doubt or ‘evade’ sacred objects drawing on more imaginative forms of display creating a conducive space for discussion on sacrality.

2.3.2 Interpretation Design

The interpretive design has been described by Charman (2013) as a melting pot. It connects what we need to communicate (vision and problem), how the product looks (presentation strategy), and how we experience it (consumption) (Charman 2013). Roppola (2012) asserts that exhibits function as mediators of visitor experience while the broader cultural, political, and social context mediates how these come to be. Thus, speaking about design is a complicated process involving commercial, aesthetic, symbolic and environmental aspects’ (Charman, 2013, p. 121) and the constant need to create relevant experiences and adapt to the new needs of their audience creating (or co-creating) something meaningful and valuable (Nielsen, 2015).

Some authors (Dean, 1996; Hughes, 2010; Roppola, 2012; Roberts, 2014; Nielsen, 2017) have addressed the complexities surrounding interpretive design, which can engage visitors emotionally (interactive, social, educational, fictive) and individually. These scholars stressed the importance of how interpretive design is subject to multidisciplinary and multiple mechanisms, including the history of the place, the aims, vision and (contradicting) values of stakeholders, and spatial arrangements, among others. According to Nielsen (2017), exhibitions are built around narratives, while storytelling builds trust between staff and users, helps designers consider the authenticity of their stories, enhances communication with visitors, and is a vital tool in creating meaning and emotional engagement. In this respect, the involvement of designers and other subcontractors and specialists, who can assess, coordinate, and act as advice advocates (see topography and audience research) has been consider

necessary by many (Roberts, 2014; Dean, 1996; Black, 2005; Hughes, 2010; Locker, 2011; Veverka, 2011; Roberts, 2015; Danwandee *et al.* 2015).

However, interpretation design is far from straightforward, especially in places such as battlefields or places evoking ideological and spiritual beliefs. These places excite a degree of emotional arousal as memories, personal values, feelings, and beliefs, indicating that visitors do not experience a place just cognitively (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998). The concept of ‘hot interpretation’ has been recruited to describe the difficulty of designers in interpreting controversial topics and the failure to acknowledge visitors' emotional engagement with heritage (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998). Others (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998; Bagnall, 2003) underscore the need for good design to generate emotional, authentic experience (such as personal memory), making their experience more meaningful while stimulating an intellectual and affective encounter with the past. One such case is the Memorial Garden at the Port Arthur Historic Site, Tasmania, which was curated to commemorate the victims of the 1996 massacre. There, it was decided to keep the shell of the café, where the incident occurred, as a physical reminder while the interior was stripped of furniture (Frew, 2012).

The presence or absence of interpretive infrastructure at museums is a debate which continues to hold some relevance among museum and gallery circles. Two approaches have dominated the interpretive design scene, divided between those advocating for the importance of interpretive infrastructures and those who believe labels are a medium of distraction. Most museum scholars (Bitgood, 2000; Rand, 1993; Ham, 1992; Screven, 1992; Uzzel, 1996; Beck and Cable, 2002; Kim *et al.*, 2011; Veverka, 2011; Wells *et al.*, 2013; Serrell, 2015) highlight the benefits of interpretive infrastructure to foster engagement, comprehension and understanding in exhibitions and help the visitor to bridge the so-called knowledge gap between their existing knowledge and the object. According to Serrell (2015), interpretation addresses people’s unspoken concerns such as ‘Why should I care’ (p. 19); it challenges their perspectives or even strive to change their attitudes, making their engagement with the exhibits more meaningful. Thus, for many (Ham, 1992; Screven, 1992; Rand, 1993; Bitgood, 2000; Serrell, 2015; Pappalardo *et al.* 2022) labels are important for museums as they form an essential aspect of storytelling, able to stimulate ‘all’ visitor senses, helping them to look back and forth following the narrative promoting their memories and fantasies. Other scholars found that interpretative design, particularly guides, influences visitors’ satisfaction, experience, appreciation, and behaviours (Stern and Powell, 2013; Ballantyne *et al.* 2007; Kim *et al.* 2011)

On the other hand, many scholars (Charman and Ross, 2006; Pringle, 2009, 2010; Charman, 2013; Staiff, 2014; Lahav, 2018) are sceptical over the benefits of interpretative infrastructure arguing that interpretation at least in a deductive form, is too restrictive. For example, Staiff (2014) asserts that discussions around heritage interpretation became narrow in conception due to the emphasis on guidelines, manuals and techniques of communication that eventually brought a standardisation which has narrowed the focus on conceptualising heritage interpretation. Staiff (2014) advocates that interpretation should shift from heritage interpretation as an educational activity, which, according to him, is both ‘stifling and restrictive’ (p. 9), to a more general and less estranging conceptualisation which will welcome different perspectives, personal stories and viewpoints. Examining the topic from the angle of Art History, Lahav (2018) questions such as what an appropriate interpretation for a particular museum should be should not follow the idea of ‘one size fits all’ (2008, p. 4) urging curators to understand the specific needs and viewpoints of various cultural groups visiting those spaces (Lahav, 2018). Thus, Serota (1997), Charman and Ross (2006), Charman (2013), and Pringle (2009, 2010) underscore the creative dimension of art stressing the pedagogic relationship between the participant and the artist as an educator, envisaging an interpretation that can instil dispositions of critical thinking and a sense of discovery that challenges the encyclopaedic learning.

2.3.3 Entrance Narratives

To materialise the idea of an ‘engaging exhibition’, designers seek to understand the profiles of visitors, their age, motivations, pre-occupations, emotional and intellectual profiles, as well as their ideals, even their socio-economic group (Beck and Cable, 2002; Black, 2005; Hughes, 2010; Locker, 2011; Veverka, 2011; Serrell, 2015; Roberts, 2015). Understanding visitors’ ‘entrance narratives’ is regarded as one of the principles of a good exhibition as it can secure better involvement of visitors, encourage participation, and forge a more significant emotional and intellectual connection with the site (Black, 2005). However, visitors are not ‘blank slates’ as they have an interest and usually a relatively good understanding of the place (Doering and Pekarik, 1996). According to Doering and Pekarik (1996), ‘entrance narratives’ comprise three components: an essential framework visitors use to perceive and contemplate the world, knowledge about the specific place and personal memories that validate this understanding. Executing longitudinal qualitative research at an aquarium, based on face-to-face and following up semi-structured interviews of 395 visitors, Falk and Adelman (2003) found that both prior knowledge and interest towards exhibition affect museum experience and

gain. The authors demonstrated that prior knowledge does have an impact on the museum experience. However, the gains (conservation knowledge and attitudes) vary from visitor to visitor. In this context, Hooper-Greenhill (1999) adopts Fish's (1980) notion of 'interpretive communities' to describe those visitors sharing common interpretative strategies of assigning meanings to engage each group differently.

Developments in the field of interpretation planning have been interrelated with the great thinkers of meaning-making (Meszaros, 2008). Various philosophies such as post-structuralists, phenomenology, hermeneutics, communication theories, constructivism, and postmodernism have been recruited to comprehend how humans form their understandings in heritage places (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994, 1999; Carnegie, 2007; Meszaros, 2008; Ablett and Dyer, 2009; McCall and Gray, 2014). Some prominent, influential theories include communication theories such as Shannon and Weaver's communication model between a transmitter (exhibition encoded message), channel (objects, texts, events) and receiver (visitors), highlighting how communication can be interrupted by fatigue, noise, poor graphics, workers among others (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). Another theory is educational constructivism, which holds that knowledge resides in people's minds (Hein, 1998). According to Piaget, when we interpret the external world, we do it through existing schemes and available ways of thinking, which adapt to accommodate new information. Thus, learning requires reconstructing prior knowledge (Falk and Dierking, 1992). In line with educational theory, which maintains that meaning is dialectic, hermeneutics have also influenced museum theory. The writings of Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans-Georg Gadamer about the context-bounded and the holistic way people attach meanings were particularly influential in unlocking visitors' understandings in museum settings (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). In this framework, the meaning of an artefact is continuously rechecked and revised, and meaning is never static but historically and culturally dependent (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999; 2000; Meszaros, 2008; Ablett and Dyer, 2009). Hence, prejudice/bias/pre-understandings become particularly substantial in bridging what people already know with the given meanings of the site (Thouki, 2019).

2.3.4 Exhibiting Religious Sites

Today, interpretation is considered a vital management issue at religious destinations and aims to enculturate visitors (through public engagement and audience development) and enhance sacred sites' distinctiveness (Baker, 1999a; Cohen, 2006; Curtis, 2016; Coleman, 2019; Duda, 2021). In a recent survey of European churches comprising 500 visitors, Duda and

Doburzynski (2019) reported that 30% of pilgrims and 80% of tourists needed assistance interpreting religious sites.

For various scholars, (tourism) education in religious settings is often clustered with recreation and leisure as attributes portraying the new multi-use profile of sacred sites (Olsen 2003). In this context, Knox and Hannam (2014) and Curtis (2016) argued that museums and educational institutes operating in the cathedrals denote a 'progressive route of breaking out of the confines of their strict Christian heritage' (Curtis, 2016, p.9), to reach an increasingly secular audience. The clustering of education at religious sites within a secular educational context or an extension of the mundane world has been the subject of some studies. Several scholars (Cohen, 2006; Voase, 2007; Poria *et al.*, 2009; Othman *et al.*, 2013; Knox and Hannam, 2014; Wiltshier, 2015) have addressed the weariness of visitors towards historical information emphasising historical events and important people highlighting the need for more 'affective' interpretations, that would trigger emotional alongside the cognitive experience. The secularisation of religious interpretation was demonstrated by studies analysing the interpretative labels/guidebooks at Notre Dame Cathedral in Ho Chi Minh City, Cyprus, and Spanish Churches (Knox and Hannam, 2014; Thouki, 2019). Other scholars, including Voase (2007), Francis *et al.* (2008) and Poria *et al.* (2009), studies at Lincoln Cathedral (UK), St David's Cathedral in west Wales, and Walling Wall (Jerusalem) respectively, using both interviews and surveys found that visitors felt overwhelmed by the intellectual nature of the interpretation which presented mainly architectural and historical information. Among these authors, there is a growing awareness of interpretative strategies that would help visitors enjoy both experiences. Over the last decade, scholarships envisaged addressing this issue by developing more personalised interpretations, including sensory engagement (Coleman, 2023) and augmented and virtual reality where visitors can access sites such as the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris by the comfort of their homes (Allal-Cherif, 2022). Thus, a number of scholars (Poria *et al.*, 2009; Othman *et al.*, 2013; Ndivo, 2016; Božić *et al.*, 2016; Irimias *et al.*, 2016; Buggeln *et al.*, 2018) advocate for the importance of pluralistic interpretations which embrace alternative narratives as well as interpretations which that function as a facilitator for provoking both emotive and cognitive experience even interfaith dialogue.

As mentioned, interpretation is subject to specific agendas and the construction of particular political, theological, and cultural identities. Tucker and Carnegie (2014) draw our attention to heritage sites which new owners manage. Executing research at the cave Byzantine churches in Cappadocia (modern Turkey) Tucker and Carnegie (2014) aimed to investigate

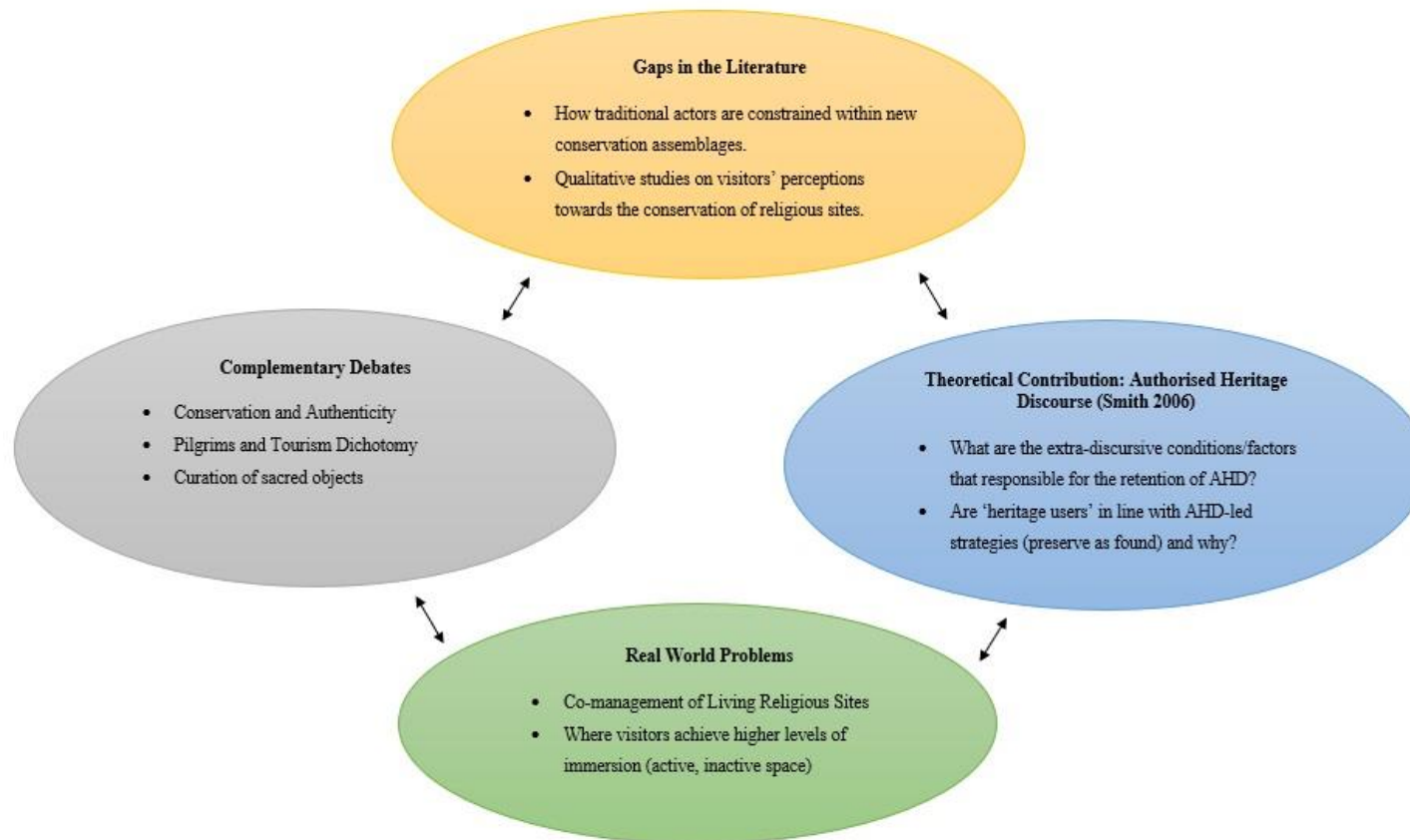
contestations surrounding the presentation of damaged frescos to visitors. In line with Di Giovine (2008b), the two scholars concluded that the ‘singularity’ of the WH idea underplays non-consensus ideas, as they are regarded detrimental to ideals of UNESCO such as mutual understanding and social cohesion. Examining interpretations provided by three different denominations (Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant) in three other countries, Thouki (2019) found distinct differences in how churches communicated information to visitors. The author also demonstrated that the different stances the three denominations hold towards the values of postmodern thinking are reflected in how interpretations are displayed to the public, with the Protestant churches adopting more open and inclusive strategies (Thouki, 2019). Similar conclusions were reached by Baker (1999b) Antohin (2019) and Hemel *et al.* (2022) who noticed how interpretation is influenced by the agendas of clergy. Isnart’s (2008; 2012, 2014, 2020) ethnographic work in Rhodes (Greece) and Southern France highlights how the traditional clergy’s active role in repackaging local religious heritage by combining historical and theological connotations. Lastly, in those instances where the religious site is disputed between multiple religious groups, certain teachings and practices are considered more authentic than others, mainly if they aim for potential converts (Olsen, 2003; Olsen and Elspin, 2020).

Research around the exhibition of religious sites and how ‘curatorial’ decisions could coexist with the unique aura of the sacred build environment is less developed. Shackley (2001, 2002) termed this aura as ‘piety’, referring to the recognition of specific areas as sacred and able to spark visitors emotive and spiritual aspects through their dynamic ‘echoing, dark, cavernous and mysterious interior of a Cathedral’ (Shackley, 2002, p. 350). Although many theorists of religious tourism have acknowledged the spiritual magnetism and awe-inspiring scale of religious destination (Digance, 2003; Bremer, 2006; Curtis, 2016) few researchers investigated the impact of curatorial decisions on the atmosphere and ambience of a religious site. Executing surveys at historic churches in the UK, Othman *et al.* 2013) found that the levels of immersion in inactive churches are higher probably because they are well preserved and have the authenticity of medieval times. Equally, examining the sacred landscape of Kii (WHS) in Japan, Jimura (2016) informed us how installing new objects, such as signs, sparked controversies among practitioners. According to local religious beliefs, signposting hinders their ascetic practices based on oral tradition and memorising the ‘mountain passes’ after executing three of four mountain pilgrimages. Thus, signposting undermines religious tradition in this particular case and demotivates pilgrims from learning the passes. In this vein, Coleman

(2023) borrows the term zero-sum game from game theory to discuss the seeming incommensurability between English cathedrals' religious and secular presentations as shaped by current interpretive strategies and museums. According to the scholar, this coexistence permeates secular spaces with a spirituality that encourages lay visitors to feel the immanent spirituality (Coleman, 2023).

2.3.5 Section Summary

The main idea running through this section is that exhibition is a socially, culturally, and politically determined process that reflects a society's vision. Postmodernism has been particularly influential in this field. However, the applicability of these theories and practices in Cypriot context has yet to be explored. Unlike public institutions such as museums, which have demonstrated an adaptive character, and to a lesser extent, archaeological sites, churches have owners with specific ideologies; thus, the infiltration of contemporary curatorial strategies is more complicated. More research is needed to capture traditional clergy's shifting perspectives towards the exhibition of their sacrament and qualitative research that would write and understand the various 'interpretive communities' at religious sites, which Paine noted (2019a). The answer to this problem lies in understanding visitors' agency, a combination of visitors 'entrance narratives' and the meanings they construct during their visit as they encounter a pre-structured environment that constrains and enables them to meet their expectations. A useful concept adopted in this thesis is 'performativity', which emphasises people's dynamic, cognitive, and physical interaction with sacred objects. Two questions were raised in this chapter and will be pursued further in this thesis. Firstly, what factors shape the exhibition of religious sites? Secondly, how visitors respond to two distinct curatorial strategies, an active temple or a museum-like temple void of furniture.



The figure showcases how gaps in the literature and ongoing conservation, management, and curation problems/inquiries at Cypriot churches prompted a research design that opened a window to refine our understanding towards ongoing debates and theoretical issues related to (religious) heritage. The diagram also demonstrates why the synthetic literature review approach, that helps the researcher to weave existing literature with broader theories, patterns and researcher's intimate knowledge, was considered the best strategy for this PhD thesis.

Figure 7 Conceptualisation Process

3. Conceptual Framework

The review revealed that there is lack of empirical studies discussing how traditional clergy and visitors (tourists and pilgrims) related to the conservation and curation of ecclesiastical heritage in Cyprus. As discussed, authenticity is a highly malleable and debated concept intertwined with notions of truthfulness, originality, and tradition. Thus, authenticity of ‘professionals’ (preservation of physical remains), ‘religious groups’ (referring to the living teaching and practices), and ‘tourists’ (viewing experience) is not necessarily the same thing (Poulios, 2018). Drawing on the various conceptualisations of authenticity that provide insight into how social agents build connections with historical sites, this comparative case study from Cyprus could surface new data on issues of conservation and authenticity are negotiated in the 3rd decade of 21st century. This empirical study creates an opportunity to understand why how the ‘material-focused’ Authorised Heritage Discourse retains its hegemony during the conservation of living religious heritage and how AHD-led practices (‘preserve as found’ strategy) impact visitors’ perceived authenticity and experience. In an attempt to avoid previous reductionist approaches that emphasis the clash between the western professional and the religious discourse this study aims to explore the extra-discursive mechanisms that that are responsible for the retention of AHD. Designed as a multi-method qualitative comparative case study at two Cypriot churches, the thesis examines the cultural processes hidden behind AHD in order to broaden the current understanding of how their living character is negotiated and experienced by policymakers, primary stakeholders (clergy) and visitors.

In line with Critical Heritage Theory, which considers heritage as an ongoing process (Harvey, 2001) fuelled by power-laden discourses (Smith, 2006), this study embraces the view that realistic conservation strategies can be achieved by gathering enough evidence and understanding a place's shifting cultural significance, such as the needs, values, and expectations of those who protect, use, and visit it (Historic England, 2008). Thus, understanding the profile of producers (policymakers and clergy) responsible for the current policies, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how conservation decisions influence visitors’ experiences and destination image (Ly and Tan, 2023) and explores areas of convergence and divergence between policymakers and heritage users. In this conceptual framework, the research question driving this thesis is ***‘What are the (causal) relationships between the current conservation strategies in Cypriot rural religious sites and discourses around religious tradition and authenticity?’*** The neglected eastern Orthodox churches of Cyprus, where an ongoing debate exists regarding the treatment of wall paintings, provide an

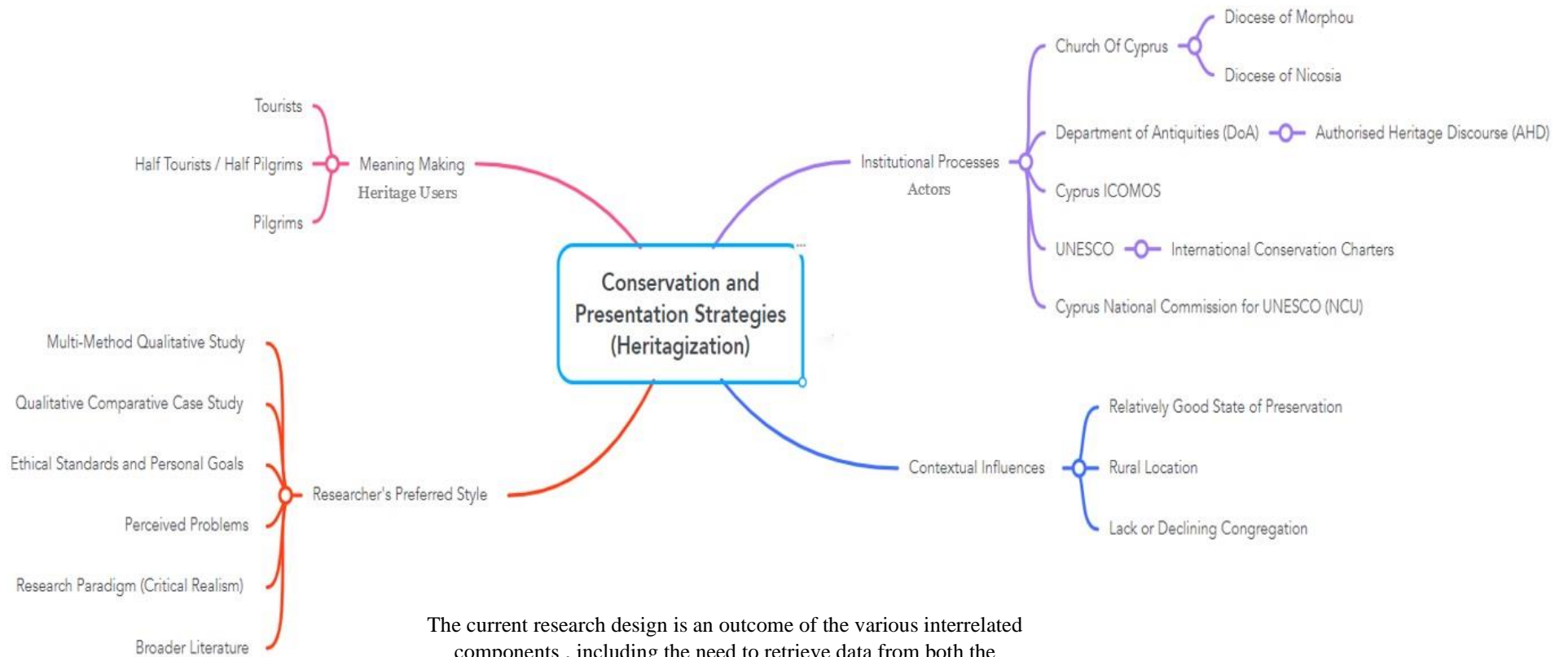
opportunity to open a window to a better understanding of how discourses and practices influence the appropriation, commodification, curation, and conservation of living religious heritage.

Acknowledging the various conceptualisations of authenticity (objective, constructivist, postmodern-existential) that expand the ways individuals perceive authenticity (Xu et al., 2022), the thesis aims *to deepen our understanding of how discursive and institutional structures, and their mechanisms, influence the conservation of Cypriot rural religious sites and identify areas of convergence and divergence between policy makers, hosts (church's representatives) and heritage users*. Considering that one of the key themes covered in this thesis is the dissonance occurring during the conversation of wall paintings, and in particular, the impact of the widespread conservation strategy 'preserve as found', which seemingly 'freezes' religious sites to a single perspective (Smith, 2006), on perceived authenticity, Smith's theory of AHD plays an important role in this thesis. The theory provides a lens to understand how hegemonic discourses are reproduced and challenged by heritage users (Di Giovine, 2008). To overcome issues of nominalisation (Skrede and Hølleland, 2018) and reductionism (Pendlebury, 2013) associated with AHD, the thesis draws on (critical) realist social ontology (Fairclough, 2005; Elder Vas, 2010; Flatschart, 2016). The originality of this study is that it explores the dialectic relationship between the discursive (AHD) and the extra-discursive dimension of conservation (institutions, organisations, and social actors) to achieve a more comprehensive analytical framework of how hegemonic and monolithic discourses, as well as the practices they influence, are contested, internalised, and endured (Fairclough et al., 2002; Flatschart, 2016).

This study comprises three objectives (Section 3.1). **Objective 1** seeks to investigate *'To investigate what discourses are institutionalised in the policy and operation of Cypriot religious sites and why?'* To accomplish this objective, the study first retrieved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders following a non-probability sampling approach (snowball sampling). Secondly, it executed archival research at the DoA library in Cyprus, looking into previous conservation reports and minutes to understand how conflict and power imbalances between stakeholders have developed. Thirdly, it investigates how the two prominent discourses - 'living religious tradition' and 'AHD' - are internalised and operationalised during the management of these two sites. **Objective 2** seeks to explore *'To explore how do visitors respond to the conservation and curation of Cypriot religious sites, and are there any differences and similarities between tourists and pilgrims?'* To answer this question, the study

retrieved 40 in-depth interviews with visitors (locals and international tourists²), at the two churches (20 at each church), following heterogeneous non-probability sampling. Secondly, at this stage, the study captured visitors' entrance narratives, such as motivation (pilgrim or tourist), concerns and expectations. Then it examined how visitors respond towards the current conservation ethos and in particular, whether the current (management) practices constrain or enable them to achieve a fulfilling experience. Thirdly, the study examined whether there are any differences in how pilgrims and tourists respond to the current conservation ethos. **Objective 3** has a synthetic purpose and examines converging and diverging stances between those running the site and those consuming it: *'To what extent do visitors align themselves – or not – with the current conservation and presentation strategies?'* This objective functions as a stepping stone for theoretical reflection on why AHD retains its hegemony during the conservation of living religious heritage and how AHD-led practices ('preserve as found' strategy) impact visitors' perceived authenticity and experience. This discussion opens a window to recommend strategies that would improve the conservation/management and tourism engagement strategies.

² The term international tourists refer to those who travelled to the site from other countries. As defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), 'international tourism comprises the activities of individuals travelling to and staying at places outside their usual permanent places of residence for a period not exceeding 12 months for leisure, business, and other purposes' (UNWTO, 2003).



The current research design is an outcome of the various interrelated components , including the need to retrieve data from both the producers (authorizers) and consumers, contextual factors influencing conservation and the researcher's preferred style, and how he is influenced but also influenced by the selected methods /philosophies.

Figure 8 Interactive Mind Map

4. Methods

Overview:

The methods chapter is subdivided into two parts and follows Saunders *et al.* (2016) research conceptualisation (Figure 8). The first (Sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3) outlines the research design, elaborating on issues of research paradigm (the meta theory of CR), methodological choice (qualitative research) and research design and strategy (CCS). The second part (Sections 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6) presents and discusses the sampling, data collection and analysis procedures.

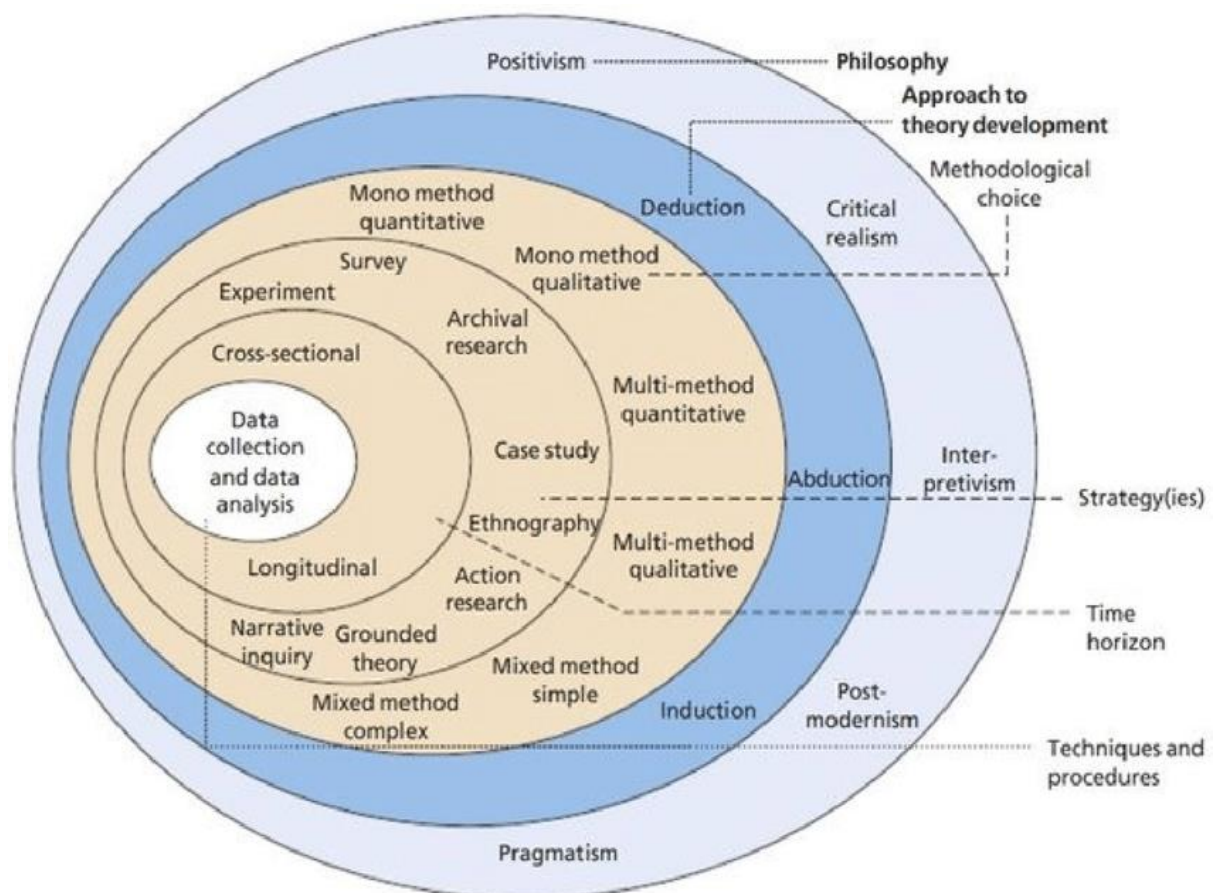


Figure 9 Research Onion (Saunders et al. 2016)

4.1. Research Paradigm

Research paradigm refers to the fundamental beliefs of the researcher, or his worldview, that guide the research in ontological and epistemological ways and the choices of methods (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Critical Realism (as a research philosophy provides a (non-deterministic) qualitative theory of causality (Maxwell, 2012). Ontologically, Critical Realism embraces a stratified/layered reality, considering social realities as external and independent (Saunders et al. 2016). Embracing realist ontology, postulating that an objective reality comprising of natural and social structures, mechanisms, and powers (Brown, 2015) exists outside of human conception, Critical Realism asserts that unobservable natural and social structures, mechanisms, and powers exist and act independently of the researcher, whose aim is to uncover them (Danermark *et al.* 2011; Brown, 2014). Bhaskar developed an ontological map, distinguishing the social world into three ontological domains. These include the ‘empirical’ comprising our experiences of the world and the things we experience directly or indirectly, the actual where the various ways underlying mechanisms are triggered and activated by particular conditions (Elger, 2010), and the domain of the real, where the power of the objects, including the causal powers of discourses (see AHD) exist. Causal powers are inherent in social and cultural structures (entities), enabling and limiting what can happen in a context (Wyn and Williams, 2012; Sayer, 1992). Mechanisms, on the other hand, are processes that depend on the structure/composition of entities and activate those causal powers (Elder Vas, 2015). Those entities (can be material (water) or immaterial) have causal powers inherent in social and cultural structures, enabling and limiting what can happen in a context (Wyn and Williams, 2012; Sayer, 1992). According to Bhaskar, conceptually, mechanisms are ‘nothing other than the ways of acting of things’ (1975, p. 14). In other words, mechanisms are processes, that depend on the structure/composition of entities and activate the powers of entities (Elder Vas, 2015). The relationship between mechanisms and causal powers is contingent and not fixed, and causal powers exist independently of their effects, thus a causal power may be activated only when mechanisms (processes) and conditions are appropriate (Sayer, 1992).

In the case of the laser pointer, for example, the mechanism is (roughly, at a certain level of detail) that when the button is depressed, it completes an electric circuit, with the result that electrical potential flows through the circuit that now connects the battery to the laser and stimulates the production of light by the laser (Elder Vas, 2015, p. 112).

Thus, the simple causality of cause and effect of positivism is replaced by a new model in which objects and structures have causal powers which may or may not produce empirical regularities as powers may exist inactivated (Sayer, 1992) or/either the capacity to reinforce each other (Figure 10) depending on the contextual circumstances (Danermark et al. 2002; Sayer, 2000). The role of the social scientist is to unravel the laminated nature of social phenomena (i.e., see conservation of living religious heritage) and to identify and understand the various ways in which underlying mechanisms are triggered or remain unexercised (or actualized) due to intervening conditions and contextual factors (Elger, 2010; Kempster and Parry, 2014; Fletcher, 2020) (Fig. 3).

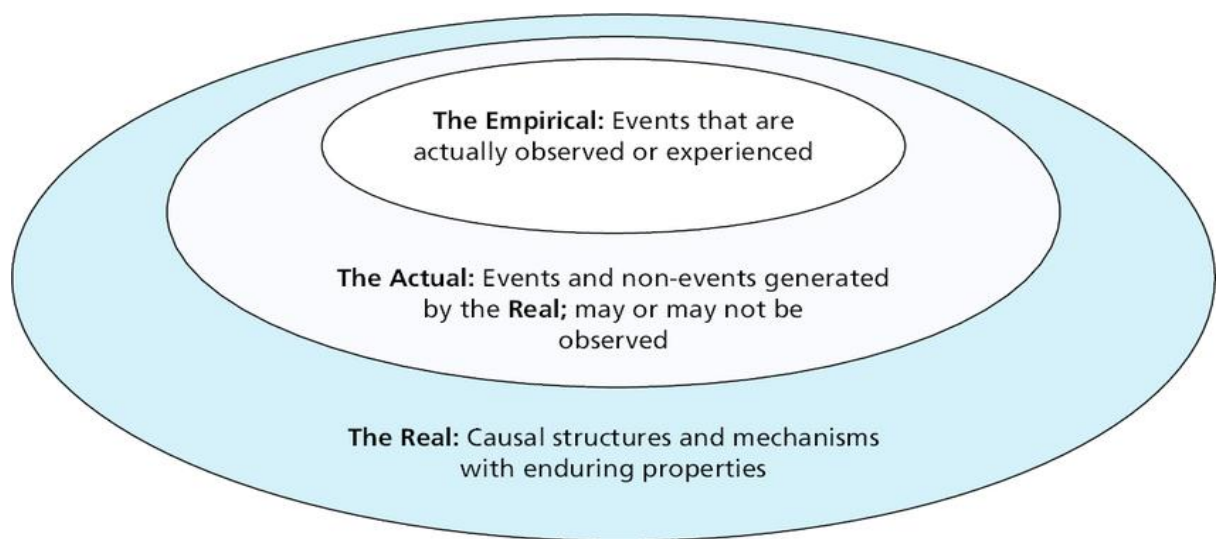


Figure 10 Critical Realism / Stratified Reality (Saunders et al. 2016)

CR is critical of knowledge production and, in particular, how knowledge is used to do its best to understand the fundamental realities of phenomena (Burgoyne, 2008). The critical dimension of this philosophy derives from what Bhaskar described as the ‘epistemic fallacy’ (Danermark et al. 2002). For CR, both positivism and interpretivism commit to epistemic fallacy because they ‘reduce what is real to what can be observed or experienced’ (Fletcher 2020, p. 175). CR’s view of caution is that qualitative research (through interviews and observations) opens the door to understanding the causal processes that explain particular events, emphasising processes (causal mechanisms), context and meanings (human agency) (Maxwell, 2019; Brönnimann, 2021). CR embraces epistemological relativism in that knowledge is valid in a specific context, historically situated and transient, while facts are social constructions that cannot be understood independently of social actors (Saunders et al., 2016; Vincent and O’Mahoney, 2018). CR seeks to describe reality based on observations and

people's interpretations of their experiences to reveal those aspects of reality (mechanisms) which must exist to make the observable phenomenon possible (Wyn and Williams, 2012). In this context, a CR axiological position recognised that research is value-laden. At the same time, they acknowledge that bias by world views, sociocultural background and upbringing could influence both researcher and responder. The aim is to be objective, buying and minimising bias and errors (Saunders et al. 2016).

Retroduction is the core methodological principle of CR and the main contribution of CR to social research (Danermark et al. 2002; Zachariadis et al. 2013). Retroduction is backwards reasoning, an in-depth 'historically situated analysis of pre-existing structures and emerging agency' (Saunders et al. 2016, p. 139). This theoretical engagement binds together mechanisms, context and outcome constructed on an ontological distinction between entities with causal powers and contingent circumstances (Elger, 2010; Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2018; Fletcher, 2020). In other words, retroduction 'is the activity of unearthing causal mechanisms' (Jagosh, 2020, p. 121), and it involves a vertical backward movement through CR stratified ontology to identify the basic conditions for the existence of phenomena (Danermark et al. 2002).

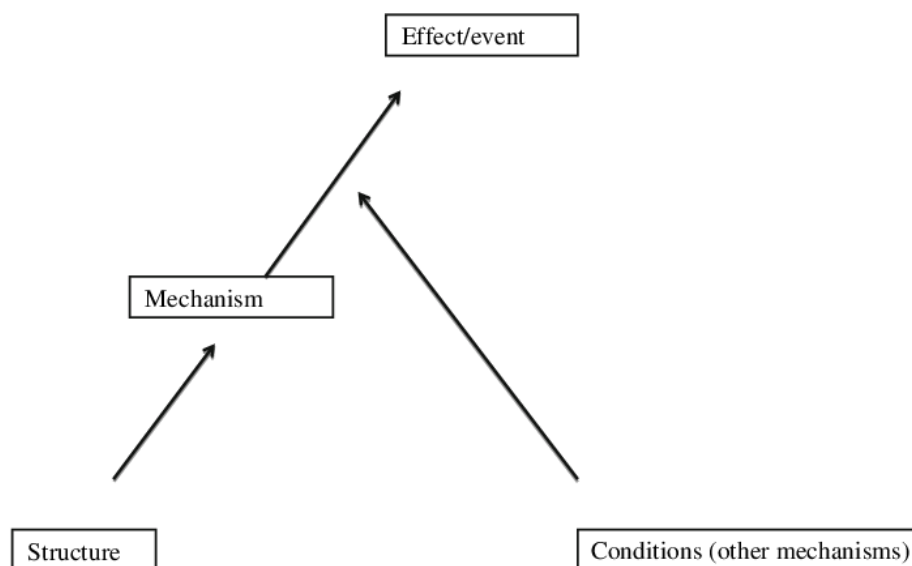


Figure 11 Critical Realist view of Causation (Sayer 2000)

Analytical dualism is based on the notion that social structures influence people's ideas and behaviours with their causal powers and mechanisms. However, actors have the power to

influence back structures. CR's profound (realist) ontology transcends the 'duality' of agency and structure, postulating 'that the two have to be related, not conflated' (Archer, 1995, p. 6). In this sense, Archer argues that agency and structure are ontologically independent; they exist in different temporal domains. In this manner, the pre-existence of structure contradicts the structuralist account, Where the agency is dissolved into the culture. And individualist thinkers privilege the agential capacity to resist structural pressures (Porpora, 2013; Elder-Vass, 2010). Structure and agency are crucial to exercising autonomous influences and actors are not passive receptions of social structure. In this way, CR researchers can examine how people, as reflexive agents, critically evaluate and change their dispositions (DeCoteau, 2016; Elder-Vass, 2007; Wimalasena, 2019). Analytical dualism has also been applied within organisational studies literature to understand the 'paradox of embedded agency' without conflating structure and agency open window to understand who and why is being constrained or enabled (conditioned action) (Leca and Naccache 2006; Delbridge and Edwards, 2013; Vincent and Wapshott, 2014).

4.2 Methodological Choice

This research follows a multi-method qualitative approach (Figure 11). It is considered the appropriate strategy to explore the perspectives and potential tensions between a small number of institutional actors running Cypriot churches as well as to capture the ‘lived experiences’ (how people understand and form responses) with Cypriot religious sites. Qualitative research builds an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, provides a rich amount of verbalisation which cannot be achieved through quantitative research and develops a more nuanced understanding of how social phenomena are understood and occur in different settings (Mason, J, 2002; Richards and Munsters, 2010; Oktay, 2012). For Stake (2010), qualitative research is situational, oriented to objects and activities in their context and helpful in real-life settings situations where little is known (Gilham, 2000; Flick, 2009). In this research, a qualitative approach ‘humanises’ the phenomenon of heritagization of Cypriot churches, investigating this phenomenon through the eyes and reflections of those involved in the process by initiating conversations. According to Yin (2015), qualitative study helps explore in-depth issues such as institutional responses to phenomena, such as the management of a living religious site (Objective 1) as well as conducting research in intimate social settings where the focus of the research is an analysis of conversations and interactions (Yin, 2015) such as the case of how people experience and response to the management of religious sites (Objective 2).

CR favours qualitative studies as it provides a qualitative theory of causality, with rich contextual data, that avoids the pitfalls of the empiricist theory of causality, such as quantitative approaches making causal explanations (Roberts, 2014). Qualitative inquiry is an intrinsic aspect of CR epistemology and is interrelated with the retroductive process, asking the question of ‘what must be true for this to be the case’ (Oliver, 2011, p. 379). A qualitative approach could identify the causes of specific outcomes and other causal processes as opposed to the quantitative approach, which estimates the effects of independent variables. A qualitative design can help the researcher to abstract the underlying causal mechanisms of the phenomenon under investigation (heritagization) and analyse how it operates under certain conditions while it pays attention to causal processes and appropriate contextualization (Elger, 2010) and they have been popular among CR researchers (Bunt, 2016; Fletcher, 2017; Hoddy, 2019; Zhang and Smith, 2019), while mixed methods have also been proposed (Zachariadis *et al.* 2013; Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017).

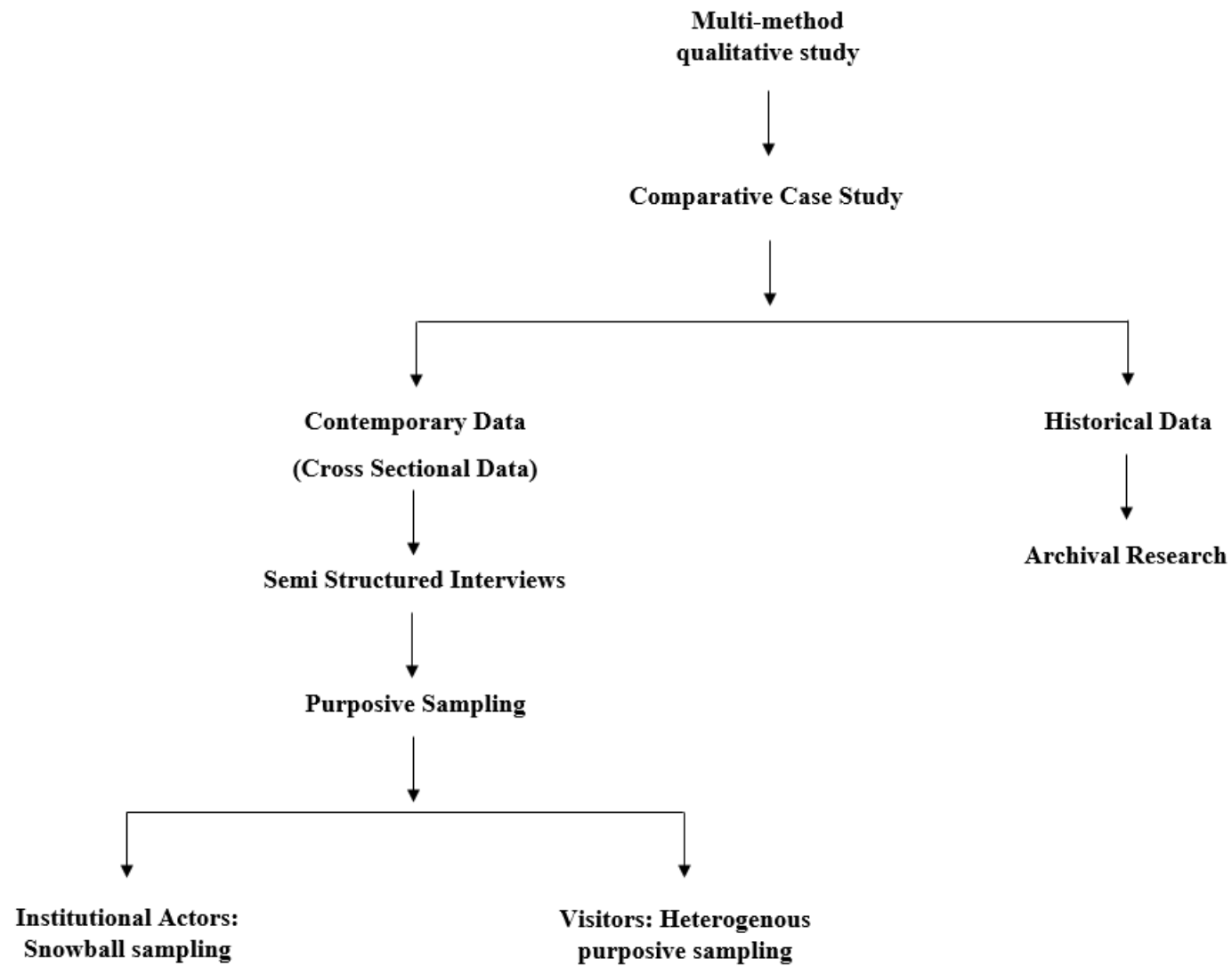


Figure 12 Diagram of Methodology

4.3 Research Strategy

4.3.1 Comparative Case Study

A qualitative case study allows the investigation of real-life complex issues in their contextual framework (Yin, 2014). According to Gilham (2000), a case is a unit of human activity ‘that merges in with its context’ (p. 1). It is characterised by dynamic processes and ambiguity, including many complex variables and relationships. This method is beneficial for in-depth investigations of behavioural conditions through actors’ perspectives and finding the underlying reasons for those behaviours (Gilham, 2000; Zainal, 2007). Case study design provides several advantages, including examining the data within the activity context (Zainal, 2007). This close and continuous proximity to the study allows the researcher to gain feedback from the participants and explore the data in the complexities of the real-life environment (Hartley, 2004; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Hancock and Algozzine, 2006; Zainal, 2007), considering not just actors’ perspectives but also how the relevant groups interact between them (Tellis, 1997). Case study appears to be the first choice for CR researchers (Easton, 2010; Wynn and Williams, 2012; Vincent and Wapshott, 2014). CR values many standard features of case study design, such as investigating discourses and negotiated meanings in context and how their dynamics are shifted over time, asking the question, ‘What caused the events associated with the phenomenon to occur’ (Easton, 2010, p. 123). For Wynn and Williams (2012), case study and CR methodological principles are compatible in explaining the causes of events in the sense that the former establishes the research boundary of a phenomenon while the latter uncovers the causal mechanisms and contextual factors that generate it, seeking to understand the causal configuration that shape the causal relationships of the study (Kempster and Kerry, 2014).

CCS covers two or more cases and seeks to investigate how particular programmes or policies work, emphasising comparisons within a context (Goodrick, 2014). In other words, in CCS, the researcher gathers data and compares similarities and differences between the phenomenon occurrences (Dion, 1998). Thus, CCS is a suitable approach to explain how features within the context influence policies, while the emphasis is how the particularity of context influences interventions (Goodrick, 2014), allowing the examination of patterns across cases (Bergene, 2007; Campbell, 2010). In doing so, cases are selected based on different outcomes and share a standard structure, allowing the researcher to investigate the necessary and contingent conditions between them (Bergene, 2007). Thus, CCS favours examining

typical extreme cases because selected cases should demonstrate enough commonalities to allow comparisons (Campbell, 2010).

From a CR point of view, Danermark *et al.* (2002) highlighted the benefits of comparative studies to discern a phenomenon's fundamental conditions (structures and mechanisms), as comparison provides an empirical foundation for retroduction. Comparing cases that share similarities and differences, researchers could distinguish the necessary constitute conditions from the more accidental and the different mechanisms and structures involved (Danermark *et al.* 2002), within and across cases (Goodrick, 2014). Systematic comparisons provide an empirical foundation for identifying cross-cutting patterns or demi-regularities for retroduction. It helps researchers discern underlying structures that may be hard to determine in concrete cases, while comparison strengthens validity (Bergene, 2007; Kessler and Bach, 2014). Thus, the purpose of CR researchers in CCS is to explore how similar mechanisms operate in different contexts, identifying patterns and revealing their underlying causation (Kessler and Bach, 2014; Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2018). Lastly, qualitative research is a common strategy in CCS. It includes methods such as field work visits, interviews, and document analysis., At the same time, purposive and stratified sampling is often used for in-depth study, assisting in the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns across cases sharing a common focus (Goodrick, 2014).

4.3.2 Selection of Cases

In CCS, case studies should share some differences and similarities (Bergene, 2007; Kessler and Bach, 2014). Similarities and differences (Table 2) expose those local contingencies or situational factors which provide clues for particular generative mechanisms, while where expected patterns are not revealed, may suggest alternative causes (Kessler and Bach, 2014). Regarding similarities, the two churches are part of the same institutional framework (under the stewardship and legal framework provided by DoA and UNESCO). Regarding the differences, there are three issues. From a policy point of view, they belong to two different dioceses. Thus, local bishops also influence their management. From an exhibition point of view, they share two distinct exhibition strategies. The church of St. Nicholas of the Roof is stripped of religious furniture, with four lamps providing sub lighting for the frescos. In contrast, the church of Agios Ioannis (St. John) Lampadistis is active. Lastly is the positioning of St. Nickolas' church, located 3 miles outside the nearby village of Kakopetria, while St. John's monastery is at the heart of the village of Kalopanagiotis. .

4.3.3 Time Horizon

This study opted to retrieve both cross-sectional and longitudinal data. Cross-sectional studies investigate a particular phenomenon at a specific time (Saunders *et al.* 2016), information from a population at one point in time capturing a representation of the population of interest (Shanahan, 2010). The advantages of cross-sectional design come down to its flexibility, adaptability, and capacity to provide a broad and complete sample of relevant cases without the outlays associated with longitudinal studies (Shanahan, 2010). Thus, the study intends to collect data from a cross-section of institutional actors from all levels (Objective 1) and visitors from different trajectories (see next section), providing a cross-case analysis between the two cases. Within CR literature (Bunt, 2016; Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017; Fletcher, 2017; Hoddy, 2019), cross-sectional design appears to be the most preferable method, while few scholars (Reed, 2005; Zachariadis *et al.*, 2013; Mutch, 2014) also utilising longitudinal design. This study has also been designed to introduce a longitudinal element to the analysis of heritagization. Studying historical data through archival research, this study envisages to shed more light on how the current institutional policies have developed. According to Saunders *et al.* (2016), such longitudinal analysis allows the researcher to investigate change, such as how institutional relations developed over time. The combination of these approaches aims to enhance the credibility of this study by collecting and discussing all available sources related to the conservation of Cypriot churches, examining actors' accounts and filling gaps found within their accounts with information found within the archive.

4.4. Sampling

Although firmly conceptually connected, the two objectives of the research question are to give access to empirical data that allow the researcher to build a theoretical and practical grounded argument (Mason, 2002; Bryman, 2012) during fieldwork, data collection and analysis. At the same time, they proceeded hand in hand. About institutional actors, this process allowed the researcher to understand the complexities surrounding the management of these sites and postulate relevant mechanisms responsible for the phenomenon under consideration. During the interviews, the researcher had the opportunity to refine and test the pertinency of these mechanisms. Once the main mechanisms and practices are produced, the two churches' management list of interview questions is presented to visitors. These interview questions were further refined at the initial stages after gaining an insight into how visitors see things. Records of inquiries, arrangements and activities are also kept.

The two objectives although firmly conceptually connected followed different sampling and data analysis procedures. This approach enabled the researcher to achieve methodological clarity and rigour to the study ensuring that the particularities of each aspect are captured while it develops a more sensitive and nuance understanding of the phenomenon, allowing the researcher to foster stronger links between the two research objectives. Regarding Objective 1 the researcher collected primary and secondary data by interviewing relevant institutional actors and analysing management reports. The analysis followed a retroductive approach to identify the social structures, discourses, mechanisms, and practices underpin the management of the two churches. In line with Objective 2, visitors were invited to reflect and criticize on the practices identified during retroductive analysis (Objective 1) and constitute the pre-structured environment visitors encountered during their visit.

4.4.1 Institutional Actors

Considering that there is no prominent list of individuals involved in the management process the researcher could get access to, snowball sampling was the only viable choice for accessing critical responders (Sharma, 2017). The study identified and interviewed vital stakeholders (Table 3) responsible for decision-making and other individuals who support and consult the operation of these churches (Foroughi *et al.*, 2023). Snowball sampling is a purposive sampling (or non-probability sampling) strategy that samples participants strategically instead of randomly (Bryman, 2012). Purposive sampling, as the current one, is in line with CR concerns to identify and carefully select critical groups who can provide case-

based comparisons that could illuminate factors in the realm of honesty (Clark, 2008). Hence, key informants can provide links between their situated knowledge (how policies have been implemented and challenges), from which researchers can formulate underlying mechanisms (Smith and Elger, 2012). The first two interviewees were the Bishop responsible for ecclesiastical cultural heritage in Cyprus and the keeper of St. Nickolas's church. These two participants indicated other relevant institutional actors, including priests running the churches, bishops responsible for the administration issues and policies, and other professionals such as heritage consultants and conservators collaborating with the two bishoprics. Members of the local councils were approached as well. Members of the council of Kalopanagiotis village (St. John) provided an insightful interview. In contrast, Kakopetria (St. Nickolas) council members rejected the offer that the village has no jurisdiction in this area. Having developed a good insight into the particularities, an official letter was sent to the Department of Antiquities to request an interview with officials. Three officers responded: one specialist on the conservation of these sites, the second on issues of planning and UNESCO, and the third was a former officer of DoA whose policies shaped, to a large extent, the current appearance and management of these sites. An interview was also retrieved from an officer of Cyprus ICOMOS while the officers running the Cypriot UNESCO committee politely rejected redirecting me to the officers of DoA. Interviews were also collected by an academic and a tourist guide. The core of the interviews took place between June and October of 2021, while few interviews took place in the first half of 2022.

Inf/ant	Role	Code	Date
1	Clergy: Office Holder	S1	25.06.21
2	Historian - Curator - Consultant	S2	02.08.21
3	Visitor Engagement and Facilities Assistant	S3	11.08.21
4	Archaeologist - Curator	S4	12.08.21
5	Conservator (DoA)	S5	17.08.21
6	Parish Priest	S6	04.09.21
7	Clergy: Office Holder	S7	07.09.21
8	Member of Village Council	S8	12.09.21
9	Visitor Engagement and Facilities Assistant	S9	12.09.21
10	Officer of DoA	S10	15.09.21
11	Officer of ICOMOS	S11	16.09.21
12	Parish Priest	S12	02.10.21
13	Clergy: Office Holder	S13	08.10.21
14	Conservator from foreign conservation institute	S14	15.03.22
15	Officer of DoA	S15	23.05.22
16	Officer of DoA	S16	24.08.22

Table 5 Institutional Stakeholders and Practitioners Interviewed

4.4.2 Visitors

Heterogenous purposive sampling was used for sampling visitors at the two churches (Table 4). The complete set of possible data sources in the two churches (the sampling frame defining the members of the population eligible for the research) (Morgan, 2008) is characterised by significant heterogeneity, including any individuals who visit those places for recreational, spiritual, or other reasons. Thus, the people accessible for sampling include adults of different ethnicities, ages, and economic and cultural backgrounds, such as local individuals living in the village and domestic and international tourists and pilgrims (such as Russian Orthodox pilgrim groups). This strategy was selected based on providing an intense analysis of a few sources drawn from the large population visiting the Cypriot churches and why particular people experience the church in specific ways instead of seeking more significant tendencies (Palys, 2008). According to Saunders *et al.* (2016), during the heterogeneous sampling process, the researcher should use his judgment to select cases that best enable him to answer the research question, achieve maximum variation in the data collected and help him to explain the critical themes observed. According to Saunders *et al.* (2016), the heterogeneity found within this ‘small’ sample (containing cases that could be completely different) is its strength, as the emerging patterns likely represent the critical practices observed. The research started collecting data from locals and international tourists to achieve maximum variation. It preceded in people processing different qualities such as different demographics, including women and men old and young. As the data collection proceeded, I realised that some narratives, such as religious solid people, were underrepresented. I tried to sample visitors with the same profile (older Greek Cypriot people), but it wasn't easy to detect them. In general, sampling visitors was challenging. I was interviewing, on average, two people in a day due to the slow influx of visitors and the isolated character of the places. At the same time, many were unwilling to dedicate the necessary time to the interview. Lastly, this strategy allows the researcher to identify unique cases that might not have emerged in random sampling. Thus, the researcher needs to report every single case as it may represent a substantial portion of the population (Weiss and Connelly, 2013).

Study Area	Demographics	Frequency	Percent
St. Nickolas 20 Visitors	Gender		
	Female	12	40%
	Male	8	60%
	Education		
	Primary	2	10%
	Vocational	3	15%
	University	15	75%
	Pilgrim / Tourist		
	Pilgrim	3	15%
St. John 20 Visitors	Tourists	14	70%
	Mixed (Pilgrims and Tourists)	3	15%
	Gender		
	Female	12	60%
	Male	8	40%
	Education		
	Primary	1	5%
	Vocational	5	25%
	University	14	70%
	Pilgrim / Tourist		
	Pilgrim	3	15%
	Tourists	6	30%
	Mixed (Pilgrims and Tourists)	11	55%

Table 6 Visitors Interviewed

4.5 Data Collection

Before the commencement of fieldwork, the researcher negotiated a plan of action with the Church of Cyprus, the primary stakeholder. Issues of access, time horizon, confidentiality and research ethics were discussed. The interviews in this research take two directions. The first series of interviews targeted 18 institutional actors and formed an account of the experiences of those involved in managing these churches. This part of the research was supplemented by archival research that brought silent topics pursued further in the interviews to the surface. The second part of the data collection involved interviewing 40 visitors at the two churches, 20 in each, who were asked to provide accounts for their management strategies in place. The interviews with stakeholders and visitors were conducted in Greek and English language. Stakeholders were interviewed in their offices or virtually, which lasted approximately 30 minutes to 1.5 hours. The first interview was completed in June 2021, and the last was in August 2022. Visitors were interviewed in the courtyard of the two churches in a shady area. Interviews lasted 10 to 40 min and took place in August and September 2021 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

A data protection protocol was followed during the study design and the fieldwork activities. To avoid losing valuable information, the interviews were recorded, following the participant's permission. Audio recording ensures that critical ideas and meanings are not lost. In line with Sheffield University's ethical principles, the interviews were recorded after the consent of the participants. The gathering and processing of identifiable personal information were done fairly and lawfully. Any personal information is securely kept and protected digitally using passwords and accessed only by the researcher. All data were anonymised wherever possible. Under particular circumstances, when the disclosure of identifiable information is deemed necessary, this will occur after acquiring the participant's explicit consent. Extra care was taken to religious information as a particular category of data during interviews, as they could spark uncomfortable feelings and violate interviewees' rights. All questions, especially those dedicated to international tourists where the interviews were made in English, were clarified through the back translation approach used as a quality assurance method. In particular, my supervisors checked the translated questions to explain the 'experiential meaning' of converting research concepts and ideas into people's everyday familiar language (Saunders *et al.* 2016). This process improved the questions which were paraphrased and explained in real-life contexts.

4.5.1 Interviews: Institutional Actors

Semi-structured interviews are one of the most important sources of information in case studies (Tellis 1997; Hancock and Algozzine 2006). In contrast to structured and unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews seek to address several predetermined questions, giving the researcher more control over the topics of the interviews while allowing new relevant ideas to arise (Barlow, 2010). Interviews in case studies are used to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others who can provide insight into things we cannot observe (Stake, 1995, 2010). The research literature informed the interview guide, the researcher's field knowledge and experience, and informal preliminary discussion (King, 2004; Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). However, this does not mean that all participants were asked the same questions nor that the researcher followed the guide to the letter. The questions were subject to constant revisions as data analysis went hand in hand with data collection (see next section). As the research proceeded and relevant structures and mechanisms emerged, new questions were evoked to establish the causal relationships. Thus, further questions were postulated to examine the validity of specific mechanisms. This method allowed the researcher to modify the questions and pursue relevant enquiries that might arise and the flexibility to identify possible causal mechanisms (Easton, 2010; Hoddy, 2019). Thus, the process was a collaboration between the researcher and interviewee and included concert questions, narrative questions, and various probes.

CR epistemological consideration also influenced the data collection. Its commitment to ontological depth emphasised how various mechanisms are activated in a contingent and conditional context to shape the empirical phenomenon under investigation (Pawson, 1996). For a realist, interviews are essential in gaining access to underlying accounts and conditions of events (Smith and Elger, 2012) and go deeper in time revealing related causal mechanisms even the initial conditions that shaped the institutional structures under investigation (Brönnimann, 2021). To achieve rigorous data collection, Pawson (1996) advises that this should be a close collaboration between the subject (with particular expertise through privileged access) and the researcher (being in the driving seat checking and seeking to clarify those accounts). Considering that people are separate from social structures, the researchers should acknowledge the limitations of interpretive accounts in uncovering underlying structures. Thus, interviews did not present natural causes but a partial picture (Smith and Elger, 2012). Hence, the interview questions were both attuned to the concrete specificity of the phenomenon while retaining some flexibility so they could elicit information about the

interplay of various hidden mechanisms step by step (Roberts, 2014; O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). However, the validity of interviews cannot be taken for granted; people's subjective experiences and narratives are fallible and demand critical scrutiny and knowledge about underlying conditions (Smith and Elger, 2012). During this process, the researcher kept analytical memos. This process helped the researcher to reflect on the coding process and coding choices and how his assumptions and decisions shaped the research, including unanswered questions and problems raised during the analysis (Saldaña, 2013).

The topics covered in the interviews align with the gaps and irregularities of the literature and the particularities (problems) identified at the Cypriot churches. These include issues concerning the provision of information related to challenges in managing living religious sites, areas of contestation as a result of conservation and commodification, and other priorities and values. Thus, the following questions were prepared to provide access to strategy, discourses and accounts of the politics and asymmetries of decision-making (Smith and Elger, 2012) occurring at these churches. In this vein, some of the following questions (comprising the initial interview guide) have an introductory character; others explore the context, looking for known or unknown outcomes, while others look into mechanisms leading to current management strategies, asking about other structures involved in the process.

1. How the two churches run?
2. What is the management structures, and why is organised like this?
3. Could you explain to me the types of people and expertise involved in this process?
4. Could you explain your reasoning when managing these, Churches?
5. What ideally should happen to these churches in terms of functioning as both spiritual places and cultural attractions?
6. Could you talk to me about any difficulties that can alter your plans? Are there any important things that are working well?
7. How your values and priorities influence issues around preventive conservation, interpretive design, finances, and institutional regulations.
8. There seem to be external factors affecting the way those churches are managed, how would you characterize the collaboration with other institutions (such as UNESCO).
9. How do you think the designation of the churches as WH sites impact the management of the site? I am thinking that they may be doing things differently than they used to do before the new regulatory program was adopted.
10. What are the conservation and interpretation strategies?

11. In your opinion how appropriate the current conservation and interpretation strategy is. Do you think that it works for everyone?
12. The church is both a spiritual space for worship, and now also a cultural tourism attraction. Is it possible to balance these two functions? Why/why not?

Examples of following up questions raised during interviews:

1. How often DoA officers visit this place / conservation check?
2. Regarding funding would you say that the monastery requires more financial support?
3. Is there any dress code for visitors?
4. Has the DoA requested financial assistance from UNESCO?
5. How would you characterize DoA's relationship with the NCU and ICOMOS?
6. What is the reasoning behind the relocation of frescos?
7. Can you recall a case when the conservation strategy was adopted to religious demands?
8. Has UNESCO expressed an interest in the interpretation and presentation of the place.
9. Do you believe that law regarding listed monuments is sufficient?
10. Is the management of the churches influenced by museological ideas/strategies.

4.5.2 Interviews: Visitors

The transformation of religious sites into cultural attractions raises particular challenges for studying religious tourism. Intensified contextual discontinuity characterised by cultural and social changes constitutes sacred sites as semi-sacred and semi-secular places where traditional values and uses have shifted. The questions presented to visitors were built around this ambiguity. The ultimate goal was to understand how visitors perceive the socio-cultural changes in Cypriot churches and whether there is evidence of convergence and divergence between visitors and management. Thus, it was essential to reveal and understand how visitors responded to the five practices shaping the conservation and presentation of the two churches.

The questions followed an in-depth semi-structured format for this part of the study. Firstly, the interview aimed to capture personal information, including motivation(s), interests and concerns, and establish whether they are pilgrims, tourists or 'something in between'. Secondly, understand how they perceive, experience and form responses towards the heritage strategies in place. Visitors were encouraged to demonstrate their agency through deliberate and reflexive thinking by asking them to judge issues around commodification, exhibition, conservation, and authenticity. Hence, people were encouraged to share their experiences and reflections and have the opportunity to describe what matters to them most, as well as past, present and future aspirations for managing the churches (Mason 2002). The following

questions represent the final interview guide, formulated after the first 3-4 interviews when I realised that some questions and topics required further clarification. Although the critical topics covered stayed the same, the sequence varied from interview to interview, depending on the flow of the conversation.

1. Why was it important to you to visit this place today? What are your usual expectations visiting these types of sites?
2. How often do you visit churches? Would you describe yourself as pilgrim, tourist, or something in between?
3. Do you have any personal memories with the site?
4. How often do you visit churches?
5. How do you understand the WHS of the site and what message this monument sends to the world?
6. Are you satisfied with the overall conservation of the place?
7. When you entered the place did you have a feeling entering a church or a museum? Would you have the same opinion if the place was sterile of religious furniture in order to emphasize the artistic part?
8. Have you noticed that the murals have not been restored? What do you think about this strategy? Do you believe that we should complete the missing parts of the frescos?
9. What do you think about the information provided on site?
10. What do you think about the souvenir shop is it appropriate at this site?
11. The management of the site is a cooperation between Church of Cyprus, Department of Antiquities and UNESCO, usually local communities are excluded. What is your opinion?
12. Do you feel that your experience was fulfilled today? What idea you will take with you today?
13. What do you think the future holds?

4.5.3 Archival Research

DoA keep records of interventions and essential decisions for future reference, including conservation reports in the form of notes, minutes of meetings, letters and later emails exchanged between stakeholders and newspaper abstracts referring to issues related to the monuments. The archival study can generate new interview questions through unexpected discoveries, provide a longitudinal perspective on the history of organisations and new data which can be compared and verified with other data such as interviews and observations

(Bowen, 2009; Saunders et al., 2016). While data from documents help make inferences about events and people's values (Tellis, 1997; Stake, 2010), these documents do not represent the reality (what happens), but they are part of the evidence base (Gilham, 2000), leading us to the deeper generative mechanisms. The first entry in the archives of St John was in 1936, and the last was in 2006, while for St Nickolas, the first was in 1943, and the previous was in 2018.

Documents and interviews are two methods which can provide 'completeness and complementarity' (Zachariadis et al. 2013, p. 873) in a CR study in the sense that the former indicates where the latter can focus. According to Mutch (2014), structures (organisations, family, law, etc) and policies change simultaneously. Documentary analysis can give us temporal contrast to understand an entity's development (emergence and stratification), including long-term mechanisms shaping current situations (Mutch, 2014), such as how conservation policies were negotiated and contested over the years. Archival research was beneficial in providing hints about tensions, power imbalances, shifting strategies, and even converging areas between parties. This was particularly helpful as practitioners collaborating with UNESCO (DoA officers) downplayed conflict and contestation with UNESCO, portraying an idyllic collaboration highlighting the positive aspects of the World Heritage Convention. Such an approach from 'insiders' is not unusual; as Hølleland and Johansson (2019) noted that driven by sentiments of discretion about UNESCO matters, 'insiders' often accentuate the positive aspects of the World Heritage Convention, which can be translated as an expression of loyalty. Document analysis started at the early stages of the data collection in September 2021 and proceeded hand in hand with interviews.

4.6 Data Analysis

The act of coding refers to the analysis and interpretation of data and is guided by researcher's analytic lens as well as his ontological and epistemological positions (Saldaña 2013). This study adopts a data coding analysis strategy that is commensurable with CR epistemological assumptions and is meaningful to the researcher. The methodological lens driving the investigation of Objective 1 (Macro Level) is that of 'retroduction', a vertical movement towards CR deep ontology exploring the most relevant structures and mechanisms (Fletcher, 2020) underlying the heritagisation of Cypriot Churches. In doing so this study recruits the heuristic tools of open and axial coding to help with the abstraction process which as Sayer (1992) stated its main purpose is to distinguish incidental (contingent) from essential (necessary) characteristics. Beyond discourses and structures with their causal powers (mechanisms) this part of the research seeks also to identify the (social) practices that mediate the relationship between structures and processes (and events)' (Fairclough, 2005, p. 918). The epistemological baseline for analysing visitors responses (Objective 2) is that of analytical dualism that underscores the need to maintain an analytical distinction between structure and agency that are considered ontologically distinct (Porpora, 2013). Having established the (social) practices in Objective 1, at this part of the research examines how visitors respond to the causal powers of these practices. Fairclough (2003, 2005) explains that practices are those mediating entities between structures and events and possess their own causal powers, which once formed, 'define particular ways of acting' (2003, p. 25) and are in tension with the causal powers of social actors.

'Interdiscursive analysis allows the analyst to assess the relationship and tension between the causal effects of agency in the concrete event and the causal effects of practices and structures' (Fairclough, 2005, p. 926).

In this way the analysis contextualizes visitors responses within the margins of practices providing a clearer picture on how mechanisms of macro level entities such as Church and DoA are actualized in the particular context of Cyprus, through the heritage practices (management, conservation and curation) adopted at the two churches. Understanding the management of religious sites as a network of social practices, allows the researcher to examine what works well and what does not. This approach, that provides an analytical separation between structures (and mechanisms), practices and events (Newman, 2020) avoid the dilution of visitors' agency within a macro level analysis and abstract entities such as mechanisms and

structures. The following two sections provide a step-by-step guide on how the analysis occurred.

4.6.1 Interviews with Institutional Actors and Document Analysis: Objective 1

CR has been described by many (Yeung, 1997; Oliver, 2011) as a philosophy in search for a method. The lack of methodological developments in the application of CR urged researchers to adopt various methods and analysis procedures favouring qualitative methodologies (Fletcher 2020). One of those is Grounded Theory (GT) (Yeung, 1997; Oliver, 2011). The use of GT is a well-established approach in CR research with various scholars (Kempster and Parry, 2011, 2014; Bunt, 2016; Hoddy, 2019) investigating issues of leadership and social inequality. For these scholars the retroductive framework of CR compliments GT in the sense that CR attempts to extend the conceptual analysis through the different levels of social stratification (empirical, actual, and real) appears congruent with the conditional matrix of GT (Bunt, 2016). A very good study that this thesis draws upon is that of Eric Hoddy (2019) paper published in the *'International Journal of Social Research Methodology'* who achieved a logical and clear structural analysis towards the deeper levels of reality Hoddy demonstrated how the heuristic tools of grounded theory, namely open and axial coding, could be harnessed to reach deeper stratum. Thus, open and axial coding help the analysis to do the necessary abstraction required moving from the empirical level to the real where structures and mechanisms exist while he maintains epistemological rigour and validity (Kempster and Parry, 2011). In addition to previous analytical efforts, this study adds another layer in the retroductive analysis that of (social) practices.

First Cycle of Coding (Open Coding)

At the initial stages the analysis adopted 'In Vivo' coding and 'Versus' coding (Figure 12). These two exploratory coding methods can be used sequentially and provide richer understanding of the same data (Saldaña, 2013). 'In Vivo' strategy provides the direct language of participants and enhances researcher's awareness of individuals unique circumstance while 'Versus' coding 'captures the actual and conceptual conflicts within, among, and between participants' (Saldaña, 2013, p. 61) revealing more conceptual ideas such as tensions and power issues (Benaquisto, 2008). The analysis followed one participant coding per time. Particular emphasis during coding was given in identifying prominent social actors and institutional structures, their policies and practices, tensions, and interactions between individuals. The coding for this initial round was inductive and, it was executed in 'In Vivo' software producing

approximately 1200 codes derived from the interviews with institutional actors and document analysis.

After this initial round the codes were transferred to an Excel spread sheet, as it was easier to manipulate the data in this form and grouped into categories and sub-categories. Seven main themes were identified at the initial stage of coding/categorization. Approximately 1200 codes, produced from interviews transcripts. These codes were allocated in these six initial themes: ‘policies and planning’, ‘stewardship, reporting and coordination’, ‘operational management’, (referring to day to day management challenges), ‘conservation’ (including the conservation of frescos), ‘presentation and interpretation strategies’ and ‘living religious site’. The next step refines these categories searching for properties and dimensions. Thirty-six sub-categories were produced and attached to the five initial broad categories. These sub-categories refine further the initial categories and get deeper into the phenomenon of heritagisation. For instance, the category ‘policies’ had five sub-categories (Legal Responsibilities, Tangible and Intangible, Authorized, Unauthorized, Multivocality and Budgeting). The next stage focused in finding the properties and the dimensions of these sub-categories. Properties refer to the characteristics of a category while dimensions how the range of the properties of a category vary (Corbin and Strauss, 1998). Some characteristic properties of ‘Legal Responsibilities’ are: National Legal Status, International Obligation and Financial Responsibilities. In the effort to dimensionalize the properties I asked ‘how’ questions, such as ‘how much’ or ‘how often’ a particular policy was happening, and archives helped in doing so. For example, archives provided valuable information on how often DoA objected conservation initiatives from the bishopric and locals throughout the 20th century. At this stage, these demi-regularities referring to imperfect trends that indicate the operation of underlying causal powers (Fletcher, 2020) started providing an insight on some basic trends such as a centralized system of governance. Following the necessary abstraction (Sayer, 2000) it was found there are 5 main practices that shape these empirical regularities.

- **Second Cycle of Coding (Axial Coding)**

Having explored the data using open coding building a picture of the sociocultural conditions and policies shaping the heritage strategies at the two churches the analysis proceeded in the second phase of coding. During this phase, the axial coding, the aim was to identify the (mediating) ‘social practices’ and link them to the mechanisms and their structures that generate them. The purpose of axial coding is to reorganize and reanalyse strategically the

data by linking categories, or seemingly unrelated facts, to develop a coherent metasynthesis of the data (Saldaña, 2013). The move from open to a more focused coding is not clearly defined process (Benaquisto 2008). During axial coding the research should pay particular attention to conditions, actions, interactions, cause, impact, and consequences related to given categories (Benaquisto, 2008; Bryman, 2012), in order to build a picture of the structural context that give birth to the current heritage practices and eventually the phenomenon of heritagisation. During axial coding empirical regularities are clustered to their underlying causal powers and liabilities (Hoddy, 2019). The movement from the empirical to the real requires both retroductive approach and abstraction. As Zachariadis *et al.* (2013) stated, during retroductive analysis the researcher infer about the possible mechanisms and structures capable of generating the phenomenon. Mechanisms such as ‘conservation restrictions’ and ‘statutory control’ are process that have triggered the causal powers of ‘social practices’. For instance, once a centralized system of governance was established the causal powers of ‘limiting polyvocality’ and ‘efficiency in decision making’ were activated. These causal powers constrain and enable clergy, local communities, and tourists in different ways. Equally, the ‘soft’ stance taken by ICOMOS towards the decisions of DoA resulted that the mechanism ‘statutory control’ to be a weak mechanisms in the sense that monitoring is fairly superficial.

Two more epistemological consideration need to be mentioned at this stage. Firstly, in accordance with Sayer (1992), this analysis has also paid attention to those power that may not be active or those that remained inactive due to the presence of countervailing mechanisms (Sayer 1992). Thus, certain mechanisms tend to dominate others while others are able to reinforce each other depending on the contextual circumstances (Danermark *et al.* 2002; Sayer, 2000). The second consideration is that attention should be given between the discursive and the non-discoursal elements of the social. Thus, alongside institutional structures such as DoA and Church of Cyprus during retroductive analysis alongside the abstraction generative mechanisms and their social structures (etc. DoA and Church of Cyprus) the two prominent discourses of AHD and ‘Living Religious Tradition’ were also abstracted, and their causal powers established. This analytical distinction is important in order to understand the complex dialectical relation between the two (Porpora, 2013) such as how institutional structures and powerful actors internalize and operationalize certain discourses.

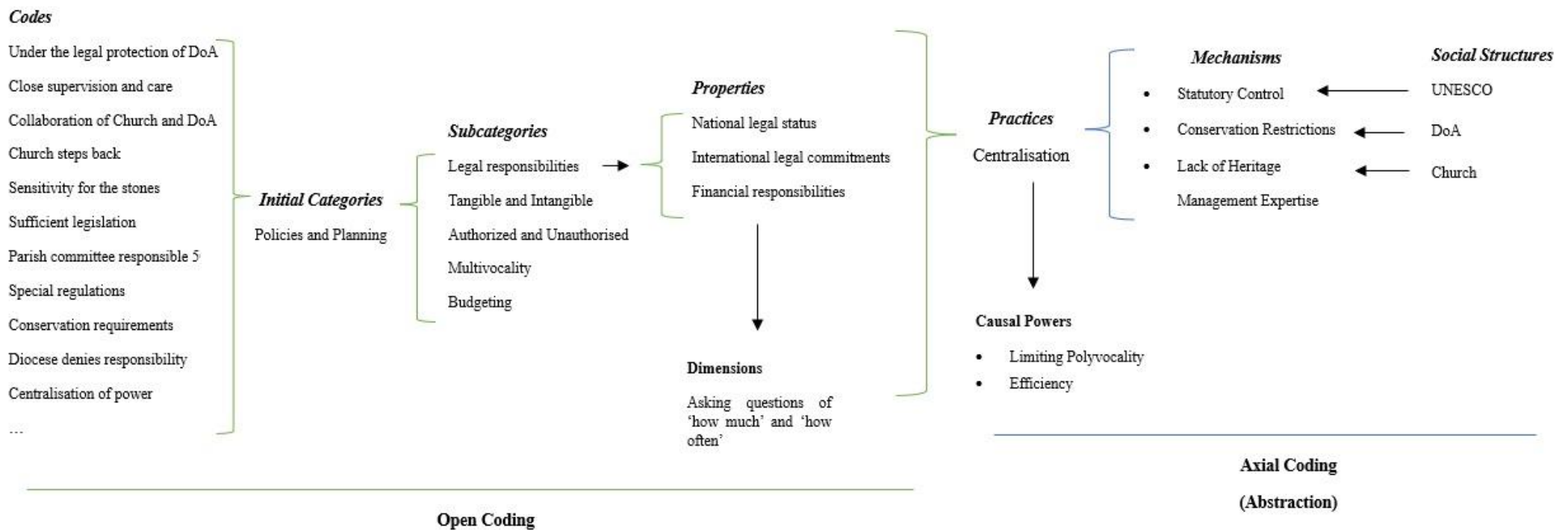


Figure 13 Retroductive Analysis: Open Coding and Abstraction (Axial Coding)

During the first cycle of coding (open coding), 'In Vivo' and 'Versus' coding was adopted to 'capture the actual and conceptual conflicts between participants' (Saldaña, 2013, p. 61) that derived from the interviews with institutional actors and the document analysis. While data from documents help make inferences about events and people's values (Stake, 2010), these documents do not represent reality (what happens). Still, they are part of the evidence base that helps uncover deeper generative mechanisms (Zachariadis et al., 2013). During this phase, the codes were allocated in initial categories (i.e., policies/planning, conservation) and their sub-categories (i.e., legal responsibilities, preventive conservation) that further specify the initial categories. The next step refines these sub-categories, searching for properties and dimensions. Properties refer to the characteristics or attributes of a category, while dimensions show how the range of the properties of a category varies by asking 'how much' and 'how often' questions (Corbin and Strauss, 1998). The second phase (axial coding) aimed to reorganise and reanalyse the data strategically by linking sub-categories to the underlying practices (and their causal powers) and mechanisms.

The study recruits the notion of 'social practices' (as those entities mediating the relationship between structures, including discourse, and events (Fairclough, 2005) to portray a clearer empirical picture of how the powers of macro-level entities (Church, Department of Antiquities, UNESCO) are actualised in the specific context of Cyprus. In terms of sequence firstly the mechanisms were abstracted and then I realized that they form a centralised system.

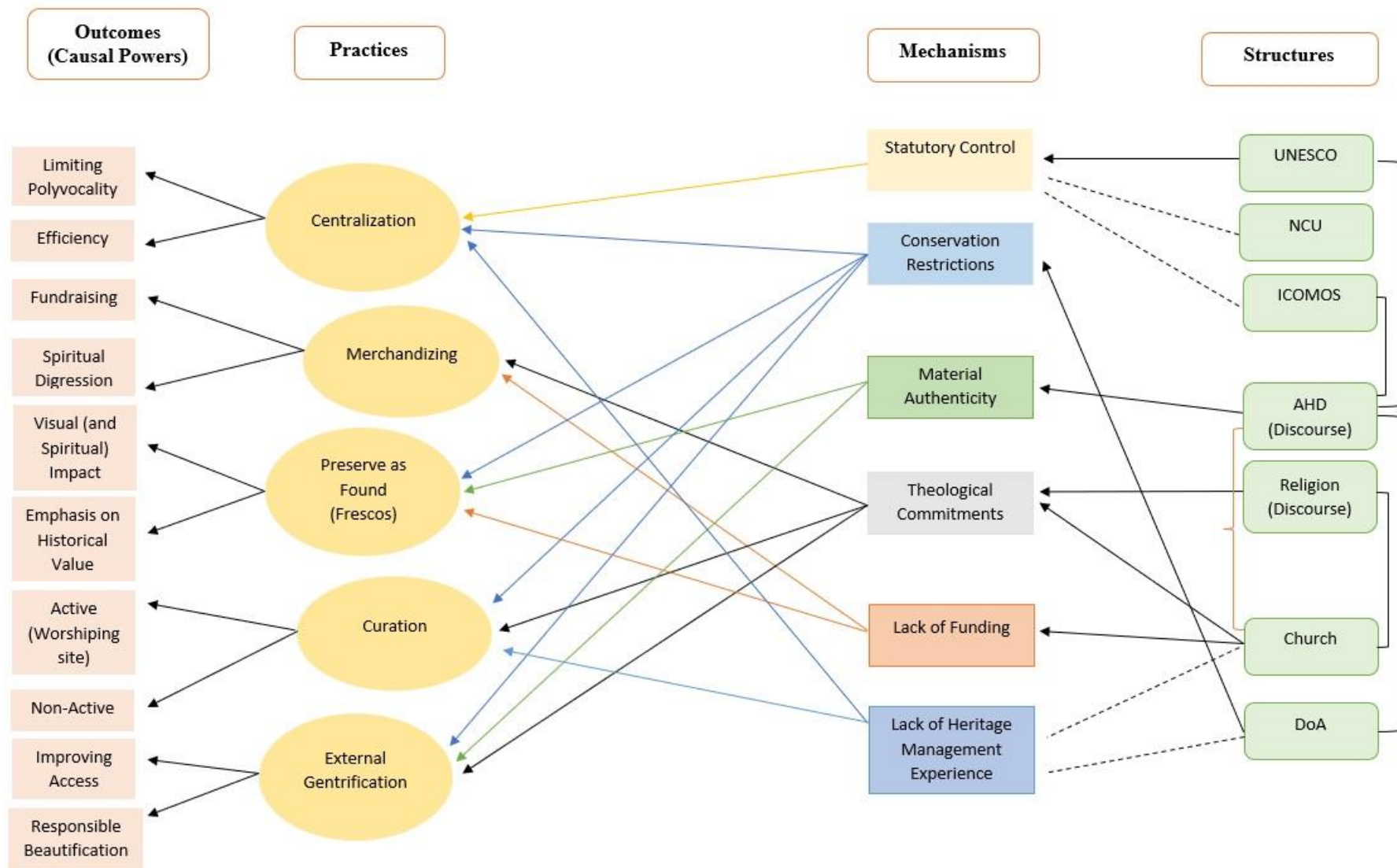


Figure 14 Structural Analysis (Axial Coding)

4.6.2 Interviews with Visitors: Objective 2

Visitors' interview data were coded and analysed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), 'thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data... and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (p. 6-10) followed by latent analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that latent analysis (in contrast to semantic where the researcher does not investigate underlying meanings) go beyond the surface investigating underlying meanings. Latent analysis seeks to 'theorise the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions' underlying people's accounts (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 14). As far as the data analysis is concerned, thematic analysis is featured as the dominant coding strategy among researchers working within the epistemological margins of analytical dualism. For example, scholars such as Davidson (2012) and Bonnington (2015) who applied Archer's reflexivity theory in their studies they regrouped their data within the four reflexivity categories identified by Archer which were used as 'deductive conceptual categories'.

Once the causal powers of the 'practices' were abstracted, the study examined visitors' responses to them. This sequence is essential as understanding 'conditional action' (that shapes agential action) requires an understanding of the structural conditioning (see 'preserve as found strategy') that constrains and enables interaction between individuals (Elder-Vass, 2022). Drawing on thematic analysis, the coding proceeded in two stages. Initially, visitors concerns and motivations were identified using In Vivo and Theoretical coding (Table 7 page 150). Subsequently, the researcher coded the visitors' responses toward the particular strategy and the powers activated in each case. According to Archer (2003), different people activate different causal powers based on their concerns. Three stances (themes) emerged inductively from the data that showcase how visitors are aligned or in discord with the particular strategy: '**compliant**,' indicating an alignment between visitors and existing strategies, '**antagonistic**,' when people expressed their discontent with the existing system, and lastly, '**ambivalent**,' demonstrating peoples' uncertainty. For example, a visitor who believes that gentrification demonstrates care was grouped under the theme 'compliant' while the visitor who argued that gentrification undermines authenticity by creating a fake impression he was grouped under the theme 'antagonistic'. Equally, if the same visitor considered the preservation of frescos in their fragmented state, she/he was assigned under the group 'compliant' demonstrating an approval towards material stasis.

The validity of the themes was reviewed, ensuring that all codes fit to the themes and that the whole process forms a meaningful organic whole. After that a detailed analysis was written for each individual demonstrating what stance they take towards each one of the five practices. The rich data helped the researcher to go beyond the three salient themes and explain underlying meanings and reveal visitors' agency and critical judgment. This 'latent analysis' helped the researcher to explain better visitor stances and how they dovetail their concerns with the constraints and enables of the practices found at the two churches. For example, as discussed in section 6.2.1 (see also Figure 19 page 229) the three stances are discussed vis-à-vis with the three conceptualizations of perceived authenticity, as discussed in Table 4 (page 46). Compliant and ambivalent stances embrace objective authenticity while antagonistic stance is related to constructivist and postmodern authenticity.

4.7 Ethical Issues

Prior to the commences of the fieldwork I asked permission from Church of Cyprus, who is considered as gatekeeper, to access the two churches. It was agreed that a small degree of surveillance and control over the fieldwork would take place by the keepers to ensure that the interest of the Church is safeguarded. Considering the sensitive sacred space, the interviews conducted outside of daily cycle of services when the two churches were open to the general public, at the church's courtyard. The visitors were given the opportunity to enter the church and engage with the space. Unlike other recruitment methods, during which the participant would have been approached before entering the church, this strategy provided the opportunity to visitors to experience the place undistracted. Thus, the visitor did not have her/his experienced spoiled or comprised by being isolated from the rest of the group/family during the initial contact with the church. Participants were approached in a friendly, social yet ethical and professional manner. Having given the opportunity to the visitors to engage with the space the researcher introduced himself. Potential participants were asked if they were interested to be recruited. They were verbally, being described the objectives of the study, their contribution value and the interview process.

Written consent (Figures 20 and 21) was acquired during formal interviews, where various aspects of the project were explained to participants. These include the nature of the project, the legal basis for the collection and data use, the research methods to be employed by the project (recorded semi-structured interviews) and full explanation of any technical terms used such as 'heritagization' 'tangible and intangible heritage' 'cultural memory'. Additionally, and in line with Sheffield University ethical code, the participants were informed what was expected from them and that they have the right to withdraw their consent (at any time of the research without giving a reason) or to refuse to answer questions. Regarding the recording material, the researcher ensured that every detail on how these recordings will be produced, used, stored, and published were made clear to the participants during informed consent. Lastly it was explained to them how the data will be stored and used prior or after their publications and for how long. All the above information were written in plain language and given to the participants in 'a participant information sheet'.

Religious beliefs were regarded as a sensitive topic under certain circumstances as it is part of the identity of many people. Religion could become an upsetting topic when someone's beliefs are challenged, when her/his belief is trivialized or by addressing sensitive 'secular' topics related to morality and ethical code such as abortion and homosexuality. As Olsen stated

it is often the case that pilgrims do not like their faith to be challenged (Olsen, 2013). During fieldwork the researcher did not provoke in any way sensitive topics or challenge visitors beliefs or cause distress to the participants. While in cases visitors chose to share some personal beliefs, these were treated with respect and compassion. Questions surrounding religion and church were concentrated on the new role church has to play as guardian of cultural patrimony and other management and conservation issues related to the two churches. Any questions that directly involved the concept of religion and belief were reduced to demographics, such as people's self-identification as tourists, pilgrims or 'something in between'. Asking visitors' religious affiliation or religious motives is a usual and acceptable practice in religious tourism studies as it has been demonstrated in other similar studies (Božic *et al.* 2016; Irimias *et al.* 2016; Hughes *et al.* 2013; Tucker and Carnegie, 2014; Nyaupane *et al.* 2015; Terzidou *et al.* 2018; etc.). The data were fully anonymised while all photos have been given the necessary credit (see Appendixes). In any case identifiable personal information will be used (future publication) with the consent of the data subject and any actions will comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the UK Data Protection Act 2018, and the Common Law Duty of Confidentiality. The photos that have not been taken by the author were retrieved either from academic textbooks or from Wikipedia granted Creative Commons Public Licenses (see Appendices for Attribution).

4.8 Quality Criteria and Researcher's Reflexivity

This chapter discusses how, in this study, the author considered the four qualitative assessment criteria namely dependability, credibility and transferability - confirmability (Denzin and Lincoln 2005) during the design, execution and data report phases.

Dependability, according to Saunders *et al.* (2016) refers to the transparency of the research, including the 'recording all of the changes to produce a reliable/dependable account of the emerging research focus that may be understood and evaluated by others' (2016, p. 206). Keeping memos, especially during data collection and analysis, helped the researcher to reflect on the process and identify grey areas that needed clarification or improvement in terms of conceptual and analytical design adopted (Maxwell 2012). Two characteristic examples are the difficulty in sourcing interviewees or convincing key stakeholders to participate, as well as the difficulty in finding appropriate methodological and analytical techniques that are compatible with CR, the researcher was not conscious of at the beginning. To help the reader, understand various complexities related to this study, there is an element of overlap between chapters where epistemological assumptions and methodological choices as well as the conceptual framework are reiterated throughout the thesis complemented by figures and tables.

Credibility refers to the accurate representation of participants' socially constructed realities and what they want to convey (Saunders *et al.* 2016), something that demonstrates the integrity, character, and quality of the researcher (Brinberg and McGrath, 1985, p. 13). Various aspects of the 'heritagization' process were discussed with stakeholders that hold different positions, something that allowed the author to test the credibility and trustworthiness of certain accounts and enhance 'interpretive validity' (Maxwell, 2012). Stakeholders accounts were based on their beliefs, interests, and perspectives (even concealing the truth on how they understood various problems). In realist research these accounts are considered as constructions from a particular perspective and although helpful in helping to understand the relationship between actors, they are different from the 'real world' which is possible to be investigated (Maxwell, 2012) and it does not mean that the views presented in the interviews represent the totality of someone's actual views (Maxwell, 2021). Characteristic examples were the 'closed toilets' with key stakeholders shifting the blame between them. Additionally in order to avoid 'descriptive validity' (Maxwell, 2012) all interviews were recorded to ensure that I have not misheard, or mis transcribe anything, while a verbatim transcription was followed document all verbal feedback provided. In order to overcome problems derived from

derive from abstraction (theoretical validity) by projecting my own fallible constructions in the data (Maxwell, 2012) this study followed a rigorous collection and analysis procedures that helped the researcher to ground abstracted mechanisms in grounded data. In doing so this thesis provides an insight into the ‘categorizing (coding) and connecting’ analytical strategies and abstracts from interviews. Equally, in order to enhance theoretical validity this study provides a thorough explanation of CR philosophy including its view on important concepts for this topic such as that of ‘discourse’.

Transferability ‘refers to the extent to which the findings of a research study are applicable to other settings’, and in qualitative research is used to provide insight that can develop existing theories instead of statistical generalizability. (Saunders 2016, p. 398). While in general findings from qualitative research are not replicated/generalized due to the contextual and individualistic interpretations of participants (Sayer, 1992), providing a full and thorough description of research design, findings and interpretation could provide the opportunity for future researchers to examine the transferability and the confirmability of the particular research design, or certain aspects of it, in different settings (Saunders *et al.* 2016). Thus, for a CR driven study it is important to communicate the processes, meaning and local contextual influences involved in the phenomenon under investigation (Maxwell, 2012). Various tables and figures have a complementary role to help readers to understand the conceptual and analytical issues raised in this thesis. These ‘networks’ form (logical) extensions of coding and causal analysis linking concrete data with more abstract categories (Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative studies though are able to contribute to what Maxwell (2021) described as internal and external generalizability (transferability to other settings or populations). The former aims to capture the diversity of views within specific setting. The latter requires an understanding of the processes and contextual influences that gave rise to the original outcome and an understanding of the contextual influences of new settings searching for causal explanations (Maxwell, 2021). In other words, for a CR researcher the aim is to explore how the causal mechanisms identified in this study are manifested or not and in what ways in different settings.

Researcher’s reflexivity refers to the awareness of researcher about his role in the research, a process of thinking how the object of the research influences the researcher and how the latter affects the process of the research and the outcome (Haynes, 2012; Maxwell, 2012). The sensitive spiritual environment of the church, that on many occasions spark deep

affective and cognitive emotions, greeting formalities (clergy) and suspicions surrounding the audio-recording process which inevitably alters a naturally occurring conversation making participants more reluctant to reveal things. Characteristically in different occasions visitors became deeply emotional and they shared with me personal (health) problems, or they engaged in an open reflection regarding their relationship with God.

Also, the researcher was aware that his perception was influenced by the epistemological and ontological framework, political views, motivations for undertaking the research and personal values (Haynes, 2012). Discussing realist ethnographic fieldwork Roberts and Sanders (2005), found that during fieldwork structures (funders, university departments) mechanisms and context influence the way researchers undertake their research. In order to minimize this, Saunders *et al.* (2016) advocate for a learning cycle during which the researcher reflects on previous experiences and observations improving his practices. In this vein, the researcher kept a reflective diary in chronological order taking notes (about conversations, incidents, emotions and emergent thoughts) and questioning his practices, the language used and how things can improve. This process can help the researcher to understand how his pre-existing thoughts influence the execution of the study and how they are constantly revised in the light of new ones and assist towards methodological reflexivity in the sense of revising the methods considering the effectiveness, of data collection (Haynes, 2012). This was evident during the interpretation of the data when the researcher realized gaps in his knowledge and blind spots that eventually forced him to return and enrich the literature review, clarify aspects of the conceptual framework, and revisit the analysis of the data.

In hindsight, some of the questions (see question 9, second part) could have been improved as they had a 'leading' character. This happened mainly because the researcher was influenced by the literature and theory on heritage studies that look for dissonance and contestation in the management of WHS. However, the impact of these questions in the final data was not significant as they were following up questions which in most cases were not raised as the participants touched on those areas. For example, priest S6, described UNESCO as the 'experts', 'specialists' and 'big family' in his introductory comments demonstrating how he internalized assumptions of AHD such as expert-led conservation. In retrospect, these questions could have been avoided if the author has undertaken a pilot study which was compromised due to Covid-19 pandemic and constant change of supervisors and priorities set by the later.

5. Presentation of Findings

Overview:

This chapter comprises two parts, with the first addressing the macro level of heritagization, such as the institutional dynamics (Objective 1) and the second the micro level, visitors' responses towards management strategies (Objective 2). The two sections are organically connected. The first part of the analysis presents and discusses the five core institutional practices manifested in the management of the two churches and the underlying process (mechanisms) responsible for those practices (Figure 14). Alongside the mechanisms the section discusses the way the two disclosures (AHD and religious discourse) have been internalized by social actors. Once the causal powers of the 'practices' were abstracted, the study examined visitors' responses to them. This sequence is essential as understanding 'conditional action' (that shapes agential action) requires an understanding of the structural conditioning (preserve as found strategy) that constrains and enables interaction between individuals (Elder-Vass, 2022). Thus, the second part (section 5.2) presents visitors' responses towards the causal powers of the practices that shape the pre-structured environment they encounter during their visit.

5.1 The Dialectics of Heritage Management in Cyprus

This section addresses the macro level of the heritagization of Cypriot religious sites. In line with Maxwell (2012), the data presentation in each sub-section presents one theme to provide analytical transparency. However, during analysis, all codes were analysed together. The outcomes of each section are taken into consideration in the subsequent sections. Section 5.1.6 summarises the main results and presents the causal powers of the five practices, paving the road for the analysis of visitors' responses in section 5.2.

5.1.1 Policy and Planning

Dissonance and contestation at religious sites are particularly evident in the efforts to blend modern conservation ethos and other secular aspirations on the one hand, with living tradition and theological concerns on the other, without degrading the sanctity of the sites

According to ICOMOS officer (S11), the archaeological law is considered a powerful legal instrument, and it is highly respected in Cyprus, allowing the state to protect monuments of great historical value. According to the DoA officer (S10), such restrictions are essential as people usually do not have the necessary sensitivity to protect historic monuments.

‘Listing monuments or declaring them as WHS is a restriction... without those restrictions, we wouldn’t have anything; they would have been destroyed’ (S10).

Archival research has demonstrated that the close stewardship enacted by the DoA has resulted in significant improvements that led to the nomination and eventual declaration of the 10 Byzantine churches of Troodos mountains as WH sites in 1985. While some small-scale maintenance works, such as conserving timberwork and unstable masonry, took place during colonial times, the first major conservation project started after the 1960s when Cyprus gained independence. Since then, the DoA proceeded in small-scale maintenance and restoration work, including strengthening works, restoration of roof and masonry, insulation, as well as stabilisation and cleaning of frescos. The main conservation projects for St. Nickolas took place on two occasions. The first was in the 1970s, and the second was between 2005 and 2015, when extensive landscaping was undertaken to improve access and parking (St. John’s archives No 2/9/2 Volume). At St. John’s, the main conservation works were undertaken in the late 1960s and early 1970s, while in the early 21st century, a foreign institute specialized in the conservation of frescos undertook a large-scale restoration project (St. John’s archives N2/36/3 14.03.2003. 36). As Officer S10 indicated, these improvements were critical in considering those churches as WH sites in 1985. However, while the conservation works and the WH designation were a welcomed development from the Cypriot Church, these conservation works did not pass unchallenged.

The study of archives indicated tensions early on in the co-ownership of the two churches due to the tentative ways the DoA authorised conservation projects during the colonial period (before 1960). According to archival research, in 1936, the local bishop expressed his discontent about including the lodgings of the monastery under the conservation law, something that would prevent the church from demolishing and rebuilding them. Although the bishop professed 112 reasons why the monastery should not be listed as an ancient monument, the then-director of antiquities refused such an exception (St. John’s archives Letter from DoA Direction 19336). According to English antiquarians, both church and monastery are considered a homogenous complex of great architectural value and preserving them is of public

interest. On a few occasions since then, local initiatives, especially at the village of Kalopanagiotis (St John) expressed through the ecclesiastical committee (comprising of villagers answering to the bishop) have also been declined as inappropriate for the archaeological status of these sites (see Figure 17). These include landscaping works initiated in 1971, in close vicinity to the monastery, for harming historic foundations despite locals' claim that they were entitled to do so as the surrounding area of the monastery belongs to the village. A proposal for holiday accommodation near St. Nickolas that had the church's approval was rejected by the DoA because it was considered too close to the church (Archives of St. Nickolas entry: 1987 N 2/36/2 Start 15/10/73 – 28/01/99). In 1995, a request from the local council to execute landscaping works around the monastery, including the parking area, was also declined because such infrastructure works would raise problems of tourist flow and contestation. Additionally, in 1996, the request to establish a shop within the monastery was declined due to concerns regarding fire hazards and lousy management. In the same year, the request for establishing a pier near the monastery (easter Orthodox traditional custom) was also rejected for safety reasons. During these exchanges, the DoA clarified that any future development such as structural works (roads, cobble yards) or cultural and social events, including fairs, attracting large numbers of people and consumption of food, should be consulted and closely monitored by the DoA (St. John archives *Letters* No 2/9/2 1994-1997). Considering the accounts that revealed close hierarchical supervision backed up with strict legal regulations that draw a line between authorised and unauthorised practices, the first mechanism abstracted is '**conservation restrictions**'. This mechanism that manifests the power of 'DoA' (organisational structure) has a long tradition on the island and has shaped the conservation of the monuments over the last 100 years, constituting the DoA as a potent regulator and steward for the two churches.

According to clergy (S1, S7) and other actors (such as conservator S5) engaging with religious heritage, funding is a diachronic problem in the ranks of the Church. According to the ecclesiastical canon, traditionally, the funds required for conservation works at churches are provided by the ecclesiastical committees, whose main source of income is the local congregation offerings, a budget that is distributed only with the consent of the local bishop, while in those occasions when parishes cannot fund important conservation works (such as or restoration of portable relics), the local diocese could contribute (S13). Financial difficulties have been exaggerated in the last decades by the shrinking congregation in rural Cyprus due to urban deprivation and, recently, the pandemic (S1, S10, S13). According to the Cypriot

ecclesiastical canon, each bishopric is responsible for providing administrative and financial assistance to its parishes. In other words, each diocese manages its budget, and with this budget, they conserve the monuments. However, it should be noted that some dioceses are richer than others (S1). For instance, the diocese of Morphou (where 7 out of 10 UNESCO sites are located, including St. John's monastery) is considered one of the richest (S1). From local parishioners' viewpoint, local churches are suffocated between financial restrictions on the one hand and the conservation law on the other. Local priests often ignore regulations and authorities and use 'unauthorised' conservation programs (S12).

'I am telling you that we have not reached the levels we want to reach. This is because there is a lack of funding/financial support [from DoA] ... One monument may require anything between 200 000 to 500 000 thousand euros' (S1).

'That project [restoration of a sacred cave] was entirely on me I found this money from my friends and praying to the saint. Usually, ecclesiastical committees have their own. As a priest, I cannot touch on this money. The committee has the president etc and you should ask the bishop to allow you to use this budget' (S12).

The data above built a clear path towards the second mechanism, **'lack of funding,'** that takes the form of liability for the church. This liability was abstracted through various empirical regularities, including financial obligations, costly conservation projects and shrinking local congregation. The analysis has further demonstrated that the DoA has taken advantage of this 'gap'. The following two examples illustrate how funding can be a susceptibility for the church. The first was detected during the archival study of St. John's archives. In 1999, the newly elected bishop (still in office) proceeded with some conservation works at the monastery of St. John's without prior consultation with the DoA. When the bishop demanded reimbursement, the DoA refused because the works undertaken had not been submitted and authorised by the department as the protocol commands. No similar initiatives from the local bishop have been undertaken since. Acknowledging how sensitive the issue of funding for the Church is, the DoA activates this susceptibility by refusing reimbursement. The second example emerged after a discussion with Officer **S10**. In the 2000s, an unofficial institutional change regarding funding occurred at those sites that further shifted the balance between local dioceses and the DoA. As interviewee **S10** explained, the funding obligations (50%-50% between the DoA and the owner) derived from the antiquities law change for the 10 UNESCO. The new status allows external donors to cover 50% of the conservation funding

expected by the church. This usually happens by drawing in external benefactors such as ‘Leventis Institute’ a popular patron in Cyprus. According to Officer **S10**, something acknowledged by clergyman **S1**, this happened to avoid confrontations and disputes that would slow down restoration projects. Thus, we see the DoA taking advantage of the liability ‘lack of funding’ either to enhance the mechanism ‘conservation restrictions’ as the first example demonstrated or to proceed with conservation projects faster without being slowed down by financial difficulties or other concerns expressed by local bishoprics. Thus, we can argue that the DoA uses the two mechanisms to consolidate a hierarchical policy framework that promotes the DoA’s vision and priorities.

The next stage of the analysis was to decipher the role and involvement of UNESCO and how it impacts the traditional relationship between the DoA and the Church of Cyprus. As curator **S2** explains, the involvement of international bodies is a welcome development in Cyprus, which not only bust international tourism but, most importantly, raises awareness towards ecclesiastical patrimonial heritage, especially in a world where religious heritage is targeted by extremists or neglected for political reasons.

‘The fact that 10 out of the 13 Ecclesiastical monuments in Cyprus say something... We (Church of Cyprus) promote ecclesiastical heritage, and more churches have been nominated’ (S1).

‘Because we have negative consequences such as the destruction of monuments in the Middle East from Islamic Fanatics and Turks. This is not helpful. What has happened for the last 50 years in North Cyprus is inadmissible. Until yesterday, Greek Cypriot patrimony was destroyed in North Cyprus.... (WHS) receive attention. These are the monuments that you can see everywhere. I think that UNESCO monuments are cultural centres’ (S2).

The accounts mentioned above demonstrate how the Church of Cyprus thinks highly of WH designation to raise awareness towards its patrimonial heritage and underscore national and political messages. Equally, UNESCO’s brand name enhances the status of the Church as the legitimate owner of these historic places.

The situation is more complicated regarding the involvement of UNESCO in conservation and monitoring. The DoA officer **S10** described UNESCO’s involvement as ‘a legal protection’. The interviewee stressed the importance of meeting the regulations and guidelines set by UNESCO and highlighted how nonadherence could trigger penalties and eventually withdrawal. From DoA’s point of view, due to their WH designation, these churches

acquired an upgraded legal status expressed through new responsibilities and regulations custodians should meet. However, in contrast to this reading of UNESCO, the ICOMOS officer (S12) argued that UNESCO status is not legal but a characterisation that provides some obligations and responsibilities. The following abstract indicates how the DoA understands the involvement of UNESCO.

UNESCO does not legally own those sites, but they have the 'legal' oversight; UNESCO also has an obligation. Nothing changes with the involvement of UNESCO in the management of the place (S10).

[is UNESCO's involvement an issue?] *'No. On the contrary, the plus side is that the state controls the monuments, and, so you avoid the ecclesiastical committees and the bishops, and you conserve them as you want. Of course, there are many obligations, and there is always the danger of losing the status' (S10).*

After a probing question towards the ICOMOS officer (S11) on whether he believes that the DoA uses UNESCO status to enhance its position against the Church or local communities, the interviewee stated:

'Yes, this can happen. They may say that arbitrary interventions will jeopardise the monument's status, so UNESCO will report us. It is a strong card... because they are under the spotlight's glare' (S11).

Another mechanism that can be deduced from this account and is also evident in the literature is the power of UNESCO to exert **'statutory control'** over state parties. The accounts mentioned above demonstrate that the two mechanisms, 'statutory control' and 'conservation restrictions', enhance each other. This alliance between the DoA and UNESCO has left an impact on the conservation of the churches. From the perspective of the Church, UNESCO complicates the management of those sites, making the DoA oversensitive towards living practices that could impact the integrity and originality of these sites (S1, S7). The Church's main concern is that UNESCO places particular concern on the materiality of those sites and less so on religious practices and Orthodox theology. According to the clergyman (S7), UNESCO places greater emphasis on the history and architectural value of these sites and less on the spiritual dimension evident through preventive conservation expressed through various policies (removal of candle holders, prevention of mysteries, among others).

‘Yes, I believe they restrict us. They do not put terms or restrictions to execute liturgies, but as it works in practice, as a museum space, it does not serve our liturgical needs. On the other hand, especially the particular church we are discussing, it is in such a location and considering each capacity, it wouldn’t be able to serve different types of mysteries’ (S7).

At this analysis stage, I tried to understand how much impact the WH designation has on managing the sites under consideration. To answer this question, I tried to understand how the ‘conservation restriction’ mechanism plays out in a context where sites are not declared as WH. Within the CR epistemology, I tried to create a quasi-closure system by restricting how this mechanism is activated spatially (and temporarily through archival research) (Zachariadis *et al.* 2013).

After interviewing a local parishioner priest actively involved with the conservation of the local religious-built heritage, I found out that he was particularly discontent with DoA’s strict conservation policy, as the following account demonstrates:

‘We gave a great battle to renovate and reveal the church of St Giorgos. This is what happens when officials employed by the DoA approach churches as monuments that are not alive. Saints are alive, you know. Thankfully, the DoA was not involved. We did the project by ourselves. An official was not very happy about this’ (V12).

The account above demonstrates that when the two mechanisms are not combined, locals are more likely to find ways to bypass specific policies. This could also be related to the fact that the DoA’s control over UNESCO churches is the sticker of fear of losing the WHS. Nevertheless, UNESCO is a strong card in the hands of the DoA.

It also must be highlighted that the Church’s stance towards conservation restrictions is not homogenous. As demonstrated later in specific practices such as the conservation of frescos, the clergy’s stance varies from very mild reactions, usually shown in churches that lost their congregation and fell in inactivity, and stronger resistances, especially in monasteries where the living character is more prominent. Few clergymen (S1, S13) used the monasteries as examples to criticize the DoA’s ‘obsessive’ behaviours and ‘compulsive syndromes’ to freeze such sites and compromise the basic needs of monks. In an informal discussion with a monk at the church of St. Nickolas I encountered during one of my visits, he described UNESCO as a dictator who imposed their will without consideration in the monasteries. He also pointed out that the holy sites which have been declared as WH monuments started rapidly losing their functional character:

The accounts above are not far from the truth, as the following abstract indicates, as DoA considers the living character of religious built heritage an inherent problem that needs delicate mitigation.

‘... the problem is with monasteries. Monasteries are a big problem. Isolated small chapels do not present major challenges. They are conserved once every ten years. But when a small brotherhood of 5 or 10 nuns occupies a small, abandoned monastery. They start building, see other monasteries, and get jealous... we visited the place one month later and found all the walls nailed with old and contemporary icons. Why, father, have you put this there? And the response is, ‘I want to see icons’. They do not see it as a monument.’ (S10)

Concluding remarks

This sub-section discussed the institutional dynamics developed during the heritagization process. This initial analysis has demonstrated that the DoA has established a centralised system of management that reduces alternative sub-discourses around development. Thus, we see mechanisms such as ‘conservation restrictions’ and ‘statutory control’ to restrict the involvement of other stakeholders and their discourses, often by taking advantage of their internal pathogenesis, such as ‘lack of funding’. This approach creates a ‘centralised’ (practice) system of decision-making that favours those sharing the values of AHD, such as material authenticity over development. This centralisation has the power to limit polyvocality but, at the same time, to ensure efficiency in terms of conservation and protection. In terms of conservation, the preferred praxis is that of ‘external gentrification’ that has a dual purpose: to beautify the place in a responsible manner using compatible materials and traditional techniques (responsible beautification) and improve access; the following section delves further into how this centralisation is achieved examining the coordination between institutions.

5.1.2 Stewardship, Reporting and Coordination

Due to the increasing number of stakeholders, I considered it essential during the early stages of data collection to shed more light on the channels of communication between the ‘authorising institutions of heritage’ (Smith, 2006) to better understand how centralisation works. Mainly, I was interested in finding out whether any control mechanisms in place would constitute the DoA accountable for its decisions.

The DoA, as the highest authority in Cyprus on issues of cultural heritage management, is a self-referential institution whose power derives from the archaeological law (S12). Two institutions have the statutory power to question its policies: Cyprus ICOMOS and the Cyprus National Commission for UNESCO (NCU). Although ICOMOS has the statutory authority to report their own countries to the International ICOMOS for violations, this strategy is generally avoided (S12). The relationship between ICOMOS and the DoA varies depending on the stance and the agenda of the ICOMOS at the time. While tensions between the two institutions sparked during the previous presidency of ICOMOS, in recent years, the new committee presidency has taken a different stance based on dialogue and proactive planning (S11). According to him, by maintaining good relationships, the DoA and other governmental bodies could avoid mismanagement and resolve problems more efficiently, preventing formal complaints that do more harm than good. As the following quote demonstrates, although ICOMOS has the potential to activate the causal power of ‘statutory control’, it chooses not to report the DoA. Still, it raises some concerns unofficially.

‘...the positioning of the newly built toilets obscures the view towards the church. After an investigation, the project was undertaken by officers without prior consultation. That project was poorly conceptualised; the DoA makes mistakes sometimes. As Cyprus ICOMOS, although we highlighted the problem to the president of the DoA, we did not want to escalate it further’ (S11).

NCU is the representative body of UNESCO in Cyprus (S11). According to the ICOMOS officer (S11), this institution is not responsible for any budget, while the collaboration with other governmental institutions has been deemed limited. The NCU committee is small and staffed with representatives of DoA. Their primary responsibilities include the preparation of nomination dossiers, publications and dissemination, intangible heritage well and providing administrative and legal support (S1, S10, S11).

The two individuals running the institution are unfamiliar with conservation issues; thus, they do not consider themselves fit to assess (informal interview with NCU officer). This was also witnessed by me when I approached the officers of NCU for an interview, who directed me to officers of the DoA for issues related to building heritage and conservation. However, the absence of consultation and formal reporting between the two DoA and NCU (S12) is offset by the presence of officers of the DoA not only within NCU but also in Cyprus ICOMOS.

Thus, DoA officers participate in both institutions responsible for controlling the policies of DoA.

‘Cyprus ICOMOS comprises 12 people, the majority of whom are architects and archaeologists, while other specialists such as topographers complement the committee.

Some of those are officers of the DOA’ (S11).

The accounts above suggest that the DoA operates as a self-monitoring institution. Other evidence to support these assumptions includes the reporting process. Apart from a periodic report UNESCO demands from state parties every five years, it appears that there are no other inspections from UNESCO (S16). As the DoA officer (S10) explained, UNESCO is not involved in the management of sites at a national level (such as the construction of particular walls or cleaning of frescos), where the responsibility falls with the DoA and the owner (local dioceses). The DoA keeps a written (comprising minutes of meetings, letters and emails exchanged between locals and the DoA) and photographic archive of conservation work. Upon examination of the archives, it was found that the reporting of various conservation projects was very superficial, with descriptive language. The reports comprise a few paragraphs or sentences written by the appointed conservator. These entries include the date and place where the conservation occurred and a brief explanation of what happened. This issue was raised in an interview with DoA’s conservation officer, who stressed the lack of detail reporting to the shortage of staffing (S15).

‘In the past there was no documentation regarding conservations. We can find some photographs and dates when the conservation took place. Without many details, here are some general comments. But I can tell you that we do not have the time to produce such detailed documentation...’ (S15).

The analysis of the accounts mentioned above sheds more light on how the ‘statutory control’ mechanism is exercised. While three institutions (ICOMOS, UNESCO, NCU) have the potential to operationalise this mechanism, it appears that this is not happening, at least in a strict form. Firstly, ICOMOS prefers to go soft on the DoA and use this mechanism to raise some concerns that can be resolved through dialogue and cooperation. Secondly, NCU does not have the capacity, due to incompetency, to operationalise such a mechanism, while UNESCO takes a ‘distance management’ that is limited to periodic reports. Thus, the analysis

has shown that the mechanism '*statutory control*' is a weak mechanism that is not activated by the relevant institutions on several occasions and remains dormant.

At this stage of the research, I was also interested in examining the coordination between local stakeholders such as the Church of Cyprus and local communities. Church of Cyprus, as the primary stakeholder of these sites, retains a close relationship primarily with the DoA (**S1**, **S4**, **S7**, **S15**). From the perspective of the church, communication is generally considered as good. According to the ICOMOS officer (**S11**), the Church of Cyprus has no heritage management policy on cultural heritage management issues. Usually, bishops initiate conservation projects without prior consultation with the DoA and without having the necessary expertise or consultation (**S11**). However, although this policy is limited and often to the discretion of bishops' quirk, it is still subject to the agendas, budgets, and aspirations of the DoA. Due to the liability of lack of funding, the Church of Cyprus usually relies on European funds. One of these is a European program called 'Philokalia', through which the Cypriot church could acquire European funds up to 500.000 euros. Despite this generous program, not all dioceses take kindly such initiatives, arguing that they cannot afford to contribute the expected 15% of the conservation budget (**S1**). As clergyman (**S1**) further explained from the eight dioceses, only the diocese of Limassol has a technical department. The rest depends on the DoA.

On a more practical level, aside from the yearly checks for each monument, formal meetings and opinion exchanges occur only in extensive development works such as landscaping and gentrification (**S7**). As a general observation, people employed at the two churches were more eager to highlight underlying tensions between the two institutions than the bishops. Characteristically, responder **S3** stated constant tensions between the DoA and the Church of Cyprus, with her receiving conflicting accounts between the legal owner (church) and conservation steward (DoA). One such occasion is when the DoA built hygiene facilities at St. Nickolas' without prior consultation with the Church during the redevelopment works. Although the diocese did not raise particular objections, the last objected to allocating funding for maintenance, claiming that they had not been informed about their construction in the first place. At the monastery of St. John's, informants expressed some discontent toward the slow response from the DoA on conservation issues, including the provision of rain shelters, signage, and protective wooden covers for masonry. However, in a similar question, the administrative diocese responsible for St Joh (diocese of Morphou) expressed a different, more understanding

stance, highlighting through the slow reflexives of the DoA to keep pace with new needs such as wheelchair ramps:

'I think the DOA responds. My concern is the access of disabled people at monuments. We have lots of delays there. A broken wood is not the end of the world. People with disabilities should have access it's a social and religious problem. I would expect them to go faster' (S13).

The ability of the DoA to respond timely and competently to conservation issues raised at historic monuments is also proportionate to long internal pathogenesis related to understaffing. Although the DoA has been better staffed in recent years with various expertise (archaeologists, architects, engineers, conservators, Byzantinologists) that can provide multidisciplinary approaches, it is still understaffed in certain areas. For example, they do not have civil engineers and collaborate with the Department of Infrastructure (S1, S4, S5). This is further supported by participant S10, who admitted that the DoA has been diachronically understaffing. Various issues, including delays, lack of resources, technology, skills, and insufficient documentation, indicated internal pathogenies within the DoA.

The coordination between the DoA and the two villages, Kakopetria (St. Nickolas) and Kalopanagiotis (St. John), is less structured. The absence of local councils from managing the two religious sites is primarily an issue of ownership and, to a lesser extent, inclusive strategies. As the legal owner, the church of Cyprus has never favoured inclusive or bottom-up management for these sites. As clergymen (S12, S13) shared with me, the local bishop should approve any conservation or other development works at the churches and have the authority to approve or reject them based on the diocese's priorities.

'We have adopted a practice that has worked for the last 20 years. All our pastoral committees inform us about the conservation works required in their villages. We choose those projects that require imminent conservation. We discuss this with the DoA. The (local) church gives what they can do because they are tiny villages. (S13).

Taking into consideration the previous section around issues of policy and planning, in the light of this evidence we can argue that the decision-making process, especially for critical intrusive works, is a matter that remains with the DoA. As a result, stakeholders are divided between 'authorised' (DoA) and 'unauthorised' (Church and the Locals). This centralisation is acknowledged by locals and, to a certain extent, as the following evidence indicates, is

embraced. Data showed that local authorities are reluctant to be involved in the management of their local pastoral heritage. As the informant **S3** explained, the local village of Kakopetria is not involved in the management of the place, something that creates specific management issues, as we will see in the next section. According to this informant, this stance is a result of indifference. I had a similar impression when I interviewed the mayor of the village for an interview. The last refused to collaborate because the local council has nothing to do with the diocese's property. However, this indifference is an empirical demi-regularity that deserves further analysis. Discussing with the vice-mayor of Kalopanagiotis, the situation became slightly more clear. Informant **S8** admitted that the village expressed an interest in the development works around the monastery but faced resistance from both the Church and the DoA who consider the village and monastery as administratively two different things:

‘From what I have been told from previous members of the council. The Nicosia mayor sent a letter to the council here telling them to ‘not get involved in the affairs of the church’. Your responsibility is the village, not the church’. [...] Yes, we should... [collaborate], but the other site must be positive. The era when the local bishop was [an undisputable leader] and the rest of the villagers uneducated is long past’ (S8).

Further down the interview, the same informant admitted that the local council is not particularly interested in the conservation of the interior of the monastery. However, they did express interest in landscaping works, although the proposals for constructing a theatre and tourist lodgings were rejected. While locals are interested in developments that provide financial incentives, as the following account demonstrates, they also understand that involvement in decision-making also requires responsibility that they are not always willing to undertake.

‘My personal view is that we are very busy with the village. Our responsibility is to the village. It is possibly even illegal if we spend money from the village’s budget for the monastery’ (S8).

Concluding remarks

This section sheds more light on how the four major stakeholders exert influence over the management of the historic churches through two causal mechanisms, ‘statutory control’ and ‘conservation restrictions’. Through the years, the DoA has achieved to maintain a centralised system of governance through various restrictions. The accounts mentioned above

demonstrate that the two mechanisms, ‘statutory control’ and ‘conservation restrictions’, enhance each other. Equally, the cursory control taken by ICOMOS and NCU, characterised by a non-confrontational approach underscoring material values over intangible concerns, facilitates the dominance of the DoA and centralisation. Thus, ICOMOS and NCU institutional processes are primarily inactive in CR terms. It is also worth noting that the local dioceses are distant from locals. The two groups appear to be in an antagonistic relationship that often leads to new alliances between the Church and the DoA. The following three sections deepen the understanding of this phenomenon by examining how these causal powers coexist with the two dominant discourses on site: ‘religious living tradition’ and ‘AHD’.

5.1.3 Operational Management

This section addresses issues related to the operational management of the two churches, referring to the various ways managers attract, welcome, and mitigate the impact of mass tourism and their efforts to retain religious sites as living, self-sustained, spiritual spaces (Thouki, 2022). This section delves deeper into how mechanisms and discourses play out in the day-to-day management of the two churches particularly regarding tensions emerging from DoA’s decisions to impose restrictions on continuous spiritual use (religious practices) and maintenance.

Church of Cyprus considers these sites primarily as ecclesiastical living monuments that ought to serve believers’ practical and spiritual needs. They cannot be considered simply museum spaces (S7). However, the hybridity of these sites provokes a constant anxiety for the Church, which thinks the prohibition of liturgies is a step towards museumification. For clergy, it is essential to ensure that preventive conservation as a praxis does not take over the living site of the churches but works in harmony so both benefit from each other. Thus, for the Church, ‘conservation restrictions’ in preventive conservation on this occasion should not threaten living religious tradition (S1, S7, S15). The difficulty to balance living practices, motivated by reverence and piety, and preventive conservation measurements was evident in the accounts of informant S9 St. John:

‘There are many who have faith, telling me, please let me touch the icon because I have an oblation, I am sick; in these cases, I do not refuse the request. We have signs instructing that photographs and touching are prohibited, but when someone admits that he has a health problem and you see in his eyes that he believes that if he feels the icon, he will be healed, who am I to refuse it (S9)?’

While in theory, the two discourses appear incommensurable and in a perpetual conflict, in reality, the management of these sites is more harmonic than is portrayed in certain accounts. As the following data demonstrates, both sites internalise some aspects of the opposite discourse. The data indicate that the discourse of ‘living religious tradition’ is ‘cracking’, allowing ideas around preventive conservation and inherent (material) value to coexist in the management of the churches. In particular, the religious discourse in Cyprus is shifting, embracing secular values while, on certain occasions, inviting a ‘museological discourse’ as subordinate to living religion.

Our candles are natural. But yes, the candles are outside because people bring their owns with paraffin as a measure to protect the murals from getting blacked’ (S6).

‘Various mysteries (weddings/christenings) never take place here... We do not light candles, nor do we allow people to take photographs. We have these orders.’ (S3).

Thus, ideas of ‘preventive conservation’ are accepted by clergymen and justified and blended with religious tradition using historical examples and orthodox theology. Characteristically, informant S1, who has an archaeology background, appears fully in line with various restrictions to prevent damage and degradation inflicted by traditional practices (see next section). As he explained, it’s logical for these sites to have stricter regulations, considering the large number of visitors they attract. Also, considering the unique features of those sites (such as the fragile wall paintings), extra care should be taken (S1). Clergyman S1 goes one step further, arguing that everybody should respect binding international conservation and agreements.

‘Some policies are logical. For instance, they allow the [natural] light but not projectors. In those times, the light infiltrated within tiny windows, and it was controlled with curtains, etc. The churches were not exposed to excessive sunlight. Modern events using projectors cannot occur in a space where never similar practices have occurred since the creation of those frescos [...]. There are special lamps that do not emit harmful lighting that harms the frescos, and it is protective. Do not take photos with flash; take [photos] without flash. They [frescos] do not have a commercial use to treat them as such’ (S1).

Occasionally, DoA allows certain services to take place at the UNESCO churches under consideration. However, this does not suggest a peaceful coexistence between material concerns and religious practices. Having ensured that several restrictions are in place, including

the removal of candles, prohibition of unauthorised conservation works and mysteries such as weddings and christenings, and the acceptance of liturgies to take place twice a year in honour of Patron's day, suggest a strategic repositioning of DoA officers towards living religious tradition to offset tensions between the two institutions.

'Our churches, because they have the peculiarity to have owners, they remain functional. They are still churches, in some, they have been convinced to stop daily liturgies just one or two per year [...] Very few churches that belong to UNESCO are in daily use. But this is a problem' (S10).

Regarding the hybrid status of these sites, there was a consensus from all parties that more needs to be done to upgrade the tourist status of these sites to constitute them as welcoming destinations for visitors. One such issue is the protection of these sites from tourist curiosity and negligence. The church tries to restrict such incidents by appointing keepers to observe tourists or by having the churches open to the public only after request, as is happening with other isolated UNESCO chapels.

'Last year, a lady arrived without being appropriately dressed and with one leg covered in tattoos. The lady stayed outside the church, considering whether it was appropriate to enter it. I could see in her eyes that she wanted to get inside' (S9).

'People tend to inspect things; they could touch the canvas of an icon that lots its paint. If they could, they would have ripped it off to check it (S9).

At this stage, it has been evident that the 'living religious tradition' discourse has limited influence in management decisions. This discourse appears to influence decisions related to merchandising practices, how close, for example, the souvenir shop should be located to the church, what products they sell, and most importantly, whether admission fees should be considered as an option. As the following responses demonstrate donations boxes are preferred over admission fees:

Unlike the Catholics, we never ask for admission fees. The same happens in Brussels. This commercialisation of religion refers to those who see it not as a place of worship but as a museum space. Even for those with a cultural interest or curiosity towards Orthodox churches, we never asked for admission fees (S1).

'Yes, our priest there, first of all, is a guardian of the place... He also needs to attend the bookshop because, as you said, it is a living organism that requires immediate funding (S13).

'We have the donation box there. Whoever wants it can offer something. They think, 'I have seen something important places as such need maintenance, expenses, electricity'. Visitors often propose to make donations.' (S6)



Figure 15 Souvenir Shop at St. John Monastery (Author ©)

Regarding ‘merchandising’ practices, these decisions create a paradox. On the one hand, although funding is a liability for the church, theological concerns appear to dictate money-generating policies, such as prohibiting admission fees or visitor centres, which could solve the financial problem. Such an initiative would be against Orthodox tradition, which expects believers to freely enter the temple and execute their spiritual duties unobstructed by monetary concerns (S6). Additionally, such endeavours are alien towards Christian Cypriot cultural tradition, which would spark the rise and exaggerate their museumification (S1, S13). However, this does not mean that the Church has not made provisions to harvest the financial benefits of religious tourism. Firstly, the donation box always exists in Orthodox churches where parishioners could donate money voluntarily. The second source of income is from the souvenir shops, which are respectfully blended within the sacred site. At St. Nickolas’, it is accommodated in a newly built outlet, built with traditional material and technique some distance from the Church. At the same time, at St. John’s, it is housed inside one of the monastery’s rooms (Figure 15). To offset their merchandise character, the Church has the habit of naming these shops as ‘bookshops’ and selling products related to orthodox Christian pilgrimage, such as icons, ambulates, and biographies of saints, while no refreshments are allowed. According to responder S3, there were some informal discussions about constructing a café at the parking of St. Nickolas which never proceeded due to ‘theological commitments’.

Operational problems exist in service quality, guardianship, security, and staffing. In line with UNESCO guidelines, the DoA constructed toilets at the UNESCO churches, including the Church of St. Nickolas (S10). According to informant S3, the primary source of contestation at St Nickola is the recently built toilets, which remain closed to the public. None of the two authorities is willing to take full responsibility for the running cost, shifting the blame and responsibilities (S3). Nevertheless, the clergyman (S7) moved the discussion away from finance arguing that the main problem is the collaboration with the keeper, raising issues of professionalism as another liability for the church:

We have one individual there who is very good with good soul..... but is not the person, as keeper I mean, who can bring the situation a bit further... we hesitate to take such a decision that it will secure and professionalism of the keeper. Because we consider the keeper to be there not just to protect, but to provide to knowledge and ethos (S7).

To better understand the criteria for recruiting keepers, a similar question was asked to the bishopric Morphou. According to the responder (S13), the recruitment process

predominantly uses social criteria, including the need for a job, willingness to undertake a low-paid job, and strong religious beliefs. Relevant academic qualifications, such as knowledge about archaeology, history of art, or English language, are of secondary importance (S13). The lack of professionalism is also evident in security measures. Fire detection and automatic fire extinguishing systems have recently been installed in UNESCO churches. This installation was difficult and costly and was done by the government (DoA) (S7). However, as keeper (S3) explained (something confirmed by informants S5 and S17), in most cases, these systems fell in disuse as keepers or ecclesiastical committees, comprised of senior individuals, were unfamiliar with the new technology.

...wherever you go, the security systems have problems in all ten churches. I am the only person who knows how to operate the security and alarm systems. In other churches, because older people are usually responsible, the systems have slowly disused. They need updating.
(S3).

All churches of UNESCO have security systems, and because locals demanded it, other churches have been installed as well. However, sometimes they are functional, and others, not because locals do not know how to operate them, create problems. Other times, they deactivate them to do their jobs (S16).

Considering all these accounts and the data presented in previous sections at this stage, a new causal mechanism (liability) was abstracted: '**lack of heritage management expertise**', which is primarily evident within the Church of Cyprus.

Concluding Remarks

This section has demonstrated how mechanisms, such as statutory control, conservation restrictions and lack of heritage management expertise, are mixed and merged with the prominent discourses of 'living tradition' and 'AHD'. In particular, the analysis has demonstrated how organisational structures such as the DoA and the Church internalize appropriate practices, such as preventive conservation and living religious tradition, respectively. The analysis revealed that the DoA, an institution that has internalized AHD, is strategically repositioning itself to satisfy some basic needs of the church while retaining its core preservationist agenda. Thus, the centralised system already discussed makes the expression of religious practices/discourse difficult. This section has also clarified that a fourth mechanism of 'lack of heritage management culture' is responsible for several operational

problems. The following section demonstrates further how AHD is internalized, taking a closer look at the strategy ‘preserve as found’.

5.1.4 Conservation of Frescos

The excellent preservation of the medieval wall paintings and their historical significance constitute these features as the highlights of Cypriot churches. From the perspective of the Church, these features contribute significantly to the respectful atmosphere. As clergymen **S1** and **S7** indicated, visitors entering the church form a personal communication with the saints depicted on the frescos. The last is to create the necessary aesthetic atmosphere that does not intend to impress or be the product of aesthetic contemplation but to create the atmosphere of revelation that helps the viewer connect spiritually. For clergy, the depicted saints and, in general, holy scenes have the agency to influence the viewer spiritually and miraculously.

‘The visitor entering the space feels the need for personal communion with God and with Saints depicted through the frescos... wall paintings you keep the aesthetic conditions necessary to reach that spiritual need. The fresco is a communion between saints and believers and helps the devoutness’ (V1).

As the conservator (S14) (part of the foreign conservation team invited to the island by the DoA) argued, in Cyprus, wall paintings are preserved in excellent condition, and the worst that happened to them is the accumulation of superficial dirt. In certain areas, especially at the ceiling, the areas where frescos have been wholly gone are scarce. However, the question arises as to why those missing parts have not been restored either to enhance their spiritual efficacy or to reconstruct the wholeness of the artwork and, subsequently, its aesthetic appreciation. This section unpacks the Church’s and the DoA’s stances.

The conservation of frescos is one of the primary sources of contestation among stakeholders at these sites. From the DoA’s standpoint, a solid adherence to objective authenticity and the authenticity of original material appear to guide the conservation of wall paintings. The conservation of these features started in the 1950s. According to the archives, the first recorded conservation attempt at St John was made in 1955 during colonial times, while extensive stabilisation and cleaning works took place once a decade (late 60s, mid-70s, late 80s, early 90s and early 2000s) (St John Archives No 2/9/2 Volume). In certain instances, removing and transporting 2nd layers of wall paintings overlying older scenes was undertaken. This was done so the early concealed wall painting of the 11th century could be revealed while

the later layer (dating to the 14th century) was transported to the Museum of the Archbishopric. A vital conservation project occurred at St. John's monastery between 2006 and 2013 in close collaboration with the Courtauld Institute. This conservation project comprises a combination of restoration strategies, including cleaning of soot (smoke blackening from religious use), simple wear and tear, support via injections and removal of salt. One area of contestation raised during this project was the conservation of sensitive areas such as the face and the hands of the figures.

The damaged areas are treated with a smooth, pinkish white or brownish white colour mortar to tone out the colour differences between damaged areas and painted parts (Figure 5). With few exceptions, this strategy appears to be the dominant strategy adopted by the DoA (S16). For the DoA, deliberate damage is considered a critical historical moment that contributes to the site's rich history. At St. John's, such damage reflects either iconoclasm (image vandalism due to religious reasons) or devotion, stemming from talismanic healing powers of saints' eyes (Figure 15), during which believers scrapped, diluted and drunk elements of paint (Ieronymidou and Rickerby 2010) collecting the sacredness (S15). Foreign conservators and the DoA share the same perspective on this matter: to avoid restoring areas where there is no evidence of surviving paint. This approach considers any new addition to the historical wall painting as inauthentic, unethical, and misleading. Characteristically foreign conservators (S14) who appeared sympathetic towards clergy's concerns at St John's monastery maintained that historical and living perspectives should not be seen as athletic, arguing simultaneously that modern interventions in the name of spirituality are unethical:

If you are venerating an icon that is staring at you with modern [instead of] spiritual eyes, it is actually an insult. There is a strong argument that an icon is painted when the artist is cleanest and spiritually attuned to his task. Is it appropriate for us, as Westerners, non-Orthodox and non-medieval people, to even attempt to bring the most important part of that image back to life? We think it's not; we think it's inappropriate'. (S14).

The bishop was desperate to get those paintings cleaned because they were very important on either site there, or it was simply impossible from a practical perspective. There was a bit of a clash there; it took him a long time to understand. If we had pushed them, we would have ruined it. In the end, he accepted what it was... 'The monks like the patination of age. Some people consider dirt as the accumulation of spiritual activity.' (S14).



Figure 16 Vandalism, Damage and Graffiti at St. John (Zairon 2017 CC)

Under further investigation, it was revealed that the authorities in Cyprus, particularly the DoA and the ICOMOS, draw on certain charters such as the Venice Charter to enhance their narratives over ‘scientific truth’ and ‘material authenticity’. Fairclough argued that international charters as institutional texts manifest certain discourses with certain causal powers (2005, p. 919).

‘The conservation of frescos follows particular regulations such as the Venice Charter and under other international monuments. We do not complete the frescos, although they often do it at Mount Athos. This policy is applied to all churches on the island. We try to preserve the authenticity of the monument as far as possible. But this is regulated by other conventions, not by UNESCO; today, conservation has a different approach. You do not rebuild a monument that survives at 50% (S10).

‘It is a matter of authenticity and sensitivity. All these matters are covered in international charters such as Venice and Athens, which explain what should happen... Very few charters from those published after the Venice charter have been applied. There is a discussion around them, but they are not mandatory decisions. So, since they are not required, they stick to what they know and can do (S11).

Using a ‘cherry-picking’ tactic, the DoA chooses to internalise specific charters and eventually operationalise conservation policies that underscore the values of AHD. The foreign conservators admitted that while ‘in the spirit’ they try to abide by all of the charters (including those influenced by postmodernism) their approach is based on a minimal re-integration that is considered as the most ethical while other characters while they inform their work, they stay in the background. Thus, by the philosophy of the Venice Charter, locals’ concerns are considered subordinate, lacking scientific credibility. However, it should also be noted that other issues may play a role. According to conservation officers within the DoA, introducing new practices, philosophies, and other novelties inhibits risks and potential mistakes (S17) that the DoA is unwilling to undertake. However, living religious tradition is not the only discourse sidelined by the DoA. There have also been other sub-AHDs within the DoA that were silenced through the years, as the effort of a chief conservator to restore the damaged eyes demonstrates:

‘My first project was at St. John’s of Lampadistis. Since I belong to the Italian Schoch of Thought where they do aesthetic re-integration through different strategies such as the selection cromatica, mimetic reintegration etc I was positive in restoring those frescos. However, I was not allowed to do it by higher officers. So, I changed my plans, I did

selectionse cromatica for the cloak and mimetic reintegration for the eyes. Now you will tell me how I did this, by observing and copying other surveying eyes found in the church. So, I could do it appropriately... I spoke with the bishop of Morphou, and he was very positive in my approach but then everything stopped by DoA' (S15).

A combination of data, including the above abstract and minutes found during the archival research, demonstrate that the DoA's approach is not as strict as is presented. Aesthetic re-integration or improvement is allowed in areas with enough evidence to execute restoration, avoiding the risk of fakery. This strategy, which has been downplayed in the interviews, concentrates on the feeling of tiny gaps to improve the wholeness of the scene, aesthetic value, and narrative (S15).

Retouching is needed in visible parts where the paint has been destroyed. In the medieval chapel, several interventions happened for aesthetic re-integration by the colleague K. Pissaridou [...]. It has been noted that under the apse, there is a fresco beneath the existing one. It should be decided whether the later fresco should be removed to expose the earlier one' (Archives of St. John entry: 2000 Conservation Report N2/9/4).

Additionally, and according to scientific validation, we could add some colours to achieve a better appreciation of the monument's aesthetic quality. We should make sure that the 'conserved areas' are distinctively different from the original' (Archives of St. Nickolas Conservation Report entry: 2018 N2/36/3 14.03.2003. 36).

This seeming contradiction in conservation strategy expressed through selective aesthetic treatment, which aligns with the guidelines of the Venice Charter underscoring the scientific procedures that should guide restoration practices, supports the assumption that the DoA's emphasis on object authenticity is not necessarily a fetishism towards materiality, but efforts to highlight the historic (talismanic beliefs) and aesthetic values (including patina) original material can generate.

Religious circles with various degrees of resistance dispute the practice of 'preserve as found'. Informant S7 could consider the restoration of frescos, considering that this would be an accurate representation that would enhance spiritual reverence. According to this clerical approach, conservation does not stop at the time of the creation; it is an ongoing process, a continuation that brings the monument back to life. With careful study and meticulous intervention, instead of noncritical intervention that could hinder the integration of the monument, it is something that can be achieved (S7, S14). This position demonstrates how

clergy adopt elements of AHD, such as adherence to innate value tied to materiality and restoration guided by reliable and accurate research. However, the interviewee also highlighted that such restoration would have been more meaningful in an active church. The following abstracts indicate how clergy emphasise the narrative rather than the historic/material dimension.

'I saw this movie recently with colour, and I like that I saw it in its coloured edition because I had that sense of how the colours looked back then. I do not know if the colours were the same as back then or if they added them. It gives you a sense of coming back to life. I am trying to say that you do not change a fresco's meaning or content (S7).

'It's like leaving someone with half a leg and telling him that because I knew you as a leg man for so many years, I will not change you'. I help him add an artificial leg; we know it is artificial, and he can take it out whenever he wants (S12).

However, this stance is not shared by all clergy. According to the interviewee (S6), aesthetic re-integration is a terrible strategy that would blend new and original covering historical moments that demonstrate what the monument and Christian faith suffered (S6).

'[murals] are original ... The palimpsest should be visible. The monastery is eleven centuries old. History is displayed here. The eyes are damaged. This should be visible. Despite the profanity, it is part of the monument's history.' (S6).

No [referring to restoration], they are original is history... No, it's not possible. The history should be visible in the century. The monastery is 11 centuries old. History is displayed here. Turks damaged the eyes. This should be visible. Despite that profanity, it is part of the monument's history (S4).

Accepting the incompleteness of wall paintings signals an internal transition within the Church of Cyprus, proving a previous remark that religious discourse is evolving, and it considers historical value on the same moral ground as centuries of religious tradition. In this context, damage is regarded as a critical historical moment that serves as testimony to the rich Orthodox Christian ecclesiastical history.

Despite this mild critique, the diocese of Morphou pushes for some changes, especially about the damaged eyes. The diocese does not approve complete restoration but rather targeted interventions in areas of high spiritual importance, especially in the face and other small parts like ears and fingers. According to those espousing this view, this approach should be critical,

meticulously executed, and reversible (**S7**, **S13**). The following abstract is another example of how the Church internalises elements of AHD and secular heritage values within its theological discourse.

'When the conservators from England came, we realised that the three of us had a good collaboration. The only thing that has not been settled, and we keep discussing it, is whether we can complete (repaint) the damaged eyes. In our position as a diocese, we hope that the completion of the eyes, in a certain way, will not affect negatively... We believe it will help the aesthetics, but we do not think it will negatively impact the historical dimension. Archaeologists in the future will be able to understand that those eyes are additions so that they can remove them. If you like, from an aesthetic, spiritual and historical perspective
(**S13**).

Delving further into this issue, it is evident that the current conservation strategy, expressed through the strategy 'preserve as found', is also related to other system pathogenesis. One of these is 'understaffing', a recurring liability within the data. As responders **S14** and **S15** explained, restoration of such scale takes particular time and resources. At the same time, the ICOMOS officer (**S10**) admitted that technological and logistical difficulties make such interventions challenging to apply in Cyprus. The lack of qualified staff in key positions and work overload exaggerates this. For example, two officers are only responsible for the conservation of built heritage and usually underperform due to overload. According to various sources, the DoA is not only understaffed (**S5**, **S10**, **S11**) but both the DoA and the Church lack specialist and interdisciplinary approaches (**S1**, **S5**, **S16**, **S11**). Responder **S11** explained that the DoA lacks skilful architects and engineers, who often ignore important conservation works because they do not want to divert from initial plans. This is further supported by a conservator working for the DoA (**S5**) who characteristically argued that there is no single conservation policy within the DoA as different conservators and officers follow different approaches that often lead to tensions.

There is no planning; there is no policy. Regarding the frescos, they avoid any interventions because they do not have the knowledge, resources, the staff and the budget to do something else. So, the strategy 'preserve as found' is an easy option. I am not saying that I disagree with this approach. But if I had allowed any interventions, I would have made sure that any interventions would have resulted from severe research (**S11**).

. I have never received guidelines from anyone, not even from the DoA ... We have high-ranking officials who do not know the area and cannot make the right decisions. They are influenced by different project supervisors who are not qualified either. (S5).

Concluding Remarks

The analysis revealed that the practice ‘preserve as found’ as a manifestation of western AHD that underscores material stasis is the dominant strategy that guides the conservation strategies in Cyprus. However, the analysis has also shown that clergy in Cyprus apprehend this discourse with various degrees of resistance. One group demonstrates a mild criticism towards material stasis as it compromises the living character of Orthodoxy in Cyprus. The second group shows a more positive stance by justifying such practices because they enrich ecclesiastical history. These people blend AHD language with theological concerns, demonstrating the progressive adaptability of the Church towards the new secular conservation ethos. The analysis has also surfaced that beyond the two dominant discourses of ‘AHD’ and ‘living religious tradition’, other structures and mechanisms are at play that determine such conservation decisions. Firstly, due to the ‘conservation restrictions’, local dioceses are not allowed to hire their own artists and restore their frescos as they wish. Secondly, discursive constraints manifested through international conservation charters underpin certain material-driven mentalities towards treating ancient monuments. Thirdly, other pathogenesis within the system, such as understaffing, lack of expertise and underfunding, also prevent the DoA from exploring other restoration options, constituting liminal intervention a safe strategy.

5.1.5 Curation

In Cyprus, curatorship as a process of strategic presentation and interpretation of archaeological sites and monuments is at an embryonic stage, especially at archaeological sites and historic monuments. The following data present and discuss institutional actors’ perspectives regarding the exhibition and interpretation of living religious sites.

According to informant **S4**, exhibition strategies in churches are determined by practical needs and the purpose these monuments serve. As the interview further explained, Cyprus has no professional curatorial approach (informed by museology), neither from the DoA nor the bishoprics (**S4**). While this may be the case, my observations have also revealed some ‘curatorial’ touches in the Cypriot churches and ‘staging’. The focus of this section is the reasoning behind such strategies and the dialectics developed during the ‘curation’ of these churches.

The term ‘museumification’ is a ‘red flag’ within ecclesiastical circles and a concept that encapsulates dissonance and contestation. The way this term is used varies from priest to priest. At Morphou diocese (St. John) is used in a scornful and dismissive manner to denote the negative impact of the commodification of religious sites and conservation restrictions (S13). On the other hand, the clergy responsible for St. Nikolas argued that secular and religious dimensions can coexist as long as one respects the other. These two discourses are represented below.

‘We do not want to turn our religious sites into pure museum sites. For this reason, we always want to have one priest in every pilgrimage site and, subsequently, a monument that attracts visitors. This priest will primarily guide visitors around the place not so much related to archaeology than to theology.’ (S15).

The church as a building has a goal; it aims to help believers communicate with God, if we alter this character, the liturgical stops being church and becomes something else. The fact that, through time, it receives historical and museological meaning is a fact. If the two [religious and secular natures] do not clash, the one does not undermine the other; the Church consciously accepts the historical and museological significance of the monument without damaging the liturgical objective these sites have to serve’ (S7).

It is evident that in the second case, actor (S7) allowed elements of AHD (favouring a preservationist culture that emphasises the material qualities of the church) to coexist with ‘living religious tradition’. From a practical point of view, the two churches

For Cypriot clergy, it is essential the space to disseminate reverence, humility and owe towards the holy (S1, S7, S15). To retain this reverential atmosphere, the church avoids ‘disturbing’ the churches with ‘alien’ objects, something particularly evident about interpretive infrastructure. Thus, the interpretive infrastructure is reduced to a single label of the same format in all UNESCO sites. These labels are usually respectfully placed near the entry points and often are passed unnoticed. In general, labels are avoided to remove what triggers the senses, enhancing the reverence and religious atmosphere (S7). The informant of St. John (S6) argued that labels as are unnatural obstacles that obstruct a respectful atmosphere and prevent face-to-face communication.

It’s not right to have labels here and there. The place speaks by itself; the stones speak for themselves. I think you feel it, too. It’s not about adding a fake label that will attract the interest... your eye will go to the title, and you will not enjoy this masterpiece. We

go to other places and museums in different countries and see labels emerging from the ground like crops. It's like telling visitors I ignore you, read the labels, and go. It's different to speak to the heart of someone, and it's something else to read something in mute (S6).

Apart from the absence of labels (and any other interpretive form such as audio guides) at St. John's, there is also evidence of 'staging'. As the ICOMOS officer (S11) shared with me, the diocese of Morphou has repeatedly transferred historic pews from other less-known churches inside St. John. ICOMOS officers disapproved of this practice as those pews that bear inscriptions commemorating the donors constitute the intangible heritage of local villages that gets lost. This strategy at St John aims to enhance the historical value of the monastery and its living character, also demonstrated by the preference for live interpretation given by ordained priests. The allowance of believers to offer wax body parts and votive offerings in the church further supports the policy of local dioceses.

Regarding the interpretation provided at these sites and the meaning conveyed to the public, it appears that in Cyprus, the Church is unwilling to diverge from the religious narrative towards a postmodern narrative. In a discussion with two experienced archaeologists-curators (S2, S4) of religious heritage in Cyprus, it is evident that this is considered an unnecessary and 'dangerous' strategy. According to them, narratives that could provoke visitors to think religion within broader social problems are extreme because they usually refer to specialised audiences. The curators were also particularly sceptical in reinterpreting religious objects within new metanarratives. As both curators explained, such endeavour is a tightrope walking that could open the 'aeolian bag', and leaving spiritual meanings uncontrolled and open to interpretation is dangerous. It is evident from these accounts that while the Church of Cyprus is aware of the historicity of these sites and the various secular values attached to them, religious discourse is very prominent in how these sites are presented to the people.

While these accounts demonstrate that a solid religious mentality guides the exhibition at the Monastery of St John, exhibition strategies at St Nickolas reveal other processes that influence the curation of rural sacred sites. A scarcity of religious furniture is encountered at St Nicolas church, including two pews attached to a psaltery stand, a donation box and two icons depicting St. Nickolas and the Virgin Mary at the narthex where visitors can venerate. Two processes influence this minimalist strategy. As the following data demonstrate, the lack of congregation due to the isolated character of the church and the new function the church

received as the ‘parish church’ of the nearby camping site during the summer period make this strategy feasible and practical (S1, S7).

‘The camping site continuously accommodates 150 to 200 children who regularly attend the mass between July and September. Due to the church’s small capacity, only 50 children can be accommodated, so the pews have been removed to accommodate more (young) children [he also implies that because they are young, they do not need to sit as opposed to older adults]. The space is very small at St Nicolas... Also, this monument is outside of the village’ (S1).

‘Because it is not an active parish church or monastery. Because it stopped to function as a monastery or as a central [religious] site to serve a parish for a long time, there is no need, because it is also small space’ (S7).

The mechanism ‘lack of curatorial expertise’ identified in previous sections appears to be not an isolated liability, but alongside religious discourse and contextual factors, such as urban deprivation, all together contribute to the current curatorial decisions. The lack of curatorial culture on the island was evident within local communities. Various participants who have actively been involved with the curation of ecclesiastical monuments (S2, S4, S16) asserted that there is a demotion of the museological discipline in Cyprus evident with local communities, the Church and the DoA.

‘I think it is for practical reasons [curatorial choice]. Museologist is a word in Cyprus that they do not understand, not even inside the DoA. For example, if you examine the staff of the DoA, you will not find any museologists, and they never ask for one, although they run museums’ (S4).

‘It’s a bureaucratic system, and I will say this. We think in Cyprus that we are specialised about everything. And I think this is happening, especially with the DoA officers. They do not trust specialists. They have museologists, but they do not take them into consideration. They say I will allocate an architect, but these two aren’t the same’ (S15).

However, findings suggest that this stance has started shifting, and museological practices have infiltrated within the church. As I have been informed by the informant (S16), the DoA collaborated with a museologist who decided to curate these sites following a minimalist approach by placing four-floor lamps at St. Nickolas that provide sub-lighting to

the frescos on the dark parts of the church. Apart from this sub-lighting, no efforts were made about the interpretive infrastructure.

'These lamps were purchased with Leventis money and someone from Greece studied and designed the space. This intervention was made after the study. There was no extended museological study' (S17).

This is not an isolated incident. It is a growing practice in Cyprus, that due to urban deprivation and how churches falling into disuse, the Church of Cyprus finds ways to re-appropriate them. This usually takes the form of ecclesiastical museums where icons are displayed. These places are named [ikonofilakio] (εικονοφυλάκιο), meaning 'church storage room'.

'No church in free Cyprus is used as a museum. There are instances when... a church becomes a vestry where old religious relics, including scriptures and clergy clothing, are kept and exhibited. These artefacts are kept in their natural space while the church accommodates religious services such as christenings or weddings at the same time (S1).

The following abstract was accepted from a letter sent from the DoA to the archdiocese. The letter demonstrates how the DoA tried to 'stage' those sites to look more authentic and highlight the aesthetic qualities of the church. These policies were introduced before the designation of the churches as WHS.

'Many have expressed their discontent because damage is inflicted due to overcrowding and conduct with frescos during the visitation of groups. It has also been noted that an unesthetic episcopal throne has been inserted. The throne is not only incompatible with the woodwork of the church but also inappropriate with the size of the church. Additionally, it hides some important frescos. I recommend being removed from the church. Also, I recommend adding a barrier between the pillars to restrain visitors from touching the frescos. We need £400 for its construction'

(Archives of St. Nickolas entry 1980 Letter from DoA director towards Archbishop).

- **Concluding Remarks**

The analysis has demonstrated that although various mechanisms (conservation restrictions), liabilities (lack of heritage management culture/expertise), discourses (AHD and its emphasis on expert led conservation and objective authenticity), external conditions

(shrinking congregation) and the vision of local bishops, the central discourse that drives their presentation is that of 'living religious tradition', that functions as a breakwater against museumification. In other words, while the interaction of these 'factors' gives rise to two distinct curatorial strategies, the 'active approach' (St. John) and the 'minimalist' (St. Nickolas), both strategies aim to retain the sanctity and mysticism of the place. Thus, unlike in Western Europe, where churches demonstrated significant capacity for adaptability to secular demands, in Cyprus, these 'new uses' and new values attributed to historic churches should not overshadow the religious character and the reverential atmosphere of these monuments. A characteristic example is the transformation of rural abandoned sacred sites into ecclesiastical museums or empty spaces where visitors can contemplate the rich religious art. As Coleman and Bowman (2019) argued, at least within the margins of Cyprus, these developments should not be considered a decline in religious morality. The salient evolving nature of the Church to reinvent its public profile is evident in the ways the last has mingled theological concerns with a preservationist culture.

5.1.6 Concluding Thoughts


The analytical approach (retroduction) adopted in this PhD thesis provided some clarity on the underlying forces (including mechanisms, discourses, agency, and other contextual factors) that shape the heritage practices found at Cypriot churches and help the researcher to decipher how AHD coexists with living religious tradition.

The analysis surfaced that the centralised decision-making in Cyprus has been created and maintained through a delicate manoeuvring of the DoA to target the liabilities (lack of funding) and indecisiveness (dormant power of statutory control) of other institutions. Within this centralised system, where the independence and resilience of other institutions (Church, ICOMOS, NCU and local community) have been weakened, AHD, as the discourse adopted by the most powerful institution (DoA), backed up with conservation guidelines (Venice Charter) retains its hegemony perpetuating concerns over object authenticity. While this strategy ensures the integrity and authenticity of the sites, as defined by UNESCO, it also creates a sense of dependency of local dioceses and communities towards the DoA. The lack of reflection towards funding opportunities, creativity (curation), innovation (service quality and closed toilets) and training initiatives, which are considered the responsibility of the Church, underscore the dependency of the Church on the DoA, which resulted in the inability of the first to develop heritage policies and a heritage management culture.

While the data showcased instances where intangible living heritage clashed and challenged object authenticity-driven practices, especially about restoring frescos, the analysis also demonstrated that intangible concerns were recruited to justify such practices. In other words, it mingles theological discourse with AHD values. This was particularly evident when clergymen used theological language, particularly the omnipresent spirit of the divine, to validate secular practices such as preventive conservation and the ‘preserve as found’ strategy. However, within the Church of Cyprus, two distinct narratives demonstrate two different visions of how religious heritage can be reintroduced. The first highlights ‘spiritual value’ and the continuation of living religious practices. According to Historic England (2008), the second evidential value’ highlights the original design increases our appreciation and stimulates further interest towards the past.

5.2 Visitors' Responses Towards Heritagization

This section presents and discusses visitor responses towards the conservation above and exhibition strategies that pre-structured the environment pilgrims and tourists encountered upon their visit. Five core institutional practices emerged from the previous sections, including '*external gentrification*', '*merchandising*', '*curation*', '*preserve as found* (frescos)', and '*centralisation*'. The following analysis was built around the epistemological considerations of 'analytical dualism' that keeps structure and agency distinct from deciphering their dialectical relationship. Thus, practices and their causal powers that mediate the logic of structures (Mutch, 2017) and visitors with their concerns (Tables 6 and 7) were coded separately (Table 5). This approach helped the researcher understand the tensions between the casual efficacy of people's agency and the causal powers (or effects) of practices (Fairclough, 2005; Mutch, 2017; Newman, 2020) at the two churches. Three recurring (reflecting) stances emerged from the data inductively: '**content**', '**antagonistic**' and '**ambivalent**' (see Tables 8 and 9). These three stances helped the researcher to answer Objective 3, building a clear picture regarding converging and diverging stances between those running the site and those consuming it. Each section discusses a single practice and is divided into two parts, one for each church. A distinction is also kept between religious and secular-motivated visitors.

First Cycle	Second Cycle	Emerged Themes	Second Cycle	
Codes (Concerns)	Codes (Responses)	Stance	Causal Powers (activated)	Practices and Ideational Structure (Religion)
				
Cultural tourism	Conflicting interests	Ambivalent	Limiting polyvocality	Centralization
Video making	Priority to specialists		Efficiency	
Worship at chapels	Church protector of culture			
Historic churches	UNESCO expertise			
	Consultation not bad thing			
	Someone should have primary role			
	Necessary interventions	Compliant	Responsible beautification	External Gentrification
	Against gentrification			
	Authentic conservation			
	No impression of new			
	Against full restoration	Compliant	Historical Value	Preserve as found (Frescos)
	Not beauty contestation			
	No restoration			
	Simplicity			
	Icons and candles sense of spirit.	Ambivalent	Active	Curation
	Preventive conservation reasonable		Minimalist	
	Extra icons contribute			
	Promotes the church	Compliant	Fundraising	Merchandizing
	Spiritual reminiscence			
	Ticket small contribution			
	Christian country			Religion
	Religious division			
	Pure spiritual experience			

St. Nickolas Church						
Visitor	Origin	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Pilgrim/Tourist	Visit Motivation
V1	Cypriot	M	50s	University	Mixed	Religious Motivation / Historical Interest
V2	Cypriot	M	70s	Primary	Pilgrim	Social interaction
V3	Cypriot	F	70s	Primary	Pilgrim	Religious Motivation / Escape
V4	Russian	M	30s	University	Tourist	Escape / Novelty and Exploration
V5	Russian	M	30s	University	Tourist	Escape / Historical Interest
V6	Belarus	M	20s	University	Tourist	Historical Interest
V7	Cypriot	M	20s	University	Tourist	Nostalgia / Historical Interest
V8	Cypriot	M	40s	Vocational	Tourist	Escape / Historical Interest
V9	Swiss	F	50s	University	Tourist	Historical Interest / Novelty and Exploration
V10	Cypriot	M	50s	University	Tourist	Historic Interest / Nostalgia
V11	Romania	F	60s	University	Tourist	Escape / Historical Interest
V12	Polish	F	20s	Vocational	Tourist	Novelty and Exploration
V13	Cypriot	M	50s	University	Pilgrim	Religious Motivation / Historical Interest
V14	French	F	20s	University	Tourist	Novelty and Exploration
V15	American	M	70s	University	Tourist	Novelty and Exploration
V16	Cypriot	F	50s	University	Mixed	Religious Motivation / Historical Interest
V17	American	F	60s	University	Tourist	Novelty and Exploration
V18	Cypriot	M	50s	Vocational	Mixed	Religious Motivation / Escape
V19	Russian	F	40s	University	Tourist	Novelty and Exploration
V20	French	M	20s	University	Tourist	Novelty and Exploration

Table 8 Profile of the respondents St. Nickolas

Monastery of St. John						
Visitor	Origin	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Pilgrim/Tourist	Visit Motivation
V21	Cypriot	F	30s	University	Pilgrim	Escape / Social interaction / Spiritual Enrichment
V22	Cypriot	F	30s	Vocational	Mixed	Escape / Spiritual Enrichment
V23	Cypriot	F	20s	University	Pilgrim	Escape / Religious Motivation
V24	Cypriot	F	30s	University	Mixed	Escape / Religious Motivation
V25	Cypriot	F	60s	Primary	Mixed	Escape / Religious Motivation
V26	French	F	30s	University	Tourist	Novelty and Exploration
V27	Russian	F	30s	University	Mixed	Escape / Religious Motivation
V28	Cypriot	M	20s	Vocational	Mixed	Escape / Religious Motivation
V29	Cypriot	M	40s	University	Pilgrim	Social interaction / Religious Motivation
V30	Cypriot	M	40s	University	Mixed	Spiritual Enrichment / Nostalgia
V31	Cypriot	M	70s	University	Mixed	Escape / Religious Motivation
V32	Cypriot	M	30s	University	Tourist	Historic Interest / Escape
V33	British	M	30s	University	Tourist	Historic Interest / Escape
V34	Cypriot	F	60s	Vocational	Mixed	Escape / Religious Motivation
V35	Cypriot	M	20s	Vocational	Mixed	Escape / Religious Motivation
V36	American	F	60s	University	Tourist	Historic Interest / Novelty and Exploration
V37	British	F	30s	University	Tourist	Historic Interest / Novelty and Exploration
V38	Cypriot	F	20s	University	Mixed	Historic Interest / Religious Motivation
V39	Cypriot	M	20s	Vocational	Mixed	Historic Interest / Religious Motivation
V40	Belgian	F	60s	University	Tourist	Historic Interest / Novelty and Exploration

Table 9 Profile of the respondents St. John

5.2.1 External Gentrification

The first heritage practice discussed is that of ‘external gentrification’. This practice is manifested in policies and strategies that shape the outer physical shell of the church, its surrounding area (churchyard) and the access routes. Regarding the church of St. Nickolas’ 17, visitors expressed their contentment with the conservation strategy and three their discontent. All visitors expressed their delight while at the monastery of St. John’s.

- Church of St. Nickolas - ***Contentment***

The age, gender, educational background, ethnicity, and motivation of those taking a compliant stance vary substantially at the church of St. Nickolas’. As the data below demonstrate, they share a conviction that certain ‘sacrifices’ are expected to be made once a religious site acquires the (world) heritage status. Thus, visitors consider certain restrictions due to the institutionalisation and commodification of these sites logical within the broader spectrum of the heritage industry. Because this is the first section discussing this topic, an insight into visitors' profiles is provided.

The first subgroup in this category comprises eleven individuals (**V4, V5, V6, V7, V8, V9, V11, V12, V14, V17, V20**). This subgroup represents those holding secular motivations falling into the broad cultural tourism category. Some of the main motivations of this group include *novelty and exploration* expressed through curiosity and a need for discovery, *historical interest*, the desire to learn and explore different cultures, traditions and values and often the appetite for spiritual growth. Other motivations include the need to *escape* from the routine by being in a calm atmosphere where heritage site is blended with the natural world where they can create new and lasting memories, and *nostalgia* expressed through the need to return to places where people had good memories. It should also be highlighted that the WH status of the site was an important stimulus for visiting these sites as well.

Characteristically, this category includes visitor V4, a non-religious Russian man in his mid-30s who combined a business trip in Cyprus with a mountainous adventure. ‘It was mostly accidental; I did not know about the church; *I just wanted to go to the mountains and walk by the river*’. Visitor V6 was a non-religious Belarusian man in his late 20s living and working in Cyprus who expressed an interest in Byzantine culture and art ‘*...I am a fan of the Byzantine Empire, which was absolutely destroyed. There are some portals where I can be close to that culture, while visitor V8, a Cypriot middle-aged man interested in architecture, ‘...to see the architecture, how it is preserved over and how well conserved it is*’. Visitor V9, a Swiss female

educator in her 50s, and visitor V12, a late 20s woman, are both interested in alternative tourism. The two women had a Catholic background and expressed an interest in famous places where they could contemplate the world history of art ‘...*I try to visit important and famous places. I prefer old places, the older, the better because they are simpler and not so much decorated. There is not so much to distract you from the original idea of a place like a church*’ (V9). Two other visitors in their 20s (V14 and V20) visited the site with locals, ‘*I heard about it, and my friend told me that it’s great and I had to see it with my own eyes*’ (V20). Although driven by secular interests, these visitors hold a strong preconception regarding the capacity of spiritual places to provide a peaceful experience, an isle of spirituality where they can immerse themselves. Although non-religious, this group of people share a Christian background, including five Orthodox (V4, V5, V6, V8, V11), three Catholics (V9, V14, V20) and one Protestant (V17). Some characteristic responses include ‘*I just want to see it and feel it personally*’ (V6), ‘...*you feel closer to your faith here*’ (V8), ‘*From my childhood we used to visit special places with family, I am roman catholic, and I used to visit churches something I kept in later years*’ (V9) and ‘*It is something very old and unique, and it is something we want to experience it gives you an impression of spirituality and I wanted to see something about Byzantine art*’ (V12).

Regarding the first question, whether visitors are content or discontent with the overall heritage conservation strategies, these visitors took a compliant stance. In the question of whether they find this place authentic, some characteristic responses include:

‘Definitely, it is authentic. I see that there are very few interventions from the modern times and is nicely preserved and well kept’ (V4)

‘Definitely, here is about small artefacts related to historical times. I will say not so expensive in terms of materials, but it is valuable in terms of human effort and value’ (V5)

‘it’s authentic because it does not fit with the imagination of churches. Churches of me are always vibrant and here it’s straightforward a place like a farmhouse and makes it more authentic’ (V12)

‘Yes, because it did not look shiny and updated’ (V17).

From these accounts, we can deduce that authenticity is related to relatively undisturbed old and simple historical objects unspoiled by modern intrusive features deprived of religious extravagance observed in other prominent sacred sites such as cathedrals. As a result, we can

infer that these visitors take a compliant stance towards the causal power of '*responsible gentrification*' that enables them to detach themselves from the modern world or contemporary expressions of faith driven by materiality. Additionally, this strategy invokes nostalgia for the countryside and folkloric life that embodies more authentic values such as humility and true faith. As a result, this 'staging' manifested through a new traditionally looking cobble yard and the minimalist grass areas meet visitors' pre-entrance expectations around escapism and nostalgia.

The second sub-group comprises five individuals and represents those holding religious or mixed motivations (**V1, V2, V3, V13, V18**). These visitors are located in various positions on the pilgrim and tourist continuum, with some demonstrating a more robust, pious attitude. In contrast, others fall under 'half tourists – half pilgrims'. Some of the main motivations of this group include *historic interest* demonstrated through special interests such as videoing, *social interaction* with locals, and religious motivation expressed through a feeling of obligation to visit the site, a need for a vow, or praying for loved ones.

Visitor **V1** was a middle-aged Cypriot man with mixed motivations. He combined his passion for videoing historic sites with a Sunday tourist journey to a historic spiritual place: '*I like photography and video. I have created an amateur channel on YouTube... I am not religious; I prefer to pray at a chapel. I cannot go to a mass, and I will start thinking about other things. I prefer to stop somewhere to pray.*' Visitor **V2** was a 70-year-old local parishioner who has visited the church every day for the last decades for its beautiful scenery, and opportunity to socialise and receive blessings: '*I am a pilgrim. I cannot be a tourist in my village... My grandparent was working as a steward at Kakopetria, and he used to give me the key to come here and open the church here two times a year.*' Visitor **V3** was a Cypriot woman in her 70s who visited the site with her husband for the first time, she can be characterised as a peripatetic pilgrim as this was not the first church she visited: '*We saw the Panagia of Arakas where we found a monk who told us an adorable thing. We visited Kykkos yesterday. We are pilgrims; we belong to the church... I wanted to pray for my children to be well and for all people. To provide me with a piece of bread, and we want nothing more than health and a piece of bread to eat.*' Lastly, visitor **V18** was a middle-aged Cypriot man who leaned towards pilgrim rather than tourist. His motivation was a combination of curiosity and prayer for his health problems: '*I visited the village here for holidays. I have been told to visit the church because it is lovely... I am a pilgrim, I am an Orthodox Christian. I am a bit of a tourist today, but mainly to pray as I have cancer.*'

This group of people are equally satisfied with the overall conservation, like secularly driven visitors. Knowing the place for decades, visitors **V2** and **V13** (visiting the nearby camping site from a young age) appear to be satisfied with landscaping and development works around the site. The view of visitor **V2** demonstrates that the institutional structure of UNESCO breathes a feeling of professionalism and attentiveness that contributes positively to his perception. Furthermore, for visitor **V13**, the account underscores the importance of convenient access and humility of the church. We can infer from these two accounts that people who were aware of the developments at the historic site expressed an appreciation for the attentiveness shown by the institutions.

When I was a kid, there were no roads here. The road you came in today was not here... Look inside; it has been changed; the church was not looked after, and due to weather conditions, there was some damage because it was left open. I remember them in better condition. Since UNESCO has been involved, the DoA conserves some elements so it will not deteriorate’ (V2). In a probing question regarding any improvements he would like, the participant embraced a preservationist stand highlighting the importance of preserving the historic fabric: *‘No, the church should stay as it is. It is 1000 years old. It does not need anything else; it stands there by itself... I respect how old it is. It has been there without iron, concrete... who knows what materials they used to do it’ (V2).*

‘The place is authentic, yes, it’s an old church preserved nicely. It’s a small place unlike those you get inside and get lost’ (V13). In the probing question on whether he would like to see any improvements, he replied: *‘Not so much around the church. The entrance to the church was through the camping site. Now they created a new entrance with parking and disabled paths, and it’s much better.*

Furthermore, visitor **V3** has expressed her contentment with ‘gentrification’ and beautification works. Whether the grass is authentic, or an addition is not essential for this individual or participants **V2** and **V13**. Lastly, visitor **V18** approves the overall conservation as a strategy that demonstrates care, interest, and respect towards rural cultural heritage: Whether the grass is authentic or not is not essential for this individual or participants **V2** and **V13**. Lastly, visitor **V18** approves the overall conservation as a strategy that demonstrates care, interest, and respect towards rural cultural heritage:

‘The exterior is beautiful, clean with the grass’ (V3). ‘Yes, it looks nice.

We cannot do lots of development work because it will look bad. We should preserve it as it was... It is maintained very well. It's not running the risk to fall apart like our churches at the occupied territory which have almost collapsed' (V18).

The most characteristic answer was given by visitor **V1**, whose answer demonstrates that the problem is not about 'intrusive' contemporary works but how they are executed. Comparing the church of St. Nickolas with the generosity of the monastery of Kykkos, visitor **V1** considers authenticity in terms of compatible materials and traditional techniques that would retain a feeling of originality:

'There is a difference [conservation wise] between this church and Kykkos in the conservation. The strategies here appear to respect the authentic technique more, but at Kykkos, everything is squarish and with new plaster. It does not give you the impression that it is 300 years but five years old' (V1).

Lastly, the national trauma of the destruction of patrimonial Cypriot heritage in north Cyprus has made visitors sensitive towards the protection of Greek Cypriot Orthodox heritage, as evident in the accounts of visitors **V1** and **V18**, who considered religious heritage as an integral part of their cultural identity.

'...we should respect Orthodoxy. Not like the occupied territory, I am a refuge personally, when every time I go there, I see our churches abandoned and our cemeteries deserted. That's the problem: when you do not conserve these Christian sites, you are losing Christianity' (V18).

- Church of St. Nickolas – ***Antagonistic***

An antagonist stance was expressed by a small sub-group of three individuals that hold religious (**V16**, **V19**) and secular motivations (**V10**). Characteristically, in this group, we encounter visitor **V16** a half pilgrim and half (Cypriot female) tourist whose visit was an opportunity to pray for her loved ones, visitor **V19** a Russian well-travelled tourist who was primarily motivated by the WH designation of the site and visitor **V10** a Cypriot expatriate living in USA who visited the site with his wife as tourists. For him, visiting these historical sites was a way of strengthening his cultural routes: *'I do appreciate the old art because it is a piece of art and I have been here before, and I thought visiting again and seeing it gives you a sense of satisfaction and admiration what the older folks have accomplished' (V10)*. A common characteristic of all three participants is their high educational and social status. These

three well-travelled visitors demonstrated stricter criteria towards authenticity. Visitors **V10** and **V16** expressed their discontent towards the conservation of the outer shell of the church, which was considered neglected. Similarly, visitor **V19** went one step further, questioning how authentic the surrounding green grass is, demonstrating a dissatisfaction with the mechanism of ‘responsible beautification’.

‘I think authenticity is to preserve monuments, but it does not mean I do not enhance, touch, or repair things... For example, you can see it is fixed on the exterior in some areas. In other places, not so much ... I prefer to see them repaired instead of falling apart like there [pointing to the crumbling mortar on the exterior] ... And I do not know if the roof is supposed to be like that. Maybe it requires some cleaning [referring to the roof tiles covered in moss] (V10).

‘I have seen some sockets; I do not know if they damaged the walls or the frescos for that’, while in a probing question on whether she would like to see any improvements, she equally pointed towards the crumbling mortar: ‘The mortar has been damaged on the pillar’ (V16).

‘When I entered the site, it was dry modern, but it was more authentic when I entered the church. The green grass killed the authenticity’ (V19).

- **Monastery of St. John - *Contentment***

Regarding the monastery of St. John, all visitors appear content with the heritage conservation strategies. Seven visitors had been self-identified as tourists, a marginally smaller amount than St. Nickolas’ (**V26, V32, V33, V36, V37, V40**). This culturally motivated subgroup is interested in visiting a characteristic example of vernacular architecture where they can have a first-hand experience of Orthodox (living) religious tradition. Their motivations include *novelty and exploration* expressed through a desire to discover Orthodox tradition, *historical interest* in churches’ architectural and artistic beauty as cultural landmarks convey, *escape* and an opportunity to relax mentally.

In this category, we encounter a mid-30s French woman (**V26**), a late 30s Cypriot man (**V32**) and a mid-30s English man (**V33**): *‘Yes, I like to know how religion is lived. It is interesting for me... It’s part of Eastern European history because it is an orthodox place. It is a signature for this kind of religion’ (V26).* *‘The artistic beauty. The beautiful architecture, a sense of place and very last religion... Past generations had a sense of beauty and were skilful’*

(V32). Other visitors include an American female tourist in her late 60s (V36), who identified herself as a *'total tourist'*, a British woman in her 30s (V37), spending her honeymoon on the island and a Belgian woman in her late 60s (V40) who all highlighted the WH designation of the site and their interest in including spiritual sites in their tourist itineraries as they reflect local tradition and culture: *'Because I saw that it was UNESCO site, I was told that they have very nice frescos and I like visiting religious places. And I like visiting religious sites; they often have an exceptional feel, the sacred... I cannot say it exactly, but it feels special'* (V36). *The thing is that when you go for holidays, you go to churches because they have been there forever, and they tell a lot of times the story of the place and every city and town has a church, so you often go there because it is part of the village* (V40). A common aspect of these visitors is a search for an authentic experience.

Whether they consider the monastery authentic, these visitors responded positively, arguing that the current strategy preserves the site in good condition. At the same time, it enables the patina, decay, and the passage of time to add historical depth and authenticity (V32, V33). For others, such as visitor V36, preserving the original character of the monastery, conservators were able to preserve the original values of those who built it, such as humility and piety, rather than owe through scale and imposing architecture. From these accounts, it appears that *'restricted beautification'* and other maintenance-related works are not considered inauthentic as long as they do not stand out.

'Of course, all decay at some point, but I think it will last centuries. I think we should not try to make everything diachronic and immortal. They can last as long as they can. In a probing question regarding gentrification works and, in particular, the replacing of the whole road with cobblestone path, he replied: *'I wouldn't say that this is modern; I guess it is nice, but now I am conflicting myself with what I said about the frescos. It is a tricky question* (V32).

'Yes, the conservation inside is very respectful; they did not paint anything new because they couldn't tell what the original stuff was. I like the way the place is looked after (V33).

'Yeah, I like this approach is not about creating something to impress people to provoke awe like the Egyptians, but something that sparks an internal emotional connection with the divine' (V36).

'What you can do is to say that you preserve what you have, that's something else that will not deteriorate more... It is more here [feeling of living place] than in Belgium. It is faded away there' (V40).

Regarding the rest of the visitors, eleven have been self-identified as having mixed motivations (**V22, V24, V25, V27, V28, V30, V31, V34, V35, V38, V39**) and three as pilgrims (**V21, V23, V29**). Some characteristic motivations from this group include *spiritual enrichment* associated with *historical interest* and a desire for self-discovery and *escape* in a calm atmosphere. *Nostalgia* has also been featured in responses that underscored a search for meaning derived from cultural heritage. For this group, the feeling of escapism is more prevalent. For them, visiting the monastery is a revitalising spiritual experience away from the mundane world that falls within a broader nostalgia of an authentic past that accumulates centuries of cultural history. In this category, we encounter visitor **V22**, a Cypriot artist living in London in her early 30s, and visitor **V27**, a Russian lady in her 40s living in Cyprus: ‘*It is a holy place, I am not very religious. It is something about history, the space, the memories, and the fact that people come here and have faith. It is a place where I feel comfortable*’ (**V22**). Other Cypriot visitors holding similar views include visitor **V30**, a Cypriot in his late 30s living and working in Europe; visitor **V38**, a Cypriot junior doctor in his late 20s; and visitor **V39**, his mid-30s who demonstrated a preference towards historic churches seeking spiritual and cultural connection: ‘*The connection with the past, and the cultural heritage. The search for meaning in what we see around us... Spiritual or even culturally different dimensions*’ (**V30**). Furthermore, in this category, we encounter visitor **V31**, an expatriate in his 60s. For him, this visit is primarily a Sunday trip to his village that awakes childhood memories, enhances ties with the local community and an opportunistic pilgrimage: ‘*Two motivations. Firstly, to escape from Nicosia, the place here is well known. I was born here, and I left early; I remember very little... I have come to pray and then see the area around.*’. Lastly, for two other visitors, a mid-30s Cypriot woman (**V24**) and a Cypriot woman in her 60s (**V25**), the monastery of St. John was an important reason for lodging at Kalopanagiotis village demonstrating a combination of spiritual and escapist motivations: ‘*We came at the village for holidays. We stayed in a local hotel and decided to visit the monastery*’ (**V24**), ‘*For holidays and pilgrimage. I combine both*’ (**V25**).

The three self-identified pilgrims (**V21, V23, V29**) hold deeper *spiritual motivations* characterised by a need to pray and an obligation to do something for the monastery. At the same time, *social interaction* was also featured, especially for expatriates who needed to interact with locals. The first is visitor **V21**, a banker in her early 40s who bears strong family ties with the village. Visitor **V21** spent two hours watering the courtyard flowers before providing the interview. The second was visitor **V23**, a Cypriot student in her early 20s. For

her, a historic church untouched by modernity and richness provoked strong spiritual feelings. The third is visitor **V29** an academic who also has origins from the village of Kalopanagiotis and never loses the opportunity to visit the monastery and receive blessings:

‘The monastery can give me the serenity I am looking for. Looking at it, I feel content it is something sentimental and spiritual. I cannot explain it. I do not have expectations. I think the monastery should have expectations from me’ (V21).

‘Usually, I come here for peace, which is why I like monasteries. They are simpler without so much wealth. I am expecting, from my religion, to not present so much gold and wealth in the churches’ (V23).

‘My wife comes from this place. We consider it an obligation to go and worship the saint... Prayer: a closer look at the detail because you will always dictate something new on the icons. I am a pilgrim, but at the same time, I am interested in the icons’ (V29).

Unlike secularly driven visitors who considered authenticity about original materials and techniques, the 11 visitors introduced in the previous paragraph drew on the conceptual structure of religious beliefs to consider authenticity issues. Some characteristic answers were:

‘When I go to big, splendid churches with extravagant decoration... I am losing the spiritual part. The calmness of the monastery. It represents something else. Here, it is authentic because of its simplicity (V21).

‘It is a place where I feel comfortable. I do not feel as much the holiness of the place, but this place, because it is also an old place, seems that it has attracted the faith of all those people who come here and light a candle and pray. It makes it special’ (V22).

‘Yes, I think it is authentic; it is built humbly with stones and timbers (V23).

‘Yes, I do. I earn peacefulness and calmness from these places. Hope for tomorrow. I have not seen anything negative since I have been coming here. They do not harm the place’ (V25).

‘At least it does not have the tourist market around people selling stuff. As long as it is pretty old and they do not try to bring something new into it, it’s okay (V27).

‘Authenticity emerges from architecture, iconography and then from the behaviour, the simplicity. We can see the authenticity of the place here. There is authenticity beyond the wooden roof and the stone masonry; we have the holy icons from the 14th and 15th

centuries—things we cannot find abroad. The experience here is deeper, more meaningful’
(V30).

The rest of the visitors (V24, V34, V35, V38, V39) expressed their contentment. However, some visitors (V35 and V39) connected overall conservation with religious practices. Lastly, like visitors V2 and V13 interviewed at St. Nickolas’, visitor V31, who also remembers the monastery of St. John from a young age, spoke highly of some improvements, such as access. In line with secular visitors, for these groups, appropriate heritage conservation should preserve and highlight the spiritual values of the site, such as humility, quietness, simplicity, and serenity.

‘I am satisfied with how the place is organised, and they have done a good job’ (V38).

‘I have come here three times and never seen liturgies taking place. Our churches are a bit neglected’ (V35).

‘The wealth we see in some other monasteries questions people about the spiritual purpose of religion. First, they [the church] are interested in the beautification of the place. I do not see this gentrification here. The only difference is the cobblestone of the street. I detest the dust; I prefer the cobblestone; dust makes you dirty’ (V31).

Concluding Remarks

Two important issues are coming out from this first section. Material authenticity is crucial for those showing a compliant stance in both churches. The analysis demonstrated that authentic material, traditional building techniques and natural wear and tear all trigger the perception of authenticity. Equally for both groups (tourists and pilgrims), a historic, authentic environment (a place that looks old) reflects better the (Christian) intangible values attached to these places, such as humility and simplicity. Thus, by ‘freezing’ the monument's structural fabric, the intangible values attached to the monument are also preserved. In conclusion, visitors are willing to accept an element of ‘staging’ or ‘gentrification’ as long as it looks authentic and triggers nostalgia.

Visitors’ motivations have also been discussed in this first section. Qualitative interviews provide rich data, and visitors cannot be placed within a single category as their motivations vary. Data demonstrated that escapism and religious motivation it is more prominent with Cypriot visitors who valued the historic and natural beauty of the churches to provide a calm atmosphere and facilitate an escape from their daily lives. For Cypriots, this

escape was an opportunity to pray for their loved ones and receive blessings to continue their lives. On the other hand, for international tourists, exploration and discovering the history of the place where the need for learning and curiosity was more prominent. Data also revealed that social interaction as motivation was more evident with locals and expatriates familiar with the site and its people.

5.2.2 Merchandising

The presence of two souvenir shops manifests this practice. At St. Nickolas', it is placed within an outbuilding constructed with traditional stonework, approximately 15 meters from the church. At the same time, at St. John's, it is housed within a low-ceiling monastic cell next to the church's door (Figure 15). The question put forward to visitors was the following: 'Does the souvenir shop contribute to your experience or alter the character of the site?' Overall, the analysis revealed that at St. Nickolas', out of twenty visitors, 15 appeared to be content with the souvenir shop; 1 was discontent, while 4 expressed an ambivalent stance. While at the Monastery of St. John's, 16 visitors were categorised as compliant, 1 antagonistic and 3 ambivalent.

- Church of St. Nickolas - *Contentment*

Nine who expressed their contentment had been self-identified as tourists (**V5, V8, V9, V10, V11, V12, V14, V15, V20**). An underlying idea running through these responses is that although these visitors usually do not purchase souvenirs, they consider them necessary at heritage destinations. These visitors view souvenir shops as a source of revenue and an opportunity to generate income (**V14**) and memorable experiences (**V20**):

'I do not think so because it's not huge and because they sell icons and try to make some normal money. If there were several shops, it would affect it a lot. But just one, I think it's normal and great' (V14)

'It's good that the souvenir shop is outside the church. It is good that it contributes to the place to generate money. It makes people remember the time. I bought a ring, and I like it (V20)

For visitors (V11), a shop like this reflects the hospitality of the site, providing a comfortable experience offsetting the isolated character of the church:

‘It’s good to have something like this because you can buy water or a coke. I am not saying that we should put chairs with children running around, but I do not like this in Cyprus (V11).

However, the most prevalent response for these visitors is an altruistic stance (V9, V12, V15), acknowledging that such shops are important for those interested in buying some ‘symbols’ to remember their visit or bring gifts back to their loved ones (*‘spiritual reminisce’*). Visitors V9 and V12 argued,

‘I think it’s good. I do not buy souvenirs, but I think if someone is religious and orthodox, he may buy some things and items to bring it back home. It does not affect the authenticity, is not too much’ (V9),

‘It’s okay, but it could have been avoided. For me, I do not need it. But it’s okay for some practitioners to be useful. It does not matter for me’ (V12).

On a different note, visitors V5 and V8 stressed the importance of scale and positioning:

‘I think it is small and that’s good, it’s not nice to have commercial activities in such places’ (V5).

‘It does not alter the character because nobody forces you to buy. In the past, it was in the narthex, but now it’s much better. I do not mind it. Now when the church was left just as a church, I do not mind it’ (V8).

These nine visitors demonstrated that product relevance, presentation (blended with the historical landscape), scale and positioning, and discourses around hospitality and fundraising could offset ethical concerns regarding the ‘profanity’ of such secular activities.

Six visitors, who equally expressed their contentment towards merchandising practices, self-identified as pilgrims or had mixed motivations (V1, V2, V3, V13, V16, V18). Unlike the previous group, who tried to justify the souvenir shop considering how it is blended with the space (physically and ethically), this group appears more familiar with such activities. Thus, issues of scale, positioning and ‘blending’ were replaced by other concerns, such as spiritual reminisce, as in the case of V1, and affordances in V3. At the same time, V15 appears unobstructed and indifferent towards such merchandising practices. However, as the account of visitor V13 demonstrates, scale and positioning could also become an issue under some

‘extreme’ circumstances. These concerns were lifted once the souvenir shop was repositioned outside of the narthex, according to (V8 and V13).

‘I think it is good because it contributes to the promotion of this asset. My wife collects shot glasses, we always bring something back when we travel. It’s a memory.

It is not something negative’ (V1).

‘They are very expensive. You can find these things in the city much cheaper. The same happens at Kykkos there are so many icons full of gold you cannot buy them’ (V3).

‘We have not noticed it, to be honest. We are not into consumerism either. We were staring at the beauty of the church’ (V15).

‘For a few years, she used to sell souvenirs inside the temple, and now she is outside. I did not like that. Because we do not want to sell something inside the church, we want to promote it. She was settled inside the Narthex at the entrance, and she had shelves and cupboards there selling. It was standing out a lot’ (V13).

- Church of St. Nickolas – ***Antagonistic***

Only one visitor (V4) expressed openly his discontent with the souvenir shop. According to him, such commercial activities on-site impact the authentic character of the place more than anything else. For this visitor, the Church is an institution rich enough to put up with funding issues; thus, any merchandising activities can only degrade the place. For him, commercial activities of any form are a modern touch that is better to be avoided. In the question ‘Do you consider this place as authentic?’

‘Definitely, it is authentic. I see that there are very few interventions from modern times, and they are nicely preserved and well-kept... Souvenir shops or any shops in any church is something it should not be there’ (V4). In a probing question, what would have been his opinion regarding admission fees? *‘I think it should be on a voluntary basis you should do it if you want to do it.... After all, judging from Russia, the church is a vibrant organization they are like oligarchs’ (V4).*

- Church of St. Nickolas – ***Ambivalence***

Four visitors, self-identified as tourists (V6, V7, V17, V19), had been categorised as ambivalent. The reflection regarding the pros and cons of merchandising at the church of St.

Nickolas' is more prominent in these accounts. Three thorny issues that do not sit well in these accounts are ethical concerns such as the use of money (V7) on these sites, distance (V6, V17) of the souvenir shop from the church and scale (V19). However, the underlying assumption is that certain 'sacrifices' should be expected at historic sites, which gives us food for further improvements and adjustments.

'I think it is not good; it erodes the place, but on the other hand, it gives some money to the church. But we should make some money out of it, and possibly it is needed because this place requires lots of money (V7).

...it's OK to be respectful. I would not mind if it were further back so it would not fit in my photo' (V17).

'I guess someone can buy a little guide. They need some revenue for the tourists. Of course, I am a bit sceptical about making money around churches. Many people like it, so you cannot deny this experience. It stands out, but you must attract people. You cannot have it very small because the person sitting there should have enough space. The kiosk is nearly the same size as the church dominating the landscape' (V19).

- Monastery of St. John - **Contentment**

Most visitors (17 out of 20) at the monastery of St. John's expressed their content with merchandising practices. Regarding those expressing secular motivations in visiting the site (V26, V33, V36, V37, V40), the souvenir shop to the right of the church's entrance was considered a necessary intrusion. Its humble positioning and the need for fundraising offset the spiritual digression. Characteristically, visitor V26 argued:

'I think taking the money and conserving the frescos is necessary. It is a small shop to the right'. (V26)

These concerns were also shared by visitors V33 and V40:

'I have not been, but yes, it looks fine if it keeps some kind of fund generator is fine' (V33).

'I do not think it is a problem. I understand why it is there, but it is not that we will buy something. It is not so useful for us' (V40).

Visitor **V36** argued that the shop does not impact authenticity; however, she raised some concerns over product relevance, while **V37** highlighted the non-pestering environment.

‘In some sense, some of the souvenirs they have are for the observant. If you are not observant, you do not know what they mean, and that’s important. They are in Greek Language. I guess is because Greek is the language of worship here’ (V36).

‘I am always worrying about the gift shops, but that one was quite nice, and the guy who runs it is very friendly. He shows you everything, and we did not feel pressure to buy. I think because it is free to get in, I wouldn’t mind buying something from the gift shop—a small contribution to maintain the site. It can be a nice addition if you do not feel the pressure. People like souvenirs, so it is nice’ (V37).

For spiritually or quasi-spiritually motivated visitors, spiritual reminiscence (**V22**, **V25**), fundraising and affordances (**V23**), product relevance (scale and positioning scale and positioning **V38** and **V39**), as well as scale and positioning (**V27**). Lastly, visitor **V29** maintained that the shop is necessary for covering financial needs, highlighting how relevant products could promote the Christian church's cultural heritage:

‘Look, the particular one here is a small shop that has primarily icons, rosaries and books inside. I think it is good that it exists, and I will correlate it with my overall experience when you feel that you receive the blessing from the monastery and the power; sometimes, you need to maintain this spiritual bond by buying something (V21).

‘I think it is a good balance. For those that it means something, it is nice to take something with them, even a small icon, or oil because I live abroad it is a memory, a part of the holiness of the place’ (V22).

‘You can find an icon there, a memory you can take with you. Especially when you travel abroad and bring something back to remember the place. Where else can you find them, and they are connected to the site’ (V25).

‘When the prices are logical, I think it’s okay. I think these shops it is a way for the community to benefit by selling their homemade stuff’ (V23)

‘I can barely see it. It is a tiny door; it does not shout out. It is okay like this. It balances out (V27)

‘Maybe because it is called ‘bookshop’, it tricked us into not seeing it as a souvenir shop. It depends on what they sell; they should send relevant things, not fridge magnets, ‘I love Cyprus’ (V38).

‘No, there is no negative impact because they provide good religious and historical books for the nation and books with St Paisios prophecies, which are relevant today and icons. We can learn many things from these’ (V39).

Some priests spend some time here, and the monastery needs support. It would have been ideal if they sold icons such as the holy icon of St. John’s sleep or St Linos; these icons do not exist. Incredible icons that do not exist in other churches. Icons, which can be found only here, should have been photographed, following copyright procedures like the Vatican, and to be sold for financial support of the monastery, in any form, paper, or wood’ (V29).

- Monastery of St. John – **Ambivalent**

Two visitors, V32 and V35, fall into this category. Although eventually, they agreed that it is a necessary intrusion, their reflections could provide insight into the debates surrounding merchandising practices, including ethics and authenticity. Visitor **V32** holds an idealised stance, considering any commercial activities as the Achille’s heel of the institutional church:

‘I am not great a fun of mingling religion and finance. I understand why they have it; the church requires income for conservation and the salaries of the staff. But I lose a bit of my respect when money is involved in religion’ (V32)

During the interview, it was evident that for him, such activities evoke negative thoughts related to some of the practices the institutional Church endorses. This idealised stance is also expressed by visitor **V35**, who raised concerns regarding authenticity:

‘I think it spoils to some extent the authenticity of the place, but I believe that it contributes to the expenses of the monastery’ (V35)

- Monastery of St. John - **Antagonistic**

One visitor demonstrated his aversion towards the souvenir shop. Visitor V28 who identified himself as being half tourist – half pilgrim, argued that the shop: ‘it is something that it could have been avoided’. In a probing question on how he would respond to admission fees

he replied: ‘I wouldn’t bother entering the church’ in a humoristic tone. The participant did not provide any explanation for his answer while there was no evidence of reflection.

Concluding Remarks

Visitors’ responses towards this practice demonstrated how well the souvenir shop is blended with the space and the nature of the product provided, such as the preference for items that could give spiritual reminiscence and pragmatic concerns over fundraising, making visitors more accepting of this ‘intrusive’ practice. The power of these issues can offset the shop's proximity to the sacred periphery. An interesting finding is that tourists appeared more concerned with how the shop impacts the sanctity of the sites. At the same time, religious-driven visitors seemed more concerned with product relevance and affordances. In this context, the visitors who expressed their discontent towards such practices were predominantly tourists with a more idealised perception of the religious sites than pilgrims who were more familiar with such practices at sacred destinations.

5.2.3 Curation

This section aims to answer the central question of what church visitors felt higher levels of immersion and why. As discussed, the two churches demonstrate two different curatorial strategies, with St. Nickolas adopting a minimalist exhibition while St. John is curated as an active church. The analysis revealed that at the church of St. Nickolas, ten visitors identified as ‘content’, six as ‘antagonistic’ and four as ‘ambivalent’. While at the monastery of St. John’s, 16 visitors expressed their satisfaction, and 4 said an ambivalent stance.

- Church of St. Nickolas - *Contentment*

Ten visitors appeared to be content with the presentation strategies at this church, 7 of whom were identified as tourists and three as having mixed motivations. Tourists (**V4, V8, V9, V11, V17, V19, V20**) believe that removing furniture does not impact the sense of a living church and that the church retains its function as a ‘living worshipping site’. A visitor (**V8**) with an Orthodox background argued that the relocation of candle holders is reasonable considering the sensitivity of wall paintings. Most importantly for **V8**, this strategy does not impact the spirituality of the place as, according to him, spirituality is an intrinsic element of the temple that coexists with any efforts for preventive conservation under the church's new status as a heritage site. Visitor **V9**, who had a Catholic background, expressed a similar view. Equally, **V19**, a tourist with a Russian Orthodox background, was quite satisfied with the

internal arrangement, unlike the exterior nanomagnet considered ‘gentrified’. For this tourist, a fully furnished church is not a prerequisite for its living character.

‘No not at all [it does not impact the character of the church]. The fresco will be damaged if you light a candle. I do not think it’s a pew or a candle that it will give identity to a church’ (V8).

‘I would not have noticed that if you have not mentioned it. I do not think they need to have these to be considered authentic. As long as the spirit is there you do not need the pews... Once you go inside it’s a proper church. Because it’s orthodox Christian more or less they look the same... Because I am not a religious person, I did not think about it. It was a pretty amazing craftsmanship there for me. I find interesting how they sent messages through the frescos that God is here’ (V9).

A different picture was given by visitors **V11** and **V17** on this issue. The first considers furniture relocation as a prudent strategy to protect the site by reducing the time spent in the church and the activities performed, embracing the mechanism of ‘preventive conservation’. The second visitor justified the furniture removal on her understanding of the authentic religious site drawing. Lastly, visitor **V20**, reflecting on his experience of museumified churches, argued that minimalist strategies are usually less distracting, allowing instead of overshadowing spiritual magnetism. The visitor also justified the presence of floor lamps and the absence of pews as a combination that facilitates the appreciation of religious art].

‘It’s irrelevant to me. I think it’s logical in these places to be like this because people destroy relics and paintings with their breathing. It’s positive that it does not have any’ (V11).

‘It does not look shiny and updated... ‘It’s irrelevant to me. I think it’s logical in these places to be like this because people destroy relics and paintings with their breathing. It’s positive that it does not have any. (V17)

‘[It reminds me] a church, because if it were a museum, there would be many added things like signs. There was only one single outside. It seems that no one touched it. It is like a museum because it’s an important monument, but obviously, it is a church’. ‘[The emptiness] ... enables us to see things that we could not know if it was not light and put focus on some parts of the church. Yes, we lose the authenticity of the place, but it is necessary to highlight some aspects (V20).

Religiously motivated visitors (**V2**, **V13**, **V18**) who were content with the minimalist presentation strategy appeared to embrace this ‘museological – secular’ metanarrative by considering presentation strategies and spirituality as unrelated things. The following abstract demonstrates how visitor **V2** recalls the transformations of the church:

Researcher: Do you remember if there were pews within the church in the past?

V2: *‘I think it had... they used to sit, yes... there were lots of icons and relics inside. Those who knew they took them. It was not protected they robbed it many times’.*

Researcher: So, I assume they removed those relics for safekeeping.

V2: *‘Yes, when they expressed an interest to protect it, not much was left, just the icon’.*

Researcher: Do you think these alterations impacted the authenticity of the place?

V2: *‘No, they protected it. Because if it were left year after year, the frescos would deteriorate more. There are some candles inside the iconostasis, but it is prohibited to light a candle inside. I think this is good practice. I light my candle outside and then pray it’s the same. I think what’s the point of lighting a candle inside because, through the years the smoke destroys the church’.*

Prioritising the safety of the church and its treasures, this local villager considered the removal of religious items a prudent strategy that had no impact on his spiritual experience. Visitor V18 responded similarly: ‘They have built big churches in villages in *recent years in Cyprus*. So, we do not need to enlarge these small chapels and put pews inside. I do not think it affects the spirituality of the place. Lastly, **V13**, who was familiar with the practices of the nearby camping site and the need for space, justified this strategy for practical reasons. The data suggest that this group of people has internalised elements of AHD, particularly preventive conservation, that made them a positive predisposition towards ‘minimal re-integration’. Furthermore, what is of interest is that these visitors, pilgrims, and tourists used religious language in many instances to justify such strategies. This point of view aligns with Orthodox tradition, embraced by clergypersons in this study, that considers churches a living efficacious ritual space regardless of their state.

- Church of St. Nickolas – *Antagonistic*

Of the six individuals who expressed their discontent, four self-identified as tourists (**V5**, **V6**, **V7**, **V15**), one as pilgrim (**V3**) and one as having mixed motivations (**V16**). The main

problem raised by tourists was that the current curation that emphasises the artistic elements overshadows the church's liturgical character and, eventually, the immersion levels.

'I think this one is closer to a museum. Because there are few attributes like candle places, smells, pews, it's more a museum than a church' (V5).

'For me, no... The original function of every church is where you can be with yourself and be alone to pray to God, and you can light a candle. This is the church's original mission, and I had a similar experience at Kykkos Monastery. It was a performing church inside. But with St. Nickolas, the feeling was to explore and visualise the place and try to imagine damaged churches' (V6).

The following discussion with **V15** is of interest:

Researcher: Since you visited a few of these UNESCO churches in Cyprus, could you compare them for me?

V15 *'This one was more like a museum, the others more like a church, and the other at Pelendri we had to call him to come, and he was sitting on a church to make sure that we do not steal anything [laughing] or take photos'.*

Researcher: Does the absence of religious furniture have any impact?

V15: *Yes, and the place looks emptier. The other thing is that we have been in many active orthodox churches with icons on display and people coming to pray. You do not have this here. At Kalopanagiotis [St. John's monastery] you have this.*

Researcher: Do you prefer this?

V15: *'I think it makes it more... there is more continuity, and yes, being active is more living. It felt like the church at Kalopanagiotis... with the church and people around it, it felt like a real church. Also, we cannot take photos, which creates a bit of distance.*

These tourists find it difficult to immerse themselves in the church. The absence of religious furniture leaves a lot to the imagination; thus, the feeling of secularisation is prominent in these accounts. Unlike previous visitors who showed contentment, these people could not feel the 'spirit of the place'.

The two spiritually driven visitors (**V3**, **V16**) considered the current strategies limiting, raising practical obstacles preventing them from performing religious practices. Visitor **V3**, a self-identified pilgrim, finds the current arrangement restricting as it prevents her from

executing everyday spiritual rituals. For **V16**, the absence of furniture and the difficulty in finding a moment of solitude to pray takes away an essential part of the experience, leaving her spiritual need unfulfilled.

‘The exterior is very beautiful, clean with the grass, but inside they should have put a pew, a donation box candles, to complete the frescos’ (V3).

‘Yes, it does not recall as a church when someone will come and spend some time and listen to the liturgy. You enter and leave the space like a tourist (V16)

- Church of St. Nickolas – *Ambivalence*

Four visitors were identified as having an ambivalent stance. One had ‘mixed motivations’ while the other three were self-identified as tourists. For visitor **V1**, who holds diverse motivations, the absence of religious furniture does hurt this experience. However, this is offset by two icons at the narthex, where he could demonstrate his devotion. Minimal re-integration as a strategy sits uneasily with V1, who consider it an inescapable development. What characterised this visitor's account is a back-and-forth reflection regarding the ideal presentation strategy for a monument of this nature, considering issues of a living tradition, protection, and authenticity.

‘If the original was like this, then yes. If they had ten pews, then they should remain. It should be retained as it was... Although the particular church, because people were visiting, put some icons and a candle which gives you a sense of spirituality. Conservation works are part of reasonable efforts, I believe. On the other hand, if these things [icons on stands] were not inside the church...’ (V1).

Regarding the three tourists (**V10**, **V12**, **V14**), their position is not so different from those demonstrating a content stand. The similarity is that although they are secularly driven, they can feel the spirituality of the place, which takes the form of a (distant religious) cultural memory. The difference is that the absence of religious furniture takes away some of the spirit of the place, giving a ‘museum effect’. For **V10**, the ability to perform religious practices helped him to immerse himself and feel the spirit of the place. Similarly, visitors **V12** and **V14** had Catholic backgrounds, although tourists strongly perceived the church as a living spiritual site despite the minimalist approach. However, their reservations take the form of altruism,

considering whether this choice would prevent local parishioners from performing their religious performances.

There was an old pew on the one side. I think it would have been better if there were pews. Of course, I do not know if they use this for regular masses. A little affects the authenticity if it wasn't set up as it was meant to be... I would say something in between. I kissed the icons, though, so it still maintains the feeling of the church. It has not lost its sense as a church' (V10).

'I think it's a church. It's a place that makes people believe, and when I get inside, I can see this aim'. In a question regarding religious furniture, she replied: 'I think it helps to get the effect, but it makes it harder to use the place as a church to sit, for example, and pray. I understand why people need them; I do not personally, but it's still a church for me (V12).

'I am not exactly sure this is the first orthodox church, and I cannot compare; there are no sits to sit and pray, so I am not sure if it still has this function, but the spiritual atmosphere is there. If you are religious, you can pray and achieve communion with God without sitting... but it's challenging to have the same function as a spiritual place where you can pray. For people coming here to stay a bit and reflect on themselves, their faith is more complex (V14).

- Monastery of St. John – ***Contentment***

Sixteen visitors were content with the exhibition strategy at St. John's, while four held an ambivalent stance. These results are significantly different from the previous church, where half of the sample openly expressed their discontent or concerns regarding the site's internal management (V26, V32, V40). Apart from the historic pews that denote a 'worshipping living site' and the feeling of inauthenticity 'labels' could provoke, visitor V37 also highlighted other features, such as the church hymns playing in the background that created a 'multisensory experience'. The following accounts indicate that immersion is higher in a church that retains its active character for non-religious people. This strategy allows visitors to experience the performative aspect of living religion and triggers the sense of a living site. Equally, the following responses demonstrate that the experience of an immersive and performative experience with a residing site is more important than satisfying curiosity. At the same time, the lack of information retains a mysticism in the atmosphere.

[It reminds me] *a church... Maybe the feeling you have entering here. Maybe the frescos make it original it's not like a museum. You do not have all the information like in a museum* (V26).

'A church. I was impressed by how old and nicely done the frescos are. You could understand from the style that different hagiographers did different parts. You can see a historical continuity in the place. One fresco could have been drawn 100 years after the other. I do not see anything to remind me of a museum; it is just the feeling of history' ... [author] if the place is cleared of religious furniture to emphasise the artistic part? 'I wouldn't like it. It should remain a worshipping site, not just a museum' (V32).

'A museum is a place where you cannot touch, things. And here you can touch things, it is alive, you have a feeling that people use it, in the museum they do not. The pews and the cards for blessings are a real place, not a museum' (V40).

'I think it seems more so with the music going on in the background. I would say yes. I have never seen pews like that either so yes. Are the pews here for the congregation or for the monks?' (V37).

Regarding pilgrims (V21, V23, V29) and visitors with mixed motivations (V22, V24, V25, V27, V28, V30, V31, V34, V38, V39) two narratives emerged. The one underscores the idea that the absence or presence of religious furniture plays little or no role in the 'spiritual' sense of place. For these visitors (V21, V29 and V30), religious furniture could contribute but do not have a decisive role in experiencing spirituality. For this visitor, spirituality is innate, while with appropriate use, curatorial strategies could highlight the artistic and spiritual elements of the church.

'The sacred space remains the same. I have been to a church in Athens, St Helena. It was full of pews. When I revisited the place, they removed all of them, leaving a few chairs quite apart. Then, a considerable space was created, and it was imposing. I found this approach very interesting because there are some people who do not want to sit. I like it as a church and as a place at the same time (V30).

I consider the pews an integral part of the church, especially the old ones. Sometimes, they put old pews, and this is good because they contribute to the atmosphere. Once in Germany, I sat on the 16th-century pews and felt very nice being part of history' (V31).

Two interviews that show how religious people do not associate spirituality with items are the accounts of visitors **V29** and **V21**, who shifted the discussion away from materiality to intangibility:

‘The particular site has not changed much because liturgies are held here. When masses stop taking place, I will be in a position to comment on that. Since masses keep taking place, I think the site retains its religious character’ (V29).

‘I am very attached to the space, but if it was an isolated chapel that used to function two times a year and you stopped this as well, then yes, probably... I cannot see one church, just a building (V21).

Others (**V23**, **V25**, **V30**, **39**) expressed a more practical stance, highlighting how religious furniture helps them to perform their spiritual practices. Visitor **V39** shared with me how lighting a candle and praying to the icons are essential practices he expects to find during his visit. Equally, for visitor **V23**, religious items such as votives and music helped her to achieve a spiritual experience. Lastly, visitor **V34** considered the presence of pews as an essential element with a functional purpose in helping her to sit and pray.

‘Mostly church, I did not feel that I came to observe something; I came to pray, light a candle, and pray to the icons. I have not come to observe something like a museum’ (V39).

‘Yes, I think the place is clean. People come and leave their votive offerings. It is a tidy place. I found the music interesting. Two, I thought there was a liturgy when I entered the monastery... Yes, it is positive [pews], because the furniture arrangement like the pews they are not looking in a line creates an authentic experience on how the space was functioning’ (V23).

‘I think pews should remain. I recall now the Aggeloktisti church at Larkana. I think they contributed. When I visit a church, I need to sit somewhere to pray. Even for a few seconds, I take a position there. It’s an important pause’ (V34).

- Monastery of St. John - **Ambivalence**

Lastly, four visitors expressed an ambivalent stance towards the specific exhibition strategy—their ambivalent view results from an internal reflection of how an ‘ideal’ religious

site should look. In pursuing authenticity, these visitors considered whether the current strategy represents an untouched living sacred site. Regarding the two tourists (**V33** and **V36**), although both agreed that the arrangement give the feeling of a church, the place also gave them the sense of a museum. The lack of religious affiliation was the primary reason **V33** could not feel the place as a church but as a place that looked like a church. Similarly, **V36** thought that the limited presence of pews at the central chapel and the general current arrangement create a ‘fake atmosphere’ resembling a living church. These responses support an emerging idea in this section that those lacking any affiliation with the Christian faith, either as a belief system or cultural memory, place more emphasis on religious items that function as stimuli.

‘For me, more of a museum, I guess it looks like a working church; I do not go to churches often; I do not get a spiritual feeling’ (V33).

‘A church. I like that the old pews are stuck upon the tiles and can have mass any moment. I wish it were a bit more organised for the mass, and I would like that to be more of a place of worship than a museum...I think it does, yes [referring to the impact the absence of pews can have], you appreciate more. At least it is good to know that people will come and worship here when we leave. It adds to the respect. It does not feel that it is outdated and dead (V36).

Lastly, the answers of visitors **V35** and **V38**, self-identified as half-pilgrims and half-tourists, demonstrated how heritagization (expressed through fuzzy hybridity) is a riddle that some people find difficult to apprehend. While this visitor prioritises religious practices highlighting a church's worshipping character, he simultaneously undermines his view by saying that religious furniture is unimportant. Visitor **V35** gave a quite confusing answer that demonstrates how he tried to balance the secular and spiritual significance of the church in his mind. The following discussion is indicative.

Researcher: Do you think the church retains its original liturgical function?

V35: ‘I have come here three times and never seen liturgies taking place. Our churches are a bit neglected.

Researcher: Do you think the pews contribute to the authenticity?

V35: ‘I think no, I prefer if they were not there to reveal...how to say it... Okay, we can leave them, but staying as such is good and authentic. To add something like the pews without hiding the frescos’.

Lastly, visitor **V38** argued that the place reflects a museum and a church: *'I think both because we are both more curious and we want to explore and understand what we see'*. In a probing question where she spotted the musicological approach, she replied: *'Yes, especially some elements such as the saint's relics where it is like an exhibited object'* (**V38**). This view brings to mind how an element of 'curation' or exhibition has always been part of religious tradition to display its rich historical and theological routes.

Concluding Remarks

The first observation is that immersion in an active worshipping church is higher than in a non-active one. To a large extent, this is because furniture provides the 'stage' where spiritual practice can be performed and observed, which matches visitors' expectations of visiting an authentic living religious place. The qualitative approach revealed that pre-entrance narratives influence visitors' perceptions of this issue, particularly the conceptual structure of 'religion'. Those who have some affiliation (religious, cultural or both) with Christian tradition tend to consider sanctity as inherent; thus, the absence of sacred furniture had little effect on feeling the spirit of the place. On the contrary, those who could not draw on the religious tradition needed furniture as a stimulus to feel the spirit of the place. The religious-driven visitors who expressed their dissatisfaction highlighted mainly the impact this strategy has on the performative aspect of the experience rather than the spiritual feeling. It should also be noted that for most visitors, labels and other interpretive material encountered traditionally in museums accelerate the feelings of secularisation. These data demonstrate that the perception of authenticity combines the knowledge and concerns visitors bring with them on-site (pre-entrance narratives) and their interaction with religious space.

5.2.4 Preserve as found (Wall Painting Conversation)

The conservation strategy adopted for the conservation of frescos at the two churches is the same. The only significant difference is that several holy figures have had their eyes damaged and coated by a whitish mortar at St. John. The current practice 'preserve as found', adopted by the DoA, has two outcomes. Firstly, it underscores the original material and damage inflicted on the frescos, thus, at the very least, elevating historical value on the same ethical ground with spiritual significance. Secondly, retaining the fragmented nature of frescos constitutes religious scenes, in many cases illegible to the viewers. The following paragraph presents and discusses visitors' perceptions of this issue. At St. Nickolas' 14 church, visitors expressed a compliant stance towards the existing management structure, four antagonistic

views and two ambivalent ones. At the monastery of St. John's, 18 visitors said a respectful stance and two antagonistic.

- Church of St. Nickolas – *Contentment*

Regarding 'content' visitors, ten had been self-identified as tourists (V4, V5, V7, V8, V11, V12, V14, V17, V19, V20) and four as holding some spiritual motivation. Tourists such as V4 and V5 were impressed with the current state of preservation, especially by how well the colours of the frescos are preserved: *'It looks very authentic'* and *'It's wonderful'* were repeated phrases in those narratives. Characteristically, The excellent preservation of the frescos and the patina created over the centuries, demonstrating the natural passage of time, enhanced the feeling of authenticity, while the superb preservation of the frescos was a catalyst for many visitors to consider the monument authentic.

'Yes, I think they are very colourful, and I can see them clearly, I can recognise the saints'
(V12)

'Yes, really authentic because the frescos are magnificent. There has been some renovation, but the colours are not so bright or new' (V14)

In the hypothetical question, asking visitors to provide their opinion about a potential completion of the missing parts of the frescos, they all replied negatively, considering the damage and aesthetic fragmentation as tangible evidence of 'historical accuracy'. None of these visitors thought of the illegibility of the frescos (due to their aesthetic fragmentation) as a problem but rather a stimulus for historical immersion.

'I think we should not add anything and keep it as it is' (V4)

'To be honest, it is not a good idea. I prefer it like this. It is more authentic, and it's normal to have missing parts' (V14)

'No, it would be a mismatch [referring to completion]. They should stay like this to show how it was, what has remained, and nowhere in the world they complete that'. (V11)

No, wrong. You change the history. It is something new. They preserved the existing frescos. I had the opportunity to see the conservation project here, and they conserved what it was there. If they try to add something on top, then it is something new' (V8)

'No, because I do not like modern mix with the original' (V19).

Other visitors, such as V12, raised ethical concerns regarding completing frescos. According to her, ‘freezing’ the monument by preventing modern interventions enhances historical accuracy. A common theme these visitors present is the connection of authenticity with materiality. For them, original material, even in fragmented form, is a source of authenticity and historical accuracy. The idea that they would not be able to distinguish the original from the added new part was an idea that made these visitors nervous and uncomfortable. Aesthetic re-integration is perceived as a misleading strategy, while any addition creates an anxiety about being unable to distinguish the original. Characteristically, visitors **V17** and **V20**, having considered alternative methods of aesthetic re-integration, argued that such methods eventually undermine authenticity, showing a preference for aesthetic fragmentation and illegibility over restoration. Lastly, weighing the pros and cons of restoration touching the heart of the conservation debate, visitor **V7** maintained that mimetic reintegration risks hindering the historical value, constituting the original unrecognisable. In contrast, conservation that highlights new additions would overshadow the original, creating a fake perception. It should also be emphasised that responses including the ‘right thing to do’ and [this is what] ‘everybody does’ indicate visitors' familiarity with the ‘preserve as found’ strategy.

‘Because when someone paints something new on an old fresco, you add your interpretation on the original, so this is something that the original artist may disagree with’. ‘I do not agree to it [restoration]. As we said, that means we will add and lose the place's authenticity.

It can be well done, but it has not in the past (V12).

They would not look real... I do not think you need to. I have been to places where they redid the masonry using different colours so you could tell the old and the new, and it is very distracting’ (V20).

‘I disagree with this. We had a similar discussion in France on whether the church should be restored as it was before the fire If you do the same exactly, you may lose its value and beauty. On the other hand, highlighting the difference between the old and the new may work, but then again, you will destroy the original. Isn’t it shame?’ (V7).

Some spiritually driven visitors (**V1**, **V2**, **V16**, **V18**) also agree with ‘tourists’ towards this strategy. Responders such as **V1** and **V6** appear to accept this practice, while he considers church emphasis in the pictorial/narrative dimension an obsession.

‘In a church, you try to conserve if the frescos have been destroyed or faded; it is possible to feel that something is missing. At historical sites, you always have this restriction that you will destroy it if you do something that was not there... it’s okay to leave a bit of white in the churches. Not all of them were fully decorated. It is not beauty contestation’ (V1).

‘I think it would not be authentic. Our church has this tendency to refurbish everything. I think they should stay as it is (V16).

‘No, it’s better as it is. We, the Christians, can visualise how the icon continues. We guess what saints are presented. I am not sure about the foreigners, but we guess how the hands and the legs of the saints continue’ (V18).

These accounts demonstrate how liabilities such as aesthetic fragmentation and, consequently, the illegibility of religious scenes are of secondary importance. In their eyes, aesthetic fragmentation indicates authenticity and historical accuracy that does not freeze monuments in the present but reveals cultural and historical layers that would have been buried beneath the restoration. For these visitors, material integrity is an essential indication of authenticity and triggers escapism, nostalgia, and historical immersion.

Church of St. Nickolas – *Antagonistic*

Of the four visitors expressing an antagonistic stance, two self-identified as tourists (V10 and V15) and the other two as pilgrims (V3 and V13). The two tourists provided a different view on the relationship between materiality and authenticity. For V10 and V15, authenticity is not to be found in the originality of the materials but in an embodied experience during which they can recreate the authentic environment. Visitor V10 says conservation does not mean freezing a monument or avoiding repairing and completing missing parts. For this individual, restoring frescos also indicates care and responsiveness from authorities. Similarly, visitor V15 was satisfied with the frescos, which looked bright and well-defined; however, in a probing question regarding the restoration of missing parts, she argued. These two tourists considered aesthetic fragmentation a constraining factor preventing them from experiencing what medieval churchgoers would experience. This type of experience-seeking authenticity has been linked to postmodern tourism (Jin *et al.* 2020) and is characterised by a cynical perspective where the line between real and fake is pointless while restoration aims to optimise experience (Wang 1999; Chhabra 2010).

‘In my view, as I walk in and see some of the paintings, I understand that they are authentic. They are beautiful, but in my view, they should repair them. They should try to. They should bring painters who are specialised in restoration and try to restore the paintings and not allow them to deteriorate. In a probing question of whether he would like to see the frescos restored, she replied: ‘I prefer to see them repaired instead of seeing them falling apart’
(V10).

‘I would probably respond positively. We can always keep the section of how it looked before in illustrations. Still, I think going in and seeing the bright colours gives you an appreciation of how people experienced these places in the past.... walking in, you can understand how 1000 years ago, people experienced this church; it’s a powerful place. Seeing them faded is interesting from a preservation perspective, but it takes away the experiential part of it’
(V15).

On the other hand, visitors **V3** and **V13**, both self-identified pilgrims, maintained that this material stasis and aesthetic fragmentation is a strategy that downplays narration and pictorial narrative and impacts the respectful atmosphere. Conclusively, it appears that for visitors **V1** and **V3**, authenticity is not material-based but constructivist, driven by their religious ethics, such as their piety.

‘I think no because icons [frescos] have faded colours and letters. They should do something about it and make it beautiful again... For instance, where the painting is missing, they could restore it. In the following probing question, where the interviewer underscored how the ‘preserve as found’ institutions propagate strategy as ‘more scientific’, she replied: ‘But they will not destroy it, they will complete it with someone who knows how to do it. For instance, we donated today and would like to light a candle away from the frescos (V3).

‘If it will happen with the appropriate technique used in the past, then yes, it will be nice’.
[interviewer] *‘Despite that, you will have the old and the new next to each other’. ‘It will not be visible that it is old and new. I would not like it if you did it with bright colours to make it more beautiful and impressive* (V13).

Church of St. Nickolas – *Ambivalence*

Two visitors expressed an ambivalent stance and self-identified as tourists (**V6**, **V9**). For these visitors, restoration can be an acceptable strategy when an extended damage constitutes the fresco illegible. The analysis of these accounts has also revealed an altruistic

stance of how the historical and symbolic meanings of these frescos can be best communicated, mainly from an educational and cultural point of view:

‘I think that we should keep some places as they are because we should have an opportunity to see that nothing lasts forever. Of course, we should demonstrate to the new generation how it is now. But with a mixture of painting-specific pieces so we can compare. But in no way we should repaint all of them because we can lose this historic magic. For instance, the damaged eyes should not be restored because it’s part of the history (V6).

‘I think they should not repaint everything. They can repaint or redo something in order to make it visible to the public if there is not much left. But everything that is left should be protected’ (V9).

- Monastery of St. John – **Contentment**

Apart from two visitors (V23, V30) who expressed an antagonistic stance, most visitors at St. John’s monastery said their content towards the current conservation strategy, regarding those taking a compliant stance, six self-identified as tourists (V26, V32, V33, V36, V37, V40) and as 12 pilgrims or holding mixed motivations (V21, V22, V24, V25, V27, V28, V29, V31, V34, V35, V38, V39).

The ability to identify and appreciate the original artwork is a primary concern for this group of tourists, who maintained that this strategy reflects historical accuracy. In contrast, original material, patina, and damage (natural or anthropogenic) are considered integral parts of the church's history, enhancing appreciation and curiosity. In these margins, visitor V26 raised ethical concerns regarding our rights to intervene in historical monuments, who considered aesthetic re-integration an inherently subjective process that de-historicizes these landmark features. Visitors V32, V33 and V37 believe that ‘material stasis’ avoids homogenisation by highlighting the artistic differences between scenes. At the same time, damage is an opportunity that enables them to appreciate the historicity of the monument.

‘It is a hard question in art in general. Do you think it’s better to have the original one or...? It isn’t easy to find the answer to this. I think we have to conserve it as much as we can as we know it today. It is a mock to the past, making it ours and not theirs anymore’ (V26).

‘Getting inside the church, I was impressed by how old and nicely done the frescos are. You could understand from the style that different hagiographers did different parts. You can see a historical continuity in the place. One fresco could have been drawn 100 years after the other. I do not see anything to remind me of a museum; it is just the feeling of history (V32).

‘The conservation inside is very respectful; they did not paint anything new because they couldn’t tell the original stuff. I like the way the place is looked after (V33).

‘I think it is pretty nice the way it is. You have the more original parts at the bottom half when you can see the age of the place and then the over-the-top restored areas, so having that mix is very nice. I have not seen this before having this balance. I think it is good (V37).

‘What you can do is to say that you preserve what you have, that’s something else that will not deteriorate more. No, not. It will not be real anymore. They will be damaged’ (V40).

In the same vein, religious-driven visitors taking a compliant stance are equally unaffected by the fragmentation of the frescos that inhibit the religious narrative. However, the difference between the previous group is that visitors dovetailed historical accuracy with religious values (piety, humility, and reverence) and an interest in exploring non-intrusive ways to restore these features. Visitors such as **V21** and **V28** considered the ‘preserve as found’ strategy as an approach that prevents the gentrification of the church while retaining a nostalgic spiritual atmosphere marked by reverence, humility, and historical depth.

‘Inside, for instance, the frescos are damaged, half-extinguished, there is no luxury inside... The fact that some parts are missing contributes to the experience; it gives you an understanding of what those frescoes passed through. I think they should stay like this because it passes a message. For instance, the damaged eyes illustrate a part of the monument’s history’ (V21).

When I see the authentic frescos [it reminds me] of a church (V28).

Similar responses were provided by other visitors (**V22**, **V24**, **V25**, **V27**, **V29**, **V34**, **V35**, **V38** and **V39**) who stressed how damage provides historical accuracy and depth for spiritual reflection, considering interventions as inauthentic. For these visitors, any efforts of aesthetic re-integration run the risk of destroying the features while any completions belong to the museum or in guidebooks:

‘I do not think we need to change them. Keep it as it is and replicate it if you want to show people how it was. Every scratch has a point that says how it has survived (V22).

‘No, because that’s part of nature, time and history. It’s like an antique car putting everything new. Is it a new or an old car? It is like those archaeological sites. I drive past every day, and one day, I see some random ancient rocks and, the next day, a whole new building. You do not know what is natural for tourists alike (V27).

‘No. We could have had a picture showing how the fresco was back then. A comparison of how the frescos were back then and how they are today. Or books showing what the fresco could look like. They could send this book here’ (V29).

‘I think not. There is no need. It’s better to stay as they are. If you add anything else, I think it’s an intervention’ (V34).

‘No, I think it is a different feeling to have old frescoes of the 14th century. I think it highlights the archaeological value’ (V38).

It is evident in these accounts that a potential restoration of the frescos is considered an intrusive and non-welcomed practice that would conceal the palimpsest of human (spiritual) activity. The combination of legible and illegible scenes, damage and patina creates a powerful link between materiality and authenticity, enhancing spiritual and nostalgic thoughts.

The last two visitors discussed in this section are visitors **V36** and **V31**. Although they approve of the current strategy, they believe restoration could be considered when the damage is extended. The following accounts are a reminder that the recent results are endemic in Cyprus, and in cases where the damage is more extended, responses could have been different.

‘No. No, I wouldn’t mind if they do it, we should know that it has been changed. It is like buildings when they correct them, showing that it was not original. This piece was corrected. I am happy with the way it is. I do not feel that there is so much missing here. Sometimes, you cannot get a sense of the whole painting. In these cases, at least the ones I can see, they are wonderful’ (V36).

‘No, although in other cases, it could happen, like the medieval walls at Nicosia, instead of leaving them abandoned to fall in ruins. Or when you visit an archaeological site with a few random stones, they tell you that that was a historic settlement. I do not see that ... wherever

I see restoration and the authentic, or just a depiction of the original; I enjoy it more...

However, It isn't easy to do them similarly (V31).

Monastery of St. John – *Antagonistic*

Regarding the two visitors taking an antagonistic stance, one was self-identified as a pilgrim (V23) and the other as having mixed motivations (V30). Driven by religious motives, these visitors considered aesthetic fragmentation as a problem, especially in sensitive areas such as the face of saints.

‘I would like to see the face of the saint restored at least’. In a probing question regarding the damaged eyes, she replied: *‘No, [I have not noticed], but I believe that holy icons are miraculous’ (V23).*

Visitor V30 raised the issue of religion as a cultural memory. This individual was mainly concerned with the vandalism inflicted on the frescos. He questioned the ‘preserve as found’ strategy on three levels: the spiritual, the scientific and the meanings sent to the public (collective memory). For him, this strategy freezes the monument, demonstrating a lack of attentiveness and care, leaving the monument in a state that undermines the efficacy of wall paintings to create a spiritual atmosphere. The following discussion is indicative:

Interviewee:

‘Some of them are quite fated though, like the eyes, which probably is a result of vandalism. I believe that they should have tried to restore those crucial areas, such as the eyes and face, that have been damaged. Although they are not authentic, they can restore them. They can recreate them so the icons can come to life again. Entering the temple and seeing the eyes taken out, I feel disgusted. They should have tried to restore these’ (V30).

Researcher: Would you prefer all parts of the frescos to be restored or some sensitive areas?

Interviewee:

V30: *‘Initially the most significant. Let’s start from those; if they do a good job, they can continue. Because, in some instances, the frescos are completely damaged. They should bring a specialist to repaint them. Also, this conservation program can spark an interest in the public’.*

Researcher: Some believe that even the damage is part of the history of the place, and we should not intervene.

V30: *‘Yes, but it’s an adverse history, and we should, maybe, erase it. Not necessarily everything can leave some damage in other parts, but the aim is to respect the depicted saints. This is something that struck me with a negative impression.’*

Visitors’ **V23** and **V30** concerns were closer to visitors **V3** and **V13** encountered at St Nickolas. These four visitors, who all share religious motivations, take a constructivist authenticity, arguing that a restored fresco could communicate better spiritual and national values, contributing to the reverential atmosphere.

Concluding Remarks

Concerning the conservation of frescos, all three types of authenticity have been identified in visitors’ responses. The first group comprises those taking a content stance, embracing the current strategy that underscores material authenticity and includes tourists and pilgrims. For them, patina and damage testify to the continuity of the church's cultural, artistic, and spiritual heritage and trigger nostalgia and historic immersion. Those taking an antagonistic stance, favouring restoration, are divided between spiritually driven and tourists. The first group (4 out of 40 visitors) demonstrated a constructivist authenticity, expecting the conservation to be caused by intangible values such as purity and reverence. Tourists, on the other hand, comprising two visitors visiting from the USA, expressed the view that the conservation aims to recreate the historic space that enhances, in their eyes, landmark immersion. These people, who were not concerned with issues of originality, have been clustered under the ‘post-modern authenticity’ category.

5.2.5 Centralisation

As discussed in the literature review and demonstrated in section 5.1, institutionalisation and heritagization are intertwined processes. During this part of the interview, the study investigated visitors’ perceptions of the centralised management at the two churches. At this stage, the research aims to understand whether the general public sees the benefits of bottom-up management strategies and community involvement. At St. Nickolas’ 11 church, visitors expressed a compliant stance towards the existing management structure, three antagonistic views and six ambivalent ones. At the monastery of St. John’s, nine visitors said a respectful stance, six antagonistic and five ambivalent.

- Church of St. Nickolas – *Contentment*

Eight of the 11 visitors with a compliant stance were identified as tourists (V4, V5, V6, V8, V11, V12, V15, V17). Although this group see the advantages of democratic procedures, they consider the current strategy that discourages participation as more reliable and effective due to its capacity to ensure professionalism and expertise. Characteristically, visitors V4, V5 and V12 value the ‘expertise’ of professionals over ‘polyvocality’ while UNESCO’s reputation as steward is a catalyst for their decision:

‘I think it’s a difficult question because when you have a choice between a group of professionals and some democracy, it is complicated. I think it is preferable to have UNESCO, the professionals who know how to deal with such things. When you have a headache, you go to the doctor. You do not go to your neighbours’ (V4).

‘If the question is whether I think it’s good for the local people to participate more I would say no. Such places are so essential for the whole world that we should rely on the opinions of large groups of people. Their opinion is also necessary, but we should consider primarily the professionals’ (V5).

‘Emm, it’s a difficult question. I have nothing against local people, but I think in cases like these the decisions should be made by people who know the situation (V12).

Others, such as visitors V6 and V8, demonstrated disbelief towards locals' efficiency in raising expectations. The strong branding of an international institution such as UNESCO provides a more credible solution to the management of the fragile historic environment compared to the clouded local agendas that lack transparency:

‘History has shown that when local people manage these buildings, nothing good happens. I do not know because I do not know the will of the local people, their vision, and their motivation, but I know that UNESCO will keep it safe, clean, and untouchable, and they will restore it when the time comes (V6).

‘The fewer, the better. If you ask people about conservation work, they may be harmful, so the fewer, the better. For example, at the church of Archangel Michael in Kokinotrimithia, the DoA tried to restore the monument and the village for many reasons because there is also a cemetery nearby, leaving the church to deteriorate. It is an ancient church, but it would have been better if the management had fallen just on the DoA or UNESCO (V8).

Other visitors, such as **V11**, are sceptical towards the efficiency of locals in providing the necessary funding, while visitors **V15** and **V17** raised issues of professionalism, such as opening times.

I think the state should be responsible for that. UNESCO can list it, but it's Cypriot heritage. I believe the DoA should be accountable and try to find the funds to preserve the monument because it promotes Cyprus (V11).

When locals are involved, there is more hazard. When volunteers run the places, usually, they may not be professional and may not open the gates according to the itineraries, and I may not see it, and it's a lifetime thing for me. We went to Alaska and had this issue: the guy did not show up (V15).

'Considering that it's just two times a year, it is better to have the government and UNESCO overseeing and not to the verities of the local community because I want to come and visit, and they may decide that women are not allowed' (V17).

No significant qualitative change has been observed with those holding religious-related motivations (**V2**, **V3**, **V18**). Visitor (**V2**), a local villager, also raised efficiency issues when the decision-making process is open up. Visitors **V2** and **V18** expressed trust towards the main stakeholders, particularly the church and UNESCO. Unlike tourists who pointed towards professionalism and expertise, these three Cypriot elderly visitors demonstrated particular respect and trust towards the institution of the church and UNESCO. Characteristically, visitor **V18** believes that locals' involvement with religious sites should be restricted to their spiritual practices and not extend to cultural heritage management. These accounts include both Cypriots (including villagers or expatriates, as we will see in the section discussing St. John) and international tourists, indicating that nationality does not play a decisive role in trust issues.

'It seems that it works, for instance, the employees the Archdiocese hires them. I think UNESCO should contribute with some money. I do not think it is positive for the local community to be involved. Because when many people are involved, one hand cannot fit so many heads... I think the church should be responsible; it belongs to the church is religion' (V2).

The local community does not care about this because they have a big new church. UNESCO and the archdiocese are enough. (V18).

Church of St. Nickolas – *Antagonistic*

Three visitors expressed an antagonistic stance: two tourists (V9, V20) and one with mixed motivations (V16). These visitors argued that the current centralisation creates some limitations which could be mitigated with the involvement of locals. Visitor (V9) highlighted the capacity of locals to provide local knowledge: *‘Yes, I think the authorities have to work together because they have different approaches. Some have the money, others the infrastructure and others the knowledge of the place. I think putting the public in will also benefit the process.* Visitor V16 believes that locals could have a positive input, especially on promotion and tourist management issues. In contrast, visitor (V20) maintained that including locals in the decision-making process future decision making will be more compatible with the local vision of increasing sustainable development:

‘I think the local community should have a say because these people will accommodate the visitors. Kakopetria should have a say about the management of the place and advertise it’
(V16).

‘I will say it’s good if these people know what they do and do it well for the public. It is also good to have the eyes of people who visit the place. They can give their opinion and use it. It would be nice to open the decision circle to the public who can give their opinion and choose some things to say and propose’ (V20).

For these visitors, community involvement could enhance the management of the site and consequently the experience by providing the intangible dimension as well as benefiting from tourism.

- Church of St. Nickolas – *Ambivalent*

Six visitors expressed an ambivalent stance: 4 self-identified as tourists and two as pilgrims. Tourists (V7, V10, V14, V19) weighed the pros and cons of local involvement. The central dilemma discussed is whether locals, who should have the right to participate in their local heritage, have the capacity and the resources to meet the management challenges for such an important monument. Visitors V7 and V10 stated that although institutions can be hegemonic in their approaches, their advantage over locals is that they could ensure funding and expertise on issues of management and protection.

'The fact that UNESCO is involved is positive. The plus is that they are stakeholders with money and can help. Beyond that, I do not know if the absence of local people from decision-making is good or bad, but on the other hand, local people may not be able to understand the importance of the church. They may insist on having masses here without trying to underestimate them. Maybe they cannot understand the importance (V7).

'I think it's an okay thing [absence of locals]. I believe that sometimes the local communities cannot rise to the challenges and the understanding of the value. So, the fact that we have UNESCO, the state and the church, I know, is more bureaucracy, but this is positive. I know it's difficult, but do we leave it to the community here? Do we think they will do a better job? I am not sure' (V10).

On this note, visitors **V14** and **V19** were sceptical over polyvocality, especially when locals do not share the same vision with stakeholders. Nevertheless, for these visitors, the presence of the state and other institutions as regulatory actors is vital in any future public engagement in conservation.

I think that stage management is a good thing because sometimes there is a conflict between broader historical and local interests, and it's good that the state has the primary role. For me, the best management is a mixture of state, UNESCO, and local people (V14).

'Ideally, primary stakeholders should be included so the property is not vandalised, and they can have economic benefit from it. It's good for the whole community. It gives them their identity. But having experience working with them, I realised that they do not have much to do, and they are not usually very productive. It depends on how old the community is if you only have old people who like debate and cannot take things forward' (V19).

Lastly, while visitors **V1** and **V13** are not against public consultation, they argued that it should be placed within an appropriate hierarchical system.

'Someone needs to take the decision. Consultation is not a bad thing. On the contrary, we should discuss before making decisions. But if those collaborations do not affect the decision-making, it does not raise conflicts. I think it is okay. If everyone contributes to positive development, it's a good thing. However, someone should decide if there are conflicting interests (V1).

- Monastery of St. John – *Contentment*

Nine visitors, three tourists (V32, V36, V37, V40) and seven having mixed motivations (V25, V27, V29, V34, V35) expressed a content stance. Regarding tourists, visitors V32 and V36 argued that the importance of this monument is too great to be co-determined by non-experts who lack expertise and professionalism. In a similar vein, V40 believes that locals lack a transparent agenda and the ability to set long-term plans:

‘To a certain extent, their opinion should be heard, but it is vital to this monument to listen to the specialist. I think locals should speak their opinion, but the final word should be with specialists’ (V32)

‘What part of the management? They should do staff for the community, but I think when it comes to UNESCO sites, they need to ask people who understand what needs to be preserved. It’s okay to have a modern toilet but not to paint the walls purple. It’s a hierarchy... church, historians, and conservators’ (V36)

‘I think having a close group of specialists involved is a good thing. Otherwise, too many voices will ruin it. On top of that, if you are local one day, you have one opinion... with a holistic opinion is better’ (V40)

Regarding the second sub-group, these individuals demonstrate a distrust towards local initiatives and the benefits of polyvocality. At the same time, they showed trust towards the institutions whose agenda is considered more transparent. This is either because of their proven record or because they have the necessary means to do their job:

‘I think everybody has his opinion, and if you try to consult everyone, nothing will happen. Everyone will start pushing their ideas, and everything will become too complicated’ (V27).
‘I think it is positive. I trust the archaeological department I know how much they respect the site’ (V29).

‘We cannot take into consideration everyone. When a site is archaeological, especially when UNESCO is involved, it means it’s enough... maybe the church can be involved. I think one should take decisions’ (V34).

‘I somewhat understand it because the village is small, and the local council does not have enough money. The archdiocese should contribute, not just the DoA’ (V35).

- Monastery of St. John – *Antagonistic*

Of the five visitors expressing an antagonistic stance, two were tourists (V26, V37), and the other four had some sort of spiritual motivation (V25, V28, V38, V39). These visitors were more concerned with the ethical dimension of heritage management, taking a critical stance towards the non-involvement of locals. According to these accounts, community participation could enhance local identity and promote social cohesion. For instance, visitors V37 and V38 believe that discouraging locals from heritage management runs the risk of alienating locals from their heritage. Considering the monastery's vital role for the local community, visitors V25 and V39 maintained that locals, considering that they are qualified to do so with the right representatives, could have a positive impact not only in the management of the site but in harvesting the benefits of tourism.

‘I think it is good to have a community involved in some aspects of the local sites and maintaining them because it is linked to their history and culture’ (V37). ‘If they can do it collectively everyone involved should be better. The final decision is better with the specialist, though. Considering that the moment is part of their village’ (V38), it sounds terrible not to be involved.

‘I believe that the local community should be included, but it depends on who the representatives are. They should not promote their self-interests because they may harm the place. It is good to work with UNESCO and other institutions to help and support site maintenance. Local people are here daily, and they can protect it from any disaster. They can take care of it and inform the other institutions. It depends, of course, on their qualifications (V25).

‘I think a place like this that takes place inside the village I think the village should have the primary role, I think all in the village should be interested and involved not just external stakeholders to come and contribute because it is something, for instance from an economic perspective, that contributes to the village (restaurants, coffee shops)’ (V39).

- Monastery of St. John - **Ambivalent**

Six visitors self-identified as having mixed motivations, three with diverse motivations (V22, V23, V24, V31) and two (V26 and V33) tourists. Some of these visitors found the

question difficult to answer, demonstrating that it was something they had not considered before (V23, V24 and V33). Despite their reluctance to answer the question, these accounts illustrate a trust towards the current management structure, which emerges to a large extent from the positive experience.

'I do not know what to say here. Sorry. I trust church' (V23)

'I do not know how to respond to that. Are these three institutions considered few?' (V24)

I couldn't tell you my experience is excellent. I do not know the ins and outs of the situation to have a proper opinion. But it does seem very well looked after is not like a Disney land attraction' (V33).

On the other hand, visitors such as V22, V26 and V31 (local expatriates) provided a more in-depth analysis of the pros and cons surrounding the involvement of locals. Issues of 'professionalism', such as access and 'transparent agenda', are some of the topics discussed. Nevertheless, these visitors believe local involvement should be under close supervision from the authorities.

'Considering where this church is located, it is essential for the locals. Sometimes, it depends... people can be overprotective of what belongs to the village, which can be bad for those who want to visit it. They may claim that tourists may damage the place. The place is good if they are open for the people to see. I think people should have access to the decision-making as long as it is positive for the monastery. Its future should be a priority, not what the locals or the church will benefit from (V22).

'Em..., it depends on the monument and the people who run the local council. Some are more open-minded, some ignorant, and others see only their interest, whether religious or economic... I see that the local council was more interested in the financial gain of the village. I think this should be mutual, primarily from the specialist who needs to consider the locals' needs (V31).

'I do not know, I think it is always difficult to make decisions when you have too many people getting involved but... maybe the local people might have a right to give their opinion but, in a way, to are being heard but not to take decisions' (V26).

Concluding Remarks

For those taking a content stand, limiting polyvocality is not considered a problem but an opportunity to improve the efficiency of the current management structure. A centralised system ensures professionalism, expertise, resources, and a transparent agenda. These responses are often the result of personal negative experiences, while the involvement of UNESCO creates a feeling of trust. Those taking an ambivalent stance are concerned with the ability of locals to rise to the demanding expectations of conservation and protection. Thus, they maintained that a possible solution is to involve locals within a hierarchical management structure. Lastly, those who expressed discontent with the existing system highlighted the advantages of involving locals, such as co-management (maintenance, protection, promotion) and social cohesion. No significant difference was observed between locals and international tourists.

St. Nickolas Church

Visitor	Origin	Gender	Age	Motivation	Minimal re-integration	Merchandising	Exhibition Strategies	Preserve as Found (Frescos)	Centralisation
V1	Cypriot	M	50s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent	Compliant	Ambivalent
V2	Cypriot	M	70s	Pilgrim	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V3	Cypriot	F	70s	Pilgrim	Compliant	Compliant	Antagonistic	Antagonistic	Compliant
V4	Russian	M	30s	Tourist	Compliant	Antagonistic	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V5	Russian	M	30s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Antagonistic	Compliant	Compliant
V6	Belarus	M	20s	Tourist	Compliant	Ambivalent	Antagonistic	Ambivalent	Compliant
V7	Cypriot	M	20s	Tourist	Compliant	Ambivalent	Antagonistic	Compliant	Ambivalent
V8	Cypriot	M	40s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V9	Swiss	F	50s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent	Antagonistic
V10	Cypriot	M	50s	Tourist	Antagonistic	Compliant	Ambivalent	Antagonistic	Ambivalent
V11	Romania	F	60s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V12	Polish	F	20s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent	Compliant	Compliant
V13	Cypriot	M	50s	Pilgrim	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Antagonistic	Ambivalent
V14	French	F	20s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent	Compliant	Ambivalent
V15	American	M	70s	Tourist	Antagonistic	Compliant	Antagonistic	Antagonistic	Compliant
V16	Cypriot	F	50s	Mixed	Antagonistic	Compliant	Antagonistic	Compliant	Antagonistic
V17	American	F	60s	Tourist	Compliant	Ambivalent	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V18	Cypriot	M	50s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V19	Russian	F	40s	Tourist	Antagonistic	Ambivalent	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent
V20	French	M	20s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Antagonistic

Table 10 Visitors (reflective) stances towards practices at St. Nickolas

Monastery of St. John									
Visitor	Origin	Gender	Age	Motivation	Minimal re-integration	Merchandising	Exhibition Strategies	Preserve as Found (Frescos)	Centralisation
V21	Cypriot	F	30s	Pilgrim	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V22	Cypriot	F	30s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent
V23	Cypriot	F	20s	Pilgrim	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Antagonistic	Ambivalent
V24	Cypriot	F	30s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent
V25	Cypriot	F	60s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Antagonistic
V26	French	F	30s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent
V27	Russian	F	30s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V28	Cypriot	M	20s	Mixed	Compliant	Antagonistic	Compliant	Compliant	Antagonistic
V29	Cypriot	M	40s	Pilgrim	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V30	Cypriot	M	40s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Antagonistic	Compliant
V31	Cypriot	M	70s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent
V32	Cypriot	M	30s	Tourist	Compliant	Ambivalent	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V33	British	M	30s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent	Compliant	Ambivalent
V34	Cypriot	F	60s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant
V35	Cypriot	M	20s	Mixed	Compliant	Ambivalent	Ambivalent	Compliant	Compliant
V36	American	F	60s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent	Compliant	Compliant
V37	British	F	30s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Antagonistic
V38	Cypriot	F	20s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Ambivalent	Compliant	Antagonistic
V39	Cypriot	M	20s	Mixed	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Antagonistic
V40	Belgian	F	60s	Tourist	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant	Compliant

Table 11 Visitors (reflective) stances towards practices at St. John

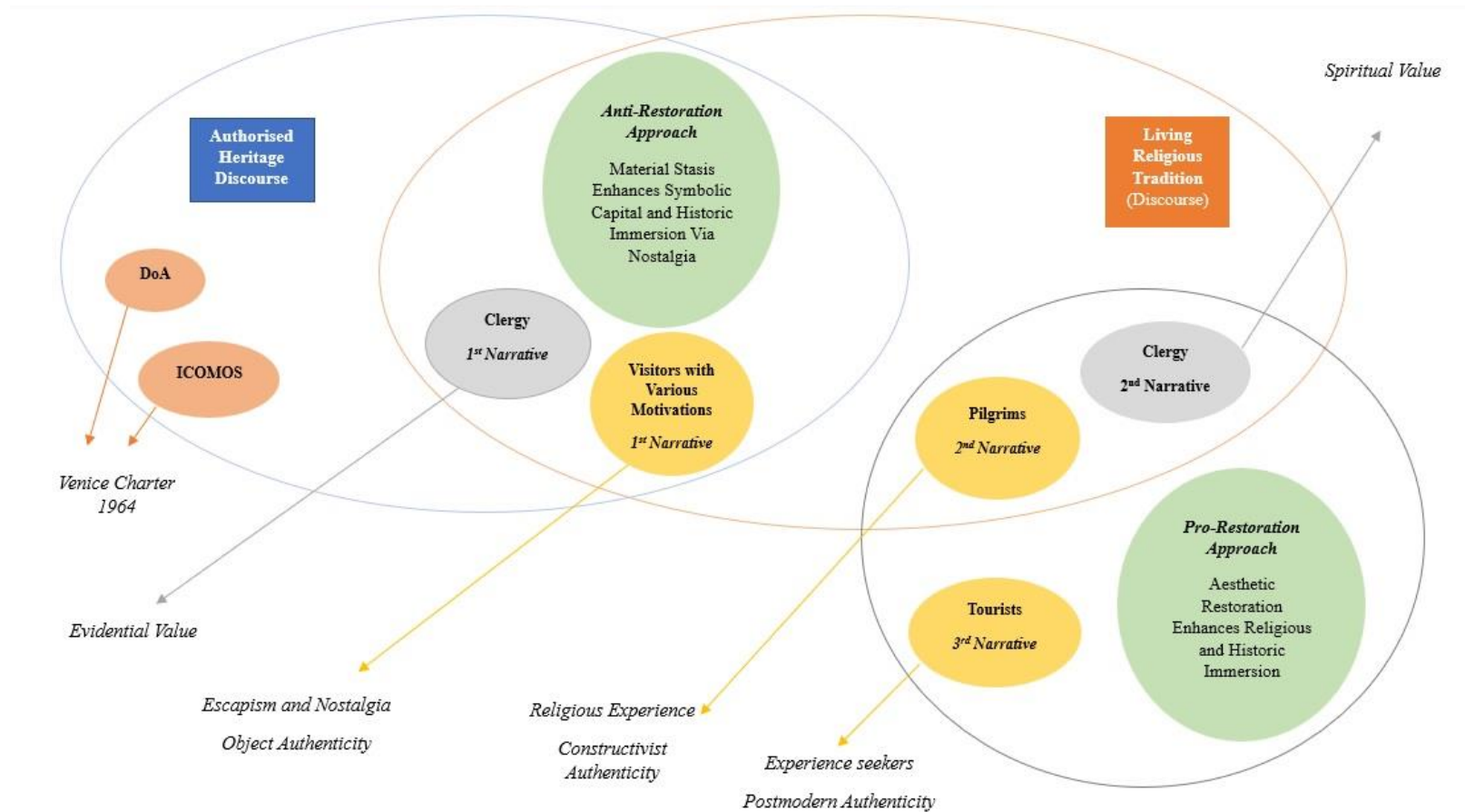
5.2.6 Concluding Thoughts

As described throughout this section, visitors' meaning making was characterised by balancing secularly driven management strategies and, on the other hand, living religious tradition. However, visitors' answers (see Tables 7 and 8) are inconsistent across the four practices, especially at St. Nickolas, where secular strategies are more evident. Thus, we see the same visitor's responses, sometimes tilt towards strategies favouring nostalgia and cultural immersion (i.e., material stasis) and, in other cases, tilt towards strategies that would breathe a more vital religious spirit again. Thus, one question that needs answering is why visitors' responses varied across the four practices and what this means. From a CR point of view, this is expected as each practice had its unique causal powers that constrained every individual in unique ways based on their interests and expectations. As Delbridge and Edwards (2013) stated, agential reflexivity is 'an outcome of past experiences and the contextual circumstances within which actors find themselves at any given moment' (p. 941). Another reason why visitors' responses vary is due to the hybrid management adopted at these churches to combine old and new, often contradicting practices.

Considering individuals' responses across each practice, three broad narratives (or trends) can be discerned (Figure 16). The first and most prominent narrative, expressed by both pilgrims and tourists, demonstrated clearly at the church of St. John, is where visitors expect to encounter a place that feels both an active worshipping site (thus furnishing) and old (patina and fragmented frescos). Therefore, this hybrid strategy that combines elements of living tradition and modernist conservation (material stasis) enables this group to achieve deeper spiritual and historical immersion. Most prominently, this was evident in visitors' responses at St. John, who expressed their contentment with the incompleteness of frescos. These people enjoyed sitting on a pew, relaxing, and praying while contemplating the 'old-looking' frescos. In this way, they achieved higher spiritual and historical immersion. The second narrative expects the religious site to look fresh and unspoiled. This is expressed either by religious people driven by purity or experience-seeking tourists who, conscious about staged authenticity, believe that accurate restoration would restore the original ambience of the church. For example, for religious-driven visitors (see **V23** and **V30**), conservation should not freeze living religious sites, and the religious environment should look fresh and unspoilt. Thus, frescos should be restored.

This does not mean that these two broad stances or interpretive communities in museum language, referring to people who share common interpretative strategies (Fish 1980), are

homogenous. A closer look into the first stance, for instance, demonstrates that visitors who were not able to draw on religious tradition or indicate an affiliation with Christian tradition (V5, V6, V7 and V15) appeared more conflicted, especially about the curatorial decision to strip St. Nickolas' from furniture. Visitors who could merge religious tradition and AHD-driven practices appeared to be more enabled than constrained by the current management, achieving higher immersion in a church that felt both 'active' and 'old'. In conclusion, the deep qualitative data presented not only indicate what strategy helps people to feel higher immersion but also demonstrate why this is happening considering their concerns and pre-entrance narratives.



Key: This model showcases how institutional structures and social actors positioned themselves in relation to the current hybrid conservation strategy.

Traditional clergy is divided between those who merged AHD (material stasis) and living tradition, as a way to enhance the symbolic capital of religious heritage (anti-restoration conservation approach), and those who prioritise the spiritual value over the evidential value (pro-restoration). It also showcases the three narratives emerged in visitors' accounts. The first, embraced by both pilgrims and tourists, see the benefits of a living religious site that also preserve the passage of time. The second and the third stances embrace a pro-restoration stance that enhances spiritual immersion, for pilgrims, and historic immersion, for some tourists.

Figure 17 Actors Responses Towards Restoration Strategies

6. Discussion

Overview:

Section 6.1 addresses the first objective of this study and discusses how the DoA takes advantage of institutional mechanisms (conservation restrictions), the liabilities of other institutions (lack of funding) as well as unexercised mechanisms (statutory control) to perpetuate a centralized system that favours the operationalisation of AHD. Thus, the findings suggest that DoA maintains a centralized system by strategically repositioning itself to create the conditions that favour AHD-led practices. The section corroborates scholars advocating that value-based conservation policies do not provoke a real change in historic environment. Furthermore, the section discusses how traditional clergy internalise and dovetail some of the core values of AHD, such as material authenticity, expert values, and objectivity with religious tradition. In contrast with what was previously thought, this study advocates that object-based authenticity is neither redundant nor incompatible with living religious sites.

Section 6.2 addresses the second objective of this study, discussing the convergent and divergent areas between visitors and policy makers. Taking into consideration visitors' motivation and concerns the section discusses how the existing heritage strategies constrain and enable visitors to achieve a fulfilling experience. Additionally, the section re-examines the pilgrim and tourist debate in the light of the current findings. The analysis shows that original material, alongside damage, patina and decay stimulates imagination, religious prudence, and nostalgia. This means that visitors, able to merge some of the core values of AHD with living religious tradition, were more likely to accept hybrid management practices.

Section 6.3 takes a closer look at the theory of AHD to further refine it in light of these findings. Reapproaching AHD as one of the many social mechanisms at play alongside other mechanisms that facilitate its operation and the vested interests of social agents to internalize it and meet their own shifting concerns (extra-discursive) the thesis managed to surface surfaced power relations embedded within Cypriot conservation assemblages and shifting ideological positions among social agents. Considering that social agents' understanding and expectations for the historic environment evolve and grow in complexity over time (Harvey, 2001; Mason, 2002), this study brought to light a new discourse that combines material and immaterial elements. By embracing forms of discontinuity manifested through the anti-restoration stance, Cypriot churches allow religion to overlap with secular values, enabling the Church to reintroduce itself into contemporary spiritual and cultural maps.

6.1 Stakeholder Orientation and Conflict Dynamic

At the outset of this research two broad areas were identified as ‘problematic’ the relationship between institutional stakeholders and visitor satisfaction. The first, which is the subject of this section, is manifested through the appropriate treatment of frescos, and curatorial decisions as well as various micromanagement issues related to service quality and safeguarding. These two empirical ‘problems’ formed the starting point to examine the dialectics of heritagization in Cyprus. This section examines in more depth the interplay between institutional structures, powerful actors, and discourses to shed light on how particular discourses are institutionalised in the policy/operation of Cypriot religious sites and why.

6.1.1 Limiting Polyvocality of Heritage Management

Four main causal mechanisms were identified as responsible for shaping the heritagization of religious sites in Cyprus. Firstly, ‘conservation restrictions’ is a mechanism that is actualized by the DoA and buttressed within a legal framework. This mechanism dates back to colonial times and the antiquarian law of the 1930s. The second mechanism is that of ‘statutory control’, and is related to overseeing bodies such as UNESCO, ICOMOS and NCU to control member states. As this study demonstrates, this mechanism is not always actualized and in certain cases, such as the ICOMOS and NCU, it remains dormant. The other two mechanisms, ‘lack of funding’ and ‘lack of heritage management expertise’, in relation to the Church of Cyprus take the form of liabilities. We should also bear in mind that these mechanisms operate within a particular context, that of rural Cyprus, characterized by a shrinking congregation, the isolated location of these churches in certain cases, and material concerns such as the specific conservation needs that are determined by the fragility of wall paintings. The following discussion further unpacks the dialectics of heritage management in Cyprus explaining how the aforementioned mechanisms and contextual factors are dialectically interwoven with the two dominant discourses, those of ‘AHD’ and of ‘living religious tradition’.

The information provided in this chronological timeline was retrieved from the archival research. The diagram demonstrates how DoA maintained a centralized decision-making system over the years by regulating conservation projects and restricting bottom-up initiatives aiming for regeneration.

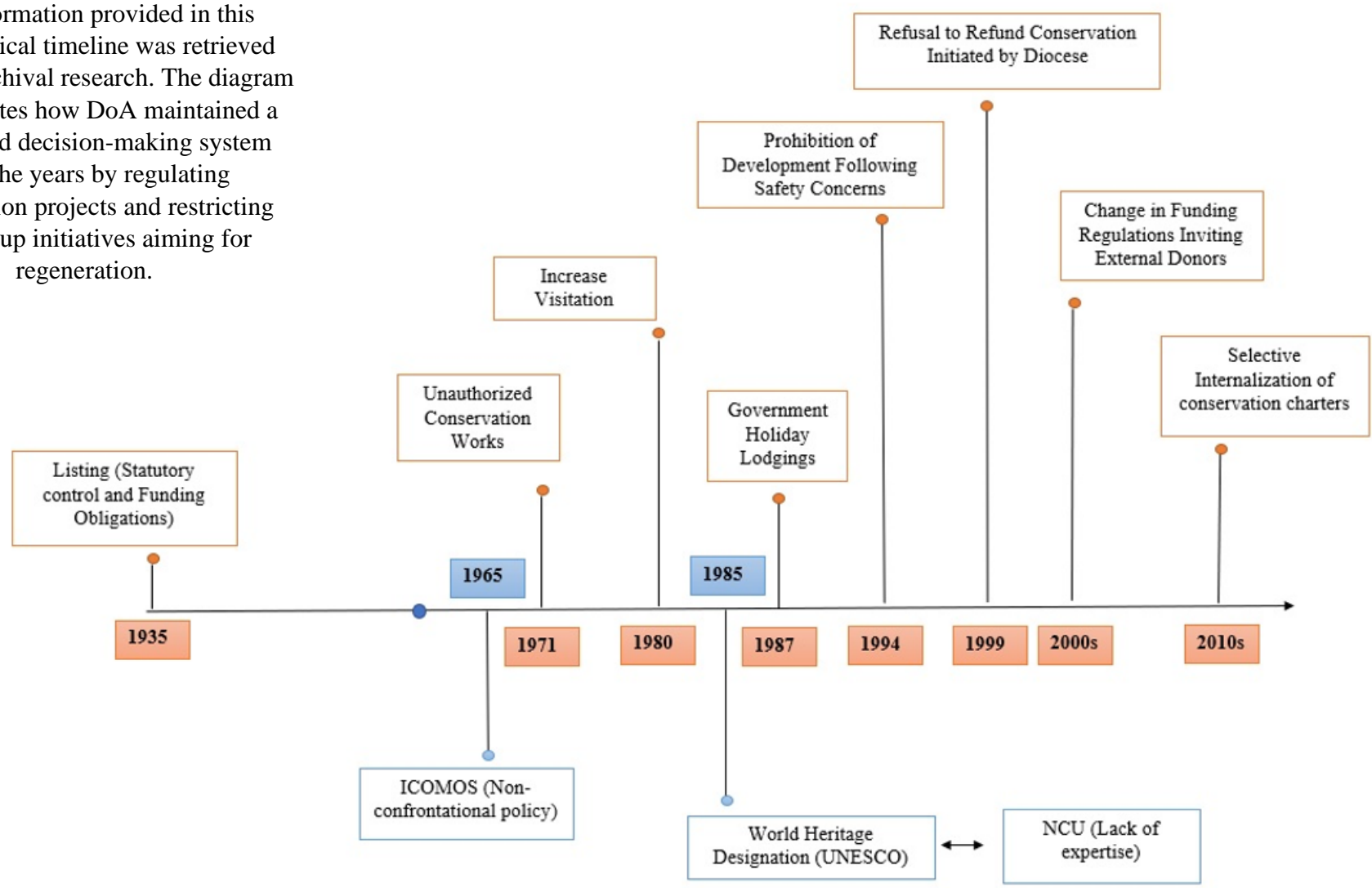


Figure 18 Historic Diagram of Key Policy Implementation

The lack of subsidies provided by local dioceses for conservation projects in Cyprus reflects two concurrent problems, one social, related to rural deprivation and one pragmatic, related to high-cost budgeted conservation projects. Although local dioceses could intervene to support certain conservation projects executed within their bishoprics, these projects are primarily financed by the budget of local ecclesiastical committees comprising lay people. However, due to rural deprivation and the increasing cost of scientific conservation projects, local communities, consisting of a few dozens of villagers, are unable to assume responsibility. This apparent ‘problem’ withing the planning process in Cyprus has become an ‘opportunity’ for the DoA. Considering the poor financial state of the two major stakeholders (village and diocese), the DoA has forged new allegiances with external donors who is willing to cover the 50% of the conservation cost on behalf of local dioceses. This policy is neither a form of altruism nor a community centred policy aimed at alleviating the burden from locals but rather a policy that secures the efficiency of conservation process. By forming new alliances with wealthy external donors, the DoA bypasses obstacles raised by the church, shifting dissonance to the margins. This findings bring in mind Josselin and Wallace (2001) and Vadi (2018) thesis that in an era of austerity and limited public funding Non-Governmental Organizations play an essential role in raising funds for the preservation of cultural heritage.

Although the change to the usual financial responsibilities appear to benefit the church by alleviating financial burden, at the same time this practice further centralizes the decision-making process, forming dependencies by shortcutting consultation with the church that would inhibit the progress of conservation projects. Characteristically, the analysis proved that although the Leventis Institute (donor) generously contribute large budgets, at the same time it does not raise any demands or expectations. The alignment of the Leventis Institute with the DoA on issues of conservation constitute the first a supportive agent that empowers the DoA to proceed with its own conservation agenda while at the same time marginalizing the Church from the decision making. These findings corroborate Alexopoulos (2013), who having investigated similar management challenges between monastic communities and conservators at Mount Athos in Greece, concluded that whoever controls the funding and whoever’s agendas and values prevail are vessels of communication. The findings also provide an alternative picture of conservation planning found in western European countries. Since 2008, austerity has resulted in the advancement of the private sector at the expense of the public sector combined with the capacity to manage heritage within the frame of AHD (Pendlebury *et al.*

2020), financial difficulties have thus become an opportunity for further centralization in Cyprus.

The third mechanism discussed is that of (weak) ‘statutory control’. As the analysis demonstrated controlling bodies such as UNESCO, ICOMOS and NCU exert little or no statutory control over the DoA. This is due to a diachronic policy of certain organisations such as UNESCO to take a distant control (Di Giovine, 2022) that allows state parties to manage the cultural assets as long as they maintain the integrity and authenticity of the place. This is manifested by adopting remote monitoring, through periodic reporting, that enhances the authority of the DoA as the representative and authorized custodian. In this way, the DoA enjoys statutory protection and implements its material-oriented policies without being constrained by concerns over public consultation, while the strict legally defined policies further contribute to the centralization of heritage planning. These results echo previous arguments made by other scholars such as Hammer (2017) and Brumann (2018) regarding the incapacity of UNESCO to enforce mechanisms and find workable policies sensitive to local demands.

A question that requires answering in relation to the world heritage designation is how much influence UNESCO has in the conservation of the Cypriot churches and whether is an actor that destabilizes power relationships. While this study corroborates other scholars who highlighted that periodic reporting and the possibility of losing the world heritage status (Alberts and Hazen, 2010), exert pressure on nation states to conform to notions of ‘integrity’ and ‘authenticity’, archival research demonstrated that similar concerns over material integrity pre-existed the world heritage designation. In Cyprus AHD is manifested through the national conservation law established during British rule. As Figure 17 shows, throughout the 20th century (1935, 1971, 1994, 1999) the DoA raised particular concerns regarding the renewal and development works initiated by the local administration around the external and internal periphery of the monastery. These include the refusal to refund conservation works undertaken by the local diocese, reporting of the village administration to relevant governmental bodies and police for unauthorized works, and refusal to house a café within the buildings of the monastery. Thus, what really changed since 1985 (WH declaration) was that DoA was able to assert pressure on local bishoprics and villagers to accept the material related strategies that would ensure the WH status that all benefit from. The longevity of this mechanism demonstrates that UNESCO should not be blamed entirely for centralization and undemocratic

procedures as some scholars have highlighted (Labadi, 2010; Singh, 2014; Willems, 2014; Causta and Vecco, 2017; Brumann, 2018). The longevity of this mechanisms predates UNESCO, and underlines Smith's (2006) observation that this 'authorized' perspective towards the management of historic source should be sought in the 19th century when adherence to 'objective truth', and the 'pastoral' role of professional expertise to identify and conserve aesthetically pleasing sites emerged. Considering Cyprus' colonial past, this study aligns with Charlotte Joy's (2010) argument that national states perpetuate colonial values in the management of cultural resources 'prioritizing the material over the immaterial' (p. 73) that clashes with social and economic changes.

This study has not surfaced significant dissonance and contestation between UNESCO and the major stakeholders of the two churches. It appears that in Cyprus the DoA, bishoprics and local villages are all co-depend to UNESCO's branding. As Fairclough (2005) stated, 'organisations may be seen as colonised by external discourses, but they actively appropriate them' (p. 934). DoA appears as the guardian of the physical fabric of the monuments. For DoA UNESCO status is synonym with ideas of objective authenticity, innate value and the authenticity of original material. Thus, the 'withdraw narrative' often employed by DoA is a strong card that underscores the anti-restoration and preventive conservation strategies. These findings echo Hølleland's (2014) position that there is an overlap of World Heritage regime with national legislation to ensure and enhance compliance. From local bishoprics perspective the world heritage status has multiple benefits. Apart from the opportunity to attract external funding, the featuring of Christian Greek-Cypriot Orthodox heritage as WH provides an international recognition for the church of Cyprus. For the Church WH status is a vehicle to draw the attention of the international community towards the occupied north Cyprus and the efforts for restoration of Greek Cypriot patrimonial heritage. For the local communities, at least the village of Kalopanagiotis (St John monastery), the monastery enhances the position of the village in the Cypriot 'heritage market', while the administrative and financial responsibilities that accompany co-management features as a strong deterrent alike.

As a result, UNESCO's brand name highlights existing values attached to the monuments and provides new opportunities and financial incentives for the major stakeholders that ease dissonance and contestation. Unlike to the picture provided by Boland et al. (2022), who argued that powerful stakeholders are willing to risk the World Heritage status to serve their own interests, in the case of Church of Cyprus the benefits of WH designation outweigh

the restrictions imposed to living religion. These findings lead to the conclusion that in Cyprus WH designation is more of a 'boon' instead of 'bane'. While this study corroborates Vrdoljak (2018) that there is no robust procedure within UNESCO to effectively involve the Church and locals in the management of the UNESCO churches in Cyprus, WH designation has managed to give the church of Cyprus ethnic recognition, support struggling rural economies by strengthen existing cultural and pilgrimage routes while it has attracted the interest of international community including donors towards the preservation of cultural heritage. Within this status quo, local discourses manifesting spiritual concerns regarding regular maintenance of wall paintings and greater use of monasteries ground for secular projects are 'displaced' by technocratic form of knowledge rooted in scientific objective and value neutral knowledge (Winter, 2013; James and Winter, 2017).

In the meantime, ICOMOS and NCU, as statutory control bodies appear to be disempowered. For instance, ICOMOS prefers a 'tempered' and 'prudent' stance towards DoA, which aims at fostering a collaborating spirit that downplays direct confrontation as a strategy. This is evident in the reluctance of ICOMOS to report the DoA over the construction of hygiene facilities and instead opting for an informal complaint. Furthermore, the NCU is not appropriately staffed with the conservation experts; thus, its responsibilities are limited to administrative works and licencing between UNESCO and the DoA. Additionally, the fact that both ICOMOS and NCU include on their committees high DoA officials should also be considered as to why this mechanism remains dormant. Thus, no major disputes, or willingness to enter such disputes, have been detected between the NCU and the DoA during fieldwork, which is suggestive of the limited control the former is able to assert on the latter. Thus, the alignment with the western conservation ethos, and the adherence to the Venice Charter, demonstrate how the DoA and Cyprus ICOMOS value the same institutional logics that, in accordance with Leca and Naccache (2006) can support their own interests. It should also be noted that the reluctancy of ICOMOS, NCU and UNESCO to exert influence on DoA is also a result of the co-dependence, or as Albers and Hazen (2010) put it the 'overreliance' of these international bodies (and their representatives) to state parties (DoA) to enforce sufficient regulatory and legislative policies to safeguard listed sites. Therefore, the DoA's 'pragmatic' policies go unchallenged something that weakens the capacity of local dioceses to from alliances and take initiatives.

The last mechanism is what this thesis termed as ‘lack of heritage management experience’ a very broad issue that covers issues of tourist management, staffing, expertise, and resources. Throughout the interviews state officials employed by the DoA highlighted their work overload, the shortage of archaeologists (and museologists) in the department and the absence of site-specific managers. As a result, heritage management related issues fall within the portfolios of religious leaders who lack heritage management knowledge. Apparently, these issues have a profound impact on various facets of the management, as have been outlined at the introduction of this thesis, including security issues (such as lack of training) and tourist services (infrastructure, publication etc). These results bring to mind scholars (Pavicic *et al.* 2007; Shackley, 2008; Olsen, 2009) who have highlighted that the difficulty of religious sites to harvest the positive and mitigate the negative effects of tourism comes down to religious leaders’ lack of tourism management expertise (product development and customer-centred strategies) as they do not see themselves as business-like managers. Thus, this mechanisms remains to a large extent dormant. Eventually religious leaders’ role is reduced to that of guardians or an ‘ethics police’ that safeguards the religious and pious character of site. Regarding conservation issues, various participants within the DoA and ICOMOS highlighted the shortage of conservation experts, such as architects and civil engineers within the DoA, as well as the lack of advanced scientific practices which are usually introduced in Cyprus after collaboration with foreign institutions. However, this lack of management expertise does not suggest that indifference towards religious patrimony, but rather it should be understood that traditional clergy although they embrace heritagization this is manifested through a hierarchy of values where, as Coleman (2019) argued cultural values are consider as subordinate to spiritual. Nevertheless, the current management framework appears to deprive practitioners from generating a pioneering, reforming and forward-looking solution that will address conservation challenges. As a result, the current ‘modest’ conservation strategy of limited intervention, is considered as a ‘prudent’ strategy that as Spaarschuh and Kempton (2020) put it allows conservators to remain ‘within safe boundaries’ (p. 368).

The inactivity of this mechanism is further supported by the absence of curatorial strategies, visitors’ studies and a reflective thinking about the re-interpretation and re-contextualization of religious heritage within the needs of contemporary religious heritage tourism. Throughout the history of display there has been an association between heritage design and the political, cultural, and social developments that frame what is acceptable interpretation (Roppola 2012). It appears that the mechanisms church of Cyprus recruits to

communicate meanings are framed within a religious driven policy aiming to pass across the values of Orthodoxy and highlight the spiritual value of these sites, something most profoundly demonstrated by the interpreters at these sites who are characterized by their faithful ethos. The findings of this study corroborate earlier assumption of the author (Thouki 2019) who argued that the values and teachings of specific denominations, and in particular their aversion towards postmodernism, influence the way interpretations are conveyed. The idea of a world that is irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, comprised an infinite number of narratives which could be equally valid, is rejected by curators working closely with church in Cyprus (Bauman 1992). While there have been instances when curators considered the communication of non-religious values important these were limited within the margins of art history and framed within a modernist didactic framework. On the contrary, ideas about pluralistic interpretations that would facilitate emotive, cognitive, and even interfaith dialogue about religious heritage have not yet been explored, or at the very least are even considered as dangerous as they may distort the Orthodox message. This situation perpetuates anachronistic communication strategies that have failed to reflect how religious connotations can be communicated to non-religious people and how secular and humanistic ideas could be transmitted to faith-driven visitors.

In addition to the four aforementioned mechanisms, to a lesser extent ICOMOS but more importantly the DoA, as the ‘authorizers’ of AHD according to Feintuch (2007, p. 181), utilize other strategies to limit polyvocality such as the selective internalization of international conservation treaties. The way in which the DoA internalizes certain conservation charters as they see fit, is a strategy that also marginalizes the interests of the church, whose criteria are not materially based. These charters are part of the norms that help define and guard AHD and comprise an important part of the conservation assemblages (Pendlebury, 2020). In order to enhance its narrative over the ‘preserve as found’ strategy, the DoA draws upon the Venice charter known for its adherence to material-based authenticity and scientific standards in heritage conservation, ignoring simultaneously other charters that advocate the importance of intangible ideas (such as tradition and beliefs) in the conservation process. Similarly, ICOMOS officers and foreign conservators while they acknowledge the importance of other charters (i.e., Burra, Nara etc), to guide conservation towards the environmental and cultural context of the monument under conservation, in practice they considered restoration ‘unethical’. From this point of view, the meaning of the murals is innate within the fabric and sealed during their production in medieval times by a culture with a particular set of values that is gone. Alongside the fact that large part of the murals are gone and there is no sufficient evidence to guide

reconstruction, any treatment may result in significantly changing the initial conceptualisation something that would inhibit the authenticity of the mural.

‘we do not find that it enhances the historical icon if you have modern eyes added to it today. If you are venerating an icon, something that is staring at you with modern not spiritual eyes, it is actually an insult. There is a very strong argument that an icon is painted when the artist is cleanest and spiritually attune to his task. Is this appropriate for us as westerners non-Orthodox and non-medieval people to even attempt to bring the most important part of that image back to life. We think it’s not, we think it’s inappropriate’ (S14).

The term ethical conservation in this instance is malleable and means different things to different groups. This study has surfaced two broad interpretations of the term that align with the two main discourses discussed in the thesis. The first is expressed through professionals and other stakeholders who work within the margins of objective authenticity and material-focused conservation (see AHD) and the religious discourse that advocates for regular maintenance and underscores spiritual and other intangible concerns regarding the treatment of living religious heritage. As Henderson (2018) noted, there is an ethical uncertainty in Cyprus, and it is related to the subjective ways, including emotional responses people develop to the consequences of the preserve as a found strategy.

As Fairclough (2005) maintained, the successful incorporation of certain discourses in strategies is not only associated to the power struggles that exist between groups, but also to the resonance of certain discourses and the resilience of the institutions carrying them (Thouki, 2022). In this instance, the DoA’s alliance with international conservation treaties bears more gravity and resonance compared to some accounts expressed by lay people and clergy that were characterised by sloppiness and bewilderment due to a superficial understanding of the capacities of new technology.

This centralization has created an inward-looking heritage policy in Cyprus. This was particular evident in the absence of holistic heritage management plans aiming for (sustainable) regeneration of historic churches, very slow institutional changes to meet new demands in ‘heritage industry’ and an absence of grey literature that would provide advice and recommendations for over the management of historic resources such as the documents produced by Historic England in UK. This process is particularly evident at St. Nickolas’ where the authorities have failed to engage the nearby village in the operation of these monuments. While none of the two villages demonstrated an interest in engaging with the costly

conservation of the churches, even arguing that such actions would be illegal in a way to accentuate their reluctance, at St. John's, locals expressed great interest in developing the surrounding area that would enhance the profile of the village as a tourist resort. These comparative results demonstrate that locals could develop genuine interest in local heritage once they can see incentives, harvesting the monetary value of such WHS or generating cultural and social capital (gathering points where traditional customs could take place). However, the lack of site-specific managers appears to be the major obstacle, not only to efficiently tackle conservation issues by bridging opposite discourses that emerge from this co-management, but also to reintroduce religious sites within the cultural fabric of rural communities by providing tangible and intangible incentives to locals. The following section delves deeper into the way social actors, particularly clergymen, respond (internalize and reject) to AHD.

6.1.2 Internalization and Operationalization of 'Religious' and 'AHD' Discourses

The previous section discussed how, over the decades, the DoA has created and maintained a centralized system of decision making. This section examines how the two discourses of 'AHD' and 'living religious tradition' coexist, how they are internalized by state officials and religious clergy respectively and how they influence conservation and curation.

In both churches extensive works comprising grass areas, cobbled yards, retaining walls, outlets, disabled ramps, and lighting (external and internal) have beautified the sides making them simultaneously more tourist friendly. All works replicated the local architecture, techniques, and materials. This 'responsible gentrification' has never been a major dispute between the church and the DoA. The DoA's stance to preserve the integrity of the historic environment and underscore its aesthetic value, is aligned with religious discourse that raises specific concerns regarding over gentrification and touristification that would accelerate secularization. This alignment that combines reverence, sanctity and development was described by Singh and Rana (2022) as 'reverential development' that has the capacity to make religious sites relevant to a broad body of religious and culturally driven visitors. This strategy brings to mind what Vukonic (2002) referred to as 'convenient symbiosis' (p. 64) that constitutes tourist-friendly religious sites showcase how faith is alive, relevant, and flourishing. However, 'responsible gentrification' sits uneasily with the local council of Kalopanagiotis (St. John's monastery) that since the end of the last century has made considerable efforts to enhance the tourist profile of the village, with the monastery as the focal tourist attraction. The results demonstrated that often there is an alliance between the DoA and the Church against

the initiatives and recommendations initiated by the local council that are considered as harmful for the historic and spiritual character of these churches. Although the two discourses are ontologically incompatible, which is particularly apparent in relation to the conservation of frescos, and to the periphery of the religious sites, local bishops appear to accept AHD driven strategies that underscore the old, monumental, and aesthetic value of the churches. This ‘controlled staging’ allows local bishoprics to improve the status of a pilgrimage destination (access and beautification) while it protects the sacred sites from uncontrolled touristification (or even Disneyfication) in the name of the tourist industry.

While the DoA demonstrates some flexibility in conservation of the outer periphery, it takes a firmer stance towards the interior of the church. It appears that the ‘preserve as found’ strategy that underpins material stasis is the preferred conservation method. In relation to wall painting conservation, the DoA considers their (authentic) value as an innate or inherent quality possessed by the original material fabric rather than associative related to living religious practices (see Smith, 2011). Thus, the DoA rejects conservation practices driven by living tradition (religious practices, traditions, and cosmologies) that consider the material fabric as a renewable source that helps to communicate the spiritual value of holy scenes. The department believes that the living character of the monument (liturgies, mysteries etc.) should be restricted to non-intrusive practices and in no way should faith dictate conservation works that target the material fabric of the church. Characteristically, foreign conservators, although they demonstrate some sensitivities to alternative voices and an awareness of postmodern conservation practices, have considered any restoration as artificial, fake and in general an inappropriate strategy. This ‘moralistic framework’ as described by Pendlebury (2013), indicating the correct actions to be taken, often ‘corrects’ or ‘silences’ sub-AHD expressed by advocates of restoration also within the DoA. However, a recurrent theme within the archival research indicated that aesthetic enhancement is taking place to improve the aesthetic qualities. This brings to mind what Villers (2004) noted, that there is no such thing as ‘neutral conservation’ or ‘minimal re-integration’, but it is in a non-accountable process that fails to clarify its purpose, that eventually reflects the narrative of the conservator to maintain the historic-material dimension.

From a Church’s perspective there are two school of thought demonstrating that AHD has been both contested and internalized by traditional clergy. Some bishops and clergymen, especially at the diocese of Morphou (St. John’s) expressed a scepticism towards ‘material

stasis'. These people, under the pressure of the strict conservation they maintain that at the very least sensitive areas such as facial characteristics (damaged eyes, ears, and mouths) should be restored out of piety and respect towards depicted saints. These clergymen have demonstrated their bitterness towards the authoritative stance enforced by the DoA, that freezes the living character of these churches. However, it must be highlighted that even the dioceses of Morphou (St. John's) that pushes for selective restoration, is mild and compliant, embracing the view that restoration should not be processed in areas where there is no evidence of how the authentic scene looked. On the other hand, and contrary to the expectations, other clergymen, although critical of the DoA's 'obsession' with materiality, especially in cases that such strategies inhibit day to day practices (see monasteries), embrace the 'material stasis' strategy in relation to wall paintings. From this stance, the current conservation ethos is legitimized through a theological discourse. The analysis demonstrated that a portion of clergymen justify the 'preserve as found' strategy using Orthodox theology. This pro-material stasis stance does not consider aesthetic fragmentation as a problem but rather an opportunity to highlight the archaeological value alongside ecclesiastical history. The core tenet of this approach is that the 'living character' of the place is not affected, because spirituality is an inherent quality of the sacralised temple and religious depictions remain spiritually efficacious.

The merging of the two discourses is even clearer in the accounts of other clergymen who delve deeper into the historicity of the two medieval churches. While there is an underlying idea the infiltration of AHD, has resulted from their inactiveness and strict conservation policies, through the interviews there is an element of pride felt in relation to the accumulated historical significance of these monuments evident in their physical fabric. This perception is coupled with a theological explanation that the spirit of the place is not lost or changed due to the physical state of the wall paintings. Some respondents went one step further arguing that ideas about restoration are outdated as they fail to understand the historical significance of the monument. I consider these changes as part of church's developing historical consciousness, that combine religious mindset and national history into a religious cultural knowledge. Thus, unlike scholars who raised concerns on how strict conservation strategies could 'freeze' and 'focalize' historic assets (Alberts and Hazen 2010; Zhang and Smith, 2019; Zhang *et al.* 2021) this study has shown that material stasis can coexist with intangible concerns and living Christian orthodox tradition.

One question that remains unanswered is why certain social clergymen considered the conservation strategy 'preserve as found' as an opportunity for change while others do not.

This comparative approach revealed that the two bishoprics under investigation have different attachment styles and conservation agendas. According to Fairclough (2005), organisations internalise and appropriate external disclosure in ways that lead to unpredictable transformations and new ‘successful’ strategies based on the vested interests of social agents. In Cyprus, the overarching aim of the church is to reintroduce religious sites as focal pilgrimages and cultural centres, which is manifested in two ways. The anti-restoration narrative (1st narrative) becomes an opportunity to communicate the ecclesiastical history by blending, as Taylor (2007) put it, ‘religious commitment and materialism’ (p. 360). Thus, certain clergymen have internalised some of the core values of AHD, including ideas of material authenticity and ‘expert’-led conservation. This hybrid narrative aligns with the secular conservation ethos, particularly ‘evidential value’ that highlights a national discourse on how the Greek Orthodox culture prevailed through centuries of hardships and suppression by Latin and Ottoman rulers. Through calculated thinking and balancing the pros and cons of the ‘preserve as found’ strategy, they re-negotiate the meaning of historic churches, turning the limitations of secular ethos into new opportunities. This study echoes similar conclusions reported by others (Maags & Svensson, 2018; Xia, 2020; Katapidi, 2020; Wu, 2023) who underscored the creative agency of ‘heritage users’ to develop flexible relationships with AHD-led practices. The pro-restoration narrative (2nd narrative), on the other hand, driven by religious beliefs, teachings, and spiritual aspirations, advocates that restoration is an act of care and attentiveness but equally a ‘redeeming’ act, as some of this damage was the product of outdated religious superstition (talismanic beliefs) a disconcerting topic for the Church of Cyprus. Thus, clergymen embracing the 2nd narrative appear more constrained than enabled due to their desire to ‘maintain continuity rather than seeking opportunity for change’ (Delbridge and Edwards, 2013, p. 938). These findings echo Henderson’s thesis that ‘materials-based response to repair a tear or fill a loss may offer little value in some contexts and in others may erode a positively perceived quality of ‘pastness’ (2020, p. 197).

The recruitment of theological language to justify secular conservation strategies within Christian churches is an interesting finding that demonstrates that AHD, or at least some of its core tenants including objective authenticity and expert led conservation, have been adopted by traditional clergy. The comparative approach taken revealed that certain bishoprics feel more constrained than others, demonstrating that ‘core communities’ are not homogenous and social agents internalise external discourses at different speeds. These findings align with those interviewees who argued that church in Cyprus ‘is not one thing’ and provide more clarity on

the individual agency of social actors. The results contradict earlier scholars who investigated living Orthodox monasteries (Chatzigogas, 2005; Alexopoulos, 2013) and others taking a more theoretical approach (Poulios, 2010; 2014) who argued that the values and vested interests of religious communities should not be expected to settle with heritage professionals in the management of ecclesiastical heritage. This approach makes us reconsider Poulios (2014) theoretical framework, who maintained that the empowerment of host communities requires the renouncement of object authenticity and the embracement of a ‘living heritage approach’ firmly linked with continuity as this is defined by host communities (traditional knowledge, maintenance practices etc.).

‘according to living heritage approach [...] emphasis is no longer on the preservation of the (tangible) material but on the maintenance of the (intangible) connection of communities with heritage, even if the material might be harmed (Poulios, 2014, p. 28).

Although this thesis stresses the need for more democratic procedures in heritage management it is equally sceptical in dismissing object-based authenticity from conservation practice as an outdated modernist practice. The results demonstrated that object-based authenticity and discourses around inherent historical value and material stasis could coexist with living religion and discourses around continuity. In this context, Poulios (2010, 2014) also fails to acknowledge the capacity of religious social actors to internalize successfully opposite (or external) discourses. As the literature review has shown, heritage is manifested in different forms in each era based on societies concerns and interests (Harvey, 2001). Thus, this thesis rejects the linear model professed by Poulios (2014) (object based – value based – living heritage approach) and embraces a more diverse model that considers heritagization as a contextually determined process shaped by power-laden discourses but also shifting vested interests (Thouki, 2022). More recent scholarship appears to support this perspective, such as Jong (2023) who argued that heritagization should not be considered as a linear process and emphasis should be given to how religious and secular temporalities coexist, that often contradict each other. Within these margins, the malleability of religious position to blend theological and secular concerns demonstrate that ‘intangible heritage’ is not always a source of dispute, (see Smith, 2011), but a flexible and evolving notion that can be reconciled with secular (conservation) metanarratives and make religion relevant again, demonstrating as Coleman and Bowman (2019) put it the efforts of church to adopt in new regimes of values and perpetuate their tradition.

Similar conclusions can be extracted in relation to the curation of the rural churches. The ways, in which Cypriot churches are managed demonstrate further how the two discourses coexist. The analysis has demonstrated that the curation of Cypriot churches, is the result of many factors including preventive conservation that prioritizes the material fabric over living practices, the zeal and agenda of local bishops to ‘stage’ rural churches, and contextual factors such as the availability and nature of congregation. Regarding preventive conservation, it is evident that the DoA would prefer a museum-like management approach in an effort to minimize the impact religious practices can have on the fragile interior. The removal of pews, candelabras and oil lamps reduces damage inflicted on the monument as a result of mobility, wear and tear, soot and fire hazards. The need to create a space free of obstructions, such as pews that could cover the wall paintings, is a lesser reason that also influence the presence or absence of religious furniture. Thus, for the DoA, small isolated rural churches should be treated as ‘museums’ where visitors can contemplate the unique architecture and internal décor without jeopardizing its integrity. On the other hand, religious discourse is also prominent in the way these sites are curated. While there is a general consensus that candelabra should be kept out of the church, often there is one oil lamp lit hanging in front of the iconostasis symbolizing the eternal life and God’s wisdom. Also at both churches, while the DoA prohibits mysteries from taking place, it allows the hosting of small-scale liturgies. Liturgies are held weekly at St. John’s and in summer at St. Nickola’s, while in other small chapels of the region, part of this WH cluster, liturgies are only held during the name day of the patron saint.

Therefore, small compromises, such as the occasional performance of religious practices, should be seen as a strategy to ease dissonance. As Pendlebury (2013) argued it is often the case that those holding the power often accommodate other sub-AHDs, in an effort to achieve their ultimate control and demonstrate their flexibility towards politicians and the public. Thus, regarding the curation of the internal space, the minimalist approach adopted in most Byzantine churches, apart from St. John’s, is a way to defuse the tensions between ‘precarious’ living tradition and secularisation.

The removal of pews and their replacement with a discreet floor lamp and the presence of icons (on a movable stand) alongside a two-seated hymnbook stand aimed to maintain these places as living worshiping sites. Equally, the absence of interpretive infrastructure and other tourist related audio-visual aids precludes the acceleration of the secularization of these churches. This minimalist approach satisfies the church as it guides the tourists’ gaze towards

the spiritually rich religious scenes while, as observed in relation to the fragmented state of the wall paintings, the removal of furniture does not take away the inherent spirituality of the place. Nevertheless, the presence of floor lamps and the emptiness of the space further supports the idea that in Cyprus clergy have internalized elements of AHD, especially those justified by preventive conservation. Meanwhile, regarding the DoA's role, these decisions appear to be tactical responses over a system where religious value is very prominent.

As Fairclough (2005) argued new discourses emerge 'through reweaving relations between existing discourses' (p. 932). This study has proved that there is a new discourse within orthodox churches that allows material stasis to coexist with living religious tradition, that highlights the reflexive capacity of clergymen (and later heritage users). I consider this development as part of the church's evolving historical consciousness that falls within its broader agenda to establish its relevance to a society that is searching for its cultural and spiritual roots. According to Elder Vas (2010) this innovation (transformation or change of discourse) is possible in contexts where conflicting discursive dispositions are manifested as well as human reflexivity. The pending question throughout this first section is whether the internalization of AHD driven practices by certain (if not all) clergymen in Cyprus has been enforced through a centralized system that does not allow new discourses (especially those driven by intangible ideas) to influence conservation, or whether it is an organic process in which clergymen become self-aware of the historicity of their sacrament. I argue in this thesis that both are the case. Strict conservation restrictions, backed up by statutory control and lack of funding have crippled the religious driven initiatives that should have been promoted. Considering clergymen are embedded within this AHD driven policy framework, these social actors pursue strategies that are possible within this centralized system using strategic judgment (see Delbridge and Edwards, 2013). While these new discourses marginalize the interest of some key stakeholders, there is strong evidence to suggest that clergymen in Cyprus do embrace AHD.

However, this does not mean that clergymen lack agency, or that they have internalized object-based authenticity uncritically. The interviews revealed that the clergy's stance was characterized by what Archer (2003) termed as 'internal conversation', a thoughtful and calculated thinking that balances the pros and cons of implementing AHD driven strategies (lack of congregation, funding, cultural memory). This reflection demonstrates the clergy's concern regarding the new role rural churches ought to play within the spiritual and cultural life of rural Cypriot communities, and how heritagization can be an opportunity to revitalize

religion. After all, as Leca and Naccache (2006) stated, ‘reflexivity does not develop in an institutional void [...] actors build on the existing institutional logics’ (p. 633). In a more philosophical tone these changes signal a shift in the theological mindset. While materiality (or ‘substance’) has always been subordinated to spiritual efficacy, evident through the repainting and renewal of wall paintings in previous centuries, today for cultural reasons, at the very least, it is considered on the same ethical level as spiritual value. As Sayer (2000) argued discourses, although they demonstrate prevailing ways of thinking, are not prisons and their limitations should not be exaggerated. These results align with more recent studies (Xia, 2020; Katapidi, 2021), who demonstrated that local communities do develop flexible relationships with AHD, that are not necessarily contrasting co-creating heritage and providing new layers of meanings especially as locals become more aware of conservators’ values. In conclusion, and in line with Leca and Naccache (2006), understanding how society changes its perception towards what heritage is and how it should be curated requires a non-deterministic view that acknowledges not only the pressures enacted by prominent discourses, see AHD, but also how social actors embedded within such institutional logics respond.

6.2 Heritagization Through the Eyes of Visitors

This section delves deeper into tourists' different understandings and interpretations of the conservation and curatorial decision and whether the current strategies meet their expectations. The first sub-section discusses how visitors respond to the four practices and their causal powers, forming the pre-structured environment they encounter. Unlike to previous studies that position heritage users in opposition to AHD-led practices, this study demonstrates how object-based authenticity and responsible beautification, improves both historic and spiritual sentiments provoking feelings of nostalgia and escapism. The second sub-section delves deeper into visitors meaning making mechanisms and discusses why the pilgrim and tourist dichotomy is a reductionist and unhelpful categorization that conceals visitors' agency and in particular the way they critically assess the coexistence of the two discourses ('living religious tradition' and AHD). It appears that those visitors who were able to merge AHD driven practices with living religious tradition were more likely to accept hybrid management practices. In this context, visitors pre-entrance narratives (motivations and expectations) and, in particular, their affiliation with Christian Orthodoxy, either as a faith or cultural memory is a major factor in the way they respond to heritage strategies.

6.2.1 Resistance and Compliance Towards Heritage Practices

- ***External gentrification***

Visitors to both churches, appear to be content with the conservation strategies on the periphery of the two churches. Beautification, executed in a responsible manner as well as improvement of access are welcomed by visitors for two reasons. Firstly, they demonstrate care and attentiveness and secondly, to a large extent they match the visitors' pre-entrance expectation to visit an authentic, genuine, and original rural sacred site. The findings demonstrate that visitors do not fall victim to this staging in their search for authenticity. It appears that visitors are content with 'beautification' provided it is done in a responsible manner, such as the preferences for coupled streets over whole roads, the construction of new buildings with traditional materials and the minimalist grass areas that demonstrate attentiveness. Characteristically, locals or expatriates who remembered the site before these developments retrospectively approved of such changes to substantially improve access and convenience. As Chhabra *et al.* (2003) noted, staging and authenticity are not in opposition as the former 'contains elements of the original tradition' (p. 715). So, although in the two churches there are areas where authenticity has been 'staged' or 'contrived' (Cohen, 1979),

visitors are not merely passive receivers that fall victim to their own search for authentic cultures. Considering visitors awareness of restricted gentrification, this thesis aligns with those scholars (Di Giovine, 2008; Alivizatou, 2012; Zhu, 2012), arguing that visitors are not merely passive receivers of staged heritage product, but rather conscious seekers of life-changing experience that is relevant to present concerns around unspoiled rural environment.

To better understand the way visitors ‘negotiate’ authenticity, we should revisit their motivations. As the data demonstrated escapism and nostalgia were two motivations that featured predominantly, either as the main motivation or alongside pilgrimage and experience seeking. This was evident in the way visitors described religious sites as ‘peaceful’, ‘spiritually rich’, a place that provides ‘calmness’ and ‘inner peace’. Equally, they expected to find a place in a good state of preservation, while they consider wealth and any modern additions as (spiritually) ‘distracting’. According to Davis (1979) nostalgia ‘occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, and uncertainties’ (p. 34). Religiously and secularly motivated visitors, seek for what Smith and Campbell (2017) called as a ‘safer place’, that provides an escape from their daily routines, urbanization, anxiety and uncertainty of modernization. As discussed later in relation to the conservation of frescos, although nostalgia has not featured prominently in visitor motivation as a ‘pulling factor’, (see Leong *et al.* 2015; Hsu *et al.* 2017), nostalgia was raised during visitors’ interaction with the sacred sites. Thus, the current conservation, aiming to ‘beautify’ the place without overshadowing its spiritual dimension has triggered nostalgic feelings. These findings confirm the position of Gao *et al.* (2020) that interaction with the historic environment can spark nostalgic feelings, and the view adopted by Chhabra *et al* (2003) that staging that aim to meet visitors’ authentic criteria, can trigger the perception of authenticity.

As Angé and Berliner (2015) argued, nostalgia as ‘the yearning for what is lacking in a changed present’ has an ‘empowering agency’ to renew our relationship with the past (1-5). A recurrent theme during the interviews, is comparing of these churches with other beautified monasteries to demonstrate their disapproval of extravagant practices that gentrify sacred sites that make them an extension of the contemporary world. In these margins another element that demonstrates visitors’ reflective thinking is the assumption expressed by many that conservation should be guided by and reflect the intrinsic intangible values of the place such as piety, reverence, simplicity, and humility. Such concerns were evident for both religiously and secularly motivated visitors. Thus, this group of visitors did not feel that their emotions were manipulated with gentrified strategies, golden glamorous mosaics, newly built retaining

walls, and shiny cobble yards. The respectful beautification utilizing compatible materials reinforced the authentic experience and highlighted the intangible values of the site. In this manner, conservation does not threaten the prevalent values of the sacred sites and is still meaningful and organically blended with the cultural, spiritual, and natural scenery of the monastery, surrounded by gardens, orchards, the morning mountain breeze, and the sound of the nearby stream. The poetic and spiritually rich way visitors considered conservation strategies to in mind what MacCannell (1976) pointed out that escapism from their mundane world is the new faith.

However alternative criteria of authenticity have been expressed by four visitors at St. Nickolas' whose reasoning vary substantially. In terms of demographics these tourists demonstrate higher social and/or educational background compared to the rest of the sample. The main issue that differentiates them from the rest is the level of intervention. Apart from V19 who considered the grass area as intrusive and unnecessary, the other three visitors demonstrated higher expectations in terms of maintenance and restoration questioning the practices of the DoA. For example, they consider the moss covering the roof tiles, the crumbling mortar, and sockets within the church as signs of neglect. While development works were marginally more visible at St. Nickolas' as well as areas of conservation neglect, compared to St. John's, it is also worth considering whether their stance is equally influenced by higher elitist criteria possibly related to their educational and social background.

This section has demonstrated that visitors are aware and positively predisposed towards responsible beautification. It is evident that the 'destination image' heritage practitioners have crafted, driven by strict conservation restrictions with selective responsible beautification, meet visitors' interest and concerns to visit an authentic religious setting that helps them immersing themselves in a pre-modern world that retains authentic spiritual values they cannot find in their daily world. As a concluding thought, it appears that the escapist and nostalgic feelings generated during the visit are catalyst for positive experience. This observation brings in mind Willson's *et al.* (2013) arguments that today spirituality escapes beyond the anchoring of religion a dogmatic beliefs towards destination experience, seeking a transcended, harmonious and meaningful experience that goes beyond ordinary sense of time (Voase, 2009; Coleman and Bowman, 2019; Astor and Mayrl, 2020).

- ***Merchandizing***

The commodification of sacred sites and in particular how commercial activities impact the spirit of the place has received considerable attention from the scholarship. Scholars such as Rotherham (2007), Curtis (2016) and Coleman and Olsen (2021) have discussed visitors' scepticism towards blending sacred and secular activities while others such as McGettigan and Burns (2001), Levi and Kocher (2012) and Dora (2012) found that commercial activities have a negative impact on visitors perception of authenticity. Although this study confirms previous findings that scale, positioning and the sense of monetary exchange can spark a mild scepticism and feelings of spiritual digression, it also demonstrates visitors can justify such activities if they are 'packaged' in a respectful manner.

The analysis has demonstrated that product relevance (with a preference towards items that evoke spiritual reminiscence), fund raising for supporting maintenance and conservation and the way the shops are 'camouflaged' and presented to the public make visitors more inclined to accepting such activities. The small size of the souvenir shop at St. John's and its humble character placed within a low roof monastic cell gives the impression that it has been sanctified by the holiness of the monastery. Thus, while some sort of economic exchange is considered acceptable for the maintenance of a living church this is expected to be packaged within a moral and cultural context characterized by humility that does not hinder their genuine experience seeking. In accordance with Morgan (2015) it appears that the souvenir shops have absorbed the sacredness of the places. The findings also corroborate those scholars (Alberts and Hazen, 2010) who have pointed out that visitors come with certain expectations at heritage sites, not only in relation to authenticity, but also regarding comfort and tourist facilities.

This study also demonstrates that certain secular tourists tend to be more sensitive to commercial activities at the 'sacred periphery' of the two churches, adopting stricter criteria for authenticity over those holding some sort of religious motivation. On the contrary, religious or partially religious driven visitors, appeared to be far less concerned with ethical dilemma around profanity and secularism, emphasizing practicalities related to their experience such as the power of objects to provide spiritual reminiscence (as carriers of blessings, affordances), product variety and a sense of obligation to financially contribute to the monastery in an exchange (or bartering with the saint). In other words, those who are culturally and religiously closer to Orthodoxy highlight the 'economic' and 'spiritual value' of these places. As other scholars have noted (Collins-Kreiner *et al.* 2015; Irimias *et al.* 2016; Heidari *et al.* 2018) while

souvenirs are part of tourists integral experience monetary exchange at religious sites has been an integral traditional practice around sacred sites. This does not mean that tourists hold higher ethical and moral sensitivities than religious visitors who appear to be less concerned with the appropriateness of these activities. On the contrary tourists' lack of religious attachment, deprives them from the need to demonstrate devotion either by purchasing a souvenir or contributing to the maintenance of the monastery. Deprived of such obligations and commitments towards the deities or what Terzidou *et al.* (2018) described as a 'the patron-client relationship (p. 57), these people have developed an idealistic perception of an unspoilt religious site.

- ***Curation***

The data emphatically showed that visitors could demonstrate higher levels of immersion in a church that retains its furnishing and gives the impression that at any moment a liturgy could take place. The interaction between sounds, smell of the incense, the historic pews, the sub lighting, the flickering flames illuminating the holy icons as well as the eyes of saints following you around the church all create a mystical atmosphere that enhances the embodied experience. These findings confirm the study of Othman *et al.* (2013) in York (UK), where comparing three active and inactive churches they found (marginally) higher levels of emotional and spiritual experience in active churches. Similarly, to the previous practice (merchandizing), religion either as belief or cultural memory appears to perform a prominent role in the way visitors' feel the spirit of the place. Thus, visitor immersion is a result of their interaction with the sacred space, but also influenced by their religious affiliation. The analysis revealed that knowledge about Christian values and beliefs could be recruited to ease the feeling of emptiness occurred by the absence of religious furniture. Equally, the absence of such attachment required physical stimuli to 'feel' the spirit of the place. An exception to this trend is represented by those visitors who demonstrated stronger religious attachment and deemed the absence of religious furniture a practical obstacle.

An antagonistic stance was expressed by visitors who either demonstrated strong attachment towards religion or reported complete absence of religious attachment. The former group comprise pilgrims or religious tourists with strong religious interests. These people consider the absence of icons, pews, and the relocation of candelabra as restrictive measures that inhibit the religious practices they have come to perform. In these accounts there is a strong link between religious objects and pilgrimage performativity. This approach was expressed by

a small number of visitors who had strong religious motivation. In a recent paper, Terzidou (2020) calls for greater attention on how objects as activators of all senses help religious people move into the spiritual realm, as they communicate sacredness through their 'thingness'. It is important, however, to note that these people had no difficulty in feeling the spirit of the place, but their scepticism was a result of the difficulty to perform their rituals.

The second group of visitors that expressed an antagonistic stance towards the minimalist curation at the church of St. Nickolas, comprised predominantly of experience seeking tourists with no attachment to Orthodox Christian tradition. For these individuals, the absence of religious furniture inhibits their immersion and the feeling of a living site. However, the absence of spiritual attachment and knowledge of Christian theology contributed further to the feeling of emptiness and enhanced the impression of a museum space, something also evident in the absence of emotional language. As Paine (2013) argued, the meanings of (sacred) objects cannot be understood if visitors have never been taught how to recognize them. Thus, the absence of tangible stimuli and the lack of spiritual and cultural attachment made these visitors adopt an antagonistic stance and consider the 'minimalist' curation as restrictive. While the reasoning behind these two groups varies, with the former emphasising practical worship and the latter an opportunity for further historic immersion, both cases appeared to confirm Zhu's (2012) stance that authenticity is related to 'performativity'. For these visitors, ritual embodied performance, either as participants or observers, enhance individual engagement and demonstrate the continuity of tradition.

A compliant stance was expressed by those who were able to merge the two discourses. This category comprises visitors across the whole tourist and pilgrim continuum, who unlike the previous group that demonstrated a discontent towards the absence of religious furniture, express that the emptiness does not take away the spirit of the place. This group of people showed a tolerance towards this curatorial choice by drawing on (Orthodox) Christian theology, that was expressed, through knowledge of Christian tradition, either in the form of Christian belief (for pilgrims and spiritually motivated visitors) or in the form of cultural memory (for secular tourists with a Christian cultural or personal background). Considering spirituality as an inherent quality and not determined by the presence or absence of religious furnishing, they appear less critical over the absence of furniture. These findings demonstrate that spiritual attachment, in the form of religious or cultural affiliation, constituted in visitors familiar with Orthodox Christian tradition, does influence perception of exhibition strategies. It is worth noting that this minimalist strategy is considered more appropriate than the

intrusiveness of labels, which would increase the secularization the church. This study corroborates Berns' (2016) position that secular driven exhibition strategies do not limit the spirit of sacred objects as long as the viewer is able to recognize these meanings. As Baxandall (1991) argued, even in the absence of interpretive resources, the viewer will inevitably always construct an interpretation for themselves using his own light. Lastly, but not least, those taking an ambivalent stance demonstrated an altruistic view of how this strategy could constrain devotees who would like to perform some religious practices. However, while these people reflected on the negative effects of this strategy, they did not seem to be particularly discontent with this strategy.

These results demonstrate that there is room for improving visitors experience and eliciting stronger emotional arousal from non-religious visitors at Cypriot rural churches. Although these results should be taken with caution as neither of the two sites had an interpretive strategy in place, visitors' responses indicate preference for live interpretation, with visitors appreciating the intimacy and feeling of authenticity triggered by the interaction with the priest at St. John's. These findings contribute to existing knowledge that highlighted visitors' weariness towards intellectual and historic information and its failure to spark emotive aspects (Voase, 2007; Francis *et al.* 2008; Poria *et al.* 2009). While the author embraces this stance and the need for more balanced interpretations at religious settings (see Thouki, 2019), it also highlights an overlooked area, which is the power of the 'medium'. This study advocates that interpretive infrastructure in terms of labels, panels and interactive displays appear to be considered as distractive. The ordained priest at St. John's, not only matches visitor expectations for visiting an authentic site, but also provides an opportunity for an original experience that could stimulate their imagination. In conclusion, visitors needed more information to understand the visually impressive wall paintings but not through the conventional method of labels or alienating technology, but rather as Isnart (2008) put it, through the warm words of clergy that combine heritage discourses with liturgical discourse. As Staif (2014) argued, people value personalized experience at heritage settings that are less estranging and evoke personal stories and viewpoints.

Conservation of Wall Paintings

As already discussed, the 'preserve as found' practice provides an opportunity to examine how heritage users respond to one of the main tenets of AHD, best manifested in the Venice Charter of 1964, and that has been considered the cornerstone of international

conservation policy (Waterton *et al.* 2006). The data revealed that from the overall sample at both churches a small number of visitors, comprising a mixture of tourists and pilgrims, expressed scepticism or discontent towards the ‘preserve as found’ strategy. The ‘narratives’ encountered in the previous section are also evident in this practice. Visitors taking a compliant stance can merge spiritual concerns with ‘object-based authenticity’ enhancing historical immersion. Those adopting an antagonistic stance considered this practice restricting either for spiritual reasons demonstrating a ‘constructivist authenticity’ or experiential reasons, demonstrating a ‘postmodern authenticity’ (Figure 18). The overall idea running through the following observations is that perception towards authenticity is not ‘one size fits all’, but deeply personal, it involves self-reflexivity and varies between people who prefer different settings and experiences (Peterson, 2005; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Chhabra, 2010).

Regarding the first group that embraces *object-based authenticity*, they appear to be content with the fragmentation of the frescos. Some of the key words people used to describe material stasis and acceptance of incomplete frescos were ‘it’s normal to have missing parts’, ‘keep it as it is’, ‘it would be mismatch’, [restored frescos] ‘would not be real... it’s distracting’. These findings align with Chhabra (2010, 2012, 2019) and (Belhassen *et al.* 2008) who emphasized the importance of object authenticity to enhance existential authenticity and spiritual growth as well as a body of people that is motivated by frozen or static cultures. For these visitors any interventions are considered intrusive unacceptable practice that spoil the medieval character of the church and inhibit their capacity to spot artistic changes. If anything, a new restoration program following religious practices, would hide the accumulation of meanings to a ‘made up’ present that reflects the taste and spiritual concerns of the 21st century. Equally, for these visitors, material stasis does not inhibit inherent spirituality and the efficacy of religious paintings, that is inherent in the sacred space. A common theme raised with these visitors is the connection of authenticity with materiality. For them original material, even in fragmented form, is a source of authenticity and historical accuracy, while the difficulty in recognizing holy scenes (pictorial/narrative dimension) is not considered a problem, whereas any addition creates a feeling of anxiety of not being able to distinguish the original and overshadowing the historic palimpsest. Drawing on Orthodox tradition these visitors were able to justify such conservation restrictions. Characteristically, for those who hold some spiritual motivations, especially those identified as half pilgrims, they argued that pictorial fragmentation does not inhibit the devotional power of these scenes neither their pictorial narrative, but through it they acquire a historical aura that connects present and past piety in an

unbroken line. These findings align with Sweetnam and Henderson (2022), who argued that neutral gap-fill and other intrusive restoration strategies aiming to reconstruct the wholeness of the artwork are deceptive and misleading and conceal the continuous lifespan of the painting.

Revisiting visitors' motivations, the current conservation strategy enhances the historicity of the place matching visitor expectations and concerns around escapism, nostalgia, and an unspoiled historic environment. For these visitors the current causal powers that freeze the material fabric and inhibit pictorial comprehension enable them to complete this nostalgic journey. Lowenthal asked the question 'what does heritage loom so large today?' (1995, p. 5). The importance of nostalgia as expressed at the beginning of this section is also evident here. According to Lowenthal (1985) while the future is unpredictable, the past is unsurprising and secure, and many want to return to it, and it can be accessed by traces of time that trigger both cognitive and emotive sentiments. These 'physical residues', a combination of natural and anthropogenic causes such as patina and deliberate damage, provide unlimited access to the past through empathetic immersion and detailed knowledge. This happens in three ways. Firstly, it enriches the present by linking ourselves with past events and people, something evident in visitors' reflection towards the different artistic styles on the walls that indicate different artistic trends and reminiscent for the difficult Ottoman times. Secondly, people can appreciate the past because it is over. As Lowenthal (1985) explains, termination provides the stability we lack in the chaotic present. That was evident when people preferred the 'preserve as found' strategy that preserved the original material that was considered more pure and innocent, instead of non-reversible techniques which were perceived as cheap or/and corrupted. Thirdly, the current surviving state of the wall paintings, where a small portion (approximately 30-40%) has been destroyed, allows visitors to feel that their experience is not contrived. This state of preservation maintains the temporal remoteness evoked by decay while providing stimuli for imagination and immersion.

The philosopher Charles Taylor (2007) characterized our contemporary era, as the 'age of authenticity'. Driven by individualism and expressivism due to new life patterns, Taylor asserts that today people are morally uneasy searching for authenticity that resists the conformity imposed on us by society. This is to be found in the aesthetic realm where 'beauty, form and content emerge inseparably' (2007, p. 358) making art crucial for people's lives. This material-based notion of authenticity, that triggers nostalgia, through patina, damage and the passage of time, alongside responsible beautification, that retains the spirit of the place, help visitors meet their expectations of a peaceful, romantic place that retained its intrinsic values.

But most importantly material stasis provides an existential security as heritage users are able to distinguish the new from the original and achieve an authentic experience. These results corroborate Chhabra's (2012) position that object-based authenticity continues to be prominent within heritage tourism.

The diagram demonstrates how visitors reflect on the two causal powers of AHD-led strategy ‘preserve as found’ manifested in the conservation of wall paintings. The strategy has the potential to constrain but also enable/enhance experience depending on agents’ vested interests and concerns. Drawing on qualitative responses, visitors were grouped into the three main types of authenticity, as expressed by Wang (1999). While the current strategy that maintains the wall paintings in a fragmented form improves the experience for those embracing an objective authenticity as they value original material, at the same time it contains those who would like to experience the murals fully restored, either for spiritual reasons (constructivist) or enhancing experience paying little attention whether the authenticity is ‘staged’ (postmodern).

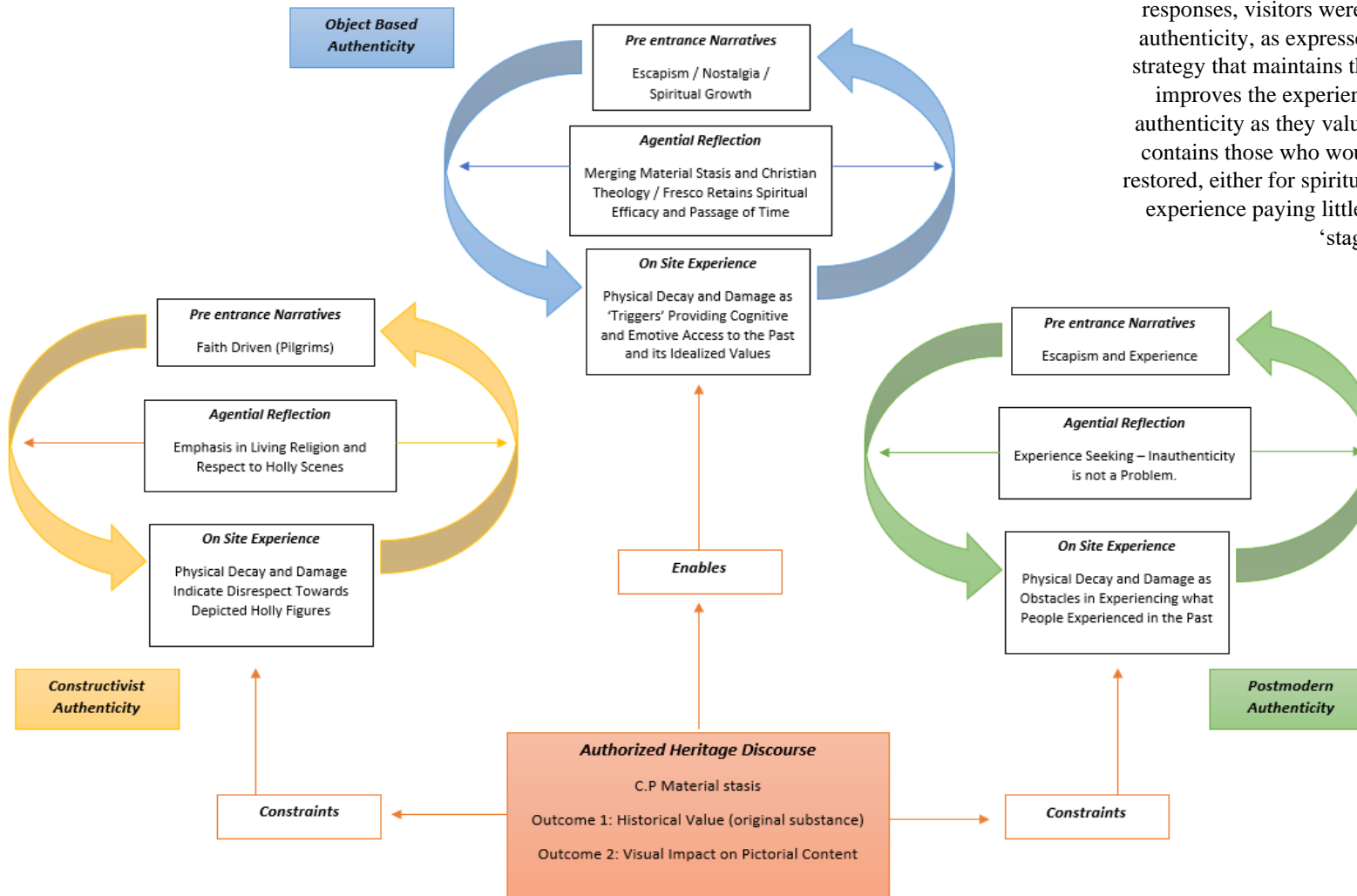


Figure 19 Diagram of Perceived Authenticity

The second category comprises those who expressed their discontent towards the current practices. This group of people, with religious motivations consider aesthetic re-integration an act of piety towards the depicted saints. Often this stance is coupled with national sentiments, raising reservations about whether such ‘negative history’ (referring to damage and vandalism on eyes) should be remembered. Thus, these visitors, driven by the symbolic attributes of religious scenes that communicate grace and other intangible ideas, drift away from the objective qualities of wall paintings (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999; Belhassen *et al.* 2008). For this group, material stasis is a problematic, not so much in terms of experiencing the sense of place, but they considered such approach as disrespectful and neglectful towards the holiness of depicted saints. These people embrace a *constructivist authenticity* underscoring the idea that values such as piety and reverence should guide the conservation process. These results are consistent with those of other studies (Zhang and Smith, 2019; Zhang *et al.* 2021; Zhu, 2021) and suggest that strict conservation restrictions obscure the living and changing character of heritage sites by focalizing and freezing them in a single perspective (Strange and Whitney, 2003).

The third category comprises those who expressed their discontent (antagonistic stance) towards material stasis but share no spiritual connection with the two churches. This group consists of two visitors, one with mixed motivation and one tourist, whose primary concern is neither reverence nor piety but longing for a time travel that would bring their experience as close as possible to the original atmosphere. For these visitors, material stasis is an obstacle to achieving an immersion in a different historic era. Although they acknowledge that restoration is a contemporary intrusive work, in their view it helps them to experience the original atmosphere, while inauthenticity is not an issue. This stance corresponds with what Rickly (2022) described as *postmodern authenticity* characterised by a cynical perspective that justifies the contrived and staged authenticity. Such conservation can enhance experience and aesthetic enjoyment, simultaneously rejecting (modernist) notions of absolute truth and reality and emphasizing pleasure and freedom over originality (Wong *et al.* 2023). These findings reflect those observed by Wells (2010) who pointed that AHD practices restrict spontaneous historical (even fantasy driven) conservation practices that help people to find emotional attachment to their heritage. As Reisinger and Steiner (2006) argued, postmodern authenticity creates the illusion of deep cultural experience, a hyperreality where the boundaries between real and fake are indiscernible.

6.2.2 The Pilgrim and Tourist ‘Dichotomy’

The rich empirical findings retrieved from visitors in this study, also shed light on the pilgrim and tourist dichotomy discussed in section 2.2.4. beyond its anthropological significance. This debate has been eloquently influenced by surveys that aimed to inform visitor satisfaction towards management strategies. However, as already discussed, there has been a methodological bias within religious tourism literature. The predominance of positivist-empiricist quantitative studies comprised primarily of surveys that perpetuate rigid dichotomies (pilgrims vs tourists) conceal the agency, micro histories, pre-entrance narratives and in general a limited understanding on how visitors reflect and respond to heritagization (Thouki, 2022). This study has demonstrated that, apart from entrance narratives, the interaction with the conservation and curatorial strategies is an important factor on whether pilgrims and tourist can reach an uplifting experience.

This study found that both the *diverging* (stressing the importance of motivation, religious and doctrinal beliefs) and *converging* school of thoughts (stressing their similarities) hold some ground on this debate, thus considering tourists and pilgrims as distinct groups oversimplifies religious tourist experience. Firstly, the analysis demonstrated that motivation and pre-entrance narratives should not be dismissed, as these form important part of their experience. From an epistemological point of view depriving visitors from their motivations is also problematic as their concerns and vested interests form the basis for agential reflection (Archer, 2003). The best way to understand why motivation (alongside pre-entrance narratives) is important is to consider the influence religious affiliation has on visitor perceptions. As discussed, it appears that those who can demonstrate spiritual or cultural attachment to Christian religion are more likely to accept certain non-traditional practices, arguing that the spirit of the place is always present. Equally, the absence of religious affiliation tends to make people more idealistic in their views in relation to merchandizing practices of curatorial choices. However, visitors’ religious affiliation, despite affecting perceptions, is neither a decisive nor predictive attribute. For instance, those who self-identified as pilgrims or half-pilgrims and half-tourists (see V3, V13 and V18) utilized religious language to justify secular driven conservation and curatorial strategies such as preventive conservation. The same can be said for tourists. Regarding the diverging approach that stresses the similarities of the two groups it has been found that tourists can also achieve an uplifting spiritual experience through historic immersion, nostalgia, and escapism. Something that has been discussed in relation to wall paintings and the capacity of material stasis to provoke nostalgic feelings. Considering

that both observations hold ground religious tourism experience should be reconceptualized to address how pilgrims and tourist dialectically interact with the place, what knowledge and expectations bring with them and how they reflect on the constraining and enabling powers of strategies that comprise the historic sacred environment. While from an anthropological or theological point of view this debate could still hold ground, from a heritage management viewpoint it such strict categorization that polarizes people into pilgrims and tourists is unhelpful and metalating.

Conclusively, this study aligns with the third approach that emphasises the performative character of religious tourism, the knowledge, interest, and values visitors bring with them and their agential capacity to come out with genuine responses that do not fall within the strict religious or secular metanarratives. Thus, we can see how visitors, after interacting with the religious space and the new ideas evoked by the current practices, shift their pre-entrance narratives towards strategies and perspectives that traditionally are against ‘living’ religious practices. By reconciling the two approaches, the importance of vested interests on the one hand and the capacity of all visitors to uplift the experience of the other, as well as paying attention to how visitor dialectically interact with the sacred environment, future scholars can achieve a better understanding of what sacred sites mean to people nowadays and how heritage strategies shape these understandings. These findings support Eade and Sallnow’s (1991) argument that heritage tourism is a valuistic journey and an arena of competing discourses. Equally, the findings align with scholars who argue that visitors are in search of a complex multi-faceted spirituality (Curtis, 2016, p. 18), coupled with an ‘aesthetic obsession with authenticity’ (Bremer, 2006, p. 32). As Taylor (2007) claimed, people today choose to partake in religious life or practices, that make sense to them and help them to grow spiritually. This assumption is consistent with the thesis expounded by Di Giovine (2011), Kim *et al.* (2020) and Iliev (2020) that the pilgrim and tourist dichotomy conceals the dynamic ways of their interacting with religious environment, which is subject to their motivation and the set of knowledge these people possess and produce.

This understanding of religious space corroborates Verter’s notion of the extra institutional, individualistic and ‘often highly eclectic personal theology self-consciously resistant to dogma’ (2003, p. 158), that unlike religious capital, that is confined within closed system, it affords individual agency to religious men. This extra-institutional esoteric thinking allows individuals to dialectically combine dispositions (such as knowledge, taste etc.) acquired in the field of religion, and new ones through socialization that allow them to shift

their taste against dogmatic beliefs and change their perceptions towards materiality. A characteristic answer that proves visitors' reflective deliberation and interaction with sacred site what Taylor (2007) would describe as the capacity of humans to play 'with aesthetic spontaneous freedom' (p.359), was provided by **V18** '*We, the Christians, can visualize how the icon continues... we estimate how the hands, and the legs of the saints continue*'.

6.3 Theoretical Contribution: Responses and Refinements to AHD

The previous section has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of some of the core debates surrounding (living) ‘ecclesiastical heritage’, such as the importance of object authenticity, ethical dilemmas around merchandising activities and the importance of tangible (religious furniture) and intangible (interaction with priests) stimuli for greater immersion regarding curatorial strategies. Conclusively, the study has so far demonstrated that future research should be orientated towards examining how pilgrims and tourists interact and form meanings with a sacred environment. This section focuses on AHD, that is the core theory to which this PhD seeks to contribute and is subdivided into two sub-sections. Sub-section 6.3.1 discusses how AHD retains its hegemony in an environment that is heavily influenced by religious discourse. Sub-section 6.3.2 discusses whether ‘heritage users’ align themselves with strategies influenced by AHD and why?

6.3.1 AHD and other extra discursive mechanisms and discourses

As mentioned in the literature review the overemphasis placed in the agency of this ‘discourse’ (self-referential character) to define what heritage is and how it should be managed led scholars to question the AHD theory on various levels. Prior studies have noted limitations in relation to the theory in terms of both its epistemological (nominalization and reductionism) and methodological (overemphasis on formal charters and periodic reports and lack of deep qualitative methods) grounding. According to this critique (Di Giovine, 2008a; Pendlebury, 2013; Skrede and Hølleland, 2018) AHD leaves little room to examine how it is contested between practitioners, conservation professionals and other powerful stakeholders. Building on this criticism, the present study was designed to investigate the ‘extra-discursive’ dimension of heritage conservation. In other words, how other discourses and mechanisms coexist with AHD, and how the latter, as discursive structure, is internalized and operationalized by organizations and social agents. This approach has opened a theoretical window to examine how AHD retains its hegemony during the conservation of living religious heritage.

The results of this study indicate that whether a discourse is internalized and eventually operationalized, or in certain cases coexist with other discourses, is contingent to the broader dialectics of heritage policy planning and individual aspirations of social agents. The thesis advocates that the preservation of AHD-led practices at Cypriot churches is the result of a meticulously centralized decision-making system that is maintained through strict conservation law, the capacity of the Department of Antiquities to capitalize on the liabilities of other parties

(lack of funding and expertise to and carry out a conservation strategy), and the DoA's strategy to remind non-governmental groups (Church and local councils) that deviations from these policies would result in the withdrawal of the world heritage status. Hence, in a centralized system, that is dominated by institutions (see DoA) that embrace the core values of AHD, the latest retains its core values and hegemonic status. The empirical findings indicate that in Cyprus, the existing power structure that favours AHD-led practices is not becoming more inclusive or democratic. Instead, it is strategically repositioning itself to perpetuate fabric-focused values. Consequently, local bishoprics are considered 'passive regional development beneficiaries' rather than equal development actors (Lee and Eversole, 2019, p. 1510). Thus, by internalizing this professional discourse DoA perpetuates innocuously the current imbalance of power relations between experts (or authorisers) and non-experts embedded in AHD. These findings confirm Poullos' (2014) argument that within 'value-based conservation' alternative viewpoints are considered and often incorporated in the planning as long as they do not challenge or undermine scientifically driven conservation principles and material-based aspirations established by conservation professionals. The present findings are consistent with other studies which found that governmental bodies in other countries (advocates of AHD), raise various obstacles for local stakeholders, such as technical language, bureaucracy and other criteria set by AHD (Mydland and Grahn, 2012; Ludwig, 2016; Parkinson *et al.* 2016).

This study postulates that the infiltration and eventual operationalisation of non-material and other counter-hegemonic discourses (see traditional religious practices) in conservation practice is related to how centralised the decision-making process is in a particular context and how (in)dependent and resilient the institutions carrying certain discourses are. This thesis does not preclude cases where authorities allow wider concerns on tangible and intangible heritage to coexist or take precedence over AHD-led practices as demonstrated in section 2.1.3. An analysis of why AHD retains its hegemony is subject to power struggles sustained between institutional structures and social agents vested interest and concerns. As Fairclough (2005) argued, through 'reweaving' existing discourses a process can emerge that is not socially arbitrary, but rather subject to social actors' vested interests. In this framework, we can argue that 'restricted beautification' and 'material stasis' are strategies that help the Church's new 'social agenda' to reintroduce faith under the disguise of cultural memory. Thus, this study challenges previous theoretical positions (see Poullos, 2014 and Smith, 2015) that placed intangible heritage in opposition to AHD. That was particularly evident when traditional clergy (and visitors) dialectically transformed religious discourse to accommodate material

stasis justifying strategies that freeze religious settings in the name of the historicity of ecclesiastical heritage. As Foroughi *et al.* (2023) noted conflict can generate new ideas and become an opportunity for consensus building.

Although this study confirms the scepticism of various scholars (Stovel, 2007; Munasinghe, 2005; Orbasli and Woodward, 2009; Poullos, 2010; Konsa, 2015; Winter, 2014b) who questioned the feasibility of value-based conservation to be applied in living settings, equally the choice of traditional social actors to align themselves with some core tenets of AHD, should not be dismissed. This research posits that scholars should reconsider AHD not only as a restrictive ideological position but one of the multiple coexisting discourses that underscore a specific vision regarding the management of the historic environment. In this way, future research can gain a better understanding of the dialectics of heritage and in particular how social actors (clergymen and heritage users) shift their understanding towards heritage by creatively, attaching new layers of meanings and values to heritage based on their evolving concerns and available discourses. This approach opens a window to examine how social actors with their vested interests, dialectically engage with AHD, by rejecting, embracing, or merging it with other discourses to ‘construct’ their own vision of what heritage is, and what it should represent. Thus, future research should avoid the current reductionist approach that places ‘heritage users’ and ‘primary stakeholders’ as opposed to AHD. Within the ‘mutability of culture’ (Smith, 2006) where meanings are renegotiated, AHD driven practices (material stasis) and policies (centralization) appear to be relevant and even necessary to project and protect the new values attached to these monuments.

6.3.2 Heritage Users Aligned with AHD?

Smith (2006) did highlight instances when visitors embrace AHD driven strategies. Such ‘alignment’ could be motivated by feelings of comfort, social and cultural security and belonging, that reaffirm a patriotic sense of a middle class or adherence to a particular place/land (Smith and Waterton, 2009). However, while those instances when AHD-led practices constrain ‘heritage users’ are commonly discussed, one less discussed area within heritage literature is an understanding of those instances where ‘heritage users’ are aligned with AHD. In other words, ‘are ‘heritage users’ always in opposition to AHD-led practices? This section delves into this issue examining more closely how heritage users reflect on some core tenets (objective authenticity, expert led conservation, innate heritage value attached to materiality) manifested through the AHD-led practice ‘preserve as found’ including.

All forty participants demonstrated an intuitive thinking towards the conservation of wall paintings and provided insightful responses to the questions, demonstrating passion, interest, care, and admiration. According to Smith (2006), it is often the case that audiences think within the margins established by AHD. Various responses from people including [this practice is] ‘the right thing to do’ and ‘it is something [referring to the preserve as found practice] that happens everywhere’ proved how ‘users’ have indeed internalized the modernist conservation ethos. However, the in-depth interviews also revealed that visitors’ stances are also characterised by reflection and, on most occasions, deep cognitive and emotive processing, proving that they do not accept such ‘top-down elitist’ approaches passively, neither do they reproduce internalized dominant narratives found within their habitus in Bourdieusian tradition. As Sayer (2010) and Elder-Vass (2010) argued people can demonstrate their ‘reflective habitus’ when they consider the consequences of doing or not doing something. As Archer (2003) maintained, those who want the reproduction of social status quo are equally calculated and interested in the topic which is accessed based on their own subjectively defined concerns and vested interests. Those taking a content stance towards the ‘preserve as found’ strategy advocated that material stasis is not a restricting agent but a trigger that allows visitors to build a stronger cultural and spiritual connection with the monument. Nevertheless, the fact that there was no unanimity within or among the clergy and visitors on this issue further proves that the ‘preserve as found’ metanarrative is not accepted uncritically. These findings, support those advocating that authenticity is a personal, negotiable, and changing concept that is characterised by the judgment of the viewer and the value (memories, expectations, embodied experience) visitors attach to on the product (Littrell *et al.* 1993; Chhabra, 2005; Park *et al.* 2019; Dai *et al.* 2021).

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003) has challenged some of the fundamental intellectual principles of heritage management established by UNESCO since 1950, such as the idea that heritage is predominantly material and non-renewable (Smith 2015). Within these margins, Smith (2015) argued that intangible heritage, can challenge AHD practices. The results of this study depict a more complicated scene of this conceptualization that treats AHD driven practices as merely obsolete remnants of modernity, obsessed with authenticity and aesthetics, a world that freezes and fossilizes heritage. While this study embraced the notion that intangible concerns do challenge AHD, evident within ecclesiastical and lay (visitors) circles, the analysis has demonstrated that one fundamental principle of AHD that of objective authenticity manifested through ‘material

stasis', has also been embraced by a portion of clergy and a large portion of visitors at the two churches. The results have proven that those endorsing this view, especially those with a Christian background, justified such conservation decisions, recruiting a theological language. These results differ from Smith's (2015) argument that intangible heritage challenges AHD practices providing a more complex picture where intangible concerns, such as religious beliefs and Christian tradition, become a source of reconciliation between intangibility and materiality within ecclesiastical cultural heritage that allows greater historic and spiritual immersion. As Di Giovine (2008b) noted, there is no single universal stance towards AHD, and it varies between societies demonstrating the scepticism that AHD may not be applicable in societies that do not share colonial characteristics or belong to the commonwealth.

For Orthodox Christianity, piety is inherent within the temple from the beginning of its consecration, and the church maintains such piety even in a ruinous state, while in the cases of forced conversion of Orthodox Christian temples into Mosques it is considered that the sanctity of the place is paused. As the following 'iconophile argument' from John of Damascus demonstrates, 'matter' is a medium that helps in transmitting the divine spirit and because of that is worthy of reverence:

'I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake... I salute all remaining matter [he includes in this category the tomb of Christ, the ink in which the gospels were written and the wood of the cross etc] with reverence because God has filled with His grace and power. Throughout it may salvation has come to me. (John of Damascus 1.16).

Thus, in Orthodox tradition the ever-present spirituality within the temple sanctifies all religious forms, shapes, and preservation conditions and considers fragmented religious scenes to be spiritually efficacious. But most importantly it appears that it provides theological justification for big portion of social agents to accept material stasis by considering materiality subordinate to spirituality. This approach opens the doors for traveling back in time and nostalgia. As a result, faded frescos do not lose their spiritual value, which is enhanced by the ever-present spiritual aura, but due to material stasis, acquire a new historical value.

To better understand how 'heritage users' are aligned with AHD as a set of values that inform professional conservation, we should revisit what Smith (2006) described as the performative aspect of heritage. According to Smith (2006), performativity captures that which is being practiced at heritage sites, such as reminiscence as a performance of remembering and

commemorating personal and other types of memories. In her own words heritage is an ‘active process of doing and remembering’ (Smith, 2006, p. 264). According to Smith performativity is closely linked to the agency of heritage users, and thus has the capacity to challenge traditional accounts and meanings attached to heritage (2006, p. 67). Authenticity has been traditionally defined as the search for ‘traditional culture and origin, a sense of the genuine, the real or the unique’ (Leong, 2016, p. 192). Decay or damage, through graffiti and damage provoked by talismanic beliefs, enhance the nostalgic sense of place providing historical value and depth by highlighting significant cultural and national events that have left their physical marks on the monument. Local and international visitors, religious or not, hold the view that this state of preservation functions as a stimulus, or gateway to the past, reaffirming their national and/or cultural identities such as the graffiti with names and prayers indicating the accumulation of passing memories.

The evidence of this study supports the idea that the coexistence of objective authenticity (manifested through material stasis) and living tradition should not be considered as exclusively antithetic approaches that seemingly ‘freeze religious sites’ (see Poullos, 2014). Acknowledging that social agents’ understanding and expectations for the historic environment evolve and grow in complexity over time (Harvey, 2001; Mason, 2002), this study brought to light a new discourse that combines material and immaterial elements. By embracing forms of discontinuity manifested through the anti-restoration stance, Cypriot churches allow religion to overlap with secular values, enabling the Church to reintroduce itself into contemporary spiritual and cultural maps. These results challenge the postmodern perspective that ‘authenticity is irrelevant to many tourists, who either do not value it, [or] are suspicious of it’ (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006, p. 66) and is aligned with Belhassen et al., (2008) and Chhabra’s (2010, 2012) position that object-based authenticity remains prominent within (religious) heritage tourism.

Have these conservation methods that cultivate nostalgia, as Lowenthal (1985) would argue, had the ability to provoke escape from the tyranny of an acceptable present and alleviate stress? Although it is difficult to answer this question, as the data do not stretch to the visitors’ psychological state, the collected narratives suggest that material stasis does indeed enable visitors to engage cognitively and emotionally with the church and complete a ‘nostalgic circle’. Examining visitors’ nostalgic escapist motivations and their contentment towards material stasis it is evident that visitors’ ability to observe the diachrony of the past helped them to achieve historic immersion that provided spiritual and cultural enrichment. In his seminal

work Eliade discussed how sacred places constitute a ‘break in the homogeneity of space... this break is symbolized by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible’ (1957, p. 37). While Eliade’s argument highlights believers communication with heaven the new role heritagized churches have taken equally should not preclude the communication with previous historic eras. By internalizing and subsequently reflecting on the two discourses (living religious tradition and AHD) visitors were able to merge secularized practices (material stasis) that trigger imagination and access to the past without ignoring religious tradition either as faith (pilgrims) or cultural memory (tourists) or both. As Hemel *et al.* (2022) stated, secularization does not suggest necessarily a withdrawal from religion but rather an exploration of new forms of spirituality and meaning making. Findings on religion show that religion does not have the same effect on all religiously driven (or quasi-religious-driven) visitors. As in the case of clergy, many adopted a hybrid discourse that considers murals as spiritually efficacious in a fragmented form. The anti-restoration strategy has allowed these visitors to establish links with the past and confirmed the continuation of religious and cultural identities.

As well as providing the conditions to stimulate further reflection and provoke reminiscence, creating new opportunities for reflection and nostalgia, at a policy level, it is considered from certain social agents to provide a coherent institutional framework that protects heritage resources of international importance. According to Knott (2013), people have the tendency to create sacred places, separating those things of supreme value from the mundane world and establishing boundaries, and rules of conduct that protect them. Analysis has demonstrated that AHD and in particular its values towards excerpt-led conservation support (or legatine) an institutional framework that prevents the restoration of wall paintings while it ensures access to all against possible capricious self-centred interests of locals. Drawing on Bossy’s (1985) notion of the ‘migration of the holy’ Hemel *et al.* 2022 explain how the notion of sacred has been detached from religion and absorbed into other spiritual forms and practices of meaning making. This thesis argues that the ‘preserve as found’ strategy has been elevated as a ‘sacred strategy’ that guarantees originality through material stasis and protects authenticity and integrity against those who, as Stovel (2008) put it, would intervene in the historic resource as they wish. The way ‘heritage users’ embrace AHD at a policy level is evident in the way visitors reflected on the centralization of decision making in Cypriot cultural heritage management.

Visitors have largely demonstrated trust towards institutions and the top-down management structure running the two churches. Only three visitors at St. Nickolas' and five at St. John's demonstrated their deep scepticism about the centralized decision making in Cyprus. Visitors' compliant stance towards the existing management structure, reflected a scepticism towards the ability of locals to rise to the challenge of running or co-running such an important cultural asset either due to lack of expertise or/and resources, as well as their unknown agenda of locals. Some visitors, especially those visiting from abroad were particularly concerned whether they may find obstacles during their visit such as inconsistent opening hours. For them the familiar brand of UNESCO secures a trusted protocol such as strict protection, good preservation, and free access to anyone. Some key words in visitors accounts that reflect UNESCO's discourse include 'professionals know better', 'important for the whole world', 'UNESCO will keep it safe', 'UNESCO is bureaucratic, but this is also positive'. While this group is aware of public consultation and the advantages of democratic procedures, they consider the current strategy that discourages participation as more reliable and effective due to its capacity to ensure professionalism and efficiency. Equally, for Cypriots, the involvement of UNESCO triggers a sense of national and local pride emerging from the realization that their national heritage has attracted the attention of a prestigious international body such as UNESCO who initiated the inscription and protection of the churches. This does not mean that visitors support the museumification of religious sites, but rather reflects a lack of trust towards the locals to maintain the balance of the two natures. Considering that locals also can commodify and trivialize historic sites, the question posed is who is better in preserving the tangible and intangible attributes of WHS, the locals, or bureaucrats?

What characterizes those taking an ambivalent stance is a deeper reflection on the pros and cons of public consultation without, however, though demonstrating a definite will for change. Their scepticism is driven primarily by ethical sensitivities towards the rights of locals to be involved rather than a firm believe that they can have a positive contribution. For these people, such involvement is 'the right thing to do'. Thus, these visitors were usually inclined to consider a potential collaboration that would be regulated and supervised by traditional institutions. On the contrary, driven also from ethical concerns, those taking an antagonistic stance, provided more concrete benefits of public consultation. These include the opportunity to provide social cohesion and reduce the risk of alienation from local heritage as well as helping in the form of traditional knowledge, protection, and tourist related initiatives. Conclusively, these responses although critical should be considered as a mild critique towards

the current strategy. These groups share many characteristics with what Archer (2003) described as the meta-reflexive stance, characterized by lack of brevity and readiness in their responses but they are contextually unsettled and as strong evaluators they criticize both themselves and the society embracing an idealist stance. Although they do not look for contextual continuity or contextual discontinuity, they ‘dwell in upon contextual critique’ (Archer, 2003, p. 273) and, as many scholars have demonstrated they are pre-occupied with values rather than performance (Bonnington, 2015). Hence, engaging in cognitive loops, they remain inactive and passive reproducing existing schemata (Wimalasena, 2017). It should also be noted that, as expected, the slightly higher number of those expressing an antagonist stance at St. John’s is related to the close vicinity of the monastery with the village. The results demonstrated that a substantial portion of visitors, what McAnulla (2006) would describe as group agency, reinforce the pre-existing structural context characterized by material-based conservation practices.

6.3.3 Transferability of the Research Findings

As discussed in chapter 4 (Methods) due to the contextual and individualistic nature of qualitative study replication should be avoided. However, this study has created two models, one methodological and one theoretical/conceptual, that could sensitize future scholars to explain how social agents respond to heritage policies in other settings. In line with Leca and Naccache, (2006) and Delbridge and Edwards (2013), this non-conflationist approach overcomes the emphasis placed on structures (see organisational policies and discourses) and helps scholars to better understand how social agents respond to institutional logics.

Regarding the methodological approach, this study builds on previous studies (Zachariadis *et al.* 2013, Fletcher, 2017; Hoddy, 2019) that aimed to examine how macro level mechanisms influence social phenomena. Following the principle of analytical dualism, keeping structure (including discourse) analytically distinct from agency, this study, as Delbridge and Edwards (2013) would argue, helps in advancing our understanding of conditioned action. This thesis has demonstrated how ‘discourse’ (as ideational structure) and ‘social practices’ (as those mediating entities between structures and events) can be harnessed in qualitative analysis to shed light on how institutional logics influence policies and how social agents reflect on the influence of discourse and the practices they influence. This approach is a step towards filling a gap within CR where issues around the ‘self’ are not fully conceptualized (O’Mahoney, 2011).

Whereas empirical data are context dependent, the mechanisms this study has inferred, and their interplay, can be investigated elsewhere, corroborated, or rejected (Sayer 1992). In line with Maxwell (2009), future research is encouraged to explore how the causal mechanisms identified in this study manifest (and in what ways) in different settings bearing different contextual influences. For instance, the emphasis placed on object authenticity in Cyprus contradicts the findings of Karlström (2005) and Byrne (2008, 2011) in Thailand. Equally, while the structural arrangement in Cyprus constitutes AHD-led practices the mainstream cultural practices it does not mean that the same occurs in other social contexts, such as England's heritage sector (see Pendlebury, 2013). Regarding the theoretical and conceptual model, this study urges future research to consider AHD as one of the many mechanisms at play during the conservation of historic environments and to approach heritagization as a laminated system comprised of various social objects at different levels, including discourses, social practices, actors, and social structures and their causal powers. Thus, keeping the discursive and the extra discursive conditions (and entities) distinct and understand their dialectical relationship future studies could avoid the pitfalls of nominalization and reductionism. Such approach can provide new insight into societies' shifting concerns towards the past, such as how heritage is valued and how these values are related to the fabric and intangible concerns or as Konsa (2015) put it how the cultural contexts are shifting and how the biography of objects reconstructed.

A question that arises is whether CR as an underlying philosophy has been a helpful explanatory framework in this Ph.D. or as Stutchbury (2020) put it an 'unhelpful edifice'? Some of the core findings of this study that demonstrate how AHD-led practices perpetuate have been addressed by other researchers. These include the use of technical knowledge, expertise, bureaucratic structure (James and Winter 2017), the use of coercive discourse over 'endangerment' and 'at risk' management (Rico 2014) and the partnership between state and private agreements to raise necessary funds for the preservation of sites (Chechi, 2018). The relevance of the above studies, and those discussed throughout the discussion chapter, is to a certain extent, anticipated in a CR-driven study for two reasons. Firstly, as Sayer (1992) pointed out, many mechanisms reproduced are either observable from the empirical level or familiar from other situations. Secondly, while theory and literature for CR can be fallible, they play an important and ongoing role in advancing our understanding of a phenomenon (Fletcher, 2020). Thus, inevitably the researcher is exposed to existing literature to abstract mechanisms. What CR brought to this research is three things. Firstly, the non-deterministic explanatory model of

CR drew authors' attention to multiple coexisting factors that avoided reductionist explanations (and oversimplification) that (over)emphasized the role of particular discourses, such as AHD, to shape heritage policies. Secondly, it drew the author's attention towards dormant mechanisms (see ICOMOS) that either were not readily evident in the data or appeared as minor themes during data collection. Thirdly, CR stance on discourse as an ideational structure that pre-exist social agents who have the capacity to reject and internalise open a window to understand the dialectical relation developed between discourse (i.e., AHD) and extra-discursive entities (i.e., structures/mechanisms and social agents).

7. Recommendations

The findings of this PhD study provided the foundations for practical recommendations that address issues related to the conservation, curation, and management of rural historic churches in Cyprus. The recommendations are directed towards improving the collaboration between local dioceses and DoA and improving visitors' experience while respecting the sanctity of the churches. The following recommendations build on the results of this study as discussed in the previous chapters and intend to be both pragmatic and workable.

One of the primary outcomes of this PhD is that it has surfaced voices that have been obscured or ignored during the conservation and curation of Cypriot rural churches. While this study highlighted dissonance and contestation in critical areas, even between groups (i.e., clergy, pilgrims, tourists), it has also brought forth convergence and alignment between 'heritage users' and heritage professionals. One of the unexpected findings of this Ph.D. is that local dioceses, 'authorisers' such as DoA, and the larger pool of visitors have internalized (with various degrees of success) both discourses, the material focus and professional-driven discourse that academics conveniently referred to as 'AHD' and the 'religious discourse.' For example, with few exceptions that have demonstrated mild resistance, there is unanimity in some core areas, such as accepting the 'preserve as found' strategy.

The author understands that the proposed strategies may not satisfy all stakeholders involved, and thus, he corroborates those who questioned (see section 2.1.1) the feasibility of value-based conservation due to its ambitious scope to protect all values and satisfy all stakeholder groups. However, doing justice to the 'people-centered approach' taken in this thesis, the following proposals aim to satisfy the majority of parties involved (including professionals) while it does not substantially undermine living tradition. In this context, realistic conservation strategies can be achieved by understanding a place-shifting cultural significance, such as the needs, values, and expectations of those who protect, use, and visit it (Historic England, 2008).

7.1 Improving the Management of Cypriot Religious Sites

This research proposes that the management of Cypriot rural historic churches could benefit from better co-management between local dioceses and the DoA. This approach does not promote the decentralisation of heritage management in Cyprus but rather a flexible system to improve this joint production between the Church, DoA, UNESCO and locals. As Prud'homme (1995) explains, decentralisation does not necessarily imply a positive way forward as it may undermine the efficiency of existing policies. For Prud'homme (1995), the question is what aspects of central administration should be decentralised and how joint production should be improved. Drawing on the findings of this study, this thesis proposes the institutionalisation of site managers. Site managers can help the Church of Cyprus to update its institutional and operational policies and be considered an equal interlocutor on conservation issues and a responsible stakeholder considering contemporary international tourism's needs.

While there are allocated individuals for the day-to-day management of the UNESCO sites and priests that oversee the liturgical and conservation issues, management responsibilities fall within the busy agendas of local bishops and officers of DoA. This perpetuates problems regarding service quality, tourist facilities, interpretation, staffing, and other logistics related to safety and security. Site managers can help the operation of rural UNESCO churches in three directions. The following recommendations follow the premise that heritage conservation should shift away from the 'heuristic approaches' characterized by minimal effort to understand alternative views in heritage conservation towards a paradigm where alternative views are acknowledged, documented, and discussed (Henderson 2011).

- ***Mediators***: Operating within the existing management structure, the site manager could breathe an air of professionalism, goal-oriented planning, and efficiency that is currently missing. As mediators, site managers could codify and communicate the Church's overlooked spiritual concerns and promote synergetic relationships between stakeholders, transforming local bishoprics from 'passive beneficiaries' (Lee and Eversole, 2019) to regional cultural development actors. Apart from the 'on-site' issues, site managers could collaborate with new lobbies (politicians, academics, etc.) and propose community-led initiatives that tend to be more successful in attracting grant applications (Historic England, 2011).
- ***Operational Issues and Tourism Engagement***: By becoming formally involved in the conservation and curation of living religious sites, site managers can provide assessments

and recommendations to improve the existing administration (coordination, mandates, guidelines, inspections, etc.) and line of communication. On a more practical level, they can tackle day-to-day problems more efficiently, including safety, access, and cleaning of hygiene facilities, and they can make sure that the products sold at the souvenir shop reflect the overall spirit of the place. Additionally, they can improve the exhibition strategies, especially at churches like St Nickolas, where there is no attached ecclesiastical museum. Other duties could include the preparation of risk management (delays, funding, reputation, etc), educational resources, guidebooks, and other research-related publications, as well as better structuring the teams running these monuments following professional instead of social criteria. By improving its policies, the church of Cyprus could enhance the quality of religious tourism and rebuild its profile as a responsible, self-sustaining, and forward-looking institution.

- ***Cultural mapping***: According to ICCROM (2015), cultural mapping refers to those activities and processes that explore, document, and share information about people and practices associated with heritage resources. Creating a cultural repository, site managers could delve deeper into the agendas of local communities, define their values, assess their significance, and open up democratic processes that would provide room to traditional knowledge and concerns (such as the tourist development of the areas around those churches), to inform a more sustainable conservation agenda (ICCROM, 2015). Such knowledge, which can also be enhanced through visitor studies as the current one, will help us understand what makes a place distinct, attractive, and enjoyable to visit (Historic England, 2011). For example, future interpretation projects could build on the current conservation of wall paintings and communicate to the public the criteria used for the treatment of these features, including perception towards materiality, historicity, and other ethnographic, performative, and intangible interests (Scott, 2015). The overall aim is to increase transparency and inclusion, resolve conflict and improve cooperation by setting measurable and mutually beneficial goals, sensitising DoA towards the living character of the monuments and bringing the church up to date with the growing demands of religious and cultural tourism.

This study states that ‘informed non-intrusive development’ can enhance social value, maintain an association with local tradition and identity, and grow the feeling of ownership and custodianship. The ‘informed’ dimension is related to the necessity of site managers to

invigorate sensitive and thoughtful change by inspiring projects that encourage investment, entrepreneurship, tourism, and employment in rural settings, in line with the concerns of locals, who underscore the economic, social/communal value and local bishoprics. Future planning should make more significant efforts to reintroduce these monuments into the island's cultural sphere without jeopardising their spiritual and physical integrity. Such an approach would allow churches to retain their distinctiveness as spiritual unspoiled heritage attractions and sites that spark 'reflexive nostalgia', to become more inclusive and democratic, allowing the social/communal and economic value to influence conservation policies.

7.2 'Staging' Small Rural Religious Sites

As discussed in the introduction of the thesis, due to the shrinking religious population across Europe, the disuse and eventual abandonment of religious sites is a serious cultural problem that requires mitigation. Despite some respectful attempts of practitioners and trusts to publish manuals, especially in the UK, academic scholarship has only recently started to address the curation of religious sites. This is done from a tourism management perspective that has not profoundly dealt with museum theory (Thouki, 2019; Paine, 2019a). One poorly understood issue is the levels of immersion visitors demonstrate in active or decommissioned empty churches. The following recommendations are built on existing findings, considering that visitors show higher levels of immersion in active churches that feel both active and old. In line with Janssen et al. (2014), the following recommendations do not aim to turn religious sites into sterile museum pieces; on the contrary, the goal is to craft hybrid management that keeps sacred sites functional while maintaining the necessary preservation strategies to retain their authenticity and integrity.

Conservation and presentation of Wall Paintings

I maintain that drastic aesthetic re-integration at these sites should be avoided. The degree of survival and the state of preservation of frescos appear satisfactory in helping people to reflect on both the spiritual and historical aspects of the monument. As discussed, the excellent preservation of wall paintings creates an uncontrived experience that Lowenthal (1985) considered an essential parameter for nostalgic imagination. Thus, it is crucial to maintain the evidence of time, either in the form of patina or damage. This approach is fairly in line with the current practice of the DoA (Ieronymidou and Richeby, 2010). Considering firstly the positive stance towards full restoration of sensitive areas such as eyes, the DoA's adherence towards the historicity and materiality of these monuments, and visitors' aversion

towards ‘smoothing’ strategies that create a ‘contrived authenticity’, any interventions should be reduced to the minimum, justified by how they enhance the spiritual and historical value and should be executed prudently and sensibly. Sweetnam and Henderson’s (2022) technique of ‘disruptive conservation’ can be explored in this instance. To the scholars, this approach acknowledges and rejects the conservator’s bias about fake neutrality, such as ‘neutral retouching’ of missing areas, while making any intervention clearly visible. In this way, conservators’ decisions and inevitable bias are highlighted as part of the object's continuous life; the object can perform its original function, and the viewer can reflect, critique and contemplate it (Sweetnam and Henderson, 2022). At the same time, complete aesthetic re-integration even in areas where an accurate reconstruction can be made, should be avoided as visitors consider this deceptive. This conservation approach that respects intangible concerns and the importance of object-based authenticity and avoids ‘contrived authenticity’ should be complemented by an interpretation strategy that crystalizes this decision. Interpretation should be considered an integral part of the conservation process that enhances appreciation, respect and understanding, communicating the decision-making to the viewer (Ename Charter ICOMOS, 2008).

In places where restorations are executed, interpretation is of particular importance. As Villers (2004) argued, intrusive conservation interventions anticipate greater responsibility from the conservation team to explain and communicate the decision-making. This conservation strategy could spark other types of visitor engagement. In particular, object authenticity offers opportunities for conservators to revive and reintroduce historical moments that have gone unnoticed or forgotten (Chhabra, 2010). Augmented reality could be a potential interpretation strategy. Using mobile applications or QR codes, visitors could digitally reconstruct the missing parts on their phones or download a restored image on their phones. This could spark collaboration between heritage experts, technicians, and artists and visitors’ interest regarding the ‘treatment’ of these sensitive features and make visitors’ more discerning regarding the analysis of the historic palimpsest. More traditionally, movable carbon panels, placed at a distance from the churches, could provide some information alongside illustrations depicting the completed scene. Lastly, this state of preservation could also initiate some activities for younger visitors, who could be provided with drawing sheets where they can draw the missing parts of the frescos. To further trigger critical thinking, mobile apps, interpretive panels or drawing sheets could be supplemented by holy verses providing information (who was present and what the meaning the scene conveys) to complete the missing scenes. This

strategy is more suitable for isolated rural churches that have lost their active character and where the visitation is sporadic. Any future interpretation program needs to take full advantage of the current state of preservation and create interactive engagement that could provoke visitors' imagination.

Religious Furniture

In Cyprus, and to a large extent throughout Europe, numerous small churches are presented empty to the visiting public. It is documented in the literature that 'staging' heritage sites using architectural, unique, and other participatory strategies increases visitor satisfaction at heritage sites (Tang and Liang, 2022). A possible reason for this strategy is a combination of a lack of congregation, the removal of relics that are transferred into museums for safekeeping and site managers' belief that this minimalist approach would emphasise the artistic beauty of these monuments without provoking further secularisation. I maintain that, whenever possible, practitioners should find ways to 're-stage' empty churches by providing pews and other relics (which could be replicas for safety purposes) that would help visitors visualise and interact with the spiritual space. Extra care should be taken in tiny places, in some instances comprised of one single aisle (nave). As the data have shown, the primary motivation driving tourists is the feeling of escapism and the aversion towards the modern world. In this context, the perception of a 'functioning' church increases spiritual and historical immersion. On the contrary, a 'museumified' space that reflects a gallery where religious art is exhibited does not meet these criteria since it takes away the anticipation of the 'spirit of the place' and the feeling of 'heterotopia'.

Ambience

As Christou *et al.* (2018) and Christou (2020) noted, visual and non-visual elements, such as ambience referring to a place of warm service, 'casual chats' and 'traditional activities', can strengthen nostalgia and arouse positive emotions. Equally, Lee (2015) argued that the more sensations an experience provokes, the more effective and memorable it is. At St. John's, some visitors provided positive feedback regarding the hymns playing in the background. This is something that can be adopted in other churches to increase immersion. Likewise, visitors were highly appreciative of personal interaction with the priest, whose overall appearance (including outfit) and attitude underscored the place's 'living' and authentic character. While it is impractical to staff isolated churches with priests, site managers could build live

interpretation by initiating volunteering programs. Labels, panels, and other interpretative material in paper or digital form should be avoided within the church and in its vicinity whenever possible. Data have shown that although visitors want more information, they prefer a place free of modern ‘obstructions’. Such infrastructure would accelerate the museumification and secularisation of the site and hinder feelings of nostalgia as these ‘intrusive destructions’ do not match the pre-entrance expectations. Such interpretative assistance should be provided further from the historical monument and serve as an invisible guide, highlighting areas of interest. The presentation must go unnoticed and not overshadow the spiritual dimension and other elements that contribute to the place's otherness. Lastly, placing interpretation outside the church would minimise visitors’ presence within the church, something that could facilitate better worship.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

However, the existing thesis can be subject to two limitations. The first is related to the research question, which has been formulated in a relatively broad manner. The advantage of the current research question is that it does justice to the term ‘heritagization’, a multidimensional phenomenon touching on many areas of social and cultural life. Secondly, it captures the essence of this hybrid ‘process’. Also, it addresses some neglected areas in the field, such as the curation of living religious sites, and makes new connections, such as the causality between presentation strategies and our understanding of the pilgrims and tourism dichotomy. This wider angle was evident in how this study reviewed the relevant literature and debates. Considering that heritagization comprises various practices and often contradictory practices, the research design could have been narrowed down by examining one or two practices (such as wall painting conservation) to increase the focus of the thesis. Such an approach, reserved for future research, could delve deeper into the dialectics of conservation, taking more advantage of institutional theory that could provide more insight into institutional complexity and the logic of social actors (Delbridge and Edwards 2013). The second limitation is related to data collection, particularly the study of archives that inhibited a richer understanding of how the DoA had centralised power. The archival study was compromised by the availability of specific documents and the fragmented archive of the two churches that presented insufficient details. Unfortunately, the DoA does not have a regular system to produce conservation reports, so any interventions are documented as ‘notes’. At the same time, the detail is restricted to the technician’s discretion. Furthermore, the selection of what is written is also at the discretion of the DoA officers. For example, there were some gaps in the

archive in areas where politicians had intervened as mediators between locals and the DoA. This absence might have caused some long and short-term mechanisms to be missed that would have provided more insight into the evolution of conservation planning in Cyprus and which were not addressed in stakeholders' accounts, such as financial resources; this could have crystalised our understanding of how particular ideas have been institutionalised (Mutch, 2014).

Further research can go in two directions. Due to the research design in this PhD study, emphasising visitors (local and international tourists) and institutional stakeholders, the area addressing the local community has not been dealt with in depth. Interviews, however, have shown that the stance of some locals and ex-patriates visiting as tourists differed or even clashed with traditional clergy, who are considered the legal and spiritual owners of the churches. Findings also demonstrated a discordance between the clergy of the same diocese, especially at St. John's monastery. Thus, a better understanding of the vision of local villagers and the local diocese is required. This will shed more light on the 'core community' (Poulios, 2014). Thus, further ethnographic research is needed to account for the varying perspectives among the clergy and between clergy and locals. What are the value assessment criteria for the two groups? What resonance does the clergy's concern over material stasis have on the local community? Answers to these questions could shed some light on whether the local diocese represents the voices of local communities.

Secondly, as far as the data analysis is concerned, this study might have overlooked visitors' affective and emotional interaction with the two churches that could provide further insight into their agency (Zhang and Smith, 2019). To a great extent, the absence of this type of data is related to the ethical restrictions regarding sensitive lived experiences and perceptions. Nevertheless, although the visitors' emotive aspect was evident throughout the interviews, it is recommended that future research should find a way to collect and analyse affective responses to enhance our understanding of how meaning-making (agency) is manifested at religious sites. Such an approach is compatible with CR philosophy, as emotions, memory, and performance can also be indications of reflexivity (Mahoney, 2011). By understanding visitors' emotional engagement with the site, research can better address how visitors negotiate personal meanings with the churches, such as the reason for visiting (Poria *et al.* 2003) and how they are mediated to produce meanings and evaluate judgments (Zhang and Smith, 2019).

8. Conclusion

The neglected eastern Orthodox churches of Cyprus, where an ongoing debate exists regarding the treatment of wall paintings, provided an opportunity to better understand of how the ‘living’ dimension of religious heritage is negotiated during the ‘conservation’ and management of religious sites. Equally, the thesis examined how the preservationist agenda, manifested through AHD-led practices, impacts religious tradition and visitors’ experiences. Examining power relations and (shifting) ideologies embedded in the conservation of Cypriot churches, the thesis opened a theoretical window to examine how the hegemonic AHD retains its supremacy during the conservation of living religious heritage and whether ‘heritage users’ are opposed to AHD-led practices. Drawing on CR’s non-reduction and non-conflations epistemological approach, the thesis envisaged overcoming previous reductionist approaches that overemphasized the agency of AHD, overlooking the dynamics developed between social actors, their vested interests, and other contextual factors during conservation (extra-discursive). Thus, examining how institutions and actors internalise discourses without being reducible to them (Fairclough et al. 2002) the thesis surfaced how discourse gives meaning to other social structures (Fairclough et al., 2002), how actors (see traditional clergy) are constrained by the structural arrangement, how they reflect on the current circumstances and even recognize new opportunities for action (Delbridge and Edwards 2013, p. 936).

In-depth interviews with policymakers, church representatives, site managers, and archival research surfaced that the perpetuation of AHD-led practices and, in general, of a preservationist agenda that prioritizes historical values and objectivism over living tradition is a result of two processes. Firstly, due to the meticulously centralized decision-making system orchestrated by the DoA. This is maintained through strict national conservation law enforced by international statutory control, the capacity of DoA to capitalise on the liabilities of other parties (lack of funding and expertise), and the timid and distant stance of non-governmental groups (i.e., ICOMOS) towards the department. This delicate process that enforced a ‘moralistic framework’ indicating the correct actions to be taken (Pendlebury, 2013), demonstrates the resilient character of ‘authorisers’ to reposition themselves and resist external pressures, such as the growing awareness of local dioceses over heritage and conservation issues. Secondly, church representatives have internalised some of the core values of AHD, including ideas of material authenticity and ‘expert’-led conservation. Developing a ‘hybrid’ discourse that combines secular ethos, material, and theological concerns they have managed

to re-negotiate the meaning of historic churches to meet the demands of cultural tourism and enable the Church to reintroduce itself into contemporary spiritual and cultural maps.

The empirical findings indicate that in Cyprus, the existing power structure that favours AHD-led practices is not becoming more inclusive or democratic. Small compromises, such as the occasional performance of religious practices, should be seen as a strategy to ease dissonance. These findings bring to mind Poullos' (2014) and Winter's (2014) argument that alternative viewpoints within 'value-based conservation' are considered and often incorporated in the planning as long as they do not challenge or undermine material-based aspirations. Considering the findings of previous studies this study postulates that the infiltration and eventual operationalization of non-material and other intangible discourses in existing professional power structures, favouring AHD-led practices, is related to how centralized the decision-making process is in a particular context and how (in)dependent and resilient the institutions carrying certain discourses are. However, while the embeddedness of clergypersons within this centralised conservation policy suffocates any alternative initiatives regarding the restoration of murals, this does not mean clergypersons lack agency or uncritically internalised object-based authenticity. Acknowledging how social actors' understanding and expectations for the historic environment evolve and grow in complexity over time (Harvey, 2001; Mason, 2002), this study surfaced that coexistence of objective authenticity (manifested through material stasis) and living tradition should not be considered as exclusively antithetic approaches that seemingly 'freeze religious sites' (see Poullos, 2014).

The second aim of this study was to understand how the current conservation decisions impact visitors' experience, demonstrating how visitors build connections with the physicality of religious sites. Regarding the conservation of wall paintings, the three responses demonstrated that the perception of authenticity is a profoundly personal construct that involves self-reflexivity and varies between individuals who prefer different experiences and settings. While a small number of visitors expressed a constructivist and postmodern stance, underscoring the role of piety and historical immersion in shaping perceived authenticity, respectively, the findings showed that the larger group of visitors comprising pilgrims and secular tourists, reasoned that material stasis contributes to the overall experience and sense of place. The findings show that religion does not have the same effect on all religiously driven (or quasi-religious-driven) visitors. As in the case of clergy, many adopted a hybrid discourse that considers murals as spiritually efficacious in a fragmented form. The anti-restoration

strategy has allowed these visitors to establish links with the past and confirmed the continuation of religious and cultural identities.

Restoration may provoke positive emotions and strengthen tourists' sense of place (Hughes et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022). However, this study demonstrated that the anti-restoration approach can also trigger positive emotions. The study echoes Lowenthal (1985), Boym (2001), and DeSilvey and Harrison's (2020) position that 'physical residues' or 'partial loss' provide unlimited access to the past by triggering both cognitive and emotive sentiments. The interviews showcased that observable elements (i.e., scratches, erosion, patina, decay, graffiti) convey a sense of authenticity and become a stimulus that encourages 'time travellers' to complete the escapist and nostalgic journey they embarked on. The 'material record,' provoked imagination and an empathetic immersion towards the culture that produced them, while the 'fear of loss', even for a culture that has not been personally experienced (Berliner, 2012), was prominent among this group of visitors and sparked 'pre-nostalgia' - a self-awareness that restoration may result in significant cultural loss (Earl & Hal, 2023).

Regarding the broader management of rural Cypriot religious sites, it appears that visitors prefer a hybrid management strategy that constitutes the church to look both 'living' (equipped with religious furniture) and 'old' or 'worn' (evidence of time including damage and decay and weathering). Thus, the coexistence of spiritual practices and religious furniture provides an embodied experience while the passage of time, evident in its physical fabric, sparks nostalgic emotions. There were, of course, some variations among visitors. An affiliation, for instance, with Christian Orthodox tradition played a role in how visitors approved or rejected commercial activities and curatorial strategies. That was particularly evident with the curation of the two churches, where visitors with no or little affiliation with Christina tradition placed greater value on embodied experience and sensory stimuli that would enhance historical immersion.

Regarding the pilgrims and tourist dichotomy, this study acknowledges both the importance of religious motivation (and in general affiliation) to influence visitors' perceptions and the capacity of tourists to achieve a spiritually uplifting experience while interacting with the sacred sites. The study aligns with those who consider religious tourism a dynamic experience during which pilgrims and tourists dialectically engage with the meanings of the place visited and shift their beliefs to accommodate new concerns based on their vested interests. This anthropological understanding, which avoids reductionist and polarising

approaches (pilgrims vs tourists), has management implications as it ascribes agency to the religious visitor and moves the attention towards the ways conservation and curatorial strategies constrain and enable visitors. As Lowenthal argued, we should consider how people 'bend the past' (2015, p. xi) to achieve what they have lost today and develop flexible and hybrid policies that meet visitors' nostalgic sentiments for an era which (according to their subjective minds) was spirituality superior and more authentic.

While this study corroborates Smith's (2015) position that intangible concerns can challenge AHD, the findings demonstrated that metaphysical concerns could coexist with AHD. The 'preserve as found' strategy allows the church to manifest its rich cultural memory (locals' devotion, palimpsest, superstitions), simultaneously preventing a contrived experience due to aesthetic restoration. These results challenge the postmodern perspective that 'authenticity is irrelevant to many tourists, who either do not value it, [or] are suspicious of it' (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006, p. 66) and align with Belhassen *et al.*, (2008) and Chhabra's (2012) position that object-based authenticity remains prominent within (religious) heritage tourism. This study advocates that by ruling out the possibility of a democratic and inclusive 'living heritage approach' from any notion of object authenticity, it fails to examine how agents can creatively create innovative answers to their existential (cultural) concerns. Considering that some of its core values meet people's vision and concern towards the past, AHD should be regarded as a discourse with both constraining and enabling powers. Such an approach can help us understand the meanings and values people attached to heritage, which, as Jokilehto (2006) and Konsa (2015) argued, are constantly recreated, reconstructing the biography of the objects.

Regarding the theoretical implications, this study avoided previous reductionist positions that examined the conservation of living religious heritage as the battle of opposite discourses (AHD vs religious discourse) and delved into the extra-semitic mechanisms that are responsible for the retention of AHD. In this more comprehensive critical analysis, the study surfaced how social actors challenge but also internalize and blend AHD values with traditional beliefs to meet their own vested interests. As far as the practical implications, the thesis proposes that the local bishoprics in Cyprus could consider updating their policies and operational practices to enhance their position within centralised systems and institutionalising site managers. Site managers could improve the site's operation, codify and communicate the church's overlooked spiritual concerns, participate in lobbies attracting funding, and improve synergetic relationships between stakeholders, transforming local bishoprics from 'passive beneficiaries' (Lee and Eversole, 2019) to regional cultural development actors. Regarding

conservation, the thesis suggests that restoration should be reduced to the minimum to avoid a contrived experience. Drawing on DeSilvey's (2017) concept of 'curated decay', which advocates how decomposition and decay of heritage can be a stimulating experience generating cultural memory, the thesis proposes that any interventions (dictated by spiritual concerns) should be reduced to the meaning and executed sensibly. Making interventions visible, conservators' decisions and inevitable bias are highlighted as part of the object's continuous life; the object can perform its original function, and the viewer can contemplate, reflect, and critique (Sweetnam and Henderson, 2022). The current state of preservation can be complemented by a sophisticated interpretation strategy that facilitates a polyphonic space for critical dialogue (Carbone *et al.*, 2020) that would stimulate broader debates regarding the conservation of living cultural heritage.

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Appendices

Figures and Tables Sources

- **Figure 1:** Zairon (2017) *Frescos at the Monastery Church of St. John Lambadhistis, Kalopanagiotis, Cyprus*. Available at: [Search media - Wikimedia Commons](#) (Accessed: 8 July 2023).
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Table 12 Summary of Empirical Studies Reviewed

<p>The Table Displays Empirical Studies Focusing on Issues Related to the management/conservation, policy and interpretation of religious sites Reviewed in this PhD Thesis.</p> <p>Conceptual and Theoretical Papers Reviewed in the Thesis are Excluded From this Table.</p>						
No	Author (s)	Year	Location	Empirical Focus	Methods	Source (Journal)
1	Winter, M. and Gasson, R.	1996	UK	Visitors' Perspectives	Survey	International Journal of Heritage Studies
2	Muresan, A.	1998	Romania	Operational Management and Service Quality	Mix Method	Book Chapter
3	Carlisle, S.	1998	Ethiopia	Operational Management and Policy Making	Secondary Sources	Book Chapter
4	McGettigan, F and Burns, K.	2001	Ireland	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	Attractions and European Tourism
5	Stein, M. and Trampedach, K.	2002	Norway	Operational Management (Conservation)	Archival Research	ICOM-CC Publications Online
6	Magar, V and Orea, H.	2002	Mexico	Operational Management (Conservation)	Historical Research	ICOM-CC Publications Online
7	Olsen, D. H and Timothy, D. J	2002	USA	Operational Management	Observations / Interviews (Key Actors)	Tourism Recreation Research
8	Miura, K.	2005	Cambodia	Policy Making	Ethnography	Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites
9	Wijesuriya, G.	2005	Sri Lanka	Policy Making	Archival Research/Secondary Sources	Sharing Conservation Decisions Current Issues and Future Strategies. Rome: ICCROM
10	Irvine, J. H.	2005	Australia	Operational Management	Interviews (Key Actors) / Secondary Sources	Auditing & Accountability Journal
11	Dhar, S.	2006	Himalayan	Operational Management (Conservation)	Interviews (Key Actors)	Studies in Conservation
12	Collins-Kreiner and Gatrell, D.	2006	Israel	Operational Management and Service Quality	Mix method (Visitors)	Journal of Heritage Tourism
13	Winter, T.	2007	Cambodia	Policy Making / Operational Management	Interviews (Key Actors and Visitors)	Monograph
14	Pavicic, J. et al.	2007	Croatia	Operational Management	Interviews (Key Actors)	Book Chapter

15	Voase, R.	2007	UK	Interpretation	Interviews (Visitors-Focus Group)	International Journal of Heritage Studies
16	Isnart, C.	2008	France	Operational Management	Ethnography	Journal of Mediterranean Studies
17	Brajer	2008	Denmark	Visitors' Perspectives	Survey	Studies in Conservation
18	Di Giovine, M. A.	2008	Southeast Asia and Europe	Visitors' Perspectives/Operational Management/Policy Making	Ethnography	Monograph
19	Poria et al.	2009	Israel	Interpretation	Mix Method	Journal of Travel Research
20	Olsen, H. D.	2009	USA	Operational Management	Interviews (Key Actors) / Secondary Sources	Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion
21	Rivera et al.	2009	USA	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors) / Interviews (Key Actors)	Journal of Heritage Tourism
22	Andriotis, K.	2009	Greece	Service Quality	Interviews (Visitors) / Observations	Annals of Tourism Research
23	Ieronymidou and Rickeby	2010	Cyprus	Operational Management (Conservation)	Ethnography	Studies in Conservation
24	Presti, O and Petrillo, C. S	2010	Italy	Policy Making	Secondary Data	
25	Di Giovine, M. A.	2010	Italy	Operational Management and Service Quality	Interviews (Key Actors and Visitors)	Preliminary Communication
26	Poria et al.	2011	Israel	Visitors' Perspectives	Mix method	Znanstveno-Strucni Casopis
27	Hoppenbrouwers, R., Horst. J. V. D., and Vugts, A.	2011		Operational Management	Interviews (Key Actors)	ICOM-CC
28	Warrack, S.	2011	Cambodia	Operational Management	Ethnography	Change Over Time
29	Griffiths, M.	2011	Australia	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	International Journal of Tourism Policy
30	Zhu, Y.	2012	China	Operational Management	Ethnography	Annals of Tourism Research
31	Levi, D. and Kocher, S.	2012	Thailand	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	Environment and Behavior
32	Berliner, D.	2012	Laos	Visitors' Perspectives/Operational Management	Ethnography: Interviews with tourists, experts, and locals	Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute
33	Wiltshier, P. and Clarke. A	2012	Hungary and England	Policy Making	Interviews (Key Actors) / Observations / Secondary Sources	International Journal of Tourism Policy
34	Dora, D. V.	2012	Greece	Operational Management / Service Quality	Mix Method	Annals of Tourism Research
35	Shinde, K.	2012	India	Policy Making	Survey (Visitors) / Interviews (Key Actors)	Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure, and Events
36	Shepherd, R. J.	2013	China	Policy Making/Operational Management	Ethnography	Monograph

37	Alexopoulos, G.	2013	Greece	Policy Making	Interviews (Key Actors)	Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites
38	Othman et al.	2013	UK	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences
39	Abbate and Nuovo	2013	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	Current Issues in Tourism
40	Hughes et al.	2013	UK	Interpretation	Survey (Visitors)	Tourism Management
41	Francis et al.	2013	UK	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	Mental Health, Religion & Culture,
42	Yara Saifi, Y and Yüceerm H	2013	Cyprus	Policy Making	Interviews / Observations	International Journal of Heritage Studies
43	Tucker, H and Carnegie, E	2013	Turkey	Interpretation	Interviews (Guides, Museum Staff, Visitors)	Annals of Tourism Research
44	Wong et al.	2013	China	Operational Management	Interviews (Key Actors)	Annals of Tourism Research
45	Wiltshier, P	2014	UK	Service Quality	Interviews (Volunteer Guides) / Survey (Visitors)	Annals of Tourism Research
46	Rodrigues, S and McIntosh, A.	2014	New Zealand	Operational Management and Service Quality	Interviews (Visitors) / Nuns	Journal of Heritage Tourism
47	Karlström, A	2015	Laos	Policy Making	Ethnography	Heritage Keywords, Rhetoric and Redescription in Cultural Heritage
48	Marine-Roig, E.	2015	Spain	Service Quality	Quantitative Content Analysis (Online Reviews)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
49	Collins-Kreiner, N. et al.	2015	Israel	Policy Making	Interviews (Key Actors)	Tourism Management Perspectives
50	Clarke, A and Raffay, A	2015	Hungary	Policy Making	Interviews	Book Chapter
51	Nyaupane et al.	2015	Nepal	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	Tourism Management
52	Wiltshier, P	2015	UK	Operational Management	Interviews (Staff and Volunteers)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
53	Kocyigit, M.	2016	Turkey	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
54	Božic et al.	2016	Serbia	Visitors' Perspectives	Survey (Visitors)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
55	Ndivo, R and Cantoni, L.	2016	Ethiopia	Service Quality	Content Analysis (Online Reviews)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
56	Afferri, R. and Ferrario, C.	2016	Italy	Policy	Secondary Data	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
57	Zhu, Y.	2016	China	Policy Making	Ethnography	Book Chapter
58	Curtis, S.	2016	UK	Operational Management	Interviews (Key Actors) / Secondary Sources	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
59	Salazar, N. B.	2016	Indonesia	Policy Making	Ethnography	Book Chapter
60	Banica, M	2016	Romania	Service Quality	Ethnographic Approach (Observations / Interviews)	Tourist Studies

61	Irimias et al.	2016	Hungary	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
62	Wiltshier, P and Griffiths, M.	2016	UK	Operational Management	Interviews (Key Actors) / Observations	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
63	Canoves, G and Prat Forga, M.	2016	Spain	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
64	Orekat, F.	2016	Jordan	Service Quality / Operational Management	Mix Method	Monograph
65	Öter, Z and Çetinkaya, M. Y	2016	Turkey	Service Quality	Interviews and Observations (Visitors)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
66	Davison, K and Russell, J.	2017	Ireland	Service Quality	Workshops (visual, oral, and audio processes) and Survey (Teenagers)	Book Chapter
67	Astor et al.	2017	Spain	Policy Making	Historical Analysis (Secondary Sources)	Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion
68	Ramírez, R. R. and Fernández, M. P	2018	Spain	Visitors' Perspectives	Survey (Visitors)	Sustainability
69	Aulet S. and Vital. D	2018	Spain	Operational Management	Observations / Interviews (Key Actors) / Archival Research	Church, Communication and Culture
70	Coleman, S. and Bowman, M.	2019	UK	Operational Management	Mix Method	Religions
71	Coleman, C.	2019	UK	Operational Management and Service Quality	Survey (Visitors) / Interviews (Key Actors)	Religions
72	Thouki, A.	2019	Cyprus, Spain, and UK	Interpretation	Thematic Analysis (In Situ Labels and Guidebooks)	Religions
73	Duda, T and Doburzynski, D.	2019	European Holly sites	Service Quality	Survey (Visitors)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
74	Sabri, R and Olagoke, O. A	2019	Nigeria	Policy Making	Observations / Structured Interviews (Community Members) / Semi - Semi-Structured Interviews (Key Actors)	Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites - Routledge
75	Su et al.	2019	China	Operational Management / Policy Making	Observations / In-depth Interviews (Key Actors and Local Community) / Archival Research	Sustainability
76	Knippenberg, K. V., M. Duineveld, and M. Buizer	2019	Netherland	Policy Making	Mix Method	Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development
77	Cassar, O.	2020	Malta	Operational Management	Interviews (Volunteers)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage

78	Spaarschuh, H. and Kempton, M.	2020	Norway	Operational Management (Conservation)	Interviews (Key Actros)	Studies in Conservation
79	Clopot, C.	2020	Romania	Policy Making	Observations/Interviews	Book Chapter
80	Dagnachew, N	2020	Ethiopia	Operational Management	Interviews and Observations (Key Actors)	International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
81	Tapia, A. A.	2020	Turkey	Policy Making	Observations/Secondary Data	Book Chapter
82	Lofgren, E.and Wetterberg, O.	2020	Sweden	Policy Making	Secondary Data	Book Chapter
83	Oliveira, M. G and Luzia, I.	2020	Portugal	Policy Making	Mix Method	Religions
84	Yanata, K and Sharpley, R.	2021	Japan	Operational Management	Interviews and Observations (Key Actors)	Book Chapter
85	Chang, H.	2021	Taiwan – China	Operational Management and Visitors' Perspectives	Interviews/Secondary Data	Book Chapter
86	Asbagh, N. M. and Tümer, E. U.	2021	Cyprus	Interpretation	Survey	Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites
87	Weibel, D.L.	2022	France	Operational Management and Visitors' Perspectives	Ethnography	Monograph
88	Ly, T. P. and Tan, X.	2023	China	Operational Management	Interviews Key Actors	Journal of Heritage Tourism



Consent Form

Heritagization of Cypriot Religious Sites

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 15/03/2020 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include answering a number of semi-structured interview questions. The interview will be recorded unless you do not agree to this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for the interview data that I provide to be deposited in Sheffield University so it can be used for future research and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

Project contact details for further information:

Principles Investigator: Alexis Thouki: athouki1@sheffield.ac.uk / Supervisors: Dr Steve Connelly: s.connelly@sheffield.ac.uk and

Hossein Olya: h.olya@sheffield.ac.uk. Western Bank Villa 300-302 Western Bank Sheffield S10 2TN: +44 (0)114 215 7190

The template of this consent form has been approved by the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee and is available to view here: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/further-guidance/homepage>

Figure 20 Consent Form

Informed Consent and Written Research Participation Agreement

Research Project Title:

Heritagization of Cypriot Religious Sites

Introduction:

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Management Department. The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study, responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with the researcher if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this

Purpose of the research:

The research is being carried out exclusively by Alexis Thouki, researcher in the University of Sheffield in the U.K., as part of the PhD of the Management School. The research investigates the heritage strategies at the current religious sites, and the way visitors understand the heritage (assumptions, behaviours, ideas, expectations and judgment). The results of this research are expected to contribute in a positive way to the heritage policies (conservation and interpretation) that are currently being used in Cypriot religious sites and the international discussion around cultural tourism.

Why have I been chosen?

Visitors: You are involved in this research because you visited the church today and I am interested in seeing your responses today.

Stakeholders: You are involved in this research because you are one of the key stakeholders of this heritage asset.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

You will be asked to answer on semi-structured questions related to religious heritage management and in particular to express your own thoughts on topics regarding conservation, access, interpretation, religion (not in depth), cultural identity, tradition, institutions and education. There are no right or wrong answer. The interview will take place in a shady space at the churchyard, is expected to last between 45 to 60 min (75 min for stakeholders) and it will be recorded unless you do not agree to this.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

The legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). As we will be collecting

some data that is defined in the legislation as more sensitive (information about religion), the following condition in law is applied: that the use of your data is 'necessary for scientific or historical research purposes.

What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

The research and all raw data will be stored, and password protected on the researcher's personal computer and online with provision of access only to the researcher's supervisors in the U.K. The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations, publications and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission.

In case of any complains the participant will have every right to come in direct contact with the researcher or with the University of Sheffield itself. Signing this form, you agree that you have been fully informed, and all your questions have been answered, that you are participating in this research voluntarily, and that you have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Age and Gender

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Figure 21 Information Sheet