



Article

Heritage Education as a Basis for Sustainable Development. The Case of Trujillo, Monfragüe National Park and Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark (Extremadura, Spain)

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Abstract: Tourist activity offers numerous possibilities for socioeconomic growth while promoting the dissemination, recognition, and appreciation of heritage. Nevertheless, tourism based on a mercantilist approach, oriented mainly towards the maximization of economic benefits and the massive attraction of visitors, can pose a threat to the conservation and integrity of heritage assets. In this panorama of vulnerability, heritage education stands as a primary strategy to resolve the tensions between heritage and tourism. Based on this premise, research aimed at stimulating tourism activity committed to education and sustainability is presented. Said study is framed in three counties of the region of Extremadura, selected for being great centers of tourist attraction: the Monfragüe National Park, the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark, and the monumental city of Trujillo. The results reveal that introducing educational principles is decisive in improving the value and competitiveness of tourist destinations and contributing to regional development. Despite this, the approaches of heritage education are not yet sufficiently integrated into tourism plans, which distances the territories from sustainability.

Keywords: education; equity; heritage; sustainability; tourism



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1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the socioeconomic phenomena with the greatest impact worldwide [1,2]. It offers excellent possibilities to achieve the development of societies while contributing to the dissemination of heritage, which implies the recovery, conservation, and valuation of the different heritage manifestations [3–5]. In addition, it generates intercultural stimuli, awakens different emotions, and makes us reflect on our identity and past, as well as on the construction of the desired future [6].

Unfortunately, the conception of tourism from exclusively mercantilist approaches, based on the maximization of economic benefits and the attraction of a massive flow of visitors, is not always in accordance with these principles. It causes serious problems that affect multiple areas, both environmental, cultural, and social, as well as economic [7–10]. The hegemony of economic benefits represents a well-founded risk that can move tourism away from sustainability. In fact, recent studies link tourism and economic resilience [11].

Threats to heritage are constantly occurring [12–14]. The World Heritage Centre (2021), in its “Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention,” has elaborated a classification of risks. These include landscape alteration, reduction of species population, lack of conservation policies, a decline of traditional knowledge and practices linked to heritage, loss of cultural significance or historical authenticity, as well as deliberate destruction of heritage (plundering and illegal extraction of resources, vandalism, fires, graffiti...) [15,16].

Among the causes of these impacts are poorly managed tourism and the actions linked to it: high number of tourist facilities, high levels of visitation, inappropriate interpretation of heritage, touristification of destinations, changes in resource values, and overexploitation [17,18]. These impacts affect areas with a varied level of tourism development, as is the case in Botswana [19], Cyprus [20], Scandinavia [21], China [22], and, of course, Spain [23], France or the United States [24]. They threaten the physical integrity of the heritage, its signs of identity, and the cultural roots of the populations.

Despite the prominence of heritage in the tourism discourse and the efforts made to protect it, there are incessant reports of looting, destruction, and other physical damage caused by lack of awareness and insostenible cultural consumption [25–28]. It is also necessary to avoid the immaterial aggressions caused by the falsification or trivialization of heritage discourses, which constitute authentic processes of depatrimonialization [10,29,30]. On the other hand, it is necessary to encourage the participation of the local population in tourist activity and the management of their heritage assets. They should be the protagonists in making decisions related to their heritage [31–38].

In this scenario of heritage vulnerability, heritage education bases its principles on raising awareness of the value of heritage and ensuring educational awareness to avoid ecological damage and depredation caused by tourism [39–45]. Under this notion, education is instrumentalized to solve negative tourism impacts [46]. It aims to promote social action that benefits both visitors and residents, integrating both groups in the construction of identity and commitment to a sustainable future. In addition, it promotes contact and understanding of the heritage by tourists, who participate in a learning process [47].

Tourism constitutes a favorable space for the communication of heritage under educational and sustainable principles [48]. In turn, heritage education is an essential means to manage tourism activity properly and to avoid the conception of heritage as a commodity, turning it into a source of knowledge and identity.

Heritage is everything that we wish to preserve and bequeath to our children, to future generations. Any element, natural or cultural, has to go through a process of patrimonialization; therefore, heritage is a social construction [49]. Society decides which assets or values make up its heritage according to their characteristics, beauty, uniqueness, identity, or any other criteria it establishes [50,51]. Accordingly, the concept of heritage has undergone significant changes [52,53].

New research currents have projected a more heterogeneous and global perspective of the concept. This new paradigm extols the symbolic value of heritage references and transcends from a vision that values assets according to their prestige, monumentality, or antiquity to one that considers their potential as an element of identity, belonging, and emotion, i.e., of affective bonds [54]. The identification of a group with its heritage constitutes a means of social cohesion [55]. Thus, the feeling of identity corresponds to a feeling of belonging and self-esteem [56].

The relationship between heritage and tourism has always been a delicate one. On the one hand, the conception of heritage assets as merchandise and merely economic resources can cause real havoc. On the other hand, the consideration of heritage for the attraction of tourists is reaffirmed, as well as of tourism itself to favor the conservation of heritage assets. Therefore, tourism activity has a dual interpretation: the first considers it a cause of degradation of heritage references, while the second sees it as a necessary experience to ensure the recovery of heritage [57].

The current conception of heritage has broadened the offer of heritage assets as tourist resources; not only the most monumental or singular ones are of interest to tourism, but also the intangible ones that had gone unnoticed until now, as well as the incorporation of the facts and productions of contemporary culture and, of course, also those ascribed to popular culture. This has led to the recovery, study, and classification of other cultural phenomena, thus avoiding their gradual disappearance. At the same time, however, the risks to some of these more vulnerable elements are increasing.

In this sense, the condition of tourism as a vector of inter-cultural dialogue is evident, as well as its capacity to make heritage visible and accessible, thus promoting numerous opportunities from a cultural, economic, and environmental point of view [58–67], as shown in Figure 1.

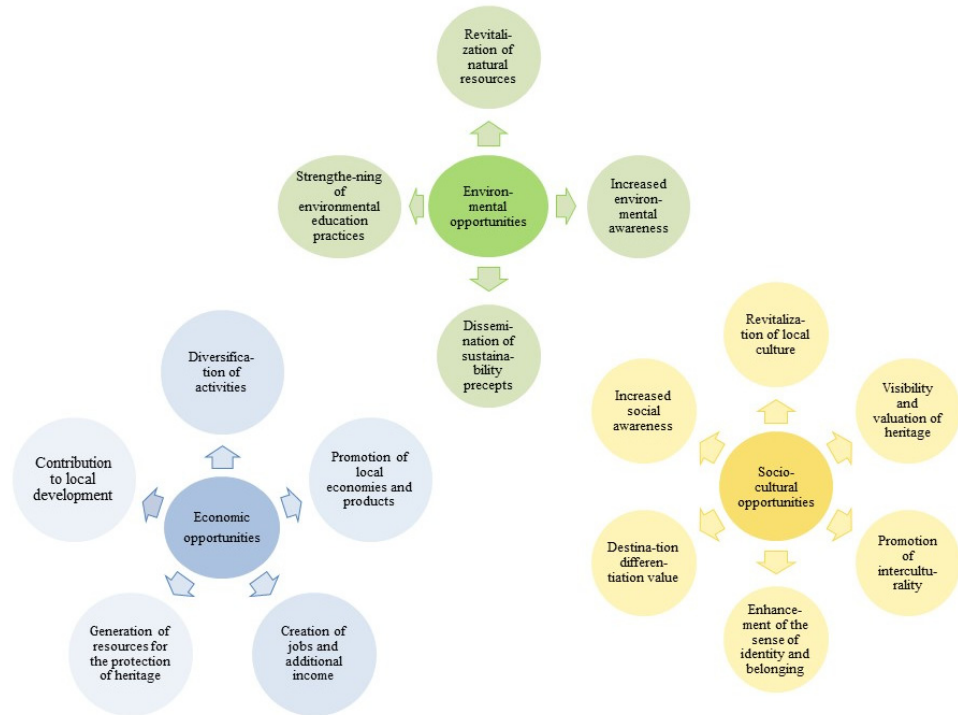


Figure 1. Tourism-related opportunities.

In short, both tourism and heritage can benefit as long as they are managed according to ethical and sustainable principles [58] to avoid, as far as possible, the problems of degradation and destruction, as well as those associated with the loss or falsification of customs and traditions [68–71]. These problems have been accentuated by the promotion of mass tourism [72]. Figure 2 shows the various risks derived from this activity, which are classified as environmental, sociocultural, and economical:

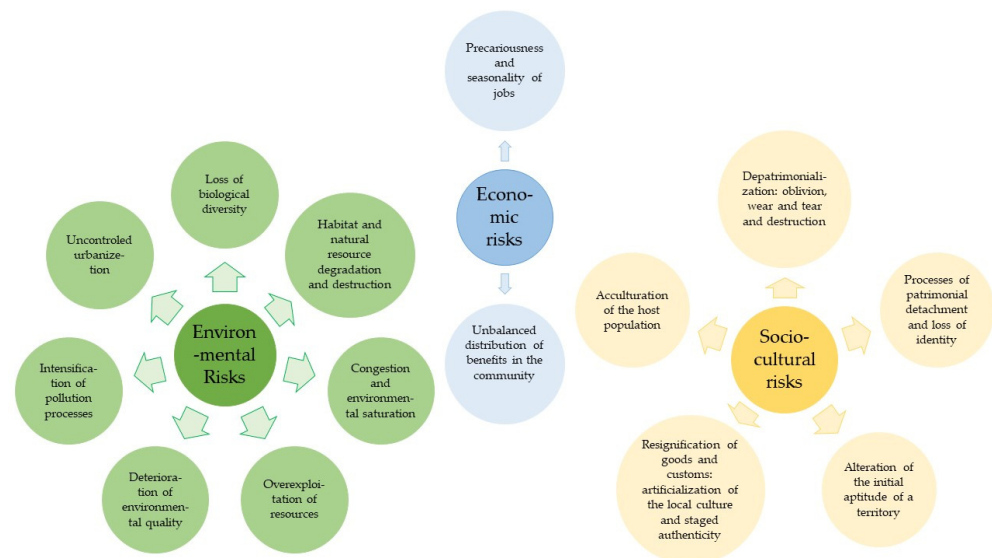


Figure 2. Tourism-related risks.

The literature reflects that the tensions caused by tourist activity are constant [8,60,61,63,73–78]. In addition to the physical impacts, there are other dangers caused by the loss of authenticity or trivialization of the property. It is important to highlight the cultural deterioration caused by the falsification or recreation of cultural elements oriented to tourist consumption, which disobeys their original meaning. This process is known as staged authenticity and contributes to the commodification of heritage, as well as to the loss of local identity [62]. These processes of spectacularization of heritage or touristification of destinations re-signify cultural assets and customs, adapting them to the demands of tourism and displacing their authenticity and original meaning towards their thematization [27,79,80].

The International Charter on Cultural Tourism [81] and the World Report on Monuments and Sites in Danger [82] already warned that overcrowded tourism, poorly managed economic growth, or considered as a simple economic growth activity would lead to irreversible losses. It does not consist in denying the opportunities that tourism brings but in promoting a coordinated, controlled, and responsible management that minimizes the harmful consequences of its activity on heritage [83]. This is precisely the approach of the Cultural Tourism Charters adopted by the ICOMOS General Assembly [81,84], which states that the benefits of tourism should not only be in the economic sphere but also in the spiritual sense.

Based on these premises, tourism experiences should value and contemplate the reconceptualization that society makes of its heritage, which implies recognizing its identity, respecting its values, committing to its recovery and conservation, integrating the local population, etc. To achieve this, the principles of heritage education [85], environmental education [86], and, more recently, educational tourism [87] should be introduced into the field of tourism studies.

Heritage education is based on the significance of ethical, effective, and civic values related to the protection of heritage assets, as well as customs and traditions that contribute to the formation of the cultural identity of communities [88–91]. In more detail, its objectives are to disseminate the responsibility of conserving heritage, identify properties as resources that generate identities, enhance the image of invisible communities, develop skills, project heritage as a source of learning, and awaken awareness [13]. These goals should be instilled in both the local population and visitors, trying to minimize threats and ensure sustainability [92–94]. It is also a means to build cognitive and affective networks with heritage, as well as to promote community participation in its appreciation [42].

This sequence is based on knowledge and understanding as the foundations on which the rest of the actions are articulated. It is assumed that only that which is understood is valued so that the teaching and learning processes become the nucleus that activates this chain of awareness. From neuroeducation, it is deduced that without emotions, there is no learning [95]. What is not known, understood, or valued can hardly be cared for.

In this sense, the literature begins to include heritage education in tourism activity, disseminating the concept of tourism as a pedagogical phenomenon and potential learning agent [96,97]. Tourism activity offers interesting opportunities to promote teaching and learning processes, generate civic values, as well as to favor the recovery of heritage through tourism awareness [98–102]. However, these potentialities have not yet been sufficiently exploited [103]. Therefore, it is essential that the tourism management model contemplates the integration of educational strategies in tourism projects, considering heritage education as an indispensable strategy for a responsible, conscious, and quality management of destinations [41,89].

The achievement of the principles of heritage education implies an adequate interpretation and dissemination of heritage. Interpretation is a communicative tool aimed at revealing meanings and generating a feeling of appreciation through a real approach to the original resources, for which it requires the application of a didactic strategy [104–108]. Its approach comprises two fundamental principles: the experience takes place in situ so that time is limited to the visit and its pedagogical approach is directed and adapted to the characteristics, interests, and experiences of a heterogeneous public [109].

Interpretive techniques pursue three types of knowledge: knowledge about heritage, with a conceptual basis, linked to learning data, recognition, and contextualization; knowledge through heritage, which refers to procedures and stimulates the ability to appreciate; finally, knowledge for heritage, which ensures the development of attitudes and values such as conservation, awareness, and sensitization [110].

To this end, it employs various communication techniques to highlight what is not always perceived or that only experts can grasp, such as its meaning or values [111]. It also facilitates intellectual and emotional accessibility through direct contact with the heritage, activating both cognitive and affective levels [112–114]. Interpretation is, therefore, a strategy to ensure heritage education.

Considering these characteristics, leisure experiences, such as tourism activities, are an ideal scenario for developing such interpretive and educational strategies [115–117]. The ICOMOS principles (1999) already included the need for active interpretation to ensure the quality of tourism projects. In recent years, its use has increased in sustainable tourism activities [118,119].

Interpretation is directly related to dissemination, considering it a mediating cultural management between heritage and society [120]. The specialist Gael de Guichen began to use the term preventive dissemination in the 1980s, understanding it as an effective way to solve the problems caused by the intense use of heritage assets. It involves the development of awareness strategies, informing about the fragility of the resources, and increasing the commitment to their conservation [64,121]. Therefore, it is essential for efficient management, as well as for controlling and reducing the impacts derived from tourism on resources and host communities [119]. It is an effective tool for communication, marketing, and territorial promotion [120].

In short, this research is based on the premise that the educational dimension should be fully integrated into tourism experiences as it enriches the visitor's experiences and emotions, guarantees commitment and respect for heritage, favors the participation and involvement of local populations in its management and articulation, and contributes to socioeconomic development.

In accordance with this premise, this study aims to analyze tourism experiences from the perspective of heritage education. To this end, it focuses on the opinion of visitors on the tourist offer of three Extremadura territories of great tourist significance. To this, the opinion of both experts and students of the degree of Primary Education and Tourism is added. This is precisely the originality of this work, to detect the demands of tourism away from the more traditional vision, approaching more innovative positions, which consider their desires for more emotional and sensory experiences and, of course, sustainability.

Based on these objectives, several hypotheses are put forward. The first hypothesis (H_1) states that tourism offers numerous opportunities for the socioeconomic development of the territories. However, it also brings with it numerous problems due to the lack of awareness, sensitization, and education of visitors, but also from the local population itself, which does not recognize his legacy. The second hypothesis (H_2) states that heritage education is not disseminated during tourist experiences, despite its relevance for improving the quality and potential of destinations. Finally, the third hypothesis (H_3) states that students of Primary Education and Tourism do not receive sufficient training in didactic strategies, which leads to deficiencies in the processes of heritage interpretation and communication.

Based on the results, we estimate the opportunities for the integration of heritage education and heritage didactics in tourism projects. Specifically, this reflection is framed along three lines: the significance of educational factors in the valuation of tourist destinations, the didactic training of the agents in charge of communicating heritage, and the degree of integration of heritage education in tourist experiences.

Its purpose, therefore, is to understand, analyze and assess tourism demand based on the principles of heritage education to generate sustainable experiences that favor the future of the territories, guarantee the involvement and participation of the hosts, contribute to

the promotion of their cultural identity, and encourage learning, as well as the experiences and emotions of visitors.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area

This work is framed in Extremadura (Spain), a region that has a great wealth of heritage and is gradually positioning itself as a tourist destination at the national level [122]. The great richness and variety of its heritage, together with the boom that rural tourism is experiencing, place it as an inland destination increasingly appreciated by the tourist demand [123].

This community has two well-differentiated tourist vocations. The first one is related to cultural tourism. Among its main attractions are the historic city of Cáceres, the archaeological site of Mérida, and the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe, all of which form part of the World Heritage List. In addition, there is a distribution of 359 Assets of Cultural Interest (BIC) distributed throughout Extremadura, according to the database of the Ministry of Culture and Sport (<https://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/cultura/patrimonio/bienes-culturales-protegidos.html> accessed on 10 February 2022)

The other orientation refers to predominantly natural tourism. The protected areas of this community accumulate more than 1,250,000 hectares, representing 30.6% of the community [124]. Among them, visits to the Monfragüe National Park, the Tajo Internacional Natural Park or the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark stand out. It also has other reference figures, such as 71 Special Protection Areas for Birds (ZEPA) and 89 Special Conservation Areas (ZEC), according to the Department of Environment and Rural, Agricultural Policies and Territory of the Regional Government of Extremadura (http://extremambiente.juntaex.es/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1285&Itemid=459 accessed on 15 February 2022).

Specifically, this work is framed in three regions of this region, very close to each other, which have natural landscapes of exceptional beauty and their own cultural features: the Monfragüe National Park, the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark, and the monumental city of Trujillo (Figure 3).

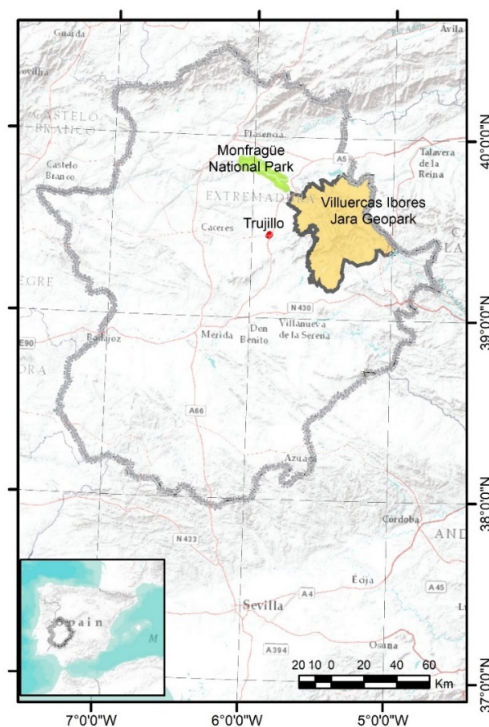


Figure 3. Study area.

These three territories are particularly significant from a tourism point of view, both for the number of tourists they attract, as well as for the great attraction they have to increase their positioning in the sector. These areas are defined as symbols of nature tourism or ecotourism, geomorphology, and geology, as well as cultural heritage, which are sustained as exponents of the community's tourism activity [123]. Together with their particularities, the proximity between the three areas favors the attraction of tourist flows and the possibility of creating specific itineraries in which differentiated tourist products coexist.

They have complementary characteristics, so the existence of different tourist modalities is guaranteed. Thus, the Monfragüe National Park stands out as a preferential space for the practice of nature tourism, highly specialized in bird watching. For its part, the Geopark also stands out as an exponent of nature tourism especially demanded as a geological reference. In turn, the presence of Guadalupe gives the Geopark cultural recognition [125], although we must also consider the important wealth of traditional architecture preserved in their villages or the remains of schematic paintings (red and black) that treasure its numerous inhabited shelters (Cañamero, Berzocana, etc.) from the end of the Neolithic to the Iron Age. Finally, the city of Trujillo combines its cultural attraction with the ornithological richness of its surroundings. All of this has generated a wide range of accommodation, as well as attracting considerable tourist demand. These parameters are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Tourism parameters of the analyzed areas (2019).

Analyzed Area	Demand		Offer		Ratios
	Travelers	Total Overnight Stays	Lodging	Restauracion	Average Stay
Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark	39,211	68,601	1391	5205	2.18
Monfrague National Park and its surroundings	75,017	139,345	2183	11,078	1.61
Trujillo and its surroundings	116,579	200,627	2879	14,127	1.60
Σ	230,807	408,573	6453	30,410	-

Source: Data from [126].

These data coincide with the year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so they are not subject to cyclical changes. In addition, the data corresponding to the Trujillo area are aggregated with other areas, but it is the most important city in terms of tourism and the one that brings together most of the supply.

The rich heritage of these areas, their proximity to each other, and their status as tourist attractions are positive factors for an educational proposal to improve the value of these destinations.

2.2. Sample and Procedure

One of the sampling strategies used in mixed research consists of a stratified sample by purpose, which involves segmenting the population under study into strata. The sample of this study is characterized by its variety as it integrates different units of analysis, which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Units of analysis and participating sample.

Units of Analysis	Sample	Total
Experts in education/didactics or tourism/territory	8 education/didactics 17 tourism/territory	25
Tourists in Monfragüe, Geopark and Trujillo	188 tourists	188
Students/graduates in Primary Education or Tourism	229 Primary Education 221 Tourism	450

The sample has three distinct units of analysis. The first was made up of 25 experts in heritage education, territorial development, and tourism. These professionals participated in an in-depth interview.

The second unit of analysis comprises tourists visiting the areas under study. In this case, a survey was conducted, whose responses were analyzed through the Hierarchical Analysis Process. This method made it possible to detect the most representative variables of the study, as well as those that require the greatest need for action to improve the valuation of these destinations.

The last unit of study is composed of students or graduates in Primary Education or Tourism who had to fill in a questionnaire. It is interesting to know their opinion in relation to tourism and heritage education as they can play a very active role in both formal and informal education.

2.3. Instruments and Techniques

To respond to the stated objectives, this research uses a hierarchical analysis process, in addition to descriptive statistics. The instruments used were questionnaires, interviews, Geographic Information Systems, the SPSS statistical program, and the Excel spreadsheet.

2.3.1. Interview

In this study, an in-depth interview was used, with the participation of a total of 25 experts whose professional work is carried out in the territory under study. Several themes that determine its structure are included in the interview, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Expert interview structure.

Item
(1) Advantages of tourism
(2) Impacts derived from tourist activity
(3) Causes of problems
(4) Solutions and proposals for the future
(5) Existence of heritage education during tourist experiences
(6) Didactic potential of interpretation centers and museums and staff training
(7) Development of educational activities for heritage education
(8) Dissemination of the attractiveness of heritage resources

The interviews were voice-recorded, which allowed their subsequent transcription and the recovery of the most significant segments of the information, which were coded into analyzable units. This process of recovery and coding generated various categories, defined by some common element or feature. During this process, the most significant phenomena were identified, examples were collected, and commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures were found [127]. This procedure continued until reaching theory saturation and concluded with the configuration of a resulting schema of category-subcategories.

2.3.2. Survey

Two different surveys have been applied to a different population. The first one is for students or graduates in Primary Education or Tourism, whose data sheet is detailed in Table 4. El segundo cuestionario está dirigido a los turistas y se describe en el cuadro 6.

Table 4. Technical sheet of the survey designed for students/graduates in Primary Education or Tourism.

Characteristic	Description
Universe	Students/graduates in Tourism and Primary Education
Sample	450 students/graduates in Tourism (221) and Primary Education (229)
Sampling	Simple random
Confidence level	95%
Sample error	$\pm 2.27\%$
Sample error	

The questionnaire for students includes variables aimed at finding out their training in heritage education and how it should be integrated into tourism experiences, their opinion on the main skills that a tour guide should have, as well as the priority actions that should be carried out during a visit. All these variables of analysis are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Analysis variables in the survey of students or graduates in Primary Education or Tourism.

Variable	Item
Training in heritage education during the university career.	A lot/Enough/Little/None
Degree of conformity with respect to the guide disseminating heritage education and its principles.	Yes, always/No, their duty is another/It depends on the context/It depends on the duration of the visit.
Rating of criteria according to the Likert scale (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree)	Introduction of a tourism didactics subject/Introduction of the profile of an educator in cultural institutions/current dissemination of heritage education in interpretation centers/suitability of guided tours to raise awareness of the need to conserve heritage/need of the tour guide to Master teaching tools/importance of collaborating jointly between educational and tourist institutions.
Three actions that must be included during a tourist visit (1st and 3rd option).	Carry out educational activities/use technological resources/communicate scientific content/encourage participation/maintain silence and attract attention/comply with the scheduled time/inform about the rest of the resources in the area.
Three qualities that a guide must have (1st and 3rd option).	Knowledge of the contents/ability to communicate/disseminate the importance of preserving heritage/adapt the explanation to the different groups/cordiality/experience.

The second questionnaire is aimed at tourists. Its data sheet is described in Table 6.

Table 6. Technical sheet of the survey designed for tourists.

Characteristic	Description
Universe	Tourists visiting Monfragüe National Park, Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark and Trujillo
Sample	
Sampling	
Confidence level	
Sample error	
Sample error	±1.94%

The tourist questionnaire integrates the variables most frequently used in tourism studies, such as the quality of accommodation, catering, accessibility, or complementary services. However, other variables are included that have a bearing on issues that are not so common in tourism quality assessments, such as educational variables such as the development of didactic strategies, the interest in raising awareness and sensitizing visitors, the training of guides, the innovation of interpretation centers or preventive dissemination. Other questions aimed at ascertaining the preferences of the demand for the range of activities on offer are also included. All of these are included in Table 7.

Table 7. Analysis variables in the second survey of tourists.

Variable	Item
Activities carried out (1st to 5th option) Sample error	Visit historical-artistic heritage/Learn about the rural heritage of the towns/Visit museums/Visit interpretation centers/Gastronomy-enology/Bird watching/Practice sports/Visit mines or caves and geological formations/Tourism in rivers and gorges or reservoirs/Hunting-fishing/Participate in congresses, seminars, scientific or outreach conferences/Participate in work camps, nature classrooms or educational workshops/Sky observation
Criteria rating according to the Likert scale (1 = very bad; 5 = very good)	Information provided/interest expressed/education/dissemination/tourist guides/accommodation/innovation/activities carried out

2.3.3. Hierarchical Analysis Process

The Hierarchical Analysis Process (AHP) is a methodological strategy widely used to rank some aspects [128] according to multiple criteria. It was developed at the end of the 1970s by Saaty, although it is still in use today, as it is contemplated in the specialized literature. It has been used for various purposes, such as the valuation of attractions [129], strategies [130], tourism products [131], and the measurement of sustainable growth [132], among others. However, despite its multiple application possibilities, it has not been sufficiently used for studies related to the educational field.

It relies on a symbiosis between experience, interest, and human perception to prioritize options in confusing situations, which facilitates decision-making in a context where not all options have the same probability of success. Specifically, it analyzes pairs of preference priorities of items based on a common criterion represented in the decision hierarchy [133–135].

This technique allows complex problems to be solved using multiple criteria. The procedure it employs contemplates several principles: the construction of hierarchies, the prioritization of elements, and their evaluation by assigning differentiated weights among the criteria and the ranking of alternatives. A complex framework is built on these principles, based on three interconnected levels, consisting of the objective, the criteria, and the alternatives.

The hierarchical ranking is useful when it is considered that the demand values each of them differently. In the specific case of this study, the AHP has been applied with the aim of finding out how tourism demand values the areas analyzed. In other words, with the aim of determining the tourism and educational potential of specific destinations.

For this purpose, eight variables have been established as criteria, which correspond to the questions of a questionnaire asked to the demand: (a) information provided; (b) interest in raising awareness coming from the agents involved in the dissemination of heritage; (c) projection of heritage education; (d) dissemination of heritage attractions; (e) professionalism of tourist guides; (f) quality of accommodation; (g) innovation of interpretation centers, and (h) offer of complementary activities. On the other hand, the alternatives correspond to four different types of tourism, which are the most representative in Extremadura and are useful for identifying the tourist profile: pure nature tourism, mixed nature tourism, pure cultural tourism, and mixed cultural tourism. Figure 4 shows the scheme that summarizes this method.

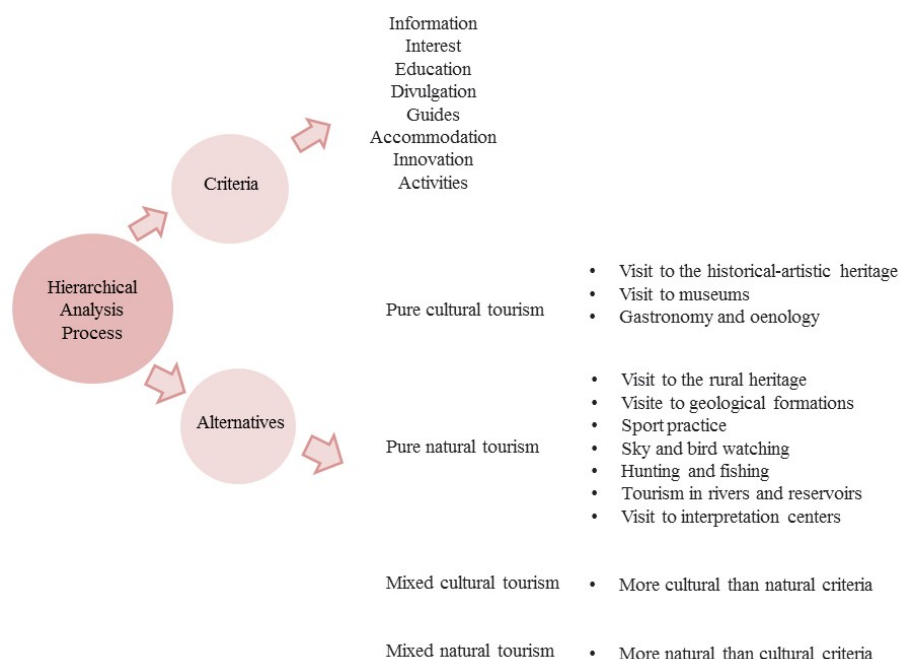


Figure 4. Synthesis of the hierarchical analysis process. Criteria and alternatives.

The proposed alternatives are based on the following aspects: the activities linked to pure cultural tourism include visits to historical-artistic heritage and museums, to which have been added participation in congresses or seminars and, of course, gastronomy and enology as cultural expressions. On the other hand, pure nature tourism has been associated with visits to rural heritage linked to its use as a means of enjoying nature or practicing sports, as in the case of livestock trails or greenways. Along with this activity, other activities have been included, such as bird watching or sky watching, visits to geological formations, tourism in rivers and reservoirs, or the practice of sports in addition to hunting and fishing. This group also includes participation in work camps, nature classrooms or educational workshops, and visits to nature interpretation centers. Although these groups are clearly defined, it has also been decided to include two other alternatives, referring to a mixed type of demand, which enjoys all the natural and cultural attractions available in the territory. In this case, the predominant set of activities has been given the prevalence in the nomenclature. Thus, the alternative mixed cultural tourism encompasses the responses of those who select more cultural than natural criteria. On the other hand, when the opposite is true, it is assigned to the alternative of mixed natural tourism.

The procedure is based on the calculation of the weighted mean of all the responses, using the number of cases for each criterion analyzed as the discriminant element. Based on the use of a Likert scale, 1 corresponds to the minimum value, while 5 refers to the maximum:

$$\text{Weighted mean} = \{(rvx1 \times 1) + (rvx2 \times 2) + (rvx3 \times 3) + (rvx4 \times 4) + (rvx5 \times 5)\} / n;$$

rvx being the number of responses that obtain the score x, a value that ranges from 1 to 5, where n is the equivalent of the number of responses.

Subsequently, the Saaty scale is applied, using which both the weighted matrix and the average vector are obtained. Thus, in addition to selecting criteria and alternatives, the AHP establishes equivalences on the preference scale. These fluctuate between 9 and 1, i.e., from extremely preferable to equal preferences. In this work, a category is increased in the scale once the difference between the criteria being compared exceeds 0.25, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Hierarchical Analysis Process preference scale.

Saaty Scale	Range of Values	Weighted Mean Differences between Criteria
1 (same importance)	≤0.25	
2 (intermediate value between 1–3)	>0.25–0.50	
3 (moderate importance)	>0.50–0.75	
4 (intermediate value between 3–5)	>0.75–1.00	
5 (strong importance)	>1.00–1.25	Criterion a vs. Criterion b
6 (intermediate value between 5–7)	>1.25–1.50	
7 (very strong importance)	>1.50–1.75	
8 (intermediate value between 7–9)	>1.75–2.00	
9 (extreme importance)	>2.00	

From all the above data, the weighted hierarchy matrix is obtained, which synthesizes the hierarchical analysis process and shows the valuation of each criterion according to the alternative.

3. Results

The application of different methodological processes to the objectives set out offers results that we categorize according to the opportunities and impacts of tourism, the implementation of heritage education in tourism experiences, and the interpretation and dissemination of heritage.

3.1. Opportunities and Impacts of Tourism Activities on the Heritage

The experts state that tourism offers innumerable opportunities for the socioeconomic development of the population. However, they also point out the existence of possible negative impacts on the heritage. Among the deficiencies of the tourist activity, they mention the incomplete dissemination of the heritage, the precarious didactic training of the guides, the uniformity and deficiency of the discourses of the interpretation centers, as well as the lack of active, innovative pedagogies. The main results of the in-depth interviews are shown in Table 9. It mentions both the advantages of tourism activity and its possible disadvantages, as well as a proposal for solutions to improve the current situation.

Table 9. Results of in-depth interviews.

Category	Subcategory
Opportunities for the tourist activity	Economic factors Promotion and projection of a prestigious image Valuation and recovery of heritage Culture exchange Dynamization
Negative effects of tourist activity	Irresponsible human behavior Overcrowding Loss of identity
Causes of impacts	Little or no heritage education Training deficiencies of the guides in didactics Lack of previous studies that assess the risks of an activity General offer not adapted to the type of tourist in Extremadura Assessment of tourist activity in relation to the number of visits
Solutions	Heritage education and tourism-educational projects Consolidate the figure of the heritage educator Management of spaces by an interdisciplinary team Centralized offer Planning: assess possible risks of an activity Preventive diffusion
Poor functioning of interpretation centers	Personnel with precarious and temporary contracts and lack of specific training Little planning in its design Uncoordinated inter-center work Lack of innovation and renewal
Lack of diffusion	Lack of a specialist responsible for educational, preventive communication adapted to different visitor profiles Little inter-territorial coordination Lack of didactic strategies and heritage interpretation Depatrimonialization. Abandonment or lack of revaluation of some resources.

The opportunities derived from tourism activity are mainly related to economic factors (income generation, diversification of the economy, attraction of people, contribution to GDP...), while the social benefits (revitalization, participation), cultural (identity, cultural exchange), and those associated with heritage conservation (valuation, awareness, recovery...) remain secondary.

With respect to threats, they point out some threats linked to irresponsible human behavior that deteriorates heritage and are aggravated at certain times due to massification.

The experts associate many of these problems with the absence of the principles of heritage education in tourism activities, which is manifested in the deficient planning and operation of both the centers and the tourism activities that are promoted, as well as in the lack of training of professionals in the sector. The analyses of the study reveal that tourist guides or managers have not carried out pedagogical or didactic studies that would allow them to diversify their discourse, adapt it to the public, and generate awareness and respect for heritage. To this must be added the existence of precarious and temporary

contracts that do not favor their motivation and interest. They point out that, both in official curricula and in non-formal and informal education, the study of heritage emphasizes the properties themselves, their monumentality and uniqueness, but not their essence, their values, or their meanings for the construction of the future. The problem is further aggravated by the inadequate training of tour guides. For the most part, they have not acquired the pedagogical skills necessary to awaken emotions and feelings among visitors, nor the development of a critical conscience.

In addition, a deficient functioning of these centers is recognized, where the training deficiencies of the professionals who occupy them are also visible. In addition to their precarious and temporary employment contracts, these shortcomings of the professionals of the interpretation centers are perceptible as a consequence of their lack of training in didactics. As for their training, studies reveal that the guides in charge of these centers have not completed pedagogical or didactic studies that would allow them to diversify their discourse, adapt it to the public, and generate awareness and respect for heritage. Consequently, the lack of a multidisciplinary team, together with the poor training of the staff and their unsatisfactory working conditions, have repercussions on the educational purposes of these institutions.

Experts also point to the lack of planning in the location and design of these interpretation centers, poor location, maintenance problems, excessive proliferation that prioritizes quantity over quality, lack of adaptation to the user profile, and even the closure of many of them. In addition, the lack of networking, their free nature, and lack of innovation are also cited as reasons that limit their optimal functioning. In short, according to experts, tourism is an opportunity not only to learn about monuments, customs, and festivals but also an opportunity to educate about heritage, teach people to reflect, raise awareness, build identities, promote respect and interculturality, etc. However, for all this, it is necessary an adequate interpretation and dissemination of heritage, a pedagogical training of guides, but also of all professionals involved in the management and planning of tourism so that the threats are reduced and the opportunities are accentuated.

3.2. Heritage Education and Tourism Experiences

The survey of visitors to the study areas is intended to assess their opinion of the tourism offer and heritage assets. The questions posed are not only related to the characteristics and quality of the restoration, lodging, and accessibility, but also to their evaluation of aspects related to education, technological innovation, the interest in raising awareness of tourism professionals or preventive dissemination; all depending on the type of tourism practiced: pure natural tourism, pure cultural tourism, mixed natural tourism, or mixed cultural tourism. The results provided by the survey are analyzed using a Hierarchical Analysis Process (AHP), which is shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Matrix of weighted hierarchies.

	Information	Interest	Education	Diffusion	Tour Guides	Accommodation	Innovation	Activities	TOTAL
SOP	0.20	0.21	0.25	0.10	0.10	0.17	0.25	0.10	0.19
MNT	0.23	0.30	0.25	0.19	0.30	0.22	0.25	0.38	0.26
PCT	0.31	0.25	0.30	0.24	0.30	0.22	0.25	0.30	0.27
CMT	0.27	0.25	0.20	0.47	0.30	0.38	0.25	0.23	0.28
Average vector	0.05	0.08	0.31	0.15	0.09	0.05	0.18	0.09	

PNT: Pure natural tourism; MNT: Mixed nature tourism; PCT: Pure cultural tourism; MCT: Mixed cultural tourism.

The results reveal visitor satisfaction in the criteria related to information (0.05), lodging (0.05), interest (0.08), and guides (0.09). However, other criteria related to educational proposals (0.31), innovation (0.18), and dissemination (0.15) reflect the need for substantial improvements.

By type of tourism, differences are reflected, as those who practice pure nature tourism indicate a higher valuation (0.19) than the rest of the typologies. These differences are mainly expressed in relation to information, interest, education, dissemination, and guide skills.

Table 11 shows the results of the educational variables in the tourism experiences and reflects similar data to those mentioned above.

Table 11. Rating criteria according to tourists.

	Information	Interest	Education	Diffusion	Guides	Accommodation	Innovation	Activities
Value 5	225	205	70	55	160	210	60	130
Value 4	340	156	108	176	256	304	116	204
Value 3	117	216	213	186	114	138	183	144
Value 2	8	40	90	66	48	8	58	30
Value 1	1	6	17	11	1	2	9	7
Weighted average	3.97	3.5	2.86	3.07	3.64	3.89	3.04	3.5

In general, most of the criteria present average values, so they all need some improvement. However, the variables referring to education (2.86), innovation (3.04), and dissemination (3.07) are the worst considered.

Generally, this type of educational variable is not considered in the analysis of tourism experiences. However, the opinions collected are very interesting before making proposals for improvement. Increasingly, tourism planning and management are focused on the search for intense sensory experiences, the development of unique experiences, and the search for alternative destinations, but the possibilities that the integration of heritage education has in achieving these new aspirations are not considered. The application of active pedagogies, the development of collective activities, the search for sensations and emotions, and heterogeneous and intercultural discourses all lead to the tourist's concern for heritage degradation, who will act accordingly. Furthermore, the application of educational strategies in the design of tourist experiences can improve the valuation of tourist destinations, as shown by the results of the survey.

3.3. The Heritage Mediator or Educator: Interpretation and Dissemination of the Heritage

The results obtained from the survey of students or graduates in Primary Education (EE) and Tourism (ET) show that both groups do not receive sufficient training in heritage education during their university studies, as shown in Figure 5.

It is worth noting the high percentage of students who receive no training in aspects related to heritage education, as well as the low values of those who claim to have received a lot of training in it, which barely reach 3% of the total. In summary, the first data collected reveal that more than 70% receive little or no training in heritage education.

Despite this, most of them appreciate the suitability of tourist visits to raise awareness among the population as a whole, the convenience of proposing didactic proposals and generating a discourse capable of raising awareness among visitors, as well as the importance of collaboration between educational and tourist institutions. In addition, both groups coincide in pointing out the need to improve the dissemination work carried out by the interpretation centers, as shown in Table 12.

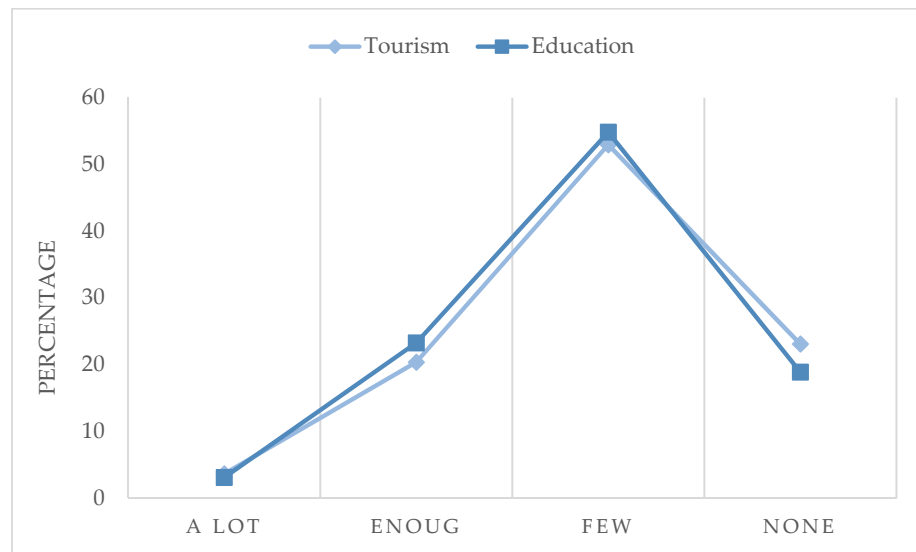


Figure 5. Training in heritage education for students in primary education or tourism.

Table 12. Evaluation of criteria according to different groups.

		Didactic	Educator	Interpretation Centers	Suitability of Visits	Teaching Methods	Collaboration
Education students	Weighing	908	904	612	990	988	945
	Cases	227	228	228	228	228	228
	Average	4	3.96	2.68	4.34	4.33	4.14
Tourism students	Weighing	748	692	697	937	698	869
	Cases	221	220	221	221	220	219
	Average	3.38	3.15	3.15	4.24	3.17	3.97

As for the need for a guide to master didactic tools, the degree of agreement varies considerably according to the educational profile of the respondent. Thus, students with a degree in Education are more in favor of this idea (4.33), while those with a degree in Tourism are more reticent (3.17).

Table 13 summarizes the priority actions that a guide should perform during a tourist visit.

Table 13. Main actions to be carried out during a tourist visit.

		Develop Educational Activities	Use Technological Resources	Communicate Scientific Content	Promote Participation	Keep Silent	Meet the Scheduled Time	Report on Other Resources in the Area
Education students	Weighing	483	111	71	423	128	31	104
	Cases	195	66	36	195	74	22	85
	Average	2.48	1.68	1.97	2.17	1.73	1.41	1.22
Tourism students	Weighing	305	154	114	351	187	75	139
	Cases	143	80	55	157	91	43	93
	Average	2.13	1.93	2.07	2.24	2.05	1.74	1.49

Both groups of students consider it very important to implement didactic activities, as well as to encourage visitor participation. Likewise, they agree that it is not necessary to inform the public about other tourist resources in the area, as well as to use innovative technological resources for the adequacy of the visit.

Table 14 shows the main qualities that a guide should have for these students.

Table 14. Main qualities that a tour guide should have.

		Knowledge Content	Ability to Communicate	Preventive Diffusion	Adaptation of the Explanation to Different Groups	Cordiality	Experience
Education students	Weighing	388	388	198	289	46	41
	Cases	161	183	116	157	28	30
	Average	2.41	2.12	1.71	1.84	1.64	1.37
Tourism students	Weighing	419	336	200	219	70	63
	Cases	169	159	111	128	44	42
	Average	2.48	2.11	1.80	1.71	1.59	1.50

According to the results, the most important thing is to master the contents and know how to communicate them. However, they attach less importance to the dissemination of values linked to awareness and respect for heritage, as well as the ability to adapt the discourse to diversity.

In short, the results of the surveys reveal that the students of Education and Tourism have a very traditional consideration of both the tourist activity and the profile of the guide: transmission of information, didactic activities to entertain and transmit, ability to maintain the public's attention, although they downplay the importance of those competences linked to awareness, respect, heterogeneity, interculturality, etc. The students' answers reveal the training deficiencies that both have in relation to heritage education. Therefore, it will be difficult for them to introduce innovative and attractive strategies in tourism experiences.

4. Discussion

The concept of tourism is associated with the notions of leisure, discovery, search, and learning. It is an educational process based on motivation and interest. Tourists are eager to know, learn, and broaden their views and visions. Therefore, tourism offers opportunities to promote heritage education. This means not only enjoying a place or a monument but also discovering people, reflecting on the present, and making decisions for the future. However, the relationship between tourism and education has always been delicate [27] and the study presented corroborates this assertion.

On the one hand, the attractiveness of heritage assets as tourism resources is recognized; on the other, unsustainable tourist visits are seen as a cause of both visual and symbolic degradation. The analysis of the experts' responses thus confirms the first hypothesis (H1), which states that tourism offers numerous opportunities for the socio-economic development of the territories, as well as an opportunity to recover, rehabilitate and get to know the heritage. However, it also brings with it numerous problems due to the lack of awareness, sensitization, and education. The consequences of tourism activity depend, to a large extent, on its management model [136]. Therefore, it is essential that the planning and management of tourism activities consider the integration of educational and pedagogical strategies and understanding heritage education as a tool for sustainable and quality tourism management [41,84,137,138].

This same idea is confirmed in this study, thanks to the application of the hierarchical analysis process, which shows the relevance of educational criteria in the evaluation of

destinations. Specifically, the significant influence of the variables defined as education, innovation, and diffusion to improve the tourism potential of the territories is demonstrated.

The first of these variables refers to the interest in sensitization, promoting sustainable tourism that encourages actions aimed at awakening emotions and experiences, respecting diversity, fostering interculturality, discovering “us” and “others,” identifying meanings, developing critical capacity, etc. Innovation, on the other hand, appeals to pedagogical strategies that seek to offer unique and quality experiences, in which active participation and dialogue are encouraged and adapted to the diversity of the public. Finally, dissemination, which refers to the development of communicative strategies that, based on didactics, make heritage known and felt.

However, the results obtained by tourists show that these criteria are hardly contemplated during tourism experiences, according to the tourists’ opinion. This approves the second hypothesis of this work (H₂), which states that the principles of heritage education are not disseminated during tourist experiences, despite their relevance for improving the quality and potential of destinations.

Therefore, the results of the study coincide with those of other publications [41,63] that call for the integration of pedagogical strategies in the planning and management of tourism experiences. To this end, it is necessary to consolidate the figure of the heritage educator. This specialist must guarantee physical, cognitive, and affective accessibility to the assets, being an indispensable part of the subject-mediator-object communication chain [107].

Among their functions, they must perform an adequate interpretation and dissemination of heritage, generating an adapted discourse and designing experiences aimed at raising awareness [139,140]. Thus, they must have solid training both in educational methodologies and in cultural or environmental disciplines [141]. This implies contemplating several requirements in their instruction: sufficient training in didactics [65,119,120]; awareness of the value of heritage [50]; ability to generate emotional ties with the assets [55]; and educational and preventive dissemination of heritage [140]. For this reason, their training should include heritage education that enables them to develop educational experiences adapted to different visitor profiles. Not all tourists have similar levels of knowledge and understanding, so it is recommended to facilitate their connection with the heritage. However, despite these needs, the results of the present study show a lack of training in the bases of these agents, which corroborates the third hypothesis of this research (H₃), in which it is stated that the students of Primary Education and Tourism do not receive sufficient training in didactic strategies to apply in the processes of heritage interpretation and communication.

The literature reflects certain limitations in the training of cultural guides and cultural agents.

Among them, there is a mutual ignorance between the tourism and education sectors, which means that these specialists do not have qualified training in either field or, in the best of cases, in only one of them [142]. Other reasons point to the fact that most professionals working in tourism and cultural institutions come from studies in art history, tourism, and sociocultural animation, but not from the educational or pedagogical field, so their training is lacking in the didactic treatment of resources [63]. Likewise, the initial training of teachers does not address heritage as a key reference in university programs, which maintains gaps with respect to the educational use of heritage resources [10,55].

After contrasting the hypotheses, the results conclude that it is difficult to link heritage education and tourism in practice. In response to this, the experts in this study point to the need to develop tourism-educational projects. This means integrating educational proposals in the design of tourism plans, carried out in an interdisciplinary manner, both by tourism professionals or technicians, as well as by educators or specialists in didactics. This suggestion for improvement coincides with that indicated by other works, which point out the need to design interdisciplinary projects that, based on sustainability, respond to the particularities of the territory and the population [41,104]. Figure 6 summarizes the characteristics that govern these plans.

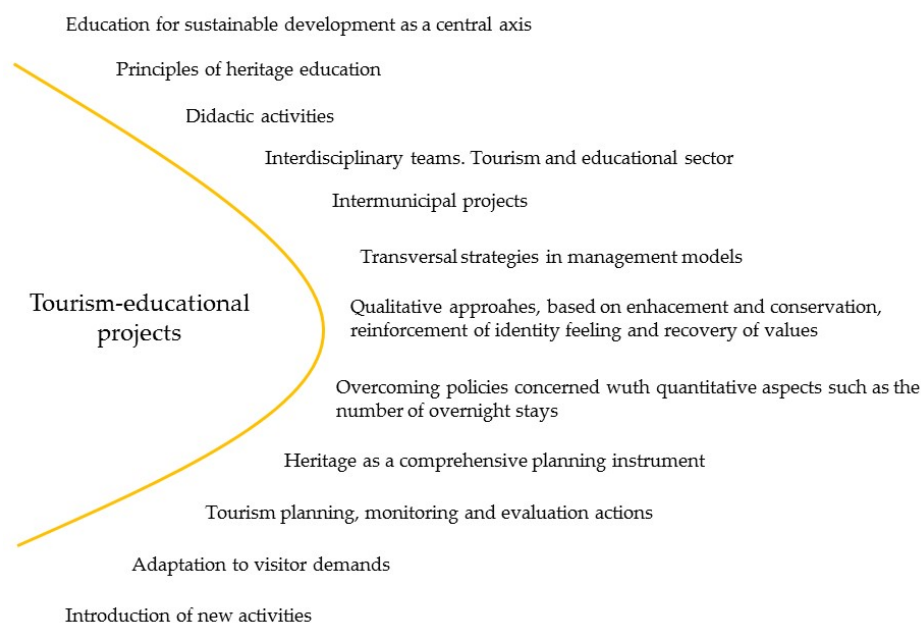


Figure 6. Characteristics of tourist-educational projects (Data from: [37,47,59,63–65,138,143–146]).

Therefore, the exercise of tourism based on heritage education requires joint agreements and dialogues between environmental, cultural, tourism, and educational administrations, whose approach is materialized in the promotion of an authentic integral policy oriented to sustainable and responsible management of heritage [37].

It is an urgent task to influence this issue, especially because the existence of tourism-educational projects is still an unformed reality and because the educational dimension is not a relevant aspect in the policies of this sector [47,58], as reaffirmed in this work.

In short, this research shows the desirability of introducing educational strategies in tourism experiences to enhance the attractiveness of destinations, improve experiences, promote awareness and respect for heritage and different cultures, as well as to contribute to sustainable development. In addition, the need to establish training for heritage agents based on didactics is pointed out as a fundamental requirement to articulate quality proposals. To this end, the need to generate interdisciplinary tourism projects that consider heritage education as a key principle for sustainable management is recognized. Nevertheless, the existence of some limitations in this study is recognized. These include the number of surveys carried out, which, although sufficient to provide statistical rigor to the results, could be larger. Likewise, both the panel of experts designed and the analytical procedures carried out could interfere with the results obtained. To this must be added the possible problems involved in the use of instruments such as the interview and the questionnaire, as well as the subjectivity in their design and interpretation.

Although it is true that the results obtained are based on the analysis of specific territories, the proposals for action gathered can be extrapolated to other geographic areas. In fact, it would be interesting to carry out similar research in other destinations in demand by tourists and to identify whether heritage education is more widespread in the tourist experiences of other countries. Other future lines of work are also proposed that consider a greater number of surveys that collect the opinion of the local population, that select a different sample, and that use different instruments, techniques, or procedures of analysis.

5. Conclusions

This study concludes that the implementation of educational strategies is essential to improve the valuation and quality of tourist destinations. In this sense, the attractiveness of the resources is a necessary condition but not sufficient to promote and achieve tourism development in the territories, as stated by the specialists consulted. They also stress that it is essential to understand heritage assets as didactic resources and tourism

experiences as learning laboratories, ideal for generating greater tourism awareness, contributing to heritage conservation, strengthening the link between visitors and destinations, and fostering respect for diversity. In this sense, it is concluded that the tourism competitiveness of destinations is closely related to their capacity to implement plans based on heritage education.

However, heritage education is not sufficiently integrated into tourism-territorial approaches. Moreover, managers are not sufficiently trained to carry it out, according to the tourists themselves. These shortcomings lead to problems related to the lack of knowledge of the value of the properties, the lack of awareness, the existence of heritage impacts, and the scarce dissemination of educational experiences, even though these are in demand by tourists. In addition, the agents do not have adequate pedagogical training, according to the tourists themselves. These shortcomings lead to a lack of knowledge of the value of the properties, lack of awareness, not very innovative experiences, homogeneity of the proposals, and, of course, do not mitigate the impacts on the heritage.

To mitigate the threats and contribute to the sustainable development of the territories, the experts propose the need to design and integrate educational proposals in the tourism activity, materialized in tourism-educational policies, carried out in an interdisciplinary manner, both by tourism professionals or technicians, as well as by educators and experts in didactics. To this end, it is considered necessary to consolidate the figure of the heritage mediator or educator. This professional, who assumes the task of communicating and disseminating heritage, must be trained in cultural or environmental disciplines, as well as in pedagogical and didactic models. Among their functions, they must be able to generate a discourse adapted to the needs and interests of visitors, propose educational experiences in line with active pedagogies and ensure physical and emotional accessibility to heritage.

In short, the analysis of the different opinions gathered in this research highlights the scarce and deficient integration of heritage education in tourism projects. Visitors miss experiences of this type, which do not respond to their interest in learning and discovering, lacking in emotions. While experts warn of the problems derived from the execution of homogeneous proposals, which are not very innovative, without the involvement of the hosts and basically aimed at increasing the number of visitors. This lack of integration of heritage education in tourism projects is aggravated by the lack of didactic and pedagogical training of the agents involved, as indicated by the visitors themselves and derived from the answers given by the students of the Primary Education and Tourism degrees, which reveal their lack of knowledge of heritage education.

In line with these conclusions, the convenience of planning tourism experiences based on heritage education is proposed to guarantee the sustainability of tourism activities, ensure the conservation and protection of heritage, and promote knowledge and respect for cultures without forgetting the development of the territories. It also points out the need to promote the pedagogical and didactic training of heritage agents to intensify the benefits and counteract the threats.

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