

Research paper

The “genius loci” of places that experience intense tourism development

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ABSTRACT

In classical Rome, the icon of a snake was used to depict the protection of place identity. This *genius loci* helped identify the quintessential elements of a place. The present study explores the extent to which places experiencing significant tourism development have lost their *genius loci*. Findings are derived from a comparative appraisal of archival and current landscape photographs, supported by an exploratory study at a particular setting. The fieldwork reveals that tourism activity is predominantly accountable for changes in a place's *genius loci* and that certain sites seem to possess attributes that retain that “genius”. Points of reference are identified so that destinations can regain their lost *genius loci*.

1. Introduction

Since Tuan (1979) provided the most cited definition of place, tourism researchers have focused on examining a place as *topos* of interactions and relationship shaping (that is, *topophilia*). Acute academic interest is reflected in a number of place studies, on subjects such as place perception (Cui & Ryan, 2011; Garrod, 2008), consumption (Rakić & Chambers, 2012), attachment/bonding (Strzelecka, Boley, & Woosnam, 2017; Wantanee & Jachna, 2016), identity (Dimache, Wondirad, & Agyeiwaah, 2017; McCabe & Stokoe, 2004; Wang & Chen, 2015), and iconicity (Ram, Björk, & Weidenfeld, 2016). Furthermore, a number of researchers from different disciplines have attempted to shed light on what “sense of place” entails (Chapin III & Knapp, 2015; Mullendore, Ulrich-Schad, & Prokopy, 2015), since it offers a way to understand the relationship between individuals and places (Mullendore et al., 2015). Even so, sense of place remains a multi-dimensional and complex construct (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Mullendore et al., 2015). Adding to its rather multifaceted and abstruse status, it reflects an ancient and rather indistinct concept; that of *genius loci* (Lecompte, Trelohan, Gentric, & Aquilina, 2017). Despite the fact that *genius loci* inspires contemporary architecture (Behnisch, 2018), it

has previously referred to a location's uniqueness, the soul and spirit of a place. It embraces a non-secular meaning that is attached to it, possessing a discrete rather than spiritual element. Ancient altars, found especially in the Western Roman Empire areas, were dedicated to a particular *genius locus*, often depicted in Roman religious iconography by a protective symbol, such as a fearsome snake, shielding a specific place (Gayley, 1893). Such places gain a tutelary spirit, a soul, through a course of storage and accumulation of the affect experience by all those generations who have lived in these places (Neri, 2006). Even so, research related to places and their sense has mainly been channelled in examining physical attributes and social interfaces within places, overlooking the potential role of a place's sanctity in forming and shaping a person's sense of place.

Despite this, according to Meyer (2003), some places bear a spirit. As individual people have personalities- some more complex and interesting than others- so individual places can also have personalities. In fact, some places are more than just locations; Each place that has meant something to someone, such as a national park, touches the person individually. For certain people, even the name of a particular place may conjure up sounds, smells, and the sense of that place. Moreover, some places are unique, steeped in tradition, are rich in

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history and are haunted by their spirit. For instance, Yellowstone's unique and sacred sense of place makes it worth preserving not only for its ecological value but for its lasting importance in local culture. Therefore, such places deserve our care, concern, compassion and attention. Nevertheless, [Petzet \(2008\)](#) has questioned whether we are preserving the spiritual message and meanings of places, which have been entrusted to us for a short time. The main aim of this study is to address this gap in the literature by exploring the perplexed concept of *genius loci* and how it is manifested within contemporary societies and settings. The significance of the study is two-fold. Firstly, it provides theoretical perspectives of an under-researched notion, aiming to provide a basis for further explorations of place *genius loci*. The notion has been regarded and described as a complicated phenomenon that resists rational explanations but should be taken seriously by destinations ([Petzet, 2008](#)). Furthermore, the manner in which a place is sensed is increasingly recognised at individual, environmental, economic, and societal levels ([Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, & Gnoth, 2014](#); [Jepson & Sharpley, 2015](#); [Tan, Tan, Kok, & Choon, 2018](#); [Walker & Moscardo, 2016](#)). Secondly, understanding the profound significance of places – also at a psycho-spiritual level – may equip stakeholders with the necessary incentive and knowledge on how to guard their *genius loci*.

Genius loci has practical value as a rhetoric device which will help us to argue for more sensitive approaches to planning, design and construction ([Thompson, 2003](#), p.68).

The present study attempts to unveil the rather blurred notion of *genius loci* within a contemporary place context, through an ethnographic exploratory study. More specifically, two researchers cross-verified their findings in a place specifically chosen for the scope of this study. Following a scrutinised procedure involving archive photos of a chosen place, the researchers examined in-depth landscape alterations and sites within a particular setting that has experienced intense tourism development. Ayia Napa, a coastal town in Cyprus, was chosen as an appropriate context for the study. Rapid tourism development transformed this once-quiet fishing village into a popular international tourist destination ([Ioannides & Holcomb, 2003](#); [Saveriades, 2000](#); [Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, Theocharous, & Massengale, 2013](#)). The particular setting reflects analogous international ones, such as regions in Zanzibar, Spain and Australia, which have experienced penetrating tourism growth and intense tourism development ([Gursoy, Chi, & Dyer, 2009](#); [Kozak & Rimmington, 2000](#); [Lange, 2015](#)). Findings are supported by a visual documentation of the place currently, and informal interviews conducted by the researchers while in the field. We start with a theoretical discussion on destination development and the relationship between sense of place and *genius loci*. Following the discussion section, we discuss managerial and theoretical implications, along with study limitations and directions for further research.

2. Destination development, sense of place and genius loci

The general pattern of a destination's development and lifecycle has been researched extensively, providing us with significant tools to understand how destinations evolve (e.g. refer to [Brouder, Clavé, Gill, & Ioannides, 2016](#)). Despite the critiques that followed, [Butler's \(1980\)](#) theory was what opened the Pandora's box for tourism academics to further explore tourism development phenomena. Although [Butler's](#) theory on destination development has been widely cited by academics ([Vargas-Sanchez, Oom do Valle, Mendes, Da, & Silva, 2015](#)) and has attracted some criticism, it provides a useful tool for description, usage and implementation in other studies (e.g. [Hovinen, 2002](#); [Moore & Whitehall, 2005](#)). The model delivers a useful framework for research by suggesting that destinations, like products, go through different stages from birth to decline. Thus, destinations go through different stages, with the final stage characterised by a decline in tourist arrivals, unless special efforts are made to extend the cycle. Between the initial and final stages, a consolidation stage sees a slowdown in the growth

rate, while a stagnation stage exhibits the peak arrival number of tourists. [Butler](#) argued that decline may result from failure to acknowledge limits to growth, a lack of good tourism management and the absence of long-term planning by the destination. The model was discussed and amended, with [Butler](#) noting that, in some cases, tourism growth appears as a wave or as a wheel more than as a cycle ([Butler, 2009](#)). Criticism also was levelled regarding whether certain destinations actually manage to reach a stagnation stage, debating whether this or similar models could be generalised. To a lesser extent, other theories have been used, such as the restructuring thesis ([Argawal, 2002](#)) and chaos theory within the tourism context ([Russell & Faulkner, 2004](#)); these are essentially linked to destination development and tourism lifecycle phenomena.

Nonetheless, if a destination follows a route from birth to decline, then development phases that fall between these two phases will have certain impacts. Destinations that have progressed through such a route have often been associated with unplanned tactics, uncontrolled tourism activity and tourism *en masse*. There is a lot of evidence highlighting the outcome of these effects towards destinations, such as impacts on natural resources and landscapes ([Lange, 2015](#); [Witt, 1991](#)). This may also explain the increased interest of academics in examining the relationship between environment and tourism (see [Holden, 2016](#)). Rapid and uncontrolled development seems to alter places, leading to phenomena such as unrestrained urbanism. Such development also deteriorates the unique and distinctive characteristics of a place by replacing natural landscapes with antiaesthetic structures. The same applies for iconic sites. Based on researchers, attractions may lose their iconicity, due to environmental deterioration ([Weaver & Lawton, 2007](#); [Weidenfeld, 2010](#)). [Plog \(2001\)](#) accurately reflected this appalling situation whereby destinations are altered because they turn to tourism as a panacea to their economic difficulties. In his study, which attempted to explain why destinations rise and fall in popularity, [Plog](#) linked people's travel preferences, based on personality characteristics, with destination lifecycles. [Plog](#) made reference to the “stealthy erosion” (p. 19) of destinations in which development continues almost unabated. At this stage, tourist shops and fast-food chains appear, making the place seem like the visitor's hometown. Also, entertainment facilities and high-rise hotels begin to dominate the original architecture. The destination allows small businesses of different types, such as pseudo-native stores, to spring up in an uncontrolled manner. “Gradually the place takes on a more touristy look... The place begins to look like many other overdeveloped destinations, losing its distinctive character along the way” (p. 19). For example, Mediterranean destinations, such as the north-eastern coast of Rhodes in Greece, and Ayia Napa in Cyprus, have reached this stage (see [Ioannides, 2008](#)). Tourism activity and relevant development may impact “landscape attractiveness”, which, based on [Walz and Stein \(2018\)](#), describes a landscape's capacity for nature-based recreation. Indeed, tourism not only uses the qualities of local landscapes but also strongly influences them, as [Doxiadis and Liveri \(2013\)](#) stressed. For instance, [Lange \(2015\)](#) noted the rapid expansion of tourist infrastructure on the coasts of Zanzibar, accompanied by serious coastal environment degradation.

Hence, destinations may follow a predictable and uncontrolled development pattern, resulting in, among other things, significant alterations on a destination's physical setting ([Plog, 2001](#)). Variations related to the physical construct of a place may affect a person's sense of a place. Besides, as [McKercher, Wang, and Park \(2015\)](#) stressed, impacts are felt when a place changes. Besides, as researchers recognise, places are continually reproduced in interaction with their surroundings, hence acquiring new meanings over time ([Gustafson, 2001](#); [Kerstetter & Bricker, 2009](#)). Much of the focus on sense of place is derived from the relationship that arises between a particular place and a person. As [Hausmann, Slotow, Burns, and Di Minin \(2016\)](#) noted, sense of place embeds dimensions of peoples' perceptions as well as interpretations of the environment (for example, symbolic meaning). [Lecompte et al. \(2017\)](#) revealed meanings that users associated with a



Fig. 1. Region of Ayia Napa.
(source: CTO, 2006. Compiled and drawn by the Department of Land and Surveys, Cyprus)

specific site. These meanings arise from a place's tangible and intangible characteristics; they represent various ways in which a place is felt, perceived and experienced by users.

There are multiple discourses about sense of place based on Chapin III and Knapp (2015); that is, most writings treat sense of place as a socio-psychological constructed phenomenon, but others have also noted the importance of a place's biophysical attributes. In particular, sense of place remains a bridge between positivistic and humanistic geographies (Foote & Azaryahu, 2009). From a human geography perspective, for instance, sense of place is a combination of social constructions interacting with physical settings (Campelo et al., 2014; Liu & Cheung, 2016). Nonetheless, several studies have stressed its importance. Research supports a positive connection between sense of place and residents' environmental concern (Wester-Herber, 2004; Vorkinn & Riese, 2001), while also encouraging tourists to develop a sense of responsibility in protecting the destination; that is, to care for the place (Walker & Moscardo, 2016). Even so, Stedman (2003) argued that extant research has emphasised the social construction of sense of place, neglecting the potentially important contribution of the physical environment to give meaning, despite landscape attributes shaping constructed meanings. Physical and aesthetic attributes draw people to particular locations and provide opportunities to derive meaning from them. Moreover, in the simultaneous process of consumption and construction of places, locals and tourists both play an active role (Rakić & Chambers, 2012). For instance, tourists bring their aspirations based on past and present interpretation of landscapes visited and the place qualities deemed important for a desired experience (Cottrell & Cottrell, 2015).

Nonetheless, with the exception of certain studies (e.g. Jepson & Sharpley, 2015), the vast majority of studies related to sense of place seem to have overlooked the important role of spiritual meaning attached to the sense of a place. Nevertheless, sense of place reflects the ancient notion of *genius loci* (Lecompte et al., 2017), although, as

mentioned in the introductory phase of this study, *genius loci* has a spiritual meaning attached to it. *Genius loci* has been associated with harmony, identity, soul and spirit (Neri, 2006). It also has an other-worldly dimension attached to it, hence its consideration in particular spiritual places and sites, such as the case of the sacred rock of the Athenian Acropolis (Loukaki, 1997). Perceptibly, the Latin epithet does not betray a concept utterly concomitant to Ancient Roman sites. It is human nature to assign to specific places significant meanings that are often analogous to their credos. For instance, the Māori recognise that within “Papatūānuku” (mother earth/land), there are “wāhi tapu”, sacred places (Matunga, 2013, p. 220). The present study aims to fill this gap in the literature, to explore deeper meanings of an under-researched notion, within a contemporary environment and setting that has experienced intense changes due to development. The study's importance is two-fold. Firstly, it explores the concept of *genius loci*, which apparently resists rational explanations, but is to be taken seriously by places (Petzet, 2008). Furthermore, it is a notion that has received little academic attention other than from a geographical-architectural perspective (Barnes, 2004; Norberg-Schulz, 1980) despite its intangible idiosyncrasy. Secondly, through the use of an appropriate context for this study (that is, a place that has experienced intense tourism development), it comes as a response to researchers who call for further insights to how meanings associated with place change with continued exposure to tourism (Kerstetter & Bricker, 2009). The study employs ethnographic techniques, as explained in the proceeding section, while having an exploratory focus. This was deemed appropriate since this approach is especially valuable and expedient in terms of understanding complicated phenomena by delving deep into the core values of notions (Christou, 2018a; Christou, Farmaki, & Evangelou, 2018).

2.1. Study methods

This study uses an ethnographic approach (Kottak, 2006; Rakić &

Chambers, 2012) in Ayia Napa, located on the eastern shores of Cyprus, which was considered to be an appropriate setting for this study. The detrimental effects on Cyprus's coastlines due to tourism have been evident since the early 1990s: “There has been a failure to integrate resort infrastructure with aesthetically pleasing characteristics of the environment” (Witt, 1991, p. 43). In the mid-1970s, Ayia Napa “was a small isolated village virtually unknown even to many Cypriots” (Ioannides, 1992, p.722). A map of the region is provided in Fig. 1, which also shows the town of Famagusta, part of which remained a closed section (also referred to as the “ghost city”), following the war of 1974.

The region of Ayia Napa experienced rapid tourism development (Ioannides & Debbage, 1998) especially following the war of 1974. More specifically, after a military defeat, the Republic of Cyprus lost 37% of its area to the invading Turkish army, which brought the tourist industry to a standstill. The government of the south quickly prioritised the development of tourism, including the spatial relocation of tourism activities to coastal areas that had previously had little such development, such as Ayia Napa (Ioannides & Apostolopoulos, 1999; Saveriades, 2000). Furthermore, coastal development in the form of construction of holiday homes and apartment complexes proceeded unabated. Currently, the destination attracts mainly “sunlust” tourism since it draws visitors with promises of the “three Ss”- Sun, Sea and Sand (Ioannides, 1992; Ioannides & Holcomb, 2003; Sonmez et al., 2013).

The present study seeks to answer three specific questions. (1) *How has the international tourist destination developed through the years in relation to its initial stage as a small quiet village?* This question was deemed necessary to establish how and to what extent tourism development in the region has altered the destination. (2) *Which settings within the destination experienced the most/least changes and what alterations occurred in the physical environment of the destination?* This question aims to establish and identify the specific areas, monuments, sites, and landscapes of the region that experienced the most and least alternations due to touristic development. (3) *Which sites within the destination have lost or kept their “genius loci”?* This final question aims to evaluate whether and to what extent particular sites within the destination have kept their *genius loci*, and identify which precise elements contribute to the formation of their *genius loci*.

To address the above questions, the research was carried out in two phases. The first phase involved the gathering and analysis of archaic photos (of the region) and old testimonials (for example, from books), in order to compare them with current findings (such as how the destination has evolved). This approach responds to Tribe's (2004) call for a greater intellectual space for *new* research. Approximately 150 archive photos were examined, 36 of which were kept for further examination purposes; Even so, these are not presented in the study, for copyright reasons. This process involved three expert team members who accessed archive photos published in travel books and booklets found in the official library of the Cyprus Tourism Organization. The second phase involved two expert researchers who accessed the particular place during different seasons, such as peak and low seasons (between 2017 and 2018), to document setting alterations within the destination that could result in a change of its *genius loci* (Lecompte et al., 2017). This was also done to observe changes that occurred in the setting as a result of high or low tourism activity throughout the different seasons. This made it possible to compare fieldwork information by the two researchers. A similar method was used in other studies, where the introspection of one researcher was analysed with that of another researcher (e.g. Komppula & Gartner, 2013; Prebensen & Foss, 2011). Observations in this study focused on the physical environment of the place, as well as the tourism activity taking place within the setting; for instance, on landscape characteristics and changes throughout continuous (tourism) development. Ethnographers were solely responsible for data collection, as is the case for similar studies (e.g. Mackenzie & Kerr, 2014). The findings are complemented with

visual documentation, in the form of photos. Although the researchers took dozens of photos, a careful selection of appropriate photos is presented in this study. According to Zimbardo (1992), an image can convey a complex idea and make it possible to quickly deliver large amounts of information. Scholars have shown interest in studying photographic images in tourism settings (e.g. Garrod, 2008; Li, Huang, & Christianson, 2016). The present study offers a visual trail through photographic evidence. In this study, photographs served as a rich database for the researchers and provided the basis for the subsequent qualitative analysis (Balomenou, Garrod, & Georgiadou, 2017). Furthermore, while the researchers were in the field, they inevitably came into contact with locals and chatted with them, allowing the extraction of important information relevant to the study's scope (refer to Christou, 2018a for the importance of chats and informal interviews with people at their natural setting). In more detail, some of these locals have been residing in the area for decades, which enabled them to share their views of what changes occurred due to tourism development. Representative views are presented in the findings' section, in the form of direct quotes, supplementing findings from the fieldwork. A non-hidden – that is, *overt* – role was adopted; in other words, the researchers did not deliberately try to hide their status. Furthermore, negotiating access to sites and organisations (Monahan & Fisher, 2015) was not necessary because the study addresses the region as a whole, not specific organisations within it. As mentioned previously, researchers came into contact with locals who were easily approached and willing to share their views about the area's development. Nevertheless, ethical clearance ensured a non-exposure of individuals and organisations.

Following the time in the field (phase two), a comparison of landscape alterations took place by accessing archive photos of the area and comparing them to those taken by the researchers. Narratives of experiences were produced and supplemented by photographic evidence (Scarles, 2010), all of which were later analysed, together with a comparison of archive photos, to reach conclusions. A similar kind of method to analyse the introspection of the researcher was used in Prebensen and Foss's (2011) study. The two researchers in the present study created understandings with the aim of meeting trustworthiness and credibility criteria requirements (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Confirmability relates to results being consistent and reproducible, and dependability on the neutrality of the findings (Decrop, 2004). Data were collected in the form of field notes and photographic evidence. The application of researcher triangulation, such as cross-checking of notes, increased both confirmability and dependability, as in similar studies (e.g. Komppula & Gartner, 2013). In more detail, our study discusses the results of an ethnographic study that involved two researchers in the field and the views of locals (for example, people who have been residing in the region for decades). We sought to explore what changes have occurred in the specific place context, in order to document the alternations over aspects such as setting, buildings and sites. Conceivably, such changes do affect the manner in which each place is perceived and sensed by people in general (whether locals or tourists).

The data analyses focused on narratives of critical incidents recorded in the field (findings from informal interviews), and the examination of visuals (photos taken by the researchers and archive photos). The trustworthiness of autoethnographical research depends on abundant descriptions of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), as presented in our findings section. The study findings and discussion are presented below with the presentation and description of visual evidence. Similarly, Mahn (2014) presented and discussed such evidence in the form of stereoscopes. Direct quotes derived from ethnographers' field notes and locals who have been living in the region for decades, as well as information from leaflets published by organisations of the region, are presented in the following section.

2.2. Study findings

2.2.1. The past of Ayia Napa and development in the region

The discovery of a site at Nissi Beach dating back to 8500–10,500 BCE marks the first seafaring foragers on the island. Yet the region was deserted for centuries until the 14th century when the Ayia Napa Monastery was built and people settled permanently around the monastery. A small community of farmers and fishermen grew to a town towards the end of the 20th century (Ayia Napa Municipality, 2018). Archive bibliography betrays the *genius loci* of the place, with a strong spiritual element attached to it.

There is also a stone cavern, a holy cave... the devoted Christian goes to this holy cave in faith and piety where it can provoke him a great devoutness... In this venerable and holy monastery of Ayia Napa which is dedicated to our most holy lady of Panayia [Mary], there is a wonderful old building that is situated in a beautiful area (Arch. Filotheos- encyclical letter, 1735).

Following the dramatic incidents from the 1970s on the island (see previous section), tourism developed rapidly in the area, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting the overall increased tourist inflows that the island accommodated during these decades. Until the late 1970s there were no hotels in the area. An archival photo of the region from a distance shows limited tourism development in the region during that decade, but statistics show that the number of hotels escalated to around 60 in the region within the following few decades. Although not at the same pace, beds in operation and units and arrivals in licenced accommodation establishments continued to increase in the following years (see Fig. 2).

Areas surrounding the town centre and the coastline areas are the settings that have experienced the most changes throughout the last four decades. Archive pictures show significant changes in Ayia Napa's landscape, which took place in the 1990s and early 2000s. Such changes include additional accommodation and holiday houses, new squares and public buildings, and a new church. The development that occurred is mainly due to touristic reasons; hotels, hotel apartments, restaurants, bars and souvenir shops were built to accommodate the increased number of tourist inflows.

2.2.2. Ayia Napa currently

The terrain of the area has altered significantly; The natural landscape has been replaced with structures and the building elements do not resemble the local elements (such as natural stone) used in the monastery. The scenery is rather artificial, and the areas are occupied by pseudo-elements mimicking authentic pieces and structures of the region, such as fake windmills. The views of two locals, who have been

residing in the region for decades reveal the rest:

The setting has changed... The beaches have been altered... there aren't many open spaces anymore, and you can't have easy access to the beach. Development was left without control... But it's not only tourism to be blamed... After the war [of 1974], a lot of refugees [referring to hoteliers and restaurant owners and owners of car rental companies] were forced to leave their regions, and started investing in our area... I have difficulty remembering unspoilt areas... like for example "Lady's mile" in Limassol... [natural beach]. (Anna Maria, female, 56 years old).

From where I'm standing now, before, you could see the beach and the sea. It was a beautiful view... Now, all these buildings block the view... all you can see now are huge blocks of cement... It's not the same [referring to the setting]. It has changed, and I personally don't like it. They shouldn't give permission [referring to the authorities] to build them. I prefer how it was in the past... (Elli, female, 81 years old) (Photos 1 and 2).

Likewise, Plog (2001, p.19) made reference to the "stealthy erosion" of destinations, in which a place loses "its distinctive character along the way". Even seemingly minor alterations that took place in natural settings to enrich visitor experiences, if observed carefully, betray significant changes. For instance, a sculpture park amidst natural surroundings reveals minor changes at the particular place. However, a closer look at the area's terrain betrays observable changes as a result of soil additions and construction work to accommodate the statues of the park and visitor pathways. The nearby national park of Cavo Greko, the green countryside in the Ayia Napa outskirts, and the monastery in the town centre are settings that have experienced relatively minor changes. In the countryside, visitors can still witness one of the region's characteristic icons – its windmills – even though some of them have not been kept in good condition.

The changes in green areas are mainly due to natural reasons, such as flora growing over the years, as well as seasonal changes, such as normally yellow and dry terrains being replaced with grass for a relatively short period during the winter season. Almost no observable changes occurred in a seafront cave (of Ayia Thekla), in close proximity to the picturesque chapel located on the west side of Ayia Napa town. Minor changes are observed in the picturesque monastery; however, the place context in which the monastery is located has experienced dramatic changes.

The monastery was built on a hill, but now you get the feeling that the whole area is more or less a flat region full with concrete buildings... It [referring to the setting] has changed a lot, beyond recognition... I find it hard to remember how it was... "It's like night compared to day..." Ayia Napa was a small village surrounded by fields where we used to come to gather snails during the autumn season... (Doros, male, 63 years old).

Archive photos show minor modifications over the last 40 years. These changes were mainly due to maintenance reasons, restoration procedures and minor additions, such as ramps for the disabled. The small courtyard of the spiritual place and its adjacent backyard still host endemic trees that have been there for centuries. Furthermore, the monastery, which encircles a cave, has kept its traditional architecture with local stones and other natural building materials. The inner church of Mary the Mother of Jesus, which gave the town its current name, has kept its character untouched throughout the years. A small addition on the side of the monastery includes three statues, which illustrate three locals wearing traditional costumes. A quote from the field notes of one of the researchers, while in the monastery area, tells the rest:

... I notice that the small courtyard is almost the same as it was in the past. I recall seeing an old photo of the monastery which depicted the picturesque fountain in the middle, as it stands today. The ground has somewhat changed though. Every little detail betrays

Beds in Operation and Units (1*-5*)
(Famagusta Region- 1st Quarters)

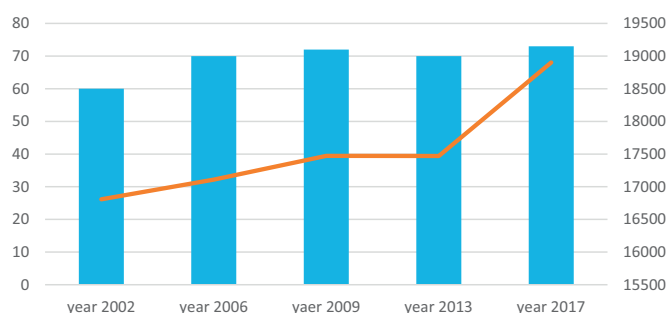


Fig. 2. Beds in Operation and units in Famagusta region. (note: line representing beds, and columns representing units) (graph based on statistics published by the Cyprus Tourism Organization, available at: <http://www.visitcyprus.biz>, accessed: January 2018).

the calmness and serenity of the place... It seems, and I feel that the place has kept its character, dynamic, spirituality, *genius loci*... The distinct fragrance in the church, its ambiance, the old icons and the lit candles. By entering the area, it is as if you stepped back in time. I notice that the church has no visitors [season of visitation, winter]. I can actually picture how Ayia Napa was prior its development. It's an oxymoronic place – like an oasis in the middle of cement and cacophonies. I find that the tranquility and serenity of the place is unique and unparalleled to anything else surrounding it... (Photos 3 and 4)

I've noticed that the beaches [sand areas in close proximity to the sea] are places that have also experienced changes. But it seems that these changes are restricted to certain supportive infrastructure, such as lifeguard towers, sunbeds and umbrellas which are placed mainly during the high season... I find that although noteworthy changes occur throughout the seasons, these are not permanent, but rather seasonal. I recall visiting the area during the summer period, when tourism activity was intense with crowds, beach sports and parasailing... Then again, the two most well-known beaches of Ayia Napa are empty of sunbeds now [winter season]. Since no infrastructure was constructed in the sea, I find that the setting has remained the same throughout the decades. I observed that non-permanent changes to the setting throughout the seasons are caused by climatic conditions, such as cloudy skies replacing clear ones, and a wavy sea replacing a calm one... (field notes of one of the researchers).

The sea view picture taken from the east side of the church (Photo 5) illustrates a static scene, with the sea in the distance. However, another picture (Photo 6) taken from the same position on the other side of the church (northwest) displays a continually altering inland setting with infrastructure penetrating the natural environment. Likewise, with the focal point of the main entrance of the Ayia Napa monastery, the scenery of the particular place differs significantly based on the viewer's position, such as if he or she is standing outside the monastery and looking through its door to the courtyard, or if he or she is standing inside and looking at the surrounding area (compare Photos 7 and 8).

I love the sea here [referring to the beach of Ayia Napa and Protaras' areas]. The waters are so turquoise... But, I prefer to go to beaches that I know that they are quieter, with fewer tourists [referring to locals and internationals]. Away from the crowd, I sit there, watch the sea and listen to the waves till late afternoon ... Sometimes I stay

there until 8 or even 9 p.m. It relaxes me. It reminds me of my childhood, when I used to come here with my parents and brother... (Markella, female, 38 years old).

Nevertheless, when informants were asked to share their opinion whether and how the particular destination may regain its previous character (prior to tourism development), they had contradictory views. Some young locals (in their twenties) stressed that they could imagine Ayia Napa any other way. Even so, informants in general communicated certain suggestions, the majority of which were found to be related to the preservation of important sites; specifically, the monastery of Ayia Napa. Based on respondents' views, such sites may direct policy makers and stakeholders. These suggestions are summarized and presented in Table 2. The view of one local is presented below:

They [authorities] should demolish everything and start building again! Unfortunately, now they cannot do much... it will take them years... But they can start by investing more money in cleaning the place. I believe that they should not allow commercial signs, or at least make them look more traditional... They must expand what they've done in the monastery [preservation] to the surrounding area... they should construct more picturesque roads, and relocate elsewhere the clubs and bars surrounding the monastery. (Amelia, female, 42 years old).

3. Discussion

This study is a response to the need for further understanding of an under-researched notion (that of *genius loci*) and researchers' calls for further insights to how meanings associated with place change with continued exposure to tourism (Kerstetter & Bricker, 2009). Firstly, this study confirms findings from other studies regarding the impacts of uncontrolled tourism development on natural resources and landscapes (Lange, 2015). More specifically, as observed from the aforementioned findings, the destination (for example, setting and attractions such as windmills) experienced dramatic changes as a result of touristic development and activity. This adds to the discussion of previous work revealing that attractions may lose their iconicity due to environmental deterioration (Weaver & Lawton, 2007; Weidenfeld, 2010). More specifically, as development took place in the region, changes occurred over the natural and physical environment of the destination. For instance, agricultural land was replaced by new structures. The town center (adjacent to the monastery) and the “tourist area” situated



Photo 1. Holiday houses under construction in the distance.



Photo 2. A replica windmill.

parallel to the seafront experienced dramatic changes, as the result of infrastructure and buildings constructed specifically for tourism purposes. Likewise, other international destinations experienced similar impacts, such as tourist infrastructure on the coast of Zanzibar, accompanied by a seriously degraded coastal environment (Lange, 2015). An in-depth analysis of the landscape and its changes shows that tourism is mainly to be blamed for the aforementioned alterations close to the town center and suburbs. For instance, development and changes in nearby areas (for example, the eastern region of Ayia Napa) resulted from an increase of holiday homes to accommodate international as well as local clientele; that is, locals who reside in other parts of the island and seek holiday houses in the region. There seems to be a cause-and-effect relationship of tourism activity on the *genius loci* of the destination: tourism development (such as new hotels and holiday houses) changes the natural terrain of the destination, thereby impacting the way it is seen. That is, what was previously a place with rock formations and endemic flora is now a setting with buildings and artificial surroundings: "... It has changed a lot, beyond recognition..." (Doros, male, 63 years old).

Nevertheless, the findings enabled the exploration of the concept of

genius loci, which although important for places, remains a confused notion (Petzet, 2008). In more detail, research findings show that specific micro-environments (sites) within the destination appear to have not been greatly affected by the overall changes that the place itself experienced. These appear to act as shielding "capsules" that have been almost untouched by increased and unplanned construction and developmental phases occurring in the surrounding overall environment. In particular, the monastery of Ayia Napa – an iconic symbol (Weidenfeld, 2010) of the town – appears to have kept its *genius loci* throughout the decades to some extent, even though tourism flows have transformed the site into an important tourist site. Even so, certain noticeable and tangible characteristic elements within the particular site, such as the constructive components, have retained their initial eloquence. Stone walls and pillars are as they were in the past and the distinct architecture of the structures has been preserved. More importantly, the site has also retained its 'spirit' and 'soul'. Nonetheless, the 'spirituality' of the site seems to be impacted by increased tourism flows, transforming the worship place as a tourist site, thus altering its context. This adds to the discussion of whether we are able to preserve the spiritual meanings of places (Petzet, 2008) under intense tourism



Photo 3. The courtyard of the monastery.



Photo 4. Church entrance.

demand pressure. Nonetheless, Meyer (2003) argues that certain places, such as a national park, bear a religious or spiritual element and may evoke awe in different generations. These places are unique and rich in history, hence they deserve our concern, care and attention.

Despite this, the psychological and spiritual elements at the particular site (monastery), are still supported and perceived via certain (particularly physical) elements that have remained un-spoilt through the passage of time. For instance, candles in the church are still lit by faithful pilgrims and visitors, the characteristic ecclesiastical essence of the censer remains, and hymns from masses are performed as they were during the Byzantine era. These particular elements contributing to the *genius loci* of the spiritual site, which acts as a sealed “capsule” unscathed by (tourism) development, are summarized in Table 1. Of interest are the views of a local (refer to Amalia's quote in previous section), which suggests an ‘extension’ of protection and preservation initiatives to the adjacent surrounding area of the monastery.

The specific site offers useful insights into the deeper meanings of *genius loci*; that is, it enables an understanding of the concept as it was firstly conceived and introduced millennia ago; a concept directly linked to the core of a place, its soul. These are illustrated in Fig. 3.

Fieldwork findings from personal experiences and from informal interviews with locals enabled us to gain deeper meanings of a site's *genius loci*; that is, those factors that assisted the preservation of the site's “soul/spirit” throughout the centuries. For instance, as one local (male, 47) stressed:

... I enjoy the peacefulness of the place [referring to Ayia Napa monastery] every time I come here... I try to avoid visiting the monastery during summer... there are too many tourists and it's not a very quiet place to be... To be honest, I don't come here very often, but when I do, it relaxes me... There is something about this place that comforts me... The garden, the building, the smell... It's like the whole building has a soul of its own...

These factors enable us to gain further insights into the sense of place, as a multidimensional and complex construct (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Mullendore et al., 2015) and, more specifically, to a place's *genius loci*. Précised into physiological, social and psychological elements, these factors can inform academics and practitioners about how the notion of *genius loci* is manifested within contemporary society.



Photo 5. Church of Ayia Thekla.



Photo 6. Church of Ayia Thekla-inland view.

4. Conclusion

By employing an ethnographic approach, this study was able to gain deep meaning of a destination's *genius loci*, an important notion for places (Petzet, 2008) that has been largely overlooked in studies relating to the sense of place. *Genius loci* seems not to be necessarily linked with the secular depiction of a place, but rather its spirit; This “spirit” does not depend solely on physical structures, but on objects and items within that may be linked with the divine, and to which the individual endeavors to connect. More specifically, the site (a monastery) in this case through its *genius loci* acts as a joining tool between the visitors and their psychological and spiritual personal aspirations. The site reflects the initial *genius loci* of the core of the place before any development had occurred, centuries ago, “... a holy cave... where it can provoke him [visitor] a great devoutness...” (Arch. Filotheos- encyclical letter, 1735). Although the notion of *genius loci* is not to be regarded as synonymous to spirituality, the findings of this exploratory study add to the theoretical discourse of what *genius loci* entails, especially within a contemporary setting and society. Even so, future researchers might want to further explore this notion from other perspectives, such as

from a more social standpoint. For instance, a study could obtain views from visitors who have visited a particular place more than once through a certain period; such research could investigate visitors' perceptions of changes that have occurred at the particular place. We suggest that academics from different disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology and environmental psychology, delve deeper into *genius loci* and how it relates to cognitive and affectionate interpretations of sites and places. Or, perhaps, how *genius loci* is manifested in settings that support a utopic experience (refer to Christou & Farmaki, 2018). Furthermore, it would be interesting to see whether and to what extent human interactions supported by deep-rooted philoxenic attitudes of locals (as in Christou & Sharples, 2019) contribute to the preservation of a place's *genius loci*. This study offers the basis for such further investigations. Particularly, how the *genius loci* of a particular site can be extended to a wider place context could definitely offer useful insights, both to academics and practitioners. For example, it can offer a fresh perspective for researchers interested in sustainable tourism and other sustainability issues. Furthermore, while it is believed that the chosen setting (of Ayia Napa) is an appropriate one for the investigation of this study, it would be interesting to see whether other sites (not necessarily



Photo 7. Viewpoint from inside.



Photo 8. Viewpoint from outside.



Photo 9. A sculpture.

linked to spirituality, such as a place of worship) act as shielding “capsules” (as discussed above) within a changing developmental setting. This may equip stakeholders with the appropriate theoretical knowledge on how to shield and manage such specific sites so that the destination does not lose its *genius loci*.

This study yields certain managerial implications, despite the highlighted need to protect and preserve particular sites. Stakeholders should consider the elements and factors presented in previously, if they truly aim to protect the *genius loci* of their places. For instance, through the placement of specific items (such as an icon) in the town, authorities may extend and spread a site's *genius loci* to the entire place. This initiative could add to the discussion of how the concept of iconicity (Ram et al., 2016) may practically be implemented by tourism destinations. In fact, tourism stakeholders should also consider whether the surrounding environment can be transformed (if it has changed) to complement the “inner side” of such sites, as sense of a place is perceived differently from divergent viewpoints a person may take. For instance, as explained previously, from the same position of looking at the beach, the view and sense of place differ significantly compared to the view and sense of the same place if experienced from another point

or angle. Hence, it is advisable that the destination focus not only on the preservation of particular sites, but also on the immediate surrounding grounds of these sites so that the *genius loci* extends from the “capsule” site to the adjacent environment. Furthermore, local memorabilia may be designed as representations of the destination's *genius loci*, promoting local heritage while supporting positive linkages of visitors with the destination, such as through place nostalgia (refer to Christou, 2018b). It is also advisable that destinations adjust visitors' perceptions of the destination's *genius loci* with truthful promotional material prior to their visit. For instance, Photo 9 could be used in a leaflet or website promoting a particular sculpture park. The photo creates the impression that the sculptures are located amidst natural surroundings. However, Photo 10, taken from the opposite direction, clearly shows an immediate environment dominated by structures. Media such as images, magazines and movies have been proven to influence the “tourist gaze” (Urry & Larsen, 2011). It would be worthwhile investigating the extent to which the incorporation of specific images, such as in marketing campaigns, shapes or influences the sense that visitors have for a setting after their actual experiences took place.

This study has certain limitations. First, the study cannot confirm a



Photo 10. The same sculpture from the opposite direction.

Table 1
The “Genius loci” of the spiritual site.

Elements and rudiments	Examples
The physical static environment	The church, other buildings within the monastery, fountain and columns
The natural environment	Particular endemic flora, such as olive trees and other vegetation found in the monastery.
Objects and items within the static environment	The wooden seats for the pilgrims, and Byzantine icons.
The sensory environment	The candles, censer (“thymiastos”) and the ethereal essences.
The social element	Social interactions, chats with spiritual people and other visitors.
The aura of the place	The psychological and spiritual offering of the place, such as from the Mass and ceremonies taking place at the site.
The personal factor	Perceptions and interpretations that individuals assign to the spiritual place.

Table 2
Suggestions for regaining a destination's genius loci.

Suggestion	Paradigm
Enforce strict legislations and implement these.	Initiate, enforce and follow strict legislations to protect the destination's environment (e.g., historical buildings, architecture, noise/visual pollution, and natural environment).
Identify significant sites and places within the destination.	Recognise significant sites within the destination that reflect the character, culture and ‘soul’ of the destination, such as spiritual sites.
Protect and enhance the physical, natural and spiritual characteristics of these sites.	<p>Preserve the distinct architecture of sites.</p> <p>Restore significant elements within (e.g., a fountain).</p> <p>Enhance the static environment with relevant objects and items (e.g., icons).</p> <p>Include plantations (flowers and herbs) that are linked to the destination's endemic flora.</p> <p>Enforce strict ‘carrying capacity’ rules.</p> <p>Prohibit unwanted behaviors and, if necessary, enforce dress code.</p>
Enrich the sensory environment of these sites, and the social, psychological and spiritual experience of visitors.	<p>Allow visitors to experience a holistic experience (e.g., acoustic hymns in a religious site).</p> <p>Allow locals who may want to share their knowledge and experiences with visitors to be employed at the particular site.</p> <p>Prohibit unwanted arguments and possible conflicts as a result of ‘masses’ (controls).</p> <p>Promote psychological/spiritual experiences (e.g., a spiritual seminar, in a specific room). Extend and tangibilize the experience of visitors through the offering of memorabilia (avoid the charging for them).</p> <p>Provide details (through social media and leaflets) of future events taking place.</p> <p>Invite visitors at other times of the year to witness and participate in special events.</p> <p>Allow visitors to feel part of the ‘genius loci’ of the destination (e.g., suggest activities and happenings that visitors may engage in)</p>
Extend the site's ‘genius loci’ to the whole destination (region)	<p>Protect the surrounding environment (of the site). If possible, the surrounding environment must be redesigned to reflect the site's character.</p> <p>Endemic flora should be included in the neighboring areas.</p> <p>Local artists may be asked to include in their works elements derived from the site. The destination must ensure their viability.</p> <p>Include ‘references’ of the site in the destination (e.g., an icon placed in a public area).</p>

cause-and-effect pattern of development and the *genius loci* of places in general. We focused on a particular setting that experienced dramatic changes within a relatively short period of time due to (tourism)

development. Second, the context of this study is regarded as a typical “three Ss” destination. While other destinations may follow a similar path of development and be recipients of comparable impacts, it could

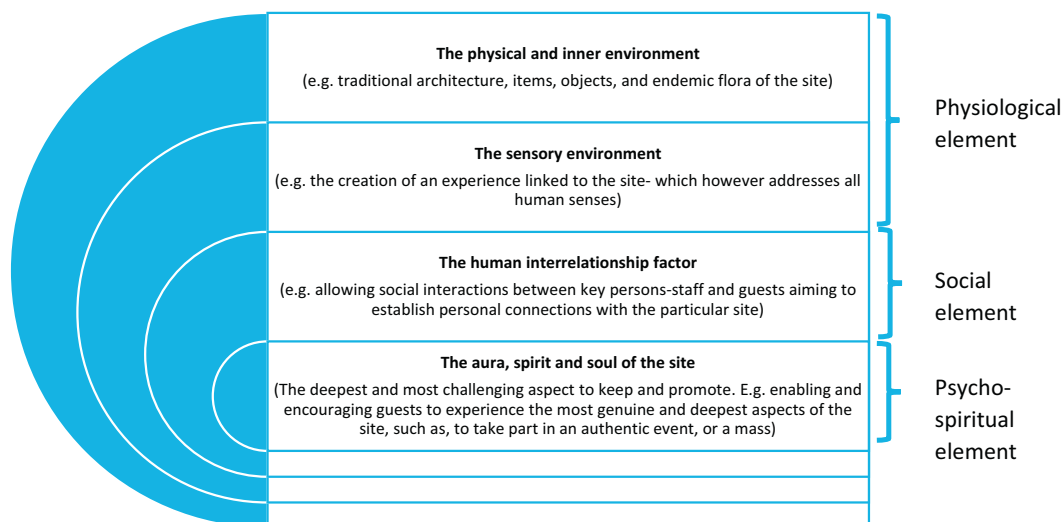


Fig. 3. Deeper meanings of *genius loci* (e.g. of a specific site, such as a monastery).

be argued that each destination is unique and transforms in a dissimilar idiosyncratic way; hence, alterations of a place's *genius loci* may be inimitable to each destination, which necessitates further research. Third, for the aforementioned reasons explained in this study, only a particular site was found to act as a “capsule”, although it should be stressed that the *genius loci* of these sites was also found to be impacted due to touristic activity (that is, increased tourism flows). However, this does not imply that only spiritual sites keep their *genius loci*. Hence, more research should further investigate the notion of *genius loci* and its connection to places and other sites (such as castles and places of macabre association).

Nonetheless, this study acknowledges that tourism development may alter the *genius loci* of a place. This is because a number of elements and factors of a place, such as the landscape, buildings, spirit, soul and aura, experience significant alterations and modifications. Even so, particular sites within this place seem to act as sheltering “capsules” against changes occurring in the destination's broader environment. Certain intangible elements and tangible features within these sites have not been dramatically transformed, perhaps due to the site's significance, spirituality or amplified power dynamics (that is, their soul) such sites possess. Within their walls, these sites have managed to keep almost untouched and unblemished their *genius loci* throughout the passage of centuries. Nevertheless, increased tourist flows may still alter their context and *genius loci*, transforming them more into tourist sites, rather than centres of cultural and spiritual iconicity. Hence, the destination is called not only to continue protecting these sites, but to use them as a point of reference and a guiding torch, if they aim to preserve or even regain the lost *genius loci* of their place.

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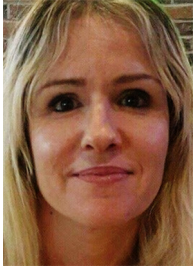
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