

Nurturing nostalgia?: A response from rural tourism stakeholders

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Nostalgia
Rural tourism
Emotions

ABSTRACT

The desire to relive bygone days stimulates nostalgia-seekers to travel to rural settings that have a kind of vintage charm. However, there is no evidence that stakeholders actually acknowledge the beneficial outcomes of nostalgia. This exploratory study sought to identify whether rural tourism stakeholders deliberately nurture visitor nostalgia with the intention of harvesting its positive outcomes. The findings suggest that the notion is credited as constructive, both at a personal and social level, but stakeholders do not seem to be fully cognizant of its potentiality. The study presents a diagrammatic tool that identifies those elements that need to be targeted so that nostalgia is triggered, strengthened and comforted.

1. Introduction

Nostalgia is one of the most appreciable new developments of postmodern tourism (Uriely, 2005). It addresses most of the tourist psychographic spectrum. That is, it is prevalent and universal and its effects are felt by more age groups than is generally recognised (Hunt & Johns, 2013; Sedikides et al., 2015). Recent studies have acknowledged the positive outcomes of nostalgia on tourism. For instance, it acts as a commanding motivating vigour (Yoon & Uysal, 2005) and it enhances marketing potentials of tourism organisations (Hunt & Johns, 2013). It also adds value to the overall tourist overall experience (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Furthermore, it impacts favourably upon destinations since it leads to future visit intentions (Leong, Yeh, & Chang, 2015a).

Reflecting on the importance of nostalgia within the tourism context, much of the literature is located within a historical experiential context. For instance, researchers investigated the effects of museum exhibitions and commercialised items on visitors (Brown, 2013). However, a number of more specific themes related to tourists' emotional and nostalgic experience have emerged more recently. These include the attachment of tourists to certain places (*topophilia*- Tuan, 1974) due to nostalgia (Yeh, Chen, & Liu, 2012). Hence, academic attention has been channelled towards investigations of the nostalgic notion from the consumer (that is, tourist) perspective. It has been argued that the rural setting, with its rural sense and traditional food (Renko & Bucar, 2014), give rise to a collective memory of a nostalgic and idyllic past. For instance, studies have examined tourists in search for nostalgic experiences (Russell, 2008) in farms and *kibbutzim* (Timothy & Ron, 2013; Uriely, Reichel, & Ron, 2003). It is also widely

recognised that rural settings bear a nostalgic character and reflect a desire for a past time (Creighton, 2015). They also offer emotional (i.e. nostalgic) experiences to their visitors (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

From the stakeholders' perspective, however, research on the notion of nostalgia remains notably lacking, despite calls for further research from the supply side (Sharpley, 2014). Despite this, recent studies confirm that stakeholder involvement is crucial for the success of the tourism sector in establishing a viable equilibrium between economic, environmental and social dynamics (Byrd, 2007; Jaafar, Noor & Rasoolimanesh, 2015; Nicholas, Thapa, & Ko, 2009). More specifically, there is no evidence suggesting the extent to which stakeholders deliberately promote a sense of nostalgia to their visitors, despite an increasing number of studies referring to people pursuing nostalgic countryside experiences (Creighton, 2015; Frisvoll, 2013; Frochet, 2005; Skuras, Petrou, & Clark, 2006). That is, stakeholders may not be aware of the beneficial outcomes of nostalgia, as recognised in recent studies (i.e. Cheung, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2016). They may possibly trust that the rural constructed setting acts by itself as a nostalgic trigger, and therefore may not actively seek to evoke or comfort this emotion to their visitors. As a result, guests may be left with the nostalgic craving, unsatisfied. Even so, nostalgic references, based on Joyce and Lambert (1996), satisfy particular consumers' needs in an aesthetic and hedonic sense. Particularly, Hamilton and Wagner (2014) argue that small businesses, through nostalgic triggers, are effective at transforming an ordinary activity to an experiential one. Such owners, employ nostalgia via the construction of an idealized home through aesthetics, ritual and product; Photos in their study, display tearooms filled with vintage items such as tea pots, retro icons and furniture. As

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the tourism experience is based on an instantaneous production and consumption structure (Sharples & Stone, 2014), it is necessary to consider stakeholders' perspectives in the process of developing and/or enhancing nostalgia amongst tourists. Cooper and Hall (2016) posited that supply and demand are inseparable components in the production and consumption of tourism experiences; thereby, tourism stakeholders play an important role in shaping the tourist experience. The involvement and support of stakeholders in tourism product development and destination marketing has been recognised by tourism scholars, particularly within a rural tourism context (Komppula, 2014). Specifically, Benur and Bramwell (2015) highlighted the importance of examining “how tourism product features and relationships are manifested in the co-creation of tourism experiences through the activities of both producers and consumers” (p.222). Indeed, through the development of social and symbolic cues in the environment in which the tourists experience takes place, tourists' emotions may be positively influenced to achieve desirable outcomes, such as enhanced competitiveness and improved destination image amongst others. Hence, while seeking to address the aforementioned gap in the literature, this study considers the outcomes of an exploratory study which took place in the hinterland of Cyprus. The study sought to identify whether rural tourism stakeholders are consciously trying to promote nostalgia among their visitors. In so doing, we address persistent calls by academics to examine a socio-psychological notion that remains largely overlooked (Hunt & Johns, 2013; Kitson & McHugh, 2015; Stephan et al., 2015). The present study also contributes to the understanding of the tourism and nostalgia nexus. Finally, it provides useful guidance for managerial implications (through a proposed model) and highlights the need for further research.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we review the notion of nostalgia and its importance within the tourism context (Yeh et al., 2012). More specifically, it focuses on people's emotional relationships with places (Manzo, 2003) and the nostalgic element this may hold. We then discuss settings and cues within such rural settings that may trigger nostalgia (Brown, 2013). This discussion serves as a framework for the methodology. Last, we present the findings of the exploratory study before discussing the theoretical and practical implications of the study. An agenda for further research is also established.

2. Nostalgia as an emotion

The meaning of nostalgia is reflected in the words of Holbrook (1993, p. 245), who referred to it as ‘a longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday’. And since the past has disappeared forever, it carries a kind of melancholic charm (Bazin, 2013). Nostalgia has been referred to as a self-indulgent and maladaptive sentiment that individuals experience when they are trapped in their past. This entails remembering an event from someone's past and a longing to return to it. As a result, a person may feel sentimental, most often happy, but with a tinge of longing (Stephan et al., 2015). In the study of Jarratt and Gammon (2016, p. 131), ‘respondents became emotional when recounting memories of family holidays ...’

2.1. Forms of nostalgia

Batcho (1998) distinguished two types of nostalgia. *Personal nostalgia* is characterised by how much a person misses various personal past aspects (i.e. family). *Historical nostalgia* is a desire to return to a past not experienced by the individual yet believed to be superior to the present. Marchegiani and Phau (2011, p.108) also differentiated personal nostalgia (‘the way I was’) from historical nostalgia (‘the way it was’). While both principal analytical perspectives of nostalgia are evidenced, Papatomas (2016) noted a dissimilar form of nostalgia that bears an antithetical direction. More specifically, he acknowledged two forms of nostalgia. The first is characterised by escapism from reality,

and the imagination, relating to memory and being slightly sad (i.e. historical nostalgia). The other form of nostalgia has an opposite, positive and ontological content. It antipathises the past escapism and memory's return to the past. Moreover, it looks fixedly at life and has an eschatological dynamic content relating to hope and expectation for the future.

2.2. Nostalgia and linkage with personal states

The negative emotion of ‘sadness’ as a result of past memories and the melancholy caused by nostalgic thoughts was once perceived as an illness. Hence, nostalgia designated a condition or sickness known as *Heimweh* (Prete, 2001). According to the Alsatian doctor Johannes Hofer, nostalgia was an illness caused by homesickness. The only treatment for it, was a return, or ‘repatriation’ (Rauchs, 1999). Nostalgia has been regarded as a negative emotion (Cappeliez, Guindon, & Robitaille, 2008). Academics have noted its adverse societal effects. In particular, Smeekes (2015) demonstrated how group-based (national) nostalgia is likely to be related to a positive in-group orientation. Furthermore, it has a negative out-group orientation since it fosters an exclusionary and essentialist sense of national identity based on common ancestry descent. Even so, Holak and Havlena (1998) revealed the complexity of emotions elicited in a nostalgic experience. These included negative and positive emotions, such as sadness being linked with warmth, joy, affection, and gratitude. Nostalgic posts in social media were found to include both negative and positive emotions (Davalos, Merchant, Rose, Lessley, & Teredesai, 2015). Based on Jarratt and Gammon (2016), reconnection with the past highlights dissatisfaction with the present. This hinges on the loss of childhood, yet it enables a positive re-telling of the past, underpinning family narratives. Hence, “nostalgia” may be regarded as the longing to return to a seemingly ideal past, which requires memory arousal and an amalgamation of positive and negative states, such as comfort, warmth and sadness.

2.3. Nostalgia as a relatively unexplored notion

Researchers have observed the concept of nostalgia shifting from an interest in its historical consideration (as an indicator of psychopathology) to something more positive (e.g. Specht & Kreiger, 2016). Likewise, another study confirmed that nostalgia is often experienced as a positive emotion. This is because it was found to be linked with optimism, despite a negative affect presence (Cheung et al., 2013). For instance, hearing old, well-loved songs has been noted to evoke positive moods (Chou & Lien, 2010). Stephan et al. (2015) put forward several beneficial impacts of nostalgia. For instance, it increases current levels of positive affect, self-esteem and social connectedness – a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and belonging. It also spawns inspiration via social connectedness and attendant self-esteem. A number of recent studies (Cheung et al., 2016; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016; Sedikides et al., 2015) recognised that nostalgia potentiates an attainable future. In particular, it serves a self-oriented function by raising self-positivity and optimism for the future. Additionally, it serves an existential function by increasing perceptions of life as meaningful. It also has a social function, by increasing social connectedness and fostering pro-social behaviour. Studies have used different measures to assess the nostalgic emotion variable, most of which being associated with the past, and previous experiences. For instance, “revisiting childhood” and “remembering how things use to be” (Chen, Yeh, & Huan, 2014). The study results of Leong, Yeh, Hsiao & Huan, 2015b, make a strong case for attracting nostalgic-motive tourists to visit Macau, with its attractions of historical and heritage significance. Nonetheless, nostalgia remains an elusive concept; it “depends on each individual” (Yeh et al., 2012, p. 175). More specifically, nostalgia is a relatively unexplored notion, with not much research to support it; Firstly, its idiosyncrasy and interrelation with other constructs, makes the process of

distinguishing it from other constructs and emotions quite challenging. Indeed, it may appear to the reader that it is somehow synonymous to authenticity and belongingness; Yet, both are strongly linked to the notion. Secondly, it is an elusive emotion, based on individual perceptions and interpretations; it differs depending on each individual (Yeh et al., 2012), it is a complex emotion (Bellman, 2007) and highly subjective (Chen et al., 2014).

3. Nostalgia within the rural tourism context

Nostalgia has been positively linked with the tourist 'experiential value' (Leong et al., 2015a). This is described as a subjective assessment of benefit obtained by consuming a product, service (Holbrook, 1999), and aesthetics (Wu & Liang, 2009). Such in/tangible elements that are offered by places are obtainable for tourism consumption (Knudsen & Waade, 2010). These consecutively may lead to an emotional (tourist/place) relationship. This affective bond, otherwise known as *topophilia* (Tuan, 1974) results from the meanings or significance that people attach to places and the ways they interpret them. These meanings, in turn, are determined partly as social constructs; That is, meanings rooted in historically contingent and shared cultural understandings. Also, through the manner in which people experience particular environments. An example is when people seek environments for potential restorative effects. These may include pleasant and 'romantic' countryside places that Sharpley and Jepson (2011) found to embrace emotional (e.g. nostalgic) relationships between visitors and rural settings. Likewise, Yeh et al. (2012) found that the nostalgic emotion contributes positively to place attachment of cultural tourists. Furthermore, nostalgia at playful beach grounds allowed both a connection to other generations and to the child within (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Tourism experiences may also bear a negative (by valence) emotional experience, as in the case of sites that are associated with death and suffering (Sharpley, 2009a). Nonetheless, nostalgia plays a key role in the special bond between the tourist and a place, despite the *macabre* sense that characterises it. An example is Australian and New Zealand tourists visiting the battlefield of Gallipoli and connecting with it in personal emotional ways (Cheal & Griffin, 2013). Particularly, as Leong et al. (2015a) note, individuals with nostalgia tend to seek objects which take many forms associated with the past; such as, old buildings and texts, to soothe personal feelings associated with thinking about these places, and times.

3.1. Nostalgia stimulators within the rural setting

A place and the in/tangible objects and cues within it, seem to act as stimulators of nostalgia. Since returning to the past is not the remedy for nostalgia, this is why the past has to be reanimated (Bazin, 2013). This constructed setting (e.g. through old picture displays) triggers human senses and promotes the nostalgic emotion. Besides, senses constitute the different ways people have of perceiving the world, such as seeing, hearing, touching and smelling (Macpherson, 2011). Researchers have noted that nostalgia can be triggered by more than an individual's past experiences, such as by a variety of external stimuli (Boym, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2015). Various mechanisms may evoke nostalgia and help an individual to remember a specific place at a specific time-period; These include, a place, a sound, a scent, or a picture (Leong et al., 2015a). Kessous and Roux (2008) showed pictures of products that could evoke nostalgia to respondents. Then asked them about what came to their minds once they were exposed to such material. Retro pastiche videogames were found to appeal to the desire of people to connect to their younger selves (Sloan, 2015). Physical stimulating 'cues' are also offered at dark places and act as nostalgic stimulators; These retro or 'kitsch' objects are concerned with a commercial reminiscence (Pearce, 1995). Most importantly, they create a sense of nostalgia (Brown, 2013; Sharpley, 2009b). The consumption of food also may trigger nostalgia (Vignolles & Pitchon, 2014). The

consumption of 'nostalgic food' was found to be particularly related to positive emotions (Chen et al., 2014). All the same, human interactions and stories of the past, in the form of conversations, seem to trigger nostalgia. Stories of nostalgia, based on Synnes (2015), are vital aspects of maintaining the continuity of the self when much in life is characterised by discontinuity and uncertainty. Besides, humans are reflective, adaptive, and social. According to Davalos et al. (2015), people recall the past and sometimes discuss these recollections with others and become nostalgic.

Rural places are particularly equipped with unique features, cues, and objects that may trigger nostalgic encounters among their visitors. These act as pull factors for rural tourists who seek such emotional (nostalgic) experiences. Besides, nostalgia has been characterised (Yoon & Uysal, 2005) as a psychological need that acts as a powerful motivation for people. Tourists were found to be attracted to rural settings by a peaceful environment and nostalgia for the old ways of life; Such as, the relaxers and gazers segments identified by Frochot (2005), and the independent ruralists segment of Kastenholz, Davis, and Paul (1999). Furthermore, Frisvoll (2013) found that a common reoccurring motive of tourists at a folk museum and two farms (heritage and goat farm) was nostalgia.

The consumption of rural tourism services may also serve a "nostalgia" for natural life or "the past" or for the place where the consumer was born and raised (Skuras et al., 2006, p.185).

Indeed, Creighton (2015) made reference to the accompanying collective nostalgia of rural areas as a reaction against industrial anomie. According to him, the rural setting acts as a desire to return to a specific geographical place, really reflecting a desire for a past time. Scenes showing tourists in close encounter with animals and picturesque rural settings in the study of Daugstad (2008), evoke a rural idyll and a sense of nostalgia. While describing "the nostalgic voyage", Creighton (1997, p. 241) noted that in major cities of Japan commercial interests offer pseudotravel experiences such as festivals which are a feature of community lives in rural areas/small villages. Also, ancestry research and nostalgia, act as driving force for visitors from Israel and the U.S to the rural areas of Romania where Jews used to form a large proportion of the communities there (Iorio & Corsale, 2010). Furthermore, key contents of the nostalgia and harmony attribute were found in the study of Zhou (2014) to be: childhood memory, senses of the rural, and the innocence/friendliness of the rural. In southern Pennsylvania, the economy of the Amish region "has been converted to the peddling of rural nostalgia" (Bunce, 2005, p. 108), such as through the restoration of certain villages. Nostalgic railway journeys in the countryside, such as of Britain, offer to the enthusiasts a unique experience accompanied by the smell of coal-generated steam and the sound of a locomotive's whistle (The Telegraph, 2012). Furthermore, the official site of the famous lake district in England, encourages visitors to join them "for a summer of nostalgia" at the Abbot Hall Art Gallery in order to discover the popular culture of the 60's by listening to sixties music, while enjoying sixties themed food (Lake District National Park, 2018).

Even so, limited attention has been given to the deeper understanding of nostalgia from the supply rural tourism perspective. In particular, the possibility of a deliberately directed nostalgic arousal amongst rural visitors by rural tourism stakeholders, is yet to be explored. The present study seeks to identify whether rural tourism providers seek (intentionally or otherwise) to evoke nostalgia amongst their visitors. It may be argued that rural tourism owners believe that the rural setting bears a nostalgic character (Creighton, 2015) in itself, without them having to further trigger 'nostalgia'. Even so, studies indicate a purposely directed nostalgic stimulation by marketers (Marchegiani & Phau, 2011) through various cues. It is this aim that the present study seeks to address. By doing so, it contributes to the understanding of nostalgia as a point of differentiation in a crowded marketplace (Hamilton & Wagner, 2014). It also answers calls for an inadequate comprehension of the notion (Stephan et al., 2015) also

within the context of tourism (Yeh et al., 2012). The study provides useful guidance to tourism stakeholders on how to trigger the human senses through various elements, thus promoting nostalgic emotions to their visitors.

3.2. Study method and research questions

The main aim of the study is to identify whether rural tourism providers seek, intentionally or otherwise, to evoke “nostalgia” amongst their visitors. The study targeted rural tourism stakeholders who were asked questions that were general in their frame; For instance: “What is your understanding of the term ‘nostalgia?’”, “Do you find the term as something positive, or negative for an individual?”, “Do you believe that ‘nostalgia’ particularly, drives visitors to the countryside?”, “In your opinion, can something or someone trigger ‘nostalgia’ of a visitor in the countryside?”, “In your opinion, how can this be done?- Can you provide any specific examples?”.

In more detail, the study was directed by the need to illuminate existing knowledge on the concept of nostalgia. The notion had previously been examined from a consumption/demand and rural tourist perspective (Uriely et al., 2003). The present study focused on the suppliers' side and the likelihood of stakeholders in eliciting nostalgia. Through an exploratory approach, our research centred on rural tourism suppliers' perceptions of the concept of nostalgia. Specifically, we attempted to explore stakeholders' perceptions over their understanding of nostalgia, their views regarding nostalgia's role and actions taken to trigger nostalgia. Given its exploratory nature, a qualitative research strategy was deemed more appropriate for examining the particular notion (see Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). In-depth semi-structured interviews were performed with suppliers of the rural tourism product of Cyprus. The list published by the ‘Cyprus Agrotourism Company’ was consulted. Other methods were not employed, since these would have not added further value to the study; For instance, observations are mainly used when exploring consumers' perspectives (e.g. Russell, 2008). Since the research aimed to investigate an inherently qualitative issue, purposive sampling was employed. This ensured that a wide spectrum of views was obtained (Miles & Huberman, 1994) from different rural tourism stakeholders that would meet the objectives of the study (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Hence, the study targeted differing rural tourism sectors; for instance, rural tourism accommodation establishments, food and beverage outlets and a rural community center. It was anticipated that these particular (rural tourism) stakeholders would be able to provide in-depth responses to the aforementioned questions of the study, given that visitors may be driven to the countryside for nostalgic purposes. Furthermore, the setting of an authentic (traditional non much altered) accommodation and restaurant establishment, could have allowed the sense of nostalgia to emerge for its visitors. Additionally, obtaining views from differing rural tourism organisations would have allowed us to examine in more depth the notion; Such as, to identify which precise triggers are used to stimulate nostalgia. Interviewees who were randomly selected from these sectors were initially contacted by a member of the research team via telephone. The researcher informed them of the purpose of the study and requested their participation. Those who agreed to participate, were interviewed at a later stage in a time and place convenient to them (for example, their office). Overall, 25 rural tourism stakeholders, including owners/managers of key public and private rural tourism establishments and organisations, agreed to participate in the study. More specifically, the views of the following informants are presented in the study: eight owners/managers of rural tourism accommodation establishments, the owners of two small rural hotels, the owner of a boutique hotel, six owners of tavern restaurants, two owners of two restaurants, three owners of coffee shops in the countryside, the owner of a chocolate workshop, a donkey farm owner and the division manager of a community center (Events department). The information collection occurred between May2017 and July 2017.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 min, and notes were taken before, during, and after the interviews to capture verbal and non-verbal aspects of the interviews. The study ended once a saturation stage was reached in which new findings reinforced those that have already been collected (Suri, 2011). Frame analysis was used to analyse data; That is, emerging topics were grouped into interrelated themes following a coding scheme. Key themes were identified through a careful examination of transcripts and notes from the interviews. The attainment of such rigorous processes, and the implementation of verification strategies, aimed at maintaining reliability and validity of qualitative findings (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). In more detail, blocks of verbatim text were copied, re-organised, and cross-referenced to allow the identification of thematic categories. Sub-categories also emerged, which were combined with pre-identified themes. This allowed deeper elaboration on key issues that encourage evidence-based understanding (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Two expert researchers assisted with this process, by reviewing information derived from the interviews, cross-checking the findings and reporting results through thick descriptions, to ensure validity in qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Study outcomes are presented as follows, in a similar format as in other studies (e.g. Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

4. Study outcomes

4.1. Understanding of nostalgia and its beneficial outcomes

The interpretation of nostalgia by stakeholders allowed an understanding of how they perceive the notion, and whether this influences potential awareness of its beneficial outcomes. Almost all respondents regard nostalgia as a positive notion that can be explained as the reminiscing of someone's past. More specifically, it is regarded as a ‘personal’ term that can be felt differently from one person to another according to his/her own experiences. Reference was made by interviewees about the past, as well as a particular (rural) setting, such as a village. For instance, a coffee shop owner said:

Nostalgia brings back positive memories from our past, from our past childhood, and the life that was in the villages.

Respondents placed more emphasis on the invisible, non-secular character of the notion, such as for instance: ‘Nostalgia is intangible and can only be felt’ (rural tourism accommodation owner). Respondents generally referred to pleasant or even disagreeable emotions, as a consequence of nostalgia. More specifically they referred to a remembrance of the past, thus betraying a bittersweet character of nostalgia, as noted in previous studies (Cheung et al., 2013). In more detail, respondents mentioned certain positive and negative emotions (e.g. ‘joy’ and ‘sadness’) while explaining their understanding of the notion. In fact, according to their views, a particular place based on their personal experiences may trigger joyful innocent childhood memories. Despite that, it may also trigger sad memories as a couple of respondents stressed, based on their individual experiences. One interviewee (rural tourism accommodation owner) pointed out the negative results of nostalgia, arguing that the term has a negative aspect by valance.

I find the term as a rather negative one, since wishing to go back to a familiar place might bring back to me negative memories.

However, the vast majority of the respondents recognise the beneficial outcomes of nostalgia, such as the linkage of nostalgia with a repeated clientele. However, one disagreed on the assumption that nostalgia acts as a driving force for individuals in the rural setting. According to the majority, the creation of a ‘nostalgic atmosphere’ gives a reason for visitors to come back (to the countryside and a particular establishment); This is because they wish to relive that precise pleasant experience. Some of them made reference to certain repeaters (mainly domestic visitors) who regularly pay them a visit throughout the year.

One of the main reasons being – as their guests divulged to them – the *relying* of certain traditions and festivities that have deteriorated in urban areas. In fact, respondents made specific reference to domestic and mature visitors (in this case, those above the age of 40) who have grown up in a village. These visitors wish to relive their childhood through a nostalgic experience by ‘*relying*’ important countryside events: ‘*I have guests who come here [rural tourism accommodation establishment] every Easter to attend the festivities*’.

The close interaction with guests (which rural tourism allows, as respondents stressed), results in a special host/guest bond. It furthermore leads to ‘*some interesting conversations (with guests)*’ as one pointed out. Through such personal discussions, they find that the domestic tourist is more prone (compared to the international tourist) to seek a rural tourism nostalgic experience. For instance, based on interviewees, domestic tourists may request from them, specific information about old practices and customs of the area, also, stories and ‘glories’ of the past which might have included their ancestors. Informants also acknowledged the craving to *go back (in time)*, particularly among domestic tourists. Because time travel is not actually possible, they choose to visit such places in which they feel as if they have stepped back in time. A respondent shared the opinion of one of his guests:

Nostalgia makes me go back to a humbler era, when things were simpler ...

Additionally, the need for *belongingness* was brought up. That is, visitors wishing to come in touch with the history of the place, to feel part of the same (rural) group and experience erased (by modernity) long-held customs. This is predominantly the case for locals (but also certain international visitors), as one respondent highlighted; through past rural/village visitations they came in contact with the cultural manifestations (that is, events) of the particular destination:

Some of my guests regard the village as their own, although they haven't lived or are descendent from here. They say ‘our’ village when they refer to it. I find that this is very nice. They also regard me as part of their family. I do too ... People visit our establishment [rural tourism accommodation establishment] to feel part of a family and come closer to our traditions since they reside in cities that have started to forget our customs.

For another, it is the *alternativism* that the countryside offerings (constructed/natural environment) provide, as a contrast to the ‘typical’ tourist product. Also, the nostalgic emotion that may be evoked through the consumption of these, such as in the case of an rural tourism venue (accommodation) owner who said:

I have guests who visit the countryside and stay in my establishment in order to escape, as they say, from the mainstream tourism product, which is the ‘sea’ and ‘sun’, simply because they feel nostalgic about being closer to nature, and the countryside.

Thus, rural tourism stakeholders acknowledge certain benefits of nostalgia, such as the fact that it fosters social connectivity. This is because it encourages discussions of the past and it connects people through a family belongingness sense. They also recognise that it promotes closer relationships and that it fosters rural tourism re-visitations; This is based on the fact that guests (particularly domestic) request information about the past, while repeaters wish to relive special events/festivities throughout the year.

4.2. The (un/intentional) triggers of nostalgia

Being certain that nostalgia benefits rural tourism, most respondents agree that they intentionally try to trigger the nostalgic sense amongst their visitors. Even so, two respondents specifically noted that they do not have such intention, with one noting:

The vintage décor is my personal preference; It might create a nostalgic feeling to my guests, but this was not done intentionally.

Of note, however, is the fact that respondents regard it as an *easier task* to ‘trigger’ nostalgia amongst domestic visitors rather than international ones. All respondents seem to agree that nostalgia may be mostly ‘felt’ by locals on the assumption that these might have lived in the countryside, or had experiences directly linked with a particular village. In more detail, informants did not make any comments implying that international visitors do not feel nostalgic while visiting the particular rural setting. Even so, based on their responses, it seems that there is a more concrete notion of nostalgia expressed by the domestic guests; This is based on the fact that domestic guests are able to associate particular elements with their former years-such as specific (traditional) objects, that perhaps their grandfathers used. Previous studies have shown that locals are driven to certain rural settings with nostalgia being attached to their experience-i.e. the case of *kibbutzim* (Uriely et al., 2003). Even so, it was mentioned that it may also be possible to trigger nostalgia for international visitors; This may be achieved through the organisation of traditional events. It is also interesting that all respondents agree that it is impossible to evoke nostalgic emotions to their guests prior to their visit. Even so, there is evidence to suggest that nostalgia may shape the experiential value before an individual had a chance to experience the destination (Leong et al., 2015a). Respondents claimed that they intentionally try to trigger nostalgia once their guests are on their premises, yet not before or after. For instance, engaging their guests into traditional activities. As an interviewee stressed:

We [manager of small rural tourism hotel] are trying to ‘create nostalgia’ by organising activities such as baking bread in a traditional oven, donkey riding and local food tasting. Hence visitors have the chance to receive an authentic experience that will be memorable and will make them want to pay us a visit again.

According to informants, triggering nostalgia is achieved by focusing mainly on ‘authentic’ and (rural) place-related elements. Even so, the extent to which such decorative elements are used by informants, was not revealed. It may well be that certain elements may disrupt an authentic rural feeling and turn the setting into something artificial, or even hinder the creation of nostalgia. For instance, an “old picture” of a deceased person in guest room, may evoke negative feelings to the guest. Nonetheless, the majority of the participants stated that certain elements found in the countryside may act as nostalgia triggers. These included the constructed (that is, buildings) and natural (that is, landscape) rural setting. Nonetheless, they deliberately use other elements (i.e. decorative items), in their effort to enhance the cultural awareness amongst their visitors, promote their history, and essentially trigger nostalgia. Similar views are shared by the respondents; A restaurant owner highlighted the importance of a long-held practice of providing hospitality to guests:

With the providence of a hospitable and warm service, as well as the surrounding environment, nostalgia can actually be felt by visitors ... The decoration of the establishments can certainly create a feeling of remembering the former, such as by including artefacts that can be found in a typical traditional household.

This warm service/hospitality also seems to impact on those international visitors (based on certain respondents) who have been to Cyprus in the past and their visit to rural tourism establishments is triggered by that search of nostalgia. That is, a particular setting and a kind welcoming gesture, may trigger fond memories of the past in which a guest experienced a warm welcome, in an analogous setting. One respondent shared the same view as another one (restaurant owner), that: ‘*nostalgia cannot be necessarily created by the owner, but rather from the actual establishment, such as through decorations*’. Yet, several others emphasised ‘storytelling’ as an additional intangible

element that may be used to trigger nostalgia amongst visitors; One rural tourism (accommodation) owner said the following:

I casually chat with my guests and tell them stories from my childhood to enable them to understand a bit more about the local culture; Especially if they are not locals. I encourage them to also tell me stories about their own past. This makes them feel nostalgic about their childhood.

Hence, it may be concluded that most rural tourism providers believe that they trigger nostalgia amongst their visitors. This is done through the display of (physical) cues in their venues, as well as through other intangible elements (discussions of the past). However, the way in which nostalgia is triggered seems to be based on two factors; One is, the (unintentional) provision of cues found in the countryside. The other one bears a deliberate deed, although not necessarily one directed towards the triggering of nostalgia; Instead, it covers the personal needs of the owner for a vintage ambiance or to enhance cultural place awareness for visitors.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study is driven by the lack of academic attention on nostalgia within the tourism context (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016) and by calls for further insights into nostalgic encounters through the interaction with places (Kitson & McHugh, 2015). The present paper sought to explore nostalgia from the perspective of stakeholders since this has escaped researchers' attention. Although our findings have not assisted much in distinguishing clearly the construct of nostalgia, it has nonetheless enabled us to reach conclusions on how to trigger this state to visitors. Besides, our overall aim was to explore whether rural tourism providers deliberately trigger nostalgia by acknowledging its beneficial (for them) outcomes. In other words, we set out to explore empirically, the assertion that tourism suppliers intentionally trigger nostalgia within a rural setting that offers such emotional (nostalgic) experiences anyway (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

5.1. Nostalgia- a beneficial notion for rural tourism stakeholders

Although most interviewees admit that they intentionally promote nostalgic emotions, they agree that what the rural setting evokes in someone, acts as a nostalgic trigger by itself anyway; That is, despite tranquillity that may bring someone in a relaxing mood, specific elements found in rural areas, such as traditional buildings and objects, may trigger the notion. In general, they regard it as a positive concept; nevertheless, one interviewee characterised nostalgia as a negative emotion by referring to negative memories and emotions (i.e. 'grief') that a particular place may evoke. However, no reference was made to any sites that might be associated with the *macabre* (Sharpley, 2009a); Or, references to any possible nostalgic encounters this may evoke, as found in previous studies (Cheal & Griffin, 2013). This could reflect the lack of a large-scale historical site; Rural tourism stakeholders could examine the possibility of creating such a site; This could augment the visitor experience by creating and presenting a 'nostalgic cultural image' rather than the more brutal site of war (Brown, 2013). Even so, informants acknowledge the beneficial outcomes of nostalgia towards their establishments since they believe it may foster repeat clientele. Through discussions with their guests, they recognise visitors' desire to visit a place that has been untouched by modernity, gifted with unspoiled nature and retained its traditional character. According to them, the countryside allows people to feel that they have '*stepped back in time*'. Interviewees seem to agree that the nostalgic effects are mostly felt by locals rather than the international visitor. This assumption rests on the fact that they '*did not grow up here*' and apparently were not exposed to the same cultural manifestations and '*ways of life*' of a particular place. The assumption is supported mainly by the interest and the enthusiasm that locals exhibit towards traditions and stories of the

past. As an informant pointed out:

Most tourists might not be linked with the establishment they wish to visit, or even the tradition of the island [referring mainly to international visitors] since they did not grow up here, and were not exposed to our traditions and religious practices.

However, they recognise the importance of repeated international visitors who wish to '*relive*' the culture and the warm hospitality they had experienced at a certain place. The hospitality element, which based on stakeholders is still provided in villages, seems to constitute an important part of 'old' Cypriot practices of warm welcoming (in rural settings). According to the respondents, they have international visitors who may also pay them a revisit, keen to create special bonds and seek information about the owner's/destination's past. Although nostalgia is felt by people of different ages (Hunt & Johns, 2013) hence not necessarily restricted to a feeling experienced by the elders, it was mentioned that locals are more prone to *reliving the past*. Owners make reference to such visitors who ask questions about the past and get excited about sharing their childhood stories with them.

Participants also acknowledged specific constructive and positive nostalgic impacts. For instance, the fact that it increases social connectedness and inclusion; More specifically, respondents made clear reference to conversations with their guests and especially locals. These entailed stories of the past and the sharing common practices/traditions, hence fostering a sense of *belongingness*. Hosts also made reference to particular visitors who after a long and regular relationship over the years, confessed to them that they '*feel like part of their family*'. While discussing common stories of the past, make both parties (stakeholders and visitors), become nostalgic. Even so, the present study supports a relationship between nostalgia and in-group orientation. It cannot nevertheless, confirm out-group consequences, as suggested by others (Smeekes, 2015).

5.2. Nostalgia in/tangible triggers

According to respondents, the creation of a '*nostalgic atmosphere*' fosters an emotional bond with their guests. Although some respondents stated that '*nostalgia cannot be necessarily created by the owner, but rather from the actual establishment*', they feel that discussions about the past may trigger nostalgia (Davalos et al., 2015). In fact, stakeholders believe that they trigger nostalgia (consciously or otherwise) through various socio-psychological mechanisms. For instance, the '*provision of warm service*', the '*active involvement in certain (traditional) activities*', and '*casual chats*', which are believed to make visitors who have experienced analogous incidents in their former years, become nostalgic. Other tangible triggers are used, such as the display of old objects and pictures. Also, through traditional food. Hence, it seems that there is a division of stakeholders' role when it comes to triggering nostalgia. That is, certain stakeholders, may have active and deliberate behaviour towards nostalgia enhancement. However, others may have a passive role, with no intentionality hidden in, for example, their display of old objects to trigger nostalgia. Regardless of their role, food, pictures, retro objects, and social interactions may still trigger nostalgia (Leong et al., 2015a; Sloan, 2015; Vignolles & Pitchon, 2014). This non-purposive/purposive intentionality to trigger nostalgia and the actual behaviour of stakeholders is clearly presented in Fig. 1.

This study cannot confirm a complete deliberate nurturing of nostalgia by rural tourism stakeholders, for three main reasons. Firstly, the respondents found that the particular rural setting bears a nostalgic (Creighton, 2015) character by itself. Secondly, a particular venue owner may not necessarily believe that nostalgia acts as a motivational driving force for visitors. Therefore, he will not intentionally try to evoke this emotion. Thirdly, nostalgic objects and vintage décor may be used simply because they fulfil the personal preferences of the owner. In this case, the owner does not purposely seek to nurture nostalgic thoughts to visitors. Whether done intentionally or otherwise, the past

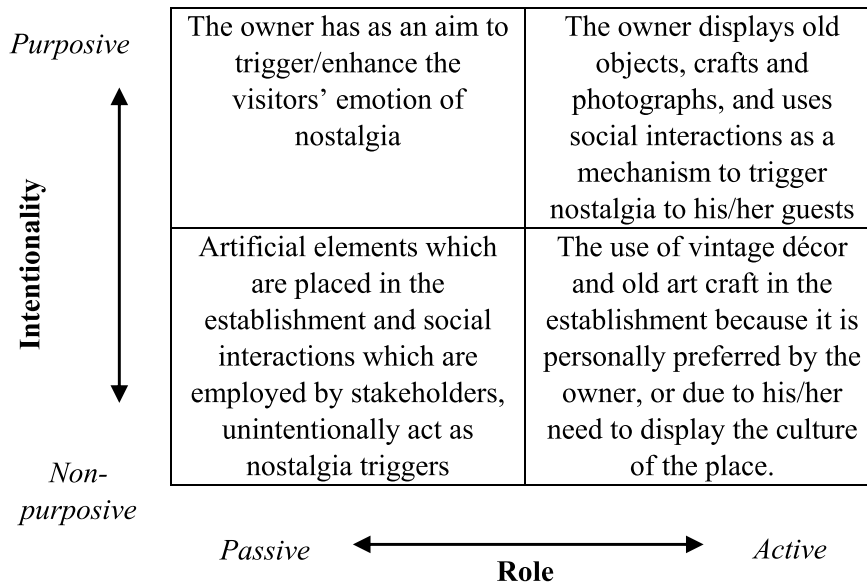


Fig. 1. Rural tourism stakeholders' behaviour towards nostalgia.

is 'reanimated' (Bazin, 2013) by rural tourism stakeholders. This is done through the 'decoration of the establishments' and exhibition of old objects, which act as external stimuli of nostalgic emotions (Boym, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2015).

5.3. Triggering the senses

As a result of the above outcomes, a graphical representation that summarises (and illustrates) the different elements that stakeholders may use to trigger nostalgia through the visual/non-visual senses is proposed (Fig. 2). In more detail, although rural setting triggers may act

as nostalgia stimulators, stakeholders may likewise intentionally and actively trigger nostalgia by targeting certain in/tangible elements. It was mentioned in the interviews that nostalgia is not a driving force that leads visitors to the countryside, although evidence from previous studies suggests otherwise (Timothy & Ron, 2013; Uriely et al., 2003). Furthermore, respondents made no reference to specific mechanisms that have been noted in other studies to generate nostalgia, such as, scents (Leong et al., 2015a). Also, participants trust that nostalgia is felt by visitors while at a particular place/venue, and not prior the actual tourist experience.

Even so, there are certain study limitations; Firstly, the rural setting

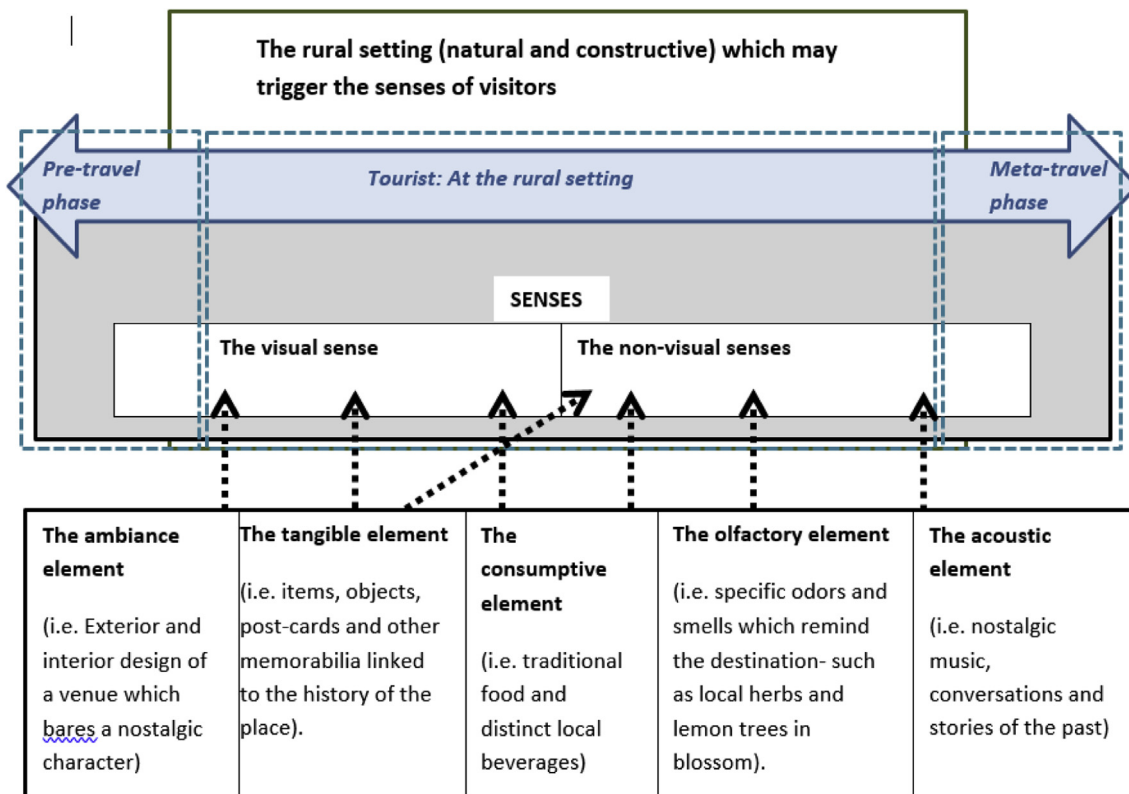


Fig. 2. Elements to trigger nostalgia.

of Cyprus was used as an appropriate place/context to address this study's aim. Even so, it could be that rural stakeholders in other regions/countries, use differently the notion of nostalgia, for their advantage. Secondly, although qualitative studies do not rely on amounts to reach conclusions, the limited choice of stakeholders per se, did not allow comparisons between differing rural tourism entrepreneurs, their ages, gender, or sub-regions within the destination. Thirdly, since this study focused on tourism stakeholders' views/perspectives and actions only, findings do not contribute much in gaining deeper meanings of nostalgia. Lastly, linked to the previous limitation, this study failed to distinguish sharply and clearly the construct of nostalgia, compared to other interrelated constructs, such as authenticity.

Nevertheless, there are certain managerial implications which are derived from the aforementioned. Firstly, it is suggested that rural tourism stakeholders make use of decorations in their premises to stimulate nostalgia amongst their guests; Examples may include, vintage advertisement signs, tea pots and traditional coffee cups. Yet, items not linked with the particular destination and setting, must be avoided, since they may create a non-authentic and artificial atmosphere. Also, there are certain items that should not be used; For instance, an old photo of a deceased person, may evoke other negative feelings rather than nostalgia. Even so, nostalgia can also be triggered prior and after the visitor experience at the rural setting. For instance, stakeholders could incorporate a discrete nostalgic character on their websites as a promotional driving tool for potential nostalgic seekers, as identified in previous studies (e.g. Russell, 2008). The homepage may for instance include a specific nostalgic citation from a former visitor. Or a picture, showing how the establishment was in the past. Even so, adopting a complete vintage as such character on their websites is to be avoided. This is because the establishment may give the impression that it targets and accommodates only specific types of visitors, and as Farmaki (2012) notes, people travel to rural areas for varying reasons (Farmaki, 2012). Respondents also made no reference to any commercial nostalgic items, despite these being used to create a sense of nostalgia. These may be provided hence, along with other specific items (e.g. vintage cards), which may act as a nostalgic commodification product. Additionally, act as stimulators of nostalgic emotions during the meta-travel (visitor) phase. Stakeholders should seriously consider that nostalgia not only drives visitors to the countryside, but also augments their experience. This is established through a mental connection with an idealistic past, hence should purposely aim to trigger this sense while the tourist is at the destination. Such as, through appropriate vintage décor (of establishments), and the organisation of events-of nostalgic character. Exhibitions of nostalgic appeal with a retro theme organised by stakeholders, is another example. Old photos' displays may enthrall people who once lived in the countryside, and now reside in urban areas. For instance, in West Cumbria, they compiled a collection of old pictures of Nativities held in schools of the region, over the years (Whitehaven news, 2017). Also, the creation of further products by the destination, such as the aforementioned railways and trains of nostalgic character, is another example. Official regional/destination bodies, may take a more active role in promoting these products, activities and events through their websites. Service may also be adjusted accordingly, so that nostalgia is targeted and triggered (i.e.) through hospitable attitudes, the sharing of former stories with visitors, and the provision of historical information.

Theoretical implications also arise from the findings. First, our study has contributed to the further understanding of the relatively unexplored notion of nostalgia, as well as its relationship with places and its people. Findings fill a theoretical gap of suppliers' perspectives and actions towards a seemingly important driving vigour of people to consume certain touristic experiences. In fact, this is the first study to examine in such depth the relationship between tourism and nostalgia. Nonetheless, it provides a theoretical foundation (through the proposed conceptual diagram) for further investigations of the notion. The study also contributes to the existing literature of emotions by providing

insights into an overlooked psycho-social emotion.

In conclusion, this study has firstly identified that rural tourism stakeholders regard nostalgia as a positive notion that carries a melancholic charm. Secondly, these stakeholders recognise its constructive nature, on the basis that it acts as a 'remedy' to the bygone past; This is because it fosters social interactions and promotes human and place emotional bonds. Thirdly, although stakeholders provide in/tangible triggers, one cannot conclude that they necessarily and deliberately nurture nostalgia. For instance, their need to share 'stories of the past' with their guests is not an indicator of a deliberate nostalgic arousal for their visitors. Finally, it may be argued whether they fully understand the beneficial outcomes of nostalgia towards the destination and their venues. That is, stakeholders do not use nostalgic triggers to their complete capacity. Any potential endeavours to promote nostalgia are placed within a time frame in which the visitor is at the destination, not during the pre- or meta-travel phase. This, in turn, suggests that further research is necessary to identify which precise cues may trigger nostalgia prior to/after the tourist experience has taken place. Also, further research is needed to appreciate which cues may trigger nostalgia for the international visitor who has not been exposed to particular (that is, destination-specific) experiences in the past. Nevertheless, this study recognises that the rural tourism sector is not promoting nostalgia to its full potential. Therefore, is being deprived of benefitting from its extensive positive impacts. This may conceivably be due the fact that stakeholders do not fully grasp its beneficial effects towards the destination/organisations. Also, because they may feel that the rural setting and the constructed element that it carries, are sufficient to secure nostalgic arousal. This consequently opens up some exciting avenues for further explorations to appreciate further the topic. The study has demonstrated that nostalgia may be further nurtured even in such settings that charmingly promote a *past* sense.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.05.010>.

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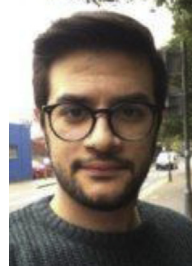
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