INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL ROUTES AS A DRIVER FOR CULTURAL TOURISM PROMOTION – EXAMPLE OF THE EUROPEAN PILGRIMAGE ROUTE

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Purpose: To investigate how cultural routes, specifically the European Pilgrimage Route, contribute to the promotion and development of cultural tourism in Europe.

Design/methodology/approach: Specific pilgrimage routes within Europe were analysed to understand the varied impacts of cultural tourism on local communities and cultural heritage preservation. The analysis of different routes highlighted the different tourism development strategies.

Findings: The study has demonstrated that cemetery routes play a significant role in promoting cultural tourism. These routes offer an opportunity for tourists to explore unique cultural and historical narratives, providing an alternative form of engagement with a region's heritage. Although awareness of cemetery routes is currently low, their inclusion in broader cultural tourism initiatives can contribute to the diversification and enhancement of tourism offerings, stimulating interest and expanding the cultural tourism market.

Research limitations/implications: The research focuses on a specific pilgrimage route rather than all pilgrimage routes across Europe, which limits generalizability. Addressing potential limitations of the study, such as the relatively small sample size, may not fully capture the diversity of tourist perspectives, and the limited geographical scope, focusing predominantly on Lithuania, additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces bias, as participants have provided socially desirable responses rather than accurate reflections of their preferences.

Practical implications: Based on the findings, tourism boards and cultural route managers can develop more targeted and effective promotional campaigns to attract visitors to pilgrimage routes.

Social implications: The research can raise awareness about the importance of cultural heritage, specifically pilgrimage routes, as part of Europe's shared cultural identity. By promoting these routes, society is encouraged to value and preserve local traditions, historical landmarks, and cultural practices.

Originality/value: The paper offers a contemporary examination of pilgrimage routes as drivers of cultural tourism in the context of today's tourism dynamics. It highlights the shift from purely spiritual journeys to multifaceted tourism experiences that include cultural, social, and economic components. This new approach contrasts with traditional studies that focus primarily on religious aspects, expanding the discussion to include how these routes function as part of the broader cultural tourism ecosystem.

1. Introduction

Relevance of the topic. Cultural tourism has its roots in ancient Egypt, where people travelled to admire architectural marvels, artistic achievements, and religious sites, marking the beginnings of pilgrimage. Even then, routes connected people, history, and culture, though cultural tourism as a defined concept emerged much later.

Cultural routes enhance heritage value through artistic and cultural initiatives, serving as tools for promoting history, notable figures, and European values. The European Cultural Routes Program, established in 1987 with the Santiago de Compostela Declaration, has increased the appeal of cultural tourism across Europe.

While Europe boasts many cultural routes, Lithuania has only one national route: the 487-kilometer M.K. Čiurlionis route, dedicated to the artist and composer. The promotion of cultural tourism is a priority in Lithuanian government strategies, yet thematic routes like cemetery routes remain undeveloped.

Lithuania's cultural resources include archaeological, architectural, and artistic sites, as well as mythological, historical, and memorial landmarks, such as ancient cult sites, historic cemeteries, and burial places of notable figures. Cemeteries, as cultural and historical sites, reveal the past, represent the present, and offer insights into the future.

The European Cemeteries Route, certified by the Council of Europe since 2010, connects 63 cemeteries across 50 cities in 20 countries, offering tours and events that highlight local and European heritage. Despite its rich cemetery culture, Lithuania has not joined this initiative, missing an opportunity to develop a cohesive thematic route that could attract visitors and showcase its unique heritage.

Novelty of the Study. In recent years, shifts in the preferences of tourism consumers have become evident. Tourists increasingly seek unique and personalized experiences rather than merely replicating the experiences of others. In response to this demand, tourism offerings are gradually adapting to meet these evolving expectations. Scholars such as Ščiglienė (2014; 2017), Graf and Popesku (2016), Kuizinaitė and Radzevičius (2020), Abramavičienė (2020), as well as Moropoulou, Lampropoulos, and Vythoulka (2021), have explored the benefits and impacts of cultural routes. Additionally, researchers like Pécsek (2015) and Diogo (2017) evaluate cemetery tourism as an engaging cultural exhibition for tourists, offering both natural and cultural activities.

While cemetery tourism is rightly categorized under heritage and cultural tourism, there is a notable absence of Lithuanian studies addressing the challenges and opportunities of cemetery routes. Therefore, the **research problem** addresses the question: how can cultural routes, exemplified by cemetery routes, promote cultural tourism?

Research object - cultural routes as a factor in promoting cultural tourism.

Research aim is to evaluate the factors that promote cultural tourism using the example of the European Cemeteries Route.

Research objectives:
1. To analyse the concept of cultural tourism.
2. To present the concept of cultural routes as a tool for tourism promotion.
3. To investigate the factors promoting cemetery routes as a cultural tourism direction for Lithuanian tourists.

Research methods: the study employs analysis of scholarly literature, legal documents, websites, and other sources. Empirical methods include a quantitative survey and a qualitative semi-structured expert interview. Data analysis, systematization, graphical representation, and formulation of conclusions and recommendations are also utilized.

2. Analysis of the Concept of Cultural Tourism

For thousands of years, people have visited locations preserving remnants of ancient cultures and civilizations. Historically, pilgrims were akin to modern tourists, with early travel primarily focused on religious pilgrimages—such as Christian journeys to the Holy Land or Muslim pilgrimages to Mecca. By the 17th century, wealthier individuals travelled for cultural and educational purposes. The rise of European travel during this period led to the development of inns, hotels, restaurants, and transport infrastructure, though the primary aim remained cultural exploration. Over time, museums, exhibitions, and cultural events further incentivized tourism.

Today, tourism is deeply intertwined with culture, creating a dynamic and mutually enriching relationship. Cultural tourism emerged as a distinct concept in the late 20th century, emphasizing visits to historical landmarks, art collections, and cultural events. However, contemporary cultural tourism extends beyond visiting iconic sites. Tourists increasingly seek engagement with local communities, exploring their traditions, customs, and beliefs. Culture is thus a core driver of tourism, shaping destinations' attractiveness and enhancing their unique identity.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018) emphasizes the symbiosis between culture and tourism. Arts, crafts, and traditions at risk of being forgotten are revitalized through tourism, while monuments and cultural assets benefit from preservation efforts funded by tourist activities. Abandoned or neglected relics often find new life through visitor interest.

Richards (2018) highlights that while cultural tourism is a growing segment, it is not easily defined or isolated as a market. He notes that cultural consumption often represents a small proportion of tourist spending; for example, in Venice, tourists allocate most expenditures to accommodation (45%) and shopping (21%), with only 2% spent on cultural activities. Similarly, Gómez (2018) argues that "ideal" cultural tourists form a minor share of the market, with most visitors prioritizing leisure and entertainment over cultural motives.

Despite its complex definition, cultural tourism fundamentally involves consuming various cultural expressions such as heritage, art, and folklore (Mousavi et al., 2016). ICOMOS provides one of the most comprehensive definitions, describing cultural tourism as activities that allow people to explore diverse lifestyles, customs, traditions, and environments, as well as architectural, historical, or archaeological sites from previous eras (Csapo, 2012). This form of tourism differs from recreational tourism by emphasizing understanding and appreciation of the destination's cultural character.

Cultural tourism today includes creative experiences where tourists actively participate in cultural activities like painting, dancing, photography, or cooking. Smith et al. (2010) define cultural tourism as travel motivated by cultural assets, events, and practices, encompassing heritage tourism, artistic tourism, and interactions with local communities. This form of tourism offers educational, creative, and entertainment experiences through active or passive engagement.

The essence of tourism lies in transforming resources into products. In cultural tourism, resources are consumed only when prepared and marketed as attractions. Dujmović et al. (2016) identify three ways cultural resources are presented: as activities (e.g., tours of historic sites, museums, or cultural events), as media (e.g., documentaries or films), and as goods (e.g., books, art, handicrafts, or souvenirs). These transformations enable cultural resources to drive tourism while contributing to their preservation and appreciation. Cultural tourism products are described in Table 1.

Table 1.
Cultural Tourism Products

Heritage tourism	• Building heritage, architectural and archaeological sites, world heritage sites, art, folklore, legends, historical events and personalities.
Themed cultural routes	• Routes based on historical, artistic, spiritual and religious, architectural, culinary and linguistic themes.
Cultural urban tourism	• Tourism in historic cities, modern cities and European Capitals of Culture.
Ethnic tourism	• Tourism that involves exploring local traditions, crafts, ethnic minorities or indigenous cultures.
Event tourism	• Attracting visitors to cultural, music and art festivals.
Religious tourism	• Attracting visitors to religious sites and buildings, shrines and pilgrimage routes, including visitors who are interested in religious sites for their architectural and cultural significance.
Creative cultural tourism	• Performing arts, visual arts, literature, cinema, audiovisual production, design and printed works.

Source: made by the authors according to Dujmović et al., 2016; Mousavi et al., 2016; Council of Europe, 2020; European Commission, 2022.

As illustrated in Table 1, researchers have identified seven distinct directions within cultural tourism. Notably, each of these directions can encompass thematic cultural routes, often spanning multiple countries. The primary objective of cultural tourism is to fulfill spiritual and intellectual needs while enhancing the development of cultural tourism frameworks. This includes visits to historical sites, museums, and art galleries, alongside the creation of tailored tourist itineraries (Dujmović et al., 2016).

In summary, tourism consumption patterns have evolved significantly over time. Once considered an elite activity, tourism has transformed into a fundamental leisure pursuit for the masses and arguably the world's largest employment sector. This shift has redefined the relationship between tourism and culture. As cultural consumption has grown, tourism has emerged as a vital form of cultural engagement, supported and promoted by local, national, and international institutions.

Cultural tourism distinguishes itself from other types of tourism, primarily through its motivations. It can be defined as a form of mobility aimed at broadening one's horizons by exploring artistic, architectural, or territorial heritage. The range of cultural products within this context is extensive, encompassing art, heritage, folklore, and a variety of other cultural expressions consumed by tourists. This evolution reflects changes in both the ways tourists consume culture and how cultural experiences are curated and presented to them. Consequently, cultural tourism continues to adapt, offering dynamic interactions between cultural heritage and tourism practices.

3. The Concept of Cultural Routes as a Factor in Promoting Tourism

Cultural routes make significant economic and social contributions, prompting countries to exert considerable effort to attract cultural tourists. Cultural tourism is not only growing economically (Kuizinaitė, Radzevičius, 2020) but also rapidly evolving in all aspects, with constant efforts to offer new experiences and create new travel destinations (Severo, 2018). This development has led to the creation of new tourism programs, which were previously unimaginable. These innovations respond to the increasing demand from tourists for new emotions and knowledge, seeking unusual and unique memories.

The analysis of scientific literature reveals that cultural routes encourage community involvement in cultural activities and raise awareness about shared cultural heritage. Cultural projects are also based on social principles, positioning cultural routes as sources of innovation and creativity, fostering the development of cultural tourism products and services (Paiva, Seabra, Abrantes, 2019). These routes enhance Europe's image globally, strengthen European cultural values validated through centuries of cultural exchange and creativity (Ciubotaru et al., 2015). European cultural routes foster artistic, cultural, commercial, and political ties between countries, and the Council of Europe views them as key tools for cultural initiatives and exchanges, promoting knowledge and ideas that transcend cultural and political barriers shaped by the major 20th-century conflicts (Ciubotaru et al., 2015).

In less developed or rural areas with limited financial and technological resources, cultural routes are valuable development tools, addressing local needs (Moropoulou et al., 2021). In rural areas, food and wine production are significant tourism attractions, stimulating local entrepreneurship and community initiatives. When cultural routes are linked to rural areas, the interconnections between various sectors become crucial for sustainable heritage use and innovation. Consequently, wine routes, in particular, are gaining increasing international attention and can drive regional development (Ferrara, Passarini, 2020).

Despite the European Commission's assertion that cultural routes contribute to regional economies and societies by operating on sustainable and ethical models, Graf and Popesku (2016) found that unless cultural heritage becomes a brand, it does not attract tourists. They argue that only a brand guarantees quality, ensuring tourists that each stop on the map—from restaurants to hotels—is associated with a form of local heritage and history. This requires collaboration among various stakeholders, coordinated by a brand representative. In remote areas, local heritage and culture serve as the primary source for territorial brand creation. In this regard, cultural routes present both a challenge and an opportunity for culture, science, tourism, and the economy, as they offer more effective branding and promotion than individual travel destinations. They foster innovation, creating something new and unique from available resources.

Cultural route development projects in Europe are subject to rigorous evaluation and selection. Uniform criteria apply to smaller territorial routes aiming to attract European travellers' attention. A cultural route must function as a cultural tourism product, possessing all necessary attributes and offering relevant content, information, and facilities for hospitality and accommodation services. Travelers seeking enjoyment, relaxation, and local culinary experiences must have access to these offerings (Ciubotaru et al., 2015).

Since 2010, new cultural routes in Europe have been certified. The Council of Europe's "Cultural Routes" program, as of 2021, includes 45 certified routes covering themes related to European memory, history, and heritage, contributing to the interpretation of today's European diversity. These routes include the Viking Routes, Hanseatic Routes, Mozart and Napoleon Routes, European Ceramics Route, Roman Emperor and Danube Wine Route, European Historic Gardens Route, and others. All cultural routes promote cross-border cultural cooperation across Europe (Ciubotaru et al., 2015).

The first cultural route concept emerged in 1987 with the Santiago de Compostela network, which played a symbolic role in European integration. Each year, tens of thousands of pilgrims travel to Santiago de Compostela. This route was designed to solidify core European cultural principles, including human rights, cultural democracy, European cultural diversity, identity practices, dialogue, and mutual exchange (Abramavičienė, 2020).

Currently, Lithuania is part of four European Council routes: the Way of St. James, the Jewish Cultural Heritage Route, the Iron Curtain Route, and the Impressionism Route. Lithuania is an integral part of the European network of these cultural routes. The Jewish heritage is widely spread across Europe, including archaeological sites, historic synagogues, cemeteries, ritual baths, Jewish quarters, monuments, and memorials. This route promotes understanding and appreciation of religious and everyday artefacts, acknowledging the essential role of the Jewish people in European history (Council of Europe, 2022).

In conclusion, cultural routes play a vital role in preserving Europe's rich cultural heritage. They serve as an effective means to promote cultural dialogue and international cooperation. Lithuania is part of the European network of cultural routes, joining four routes. Since 2010, new cultural routes have been certified in Europe, and the certification process for cultural routes in Lithuania was officially established only in late 2021. As such, Lithuania's M.K. Čiurlionis Cultural Route has not yet been certified.

Cemetery Route Tourism. In recent years, cultural tourism has emerged as one of the driving forces behind heritage preservation, and this trend has extended to cemetery tourism. Cemeteries are often referred to as open-air museums, as they represent a significant aspect of cultural heritage, increasingly attracting the attention of scholars, artists, and visitors. Many cemeteries feature impressive monuments that house important works of art, while others serve as repositories for numerous historical testimonies, earning them the designation of "open museums" (Pliberšek, Vrban, 2019). Cultural routes highlight the monumental and artistic-historical characteristics of cemeteries, defining them as "open museums", "museums under the

open sky", "microcosms", "local heritage sites" (Millán et al., 2019), "visitable objects", "meditation spaces", or "city-museums, tourist attractions" (Diogo, 2017). In other words, cemetery routes are presented as an alternative way to explore and discover the history and traditions of cities.
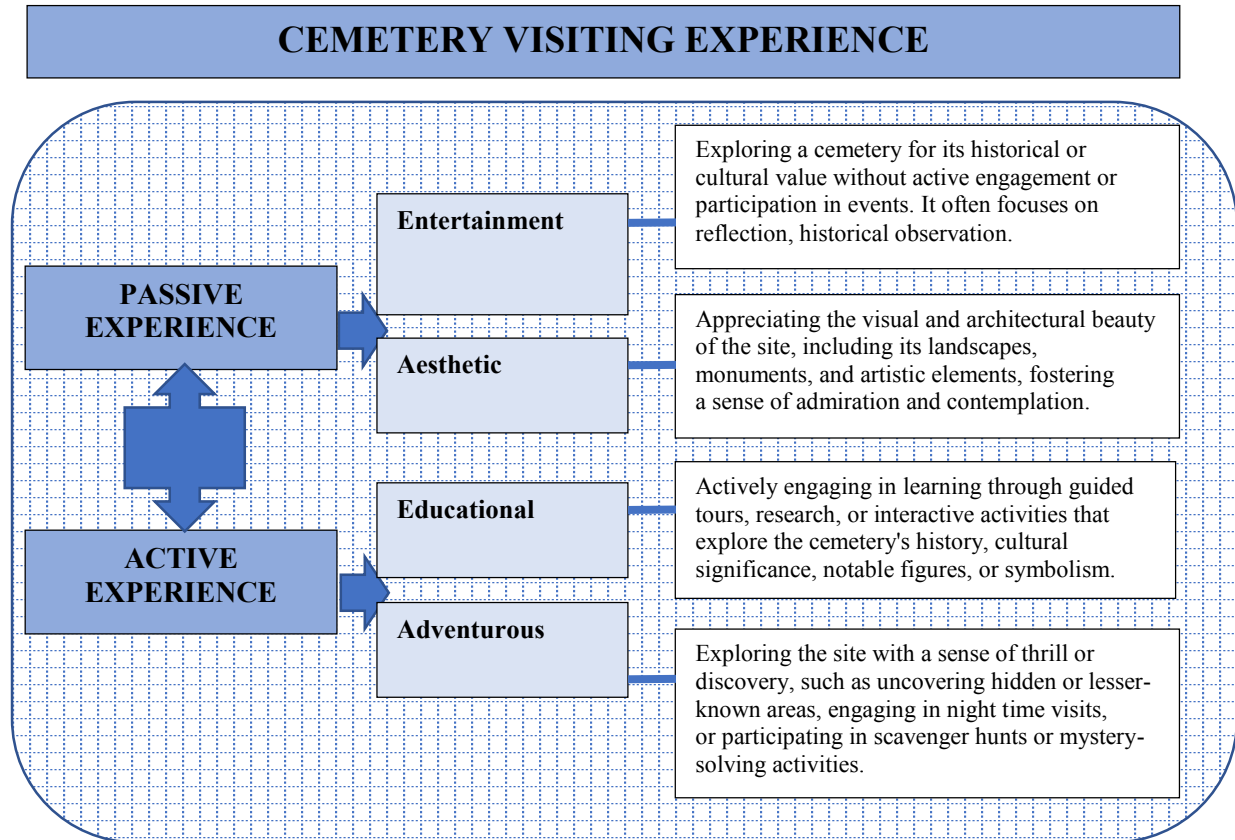

Figure 1. Cemetery Vising Experience.
Source: made by the authors according to Pécsek, 2015.

Europe, in particular, is rich in urban cemetery heritage, with almost every major city home to at least one cemetery of cultural significance. As such, cemeteries represent a new and important "niche" tourism market with substantial growth potential, capable of yielding significant economic benefits for cities. In 2010, the European Cemetery Route was officially recognized as a certified Council of Europe Cultural Route, attracting between five and seven million visitors annually (Pécsek, 2015). A review of the scientific literature reveals that cemetery visits offer four distinct types of experiences (see Fig. 1).

As seen in Figure 1, the model encompasses two passive experiences—recreational and aesthetic—and two active experiences—educational and adventurous. Cemeteries, often referred to as open-air museums, are not only repositories of art and historical artefacts but also vibrant ecosystems. Many cemeteries are home to diverse species of birds and plants, blending cultural and natural heritage. The landscape surrounding these cemeteries, with their botanical richness, transforms them into parks and gardens, offering public enjoyment (Millán et al., 2019). The natural cemetery landscape, with green spaces, intersecting paths, and scattered benches, along with its architecture, provides aesthetic pleasure to visitors (Pécsek, 2015).

By visiting the burial sites of notable individuals and learning about their lives and achievements, visitors broaden their knowledge. Like outdoor museums, cemeteries serve as valuable sources of information about the history of a particular city (Millán et al., 2019).

Participation in local funeral rituals also provides an educational and recreational experience. It allows tourists to enter a spiritual realm while creating a unique, collective narrative. Visitors explore burial sites not only to discover artistic, architectural, and landscape heritage but also to delve into the chilling legends of violent deaths (Millán et al., 2019).

The primary goal of the European Cemetery Route is to raise awareness about European burial heritage, customs, traditions, and funeral art that represent the European continent. This international route aims to promote high-quality cultural tourism by introducing new sites and fostering international collaboration between European countries to showcase burial traditions, landscapes, and create a route that not only offers an itinerary but also provides educational opportunities. The inclusion of cultural cemetery routes in school curricula further promotes education (Interreg Central Europe, 2016).

Different cemeteries offer distinct experiences, largely depending on their style, layout, the monuments present, and the integration of greenery. Some resemble outdoor sculpture museums, others resemble botanical parks, while some lie somewhere in between. The European Cemetery Route includes 63 cemeteries across 50 cities in 21 European countries. The sculptures and engravings in these cemeteries tell the history of Europe, revealing periods in European history, burial customs, and the urban planning traditions of European cities.

In conclusion, the European Cemetery Route was officially recognized as a certified Council of Europe Cultural Route in 2010. The route aims to enrich the public's understanding of a city's history, promote quality cultural tourism, and foster international cooperation between European countries in showcasing burial traditions, landscapes, and European customs. Cemeteries offer four distinct types of experiences: two passive—recreational and aesthetic—and two active—educational and adventurous. One of the most renowned cemeteries is Père Lachaise in Paris.

Cemeteries in Lithuania Belonging to the European Cemetery Route. The European Cemetery Route has been certified by the Council of Europe since 2010; however, Lithuania is not currently among the 21 countries participating in this route. Nevertheless, over the past decade, the Association's committee has recognized more than 150 significant cemeteries across Europe. The list of significant cemeteries includes the following cemeteries in Lithuania: Rasos, which are included in the list of tourist attractions, and the cemeteries of Antakalnis and Bernardinai.

Rasos Cemetery was established at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. It is considered one of the oldest, most unique, and historically significant cemeteries for Lithuanian statehood and culture. As a specific cultural heritage site, it reflects several centuries of history and serves as an important tourist attraction, drawing both

Lithuanians and visitors from other European countries. Rasos Cemetery is included in the Register of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Lithuania.

Today, Rasos Cemetery no longer serves as a burial site, and its role as Lithuania's pantheon has been taken over by Antakalnis Cemetery, established in the first half of the 19th century. Antakalnis Cemetery is the final resting place for soldiers, prominent Lithuanian artists, scientists, politicians, and victims of the January 13th and Medininkai tragedies. Several notable figures are associated with Antakalnis, and many are buried there. One of the most famous sites is the Hill of Artists, where the writers I. Simonaitytė and J. Ivanauskaitė, singers J. Miščiukaitė, V. Kernagis, as well as other renowned singers, musicians, writers, and actors, including the president A.M. Brazauskas, are buried (Tiukšienė, Sisaitė, 2015).

Bernardinai Cemetery is the second oldest cemetery in Vilnius, established in 1810. For more than 200 years, it has served as the final resting place for various cultural, social, and scientific figures.

When linking the cultural route with cemeteries, it is worth mentioning that one of the certified European cultural routes, to which Lithuania belongs, is the Jewish Heritage Route. This route includes visits not only to Jewish heritage sites such as neighbourhoods, wooden and stone synagogues, and buildings associated with prominent Jewish figures, but also to Jewish cemeteries. Visitors can explore the old Jewish cemeteries in Užupis and Šnipiškės, as well as the Vilnius Gaon Family Tomb—currently a mausoleum in the active Jewish cemetery in Sudervė. These are among the most visited Jewish sites in Vilnius, and their legends resonate with Jews worldwide (Jewish Heritage Route Association).

In summary, Rasos and Antakalnis Cemeteries represent Lithuania and even Europe. These cemeteries are valued for their uniqueness and significance to the history and culture of the Lithuanian state. They, which tell and reflect several centuries of Lithuanian history, could serve as tourist attractions not only for Lithuanians but also for international visitors.

4. Methodology for Research on the Role of Cemetery Route as a Cultural Tourism Promoter for Lithuanian Tourists

Research Methodology

Objective of the research: the aim of the study is to assess the factors promoting cultural tourism through the example of the European Cemetery Route, based on empirical research data.

Research methods: According to Kardelis (2016), two main groups of research methods are distinguished: quantitative and qualitative methods. To evaluate the factors promoting cultural tourism through the European Cemetery Route, the following research methods were chosen: a survey of tourism service consumers and a semi-structured interview with a tourism

service intermediary—an expert-guide. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes, coding techniques to categorize responses. The interview questions were developed based on the survey questions, thus expanding the scope of the research and providing a more detailed exploration of the study's objectives and subjects. Factor analysis was used to explore underlying factors influencing cultural tourism.

Triangulation was achieved by integrating the quantitative findings from the survey with qualitative insights from expert interviews. Survey data provided broad patterns and trends regarding factors influencing cultural tourism, while the expert interview offered in-depth contextual understanding and professional perspectives. By comparing and cross-validating these findings, the study ensured a more nuanced and reliable analysis, reducing potential biases and enhancing the credibility of conclusions about the European Pilgrimage Route's role in promoting cultural tourism.

The questionnaire consists of 18 questions, four of which are demographic in nature. The questions in the survey allow respondents to choose one of the available answer options and mark their response. The questionnaire is composed of closed-ended questions that reflect the research aim and objectives. The survey includes questions related to the social-demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as questions directly related to the research objective.

Sampling: the sample is an integral part of the research process. During the selection process, the sample size must be planned so that meaningful conclusions can be drawn, and the research objectives can be achieved. A simple random sampling method was chosen for this study. The sample consists of 175 respondents, and the sample size was determined using the Paniotto formula with a 5% margin of error.

Qualitative research sample: the qualitative research sample consists of a tourism expert and guide. The expert has over 20 years of experience in the tourism sector and is well-versed in the tourism market, knows tourists' needs, and is capable of assessing new tourist routes.

Research process: The research process was carried out in the following stages:
1. Identification of the problem.
2. Selection and analysis of scientific sources. Lithuanian and foreign scientific sources related to the chosen topic were collected and analysed. The sources were found in databases, academic journals, and online resources.
3. Preparation of the research plan and development of the research instrument. Research tasks were formulated, and the research methods were specified. The research instrument consists of a questionnaire, a written survey including demographic data and questions reflecting the research aim and objectives, as well as interview questions.
4. Data collection.

5. Data analysis, interpretation of results, and presentation. The collected data were processed using Microsoft Office Excel. The results were presented in graphical form, using percentages.

6. Preparation of conclusions and recommendations. After analysing the data, conclusions were drawn based on the results, answering the research tasks.

Research ethics: during the research, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and it was clarified that the results would be generalized and presented in the scientific paper. The following ethical aspects of the research were ensured (Kardelis, 2016): anonymity – the information provided by participants, regardless of its openness or personal nature, would not allow the identification of respondents; confidentiality – the researcher would remain faithful to those who assisted in the research; voluntariness – the participants voluntarily took part in the study, without any pressure; respect – participants were thanked for their participation, honest completion of the survey, and return of the questionnaires; integrity – the data collected during the research would not be altered or falsified, and the researcher commits to presenting only the data obtained from the respondents.

The justification for the survey questions is provided in the table below (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Justification for the Survey Questions

No.	Questions	Justification
1	1-2	These questions aim to clarify the respondents' opinions about the situation of cultural tourism development in Lithuania and the availability of information.
2	3-7	These questions aim to find out the respondents' opinions about their understanding of cultural tourism, what motivates them to engage in it, and whether they have heard of cemetery road routes, as this is very important for developing cultural tourism.
3	8-9	This question aims to find out in which countries and what would encourage respondents to visit cemeteries. This is important because the European Commission aims to encourage Europeans to re-explore their roots and engage in cultural tourism in their free time.
4	10-12	Csapo defines cultural tourism as an activity that allows people to get acquainted with different ways of life of other peoples, their customs, traditions, and physical environment. Therefore, these questions aim to find out what the respondents would be most interested in getting to know on the cemetery road and how the routes should be promoted so that they reach as many people as possible.
5	13-14	ASECE takes care of cemeteries of historical or artistic significance and the Rasai, Antakalnis and Bernardinai cemeteries are included in the list of visitable and significant cemeteries. Therefore, this question aims to find out whether respondents know and have visited these cemeteries. Since Lithuania has not joined the European Cemetery Route, the aim is to find out the respondents' opinion on whether it is worth it for Lithuania to do so.
6	15-18	This is a block of demographic questions that explore the gender, age, education, and income of respondents, as this will allow us to evaluate the responses according to these criteria.

Source: made by the authors.

The questionnaire was designed to gather insights into cultural tourism and the potential for promoting cemetery routes. It helped to evaluate public perceptions and attitudes toward cultural tourism, with a specific focus on the potential for cemetery routes as a niche attraction.

5. Results of the Research on the Role of Cemetery Route as a Cultural Tourism Promoter for Lithuanian Tourists

Presentation of the European Cemeteries Route. The European Cemeteries Route is a unique cultural tourism project that invites individuals to explore the rich heritage of the most renowned cemeteries in Europe, reflecting the social, cultural, and historical development of cities and local communities. The route comprises 63 cemeteries located in 50 cities across 21 European countries. The main goal of the European Cemeteries Route is to raise awareness about European burial heritage, as well as the customs, traditions, and funeral art that represent the continent.

This international route aims to promote high-quality cultural tourism by introducing new attractions, fostering international cooperation among European countries, and showcasing burial traditions, landscapes, and customs. The route is designed not only to offer a touristic pathway but also to provide knowledge, encourage ongoing research, and promote education in schools, including the integration of cultural cemetery routes into educational curricula.

The sculptures and engravings found in these cemeteries, like elegiac musical compositions, narrate the history of Europe. The cemeteries reveal chapters of European history, the continent's anthropological traits, burial customs, and the planning traditions of European cities. Cemeteries encompass four types of visiting experiences: two passive experiences (recreational and aesthetic) and two active experiences (educational and adventurous). Among the most famous cemeteries is the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

In 2010, the European Cemeteries Route was officially recognized as a certified Cultural Route by the Council of Europe.

Quantitative Research Results. The research results revealed that the tourism sector in Lithuania is moderately developed and can be further improved. Online websites, social networks, and recommendations from family and friends are the most convenient and reliable channels for obtaining information about cultural tourism sites. Tourists express interest in cemetery route itineraries; however, awareness of these routes is low. As a result, cemetery routes could be incorporated into more tourism activities as part of a broader initiative to promote cultural tourism.

The study also indicated that respondents view visits to cemeteries positively. They found it interesting or even impressive to visit cemeteries, yet this activity is not a priority attraction. Instead, it is seen more as a general part of the route, which would be considered a normal practice within the broader context of a tour. Respondents stated that while they would not specifically seek out cemetery visits on their own, they believe it would likely appeal to specialists.

A deeper analysis of cemeteries as cultural objects revealed that respondents relate their knowledge to personal interests. Some expressed a desire to visit cemeteries in various countries or continents, as burial rituals, architectural structures, and cemetery culture differ across cultures.

The study sample consisted of 66.9% women and 33.1% men. In summary, the demographic data indicates that the participants were diverse, but mostly of mature, working age, with higher education and moderate to high monthly incomes.

Thus, in conclusion, the quantitative research suggests that visiting cemeteries is not a common tourist activity for the participants, as it is often associated with discomfort, and there is reluctance to engage in such visits in unfamiliar areas due to concerns about offending local customs. However, the results also revealed that cemetery visits are considered an interesting part of an overall route program and contribute to the cultural exploration of the area.

Qualitative Research Results. During the qualitative research, the expert was interviewed to gain further insights into the quantitative results and to explore additional perspectives on the issues being analysed. As revealed by the expert, the qualitative study largely confirmed the findings from the quantitative research. However, a more detailed analysis led to insights on two main themes. The first was the motivation for visiting cemetery routes.

The expert highlighted several reasons for visiting cemetery routes, including an interest in history, the graves of famous individuals, their biographies, and burial traditions. However, the expert also pointed out that visiting cemetery routes is often associated with negative emotions for many people, especially those who have recently experienced a loss. This association creates a significant burden on individuals, making this tourism niche not widely known or promoted.

Promotion of cemetery routes should be actively advertised on traditional tourism websites, social networks, and other media channels. According to the expert, one of the most important aspects of attracting tourists to cemetery routes is presenting interesting and relevant information in a way that captures their interest. Since cemetery visits are rarely included in mainstream itineraries, they could be developed into a niche tourism sector.

In conclusion, the expert's responses corroborated the results of the quantitative study while offering additional insights into methods and motivations for promoting visits to cemetery routes.

Discussion. The research established new insights into public perceptions of cemetery routes as a niche form of cultural tourism, highlighting both the interest in and barriers to their promotion. While previous studies have recognized the cultural and historical value of cemetery tourism, our study uniquely examined its potential in the context of Lithuania and its alignment with European cultural initiatives. Similarities with prior research include the acknowledgment of cemeteries as sites of historical and artistic significance, but our findings diverge by emphasizing the low awareness of such routes and the need for targeted promotion strategies. These results suggest that while cemetery routes hold untapped potential, their success depends

on overcoming negative associations and fostering public engagement through education and marketing. Moving forward, we plan to expand the scope of research to include comparative analyses with other European countries, explore long-term trends in cultural tourism, and investigate innovative ways to integrate cemetery tourism into broader tourism strategies.

However, addressing potential limitations of the study, such as the relatively small sample size, may not fully capture the diversity of tourist perspectives, and the limited geographical scope, focusing predominantly on Lithuania, additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces bias, as participants have provided socially desirable responses rather than accurate reflections of their preferences. To mitigate these limitations and provide a more balanced perspective, suggestions for future research were included. These included expanding the study to encompass a broader range of European countries, employing longitudinal research methods to track changes in tourist perceptions over time, and incorporating mixed-method approaches to explore both emotional and cultural dimensions of cemetery tourism in greater depth. These enhancements contribute to a more comprehensive and transparent understanding of the research findings and their implications.

Conclusions

1. The literature research critically evaluated the concept of cultural tourism, revealing its multidimensional nature as an activity that fosters an appreciation for history, heritage, and local traditions. While the study effectively highlighted cultural tourism's role in enriching tourist experiences, its limitations include a narrow focus on Lithuanian tourists, which may not fully capture diverse cultural tourism practices globally. A key lesson learned is that cultural tourism is not only about site visits but also about meaningful engagement with history and culture. The findings underscore the importance of cultural tourism in preserving heritage and promoting sustainable tourism. Theoretically, the research contributes to a better understanding of cultural tourism dynamics, while practically, it suggests that stakeholders in the tourism industry should develop experiences that combine education, recreation, and heritage conservation to maximize cultural tourism's potential.

2. The study introduced cultural routes as effective tools for promoting tourism, with the European Cemetery Route serving as a case study. While the research successfully illustrated the potential of cultural routes to connect diverse heritage sites, it was limited by the lack of comparative analysis with other cultural routes. The new knowledge gained includes insights into how cultural routes can foster international cooperation and highlight unique aspects of European heritage. These findings are significant as they demonstrate how cultural routes can drive sustainable tourism while promoting cross-cultural understanding. The research emphasizes the need for enhanced marketing strategies and integration of cultural routes into educational curricula, offering practical implications for policymakers, educators, and tourism developers seeking to elevate cultural tourism initiatives.

3. The research identified factors promoting cemetery routes for Lithuanian tourists, including interest in historical narratives, architectural heritage, and cultural exploration. However, low public awareness and the emotional sensitivity associated with cemetery visits were identified as key weaknesses. A valuable lesson learned is the importance of addressing these barriers through targeted promotion and education. The study's importance lies in its practical implications: the insights can guide tourism stakeholders in designing engaging promotional campaigns and integrating cemetery routes into broader tourism offerings. Theoretically, it enriches the understanding of niche tourism markets and their unique challenges.

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