

Reuse of Historic Buildings for Tourism: Policy Gaps

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Abstract : Background: Regeneration and re-use of abandoned historic buildings present a continuous challenge for policy makers and stakeholders in the tourism and leisure industry. Obsolete historic buildings provide great potential for tourism and leisure accommodation, presenting unique heritage experiences to travellers and host communities. Contemporary demands in the hospitality industry continuously require higher standards, some of which are in conflict with heritage conservation principles. Objective: The aim of this research paper is to critically discuss regeneration policies with stakeholders of the tourism and leisure industry and to examine current practices in policy development and the resultant impact of policies on the Maltese tourism and leisure industry. Research Design: Six semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in the tourism and leisure industry participated in the research. A number of measures were taken to reduce bias and thus improve trustworthiness. Clear statements of the purpose of the research study were provided at the start of each interview to reduce expectancy bias. The interviews were semi-structured to minimise interviewer bias. Interviewees were allowed to expand and elaborate as necessary, with only necessary probing questions, to allow free expression of opinion and practices. Interview guide was submitted to participants at least two weeks before the interview to allow participants to prepare for the interview and prevent recall bias during the interview as much as possible. Interview questions and probes contained both positive and negative aspects to prevent interviewer bias. Policy documents were available during the interview to prevent recall bias. Interview recordings were transcribed 'intelligent' verbatim. Analysis was carried out using thematic analysis with the coding frame developed independently by two researchers. All phases of the study were governed by research ethics. Findings: Findings were grouped in main themes: financing of regeneration, governance, legislation and policies. Other key issues included value of historic buildings and approaches for regeneration. Whilst regeneration of historic buildings was noted, participants discussed a number of barriers that hindered regeneration. Stakeholders identified gaps in policies and gaps at policy implementation stages. European Union funding policies facilitated regeneration initiatives but funding criteria based on economic deliverables presented the intangible heritage gap. Stakeholders identified niche markets for heritage tourism accommodation. Lack of research-based policies was also identified. Conclusion: Potential of regeneration is hindered by inadequate legal framework that supports contemporary needs of the tourism industry. Policies should be developed by active stakeholder participation. Adequate funding schemes have to support the tangible and intangible components of the built heritage.

Keywords : governance, historic buildings, policy, tourism

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