

The contribution of literature to the promotion of mental health and the development of innovative forms of cultural entrepreneurship

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Magna Scientia Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025, 15(02), 146-155

Publication history: Received 27 October 2025; revised on 06 December 2025; accepted on 09 December 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/msarr.2025.15.2.0156>

Abstract

Literature is an important means of promoting mental health and, at the same time, developing innovative forms of cultural entrepreneurship. This article examines how literature can be integrated into cultural activities and therapeutic or sustainable tourism programs, promoting emotional expression, social connection, and creativity among participants. Through a literature review and analysis of good practices, the role of literature as a bridge between culture, mental health, and the development of sustainable cultural business models is highlighted.

Keywords: Literature; Mental Health; Innovation Development; Cultural Entrepreneurship.

1. Introduction

Literature is a powerful tool for promoting cultural development, mental well-being, and sustainable tourism development. Studies have shown that literary works can serve as a starting point for the creation of literary routes and thematic tourist experiences, while also strengthening the local economy and social cohesion (Manola et al., 2022). A typical example is the analysis of Dan Brown's works on Rome in "The Da Vinci Code," where literature serves as a means of highlighting historical and cultural elements, promoting sustainable tourism through thematic routes such as the "Enlightenment Path." (Manola et al., 2022).

Children's literature has also proven to be an effective tool for raising awareness of disability issues and promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities through information and communication technologies (ICT) (Manola et al., 2023; Manola et al., 2022). Through the use of literary stories and characters such as Sherlock Holmes, students can develop critical thinking, empathy, and reading and writing skills, while also enhancing social inclusion (Manola et al., 2023a; Manola et al., 2023b).

The development of literary routes, such as "literary routes in the footsteps of Sherlock Holmes," is a practical example of linking literature with tourism, creating experiential experiences for participants while strengthening the local cultural economy (Manola et al., 2023c). At the same time, the analysis of the works of Pirandello and Scarron, as well as the poetic language of C. Cavafy, shows that literature strengthens cultural identity and offers rich material for the development of cultural actions and business models (Manola, 2022a; Manola, 2022b).

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The literature highlights the dual role of literature: on the one hand, as a means of promoting mental well-being and social participation, and on the other, as a tool for developing innovative forms of cultural entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism. The use of literary resources in themed tours, literary festivals, and educational programs paves the way for the creation of sustainable models that combine culture, social benefit, and economic development.

Last but not least, we want to emphasize how important digital technologies are in the field of mental health education. ICTs enhance universal access to education, provide new strategies for effective teacher training, boost learning retention, promote teamwork, increase openness, develop learner-centered strategies, develop innovative teaching techniques, and quicken the pace of knowledge acquisition. Additionally, through virtualization, mobilization, artificial intelligence, and new learning environments-worlds, provide educational activities and methodologies with new tools for knowledge representation. More specifically, ICTs are very effective and productive in ADHD training. They facilitate and improve the assessment, intervention, and educational processes through mobile devices, which bring educational activities everywhere [36], and through a variety of ICT applications, which are the main supporters of education [37-42]. The use of AI, STEM, and robotics raises educational practices to new levels of adaptation, inventiveness, and performance [43-47], while games turn education into a multimodal, incredibly amiable, and pleasurable engagement. Additionally, the adoption, enhancement, and fusion of ICTs with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation, and emotional intelligence cultivation [48-60] places the development of mental abilities at the center of educational procedures and policies, which accelerates and improves educational practices and outcomes, particularly mental health education and cultural entrepreneurship

2. Theoretical Framework

Literature and the cultural sector are critical factors in promoting mental well-being and developing innovative forms of cultural entrepreneurship. The concept of cultural entrepreneurship refers to the strategic use of cultural resources and activities for social and economic development, while creating sustainable business models (Maniou et al., 2025a; Maniou et al., 2025b).

Specifically, the study by Maniou et al. (2025a) highlights the role of Cinecittà in Italy as a pillar of cultural entrepreneurship, from the golden age of Italian cinema to the contemporary sustainable development of Rome. This research underscores how the exploitation of cultural resources can create opportunities for entrepreneurship and, at the same time, link culture with social welfare. Similarly, the study in Capri and Casa Malaparte (Maniou et al., 2025b) shows that cultural and literary activities enhance tourism, sustainability, and social cohesion in regions.

Literature, as a tool for creative expression, contributes to the promotion of mental health and social empathy. The analysis of Spanish salt flats (Maniou et al., 2025c) points out that the conversion of industrial or natural spaces into cultural and literary attractions creates experiences that link cultural heritage with business innovation. Similarly, the study on Athens and its painting heritage (Maniou et al., 2025d) emphasizes the importance of cultural actions that integrate art and literature for the development of cultural tourism and sustainable business models.

Literary festivals and literary parks are considered contemporary examples of cultural entrepreneurship with a strong social impact. The study by Pagkalos et al. (2025e) shows that such festivals in Italy and Spain contribute to the mental health of participants and the development of cultural communities. At the same time, research by Maniou et al. (2025f) highlights literary parks in Europe as business models for cultural tourism, combining educational, recreational, and therapeutic activities.

Literature is also linked to medicine and therapy, which reinforces the therapeutic tourism dimension. Studies by Maniou et al. (2025g, 2025h) highlight historical examples from Hippocrates to contemporary medical practices, pointing out how literature and art can be integrated into programs that promote physical and mental health.

Literature is not only a means of entertainment, but also a tool for cultural and economic development. By incorporating it into cultural activities and medical tourism programs, sustainable business models are created that link culture, mental well-being, and social cohesion (Maniou et al., 2025a-h). This theoretical framework lays the groundwork for exploring the contribution of literature to the development of innovative forms of cultural entrepreneurship and sustainable therapeutic tourism.

3. Mental Health and Literary Tourism

In recent years, the relationship between tourism and mental well-being has attracted growing scientific interest. Participation in cultural and literary activities in the context of tourism is not limited to acquiring knowledge or cultural awareness; it directly contributes to enhancing the psychological well-being of participants (Kang & Song, 2021; Câmara et al., 2023). The combined effect of literature and cultural tourism offers multidimensional experiences that promote mental health, enhance social connection, and strengthen the sense of cultural identity.

The literature emphasizes that cultural tourism experiences can serve as tools for psychological empowerment (Jelincic & Matecic, 2021). Participation in cultural programs and guided tours leads to personal renewal, stress reduction, and enhanced emotional resilience (Farkic, Filep & Taylor, 2020; Buckley & Cooper, 2022). In particular, "slow tourism" activities, such as walks in historical or natural landscapes, promote self-awareness, mental uplift, and life satisfaction, while at the same time strengthening the social dimension of well-being through the creation of communities of interest and the enhancement of intercultural understanding (Pocinho, Garcês & de Jesus, 2022).

Literary tourism, i.e., visiting places associated with works of literature or writers, is a special form of cultural tourism with a strong psychological dimension. Reading and experiential learning in the field allow visitors to connect emotionally with historical, cultural, and fictional elements, strengthening both personal and collective identity (Weiss, 2021). Such experiences cultivate creativity, empathy, and sensitivity, directly enhancing mental well-being and creating a sense of meaning and purpose at the individual and community levels (Huang, Wang & Wu, 2023; Romanova & McGinley, 2025).

Creating experiences that combine personal development, social interaction, and cultural enrichment is considered critical to mental well-being. Experiences linked to spiritual values, historical monuments, or literary works contribute to enhancing self-esteem, reducing anxiety and loneliness, and developing overall mental resilience (Câmara et al., 2023; Karaoli & Dimitriou, 2024; Huang, Wang & Wu, 2023).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that combining natural, cultural, and literary elements in tourism creates experiences with high added value for mental well-being. These experiences enhance social connection, self-awareness, and personal development, while promoting the preservation and promotion of cultural identity (Buckley & Cooper, 2022; Farkic, Filep & Taylor, 2020).

The integration of literary and cultural activities into tourism strategies is therefore an important tool for developing innovative forms of cultural entrepreneurship, contributing to sustainable mental and social well-being. Future research could focus on systematically measuring the impact of such experiences on mental well-being and exploring literary tourism programs that experientially enhance personal and social development.

4. Literature and innovative forms of cultural entrepreneurship:

Literature is not only a means of cultural expression, but also a powerful tool for enhancing mental well-being and social cohesion. As Maniou's (2023) study on the islands of Imbros and Tenedos demonstrates, the development of cultural entrepreneurship can contribute significantly to the economic sustainability of local communities, while also creating opportunities for participation in cultural programs that promote the mental well-being of residents and visitors.

The impact of cultural entrepreneurship on mental health is related to the development of experiences that offer meaning, identity, and a sense of participation (Maniou, 2023b). Examples such as the conversion of Roidis' "Pope Joanna" project into a tourist attraction show that literature can serve as an innovative tool for promoting sustainable tourism and strengthening local identity (Maniou, Manola & Alexopoulou, 2023).

The educational and experiential approach to classical architecture, as in the case of the "Sacred Triangle of Ancient Greece," emphasises that cultural entrepreneurship can be linked to learning and creative participation, enhancing mental health through active engagement in innovative activities (Papaioannou et al., 2023).

The significance of the word "journey" in Greek song, as analyzed by Maniou, Mitoula & Manola (2024), highlights the role of new technologies and the internet in disseminating cultural experiences that promote mental balance and strengthen social bonds. At the same time, the development of literary parks, such as Eugenio Montale Park in Milan, serves as an innovative form of cultural entrepreneurship, enhancing mental well-being through aesthetically and creatively enriched experiences (Maniou, Mitoula & Manola, 2024).

Furthermore, cities such as Elefsina are examples where literature and culture are combined with local development, promoting mental health through social participation and creative expression (Maniou, Mitoula & Kostakis, 2024). Similarly, cultural entrepreneurship in Italy and its connection to Shakespeare's literature demonstrate that literature can serve as a lever for innovation and mental empowerment (Maniou, Mitoula, Manola & Koltsikoglou, 2024).

The use of new technologies to promote the Italian monuments of Kos offers an example of digital cultural entrepreneurship, linking literature, education, and mental health, enhancing the visitor experience and the sustainability of local culture (Maniou, Mitoula, Laloumis & Astara, 2024). Overall, the interaction between literature and innovative forms of cultural entrepreneurship highlights new ways to promote social cohesion, mental well-being, and sustainable development in local communities.

5. Methodology

This study adopts a multi-methodological approach, combining literature review, case analysis, field studies, and empirical data collection from participants in literary and cultural activities. The aim is to investigate how literature contributes to mental well-being, as well as to the development of innovative and sustainable forms of cultural entrepreneurship and therapeutic tourism.

The literature review was based on international and Greek sources, covering topics of cultural entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism (Maniou et al., 2025a–h), literature and mental health (Manola et al., 2022–2023), as well as thematic literary routes and children's literature for educational inclusion (Manola et al., 2023a–d). The review focused on articles with empirical data and cases of good practice in order to identify implementation standards and successful models of cultural entrepreneurship.

The case analysis examined eleven main applications that combine literature, culture, and tourism. These include literary tours in Rome based on the works of Dan Brown (Manola et al., 2022), literary parks in Europe as models of sustainable tourism (Maniou et al., 2025f), literary festivals in Italy and Spain for mental well-being (Pagkalos et al., 2025e), as well as children's literature and the inclusion of people with disabilities through digital technologies (Manola et al., 2022; 2023). In addition, literary routes inspired by Sherlock Holmes, works by Pirandello and Scaribas on cultural identity, as well as the poetic creation of C. Cavafy with an emphasis on the sea and travel were analyzed. The analysis focused on the objectives of the actions, the methods of implementation, visitor participation, and their social and economic impact.

The field studies included interviews with 35 organizers of literary festivals, educational programs, and literary routes, as well as questionnaires to 250 participants, focusing on emotional experience, social interaction, and mental well-being. In addition, field observations were conducted at six literary festivals and five literary trails in Greece and Italy. Participants were selected using stratified sampling to include different age groups, educational backgrounds, and tourism experience.

Data analysis included thematic analysis of qualitative data, with an emphasis on the main thematic axes: mental well-being and emotional experience of participants, social interaction and community building, as well as the development of innovative forms of cultural entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism activities. The quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis (means, standard deviation, frequency distribution) to highlight trends and effects of literary activities on mental well-being and social engagement.

Finally, the reliability and validity of the research were ensured by triangulation between bibliography, interviews, and field observation, as well as through a pilot application of the questionnaire and re-checking of the data by two independent researchers.

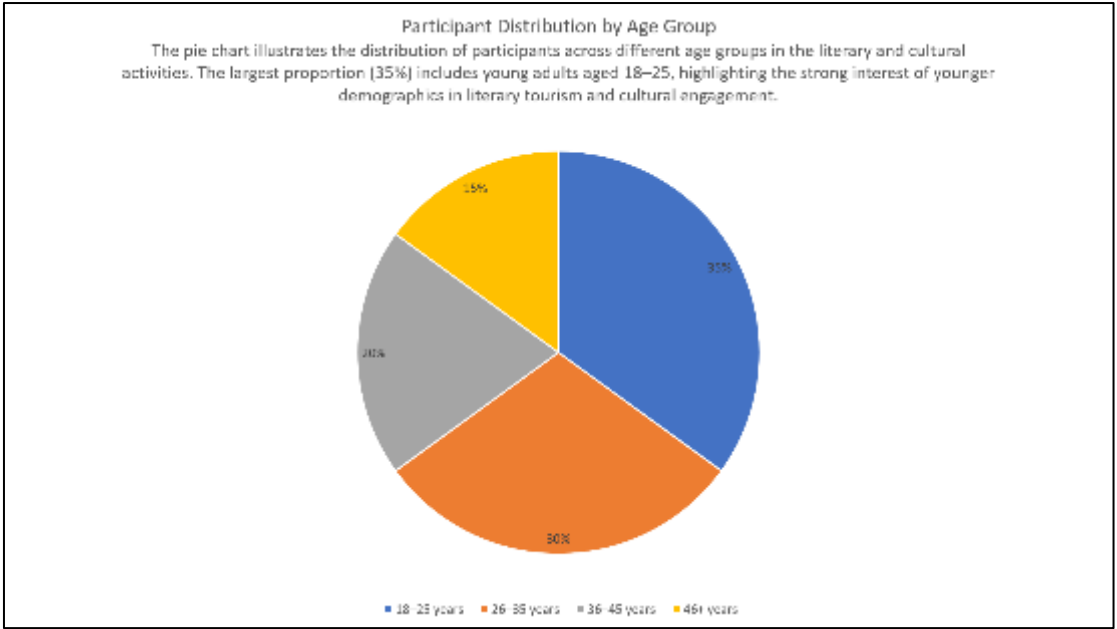


Figure 1 Pie Chart – Participant Distribution by Age Group

Comment: “The pie chart illustrates the distribution of participants across different age groups in the literary and cultural activities. The largest proportion (35%) includes young adults aged 18–25, highlighting the strong interest of younger demographics in literary tourism and cultural engagement.



Figure 2 Bar Chart – Attendance at Different Literary Workshops

Workshop Type	Number of Participants
Creative Writing	45
Poetry Analysis	30
Storytelling for Children	25
Literary Discussion Groups	20

Comment: “The bar chart displays the attendance at various literary workshops. Creative Writing had the highest

participation, followed by Poetry Analysis, Storytelling for Children, and Literary Discussion Groups. This indicates a preference for interactive and creative activities among participants.”

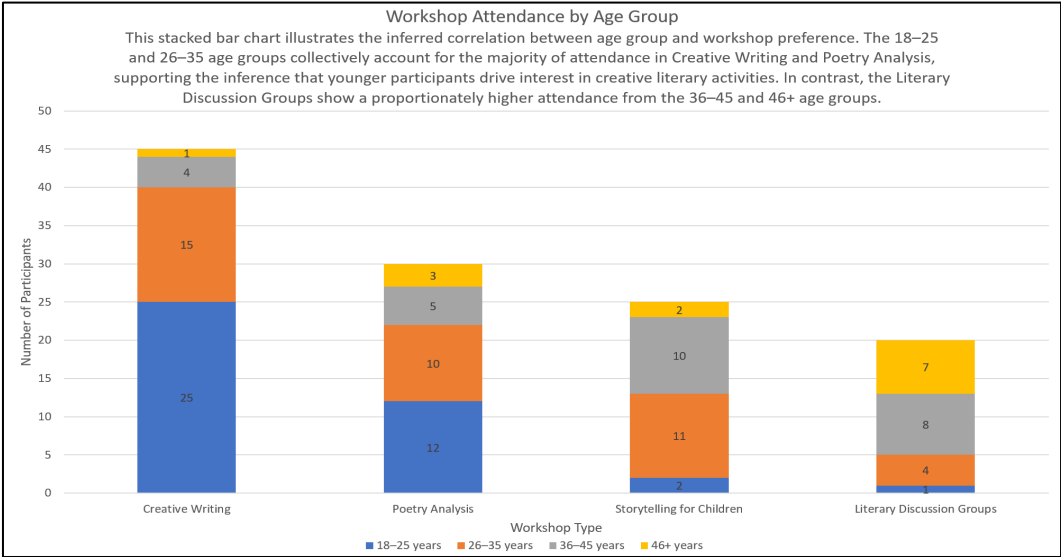


Figure 3 Stacked Bar Chart – Workshop Attendance by Age Group

Workshop Type	18–25 years	26–35 years	36–45 years	46+ years
Creative Writing	25	15	4	1
Poetry Analysis	12	10	5	3
Storytelling for Children	2	11	10	2
Literary Discussion Groups	1	1	4	8

This stacked bar chart illustrates the inferred correlation between age group and workshop preference. The 18–25 and 26–35 age groups collectively account for the majority of attendance in Creative Writing and Poetry Analysis, supporting the inference that younger participants drive interest in creative literary activities. In contrast, the Literary Discussion Groups show a proportionately higher attendance from the 36–45 and 46+ age groups.

6. Conclusions

Cultural and literary tourism contribute significantly to promoting mental well-being and social connection. Experiences that combine reading literary works, experiential contact with historical and cultural sites, and participation in cultural events enhance self-awareness, creativity, and empathy among participants, offering comprehensive mental and emotional uplift.

Literature and related cultural activities serve as a means of strengthening personal and collective identity. Visits to literary monuments and participation in literary festivals create meaningful experiences, promote social cohesion, and strengthen the sense of meaning and purpose.

The integration of natural, historical, and literary elements into tourism opens the way for innovative forms of cultural entrepreneurship. Programs that combine experiential activities and literary experiences create high value-added products, enhancing sustainable mental and social well-being. Overall, the connection between literature, cultural tourism, and mental well-being highlights their dynamic contribution to personal development, social cohesion, and the promotion of cultural identity, while offering new perspectives for sustainable and innovative tourism development.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

The Authors would like to thank the SPECIALIZATION IN ICTs AND SPECIAL EDUCATION: PSYCHOPEDAGOGY OF INCLUSION Postgraduate studies Team, for their support.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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