



Archaeological Tourism - Product Development and Experience Creation – Case Study of the Viminacium Archaeological Park

Aleksandra Bradić-Martinović¹

Jelena Anđelković Grašar²

Renata Pindžo³

Ljubomir Jevtović⁴

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Abstract: Archaeological tourism has emerged as a distinctive and growing segment of cultural tourism, offering opportunities to transform heritage sites into meaningful and sustainable tourism products. This chapter provides a thematic overview of key concepts in the development of archaeological tourism services, with a particular focus on personalization, experience design, digital innovation, and sustainability. Drawing on relevant literature, it discusses strategic approaches to tourism service development that balance visitor engagement with the protection of cultural heritage. As a review study, the chapter includes the example of the "Viminacium Archaeological Park" in Serbia to illustrate how theoretical principles can be effectively applied in practice. The example highlights the importance of integrating storytelling, infrastructure, technological tools, and community involvement in creating immersive and resilient visitor experiences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Archaeological tourism, a distinct subset of cultural heritage tourism, has developed from early forms of pilgrimage and Renaissance leisure travel into a structured global industry. In the 18th and 19th centuries, affluent travellers often engaged in excavations, driven by intellectual curiosity and a fascination with uncovering lost civilizations. Over time, this phenomenon has become a well-defined and internationally recognized field within cultural tourism, supported by various stakeholders, including museums, heritage organizations, and tourism networks (Afkhami, 2021; Timothy & Tahan, 2020). Today, archaeological tourism encompasses diverse experiences, from visits to museums and archaeological parks to exploring open-air heritage sites. These encounters are frequently enhanced through interactive exhibitions, guided storytelling, and participatory activities, offering visitors a multifaceted and immersive connection to the past (Timothy & Boyd, 2006).

Archaeological tourism contributes both to the economy and to cultural preservation by reimagining historical sites as engaging tourism products that highlight their cultural significance and make them more accessible to the broader public (Afkhami, 2021). Promoting the conservation and appreciation of invaluable cultural heritage for future generations is a crucial aspect of this approach, generating economic benefits through increased visitation (Fu et al., 2023). Beyond financial returns, this model encourages educational engagement and fosters a deeper emotional connection between visitors and the historical narratives embedded in the sites. Moreover, when aligned with sustainable tourism principles, archaeological tourism can support local economic

¹ Institute of Economic Sciences, Zmaj Jovina 12, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

² Institute of Archaeology, Kneza Mihaila 35, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

³ Academy of Applied Science Belgrade, Bulevar Zorana Đinđića 152a, 11070 Belgrade, Serbia

⁴ Institute of Archaeology, Kneza Mihaila 35, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

development, stimulate employment, and reinforce cultural identity within host communities (Afrić Rakitovac et al., 2021; Lopez et al., 2018; Walker & Carr, 2013).

Archaeological heritage represents an exceptionally valuable resource that, transformed into a tourist product, can contribute to economic development and the preservation of cultural heritage (Huete-Alcocer et al., 2018). Through innovative approaches to presentation and interpretation, archaeological sites become places of education, entertainment and interaction, attracting visitors of various profiles (Ramírez, 2020). The metamorphosis enables historical narratives to resonate, providing the audience with an indelible experience and fostering a profound comprehension of the past. Nevertheless, creating a tourist product in archaeological tourism involves carefully designing an experience that combines elements of education, entertainment, and interaction with the site. The process involves carefully analyzing the key aspects of the archaeological site that possess the most significant potential to captivate visitors' interest and then strategically developing supporting content and services to enhance the overall experience (Mossberg, 2007).

Archaeological tourism has become a globally recognized segment of cultural tourism, with many countries developing successful, high-quality heritage experiences. Destinations such as Italy, Egypt, and Mexico have transformed their archaeological assets into internationally renowned attractions. For instance, integrated planning and investment in these regions have enabled heritage sites to attract many visitors while maintaining preservation standards and creating local economic opportunities (Guimarães et al., 2018). In contrast, developing countries often face systemic challenges in building sustainable archaeological tourism. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, weak institutional coordination, limited community engagement, and low international visibility hinder the development of competitive tourism products (Silva & Almeida, 2023). Additionally, excessive tourism growth often leads to conflicts between conservation priorities and economic interests, especially in heritage-rich but institutionally fragile contexts (Afrić Rakitovac et al., 2021). These disparities emphasize the need for tailored strategies that align tourism development with heritage protection and local empowerment in less developed contexts. Addressing such challenges requires a clear understanding of how archaeological resources can be responsibly and creatively transformed into tourism products that are both meaningful and sustainable.

Given the increasing interest in cultural and archaeological tourism, it is essential to comprehend how historic resources can be transformed into significant and sustainable tourism products. In response to this need, the chapter explores relevant concepts and contemporary practices in developing archaeological tourism. "Viminacium Archaeological Park", explained in this chapter, serves as a significant Serbian initiative, exemplifying the practical application of these themes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism product development is a multifaceted process that blends tangible and intangible elements to construct immersive and sustainable travel experiences. Successful tourism supply aligns with diverse consumer expectations while incorporating experiential elements that foster cultural engagement, deepen visitor connections, and enhance market relevance. Customized tourism offerings tailored to travellers' individual preferences drive deeper engagement and encourage repeat visits, while travellers are increasingly looking for immersive experiences, such as historical reenactments, local cuisine tastings and guided storytelling, which provide cultural enrichment beyond passive sightseeing (Calza et al., 2019). Benur and Bramwell (2015) pointed out that niche tourism products, such as archaeological tours, cater to specialized interests and offer unique value propositions. Strategic alignment with market demands is crucial for product development, while

market research analysing traveller preferences and behaviours helps tourism developers refine offerings and anticipate emerging trends. Identifying visitor motivations and potential barriers supports product innovation and enhances the attractiveness and distinctiveness of tourism destinations (Risfandini et al., 2022; Samora-Arvela et al., 2023).

Developing a successful tourism product requires a structured approach that balances market demand, cultural authenticity, and sustainability. The process typically involves several key steps: (1) conducting thorough market research to identify target audiences and preferences, (2) leveraging local cultural and natural assets to create a distinctive experience, (3) integrating technology and experiential elements to enhance engagement, (4) ensuring sustainable management practices that minimize environmental and cultural impacts, and (5) implementing strategic marketing and promotional efforts to attract and retain visitors (Mackay et al., 2020; Reinhold et al., 2023).

Effective product development involves collaboration between key stakeholders, including local communities, governments, private sector entities, academic institutions, heritage organizations, and tourism agencies. Cooperation among these diverse stakeholders strengthens tourism development efforts, ensuring inclusivity, cultural authenticity, and sustainability. Engaging Indigenous communities in tourism planning fosters economic empowerment and sustainable destination management (Bhatta et al., 2023; Bilyk et al., 2022). For example, the relationship between “Viminacium Archaeological Park”, as a cultural, business, and archaeological entity, and the local community demonstrates how a collaborative heritage management approach can contribute to site preservation and regional economic growth. By involving local stakeholders in tourism initiatives, archaeological sites can serve as centres for education, economic revitalization, and the reinforcement of cultural identity (Anđelković Grašar et al., 2020).

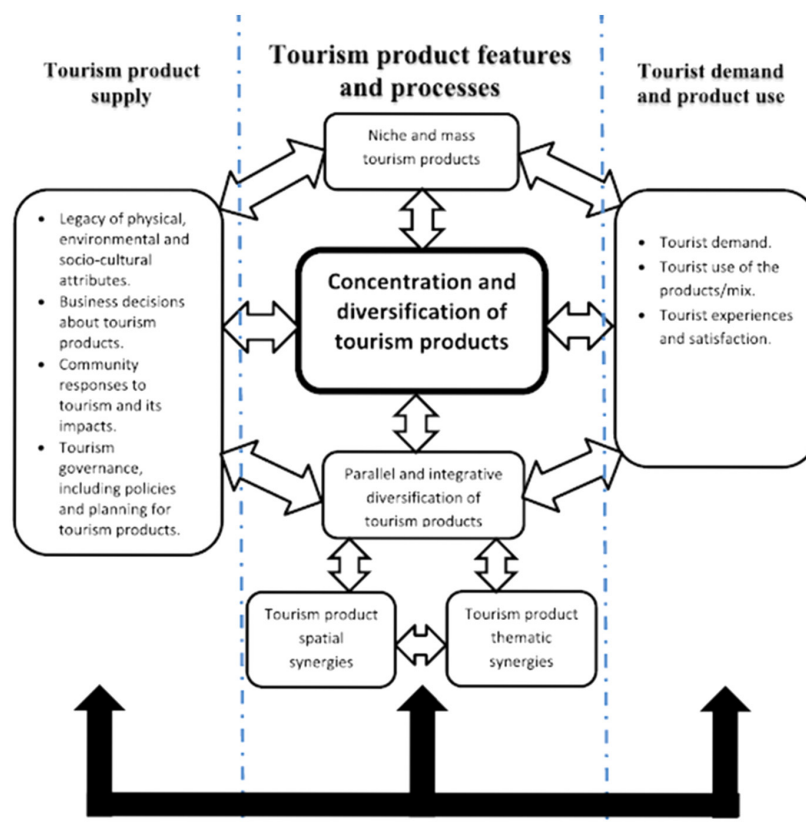


Figure 1. Framework for tourism product development

Source: Benur & Bramwell (2015, p. 220.)

The framework **Benur and Bramwell (2015)** proposed highlights the interplay between tourism product supply, features, processes, and demand (Figure 1). The supply side encompasses physical assets, environmental sustainability, and socio-cultural heritage, shaping the foundation of tourism offerings. According to **Benur and Bramwell (2015)**, business strategies, community engagement, and governance play integral roles in ensuring the success of tourism products. As stated, the process dimension focuses on designing experiences that align with tourist expectations while maintaining broader strategic goals. On the demand side, visitor satisfaction, experiential quality, and evolving travel preferences influence the adaptability and longevity of tourism products.

In addition, fostering synergies between niche and mass tourism models allows destinations to diversify their offerings while ensuring sustainable growth and competitiveness (**Petković et al., 2022**). Implementing eco-conscious tourism initiatives, such as low-impact infrastructure, conservation-focused experiences, and responsible tourism policies, meets the expectations of environmentally aware travellers while protecting cultural and natural heritage (**Haid & Albrecht, 2021**). Finally, successful tourism products go beyond functionality, creating immersive experiences that engage visitors emotionally and intellectually. Storytelling, sensory engagement, and technology enhance these interactions, making destinations more memorable. The following section explores how these elements shape unique travel experiences, particularly in archaeological tourism.

3. EXPERIENTIAL DESIGN IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURISM

Developing compelling and sustainable archaeological tourism products requires more than site conservation; it involves the strategic integration of experience design, technological innovation, community engagement, and long-term heritage stewardship to ensure authenticity, relevance, and market viability (**Helmy & Cooper, 2002; Pacifico & Vogel, 2012; Stefanova, 2022**). A coherent conceptual framework is needed—one that combines tourism development strategies with heritage management principles. Drawing from **Benur and Bramwell's (2015)** model of diversified and collaborative tourism development, effective product design entails market alignment, experience differentiation, and stakeholder coordination. At the same time, heritage conservation frameworks emphasize authenticity, long-term stewardship, and value-based interpretation (**De la Torre, 2002**). Bridging these domains allows tourism strategies to satisfy visitor expectations while safeguarding archaeological resources' cultural and historical integrity, forming a foundation for sustainable and resilient tourism practice. The following sections examine how storytelling, digital innovation, strategic planning, and sustainability-oriented practices contribute to developing immersive, meaningful, and resilient archaeological tourism experiences.

3.1. Strategic Recommendations for Sustainable Product Development

Developing sustainable and competitive tourism products requires a strategic approach integrating innovation, personalization, and responsible management. Archaeological tourism, in particular, benefits from product differentiation, regional collaborations, and emerging technologies that enhance visitor experiences while preserving cultural heritage. Destinations can create compelling tourism offerings by aligning development strategies with evolving traveller expectations and sustainability principles. The following recommendations highlight key factors for effective product development in archaeological tourism.

1. *Tourism destinations should leverage personalization and technology to tailor experiences to diverse traveller interests, as already mentioned. AI-driven tools should refine itinerary planning based on visitor preferences, offering curated experiences such as archaeological*

tours paired with cultural workshops or local cuisine. As [Tussyadiah et al. \(2018\)](#) emphasize, such customization enhances visitor engagement while optimizing resource management. However, aligning product design with actual visitor perceptions remains a challenge. A study on Roman archaeological sites in Serbia, including Viminacium, revealed significant differences between tourist impressions and stakeholder branding intentions, underscoring the need for better audience insight and tailored messaging ([Kovačić et al., 2019](#)).

2. *Cross-border collaborations should be leveraged to enhance regional archaeological tourism by showcasing shared cultural narratives.* These partnerships appeal to international markets and support unified preservation efforts. [Benur and Bramwell \(2015\)](#) state that such collaborations enable destinations to align marketing strategies while tackling common challenges like conservation and accessibility, ultimately benefiting tourists and local communities. The Trail of Roman Emperors in Serbia is a relevant example, evaluated through the Cultural Route Evaluation Model, highlighting its scientific, educational, and economic significance ([Božić & Tomić, 2016](#)).
3. *Sustainability should be a core principle in tourism product development to ensure long-term success.* Strategies such as visitor caps and eco-friendly infrastructure should be implemented to mitigate these risks while appealing to eco-conscious travellers ([Bradić-Martinović et al., 2023](#); [Knežević et al., 2024](#)). Equally important is the involvement of local communities, as their engagement in site operations fosters economic inclusivity and enhances authenticity. [Hanrahan et al. \(2016\)](#) highlight that local artisans, guides, and storytellers contribute valuable cultural context, enriching visitor experiences while supporting local livelihoods. Integrating ecological responsibility with community participation ensures that tourism remains sustainable and culturally meaningful.
4. *Destinations should enhance the appeal of archaeological tourism by integrating it with complementary experiences such as culinary, adventure, or wellness tourism.* Combining site visits with local wine tastings or traditional cooking classes, for example, creates more prosperous and more engaging travel itineraries, and such synergies improve the visitor experience by catering to multiple interests simultaneously ([Varley & Semple, 2015](#)). Moreover, these integrated offerings strengthen a destination's competitive edge by attracting a broader range of travellers. Such an approach maximizes economic potential and highlights the depth of a destination's cultural heritage.

Sustainable product development requires a balance between innovation and responsible management. At the same time, personalization and technology enhance visitor engagement, and long-term success depends on integrating these elements within broader conservation and tourism strategies.

3.2. Storytelling as a Tool for Engagement

Creating unique experiences through storytelling has become an essential element of tourism, particularly within archaeological tourism. As a discipline focused on uncovering and interpreting remnants of past societies, archaeology has long fascinated the public ([Petković et al., 2019](#)). Tourists increasingly seek narratives embedded in archaeological heritage, fostering personalized and memorable experiences. Storytelling is crucial for archaeological knowledge transfer, a connection that archaeologists as experts create between past and present tourists, and which has to be founded on facts and scientific data but improved by adequate narratives and interpretation familiar to the general audience but freed of any subjective thinking ([Moshenska, 2017](#); [Praetzellis, 2014](#); [Tapavički-Ilić &](#)

Andelković Grašar, 2013). Although the relationship between storytelling and the creation of unique experiences warrants further exploration (Koll, 2015; Mody et al., 2019), there is a notable global shift in experience-driven industries, including tourism, where compelling narratives serve as a foundation for value creation (Mei et al., 2020; Mossberg, 2008). Storytelling creates emotional connections, transforming archaeological sites into meaningful experiences. As Richards (2018) notes, tourists now seek memorable engagements over passive visits. Telling deepens visitors' understanding of cultural heritage by contextualizing historical facts and fostering engagement. Timothy and Boyd (2006) highlight cultural interpretation's role in conveying a site's broader significance.

3.3. Digital Tools and Innovations

In the 21st century, advancements in digital technology have the potential to dramatically simplify and improve the process as well as the overall experience for travellers (Marinakos & Tserga, 2019). Digital tools, including augmented (AR) and virtual reality (VR), have revolutionized visitor experiences by making archaeological sites more accessible and interactive (Bradić-Martinović et al., 2023). These technologies allow tourists to engage with historical narratives unprecedentedly, contributing to education and preservation.

The rising demand for these innovations, particularly among Millennials and Generation Z, highlights their growing importance (Buhalis & Karatay, 2022). Tussyadiah et al. (2018) emphasize that these technologies enhance presence and interaction within destinations, deepening emotional connections and enriching the tourist experience. Traditionally, archaeological site interpretation was constrained by physical remnants and limited materials. At the same time, digital reconstructions now overcome these barriers, allowing visitors to visualize and engage with the site's historical context in more immersive and dynamic ways.

Technological advancements in archaeological tourism allow visitors to bridge gaps in historical understanding, offering immersive experiences of ancient life (Hodges, 2020). VR tours recreate ancient cities as they once stood, deepening engagement with past civilizations. By simulating historical moments, such as battles or royal ceremonies, VR can "transport" users into pivotal events, providing unique insights into the past. Additionally, VR enables virtual access to sites restricted due to conservation efforts or physical barriers, ensuring broader accessibility and preservation (Chang, 2021; Djunarto et al., 2022; Seshadri et al., 2023). AR, on the other hand, enhances on-site visits by animating historical figures and events and guiding visitors through landmarks with real-time storytelling (Han et al., 2019). By overlaying virtual reconstructions of ruins or artifacts, AR transforms static sites into dynamic experiences, fostering deeper connections between tourists and the heritage they explore. Integrating interactive technologies in archaeological tourism creates more engaging and meaningful experiences, strengthening visitors' understanding of historical significance. VR and AR technologies support sustainable tourism by offering virtual alternatives to physical visits, reducing over-tourism and minimizing strain on fragile archaeological sites. Integrating these innovations enhances visitor experiences while protecting ancient structures and artifacts (Kim et al., 2012; Richards, 2014). Virtual and augmented experiences allow sites to accommodate large audiences without risking physical damage, crucial for preserving vulnerable heritage locations. By enabling digital exploration, VR and AR tours maintain site integrity while delivering immersive and educational experiences.

Beyond AR and VR, emerging technologies are transforming tourism by enhancing interactivity and personalization. Here are some examples: (a) Artificial Intelligence (AI) enables data-driven recommendations, real-time assistance via chatbots, and itinerary optimization based on traveller behaviour (Huang & Rust, 2018); (b) the Internet of Things (IoT) enhances connectivity with smart

navigation, automated check-ins, and adaptive accommodations; (c) blockchain improves transparency and security in travel transactions, reducing fraud and streamlining booking processes (Pradhan et al., 2023); (d) the expansion of 5G networks accelerates AR and VR adoption, enabling seamless high-resolution experiences and (e) mixed reality (MR) and extended reality (XR) merge physical and digital environments, offering new dimensions of immersive exploration (Alhakamy, 2024).

Emerging technologies enhance interactivity and personalization in tourism and play a crucial role in memory formation by fostering emotional engagement, novelty, and sensory stimulation (Skavronskaya et al., 2020). AR and VR create immersive experiences that deepen connections to archaeological sites while enabling tailored tours that align with individual interests. Archaeological tourism, a niche market for history and heritage enthusiasts, benefits from ICT innovations that enhance personalization and emotional resonance. Pencarelli (2020) emphasizes that the future of tourism lies in blending authenticity with innovation, ensuring genuinely unforgettable experiences.

4. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURISM

Developing unique archaeological tourism experiences presents challenges beyond conservation. Destinations must craft engaging, immersive tourism products while preserving historical authenticity. A key obstacle is integrating modern storytelling techniques, such as digital reconstructions, interactive exhibits, or AR, without distorting historical facts. Additionally, the balance between education and entertainment remains complex, as tourists seek engaging experiences while heritage professionals emphasize historical accuracy. Limited funding and technological resources further complicate innovation efforts, particularly in lesser-known or underfunded archaeological sites. Overcoming these barriers requires interdisciplinary collaboration among archaeologists, tourism developers, and digital technology experts to ensure that archaeological tourism products remain engaging and educational. Balancing conservation with accessibility remains a persistent challenge. While archaeological sites attract significant visitor interest, unregulated tourism can lead to over-tourism, physical degradation, and loss of historical authenticity. Implementing controlled visitor access, such as guided tours and limited entry programs, can help mitigate damage while maintaining public engagement. “Viminacium Archaeological Park” is an example of how protective covering constructions and controlled visitor access reduce environmental damage while preserving site integrity (Nikolić et al., 2019). The absence of these protective measures can disrupt the balance between conservation and public access, posing a risk to the long-term benefits of cultural heritage tourism at archaeological sites.

Successful site preservation relies on preventive conservation measures that mitigate risks related to environmental factors, urbanization, and tourism. International conventions, agreements, and best practice guidelines are crucial in long-term preservation efforts. These include the UNESCO 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, and the 1992 European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valletta Convention). Additionally, national laws, such as Serbia’s Law on Cultural Property Protection (1994, revised 2011) and the National Strategy for Cultural Development 2020–2029, provide essential frameworks for safeguarding heritage.

While commercialization supports financial sustainability, excessive commodification risks eroding a site’s cultural significance, archaeological tourism developers often face pressure to create revenue-generating attractions, such as themed entertainment, large-scale souvenir markets, or high-priced exclusive tours, which can overshadow the site’s historical integrity. Striking a balance between commercial success and heritage authenticity requires careful planning. Adaptive reuse

of heritage structures, locally crafted souvenirs based on archaeological findings, and experiential learning programs offer ways to commercialize responsibly while maintaining historical authenticity. Managing mass tourism at world heritage sites requires an integrated approach that includes stakeholder dialogue, conservation planning, and sustainable tourism management, and the Serbian best example is “Golubačka tvrđava”. Effective destination management increasingly relies on the integration of crisis management strategies to ensure resilience and sustainable tourism development, particularly in regions lacking established destination management systems, such as Serbia, where ad hoc responses have proven insufficient (Petković et al., 2023).

Effective management models must incorporate visitor impact monitoring, adaptive conservation strategies, and policies that ensure tourism activities contribute to site maintenance rather than deterioration (Hassan et al., 2024). At the same time, archaeological tourism offers unique opportunities to integrate sustainable tourism models that directly contribute to site preservation. Some successful preservation methodologies include heritage tourism initiatives where visitor fees and tour revenues are reinvested into conservation projects. The “Viminacium Archaeological Park” exemplifies how archaeological sites can function as cultural heritage landmarks and tourism-driven preservation models (Golubović & Korać, 2013). Educational programs that involve both tourists and local communities further enhance heritage protection by fostering awareness and reducing instances of looting and vandalism (Tapavički-Ilić et al., 2022).

Successfully navigating the challenges of archaeological tourism requires a balanced approach that integrates preservation, responsible commercialization, and evolving visitor expectations. While managing visitor impact and safeguarding heritage sites remain priorities, destinations must also embrace innovation and strategic diversification to enhance engagement. Aligning tourism products with sustainability principles, digital advancements, and experiential storytelling ensures long-term viability while maintaining cultural integrity. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders and adapting to emerging trends, archaeological tourism can continue to offer meaningful and immersive experiences without compromising heritage values.

These theoretical considerations provide a foundation for analysing the “Viminacium Archaeological Park”, where many discussed concepts, such as stakeholder engagement, experiential design, and sustainability, have been applied in practice.

5. THE “VIMINACIUM ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK” - EXAMPLE OF SUCCESSFUL ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURISM DESTINATION

Effective archaeological tourism product development requires carefully balancing experience-oriented strategies and heritage management principles. While tools such as storytelling, digital media, and personalization enhance visitor engagement, these must be aligned with conservation priorities, authenticity preservation, and long-term stewardship of archaeological resources to ensure that tourism supports rather than endangers cultural heritage (De la Torre, 2002; Timothy & Boyd, 2006). The following example of the “Viminacium Archaeological Park” in Serbia illustrates how these principles can be implemented through an integrated site protection, interpretation, and community involvement model.

5.1. From Excavation Site to Tourism Initiative

Officially opened in October 2006, “Viminacium Archaeological Park” preserves the remains of the Roman military camp of the Seventh Claudia Legion (Legio VII Claudia Pia Fidelis) and the administrative capital of the Roman province of Upper Moesia (Spasić-Đurić, 2002, 2015).

In Roman times, Viminacium was a crucial strategic point on the Danube limes, situated at the crossroads of major trade routes, facilitating encounters between various cultures, religions, and cults. In the Middle Ages, Viminacium was a source of building materials for constructing the Smederevo Fortress. At the same time, its ancient monuments and architectural elements continued to be repurposed in local settlements until nearly the mid-20th century, contributing to the site's deterioration (Anđelković Grašar et al., 2020; Kanic, 1989; Marsigli, 1726).

A turning point in the relationship between Viminacium, the local community, and the broader public began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the start of archaeological excavations, which attracted intellectuals, industrialists, and royal support (Anđelković Grašar & Nikolić, 2019; Korać & Golubović, 2009). Despite growing recognition, the site also became vulnerable to looting, with numerous artifacts illegally removed and sold on the antiquities market (Anđelković Grašar et al., 2020). In the later decades of the 20th century, large-scale protective excavations at Viminacium uncovered more than 14,000 graves, driven by the expansion of coal mining and the construction of the Kostolac B thermal power plant (Korać & Golubović, 2009; Zotović, 1986; Zotović & Jordović, 1990). In the early 2000s, the Institute of Archaeology introduced systematic research with advanced methodologies, uncovering additional graves and urban structures within the city and military camp. Ongoing threats from mining and looting highlighted the need for urgent protection, leading to the establishment of the “Viminacium Archaeological Park”. The initiative aimed to integrate research, tourism, and public engagement, raise awareness of heritage value, and secure long-term site preservation through visitor access, educational events, and local community involvement. Such initiatives reflect the need for community engagement and diversified offerings, as discussed in Section 2. By 2006, parts of the military camp, city, and necropolises had been explored, prompting the strategic decision to open the site to the public. Although Viminacium had been declared a cultural monument of exceptional importance in 1979, it lacked physical protection, leaving it vulnerable to mining and looting. Establishing the “Viminacium Archaeological Park” was thus both a protective measure and a way to raise public awareness of the site's value (Nikolić et al., 2019).

5.2. Designing the Visitor Experience

At its opening, Viminacium was equipped with protective constructions over excavated remains, paved paths, and essential visitor infrastructure, including a Roman-style tavern, souvenir shop, restrooms, and parking. Guided tours were developed around storytelling grounded in scientific research, initially conducted by archaeologists and later by trained local guides. The interpretative concept introduced experiential features, staff in Roman attire, theatrical reenactments such as Charon's journey into the underworld, and local wine served in amphora-like vessels - designed to immerse visitors in Roman-era life. The original tour, lasting around 90 minutes, included key points such as the Porta Praetoria, Roman baths, and the Pirivoj necropolis with painted tombs, presented in situ to evoke the deceased's perspective. This narrative-rich, sensory approach distinguished the “Viminacium Archaeological Park” as a pioneering model of archaeological tourism in Serbia (Anđelković Grašar, 2012; Anđelković Grašar et al., 2013; Golubović & Tapavički-Ilić, 2012; Korać, 2019). The experiential elements introduced at Viminacium, such as theatrical performances and interpretive storytelling, closely align with the principles of narrative engagement outlined earlier in the discussion (Mossberg, 2008; Richards, 2018).

During its early years, the “Viminacium Archaeological Park” emerged as Serbia's leading cultural tourism destination, attracting 50,000 to 80,000 visitors annually, including Danube cruise tourists (Maksin et al., 2011; Tapavički-Ilić & Anđelković Grašar, 2013). The site advanced toward self-sustainability

through increased public interest, local employment, and strengthened cultural valorisation (Anđelković Grašar et al., 2020). Permanent protection was secured in 2009, and regular visitor presence helped suppress illegal excavations more effectively than surveillance systems (Nikolić et al., 2017). Ongoing research and programming continue to expand the tourist offer. The tour now lasts nearly three hours and includes major events, such as the 2013 opera *Aida* performed for 2,500 visitors in the amphitheatre, now a permanent attraction (Bogdanović & Jevtović, 2019; Ilić & Nikolić, 2014).

An unexpected addition to the Viminacium tourism offer came with the discovery of mammoth fossils during coal mining at Drmno. The initial find in 2009, followed by several others in 2012, prompted the creation of the Mammoth Park—an on-site paleontological exhibition integrated into the archaeological complex. Officially opened to visitors in 2014, this attraction enriched the park's interpretative scope by linking deep prehistory with Roman heritage (Korać, 2019; Nikolić, 2019).

Recognizing the importance of engaging younger generations in heritage protection and tourism, the need for additional accommodation and educational infrastructure became evident. In response, Limes Park was opened in 2018 as a Roman-style legionary camp, offering 480 beds, a canteen, and conference halls for workshops and events. The complex also includes an obstacle course and adventure park, forming a comprehensive educational facility for summer schools, archaeological camps, and hands-on learning experiences (Anđelković Grašar & Plemić, 2022; Anđelković Grašar et al., 2024; Korać, 2019). The effectiveness of aligning product development with experiential and technological strategies outlined in Section 3 is demonstrated here.

Over time, “Viminacium Archaeological Park” has gained wide national and international recognition, supported by the Institute of Archaeology's engagement in global projects. The expansion of park facilities enabled the organization of scientific conferences and diverse cultural events, strengthening its role as a multidisciplinary heritage destination. As Serbia's first structured archaeological tourism initiative, Viminacium exemplifies a best-practice model where tourism safeguards heritage and fosters community dialogue, educational outreach, and long-term preservation through active public engagement.

6. CONCLUSION

The development of archaeological tourism is continuously shaped by evolving traveller expectations, digital transformation, and increasing sustainability concerns. One of the most prominent trends is the rise of slow travel, which encourages tourists to engage more deeply with cultural heritage. By prioritizing extended stays, in-depth exploration, and community interactions, slow travel enhances visitor experiences while reducing the negative environmental impacts of rapid tourism turnover (Poulimenou et al., 2022). Archaeological tourism is particularly well-suited for this trend, as it allows travellers to connect with heritage sites more meaningfully. Technology remains a key driver of change in tourism product development. Integrating VR, AR, and AI has transformed visitor engagement by offering interactive, multisensory experiences. These digital tools not only enhance accessibility for tourists with physical limitations but also help preserve fragile archaeological sites by reducing direct visitor impact (Rizvić et al., 2023; Tussyadiah et al., 2018). AI-powered customization further allows visitors to tailor their itineraries based on personal interests, ensuring a more engaging and educational experience (Huang & Rust, 2018).

Successfully navigating the challenges of archaeological tourism requires a balanced approach that integrates sustainable tourism product development, strategic differentiation, and evolving visitor expectations. While heritage conservation remains a priority, archaeological tourism must be

positioned as a competitive tourism product by leveraging customization, immersive storytelling, and digital innovation. The “Viminacium Archaeological Park” demonstrates how experiential design and product innovation enhance site value while fostering economic sustainability. This particular case reaffirms that well-conceived archaeological tourism products, rooted in authenticity, educational value, and immersive design, can support both heritage preservation and local development, especially in transitional or resource-constrained contexts.

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