

eLearning Courses for Tourism and Heritage during a Pandemic: The Case of 'Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Vol. 3)'

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The tourism industry relies heavily on new technological advancements; through them, hospitality and service businesses can perform their operations, influence and predict future trends and visitors' demands, and create new experiences. Due to its characteristics – high staff turnover, seasonality, a delicate equilibrium of micro, small and medium enterprises as well as global business conglomerates – the tourism sector must adapt at the same pace of innovations in digital technologies in order to survive. Education and training have been adopting digital media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) extensively in instances where traditional face-to-face lessons are not possible or sustainable. Where learning activities happen online thanks to digital means, we speak of 'eLearning,' which has shown to be beneficial in terms of cutting costs, offering time and space flexibility and, in the case of the tourism industry, in keeping tourism operators continuously updated, upskilled and engaged with industry and consumer trends. With the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, the usefulness and flexibility of digital technologies for education and training have become even more apparent. Remote work or telecommuting have become an integral part of people's lives and workplaces. In many instances, eLearning proved to be the key element for an industry's survival – and in some cases success. In this paper, the case of a particular type of eLearning phenomenon will be analysed: that of so-called Massive Open Online Courses, or 'MOOCs.' The example of the third volume of a MOOC series dedicated to tourism and heritage, 'Tourism Management at World Heritage Sites (Vol. 3),' will be used to outline the characteristics of its learners, as well as to show the significance and relevance of eLearning for the tourism and heritage sector.

Keywords: eLearning, Tourism, Heritage, MOOCs, ICTs

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Introduction

Tourism's properties must be understood in order to truly understand the sector. One of its defining fea-

tures is that the majority of its firms are either small, medium, or even micro enterprises, along with all of the issues this entails for their operational structures

and dynamics. Only a small number of tourism businesses are huge international conglomerates, yet they face the same difficulties as their smaller peers, but on a larger and global scale. Coordinating their branches through standardized strategies and skill sets is already one of the most important responsibilities for the enterprise's sustainability.

Even more daunting is the industry's tendency to suffer from skill shortages and employee turnover (one of the worst in the world) (HEFCE, 1998); training proves thus to be a significant time- and resource-consuming issue (Cantoni et al., 2009). The ability to afford and deliver continuous education and advanced upgrading courses to one's personnel is a critical success factor for tourism as an industry (Boisevert, 2000). Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have repeatedly shown to be an ideal instrument for training in this context. Indeed, digital technologies are being used to overcome constraints regarding accessibility, time, and cost, as well as to bring additional flexibility in learning and training to meet distinct work conditions (Sigala, 2002).

In the years following the outbreak of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the numerous inter- and intra-national restrictions on movement of people (if not outright travel bans) and lockdowns have, in many instances, halted the whole world, including tourism. The pandemic's impact on already faltering economies has rendered tourism particularly vulnerable, making it the most damaged sector thus far (Pololikashvili, 2020), although the trend seems to be reversing in 2022. During the first months of the disease's global spread, many tourist operators had to discover new methods in order to adjust their companies. This was a chance for everyone, from the housebound tourist to the CEO of an international tour operator, or even the policymakers or stakeholders of national tourism ministries attempting to reorganize their country's tourism business, to rediscover the value of ICTs for training and tourism. Some organizations or institutions, such as the UNESCO Chair in ICT to develop and promote sustainable tourism in World Heritage Sites at USI – Università della Svizzera italiana (Lugano, Switzerland), had already begun focusing on and researching the various ways ICTs, par-

ticularly eLearning, can be applied to tourism education, and had made their archives and resources available all.

The focus of this article will be on a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) published in English and Arabic in May 2021 (and closing in December 2022) available on the French platform FUN MOOC: 'Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Vol. 3).'¹ Following its presentation, it will serve to outline the learners' motives for taking a course focusing on tourism in heritage sites, as well as to display how they interact with e-classmates, instructors, and course materials. The UNESCO UNITWIN Network 'Culture, Tourism, Development,' coordinated by Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (Paris, France), created the MOOC, which was released on 24 May 2022. The course addresses many areas of tourism management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Tourism Interpretation, Tourism Marketing, Site Management Systems, UNESCO's Heritage Conventions, Local Communities' Involvement, Sustainable Tourism, and ICTs for Heritage Tourism. This training course is designed for and intended for policymakers, site managers, students, and other professionals of the tourism sector.

By 25 June 2022, the course had attracted 5,974 students from 164 countries. Based on the number of free course completion certificates provided as of their latest creation on the same date, 373 students eligible to receive a certificate (only a grade of 80% or higher would be awarded the free certification, so more students have surely finished the course with a lower grade) finished the course, indicating a completion rate of at least 6.2%.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs):

An eLearning Phenomenon

MOOCs appeared for the first time in 2008. Stephen Downes and George Siemens, two Canadian academics, created the first of its kind, which was based on a distributed peer-learning model. MOOCs are examples of open education resources (OER), which encourage researchers and institutions to make educa-

¹ <https://www.fun-mooc.fr/en/courses/tourism-management-unesco-world-heritage-sites-vol-3/>

tional materials available to everybody, allowing students and educators to reuse, repurpose, and remix them (Universities UK, 2013). Indeed, MOOCs are, by definition, online learning environments that provide full and free open access to an unlimited number of participants to various learning resources without the need for prior knowledge on the topic or entry requirements, and can be accessed from anywhere as long as an internet connection is available (Tracey, 2013; Murphy et al., 2017). MOOC resources often exist in the form of recorded or live video lessons, ad hoc written materials, quizzes, other peer-reviewed activities, and discussion forums (Lin & Cantoni, 2018; Lin et al., 2018).

The rising popularity and spread of MOOCs, as well as the growing number of famous schools and universities rebranding themselves as MOOC providers are generating major media interest. As a matter of fact, as reported on the website Class Central, the Indian Institute of Technology and MIT have the second and third biggest MOOC catalogue as of 2022, with 494 and 435 courses, respectively (the number has approximately doubled for both since 2021, when they had 230 and 235 courses); The Open University overtook them in 2022, reaching a total of 1,023 published MOOCs. The openness, flexibility, and scalability supported by these online courses is appealing to higher education institutions as well as tourism organizations wishing to train and educate their own staff.

At the close of 2021, approximately 19,400 MOOCs and 70 MOOC-based degrees had been launched or announced (Shah, 2021). The number of courses addressing tourism or historical subjects is unclear; no comprehensive list is available. Studies that attempted to establish one, such as Ryan et al. (2016), discovered at least 30 tourist MOOCs; in 2017, the Europeana Foundation (2017) estimated that there were approximately 400 heritage MOOCs. Still, this list of courses has at best a generic categorization, since it defines them as dealing with arts, humanities, or cultural heritage, but without specifying the objective they seek.

MOOCs are relatively new phenomena that have grown more important by the year. Their appearance and success spurred researchers to examine this eLearning method to a greater extent. Some of the

principal investigation foci of MOOC studies will be briefly mentioned in the following paragraphs.

Research on Massive Open Online Courses

Before delving into the case at hand, various studies devoted to MOOCs will be presented: they were done to investigate the course structure, pedagogical and instructional design, evaluation, reception, usages, and efficacy. There is a considerable interest in understanding learners' perspectives in eLearning. In an article on learner motivation and self-directed learning (Fournier et al., 2014), control of learning was shown to be mainly maintained by learners. Furthermore, assessing the characteristics of participants through the use of learning analytics generated by them might reveal learner types and motivations, as well as draw attention to engagement, which Deboer et al. (2013) describe as a 'promising MOOC measure.'

Other studies have directed their focus on teachers' experiences in an effort to fill a vacuum in the current state of MOOC research. According to Lin and Cantoni (2018), instructor experience follows the three steps of the innovation-decision process: decision, implementation, and confirmation; their motivation to design and develop the MOOC was documented through semi-structured interviews.

Some researchers sought to identify the prospective providers with an interest in developing and delivering ICT-based training services. Studies attempted to map the eLearning offer by analysing the types of eLearning course distributors and their features and approaches in terms of delivery formats, eLearning tool types, and even reach. Academic institutions, public entities (divided into international institutions and destination management organizations), cultural heritage sites, museums, or UNESCO World Heritage Sites, NGOs, and individuals were identified as MOOC providers in the tourism and hospitality field (Cantoni et al., 2009).

MOOC research trends are another noteworthy subject: knowing which topics, models, theories, research methodologies, frameworks, and concepts are employed and how they lead to focused studies that are able to address the gaps in MOOC research literature (Bozkurt et al., 2016).

Some studies have sought to analyse the success of MOOCs by measuring student engagement. Kahn et al.'s (2017) research put at its centre reflexivity and how it may be induced by student interaction in online learning settings. Gamage et al. (2016), on the other hand, measured the effectiveness of 22 MOOCs by enrolling and participating themselves in the course experience, analysing the quality of the learning experience through the evaluation of the platforms used to host the courses.

Objectives

MOOCs dealing purely with tourism are still uncommon, but their importance, potential, and limitations have been newly recognized, leading to the development of fresh instances of online courses teaching about the industry's reality. Some of the inherent benefits of MOOCs include the fact that the Internet, which includes ICTs in general and eLearning in particular, provides great flexibility in specific work conditions; in an information-intensive domain like tourism, these adaptable characteristics are greatly valued, especially in situations comparable with the limits and restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the scarcity of eLearning courses and MOOCs on tourism at heritage sites, the goal of this research is to find and outline what motivates learners to enrol in such MOOCs and how they engage as they advance through the course. This will ideally aid other course creators in constructing and incorporating MOOCs into their teaching programmes. The primary research objectives were thus: (a) to identify the learners' motivations for participating in such a MOOC; and (b) to identify their behavioural patterns in terms of effort, engagement, and satisfaction.

Methodology

To answer the research objectives, two distinct surveys were released for the course 'Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Vol. 3)' – one at the start of the course on 24 May 2021 and one after all chapters had been published, on 28 June 2021 (henceforth they will be referred to as 'first survey' and 'final survey', respectively). On 15 May 2022, when the data for this article was collected, the first survey

had received 533 replies, while the final survey had 199 responses. On the same date, 5,832 students were registered in the course. The information gathered relates to demographics, education, participation motives, past eLearning experiences, level of effort and involvement, and transfer to professional practice. Data was collected and evaluated in order to discover learners' behavioural patterns and incentives to engage.

Results

The survey results pertinent to addressing the study goals will be presented and discussed in the following paragraphs.

MOOC Participants

When responding to the first survey, students were requested to share information on gender, age, educational level, and employment status. Before moving on to the data on motivations to participate, effort, and engagement, the findings are briefly presented to offer an indication of who the learners of tourism and heritage MOOCs are.

Starting with *gender distribution*, female learners made up 63.1% of survey respondents, compared to only 35.6% of male respondents. The remaining either did not state their gender (0.9%) or did not respond to the question (0.5%).

In terms of *age*, learners were born between 1946 and 2006. The birth intervals were distributed as follows: 1940–1949 (0.5%); 1950–1959 (2.2%); 1960–1969 (11.4%); 1970–1979 (16.1%); 1980–1989 (23.0%); 1990–1999 (31.8%); 2000+ (14.3%). This indicates that the average student ranged between the ages of 16 to 42.

The *educational level* of the respondents tended to be graduate: 40.3% of MOOC participants held a Master's degree, and 7.8% a PhD. Undergraduate degrees accounted for 37.4%, while secondary education or lower degrees accounted for 11.6%. Respondents having academic training outside of standard categorizations made up 2.0%, while learners that had not received any academic training and those that did not respond both represented 0.4% of the sample.

In terms of *employment*, 40.7% of respondents were employed; 20.8% were seeking employment; 0.7% had no occupation; 1.1% had previously retired; and 26.4%

Table 1 Demographics, Educational Level and Employment Status of Learners

Gender	Male	35.6
	Female	63.1
	Other/Not Specified	0.9
	No answer	0.4
Age	1940–1949	0.5
	1950–1959	2.3
	1960–1969	11.5
	1970–1979	16.2
	1980–1989	23.2
	1990–1999	32.0
	2000–	14.4
Educational level	Doctoral or equivalent	7.8
	Master or equivalent	40.3
	Bachelor or equivalent	37.4
	Secondary ed. or lower	11.6
	No academic training	0.4
	Other academic training	2.0
	No answer	0.4
Employment status	High school student	1.1
	University student	25.3
	Employed	40.7
	Looking for work	20.8
	No occupation	0.7
	Retired	1.1
	Other	9.8
	No answer	0.4

Notes In percent.

were still completing their education (of which 1.1% were high school students and 25.3% university students). Participants that did not respond were 0.5%, and 9.8% could not be sorted into a specific employment or education category.

Learners' Motivations for Their Participation in the MOOC

The first survey asked learners why they wanted to take a tourism and heritage MOOC. The questions would reveal the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of

learners: intrinsic motivations refer to activities performed because they are fundamentally interesting or delightful, whereas extrinsic motivations are described as acts performed because they result in a 'separable outcome' (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students could choose multiple answers from a pool of three intrinsic motivations, four extrinsic motivations, and an option for undecided learners. The results are shown hereafter.

Examining the reasons for participating in the MOOC, the most common is intrinsic in nature: 'Because I am particularly interested in this topic' (47.5% of respondents chose this option). 'Because I enjoy learning new things' (39.6%) and 'Completing this course is a personal challenge' (16.1%) are second and third in the key intrinsic motivations.

The most common extrinsic motivation was connected to the respondents' careers: 39.2% of respondents answered 'Because in my opinion it could be an asset in my career (or my future career)'. Others included: 'to assist me with my professional integration' (27.4%), and 'in order to access a better job' (12.2%). Other, more specific, reasons included the respondents' jobs being connected to tourism and heritage, and they were searching for more in-depth information and knowledge to better perform in their respective roles (1.7%).

A few of the respondents also stated that they were taking the course for no specific purpose: 'I have no particular reason' (1.3%).

Learners' Expectation about Effort and Engagement

In many instances, MOOC literature seeks to assess learner effort and engagement – defined as the time and energy students dedicate to educationally purposeful activities (Kuh, 2001) – in order to discover how learners act and what interests them and makes them engage in a course (Harper & Quaye, 2009), be it more general or more topic-specific material. In most situations, this information is gathered using surveys; some researchers, however, prefer interviews, student self-reports, experience sampling, direct observation, focused case studies, checklists and rating scales, instructor assessments of students, and work sample analysis (Mandernach, 2015).

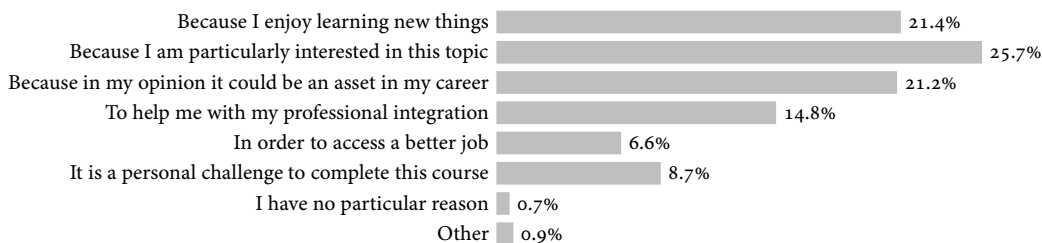


Figure 1 Motivations of Learners for Their Participating in the MOOC

Learners were invited to share their expectations on how they thought they intended to arrange their learning experience as part of the first survey. When asked how much hourly effort they expected to put into the MOOC every week, The majority of respondents said that in terms of hourly effort, for the most part they expected to invest in the MOOC 1–2 hours (39.7%) to 2–3 hours (30.0%), as opposed to 4–5 hours (17.6%), more than five hours (8.4%), and less than one hour (4.2%).

The majority also demonstrated a willingness and eagerness to engage in the MOOC: they intended to view most, if not all, of the videos (28.5% and 58.8%, respectively). Only 8.7% claimed they would watch some, while 4.0% said they would watch half of them.

Similarly, learners were expecting to complete the majority (36.0%) or all (51.9%) of the course activities (quizzes, homework, exams), 7.2% intended to do some, and 5.0% half of them.

The following projections revealed a different picture: in regard to how much respondents planned to participate in the MOOC’s ‘social’ features (general discussion forum, Facebook group, peer evaluations), a slight majority of responses indicated a preference for engaging in some of the social MOOC elements. Specifically, the percentages were: some of them (41.7%); most of them (30.0%); all of them (16.6%); and half of them (11.4%).

Actual Effort and Engagement of Learners:

Kirkpatrick’s Model and National Survey of Student Engagement

The final survey, based on Lin & Cantoni (2017), was conceived as an assessment strategy using two frameworks: the Kirkpatrick model (Kirkpatrick, 1975) and

Table 2 Learners’ Expectations about Their Own Effort and Engagement

Expected weekly effort	Less than 1h	4.2
	1h to 2h	39.7
	2h to 3h	30.0
	4h to 5h	17.6
	More than 5h	8.4
Do you plan to watch the videos?	Some of them	8.7
	Half of them	4.0
	Most of them	28.5
	All of them	58.8
Do you intend to do the activities?	Some of them	7.2
	Half of them	5.0
	Most of them	36.0
	All of them	51.9
How much do you plan to contribute to the ‘social’ elements of MOOC?	Some of them	41.7
	Half of them	11.4
	Most of them	30.0
	All of them	16.6

Notes In percent.

the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) tool. The Kirkpatrick model delineates four levels of training outcomes (reaction, learning, behaviour, and results) and established itself as an international reference point for training evaluation. The current study, based on its scope as well as on the survey’s structure, focused only on the first two layers.

The NSSE survey has repeatedly demonstrated its reliability as the most established tool for measuring learner engagement; for this reason, it was used to address the second layer of Kirkpatrick’s model, learning.

In 2014, it was later expanded into the *UKES MOOC Engagement Research Survey* (Wintrup et al., 2015). The 2014 version was used in the MOOC's final survey.

The term *reaction* refers to how much participants appreciated a particular training programme and the amount of time they dedicated to it. Reaction measures affective responses to the programme's quality or usefulness of training (Bates, 2004). The final survey revealed learners' high level of *time investment*: 73.8% spent 1 to 3 hours in the 'Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Vol. 3)' MOOC and 18.1% studied for more than 4 hours every week. The remaining 5.4% claimed to engage with the course for less than one hour every week. The percentage of those who did not respond to this question was 2.7. The findings were comparable to the results of the first survey for students' expected weekly hourly effort.

Of all survey respondents, 96.6% were quite satisfied (24.8%) or completely satisfied (71.8%) with the competences they gained thanks to participating in the MOOC. The students that voiced some dissatisfaction were a total of 0.7%, while 2.7% of those that answered the final survey did not express their opinions.

The overall satisfaction of learners is demonstrated further by the fact that almost all would recommend the course to other peers or friends: 96.0% (yes, definitely 74.5%; yes, probably 21.5%). Only 1.3% would abstain from recommending this MOOC (0.7% for each of the answers: no, not really; no, not at all) and 2.7% gave no answer.

More than half of the participants claimed that they reached a good degree of *Higher order learning* (a learner's ability to undertake cognitive tasks, e.g. application, analysis, judgment, and synthesis, as opposed to simply memorizing facts and data) during the MOOC. The most agreed-upon statement was 'During this MOOC, you formed a new understanding from various pieces of the course' (very much 21.6%; quite a bit 26.1%), closely followed by 'During this MOOC, you memorized course content' (very much 19.1%; quite a bit 27.1%). The least agreed-upon statement was 'During this MOOC, you evaluated or judged a point of view, decision, or information source' (very much 11.1%; quite a bit 24.1%).

The perception of learners as to whether the course

Table 3 Survey Respondents' Higher Order Learning

Item	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Formed a new understanding from various pieces of the course	32.3	39.1	20.3	1.5	6.8
Evaluated or judged a point of view, decision, or information source	16.5	36.1	32.3	8.3	6.8
Analysed ideas or theories in depth by examining their parts	22.6	36.1	23.3	9.8	8.3
Applied facts, theories, or methods to new situations	26.3	34.6	19.5	12.0	7.5
Memorised course content	28.6	40.6	17.3	6.0	7.5

Notes In percent. Column headings are as follows: (1) very often, (2) often, (3) sometimes, (4) never, (5) no answer.

challenged them to do their best was measured: the outcomes showed that they are more interested in educational activities that are achievable with some degree of challenge. Almost three quarters of those polled (73.7%) confirmed they pushed themselves to perform their best in their learning efforts, 42.1% by answering somewhat agree, and 31.6% by answering strongly agree. Only 4.5% strongly disagreed with the statement, and similarly, 3.8% somewhat disagreed with it. Undecided respondents numbered 13.5%, and 4.5% did not respond to this question.

Collaborative learning regards the extent to which peers work together to solve issues or tackle challenging subject matter. The MOOC was mostly tackled individually by the learners – roughly a fifth of them interacted with other participants, while the others chose not to. To the question 'During this MOOC, you asked another learner to help you understand the course material' learners gave answers that ranged from never (72.9%) to sometimes (13.5%), with the other options achieving much smaller percentages of the total replies: 6.8% for often, and 3.0% for very often. The remaining 3.8% concluded that no response was required. The results for the question 'During this MOOC, you explained course material to one or more learners' revealed that 62.4% never did, some occasionally did (18.8%), and a small share of respondents

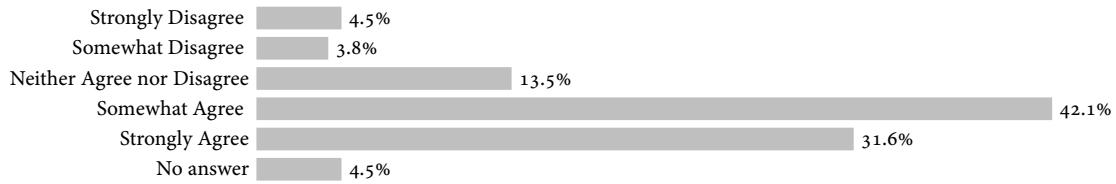


Figure 2 Course Difficulty as Perceived by Learners

Table 4 Survey Respondents’ Collaborative Learning

Item	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
You asked another learner to help you understand the course material	3.0	6.8	13.5	72.9	3.8
You explained course material to one or more learners	6.8	7.5	18.8	62.4	4.5

Notes In percent. Column headings are as follows: (1) very often, (2) often, (3) sometimes, (4) never, (5) no answer.

did so frequently for 7.5% of the time or very frequently for 6.8%. The remaining 4.5% did not respond.

In *Academic integration* the focus is not limited to course-related channels, but can potentially extend beyond the course scope and course learner base. A similar tendency noticed in *Collaborative learning* is replicated here. During the MOOC, only 18.8% of all replies (often 10.5%, very often 8.3%) indicated that they ‘asked questions or contributed to course discussions.’ A high percentage of the students (76.7%) chose not to exchange with fellow MOOC participants (never 45.9%, sometimes 30.8%). Those who did not respond were 4.5%. Interaction with others (not necessarily only learners) outside of official and related MOOC channels or even offline was limited: never 40.6%, sometimes 32.3%, often 15.0%, and very often 6.0%. Students that decided not to answer were 6.0%.

Reflective and integrative learning requires creating connections between learning materials and the settings in which they are presented, as well as re-examining and re-evaluating one’s own beliefs and viewpoints, sometimes also through the eyes of others. Many of the ‘Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Vol. 3)’ MOOC students used reflective and integrative learning throughout the duration of the course. In terms of integrative learn-

Table 5 Academic Integration of Survey Respondents

Item	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Discussed ideas from the course with others outside the course, including by email/online	6.0	15.0	32.3	40.6	6.0
Asked questions or contributed to course discussions	8.3	10.5	30.8	45.9	4.5

Notes In percent. Column headings are as follows: (1) very often, (2) often, (3) sometimes, (4) never, (5) no answer.

ing, for the most part students ‘connected ideas from [the] course to prior experience and knowledge’ during the MOOC: Often and Very Often both received 35.3% of answers for a total of 70.7% (sometimes 21.0%, never 1.5%, no answer 6.8%), followed by ‘During this MOOC, you learned something that changed the way you understood an issue or concept’ and ‘During this MOOC, you examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue,’ which gathered 61.7% and 57.1% of affirmative answers, respectively (sometimes 31.6% and 30.8%, never 0.8% and 4.5%, no answer 6.0% and 7.5%). Approximately half of those surveyed ‘tried to better understand someone else’s views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective’ (often 33.1%, sometimes 30.8%, very often 18.1%, never 10.5%, no answer 7.5%) and ‘connected [their] learning to societal problems or issues’ (sometimes 32.3%, often 23.3%, never 21.1%, very often 18.8%, no answer 4.5%).

Skills development assesses learners’ perception of whether there was an improvement in their analytical, critical or job-related skills thanks to their participation and learning in the course. More than half of MOOC participants acknowledged (often, very often)

Table 6 Survey Respondents’ Reflective and Integrative Learning

Item	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Connected ideas from your course to prior experience and knowledge	35.3	35.3	21.1	1.5	6.8
Learned something that changed the way you understood an issue or concept	24.8	36.8	31.6	0.8	6.0
Tried to better understand someone else’s views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	18.0	33.1	30.8	10.5	7.5
Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	24.1	33.1	30.8	4.5	7.5
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues	18.8	23.3	32.3	21.1	4.5

Notes In percent. Column headings are as follows: (1) very often, (2) often, (3) sometimes, (4) never, (5) no answer.

Table 7 Survey Respondents’ Skill Development

Item	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Understood people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.)	2.3	18.0	38.3	33.1	8.3
Developed or clarified personal values	3.8	25.6	33.1	29.3	8.3
Were innovative and creative	9.0	32.3	31.6	18.0	9.0
Became an independent learner	3.0	12.8	36.8	38.3	9.0
Acquired job or work-related knowledge and skills	13.5	22.6	33.1	23.3	7.5
Analyzed numerical and statistical information	21.8	38.3	20.3	9.8	9.8
Thought critically and analytically	2.3	18.8	38.3	33.8	6.8
Wrote clearly and effectively	14.3	25.6	31.6	21.1	7.5

Notes In percent. Column headings are as follows: (1) very often, (2) often, (3) sometimes, (4) never, (5) no answer.

that they indeed learned new skills. This was true for the following statements:

- ‘During this MOOC, you became an independent learner’ (very often 38.4%, often 36.8%, sometimes 12.8%, never 3.0%, no answer 9.0%),
- ‘During this MOOC, you thought critically and analytically’ (often 38.4%, very often 33.8%, sometimes 18.8%, never 2.3%, no answer 6.8%),
- ‘During this MOOC, you understood people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.)’ (often 38.4%, very often 33.1%, sometimes 18.1%, never 2.3%, no response 8.3%),
- ‘During this MOOC, you developed or clarified personal values’ (often 33.1%, very often 29.3%, sometimes 25.6%, never 3.8%, no response 8.3%),
- ‘During this MOOC, you acquired job or work-related knowledge and skills’ (often 33.1%, very often 23.3%, sometimes 22.7%, never 13.3%, no answer 7.5%),
- ‘During this MOOC, you wrote clearly and effec-

tively’ (often 31.6%, sometimes 25.6%, very often 21.1%, never 14.3%, no answer 7.5%).

Conversely, learners appear to have been not very innovative and creative throughout the MOOC (sometimes 32.3%, often 31.6%, very often 18.1%, never 9.0%, no response 9.0%), as well as avoided analysing numerical and statistical data (sometimes 38.4%, never 21.8%, often 20.3%, very often 9.8%, no answer 9.8%). The latter outcome might possibly lie in the fact that the course was not focused on numerical or statistical analysis.

As the seventh engagement indicator in the MOOC Engagement Research Survey (*Engagement with research*) was rated less relevant for the final survey of the ‘Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Vol. 3)’ MOOC, *Course Resources* took its place. It investigates the relationships between learners and course content from the perspective of learner engagement. According to the final survey’s responses, 53.4% of the MOOC’s students viewed all and 19.6% most of the video lectures for a total of 73.0%, which is lower compared to learners’ projections in the first

Table 8 Survey Respondents' Engagement with Course Resources

Item	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Chose to purchase resources directly related to the course subject matter	9.8	15.0	17.3	48.1	9.8
Used additional resources that were not suggested within the course	13.5	24.8	33.1	20.3	8.3
Found the given resources useful	51.9	32.3	7.5	0.8	7.5

Notes In percent. Column headings are as follows: (1) very often, (2) often, (3) sometimes, (4) never, (5) no answer.

survey (87.3%). In terms of quizzes and peer-to-peer assessed activities, 85.7% and 28.6% completed all or most of them, respectively, compared to the first survey's 87.9% and 46.6%. When asked if they found the MOOC's materials useful, 84.2% of respondents indicated they indeed did (very often 51.9%, often 32.3%), while 7.5% found them useful occasionally, and 0.8% considered them to be of no use to them. The remaining 7.5% did not select an answer. For the most part, students chose to use course materials and materials recommended by instructors. Slightly more than a third of respondents looked for additional documents on their own (sometimes 33.1%, often 24.8%, never 20.3%, very often 13.5%, no answer 8.3%), while a fourth chose to 'purchase resources directly related to the course subject matter' (never 48.1%, sometimes 17.3%, often 15.0%, very often 9.8%, no response 9.8%).

Discussion

In the preceding sections, the data gathered through the two surveys of the MOOC 'Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Vol. 3)' have been illustrated. This investigation had the goal of identifying and explaining characteristics and behavioural patterns of tourism and heritage MOOC participants in regard to why they enrol, how and to what extent they engage in such MOOCs. By having access to this, course designers are able to understand on a deeper level if their MOOCs perform well or not, and for what

reason. It is essential to determine what these learners are seeking so that the offer may be adapted properly, both in terms of its content and instructional design and delivery.

Beginning with demographics, the surveys showed that the characteristics of the participants of the MOOC are comparable to prior findings in tourism eLearning research (Rosani et al., 2018; 2020). After three volumes of the 'Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites' MOOC, these results may in part be explained with a certain amount of returning learners. However, with the data available to us, which was gathered automatically by the FUN MOOC platform, a precise 'census' of these returning learner base could not be done.

A differing result was the employment status of learners: there were fewer employed learners and more unemployed learners compared to the results in Rosani et al. (2018; 2020); seeing how tourism was one of the hardest hit industries during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, this result is not unexpected.

Considering students' stated motives, it is clear that acquiring information and skills is their leading objective. This occurs primarily for intrinsic reasons, but a more pragmatic angle can also be observed. This pattern is also confirmed by Fournier et al. (2014): students enrol in MOOCs for a variety of reasons, with knowledge and skills as their top priorities, while course completion is not as highly valued.

In other research studies where the NSSE was part of the tools employed, a positive association between the adoption of learning technology, learner engagement, and learning outcomes has been noted (Chen et al., 2010).

A defining quality of online learning environments is that they can motivate students and teachers to interact and communicate asynchronously (Robinson & Hullinger, 2008), which enables learners to think independently and critically. In the present study, this was reflected in the responses to the survey questions corresponding to higher order learning, reflective and integrative learning, and collaborative learning.

Previous research outcomes regarding student engagement in online training courses have had differing results. Student retention rates are usually signif-

icantly lower than in courses with required in-class attendance (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2007). Studies have indicated that the completion rate for MOOCs lies between 5% and 10% (the 'Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Vol. 3)' MOOC analysed in this paper reaches at least a 6.2% completion rate). This discrepancy between offline and online class retention may be due to various reasons but can be mostly ascribed to learners needing to prioritize other work or personal obligations (or any kind of issue taking precedence over course completion) (Moore et al., 2003), technical and technological obstacles (Jaggars, 2014), inability to self-regulate their learning schedule and attendance (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2004), or a combination thereof.

When communicating with one another, students can be passive, active, and community contributors, according to Koller et al. (2013). Positive correlations have been found between reciprocal interaction and achievement rates in a certain selection of MOOCs (Cisel, 2014). The percentage of learners who interacted with one another throughout this MOOC was low, according to the responses provided for collaborative learning and academic integration. In addition, just a few students were very active in completing peer-evaluated tasks. Furthermore, compared to the outcomes on the actual learner effort of the studies on the previous two MOOC volumes (Rosani et al., 2020), learners appeared to be interacting less with the videos, approximately to the same degree with the quizzes, and a bit more for the activities in comparison to the previous MOOCs. However, percentages regarding the engagement with course resources grew.

Conclusion

The research objectives of this paper were to investigate the factors that motivate and explain learners' participation in a tourism and heritage-themed Massive Open Online Course. To achieve this goal, two surveys were developed for the 'Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Vol. 3)' MOOC. The results of those surveys were examined, which helped to gain insight into what learners likely anticipate in such a MOOC: an entertaining and challenging eLearning

course with the opportunity to obtain career-relevant knowledge and skills. In addition, learners have high expectations about the relevance and specificity of the offered material (as well as the quality of its delivery).

We can cite the following limitations of the paper: primarily, the limited number of tourism MOOCs with which the findings might be compared. Possessing wider data pools regarding learner personas and motivations to participate in particular, but also engagement, retention, and transfer to professional practice gathered from tourism MOOCs or other online courses in general would shed more light on how effective online training for tourism in heritage sites should be achieved.

The MOOC, as it is still open for enrolment, might yield different outcomes or confirm the ones presented in this paper at its closing in December 2022. The results shown might thus be considered partial, as more learners will submit their answers to the first and final survey. To paint a definitive picture of this MOOC volume, a final analysis of the two surveys should be undertaken in 2023.

Finally, several of the identified features might be investigated in greater depth. Specifically, issues pertaining to engagement and retention should be examined further in order to comprehend why specific outcomes were discovered. For instance, understanding the dynamics of a MOOC requires consideration of not only peer-to-peer interaction but also communication and relationships with instructors. MOOCs are massive and open by nature as well as definition – hence, it is even more difficult to have enduring, substantial, or on-topic interactions with the few instructors available. Therefore, eLearning course providers must carefully consider how to arrange their content and delivery in order to increase engagement, retention, and course completion rates. Especially due to the pandemic, it became apparent that engagement between learners, and learners and instructors became lower, but the completion rate still increased compared to the previous volume of the MOOC. While COVID-19 is a plausible factor that can explain these changes, there is not enough data to confirm or deny if, in addition to the correlation, there is also a causality.

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