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Vicky Katsoni

Andreea Claudia Şerban *Editors*

# Transcending Borders in Tourism Through Innovation and Cultural Heritage

8th International Conference, IACuDiT,  
Hydra, Greece, 2021

 Springer

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Vicky Katsoni · Andreea Claudia Şerban  
Editors

# Transcending Borders in Tourism Through Innovation and Cultural Heritage

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Ioanna Chatzopoulou

# Geomapping. Cultural Enhancement Practices of the Jabel Shams and Jabel Akdhar Mountains in Oman



Monica Morazzoni and Giovanna Giulia Zavettieri

**Abstract** This contribution is part of a wider project in which the cultural and natural heritage in some areas of Oman was mapped in order to build a tourist app. The analysis methodology adopted was necessary in order to create an app that would respond to the demand of a tourist who is the architect of his own journey, choosing facilities, itineraries and having tools and services similar to those usually used in his daily life. Ultimately, the mission of this project was to capture the tourist essence of Oman in order to provide, through the app, interaction tools capable of creating a channel of communication between the user and the local community, and—in the future—to trigger a viral process of sharing (for example, through social networks) to attract new potential tourists. The focus of this contribution is the Jabel Shams and Jabel Akdhar mountains, studied through the methodological approach of the New Heritage literature in order to enhance, through the forms of participatory tourism, the mountain territory from a sustainable point of view, which today presents a heritage of cultural and natural assets that can be enhanced through alternative forms of tourism such as camping and glamping.

**Keywords** New heritage · Mountain · Oman · Tourism · Camping

**JEL Classification** Z32 Tourism and development

## 1 Introduction

In the global context of a renewed interest in non-urban spaces, which is also emerging as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, mountain areas are part of the centrality/marginality debate and of the reflections that are developing in Europe

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(CIPRA, EUSALP) to study and analyze the environmental, economic and socio-cultural dynamics through a synchronic reading of the processes in place. The marked physical marginalization (e.g. with respect to urban and/or coastal contexts) and vocational marginalization of many mountain contexts on a global scale, as an effect of objective criticalities (poor access to services, low levels of productivity, environmental vulnerability) requires community practices in function of a progressive integration of these spaces in lines of fair production, new heritage and sustainable tourism consumption.

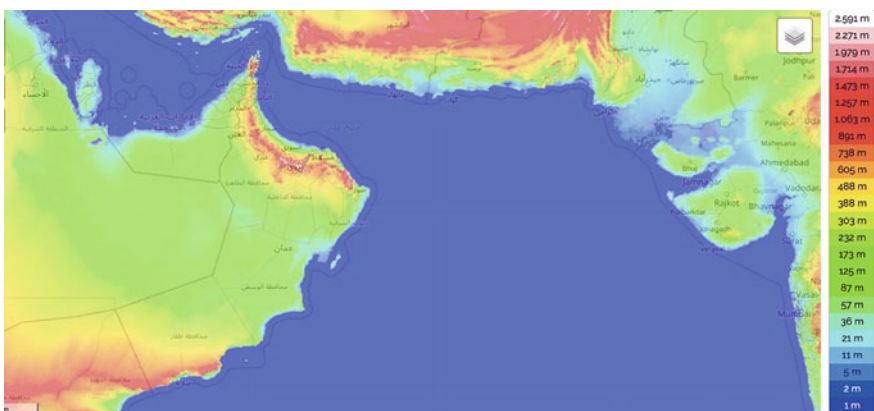
The United Nations declares certain places, certain territories as heritage of humanity, whether built by man or simply conditioned by his presence: the Tower of Pisa or the Valley of the Butterflies in Rhodes. However, the whole of human culture, consisting of a complex set of ideas, values and beliefs, is heritage of humanity. Heritage is generically the revisited and reconstructed past that becomes heritage. Heritage is a human conception, not only material but also immaterial goods, and as such its preservation can only be entrusted to the community, to the collectivity, as long as the latter recognizes its value. A cultural asset, a value, is not only linked to the society that expressed it, but also to the interpretation that society gives to it in the present. To visit a capital city, for example, is to understand what faith, what conviction produced it, but also the professionalism of those who built it, the brotherhoods that were passed on, the art of architecture, the work and who carved the stones, the pride and faith of the client, the city... it is to understand not only the work but everything that led to its production. The value of heritage, therefore, depends not only on what happened in the past but also on what happens in the present and how it will continue into the future. Heritage also includes self-regulating flora and fauna and landscape (heritage can also be used to create symbolic landscapes, where artifacts acquire cultural value because they link the present to the past in a unified project). Therefore, heritage conservation is also a problem of sustainability, not only cultural but also environmental. Heritage gives order, creating a sequence from a series of events in which the "fact" is perceived to position the lives of individuals, what they see as a continuity of events. For a discussion of Heritage, please refer to the bibliography that has been established for years.

Tourism urgently requires a radical rethinking of its development model in the direction of enhancing the quality of the tourist experience. In this context, it is interesting to see what role is played (alongside cultural tourism, committed tourism, tourism for ecological vocation ...) by luxury tourism, whose distinctive traits seem to intercept, for example, some variables of sustainable tourism—quality of experience, personalization of service, attention to detail—that can lead to a significant improvement of the tourist experience and transform it into an eco-responsible as well as exclusive activity. Therefore, it is interesting in this context to reflect on the categories of "value", "attention", "time", "dialogue", "immersion". What role does luxury tourism play in contributing to a wider awareness of places, nature, heritage, even for those who cannot access the exclusivity of its services? Two different etymological roots are traced to the word "luxury": from the Latin "luxus", "exuberance of vegetation", metaphorically indicating "abundance of delightful things". In this case, the root lux can be declined in the concept of pomp, magnificence but also

in excess, ostentation or from the Greek “lox-os”, which is translated as “oblique, bent to one side”, originally indicating the vice of prodigality of vicious people. According to Vanicek the root could be *lik-*, from *licere* (tr. leave) with the declension of “profusion”. Because of this etymology, the term can range from positive meanings such as brightness and negative as viciousness (Mattia, 2013) to other deeper meanings such as distancing, distinction from the common good, from the normal. In the latter perspective, therefore, luxury appears as a sensory, emotional experience that allows the person to perceive himself as other, different from those who do not access it. However, this inability to narrow down the field of interpretations associated with luxury is not a synonym of confusion on the subject since, as anticipated, the multiformity that accompanies it is the reason.

This research would be part of the debate on the enhancement of mountain areas in the Omani context with the aim of encouraging an articulated reading of Heritage and tourism, the latter in its meaning of luxury through green and ecological ways of tourist performance of Jabel Shams and Jabel Akhdar mountains in ad-Dakhliya Governorate.

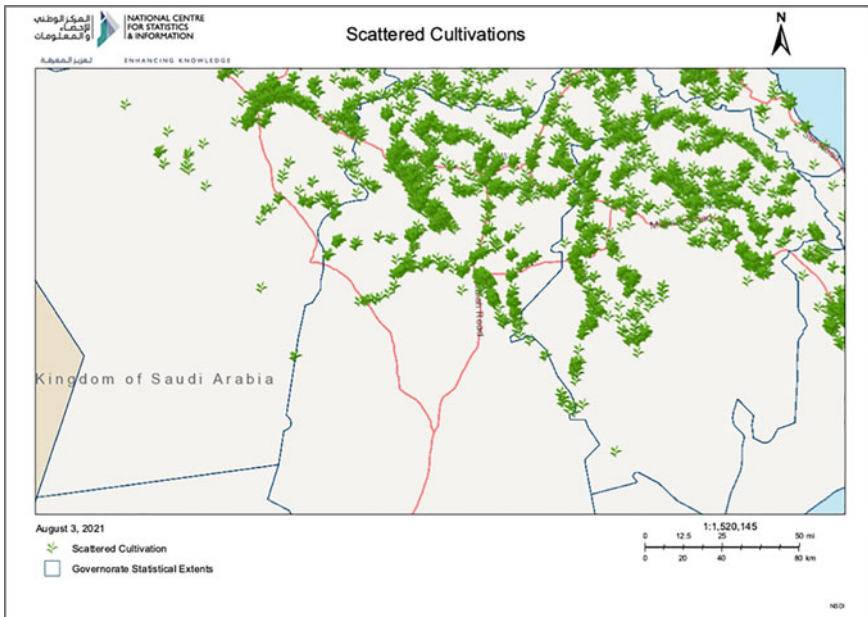
According to data collected and processed by geologist Antonino Aprile, it is estimated that the al-Hajar (The Stone) mountain in the northern part of Oman (Fig. 1) (about 600 km long) together with the mountainous area (of much lesser extension) in the southern part of Oman on the border with Yemen, occupy 25% of the territory of the Sultanate. The al-Hajar mountain range represents an important part of the local geographical environment not only for the varied presence of native vegetation but also for the traditional crops still practiced today and for the traditions still in use. Specifically, Jabel Shams (the Mountain of the Sun, 3075 m), the highest peak of the country, and the massive Jabel Akhdar (the Green Mountain, 3000 m), are characterized by the presence of wadis, rocky masses sculpted and shaped by erosion and the typical aflaj, channels dug since ancient times and used for the supply of water useful for crops such as roses and garlic, to bring drinking water to the population



**Fig. 1** Topographical map of Oman. Source <https://it-it.topographic-map.com/maps/9y6y/Jebel-Akhdar/>

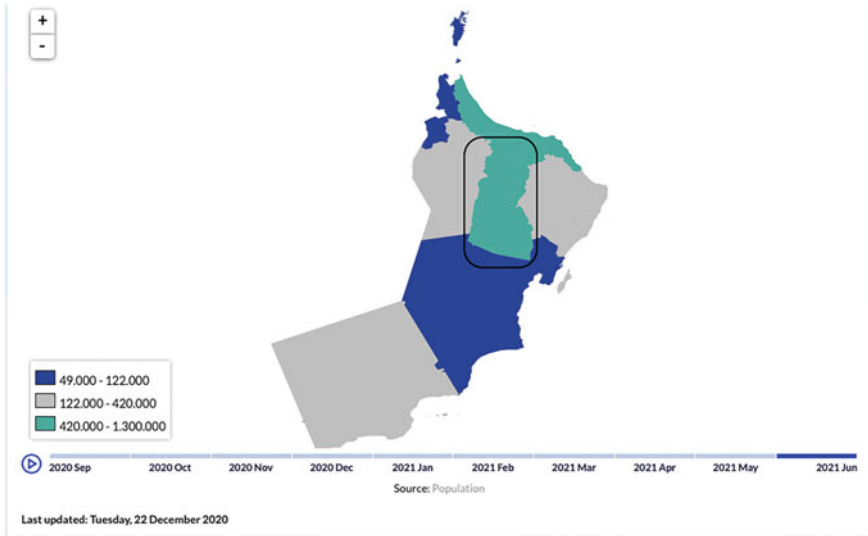
of oases and villages and, near the places of prayer, to ensure the rite of ablution of the faithful. This ancient water management system has allowed the aflaj network to be included among the World Heritage Sites protected by UNESCO. The Daris falaj, just a few kilometers from Nizwa, capital of the Ad-Dakhliyah governorate, is the largest in Oman (UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2006) with its 137 m of underground channel.

Despite the altitude, especially in Jabel Akhdar, the territory benefits from Mediterranean-type microclimates which, together with terracing works, favor a rich variety of fruit trees (apricots, peaches, figs, almonds, walnuts, red fruits and pomegranates considered among the best in the world) and saffron production (Fig. 2). In the valleys between Jabel Shams and Jabel Akhdar, there are many villages including al-Hamra in the vicinity of Al Hoota—one of the largest cave systems in the world—Bahla with its Fort, Unesco World Heritage Site, al-Nakhr, al-Hajer, al-Ghoul, al-Manther, al-Rahba, Misfat Al Abryeen, Bimah, al-Ghafat, Misfah today recognized stages in walking and hiking itineraries. In the mountain context, there is also the presence of real cities such as Nizwa, the historic capital of Oman and Manah, a cultural bridge with non-Arabic speaking nations due to the presence of the Sultan Qaboos College where Arabic is taught to non-native speakers. The population is localized in mountain villages or intra-mountainous areas locally flat, whose houses, often made of unbaked bricks and mud, recall the building style of Yemenites. In the governorate of Ad-Dakhliyah, the population reaches 480.013 inhabitants (Fig. 3),



**Fig. 2** Scattered cultivation in ad-Dakhliya Governorate. *Source* National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), [www.ncsi.gov.om](http://www.ncsi.gov.om)





**Fig. 3** Population distribution in Oman. *Source* National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), [www.ncsi.gov.om](http://www.ncsi.gov.om)

mostly allocated in the northern part of the governorate (the most densely populated governorates, whose population is between 420,000 and 1,290,000, are al Batinah North, al Batinah South, Muscat and ad Dakhliya), therefore in the mountainous area, more impervious in altitude compared to the central-south area, but the most liveable in terms of climate, native vegetation, for the intensive practice of various types of crops and, especially in the warmer months, for tourist activities such as camping, walking, hiking, trekking, climbing.

The demand for mountains, on the one hand, as a “safe haven” and “healthy” for the Omani population and, on the other hand, as a luxury destination for tourists, therefore, requires careful reading. In fact, the Omani mountains follow development processes in contrast with, for example, the Italian alpine mountains marked by a slowdown in development models, by the crisis of the traditional rural system, by depopulation phenomena and by forms of hyper-tourism that have represented over time the only development model that can be hypothesized and proposed for the rest of the mountain territories. The hypertourism, moreover, of many Alpine destinations also brings mountains, like many urban and seaside contexts, closer to the phenomenon of overtourism, which the World Tourism Organization describes as “the impact of tourism on a destination [...] that excessively affects the perceived quality of life of citizens and/or the quality of visitors’ experiences in a negative way” (UNWTO, 2018, p. 4). As a result, excessive tourism intensity is responsible for a range of economic, environmental, and social problems, including air and noise pollution, rising house prices and the associated displacement of residents, or anti-social behavior. However, numerous studies show that these developments have led

to growing resistance against tourism among the local population (Colomb & Novy, 2016).

The Omani mountains, on the other hand, hold a central position in terms of the presence of inhabitants, flows of culture, resources and local knowledge, both in the context of endogenous and exogenous processes: the mountains are attractive first of all for local communities and then for outsiders (national and international tourism). This latter condition is in tendency with the processes of disurbanization also amplified by the contingencies linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The article is the result of full collaboration between the authors, with the exception of the *Tourism and New Heritage* paragraph to be attributed to Monica Morazzoni and the *Sustainable Luxury Tourism and Glamping* paragraph to be attributed to Giovanna Giulia Zavettieri.

## 2 Literature Review

In the perspective of possible pushes towards the Omani mountain of “tourist population”, the first research question asks about the fruition of the new heritage in a sustainable way for residents, tourists and daily visitors. The mountain is not a simple material object characterized by physical attributes, but a complex system in which environment and culture orient and condition tourist practice with increasingly evident effects on the human and natural environment at the tourist destinations concerned. Therefore, it is appropriate to include in the geographical reflection the experiences of the resident community and tourists (as temporary inhabitants), on which the narratives of the territory are built: memorial narratives and, at the same time, a tool for empowerment (Ashworth, 2020). According to the most recent scientific literature on new heritage (Timothy & Boyd, 2007; Graham & Howard, 2016; Graham et al., 2016) attention to cultural heritage is emerging “[...] as a process understood, practised and experienced on the ground by the people themselves. This includes heritagescapes (or heritage landscapes) spearheaded by non-elites, and the ways in which these same actors may engage heritagescapes in more affective ways, thus exercising their own agency as both producers and consumers of “the past”” (Muzaini & Minca, 2018, p. 1).

The second research question interrogates the relationship between luxury and sustainability in order to verify luxury as an experience that gives recognition and protection to the mountain assets of the resorts that are the object of tourism interest. Luxury as a multidimensional concept referable to both object and subject can be defined as a “particular type of sign value, produced within a specific narrative” (Saviolo & Corbellini, 2007), therefore interpretable as a sign. The analysis therefore of luxury tourism today (different from that of the twentieth century) allows us to speak not only of tourism of a restricted wealthy elite (the super-rich, Hay, 2013; Birtchnell & Caletrío, 2014) but also and above all luxury tourism in search of rare goods such as time, attention, space, rest, environment (Luppis, 2016; Mortelmans, 2005). Luxury accommodation itself, especially in mountainous contexts (Banini,

2013; Banini & Pollice, 2015), is today strongly differentiated and expanded: there are those who seek the large hotel chain or the super-equipped resort, and those who seek the malga, the castle, the refuge at high altitude to experience the sunrise at 2000 m, for example, considered a unique, luxury experience.

The literature on luxury tourism is, however, scarce (Atwal & Williams, 2017; Barsky, 2009; Ciornea et al., 2012). According to the UNWTO (2001, p. 331), luxury tourism includes five-star hotels (deluxe hotels) and four-star hotels (first class hotels). However, there is not one sole definition for luxury resorts. According to Mazzucchi and Padurean (2007) and Moscardo and Benkendorff (2010), a deluxe resort is traditional, sophisticated, unique, expensive, and environmentally sustainable. However, the writer defines luxury tourism in the sense of the new luxury as the demand for a quality product/service that allows for a gratifying, different, unique and not superfluous experience (Aeberhard et al., 2020; Dornier & Mauri, 2018).

According to these recent scientific literature on tourism, luxury is seen in the sense of fostering emotional experiences, unique sensations, personalization of the tourist product, meeting between tourists and the mountain territory through different types of experiences (sports, tastings, wellness, cultural routes, relaxation) and an offer of innovative tourist services, such as glamping (Brochado & Brochado, 2019; Brochado & Pereira, 2017; Cvelić-Bonifačić et al., 2017; Milohnić et al., 2019). A recent study on glamping was conducted by Cvelić-Bonifačić et al. (2017) which, taking up the definition in use that glamping is a type of camping that is more comfortable and more luxurious than traditional camping (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017), the author attests that glamping is a portmanteau of the words “glamour” and “camping”. Glamping, according to Cvelić-Bonifačić et al. (2017), is a new trend in outdoor tourism that combines luxury and nature, comfort and respect for the environment as well as providing exclusivity and uniqueness in offering “out of the box” accommodation, both literally and figuratively (Andrey et al., 2014). Glamping can be defined as 5-star camping but unlike small, practical but uncomfortable tents, the term glamping is often associated with luxury tents in attractive locations. Glamping needs the wow effect (Loo, 2015). According to Kate (2011), the slogan Where nature meets luxury could open a new chapter in the development of global tourism as clamping owes its popularity mainly to the unusual combination of extravagance in 5-star quality accommodation and the peace of the surrounding wilderness (Guardian, 2010).

In the case of the Omani mountains, luxury tourism thus fits into a territorial system aimed at seeking environmental respect, ethics and aesthetics for/on the territory. Luxury tourism, due to its attention to the sustainable dimension addressed to the environment, stands to be read in a geographical perspective becoming the medium that can contribute not only to the preservation of the mountain environment but also to its regeneration (Luppis, 2016).

### 3 Methodology

New heritage and luxury tourism are the themes of this essay, tackled according to a cognitive approach capable of appropriating the centrality of places and people with the use of mixed and integrated research methods (quantitative–qualitative, spatial-territorial, spatial-social). An initial study interest was directed at the trinomial territories–landscapes–tourism of Oman in order to analyze and understand its context. This first analysis was carried out within the framework of a research project conducted by a team from the University of Milan and the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), which involved the creation of a prototype of the app: a dynamic platform, mediated by ICT and GIS technologies to support the exchange of information on tourism activities through information filtering which improves the decision-making process. Through GIS technology, the app was able to: acquire geographical maps covering the country or region, digitize paper maps, create topology to establish the relationship between map features, transform into real-world coordinates, expand the traditional level model with tourism levels such as hotels, restaurants and further infrastructure levels—combination of tourism attributes, such as object type, object name, hotel category etc. with geographic criteria such as proximity, distance, location or object located within a selected map region, compile and add text information to characterize positions in tables. Finally, the development and editing of images and images on text labels as well as the hot-linking images to their respective function positions were completed.

An important task of the app is to provide information to identify problems and offer customized potential solutions (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015, p. 379). This is done both by providing the location and numbers of emergency services (hospitals, ambulances, law enforcement agencies) and by explaining what the tourist needs to take with them during the itinerary to avoid being unprepared. It also guides them with navigation during the journey and offers feedback left by other users. Uncommon destinations such as Oman (at least to large tourist areas such as the European one) and their transport systems can represent a challenge even for the most adventurous travelers. These factors combine and create a tension between the desire to explore and the frustrations of moving (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015, p. 384). The app presents updated information regarding geographical locations (of the user and sites of tourist interest), reviews of services (restaurants, hotels, cafes), types of room, and prices and information on surrounding events *before* the arrival of the tourist. Tourists looking for a personalized welcome message before the trip will be able to access different lists of what to do and what to see at their destination (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015, p. 384). In summary, the digital tourism ecosystem allows tourists to extend its benefits beyond the tourism supply chain with positive economic and social effects on the territory.

As part of this first project to develop the app, the undersigned approached the context of the Omani mountains, discovering their resources, potential and historical and cultural value. The present research is based on a multi-scalar approach, with analysis on a macro-regional scale, and then going into detail by working on selected

areas (Governorate of ad-Dakhliya), focusing on a few specific cases (the mountains of Jebel Shams and Jebel Akhdar) and proposing different levels of detail in relation to the reference scale. The identification of the macro-regional scale allowed comparative analyses to be carried out (similarities, differences and gaps between territories); the sub-regional scale, on the other hand, ensured the necessary recourse to qualitative research methods, in the field, with the main aim of investigating local actors and their choices (housing, professional, mobility ...), with the intention of verifying the information bank and above all of giving a face and a voice to the processes that numbers and theoretical studies summarize.

The survey methodology was mainly divided into two phases of work:

- (1) desk phase of data collection through the use of classical research tools:
  - (a) collection, processing and analysis of literature, norms and data;
  - (b) construction of the socio-cultural scenario and progressive fine-tuning according to data collection and processing;
  - (c) collection and analysis of research material (databases, photos, literature, diaries, maps, etc.). The scenario was built according to team-work methods (elaboration of interpretative hypotheses, involvement of experts).
- (2) Field phase carried out in different forms
  - (a) meetings, testimonies and interviews with privileged witnesses (community leaders, tourist guides, cultural escorts, local entrepreneurs);
  - (b) identification of resources and values that are “attractive” to new types of tourism;
  - (c) understanding the role of the mountain’s collective assets as attractive factors for “new inhabitants” and/or able to favor the permanence of “originals” and tourists;
  - (d) evaluation of interactions between mountain communities: virtuous synergies, indifference, hostility of locals towards tourists;
  - (e) analysis of the role of local entrepreneurship, as a driving factor for new residency, tourist attractiveness and a renewed capacity to determine the dignity of working in the mountains and to strengthen forms of attachment to the values expressed by the mountains;
  - (f) identification of new projects rooted in the territory and above all endogenous that propose organizational forms built on the strengthening of heritage values.

The final aim was to identify possible innovations in the approaches to the theme of mountain tourism, which could be substantiated in the construction of intervention tools and in the methods of articulating decision-making processes from below.

## 4 Results

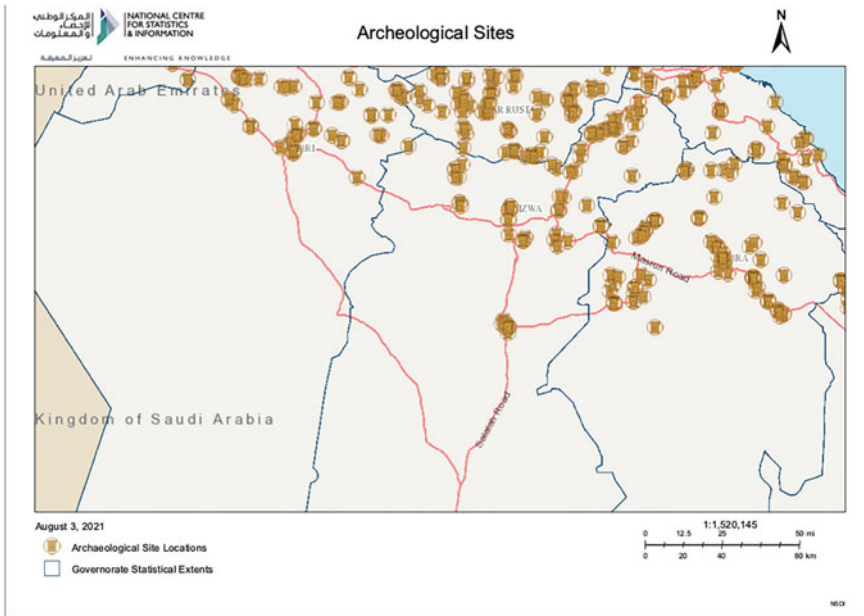
### 4.1 *Tourism and New Heritage*

As Tiziana Banini (2019, p. 157) states, “the critical revision of the new cultural geography has been based on the fact that heritage is often the result of a partial, distorted and selective selection of the history of a community; therefore, the work of geographers has been directed towards the deconstruction of national symbols and discourses embedded in objects, monuments and places of memory”. In this perspective, the question of heritage is also linked to questions aimed at demystifying discourses, narratives and practices with a political content and/or propaganda (including tourism) of values, symbols, meanings and collective imagery which stakeholders often use to strengthen their ties with citizens. See Minca, C., Colombino, A. (2012). *Breve Manuale di Geografia Umana*, CEDAM, Padova; Castree, N., Kitchin, R., Rogers, A., (2013). *A Dictionary of Human Geography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; Anderson, J. (2015). *Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces*, Routledge, London-New York; Summerby-Murray, R. (2015). Regenerating cultural identity through industrial heritage tourism. Visitor attitudes, entertainment and the search for authenticity at mills, mines and museums of Maritime Canada, *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 30, 64–89.

With reference to the new cultural geography, especially of Anglo-Saxon origin, increasing importance is given to the active role that people and groups can play in the construction of places and their meanings. Places, therefore, can no longer be thought of as static, but as crossroads of flows, people, goods and information. This polysemic, heterogeneous and open conception of places goes hand in hand with a notion of culture assimilated more to the idea of route than root (Cresswell, 2006, p. 1). In this sense, places are relational spaces but also spaces contingent on the experience of individuals and groups (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2011).

It is from this perspective that the analysis of heritage in the Omani mountains started, which has a cultural tourism offer that includes:

- Cultural sites recognized by national and international bodies. The reference is Authorized Heritage Discourse—AHD (Smith, 2006 in Muzaini & Minca, 2018) used to achieve socio-economic and political goals and stimulates narratives related to the identity of those living in the area (UNESCO sites, archaeological sites, ethnographic museums, etc.); in Jabel Shams and Jabel Akhdar, there are numerous archaeological sites (Fig. 4): aflaj system, archaeological buildings, monuments and agricultural land within the property. In developing these sites, the various Omani Ministries (e.g. Ministry of Heritage and Culture, Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources) have undertaken to consult and involve local stakeholders with a view to sustainable economic development, on the one hand, through the valorization of traditional local crops and on the other through the launch of participatory forms of local tourism. Itineraries, that include



**Fig. 4** Archeological site distribution in Ad-Dakhliya Governorate. *Source* National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), [www.ncsi.gov.om](http://www.ncsi.gov.om)

both visits to traditional material cultural assets and demonstrations of rural and folkloric traditions typical of the mountain area, have been set up.

- Heritage from below as a direct consequence of the involvement of local stakeholders, which takes the form of the active participation of some actors from local mountain communities who introduce tourists to both local traditions and the history of the place. A practice of cultural storytelling takes shape, allowing tourists to enter local cultural and production processes. One example is the visit to the countless rose gardens of Jabel Akhdar where tourists participate in a presentation of rosewater production (Fig. 5) or the purchasing of Jabel Akhdar’s garlic (Fig. 6). A visit to the rosewater production sites also provides an insight into the *afraj* system (UNESCO heritage), as they are still active in the irrigation of rose gardens today.
- New heritage or after heritage (Muzaini & Minca, 2018) processes, as a result of the tourist’s involvement in the participatory tourism process. In fact, the tourist’s approach to the production of rosewater or to the harvest of garlic or even being guests of Omani families by choosing to wear traditional clothes (the abaya for women and the dishdasha for men), causes temporary imitative practices, an emotional involvement but, at the same time, tradition is no longer simply the recovery of collective memory as the past is actualized from below. Consequently, alternative forms of heritage are launched, problematizing the multiple ways in which the past can be involved within the present, both personally and collectively.



**Fig. 5** A moment of the presentation of rosewater production to tourists. *Source* Shot by Giovanna Giulia Zavettieri, Jabel Akhdar, April 2021

**Fig. 6** Garlic for sale in Nizwa. *Source* @ertebat.oman, Instagram





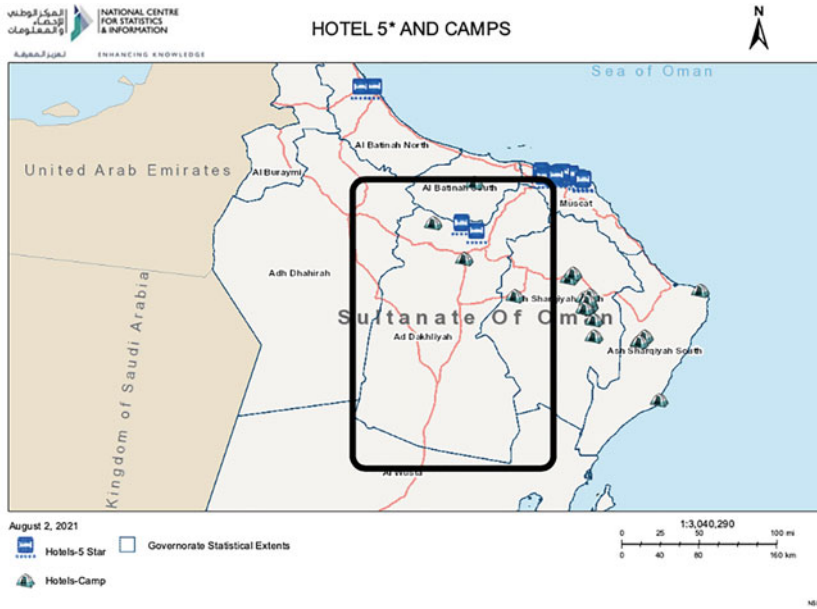
In this sense, equity expressed for and from below is seen as a continuous performance. The spatially fixed past is subject to fluid, continuous and dynamic ways of remembering and reconstructing it in everyday life. Physical space, in this case, the mountain landscape, is an integral part of the heritage performance. In fact, as Tyner (2018 in Muzaini, Minca) states, space is important as it is an essential part of social relations and therefore also of the rise of new heritage.

The emotional-experiential inheritance of the new heritage and the quality of the experience itself are, moreover, the prerogatives of the new luxury that allows the person to perceive themselves as different from those who do not live that tourist practice.

#### ***4.2 Sustainable Luxury Tourism and Glamping***

For some years now, the Omani mountains have been at the center of processes marked by innovation and experimentation linked to new models of tourism development centered not only on new heritage but also on new luxury. Luxury tourism, however, already has its beginnings in the five-star hotel offer present in some sites in the Jabel Shams and Jabel Akhdar mountains. Traditional luxury tourism, for example, is practiced in Jabel Akhdar in the two resorts Alila (of the Hyatt group) and Anantara (Fig. 7).

Here, as well as enjoying all the comforts that a five-star hotel can provide its guests, it is possible, thanks to the physical, geomorphological, cultural and environmental characteristics of the place, to enjoy another type of resource, just as luxurious, which are: silence, the simplicity of social relations with the local community, a welcome that involves the whole community... These latter elements give rise to tourism that is more personalized, experiential, ethical and emotional. In short, traditional luxury tourism buds into forms of new luxury tourism which, however, is not necessarily more expensive than traditional tourism but, certainly, has an uncompromising quality due to the fact that it is a luxury that surrounds itself with an emotional and experiential halo. The distinctive features of luxury tourism also intercept (see footnote 2) some of the variables of sustainable tourism, making it also eco-responsible and exclusive. The exclusivity of the new luxury is not the accommodation service (or if it is, it remains a secondary element) but rather the possibility of getting to know the nature and culture of the tourist destination, through local stakeholder narratives and through bottom-up tourism management. The latter element also plays a significant role in the economic development of mountain villages undergoing tourist development. However, resorts, hotels and, as we will see in a few lines, glamping sites provide activities and services that can influence the local ecosystem and therefore it is necessary to find ways to make luxury and sustainability compatible. The survey conducted on the spot already highlights an important attention and concrete actions towards the issue of the ecological footprint (hotels in Finland), the collection of differentiated waste, the thoughtful use of water with a strong awareness of tourists on its value and on how it is supplied in hospitality services through



**Fig. 7** Distribution of five-star hotels and glamping sites in Ad-Dakhiliya governorate. *Source* National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), [www.ncsi.gov.om](http://www.ncsi.gov.om)

afraj and other themes of cultural and ecological sustainability (Luppis, 2016; Turco, 2012; de-Miguel-Molina et al., 2014; Alonso-Almeida & Rodríguez-Anton, 2011; Barsky, 2009; Ciornea et al., 2012; Moscardo & Benckendorf, 2010; Ryan & Stewart, 2009).

In villages such as Misfah, for example, it is possible to stay in structures that do not have any particular luxury comforts, but which, immersed in the mountain environment at over 2000 m above sea level, with the help of a few decorative elements in Omani style and meals seated on the floor on comfortable Persian carpets located on the typical mountain view terraces, create a comfortable situation of a new luxury experience. In addition, villages such as Misfah are the starting point for hiking and climbing routes (one example is the Jabel Shams Via Ferrata) (Fig. 8).

This new meaning of luxury has led to the introduction of glamping in the Omani mountains, a transformative style of travel that is practiced in open spaces and in accommodation facilities, some of which have been created from typical local stone dwellings, in glamorous tents typically used for camping and furnished with every type of comfort.

An example of this is Jabel Shams Resort, which contains glamping rooms with a small outdoor area with panoramic views as well as traditional camping perimeters. Instead, the first glamping in Oman was built in the Empty Quarter Desert under the name 1000 Nights Camp, described as one of the best in the world (<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/travel/27next-oman.html>) (Fig. 9).



**Fig. 8** Via Ferrata hiking and climbing path, Jabel Shams. *Source* Shot by Giovanna Giulia Zavettieri, Jabel Shams, 14 November 2020



**Fig. 9** Jabel Shams Resort, Jabel Shams. *Source* Shot by Giovanna Giulia Zavettieri, Jabel Shams, 13 November 2020

Glamping is a place where the environment meets modern luxury, which consists in getting off the beaten track and away from superficial tourist activities in favor of an encounter with an engaging cultural environment. Although local actors claim that glamping goes against the essence of camping, they believe that glamorous tents can attract a new market among today's luxury hotel guests who want comfort, sustainability and class. According to Omani mountain stakeholders, glamping is expected to play a crucial role in rediscovering the attractions of both camping and the surrounding area.

In short, luxury, with this change of perspective, facilitates the affirmation of transformative travel that enriches the individual and, at the same time, is more compatible with the environment and local communities.

## 5 Conclusion

The Omani mountains, as a geo-cultural context, lend themselves to meeting the demand for New Heritage tourism and New Luxury tourism, thanks to their rich cultural heritage (authorized, bottom-up and New Heritage) and the unspoiled natural environment that is the protagonist of the luxury experience.

The results of this research show that new heritage practices and the introduction of glamping are creating a new tourist demand in the Omani mountains. New Heritage and New Luxury offer opportunities for local actors to intercept a new, generally young audience of visitors whose satisfaction with the protagonism of the choice already becomes a pleasure in itself.

This leads to personal satisfaction, self-feedback processes, acceptance of the local offer, search for contact with nature, but also search for contact with the local actors and the local community. All this is also sustainability.

The field survey also found that accommodation facilities and public institutions in the ad-Dakhliya Governorate have been applying standards to prevent, or at least limit, environmental damage and preserve the landscape for a few years. To date, we are not able to assume that the practice of the new luxury and the enhancement of the new heritage will lead to local-tourist co-participation in the preservation of the mountain heritage. This does not mean that the local community and green tourists do not want to support sustainable tourism; in fact, the interviews administered to the actors directly involved in tourism practice reveal a strong attention towards green procedures, towards the respect of strict rules for the most common activities. In the face of this co-participation of the local community tourists towards cultural and environmental sustainability, the problem currently lies in the lack of formal regulations approved by policymakers that set limits and rules for the conservation, enhancement and use of the territory. Therefore, the future effort must be to work strategically and in co-partnership to create a specific regulation for the sustainable tourist use of the Omani mountains. Certainly, regulation in support of sustainable development will require sacrificing those services and activities that may be unsustainable today.

In terms of advice to the tourism industry, we can conclude that the creation of eco-innovative tourism requires not only existing bottom-up participation but new ideas, new creativity and new political laws and institutional regulations. Investing in the protection of healthy mountain ecosystems is a strategy with significant co-benefits that requires urgent preventive measures, since it is still a context that does not suffer from all the problems that we find in many European mountain areas (hyper-tourism, economic and cultural morphogenesis, depopulation, etc.).

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