



Navigating World Heritage Nomination as a Tourism Development Strategy: Multi-Vocal Stakeholder Governance and Policy Implications at Prusias Ad Hypium Ancient Theatre

Turizm Geliştirme Stratejisi Olarak Dünya Mirası Adaylığı Süreci: Prusias Ad Hypium Antik Tiyatrosunda Çok Sesli Paydaş Yönetişimi ve Politika Etkileri

ABSTRACT

This study examines the governance and stewardship of the Prusias ad Hypium Ancient Theatre in northwestern Türkiye during its ongoing UNESCO World Heritage nomination process. Moving beyond a conventional archaeological framing, the research adopts a qualitative case study design to construct a multi-vocal analytical framework — one that bridges the structural divide between formal heritage administration and the lived experiences of local communities. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 13 strategic informants across six key stakeholder clusters, the study interrogates the power dynamics, institutional expectations, and policy tensions embedded in heritage nomination processes at emerging destinations.

The findings reveal that whilst UNESCO designation functions as a compelling catalyst for regional economic growth, its potential is constrained by persistent awareness deficits and unresolved infrastructure demands. The analysis identifies a governance gap between top-down institutional frameworks and ground-level stakeholder realities — a tension with direct implications for heritage policy and site management. In response, the study advances a Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach as an integrative policy instrument, foregrounding stakeholder collaboration and long-term sustainability.

The research contributes a replicable strategic framework for heritage managers and policy practitioners, demonstrating that authentic heritage preservation and community-centred governance are mutually reinforcing conditions for sustainable outcomes.

Keywords: UNESCO World Heritage nomination, Heritage site governance, Sustainable heritage tourism, Historic Urban Landscape (HUL), Stakeholder engagement.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin kuzeybatısındaki Prusias ad Hypium Antik Tiyatrosu'nun, halen devam eden UNESCO Dünya Mirası adaylık süreci boyunca sergilediği yönetim ve idare biçimlerini incelemektedir. Geleneksel arkeolojik çerçeveyi aşan bu araştırma, nitel bir vaka çalışması tasarımı benimseyerek, resmi miras yönetimi ile yerel toplulukların yaşam deneyimleri arasındaki yapısal uçurumu köprüleyen çok sesli bir analitik çerçeve oluşturmaktadır. Altı ana paydaş grubundan 13 stratejik bilgi kaynağına yapılan derinlemesine görüşmelerden yararlanarak, çalışma, gelişmekte olan destinasyonlarda miras adaylığı süreçlerine gömülü olan güç dinamiklerini, kurumsal beklentileri ve politika gerilimlerini sorgulamaktadır.

Bulgular, UNESCO statüsünün bölgesel ekonomik büyüme için cazip bir katalizör işlevi görmesine rağmen, potansiyelinin kalıcı farkındalık eksiklikleri ve çözülmemiş altyapı talepleri nedeniyle kısıtlandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Analiz, yukarıdan aşağıya kurumsal çerçeveler ile sahadaki paydaşların gerçekleri arasında bir yönetim boşluğu olduğunu tespit etmektedir; bu gerilim, miras politikası ve alan yönetimi üzerinde doğrudan etkileri olan bir gerilimdir. Buna yanıt olarak çalışma, paydaş işbirliğini ve uzun vadeli sürdürülebilirliği ön plana çıkaran, bütünleştirici bir politika aracı olarak Tarihi Kentsel Peyzaj yaklaşımını öne sürmektedir.

Araştırma, miras yöneticileri ve politika uygulayıcıları için tekrarlanabilir bir stratejik çerçeve sunarak, otantik mirasın korunması ile topluluk merkezli yönetişimin, sürdürülebilir sonuçlar için birbirini güçlendiren koşullar olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: UNESCO Dünya Mirası adaylığı, Miras alanlarının yönetimi, Sürdürülebilir miras turizmi, Tarihi Kentsel Peyzaj, Paydaş katılımı.

INTRODUCTION

The governance of cultural heritage has undergone a profound conceptual transformation. No longer confined to the imperatives of physical preservation, heritage stewardship has emerged as a contested field at the intersection of identity formation, historic environment policy, and regional development. Central to this transformation is the role of UNESCO, whose World Heritage List remains the pre-eminent global framework for recognising sites of 'Outstanding Universal Value' (Di Giovine, 2009). Whilst inclusion on this list is frequently perceived as a prestigious branding mechanism, its actual impact on heritage governance — particularly in emerging or peripheral

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destinations — continues to generate complex and often unresolved scholarly debate (Adie, 2019; Harrison, 2013). Recent scholarship has increasingly demonstrated that the symbolic capital of heritage listing does not automatically translate into sustainable outcomes; rather, it demands a management perspective that positions cultural heritage as a strategic asset within broader frameworks of socio-economic and spatial policy (Giliberto and Labadi, 2022).

Historical and cultural assets possess an inherent allure for global travellers, primarily because remnants of the past retain a sense of mystery that stimulates curiosity and emotional engagement (Timothy, 2011). As Göğebakan (2015) notes, visitors are profoundly impressed by the architectural and symbolic legacies of ancient civilisations. In the contemporary heritage landscape, however, such sites are no longer managed as static, isolated monuments — they function as dynamic 'living' historic environments that are continuously negotiated between institutional mandates, community agency, and competing development pressures. The 'Historic Urban Landscape' (HUL) approach reflects precisely this complexity, advocating a decisive shift from top-down, expert-led conservation towards more inclusive and participatory governance models (UNESCO, 2011; Bandarin and van Oers, 2012). As Cunha Ferreira et al. (2023) argue, the HUL approach is instrumental in ensuring that protected sites remain integrated within — rather than isolated from — the lived fabric of their surrounding communities.

The Prusias ad Hypium Ancient Theatre represents a compelling intersection of archaeological significance and contemporary urban life in the Western Black Sea region. Extensive literature has documented its historical value and architectural, social, and cultural dimensions in considerable depth (Arslan et al., 2016; Aydın and Okan, 2021; Dikmen and Toruk, 2017; Kesim et al., 2009; Mutlu and Kaya, 2022; Okan et al., 2022; Özkan, 2019; Özlü, 2008; Sağnak et al., 2022; Tanrıverdi and Demir, 2015; Tuna and Erdoğan, 2017; Türker and Yaşar, 2019; Üner, 2016). Yet despite this wealth of scholarship, a significant gap remains: whilst previous researchers have masterfully reconstructed the site's past, no study has yet addressed the specific institutional and managerial dynamics generated by the ongoing UNESCO nomination process. More specifically, the interplay between official heritage protection mandates and the diverse — often conflicting — perceptions of local actors and communities remains almost entirely underexplored.

This study seeks to address that gap by adopting a 'multi-vocal' analytical framework (Landorf, 2009). Engaging 13 strategic informants across six pivotal stakeholder clusters — from heritage professionals and municipal officials to local residents — the research examines how the UNESCO nomination is perceived, interpreted, and negotiated at the local level. This multi-vocal approach is designed to prevent the kind of 'heritage dissonance' that arises when official narratives diverge from the lived experience of host communities (Su and Wall, 2014), and to foster a governance model capable of harmonising conservation objectives with regional socio-economic development. The findings are intended to serve an explicitly policy-oriented function: offering an evidence-based roadmap for heritage managers navigating the intersection of international nomination processes, historic environment policy, and the long-term prosperity of the communities that give heritage sites their lasting value.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section evaluates the conceptual evolution of UNESCO World Cultural Heritage, critically examines the scholarly debate surrounding the socio-economic impacts of designation, and provides a contextual analysis of the Prusias ad Hypium Ancient Theatre within the framework of contemporary heritage management and historic environment policy.

UNESCO World Heritage List

UNESCO promotes global peace by identifying and safeguarding heritage as the "vital property of all humanity" (Somuncu and Yiğit, 2010). Rather than functioning as static relics of the past, these assets represent a dynamic collection of tangible and intangible qualities that communities actively preserve for future generations (Albayrak, 2013). The 1972 World Heritage Convention codified this vision, establishing the international legal and financial frameworks necessary to protect sites of 'Outstanding Universal Value' — a designation that has since become the cornerstone of global heritage policy (Bandarin and van Oers, 2012).

Securing a place on the World Heritage List requires a site to satisfy at least one of ten selection criteria through a rigorous committee evaluation process (<https://basin.ktb.gov.tr>). This process begins with the Tentative List, an essential inventory of potential candidates submitted and managed by member states (<https://www.unesco.org.tr>). As of 2025, the List comprises 1,248 inscribed properties globally. Türkiye, a World Heritage Committee member since 1983, currently hosts 22 inscribed sites — a figure that reflects both the country's deep, multi-layered cultural history and the increasing strategic importance it assigns to international heritage recognition (<https://www.unesco.org.tr>).

The Effect of UNESCO Heritage Status on Tourism

The intersection of heritage and tourism is increasingly shaped by the way cultural tourism leverages both material and intangible values to attract global visitors (Light, 2000). For the contemporary traveller, the aspiration to 'relive the past' has become a central motivator, positioning heritage sites as high-value destination assets within competitive tourism markets (Adie, 2019). With heritage engagement accounting for over 50% of global tourism flows (Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2015), UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) designation is widely pursued as a powerful mechanism for enhancing international visibility and diversifying regional revenue streams (Caust and Vecco, 2017). The policy and economic implications of these designations have consequently generated extensive scholarly interest (Deng et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2021; Noonan and Rizzo, 2017; Ryan and Silvano, 2014; Timothy, 2018).

Beyond the prestige of inscription, WHS status serves as a critical instrument for destination branding, tourism diversification, and the mitigation of seasonality- concerns that sit at the heart of regional heritage and tourism policy (Mariani and Guizzardi, 2020). Governments and local authorities invest significant resources in the nomination process (Patuelli et al., 2013), seeking to transform cultural assets into competitive tourism products capable of sustaining long-term socio-economic development (Mohale et al., 2020; Tashi and Ullah, 2019). When successfully managed, heritage designations can act as a socio-economic catalyst, stimulating inward investment, employment creation, and municipal revenue — outcomes that, under well-designed governance conditions, may translate into improved local quality of life and greater social cohesion (Öktem and Kalyoncu, 2020; Stratan et al., 2015; Virginija, 2016).

However, the direct correlation between WHS status and measurable economic growth remains a subject of considerable academic scrutiny, with important implications for heritage policy design (Cuccia et al., 2016). Whilst inscription undeniably cultivates a perception of international trust and cultural status (Shimp, 2010) and is widely assumed to stimulate visitor growth (Robinson, 2015), the empirical evidence is notably mixed. Some longitudinal studies confirm significant increases in tourist arrivals following designation (Su and Lin, 2014; Yang et al., 2010, 2011), whilst others document negligible or even adverse shifts in visitor volume (Cellini, 2011; Huang et al., 2012; Ribaud and Figini, 2017). Table 1 provides a synthesis of recent studies examining these varied outcomes across diverse global contexts, underscoring the extent to which local governance conditions and policy frameworks mediate the effects of inscription.

Cultural heritage remains a vital resource for local communities, fostering civic initiative and strengthening social awareness (Liao and Wang, 2011). Engaging communities in the interpretation and governance of heritage is no longer merely an aspirational principle but an operational requirement for sustainable management — and increasingly, a normative expectation embedded in heritage policy frameworks at both national and international levels (Ünsal and Pulhan, 2012). Yet tourism development can equally generate significant tensions: environmental degradation, the commodification of cultural identity, and the dilution of place-based values are well-documented risks. These tensions frequently arise because stakeholders who derive direct economic benefit from heritage tourism may discount its negative externalities, whilst residents who do not share in its financial rewards tend to be far more sensitive to its social and environmental costs (Türker, 2020). Navigating these competing interests requires a governance approach that goes beyond sectoral management — one that positions cultural heritage as a strategic asset within integrated frameworks of sustainable spatial and socio-economic development (Giliberto and Labadi, 2022). Ultimately, heritage becomes a genuinely valued communal resource only when local communities begin to perceive a tangible and meaningful alignment between conservation goals and the wider prosperity of their region.

Table 1. *The Effect of UNESCO Heritage Status on Tourism*

Author	Year	Destination	Result
Bernini and Galli	2024	Italy	Whilst UNESCO listing prompted a short-term spike in visitors, it had no sustained impact on long-term attendance.
Kostakis and Lolos	2024	Greece	To drive economic growth, destinations should leverage the inherent appeal of their cultural heritage.
Sampieri et al.	2024	Saudi Arabia	Whilst tourists value cultural heritage for its historical uniqueness, improvements in cost-effectiveness, customisation, and competitive positioning remain essential.
Peira et al.	2023	Italy	The UNESCO designation of the Olivetti site fosters both cultural and economic ideals, offering significant potential to attract new tourist segments.

Veghes	2023	116 countries	Strategic marketing requires a synergy of compelling cultural products, competitive pricing, and efficient service delivery by reliable staff.
Kvítková et al.	2022	Czech Republic	The monument's listing as a cultural heritage site has led to increased visitor numbers and expanded tourism activity in the area.
Dai et al.	2022	China	Cultural heritage status is vital for shaping a city's brand, enhancing public perception and stimulating tourism.
Perić et al.	2021	27 European Countries	Whilst UNESCO listing may not directly increase overnight stays, it remains a primary driver of international revenue and tourism-related employment.
Mahadevan and Zhang	2021	China	WHS status influences first-time foreign visitors and has supported the development of a strong destination brand.
Eraslan et al.	2020	Türkiye	Following WHS inscription in 2018, Göbeklitepe gained significant international recognition, resulting in increased tourist arrivals.
Canale et al.	2019	Italy	Dynamic econometric analysis confirms a strong positive correlation between World Heritage Site counts and international tourism flows.
Gao and Su	2019	China	WHS status plays a greater role in asset preservation than in tourism development.
Groizard and Santana-Gallego	2018	Arab countries	Evidence from 1995–2013 highlights that UNESCO status is vital for international tourism, with site destruction potentially halving tourist arrivals.
Lee et al.	2017	Singapore	A significant shift in tourists' destination preferences was observed before and after UNESCO inscription.
Dönmez et al.	2017	Türkiye	Following inscription in 1994, tourist numbers in Safranbolu increased sevenfold over 21 years.
Cuccia et al.	2016	Italy	Cultural and environmental preservation boosted tourism revenue and length of stay, yet simultaneously placed strain on local infrastructure and superstructure.

The Ancient Theatre of Prusias ad Hypium

Located in the Konuralp district of Düzce Province, the ancient city of Prusias ad Hypium represents a compelling example of a multi-layered historic landscape with origins dating to the third century BCE (Zeyrek et al., 2005). Named after King Prusias I in 183 BCE and subsequently integrated into the Ottoman Empire in 1323 CE (Düzce Provincial Directorate, 2025), the settlement evolved into the locality now known as Konuralp (Kurt et al., 2010). The architectural fabric of the area constitutes a complex and historically stratified ensemble of Hellenistic, Roman, and Ottoman structures, encompassing monumental walls, aqueducts, and civic remains that collectively testify to the site's enduring strategic and cultural significance (Mutlu and Kaya, 2022).

The ancient theatre remains the most significant and best-preserved monumental structure within this historic environment, functioning as a primary architectural representative of the Hellenistic-Roman transitional period (Kesim et al., 2009). Spanning 5,978 m² with an estimated original capacity of 10,000 spectators, the theatre is distinctively situated within a living urban context - surrounded by registered examples of traditional civil architecture that continue to shape the spatial and social character of the contemporary settlement (Besli, 2019). Professional excavations conducted since 2013 have progressively exposed the stage building and cavea, whilst 2020 marked a critical phase in the completion of systematic site documentation. Advanced diagnostic technologies, including three-dimensional laser scanning, have proved instrumental in generating the relief drawings required for ongoing restitution, structural assessment, and conservation planning (Okan et al., 2022).

The submission of the theatre's UNESCO Tentative List nomination dossier in 2021 represents a pivotal moment in the site's policy trajectory — positioning Prusias ad Hypium at the threshold of global heritage recognition and, in doing so, necessitating a strategic re-evaluation of its regional tourism management, institutional governance arrangements, and long-term heritage policy framework. It is precisely this transitional moment, and the governance challenges it generates, that forms the central focus of the present study.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative methodology situated within a descriptive and interpretivist framework. This approach was selected as the most appropriate means of investigating the research subject within its natural

institutional and social context, enabling the capture of participants' situated knowledge, experiential perspectives, and governance-related assessments as they pertain to the UNESCO nomination process (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011: 48). Given the complexity of heritage governance dynamics and the multi-stakeholder environment under investigation, qualitative inquiry offered the analytical flexibility required to explore the nuanced interplay between policy frameworks, institutional mandates, and community experience.

Research Population and Sample

The study population comprises tourism and heritage stakeholders operating in Düzce Province who are directly implicated in - or meaningfully affected by — the integration of the Prusias ad Hypium Ancient Theatre into regional tourism and heritage management frameworks. These actors collectively share a stake in the site as a common cultural resource and occupy diverse positions within the broader governance ecology surrounding its UNESCO nomination.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a strategy designed to ensure that each informant possessed the institutional knowledge, sectoral experience, or community proximity directly relevant to the research questions (Morse, 1995: 147). A total of 13 strategic informants were recruited, distributed across six pivotal stakeholder clusters: five representatives from official public institutions, two representatives from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), five tourism business professionals, and one local resident living in the immediate vicinity of the ancient theatre. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with all participants, encompassing representatives from travel agencies, hospitality enterprises, official heritage and tourism authorities, and the local community.

Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached — that is, until subsequent interviews ceased to generate analytically novel themes or perspectives (Morse, 1995: 147). In practice, recurring patterns and convergent responses became evident after a defined number of interviews, at which point saturation was determined to have been achieved and data collection was concluded. Given the governance-focused scope of the study and the specificity of the Prusias ad Hypium context, a sample of 13 participants provided the necessary analytical depth to illuminate the complex institutional, socio-cultural, and administrative dynamics at play.

Data Collection

This research adopted a qualitative case study design, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool. Unlike standard surveys, this approach allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' responses through probing questions, while also enabling the researcher to capture non-verbal cues such as attitudes and gestures that enrich the data (İslamoğlu and Alınçık, 2016). To navigate the nomination's complexities, the study engaged 13 strategic informants across six pivotal clusters. Selected through purposive sampling, these key actors — from heritage experts to local residents- possess the deep institutional knowledge and influence critical to regional heritage management. Data collection continued until “data saturation” was reached, ensuring that no novel themes emerged. Given the specific context of Prusias ad Hypium, this sample size provided the necessary analytical depth to elucidate the complex socio-cultural and administrative dynamics of heritage management.

The interview form was developed around the central theme of the Ancient Theatre's inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List and its impact on tourism. The questions were formulated through an extensive literature review (Canale et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018; Nadirov and Dönmez, 2021; Perić et al., 2021; Öktem and Kalyoncu, 2020; Türker and Yaşar, 2019; Uğur and Dönmez, 2024; Yenişehirlioğlu and Kalay, 2017; Yücel et al., 2017; Zor, 2019) and supplemented with original questions tailored to the study's specific goals (Çağlar and Doğan, 2018; Durmuş, 2019; Türker, 2020). Participants were contacted via telephone to schedule appointments, and face-to-face interviews were conducted at their respective workplaces. With the participants' permission, responses to four open-ended questions were recorded to ensure data integrity for subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed in full into written documents. To protect participant confidentiality whilst maintaining analytical consistency, participants were assigned sequential alphanumeric codes (P1 through P13), which were applied uniformly throughout the analysis. Descriptive profile data — encompassing age, gender, educational background, occupational role, and years of professional experience — were compiled for all participants.

Content analysis was applied to the transcribed interview data, organised around the four thematic areas established in the interview instrument. To strengthen the external validity of the analysis, an independent external expert conducted a random verification process, cross-referencing the audio recordings of five participants against their corresponding written transcripts to confirm transcription accuracy and analytical fidelity.

Inter-rater reliability was ensured through a systematic coding verification procedure. A faculty colleague was invited to independently code the research data, and the resulting codes were subsequently compared with those produced by the primary researcher. Analysis confirmed a 91% rate of agreement between the two coders; instances of divergence were resolved through collaborative re-coding and consensus. Temporal reliability was further established by the primary researcher recoding a subset of data at a separate point in time, confirming consistency in the categorisation of phenomena across different analytical periods.

In accordance with established qualitative research principles, internal validity was pursued through the direct incorporation of participant quotations within the findings (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011: 257). The use of verbatim extracts ensures that analytical interpretations remain grounded in participants' own accounts, minimising researcher-imposed framing and enhancing the credibility and transparency of the findings.

FINDINGS

This section presents and interprets the data gathered from strategic informants to examine how the UNESCO World Heritage nomination process is perceived, negotiated, and managed in relation to the Prusias ad Hypium Ancient Theatre, and to identify the governance implications of these dynamics for heritage policy and regional tourism development in Düzce. Participants' perspectives, assessments, and recommendations are presented thematically, organised around the four analytical areas explored in the interview instrument.

Table 2. Profiles of Participants

Code	Stakeholder Role / Occupation	Years of Experience	Age	Gender	Education Level
P1	Hotel Owner	10	42	Female	Bachelor's
P2	Chamber of Commerce General Coordinator	25	50	Male	Bachelor's
P3	Hotel General Manager	25	44	Male	Bachelor's
P4	Travel Agency Owner	20	37	Male	Bachelor's
P5	Hotel General Manager	15	39	Female	Bachelor's
P6	Excavation and Museum Director	20	45	Male	Master's
P7	Local Resident and Restaurant Owner	25	50	Male	Bachelor's
P8	Provincial Tourism Specialist	17	44	Male	Bachelor's
P9	Archaeologist (Turkish Historical Society) and Local Resident	10	31	Male	Bachelor's
P10	Municipal Archaeologist	10	28	Male	Bachelor's
P11	Travel Agency Owner	20	38	Male	Bachelor's
P12	Chamber of Commerce Deputy Secretary General	10	34	Female	Bachelor's
P13	Archaeologist (Turkish Historical Society) and Local Resident	10	31	Female	Bachelor's

Table 2 presents the full profile of the 13 study participants, coded sequentially from P1 to P13. The sample is characterised by considerable professional depth: all participants held at least a bachelor's degree, and each possessed a minimum of ten years of relevant professional experience. Approximately 85% of participants were male. The diversity of occupational roles — spanning public institutions, professional associations, tourism enterprises, archaeological practice, and local residency — reflects the multi-vocal analytical framework underpinning this study and ensures that findings capture the range of governance perspectives operative within the site's stakeholder environment.

Table 3. Participants' Views on UNESCO

Theme 1 – UNESCO Awareness (n = 14)		
Code	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Historical Preservation	7	50%
Genoese Castle	4	29%
Institutionalisation	2	14%
No knowledge	1	7%

Source: Prepared by the author from primary interview data.

Participants' self-assessed knowledge of UNESCO was distributed across four codes. The majority of coded responses (50%, n=7) were associated with historical preservation, reflecting an understanding of UNESCO's core conservation mandate. A notable proportion (29%, n=4) referenced the Genoese Castle in Akçakoca — a locally prominent heritage structure — suggesting that awareness of UNESCO is often filtered through proximity to familiar landmark sites rather than engagement with the nomination process itself. Responses relating to institutionalisation accounted for 14% (n=2), whilst one participant (7%) acknowledged having no prior knowledge of UNESCO. This pattern points to a significant awareness deficit with direct implications for stakeholder engagement and governance readiness during the pre-nomination phase.

P3: "Of course, I have some knowledge. As far as I know, UNESCO signed the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972. Türkiye officially became a party to this convention in 1983. There are a total of 1154 sites on the World Heritage List, 19 of which are in Türkiye, as far as I recall. There is also a tentative list, which includes 84 sites from Türkiye. I hope they will be approved as well. Italy ranks first with 58 sites on the World Heritage List, followed by China, as far as I know."

P8: "UNESCO functions as a leading organisation in promoting, supporting, standardising, and globally introducing culturally and artistically influential works, culminating in their designation as World Heritage Sites. Locally, the Genoese Castle is located in Akçakoca, a district of Düzce."

Table 4. Participant Opinions Regarding the Theatre's UNESCO Nomination

Theme 2 – The Theatre's UNESCO Nomination (n = 23)		
Code	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Positive reception	8	35%
Public awareness present	5	22%
Public awareness absent	5	22%
Need for informational seminars	4	17%
Nomination was premature	1	4%

Participants' assessments of the Ancient Theatre's UNESCO nomination were organised into five codes. The largest proportion of responses (35%, n=8) expressed positive reception of the nomination, reflecting a broadly supportive disposition among stakeholders. However, this enthusiasm was accompanied by considerable uncertainty regarding public awareness: equal proportions of participants (22%, n=5 each) held opposing views — some believing that the nomination was adequately known within the local community, whilst others considered public awareness to be substantially insufficient. A further 17% (n=4) identified the need for structured informational seminars as a priority governance intervention, and one participant (4%) questioned whether the nomination had been initiated prematurely. Taken together, these findings reveal a significant governance gap: whilst political and institutional will appears to be present, the conditions necessary for inclusive, community-grounded heritage management — most notably, consistent and well-resourced public communication — remain underdeveloped.

P5: "As a native of Düzce, I wholeheartedly support the potential UNESCO nomination for this beautiful place. However, my lack of prior awareness, despite working in the tourism sector, highlights significant shortcomings in promotion and public outreach efforts."

P6: "A rare, 70% intact 10,000-seat theatre was uncovered, featuring Roman aqueducts and city walls, 46 Ottoman structures — including houses, a mosque, a tomb, a fountain, and a bath — and the Horse Gate entrance. Awareness training is provided to key personnel, including police, gendarmerie, the public, and local mayors."

Table 5. Participants' Views on the Effect of UNESCO on Tourism

Theme 3 – UNESCO's Effect on Tourism (n= 64)			
Category	Code	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
3.1. Economic Effects	Increased recognition	6	
	Investment attractiveness	5	
	Increased asset value	4	
	Tourism integration	4	
	Stakeholder mobilisation	2	
	Increased accommodation capacity	1	
	Sub-total		22
3.2. Social Effects	Public benefit	9	
	Awareness raising	6	
	Site area improvement	1	
	Sub-total		16
3.3. Environmental Effects	Sufficient infrastructure capacity	6	
	Insufficient infrastructure capacity	4	
	Insufficient parking provision	3	
	Sub-total		13
3.4. Cultural Effects	Cultural development	7	
	Conservation awareness	5	
	Unique cultural identity	1	
	Sub-total		13

Participants' assessments of UNESCO designation's anticipated effects on tourism were distributed across four sub-themes. Economic effects accounted for the largest share of coded responses (35%, n=22), followed by social effects (25%, n=16), with environmental and cultural effects each comprising 20% (n=13) of the total. The dominance of economic considerations reflects the centrality of tourism development as a motivation for pursuing UNESCO status among this stakeholder community. Nonetheless, the prominence of social and cultural codes indicates that participants do not conceptualise the nomination in purely instrumental economic terms — a finding with important implications for how governance frameworks should be designed to communicate and distribute the anticipated benefits of designation. Environmental responses were notably divided, with participants holding conflicting views on whether current infrastructure is adequate to support increased visitation — a tension that underscores the urgency of pre-emptive policy intervention in site management planning.

P6: "UNESCO listing stimulates tourism and regional interest, motivating public, private, and NGO sectors to preserve and discover new structures. This increased awareness promotes cultural research and fosters greater cultural ownership among local, tourism-benefiting residents."

P8: "Foreign tourist interest promotes economic and cultural development, stimulating investment in expanding accommodation and food and beverage sectors, enhancing public consciousness and hospitality, and — notably — reducing air and waste pollution without generating significant traffic congestion."

P9: "The region expects increased visibility. Though high-level officials and professors have visited, many UNESCO enthusiasts bypass the theatre, unaware of its existence. The site's visitation already surpasses that of the local museum. Residents are proactively addressing the trade deficit by opening cafés and restoring homes in anticipation of future growth."

Table 6. Participants' Perspectives on the Management of the UNESCO Process

Theme 4 – Governance and Management Recommendations (n = 65)			
Category	Code	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
4.1. Promotion and Visibility	Tour circuit integration	3	
	Ancient city interpretation	3	
	Digitalisation	2	
	Cultural events	2	
	Social media engagement	2	
	Artefact promotion	2	
	Unique heritage features	2	
	Tourism integration	2	
	Film tourism	1	
	Influencer partnerships	1	
	Transportation advantages	1	
	Trade fairs	1	
	Observation deck	1	
	Genoese Castle linkage	1	
Sub-total		24	37%
4.2. Social and Community	Tourism education	9	
	Tangible community benefits	7	
	Reflecting local culture	1	
	Synergistic inter-stakeholder cooperation	1	
	Sub-total		18
4.3. Governance and Management	Investment promotion	3	
	Infrastructure development	3	
	Seasonal visit management	2	
	Academic and policy publications	2	
	Tourism High Council engagement	1	
	International institutional support	1	
	Excavation specialisation	1	
	Integrated master plan	1	
Sub-total		14	21%

4.4. Cultural Assets	Local products	4	
	Distinctive architectural heritage	3	
	Historical narrative development	1	
	Hazelnut products	1	
	Sub-total	9	14%

Participants' recommendations regarding the governance of the UNESCO nomination process were organised into four sub-themes. Promotion and visibility accounted for the largest proportion of coded responses (37%, n=24), reflecting a widely shared perception that the site's international profile and local accessibility require significant strengthening before formal inscription can generate its anticipated tourism and economic outcomes. Social and community dimensions constituted the second largest category (28%, n=18), with tourism education and the delivery of tangible community benefits emerging as the most frequently cited priorities — findings that speak directly to the governance challenges of ensuring equitable stakeholder participation in heritage management. Governance and management recommendations (21%, n=14) encompassed a notably diverse range of policy interventions, from infrastructure development and investment promotion to calls for an integrated spatial master plan and engagement with national-level Tourism High Council mechanisms. Cultural asset development represented the smallest category (14%, n=9), though responses within it — particularly around local products and distinctive architectural heritage — point to the potential for place-based cultural policy to reinforce the site's authenticity and community embeddedness.

P3: "The theatre's surrounding streets and neighbourhood must maintain their entirely natural character, free from the intrusion of overshadowing modern buildings. To inspire people to visit and explore, promotional strategies should collaborate with prominent social media influencers, and destination advantages should be communicated clearly to motivate transit visitors passing through Düzce."

*P6: "Successful nomination necessitates establishing the requisite infrastructure and raising resident awareness through targeted training and public seminars. Promotional activity requires persuasive, evidence-based strategies to attract tourists. For long-term sustainability, the Düzce master plan must establish a dedicated commission with clearly defined responsibilities, linked to the appropriate institutional bodies. Collaborative cultural events — exemplified by the university-led production of Aristotle's *The Birds* — demonstrate effective place-based promotion by generating significant national and international interest."*

P13: "Infrastructure work must first be completed in alignment with Konuralp's cultural and architectural fabric, ensuring that basic visitor necessities — including potable water, sanitation facilities, and rest areas — are adequately provided. Although the Konuralp region occasionally receives up to 2,000 daily visitors who also make use of trekking routes, the most persistent obstacle to sustainable visitation remains the chronic lack of adequate parking provision."

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a compelling yet complex governance landscape surrounding the UNESCO World Heritage nomination of the Prusias ad Hypium Ancient Theatre. A primary concern emerging from the analysis is the significant awareness deficit: despite a broadly shared understanding of UNESCO's protective mandate, 38% of stakeholders remained unaware of the site's current tentative list status. This disconnect between formal administrative processes and substantive community involvement is not merely an organisational shortcoming — it represents a structural governance challenge with direct implications for the long-term viability of the nomination. This finding reinforces the argument advanced by Cuccia et al. (2016) that the efficacy of World Heritage listing is inherently contingent upon the proactive engagement and coordination of local stakeholders. Without a unified and sustained awareness strategy — of the kind advocated by participants who called for intensified media outreach and structured public seminars — the nomination's potential to function as a socio-economic catalyst risks being substantially undermined before the inscription process is even complete.

Stakeholder expectations regarding the Ancient Theatre's anticipated impacts are overwhelmingly positive, with the projected effect distribution favouring economic (35%) and social (25%) dimensions. This optimism is not without empirical precedent. The transformative trajectories observed at other Turkish heritage sites offer instructive parallels: Eraslan et al. (2020) documented a marked surge in global recognition and visitor numbers following Göbeklitepe's inscription, whilst Dönmez et al. (2017) recorded a sevenfold increase in arrivals to Safranbolu over two decades. However, the Düzce case suggests that growth is not conceived merely in terms of quantitative visitor

increase, but as a strategic opportunity for destination branding and place identity formation. This perspective aligns closely with the findings of Dai et al. (2022) and Mahadevan and Zhang (2021), both of whom identify World Heritage status as a critical driver for destination branding and the enhancement of a city's emotional and cultural image — outcomes that have direct relevance for regional heritage policy design.

The transition from nomination to sustained tourism development, however, demands a sophisticated and anticipatory management framework — one that is embedded in policy rather than improvised post-inscription. As Sampieri et al. (2024) and Veghes (2023) observe, the prestige of a UNESCO label is insufficient on its own; it must be underpinned by high-quality service delivery, competitive visitor experience design, and a coherent synergy of cultural products. Stakeholders in Düzce echoed this necessity directly, identifying infrastructure and superstructure deficiencies as the most pressing impediments to realising the nomination's potential. Whilst the Konuralp region is widely perceived to possess the environmental and spatial capacity for managed growth, the cautionary findings of Cuccia et al. (2016) — regarding the strain that heritage tourism places on local infrastructure — remain acutely pertinent to the Düzce context. To avoid the pattern of short-term visitor spikes without long-term sustainability identified by Bernini and Galli (2024), administrative focus must shift decisively towards the concurrent development of accommodation services, visitor management capacity, and rigorous construction oversight to preserve the site's distinctive architectural and urban integrity. These are, fundamentally, policy decisions that must be anticipated and legislated for in advance of formal inscription, not retrofitted after the fact.

The study further reveals a strategic stakeholder preference for international revenue generation and sectoral employment creation over the more commonly cited metric of overnight stay duration. This nuanced economic orientation aligns with the findings of Perić et al. (2021), whose comparative analysis across 27 European countries demonstrated that whilst WHS status may not dramatically alter length of stay, it significantly strengthens international tourism revenue and tourism-related employment — outcomes of considerable relevance for regional development policy. The stakeholder consensus in Düzce reflects a commitment to this broader economic vision, and suggests that the Ancient Theatre should be positioned as an anchor within wider regional cultural networks rather than managed as an isolated monument. This integrative model, supported by Bernini and Galli (2024), offers a more resilient basis for sustaining regional tourism flows over time. Ultimately, the successful long-term governance of Prusias ad Hypium's heritage status will depend on striking a principled balance between heritage commercialisation and conservation integrity (Gao and Su, 2019) — ensuring that the site continues to function as a 'living' cultural asset embedded within its community, rather than a resource progressively depleted by the very recognition it has sought.

CONCLUSION

The UNESCO World Heritage nomination of the Prusias ad Hypium Ancient Theatre necessitates a dual approach that protects its physical fabric whilst preserving the site's 'spirit' as a living historic environment spanning past, present, and future. As Pendlebury et al. (2009) argue, embracing change is an inherent necessity in heritage stewardship, particularly for sites such as Konuralp that have witnessed a resurgence in visitor interest since 2019. This study concludes that the theatre, currently situated within the Çiftepinarlar neighbourhood, should be managed within a 'Historic Urban Landscape' (HUL) policy framework. Such an approach facilitates the mapping of cultural significance and the implementation of comprehensive area management, safeguarding the site against investment pressures and enabling a balanced transition from a local archaeological asset to a globally recognised destination.

To bridge the gap between historical integrity and contemporary heritage tourism, the strategic integration of digital technologies is a pressing management priority. Modern cultural tourism is increasingly shaped by Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR), which enable immersive exploration from any location whilst enriching the physical visitor experience through real-world information overlay (Büyükkuru, 2023; Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). For Prusias ad Hypium, the development of GIS-based three-dimensional models incorporating AR and VR capabilities is recommended both as a visitor engagement tool and a conservation instrument. This recommendation is grounded in established international precedent demonstrating the effectiveness of digital twin technologies in heritage preservation and promotion (Aziz et al., 2014; Canciani et al., 2016; Palace Museum, 2023; Polat et al., 2016; Uslu and Uysal, 2021; Yıldız et al., 2021; Younes et al., 2017).

The 'Konuralp model' emerging from this research offers a replicable strategic framework for historic destinations navigating the UNESCO nomination process. By synthesising the perspectives of 13 strategically selected informants across six stakeholder clusters, the study demonstrates that a 'multi-vocal' governance approach — actively incorporating local residents, cultural practitioners, and institutional authorities from the earliest stages of nomination — is operationally essential for sustainable heritage management. Maintaining substantive stakeholder

alignment throughout the pre-nomination phase constitutes a transferable principle for any comparable ancient settlement seeking to balance conservation with the opportunities and risks of international heritage recognition. These findings provide an evidence-based roadmap for maximising tourism's positive socio-economic contributions whilst ensuring the authenticity and community embeddedness upon which lasting heritage value depends.

PRACTICAL AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Drawing upon the empirical insights derived from this research, the following strategic framework is addressed to Düzce's multisectoral stakeholders — ranging from central and local administrators to the academic community and private tourism enterprises. These recommendations are designed to foster a sustainable heritage tourism ecosystem that catalyses regional socio-economic development whilst strictly safeguarding the intrinsic authenticity of the Prusias ad Hypium Ancient Theatre. By addressing the critical intersection of development and preservation, the proposed policy measures aim to maximise the transformative potential of the UNESCO World Heritage nomination, ensuring the site's cultural legacy remains resilient as its international profile expands.

1. Administrative Governance and Policy Framework

- ✓ *Integrated Management Planning:* Stakeholders must collaborate to develop realistic, evidence-based management plans that align ongoing excavation activity with the broader natural and cultural assets of Konuralp. To expedite this process, a dedicated UNESCO Commission — comprising public authorities, tourism representatives, and local residents — should be established to ensure multi-vocal governance and shared institutional accountability.
- ✓ *Institutional Support and Research:* Local institutions should prioritise funding for reconstruction and restoration works. To achieve and sustain international recognition, stakeholders must partner with academic specialists to produce rigorous published research and maintain a consistent flow of targeted communications to global media platforms.
- ✓ *Sustainable Standards and Impact Assessment:* Proactive steps should be taken to adopt the UNESCO/UNWTO Sustainable Cultural Destinations framework. Beyond economic metrics, authorities must commission comprehensive Cultural Tourism Impact Assessment reports to evaluate the social, educational, and heritage dimensions — including Outstanding Universal Value — of the site on a regular basis.

✓ 2. Urban Planning and Heritage Conservation

- ✓ *Strict Planning Controls:* To preserve the 'spirit of place', urban planning regulations must prevent any new construction that impairs the Ancient Theatre's visual setting or disrupts the original character of the surrounding neighbourhood. These controls should be embedded within the Düzce spatial master plan as a binding policy instrument.
- ✓ *Integrated Heritage Promotion:* The nomination strategy should follow a landscape approach, concurrently promoting the Ancient Theatre alongside related regional assets — including the Roman bridge, city walls, monumental arches, and the Tentative List-inscribed Genoese Castle — as a coherent heritage corridor.
- ✓ *Infrastructure Resilience:* Improving the destination's carrying capacity requires targeted infrastructure investment, encompassing road upgrades, water and power supply enhancements, and traffic management solutions designed to mitigate the environmental and social pressures associated with increased visitor volume.

✓ 3. Socio-Cultural Engagement and Capacity Building

- ✓ *Community Awareness and Training:* The success of the nomination is contingent upon local residents recognising and actively supporting its value. Public seminars should introduce Düzce's broader heritage context before focusing specifically on the theatre. The municipality should additionally facilitate regular guided tours led by excavation staff and provide structured training on visitor engagement and professional conduct.
- ✓ *Authentic Cultural Exchange:* To facilitate meaningful connections between local communities and visitors, Konuralp should establish a regional products market — inspired by successful models such as Akçakoca's Yukarı Mahalle — as a platform for the sustainable commercialisation of genuine local culture and artisanal production.
- ✓ *Future Research Agenda:* Whilst this study engages key institutional and sectoral stakeholders, a dedicated follow-up study focusing exclusively on the resident community's perspectives is essential to ensure the long-term social integration of the heritage site and to ground future policy in locally grounded evidence.

✓ 4. Digital Innovation and Strategic Marketing



- ✓ *Smart Heritage Integration*: Implementing QR code-based interpretation at key points of interest will enable visitors to access detailed historical and architectural information independently, reducing dependence on guided provision whilst broadening interpretive accessibility.
- ✓ *Experience-Focused Museum*: The currently closed Konuralp Museum should be reopened as a digitally enhanced, experience-oriented venue. Developing a coherent visitor itinerary in which the museum visit leads naturally to the theatre will significantly strengthen site recognition and dwell time.
- ✓ *Diverse Marketing Channels*: Düzce should capitalise on film tourism potential by facilitating television and cinema productions at the site. Strategic collaborations with digital content creators can further amplify destination awareness, with specific targeting of travellers from proximate metropolitan centres — Istanbul and Ankara in particular — to encourage planned heritage stopovers.
- ✓ *Investment Incentives*: To prevent a deficit in visitor facilities, authorities should compile a comprehensive tourism development inventory and organise investor engagement seminars to attract high-quality, heritage-compatible tourism services to the region.

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