DEVELOPMENT OF INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE BASED ON MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES: A CULTURAL TRENDSETTER PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Purpose – Tourist destinations play a strategic role in economic development as tourism offerings respond to changing visitor expectations. Policymakers promote cultural tourism as a form of special interest tourism to reduce seasonality and improve sustainability. Industrial heritage represents a niche segment offering opportunities for differentiated, experience-based travel.
Methodology/Design/Approach – This study examines intention formation toward industrial heritage tourism among cultural trendsetters in contexts where such tourism remains prospective. Using a sample of 342 respondents, the Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) framework is applied to analyse expectation-based visit intentions.
Findings – Confirmatory factor analysis confirms the validity and reliability of the MTE scale. Multiple regression analysis reveals that selected MTE dimensions significantly predict intention to visit industrial heritage sites under expectation-based conditions (R^2 = 0.301, $F(7,329) = 20.255$, $p < 0.001$).
Originality of the research – The findings offer a new perspective on experiential cultural tourism by highlighting the role of cultural trendsetters in shaping industrial heritage tourism. It raises new questions related to assessing the potential of sustainable tourism development based on industrial heritage. The study contributes to extending the validated MTE framework into the domain of industrial heritage tourism and introduces a novel intention measurement scale (*INT-IH*) applicable across heritage tourism contexts.
Keywords cultural tourism, memorable tourism experience, industrial heritage, cultural trendsetters, multivariate data analysis

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INTRODUCTION

The behaviour of tourists when choosing a destination is continuously evolving, with significant shifts observed in the preferences and values of contemporary travellers (Ianioglo & Rissanen, 2020; Jarratt & Davies, 2020). These changes have contributed to the growing prominence of special interest tourism, particularly cultural tourism (Timothy, 2011; Richards, 2018; UNWTO, 2020). Cultural tourism today accounts for approximately 40% of global tourism revenues and continues to grow at a faster pace than overall tourism demand (UNESCO, 2021), reflecting tourists' increasing interest in authentic, meaningful and memorable experiences (McKercher, 2020; Richards, 2021).

Industrial heritage represents a niche segment within the broader field of cultural tourism. Cultural heritage tourism experiences have been shown to play a significant role in shaping tourists' memories and post-visit evaluations (Lee, 2015), positioning heritage tourism firmly within the domain of experiential consumption (Richards, 2018). Industrial heritage is defined by the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH, 2003) as the remains of industrial culture with historical, technological, architectural and social value (**Ćopić** et al., 2014; Harfst et al., 2025; Orgaz-Agüera et al., 2025). Nevertheless, despite this growing recognition, industrial heritage remains underrepresented in tourism research compared with other forms of cultural heritage, and its experiential dimension has only recently begun to attract systematic scholarly attention (Xie, 2015; Somoza-Medina & Monteserín-Abella, 2021).

Experiences have become a central concept in cultural heritage tourism research. While the concept of MTEs has been widely applied in destination and cultural tourism studies, its use within heritage tourism remains limited (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), and empirical evidence regarding its applicability to industrial heritage contexts is still scarce. Previous studies confirm that MTEs significantly influence tourist satisfaction, revisit intentions and word-of-mouth behaviour (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Zhang et al., 2018; Seyfi et al., 2020); however, little is known about the extent to which specific experiential dimensions predict intentions to visit industrial heritage sites. This gap is particularly evident in destinations where industrial heritage tourism has not yet been developed and visitor intentions are therefore shaped by expectations rather than on-site experience.

Despite the growing body of literature on industrial heritage tourism, existing studies have predominantly focused on revitalised sites and general tourist populations, while paying limited attention to the experiential mechanisms that shape visit intention. In particular, little is known about how potential visitors evaluate industrial heritage tourism in destinations where such tourism is still prospective rather than established, and where intention formation is therefore driven by expectations rather than on-site experience. Moreover, the role of culturally influential visitor segments in this process remains underexplored. Cultural trendsetters, as early adopters and cultural intermediaries, are known to shape the diffusion and legitimisation of emerging cultural experiences, yet their experiential expectations and behavioural intentions toward industrial heritage tourism have received little empirical attention. Addressing these gaps, this study examines how cultural trendsetters evaluate prospective industrial heritage tourism experiences through the multidimensional framework of MTE, identifying which experiential dimensions most strongly predict their intention to visit industrial heritage sites.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Special Interest and Cultural Tourism

Tourism research has increasingly recognised the role of special interest tourism (SIT) in diversifying demand and reducing seasonality, aligning the tourism offer with the cultural and social values of local communities (Čorluka et al., 2013; Jafari, 2014; UNWTO, 2020). SIT is considered a strategic response to the challenges of mass tourism, providing destinations with opportunities to extend the season, differentiate their image, and address sustainability goals.

Recent studies emphasise that cultural tourism has shifted from a predominantly site-oriented form towards an experience-based paradigm, where co-creation, interaction with local communities, and engagement with cultural narratives play a central role (du Cros & McKercher, 2020; Seyfi et al., 2020; Le et al., 2022). This transformation underscores the importance of authenticity and memorability as core determinants of value in cultural tourism (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2018). Such developments provide a conceptual foundation for exploring industrial heritage tourism, as it combines heritage preservation with the potential for differentiated, experience-driven consumption.

1.2 Industrial Heritage Tourism

Following the definition provided by the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH, 2003), industrial heritage tourism refers to the utilisation of former industrial sites, structures, and landscapes as cultural and tourism resources. Within tourism research, industrial heritage has increasingly been recognised for its potential to preserve material traces of industrialisation while simultaneously contributing to cultural identity, collective memory, and place meaning.

In recent years, industrial heritage has gained attention as a valuable resource for sustainable development and experience-based diversification of destinations. Repurposed industrial sites can generate memorable tourism experiences that combine heritage preservation, cultural revitalisation, and regional regeneration (Ćopić et al., 2014; Harfst et al., 2025). Moreover, the authenticity of industrial architecture and post-industrial landscapes has been shown to foster place attachment and support sustainable tourism practices (Orgaz-Agüera et al., 2025).

The strategic role of industrial heritage in urban restructuring has long been noted in European planning discourse, linking post-industrial identity with cultural repositioning (Hospers, 2002). Empirical studies confirm that the transformation of abandoned industrial spaces into cultural and tourism facilities stimulates new forms of urban tourism and creates opportunities for sustainable development (Xie et al., 2020; Somoza-Medina & Monteserín-Abella, 2021). However, the sustainability of such projects often depends on governance frameworks and policy support (Harfst et al., 2025). Recent research further highlights the role of industrial heritage tourism in supporting sustainable local development when aligned with experience-based management approaches (Galluccio & Giambona, 2024; Szromek, 2025).

Despite these contributions, industrial heritage tourism remains comparatively under-researched. Existing studies largely focus on revitalised sites and socio-economic impacts, while little attention has been paid to the experiential dimension of industrial heritage and its influence on tourists' behavioural intentions (Xie, 2015). This gap is particularly evident in destinations where industrial heritage has not yet been adapted for tourism, leaving open questions about how potential visitors perceive and evaluate such experiences.

H1: Previous visits to industrial heritage sites are positively associated with higher expectations of MTE dimensions.

1.3 Cultural Trendsetters as a Tourist Segment

The concept of cultural intermediaries was introduced by Bourdieu (1984, 1991), who argued that social groups endowed with symbolic and cultural capital play a key role in legitimising cultural practices, preferences, and meanings. Acting as taste-makers, cultural intermediaries shape cultural value and public perception through their professional positions and social influence (Maguire & Matthews, 2010; Gotham, 2007).

In contemporary research, cultural intermediaries have been closely associated with the creative industry, where professionals in fields such as architecture, design, and media function as interpreters and promoters of cultural innovation (Pappalepore et al., 2014; Stockley-Patel & Swords, 2023). Within this broader group, cultural trendsetters represent a specific subset of early adopters who identify, interpret, and disseminate emerging trends, thereby influencing the adoption-diffusion process of new products and experiences (Batinic et al., 2008; Workman et al., 2019).

Due to their professional orientation and cultural literacy, cultural trendsetters display heightened sensitivity to authenticity, spatial narratives, and symbolic meanings. These characteristics position them as a particularly relevant audience for tourism offers grounded in heritage and creativity, where experiential interpretation and cultural context play a central role. From a destination development perspective, aligning tourism offerings with local resources therefore requires consideration not only of community values and lifestyles, but also of the perspectives of such culturally influential visitor segments.

Despite their documented role in shaping cultural valorisation processes and consumer behaviour in the creative industry, cultural trendsetters remain largely absent from industrial heritage tourism research. Empirical attention to their experiential expectations and behavioural intentions in heritage contexts is limited, particularly in destinations where industrial heritage tourism is still emerging rather than established. Addressing this gap, the present study examines cultural trendsetters as a key tourist segment whose experiential evaluations and intention formation offer insight into the prospective development of industrial heritage tourism.

1.4 Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE)

The concept of memorable tourism experiences has received limited attention within the context of heritage tourism (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), with insufficient research into its additional forms such as industrial heritage. Studies consistently confirm that MTEs influence satisfaction, revisit and word-of-mouth intentions in both cultural and heritage tourism contexts (Lončarić et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Seyfi et al., 2020). Recent research has further extended the MTE framework by examining the role of long-term memory systems and emotional processing in shaping revisit intention, thereby reinforcing the cognitive–affective foundations of memorable tourism experiences (Wang, Liu & Cheung, 2023). In addition, recent studies emphasise the role of perceived authenticity in shaping memorable tourism experiences by demonstrating that intrapersonal and interpersonal authenticity enhance memory impressions and subsequent behavioural outcomes (Lu, Wang & Suhartanto, 2023). However, little is known about the predictive role of these mechanisms in industrial heritage contexts. This highlights a research gap regarding the prediction of visit intentions to industrial heritage based on expected tourism experiences. In this sense, memorable tourism experiences are not conceptualised solely as post-visit evaluations, but also as anticipatory cognitive–affective schemas through which potential visitors form expectations and behavioural intentions, particularly in contexts where direct experience is absent.

The MTE framework operationalises memorable experiences through a set of empirically validated dimensions, including hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, knowledge, and involvement (Kim et al., 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Together, these dimensions capture both the cognitive and affective components that underpin the formation of post-visit memories. In heritage settings, recent studies further show that authenticity cues and visitor engagement enhance MTEs and, in turn, behavioural intentions (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Eck et al., 2023). However, applications explicitly focused on industrial heritage remain scarce, and the strength of specific MTE dimensions as predictors of intention has not been systematically examined in destinations where industrial heritage has not yet been adapted for tourism.

Building on this body of literature, the present study adopts the MTE framework to examine how prospective visitors assess potential industrial heritage experiences, with particular attention to dimensions most salient for culturally engaged early adopters. Given that cultural trendsetters display heightened sensitivity to authenticity, novelty and knowledge acquisition, their experiential evaluations offer a theoretically grounded lens for understanding demand formation in industrial heritage tourism.

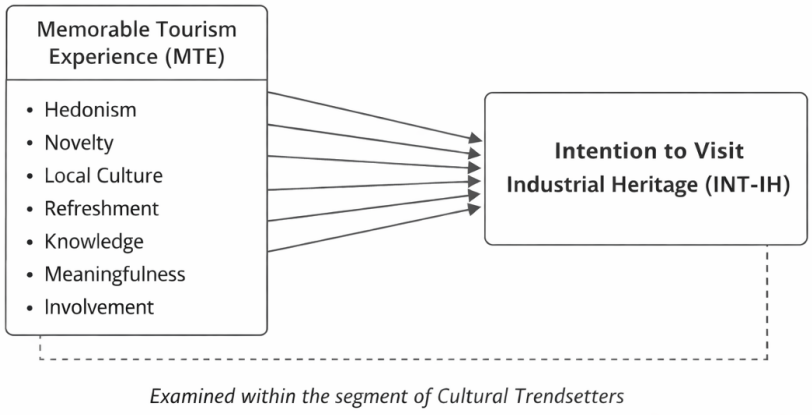
> *H2: The dimensions of Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE) are positively associated with cultural trendsetters' intention to visit industrial heritage sites.*

1.5 Synthesis and Conceptual Model

The literature review highlights three interrelated gaps relevant to this study. First, industrial heritage has been recognised as a potential driver of sustainable tourism and regional regeneration, yet its experiential dimension remains underexplored, particularly in destinations where such resources have not yet been adapted for tourism. Second, cultural trendsetters, as early adopters and cultural intermediaries, represent an influential audience segment whose role in shaping tourism demand has not been empirically examined in relation to industrial heritage. Third, while the MTE framework provides a robust basis for understanding how cognitive and affective experience dimensions influence behavioural intentions, its application within the domain of industrial heritage tourism remains limited.

Synthesising these gaps, the study proposes a conceptual model in which the dimensions of MTE serve as independent variables predicting the intention to visit industrial heritage sites (*INT-IH*), with cultural trendsetters positioned as the focal tourist segment. This framework clarifies the logical chain between industrial heritage resources, trend-sensitive visitor segments, and experiential predictors of visitation intention, thereby addressing a critical gap in research on experience-based industrial heritage tourism.

Figure 1: **Conceptual model linking memorable tourism experience dimensions and intention to visit industrial heritage among cultural trendsetters**



Based on this synthesis, Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of the study, in which the dimensions of memorable tourism experiences are proposed as predictors of the intention to visit industrial heritage sites, examined within the segment of cultural trendsetters.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Determining the sampling frame

The sampling frame is linked to a theoretically defined group of tourists characterised by a strong cultural and professional engagement with industrial heritage. In line with the objectives of the study, which focus on intention formation within special interest tourism, the sample was designed to capture the perspectives of cultural trendsetters. This group was operationalised as individuals with professional or educational backgrounds in architecture, whose training and occupational practices are closely related to heritage reuse, spatial interpretation, and cultural valorisation.

The selection of sampling units was guided by a purposive (judgmental) sampling strategy, ensuring the inclusion of respondents with relevant experiential, educational, and professional characteristics. Architects and architecture students were considered appropriate representatives of trend-sensitive cultural intermediaries due to their documented sensitivity to symbolic value, authenticity, spatial interpretation, and innovation in cultural and creative contexts (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1991; Tokatli, 2011; Pappalepore et al., 2014; Mijoč et al., 2021). The inclusion of both students and employed professionals reflects the future and present spectrum of cultural intermediaries, allowing insight into intention formation across different stages of professional development.

Architects are not treated as trendsetters by profession alone, but as a theoretically justified proxy for culturally influential early adopters due to their role in spatial meaning-making, heritage reinterpretation, and cultural valorisation. Their professional training and symbolic position within the cultural field enable them to shape interpretations of space, authenticity, and heritage, positioning them as relevant cultural intermediaries in processes of cultural diffusion and tourism innovation.

To ensure alignment with the research focus, additional inclusion criteria were applied. Respondents were required to have been exposed to industrial heritage or related cultural content during formal education and to demonstrate travel habits oriented

toward urban, cultural, and heritage-based tourism. These criteria ensured that participants possessed both the cultural literacy and experiential orientation necessary for evaluating expectations related to industrial heritage tourism.

Given the exploratory nature of the study and its emphasis on a theoretically defined segment, the sample is not intended to be statistically representative of the general tourist population. Instead, it is analytically appropriate for examining experiential expectations and visit intentions among cultural trendsetters as a specific group whose preferences and interpretations often precede and influence broader tourism demand. The final sample comprised 342 respondents from 45 countries, reflecting the international scope of the study and the transnational character of contemporary creative and professional networks.

The study does not focus on a single destination as an empirical field site. Instead, industrial heritage is examined as a conceptual tourism resource, and respondents were asked to evaluate their experiential expectations and intention to visit industrial heritage sites in general. This expectation-based approach is methodologically appropriate given that industrial heritage tourism remains underdeveloped in many contexts, including Croatia, and allows the study to capture intention formation prior to on-site experience.

2.2 Data collection process

A highly structured questionnaire in Croatian and English was used for data collection. Respondents were selected based on specific inclusion criteria. Participants were expected to have received formal education on the topic of industrial heritage or related cultural and architectural subjects. In addition, their travel habits included both short-term and extended holidays, often involving visits to cities, cultural institutions, and heritage sites, including industrial heritage locations. These characteristics ensured that the sample aligned with the profile of culturally engaged and heritage-aware travelers, suitable for exploring the research objectives. The educational background ensured that respondents were familiar with heritage-related content, allowing for a more informed perception of authenticity and tourism potential. In line with the theoretical framework presented earlier, architects and architecture students were selected as the focal group for data collection due to their status as cultural intermediaries within the creative industry. Their professional training, aesthetic sensibility, and spatial awareness position them as trendsetters in the valorisation and reinterpretation of cultural and industrial heritage (Bourdieu, 1984; Pappalepore et al., 2014; Tokatli, 2011).

The data were collected in three research phases, and in each one the suitability of the respondents for the research was checked. The first research phase included European architecture students. The respondents were addressed face-to-face by trained interviewers and they independently filled out a paper questionnaire in English. In total, 195 questionnaires were returned to the interviewers, 184 of which passed the formal logical test with a questionnaire completion rate exceeding 90%. The second and the third stage of data collection were carried out by filling out a self-administered online questionnaire. In the second phase of research, online questionnaires were sent by e-mail to national and international contacts of Zagreb Society of Architects. The questionnaire was sent along with the invitation letter to 420 addresses of European architects, 103 of whom filled it out completely. Architecture students from all Croatian universities (Zagreb, Split and Osijek) were selected for the last phase of research such that a notice was posted on their respective study programme websites asking them to join the research. The number of respondents according to the research phase is given in the table below.

Table 1: **Respondents according to research phases**

Research phase	The country of the respondent	Type of respondent	Data collection	n
First	EU, world	Experts: architecture students	Face-to-face (pen-and-paper)	182
Second	EU, world, Croatia	Experts: architects	Online survey	103
Third	Croatia	Experts: architecture students	Online survey	57

Data quality was ensured through logical consistency checks, high questionnaire completion rates, and the exclusion of responses with excessive missing values or patterned answering. The research targeted respondents with professional or educational backgrounds in architecture, positioning them as cultural trendsetters due to their expertise in heritage reuse and cultural production (n = 342). The data were collected between April and August 2021, covering the pre-season and summer period in Croatia. The combination of face-to-face and online data collection, applied to clearly defined expert subgroups, enhances the scientific replicability of the research design and ensures alignment between the conceptual framework and the sample composition.

2.3 Research concepts

The expectations of a memorable tourism experience (MTE scale) were measured using the multidimensional scale developed by Kim et al. (2012) and later validated across different cultural contexts by Kim & Ritchie (2014). This scale consists of 24 items grouped into seven dimensions: hedonism, involvement, novelty, local culture, refreshment, knowledge, and meaningfulness. Each item was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, capturing the degree to which respondents expect a given experience dimension during travel. Each of the items MTE1-MTE24 in the research measures the expected MTE through

seven dimensions, and the sentences start with *On my trips I want…* **Hedonism** 1. Thrilled about having a new experience, 2. Indulged in the activities, 3. Really enjoyed this tourism experience, 4. Exciting. **Involvement**. 5. I visited a place where I really wanted to go, 6. I enjoyed activities which I really wanted to do, 7. I was interested in the main activities of this tourism experience. **Novelty**. 8. Once-in-a lifetime experience, 9. Unique, 10. Different from previous experiences, 11. Experienced something new. **Local culture**. 12. Good impressions about the local people, 13. Closely experienced the local culture, 14. Local people in a destination were friendly. **Refreshment**. 15. Liberating, 16. Enjoyed sense of freedom, 17. Refreshing, 18. Revitalised. **Knowledge**. 19. Exploratory, 20. Knowledge, 21. New culture. **Meaningfulness**. 22. I did something meaningful, 23. I did something important, 24. Learned about myself.

Variables related to the intention to visit industrial heritage sites are criterion variables. Respondents answered four nominal-scale questions to assess their prior experience with industrial heritage sites. In addition to the introductory questions, respondents expressed a degree of their interest in visiting industrial heritage sites, and the *intention to visit* industrial heritage variable is constructed based on item aggregation. The intention to visit industrial heritage sites was measured using four author-developed items on a 7-point Likert scale. The statements began with *I want to...* and reflect core motivational aspects associated with cultural and industrial heritage tourism, including: a. visit a tourist destination to see an industrial heritage site (IND1), b. visit industrial heritage sites and personally participate in original on-site activities (IND2), c. a take short-term stay (at least one night) at an industrial heritage site (IND3), and d. try authentic food at an industrial tourism destination (IND4). The formulation of items was guided by prior literature on experiential tourism and cultural motivation (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Xie, 2006; Richards, 2018), with theoretical grounding in intention-based behavioral models (Ajzen, 1991). Socio-demographic variables describe respondents according to demographic characteristics and basic travel habits.

Given the exploratory status of the INT-IH scale and its first empirical application, exploratory factor analysis was considered methodologically appropriate at this stage.

2.4 Data analysis methods

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the construct validity and dimensional structure of the MTE scale. Model fit was evaluated using standard indices, including the Chi-square statistic (χ^2), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Construct validity was assessed using CFA model fit indices and standardized factor loadings. Internal consistency was evaluated via Cronbach's alpha coefficients, all of which exceeded 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Multiple regression analysis was used to measure the predictive ability of the MTE instrument in predicting the intention to visit industrial heritage. The data were analysed with JASP 0.17.1 and IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0 software packages. Both construct validity and internal consistency of the measurement scales were confirmed through CFA, standardized factor loadings, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients, all exceeding recommended thresholds.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Profile of cultural trendsetters

A descriptive analysis of the basic demographic characteristics of the respondents contributes to creating a description of cultural trendsetters, which includes gender, age, education, employment, income and residence (Table 2). The key characteristics of the sample are also previous visits to Croatia as a tourist destination, as well as previous tourist visits to industrial heritage sites.

Table 2: **Description of the sample**

Variable		**%**	**Variable**		**%**
Gender	Male	36.8	Employment	Employed	47.2
	Female	63.2		Self-employed	15.9
Education	Secondary school	10.6		Retired	4.4
	Undergraduate studies	6.8		Student	32.4
	Graduate studies	70.3	Income	High	4.4
	Postgraduate studies	12.4		Upper-middle	30.2
Residence	Rural area/village	3.2		Middle	54.5
	Small/medium-sized town	21.4		Lower-middle	9.1
	Big city	75.4		Low	1.8
First visit to HR	Yes	30.2	Visited industrial heritage	Yes	55.3
	No	69.8		No	44.7

In total, 63.3% of women and 36.8% of men participated in the survey, and the largest percentage of respondents completed university education (almost 90%), i.e., 70.3% of them are graduate degree holders. The average age of the respondents was 32.52 (SD = 10.83) and the youngest and the oldest respondent were 19 and 72 years old, respectively. As the sample design limited the selection of respondents to those experts associated with industrial heritage (architecture sector), their employment status reveals that 32.4% of students, 63.1% of employees and 4.4% of retired respondents. The majority were urban residents (75.4%), with middle to higher income levels. Approximately 55% *participants with prior experience of visiting industrial heritage sites*, while 69.8% had visited Croatia before. This mix allowed for comparison between those with prior exposure to industrial heritage and those encountering the concept as new. This composition provides empirical grounding for examining the expectations and intentions of cultural trendsetters in relation to industrial heritage tourism.

Cultural trendsetters show a noticeable preference for travel. On average, the respondents decide to travel 8 times a year (Mean = 8.30, SD = 9.56), with the frequency ranging from 1 to as many as 87. This maximum number of trips is justified given that these are respondents who professionally continuously monitor global architectural and cultural trends. It is possible to say for this variable that it measures respondent preferences for travelling, irrespective of their reason and duration. The profile of cultural trendsetters is further described by their choice of a travel companion on private trips. Respondents most often travel with their family (34.6%), then their friends (25.5%) and partners (23.8%). The share of those travelling alone (12.6%) is also noticeable, while organised group travels were rarely selected in the analysed sample as the form of travel (3.5%).

The change in trends recorded in the tourism sector also applies to the planning of excursions as part of the trip. The data indicate that it is a sample comprising respondents with a great number of plans for day trips while travelling (78.9%). Cultural trendsetters (936 responses) emphasised natural beauty (66.2% of respondents) and cultural historical heritage (61.3% of respondents) as the dominant reasons for a day trip. In addition, almost half of the respondents mentioned cities or villages (49.8%), interesting cities (47.6%) and new experiences (45.7%) as reasons for a day trip.

3.2 Memorable tourism experience (MTE) and Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) analysis

Dimensions of memorable tourism experience can be considered as predictors of a satisfied and loyal tourist. CFA was conducted to validate the seven-factor structure of the MTE scale (Kim & Ritchie, 2014) and assess its reliability and convergent validity in predicting intentions to visit destinations featuring industrial heritage.

Table 3: **Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) analysis with CR and AVE**

Factor	Items	Factor Loadings (λ)	CR	AVE
Hedonism	MTE1–MTE4	0.68–0.75	0.776	0.461
Involvement	MTE5–MTE7	0.66–0.86	0.816	0.575
Novelty	MTE8–MTE11	0.79–0.85	0.891	0.675
Local Culture	MTE12–MTE14	0.69–0.85	0.832	0.619
Refreshment	MTE15–MTE18	0.79–0.88	0.904	0.704
Knowledge	MTE19–MTE21	0.68–0.86	0.877	0.629
Meaningfulness	MTE22–MTE24	0.76–0.85	0.855	0.667

Note: All values are standardized estimates. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Results presented in Table 3 indicate that all standardized factor loadings (λ) ranged between 0.66 and 0.88, exceeding the minimum recommended value of 0.60 (Hair et al., 2019), thus supporting convergent validity. Composite Reliability (CR) values for all seven dimensions were above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.776 to 0.904, which indicates good internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.461 to 0.704. Although the AVE value for the Hedonism factor fell slightly below the recommended 0.50 threshold, its CR was acceptable, which, as suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981), still supports the convergent validity of the construct. Overall, the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties. The initial CFA results indicated a marginal model fit: $\chi^2_{(231)} = 816.306$, $p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.966, CFI = 0.892, TLI = 0.871, NFI = 0.857, RMSEA = 0.086, SRMR = 0.056).

The CFA model was re-specified based on modification indices (MI), which suggested the inclusion of eight correlated error terms within the same latent factors. Following this adjustment, a substantial improvement in model fit indices was observed. The re-specified model demonstrated better fit: $\chi^2_{(223)} = 671.632$, $p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.972, CFI = 0.917, TLI = 0.898, NFI = 0.882, RMSEA = 0.077, SRMR = 0.048). A summary of model fit indices before and after modification is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: **Comparison of Model Fit Indices Before and After Model Modification**

Fit Index	Initial CFA Model	Re-specified CFA Model	Recommended Threshold*
χ^2/df	3.533	3.011	< 3.00 (acceptable fit)
GFI	0.966	0.972	≥ 0.90 (acceptable fit) ≥ 0.95 (good fit)
CFI	0.892	0.917	≥ 0.90
TLI	0.871	0.898	≥ 0.90
NFI	0.857	0.882	≥ 0.90
RMSEA	0.086	0.077	≤ 0.08 (acceptable fit) ≤ 0.06 (good fit)
SRMR	0.056	0.048	≤ 0.08

** Thresholds based on Hair et al. (2019) and Hu & Bentler (1999)*

Table 4 shows that the re-specified model meets all recommended thresholds, particularly improving in CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR. According to model evaluation criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2019) and Hu & Bentler (1999), the revised measurement model demonstrates acceptable overall fit.

Internal consistency was further confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which ranged from 0.772 to 0.900 (Table 5), indicating satisfactory reliability across all dimensions. Based on the validated measurement model, seven composite variables were computed by averaging item scores within each MTE dimension and used in the subsequent structural model analysis.

3.3 Previous visits to industrial heritage sites and the level of expected MTE

Although this is a sample of experts with a high level of knowledge about industrial heritage with an above average number of annual trips, only slightly more than half of the respondents (55.3%) have visited so far industrial heritage sites that have been repurposed for tourism. Descriptive statistics were used to present each dimension of the MTE with regard to (non)visiting industrial heritage sites, and the difference between two groups (n_1 = 189, n_2 = 150) of samples is tested with a one tailed independent samples t-test.

Cultural trendsetters who have previously visited industrial heritage sites have considerably higher expectations of MTE dimensions than those who have not visited such sites ($p < 0.05$). A comparison of these two groups of tourists confirms that tourists who have previously visited industrial heritage sites rated each MTE dimension significantly higher. The results of conducted independent samples t-tests support hypothesis H1.

Table 5: **MTE dimensions and previous visits to industrial heritage sites**

MTE dimensions	Cronbach's alpha (no of items)	Samples	Mean	t-test statistics
Hedonism	0.772 (4)	1	5.56	t = 2.122, df = 337, p = 0.017
		2	5.30	
Involvement	0.792 (3)	1	6.25	t = 1.910, df = 337, p = 0.029
		2	6.02	
Novelty	0.890 (4)	1	5.80	t = 3.108, df = 289.321, p = 0.001
		2	5.34	
Local culture	0.826 (3)	1	5.79	t = 3.248, df = 298.2, p < 0.001
		2	5.36	
Refreshment	0.900 (4)	1	5.81	t = 5.592, df = 288, p < 0.001
		2	4.92	
Knowledge	0.826 (3)	1	6.26	t = 1.795, df = 288.8, p = 0.037
		2	6.05	
Meaningfulness	0.852 (3)	1	5.58	t = 3.431, df = 287.1, p < 0.001
		2	5.04	

Samples: 1 – with previous visits to industrial heritage sites, 2 – without previous visits to industrial heritage sites

3.4 Intention to visit industrial heritage sites

Exploratory factor analysis was used to test the dimensionality of the scale that describes the intention to visit industrial heritage sites (*INT-IH*), while the reliability of the proposed scale was tested by Cronbach's alpha.

Table 6: **Scale reliability statistics**

Intention to visit industrial heritage sites *INT-IH*	**Mean**	**Cronbach's α**	**Factor loadings**	**Total variance explained**
IND1	4.814	0.775	0.822	50.383%
IND2	4.834		0.818	
IND3	4.636		0.723	
IND4	5.216		0.385	

The reliability analysis results (Table 6) indicate that the respondents rated the items consistently (Cronbach's alpha 0.775), and it was confirmed that the four selected items measure the construct well. The exploratory factor analysis results are presented, with the principal components method for factor extraction and the Oblimin method for factor rotation with Kaiser normalisation. The adequacy of the implementation of factor analysis was confirmed by the KMO test, which is 0.739 with a statistically significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 441.898$; df = 6; $p < 0.001$). By calculating the average scores of the analysed items, the criterion variable *INT-IH* was created. Descriptive statistics measures for the specified variable indicate the presence of an approximately normal distribution (Skewness = -0.393, Kurtosis = -0.297).

The composite variables of the MTE scale as predictors and the *INT-IH* variable as a criterion were used in multiple regression analysis. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the predicted ability dimensions of memorable tourism experiences (hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty) on the intention to visit industrial heritage sites. By controlling for the tolerance indicator (greater than 0.1) and the VIF value (less than 10), it was concluded that there is no multicollinearity in the regression model (VIF < 2.237 and the tolerance indicator > 0.447). The Durbin-Watson statistic is a test statistic for auto-correlation between errors. The Durbin-Watson values (d = 2.033) are closer to 2, indicating that the assumption is satisfied (Gujarati & Porter, 2010) and the model does not have auto-correlation problem. Regression coefficients are interpreted as the average change in criteria when the predictor increases by one unit of measurement, assuming that the other predictor variables remain unchanged (Horvat & Mijoč, 2019). Statistical significance and a standardised value of the regression coefficients of the regression model are given in Table 7.

Table 7: **Multiple regression analysis**

	B	**Std. error**	**β**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**tolerance**	**VIF**
(Constant)	.460	.451		1.020	.308		
Hdn	.233	.078	.192	2.979	.003	.522	1.917
Inv	-.002	.080	-.001	-.022	.982	.537	1.861
Nvl	-.132	.069	-.132	-1.905	.058	.447	2.237
LoC	.277	.074	.243	3.732	<.001	.510	1.959
Rfr	.132	.058	.147	2.287	.023	.526	1.901
Knw	.204	.087	.152	2.353	.019	.520	1.924
Mnn	.059	.061	.061	.971	.332	.539	1.857
R^2	0.285				Durbin-Watson		2.033
Overall F	F (7, 331) = 18.829, $p < 0.001$						

Criterion in the model: INT_IH, Predictors in the model: Hdn – Hedonism, Inv – Involvement, Nvl – Novelty, LoC – Local Culture, Rfr – Refreshment, Knw – Knowledge, Mnn – Meaningfulness

In Table 6, the value of the F test indicates that the relationship in the model between the dimensions of MTE and the intention to visit industrial heritage sites is significant ($F_{7, 331} = 18.829$, $p < 0.001$). The predictor variables in the model are responsible for 28.5% of the variance in the criterion variable. According to the regression model, the strongest predictive ability to visit industrial heritage sites is *Local culture* as one of the dimensions of MTE (ß = 0.243, p < 0.001), followed by *Hedonism* (ß = 0.192, p = 0.003), *Knowledge* (ß = 0.152, p = 0.019), and *Refreshment* (ß = 0.147, p = 0.023). The dimensions of *Involvement*, *Novelty* and *Meaningfulness* (p > 0.05) do not have any significant influence on the intention to visit industrial heritage sites. The results suggest different predictive abilities of the MTE dimensions depending on whether the focus is on the intention to visit industrial heritage sites. This pattern suggests differentiated predictive roles of MTE dimensions among the analysed segment. As such, these dimensions may not serve as differentiators in predicting their intention to visit industrial heritage sites.

This aligns with previous research suggesting that experienced travelers are less influenced by general expectations and more by destination-specific cultural value (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2018; Orgaz-Agüera et al., 2025).

4. DISCUSSION

The findings underscore the importance of cultural trendsetters as meaning-oriented visitors whose evaluations of industrial heritage are shaped by both cognitive engagement and affective response. As creative professionals embedded in the creative industry, cultural trendsetters play a distinctive role in tourism innovation and destination interpretation by identifying, interpreting, and communicating emerging cultural value. Through their professional practices, they contribute to the reinterpretation of spatial narratives and the public revalorisation of underutilised heritage resources (Batinic et al., 2008; Bourdieu, 1984; Pappalepore et al., 2014). Positioned as early adopters (Workman et al., 2019) and cultural intermediaries, cultural trendsetters actively participate in processes of symbolic production (Maguire & Matthews, 2010; Pellow, 2014). Through these processes, they shape how industrial heritage is perceived and integrated into contemporary cultural tourism. The empirical results of this study support the positioning of industrial heritage as an experience-based niche within cultural tourism and confirm the relevance of cultural trendsetters as a theoretically meaningful audience segment in experience-driven destination development. By validating the predictive role of the MTE dimensions within a context where industrial heritage tourism is still prospective, the study demonstrates the robustness of the MTE framework under hypothetical conditions and highlights the importance of understanding experiential expectations and behavioural intentions when addressing culturally engaged markets (Richards, 2018; Wu & Li, 2017).

The empirical analysis confirms the methodological suitability of applying the MTE framework to the context of industrial heritage tourism. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated a satisfactory model fit, with all 24 original items of the MTE scale (Kim & Ritchie, 2014) retained without modification. In addition, the study introduces a novel scale designed to capture intention to visit industrial heritage sites (*INT-IH).* Exploratory factor analysis and reliability testing demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties of the four proposed items, establishing an initial empirical foundation for the further development of this scale. Together, these results support both the robustness of the MTE framework when applied to a theoretically defined visitor segment and the relevance of a targeted measurement instrument for analysing intention formation in industrial heritage tourism. The *INT-IH* scale captures motivational nuances specific to industrial heritage contexts and offers a replicable basis for future research across different cultural and professional groups.

Understanding the experiential expectations of individuals with prior visits to industrial heritage sites is essential for identifying meaningful experiential dimensions. The results indicate that respondents with prior visitation reported significantly higher scores across all seven MTE dimensions (H1), suggesting that previous experience enhances sensitivity to experiential attributes of industrial heritage. When examining the influence of individual MTE dimensions, four dimensions (local culture, hedonism, knowledge, and refreshment) emerged as significant predictors of intention to visit industrial heritage sites, indicating differentiated contributions to intention formation among cultural trendsetters. The prominence of knowledge and local culture suggests that culturally engaged early adopters prioritise cognitive enrichment, interpretation, and cultural contextualisation when evaluating industrial heritage experiences. At the same time, the significance of hedonism and refreshment highlights the supporting role of emotional resonance and experiential comfort, indicating a preference for a balanced interplay between intellectual engagement and affective experience rather than purely entertainment-oriented consumption. Given the focus on cultural trendsetters as a theoretically defined visitor segment, the analysis does not seek to compare behavioural patterns across multiple tourist groups, but instead offers an in-depth examination of intention formation within a segment whose preferences often precede and influence broader tourism demand. This level of explained variance is consistent with an abstract, non-destination-specific research design centred on expectation-based intention formation.

These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating the behavioural impact of memorable experiences in cultural and heritage tourism contexts (Lončarić et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Seyfi et al., 2020). This further suggests that cultural trendsetters respond particularly strongly to experiential settings that engage both emotional and intellectual dimensions. The centrality of local culture and knowledge as significant MTE dimensions aligns with literature on experiential authenticity (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Richards, 2021), suggesting that cognitive engagement and cultural interpretation are key drivers of value among trendsetters. The predictive role of hedonism and refreshment in our model aligns with findings by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021), who demonstrated that authenticity and destination image indirectly influence revisit and eWOM intentions through MTE in a heritage tourism context, thus highlighting emotional memory as a mediator. The non-significance of involvement, novelty, and meaningfulness may reflect the fact that cultural trendsetters perceive these elements as baseline expectations in any culturally embedded experience, rather than differentiators in industrial heritage tourism. Therefore, these factors do not differentiate industrial heritage as a uniquely attractive segment. Although place attachment was not an explicit focus of this study, the observed convergence of cognitive, emotional, and symbolic responses suggests the emergence of early place meaning. This interpretation aligns with Ramkissoon & Uysal (2018), who emphasize that perceived authenticity, when emotionally meaningful, contributes to the development of place identity and attachment.

These findings contribute to the growing body of research on experiential tourism by empirically demonstrating how distinct dimensions of the MTE scale predict behavioural intention among trend-sensitive tourists, a group still underrepresented in heritage tourism models. These findings demonstrate how cultural trendsetters, as culturally literate visitors, engage with industrial heritage through cognitive and emotional channels, contributing to the symbolic construction of place meaning and cultural value. Considering the digital affinity of trend-sensitive tourists, future research should explore how immersive technologies might enhance the interpretation and memorability of industrial heritage experiences (Cuomo et al., 2021).

Despite these contributions, the findings should be interpreted in light of several methodological limitations, which are discussed in the following subsection.

4.1 Limitations of the study

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the research is exploratory in nature and is based on an expectation-driven approach, as respondents evaluated industrial heritage tourism as a general concept rather than within a specific destination or through on-site experience. While this approach is methodologically appropriate in contexts where industrial heritage tourism is still prospective, it limits the ability to capture destination-specific experiential attributes and post-visit behavioural responses.

Second, the study focuses on a single, theoretically defined segment of cultural trendsetters, operationalised through architects and architecture students. Although this group is conceptually justified as culturally influential early adopters and cultural intermediaries, the findings cannot be generalised to the broader tourist population or to other creative or cultural professional groups without caution.

Third, data collection was conducted partly outside the immediate context of tourism consumption, as a portion of respondents completed the questionnaire online and not during an actual visit to an industrial heritage site. Consequently, behavioural intentions reflect cognitive–affective expectations rather than experiential evaluations grounded in direct on-site interaction.
Finally, the intention to visit industrial heritage sites (INT-IH) was measured using a newly developed scale applied here for the first time. Although the scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability and initial construct validity, further testing across different destinations, visitor segments, and cultural contexts is required. Future research should therefore apply the proposed framework in destination-specific settings and extend the INT-IH scale through confirmatory testing and comparative analyses.

4.2 Theoretical and managerial implications

These results respond directly to the study's objective of explaining how experiential expectations shape visit intention in industrial heritage tourism. The findings contribute to recent discussions on experience-based tourism, place-making, and identity construction (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2018; Eck et al., 2023), particularly in post-industrial contexts where tourism development is still at an early or exploratory stage. The managerial implications of this study are primarily relevant for post-industrial destinations seeking the adaptive reuse of underutilised industrial heritage sites, especially urban and regional contexts where industrial heritage tourism has not yet been fully established. In such settings, understanding how experiential expectations are formed is critical for guiding early-stage planning and destination positioning. These recommendations are primarily relevant for destination management organisations, local cultural authorities, and heritage site operators involved in adaptive reuse projects.

Based on the empirical findings, managerial recommendations can be articulated in relation to specific dimensions of MTE that predict intention to visit. With regard to knowledge and local culture, destination managers can prioritise educational and interpretive strategies that foreground local industrial narratives. These may include, for example, curated exhibitions on industrial history, storytelling-based guided tours, and participatory workshops related to heritage production practices, all of which support cognitive engagement and meaningful interpretation of industrial heritage.

The significance of hedonism and refreshment highlights the importance of emotionally engaging design approaches. Multisensory installations (e.g. soundscapes, lighting, scent), atmospheric architectural elements, and the provision of contemplative or social spaces can enhance the affective dimension of the visitor experience and contribute to experiential memorability.

Although not identified as primary predictors of visit intention, experiential dimensions associated with novelty and involvement point to the value of flexible and creative programming. Temporary interventions such as pop-up exhibitions, experimental uses of industrial space, and collaborations with local artists or creative practitioners may be particularly effective in addressing the expectations of cultural trendsetters and reinforcing the distinctiveness of industrial heritage sites.

In this study, cultural trendsetters are understood as culturally engaged early adopters, including creative professionals and students from architecture-, design-, and culture-related fields. However, their relevance is not limited to expert audiences, as they often function as cultural intermediaries whose preferences and practices influence broader cultural tourism demand.

From a governance and policy perspective, these measures are especially pertinent within local and regional cultural frameworks that support adaptive reuse, creative programming, and cross-sector collaboration between heritage institutions and the creative industry. Theoretically, the study supports an integrated perspective connecting experiential tourism frameworks with symbolic consumption and place meaning. Methodologically, it introduces a novel operationalisation of visit intention (*INT-IH* scale) tailored to the industrial heritage context, thereby expanding the empirical toolkit available for heritage tourism research.

While grounded in the Croatian context, the findings have broader relevance for post-industrial regions across Europe seeking to revitalise underused industrial heritage through experience-led tourism models. In many such regions, industrial heritage resources are present but remain insufficiently integrated into tourism development strategies, making an understanding of experiential expectation formation particularly pertinent for early-stage planning and destination positioning.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how experiential expectations shape intention to visit industrial heritage sites, focusing on cultural trendsetters as a theoretically relevant visitor segment in destinations where industrial heritage tourism remains prospective rather than fully established. By applying the MTE framework to the context of industrial heritage tourism, the study addressed an underexplored area within experience-based cultural tourism research.

The findings demonstrate that experiential dimensions related to knowledge, local culture, hedonism, and refreshment play a significant role in shaping visit intention among cultural trendsetters, while other dimensions function as baseline expectations rather than key differentiators. The results further confirm that previous experience with industrial heritage enhances sensitivity to experiential attributes, highlighting the importance of experiential expectation formation in early-stage tourism development. From a theoretical perspective, the study extends the application of the MTE framework to industrial heritage tourism and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of intention formation among culturally influential, trend-sensitive visitors. Methodologically, it introduces and validates an initial measurement scale for intention to visit industrial heritage sites (*INT-IH*), providing a foundation for future empirical research across different cultural and professional groups.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, future research may build on these findings by applying the proposed framework to destination-specific contexts, additional creative or cultural visitor segments, and post-industrial regions where heritage tourism development is more advanced. Such research would further refine the understanding of experience-based drivers of industrial heritage tourism demand and support evidence-based destination planning.

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