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30 May 2020

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/100679/>  
MPRA Paper No. 100679, posted 26 May 2020 13:45 UTC

# Tourism development through landscape theming: Exploring Art Nouveau experiences in Brussels

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A previous version of this paper was published in: *Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing*, Volume 6, Issue 2, 2020, pp. 45-54, <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3841187>

## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to present and explore the landscape approach as an innovative management model for heritage tourism, applied to the case of the Brussels Art Nouveau heritage. The main objective of this paper is to gain insight in discrepancies regarding visions on the tourism potential of the Brussels' Art Nouveau and the Art Nouveau patrimony's integration within a (themed) tourism landscape.

**Methods:** The research used an appropriate methodological approach for each of the stakeholder groups. The survey among visitors (N=105) was organized in the heart of Brussels and analyzed with statistical techniques (cross tabling and associations). Interviews (5) were conducted with key informants (policymakers, heritage managers and the Brussels DMO), after which content analysis was applied to the transcripts.

**Results:** The research resulted in an innovative perspective to increase common ground between a landscape centered perspective with a focus on heritage and a touristscape centered approach. The research deduced several hidden mismatches in perception and appreciation of the Art Nouveau and showed that there are major information and promotion problems, fostered by politically influenced fragmentation and lack of collaboration.

**Implications:** By gaining insight in the visitor experience of a tourism product's potential, valuable knowledge is created for DMO's. The implementation of a themed landscape approach has the dual potential to increase the consistency of the heritage while developing a higher level of tourist experience.

**Keywords:** Art Nouveau, Brussels, landscape, theming, heritage tourism, tourism destination

**JEL Classification:** L82, Z33

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

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When asked about the planned tourism activities, Brussels' visitors seldom mention the Art Nouveau heritage as demonstrated by this research's survey. However, the Brussels destination management organization, further referred to as DMO, still claims the title of 'European Capital of Art Nouveau' even though the Brussels Capital Region is confronted with a fragmented Art Nouveau heritage that is scattered throughout the metropolitan area. The latter is reinforced by a large number of present actors, objectives, interests and power relations. Furthermore, it is questionable whether it is recommended to stimulate further the commodification of vulnerable heritage such as individual, often small scale and fully furnished buildings in Art Nouveau style. The lack of common ground between heritage/architecture and tourism creates an extremely precarious situation. The innovative application of a themed

landscape approach, however, may trigger the development or further utilization of the tourism potential and creates an opportunity to strengthen the common ground between a landscape-centered approach or heritage perspective and a tourism-centered approach or tourism commodification perspective (Gravari-Barbas, 2017; Vanneste, Vandeputte, & Poesen, 2016; De Ridder & Vanneste, 2019). Through the exploration of the (themed) landscape approach, this research aims at representing an impetus in the creation of an integrated, multidisciplinary framework that fosters the consistency of a scattered heritage. It enables one to shed a distinct light on the unique Art Nouveau patrimony while allowing to address and overcome the hurdles concerning overtourism, simplification of meaning, and fragmentation of management.

The tourism potential of Art Nouveau heritage was researched within the Brussels Capital Region through a mixed-methods approach and from the perspective of the

visitors and the point of view of the policymakers and heritage managers involved with Art Nouveau heritage and tourism management. The first research question of this paper relates to whether or not the Brussels' Art Nouveau can be considered a tourism-themed landscape. The second research question looks into the tourism potential, more specifically whether this is fully exploited.

The main objective of this paper is to gain insight in discrepancies regarding visions on the tourism potential of the Brussels' Art Nouveau and the Art Nouveau patrimony's integration within a (themed) tourism landscape. This research provides a momentum to contextualize, within the urban tissue, and to evaluate a heritage from a tourism perspective that is partly underestimated and partly overestimated, depending on the stakeholders. Additionally, the use of a landscape approach, allows one to map distinctive perspectives, attitudes, and visions that contributed to the shaping of the environment in which the Art Nouveau heritage is embedded. Therefore, an additional objective of the research presented here was to develop recommendations that could stimulate (more) holistic and inclusive strategies among heritage and tourism managers, striving towards an optimal balance between conservation and commodification. Moreover, it was aimed to develop suggestions that can contribute to the visitors' tourism experiences while keeping in mind the carrying capacity of the patrimony. If one manages to overcome the aforementioned obstacles, momentum can be created for the destination to possess and to valorize a heritage that comprises regional, national and even international touristic recognition and reputation.

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## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

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### 2.1 Landscapes

Landscapes imply a spatial and visual entity (Naveh & Lieberman, 1994; Glikson, 1965) and form a holistic network of natural and socio-cultural elements that are intertwined, interact and evolve in mutual relationships (Burmil & Enis, 2004; Edensor & Kothari, 2004; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015). It is an artificial concept that integrates several functions, meanings, and aspects (Antrop, 2006; Burmil & Enis, 2004) and allows for the combining and interpretation of the qualities of the past, the present, and the future.

Furthermore, it expresses local identity and offers points of reference to visitors (Antrop, 2006; Markwell, Stevenson, & Rowe, 2004). A landscape is a product of continuous dynamic interaction between natural processes and human activity and is simultaneously produced and consumed by different stakeholders on different locations and levels (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015). Consequently, a landscape is never neutral as it contains multiple socially constructed symbolic layers and cultural images with intangible meaning and content (Isachenko, 2009). Because of its pluralistic and diversified nature, it is crucial to acknowledge and involve all relevant types of stakeholders, networks, and their power during the creation of a landscape as well as to lead and plan the landscapes' development (Aitchison, MacLeod, & Shaw, 2000; Jansen-Verbeke, 2009). The inherent balancing act of power will determine the intensity and direction of the benefits of commodification (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to understand and map hidden

processes and determinants that shape and influence the landscape such as contradicting visions and aims of different stakeholder groups. Keeping the latter in mind, a landscape offering a framework for an inclusive, integrated and holistic approach for a diversified and heterogeneous system in which a touristic dimension exists, cannot be taken for granted.

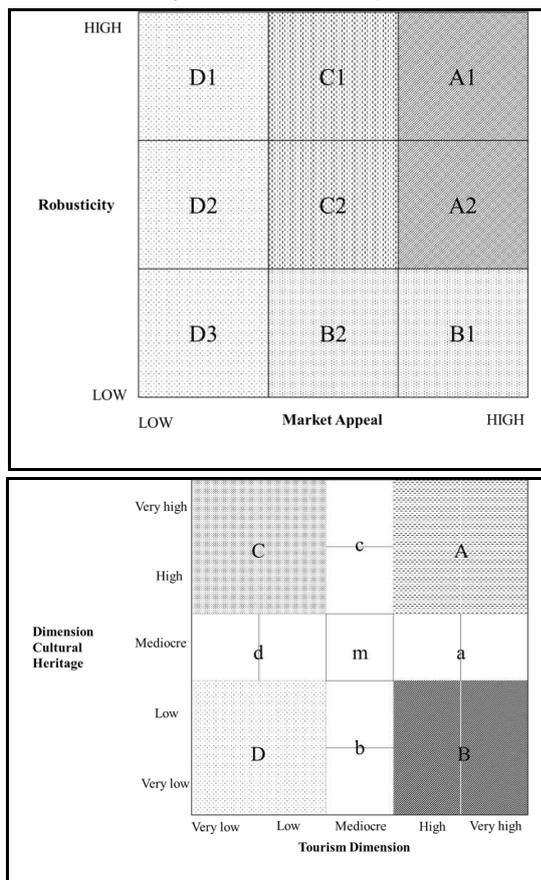
### 2.2 Tourism-landscape

The integration of a tourism dimension within a landscape goes with the creation of a tourism-landscape. However, research regarding this matter remains fragmented as there is a lack of an integrated and multidisciplinary framework that creates a common ground for both landscape and tourism. A tourism-centered perception highlights commodification for tourism goals and allows to create a recognizable destination image (Aitchison et al., 2000; Ringer, 1998; Saarinen, 2004; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015). The focus lies on the overall attractiveness of the destination for tourists and the 'primary tourist products' or the resources such as heritage which are only a link in the system (Russo & Van Der Borg, 2002). Such an approach can result in the alienation of the landscape and its users from sense and meaning, and may trigger conflicts. A landscape-centered approach, however, highlights sustainable conservation and preservation of the landscape's resources while prioritizing the tangible and physical elements of the landscape (Aitchison et al., 2000; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015). Within this approach, the complexity of the tourism perspective is minimized. One way to create common ground and dialogue between these two perspectives can be derived from the Du Cros model which puts a typical landscape dimension –robusticity or (cultural) heritage- and a typical tourism dimension –market appeal- in mutual relationship, trying to estimate the balance between the two (du Cros & McKercher, 2001). The conceptualization and analytical approach of the tension between the architectural focus on cultural, physical and tangible aspects on the one hand and the field of tourism on the other hand (McKercher & Ho, 2006) helps to identify the complexities of the relationship between heritage and tourism within the spatial context of a destination. Furthermore, the model or framework is flexible enough to extend the matrix for more detail (Figure 1). Although the stakeholders and contexts are diverse, existing elements and fields of tension can be similar such as robusticity versus vulnerability as well as presence of management. The constructionist process behind it with inherent commodification, institutionalization and constitutive power relations are well described in the model by Stoffelen and Vanneste (2015).

When merging tourism, the architectural heritage and the landscape aspect, the model allows one to create a continuum between the characteristics and distinctive features of both the tourism-centered and landscape-centered approach. However, a symbiosis between conservation and preservation of heritage and tourism development is not guaranteed (Ashworth, 1988). Tourism can function as an intermediary in the creation of spatial and mental layers active within the landscape (Isachenko, 2009) while commodifying and institutionalizing the local resources for the use of tourism, provided that the integration of the sense of place and the different inherent meanings by acknowledging the active power relations and linked stakeholders are taken into account. Hence reducing possible

latent conflicts and empowering the implementation of relevant network structures. Moreover, the reflection on tangible elements within the landscape stimulates a structuring role within the creation of the tourism product. A heritage site is not a stand-alone entity, but an element situated within a broader whole. Deconstructing the content of the landscape and the possibility to discover and acknowledge the role of context, enhances the interpretation of the heritage (Markwell, Stevenson, & Rowe, 2004) and thus, the tourism product.

Figure 1. Top: the Du Cros matrix, estimating the relationship between the continuum of robusticity and market appeal (Du Cros, 2001:168). Bottom: adaption of the matrix, to allow more detailed information (own version after Du Cros, 2001)



A1-A2 ideal minimal to moderate conservation measures  
 B1 – B2: visitation restricted or discouraged OR strict conservation & visitor management measures  
 C1 – C2: Optimizing market appeal (secondary attractions)  
 D2 - D3: Preserved for reasons other than

One of the major hurdles is the translation of the model into a real methodology that allows one to estimate the tourism potential of the (themed) tourism landscape and more precisely, the value of the heritage for tourism. Therefore, a combination of the du-Cros Model (du Cros & McKercher, 2001) and the Tourism Potential Audit Tool (McKercher & Ho, 2006) is valuable as the Tourism Potential Audit Tool proposes measurable criteria via a survey. The survey questions, leading to the quantification of the criteria can be adapted according to the destination and the specific context (McKercher & Ho, 2006). The model and accompanying tool

might not be the most performative in quantitative terms but the combination is one of the very few that facilitates the researcher in finding the balance between preservation and commodification of the cultural resources. On the one hand, deconstructing the robusticity aspect allows one to estimate the needs for conservation management, cultural values and the physical carrying capacity perspective. On the other hand the market appeal dimension is decomposed in product values and experience related values while trying to quantify the different aspects by means of Likert scales for the appreciating of respondents. Crossing robusticity and market appeal results in a matrix (Figure 1) that allows one to estimate which kind of strategy and form of management (conservation or tourism development) is needed for a particular destination or tourism landscape and to attain long-term sustainable heritage site development. The model however, lacks a dimension regarding stakeholders, partnerships and power relations which implies that additional, rather qualitative research is needed to grasp the impact of processes behind the (lack of) structuring of the tourism landscape or the heritage landscape alike.

### 2.3 Urban landscape and themed landscape

An urban setting is a space where built constructions predominate and large numbers of activities, functions and people are interwoven and grouped. It can consist of significant historical stratification combined with cultural and natural values (UNESCO, 2011; Van Mechelen, 2006). The urban landscape possesses multiple performative, architectural and tangible aspects (Edensor & Kothari, 2004) which are the foundations for the creation of the thematization of the landscape. Thematization implies the meaningful positioning of a destination through a theme (Sternberg, 1997) that potentially incorporates points of reference and the landscape's distinctive identity (Aitchison et al. 2000). Furthermore, it is an opportunity to link the past with the present in an innovative manner while stimulating creative developments within the themed landscape (Aitchison et al. 2000). Themed urban landscapes can link the elements of heritage throughout the cityscape (Markwell et al. 2004). Including architecture as a central theme within a landscape, stimulates the urban identity as well as the protection of the heritage through the positioning within a sustainable cultural context (Prentice, 2001). The latter needs to be an inherent part of the tourism strategy (Savage, Huang, & Chang, 2004). Architecture as a tourism product fuels cultural appreciation and is linked to authenticity, participation, encounter and the need to understand (Prentice, 2001). A themed landscape is not merely a summary of the historical elements in the present but a processed pattern with added value (Ashworth, 1988).

Selection, interpretation and packaging are crucial in the creation of a themed tourism product (Markwell et al. 2004) as well as permeability through gateways, legibility, signage (Tiedell, Oc, & Heath, 1996; Aitchison et al., 2000), planning and organization. It is therefore important to find the balance between a condensed and manageable theme versus its several complicated layers and subtleties (Ashworth, 1988). The composition of the content is a crucial aspect as it must include present narratives, perspectives and interpretations (Dove, 1997; Prentice, 2001; Markwell et al., 2004). Failing to acknowledge all stakeholders involved

increases the risk to present a simplified and selective thematization and will result in a lack of sense of place and community (Markwell et al. 2004). However, if one is successful in doing so and due to the uniqueness and the specific identity of the urban landscape, one can stimulate the rediscovery of architecture as well as making the intangible visible (Lasansky, 2004; Ockman, 2004; Aitchison et al., 2000).

#### 2.4 Art Nouveau as a theming topic for the Brussels heritage and tourism landscape

Theming by using architectural styles is common and dangerous at the same time. Many thematic routes on diverse scales are based on architectural styles or famous architects. There are many international routes, such as the European Route of Brick Gothic or the Réseau Art Nouveau Network which is certified as Cultural Route of the Council of Europe in 2014. On a more regional or local scale, one can mention the Wooden Architecture Route in Malopolska (Poland) or the Gaudi Route in Barcelona. The danger might take the form of a hyper-aestheticization which finally affects authenticity such as in Old Quebec (Gravari-Barbas, 2019) or even a Disneyfication such as the French Quarter of New Orleans (Souther, 2007).

As for the Brussels's Art Nouveau heritage, its expressive and artistic style emerged in the late 19th century and is considered as a response to the spirit of the time (Howard, 1996; Krastins, 2006). The founding of Belgium in 1830 led to a specific context in which this style developed. Therefore, the Belgian style Art Nouveau is characterized by a certain sense of optimism and softness but at the same time it is vivid, cosmopolitan and energetic. Therefore, Art Nouveau and Brussels constitute a intertwined reality that underpins Brussels identity with more than 500 public and private buildings in the Art Nouveau style spread over the Brussels Capital Region while the BANAD festival<sup>1</sup> (former Biennial on Art Nouveau and Art Déco) attracts around 30.000 visitors annually and the Horta Museum (one of the four major townhouses of the Architect Victor Horta on the UNESCO world heritage list<sup>2</sup>) welcomes yearly ca. 67.000 visitors. Undoubtedly, the Brussels Art Nouveau heritage has tourism potential. Nevertheless, the hardware consists of many private houses that are not open to the public and/or have a low carrying capacity. Many assets such as House Saint-Cyr (Square Ambiorix), the Hotel Solvay (Avenue Louise), Hotel Tassel (P.E. Jansonstreet) and the somewhat nameless houses such as the one in the Rue Africaine are gems of small format and unsuitable for large visitors' groups (Figure 2b, c, d). Even the residence of Victor Horta, which was converted into the present Horta Museum (Figure 2a), is vulnerable and subject to strict visitors management in order to limit damage and optimize the visitors experience. This illustrates that the heritage-tourism nexus only allows a limited number of creative solutions.

Figure 2. Different Art Nouveau buildings in Brussels



Source: D. Vanneste, 2017

Currently, a themed Art Nouveau walk exists in Brussels. This walk however, mostly highlights the more famous Art Nouveau buildings that were converted into museums such as the Comics museum in the former Warehouse Waucquez and the Museum of Music Instruments in the former Warehouse Old England. The themed walk barely takes into account elements that form a vital part of the Brussels urban landscape (such as the ponds of the commune of Ixelles) or the numerous renowned Art Nouveau architects, other than Victor Horta, such as Hankar, Van de Velde, Van Rysselberghe, and Blérot for example, who had their own style within the art movement and all contributed to the Brussels landscape.

It is interesting to notice that the Art Nouveau in Brussels gained an exceptional momentum because of the optimism and dynamism of a young and flourishing state and therefore Art Nouveau is also, to some extent, a political statement. With Brussels becoming the 'Capital of Europe', from 1958 onwards, European administrations and departments moved into Brussels and started to occupy dedicated buildings for the European Parliament, and the European council to name a few. New quarters with new symbolic architecture tended to dominate the Brussels urban scene and eurocrats started to play a role in mediating Brussels as a destination (Jansen-Verbeke, Vandenbroucke, & Tielen, 2005). As a result of enlargement, Brussels may consolidate and eventually strengthen its position as a destination for business tourism which might explain why the political symbolism of the 19<sup>th</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.banad.brussels/en/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1005>

and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century urban scene in Brussels tends to lose its importance or is subject to fading appreciation.

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### 3 METHODOLOGY

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The methodological part of this mixed-methods study contains two main components focusing on visitors, policymakers and heritage managers related to the Brussels Art Nouveau tourism landscape. Firstly, a quantitative face-to-face survey, which was made available in Dutch, French, and English, integrated the perspectives of both stakeholder groups. By means of a non-probability sampling, using convenience sampling within stratified sampling, 105(n) respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale whether they perceive the Brussels Art Nouveau heritage as typical, dominant, and/or part of the identity of the city. Other keywords intended to capture the respondent's perception of the Brussels Art Nouveau as a (developed) tourism product. The five keywords (typical, dominant, identity, tourism product, developed product) were distilled from the literature concerning themed landscapes, urban landscapes and tourism landscapes and made an attempt to translate the abstract concepts into meaningful and comprehensible terms. They represent some potential values of the tourism landscape that, in terms of concepts, are close to the general visitors' discourse and understanding.

The Brussels Capital Region welcomed 1,3 million recreational visitors in 2016 (Visit Brussels, 2016). Nevertheless, the results from the respondents' survey provide a clear perception of the answers to the initial research questions. In order to be certain the survey was only distributed to visitors who were potentially exposed to Art Nouveau, the strata was the Musical Instruments Museum (Kunstberg, the center of Brussels) which is a marker building in Art Nouveau style. Furthermore, the researchers joined two guided tours.

Secondly, it was questioned what the possible (dis)advantages of such touristic themed landscape, applied to the Art Nouveau heritage, could be. By analogy with the composition of the keywords, these questions, tackling the Art Nouveau as a tourism product and tourism landscape, were also derived from the core literature in order to obtain questions that could be formulated clearly and understandable. Linear associations were reviewed to examine whether or not the prior visitation of the Art Nouveau heritage is related to the perception of the heritage as a landscape and its tourism potential.

As this study intends to transcend a purely qualitative discourse through the modeling of tourism potential, including strengths and weaknesses, part two of the survey inquired the tourism potential of the Brussels' Art Nouveau and was called 'the quick round', confronting the respondents with twenty statements using a five-point Likert scale. The presented statements, as well as the plotting of the scores of the Art Nouveau heritage, is based on the model and measurable criteria as presented respectively by Du Cros (2001) and McKercher and Ho (2006). However, to be as tailored for the specific context as possible, some adjustments were made to the measurable criteria as well as a reinterpretation of the Du Cros (2001) model. The questions were translated to match the Brussels' Art Nouveau

framework and the main dimensions were separately presented by a matrix to avoid the balancing out of significant differences. Furthermore, instead of three possible matrix scores (Low – Mediocre – High), a categorization of five possible scores was introduced, thus allowing a very detailed positioning, resulting in a specific interpretation and linked strategic recommendations. A third adaption concerns the mapping of social interactions as presented by Jansen-Verbeke (2009) to complement the conceptualization of geo-tourism (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015) and the measurable criteria (McKercher and Ho, 2006). Subsequently, a principal component analysis was carried out in order to reveal different dimensions and variety in visitors' perceptions of heritage and urban landscapes. This allows one to evaluate the set of measurable criteria and to find out which variables are relevant to the visitors in evaluating the tourism potential of the Art Nouveau heritage (De Ridder & Vanneste, 2019). This is valuable knowledge for DMO's in the journey to construct qualitative tourism experiences.

The qualitative part of the research consists of five semi-structured interviews in French and Dutch with expert stakeholders related to the policy and heritage management concerning the Brussels' Art Nouveau. These stakeholders were selected based on their position within relevant organizations which, each within their own area of expertise, have an influence on the Art Nouveau heritage in the Capital Region, whether it be from a tourism perspective or a more landscape-centered perspective. These respondents were first asked to complete the survey after which the researchers shared the results from the visitors' survey with them. Subsequently, content analysis was carried out to compose a set of visions and interpretations from the policymakers and heritage managers.

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### 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

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The study shows that, in general, visitors do not consider the Brussels' Art Nouveau heritage as an urban-themed landscape nor as a tourism-themed landscape. Nevertheless, a significant difference was found between respondents who visited Art Nouveau in Brussels or had the intention to do so and those who did not (Table 1). Those who visited Art Nouveau do consider it as a part of the urban identity while those who did not visit Art Nouveau, clearly do not. A large share of the visitors agree that Art Nouveau has tourism potential, particularly amongst those who visited Art Nouveau or had the intention to do so, but do not consider it a well-developed product yet.

Contrary to the visitors, the stakeholders related to policy, as well as the management do consider the Brussels' Art Nouveau heritage as an urban and tourism-themed landscape. All five policymakers and heritage managers state that Art Nouveau is "something very typical and dominant" for the Brussels' landscape and that "it is definitively a part of the city's identity", in addition to "the theme that is already well-developed". Therefore, and especially from a policy point of view, it is interesting to get insight into the reasons why visitors do or do not visit the Art Nouveau heritage in Brussels (Table 2).

*Table 1. Link between visiting Art Nouveau buildings and value for the Brussels' urban landscape (Linear associations)*

Value (3 point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree)	Q: did you visit Art Nouveau or do you have the intention to visit Art Nouveau		
	Assoc. Visi/Value Prob value*	% (strongly) agree & who visited AN/total	% (strongly) agree & who didn't visit AN/total
1. "AN** is Typical"	0,0003	26%	12%
2. "AN is Dominant"	0,0003	14%	3%
3. "AN is part of the Identity"	< 0,0001	35%	12%
4. "AN has Potential as a tourism product"	< 0,0001	43%	40%
5. "AN is we well developed tourism product"	0,3	13%	9%
6. There a enough information on AN	0,2	10%	5%

\*Association according to a Mantel-Haenszel test: significant  $\rho$  in bold  
\*\* 'Art Nouveau' has been abbreviated by 'AN'

Source: own survey (N=105)

*Table 2. Reasons for (not) visiting the Brussels Art Nouveau heritage*

**Reasons for visiting the Brussels Art Nouveau heritage (45,70%)**

We did an organised Art Nouveau tour because we are architects

It is nice and fun to visit, by walking through the city (translated from Dutch: "Het is mooi en leuk om te bezoeken, door doorheen de stad te wandelen")

I have visited the Music Instruments Museum and saw that it is Art Nouveau, so I will visit the Victor Horta museum (translated from French: "J'ai déjà visitée le MIM et j'ai vue que ça c'est de l'Art Nouveau donc je vais encore visiter le musée Horta")

I look at it because I'm interested (translated from Dutch: "Ik bekijk het uit interesse")

I am interested in architecture and as historian also interested in Art Nouveau and art history in Brussels (translated from Dutch: "Ik ben geïnteresseerd in architectuur en als historicus ook geïnteresseerd in Art Nouveau en de kunstgeschiedenis van Brussel")

**Reasons for not visiting the Brussels Art Nouveau heritage (54,30%)**

Very little is known about it, so we didn't plan to visit Art Nouveau. There is no broad promotion, that's why (translated from Dutch: "Er is zeer weinig over bekend dus we hebben niet voorzien om Art Nouveau te bezoeken, er is geen brede aantrekkende promotie, daarom")  
No, I'm not really interested in architecture

We don't know it and don't think it is typical for Brussels, I'd rather say Ghent or Bruges

It is not really touristic for me. I don't see Art Nouveau as a tourism activity (translated from French: "C'est pas vraiment touristique pour moi. Je ne vois l'Art Nouveau pas comme activité touristique")  
We know about it but didn't know that there is a lot of it in Brussels (translated from Dutch: "We kennen het van zien maar wisten niet date r daar veel van in Brussel is")

Source: Own survey (N=105) from open questions

Visitors pointed out multiple reasons to visit the Art Nouveau heritage in Brussels, such as personal interest, a prior guided tour that triggered them to explore more or a visit to the Music Instruments Museum in Art Nouveau style which made them curious to discover other Art Nouveau highlights. Reasons for not visiting the Art Nouveau heritage can be attributed to a lack of interest in architecture in general or the fact that the visitors were not aware of this style's presence in the Brussels Capital Region. Of the 45,70% of the visitors who indicated that they already visited the Art Nouveau heritage, 21% pointed out that they did this by means of a guided tour or walk throughout the city. This demonstrates the need for an approach that manages to position the heritage as a coherent whole within the touristic field. Of the visitors who did not visit the Art Nouveau heritage (yet) (54,30%), 30% stated that they did not know it. The appreciation of Art Nouveau for its tourism potential is endorsed by the

popularity of the guided Art Nouveau tours provided by an association of Brussels residents. These thematic and guided tours are by far the most popular.

The cultural dimension of the Art Nouveau heritage being stronger than the tourism dimension is confirmed by the scores on statements representing the different dimensions: cultural values, physical values, market appeal and product design (du Cros & McKercher, 2001) (Table 3).

*Table 3. Statements for the assessment of tourism potential: 5-point Likert scale means and standard deviations*

Statements	Mean*(M)	Std Dev
<b>CULTURAL HERITAGE DIMENSION</b>	<b>3,54</b>	
<b>A) Cultural values &amp; significance</b>	<b>3,65</b>	<b>0,35</b>
1. "The AN heritage can withstand visitation without having its cultural values damaged." <sup>1</sup>	3,44	
2. "The historical value of the Brussels' AN heritage is high." <sup>1</sup>	4,08	
3. "The AN heritage is rare within Brussels as a destination." <sup>1</sup>	3,27	
4. "The Brussels' AN heritage is of an international cultural importance." <sup>1</sup>	4,08	
5. "The residents of the private AN properties in Brussels should not be included within the tourism vision and policy regarding AN." <sup>2</sup>	3,41	
<b>B) Physical values – Robusticity</b>	<b>3,44</b>	<b>0,61</b>
6. "The significance of the Brussels' AN is impacted by a lack of accessibility." <sup>2</sup>	2,56	
7. "The Brussels' AN heritage is perceived as authentic." <sup>1</sup>	4,37	
8. "The significance of the Brussels' AN is impacted by a poor physical condition." <sup>2</sup>	3,38	
9. "There are few visitors, which detracts the cultural value of the Brussels' AN." <sup>2</sup>	3,10	
10. "Repair works on the Brussels' AN heritage have a negative effect on its authenticity." <sup>2</sup>	3,80	
<b>TOURISM DIMENSION</b>	<b>3,05</b>	
<b>C) Market appeal</b>	<b>3,46</b>	<b>0,78</b>
11. "The centre of Brussels is associated with culture and heritage." <sup>1</sup>	4,46	
12. "There are too many visitors to allow a person to emotionally bond with the Brussels' AN heritage." <sup>2</sup>	4,02	
13. "The Brussels' AN heritage does not possess the potential to provide the visitors with interesting experiences <sup>2</sup>	3,64	
14. "The organisation of the tourism regarding Brussels' AN heritage is focused on its cultural value." <sup>1</sup>	2,32	
15. "There is qualitative interpretation available that allows the visitor to gain more insight in the Brussels' AN heritage <sup>1</sup>	2,86	
<b>D) Product design</b>	<b>2,64</b>	<b>0,64</b>
16. "The significance of the Brussels' AN heritage is high because of the intensive promotion of its value." <sup>1</sup>	1,95	
17. "The Brussels' AN heritage is big enough to attract and retain visitors for a 'longer period'. <sup>1</sup>	3,49	
18. "The Brussels' AN heritage is scattered throughout the city which makes it not worthwhile to visit." <sup>2</sup>	3,01	
19. "There is little information available about the Brussels' AN heritage." <sup>2</sup>	1,83	
20. "It is interesting to visit other types of heritage in the Brussels' city centre." <sup>2</sup>	2,90	

\*Coding of statement appreciations, ranging:

1= for positive statements from strongly disagree (1) to fully agree (5) on a 5 point Likert scale

2= for negative statements from strongly disagree (5) to fully agree (1) on a 5 point Likert scale

Note: 'Art Nouveau' has been abbreviated by 'AN'

Source: Own survey (N=105)

Table 3 illustrates the attempt to summarize the scores per statement into an overall score for the dimension by taking the average of scores per statement. It is clear that cultural value and significance is key (score 3,65) and that the dimension regarding product design is lagging behind (score 2,64). It is particularly interesting to notice that the Brussels Art Nouveau is perceived as 'authentic', with a high historical value and international cultural importance. Furthermore, the adapted and applied Tourism Potential Tool reveals that visitors believe the Brussels' Art Nouveau heritage consists of high physical values implying they consider it as being robust while this might not be the case. These opinions are very valuable to create or improve a projected image of the Brussels Art Nouveau as it is perceived as such. On the other hand, promotion and information seem deficient and need urgent attention. The interesting element is that stakeholders from policy and management, once again, are convinced they are doing well. This is demonstrated by a policymaker pointing out that Art Nouveau is "already very well known, simply because of its existence". Upon confrontation with the survey results,

indicating the lack of strategical promotion and information, it was mentioned that “this is the responsibility of each individual organization that works with Art Nouveau heritage in Brussels”.

*Table 4. Advantages and disadvantages of the Brussels’ Art Nouveau heritage as a tourism product and landscape according to visitors*

**Advantages of Brussels’ Art Nouveau heritage as a tourism product and landscape**

It is great, it teaches people the value of heritage

It is unique and and entirely Belgian (translated from Dutch: “Het is uniek en puur Belgisch”)

It is really a way to get to know Brussels from another perspective (translated from French: “C’est vraiment un moyen de connaître Bruxelles sous un autre angle”)

It is an interesting activity for tourists, especially in October, when the houses are opened to the public (translated from Dutch: “Het is een interessante activiteit voor toeristen, zeker in oktober, wanneer de huizen worden opengesteld voor het publiek”)

It is a very original tourism product (translated from Dutch: “Het is een zeer origineel toeristisch product”)

If you would put more focus on Art Nouveau, you will get more attention from a broader public even if they are not so much interested in architecture

It is a [tourism] product with a great architectural value (translated from Dutch: “Het is een [toeristisch] product met een grote architecturale waarde”)

Although there are a lot of Art Nouveau houses, they are always original and surprising (translated from Dutch: “Hoewel er veel Art Nouveau huizen zijn, blijven ze steeds origineel en verrassend”)

The Art Nouveau landscape is a great way to discover and explore Brussels

The fact that the offer it fragmented, makes it a nice opportunity to explore the city

**Disadvantages of Brussels’ Art Nouveau heritage as a tourism product and landscape**

Art Nouveau as a tourism product is not accessible (translated from French: “L’Art Nouveau comme produit touristique n’est pas accessible”)

There is a lot of competition, for example from other cities that have the same and where the offer is potentially better developed (translated from French: “Il y a beaucoup de compétition, par exemple des autres villes qui ont ça aussi et peut-être le produit là est plus développé”)

I think it is too fragile to function for tourism

This heritage as a tourism attraction can be of key importance for Belgium but it is just not known

It is a pity that the nice museums and buildings are often located in less nicer neighbourhoods

The tourism product needs more info. For example: signalisation that focusses on the history and importance of the building (translated from French: “Le produit touristique a besoin plus d’info. Par exemple: des signes qui mettent le focus sur l’histoire et l’importance du bâtiment”)

Commodification, potential degradation (translated from Dutch: “Commodification, potentiële degradatie”)

I think it is rather scattered too much to be a cohesive landscape

The offer has been destroyed and therefore, it is hard to develop the offer as a tourism product (translated from French: “L’offre a été détruit et comme ça, c’est dur à développer l’offre comme produit touristique”)

There is more need to emphasize the cultural value of the offer

*Source: own survey (N=105) from open questions*

The interviews, surveys and following discourse analysis, therefore, reveal a discrepancy between the promotion of the Art Nouveau legacy as a tourism product and the representation of this heritage ‘in the field’. Considering the Art Nouveau heritage is embedded in a specific time and space-related context, the promotion, however, prioritizes the so-called Art Nouveau headlines increasing further

fragmentation and simplification of the narrative. The latter may reinforce the visitor's perception that the heritage is scattered throughout the city. This is, amongst others, illustrated by some of the disadvantages of the Brussels’ Art Nouveau heritage as a tourism product, according to the visitors (Table 4).

This mismatch between visitors’ perceptions and experiences and local policymakers and management experts can be tackled by bridging misconceptions on both side and trying to integrate the Art Nouveau heritage into a themed, mutually managed heritage and tourism landscape. Therefore, respondents were asked to explicitly enumerate advantages and disadvantages concerning the Art Nouveau heritage as a tourism product and tourism landscape. They came up with a myriad of opinions and ideas from which a number were selected based on their value for tourism development, themed landscape development, as well as heritage valorization and commodification (Table 4).

Regarding the advantages of the Brussels’ Art Nouveau heritage as a tourism product and landscape, visitors point out its inherent cultural and architectural value. The latter in combination with its originality and potential to function as an alternative way to explore the destination, contributes to the tourism potential according to the visitors. However, issues regarding accessibility (public versus private buildings), fragility, external factors such as cleanliness and safety of less touristic areas and competition with other destinations with potentially more well-developed offers (for example Horta in Brussels versus Gaudí in Barcelona), are considerable disadvantages of the Art Nouveau heritage within a tourism context that were pointed out by respondents.

Furthermore, the visitors addressed the need for more qualitative interpretation. However, the question arises whether or not this tourism potential needs to be developed to the fullest extent possible as the risk of overexploitation or simplification of the narrative could be a threat to this particular heritage. Crucial factors that, amongst others, determine the success in the creational process of a themed landscape are the level of cooperation and the type of information flow. In the case of the Brussels’ Art Nouveau, there is no or hardly any, cooperation between the municipalities while the necessary bottom-up information flow, gathered by organizations active in the field, gets lost in the process. Furthermore, the importance of tourism as an asset is underestimated by the formal institutions and the road towards the realization of tourism potential differs substantially between public and private organizations. This is shown through the prioritization of actions regarding more common themes, such as the construction of the interactive Belgian Beer World in the former stock exchange building, located in the very heart of the city<sup>3</sup>. This is, according to the director of a private organization that organizes guided Art Nouveau tours “once again, a missed opportunity for Art Nouveau”.

This results in a serious mismatch of information. The fragmentation and differentiation of actors may hinder the further development of the Brussels’ Art Nouveau as a tourism themed landscape. The way the organizations in the field sense and observe Art Nouveau as a tourism product

<sup>3</sup> <https://belgium.beertourism.com>

differs radically from the decisions put in place by the region and its DMO. The lack of a formal or informal platform reinforces this mismatch of perspectives while hindering any possible form of coherence between actors. A clear illustration of this is the statement from a private organization in the field pointing out that “the Brussels DMO lacks ambition regarding Art Nouveau” because “they are mostly commercial profiles selling products while they should be selling content instead”. Additionally, “working together is difficult because of the regional interest and the political dimensions” pointing out the complex geopolitical situation of the Brussels Capital Region in Belgium.

Finally, this research reveals that both stakeholder groups, visitors and local policymakers and managers, lack the capacity to integrate the Art Nouveau heritage in a broader urban context, except maybe for those who developed the Art Nouveau guided tours. The integration of sites in terms of spreading visitors in space and time and therefore in spreading pressure and fueling robusticity is not well considered by the policy side as focus remains largely on headliners and the well-known city center. However, visitors and stakeholders active within the private field indicate the need for more information and guidance to see that Art Nouveau is part of a larger urban reality in past and present. “The integration of the Art Nouveau heritage within a themed tourism landscape could further stimulate this”, as stated by the coordinator of the regional Art Nouveau network.

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## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Although the interpretation and content of a themed landscape are subjective, as it represents a social construct, the landscape itself plays an indirect but crucial role in the regional socio-economic development through tourism. Because of its multiple functions and characteristics, the landscape serves as a suitable framework to examine the tourism dimension and to take into consideration elements that could have been overlooked. However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to applying a (themed) landscape perspective. Implementing a themed landscape approach implies more than merely adding up similar elements fitting a particular theme. It requires engagement, stakeholders, narratives, planning and a holistic approach. The lack of integration can result in a lack of coordination, structured actors’ networks and systematic dialogue, while increasing further simplification and fragmentation. This can hinder the positioning of the heritage in a broader context and reduce its capacity as a lever for (sustainable) tourism development. The landscape itself is a suitable matrix for integration and embeddedness. Such an approach can respond to the problematic subject of the commodification of the Brussels Art Nouveau heritage not being considered as typical, known or part of the city’s identity by the majority of visitors, and therefore not a tourism product prioritized for visiting.

Furthermore, this study revealed the existing discrepancy between different crucial stakeholders regarding the city’s Art Nouveau heritage. The themed landscape allows to suggest a method to integrate several perspectives and overcomes discrepancies. The discrepancy in promoting the Art Nouveau heritage hinders a unified positioning.

Consolidated promotion can focus on the themed heritage landscape while using the significance and meaning of it as a starting point. Moreover, existing information on the subject requires improvement. Promotional campaigns must highlight the international cultural values of the Brussels Art Nouveau as well as respond to its visual nature intrinsically linked with the urban landscape. These actions can trigger the alignment of multiple stakeholder perspectives while helping to spread the visitors geographically. Thoughtful tourism promotion also increases public awareness regarding the meaning of cultural heritage. In doing so, both dimensions will reinforce each other and the inherent value of Brussels Art Nouveau heritage for tourism will get more recognition from a larger public.

The study reveals that the Brussels Art Nouveau heritage possesses a tourism potential that is tangible, even for those visitors who did not visit Art Nouveau buildings or did not have the intention to do so. A lack of collaborative development initiatives but also some kind of self-satisfied idea that one is doing well are significant hurdles. It takes creative development initiatives through management measures that take into account the specificity of the landscape and the heritage itself, overcoming the political pillarization of the same management. The need for more qualitative interpretation and emotional attachment can be dealt with through the integration of an Art Nouveau experience center where tourism can take on the role of educator and raise awareness about the wider Brussels context in past and present. Integration of specific visitor management measures and indirect selection of visitors based on the desired level of informational intensity of their visit can positively benefit the carrying capacity of the heritage as visitors get spread throughout space due to and facilitated by the scattered heritage. This will reduce the risk of simplification and pressure on the touristic highlights such as the Horta Museum, as the Art Nouveau narrative will be embedded in a broader package with particular attention for social, political and economic characteristics of the Capital Region and the whole of Belgium for that matter. It is important that this set of measures triggers increased cooperation between different stakeholders while acknowledging and integrating the complex interactions between tourism and landscape features which very much implies bridging competencies for tourism, planning and culture which are fully regionalized and attributed at different policy levels. In order for the visitor to be able to critically analyze the proposed interpretations of the tourism-themed landscape, it is necessary to include different narratives and perspectives and to translate them in an integrated manner to an interpretation that embodies these different identities that come together in the Capital Region of Brussels. This reinforces the acknowledgment and involvement of the local community while stimulating understanding of Brussels as a living entity and its sense of place.

Brussels’s DMO is a crucial actor that has the inherent power to act as a mediator and in setting up a network structure that embeds regional, federal and even supranational levels while offering support and development to the private organizations in the field that shape the tourism offer. Additionally, it needs to address the financial support of investors, while operationalizing the tourism strategy and opening up dialogue to guarantee efficient and effective

information flows. There is a need for in-depth and frequent dialogue, enabled by an embedded and institutionalized network structure based on a holistic and inclusive strategy concerning the Brussels Art Nouveau that strives towards a well-thought-out and sustainable tourism strategy for this particular asset. As long as there is a lack of a unitary strategy, the Brussels Art Nouveau heritage cannot be seen as a coherent system and related landscape. Consequently, it will remain fragmented and relatively unknown to visitors and even to locals, being beyond the scope of public awareness.

The confrontation of the visions and opinions of different stakeholder groups, in this case visitors and policymakers and managers, using an appropriate mix of (quantitative and qualitative) methods proves that a multifaceted, comprehensive method to contextualize heritage within a broader framework reveals new insights concerning, among others, unnoticed discrepancies while reducing the risk of simplification of the narrative. Additionally, it creates an impetus in finding the right balance between commodification, valorization and conservation or, in line with the Du Cros model, between the heritage-oriented concern about robusticity and the tourism-oriented concern for market appeal. Furthermore, adapting the landscape approach to a specific context allows one to verify and acknowledge all crucial stakeholders while working on the common ground between parties.

Future research can develop this approach by involving residents and tourism entrepreneurs, refine specific management measures following the tourism potential score, improving the Tourism Potential Audit Tool with more and sharper statements and, of course, repeating the methodology for a more extended survey which allows more complex (multivariate) analysis.

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