**Virtual Reality and Nature Tourism**

Christina Karadimitriou

Public Relations Co-ordinator

Virtual Reality Applications, Athens, Greece.

Email: [karadimitriouchristina@gmail.com](mailto:karadimitriouchristina@gmail.com)

AND

Nikolaos Pappas

Reader in Tourism, Hospitality & Events

Director of CERTE (Centre for Research in Tourism Excellence)

Department of Tourism, Hospitality & Events, University of Sunderland, UK

Email: [Nikolaos.pappas@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:Nikolaos.pappas@sunderland.ac.uk)

Virtual reality is considered as one of the important technological developments expected to substantially impact the travel and tourism industry today, since it offers unbounded potentials for mass virtual visitation to actual tourism destinations (Tussyadiah et al., 2018). Research in psychology has focused on the explanation of the reason behind the effectiveness of virtual reality in order to formulate behavioural and attitudinal responses to virtual stimuli (Schuemie et al., 2001). The majority of those studies have focused on the concept of presence. Virtual reality provides users an environment that they are able to retrieve information in multi-sensory modalities, including auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic, enabling users to perceive a realistic representation concerning the environment it portrays (Slater & Usoh, 1993). Tourists are lured by the allure of landscapes and places, having as a driving force the desire to experience the visual sensations of distant areas and territories (Steenjacobsen, 2001).

In terms of nature and natural environment, virtual reality can be used in order to provide information and experience to tourists and potential visitors for natural beauties, natural sightseeing and attractions, pathways (i.e.: mountaineering; kayaking) in physical landscapes, and activities in open nature. Especially in areas that have a substantial potential of nature tourism development, but lack of relevant provision of information and promotional activities, virtual reality is able to effectively contribute to the creation of the related awareness, and subsequent visitation. Moreover, it can adequately explain the formulation of natural terrain through the projection of its historical development, connecting geomorphology, flora and fauna, and (if applicable) human interventions (i.e.: disasters; restorations).

This paper focuses on a holistic presentation of the application of virtual reality in terms of its use in natural environments and promotional activities related with tourism. Through its application it emphasises on the creation of tourism awareness, education of visitors, environmental understanding (i.e.: fragility of natural environment; environmental preservation; significance of ecosystems), and further tourism development, always respecting the fundamental sustainability pillars. It also provides evidence of virtual reality use from enterprises and destinations, and the revitalisation of marginalised areas.

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