

## Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference Rural Development 2023

Edited by assoc. prof. dr. Judita Černiauskiėnė

ISSN 1822-3230 (Print)  
ISSN 2345-0916 (Online)

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15544/RD.2023.026>

### TRANSFORMATIVE PLACEMAKING: INSIGHTS OF GROUNDED THEORY

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In this article the first insights of the study are presented where the transformations of heritage and place in different tourism areas were researched. While adapting to the global challenges it is necessary for tourism researchers actively seek and provide a broad range of perspectives on tourism development that offer opportunities for sustainability, human prosperity and ecological recovery. Thus, the purpose of the research is to conduct a study of the experiences of smart tourism development in regions and to create a grounded theory (GT) that can show us the new ways of developing tourism. This research is conducted following classic grounded theory methodology, that specifies all the research path. Summarizing the initial results of the grounded theory (GT) methodology development in the research, it was made an insight that the main concern of the interviewed tourism developers was PLACE, and it determined how the research participants addressed the main concern, i.e. their decisions about how and what to build, how to deal with that future/existing object were dictated by the PLACE. Thus, was discovered one of the most important concerns of place transformations on the basis of the methodology of the grounded theory - transformative placemaking.

**Keywords:** *tourism, place, heritage, transformation, grounded theory.*

#### INTRODUCTION

Recently, the importance of smart tourism and its global nature has been emphasized by international media, has been discussed at economic summits. It is worth mentioning that in 2010, the European Union incorporated the notion of smartness into the continent's development strategy, with the aim of fostering smart, sustainable, and inclusive economy. Additionally, during the inaugural United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) World Conference on Smart Destinations in 2017, it was observed that smart tourism is not merely a trend but rather a must that represents the future of the tourism industry. Furthermore, in 2020, the worldwide health crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has further broadened the scope of tourism that is currently being nurtured. It is important to highlight that all these facts, that recent years have witnessed, is like a call for all individuals to reconsider the notion of smartness in the realm of tourism, thereby initiating broader deliberations on the advancement of tourism research in the future. Consequently, when deliberating the significance of the proposed research, it is crucial to acknowledge that when addressing intricate tourism issues both at the local and global levels, the planned research is exceptionally timely and pertinent not solely for Lithuania, as a small country that is increasingly actively developing tourism, but also globally. Furthermore, as Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) observes, while adapting to the challenges posed by the new normality, it is imperative for tourism researchers to actively seek and provide a broad range of perspectives on tourism development that offer opportunities for sustainability, both in terms of human prosperity and ecological recovery. Therefore, the aim to reveal the experiences of smart tourism development, using local storytelling, as a way of sharing extraordinary experiences and developing sustainability, is becoming more and more relevant in the development of today's and future tourism industries.

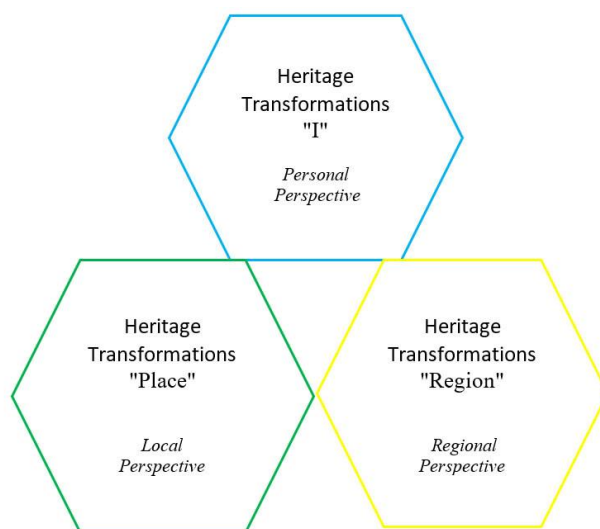
This research is conducted following classic grounded theory methodology, that specifies all the research path. Thus, the purpose of the research is to conduct a study of the experiences of smart tourism development in regions and to create a grounded theory (GT). Key Subjects of smart tourism are accessibility, sustainability, digitalisation cultural heritage and creativity (Compendium of Best Practices, 2019-2020). Since tourism is closely related to heritage, this study explores the transformations of heritage objects in various regions of Lithuania, which will create connections for the creation of new smart tourism objects. Thus, in this research tourism developers who developed their original ideas in various regions of Lithuania were interviewed. The initial insights and findings of the research are presented in this article.

### Theoretical insights of Heritage Transformations

Living in a complex and evolving world, consideration of heritage and its place in society is becoming increasingly important. It is important to rethink passing of our heritage to future generations and to decide which parts to keep and which to abandon. In this framework, it is important to discuss the various changes related to tourism and heritage. Faced with the challenge of preserving heritage for future generations, it is important to discuss changes in heritage and perspectives on these changes.

Residing in a time marked by social change, we witness the destruction and transformation of traditional heritage. Recently, heritage scholars have engaged in thoughtful and productive discussions that approach the heritage process from a revolutionary perspective. Therefore, Apaydin (2020) notes that researchers say that the destruction and modification of heritage is an important part of heritage and that it can bring about positive changes by producing diverse heritages and new memories. So we have to question the nature of memory and heritage in the present. Regarding general ideas about information interpretation and knowledge acquisition, Viejo-Rose (2015) states that current models of understanding memory and heritage have undergone significant changes, It eventually ended up in today's flexible and fluid network model, called "the cloud."

This supports the opinion of Rudokas (2017) that the awareness of modern society in the field of heritage is increasing in the 21st century. This point is achieved through the implementation of an inclusive process that embraces considering how holistic and integral this field is, not only cultural aspects but also various aspects of the modern world. Consequently, what Smith and (2006, p. 11) says "heritage does not truly exist" needs to be reconsidered. Because it is constantly undergoing transformation. When examining and experiencing the phenomenon of heritage transformations, a review of the literature emphasizes the significance of paying attention to three levels of connection to different perspectives: personal, local, and regional. Therefore, the discourse surrounding transformations can be categorized into the subsequent sections: heritage transformations - "I" as personal transformations, heritage transformations - "Place" as the local perspective, and heritage transformations - "R" as the regional perspective (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Heritage transformations (Pranskuniene, Zabulioniene, 2023)

Pung et al. (2020); Sheldon (2020) and Krillova et al. (2017) notice the factors that contribute to "I" self-transformation in tourism are reflection, interpretation of experiences, integration of values and changes in knowledge and attitude. "I" self-perspective shows that tourists experience some self-transformation during and after their trip. It is possible to change your appearance, your mind, your physical structure and all this, and your whole body. People's experiences of tourism are very authentic, and tourism as a phenomenon that can transform and influence people's perception of heritage.

As Zoon (2020, p. 4) states "A place is a place that has meaning for someone through experience". In this context the "place" is defined as a location that is recognized in terms of space, time, and content; on the other hand, meaning is the quality that gives identification upon a location. Therefore, one of the objectives of sharing local stories is to foster a feeling of place-based identity, raise tourists' awareness of the existing identity, and offer new opportunities for tourism and regional development. Through experience, local heritage can also be transformed.

Also, a new research literature on cultural heritage and sustainability is emerging, delving into how cultural heritage influences one's sense of self and place (Lillevoold and Haarstad, 2019). Above all, it is about how heritage may be used to reshape cities/regions/locations in various circumstances. This new information and understanding broadens our grasp of how historical views, historical artifacts, and a sense of place may be exploited as resources for regions and place.

Therefore, in order to answer the question of how heritage transformations can be integrated into future tourism development, it is important to pay attention to the layers of transformation of individual, local and regional heritage

through which the impact of heritage and tourism can be assessed and which lead to the integration and creation of value and connected tourism experiences.

## **METODOLOGY – GROUNDED THEORY**

It is important to note that the investigation into the development of smart tourism necessitates an interdisciplinary approach and is inseparable from qualitative research. This type of research allows for the analysis of complex phenomena such as the development of tourism businesses, personal and group travel experiences, as well as the concepts of heritage, memory, and local experiences. Braun and Clarke (2013) emphasize that when choosing a qualitative approach, researchers often face questions regarding which methods to employ and how to effectively utilize them. Grounded theory (GT) is a commonly utilized qualitative research methodology in the field of social sciences. GT was formulated by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. The unique scientific backgrounds of these two scholars necessitated the fusion of their scientific findings from diverse research avenues. Grounded theory is primarily a particular approach to research that permits us to contemplate and investigate social reality; it is grounded in a scientific foundation. In this regard, it can be considered a metatheory.

The selected methodology for this research is the classical grounded theory, which stands out due to its distinct approach to data collection and analysis. Unlike other methodologies, the process of collecting and analyzing data in grounded theory cannot be meticulously planned beforehand. It is also not based on the analysis of existing scientific literature, but rather on the collection and analysis of empirical research data. As Kardelis (2005, p.130) states, this methodology is referred to as "grounded" because it relies on data obtained from the real world. This is the fundamental principle of grounded theory: through systematic empirical research and adherence to strict rules, the researcher allows theories to emerge from the collected empirical data (Pranskūnienė, 2013). The ultimate objective of grounded theory is to generate theories that are based on data systematically obtained during social research (Glaser and Strauss, 1998). Glaser and Strauss (1967) assert that grounded theory is particularly well-suited for application in areas that have received little study, as well as for examining processes or phenomena within a specific context. Furthermore, GT is deemed appropriate for analyzing data collected in various manners. When considering the scope of topics that can be explored using the GT method, the researchers contend that the answer is succinctly "everything". GT places emphasis on theory development, rather than mere description or evaluation. Consequently, this approach enables researchers to transcend the boundaries of phenomenological description and formulate a theoretical foundation that facilitates prediction and explanation. Glaser (1998) stated, that when beginning a theory, researchers should begin with a general topic rather than a research problem defined by the literature or professional practice. A research problem is defined as a form of preconceptions, and within classic grounded theory, preconceptions must be limited so that the researcher is open to the content of the data. In the case of classical theory, preconceptions can lead to a biased view of data (Glaser, 2012), similar to preconceptions that threaten the credibility and accuracy of others qualitative research approach (Morse et al., 2002).

**Theoretical sampling** must be used to develop the concepts of the theory. Theoretical sampling is “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). For the interview process to maintain methodological fidelity for a classic grounded theory (Vander Linden & Palmieri, 2021), the unstructured interview begins with a grand tour question which is broadly worded to allow the participant to speak about whatever is most relevant to them about the topic area without the researcher directing the response (Nathaniel, 2008; Simmons, 2010, 2022). The probing questions should also be as open as possible to avoid leading the participant.

Theoretical saturation requires the development of new interview questions focused on the concepts emerging from the data. This process continues forward until theoretical saturation is achieved. Data collection and analysis are a concurrent process undertaken in a cyclical pattern guided by theoretical sampling, coding, and constant comparative method of analysis until the theory emerges (Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Substantive Coding** consists of open and selective coding (Glaser, 1978). As soon as the initial data is collected, the researcher begins open coding, which involves looking at the data for chunks of text that may indicate a theoretical pattern and assigning them a name. The pattern is called a concept and the name given to it is a code. Initially, the researcher is looking for anything and everything that might indicate a concept in the data. However, open coding is replaced by selective coding once the core concept is discovered (Glaser, 1978). Selective coding is coding for concepts related to the core concept. The core concept is the central pattern of behavior that explains how people are trying to address their main issue or concern. Coding and the constant comparative method of analysis leads to discovery of the core concept (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2016; Glaser & Holton, 2004; Holton, 2010; Simmons, 2022).

**Main category.** According to B. Glaser (1978, p. 95-96), an indispensable classification must possess certain characteristics. It should hold an essential category and frequently manifest itself in the data. Furthermore, it requires a longer period of time to become saturated compared to other categories. Additionally, it should engage in meaningful and effortless interactions with other categories. It is also important that it holds a comprehensible meaning for the participants and aligns naturally with the overarching theory. Moreover, it should possess properties that contribute to the overall process, among other qualities.

**Memoing.** Memos are the written theoretical ideas that occur to the researcher during coding and the constant comparative method of analysis. Memos are conceptual; they do not describe or summarize the data. Through memoing, the researcher captures the development of the concepts and records their relationships with other concepts. Glaser and

Holton (2004) stated “Memos help the analyst to raise the data to a conceptual level and develop the properties of each category”. Memos present hypotheses about connections between categories and/or their properties and begin to integrate these connections with clusters of other categories to generate the theory” (para. 62). You can find the example of a memo in the next paragraph of the article.

**GT researcher position.** Prior to embarking on the doctoral studies, the researcher engaged in an extensive process of familiarizing herself with qualitative research methods. Ultimately, she settled on classical grounded theory as the focal point of their research. Having made this decision, it soon became evident that this approach presented a significant challenge: the researcher has a great deal of freedom and space in this strategy, venturing into the research field without any preconceived notions and with no knowledge of the theory that may be derived from the data. There were instances where it proved challenging to avoid preconception and expectations of what insights the research should provide. Nevertheless, once the process commenced and a methodology that delves deeper into empirical data was employed, the direct experience of implementing the method greatly facilitated trust in it and guided the research endeavors.

## **EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

This section discusses the following aspects of conducting the research: methods of collecting research material, research ethics, the position of the researcher, which are important in GT.

Since B. Glaser (2001) claims that everything is data when applying GT and this principle allows expanding the field of data collection from interviews to observation, etc., the following data collection methods were used in the study: individual semi-structured interviews, individual interviews, studying the web pages of the researched heritage objects, journals, writing the researcher's personal reflections on the personal experiences of the researched objects, as well as the thoughts that come to mind while working with the interview data.

First sampling was made according to the GT sampling idea where the population to be studied are individuals who have firsthand knowledge and experience from various perspectives in the topic area (Nathaniel, 2008). For example, inclusion criteria may be anyone who has direct experience within the topic area, and exclusion criteria may be anyone who does not have direct experience within the topic area (Vander Linden & Palmieri, 2023). Here tourism developers who developed their original ideas of transforming heritage in various regions of Lithuania were interviewed. Thus, we see heritage transformations that leads to tourism promotion and place/region development as a consequence.

The data were collected in these different tourism places: Zypliai manor, the manor, revived after the restoration, simply unplanned and unexpectedly began to attract tourists due to the various artistic activities carried out here; Anykščių tree canopy path, which is established in the oldest Lithuanian forest sung by poets, which has its own natural heritage, “Perkūnijos erdvė” - a Lithuanian sauna, which nurtures the heritage of the Lithuanian sauna and revives the Baltic sauna traditions; data of the ship's dredger “Nemuno7”, which was transformed from an old dredger into Bogging Forest - a buoy planted with trees, floating in the water and which became one of the smart tourism and art creators' space. Also, the researcher tried every time to take part in tours or educations of heritage objects herself, to feel like a participant in the research and thus accumulate personal experience and attitude towards the entire ongoing research process.

In accordance with the principles of the traditional grounded theory approach, this study was conducted as a cyclical process wherein both the collection of data (through interviews, examination of various documents, etc.) and the analysis of said data were conducted simultaneously. This included the simultaneous processes of data collection, data analysis, writing of memos, conceptualization, and a return to data collection. Moving forward, the collection and analysis of data will continue until theoretical saturation is achieved. Once this saturation point is reached, the foundational theory is then formulated. The adherence to the fundamental principles of the Grounded Theory (GT) strategy, namely constant comparison, theoretical selection, and theory "emergence" from the data, is of utmost importance for the researcher. As Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 45) emphasize, it is crucial to maintain the method of theoretical sampling, which involves the researcher's simultaneous collection, coding, and analysis of data, as well as the decision-making process regarding where and what data to seek next in order to develop an emerging theory. In the present study, the initial stage involved the identification of informants who played a significant role in generating the initial ideas for tourism development in the region under investigation. To accomplish this, a pilot study was conducted, consisting of interviews with predetermined supporting questions. Following the very first interview, observations were promptly recorded, and the data analysis process commenced.

### **Identifying main concern**

In the initial phase of the inquiry, as per the guidelines set forth by GT, it is imperative to identify the main concern. Whilst still in the process of ascertaining the main concern, the initial set of data commenced being encoded in accordance with the principles of open coding. During the practice of open coding, each line of data was meticulously encoded, albeit not every line of the transcribed interview was automatically encoded. Rather, every thought, at times conveyed in a solitary word, and at other times spanning several lines or even paragraphs, was encoded. Based on open coding procedures, coding the data attempted to answer the recommended (Glaser, 1998; Holton, 2007) questions: What is happening in the research field? What does this data show? What is the main concern of the participants? How do they address that concern?

In the subsequent phase of the research, initial interviews were conducted and open coding was employed to identify the main concern. According to a classical GT research approach, data collection and analysis will persist until a central concern is identified, with the objective of elucidating how research participants address this central concern.

During the research, the researcher constantly documented her observations, reflections, and ideas in memos, which serve to capture the pursuit of the central concern and the researcher's contemplations on the progress and occurrences within the research. Memo writing assumes significance not only as a tool for fostering creativity, but also as a pivotal instrument for the emergence of theory (Babchuk, 1996), which is employed in conjunction with coding, spanning from the initial data analysis to the formulation of the theory. Consequently, it is expected that the collected data will help the theory to "emerge" by interacting with each other. Open coding also facilitated the identification of emergent themes, enabling the identification of a concern and the extraction of a substantive category.

Summarizing the outcomes of the preliminary advancement of the grounded theory, it is noteworthy that during the endeavor to develop the GT, a particular phase of data analysis, namely, open coding and selective coding, was executed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Main concern

After conducting the initial interviews and commencing the analysis of the collected data, it was determined that the preservation of authenticity and the openness to visitors emerged as a significant concern in the realm of tourism development. However, it should be noted that this concern did not serve as the unifying factor across all the research cases. As a result, further contemplation and exploration were undertaken. It was revealed that the main concern of the interviewed tourism developers revolved around the notion of PLACE, which heavily influenced the manner in which the research participants approached their decision-making processes. In other words, their choices regarding the construction, management, and interaction with future or existing tourism sites were guided by the specific PLACE of the site. This understanding of the site's characteristics and the alignment with it played a pivotal role in achieving the desired outcomes. These insights are reflected in the written memo (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Abstraction of initial categories

**03/06/2023 - Memo about the first AHA moment.**

*The supervisor of doctoral thesis called. We talked about the research and the main concern. I said I can't find anything, I don't understand. And we started with the authenticity in Zypliai, then about the ship and I said that the ship was built because they only got such a place, they wanted to expand the tourism of resort towns. And then it turned out that the LOCATION was important here: they built the ship because they got such a place, they also said on the Anykščių tree canopy path, that they did not build where there is nothing... they built because of the place... It was thought that Zypliai was not quite like that, authenticity was important here, but after flipping through the interview, it turned out that Zypliai also appeared because they were looking for a place for creativity... So it seems we got the gist... I even jumped up and started screaming: "Yes, yes, yes!" Now everything is clear to me". <...> After that, I thought about the sauna, when creators were searching for a place to build the sauna and that it is also an important place the way we built it.*

Such a discussion and conceptualization in memos, helped to raise the main concern from the data of the research participants in the research topic, the data helped to grasp the essence.

Initially, the research endeavored to adopt an open-minded approach towards the research field. This approach aimed to facilitate the discovery of significant and unforeseen research guidelines. These guidelines would subsequently aid in gradually narrowing down the research field and ultimately identifying the core category that would serve as the foundation for a grounded theory. Thus far, the research data has unveiled preliminary codes, which are presented in the Table 1. Encoding is one of the key processes in classical GT research (Holton, 2007). As already mentioned, two methods of coding are used in classic GT: 1) substantive coding, which consists of open coding and selective coding; 2) theoretical coding. B. Glaser believes that during open coding, it is sufficient to identify the categories and their properties, and it is also necessary to identify an essential category, and then in the subsequent stages of coding, based on it, connect other categories into a coherent scheme.

Following the GT path, the coding process was conducted in this research. After open coding process the concepts were based on the data obtained through interviews and other data collection process, and after that the cods were given to the main concepts. In this table is shown the main results of the coding and conceptualizing process. Named codes on the left of the table, later conceptually narrowed down to a few words and primary categories that are presented on the right side of the table (Table 2).

During theory generation, the researcher developed and considered many theoretical codes until finally choosing one code that best explains the situation. The final result of theoretical coding is one theoretical code (substantive category) - i.e. a certain model that explains the interrelationship between the main category and the substantive codes (Glaser, 1978). The process progressively enhances the conceptualization of the research data. In this case, during the growing primary conceptualization, the main concern of the research participants was identified - Transformative placemaking. The main concern of the research participants was not tourism as such, as one could think after choosing the research topic, but the place they were looking for life, work or leisure. This was revealed by the main question of the tour, which was broad enough to create a whole other dimension.

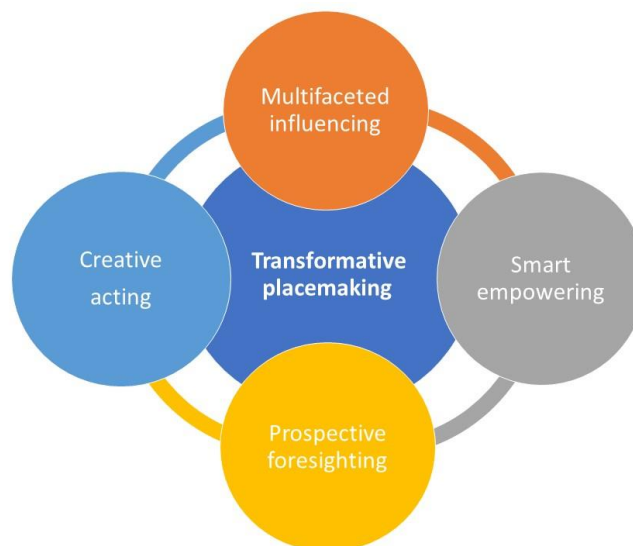
After the data coding, not only the main concern of the research participants - the choice of location, place occurred - but also other categories, accompanying the main concern, related dimensions - categories named as Multifaceted influencing, Creative acting, Prospective foresighting, Smart empowering - emerged. It was found that other important

factors of heritage transformations and tourism development in finding a place and its development and regional transformations are external relations, government support, marketing, dedication to the idea, insufficient inclusion/involvement of the local community, foreign support and ideas, heritage authenticity, originality, educational activities, storytelling, raised funds are intended for general development, development of tourism in the region/area, impact on other tourism developers, future perspective, emerging dimension of smartness, etc. (mentioned in Table 2).

**Table 2.** Abstraction of initial categories

Code	Main concern/ category
A place that determines the further implementation of an object, a place where something is already a "non-empty place" Area transformation and regional development The perception of the place is different	<b>Transformative placemaking (main concern)</b>
External challenges Advertising, sound for awareness Dedication to the idea and work Government assistance/withdrawal The influence of life circumstances on the chosen activity Insufficient involvement/involvement of the local population Significant foreign experience - ideas from abroad	<b>Multifaceted influencing</b>
Storytelling Variety of activities Heritage object and educational activity The meaning of competence	<b>Creative acting</b>
Raised funds are intended for general development Development of tourism in the region/area Impact on other tourism developers, future perspective	<b>Prospective foresighting</b>
An original, exclusive object The idea changes and refines over time The object is open to all - openness Authenticity - important to preserve and open An emerging dimension of smartness	<b>Smart empowering</b>

The extraction of the initial categories from Table 2 is depicted in the following diagram, where the categories are combined and explained a possible solution to the main concern "transformative placemaking" (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Merging of initial categories

The forthcoming research will adhere to the fundamental principle of Grounded Theory (GT), which entails following a comprehensive set of procedures throughout the entire research process. This includes the collection of data, analysis of data, and the subsequent writing of the research paper. The study will meticulously consider all procedural requirements associated with classical grounded theory, ensuring their consistent application in data collection, data analysis, and theory development. Furthermore, it is crucial to maintain an awareness that GT is detached from

individuals, as it categorizes behaviour rather than individuals themselves (Glaser, 2002). Additionally, the focus of the research will not be to describe the entirety of the researched field, but rather to concentrate on the primary process within it (Glaser, 2002). Moreover, the concepts derived from the research will not be time-dependent in their application (Glaser, 2002). Lastly, the research will strive to achieve increasingly higher levels of conceptualization.

## CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

During the theoretical research of heritage transformations, it was found that heritage transformations have an impact on tourism, which can be viewed from three positions, i.e. heritage can have an impact on a person, as an "I" perspective, as well as an impact on a "place", as a local perspective and "R", as a regional perspective through which the impact of heritage and tourism can be assessed and which leads to the integration and creation of value and connected tourism experiences.

Summarizing the results of the initial development of using grounded theory (GT) methodology in the research, it can be noted that, the main insights that were gained it is the main concern, that derived from the data. The main concern is of the interviewed tourism developers was PLACE, and place determined how the research participants addressed it, i.e. their decisions, their abilities to deal with future/existing objects development via place. It was discovered that one of the most important concerns of place transformations on the basis of the methodology of the grounded theory is transformative placemaking.

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