

“WATER PURSUITS”: APPROACHING THE PHYSIOGNOMY OF ANO SYROS THROUGH “CREATIVITY”

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Abstract

The term "place physiognomy" refers to all its morphological, historical, architectural, cultural and social characteristics, which make it a unique entity. This should be the key in promoting the place, to make it stand out. In this essay we present a series of different creative approaches that seek to contribute to highlighting the physiognomy of the historical ensemble of Ano Syros (Syros Island, Greece) and have been shown in art galleries and conferences.

Taking as a resource the research conducted during the 9th Interuniversity Seminar on Sustainable Development, Culture and Tradition of the Syros Institute, on the topic "Landscape: Natural and Cultural Recruitment" and with the aim of highlighting the character of the traditional settlement, a proposal of a spatial and digital cultural route was designed, centred on water, a natural element intertwined with human life and with multiple symbolic dimensions.

Psychogeographical and mental maps, a "literary narrative", digital collages and two videos art were created for promoting the proposal. The one is an art documentary, a wandering in the landscape of Ano Syros on the occasion of the search for the "Pigi" ("Source"). In the other, the symbolic meaning of the "Source" is enriched with another dimension, that of the symbol of a new era, in which gender equality will be an undeniable reality.

We aim in a tangible way to make it clear that the creative industries, on the one hand, can display the physiognomy of a place and, on the other hand, have the potential to contribute to its sustainable development.

Key words: *Creativity, Place Physiognomy, Cultural route, Landscape, Water, Ano Syros*

Introduction

Space, Place and Place Physiognomy

In a first distinction between the concept of *Place* and *Space*, the second one (*Space*) is an abstract concept, perhaps "epidermal" so to speak, finding, "at the end", its content, which is nothing more than its character and special physiognomy (Stefanou, 1994). *Space* is the mathematical interpretation of the most general perception we have of this concept. At this point, the contribution of human is decisive, whose activities "stir the waters" of the once abstract space, creating forms and functions. This is also the moment when *Space* transforms into *Place* and the concepts of character and physiognomy begin to be "sculpted".

For Norberg-Sculz (2009), the *Spirit of Place (Genius Loci)* is the "*manifestation of existential space*" and appears through place and character. In other words, the real space is the lived space, the one in which the respective basic mental functions of human, orientation and identity "take place" (Norberg-Sculz, 2009). So, *Place* is the bounded environment within which acts – events involving human experience – take place, while *Time* is the temporal conditions in which these mental operations occur.

The term *Place Physiognomy* refers to all its morphological, historical, architectural, cultural and social characteristics, which make it a unique entity (Stefanou, 2001). According to the "Charta of Cultural Tourism" (ICOMOS, 1999), the unique identity of a place is a palimpsest of spatial and social phenomena as they evolve and transform over time. It is composed of a set of characteristics that have, material substance, structure, shape, properties of natural and human-made landscape, as well as mental components that are shaped by the cultural character and spiritual content of the place. The *Place Physiognomy* should be the key in promoting the place, to make it stand out.

The protection, preservation, interpretation and promotion of the cultural heritage and cultural diversity of the place is an important challenge for the world and access to the cultural heritage, tangible and / or intangible, of a place, is at the same time a right and a privilege.

Creativity

In recent years, creativity has become widely known and used to include a number of different concepts (creative industries, creative industry, and creative people). According to UNSTAD (2008), "*Creativity can be defined as the process by which ideas are generated, connected and transformed into things that are valued*". This view is more generalized, as it proves that creativity concerns the birth and the development of an idea, which is usually associated with "*creative people*", who are capable of producing ideas, thus producing a creative class. Proponent of the "creative class" was Florida, who thus named workers who produce new or original products and, in general, those employed in "*knowledge-intensive*" industries (Kalogeris and Kourtesis, 2013). R. Caves (2000) believes that the *creative industries* are those that provide goods and services broadly associated with cultural, artistic or simply entertainment values and UNESCO (2021) points out that creativity is the industry of tomorrow.

Creativity and Place Physiognomy

Geographers such as Doreen Massey (1994, 2005) repositioned place as relational, as a product of both local and global flows that come together to form places that are both interconnected and unique (Barnes 2018, 3). In this context, place is therefore always in process, constantly being formed and reformed, and is always, therefore, unfinished (Massey 2005, 107). This view clearly creates problems for researchers trying to engage with the place. For this reason, the geographers, amongst others, engaged with methods more creative in

order to reflect this flow rather than restrict it. Modern cultural geographers have worked with practices such as performance, dance, film, sound, curation and the spoken word, all of which release geography and geographers from the despotism of written language and the perceived fixed nature of the printed word. These types of methods, and many others, are usually framed within the context of art in the broadest sense.

The term *geo/graphic*⁴ *approach* was introduced by Alison Barnes (2012), using a forward slash as opposed to a hyphen. With this, she pursues to offer new strategies for those interested in creative methods that engage the reader in re/presentations of place that are able to capture its relational and complex nature and utilise written text and graphics.

Alison Barnes (2018, 4) argues that "*By taking a geographical word and inserting a slash between the two parts of the word, its constituent parts –geography and graphics– are re-emphasized. Graphics these days are probably more related to painting than words, and are related to graphic design, an inherent part of the geographic approach, which shifts the interaction of meaning to a more visual perspective and points towards the interdisciplinary nature of the work*".

In this essay we present a series of different creative (occasionally *geo/graphic*) approaches that seek to contribute to highlighting the physiognomy of the historical ensemble of Ano Syros (Syros Island, Greece) and have been shown in art galleries and conferences.

Case Study: Ano Syros

Ano Syros (Upper Syros) is a town and a former municipality on the island of Syros, in the Cyclades, Greece. Historically, Ano Syros formed the medieval settlement of the island of Syros. It is built during later Byzantine era or early *Frankokratia*⁵, which for Syros will end in 1537, when Turkish Hayreddin Barbarossa will dominate the islands of the Duchy of Naxos, also known as *The Duchy of the Archipelago* (Drakakis, 1971). Syros was the center of the archipelago and contributed to the connection of Western European civilization with the Eastern Mediterranean. From the 16th to the 19th century, due to its Catholic faith, it was characterized as "Pope's Island" and was defined as a point of reference for Christian Europe in the Ottoman world of the Mediterranean (Ampelas, 1874). After founding of nearby Hermoupolis, Ano Syros ceased to be the administrative center of Syros. Nevertheless, the settlement remained a religious center since it is the seat of Roman Catholic Diocese of Syros and Mylos. During World War 2, the city was occupied by the Italians, who wanted to create an Italian province with administrative capital in Ano Syros. Nowadays, Ano Syros is a designated traditional settlement since 1978 that dominates the left hill above the port of Syros, while a part of it is within the *Natura* network.

It is a classical Cycladic medieval settlement that is densely built with narrow roads, circular order and a radial street plan. The overall effect reminds a fortified citadel (Figure 1&2). The settlement is a model sample of vernacular architecture and hospitality: The houses in Ano Syros are close to each other (Figure 4) and people even nowadays are close to each other (Figure 3). They care for each other; they welcome locals and foreigners, people and other inhabitants. We could claim that Ano Syros is in itself a small exploration of a place,

⁴ Forward slash has been described as a character that can perform a simultaneous 'division and doubling' and 'hint at meaning that is not quite there yet' (Springgay, Irwin & Wilson Kind 2005, 904).

⁵ The terms *Frankokratia* and *Latinokratia* derive from the name given by the Orthodox Greeks to the Western French and Italians who originated from territories that once belonged to the Frankish Empire, as this was the political entity that ruled much of the former Western Roman Empire after the collapse of Roman authority and power. The span of the *Frankokratia* period differs by region: the political situation proved highly volatile, as the Frankish states fragmented and changed hands, and the Greek successor states re-conquered many areas.

due to the interesting defensive fabric, which due to the absence of car entrance, it has managed to maintain until today. Here, we can see the remnants of the past: Densely built houses inside walls, gates and openings, beautiful alleys and timeless terraces.



Figure 1 (left): The "Kamara" ("Arch") in the 60s Archive: J. Stefanou

Figure 2 (right): The "Kamara" ("Arch") today https://www.exploring-greece.gr/el/show/40637/:tt/KAMARA-KATO-ISSODOS#.XfA_hYMzaUk



Figure 3 (left): Daily life of the past in Ano Syros, Archive: I.Stefanou

Figure 4 (right): Vernacular architecture,

http://www.wondergreece.gr/v1/el/Perioxes/Syros/Gia_tin_perioxi/Poleis_Xwria/6009-Anw_Syros

Approaches

Taking as a resource the research conducted during the *9th Interuniversity Seminar on Sustainable Development, Culture and Tradition* of the Syros Institute, on the topic "Landscape: Natural and Cultural Recruitments" and with the aim of highlighting the character of the traditional settlement, a proposal of a spatial and digital cultural route was designed, centred on water, a natural element intertwined with human life and with multiple symbolic dimensions.

Psychogeographical and mental maps, a "literary narrative", digital collages and two videos art were created for promoting the proposal. The first is a video art/ documentary, a wandering in the landscape of Ano Syros on the occasion of the search for the fountain "Pigi" ("Source") (Figure5&6). In the other one, the symbolic meaning of the "Source" is enriched with another dimension, as the symbol of a new era, in which gender equality will be an undeniable reality.

We aim in a tangible way to make it clear that the *creative industries*, on the one hand, can display the physiognomy of a place and, on the other hand, have the potential to contribute to its sustainable development.



Figure 5 (left): View of the area of "Pigi", Agios Athanasios,

<https://www.koinignomi.gr/news/politismos/ekdiloseis/2014/08/29/9i-tsipoyrovradia-stin-ano-syro.html>

Figure 6 (right): The fountain "Pigi" ("Source")

<https://cyclades24.gr/2024/08/syros-astrapse-kai-katharistike-i-pigi-tou-agiou-athanasiou-enopsei-tis-avrianis-17is-tsipourovradias/>

"A Journey to the Source". A proposal of a cultural route in Ano Syros

"A Journey to the Source" (Eleftheraki et al, 2020) concerns a cultural route designed in an effort to highlight the elements of the cultural heritage of Ano Syros. It is an imaginary connection of the neoclassical Hermoupolis with the medieval Ano Syros. By presenting the points of interest, a course is created, rich in intangible and tangible cultural elements of this place (Figure 7).

In our study, in addition to the simple recording of the special architectural and morphological elements and the landmarks of the historic settlement of Ano Syros, we drew our attention to social and cultural parameters of the place in relation to the water element.

The tangible elements of the cultural heritage that are recorded are human creations, such as: the houses, the streets, the bridges, the churches, the entrance gates and the "stegadia" (arcs), but also minor tangible elements, such as: the fountains, the sculptures, the furnaces, the "akoumbistrakia" etc. Also, a number of intangible elements of cultural heritage in relation to water are recorded, such as: memories, stories, traditions, customs, myths and fairy tales, music, rituals, human relationships, etc.

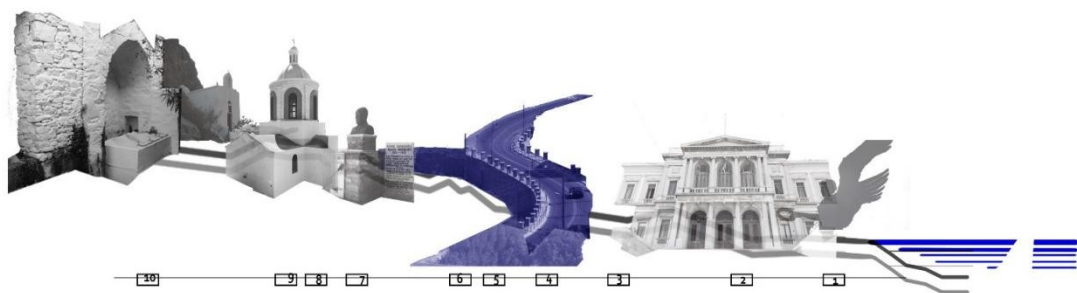


Figure 7: Digital collage of the proposed cultural route "A Journey to the Source" from Ermoupolis to the "Source" of Agios Athanasios (Saint Athanasios) in Ano Syros

© A. Sougioltzi, Research: G. Eleftheraki, A. Sougioltzi & K. Ntoska

Psychogeographical and mental maps, a "literary narrative", digital collages and two videos art were created for promoting the proposal:

The literary narrative: "A Journey to the Source"⁶

The "Stopovers - points of interest" of the cultural route are described through a "literary narrative" starring the researchers themselves and the route is diagrammatically depicted on maps (Map1,2&3). A printed issue of the "literary narrative" (Figure8) was presented at the Artistic Actions of the *Archaeological Dialogues* in Ermoupolis of Syros Island in May 2023 and was subsequently donated to the library of a small restaurant of Ano Syros.



Figure 8: Booklet titled *A Journey to the Source*, © G. Eleftheraki, Research: G. Eleftheraki, A. Sougioltzi, K. Ntoska, E. Vamvakousi, A. Amanatidou, E. Maragkoudaki

Discovering the "Stopovers" of the Cultural Route through the narration of an unforgettable experience

A small excerpt from the booklet:

[...]After some time, as they sat on the terrace, enjoying the quiet and the breeze and having now missed the bus to Ermoupolis, they decide to return to the Monastery of the Jesuit Fathers, initially to regroup and then to descend from the steps of Ano Syros to Ermoupolis.

The route is not long and it is quite easy when you go down, as they found out a little later... Having explored the area within the gates, the next day early in the morning, they decide to head for the "Source" [...]

⁶Editor: G. Eleftheraki

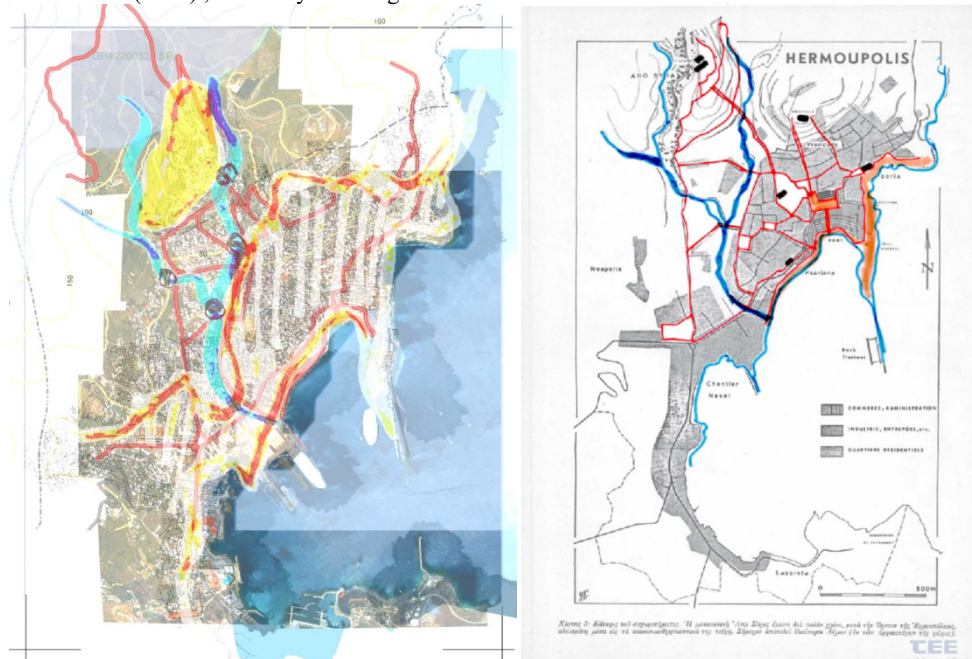
Maps-Digital collages: A. Sougioltzi

Research: G. Eleftheraki, A. Sougioltzi, K. Ntoska, E. Vamvakousi, A. Amanatidou, E. Maragkoudaki

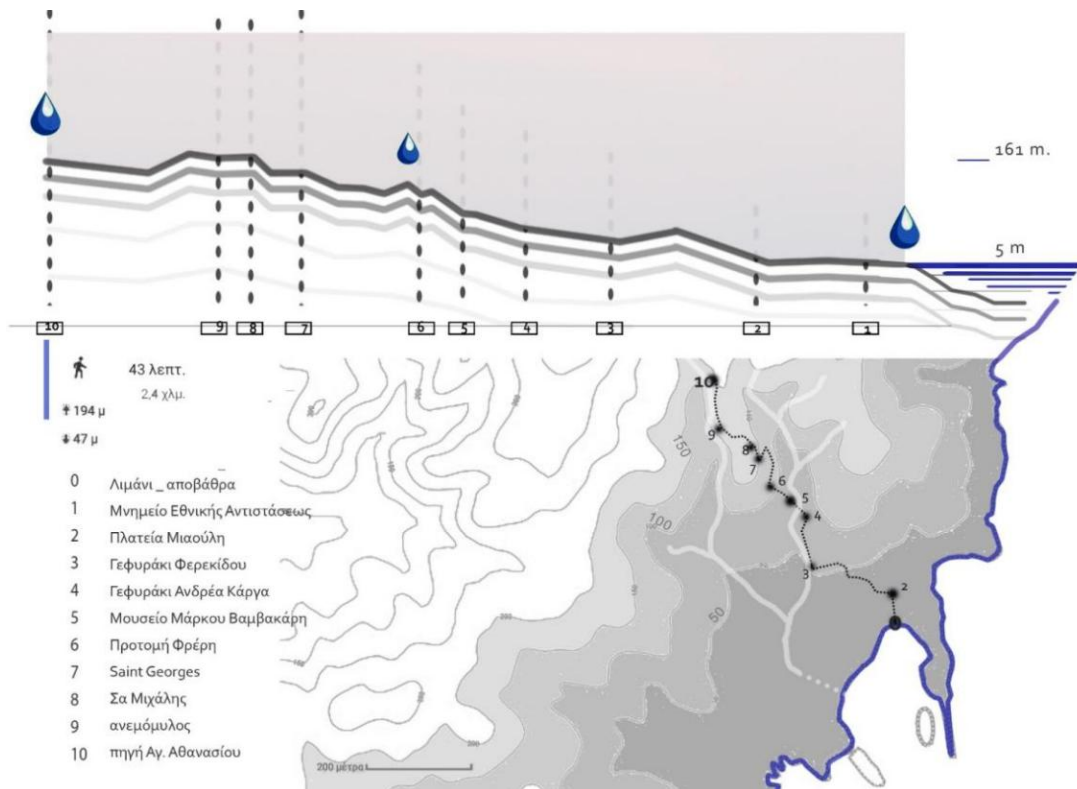
Diagrammatic maps

Map 1 (left): Diagrammatic illustration of the proposed cultural route "A Journey to the Source", © A. Sougioltzi, Research: G. Eleftheraki, A. Sougioltzi & K. Ntoska

Map 2 (right): Land use map with connections between Ermoupolis and Ano Syros,
Background: J. Stefanou (1972) , Edited by: A. Sougioltzi



Map 3: The proposed cultural route "A journey to the Source" from Ermoupolis to the "Source" of Agios Athanasios (Saint Athanasios) in Ano Syros, in section and on a map with marked "stops". © A. Sougioltzi, Research: G. Eleftheraki, A. Sougioltzi & K. Ntoska



Installation: "The 'Source' and the route of the women of Ano Syros"⁷

The Installation with video art/ digital collages-maps/ text pursues to highlight the physiognomy of Ano Syros through the proposed cultural route to "Pigi" ("Source"). In the project, the difficult path of the women of the past to obtain the precious water "is transformed" into the uphill road of today that women feel they still have to go through until the achievement of true gender equality. The installation was presented at the Artistic Actions of the *Archaeological Dialogues* in Ermoupolis of Syros Island in May 2023.

Digital collages

The women of Ano Syros of the past had taken on the "heavy" obligation of carrying water from "Pigi" ("Source") to the house every day. On their way back, they had to walk a particularly uphill route with the pitchers full (Figure9&10).



Figure 9 (top) & Figure 10 (bottom): Digital Collages *The "heavy" obligation of the women of Ano Syros at that time* © K. Kollyri, Research: G. Eleftheraki

Original photo title: *Syra – Les porteuses d'eau*, Publishing: Baud-Bovy Daniel, Boissonnas Frédéric. Des Cyclades en Crète au gré du vent, Genève, Boissonnas & Co, 1919

⁷ Conception, Organization, Curation: G. Eleftheraki
Research: G. Eleftheraki & A. Sougioltzi
Video art: K. Kollyri
Maps/Digital collages: A. Sougioltzi
Digital collages: K. Kollyri
Booklet & Cards: G. Eleftheraki
Graphic design: G. Eleftheraki & A. Sougioltzi

Today's women, with their multiple roles, feel that they still have a long way to go before real equality is achieved (Figure 11,12 & 13).

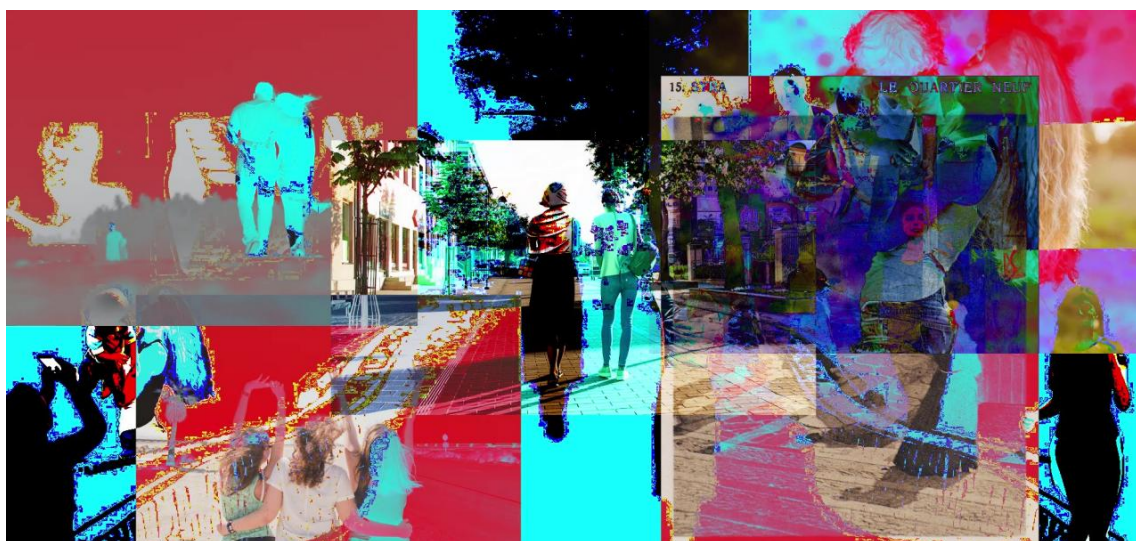
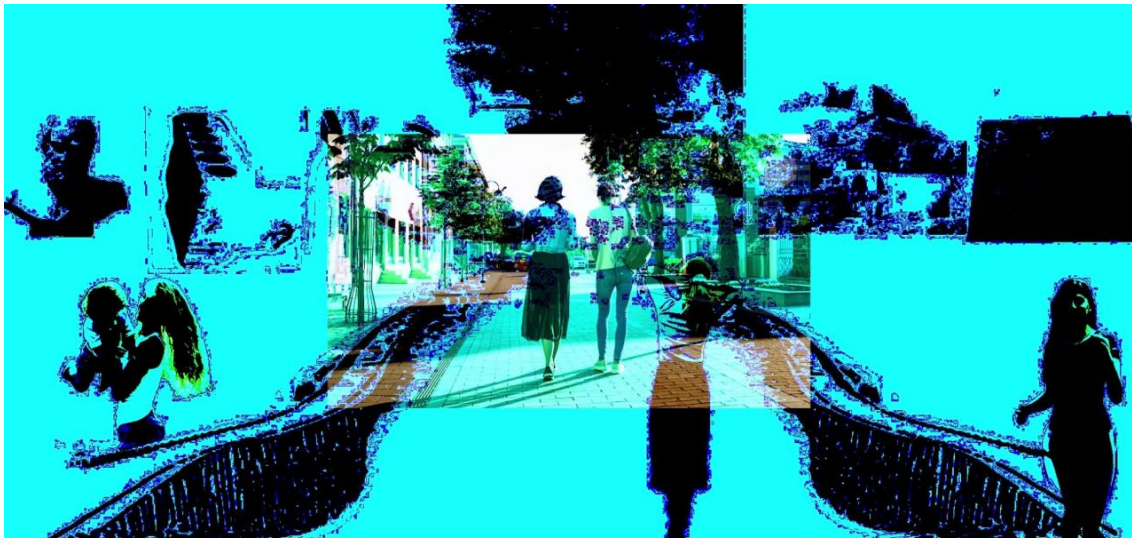


Figure 11 (top), Figure12 (in the middle) & Figure13 (bottom): Digital Collages *The “uphill climb” of women today* © K. Kollyri, Research: G. Eleftheraki
 Original photo title: *Syra – Le quartier neuf*, Publishing: Baud-Bovy Daniel, Boissonnas Frédéric. *Des Cyclades en Crète au gré du vent*, Genève, Boissonnas & Co, 1919

Installation

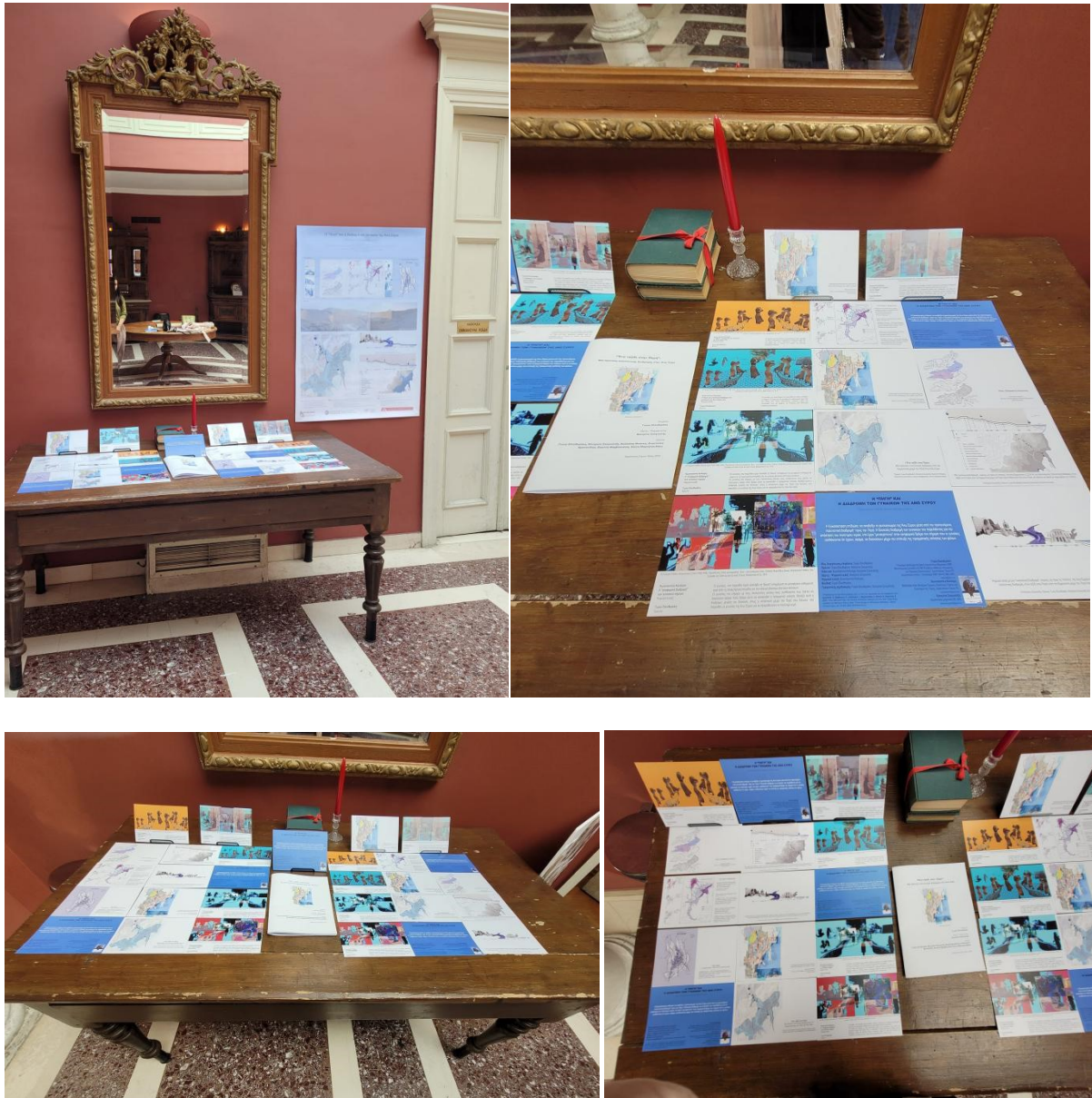


Figure 14 & 15 (top), Figure 16 & 17 (bottom) Photos of the Installation with digital collages, maps and booklet, Archive: G. Eleftheraki

Videos art

The "Source" that provides the water necessary for human life, in the first video art is sought to be "transformed" into a symbol of a new era, in which gender equality will be an indisputable reality (Figure9,10,11,12&13).The video art was presented at the Artistic Actions of the *Archaeological Dialogues* in Ermoupolis of Syros Island in May, 2023

The second video with the title *A journey to the Source* is an artistic documentary exploring the route to the "Source" of Ano Syros, which gives the viewer the opportunity to wander through the traditional settlement, to get to know landmarks, elements of tangible and intangible cultural heritage such as rebetiko (type of Greek urban folk music), and the "water route". The video was presented at the Art Gallery of the 7th Annual Conference of the International Place Branding Association (IPBA) on the theme "Place branding in times of

crisis and uncertainty" organized by Lund University (Helsingborg Campus), Halmstad University, and Kristianstad University in Helsingborg, Sweden on October 18-20, 2023.

Using the technique of *voice over*, the narrator creates an audio overlay on the images that helps to understand the place physiognomy:

"It is Sunday morning, 9:00, at the port of Ermoupolis. Anastasia, Calliope, Elena, Eugenie, Georgina, Kathryn. They meet and get to know each other at their place of residence... The monastery of Jesuit fathers... A photo of the women of Ano Syros ascending to the "Source", with the precious water, will accompany them in the rest of their journey (Figure 18).

They roam its alleys, discovering. A hidden corner... A wonderful shed... A cute yard with cats sitting lazily... A terrace overlooking the sea... A quaint little shop with bougainvillea...

They arrive at the Monastery. A small square... They had not seen it until now... They decide to sit for a while on its unique bench. "Freri Square"...

After resting, they head uphill, towards the top of the hill. At the highest point, there is the temple of the Holy Patron Saint George. The view of the country and the port is impressive and the best time to visit is in the afternoon.

In the North is the "Apanosyriani Mother", a sculpture in which the mother carries the water with the pitcher on her shoulder together with her two children. Human creations, the fountains, the winepresses, the furnaces, the beehives, the "akoubistrakia"... (Figure 19) The fountains did not only provide water, they were the centre of the settlement. All roads begin and lead to them. From there the women, loaded with their pitchers, carried water home.

14. SYRA

LES PORTEUSES D'EAU



Figure 18 (left) *Syros. Women carrying water* Original photo title: *Syra – Les porteuses d'eau*, Publisher: Baud-Bovy Daniel, Boissonnas Frédéric. *Des Cyclades en Crète au gré du vent*, Genève, Boissonnas & Co, 1919

Figure 19 (right) The "akoubistrakia"⁸, Archive: J. Stefanou

Towards the exit of the settlement, in Vornas,.. The Windmill stands on the left of the road. They decide to climb the steps to its entrance to see Ermoupolis from above and enjoy the cool breeze. Sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste... They seem impossible to capture, to evaluate, to record.

⁸ Surface on the route from the fountain "Pigi" ("Source") to the settlement of Ano Syros, where women placed their pitchers to take a rest and the pitchers had left their traces.

Descending now, after the bust of Ferekydis, looking towards the other side of the island, a beautiful little church was visible on the opposite rock. This unique identity of a place, a palimpsest of spatial and social phenomena...

They have already lost the bus and regrouping seems like an imperative need. The way to Ermoupolis is neither long nor difficult when you go down it, they find out a little later.

The next day, they go outside the gates, they finally go to the "Source". This time they will find it. They leave the settlement, follow the cobbled path parallel to the stream, pass the old windmill and after a while they come across the Church of Agios Athanasios (Saint Athanasios). It is next, in a green environment, rare for a Cycladic island.

It was a meeting place for women and young men. And as a meeting place it was filled with conversations, laughter and joy. The women with the pitchers were roaming the alleys, waiting, washing the textiles and clothes, talking, healing. As other nymphs and fairies, creatures that roamed the shadowy corners of the woods, guarded the springs and fountains and bathed in them. They glorified superhuman forces to save them from the spring dragon and free them to be freshened and water the earth. Forces that can let the water flow abundantly...

Coming to this mystery of water, we begin to understand why, in order to save a person; we must first of all immerse him in the water. Water quenches thirst, irrigates, heals, purifies, cleanses, saves. However, it can destroy, suffocate, pollute. The water... One of the four elements of life "was in the beginning, returns in the end, and always will be". In myths and rituals, it precedes every form and supports every creation.

ΥΔΡΡ ΝΕΡΟ ΑΥΓΑ ΑΚΥΟ ΒΟΔΑ ΡΥΒΑ ΜΑΖΙ ΑΜΑΝΖΙ ΒΑΣΣΕΡ..."

Epilogue

Place marketing comprises a strategically designed process, which depends on the image of the place and of an in-depth knowledge of the place's identity (Deffner, 2012). In this context, the creation of an original mobile application, with which, in a pleasant way, the visitor will be able to follow the proposed cultural route, "A Journey to the Source", and at the same time receives information about its "stopovers" and "points of interest" or reads stories, myths, traditions etc., even by creating his own unique route, it could play a significant role in the place marketing of Ano Syros.

The "space" becomes "place", a concept that we have to deal with in all its dimensions because apart from the real ones that are tangible, quantitative and measurable, the place also has ideological and emotional dimensions, which are intangible, qualitative, non-measurable and psychological. These dimensions are the elements that make it special; they express the uniqueness of its entity, in other words, its physiognomy. In this essay we pursued to demonstrate in a tangible way that *creative industries* can display the physiognomy of a place and potentially contribute to its sustainable development.

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