

## CULTURAL ROUTES AND ALTERNATIVE TOURISM IN LESVOS

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### **Abstract**

*Alternative forms of tourism are beginning to play a dominant role in the choice of final destination as they raise tourists' awareness of the pursuit and creation of positive social, cultural and environmental impacts. Visitors to a place want to experience a variety of services through exploring not only the points of interest of an area but also by meeting the locals through activities of local life. The island of Lesvos, a blessed place, bequeaths to the world beyond its natural beauty a culture that has its roots in the past but still bears fruit today. This combination is offered for a mild and sustainable tourism development. Then some suggestions in this direction will be studied.*

**Keywords:** *Lesvos, Mytilene, alternative tourism, literary tourism, religious tourism, spa tourism, sustainable development,*

### **1. Cultural Routes**

Cultural is a type of alternative tourism, a whole philosophy that seeks to reduce the negative effects of mass tourism by focusing on cultural events such as theatrical performances, festivals, tours of archaeological and environmental sites, and folklore events and the way of life of an area. It is based on local identity, broadening the horizon beyond geographical or historical constraints.

Literary tourism in a sense is included in the cultural one and is one of the most noble forms of cultural expression.

Lesvos, born and origin place in the ancient years of Sappho<sup>2</sup>, Alcaeus, Terpander, Arion, later Longos and more recently Eftaliotis, Myrivilis, Panselinos, Kampas, Elytis and so many others<sup>3</sup> who honor it with their words can rightly claim the creation a series of literary experiential journeys. According to Manola (2019: 12) more and more tourists want to "visit places that have been connected with their favorite authors, sites where their favorite stories are played" trying to meet a psychological need, that of uniting the real world with that of their imagination

Thus, routes such as that of Myrivilis around the Castle of the Gattelusio's in the city of Mytilene and then on the famous rock of "Panagia Gorgona" in Skala Skamnia where the main theme of the novel of the same name took place, the struggle of the refugees from MinorAsia

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<sup>2</sup> Sappho known as the tenth Muse gathered young girls for their cultural instruction. Her poetry about the beauty of woman proclaimed her love back to the 6th century b.C. The term lesbian describe an homosexual identity. Eressos according Bindel (2008) is a destination that the locals have become educated about the issue because of the fact that the tourists have an educated and appropriate behavior. The Festivals that are organized is one of the facts that enforce the local economy through a special touristic target group.

<sup>3</sup> Many of the younger writers from Lesbos island are mentioned in the book of Maria Manola & Papanis (2020b) "Anthology of the Literary Lesbos of the 20th century. Proposals of Educational Practice " ed. Tsiotras.

in the same places. a similar story but with other protagonists. The trip could end in the village to see up close the memorabilia from his personal collection at the museum<sup>4</sup>.

The picturesque settlement of Molyvos, over which dominates the fortress. The tourist capital of the island has to show personalities such as Argyris Eftaliotis, in whose house the Municipal Gallery operates or Elias Venezis who built his summer house in Eftalou to gaze at the opposite, familiar coasts of Minor Asia.

Lesvos the island of culture has important treasures to reveal to the visitors from the first moment of arrival.

One of them, the architectural wealth a recent action proves to us that difficulties can be turned into opportunities when there is a real basis, in this case the architectural wealth of the city. Activities such as the one that Pazianou (2020) informs us about the tour of the mansions of Mytilene with the aim of the group the acquaintance of the general public with the buildings that have a special character turns the difficulty of lockdown into an advantage, through virtual tours and giving the opportunity to all interested parties to be informed as if they were present. A number of museums are indicative of routes that could be developed:

- Teriade Museum that has been operating since 1979 is unique in its kind in Greece, an open book that gives the visitor wanderings and spiritual journeys presenting the publishing work of Stratis Eleftheriadis the copies of the "Great Books" and VERVE with lithographs by Chagall, Matisse, Picasso, Léger as well as copies of medieval manuscripts.
- Theofilos Museum that started operating in Varia in 1964 at the expense of Strati Eleftheriadis who donated the building to the Municipality of Mytilene together with 86 paintings by Theofilos, from his private collection that also represent scenes from everyday life, mythology and history
- The Digital Museum "Georgios Iakovidis", in Chydira, Lesvos, the painter's birthplace, is the first entirely Digital Art Museum in Greece. Formulated according to a special musicological study based on new technologies, it faithfully highlights the life and work of the renowned Greek painter through a variety of electronic systems of digital projection and interaction.
- The Museum of Refugee Memory 1922 is located in Skala Loutron, started operating in 2006 presenting the daily life of refugees after the Minor Asia Catastrophe. It has an important collection of relics and has a specialized library.

But because culture is a broad concept, other various aspects of the daily life of the island's inhabitants should not be overlooked.

- The Museum of Industrial Olive Oil (MVEL) which is housed in a restored stone building of 1910 in Agia Paraskevi of Lesvos and is a typical example of industrial architecture. The Olive Mill created by the Piraeus Group Cultural Foundation (PIOP) which is responsible for its operation is part of all the remarkable industrial buildings of the island and seeks to promote the industrial heritage both in the field of oil production and in the wider field. technology, but also to integrate it into its architectural, social and cultural environments.

Visitors to Lesvos soon discover that the place is a gastronomic "earthly paradise". In most cases the local flavors are harmoniously combined with the cuisine of the East and the influences of the West, creating extremely tasty results. Products such as oil, ouzo, wine, are an important part of the "art of living". Indicative of the importance they give to this sector of the island's culture is the existence of museums dedicated to them such as:

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<sup>4</sup>Stratis Myrivilis in Manola (2020a). *An experiential journey to the Writers of the '30s generation*. Athens: Tsotras.

- The ouzo museum, the World of Ouzo is located in a distillery in Plomari, Lesvos and aims to highlight the traditional art of ouzo making that has characterized the island for years.
- The Olive Mill - Vrana Museum is located in the settlement of Papado, in the bay of Gera. This is one of the oldest olive mills on Lesvos, which belonged to the family of Nobel Prize-winning poet Odysseas Elytis. He tells, in a direct and vivid way, both his own story and the history of his place and time. The main machines have the ability to be fully operational and to "liven up" the factory at any time.

The aforementioned museums should be displayed in full upon the arrival of visitors to the island in order to connect them and inform the wider travelers who will have a more complete view of the cultural wealth of the island. The visitor is now interested in various forms of tourism, for religious events and pilgrimages, architectural works, such as famous buildings, entire cities and villages or ruins as mentioned by Kafouros (2014).

## **2. Routes of Religious interest**

Religious tourism is an important part of the Greek tourist movement and concerns the visit to religious places of worship, such as monasteries and churches.

The island of Lesvos is famous for its pilgrimages, some of them are:

- Holy Monastery of Archangel Michael<sup>5</sup>, who is the primary patron Saint of Lesvos. It is one of the most important pilgrimages on the island and it is built near Mantamado. This is a Byzantine Monastery. The church was completely rebuilt in 1879. Among the old icons of the Temple and the valuable ecclesiastical objects, there is a relief icon - Byzantine style - of Taxiarch Michael, which according to tradition was made of clay and blood of the monks slaughtered by the Turks.
- Holy Monastery of Saint Raphael. It is located in the North East of the island and at a distance of 3 km from the settlement of Thermi. The current Monastery was built on the site of an Early Christian basilica, the remains of which exist in the area. In its monastic life we distinguish three periods: (a) from the 10th century to 1235, (b) from 1433 to 1463 - year of its destruction by the Turks, with the last abbot being Saint Raphael and (c) from 1962 until today. It is a nunnery, which was built and operates in honor of St. Raphael. It is one of the most important pilgrimages of the island, which contributes significantly to the economic prosperity of the wider area
- Holy Monastery of Leimonos–Saint Ignatius. It is built 3km North West. from Kalloni. Katholikon is dedicated to the Archangels. It was built in 1523 by the Metropolitan of Mithymna Ignatios Agalianos. The “Katholikon” the central place of an imposing church, a three-aisled basilica, with a wood-carved gilded iconostasis<sup>6</sup> and frescoes in the Mount Athos style of 1800. It has a rich library, while at the same time there is a Museum of Ecclesiastical Art and a Geological Museum (1990).
- Holy Monastery of Panagia Myrsiniotissa. Near the Holy Monastery of Leimonos and dependent on it is the Byzantine style Monastery, which was rebuilt in 1523 in honor of the Assumption of the Virgin. Inside there are invaluable icons, an old wood-carved iconostasis and important frescoes.
- Holy Monastery of Perivolis. Located in the North West of the island and at a distance of 3 km from Antissa. This is a nunnery of Byzantine style, dedicated to the Entrances of the Virgin. The images of the wood-carved iconostasis and the frescoes (16th century) are very interesting.

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<sup>5</sup> “Taxiarchis” in greek means Brigadier and is used to indicate the Archangel Michael

<sup>6</sup> A screen with doors and icons that separates the bema (sanctuary) from the nave

- Holy Monastery of Pithariou. Located in Eresos (3 km). It is dedicated to the Archangels and its foundation should be sought in the Medieval years. It is a Byzantine Monastery with invaluable icons, church utensils and frescoes.
- Holy Monastery of Ipsilou. Built on the top of the rocky mountain `Ordymnos, it is dedicated to Agios Ioannis Theologos. The election of the position he holds, testifies to its Medieval origin (around 800 AD). Its Katholikon is distinguished for its frescoes with scenes from the lives of the Saints, while at the same time invaluable ecclesiastical objects are kept.
- Holy Monastery of Damandriou. Byzantine Monastery (14th century), dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin. Inside the "Katholikon" there are amazing images and frescoes of Byzantine style and remarkable ecclesiastical objects. It is located 5km from Polichnitos.
- Panagia Glykofilousa: It is located in Petra, built on a rock, with 114 steps. The first church was probably built in 1609
- Panagia Agias Sion - Agiasos: This name came from the old icon of the pilgrimage of Panagia, made by Luke the Evangelist, which according to the sacred tradition the monk Agathonas transported in 803 from Jerusalem, which is known as Agia Sion
- Metropolitan Church of Agios Athanasios: Located in the center of Mytilene, near the area of the southern port. It was built at the end of the 16th century. It is dedicated to Saint Athanasios and in the Temple are kept the holy relics of the new martyr Saint Theodore of Byzantium
- Agios Therapontas: It is an imposing spot in the port area and is the largest church in the city. It was built in 1860 in a cruciform Byzantine style. There are the remains of Metropolitan Ignatius of Hungary, who developed intense national action
- Agia Varvara: Located in the village of Pamfila. It is an imposing temple of the 20th century, whose sacred iconostasis is embossed, made of white marble and crafted by the distinguished Greek sculptor G. Halepas.
- Saint Valentine. There are few people that know that Lesvos acquired in Greece, and not only the area, a unique connection with St. Valentine in the Catholic groups as their remains that are kept in the Franciscan Church on Ermou Street could be an occasion to promote the island abroad. Concerts, poetry competitions and stamps were issued in this direction. Many catholic couples want to commit to the renovated church. Despite the reaction of some factors, the existence of the Saint on the island is an opportunity for tourism development of a special religious tourism associated with weddings<sup>7</sup>. In the ceremony, which in itself is joyful and usually not as lonely as the pilgrimage, usually both the family and the friends of the couples take part, so it concerns groups of tourists. The further announcement of the existence of the saint on the island, can be considered as an opportunity for tourist promotion of Lesvos for religious reasons in other communities outside the Orthodox groups

It is also important to refer that The Saints of Mytilene are tied with customs as the hiking access to Agiasos (Manola, 2020d) on the eve of the Virgin Mary on the fifteenth of August or as mentioned Manola (2020c) the sacrifice of the bull in Agia Paraskevi

It is worth mentioning here that, as in the case of cultural tourism, tourists who choose religious travel, even though they are driven exclusively by religion, do not deny the connection of tourism with other forms and especially cultural. This could be a trigger for connections with other forms of culture such as painting, sculpture or architecture.

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<sup>7</sup>Information from the article onlesvosnews. net. "St Valentine in Mytilene;" (7/2/2020)

### **3. Thermalism in Lesvos**

Thermo-mineral and medical springs are a natural resource found almost all over Greece<sup>8</sup>, in areas with excellent natural environment and climate that have the potential to be used as tourist centers for treatment, prevention, rejuvenation and recreation, according to the standard of major European Health Tourism Centers. In the medical tourism centers the well-known spas, whose goal is to provide services for the recovery of various diseases but also in the health tourism centers (health resorts), where emphasis is placed on the overall improvement of the health and physical condition of the organization, the repetitive Form of hydrotherapy leaves the visitor a lot of time for other activities.

In 2015, the Association of Municipalities of Thermal Springs of Greece was connected to the Association of European Historic Thermal Towns Association, which has been certified since 2010 as a cultural route connecting the thermal<sup>9</sup> product with culture.

Its main purpose is to provide its services to all those involved in the promotion and provision of the health tourism product, in order to ensure its quality and to promote its sustainable development.

On the island there are in use the thermal springs of Polychnitos, the Therma Gulf of Gera, Eftalous and Thermi.

It is a form of tourism which develops throughout the year; it is enabling the extension of the tourist season. The improvement of the facilities of the spas of the country with modern infrastructure and equipment is necessary for the full utilization of the medicinal properties of their waters. At the same time, with the start of other activities in the field of springs, their emergence in long-distance tourism centers of all ages is achieved.

### **4. Geotourist Routes**

Geotourism is a form of rural tourism, motivated by the experience, knowledge and enjoyment of the geological and geomorphological environment and concerns the tour, in areas of special geological interest, karst structures, caves and gorges, sand dunes, coasts and any other form of geotope.

- The fossil forest is directly displayed by the Museum of Natural History of the Fossil Forest of Lesvos founded in 1994 in Sigri, Lesvos for the study, research, promotion, exhibition, conservation and preservation of the fossil forest of Lesvos which has been declared a Special Monument of environmental, geological and paleontological value. The Museum is a window into the history and evolution of the Aegean basin over the last 20,000,000 years. The museum hosts two permanent exhibitions where rare plant fossils from Western Lesvos are presented and geological phenomena are displayed.
- The Natural History Collection of Vrisa was inaugurated in September 1999 and includes the fossils of vertebrates and invertebrates that lived in the area 2 million years ago, samples of minerals, rocks and ores of Lesvos, zoology department and botany section with unique value not only in Greece area but also throughout Europe. The exhibition is housed in the building of the old girls' school of Vrisa and offers the visitor the opportunity to get a general impression of the natural history of the area. Among the finds are bones from rhinos, camels, antelopes, gazelles, elephants and turtle reptiles that reach a length of 2.5 meters
- Palmforest of Kalamiaris. On the north side of Panagiouda there is the Palm Forest of Kalamiaris (named after the river that flows through this area). The original trees were planted by the English businessman (and British consul) Atkinson in the late 19th century, when the latter had settled in the area and built three industrial buildings in Pamfila. The

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<sup>8</sup> Konstantinos Kouskoukis: "Greece is the first country in Europe in thermal natural resources"

<sup>9</sup>SpA from the Latin abbreviation "Sanitas per Aqua", meaning "Health through Water". Another version of the origin of the name is found in the existence of the homonymous Belgian city Spa near Liege

grove was then grown and renewed naturally. In the area there are two rare palm trees in Greece (a small *Livistona Chinensis* - also known as a Chinese fan or palm tree - a fountain and a Mexican *Brahea Armata* - also known as a blue palm tree).

- The cave of Gera, Cave of Agios Ioannis or "Fousa": Located in the area of "Mychos" of the Gulf of Gera, with a length of 95m. and two corridors with marble walls. 5th century tombs were found inside, as dated by the local Archaeological Service. It has no stalactite decoration, but there are wonderful formations in its dome.
- The wetland of Kalloni Bay, has been included in the European Program "Special Areas of Nature Conservation" of the NATURA 2000 Network. Place where Aristotle has made observations. In recent years, bird-watching in this wetland has been a pole of interest for visiting scientists-nature lovers. It is an activity of several people, which marks a significant increase every year with the help of infrastructure, which is installed in the area, through the implementation of a relevant program with modern observation facilities and operation of an Environmental Information Center.

### **Epilogue**

Lesvos has a huge potential that could be the basis for a sustainable tourism development. In essence, however, it remains unexploited for tourism as it is known to a limited number of tourists and unfortunately in recent years due to the humanitarian crisis for the wrong reasons.

The burden of the island imposes the fundamental remodeling of infrastructure that will be able to support the inhabitants not only financially but also morally and will belong mainly to the public sector. The value of these projects is great as they prove in practice a positive climate by correlating the existence of infrastructure projects with the economy, national and local but also with moral support of residents as they improve their quality of life.

Such can be considered:

- The sea and air connection of the island with lower than the current cost
- The construction of new highways as well as water supply and sewerage systems
- The enhancement of renewable energy sources
- The promotion of the urban landscape with sidewalks and organization of parks
- The construction or improvement of buildings with special uses such as schools, libraries, hospitals, police and fire services, and other buildings related to culture and leisure such as museums, sports facilities
- The creation for the city of Mytilene of environmentally friendly means of public transport such as those of the fixed track in the city such as trams and the undertaking of initiatives by bodies for the development of networks for walking and cycling and informing the citizens about them
- The promotion of ecological parks

The development of tourism products that can be supported by existing structures, such as the network of museums, monasteries, baths and especially for the latter case, the positive outcome of the case of the magnificent Charlitza<sup>10</sup> monument would be decisive as one of the factors sustainability is the integration of material heritage into a basis of sustainability and performance in the monument of functions that define it as necessary in the society of the region.

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<sup>10</sup> As mentioned in the article from 6/7/2020 "Establishment of the Region as an area with priority in thermal proposed by the Committee for Spa Tourism", there is provision for an immediate convergence of monitoring the contract for the source of Thermi-Charlitza

Also actions like:

- The subsidy for the construction of hotel units and other structures or companies in general that deal with tourism services in order to harmonize with the spirit of sustainable development.
- The Creation of study departments in DIEK and EPAL<sup>11</sup> related to the training of young people in Hydrotherapy and Religious tourism
- The organization of development seminars and conferences for the aforementioned sectors such as literary tourism, religious, health with emphasis on thermals and that of geoparks
- The integration of the island in the Cultural routes of Europe such as for example the Olive Roads and the Historic Spas
- The turn to orthodox peoples who will be informed about the religious wealth of the island two kind of all year tourism.
- The announcement in the Catholic circles of the existence of the renovated church of St. Valentine that will target specific groups of religious tourism
- The connection of places of religious interest with cultural elements of another type, perhaps architectural, in order to increase the interest of travelers who are not attracted to religious sentiment.
- The creation of a central info-point of tourist promotion and several in key points of the island in order to interconnect the different forms of touring
- The undertaking of promotional moves with strategic goals by the North Aegean region
- The technological development but also the connection of all museums. Especially now in the Covid-19 era, there has been an increase in interactive digital museum visits. Perhaps the above as stated by Tsatalbasoglou (2020) could be a trigger for changing the attitude of tourists to other forms of tourism because technology could help bring more interested people to the literary and cultural tours that are the point for which the island is proud of.

The goal will be not only the economic development but also the spiritual development of both the local population and anyone who will visit the island for other reasons. Literature is one of the strongest components for the tourist development of the island and technology can help to spread it in a non-traditional way. Technology can be an occasion to change the attitude of stakeholders. Especially the younger ages who are impressed but also familiar.

The above are some of the proposals for improvement and trigger for further research of systemic analysis in this direction, in order to promote projects that are efficient and effective for their purpose and feasible through existing resources that should come from European funds as well. The humanitarian crisis that hit the island is not local nor only Greek.

Therefore, it is appropriate to promote tourism development in a grid that according to Kokkosis & alias (2001: 84) means a development that responds "to different types of demand and will contribute to the basic principle of sustainability: the feedback of growth."

All these projects will be able to support the residents and change the attitude of tourists who will no longer connect Lesvos only with negative news but also an opportunity to favor the development of a sustainable and sustainable form of tourism.

The development and strengthening of innovative ideas and the further promotion of the island through the method of strategic communication to highlight its potential tourist spots but also to change the attitude of tourists becomes absolutely necessary for Lesvos to recover as a tourist.

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<sup>11</sup> EPAL is an upper secondary vocational school and DIEK as a training education of third grade with specialties

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