

THE FORMATION OF THE PHYSIOGNOMY OF THE CITY OF ALEXANDROUPOLIS: THE OPINION OF RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

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Abstract

The present paper refers to the physiognomy of the city and is a study that was carried out by the Department of Economics and Sustainable Development of Harokopio University of Athens. The present study aims to investigate the factors that contribute to the formation of a city's physiognomy and to examine the opinion of residents and visitors on these issues. As a case study, the city of Alexandroupolis was chosen. In order to be answered the main questions of the study and to be investigated the main factors that contribute to the physiognomy of the city of Alexandroupolis an online survey was carried out and was sent to residents and visitors of the city. For the purposes of the research, a well-structured questionnaire was designed which included twelve (12) closed-type questions. It was anonymous and was answered by 156 people. The research was carried out between October and November of 2023. The questionnaire was sent exclusively to adults. Through the research were emerged some important issues that affect negatively the physiognomy of Alexandroupolis. The empirical findings suggest that it is essential local authorities, residents and businesses, work towards to the protection and promotion of the physiognomy of Alexandroupolis, in order to be achieved at a long-term level sustainable development in the area.

Key words: *Physiognomy of the city, sustainable development, the city of Alexandroupolis.*

1. Introduction

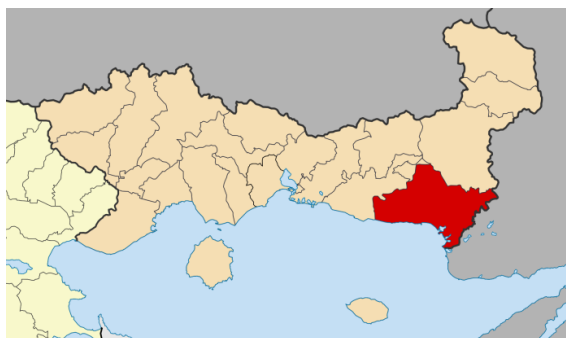
The notion of a city's physiognomy

The physiognomy of a city generally refers to the uniqueness of the entity of a place, as expressed through its landscape, through what its perceptual image offers (Stefanou, 2001). Some of the most important characteristics that are highly connected with a city's physiognomy are: the history and the monuments of a city, the urban fabric, the name, the natural resources, the geographical location, the architecture of the city, the religious monuments, the culture of a city etc. (Stefanou & Mitoula, 2003).

2. Literature review - Analyzing the profile of Alexandroupolis

Geographical Definition of Alexandroupolis

The city of Alexandroupolis is located in the South-Eastern part of the Region of North Macedonia and Thrace and is the capital of the Evros. It is washed by the Thracian sea and it borders with Turkey as well as with the municipalities of Soufli, Maroneia, Sapa and Arriana. Its geographical position has strategic importance, because it connects Greece with Turkey and Europe with Asia (Operational Program of the Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2021).



Picture 1: The geographical position of Alexandroupolis (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandroupolis>).

Administrative organization of Alexandroupolis

Alexandroupolis is the seat of the Municipality of Alexandroupolis, while the historical seat of the Municipality is Ferres (formerly was referred as “Vira”). The Municipality of Alexandroupolis according to the program of Kallikratis (2011) has 3 Municipal Units, 17 Administrative Units and a total of 45 settlements (Operational Program of the Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2021).

Geophysical definition of Alexandroupolis

Climate temperatures

The Municipality of Alexandroupolis has a Mediterranean climate, with effects of a continental climate mainly towards the hinterland. The winter is generally hard, with quite low temperatures, early and late frosts. During the summer months, there are generally high temperatures, with few rainfalls (Operational Program of the Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2021).

Fauna

The city of Alexandroupolis is characterized by a rich fauna in the wider area. For example, there are various species of frogs, toads, snakes, lizards, turtles as well as water turtles, with many of these to be rare in the rest of Europe. Moreover, there are many bird species, most of which are ostriches and storks. Furthermore, it is estimated that in the Delta of Evros there are 307 different bird species, many of which are migratory (Operational Program of the Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2021).

Flora and urban green spaces

In the Municipality of Alexandroupolis there are generally a lot of forest areas. For example, there are forests of oak, beech, conifers, small conifers, mixed evergreen and broadleaf forests as well as pastures and grasslands. Also, in the Delta of Evros there is a variety of habitats, such as sandy islands in the sea, dunes, halophytic marshes, brackish lagoons and steppes, scattered freshwater areas bordered by swamps and reed beds, tamarisk bushes, meadows and seasonal marshes. Moreover, have been identified 6 important plant taxa. In addition, in the wider area there are 2 National Parks, 7 protected Areas of Natura’s network 2000 and 6 Wildlife Refuges (Operational Program of the Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2021).

Regarding the urban green spaces of Alexandroupolis, it is estimated that there are 25 parks, 19 flower beds and 8 squares (Pistola, 2016). However, it is necessary to be mentioned that the urban parks of the city are limited, as a result to can’t meet the needs of the residents for outdoor activity and recreation. At the same time, there is an unequal distribution of green

spaces in the urban fabric, while in many areas of the city they are almost non-existent (Papadopoulou, 2004).

Water resources

In the Municipality of Alexandroupolis and in its wider zone, there is a wealth of water resources with a number of streams and rivers, the main of which is the river of Evros. The river of Evros is the second largest river in Eastern Europe and is characterized by the transportable materials it transports and deposits between Ainos and Alexandroupolis. Its width reaches 150m and its depth 2m. Evros has been included in the list of protected areas in the International Ramsar Convention (1971), and is designated as a Special Protection Area under the Directive (79/409/EEC). A tributary of the Evros river is the river of Ardas, which is an important ecosystem of the wider region and its forest, which grows along its bed, is a habitat of exceptional importance at a national level. Also, at a distance of 23 km from Alexandroupolis city is located the Delta of Evros, one of the most important wetlands in Greece and in Europe. The whole area is a part of the Natura’s network 2000. Additionally, in the coastal waters of Alexandroupolis are included the port of Alexandroupolis and its shores (Operational Program of the Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2021).

The origin of the name of Alexandroupolis

The modern city of Alexandroupolis was founded as a small fishing village in the early 19th century under the Ottoman Empire and was called “*Dedeagach*”. After the liberation of the city (on May 14, 1920), it was unanimously decided by the competent local Authorities, the Holy Metropolis and the concurrence of the scholar and Doctor Achilleas Samothrakis, the city be renamed “*Neapolis*” as it was then the newest Greek city. But when in 1920, the king of Greece, Alexander I, visited the city, the local authorities decided the city be renamed as “*Alexandroupolis*”, in his honor (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandroupolis>).

The cultural heritage of Alexandroupolis

The museums of Alexandroupolis

In the Municipality of Alexandroupolis there are 9 museums, which are presented in following table (*table 1*):

The museums of Alexandroupolis
The Historical Museum of Alexandroupolis
The Ethnological Museum of Thrace
Archaeological Museum of Alexandroupolis
Ecclesiastical Museum of the Holy Metropolis of Alexandroupolis
Folklore Museum of the Association of Cappadocians
Museum of Folklore and Natural History (George Komnidis)
The Natural and History Museum of Evros
The Museum of Sarakatsani tradition
Folklore and Historical Museum of Ferres

Table 1: The museums of Alexandroupolis.

(Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandroupolis>).

Religious monuments and houses of worship of Alexandroupolis

The city of Alexandroupolis is a destination with many religious monuments and houses of worship. One of the most notable religious monuments is the holy church of Panagia Kosmosoteira or Kosmosoteira Monastery of Ferres, which was built in 1152 and is considered an important pilgrimage center for the wider region of Thrace. Another important sample of the city's religious heritage is the Mosque of Alexandroupolis, which dates back to before 1895, when the city was called "Dedeagach" and was inhabited mostly by Muslim citizens during the Ottoman Empire. Also, an important religious monument is the Metropolitan Church of Agios Nikolaos which was founded in 1892 and inaugurated in 1901. It is located in the center of the city, in the homonymous square and is dedicated to the patron saint of sailors, Agios Nikolaos. Also, Agia Kyriaki is one of the most important Orthodox churches in the city, which is located on East Thrace Street, in the center of the city and was inaugurated in 1969. It is worth mentioning that the church houses a piece of the holy relic of Agia Kyriaki, attracting a large number of worshipers from all over the region. Finally, another important sample of the city's religious monuments is the rocky church of Agioi Theodoroi, which is located outside of the city, on the road to Avandas, after the River Castle. It is a unique monument of Byzantine art, since it has a rich painting decoration that can be distinguished in two periods: the 11th century and the 13th century (<https://www.e-evros.gr/gr/kentrikh/1/monasthria-ekklhsies/612?page=2>).

Archaeological sites and historical attractions of Alexandroupolis

In Alexandroupolis there are many archaeological sites as well as historical attractions. One of the most well known archaeological sites is the archaeological site of Mesimvria-Zoni, which is located 20 km west of the city, near to the village Dikella. It is an ancient city that was built at the beginning of the 6th century B.C. by settlers from Samothrace and became an important commercial center. They have been detected some important findings such as the temple of the god Apollonas from the 6th century B.C. as well as a large number of other findings. Also, the ancient Doriskos is an important archaeological site of classical and Greek times, which is located to the western side of Ferres and it is near to the mouth of the river. Then, close to the settlement of Avandas, there is the medieval castle of Potamos and the castle of Avandas, where together with the fortification of the Middle Ages, are observed installations and fortifications from the prehistoric and ancient times, Mycenaean, Classical and Byzantine eras. Additionally, most of the parts of the ancient Egnatia Odos have been identified at the borders of Evros and Rhodope. Moreover, an important international attraction of the city is the cave of the Cyclops Polyphemus, which is located west of the coastal site Platanos, a short distance from the sea, right next to Toumba, the prehistoric settlement. Its name has been linked to the Homeric epics in which it is mentioned that Odysseus, after setting sail from Maroneia and after a short journey, arrived in the land of the Cyclops (Operational Program of the Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2021).

Cultural festivals, events and exhibitions

Various traditional cultural festivals are taking place every year in the city of Alexandroupolis, which are an important attraction for visitors and a meeting point between residents and visitors. The most widely known cultural festivals of the city are the following:

- The festival of Agia Marina in Maistro (on July 17)
- The celebration of Agia Paraskevi Makri at the chapel on the homonymous beach (on July 26)
- The festival of traditional dances in Anthea (at the end of July)
- The celebration of Milena and Gaida in Kirki (at the end of summer)
- The Fifteenth of August at Panagia Kosmosoteira in Ferres.

- The celebration of the Holy Cross with the trade fair in Ferres (on September 14)
- In addition, a significant number of events and exhibitions are held in the city. Specifically, during Christmas and New Year's Eve, various traditional customs are celebrated, as well as during Halloween. In addition, an important local celebration is the "Eleftheria" which is celebrated every year on May 14 in commemoration of the anniversary of the incorporation of the city into Greece in 1920. In addition, the Panevria Agricultural Fair of Ferres, which for decades has been the most important institution for the primary sector of the prefecture of Evros, brings together the agricultural and livestock farming world and includes many local products, agricultural machinery, livestock, etc. The impressive Street Art Festival also takes place at the end of October, gracing the streets of the city with artists and creators from Greece and from neighbouring countries. Finally, every summer, a book fair is held on the coastal Vassiliou Alexandrou Avenue, while every two years the Chamber of Evros organizes the International Trade Fair "Alexpo" at the city's port (Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2024; <https://www.alexpo.gr/>).

Local cuisine

The visitor has the opportunity to taste a variety of dishes of the city's local cuisine. One of the most well known dishes of the city and generally of the region of North Macedonia and Thrace is "Kavourmas", a kind of pork meat that is roasted and putted in fat-covered pots and eaten mainly as a sausage.

Another typical dish of the city and generally of Evros is "Mpampo", which is a pork intestine stuffed with chopped meat, rice, liver and spices. It is baked in the oven and is usually served as a traditional Christmas dish. In Alexandroupolis there is also a variety of seafood dishes due to its geographical location, as it is washed by the Thracian Sea. One characteristic dish is the "steaming vatos", which is a stingray steamed for a few minutes in a pan with a little water, pepper, lemon and garlic. Finally, another typical example of the city's local cuisine is the sweet of Barbara, which is served with nuts, pomegranate raisins and cinnamon. It is made on 4th December in honor of Agia Barbara, the patron saint of children (<https://speedynews.gr/smart-pages/gefsi/i-paradosiaki-koyzina-tis-thrakis/>; <https://a268.webnode.gr/>).

The architectural heritage of Alexandroupolis (Preserved buildings and architectural monuments)

In the city of Alexandroupolis there are many preserved buildings and monuments of different historical periods that are inextricably linked to the city's history.

One of the most important city's buildings is the tobacco store or *tobacco warehouse*, a historic building of 1890, which was renovated in the recent years and now houses the Municipal Library of Alexandroupolis. The building of the tobacco warehouse is owned by the Municipality of Alexandroupolis and has been designated as a historical monument according to the decision of Government Gazette (858/B/25-9-1997) (https://vidarchives.gr/reports/2021_12_2085; <https://www.e-evros.gr/gr/photostories/4/sto-istoriko-kapnomagazo-pleon-h-dhmotikh-biblio8hkh-ale3androypolhs/post26611>).

Another significant building of the city is the three-storey neoclassical building of Zarifeios Educational Academy, which for more than half a century was the only higher institution of higher education in Western Thrace. It was built in 1923 and until 1947 it functioned as a Teacher Training College. The Academy received donations from national benefactor Zarifis therefore it was named after him. It was declared as a historical preserved monument in 1979. Until 1968 it functioned as a Pedagogical Academy, while today it houses the city's experimental primary schools (<https://www.emtgreece.com/el/monuments/zarifeios-paidagwiki-akadimia>).

Another historic building is the neoclassical building of the Democritus University of Thrace. This building was constructed at the beginning of the 20th century and has undergone extensions in three phases throughout its lifetime. It is a complex of buildings, located at 23 Ioakim Kaviri and 23 Patriarchos Kirillos Streets in centre of the city. Until 1960, the building was initially used to house the offices of the National Bank of Greece, while for a time it housed the Economic Tax Office and the Public Treasury until the 1970s. Today, it has been recognized as a listed building according to the decision of Government Gazette 204/29-3-1999) and belongs to the Democritus University of Thrace (https://www.alexpolisonline.com/2019/12/blog-post_32.html; <https://www.eevros.gr/gr/eidhseis/3/ergasies-synthrhshs-anaba8mishs-sto-neoklasiko-ktirio-toy-dp8-sto-kentro-ths-ale3androypolhs/post45439>).

In addition, another historic building is the Ethnological Museum of Thrace, a stone-neoclassical building that was built in 1899 and was the country residence of Konstantinos Alimantzis. In 1937 the building was bought by the merchant Chatzikonstantis Stefanou and was given as a dowry to his granddaughter Chrysoula Vasiliou Zafireiou or Mangos and later wife of Gregory Chrysostomou, a lawyer, MP of Evros and Minister of Merchant Shipping during the period of 1948-49. In January of 1951 Sophocles Venizelos was hosted in this residence. Today it belongs to Zafiria Chrysostomou, the wife of Nikolaos Papathanasiou. On (2-01-1993) it was declared as a listed building and on 2019 it has been designated as a monument. In 1998, the building was renovated and today houses the Ethnological Museum of Thrace (<https://pameevro.gr/koinonia/alexandroupoli-sto-dimosio-to-ktirio-tou-ethnologikou-mouseiou-thrakis/>).

Also, a characteristic sample of the city's neoclassical architecture is the former building of Missionary Action. It housed the boarding school of "Sotiras" under the direction of the archimandrite Father Andreas, organizer of the Christian Home. It is the property of the Missionary Action "The Great Basil" (of the Department of Alexandroupolis). The building was declared a listed building according to the decision of the Government Gazette (431/AAP/07-09-2009). Today, it has been restored and houses the "Sali Boutique Hotel" (<https://diathrhtea.blogspot.com/2020/12/16-a.html>).

Another typical sample of neoclassical architecture is the building of the Old Hospital of Alexandroupolis. The date of its construction has not been ascertained, but it is estimated that it was built in the last decade of the 19th century, probably in 1896. It was originally functioned as a Turkish boy's school when the town was called "Dedeagac" and was under Turkish occupation. At that time, the building was even outside the boundaries of the still small Turkish town. Two years after the liberation of Alexandroupolis in 1920, the Old Hospital housed the 5th Military Hospital of the Greek Army. From 1924 until 1974 it was used as the general hospital of the city, while the following year, the building of the Old Hospital housed the School of Nursing. On 1979 it has been classified as a listed building and from 2002 the building remains closed and is under renovation (<https://greece.terrabook.com/el/evros/page/palio-nosokomeio/>).

Moreover, a characteristic sample of the city's architecture is the warehouses of the port of Alexandroupolis that were built in 1870 by the Oriental Railway Company. At that time, the port of Alexandroupolis was being constructed and the new city was being built around it. First, they were built nine warehouses at the port and were divided into two complexes, one with five warehouses in the west and one with four warehouses in the east. The two complexes were communicating with iron bridges. The Warehouses of the Port of Alexandroupolis were destroyed by the English fleet and the forces of Entente that bombed the port in 1915. They were reconstructed around 1930, but not according to the exact original form, as from then onwards the complexes of the Warehouses of the Port consisted of four and three warehouses respectively, total of seven. During the 20th century, the Warehouses of

the Port housed the services of the Customs Service of Alexandroupolis, the Agricultural Department of Evros and the General Chemical State Laboratory. Today, only one building is used by Customs Service, while the rest of the Warehouses of the Port have suffered serious damages. The complex of the three warehouses (in the east) was declared a listed building in 1997 (<https://greece.terrabook.com/evros/page/warehouses-port/>).

Furthermore, the city's first primary school or "*the Folk school*" is a historic building that was built few years after the liberation of the city in 1928, by public works contractor Aristides Albanopoulos. According to local testimonies, it was the first school after the war which hosted "refugee children" from various places such as Vlachs, Sarakatsanians, Thracians, and Pontians who together with the "native" pupils, created a special mixture. The old building of the first primary school was designated as a listed building by the Ministerial Decision (No. 5759/6-9-2000 of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Government Gazette No. 630/2-10-2000)). In 2014 a restoration was carried out in the listed building, which respected and highlighted the neoclassical style of the building (https://1dim-alexandr-new.evr.sch.gr/?page_id=2).

In addition, the building of the third Primary School of Alexandroupolis is one of the oldest architectural monuments of the city. It is estimated that it was built in the 1880s. For many years, it was the only Hellenic school in the wider multicultural region of Evros. Its six classrooms have been educating students from 1945 to present, and it was declared a listed building in 1974 (<https://blogs.sch.gr/3dialexa/school/>).

In Mitropoleos Square and left to the metropolitan church of Agios Nikolaos is located the building of the former Leonardios School. Its construction began in 1907 and was completed in 1909 on the site granted by the Turkish Bey Hajisafet to the Greek Community. The building was built with a donation from the benefactor Antonios Leontaridis, from whom it takes its name. It has been classified as a listed building since 1974. The Leontaridis School was repaired and restored in the early 1980s in order to accommodate more than 400 sacred relics of the Ecclesiastical Museum (<https://greece.terrabook.com/el/evros/page/leontarideios-sxoli/>).

Important personalities and Benefactors of Alexandroupolis

Konstantinos Alimantzis was the longest serving mayor of Alexandroupolis (1924-1941) and transformed Alexandroupolis from a provincial city into a modern city, with a number of actions (e.g. purchase of a fire engine and formation of a fire brigade in the municipality, improvement of the city's water supply, provision of cleanliness and sports, creation of the Municipal Electricity Company of Alexandroupolis, the first Municipal Slaughterhouses, etc.). *Charalampos Kalpakas* was a pioneer in major social and cultural projects in Alexandroupolis in the 1940s and 1950s, one of which was the creation of the city's port, with also a significant contribution to the development of sports in the area as he was the founder of the National Alexandroupolis and of A.O. Alexandroupolis. *Aggelos Poimenidis* was a publisher of works on the history of Thrace and researcher of ancient settlements such as Zoni and Mesimvria. He discovered from ancient buildings on the coastal roads that Alexandroupolis was built over ancient Sali. *Achilleas Samothrakis* was the Health Inspector of the Evros Region and the first president of the Evros Medical Association. He is particularly known for his study and research in medicine and the history of Thrace, as well as for his homonymous library, which is located in the first Gymnasium of Alexandroupolis, but remains unused. *Athanasios Spanos* was significantly contributed to the spiritual development of Alexandroupolis. After the liberation of the city he took over the organization of the Primary Schools in the area and was for many years the director of the third Primary School of Alexandroupolis. He was also distinguished for his philanthropic work, as he was one of the

first people, who conducted fundraisers for the establishment of the first schools and for the church of Agios Nicholas of Alexandroupolis. *Antonios Leontaridis* was widely known for his philanthropic work in the region of Thrace. He was the founder of the Leontaridios School, as it was mainly built with his donations (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandroupolis>).

Benchmarks of Alexandroupolis

The Lighthouse of Alexandroupolis

The Lighthouse of Alexandroupolis is the registered trademark and the naval symbol of the city. Its construction began around 1850, by the French Company of Ottoman Lighthouses. In 2020 it officially celebrated 140 years of operation. According to the decision (Government Gazette 322/12-9-2013) of the Ministry of Culture, the lighthouse was designated as a cultural heritage monument. It is located west of the harbor and was built on a cylindrical pedestal, where its total height from the sea surface is 27 meters, which allows the light beam of the Lighthouse to be visible from a distance of 24 nautical miles. Today, its operation is undertaken by the Lighthouse Service (Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2024).

The Delta of Evros

Another important attraction of Alexandroupolis, as well as of Evros is the Delta of Evros. It is one of the most important wetlands in Europe and most of it is included in the list of protected areas of the International Ramsar Convention (1971), because of the important species that it hosts. Also a part of the Delta is designated as a Special Protection Area and proposed as a Site of Community Interest in the network of Natura 2000 according to the Directives: (79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC). As the river Evros "spills" into the sea, lakes, lagoons and islands are created with an extremely rare microclimate and rich vegetation that is a refuge for rare bird species and animals (Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2024).

The thermal springs of ancient Traianoupolis

The hot thermal springs of Traianoupolis were a major attraction from ancient times. The old baths are comprised by two domed buildings of the 16th century, each having a tank and locker rooms. The new baths began to be built in 1962 and were completed in 1964. They are located in the historic site of Traianoupolis, on the National Road, at a distance of 14 km from Alexandroupolis, on the way to the Greek-Turkish borders. Today, they are managed by the Tourist Curative Company of the municipality of Alexandroupolis (<https://www.allovergreece.com/Thermal-Spring/Descr/16/en>).

The National Park of Dadia forest

The National Park of Dadia-Levkimi-Soufli forest is one of the most important protected areas at national, European and international level. Its name comes from the village of Dadia, the picturesque settlement 67 km north of Alexandroupolis, where the forest begins. It offers hikers an unforgettable refreshing contact with the nature of northern Greece. The forest spreads untamed over a series of hills at the mouth of the Rhodope. In the forest of Dadia the visitor has the opportunity to observe some of the rarest species of birds and species of raptors. Generally, 219 species have been recorded in the area, 40 species of reptiles and amphibians, 36 species of mammals, as well as rare plants (https://www.visitgreece.gr/experiences/nature/forests/dadia_forest/). However, due to the recent fires during the summer of 2023, the forest suffered irreparable damage. It is estimated that almost 60% of the total area of the forest was burnt and it will take at least 80 years to be restored.

The surrounding area of Alexandroupolis

In general, the surrounding area of Alexandroupolis includes a fairly satisfactory level of infrastructure. First of all, it is important the fact that there is one of the annexes of the Democritus University of Thrace, which includes four departments, contributing significantly to the academic, economic and social development of the region. Also, near to the centre of the city is located, the General University Hospital of Alexandroupolis, which thanks to its modern infrastructure and experienced staff adequately serves the needs of the residents of the region (<https://pgna.gr/>). In addition, the existence of the State Airport “Democritus”, which is located 7 km from the centre of the city and specifically on the E90 highway, which connects Greece with Turkey, is a comparative advantage of the region, facilitating the transportation of locals and tourists. Furthermore, an important characteristic of the city’s surrounding area are the number of coasts that there are (Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2024).

Most beaches are located near to the urban fabric of the city. Some of the most well known beaches are N. Chili’s beach which is only 3km. from the city’s centre, the beach of Metamorphosis Sotiras which is 2km. from the city, the beach of Greek National Tourism Organization which is located west of the city (on the outskirts of Alexandroupolis) and the municipal beach of Alexandroupolis which is only a few minutes from the city. It is worth mentioning that the municipal beach of Alexandroupolis it has been awarded with a blue flag (<https://greece.terrabook.com/el/evros/chapter/paralies/>). Another important city’s advantage is that there is a modern network of footpaths, which is constantly expanding. It is worth mentioning that more than 300 cycling routes have been recorded in the Municipality of Alexandroupolis, while it has been characterized as the friendliest municipality for cycling in Greece (Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2024).

Institutional framework for the protection of Alexandroupolis

The residential development of Alexandroupolis has been aligned from the early beginning with the guidelines and principles of urban planning. However, this does not mean that the modern city does not face challenges. According to the current General Urban Plan (25903/5885/19.10. 1999 - Government Gazette 844/D/1999 Decision of the Ministry of Environment) and later with the decision: 8985/879/(Government Gazette 210/AAP/2010-08-03) the residential complex of Alexandroupolis is structured in 4 Urban Planning Units: the Unit of Avantas (which includes the settlements of Maistro and Apalo), the Unit of Exopolis, the Unit of Kallithea and the Unit of N. Chilis. According to the proposals of the new General Urban Plan, which is currently in the B1 drafting phase, a number of special zones are to be added to the existing residential area of the city (Operational Program of the Municipality of Alexandroupolis, 2021).

Important projects financed by E.U.

One of the most important city’s projects financed by E.U. is the project of “Vertical axis of the Egnatia Highway Ardanio - Ormenio: Bypass works of the settlement of Provatonas”. The new alignment bypasses the settlement from the east and the communication between the new alignment and the settlement is through the corresponding Level Crossing. As it is mentioned the project significantly improves the speed and the safety of travel, while facilitates the commercial travel, resolving an intense problem that has been pending for the last 10 years (<https://www.evros-news.gr/>).

Another significant one is the project of promotion - utilization of the historical warehouses of O.S.E. in the city’s port, which is included in the NSRF 2014-2020 (PEP East

Macedonia-Thrace) and is part of the implementation of the Sustainable Urban Development Strategies of the municipality of Alexandroupolis. The implementation of the project aims at the reconstruction of the three buildings and specifically aims at the rehabilitation and the expansion of the existing warehouses, in order to be used for recreational purposes (<https://www.gnomionline.gr/ton-aprilio-tou-24-i-oloklirosi-ton-ergasion-apokatastasis-ton-apothikon-tou-ose/>).

In addition, another important project which is also included in the Sustainable Urban Development Strategies of the municipality of Alexandroupolis is the restoration project of the beach area of Alexandroupolis. With this project is completed the restoration of the landscape of the coastal zone as well as the environmental upgrading of the area with the creation of new green spaces, a playground and a promenade (<https://sbaa.alexpolis.gr/>).

Finally, the redevelopment project of the western land zone of the port of Alexandroupolis, is considered very important and is also included in the Sustainable Urban Development Strategies of the municipality of Alexandroupolis. With the implementation of the project, the coastal zone is reformed, contributing to continuation of the urban fabric of the city with the sea and vice versa, thus providing residents with a variety of outdoor recreational activities (<https://sbaa.alexpolis.gr/>).

Local economy and employment in Alexandroupolis

According to the data of the *table 2*, the Municipality of Alexandroupolis has the highest rate of employed people, which corresponds to 52% of the employed in the Regional Unit of Evros.

Distribution of employed in Evros	Number of employed	%
Municipality of Alexandroupolis	25,044	52%
Municipality of Didymoteicho	5,334	11%
Municipality of Orestiada	12,657	26%
Municipality of Samothrace	937	2%
Municipality of Soufli	4,471	9%

Table 2: Distribution of employed in Evros. (Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011).

Moreover, the data of following table (*table 3*) show that the highest percent of employed are work in the tertiary sector, which includes the wholesale and retail trade, transport and storage services, accommodation and food services, administrative and supportive activities, public administration and social security, education, as well as activities related to human health and care. As it is shown from the data of the table, the highest employment rates in the tertiary sector is gathered in the sectors of public administration and defense, wholesale and retail trade, education and human health and social work activities. Consequently, there are fewer employment rates in the secondary sector, especially in the construction sector, while the primary sector (agriculture, forestry and fishing) is even less developed.

Distribution of employed by sector of economic activity	
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	1.897
Construction sector	1.248
Wholesale and retail trade	3.640
Transport and storage	890

Accommodation and food services	1.570
Administrative and supportive activities	420
Public administration and defense	6.140
Education	2.393
Human health and health care activities	2.376
Other sectors	4.470

Table 2: Distribution of employed by sector of economic activity. (Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011).

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that in recent years there has been a significant increase in the city’s tourism development, which encourages the development of entrepreneurial activities. Alexandroupolis is considered a popular tourist destination, due to its strong geographical position, modern infrastructure and its special natural and cultural resources, attracting different groups of tourists. However, it should be noted that the city’s tourism development is mainly focused on coastal tourism and takes place mainly during the summer months, which reinforces seasonal employment (<https://www.evros24.gr/i-alexandroupoli-metatrepetai-se-must-pr/>).

2. Methodology

Methodological approach and instruments used

For the purposes of the study a quantitative approach was chosen, using a well-structured questionnaire that was consisted of 12 closed-type questions and was anonymous and addressed exclusively to adults.

Data collection methods

Due to the limited time of the research and the geographical distance, the questionnaires were collected through the Google forms platform, between October and November of 2023 and as sampling method was chosen the snowball sampling either personally or via e-mail.

Population and sampling method

The total sample of the research was reached at 156 participants, comprised of both locals and visitors of Alexandroupolis, in order to be explored their views on certain characteristics that affect the physiognomy of the city. The sampling method that was chosen was the snowball sampling, with some of the questionnaires were administered personally, while most of them were administered using the post or by e-mail.

Data Analysis

The MS Excel was used for the procession of the frequency distributions.

3. Empirical results

Discussion

The demographic information of the respondents is presented in Table 3. As can be seen there is a good analogy between men (46%) and women (54%), with the majority of the participants being female. Also, the majority of the respondents were between the age of 18-39 years old.

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	71	46
Female	85	54
<i>Age</i>		
18-30	59	38
31-40	56	36
41-50	18	11
51-60	15	10
Above 60 years	8	5

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of respondents. (Source: Author’s calculations)

According to the following table (table 4) the most characteristic city’s trees are cypress with (34%) and the pine tree with (30%).

Characteristic tree of the city	Frequency	%
Eucalyptus	27	17
Chestnut tree	18	12
Laurel	11	7
Cypress	53	34
Pine tree	47	30

Table 4: Characteristic tree of the city. (Source: Author’s calculations)

Moreover, the data of the (table 5) show that the city’s characteristic dish of local cuisine is Kavourmas with (42%). However, it seems that the steaming “vatos” is another typical dish of the city’s local cuisine with (39%).

Characteristic food of local cuisine	Frequency	%
Kavourmas	66	42
“Mpampo”	13	10
steaming “vatos”	61	39
Barbara's sweet	16	9

Table 5: Characteristic food of local cuisine. (Source: Author’s calculations)

The results of the following table (table 6) show that the most characteristic sound of the city is the sound of the ships (in the port), with (52%).

Characteristic sound of the city	Frequency	%
The sound of the waves (from the sea)	32	20
The sound of the ships (in the port)	81	52
The sound from the cars	43	28

Table 6: Characteristic sound of the city. (Source: Author’s calculations)

In addition, according to the results of the table 7, it seems that the most characteristic festivals/events of the city is the “Eleftheria festival” (35%) and the international exhibition of Alexpo (30%).

Characteristic festival /event of the city	Frequency	%
“Eleftheria” festival	54	35
Street Art festival	19	12
The book festival	36	23
The international exhibition "Alexpo"	47	30

Table 7: Characteristic festival /event of the city. (Source: Author’s calculations)

Also, the table 8 shows that the most characteristic personality of the city is Konstantinos Alimantzis with (35%).

Characteristic Personality of the city	Frequency	%
Konstantinos Alimantzis	55	35
Charalambos Kalpakas	29	19
Athanasios Spanos	4	3
Aggelos Poimenidis	13	8
Achilleas Samothrakis	32	20
Antonios Leontaridis	23	15

Table 8: Characteristic Personality of the city. (Source: Author’s calculations)

Moreover, the results of the (table 9) show that all the buildings that were selected to be examined are characteristic samples of the city’s architecture.

Characteristic building of the city	Frequency	%
The municipal library of Alexandroupolis (the former building of the tobacco store)	32	21
The former building of Zarifeios Educational Academy	35	22
The Ethnological Museum of Thrace	38	24
The warehouses of Alexandroupolis port	31	20
The ecclesiastical museum (the former building of Leondaridios school)	20	13

Table 9: Characteristic building of the city. (Source: Author’s calculations)

As can be seen from the data of the (table 10), the vast majority of people (55%) believe that the benchmark of the city is the lighthouse of Alexandroupolis.

The city's benchmark	Frequency	%
The lighthouse of Alexandroupolis	86	55
The delta of Evros	38	24
The national park of the forest Dadia	23	15
The thermal springs of ancient Traianoupolis	9	6

Table 10: The city's benchmark. (Source: Author’s calculations)

Furthermore, the results of the (table 11) show that all the projects that were selected to be examined are considered important for the city.

Most Important city’s project financed by E.U.	Frequency	%
The project of highlighting and utilizing the port's historic warehouses	35	23
The reconstruction project of Alexandroupolis beach	38	24

The project of the vertical axis of Egnatia Road Ardano - Ormenio: Provatona bypass works	35	22
The project of redevelopment of the western land area of the port of Alexandroupolis	48	31

Table 11: Most Important city's projects financed by E.U. (Source: Author's calculations)

The next table (*table 12*) shows that the city's most negative characteristics are the traffic congestion (31%), the lack of urban green spaces (25%) and the low tourist visibility of the city (25%).

Most negative city's characteristic	Frequency	%
The traffic congestion	48	31
The lack of urban green spaces	40	25
The low tourist visibility of the city	39	25
Poor air quality	17	11
Noise pollution	12	8

Table 12: Most negative city's characteristic. (Source: Author's calculations)

Finally, the table 13 shows that the city's most positive characteristics are her geographical position (39%) and her rich natural environment (30%).

Most positive city's characteristic	Frequency	%
Its rich natural environment	46	30
Its infrastructure	9	6
Its attractions	24	15
Its local cuisine	16	10
Its geographical position	61	39

Table 13: Most positive city's characteristic. (Source: Author's calculations)

4. Conclusions

The empirical findings show that the views of the respondents are generally agree with the information that are presented in the literature review, showing that some specific characteristics are highly connected with the physiognomy of Alexandroupolis. However, from the empirical results were emerged some negative characteristics that significantly affect the physiognomy of the city. The main problems that emerged are the traffic congestion, the lack of urban green spaces and the low tourist visibility of the city, which must be taken into consideration. In conclusion, it is essential local authorities, businesses and residents protect and promote the physiognomy of Alexandroupolis, since it is considered a basic principle for the sustainable development of the city.

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