

THE FORMATION OF THE PHYSIOGNOMY OF THE CITY OF THIVA. 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 carried out by the Department of Economics and Sustainable Development of Harokopio University. The aim is to investigate the factors that contribute to the formation of this physiognomy and the opinion of residents and visitors on the issues in question. As a case study, the city of Thiva is chosen. In order to answer the main questions of the work and to investigate the main factors that shape the physiognomy of the city of Thiva a survey was carried out aimed at the residents of and visitors to the city. For the needs of the research, a questionnaire was created which included ten (10) closed-type structured response questions, was anonymous and distributed to 156 people. The research was carried out in the months of October and November 2023. The questionnaire was addressed exclusively to adults, aged 18 to 65. The paper concludes with interesting conclusions and proposals. An important conclusion is that in order to protect the special physiognomy of the city of Thiva strategies related to the more general protection of all issues related to its sustainable development should be implemented. It is proposed that both the local government, as well as the businesses of all service and production branches, work towards the protection and highlighting of the special character of the city of Thiva.

Keywords: *Physiognomy of the city, sustainable development, the city of Thiva*

Introduction

In studying the ‘physiognomy’ of a place, one must firstly distinguish the term from similar concepts such as the ‘character’ (Mitoula, 2012). The physiognomy does not simply refer to the characteristics that compose a place, but rather it is a dynamic process which includes the way people occupy and interact with it, as well as the idea and image they create for it. Namely, the physiognomy of a place encompasses its “collective consciousness and culture” (I. & I. Stefanou, 1999). It is also important to identify the role of the ‘outline’ (I. & I. Stefanou, 1999) in framing the physiognomy of a place, that comes with the need for the selection of information which is deemed important to capture its essence. This means by default that a foreground and a background is formed by said selection of features; there are those that are chosen to be included inside the outline and those that are left outside of it. This essay attempts to fabricate not only the character, but rather to illustrate the physiognomy of the city of Thiva through secondary as well as quantitative primary research and observation. Throughout this study, it is also attempted to introspect and unpack the selection process itself that has gone into building an outline of the city.



[1] *Topography of Thivaikos Kampos (2008), Vassilis Thalassinos
pencil on paper 20cmx 30cm*

Methodology

My study on the city of Thiva consists of both secondary and primary research methods for data collection. The former is used as a starting point to firstly gather information about the city of Thiva. The secondary research findings are then enriched by field study with personal observation and quantitative primary research in the form of anonymous questionnaires, created in google forms and distributed to 152 people in 2 Facebook groups. A limitation worth mentioning here, created by the choice of a virtual medium for the questionnaires, is the inadequate reach to senior citizens. This was attempted to be resolved and attain a representative sample by contacting the local Care Centre for the Elderly, which unfortunately did not work out.

The questionnaire comprises of 14 questions in total, regarding the participants' beliefs about the distinctive characteristics of the city of Thiva, the first 3 questions of which concern data such as age, gender and participants' relation to the city. The next 6 questions are closed-ended multiple-choice questions, followed by 3 open-ended ones, all concerning distinctive features of the city. The last two questions are optional and refer to the participants' evaluation of the questionnaire as to whether they felt it fulfilled their expectations as well as were given the opportunity to mention anything that might have been missed in the questions. The majority of the respondents were locals (67%), 23% of the participants had origins in Thiva, 4,6% had no relation to Thiva, 3,9% had lived in the city for a period of their life and 1,3% were visitors. The sample of respondents, ranging from 18 to 61 years old (30% 31-40, 30% 41-50, 19% 18-30, 18% 51-60 and 3% 61+) and were 67% women, 32% men and 1% queer.

When considered necessary, specific respondents' characteristics, such as their relation to the city, were taken into account in responses. The combination of the two different types of methodologies (secondary and primary) utilised in the present study have come to shed light on existing differences between found knowledge and the locals' experience of the city.

Secondary Research

Geographical Determination of the City of Thiva

The city of Thiva is located in the municipality of Thiva which belongs to the region of Sterea Ellada and specifically in the regional unit of Voiotia. According to Kallikratis Programme (law 3852/2010 of 2010) the municipality of Thiva now encompasses the municipality of Thisvi, Vagia and Plataies. It is located east of the municipality of Tanagra and west of the municipality of Livadeia, Aliartos and Orchomenos. At its north borders is located the municipality of Chalkida, which belongs to the region of Evoia and at its south it is surrounded by the gulf of Corinth. The municipality of Thiva is the largest in surface area and highest in population in the regional unit of Voiotia, with 822.92 sq. meters out of 3,211 sq. meters and 32.410 permanent residents out of Voitia's 106.056, according to the last population census in 2021. Since the previous population census in 2011, there is a decline of -11,1% in the municipality of Thiva compared to the decline of -10,1% in Voiotia and that of -7,1% in Sterea Ellada. (ELSTAT).



[2] Map of the municipal units of Voiotia

The city of Thiva is located in the western side of the municipality of Thiva at a similar distance from the sea on both sides. It is connected to several major roads including the Motorway 1 (A1) (Athens-Thessaloniki-Evzonoï), which belongs to the European Route E75 (neaodos.gr), the Old National Road (Thiva-Athens) (E962) that connects Attiki Odos to Thiva, the National Road 3 (EO3) (Elefsina-Niki) that connects Thiva to northern Greece and the EO44 (Thiva-Lepoura). Thiva is a small provincial city and is near two large cities; Athens at a distance of 94,5 kilometres and approximately 1 hour by car, and Chalkida at a distance of 45,9 kilometres and approximately 40 minutes by car via EO44 (himmera.com).

Geophysical Determination of the City of Thiva

The municipality of Thiva has a variety of landscapes such as mountainous, lowland and coastal areas, with the lowland area covering its most part. This area ranges from +145 meters in altitude (peak of Xironomi) up to +382 meters (peak of Plataies). On its southwest side towards the gulf of Corinth, the municipality is also bordered by the mountain of Elikonas (+1,748 meters in altitude), Mouses mountain and Kithaironas (+1,409 meters in altitude) in its southeast. (DEYATH, 2021). Ipato mountain is located on the east side of the city of Thiva with an altitude of +730 meters, which is considered a lower mountainous area (visitthiva.gr). The coastal regional units of Thisvi with Thisvi, Domvraina, Chostia, Ellopia and Xironomi and the regional unit of Plataies with Plataies, Leuktra, Loutoufi, Melissochori and Kaparelli, are all located on the south borders of the municipality of Thiva. The city of Thiva has an

altitude of +180 meters (DEYATH, 2021), situated on a hilly area with numerous acclivities and downslopes throughout its streets.

The municipality of Thiva has a strong primary production sector in its flatlands, where potatoes and onions are cultivated and delivered to numerous greek cities, as well as some grains, cotton and vineyard in the flatland of Vagia. On its southeast side, the city of Thiva borders to the forest of Moshopodi with the theatre “Melina Merkouri” at a distance of 2.7 kilometres and about 40 minutes by foot. The forest area covers around 5,000 acres and it is mainly even, with three prominent hills; Megali and Mikri Psilorachi located at its centre as well as Koumerki hill in its north side and Soros hill in the east.



[4] The map of Moshopodi forest and surrounding area (Makri and Vakalopoulou, 2016)



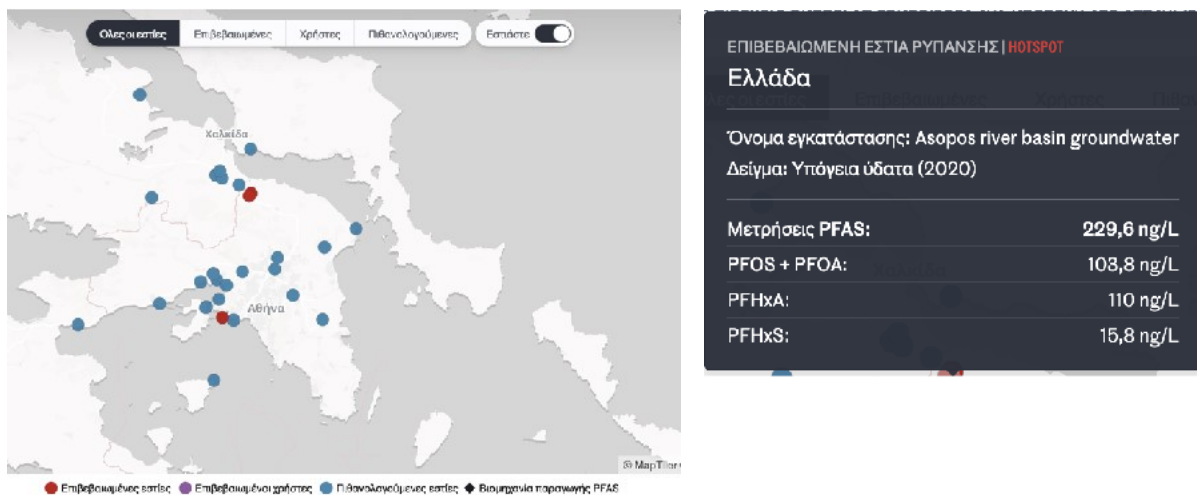
[5] Two examples of rare species growing in Moshopodi forest: Tulipa Undulatifolia (left) and Linum Leukanthum (right) (Makri and Vakalopoulou, 2016)

The forest of Moshopodi contains a great variety of flora with about 240 different species belonging to 62 different families and 9 rare native species, as recorded in 2003 (Makri and Vakalopoulou, 2016). Its volunteer flora includes brushwoods in dryer lands and oak trees and campanula at mountainous dry areas. In more humid and deeper soil one can find Mediterranean bushes and at the side of creeks there are fig trees and ivy plants. However, since the 1960s and up to this day, there has been consistent afforestation of the area, either by

the local forest service, the army which is neighbouring to the area, as well as citizens and especially students during school excursions. This has led to the prevalence of several species of conifer trees such as aleppo, pine trees and cypress. There is also variety of fauna found in the area such as small mammals like rabbits and foxes, as well as birds and reptiles.

Since 2020 the area has been utilised as an athletic tourist destination with the event “Moshopodi Trail”, a two-day event, which takes place yearly. The festival entails a variety of races for all ages around the forest, as well as a concert that takes place at “Melina Merkouri” theatre, gathering visitors not only from the city of Thiva but also numerous foreign tourists, with participants reaching more than a thousand last year (moschopodiexperience.gr).

In the greater area of the municipality of Thiva, at a distance of approximately 7.5 kilometres to the northeast of the city of Thiva, two lakes are located, Yliki and Paralimni, which belong to the Natura 2000 area. One of the two lakes, Yliki, is used as an emergency water supply system for Athens. There is a significant amount of flora and fauna found in both lakes and especially in Paralimni, which is part of the migration passage of birds in the area. There are also two rivers in the area; Viotikos Kifissos at a distance of 60 kilometres from Thiva and Asopos river at 57 kilometres. The latter presents high pollution rates with the presence of PFAS (Per- and Polyfluorinated substances) or ‘forever pollution’ as it is called due to the strength of their bonds and the resulting difficulty to be broken down from the environment.



[6] Map and metrics of ‘forever pollution’ in Europe (reportersunited.gr)

The gulf of Corinth, bordering the municipality of Thiva in its south side, although it belongs to the Natura 2000 network, the coastal areas show high rates of pollution due to the heavily industrialised area of Thisvi with numerous factories present.

History of the City of Thiva

Cadmeia, the acropolis of Thiva is said to have been built by Cadmus and taken his name, according to mythology. The acropolis was built on seven hills and was surrounded by a wall that had seven gates; Elektrai, Homoloides, Proitides, Ogygiai, Borraiai, Neistai, Hypsistai, (evloukas.gr). Thiva was most prominent during the Mycenaean period and specifically, in the Late Bronze Age (1,600-1,100 BC) although first traces of human settlement in the area are linked to the Early Bronze Age (3,2000-2,000 BC) (mthv.gr). The Classical period (478-323 BC) is characterised by many battles and defeat for the city of Thiva, yet with the blooming of the Arts like Aeschylus tragedy ‘Seven Against Thebes’ and Sophocles’ ‘Oedipus Rex’ and ‘Antigone’. During this period, the city gained hegemony (371-364 BC) and the battle of Leuktra is known for Epameinondas’ ‘Loxi Phalanx’, an innovative tactic that led to victory

in battle (ekivolos.gr). There are numerous archaeological sites left from this period around the city center, yet most of them have not been excavated. During the Middle Byzantine period (867-1,204) there was a great number of churches and monasteries built, like the church of Saint Ionannis Kaloktenis and the church of Evangelist Loukas. These monuments could attract alternative forms of tourism of religious interest, engaging visitors both culturally as well as enabling connection to nature (visitthiva.gr). After the catastrophe of Smyrna in 1922, there were refugees that settled in the city. Specifically, one can find the old refugee settlement in Thiva, with 272 units covering an area of 25.950 sq. metres. Stone buildings closely built together, with evident subsequent parts added to them that make the passing of cars through the streets in the area especially difficult, if not at times impossible. Most units were built without the space for a kitchen or a bathroom, which made the later additions -that take up the space of sidewalks and common spaces- necessary in order to cover residents' basic needs. Despite a proposal to redevelop the area following a moderate approach made in 1986-87, the issue did not have followthrough. The poor conditions in its construction and lack of technical buildings' equipment, was accompanied however, by a strong social cohesion and lifestyle of its residents and its unique character reveals, still to this day, its complex history (Loukopoulos, et.al., 1990).

Cultural Heritage

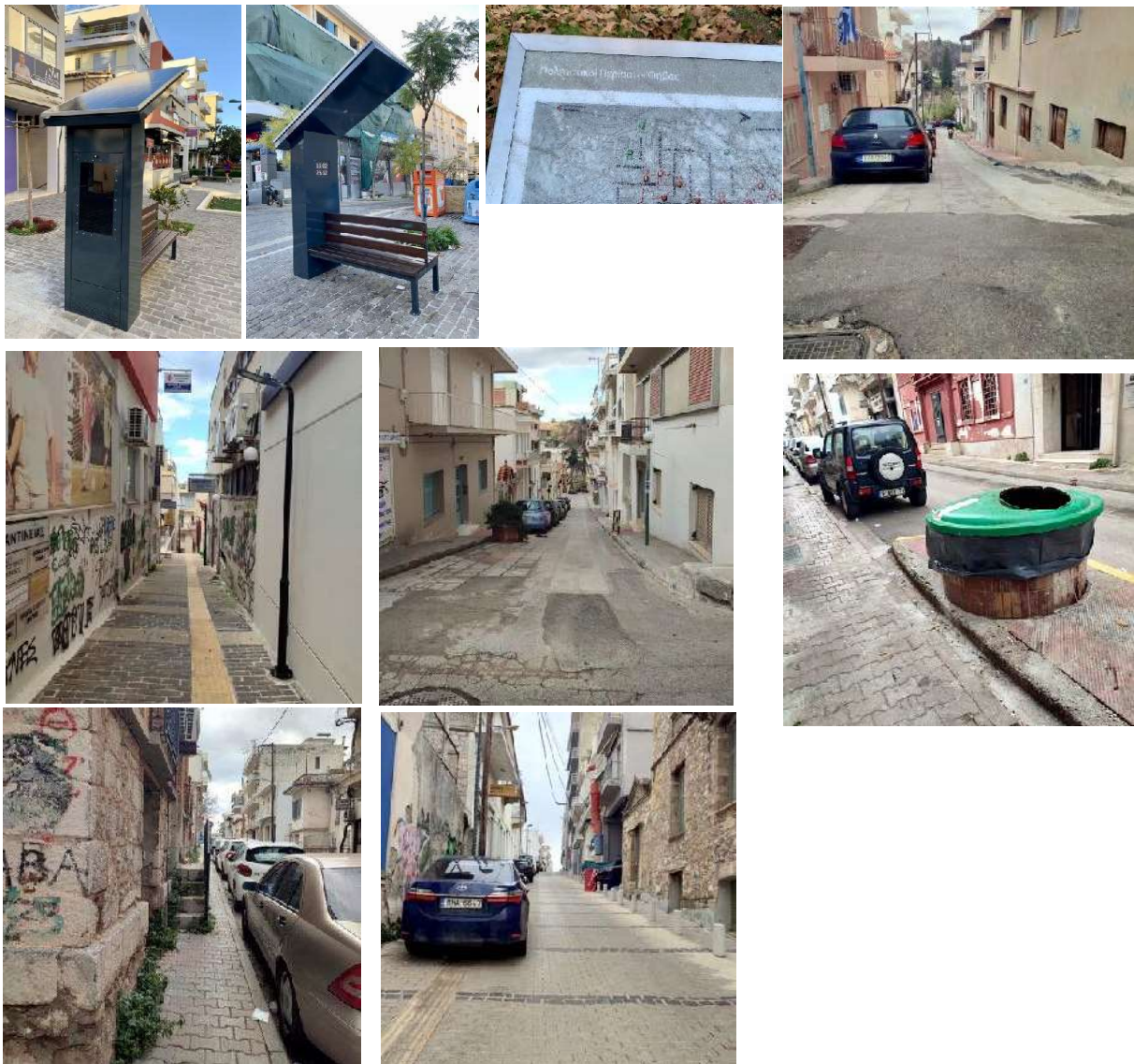
The culture of a place has both material and immaterial aspects that can act in a community-bonding manner, providing the opportunity to people to come in contact with its particularities and its history, as well can act as a point of attraction to visitors. Aside from the aforementioned, there are several organised structures, activities and initiatives worth mentioning. For one, the establishment and gradual development of the Archeological Museum of Thiva is a vital structure to the city and its history that curates valuable knowledge and a rich culture in an accessible way. Additionally, the organised cultural walks and heritage routes, such as the Green Cultural Routes that include sightseeing and workshops supported by the Archaeological Museum of Thiva, offer an experiential way of learning (mthv.gr). Multiple EU-funded archaeological site excavations have been , such as the 'Restoration and enhancement of the archaeological site of Cadmeio of Thiva', 'Intervention connecting the historic center of the city of Thiva to the forest of Moshopodi', the 'Restoration and enhancement of the archaeological site of the Electrai Gates of Thiva', the 'Restoration and enhancement of the archaeological site of Sanctuary of Hercules of Thiva' and the 'Restoration and enhancement of the neoclassical house (former Zioma house) of Thiva', all revealing great interest and the recognition of the significance of their promotion (ypodomes.com).

Another aspect that adds to the particular feel of the city of Thiva are its cultural events, such as 'Vlahikos Gamos' (Vlach Wedding), a yearly custom taking place on Clean Monday with themes around fertility and rebirth. The event includes a satirical dialogue, Pyrrhichios dance and music -to name a few activities- and it has been registered in the National Index of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture. The tradition has travelled all the way to Thiva from Vlach peasants, native to the area of Aspropotamos and was set in place in the city of Thiva due its satirical and playful nature which evoke elements of a Dionysian celebration. Other cultural events include the fair of Thiva 'Emporopanigiri', with numerous merchants selling local products, and the tradition of gourounopoula (skewed pork), Pindareia, as well as an arts and music event taking place in the square and at the "Melina Merkouri" theatre as well as the summer festival Epameinondeia (visitthiva.gr).

Primary Research

Field Study: Observation

During my visit in the city of Thiva, the hilly nature of the landscape was highly noticeable when walking around the city centre, with streets often having a high incline and decline. There is also evidence of poor city planning caused by uncontrolled building, a characteristic found in several greek provincial cities. Examples include narrow streets meant for cars which make their passing difficult (see below: bottom left picture), inconsistent road paving (see below: top left and top right picture) staircases that interrupt sidewalks (see below: bottom middle picture) and out of place road structures (see below: bottom right picture). On the other hand, an aspect of the city center that draws attention in a pleasant way, is the endless greenery that meets the eye when looking through its alleys (see below: top left and top right picture) as well as the town square, which is a lively area filled with coffee shops, restaurants and people occupying public space.



The city centre has a variety of plants and trees, with sycamore trees being prominent. There also seem to be adequate waste management facilities in the city centre, such as designated bins for clothing and oil recycling (see below: bottom right picture). Furthermore, there have been installed two ‘smart solar benches’ in the pedestrian walkway of

Emacinondas street, that include charging stations with usb ports, as well as an outlet for charging an electric wheelchairs as well as speakers providing information to visitors (see below: left and middle picture). Another point worth mentioning here, are the maps annotating the cultural walks around the city, some of which however have been damaged or shattered (see below: top right picture).

Results of Questionnaires

In the first question ‘what is the most characteristic plant of Thiva?’ the most predominant responses are the onion and the potato with 39% and 35% accordingly, (followed by the sycamore tree with 14%, the grapevine with 8% and the cotton plant with 4%). In regards to the most distinctive monument of Thiva, most respondents selected the with a 38,2% was said to be the Gates of Cadmeia (followed by a 21,7% of responses for Cadmeion Mycenaean Palace, 17,1% for the church of Saint Ioannis Kaloktenis, 3,3% for Timnos of Amfeion and 2,6% for the Temple of Isminios Apollonas). When the participants were asked about the most characteristic cultural event of Thiva there was a significant majority of 70% selecting Vlahikos Gamos (Vlach Wedding) (23% for Pindareia, 3% for the tradition of Gourounopoula, another 3% for the fair of Thiva (Emporopanigiri), 1% for Epameinondia). The next question was an open-ended one regarding the most characteristic sound of the city, which is thought to be musical instruments associated with Vlahikos Gamos (Vlach Wedding), such as pipiza (flute), the tambourine and the clarinet (20% traffic sounds, 16% nature (wind, silence, birds) and another 16% N/A). The most characteristic dish is thought to be Roast Lamb (Provatina) with 69% (followed by 30% of responses for pork (gourounopoula), 1% legumes and 1% N/A). The most famous personality associated with the city of Thiva was found to be Epameinondas with 45,4% (followed by a 22,4% of responses for Oedipus, 13,8% for Pindaros, 9,2% for Antigoni, 2% for Pelopidas and 2% for Pantelis Pouliopoulos and 1,3% for Heraklis). The most important EU-funded project is considered to be the ‘Restoration and enhancement of the archaeological site of Cadmeio of Thiva’ with a 44% (followed by a 23% for ‘Intervention connecting the historic center of the city of Thiva to the forest of Moshopodi’, 14% for the ‘Redevelopment of Polyneikos St. in front of the archaeological sites of Elektrai Gates and Sanctuary of Hercules of the Municipality of Thiva’, 8% for the ‘Restoration and enhancement of the archaeological site of the Electrai Gates of Thiva’, 5% for the ‘Restoration and enhancement of the archaeological site of Sanctuary of Hercules of Thiva’ and 5% for the ‘Restoration and enhancement of the neoclassical house in Thiva (former Zioma house)’.

The following two open-ended questions refer to the believed most negative and most positive characteristic associated with the city of Thiva and were placed into categories and in some cases further divided into subcategories in corresponding percentages. The two prevailing answers in regards to the most negative characteristic of Thiva is shown to be the residents’ mentality with a 24%, and the city planning with a percentage of 23%, 70% of which refer to parking and 30% to the road network (followed by an 18% for not taking advantage of the the rich history of the city, another 18% for its proximity to Athens, 11% for the non-integrated Roma community and 7% for its lack of cleanliness). As for the most positive characteristic of the city the predominant answer refers to its location 34%, with 50% of the answers mentioning its proximity to Athens as a positive feature (followed by 27% to the history of the place, its cultural heritage and archaeological sites, 14% for its natural beauty, 11% for the peace found in a small and quiet city, 10% for the Arcaheological Museum of Thiva, and 5% for its residents).

As far as the fulfilment of respondents regarding the present questionnaire, 49% said they are completely satisfied, 41% answered they were somewhat satisfied, 6% said they were somewhat dissatisfied and 1% said they were not satisfied with the questions. When it comes

to the last question with the opportunity to add something, many amplified some reoccurring themes such as parking and amelioration of streets, connection of the city to its natural surroundings such as the Moshopodi forest, lake Yliki and Mornos canal and mentioned the creation of a public nursery, the emphasis that can be put on religious and athletic tourism and the Smyrna settlement.

Analysis

The highest percents in responses concerning the most characteristic plants being the onion and the potato, are supported by secondary research due to the extensive cultivation of both plants in the flatlands surrounding the city. Similarly, prevailing answers regarding the most distinctive monument are also congruent to secondary research findings in that Cadmeia is well known and inextricably linked to the city's history and myth of its creation. Similarly, the cultural event Vlahikos Gamos which holds the majority of responses as the most characteristic of the city, seems to be a community-bonding experience with satire and humour as one of its important components. However, as it is evident in the results, this event -that could potentially act as an attraction to visitors- is not well-known to participants who have no relation to Thiva. Regarding the next question, in order to avoid to limit responses to specific directions, the most distinctive sound of the city was left open-ended. This however, led to a smaller sample of answers, as a portion (16%) of responses did not offer an opinion. Results for the most characteristic sound of Thiva is in accordance to the previously stated predominant belief of the Vlahikos Gamos being an important cultural aspect of the physiognomy of Thiva for its residents. Another point worth making here, is the divide of answers when it comes to whether the city is noisy (20% traffic and associated sounds) or quiet (16% nature), data that does not allow for a conclusive answer. In regards to the most well-known dish of Thiva, results show a prevalence of the roast lamb, an answer which, however, is mainly stated as by locals, possibly meaning that it the city is not known for this dish. In regards to the most prominent personality affiliated with Thiva being Epameinondas, is also an answer that could be expected due to the figure's contribution to the battle of Leuktra, an important event in greek history. What is interesting, however, is the visibly low percentage of answers (only 1,3%) pertaining to Heraklis and the city of Thiva. Despite the fact that Heraklis is possibly the most well-known out of all answers when it comes to greek history and mythology, there seems to be no evident linkage of the figure to the city. Such a connection, especially if executed creatively, could be an incentive to visitors. Numerous similar initiatives have taken place in cities around Greece, an example being that of Volos and the construction of a contemporary Argo as a tribute to Iasonas and the Argonauts, which managed to clearly establish a link to the figure, while adding to the cultural landscape of the city (hellenictrain.gr). However, a prevailing issue in the city of Thiva, that indicates not the lack of history to show forth, but the lack of actions taken regarding the above, are numerous EU-funded projects dedicated to the cultural sector to which I chose to focus on. Despite their existence being common knowledge, most archaeological sites have yet to be excavated from under hills throughout the city. Another aspect of the city highlighted in the second most selected response being the 'intervention connecting the historic center of the city of Thiva to the forest of Moshopodi', is how highly important the natural environment is deemed in city life.

In the two open-ended questions regarding Thiva's most negative and positive characteristics, previously mentioned topics are amplified, while the answers also bring forth contradictions. Specifically, regarding the most negative aspect of Thiva, a 24% of the answers state the biggest issue being the residents' mentality (yet 5% of answers consider it as its most positive characteristic) and an 11% mentioning the non-integrated Roma community

as a problem, which indicates incohesion in community. Another issue that is raised here is poor city planning, an observation also made by participants who have no relation to the city and an issue also supported by observation. The prevailing theme of the city's untapped historical and cultural potential is prevalent also in answers pertaining to its most negative characteristic and both answers regarding its most positive feature once again highlights the importance of its history (27%) and cultural saliency (10% for the Archaeological Museum of Thiva) to participants. Another contradiction emergent in the results is the proximity of Thiva to Athens which is stated both as the most negative (18%) yet also as the most positive characteristic (17%). Lastly, the city's surrounding natural beauty is emphasised in the answers with 14% stating it is its most positive characteristic.

Conclusions

The city of Thiva is a place with a lot of untapped potential in regards to its cultural heritage and archaeological sites, as well as problems when it comes to its planning, its economic flourishing caused by its proximity to two large cities and the pollution created by factories, all of which can be a source of disappointment and even frustration to its residents and people who have interest in accentuating its features. Despite its proximity to Athens, rarely do people choose Thiva as a touristic destination, possibly due to the above issues. Furthermore, there is a matter to be addressed regarding community cohesion and coexistence with the Roma minority, as emergent from the present study, which if tended to, could benefit greatly locals' everyday life. On the other hand, the city of Thiva is one of unique physiognomy which comes forth through events such as Vlahikos Gamos, the Moshopodi Trail and many other cultural events that combine different interests and could potentially lead to forms of alternative touristic interest.

Throughout this study, selected features to be addressed were repeatedly questioned as to what constitutes the 'foreground' and what is included in the outline for the physiognomy of the city of Thiva and attempts have been made to identify and contain potential personal biases. However, as it is not realistic to eliminate bias completely, it can be a serious limitation in cases of positions with influence and impact. Therefore, a personal observation is that it is important to carry out extensive research involving all parties that might be affected by a study aiming at the development of a place.

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