

**WORLD HERITAGE MONUMENTS AND THE CITY: SOME
PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE
MONUMENTS OF THESSALONIKI, GREECE**

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Abstract

The World Heritage Monuments (WHM) and sites constitute a special category of monuments. Being selected for inscription on the World Heritage List on the basis of certain criteria, they are considered of outstanding universal value. According to the World Heritage Convention each State Party shall endeavor “to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes”. In this way, Sustainable Development is introduced as the main axis for the protection and management of WHM, while improving the everyday life of the community is considered as a main goal of the implemented policy.

“Palaeochristian and Byzantine Monuments of Thessalonika”, inscribed on World Heritage List since 1988, is a group of monuments, which includes secular, military and mainly religious ones, an important number of fine churches scattered throughout the historic centre of the modern city. These monuments could be the main touristic attraction for the city, especially in the context of cultural tourism, while they continue to function regularly as places of worship.

The present paper aims to investigate the role of WHM in the economic and social life of the city of Thessaloniki and the degree to which they have contributed in improving the quality of citizens’ everyday life. For this purpose, a survey was conducted with questionnaires which address to certain groups, as well as semi-structured interviews with persons involved in the management of the city’s Unesco monuments. The survey is still in progress. The first results combined with a study of Unesco’s relevant documents as well with onsite investigation show that the impact of the WHM on the city’s life is not analogous to their international status. In this context, some preliminary remarks regarding the current management system are uttered and a proposal for a different approach is made, in view of the drafting of the site’s management plan.

Key words: management of World Heritage Monuments, Thessaloniki, Sustainable Development

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1.Introduction-Historical Outline.

Thessaloniki, the second largest Greek city, after the capital Athens, is located in Northern Greece and belongs to the geographical region of Macedonia (in the Administrative Region of Central Macedonia). It is built at the cove of Thermaikos Gulf, in a strategic position for communication and trade, controlling the trade routes from the Balkans to the Aegean Sea and

from the eastern coast of Asia (Asia Minor - modern Turkey) back to the Balkans, but also, via the sea, to the Adriatic Sea and the West. Apart from a strategic port, a fertile plain is formed to the west of the city, at the mouth of four rivers (Axios, Loudias, Gallic , Aliakmonas). In addition, the city 'touches' on Mount Chortiatis, while two lakes (Megali and Mikri Volvi) are located in the wider area to the east. These advantages of its geographical position and geomorphology were probably the criterion for its foundation during the Hellenistic period (315 B.C) by Alexander the Great's general and later king of the kingdom of Macedonia, Kassandros, and the basis for its economic and cultural development in the following years. They were, probably, also the reason why during its long history and despite the periods of decline, the city was never abandoned.

During the Roman period, the city flourished and became the seat of the eastern province of Macedonia and later the capital of the part of the empire (the system of tetrachy) ruled by Caesar Galerius (Trakasopoulou-Salakidou 1986, 40-42, Veleni 2009, 63-65). Testimonies of this glorious period of the city, the buildings erected by Galerius, remnants of which are more or less preserved to our days: the palace, the Hippodrome, the triumphal arch (Kamara) and probably the mausoleum of Galerius (Rotunda) (Veleni 2009, 74-75).

The prosperity of the city continued during the Byzantine period. The 5th century was a milestone in the history of the city, during which the defensive fortification of the city was constructed and magnificent temples were erected, typical examples of Byzantine temple architecture (Papazotos 1985, 9). The next great cultural heyday would come in the 14th century, when historical circumstances would allow Thessaloniki to play a leading role in this last period of the Byzantine Empire. This splendour would be reflected in the elaborate architecture of the temples of the period and the impressive paintings that adorned them, which would have a significant influence on the art of neighboring states (especially Serbia) (Papazotos 1985,14).

After the fall of the city to the Turks, its position in the region will continue to be important, as a main port of the Ottoman Empire. The Muslim monuments, secular or religious, erected at that time testify with their size and their grandeur the great importance and prestige of the city. A turning point in the 15th century was the arrival and settlement of a significant Jewish population (coming from Spain after the persecutions launched by Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain) which changed the composition of the population (Mazower 2005,47-49) and left its own imprint on the city's building stock. The multicultural Thessaloniki would continue its course through periods of prosperity and decline as a city of the Ottoman Empire until the beginning of the 20th century, when the Balkan wars would bring Thessaloniki into the territory of the Greek state and gradually eliminate its multi-ethnic character. The fire of 1917, which destroyed a significant part of the centre of the Ottoman city and its buildings (Mazower 2005,318-321) and the redesign of the city according to European standards⁷, had a decisive influence on the city's building stock and its subsequent form.

A second major natural disaster that would affect many buildings, including the city's monuments, occurred towards the end of the 20th century, in 1978, when a strong earthquake hit the city. In the meantime, the Greek-Jewish population of the city was exterminated by Nazis during the Second World War.

⁷The new design of Thessaloniki was made by Ernest Hebrard with the responsibility of a state appointed Committee consisting of Greek, French and British experts (Mazower 2005, 324, Yerolympos 2007).

In 1988⁸ (almost 37 years ago)⁹ the majority of the monuments belonging to the prosperity phases of the Byzantine era, were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List under the title “Palaeochristian and Byzantine Monuments of Thessalonika”, on the basis of specific criteria (i,ii,iv)¹⁰. This international recognition of the historical and artistic importance of Thessaloniki’s monuments created many opportunities for the monuments and the city of Thessaloniki but also many obligations for the administrative bodies and eventually for the Greek state to fulfil regarding their protection and management.¹¹

2.Thessaloniki’s World Heritage Monuments-some observations.

Thessaloniki’s World Heritage Site comprises fifteen (15) monuments dating back to the Early Christian and Byzantine periods, from the 4th to the 15th century. Most of them are Byzantine churches¹², while the secular buildings are limited to the Byzantine fortifications (the 4km long city walls and the Acropolis fortress called “Heptapyrgio”), the emblematic monument of Rotunda (Roman construction with Early Christian mosaics), probably originally a funerary building (see above), and a Byzantine bath unique to the period¹³.

The World Heritage Monuments (WHM) of Thessaloniki have some specific characteristics:

1.First of all their great number. Thessaloniki with its fifteen WH monuments is one of the European cities with the greater concentration of Unesco monuments¹⁴.

2.Secondly, the great dispersion of the monuments throughout the urban fabric. Unlike the historic city centres or other Unesco designated groups of monuments that form ensembles¹⁵, the World Heritage Monuments of Thessaloniki are scattered within the boundaries of the so-called "historic centre", the commercial heart of the modern city. This area, bounded by Pavlou Mela Street to the east, Kassandrou Street to the north, the Western

⁸The World Heritage Convention was ratified by law in 1981 (Law 1126/1981) and the first Greek inscription on the list took place in 1986. It was an ancient Greek temple of the classical period, the temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae of Figaleia (Peloponnese).

⁹ We cannot fail to mention the article of Demetrios Zygomas (Zygomas 2023) which also deals with the WHM of Thessaloniki and the impact of their status but sets different axis of examination.

¹⁰**Criterion (i):** The mosaics of the Rotunda, Saint Demetrius and Hosios David’s (Latomou Monastery) are among the great masterpieces of Early Christian art. **Criterion (ii):** The influence of the Thessalonian churches on the development of the monumental arts was considerable first in the Byzantine and later the Serbian world, whether in the Early Christian period, the Middle Byzantine era or the Palaeologan Renaissance. **Criterion (iv):** The Christian monuments of Thessalonika are outstanding examples of churches built according to central, basilical and transitional architectural types over a period going from the 4th to the 15th century. For this reason, they constitute a series which is a typological point of reference.

¹¹The engagement with this topic is in the context of a PhD thesis on the policies for the protection and management of UNESCO Sites in Greece that I am working on at the University of Macedonia, Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies.

¹²Church of Acheiropoietos, Church of Saint Demetrios, Latomou Monastery, Church of St. Sofia, Church of Panagia Chalkeon, Church of St. Panteleimon, Church of the Holy Apostles, Church of St. Nicholas Orphanos, Church of St. Aikaterini, the Transfiguration of the Saviour, the Katholikon (main church) of the Vlatadon Monastery, Church of Prophitis Ilias.

¹³ For extensive historical information and archaeological documentation on the WHM see: “I Thessaloniki kai ta mnimeia tis”, Ephoreia Byzantinon Archaioiton, 1985, Thessaloniki, Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou and Tourta 1997, Tzevreni 2013.

¹⁴ The serial property “Early Christian Monuments of Ravenna”, Italy, consists of eight (8) monuments.

¹⁵ For example, Historic Centres of Rome or Florence in Italy or the Old City of Rhodes in Greece and ensembles like the Piazza del Duomo, Pisa.

City Walls and the old port to the west, and the seaside promenade (Palia Paralia) and the White Tower to the south, is designated as “historical place”¹⁶.

A second area with important density of WH monuments is Ano Polis (the Upper Town), the traditional settlement developed during the Ottoman occupation on the slopes of a hill, (now at the outskirts of the periurban forest of Seih-Sou) and defined by Olympiados street to the south and by the outline of the Byzantine City Walls to the other three sides. This separate entity with medieval characteristics (Vyzantiadou and Selevista 2019, 719) has also been designated since 1979 as “traditional settlement”¹⁷ and enjoys a special protection status.

The way the Unesco monuments have been integrated in the urban fabric of these two separate areas varies¹⁸. The space around the WH monuments is not always treated in the same way¹⁹. In some cases, the monuments are the centre of shaped squares (Rotunda, Acheiropoitos, St. Sofia., St. Demetrius), in others are surrounded by gardens that form an oasis of greenery and tranquility in the bustling concrete city-centre (St. Panteleimon, Panagia Chalkeon) or in the picturesque labyrinth of Upper Town (St. Nicholas Orphanos, Moni Latomou, St. Aikaterini)²⁰. In some cases, there is no free space at all around the monuments. The reasons for this variation go back to the replanning of the city after the great fire of 1917, where some of the byzantine churches were used as starting points of the new layout (Yerolymou 2007 7-9, Amygdalou 2014, 154 footnote 308). The plan was only partly implemented for a variety of reasons (Yerolymou 2007, 14-16). For the rest of the monuments their surrounding area was formed accidentally and gradually by modern building activity. In the case of the Byzantine Walls, parts of the Unesco monument had been incorporated into the Minor Asia refugees’ small houses, “castroplikta”, some of which have been chosen to be preserved and enhanced together with the walls, while others were demolished in order to develop a green zone around the walls (Tokmakidou and Kaltapanidou 2015, 28,30). As to the churches, many of them appear unexpectedly and suffocatingly intertwined with the contemporary multi-storeyed buildings (polykatoikies) of the decades 60’s and 70’s. Often, there is no free space enough for their enhancement, there is no surrounding area and in most of the cases there is no buffer zone. The Transfiguration of the Saviour and the Byzantine Bath are two of the most characteristic examples where the byzantine Unesco monuments constitute the small stone garden for the massive apartment buildings.

As a consequence of their integration in the modern urban web, the monuments suffer from all the problems of a modern Greek city such as excessive and anarchic building, lack of open spaces, air pollution, noise pollution, vehicle traffic, accumulation of large amounts of waste, graffiti, etc.

On the other hand, this spatial proximity has created a special relationship between the residents and the monuments (Loukaki 1996,66). Through intimacy cultivated by everyday contact the monuments continue to be invested with memories and emotions and to demand a

¹⁶Ministerial Decision YPPO.DILAP/C/73046/51009/1994 (FEK 833/B/1994): Designation of the historical centre of Thessaloniki as “Historical Place”.

¹⁷ G.G.I. Designation of Ano Poli Area of Thessaloniki as Traditional Settlement. 197/D/2-4-1979. 1979, pp. 2323–2325.

¹⁸ The Committee, responsible for the replanning used the churches as a starting point for the new layout, in order to highlight them, according to the architect and member of the Committee K. Kitsikis Kostantinos, Kitsikis, I ktiriologiki aposis tou Neou Shediou Thessalonikis, Athens: Blazoudakis, 1919, p.12. (Amygdalou 2014, 154 footnote 308). This plan reflects the ideological and political choice of the planners to promote the byzantine past of the city (Yerolymou 2007 7-9)

¹⁹ Only in few of the monuments there is a designated buffer zone and wherever has been delimited, is defined on the basis of the existing enclosure of each monument (Unesco, State of Conservation of World Heritage properties in Europe, Section II, Greece, Palaeochristian and Byzantine Monuments of Thessalonika, par.2, 2006)

role in the life and imaginative of the inhabitants. For the visitor of the city, they are-at least some of them- like hidden secrets intriguing him to discover, difficult to find sometimes, but when he does, they offer him a pleasant surprise and a relief from the concrete modern city.

3.A third characteristic of Thessaloniki's WH Monuments is the coexistence with other monuments within the boundaries of the urban units mentioned above, which are also designated, as "historical place" and "traditional settlement" respectively. The Unesco monuments coexist with other architectural monuments of various periods and various cultures (roman, other byzantine monuments not included in the World Heritage List, ottoman and modern ones), remnants and material testimonies of the rich history of the city and the uninterrupted habitation around the same core since its foundation. This range of monuments and sites comprises roman palaces and forums, arches, byzantine churches, ottoman baths and mosques, markets and commercial galleries, fountains, imposing jewish mansions and houses of eclectic architecture of 19th and early 20th centuries and early industrial buildings, like the port and its depots. Sometimes, the WH Monuments and the ones that are not listed as Unesco form part of the same architectural ensemble, as in the case of Rotunda and Galerius palace.

As a result, a special urban landscape has been formed, anarchic but rich in architectural variety, historical references and memories, a landscape with which the UNESCO monuments are inextricably intertwined.

4. A fourth characteristic of Thessaloniki's WHM is the religious use of the majority of them. The byzantine churches, as they preserve their original use, belong to the so-called "living cultural heritage" (Poulios 2014,115) and are associated with intangible elements, spiritual content and worship practices.

The secular monuments (the Byzantine Walls, Rotunda²¹ and the Byzantine Bath) are used occasionally for cultural events (concerts, exhibitions), while the fortress of Heptapyrgion houses nowadays²² the premises/offices of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Thessaloniki City (the competent for the protection of the monuments service of the Ministry of Culture) and it is also open to visitors.

5. As a result of Monuments' great insertion in the urban tissue and their use, there is a large number and variety of users: residents, visitors-tourists, the members of the Greek-orthodox community, the employees of the Ministry of Culture, the audience of the cultural events and also some special categories of visitors like scholars and the members of the educational community (students and teachers of the city's schools and Universities who visit the monuments for educational purposes). We could also add other categories of involved stakeholders like the businessmen in the surrounding area of the monuments and the property owners.

6. In the same way , there is also a great number of authorities involved in the protection and management of the WH Monuments: Firstly, the ministries and services competent for the supervision of the "historical place" of the historic centre and for the "traditional settlement" of the Upper Town. Respectively, these services are: the Ephorate of Modern Monuments and Technical Works, Ministry of Culture, also responsible for the protection of listed individual buildings of the modern era in the surroundings of Unesco monuments²³ and the Department

²¹ Rotunda functions also as a church for the limited number of twelve liturgies (one per month) every year.

²² The fortress was converted into a prison at the end of the 19th century by the Ottoman administration. After 1912 and the liberation of the city it was used by the Greek administration for the same purpose. Its operation as a prison was interrupted after complaints and judicial tensions in 1989, and afterwards the Heptapyrgio was assigned to the Ministry of Culture, Eptapyrgio: The Acropolis of Thessaloniki (2001), Exhibition catalogue, 9th Ephorate of Antiquities of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki

²³Presidential Decree 4 FEK A' 7/22.01.2018 Organization of the Ministry of Culture and Sports

of Traditional Settlements and Listed Buildings of the Ministry of the Interior, with further competencies in the protection of some of the modern buildings which sometimes overlap with the competencies of the Ephorate of Modern Monuments (Vyzantiadou and Selevista 2018,724), as there are designation decisions of both ministries. This overlapping of competencies has a negative impact on the protection of all listed monuments.

Secondly, the two different municipalities, in the area of which the WHM are located. The majority of them are found within the limits of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, while the northern-eastern part of the Byzantine Walls falls within the boundaries of the Neapolis-Sykies Municipality. Moreover, responsible for the operation of the monuments in the context of their regular religious use are the Ecclesiastic authorities, mainly the Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki and secondly the Holy Patriarchate of Constantinople to which the Monastery of Vlatadon and the St Nikolaos Orphanos (metohi of the Vlatadon Monastery) belong. Last and most important, the Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Thessaloniki, the competent regional service of the Ministry of Culture, together with the Central Service of the same Ministry and the Central Archaeological Council, which supervise and coordinate the protection and management of all Unesco monuments in the Greek territory, are the main official bodies for the protection and management of Thessaloniki's Unesco Monuments.

3. World Heritage Convention and Sustainable Development-The framework of the research

After their inclusion in the World Heritage Convention, the monuments of Thessaloniki entered a special category of increased prestige and recognition, which implies, at least theoretically, significant benefits for the city that hosts them: economic and developmental benefits in the context of tourism and especially cultural tourism, and social benefits as the monuments' high status is supposed to raise the self-esteem of the city's residents and consequently to foster the community's cohesion and feeling of local identity.

On the other hand, their inclusion in the World Heritage List created increased demands for their conservation, in terms both of human and material resources, while their protection against damage and distraction became an absolute priority which sometimes contradicts developmental projects and constructional activities.

To resolve this contradiction, the World Heritage Convention has stated²⁴ the concept of sustainable development; that each State-party "shall endeavor to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes (article no 5(a))²⁵". In the framework of the Convention, the concept of sustainable development will be further explained and enriched by the Budapest Declaration and the 5 Cs: Credibility (of the List), Conservation, Capacity Building, Communication and Communities as main pillars of sustainable development²⁶.

Most recent development, under the influence of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations for Sustainable Development²⁷, is the adoption of a policy for the "*Integration of a*

²⁴ In The World Heritage Convention the principle of sustainable development is proclaimed, perhaps for the first time in an international binding institutional text, with a then (1972) pioneering wording.

²⁵Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

²⁶ Budapest Declaration on World Heritage (Decision 26 COM 9 and Decision 31 COM 13B), accessible from <https://whc.unesco.org/document/1358> and <https://whc.unesco.org/document/9192> respectively.

²⁷ Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, target 11.4: Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11#targets_and_indicators

Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention” which emphasizes the dimensions of: Environmental Sustainability, Inclusive Social Development (underpinned by inclusive governance), Inclusive Economic Development and Fostering Peace and Security (in case of war, civil conflict and all forms of violence)²⁸. Two of them, the Inclusive Social Development and the Inclusive Economic Development are the most relevant to the case of Thessaloniki’s Unesco monuments, and to urban heritage in time of peace. For the integration of a sustainable development perspective, the mentioned dimensions are analyzed in strategic Objectives, as following:

Strategic Objectives:

Inclusive Social Development (III, 17-23, p.6-8)

- Contributing to inclusion and equity
- Enhancing of quality of life and well-being
- Respecting, protecting and promoting human rights
- Respecting, consulting and involving indigenous peoples and local communities
- Achieving gender equality.

Inclusive Economic Development (III, 24-27, p.8-10)

- Ensuring growth, employment, income and livelihoods
- Promoting economic investment and quality tourism
- Strengthening capacity-building, innovation and local entrepreneurship

The main tool, according to Unesco’s guidelines (2005)²⁹, which should specify how the outstanding universal value of a property should be preserved, preferably through “participatory means”, (UNESCO: p. 26, par. 108) and the way and means to achieve the strategic objectives mentioned above is the Management Plan (or any other documented management system) which from 2005 onwards became obligatory for all inscribed sites and a prerequisite for every new inscription. The management plan constitutes the basis of effective management and includes, among others, a thorough shared understanding of the property by all stakeholders, a cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and feedback and the involvement of partners and stakeholders (Operational Guidelines 2005, par.108).

A mechanism of monitoring the implementation of the declared policy has also been established under the World Heritage Convention, called “Periodic Reporting”³⁰. Every six years or so, the States Parties are invited to submit to the World Heritage Committee a Periodic Report on the implementation of the World Heritage Convention in their territory. The process lasts for a period of six years approximately and is conducted through questionnaires completed by the responsible site managers in each country. Information on legislative and administrative provisions and other actions taken for the application of the Convention is provided. These questionnaires are sent to the World Heritage Centre where regional reports are developed (Greece belongs to the region of Europe and North America, subregion of Mediterranean). Then the regional reports are examined by World Heritage Committee and recommendations are formulated to the State Parties on compliance with the objectives of the Convention. In the final stage, regional action plans are created, setting

²⁸Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention, as adopted by the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention at its 20th session (UNESCO, 2015), p. 4, par.III,13. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabledevelopment/>

²⁹Operational Guidelines 2005 for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, World Heritage Centre par. 108, p.26

³⁰World Heritage Convention, article 29, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/periodicreporting/>

priorities and goals at a regional level³¹. Two cycles of Periodic Reporting have been completed until now-2006 and 2015-and a third one began in 2018 and is still ongoing.

4. Working hypothesis and Methodology

Regarding the research on the policies for protection and management of Thessaloniki's WH Monuments our aim is to examine to what extent the Unesco's policy for the integration of a sustainable development perspective in the processes of World Heritage Convention is implemented in the case of the WHM of Thessaloniki, focusing to the social and economic dimensions and their strategic objectives, some of which were used as the base of the field survey and as axes for our analysis. The strategic objectives which were chosen as the most suitable for the case of Thessaloniki were: the "contributing to inclusion and equity", the "enhancing of quality of life and well-being" and the "respecting, consulting and involving indigenous peoples and local communities", as to the inclusive social development dimension, and the "ensuring growth, employment, income and livelihoods and "promoting economic investment and quality tourism", as to the inclusive economic development dimension.

A series of questionnaires has been developed to be delivered to certain groups of users (university students, citizens and residents-members of Non Governmental Organizations active in the protection of the monuments, professional guides, tourists) together with a series of semi structured interviews addressed to experts and responsible managers of the main bodies involved in the management (public, municipal and ecclesiastic authorities) of the monuments. At the same time a systematic recording and documentation of the state in and around the monuments is taking place through regular visits. The questionnaires of the three cycles of Periodic Reporting (2006, 2015 and 2023-still under process) answered by the responsible for the site's management public body—the Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Thessaloniki were used as a guide for the formulation of the main research questions and the elaboration of the survey questionnaires and interviews. The research focuses on the event of the visit to the World Heritage Monuments and the issues connected to it. The visit is, in our opinion, the crucial event for the interaction of the monument with the public and a reliable indicator of the achievement of the goals of Unesco's sustainable development policy.

The survey is still ongoing but the first results seem to confirm and enrich with more quantitative data and qualitative details the questionnaires of the Periodic Reporting and the observations made on the field. These latter form the basis of the remarks on the management of the site we are going to present here.

5. The management of Thessaloniki's World Heritage Monuments: some remarks on the management system and emerging issues

In the case of Thessaloniki, there is no management plan and this is the situation for the majority of the sites of the Greek World Heritage List³². The management system of Unesco's Monuments hasn't changed much since the date of inscription, 1988. The Ephorate

³¹Operational Guidelines 2024 for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, World Heritage Centre , par. 199-210, p.62-64 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines>.

³²Only three of the inscribed sites of the Greek World Heritage List have management plan: the Old Town of Corfu (inscribed in 2007), the archaeological site of Philippoi (inscribed in 2016) and Zagori Cultural Landscape (inscribed in 2023). The project of the Ministry of Culture "Drafting of management plans for the monuments and sites of Greece inscribed in the World Heritage List of UNESCO" aimed to fulfill this obligation towards Unesco. It was initiated in 2018 and had as deadline the end of June 2022. The outcomes are still anticipated.

of Antiquities of the City of Thessaloniki (regional service of the Ministry of culture) is the responsible body for the protection, and the Central Service of the ministry supervises and coordinates all the works and activities concerning the WHM.

The legal framework for the protection of Thessaloniki's Unesco monuments (and of Unesco Monuments in general) is the Law 4858/2021 "Codification of the law "On the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in general" (known also as Archaeological Law)³³ and the competent Ephorate of Antiquities is the main governmental body responsible for its implementation.

The main obligation for every State Party of the World Heritage Convention is to preserve the outstanding universal value of the site together with integrity and authenticity (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/456>). Under the supervision and guidance of the Ephorate many conservation and enhancement works have been carried out in the monuments, in some cases with great success, like the exemplary restoration works in St. Panteleimon (the Europa Nostra award 2000) and the enhancement of the outer perimeter of the eastern part of the Byzantine Walls. Since 2022 a major program of restoration and enhancement of many monuments inserted in the urban web, the Unesco monuments among them, is running³⁴. Moreover, the Ephorate controls the surrounding area of the monuments imposing prohibitions and restrictions in constructional works and various activities (commercial and recreational) in order to protect effectively the WH monuments.

Despite the efforts of the Ephorate, the surrounding area often does not contribute to the enhancement of the monuments and their value, due to factors related to the major problems of the city referred above (lack of open spaces which could have been designated as buffer zones and could have been landscaped, concentration of garbage bins in the vicinity of the monuments, air pollution, noise pollution due to the vehicles' circulation and sometimes to the establishment and operation of entertainment businesses in the area near the monuments.), problems which the Ephorate is not the only competent to address and often has not the means to solve, and the solution of which depends on other bodies and authorities (partly on the municipal authorities)³⁵. The involvement of the administrative bodies and services responsible for the numerous listed buildings in the surroundings of the World Heritage Monuments and the wider protected ensembles of the "historical place" and the "traditional settlement" (the Ephorate of Modern Monuments and Technical Works and the Department of Traditional Settlements and Listed Buildings) make the task of protection even more complicated.

Another factor affecting the state of many of the monuments is their regular use as churches. As some scholars observe, the coexistence in a religious site of secular and religious values amplifies the contrast between private and collective interests further increasing the level of management complexity (Presti and Petrillo 2010, 306). Special facilities and equipment are demanded for the conduction of liturgies and other ceremonies, while sometimes interventions take place (like repairs, changes of flooring, painting of walls, installations of lighting or heating and cooling appliances) incompatible with the character of

³³ There are also separate Ministerial Decrees for each monument which define boundaries and specific terms of protection.

³⁴ The conservation programme is funded by Recovery and Resilience Facility Loans and ESPA (Corporate Pact for Development Framework) and comprises the following Unesco monuments: the churches of Acheiropoiitos, St. Sofia, Panagia Chalkeon, St. Aikaterini, St. Nicholas Orphanos, Profitis Ilias, Rotunda and the Byzantine Walls (northern and western parts).

https://www.facebook.com/profile/100068773424009/search/?q=Unesco%20monuments&locale=el_GR
accessed on 04/08/2025.

³⁵ These problems were created during the evolution and transformation of Thessaloniki in a modern Greek city and unfortunately constitute the pathology of the majority of Greek cities.

the monuments with the responsibility of the Ecclesiastic authorities and against the restrictions and prohibitions imposed by the Ephorate³⁶. The needs and demands of the users, who attend the liturgies or participate in special ceremonies and events such as weddings, baptisms, etc., have also impact on the state of the Monuments, sometimes negative. For example, it is not rare the courtyards of the churches to be used as parking areas by the participants in these religious mysteries and social events.

The lack of coordination among the different Services, bodies and authorities has a serious impact on the state of the monuments and a subsequent negative effect in the enhancement of the monuments degrading their surrounding area and the quality of the visit. This fragmentation extends to other aspects of the protection and management such as the presentation and promotion of the distinguished assets on the internet. This becomes obvious even from the initial stage, when someone attempts to collect the necessary information for the organization of the visit. Each of the involved bodies and authorities provides in its website the part of the information considered the most significant depending on the organization's character and interests. For example, the Ephorate is more concerned for the presentation of the scientific content of the monuments³⁷, the Holy Metropolis is interested in the religious function, the Municipality of Thessaloniki³⁸ tries to promote the monuments as major visitor attractions and main component of the city's unique cultural identity³⁹. There are also other stakeholders in the tourism sector like the NGO "Tourism Organization of Thessaloniki" and many private travel agencies that promote the visit to the Unesco Monuments of the city⁴⁰. In any case, the information is never complete (Zygomalas 2023, 28). A crucial element for the organization of a visit, that is usually missing, is the opening hours of the monuments. The opening hours differ between the secular and religious monuments, as the first ones are supervised as to their operation by the Ephorate and the religious ones by the Metropolis. The access to the monuments is also another problematic point for the organization of the visit as specific instructions concerning the means of transport or the traffics' circulation are usually absent⁴¹. As a result, organizing a visit to the monuments, especially to some of them is not such an easy task.

³⁶ The relations between the two bodies vary from an harmonious cooperation to a deep conflict depending on the circumstances and the specific persons involved every time. Characteristic is the case of Rotunda the function of which was at the heart of the dispute between the Ministry of Culture and the Ecclesiastic authorities.

³⁷http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/3/gh3530.jsp?obj_id=9141,

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a10838af2a024c2aa7be58c2e9737de9>,

³⁸<https://thessaloniki.gr/i-want-to-know-the-city/discover/unesco-monuments/?lang=en>, all accessed on 04/08/2025

<https://thessaloniki.travel/el/exerevontas-tin-poli/thematikes-diadromes/palaiochristianiki-vyzantini-diadromi/page/2/>, accessed on 04/08/2025

³⁹<https://www.dimosneapolis-sykeon.gr/%CE%B7-%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%BB%CE%B7-%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%82/%CF%80%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%85%CF%83%CE%B9%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%B7-%CF%80%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%87%CE%B7%CF%82>, As to the Municipality of Neapolis-Sykeon, although in the official website, Heptapyrgion and the byzantine walls are referred as the most characteristic sights of the Municipality, nowhere is mentioned that they are listed as Unesco monuments.

⁴⁰<https://www.thessalonikitourism.gr/index.php/en/history-culture-2/unesco-en>,

<https://bestofthessaloniki.com/thessaloniki-monumental-unesco/>,

<https://thessalonikiblog.com/el/%CE%BC%CE%BD%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%B1-unesco->

[%CE%B8%CE%B5%CF%83%CF%83%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%BD%CE%AF%CE%BA%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%AD%CF%81%CE%B1-1/](https://www.dimosneapolis-sykeon.gr/%CE%B8%CE%B5%CF%83%CF%83%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%BD%CE%AF%CE%BA%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%AD%CF%81%CE%B1-1/) all accessed on 04/08/2025.

⁴¹ For example there is a map for Unesco Monuments edited by the Municipality of Thessaloniki, which contains adequate historical information about the monuments but no instructions on how to get there. <https://thessaloniki.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Thessaloniki-Unesco-Monuments-Map-GR-ENG-Web.pdf>

In a second stage, during the visit, there are other problems for the visitor to face. There is no visitor's management plan for any of them and the visitor has no guidance as to his movement into the monument. There are no visitor facilities like rest areas and toilets and things become even more difficult for persons with special needs and disabilities or for other categories of the population like mothers with pushchairs and babies. We have to mention the realization, with the responsibility of the Ephorate of Antiquity of the City of Thessaloniki, of the project "Prospelasis" a very important effort to improve the monument's accessibility⁴². In the framework of this program, interventions were carried out in six of the fifteen World Heritage Monuments⁴³. The interventions aimed to improving physical and sensory accessibility and in general included installations of lifts, metal platforms and ramps (and an accessible toilet in one case) and of wi-fi information systems. It has been almost 15 years since this remarkable effort, and it has been no extension to the rest of monuments, neither follow up to the previous ones.

Moreover, there is no in situ information, neither digital nor printed, especially in many of the religious monuments. There are some signs placed by the Municipality of Thessaloniki which provide only some basic information on the monuments and without any reference to the World Heritage status⁴⁴. So, in case of individual visitors not accompanied by a professional guide, a previous preparation and knowledge is demanded, otherwise is difficult to understand the historical and artistic importance of the monument and to appreciate its unique universal value.

All the factors mentioned above, the major problems of the city that affect the state of the surrounding area, the problems caused by the religious function of the monuments (desirable as it is the original use but sometimes problematic), the fragmented and ultimately incomplete presentation of the monuments on internet, the lack of scheduled visit and visitor facilities and of in situ information in the majority of the monuments, are degrading the visitor's experience. Moreover, there is no connection to tourism industry and the private sector (commercial and recreational activities, enterprises in the surroundings of the monuments). As a consequence, the ability of the WHM monuments to function as major attractions for cultural and religious tourism is shrinking and this fact affects negatively the achievement of the objectives of Inclusive Economic Development.

Specific categories of visitors are more related with the social dimension of sustainable development like the members of the educational community of Thessaloniki, pupils and students of the numerous primary and secondary schools of the city and students of the universities⁴⁵ with their teachers and professors. For all of them, the monuments constitute an important educational resource which remains to a considerable extent unexploited. Educational programs and guided tours adapted to the different ages and educational needs are very limited⁴⁶, due to various reasons, mainly to the lack of staff and to the many and

⁴²The other partner of the project was the Aristoteleion University of Thessaloniki, Research Group for Transportation System (coordinator: professor Aristoteles Naniopoulos) <http://prospelasis.com/project/antikeimeno-stoxoi-toy-ergoy> accessed on 04/09/2025

⁴³ Church of Acheiropoietos, Church of Saint Demetrios (Hagios Dimitrios), Church of Nicholas Orphanos, Church of Hagia Sofia, Rotunda, Heptapyrgion Fortres <http://prospelasis.com/sites/default/files/pdf/d7.pdf> accessed on 04/09/2025

⁴⁴ The Unesco emblem either is not displayed or it is placed at a discrete, relatively obscure point (Zygomalas 2023, 24).

⁴⁵ Aristoteleion University of Thessaloniki, University of Macedonia, International Hellenic University.

⁴⁶Educational programs are conducted by the Ephorate of Thessaloniki in specific monuments (principally in the Heptapyrgion) and for a certain period of the year

<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100068773424009/search/?q=%CE%B5%CE%BA%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B5%CF%85%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AC%20%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF>

complicated other duties the staff the staff of the competent Ephorate has to accomplish. So, usually the educational success of the visit depends on the initiative and good will of the teachers and professors or on the knowledge and inspiration of a professional guide. Apparently, it has not been established a regular and systematic communication and cooperation between the managerial authorities of the Monuments and the educational institutions of the city.

The same is true for the organization of cultural events, usually with the initiative of municipal or regional authorities who ask for the permission of the Ministry of Culture to use the Monuments-a difficult and time-consuming process. The Central Archaeological Council is the responsible body to grant the permission and impose terms and restrictions on the event in order to protect the monuments (number of spectators, kind of equipment, etc.) upon the suggestion of the competent Ephorate. As a result, the number of cultural events is relatively limited and their occurrence is irregular. A bright exception, two cultural institutions that have been created recently, the Heptapyrgion Festival, an initiative of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki in cooperation with the Ephorate which since 2019⁴⁷takes place in the fortress of Heptapyrgion every summer, and the Worship Week, an initiative of the Municipality of Thessaloniki⁴⁸ under the aegis of the Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki, which, since 2024, takes place mainly in the WH Monuments of Thessaloniki (Rotunda, St. Demetrios, St. Sofia, Acheiropoitos) one week before the Passion Week.

The difficulties and deficiencies before and during the visit affect negatively the frequency and the quality of the visitor's experience. The interaction of the monuments with the public (the general public or specific segments of it like the student population or the audience of cultural events) remains limited and to a certain degree superficial and WH Monuments' potential for education, equity and well-being is not fully exploited. Moreover, citizens and local communities are by law excluded from the management of the Monuments. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to mention the organizations of citizens and residents active in the protection of the city's monuments, among them the UNESCO ones, like the "Friends of the Historical Centre of Thessaloniki", "Friends of Thessaloniki's Monuments", "Friends of Rotunda" and others.

As a consequence of the above, the objectives of Inclusive Social Development, the citizens' wellbeing and the local communities' participation are difficult to achieve, under the circumstances.

These field observations are confirmed by the assumptions of the competent Ephorate of Antiquities to the questions of the Periodic Reporting questionnaires. So, as to the inclusive economic development, the Ephorate admits that there is only some flow of economic benefits to local communities (Periodic Reporting 2014 par.4.4.5,) while the relationship and the cooperation of the World's Heritage property managers with tourism industry is characterized as "fair" in 2014 (Periodic Reporting 2014 par.4.3.7) and "good" in 2023 (Periodic Reporting 2023, 5.3.16.10), although admitting that, regarding to improving the visitor's experience, the contact is "largely confined to administrative and regulatory matters" (Periodic Reporting 2023 9.11).

[%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%AC%CE%BC%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B1&locale=el_GR](#) Accessed on 04/10/2025

⁴⁷<https://kepo.gr/festival/#> Accessed on 04/10/2025

⁴⁸<https://thessaloniki.travel/el/event/%CE%BB%CE%B1%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B5%CF%85%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE-%CE%B5%CE%B2%CE%B4%CE%BF%CE%BC%CE%AC%CE%B4%CE%B1/>

According to the statements of the Mayor of Thessaloniki St. Aggeloudis the Worship Week is anticipated to be a starting point for the promotion of Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism in Thessaloniki. <https://e-thessalonikiculture.gr/latrefitiki-evdomada/>, accessed on 04/10/2025

As to the adequacy of the visitor facilities and services for education, information, interpretation and awareness building, the situation doesn't seem to have significantly changed since 2006 and is characterized as "poor" in the questionnaire of 2023, the website and other online information included (Periodic Reporting 2023, 8.4). Additionally, the existent planned education and awareness programme only partly meets the needs of the public and could be improved, consequently and the influence of World Heritage status on education, information and awareness building activities (Periodic Reporting 2014 4.6.3). Especially for children and youth there is "a limited and ad hoc education and awareness programme" (Periodic Reporting 2023, 11.8.2.)

As to the role of local communities, since 2006 it is stated that it is not possible to involve local people in the management (Periodic Reporting 2006, par.11), as there are no mechanisms for participation (Periodic Reporting 2023, 5.3.15.1.) while the relationship and the cooperation of the World's Heritage property managers with local residents and communities and with local/municipal authorities is characterized as "fair" (Periodic Reporting 2014 par.4.3.7). In the questionnaire of 2023, it is referred only some participation of local authorities (Periodic Reporting 2023,5.3.15.2) but the cooperation is characterized as good (Periodic Reporting 2023, 5.3.16.2).

The extent to which the management system contributes towards achieving the objectives of World Heritage Committee's "Policy for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention" is rated as "full achievement" for social inclusion and equity (Periodic Reporting 2023 5.3.17.3.) and as "significant" to fostering inclusive local economic development and to enhancing livelihood (Periodic Reporting 2023 5.3.17.5).

6. Some thoughts on a different approach for the management of Thessaloniki's WHM

It becomes evident that the current management system is not capable to achieve the strategic objectives and the targets of Inclusive Economic and Social Development perspective. The complexity of problems in an urban context in combination with the overlapping competencies and the lack of coordination⁴⁹ among different administrative bodies and levels of administration don't support the implementation of inclusive policies of sustainable development. The system seems more successful as to the conservation of the monuments and the implementation of a consistent conservation policy⁵⁰. As to the visitor's experience, some great efforts have been done in the past, like the "Prospelasis" project but unfortunately since then it has been no continuity or follow up. Regarding the use and the conduct of cultural events, the initiatives of local authorities and the establishment of synergies with the Ephorate of Antiquities and the Holy Metropolis have been proven effective for the creation of institutions like the Heptapyrgion Festival and the Worship Week. These few successful examples offer a strong argument for the importance of the establishment of a stable status for participation and cooperation of all the involved stakeholders.

The Unesco's requirement for inclusive governance presupposes the institutionalized participation of all stakeholders with clear and defined responsibilities in a single

⁴⁹According to the 2023 questionnaire, paragraph "Identification of Priority Management Needs": "There is coordination between the range of administrative bodies involved in the management of the property, but it could be improved "(2023, 11.1.5.3.11).

⁵⁰This management system is very close to the so-called "material based approach" of heritage conservation which focuses on the preservation of the material fabric (Poulios 2014a 19, Poulios 2014b, 17) and is driven by experts, mostly state-appointed heritage authorities manned by conservation professionals while community is not taken into account (Poulios 2014b,18). The difference, in our opinion for the case of Thessaloniki's monuments, is that the Holy Metropolis is also actively involved as the main administrator of the religious use.

management body. This steering group could take quick and effective decisions and propose comprehensive solutions, taking into account the dimensions of economic and social sustainability.

In the core of such a proposal lies a different notion for the object of protection. Though they do not form a coherent in the space ensemble, Thessaloniki's WH Monuments should not be treated as isolated, separate monuments.

In our opinion, a landscape approach would be more suitable for the case of Thessaloniki because of all the special characteristics mentioned above. The great number of monuments, the loss of their original context, their strong spatial integration in the tissue of the modern city, the dispersion in the designated areas of the Historical Centre and Upper Town, the coexistence with numerous other important monuments of various eras together with the contemporary buildings, the combination of tangible and intangible heritage in the religious monuments, the variety of users and stakeholders, and finally the specific geographical position and topographical features (peril of the impact of Climate change) of the city advocate for the usefulness of a broader concept as the basis for their management. Unesco's Recommendation (2011) on Historic Urban Landscape, a tool which has not been utilized until now (Periodic Reporting questionnaire 2023 5.3.5) offers perhaps an alternative basis for the management of Thessaloniki's monuments.

The Recommendation recognizes the results of rapid and uncontrolled urbanization, like the excessive building density, the loss of public spaces, the standardization and monotony of the building environment, the debilitating poverty and the social isolation, the increasing risk of climate relating disasters and finally the social and spatial fragmentation and the deterioration of the quality of life in urban areas. It considers urban heritage a key resource in fostering economic development and social cohesion and in achieving a balance between urban growth and the quality of life on a sustainable basis (Introduction.3).

According to the Recommendation's definition, the "historic urban landscape" is an urban area understood as the result of an historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of "historic centre" or "ensemble" to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting (I, par.8)⁵¹. In the context of the "Historic Urban Landscape" both tangible and intangible heritage are included in equal terms. This broad, unifying and dynamic notion is closer to the complexity of the contemporary landscape of the Historical Centre and the Upper town, where the Unesco monuments are scattered and inextricably linked, spatially and visually, with various other monuments and contemporary constructions, rich in historical references, social memory and cultural meaning. In this context of a rich building stock and of multiple layering due to the uninterrupted habitation, this approach advocates for a shift of urban heritage conservation from individual architectural monuments towards a broader recognition of the importance of the social, cultural and economic processes in the conservation of the urban values (Introduction 4). In this way, the historic urban landscape provides the basis for the identification, assessment, conservation and management within an overall sustainable framework (I.10), involving a variety of stakeholders, including local, national, regional, international, private and public actors (Introduction.6).

Thessaloniki is probably the most appropriate case for the implementation of this Recommendation. In view of the drafting of a Management Plan that the country is obliged to submit at some point in the immediate future, the separate fragmentary initiatives could be organized to consistent policies related to the broader urban context, in the framework of historic urban landscape's approach. The effective conservation of the Unesco Monuments

⁵¹<https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-638-98.pdf>

and of their outstanding universal value cannot be discerned from the rest of the tangible heritage of the city or from their intangible content which continues to be enriched through regular use. The planning of short and long term actions in all related sectors of protection and management and the assurance of their continuity would optimize and add value to the anticipated benefits. The need for coordination of all the involved administrative bodies and the demand for the participation of local communities (local authorities, NGOs of active citizens, and individual residents) could be met by the creation of a single management body. In this way, the conservation policy would integrate with the goals of inclusive economic and social sustainable development policy and the enhancement of the universal value of the distinguished monuments with the interaction of the public with the urban heritage and the subsequent social and economic benefits.

In the case of Thessaloniki's World Heritage Monuments, the possibility of restoring their original context has been lost forever (perhaps a last chance was the byzantine avenues and monumental squares uncovered during the excavations of the city's subway). The surroundings of the monuments have changed many times and continue to change, and traces of these transformations are still standing or have been revealed through excavations of the architectural palimpsest of the city. The WH monuments, however, remain constant reference points in the neighborhoods of the Historical Centre and the Upper Town, sometimes more and sometimes less visible, and they are still being made meaningful by the daily movement and activity of the residents and visitors of the town. This landscape may not exactly be compatible with the ideas and requirements of the conventional heritage enhancement, but it is unique. The monuments have become an integral part of the city and can only be treated as such. And then perhaps what at first seems like the most significant threat to the WHM, "the location within the urban tissue of Thessalonika, which is continuously changing" (Periodic Reporting 2006, par. 12), will become the greatest opportunity for the Monuments and the City.

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