

CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS - CASE STUDY: OLIVE OIL MILL-MUSEUM OF VRANA IN GERA LESVOS

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Abstract

In this paper the importance of the valorization of industrial buildings of Lesvos will be investigated, using as a case study the Vrana Museum in Pappados, Gera. The aim of this study is to showcase the importance of the buildings or complexes, which operated as olive mills, soap factories and tanneries in the 19th and 20th century on this island, based on the olive product, and how they could be utilized today, as elements of cultural entrepreneurship and a pole of attraction for both domestic and foreign tourism. Industrial buildings of great architectural merit, which in the past were a vibrant and useful feature of the area, are being reused functionally and contribute to the sustainability of Lesvos villages, while, simultaneously, strengthening the local economy.

The Vrana Oil Mill - Museum is an example of one of the oldest steam-powered oil mills on Lesvos, which belonged to the family of the Nobel Prize-winning poet Odysseus Elytis and its restoration was completed in 2009. Today, after the renovation, the interior is a fully functional 19th century oil mill, while the courtyard of the museum is adorned with 19th and 20th century exhibits through which the visitor has the opportunity to live an experience in time. Works by Theophilos are found, alongside rooms that host exhibitions, lectures, conferences, concerts and complete the interior of the museum. Manola, & Michopoulou, 2021; Manola, & Vekri, 2021) This architectural and industrial monument of Lesvos is a cultural heritage monument and an example of cultural entrepreneurship, hosting concerts of famous singers/celebrities, and the recent holding of an international conference on "Olive Oil & Health", which helped significantly in promoting the region and, especially, strengthening the local economy and development.

Key Words: *Cultural entrepreneurship, cultural heritage, industrial buildings, Vranas Museum, Gera, Lesvos, sustainable development.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural entrepreneurship, referred to as a relatively new discipline in management and cultural studies. At the present time two ways of understanding cultural entrepreneurship in industrial buildings prevail. The first is business activities in the cultural and creative industries as well as in the arts. In this sense, culture is perceived as a specific sector related to cultural and creative industries and traditional arts, and entrepreneurship focuses on economic and social forms defined as the cultural sector. (Spilling, 1991) The second conception of cultural entrepreneurship considers culture as an aspect of all sectors, while the focus refers to

how entrepreneurs use cultural resources to legitimize their businesses (Gehman & Soublière, 2017).

In this context, cultural entrepreneurship can be defined as the specific activity of establishing cultural businesses and marketing cultural and creative products and services that contain a cultural value but also have the potential to generate economic revenues in industrial buildings. According to Metze, (2009) interest in the business models used by cultural entrepreneurs in industrial buildings as well as, public policies to stimulate these practices and the role of cultural entrepreneurship for urban development have been growing over the last five years. Moreover, according to Gangi, (2015), the need to apply cultural entrepreneurship as an academic discipline in industrial buildings has been recognized as an essential tool to strengthen cultural and creative industries.

2. CULTURAL BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS

Paul Dimaggio (1982) presents the new figure of the cultural capitalist - as an individual who invests the profits gained from managing industrial enterprises in the establishment and maintenance of a cultural institution. Mazzoni & Lazzeretti (2018) argue that academic interest in the persona of the cultural entrepreneur has increased due to the revealed potential of cultural and creative industries to constitute economic elements of important sectors, while the creative dimension of this type of entrepreneurship is gradually entering the academic discourse. More generally, the characteristics and motivations of cultural entrepreneurs in industrial buildings seem to be an important topic in the international literature.

2.1. Characteristics

Cultural entrepreneurs in industrial buildings seem to differ compared to those in other economic sectors, due to the nature of the artistic work and the specific cultural values they use. Klamer (2011) points out that the creative process is the 'moral characteristic' of cultural entrepreneurs, with financial profit being for them a means to achieve cultural values. Scott (2012) identifies the 'cultural entrepreneur' as the combination of three elements: a) creating new cultural products, b) orienting oneself towards exploiting opportunities for identity and social status creation, and c) seeking ways to achieve these without significant financial resources. Central to cultural entrepreneurs is personal involvement in the creative process.

According to Werthes, Mauer and Brettel (2018), an important factor in cultural entrepreneurship in industrial buildings is that many cultural entrepreneurs are reluctant to label themselves as entrepreneurs, as they do not want to emphasize the economic dimensions of their work or the cost of the cultural values they produce. At the same time, they often have to negotiate the risks associated with maintaining autonomy in their cultural practices (Naudin, 2017; Bridgstock (2013) notes that cultural entrepreneurs are often 'pushed' or 'drawn' to take risks because of the 'necessity of choice' to become entrepreneurs, while the uncertainty and project-based work in the cultural and creative industries influences their decision to embark on entrepreneurial initiatives.

Amolo and Beharry-Ramraj (2015) describe cultural entrepreneurs as individuals who often violate the boundaries between work and personal life. Kohn and Wewel (2018), in their empirical research in Germany, find that cultural entrepreneurs are usually younger and better educated compared to entrepreneurs in other sectors.

Finally, according to Heebels and Van Aalst (2010), the importance of place and social networking is an advantage for cultural entrepreneurs, and place contributes to the creation of networks of cultural operators and entrepreneurs. Konrad (2013) describes networking as an

'essential business capability' for cultural and creative entrepreneurs, adding that it is 'perhaps the most important element of entrepreneurial behaviour'.

2.2. Motivation

Cultural and creative entrepreneurs operating in industrial buildings create spontaneous collaborative networks, characterized by friendship, support, learning opportunities and identity creation. These networks offer opportunities for sharing experiences, contact with 'cultural gatekeepers' and reputation building, while also acting as spaces where talents combine, creatives co-create and inspire each other (Coulson, 2012; De Klerk, 2015). However, networking can also serve in more conventional ways, such as securing funding and creating market opportunities.

Cultural entrepreneurs operating in industrial buildings are driven by complex motivations, such as desire and experience, which are key determinants in launching their entrepreneurial careers (Amolo & Beharry-Ramraj, 2015). According to Chen, Chang and Lo (2015), the key motivation for most cultural entrepreneurs in industrial buildings is to build a decent career that will allow them to gain social reputation and achieve professional recognition. They prefer to engage in activities that align with their professional ambitions and identities, and are almost always driven by intrinsic motivations such as artistic fulfillment and growth, creating beauty, challenging innovation, and passion for their work (Kohn & Wewel, 2018; Maniou et al.,2025)

3. CASE STUDY: OLIVE OIL MILL - MUSEUM OF BRANAS

The Vrana Oil Mill Museum constitutes a dynamic cultural space, which, via its infrastructure and archives provides valuable evidence of the economic, social and technological life of Lesvos during the 19th and 20th centuries. Moreover, it serves as a platform for contemporary art exhibitions, integrating the past into the present and promoting a continuous dialogue with the public (Vrana Museum Oil Mill, 2024).



Figure 1: Interior of the Vrana Olive Oil Mill - Museum Vrana, Papados.

The permanent exhibition "Lesbos of Elytis" presents the special links between the life and work of the great poet and the birthplace of his parents, in the most appropriate place: his grandfather's olive grove. The Vrana Oil Mill Museum is a multifaceted cultural space. Through its facilities and archives, it sheds light on the economy and society of Papados, Gera and Lesvos in the early 19th and 20th centuries, as well as on the technology of machines,

which revolutionized many areas of production. By hosting a variety of events, the Museum fosters a dynamic dialogue with contemporary artistic creation and establishes a relationship of familiarity and ongoing communication with the public (Vrana Oil Mill Museum, 2024). The Vrana Oil Mill Museum is a museum of memory and honour.



Figure 2: The Prayleios area of the Vrana Oil Mill Museum, Papados.

4. OLIVE FESTIVAL IN LESVOS

On May 23-26, 2024, the Historical Olive Oil Mill of Vrana in Lesvos hosted the international conference "Olive Oil & Health", with the participation of many scientists and professionals from all over the world. The conference aimed at the exchange of know-how and experience about the olive tree and the promotion of the beneficial properties of extra virgin olive oil for humans and the environment.



Figure 3:Poster from the 2nd International Olive Festival Conference

The activities included, among others, laboratory topics in areas such as technology, marketing, environment, health sciences, therapeutic sciences, nutrition - with emphasis on the particular importance of olive oil as a fundamental element of the Mediterranean diet and its influence on health and well-being - cultivation practices and culture, as well as related lectures. Finally, particular emphasis was placed on the relationship between local

development and olive oil tourism, with successful examples from different regions. (Agro24.gr,2024).

Particular importance was given to olive tourism and how the exploitation of our country's high tourist footprint will benefit olive oil. Gastronomy and the ways in which it can become an "ambassador" of olive oil and a "vehicle" for the distribution, knowledge and information about olive oil were also in the focus of attention. In this context, the more effective penetration of olive oil in haute cuisine, in prestigious restaurants and from there to our kitchens was also discussed. For this reason, the conference programme included for the first time workshops and masterclasses by Greek and internationally renowned chefs. Participants had the opportunity to enjoy tastings of exceptional varieties of olive oil from Lesbos, to watch and taste unique recipes with extra virgin olive oil. In addition, important issues such as sustainability, organic farming and the prospects of exporting olive oil to new markets were discussed. (Vranasmuseum.gr,2024; elialesvosconfest.com)

5. POTENTIAL USES OF INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS

The reuse of old industrial facilities represents an important trend for boosting local development, promoting sustainability, and preserving cultural heritage. A common practice is the conversion of these facilities into cultural centers and museums, hosting exhibitions, industrial heritage museums, art galleries, and cultural events. This form of utilization not only attracts tourists but also enhances local cultural identity, adding value to industrial areas traditionally considered degraded (Gospodini, 2004).

Moreover, many abandoned industrial facilities are being used as educational and training spaces, with the creation of vocational training centers, educational institutions, or research centers. These spaces incorporate the history of industry into education, serving the needs of modern societies and keeping industrial heritage alive (Tzoukalas, 2010). At the same time, the facilities can be used for developing social enterprises or collaborative workspaces (co-working spaces), where small and medium-sized businesses and startups can find an environment of growth and collaboration, promoting the local economy and entrepreneurship (Evans, 2005).

Another significant approach is the renovation of old factories for the creation of sustainable housing or mixed-use urban complexes. Utilizing these spaces for housing, offices, and shops provides solutions to urban development and addresses the housing crisis, incorporating principles of energy efficiency and sustainability (Miles, 2007). At the same time, abandoned factories can be transformed into energy parks that utilize renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power. This practice contributes to sustainable development and strengthens the green economy, attracting new investments in renewable energy sources (Gospodini, 2004 Manola, Papani 2020 ; Manola et all.,2022; Manola , Koufadakis ,2022a)

Also important is the role of old industrial facilities as centers of technology and innovation. These spaces can be transformed into hubs and incubators, attracting startups and research projects in the fields of technology and the digital economy. In this way, industrial areas are revitalized and become reference points for innovation and entrepreneurship (Evans, 2005). Finally, many industrial spaces are converted into recreational multi-purpose venues, offering citizens places for entertainment, dining, sports activities, and cultural events. These conversions rejuvenate local communities and strengthen social cohesion, creating new opportunities for social and cultural life (Miles, 2007 ; Maniou et all.,2024 ; Maniou et all., 2025 ; Maniou, , Mitoula,2025).

Cultural entrepreneurship in industrial buildings is an innovative approach that combines the utilization of industrial heritage with the creation of cultural and economic opportunities. Old industrial buildings are transformed into venues for cultural events, museums, galleries,

and centers for creative activities, attracting tourism and strengthening the local economy (Maniou et al., 2024d). These initiatives contribute to preserving the historical identity of the areas while simultaneously creating new jobs and fostering conditions for sustainable development. By using green technologies and involving the community, industrial buildings can become hubs of culture and innovation (Maniou, 2023; Maniou, 2024a; Maniou, 2024b; Maniou, 2024c).

The utilization of industrial buildings for cultural entrepreneurship promotes sustainable development by combining cultural heritage with the modern economy. Industrial monuments can be transformed into spaces for cultural activities, offering new business opportunities and revitalizing local communities. Through the promotion of cultural products and experiences, local identity is strengthened, visitors are attracted, and the economy is supported. Sustainability principles, such as building preservation and the use of green technologies, enhance the social and environmental impact of these enterprises, promoting long-term development (Manola, 2019; Mitoula, 2014; Mitoula & Astará, 2012; Manola,Koufadakís,2022 ; Manola, 2020)

6. METHODOLOGY

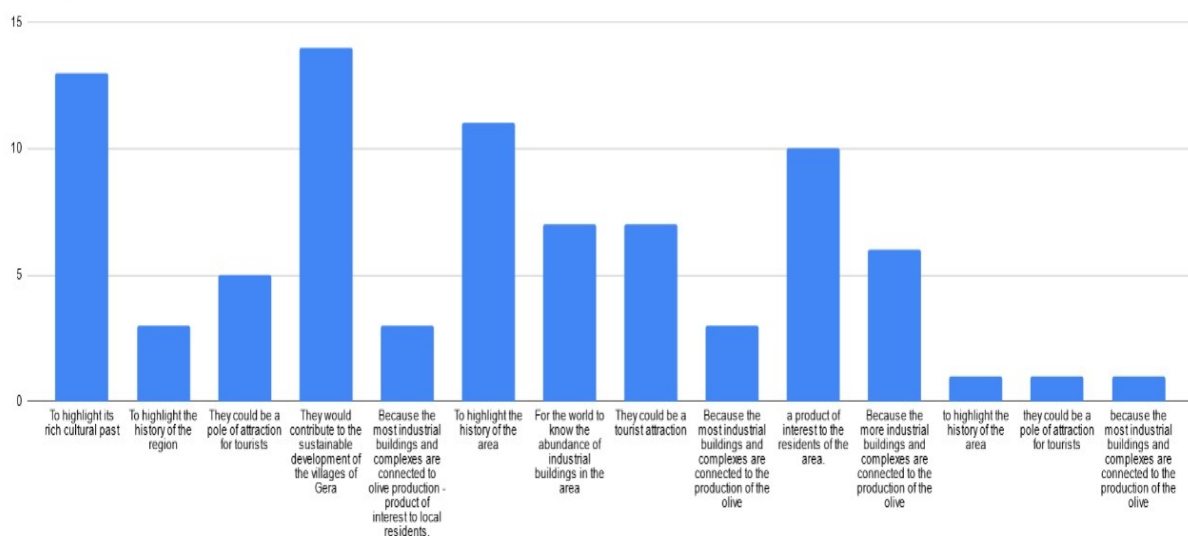
As we wanted to see residents' views on the use of other industrial buildings in the area, we distributed questionnaires to a sample of 170 local businessmen and visitors surveyed. The questionnaire consisted of structured closed-ended questions and was completed in September 2024. Ethical principles were adhered to throughout the research process such as confidentiality and anonymity were maintained during data collection and analysis.

We believe that the survey contributed to a comprehensive assessment of the role of industrial buildings and captured the needs and desires of the market.

"In the research, the majority of responses were from men (58.82%) compared to women (35.29%). Regarding age, most participants were aged 41-50 (30%), while 24% were in the age groups 41-50 and 31-40. 64% had visited the Museum and attended an event. 94.12% believe it is important to utilize the industrial buildings in the area."

6.1. Question 7: Why do you think industrial buildings in Gera should be developed?

Why do you think the industrial buildings in Gera should be used?



Comment to question 7: In the six villages of Gera there are many industrial buildings that remain unused. In a survey, residents, local business people and people of local origin were asked whether they would visit these buildings if they were developed, and whether they

would be prepared to pay a ticket. 94.11% responded positively, underlining that their development would contribute to the promotion of the history of the area (88%) and the sustainable development of the villages of Gera (88%). Furthermore, participants indicated that the promotion of the rich cultural past of Gera is an important reason for the development of the buildings. Many of these industrial complexes are related to olive production, while the potential to attract tourists was considered equally important. All three of these reasons attracted 76% support.



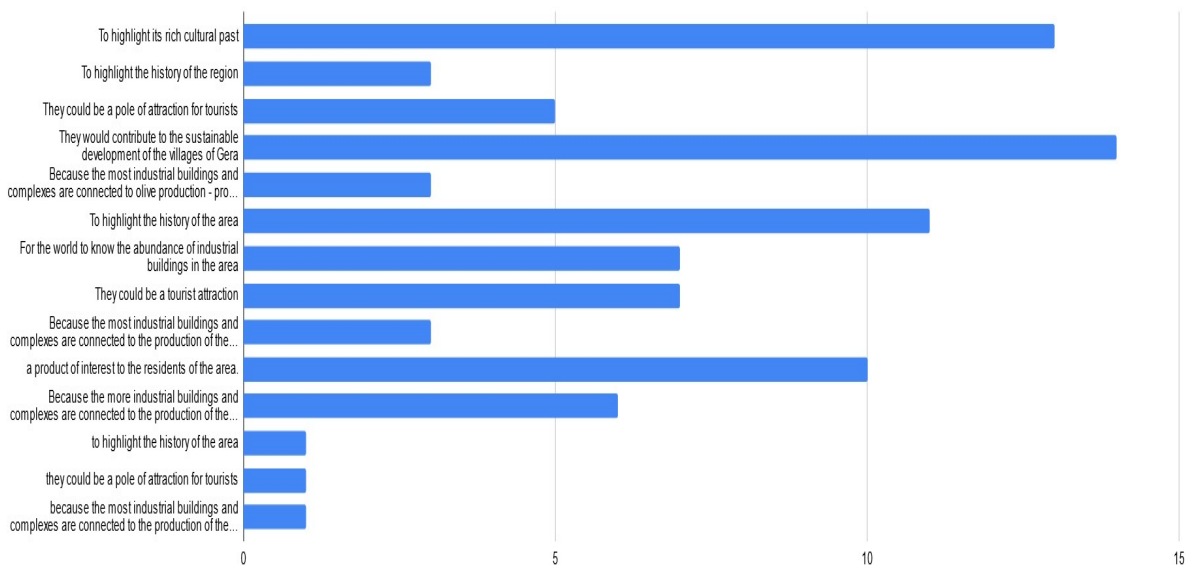
Panoramic view of the Sourlaga Tannery, Perama

6.2. Question 8: Which industrial buildings would you like to see developed in Gera?

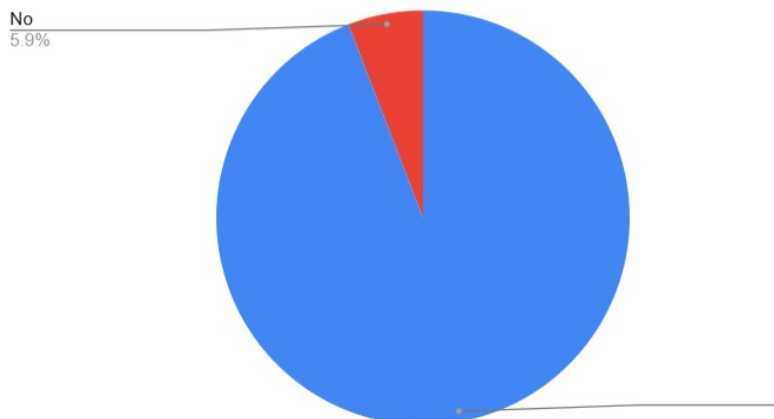
The survey was extended to other industrial buildings in the area, which reveal its rich cultural past. The Hatzigiannaki soap factory in Perama, which received a preference rate of 76.47%, ranked second after the Surlaga Tannery and could be included in the cultural business activities. Its development, together with other industrial buildings, could contribute to the sustainable development and regeneration of the village.

Together with the Frangos Oil Mill and a number of other industrial buildings, the area of Gera constitutes a potentially valuable cultural heritage site, which, until now, has been left to the ravages of time.

Why do you think the industrial buildings in Gera should be used?



6.3."Question 3. Would you pay for a ticket to visit the renovated industrial buildings of Gera?"



Comment to question 3: The majority of the sample is positive about paying for a ticket to visit the industrial buildings, provided they are properly utilized."

The following industrial buildings have not yet been utilized in Gera Lesvos. Which of these would you like to use?

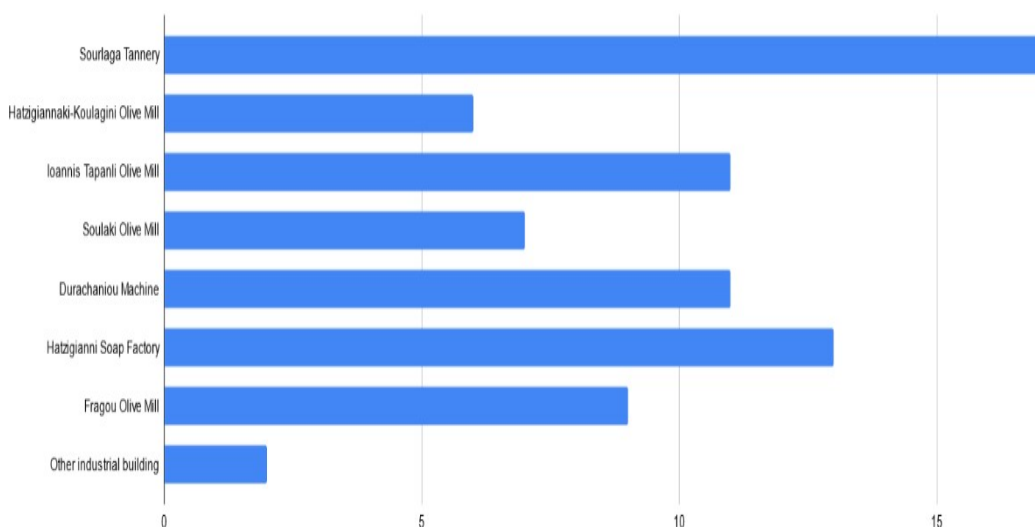


Diagram of the utilisation of industrial buildings in Gera

6.4. RESULTS OF THE FINDINGS OF THE INVESTIGATION

It is worth noting that, according to the findings of the present investigation, there is an urgent need to utilize other industrial buildings in addition to the Vrana Oil Mill. One of these is the Sourlaga Tannery in Perama, which has a 94,11 % share of the desire to be exploited. The tannery, with a 160-year history in the economic and social life of the region, was closed in 1990 due to the use of chemicals and problems with biological purification. It was the largest industrial unit on the island, with 30 buildings for leather processing, warehouses, machine shops, electrical workshops and carpentry, extending over 32,000 sq m. With infrastructure such as transport roads and wagons, and a daily production of 25 tons of leather, the tannery was a major supplier of leather goods, including boots for the Greek army.

The tannery could be exploited by creating a museum or theme park open to the public, showcasing both the tangible and intangible heritage preserved in it. A project of this

magnitude would attract tourists and visitors from Greece and abroad, upgrading Lesvos, and particularly Gera, as a high-traffic tourist destination.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Lesvos is an island that harmoniously combines the endless blue sea with natural beauty, rich history, art, excellent gastronomy, warm hospitality and a wealth of experiences. The variety of its museums is impressive: from the Natural History Museum of the Petrified Forest to the Museum of Art dedicated to the popular painter Theophilos, honouring the artistic heritage of the island.

Despite the wealth of industrial heritage, many of Lesvos' old industrial facilities remain unused. An example of successful cultural entrepreneurship is the Vrana Oil Mill Museum in the area of Gera. Its restoration and conversion into a cultural centre has been instrumental in attracting conference tourism, while at the same time highlighting the historical and industrial identity of the area.

The residents of Gera and the wider region wish to see this successful effort continue in other industrial buildings, exploiting the wealth of industrial heritage to boost the local economy and enhance cultural tourism. If properly managed and promoted, such initiatives could transform other areas of the island, highlighting Lesvos as a top cultural tourism destination.

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