

TOURISM, CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION OF BOEOTIA

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Abstract

The cultural heritage of our country is the reason for regional and local sustainable development. Greece is a country with characteristic customs and of course culture. To be more specific, an Orthodox feast that in its core contains historical elements from the Revolution of 1821, is an important tradition for Boeotia, and at the same time these elements include a mythological core from antiquity. This feast is called the "Panigiraki", which takes place every year on the celebration day of St. George in Arachova, the important township of Boeotia.

Due to the large turnout of the congregants, it is natural to mobilize the Regional Unit of Boeotia, the Municipality of Distomo in Arachova and the various local cultural-folklore clubs, on the one hand in order to give the celebrated Saint proper honor and on the other hand to have decency and safety as much as possible in the event. At the same time, local businessmen those days try to cover every possible need of the visitors, since Arachova is the most famous winter tourist resort in Greece.

In conclusion, the cultural dimension of the holiday is realized mostly in its finest form, which coincides with the protection of the environment, the development and the circular economy.

Keywords: *cultural heritage, development, safety, protection*

1. INTRODUCTION

Starting with the presentation of my theme on tourism, culture and sustainable development in Boeotia and beyond, I have to stress that the combination of these three pillars is the main economic force in Greece in recent years, because of the diverse history that each place has. It is a rare phenomenon abroad, to have a combination of history-culture and tourism, unlike our country. Politicians, scientists, historians and businessmen, discovering after excavations and research archeological sites, old myths based on sources and representing important historical trails, managed to make great progress, while taking advantage of a positive sign beyond the research and tourist "part" of our country.

My theme focuses on a custom called "Panigyraiki" that takes place for many generations in Arachova, Boeotia, in honor of Saint George, patron saint of Arachova. The custom includes procession of the image, a three-day feast and racing events, while at the same time the pilgrims actively participate wearing the traditional costumes. This is exactly where the provinces and the public administration have assisted on the occasion of the custom, as they try in the safest way to ensure the smooth running of the custom. It is also important that these days a plan is carried out by the organisers and the public administrators, according to the European standards, that determines from the beginning to the end both from the side of the pilgrims and from the side of the organisers themselves how the procession of the image and the events will take place.

Concluding with the introduction beyond the customs and traditions of each place, it is remarkable that young children participate without feeling underestimated that they continue such an old tradition and this has been achieved, as advertisements are made with modern media and smart advertisements from the media and communication platforms. Only in this way will they continue and continue the customs with the culture that surrounds them to remain alive, because the people themselves do not keep them stationary but evolving, which is quite moving.

2. THE CUSTOM "PANIGYRAKI" HISTORICALLY

Each place has its own history, some areas have more and other areas have fewer customs and traditions. In this case, in the municipality of Boeotia since ancient times we meet famous legends and stories that characterize the place itself. Arachova is one of the villages that on the one hand are a winter destination for rest and good food combined with the magnificent view, but on the other hand the history and myths that exist for this place are really fascinating to the visitor.

In Arachova central place in the soul and heart of the people is St. George, the central church that dominates almost the top of the village. The custom is called "Panigyraiki" and the whole story behind this custom has come from the battle of Arachova (18-24 November 1826) between Greeks and Turks. In this battle from the side of the Greeks we have the important hero Georgios Karaiskakis (1782-1827) and from the side of the Turks we have Mustafabei Pasha. This victory has been dedicated to St. George, as without his help the Greeks could not prevent the Turks. According to the sources, the Saint gave the vision to the captain to go with his henchmen to set up and wait for the Turks on the hill of Parnassos, located on the road of Zemenos to Arachova. Karaiskakis in exchange demanded from the Turks, holding hostages, Amfissa and Livadia. The great captain managed to block Mustafabbey and the Turco-Albanians, killing 600 soldiers. The victory was brilliant, as we no longer talk about a strategic plan, but about a miracle that St. George did once again, hence both phrases left in history by Andreas Zaimis, the one was "Where do you go, as if Karaiskakis is chasing you?" and the second was "Resurrection of the Revolution" (Dionisis Tzakis, 2021).

The "Panigyraiki" is primarily a story, the story from the battle is described with some metaphors in the song itself accompanied by the traditional instruments, namely the daouli and the pipisa, in all the dances. The song is titled "Panigyraiki" and describes the Dragon, who are the Turks that Saint George killed through the captain Karaiskakis and gave the water from the fountains, that is, the freedom to enslaved Greeks. There is also a reference to the three lygeres in one part of the song, implying the three great powers (England, France, Russia).

Concluding, there is also parallel to the historical events of the revolution a myth from antiquity, which describes a Python, that is, a large saurian monster which the earth had given birth to, which sat tied in a cave at the point where the church was located, at the location Anemoria and protected the sources "Mana" and "Kastalia" while he was pursuing Nymphs, creating winds and disasters. The God who managed to exterminate this mythical creature was Apollo, who then left Delphi to be purified. Of course, when he returned to Delphi he reestablishes his worship under the name Pythios (My Arachova, 2025).

3. THE CONDUCT OF THE CUSTOM BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The custom could not be performed without the help of the ecclesiastical, police and fire authorities, as they accurately coordinate the three days of the custom from the beginning to the end all the sequence of the procession, dance and events.

During the stay, the police have closed down specific streets - alleys with security mesh, in order to let the saint icon and the pilgrims to pass. More specifically, on the evening of the stay at five and a half, as the three cannons fall from the artillery of St. George, the church bells call the people to go up for the Vespers. The Feast begins. The narrow streets lead to the church become light white from the skirts and the sigkounia. The Arachovites of all ages, dressed in traditional costumes, come to the grace of Afentis Ai-Giorgis, in order to worship the icon. An hour later, after a crowd of people gathered, the vespers starts at six and a half, accompanied by distinguished chanters from all over Greece (Mauropoulos E. Christos, 1982).

At the end of the service begins with Byzantine priesthood the procession of the Holy icon of St. George flanked by hundreds of fustanelades and sigounoudes of all ages walk slowly and modestly, behind the Holy icon in two long rows, one behind the other, at the ends of the road. The icon of Afentis Ai-Giorgis proceeds on the shoulders of the fustaneloid men, and is accompanied by the "three lygeres" three Arachovitan women, according to the Arachovitan song. In front of the Holy icon, four young men holding the first revolted flag of Roumeli, which was the Arachovitic emblem of St. George and the words: Freedom or death. After the procession all the pilgrims end up in the village square, in order to have fun with a lot of dancing and wine.

On the first day the world is growing and Arachova awakens in an unusual way. The voice of a war trumpet sounds arousal. Meanwhile, the whole of Arachova is wrapped in the fumes (second time after Easter) by the fires in the "pits" of the neighborhoods for the roasting of the lambs in the Grace of Afentis Ai-Giorgis. Then three cannons from Ai-Giorgis' artillery disturb the place. It is the call to Matins and the Divine Liturgy. The Arachovites will ascend the church and come to the grace of the Saint. As the liturgy is finished, the uphill road of young men and old men with skirts begins, in memory of the glorious battle in 1826 on the battlefield, on the hill above the church of St. George. It is the harmonious coexistence of generations, this unbearable, the very way of life, and Arachova rightly flaunts. In the meantime, the police in cooperation with the Distomo health center are alert, because in the first event, because of the high degree of difficulty, it makes sense for someone to falter or lose consciousness. Local authorities should therefore be involved, if necessary (Mauropoulos E. Christos, 1984).

After the uphill race follows a 5 km race from the church of Agios Minas to the central square of the village in memory of finding the historical icon of Agios Georgios. Then the youth of Arachova will set up a dance in the central square. After darkness falls, the need for human communication in the homes of the celebrants for the "happy birthday" is a given. The "Giorgades" have the words three days. Decorated with the Arachovitika carpies and handiworks, the houses offer a sweet "mygdalato" and "sarmades" (dolmades) to the visitors.

On the second day of the festival the trumpet and the cannons will sound again, serving as a call to the Divine Liturgy. When the liturgy ends, the athletic competitions, the kleftist events will begin. The courtyard of the Temple will also become a stadium of racing. Jumping simple, triple, height and lifting stone, as the thieves used to. The prize, a little lamb to the winners. The sun is darkening now, as the games are over and the world is descending from St. George's heave. Also there the participation of both the police and the health center Distomo, for any injuries is again necessary (Mauropoulos E. Christos, 1985).

On the third day, the trumpet will sound the third trumpet. The bells will sound the Divine Liturgy again. Everyone will gather again at the monument of Karaiskakis with the broken cannon, in the small garden of the courtyard of the church, it is the time of supplication for the heroes of the Battle of Arachova. The white Arachovian flag, a copy of the first rebellious Roumeli, flies high on the Heroo. The tribute shots from the duffel of the fustanelophoros elder, are a tribute to the glorious fallen of the battle of Arachova.

Immediately there is the beginning of the third day races: shot put, stoned, wrestling, tug of war. Kleftist events of ancient origin, as well as the events of the two previous days.

Finally, the "ruin" of the feast will take place at 03.00 at noon, when the common lunch will begin in the courtyard of Ai-Giorgis, where everyone participates. In the dish of hospitality, along with the roasted lamb there is cheese, feta of Parnassos and Arachovic wine. Everyone is caught hand in hand, forming a circle that rounds the church. Singing the 'feast', they are rounding three times around the Temple of Ai – Giorgis. Three cannons drop from the gun, one for each round. In the third cannon, the bells begin to ring, which sends the message, that Arachova once again honored with a three-day celebration the patron saint, as every year.

The procession descends from the church with the pipizes and the daoulia. In front the fustanelades and the sigunoudes, in back the rest of the world, so many that overwhelms the entire length of the stairs of St. George. Thus the cycle of this custom closes, it is really moving that every year more and more people not only come to watch the "Panigyraiki", but that they also take part wearing the traditional costumes.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VILLAGE ITSELF

One of the most important effects that a custom could have anywhere is every year people to honor it with their presence in the place where it takes place. This really is the challenge that local authorities should have, in order to organize the traditions in the best possible way, together with the cultural clubs and the local communities, while respecting the resources that have been allocated for this purpose.

Furthermore, the custom is an advertisement for the village itself, as it attracts not only visitors, but also entrepreneurs, who aim to use their money by investing in dining areas, such as restaurants and hotels, or to rebuild houses for themselves. The economy is based on mobility both in terms of external and internal consumption (United Nations, 2025).

In addition, by providing archival material and funds to scientists, with a view to organizing conferences, we will attract the European Union, Unesco and several other international organizations, with a view to gaining their trust. So we will have a major impact as a country on these international organizations if we further our tradition of both material and intangible culture (Unesco, 2025).

The legacy that leaves the "Panigyraiki" as a custom has to do with the element directly of people's faith in St. George. The Orthodox Church, in cooperation with the State, always strives to promote such traditions, which exalt the morale, love and spiritual strength, always combined with the faith of the Greeks. It is difficult many times to achieve both, however I believe that the Saint again with his contribution creates the necessary conditions for this custom to continue in Arachova.

Also a legacy is not only in the soul but also in the memory of people, recalling the heroic battles that took place during the Revolutionary period of '21 with many of the traditions and customs having direct correspondence with captains and fighters. In this case, the battle of Arachova (18-24 November 1826) between Greeks and Turks becomes more and more, as many locals decide together with the cultural associations to write books, books, to publish articles on social media and so that others can edit the useful information of the place (Apostolos B. Betsopoulos – Chrisoula Spireli, 2016).

Finally, it is useful for the effect the help of academic teachers because without them, no formal integration of this custom into the Pan-Hellenic dimension that has today the "Panigyraiki" would have taken place. Because social media can be influential in the world, but of course international factors beyond the offer of the world play an important help the

books written by scientists and historians. For the simple reason, the book, when it is written by a series of approved scientists, is the same custom example of attention from society itself.

5. CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, the conclusion is considered by many the easiest point of a work, because it is a summary of the main points of the piece, but in this case, because of the emotional charge, the common factor that connects the intangible cultural heritage with the custom – tradition from my homeland is quite difficult to depict.

Customs and traditions are never going to end without exception of season, fame, culture, social media influence and many other factors for the simple and unprecedented reason, because the people who made and preserved them are our ancestors and our outward and inward appearance has been based on them. Many unfortunately doubt this view, as they rely solely on their logic on the fact and the theory of evolution, believing that what exists before them is considered obsolete to some extreme cases subculture.

Fortunately, the enlightenment and spiritual power that St. George exerts on believers is unsurpassed and unchanging. This is also demonstrated by the believers themselves, who every year grow more and more with their traditional costumes and costumes making, not only themselves, but also the Saint proud.

Finally, I would like to stress to the readers a sensible remark that I really hope will shake the new generation. We are the best generation that truly believes in the future, that has been realized today, it is a shame to find ourselves in the last place to be judged that we were unworthy to continue a tradition that really founded with great effort and sweat the sacred ground of our country.

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