

Cultural heritage displaying: Residents looking in the mirror

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Abstract

Residents' involvement in participatory processes which have to do with tourism and cultural heritage is a research subject with great impact on academic circles. However, most surveys focus on residents' views about the impacts of (cultural) tourism. There is a scarcity of research regarding how residents themselves perceive their engagement into procedures with cultural heritage displaying as epicenter. The paper investigates the notion of residents' participation in the city of Larissa, central Greece. Larissa is a city that now tries to put itself on the tourist map based on its special cultural heritage asset; the 1st ancient theatre. The basic aims of this survey are to identify the element which should primarily characterize the relationship between inhabitants and monuments and how participation can be implemented, to a great extent at least, when a city makes efforts for the first time, to create its destination image through cultural heritage.

Keywords: *cultural heritage, participation, residents, ancient theatre.*

Introduction

It would be extremely naive for anyone to consider that cultural heritage monuments are simply human, artificial constructions which were built during different eras. On the contrary, monuments are material proofs which incorporate intangible elements; elements which sometimes determine not only perceptions but also ways of life as well. Lavvas (2010) argued that cultural heritage monuments are human's effort to succeed in the world of consciousness whatever cannot exist in real life. Taking into account the deeper meaning that every monument hides all over the global, it can easily be stated that cultural heritage monuments are non-renewable resources (Grimwade and Carter, 2000) with great significance.

Heritage assets are in position to form a heritage tourism framework; still, if cultural heritage is not linked to social and economic development there is a great hazard for cities or even regions to face extended economic recession (Yang et al., 2008). As a result, heritage – through its conservation and preservation – is often the epicenter of urban regeneration programs (Harvey, 2005). From that point of view, cultural heritage can contribute to the empowerment of cities' competitiveness and the enhancement of the local economy (Yuen, 2005) through cultural tourism. The important role that cultural tourism or tourism in general plays in any local economy is considered as an accepted reality by local authorities (Mason, 2003).

However, focusing mostly on the economic benefits means a great risk for the residents. When appreciation of what is being preserved is absent, cultural heritage can be regarded as simple merchandise. Residents are excluded from any form of participation and according to Sofield

(2003), the whole participation process is too important as its result is. While research imprints residents' perceptions about heritage tourism (Besculides et al., 2002; MacDonald and Jolliffe, 2003; Lee et al., 2007), there is poor evidence regarding residents' perceptions about their involvement in processes which have to do with cultural heritage displaying. This paper seeks ways and criteria of public participation or in other words, how residents perceive – for themselves – the term “*participation*”. A monument of great importance in the city of Larissa, central Greece, is used as a case study.

Literature Review

The participation of the residents in shaping views on issues concerning the society they live in, is an inalienable right. The right of the public to participate in the planning of activities that sometimes affect everyday life is an acceptable and recognized principle all over the democratized world. Most times, these effects have to do with a large part if not the whole society. For this reason, literature suggests that residents' involvement in cultural and tourism issues is a catalyst so that a project of cultural tourism or tourism in general can be sustainable (Grimwade and Carter, 2000; Hardy et al., 2002; Lankford, 1994; Williams and Lawson, 2001). On the one hand, every proposed policy is much easier to keep up with the residents' preferences when they participate whilst the public shares the responsibility for the sometimes difficult decisions the local government has to make. The analysis and explanation of the policies which are going to be implemented in any case by the local government or/and some experts are able to convert the inhabitants to informed members of their society, make the residents understand any technical difficulty that can arise and even propose solutions (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004). Thus, an achievement of general consensus can prevent the occurrence of any complication in the long term (Yuksel et al., 1999). Residents' opinions, their support and involvement are very crucial elements in order to avoid any conflicts within a society (Bandyopadhyay and Morrajs, 2005; Dredge, 2010; Shelson and Abenoja, 2001). Participation is characterized as something very essential and should be encouraged because cultural tourism planning becomes more efficient, equitable and legitimate, as long as those people who are involved care not for individual but for collective interests (Buanes et al., 2005). Moreover, the benefits of participation are detected during the whole process and not necessarily in the end of it (Beeton, 2006). For instance, local pride and sense of belonging are two important aspects of participation (Yung and Chan, 2001) which on account of globalization are closely associated mostly with young people (Jaafar et al., 2015; Latkova and Vogt, 2012). Above all, the involvement of local community ensures guests a memorable experience while the local community is able to benefit from these visits (Sebele, 2010), directly or indirectly.

On the other hand, though many studies have focused on the importance of involving the local community, the practical applications are not articulate (Okazaki, 2008). Many long-range plans have not been viable due to the lack of emotional bonds of the residents for their place (Reid et al., 2004). Thus, when (cultural) tourism development is about to happen in a city or a region, the danger of splitting a previously homogenized community lurks with the formation of different groups which seek to serve their own interests exclusively (Taylor, 1995). At this point, it should be noted that community is a fuzzy term. Communities are usually presented as homogeneous entities but that does not reflect the reality (Blackstock, 2005). Most societies are heterogeneous entities (Cowlshaw, 1988). In fact, community is genus plural. Taylor (1995) criticizes the concept of comprehensive participation by characterizing it as a romantic idea that cannot be implemented and a costly process. Furthermore, other obstacles such as the educational level, the lack of business experience and conflicting interests (Addison, 1996) are very difficult to overcome. Tosun (2000), apart from cost and cultural limitations, underlines the phenomenon of apathy of many people in a community. Another negative factor is the question “*who is going to participate?*”. This is a dispute about the right and the ability to participate. A narrow framework defines the participant as a person who not only has the right but also has the ability to participate (Gray, 1985). Last but not least, a priority of some people

with low financial income is the search of a second job and not their involvement in any kind of participation and meetings (Russel and Vidler, 2000).

Study area

Larissa, with approximately 200,000 inhabitants, is the biggest city of the region of Thessaly. Despite the fact that Thessaly is in the centre of Greece and there is a wealth of cultural heritage items, elements that constitute a comparative advantage, it gathers a very small percentage regarding tourist arrivals (2.6%) in relation to the other Greek regions (Pateraki et al., 2016). In the present, there is a strong will from the local authorities and the residents to display every cultural heritage item that exists in the region of Thessaly and these are not few in number. Besides, it is not a coincidence that Thessaly is considered to be the cradle of Greece since mythological times.

Concerning Larissa, its importance is equally great as well, since along with the city of Argos in the Peloponnese, are the two oldest cities in Europe. The continued habitation of Larissa for 8,000 years is documented from settlements of Neolithic origin on a hill which is called “Fortress” (Gallis, 1985). The city experienced prosperity because of the river Peneius which flows even nowadays through it. Human’s survival was much more difficult in the other regions of the Greek territory rather than in Thessaly since there was a great amount of food. In his tragedy “*The Trojan Women*”, Euripides depicts this prosperity saying “*Modest country of the river Peneius, the finest at Olympus’ foundations, I heard that full of happiness exists there and the fruits bloom, so I think this city comes second after the sacred place of Theseus*” (Mavropoulos, 2008). According to Greek mythology, the city was named after the Nymph Larissa who fell in the Peneius River and was drowned. Her figure is depicted on the obverse of Larissa coins while the reverse shows the second most popular theme, a galloping or grazing horse. The place name Larissa, which also occurs in other regions of the ancient world, has a Pelasgic origin and indicates a naturally fortified site (Mpatziou-Ephstathiou, 2014).

Apart from the main symbol of the city of Larissa, the horse, another emblem has come to the surface several years ago; the 1st ancient theatre of Larissa. Its great significance lies on the fact that the sign of the Municipality of Larissa nowadays is the horse together with the ancient theatre (Image 1).

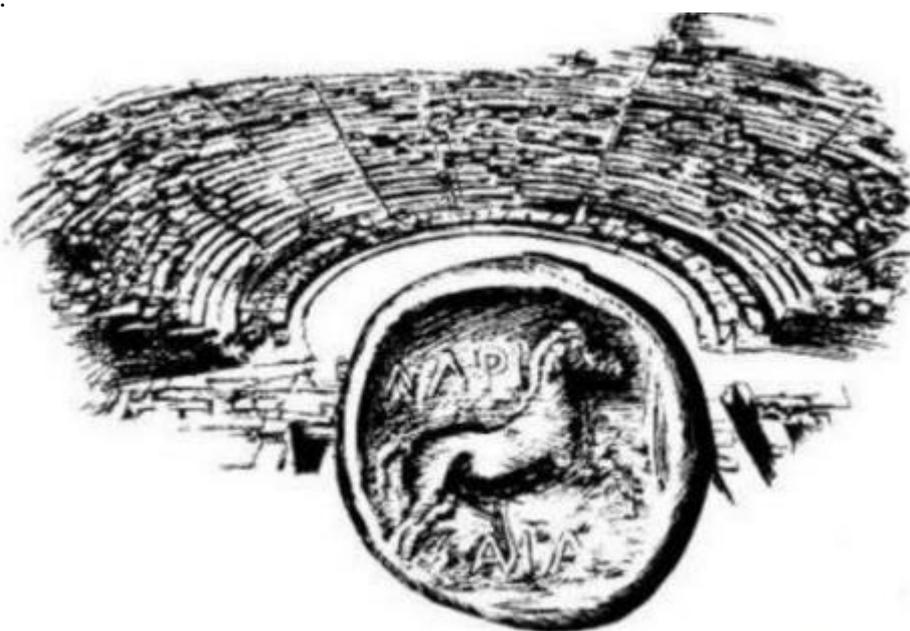


Image 1: The current sign of the Municipality of Larissa Source: www.larissa-dimos.gr

The 1st ancient theatre of Larissa was built on the south side of the hill called “*Fortress*” (Image 2), right in the heart of the current city. Its construction is directly connected with the worship of the god Dionysus and dramatic performances. From the 1st century BC, the Romans transformed the ancient theatre into an arena for the commission of official celebrations, gladiator fights and beast fights (<http://www.larissa-theatre.com>). In commemoration of the liberation of Thessaly from the Macedonians, a celebration was established in 196 BC named “*Eleftheria*” and was held every four years in the capital of Thessaly, Larissa, with the presence of delegations from all the Thessalian cities. The ancient inscriptions advocate this fact and refer that during the period of Roman occupation, parts of this celebration were horse races, poetry, dancing and music competitions in the ancient theatre (Tziafalas, 2008).

The reputation of “*Eleftheria*” was so big that it exceeded the borders of Thessaly and many famous athletes and artists from all over the ancient Greek world came to Larissa to participate in this celebration, even from cities of Asia Minor (Ephesus, Smyrni, Sinope) and Italy (Mpatziou-Ephstathiou, 2008). Chronologically, the 1st ancient theatre of Larissa was built during the first half of the 3rd century BC, when after the death of Alexander the Great, during the Hellenistic era, Thessaly was part of the Macedonian kingdom (<http://odysseus.culture.gr>). Of all the ancient theatres which exist in the Greek territory, that of Larissa has two specific features that makes it unique. Firstly, it is the only ancient theatre which is located within the urban fabric. The rest of the other ancient theatres are located in mountains or plains. Secondly, it stands out for its capacity which according to the inscriptions was approximately 10,000-12,000 spectators. The number is big enough since in Greece there are more than 100 ancient theatres and the ancient theatres with more capacity than that of Larissa are those of Epidaurus (14,000 spectators), Dodona (17,000 spectators), Megalopolis (20,000 spectators), Argos (20,000 spectators) and Sparta (20,000 spectators) (Spanos et al., 2014).



Image 2: The 1st ancient theatre of Larissa. Source: <https://xromonastiri.wordpress.com>

The ancient theatre is characterized by archaeologists as “*the telephone directory of its time*” since it provides plenty of information about many unknown aspects of the city’s life during the ancient times. For example, archaeologists know that the city of Larissa was saved from Caesar’s wrath by a Roman officer, Lucius Cornelius Valvus – because Larissa took the side of Pompey – who convinced him that Larissa was of great significance because it supplied with wheat the whole Roman Empire. Thus, Larissa avoided total devastation (Rigopoulos, 2014). In the present, the ancient theatre continues to play a significant role since the effort of the city’s extroversion and visitor attraction is based on this monument (Spanos, 2014).

Study method

The findings registered here are part of a three-year study on public participation in the city of Larissa since the authors are active members of the cultural institution named “*Hippocrates*” and residents’ involvement in cultural heritage displaying is a motive on a daily basis. Consequently, the methodology used, comprised mixed methods. As participants, the authors joined numerous meetings of cultural institutions, the Ephorate of Antiquities, museums and the Municipality. The main issue of those meetings was the proposition of ways so that residents can have an active role in cultural heritage displaying. As observers, the authors participated with other residents in some propositions which were implemented and had the chance to discuss with them the whole participation project.

Another significant source of evidence was in-depth interviews which took place in Larissa with 7 people from the new founded Diachronic Museum of Larissa, 13 people from the cultural institution “*Larissa’s Ancient Theatre Friends*”, 5 people from the cultural institution “*Hippocrates*”, 3 people from UNESCO (Department of Larissa), 2 people from the cultural institution “*Association of Thessalian Culture*”, 2 people from the Greek Tourism Organisation (Department of Larissa), 3 professional tour guides, 2 people from the Hotel Chamber of Larissa and 4 people from the Municipality of Larissa who were responsible for cultural tourism practices. Every interview took place after communication with each person separately at their workplace (duration September – November 2015). Everyone’s opinion was written by hand and when the interviews finished, a formation and comparison of these opinions were made. In addition to the above, leaflets and articles from local newspapers, magazines and internet were also taken into consideration. Finally, a questionnaire was conducted and distributed to 500 residents in Larissa. In this case, the authors introduced themselves as researchers from University of Thessaly. Residents were chosen accidentally in different districts of the city and the questionnaires were completed by them right at that time (10 – 15 minutes) so that there would not be any unanswered queries from the residents. This process took place in May 2015. The analysis of the results was made using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Study findings

The findings of the survey reflect the views of the people who expressed their will to participate in the interviews and the questionnaires. One outcome of the qualitative research was that everyone, without exception, believed that participation cannot be massive. The most important aspect of this view is that most interviewees focused mostly not on the quantitative rather than on the qualitative sense of the term “*participation*”. This result strengthens Murphy’s (1985) opinion who claims that massive involvement is a utopia. More specifically, the Chairwoman of UNESCO Larissa argued:

“Larissa is an urban centre of 200,000 people. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to organize a large population and the problem is getting bigger when we are talking for larger cities such as Athens or Thessaloniki. The quality obstacle though, is ten times more difficult to surpass. Everyone should wonder and try to answer questions like “why should I participate?”, “what

is the meaning of my city's monument?", "which are the benefits for the rest of the community?". I am afraid that this notion represents a small percentage of the residents".

Regarding the residents, it seems that their opinions do not differ. The results from the questionnaire depicted their views. According to them, the possibility of massive participation is not feasible. Analytically, 78% of the residents believe that massive local involvement cannot be carried out. Using the Chi-square test, statistical significant difference was found out between the feasibility of massive participation and the education level (p-value=0.019). The more negative answers respond to higher educational level.

In addition to the above, the interviewees were asked about the best criterion that residents should satisfy in order to participate in any cultural heritage management process. Excluding the tour guides and the Greek Tourism Organization (focused mainly on the acquisition of economic benefit), the best criterion recorded was not only the knowledge but also the understanding of (local) history. Few interviewees proposed additionally two more criteria such as previous experience in participatory processes and total time of residence in a place. The Chief of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Larissa stated:

"The key to involvement and real interest is cultivation, a word which is synonymous but not identical to the term "education". This is exactly what transforms a resident into a citizen (active resident). We should primarily be interested, for example, in what the ancient theatre represents, what Hippocrates represents through his philosophy etc and not just the material substance of each monument. This is reflected, as you can see, in the few volunteers who contribute to a great extent to the promotion of Larissa's Diachronic Museum offering their services as local guides. Unfortunately for the majority of people, this is a laborious process which requires persistence, patience and time".

The Chairman of the cultural institution "Larissa's Ancient Theatre Friends" added another negative factor; leisure time. More specifically, he noted:

"Concerning free time, we should take into consideration the human factor. It is common knowledge that the majority of people choose simple fun instead of entertainment activities after eight hours of work. Of course, this is not reprehensible but we have to admit that our activities during leisure time (no matter how much free time we have) demonstrate both the individual quality and the quality of a community as a whole".

The significance of leisure time is not something new since ancient philosophers dealt with this term. For example, fun for Plato did not seem to exist as a basic principle and he considered entertainment of utmost importance, especially for the young members of a society because at that particular time the human character begins to form (Parker, 1996). From his side, Aristotle believed that work marks the end of leisure time (not vice versa) highlighting the importance that must characterize leisure time because it forges human entity and plays a crucial role in community issues (Lypourlis, 2006).

Another discouraging factor that came up from the interviews was the economic benefit which anyone could look for by participating in cultural heritage displaying. 96% of the interviewees rejected this perspective. The City Mayor stressed:

"When people expect economic gain from these activities the outcome can be equivocal. This cast of mind is inappropriate. Everyone is welcome but should be motivated by true interest and selflessness. It is the only way to make a monument worthy and viable and not just to take advantage of it".

Taking advantage of a monument and the economic profit are two variables that do not enhance residents' participation. On the contrary, empirical studies show that the people who are

involved are related to tourism jobs and very little money rates end up to weaker sections of the society (Mitchell and Ashley, 2007). Residents' views are in line with those of the interviewees. 76% of the respondents answered that the relationship between residents and cultural heritage should be characterized primarily by knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage, 3.4% by the possible economic benefit, 0.6% none of them, 19% both of them and 1% gave other answer (e.g. respect of cultural heritage). No statistical significant differences were observed concerning age and education level.

On a theoretical level, the residents of Larissa seemed to express desire to participate voluntarily in cultural heritage displaying but on a practical level this does not seem to happen. This is a result that can be proved either from the authors observing the everyday life or from the questionnaires. 61.4% of the residents stated that would like to participate in any process related to the ancient theatre. Statistical significant difference was observed between participation desire and education level (p -value=0.002). The will for participation is getting bigger in higher education levels. Of course, 38.6% of the negative responses is not a negligible percentage. From the inhabitants who answered positively (61.4%), 47.2% stated that the motivation would be voluntarism while 14.2% stated that the motivation would be economic benefit. Statistical significant difference was observed between the motivation of participation and voluntarism as a leisure time activity (p -value=0.002). More specifically, 85.2% of those who stated that their motivation would be voluntarism do not do any volunteer work during their free time. This finding strengthens the view that most times, altruism, is not the basic motive (Rehmet and Dinnie, 2013).

Residents seem to agree also with the interviewees about the best criterion for participation. 60.6% believes that the best criterion is the knowledge and understanding of knowledge of any cultural heritage item, 15.6% the involvement in other participatory processes, 15.2% the economic benefit and 8.6% the total time of a resident in a place. No statistical significance was observed regarding age and educational level.

Finally, the interviewees were asked about the most appropriate way of participation. Almost all opinions had to do with indirect participation like participation in various kinds of events related to the monument and promotion of local products, handicrafts, handmade souvenirs (a policy that is going to be implemented in the region of Epirus with the ancient theatre of Dodona as the central monument). The Chairwoman of the Hotel Chamber of Larissa argued:

“It is much easier for the public to indicate its active presence through various events or promoting products. Ways of participation like conservation (community archaeology) or local guides are difficult for most people to deal with. But this does not infuse pessimism. On the contrary, it can empower participation. The active involvement of a few residents (e.g. local guides) is shown in the local newspapers, magazines and of course the internet. So, the rest of the community understands that there is a boost in engaging residents to a small extent at least. This fact (the active engagement of the critical mass) though, is the driving force so that other community groups can find a motive. Recently, for example, we had a meeting with people who expressed their will to promote their products to tourists and in international exhibitions along with the display of the ancient theatre. It is like the links of a chain”.

The residents had quite similar views. When asked “Which of the following ways would you prefer to participate in order to contribute to ancient theatre's displaying?”, the types of indirect participation had greater resonance (the residents had the right to pick more than one answer). The recommended answers were taken from international bibliography and were “monuments' conservation” (Elsorady, 2012; Tyler, 2000), “registration in cultural institution” (Grimwade and Carter, 2000), “contribution to various types of events” (Esman, 1984; Garrod et al., 2012; Grimwade and Carter, 2000; Lee et al., 2007; McDonald and Jolliffe, 2003; Nyaupane et al., 2006), “local guide” (Nyaupane et al., 2006; Salazar, 2012), “promotion of products related or not to the monument” (Chirikure and Pwiti, 2008; Elsorady, 2012; Nyaupane and Timothy, 2010; Nyaupane et al., 2006; Russo and van der Borg, 2002; Sebele,

2010; Sirisrisak, 2000; Wang and Bramwell, 2012). The third choice gathered 46%, the first choice 31%, the fourth choice 20.2%, the fifth choice 17.6% and the second choice 11%. No statistical significant difference was observed regarding educational level and age. Concerning the first choice, there is doubt about this high percentage since very few people are really keen on this kind of participation as the authors' daily experience indicates both in the archaeological site of the ancient theatre and the Diachronic Museum of Larissa (unless something different will occur). It is possible that there is a mismatch between theory ("it would be nice to participate in a conservation program") and practice (see the case of voluntarism above).

Conclusion

Two basic results were taken out from this survey. Firstly, knowledge and much more understanding of knowledge is an important factor for both evaluating cultural heritage and participating in any displaying process. Understanding of knowledge enhances public participation and is a stable basis when a local community tries to make a monument worthy and not just to gain economic benefits from it (Grimwade and Carter, 2000). So, the dissemination of information about cultural heritage and its benefits, either tangible or intangible, is a continuous process that in fact never stops. Secondly, it seems that most residents prefer an indirect way of participation when it is about a monument's displaying. Participation in various kinds of manifestations or exhibitions has big resonance. In turn, direct participation involves activities such as community archaeology and local guides. Though this is not an optimistic reality since the majority of the residents do not prefer this form of participation, these ways of direct involvement secure the continual interest of some people who on the one hand are few in number but on the other hand are active. This activity can motivate other residents to participate in their way (directly or indirectly), as it happens in Larissa, so that a holistic participatory approach can be implemented, to a great extent at least. Of course, there are limitations concerning this research because the 1st ancient theatre of Larissa is considered as a simple case study. Further investigation needs to be done also in other cultural heritage sites so that a general image of how residents perceive their involvement can be created.

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Ανάδειξη πολιτιστικής κληρονομιάς: Η αντανάκλαση του ρόλου των ιδίων των κατοίκων.

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Περίληψη

Η συμμετοχή των κατοίκων στις συμμετοχικές διαδικασίες που σχετίζονται με τον τουρισμό και την πολιτιστική κληρονομιά αποτελεί ερευνητικό θέμα με μεγάλο αντίκτυπο στους ακαδημαϊκούς κύκλους. Ωστόσο, οι περισσότερες έρευνες επικεντρώνονται στις απόψεις των κατοίκων για τις επιδράσεις του (πολιτιστικού) τουρισμού. Υπάρχει μια έλλειψη έρευνας σχετικά με το πώς οι ίδιοι οι κάτοικοι αντιλαμβάνονται την ενασχόληση τους σε διαδικασίες με την πολιτιστική κληρονομιά ως επίκεντρο. Η παρούσα ερευνητική εργασία διερευνά την έννοια της συμμετοχής των κατοίκων στην πόλη της Λάρισας, στην κεντρική Ελλάδα. Η Λάρισα είναι μία πόλη που τώρα προσπαθεί να τοποθετηθεί στον τουριστικό χάρτη, βασισμένη σε ένα συγκεκριμένο υλικό στοιχείο πολιτιστικής κληρονομιάς· το 1^ο αρχαίο θέατρο. Οι βασικοί στόχοι αυτής της έρευνας είναι να προσδιοριστούν αφενός το στοιχείο που πρέπει να χαρακτηρίζει πρωτίστως τη σχέση μεταξύ κατοίκων και μνημείων και αφετέρου πώς μπορεί να εφαρμοστεί η συμμετοχή, σε μεγάλο βαθμό τουλάχιστον, όταν μία πόλη καταβάλλει προσπάθειες για πρώτη φορά, να δημιουργήσει την εικόνα της ως προορισμού μέσω της πολιτιστικής κληρονομιάς.