

THE INHABITATION EXPERIENCE AS A MEANS OF PROMOTING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF A PLACE

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Abstract

New trends and development prospects of the tourist product would like tourism to move from mass tourism to a qualitative or alternative one. Part of the alternative tourism is the cultural tourism that is the search of a different way of vacation focused on finding destinations with cultural interest. In this process, architectural design, free from additional and newly arrived elements may contribute, so that the stay can be part of an authentic experience with substantial involvement in everyday routines and the residents' lifestyle in local events, in the manners and customs of the local community and, as a total living experience, a tool of utilization and enhancement of the cultural heritage of the place. This paper includes the presentation and evaluation of cases of the tower-houses' adaptive reuse in the region of Vathia in Mani Peloponnese, and the tourist village "Astra" in the ruined settlement of the village Pefki in the White River in Crete.

1. Introduction

In an age of ever increasing globalization, the protection, conservation, interpretation and promotion of the cultural heritage of each region is an important challenge. The International Council of Sites and Monuments (ICOMOS 1999), describes as cultural tourism "any activity that allows visitors to experience discovering other people's lifestyles, allowing them to get to know their customs, traditions, natural environment and ideas and to have access to places of architectural, historical and archaeological interest or any other kind of cultural

value". In this context, ICOMOS replaced the previous Charter on Cultural Tourism in 1999 with a more comprehensive institutional means that recognizes the relationships and interactions between tourism and cultural heritage.

The Charter contains a broader definition of cultural heritage than the archaeological sites and the historically-structured environment. It integrates the non-material heritage, i.e. the cultural traditions and collective memory of each community, and focuses on the importance of involving the local or host community in the design and management of cultural tourism, due to their proximity to the tourist attractions and because of the fact that tourism is part of their daily lives. The Charter's main objective is to promote and encourage appropriate tourism development through a tourism sector that respects and highlights the assets of both cultural heritage and living culture of the host community. This is because one of the primary goals of cultural heritage management is to convey its importance and the need of its preservation to the host community members and visitors. Tourism has become an increasingly complex phenomenon with economic, social, cultural, educational and aesthetic dimensions. The success of a beneficial interaction of the potentially conflicting expectations and aspirations between the visitors and the residents of the community that welcomes them, presents many challenges and opportunitiesⁱ.

2. Surveys and international trends

According to a survey (Hotels 2020: Beyond Segmentation, Fast Future Research), which analyze tourism development until 2020, visitors should be able to customize every aspect of the experience of stay. The traditional way of tourists separation will disappear and be substituted by a series of customized services in the context of creating an integrated service model. This means that future guests will be able to adapt every aspect of their travel experience, including technology, hotel services, rooms, travel, pricing and communication, to their demands. It is also worth noted that the objective should not be to reduce costs and prices according to competition, but in order to increase the value and quality of the product offered and the hotel services for consumers.

Nowadays, people all over the world are more informed and show an increasing awareness of environmental issues. Many tourists are already taking into consideration the "carbon footprint" ("ecological footprint")ⁱⁱ that their journey leaves on the destination, and the time is near when this print will determine the choice of destination, means of transport and accommodation. It is no coincidence that an increasing number of hotel business foster environmentally friendly solutions and policies and promote an environmentally friendly mentality. The traveler now approaches vacation in the sense of self-fulfillment, experience and "good living". For

those consumers the acquisition of experience and the “exclusive” and customized services are more important than anything else.

On one hand it seems to be a necessity the adoption of a sustainable development model in all matters relating to tourism. On the other hand, socio-economic changes which have been taking place rapidly in recent years, contribute to the differentiation of consumer behavior in tourism worldwideⁱⁱⁱ resulting in the substitution of the time-limited vacation by a meaningful one which involves customized, original and respectful to the local culture and the environment, vacation. The natural and cultural heritage, the idiosyncratic and lively cultures are the greatest tourist attraction. The internal and international tourism remains one of the most important factors of cultural exchange as it offers personal experiences for whatever has survived from the past, but also for contemporary life and other communities. However, intensive or inadequate tourism management and the related growth may harm nature, integrity and their dominant characteristics. In this way, the ecological structure, the cultural features and the lifestyles of the host communities may also be degraded, like the visitors experience in this place^{iv}. A large number of potential tourists around the world seem to prefer to differentiate by choosing escape from routines of everyday life and enjoy authentic experiences in a slow rhythm apart from the hordes of tourists. «Slow travel»^v holiday and the sharp rise in rural tourism are two such examples. This kind of vacation facilitates the development of small units which enable travelers to taste local daily life and nature in the places they visit. This can be achieved by hotels characterized by their small number of rooms, unique architecture and decoration, provision of personal services and food of high quality, as well as the benefits of new technologies^{vi}.

But how can the new trends been integrated in the existing structures and how can the incorporation of tourists in the existing envelopes be achieved, so as to enable them to experience an authentic stay? During the previous decades, the shift towards post-modernity and international developments in the field of historical buildings' preservation led to the imposition of strict rules that limited design interventions and led to a form of morphological integration of new buildings into traditional architectural settlements. These rules resulted in a sterile application and a distortion of the truth about the perception of the authentic, truly traditional-folk building, contributing to the confusion and abuse of traditional architecture's forms. But the more tourism was expanding, the more tourists were seeking locality towards a different relationship with the place, where the local is construed as an honest approach, and the question of the relationship with nature starts becoming an important design element. It is thus preferable to reuse the existing building stock in a different way of thinking. The stereotypes of tourist habitation are questioned, such as the importance of the view, coast and the twofold "sun and sea". The

suggestions have a simplicity, the materials become basic and the tourist is invited to develop direct relationship with nature and the certain place. The sophistication of 2000s does not exist and the need for an ongoing connection with technology, networks and information may be revoked.

Thus seeking past style forms seems mainly to involve the surroundings and the building's envelope that are connected formally to tradition or history. Interior space in this case is easily disconnected from the natural environment and the architectural shell and follows its own style. So it becomes an experimental design field for innovations and international styles. These interior developments acquire specific dimensions, incorporating lifestyle elements, body and beautification facilities, technological gadgets, lightings etc. The interior's "globalized image" removes the feeling of being integrated in the local community and the differentiation between interior and exterior spaces causes confusion and disorientation. The principles of alternative tourism, adaptive reuse of existing buildings and complexes and their utilization as accommodation units, as well as the active and experiential participation in activities and local events provides the possibility of living in buildings and environments of local character. All these aspects leave their mark on Greek architecture and the potential use of buildings and architectural ensembles or parts of traditional communities, and can provide an authentic tourism experience: integration into the local settings, daily contact with residents, participation in the manners and customs of the host place and stay in places similar to the residents'. Though this experience we argue for that traditional architecture and cultural heritage of a place are promoted and tourism development is reinforced.

3. The use of traditional settlements

The Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) in an attempt to reuse the traditional settlements, promptly realized their importance and undertook their preservation and utilization; not as a lifeless museum exhibits or ruined monuments, but as a dynamic part of modern life, that would play an important role in tourism and the country's development. Thus in 1975, under the aegis of J. Janetakis –as general manager of GNTO and A. Konstantinidis –as architect, a pilot program started forth aiming to preserve, restore and maintain buildings and ensembles of traditional architecture in order to use them as hostels or public buildings , such as museums, restaurants, community offices, etc^{vii} This would be a pilot project for other settlements. The programme originally included six settlements: Vathia in Mani (Peloponnese) Vizitsa (Pelion), Mesta (Chios), Oia (Santorini), Papingo (Epiros) and Fiskardo (Kefalonia). This paper is focused on the case of Vathia (Mani), as an attempt of adaptive reuse, and also the case of the White River village in Crete.

Vathia village's several traditional house-towers were included in the above pilot programme, which aimed to preserve and use them as touristic settlements for a period of 11 years and then the buildings would be returned to their owners. The settlement has taken its current form after the 18th century and flourished in the 19th century with 300 inhabitants. In the years following 1900, however, the village became deserted and abandoned as its residents migrated and moved to large cities. By 1980 only few residents (11 in total) had been left. In the same year GNTO had the village connected to the electricity network as it was included in this programme. As mentioned by K. Katsigiannis, an NTUA engineer and former General Manager of GNTO this was an *"effective intervention by GNTO, which was practical the first connection of tourism development to the architectural heritage, occurred later during the period 1975-1985, through the study and modification of private traditional buildings into tourist accommodation, in a number of more than 100 guesthouses built. The state encourages such actions, since a subsidy is provided for the modification of existing traditional buildings into tourist accommodation, with a 40% of total cost, according to the provisions of the development law"*. Architectural interventions were characterized by the conservation of the building's envelope authentic elements and the minimum possible modifications in the interior's configuration. The humble effect of these guesthouses is completed by a series of wooden furniture designed with the simplicity of traditional Greek pieces as bed-berms, stools and seats. These wooden pieces are placed besides traditional constructive elements such as stone domes, semicircular window arcs, stone shelves, bays, armoires, etc. The interventions clear to see, concern electricity and lighting installations. (Figure 2). So Vathia became lively in terms of construction (buildingwise) and was used as a model. This movement unfortunately was not extended to the whole settlement and when GNTO preserved the selected tower-houses, it did not expropriated them.



Figure 2: Interiors from Giannakakos (left) and Kremida towers (right). Source: Collective, (1984). *GNTO Programme 1975-1985*. Athens: GNTO publications.

There was an agreement with the tower-houses' heirs without renewing it after its expiration. *«Then, when GNTO left Vathia, ten years ago, the towers were returned to their owners; some of them became now forgotten and some others were disputed by many heirs. The result is the "backdrop" of the ruins and abandonment which currently dominates the Vathia settlement which, beyond that, is a symbol of traditional Mani architecture and has now gained, as a memorial, an undisputed emblematic value for Mani»^{viii}.* (Figure 3).



Figure3: Abandonment inside Vathia Mani. Source: D. Frangou's archive.

The case of White River (figure 4) has another result. It was also included in the expanded GNTO programme. Filippidis mentions that: *"Along this line, but in a more extreme form, there was the restoration of abandoned small settlements to be used as guesthouses. The 20 houses in Koutsounari (Zervas T, Zervas-Bozineki B.) and the 50 buildings of the White River in Ierapetra, Crete (S. Karantinos) belong to this specific category, which was later identified with the creation of ecotourism units"^{ix}.*



Figure 4: View of a part of the White River settlement. Source: www.kritionline.gr

The White River is located 1 km north of the sea and Makrigialos. It is built in a valley surrounded by impressive rocks. The area is of outstanding natural beauty and has paradoxically enough greenery for this area. It took its name from the river that runs through it, which springs from the village Pefka and flows into the gorge of Pefkon. It

functioned as a settlement for the villagers of Pefka who went down to the valley either for their harvest in summer or for their animals in winter. The two-rooms houses covered with flat roofs, were built out of the natural local stone, and accommodate family and domestic animals^x. That might be the reason why, along with the embossed terrain, three different types of small-houses of different sizes and features have been created. It has not been identified as a settlement, neither there are any boundaries around it, and there is no "cohesive fabric" but only 10 individual sets of ground-floor buildings. It can be characterized as a tourist resort as it consists of three sections of holiday homes which previously belonged to M. Karantinos, and partly now to Chalkia A and are used as an alternative tourist accommodation. Although the two sections have been characterized as traditional preservable sets in 1986 and 1987 - this part restored has not been classified. The restoration has been accomplished by using similar materials to the primary ones and kept the authentic parts of the building envelope and the configuration of the interior space according to the needs of the adaptive reuse. So in the interior spaces we can notice stone walls without plaster, just painted with lime, wooden beams, stone berms and bays for the water pots and lamps, combined with a few furniture pieces-tables and seats. The humble decoration is completed with traditional hand wove textiles, chests and cooper vessels. (Figure 5).The move from the house to the open space is made through semi- interior spaces, which point out the strong connection of traditional architecture to the environmental conditions and orientation. It is worth mentioning that conventional forms of energy (electricity and telecommunications networks) can be used only in the common used areas, in the settlement. *«This kind of green tourism, which is currently in force in White River, has given life to an area that otherwise could be heading to a total devastation. Certainly, the use of the buildings as tourist accommodations of a kind of tourism that respects and promotes nature itself, can only be judged in a positive way. Whether, however, the story being promoted will not constitute, beyond a certain point, a museum piece or sterile imitation of a long forgotten situation is something we have to wonder about^{ixi}.*



Figure 5: Part of interior space in White River houses. Source:

http://www.enallaktikos.gr/ar7035el_aspros-potamos-kritis-anastilwsan-ton-arxaiotero-synoikismo-xwris-reyma-kai-oi-toyristes-kanoy-n-oyra.html

4. Synopsis

According to ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) the principles for promoting and managing tourism in ways that respect and enhance the heritage and living cultures of the host communities, in order to encourage a dialogue between conservation interests and the tourism industry are that *“conservation should provide well-managed opportunities for tourists and members of the host community to experience and understand the local heritage and culture at first hand; the relationship between heritage places and tourism is dynamic and should be managed in a sustainable way for present and future generations; conservation and tourism planning should create a visitor experience that is enjoyable, respectful, and educational; host communities and indigenous people should be involved in planning for conservation and tourism; tourism and conservation activities should benefit the host community, improving development and encouraging local employment; tourism programs should protect and enhance natural and cultural heritage characteristics”*^{xii}

Tourism creates identities, to a greater or lesser extent, it creates narratives, it transforms them, it turns them into stereotypes. When someone goes to a tourist destination they expect to meet the ideal image that has created in their minds. Therefore what they expect to meet they have it predefined through images, reports and descriptions. What they expect to live, they themselves have already seen it and they are there to get it - being bound by all of this information and impressions and having to respond. All this spectrum of how tourism creates identities and how these identities are transmuted or become stereotypes is of great interest and is simultaneously an extremely complex topic. How the interior of a traditional building is transformed to meet modern needs and how feasible it is for the contemporary man to live without their daily habits and comforts is another challenge. Dependence on technology and ongoing access to the internet: how can anyone get rid of those needs? Ultimately, they all are experiential experiences, i.e. inhabiting modern facilities which mean to represent through imitation the "old", participating as users in virtual experiences or being members of a theater company that takes part in a performance based on a staged setting. Is the utilization of local architectural features in active traditional settlements, the transaction between the interior and the shell that surrounds it, the authenticity in the design of space, the manners and customs of a place, and finally the integration into the local community and everyday life, an advisable way to enhance the architectural cultural heritage, when we reflect on A. Constantinides' words: *“Studying those forces which in past years built projects and forms, we wake within our contemporary self its truer world”*.

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ⁱ Dimitsanou-Kremezi, A., (2004, September-October). *The Revised Charter of Cultural Tourism and Articles that Ensure the Architectural Heritage*. Paper presented in the International Conference: Cultural Environment and Tourism: The role of the Architect, Kavala in Journal of Technical Chronicle, page 53.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.footprintstandards.org> (accessed 23/07/2011)

ⁱⁱⁱ SETE, (2010). *Greek Tourism 2020: Proposal for a New Development Model, Tourism as a Protagonist in Economic and Social Development of Greece*, Athens, pp. 36-37.

^{iv} A. Dimitsanou-Kremezi, (2004). *ibid.* page 53.

^v This involves vacation in quite and calm places with a leisurely schedule, enjoying walks, local flavors, urban exploration of cities, etc.

^{vi} Frangou D., Geogiadou Z., Marnellos D., (2014) *The Architectural Design as an effective aspect for the improvement of the Tourist product*, Journal of Tourism Research, Vol 8, pp. 12-29.

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^{viii} Vathia of Mani - Rape of a Monument, A Letter - Report by Helen Kouvari, (04 February 2014), The "Social" daily Political, Economic and Shipping newspaper.

^{ix} Filippidis, D., (2015). *Tourism Landscapes, Architecture in the Era of Mass Tourism*. Athens: "Structures" magazine, page 94.

^x The two room houses with flat roof is a common type in Mediterranean. They had trivet, built oven for cooking, berms for sleeping and keeping the crop. The building has a simple rectangular shape, with length 2-3 times its width, depending on the length of the wooden beams used for the roof (usually 2,5-3 m.). The total space covered 25-30 m². The entrance's placement divided the functional areas and on the walls there were bays and armoires for the water pots. Bozineki- Didoni P., (1984). Crete in Filippidis, D., *Greek Traditional Architecture*, Vol.3, pp. 256-258.

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^{xii} ICOMOS. 1999. "International Cultural Tourism Charter: Managing Tourism at Places of Heritage Significance." Accessed 25-4-2014 http://www.international.icomos.org/charters/tourism_e.pdf.