

A GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE OF EDUCATIONAL TOURISM IN SANTORINI: «INTEGRATED GREEK LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PROGRAMME»

Ifigenia GEORGIADOU

Hellenic Culture Centre, Megalochori Santorini, 84700, Cyclades, Greece

ifigenia@hcc.edu.gr

Abstract

Teaching of a foreign language in the place where it is spoken is essentially an invitation to adult students to participate in a cultural trip. Culture is not merely a stage during a foreign language lesson. Learning a language is an invitation to a culture in order to use the rich cultural resources and join, just as a fictional citizen, this new culture. Accordingly, a journey is always a journey to the language and culture of the Other, as is a trip to Ourselves. The paper refers to the contribution of experiential education methods to create a unique tourist product and focuses on the example of the Hellenic Culture Centre (HCC), a well-known pioneer institution which organizes, for 20 years now, an original educational tourism programme for adults (since 2014 in Santorini too). The paper presents the HCC's function with references to the linguistic, cultural and educational programme, the profile of its customers and associates. It also refers to the contribution of the HCC to: a) processing and production of special educational materials to present Greek culture b) the practice and outdoor experiential training methodology c) the research on teaching Greek as a foreign language. Finally it refers to its participation in European projects and Networks.

Educational Tourism and the Hellenic Culture Centre

Cultural tourism is dominant among the forms of alternative tourism. Educational tourism is an important part, which makes travel people who spend increased - much more than the average - residence time and travel expenses. This happens because usually time required to learn anything is increased (in 2014, which was the first year of our School in Santorini, with 70 trainees and their companions, we had about 1000 accommodation nights, while research shows that the most common length of stay in Greece are seven days, Varotsos, 2013: 22). Language learning is mainstream in educational tourism, and English is, of course, the first language to learn. While English has many followers, Greek has few and devoted friends. For 20 years, commencing from an alternative and somehow inaccessible island, Ikaria, the Hellenic Culture Centre created a new "school" in teaching Greek as a foreign language and offered an example of good practice for teachers, tour operators and

agents of local communities wherever it has been active (Ikaria, Lesvos and now Santorini, with teacher training courses also in Barcelona, Milan, Istanbul, Berlin, Nicosia and other European cities). In Lesvos, the HCC through its cooperation with the local cultural society AEOLIS, mobilized the local community in a movement entitled "Destination: Cultural Lesvos", which was a network of artists, cultural associations, municipalities, hoteliers and restaurant operators, tour operators and unemployed youth of the island. This created synergies, kneaded the idea of quality in services and make emerge the need for all inhabitants and entrepreneurs to learn more about their place, local history, customs and events.

Language courses, which is the main part of the programme, are divided into six levels, according to the European Framework of Reference for Languages. We offer intensive courses (two weeks, 66 hours) and extensive programmes, as well as private lessons. Apart from the six levels we organize special language programmes: Greek Literature, Legal Terminology, Greek course for Translators and Interpreters, Katharevousa, three-month Perfection Programme (which includes Greek History, Geography, Financial and Legal terminology, Practice in interpretation and translation). We also offer since 2000 Teacher Training in teaching Greek as a foreign language. Almost all our programmes for language students and teachers are offered online too. We have been certified by the international organization International Language Network (ICC) as the only EUROLTA CENTRE in Greece, and provide Certification to language teachers. For the teacher training seminars we have won the third GINCO Quality Award among thousands of seminars across Europe. Our associates are experienced and specialized teachers in teaching Greek as a foreign language to adults. They are continuously trained inside and outside our organization and are involved in research too.

Culture and Language

Teaching of a foreign language in the place where it is spoken is essentially an invitation to adult travellers to participate to a cultural trip. It is a journey which will remove them from their own "centre of the world", which is usually their country or their city, where they often feel alienated, and bring them in contact with the authenticity of another culture (Cohen, 1979). Greece, with its rich culture, has a lot to offer in this search.

In terms of learning a foreign language, culture is not just a stage during a lesson. Learning a language is in itself an invitation to a culture in order to use the rich cultural resources and join, as a fictional citizen, this new culture. Accordingly, a journey is always a journey to the language and culture of the Other, as is a trip to Ourselves.

Characteristics of the travellers

Let us see in short the profile, i.e. the characteristics, needs and expectations of our customers - students:

Ours programmes are intended to foreigners who live abroad and in Greece, and start or continue learning Greek. Our adult students come from all over the world, mainly from Western Europe and USA, and are either philhellenes of any profession, or expatriate Greeks and professional translators and interpreters. They also are teachers or students of ancient and modern Greek in their countries. They are educated, multilingual and have visited Greece on average 5-6 times at least. The age vary but the average is 45-55. We also have several elderly pensioners. Most are philhellenes i.e. know Greece and support Greece in any way in their countries, by organizing events on Greek culture, going to Greek language courses or Greek dance courses, watching tributes to Greek cinema and organizing themselves 'Greek nights' at home with their friends.

In empirical research (Georgiadou, 2003) on reasons why they learn Greek as foreign language we can see their desire to feel satisfaction coming from their own selves, either because they decided to learn a difficult, almost exotic language or because their friends and acquaintances admire them. Usually the skill to concentrate and collect their spiritual forces to learn new things, especially when one is not on the learning path for long time, gradually decreases with age. Participating in language courses strengthens their self-image, and they feel richer in experiences and are ultimately empowered psychologically (Weiler and Hall, 1992, 8-9). Strangely enough, some of those who insist on learning a difficult language are people who experienced some learning difficulties as children. Their satisfaction is in this case even larger and they feel even more empowered for their learning success. Greek language, with its rich tradition and masterpieces in literary and philosophical works, is very attractive, even more so because many words of Greek origin are located in other languages.

On the other hand, learning a language along with the contact with culture of people who speak this language creates relaxation, offers the feeling of escape from the world of (forced - alienated) labour, and a sense of control on their life and on the experiences that life offers (Chen , Petrick & Shahvali, 2014). We are often told by students: "You can't imagine how much I need to devote myself to Greek and forget everything else" or, " the most important for me is to just forget myself in the language. Greek is ... my treatment! ".

Contact with local people is what makes the difference in every cultural tourism programme. If we created a cultural tourism programme and travellers were not in

contact with locals that would be an important lack in the project, just as if we were organising a solidarity action for migrants and invite only Greeks and no migrants to attend, which is somehow strange and almost hypocritical. Original contacts with Greeks is something that needs to be at the heart of any similar programme. Through this contact something changes to both locals and travellers, if this is done carefully and correctly. They understand each other as people, they change their perceptions about each other and their approach, and shape and develop intercultural skills (Yu & Lee, 2014). This contact creates emotions and personal relationships, which are among the main factors for the return of the traveller to this country. Especially now that the mass media abroad created an unprecedented negative image of Greece, the ability to reverse this picture and create a "positive surprise" (Hosany, 2012) is through personal contacts between travellers and Greeks. We have to see travellers' return to the same place in the light of the relationship that was developed or was not developed with locals. Our students come again and again in the courses, and the former students are always 2/3 of our customers. Visiting the farm of a local producer or the workshop of a local artist is an experience, but primarily is a personal human contact.

Greece is not a country where one goes without knowing anything at all, much more than this year, 2015. Everybody talk about Greece abroad, have an opinion about politics and politicians, everybody feel their lives more or less connected with the Greek crisis, especially if Europeans, and have stereotypes and prejudices. It is up to us - and tourism is called to play this role - to remove their prejudices.

One important category of travellers are the middle - aged and elderly people. Either because they wish to prevent senile dementia or to feel young again - or even children in the classroom! - or, finally, to feel self-fulfilment and realize one of their dreams, our elder students come again and again to the courses, being our most loyal customers. Those students interested in not only activities in the lesson, but rather activities outside the classroom (Littrell, Paige & Song, 2004: 349): they want to walk a path even if they get tired quickly, they want to take part in the excursion by boat to the volcano, even if they can't walk fast, they want to climb the stairs in Thirassia even though they have an knee which has been recently under operation. Changes in the structure of the age pyramid are resulting increase in this form of tourism, and this we see in our organisation.

On the other hand, working people have already flexible work contexts, shorter working time, and are forced to distribute their holidays throughout the year. They have money to spend and are already turning their backs to the "sun and sea" model. These people come back to the model of a traveller - explorer, which was the first

form of tourism, travelling for personal pleasure and mind wandering, curiosity about unknown lands and learning (Lofgren, 1999).

What do they take with them when these people leave? Their small souvenirs are any object that a Greek generously gave to them, which is simple and reminds them just that: a place or a person. It's a small stone with a strange shape, a flower root to plant, a dried flower, a food recipe, a favourite song list recommended by a Greek. These are to be kept for themselves, as evidence of their unique experience (Wilkins, 2011: 241), while other local products they buy are to be given as presents to their friends: the fava beans, wine and cherry tomatoes.

The educational and cultural activities programme

The language programme is framed and substantially supplemented by a parallel programme of educational and cultural activities: cultural presentations, Greek dancing and singing lessons, Greek cuisine lesson, attending theatrical plays and concerts, visits and discussions in museums and professional workshops or exhibitions, trips to places of great natural beauty and cultural value. In this context we incorporate every idea of our associates and the people who are near us: one week can go to a farm to talk about the fava beans and cherry tomatoes, the other week we might arrange Treasure Hunt in Megalohori, in consultation with its residents, who help us, the third day we might press grapes by feet at a winery with our students. We go to learn how ceramics are made by the artist ceramist Makaris and create our own ceramic, we go to participate to local customs such as Klidonas or Lazarus in Megalohori, and Simantra in Perissa, we will decorate the Epitaph in the church of our village.

Here is what we offer as educational and cultural activities in the Cultural programme “Unexplored Santorini”, which we implement every year depending on demand.

Educational presentations & seminars

Presentation of Santorini

Dance lesson on traditional Greek dances

Singing lesson on Greek songs

Tribute to Rebetiko

Cooking lesson and dinner at a restaurant with what we have cooked

Educational - cultural visits

Visit to a local producer and discussion about local products

Visit to an artist's atelier

Visit to a pottery workshop, and pottery course

Tour of a winery (Santo Wines, Venetsanos et al) and wine tasting on the top of the Caldera, sometimes after watching audio-visual material about local vineyards and winemaking traditions.

Educational tours & walks

Walk in Megalochori village: history, people and sights

Visit the traditional villages of Pyrgos or in Emporio and their castles

Educational visit to the Archaeological Museum of Fira with activities in the Museum

Educational visit to the Folklore Museum of Fira with activities in the Museum

Educational visit to Oia and Thirasia island

Visit by boat to the volcanic islands Nea & Palea Kameni and Thirassia

The contribution of the Hellenic Culture Centre:

a) to processing and production of special presentation materials on Greek culture

We have prepared up to date materials for the cultural programme in Greek and English. The singing lesson may be attended by visitors who do not speak Greek (translation of the lyrics in English provided as well as their transcription into Latin characters). The cooking class in a tavern includes booklet with recipes. The dance course is preceded by a presentation of Greek dances, etc. The fees of the cultural programme include: transportation from the HCC' offices in Megalochori, written information material on the topic of the activity, interpretation Greek - English, entrance to museums and archaeological sites, teaching by a trainer of the Centre's team.

b) To the practice and outdoor experiential education methodology

Applying the Project Method, through which our students discover on their own many different aspects of the Greek culture outside the classroom while exchanging information about the cultures from which they come from, is our methodology, which we have supported by relevant research

<http://www.sharinglandscapes.eu/index.php/en/educational-materials/publication> and <http://www.sharinglandscapes.eu/index.php/en/educational-materials/teacher-notes> , implemented with the assistance of the European project "Sharing Landscapes – outdoor adult education". Combination of experiential learning principles to outdoor learning offers students confidence and joy. The interdisciplinary approach offers a valuable tool to integrate their various learning styles and to transmit knowledge, skills and competences tailored to their individual needs. Through implementing the Mutual Learning / Tandem method, where

students teach and learn at the same time, in pairs with native speakers of Greek who learn their language, we have acquired much about how adults learn.

c) To the research on teaching Greek as a foreign language

The teaching materials we use are applied in small and larger groups, based on the principles of individualized teaching. They include many different texts and communicative exercises, so as to operate in mixed - ability classes and in multilingual and multinational classes. A small part of these materials is already published in four books. Our experience is transferred into teacher training courses to teachers from across Europe where, in sessions and workshops, we present some of our teaching techniques and materials. Seminars are carried out face to face or online and cover up to 200 hours of teacher training. While these seminars are already practical and experiential, we also offer the chance to a teacher to do a "practicum", by participating as shadow - teacher or as an observer in our classrooms. The working language for the Greek lessons is Greek, which is the lingua franca in our school.

Participation of the HCC in Networks

We participate in research networks and European projects together with foreign universities, Greek communities and Greek schools abroad, language organizations, enterprises, and research centres. Some of the 20 projects in which we have participated from 2004 onwards are:

- GLOSSA-the Greek as a vehicle for promoting linguistic diversity - online C1 - C2 levels
- SuN.Com - online sustainable language communities
- Metikos - informal learning through Tandem and Language Café for migrants
- JOYN 2.0. Language Champions - use of Social Media for language learning
- EUROLTA - ELTACS Teacher Training Scheme - certified foreign language adult educators
- Montessori – applying the Montessori method to language adult education
- GLOSSA 2- teacher training in teaching Greek online- online B1 level
- M-LANG - use of mobile devices in the language classroom
- Learning to Learn By Teaching 2 - learning techniques through Flipped classroom and knowledge clips

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