

# **CULTURAL TOURISM**

## **Religious tourism and pilgrimage routes - Amorgos case**

Tourism itself has become an increasingly complex phenomenon, with political, economic, social, cultural, educational, bio-physical, ecological and aesthetic dimensions.

Cultural tourism continues to be among the foremost vehicles for cultural exchange, providing a personal experience, not only of the past, but of the contemporary life and society of others. It is an essential part of many national and regional economies and can be an important factor in development, when managed successfully.

The EU recognises the importance of culture as part of the European tourism experience and supports the areas of cultural tourism that have the greatest potential for growth.

It is estimated that cultural tourism accounts for 40% of all European tourism, 4 out of 10 tourists choose their destination based on its cultural offering.

Cultural Routes represent interactive, dynamic, and evolving processes of human intercultural links that reflect the rich diversity of the contributions of different peoples to cultural heritage.

Cultural routes can also strongly contribute to local economies and societies as they work on a sustainable and ethical model, building on local knowledge and skills and often promoting lesser-known destinations. For instance, 90% of cultural routes are through rural areas.

The most well known old route is the Silk Road. This 5,000 km road was not only an ancient international trade route, but also a splendid cultural bridge linking the cultures of China, India, Persia, Arabia, Greece, and Rome. It was functioning since the 2nd century BC and remained in use until the 16th century,

The Council of Europe launched in 1987, the European Cultural Routes program demonstrate, by means of a journey through space and time, how the heritage of the different countries and cultures of Europe contributes to a shared and living cultural heritage. In 2017, are counting 31 Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

The European Commission regularly publishes calls for proposals to support the development of physical or virtual routes that have a transnational or European dimension.

**Religious tourism and pilgrimage routes** are the most ancient forms of tourism. Recent researches show that this category of cultural tourism has produced a tremendous growth especially from the 1990. The number of visitors taking part in religious tourism and their tourism spending an estimated 18 billion USD with over 300 million travelers worldwide.

A large network of ancient pilgrim routes was **the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James)** root stretching across Europe and coming together at the tomb of St. James (Santiago in Spanish) in north-west Spain. This famous pilgrimage site became a symbol in the Spanish Christians' struggle against Islam and one of the most important Christian pilgrimages during the Middle Ages. Today, each year hundreds of travelers set out to make their way to the above tomb.

## **AMORGOS CASE**

**Amorgos**, having about 370 monasteries, churches, chapels could be described as an open air religious museum.

**Hozoviotissa** is one of the oldest and most important monasteries of the Archipelago built on the foot of a giant steep rock.

According to the local tradition the foundation of the monastery is connected to the

discovery of the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary arriving until the foot of Amorgos rock from the Greek Orthodox monastery of Agios Georgios tou Hoziva situated on the Western Bank of Palestine. The monastery was built in 1088 by the Byzantine emperor Alexios Komninos. The current building is the result of various changes taken place during the Venetian occupation (1296-1537) and later. Narrow stone stairs connects the 8 storeys sections of the monastery. The monastery consists of the altar, the monks' cells, the ovens, the warehouses, the wine cellars and various auxiliary rooms.

The vaulted katholikon with the elegant bell-tower, located on the highest point of the complex, hosts the icon of Panagia "Hozoviotissa", other notable Byzantine portable icons and precious offerings. The monastery holds also one of the most remarkable collections of Byzantine and post - Byzantine manuscripts and precious artifacts.

**Mechanisms of promoting Hozoviotissa at international level.** Unesco the only International organization responsible for Culture through the Convention of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO, 1972) provides a permanent framework for international cooperation in safeguarding mankind's cultural and natural heritage and introduces the specific notion of the "world heritage" whose importance transcends all political and geographical boundaries.

The core of the Convention is based on the conception that it is the duty of the international community as a whole to co-operate for the World Heritage protection.

The Committee, responsible for its implementation, establishes the "World Heritage List" including cultural and natural monuments of outstanding universal value based on national inventories and specific criteria. Until today, 18 Greek monuments have been inscribed on the world heritage list, among which and religious ones such as, Mount Athos, Meteora, the Monastery of Saint - John the Theologian and the Cave of the Apocalypse on the Island of Patmos.

In my opinion Hozoviotissa meets all the required criteria for its inscription on the "World Heritage List". With its particular architectural features, its history, its intangible values, its location with the surrounding environment could be nominated

as a cultural landscape of outstanding universal value.

During the years of Ottoman domination (1537-1824), Amorgos, and mainly the capital, Chora, witnessed days of economic development and "ecclesiastical renaissance". Testimonies for the bloom of ecclesiastical architecture from the early 17th century are the numerous churches, most of which are located in Chora. Of the thirty churches of Chora, most of them save the inscriptions of renovation such as the Agioi Panta in 1644, the Holy Apostles in 1689, the St. John the Theologian at the root of the Castle an old dependency of the monanstery of Patmos, the Agia Theodosia, in 1767 and others post-Byzantine churches such as Kera Leoussa, Agios Thaleleos, Agios Thomas.

### **St. George Valsamitis**

The church is a three-aisled, vaulted basilica of the 16th century, built upon an ancient temple dedicated according to myths to the god Apollon and also used to be an oracle connected to a very old tradition of hydrodivination.

### **Panagia Katapoliani**

It is situated among picturesque houses, dominating the settlement of Katapola. Architectural elements from the temple of Pythian Apollo were used for its construction. Under the church there are ruins of an early-Christian basilica, built upon an ancient temple of Apollo according to archaeological findings.

**St. John the Evangelist** is a domed 3-aisled basilika built between the 7th and the 9th century on the site of an ancient temple.

**St. Trianda Chapel** was built during the years of piracy and was used as an occasional hiding place for the local people.

**St. John Chrysostomos** a chapel preserved Byzantine and post-Byzantine frescoes. Outside are ruins of cells and a mill

### **St. Anna chapel**

**PROPOSAL:** a religious route program could be elaborated linking the religious monuments of Amorgos with the analogous ones of the neighboring islands Paros and Naxos.

## PAROS

**Panagia Ekatontapyliani**, is one of the most important Byzantine monuments of Greece (Our Lady of the Hundred Gates) . The church complex dated to 326 contains a main chapel surrounded by two more chapels and a baptistery with a cruciform form. Every year, on August 15th thousands of pilgrims arrive to honor the miraculous icon of the Virgin.

**The monastery of Longovarda** founded in 1638, is the largest monastery of the island and it is famous for the interesting architecture, the icons and the valuable manuscripts.

**The Monastery of Jesus of the Woods** was built in the 18th century and it is actually a nunnery dedicated to the Transfiguration of the Christ and to Agios Arsenios.

**The church of Holy Trinity, built in 1830**, stands In the mountainous village of Lefkes.

## NAXOS

**Panagia Drosiani** The older temple is a cruciform with a dome and later additions built in the traditional architecture with rough slabs of stone a covered with slabs. It dates back to the 6th century AD. The original mural paintings of the monument dated to the first half of the 7th century are unique and probably the most preserved of the period.

**St. Artemios, St. Kyriaki, St. John** were built during the iconoclastic period, 8th and 9th century, when the use of religious images or icons was opposed by religious and imperial authorities within the Eastern Church. So the figurative style decoration was banned and replaced with geometric and floral motifs. Agia Kyriaki has a number of frescoes depicting birds with ribbons on the neck. The monuments of this period are very limited in Greece

**The Monastery of St. John Chrysostom** built in local defensive architecture with an imposing square tower is functioning as nunnery since 1280.

If we take into consideration religion as a motivation, religious tourism includes the

following activities: Visiting religious sites and monuments (churches, clusters, exhibition places). Taking part in religious events (holy days, religious cultural and music programs, visiting religious persons). Pilgrimage. Spiritual training. Ecclesiastic art and literature.

Concerning the above 3 islands thematics of the program could be: history and local traditions on its foundation, architecture of the monuments combining Byzantine styles with the traditional cycladic architecture, the involvement of the local communities in oral traditions, rituals, festive events.

Cultural tourism is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. An understanding of the culture of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

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