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GLAMMONS

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF COLLABORATION AMONG DIFFERENT ACTORS

Panteion University Social and Political Sciences
CREARE SOCIAL
in polis urbanism
Technische Universität Berlin
BSB Burgundy School of Business
european creative hubs network
MAZOMOS Landscape | Heritage | Consultants
Nova Iskra

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This working paper examines the heritagisation process of the uninhabited islet of Spinalonga in Crete over the past decades and its links with processes of local development. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in and around Spinalonga, archival research, and the rich literature, empirical data, and related theoretical intakes, it explores how Spinalonga was transformed from a leper's colony into a heritage site and sheds light on the continuous processes of heritage-making.

Moving beyond the official narratives and representations of Spinalonga as a Venetian fortress, this research seeks to explore the various groups of actors from the cultural sector, local government, economic agents, and communities that appropriate and use the small uninhabited islet in the Mirabello Gulf in Northern Crete. In doing so, this research puts forth the ways in which people make sense of Spinalonga island as a monument, the different paths of memory, and varied "difficult" recollections of its function as a Leper Hospital (1904-1957) and how these narratives rest within historical and contemporary processes of economic and tourism development. Mainly, this study focuses on five interrelated groups of stakeholders:

1. Local communities of the Mirabello Gulf
2. Tourists and the tourism industry
3. Archaeologists, historians, scholars, and practitioners actively involved in Spinalonga's preservation and restoration works
4. Artists and creatives such as authors, visual artists, movie directors, and cinematographers
5. State institutions involved in Spinalonga's management (i.e. the local Ephorate of Antiquities and the Greek Ministry of Culture, the Municipality of Lasithi, and the local government of the Region of Crete)

Since 1976, Spinalonga has been a designated archaeological site[1] under the management of state archaeologists of the Greek Ministry of Culture. Normally, the official archaeological management of heritage sites in Greece leaves little or even no space for public involvement. Official management 'from above' narrows down the ways in which people experience a heritage site and the role they may play in it. However, this is not the case for Spinalonga. Although managed as an archaeological site, in recent years, the small island in the Mirabello Gulf has been providing a rich source of knowledge and inspiration for various groups of actors and has been explored through manifold creative and artistic practices. A good deal of media representations across literary works, films, documentaries, and TV series showcase Spinalonga not only as a mere backdrop but as the set of action and have been constructing and reconstructing the 'difficult' past of the island and its afflicted inhabitants —often in a

[1] Official Government Gazette (FEK) B. 699/1976

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romanticised way. Along with the local discourses on the recent past of Spinalonga and the memories and lived experiences of its function as a leper colony, these creative representations value the heritage site for its recent history and leave aside its formal archaeological meanings and values. These counter-narratives, nurtured by popular culture, have also emerged as the primary discourse for tourism development and tourism consumption.

Against this background, our research on Spinalonga focuses on the multilayered memories, public perceptions, and representations of the heritage site through ethnographic fieldwork and archival research, while we employ the Gramscian notion of hegemony through the interplay between base (economy) and superstructure (meanings, discourses etc). Ethnographic fieldwork unfolds the complex and multilayered processes of heritage-making. At the same time, through archival research, our study deals with the historical processes of heritagisation and the transformation of Spinalonga from a leper colony into a heritage site and, gradually over time, one of Greece's most popular tourist attractions. Our thorough review of the regulatory frameworks and the national and regional strategic developmental plans throws light into official visions for Spinalonga. Understanding this multilayered process, the interplay between competing discourses regarding the site, and the interplay between local/ regional development and heritage management of Spinalonga aims to provide the grounds for new modes of collaboration that enable sharing of knowledge and experience and, more importantly, the sharing of authority and power over the uses of heritage resources.

This deeper understanding of the processes of heritagisation and the ways various groups of actors are involved in them, that span from exploring and promoting a past to exploiting the site for tourism development, leads us to a series of key conclusions. Today, Spinalonga as a heritage site is centrally regulated by the Ministry of Culture, through the local Ephorate of Antiquities. This monocentric governance (Termeer, Dewulf, and van Lieshout, 2010) as the only legitimate mode of managing the site has been excluding local communities, and others partaking in the production of the knowledge about the past of the islet and the management decisions concerning its present and future. Yet, knowledge and lived experiences of Spinalonga as a leper's colony are an intangible set of elements that transcend the strictly centrally-regulated materiality of the site. So, the knowledge about the past of Spinalonga is being produced and reproduced by different groups of people as a heritage commons, where symbolic meanings and values can be and are shared among diverse actors as a resource. Our consideration of knowledge about the past as a resource led us to document a variety of institutional and public heritagisation processes. Heritage-making processes can be rather challenging since they often involve balancing preservation with commercialization, especially in a touristic setting.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM	DESCRIPTION
ICOMOS	International Council of Monuments and Sites
NSRF	National Strategic Reference Framework
ROP	Regional Operational Plan
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHS	World Heritage Sites
GLAMs	Galleries, Libraries, Archive and Museums

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose and Scope

This working paper discusses Spinalonga's recent past and the ways in which this uninhabited islet has been heritagised, or in other words, how it has gradually been transformed from a leper colony to a heritage site and one of Greece's most visited tourist attractions[2]. To do so, we are looking both into official, institutional, and unofficial actors, as we will describe later on. This transformation reflects the evolving dynamics of regional development and the changing socio-economic landscape of the area. The shift from being one of the poorest peripheries of the country to a sought-after tourist destination has undoubtedly influenced the reimagining and utilisation of Spinalonga as a significant cultural and historical site. Spinalonga's status as a heritage institution is shaped not only by official channels but also by the involvement of unofficial, 'unauthorised' actors who serve as 'co-producers' of its meaning and heritage significance. In particular, as our research reveals, these actors, including local communities, artists, writers, cinematographers, and other non-official stakeholders, play a significant role in co-shaping the discourses about Spinalonga's past. Their participation in interpreting the site contributes to a more diverse and nuanced understanding of its historical and cultural significance. We argue that by looking into the ways in which both official and unofficial actors engage with Spinalonga, we can gain a deeper insight into the multifaceted and potentially diverging or even conflicting constituents and 'ingredients' of Spinalonga as heritage.

The engagements of various actors in the interpretation of Spinalonga involve the collective stewardship and co-creation of meaning around the heritage site. By studying these engagements, we can learn about the ways in which diverse stakeholders negotiate identities and place, and collaborate to shape the narratives, representations, cultural images, and uses of Spinalonga. This can provide insight into the complex dynamics of heritage-making and heritage management, the role of local communities and unofficial actors in preserving and interpreting heritage, and the potential for shared governance and co-creation of heritage experiences under increasing tourism pressures and aspirations for regional development. Understanding these as collective practices can also shed light on the evolving nature of heritage sites as dynamic spaces. Documenting the dynamic material-discursive production of Spinalonga as heritage allows us to understand which representations and discourses became dominant over the site's history of heritagisation, how this discursive production is linked to different actors and power blocks, and the processes through which particular conceptualisations of Spinalonga became dominant or established as legitimate, through their resonance with other material/tourism processes in the region (across the spectrum of broader economic processes and relations of production between people, resources and heritage landscape). Unpacking the selective processes of heritigisation, the heterogeneous actors and competing discourses involved in this long process allows us to reflect on the conditions and practices which could render this collective production a heritage commons.

[2] Spinalonga attracts about 410,000 annual visitors and is in the 'top 10' of the mostly visited archaeological sites in Greece (see Hellenic Ministry of Tourism)

1.2. Contribution to other Deliverables

This working paper is integral to GLAMMONS' Work Package 3, 'Communities, Commoners, and Trauma,' specifically addressing Task 3.3 titled 'Communities, Cultural Images, and Economic Development; The Case of Spinalonga.'

Deliverable 3.4 delves into the discourse production processes in Spinalonga—examining official narratives, grassroots stories, and popular culture, as well as the power structures dictating who can speak about Spinalonga. The paper also examines how these narratives interact with tourism discourses and practices and tourism fuelled economic growth—this working paper critically reflects on this ongoing discussion. We focus more deeply on the challenges faced by heritage researchers and managers in crafting a more representative and reflective visitor experience. This includes addressing the complexities of presenting a multifaceted historical site like Spinalonga in a way that honours its diverse past and engages contemporary audiences effectively. In this context, the work presented here complements directly Deliverable 3.5, 'Working paper on the processes, tools and protocols of researching areas of 'dark heritage'' and is also corresponding with Deliverable 3.2, 'Working paper on historical memory, trauma and the sense of belonging.'

1.3. Structure of the Document

In the introductory section, we provided an overview of the working paper's theoretical groundings, setting the stage for an in-depth exploration of regional development and the role of collaboration among different actors. Next, we present in more detail the theoretical framework of our work (Section 2.1). The concept of 'hegemony' is explored, focusing on how cultural representations promote and naturalise particular conceptualisations particular facets of cultural heritage which fit with specific conceptualisations of cultural and economic development driven by particular power blocks. The discourses and representations are examined so as to consider how narratives about the past are constructed, maintained, and contested in the context of regional development. These theoretical intakes provide a comprehensive lens through which the complex interactions between economic forces, power structures, and cultural heritage can be understood and analysed. Our methodology (Sections 2.2) discusses the rationale behind selecting Spinalonga as a case study and outlines the research methods and practices used to gather and analyse data on the case. The next section (Section 2.3) of the paper defines the various groups of actors and agents involved in regional development, heritage management, and the production and dissemination of Spinalonga's representations. The analytical part of the paper (Section 3) follows a chronological order to delve into the processes of discourse production, to explore official narratives and representations in popular culture, and to investigate power structures that determine who is entitled to speak about Spinalonga and how these influence and are influenced by tourism and economic growth. The working paper concludes with a set of concluding remarks (Section 4) on the challenges of heritage management.

2. HERITAGE MAKING AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF SPINALONGA

Our approach aims at exploring how Spinalonga's cultural heritage is shaped through its relation to official knowledge, popular representations, and economic relations, especially the economic relations of the turn to tourism as the main engine of regional and economic development. To do so, we focus on the interplays between local/regional economic development, social transformations and heritage-making. Viewing the ways in which Spinalonga's cultural heritage is used to construct and negotiate identities and place (Ashworth et al., 2007), draws our attention to the ways heritage narratives are influenced by and reinforce power relations and specific economic interests, the ways in which heritage is socially constructed and its meanings and uses are shaped by contemporary social, political and economic contexts (Harvey, 2001). Similarly, Laurajane Smith (2006) argues that heritage is not a neutral recounting of the past but is actively constructed in relation to and potentially used to serve present-day needs and interests. Viewing heritage as part of the superstructure which is in a mutually reinforcing relation with the economic base, we turn to our former readings and writings on Antonio Gramsci (especially Avdikos, 2007). In doing so, we discuss the role of heritage in processes of regional development from a heterodox conceptualisation of development as a point of departure. One that goes beyond economic growth, and attempts to have a more holistic perspective, thereby being sensitive to different components that can influence developmental processes, such as the historical and institutional contexts, but also the social and cultural frameworks that directly or indirectly impact development trajectories.

2.1 Hegemony and the base-superstructure relation

Within the marxist tradition, superstructure refers to the ideas, cultures and ideologies that are shaped by the relations of production and capital. More specifically, the base is seen as determining all the ideological structures in a society and agents make sense of their relations of production and of their world in the terrain of superstructure. Marx states in the Preface of the "German Ideology" that *"civil society as such only develops with the bourgeoisie; the social organisation evolving directly out of production and commerce, which in all ages forms the basis of the State and of the rest of the idealistic superstructure, has, however, always been designated by the same name*" (Marx, 1932; preface). Marx also argued that "*the "idea", the "conception" of the people in question about their real practice, is transformed into the sole determining, active force, which controls and determines their practice"* (Marx, 1932; preface). Thus, ideology is seen as the force that is shaped by the base and, in turn ideology, "guides" human practice, thereby establishing a relationship of straightforward mechanical causality between the base and superstructure.

Within the marxist tradition, but in contradistinction to these mechanical or deterministic conceptualisations of ideology, Gramsci put more emphasis on the immaterial conditions (e.g. history) that affect ideas and produce human praxis and on the role of human beings as subjects that produce historical change (see the introduction to "The Intellectuals" by Luciano Gruppi, 1972). Gramsci's novel conception of the role of intellect and human consciousness allowed him to elaborate how hegemonic ideologies dominate and influence the processes of

social relations through the legitimation of specific power relations. To bring these ideas into the field of cultural heritage and read heritage as a hegemonic apparatus that produces practices and change, we need to see the narratives, representations, significance, and meanings we attach to sites of heritage like this of Spinalonga as as complex, symbolic, sometimes embodied and more often abstract superstructures shaped by and at the same time forming economic and social structures of society. Brian Graham, Greg Ashworth and John Tunbridge presented the needs of people as the key defining element of the definition they give to the term 'heritage' (2000: 2). Therefore they were not concerned whether heritage can be true or false, correct or incorrect but rather with how it serves or challenges existing economic and social hierarchies. In their words "*If people in the present are the creators of heritage, and not merely passive receivers or transmitters of it, then the present creates the heritage it requires and manages it for a range of contemporary purposes. Like many other aspects of modern society, this can be done well or badly, for the benefit, or at the cost, of few or many"* (2000: 2). In seeking to locate heritage in this broader thinking and focusing on the meanings of heritage rather than its material aspects, they conclude that interpretations of heritage are "context bound and power laden".

Accounting for the operations of power in modern societies, Gramsci defined two distinct forms of control: "domination", that is, direct physical coercion by armed forces (e.g. police), and "hegemony", that is, ideological control of the masses which results in their consent to the ruling class and their practices. Hegemony is achieved through gaining consent. It is the spontaneous consent of the masses given to the dominant fundamental group in a society. By hegemony, Gramsci meant the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an "organising principle" that is diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called "common sense" so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things (Boggs, 1976: 39). Femia (1981) gives a more tangible definition. He describes hegemony as *"an order in which a common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour"* (Femia, 1981: 24). Agents consent to the hegemony of a powerful group either actively, by participating in the social processes and supporting the ideology of the group, or passively, by playing the role of bystander and not opposing the actions of the ruling group.

Gramsci emphasises the role of the past in the construction of certain ideologies which efficiently support the structural principles of a hegemonic bloc. When an ideology has certain roots in the past Gramsci calls it a "historically organic ideology" that is essential for a given structure. *"This kind of ideology has a validity, which is "psychological" over agents and creates the terrain on which agents move. These kinds of ideologies, as Gramsci points out, organise human masses and are thus effective through practice, giving a sense of unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct"* (Ransome, 1992: 128-9). In this respect, heritage sites and monuments can be regarded as embodiments or materializations of this "historically organic ideology", selected and promoted as its material reminders. All the other ideologies that are not historically rooted, Gramsci defines as "arbitrary" and he argues that they can only create individual movements and polemics

(Gramsci, 1971: 371) or in our case, engage in counter processes of heritage-making 'from below'. *"In fact every real historical phase leaves traces of itself in succeeding phases, which then become in a sense the best document of its existence. The process of historical development is a unity in time through which the present contains the whole of the past and in the present is realised that part of the past which is essential. The part which is lost i.e. not transmitted dialectically in the historical process, was in itself of no import, usual and contingent "dross", chronicle and not history"* (Gramsci, 1975: 409). This view of the past presupposes time as truly historical which in turn makes the future "radically open" (Massey, 1999: 272). An agent consents to a historically organic ideology because *"this is the way to insure the reciprocal conduct of others...he perceives no realistic alternative... conformity arises out of the existential conditions that make social units interdependent"* (Femia, 1981: 40). History and ideologies that are grounded in space form the "condition" of this kind of consensus. This led Strinati to write that "*it can be argued that Gramsci's theory suggests that subordinated groups accept the ideas, values and leadership of the dominant group not because they are physically or mentally induced to do so, nor because they are ideologically indoctrinated, but because they have reasons of their own"* (Strinati, 1995: 166). Consent legitimates the superior view and position of the ruling group and, as Gramsci argues, consent can result in the active commitment of the masses in the direction the ruling group emphasises.

Gramsci conceptualised the way consensus is given through the way base and superstructure are related to each other; we may view 'heritage' as a terrain whereby meanings ascribed to the past can be negotiated and contested amongst different actors (e.g. what past, whose past). Still, these negotiations are always permeated by power relations produced through base-superstructure interactivity. He used the term historical bloc (bloco storico) to explain how a group can achieve hegemony. The historical bloc is formed by a fraction of groups and allies whose common interest favours one mode of production (and by extension, production of meaning expressed as promoting one heritage interpretation or discourse over another). Gramsci argues that the hegemonic complex of the bloc's cultural and economic institutions *"corresponds to the requirements of the development of the productive forces"* (Gramsci, 1971; 128). This means that the structure has a primacy over the superstructure in a sense that the former influences the latter. Gramsci believed (in line with Marx) that the trajectory of human history is shaped by the structure and the development of the relations of production. However, he realised when he elaborated the case of the Italian Risorgimento (the backward Italian South) that backward societies can "borrow" ideas from more advanced ones but always in relation to their spatial history, as ideologies need always the essential and adequate historical conditions to develop and support the structure. Moreover, Gramsci stresses that ideological hegemony is also attained by elaborating the interests of other groups (allies, subordinate) into the interests of the ruling bloc. So, this gives another dimension of how hegemony can be achieved. Gramsci explains that *"the fact of hegemony undoubtedly presupposes that the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised are taken into account, that there is a certain equilibrium of compromise, that, that is, the ruling group makes sacrifices of an economic corporate kind, but it is also indubitable that such sacrifices and such compromises cannot affect what is essential"* (Gramsci, 1971: 161).

Gramsci suggests that *'in a hegemonic system democracy between the ruling group and the ruled groups exists to the extent that the development of the economy, and therefore of the legislation which expresses that development, holds open the channels for the ruled to enter*

the ruling group' (cited in Podlashuc, 2011: 1). Hegemony and the power of it, is never a fixed and closed system, never always already achieved.

To sum up, hegemony in the Gramscian notion means that a ruling bloc becomes hegemonic when the subordinate groups share the ideology of the ruling bloc and consent to the bloc's functions. This is built upon an ideological basis which serves the interests of the ruling group but also addresses the interests of other alliance groups. However, consensus is always built upon an economic base. *'Hegemony's ideological superiority must have solid economic roots; it must have its foundation in the decisive function that the leading group exercises in the decisive nucleus of economic activity'* (Gramsci, 1957: 31). The single view of society and culture has a psychological validity over other ideologies as it is constructed in accordance with spatial historicity. Adamson argues that a class or group *"as it develops itself historically, becomes more or less politically powerful not only because of its position within the economic structure but also because it is the carrier of certain values"* (Adamson, 1980; 176). Hegemony means either the passive consensus or the active engagement of other groups that historically share these same values. In turn, it allows us to conceptualise heritage as a dynamic terrain, where multiple agents actively claim their views of the past that may reproduce official discourse or may deviate from the hegemonic 'canon'.

In the process of gaining consent popular culture becomes an exemplary terrain which, as Bennett (2009: 26) explains, "is structured by the attempt of the ruling class to win hegemony and by forms of opposition to this endeavour. As such, it consists not simply of an imposed mass culture that is coincident with dominant ideology, nor simply of spontaneously oppositional cultures, but is rather an area of negotiation between the two within which – in different particular types of popular culture – dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural and ideological values and elements are 'mixed' in different permutations". Within British cultural studies, in what Tony Bennet (2007: 5-6) terms "the turn to Gramsci", the concept of hegemony was conceptualised as giving due weight to the role of cultural and ideological forces as well as non-class actors, allowing a non-reductive theorisation of class struggle, and offering a way to conceptualise popular culture as a mobile formation made up of diverse elements that could be articulated together in various configurations and connected to social struggles in a variety of intricate ways.

In the heritage milieu, acceptance of values, beliefs, morals and meanings is a requirement for transforming a thing or a set of things into heritage. Making certain meanings and values dominant is an essential part of the heritagisation processes. The domination of some narratives—often over others—makes cultural heritage sites seem natural and beyond negotiation. A cultural heritage site is made "visible, sensed, memorable and widely accessible" by archaeology (Solomon, 2021: 3), and more specifically in Greece by the Archaeological Service which is—to use Gramsci's terms—'a coercive state institution' and the oldest in Europe, with long-held power over national heritage. Making a place accessible as a heritage site, provides the ground for public engagement. And it is through this public engagement with the place, its meanings, values and narratives that consent is achieved. In other words, a heritage site becomes part of civil society through the official discourses and representations, popular or other, which transmit narratives and values. Heritage has historically played a central role in the development of the modern nation as an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) , and the establishment of historically organic ideology (Hall,

1999). Heritage sites play a significant role in the construction of community identity, and tourism, while embodying and communicating specific ideological and historical narratives.

Power dynamics and ideologies shape certain representations through which cultural heritage is presented and interpreted (Hall, 1997) and authorised views and discourses are produced and established (Smith, 2006). And conversely, this "authorised" view of heritage, for instance, the way a heritage site like Spinalonga is interpreted within hegemonic politics of the past, reflects the ideological agenda and priorities of those who have the power to shape the site's representation in the present. This can perpetuate the selective function of heritage and history that supports and legitimises power structures. Still, beyond official discourse of policy, regulations and narratives of the past often emerge counter-processes of heritage-making, appropriations (e.g. in literary and cultural texts) and ascriptions of heritage values from 'below' (e.g. use values, economic values and so on). Exploring these further is useful in order to better understand how heritage functions as a 'resource' in the present or even how sites and monuments can contribute to the emergence of 'heritage commons' thus destabilising established hegemonic articulations.

2.2 Approaching Spinalonga: Research scope and methodology

Our research concerns events that began after 1957 when the islet of Spinalonga in the Mirabello Gulf stopped being an exile island where people affected by leprosy were isolated. Since then, Spinalonga has been undergoing complex and manifold heritagisation processes, reflecting shifts in social, cultural and economic perspectives. Concurrently, the Mirabello Gulf and particularly Elounda and Plaka, have transformed from poor and largely depopulated villages into a vibrant tourism economy, attracting significant investments in the luxury all-inclusive hotels sector. This shift has not only revitalized the local economy but also brought challenges related to sustainability and power relations. It is worth noting that before the early 1960s, villages of the Mirabello Gulf were connected to Ayios Nikolaos, the capital town of the region, by boat. The transition to a tourism-driven economy necessitated new modes of transportation. Today, Plaka, the small settlement that is only a few minutes by boat to Spinalonga, is a seasonally inhabited area that lacks the typical public and social spaces of a village. In Plaka there are about 35 hotels (most of them can be regarded as luxury five star hotels, 2024) and more than 60 luxury villas that are rented through short-term rental platforms.

To follow how the story of the islet unfolded within the last decades of the 20th century, we interviewed key representatives from official institutions (Ministry of Culture, local authorities), from the local community, and the tourism sector. Our interviews sought to understand how these representatives interpret the islet's past in the present context. Since all of our informants had participated in the management of Spinalonga and its transformation into a heritage site from different positions, the interviews were lengthy and dense in detail. The density and depth of their insights were beyond what we had initially anticipated. Each recorded conversation provided a wealth of information, reflecting the complexities and controversies of Spinalonga's heritagisation processes, and indicating the need for careful archival reconstruction of the forces and knowledges involved in the heritagisation of Spinalonga. The analysis of the interviews proved to be a demanding task that required careful attention to the historical frame and context of what was being said. This process involved extensive research into local and national press, as well as historical archives, including the Archive of the Archaeological

Service, the General State Archives of Greece and the Archive of the Historical Museum of Crete. The archival material allowed us to uncover the story of Spinalonga's development, observing how the islet transformed into its present state and tracing the contributions of various stakeholders to this process of heritage-making.

Exploring the multifaceted heritage narratives surrounding Spinalonga is a complex and compelling endeavour. Our research delved into the diverse heritage values and representative images that coexist in historical and cultural discourses concerning Spinalonga. The narratives range from portraying Spinalonga as a former leper colony to recognizing its significance as an archaeological cultural heritage site. These representations often embody both positive and negative aspects of Spinalonga's past, reflecting the intricacies of its heritage. The primary aim of this fieldwork was to discern and record diverse voices, involving crucial representatives from the local community, the Archaeological Service, the tourism sector and the art world. Through the discussions, we seek to shed light on different aspects of Spinalonga's past, exploring how each entity treats and deals with the different layers of heritage islet's history. Additionally, our research focused on gathering and analysing a manifold of published memoirs from lepers and descendants of the lepers community through archival research as well as documentaries and other footage of Spinalonga before 1957. Thus, our research delves into the depiction and utilisation of Spinalonga in literature and the arts, aiming to understand how collective memory and imagination is shaped and perpetuated. By conducting multi-sited research across different representations and contexts, we aim to comprehensively grasp the subject's presence within and impact on various creative media. Additionally, our investigation extends to the multiple expectations and visions of the mixed community formed around Spinalonga, examining the factors that contribute to the formation of different expectations and visions for the future of the island, including aspirations for regional development paths. Throughout this exploration, the role of literary tourism in shaping perceptions of the past and future of Spinalonga is also a focal point of our research.

Overall, our focus points, listed below, determined the methods and practices of the fieldwork and the ways in which we approached Spinalonga as a subject of research.

A. The various heritage narratives currently existing and coexisting on Spinalonga encompass a wide range of historical and cultural discourses, heritage values, and representative images. These narratives include the portrayal of Spinalonga as a former leper colony, its significance as a cultural heritage site, and its role in local history. Additionally, representations of Spinalonga may encompass both positive and negative aspects of its past, reflecting its heritage's complex and multifaceted nature. Focusing on multiple and sometimes *contested discourses* about and around Spinalonga, our primary intention is to discern and record diverse voices. Therefore, crucial representatives from the local community, the Archaeological Service, the tourism sector and the art world are approached as our main discussants in order to throw some light on different aspects of the past of Spinalonga. How each of them treats and deals with the past of the heritage islet? What do they want to remember and what to forget? What is left out of the official (either it being the hegemonic ones or not) discourses produced by archaeology? Where and how do public and alternative discourses about the recent past of Spinalonga emerge?
B. Our research also focuses on how Spinalonga is depicted and utilised in literature and the arts (and by extension, how these feed into the image of Spinalonga as a tourism

attraction). By examining these appropriations, we aim to understand how collective memory is created and perpetuated. In order to accomplish this, our approach involves conducting multi-sited research, which means that we actively track and observe our subject—Spinalonga—across different artistic representations and contexts. This allows us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject's presence and impact within various creative mediums. How do different artistic representations contribute to shaping public perception of Spinalonga? How does Spinalonga's artistic appropriation differ from its archaeological and historical interpretations? Moving beyond archaeological interpretations, and investigating Spinalonga under the lens of public history, we reflect upon issues concerning the production of history 'from below'. How arts, and more effectively literature, affect the production of history and stories of Spinalonga within the public domain?

C. Another major concern of our research and a focal point of the interviews conducted are the multiple expectations and visions of different representatives of groups of interest formed around Spinalonga. What are people expecting for the future development of Spinalonga islet? What factors contribute to the formation of different expectations and visions for the future of Spinalonga among the representatives of the hybrid community? What is the role tourism plays in the ways people think of the future of the past of Spinalonga? These questions allow us to investigate in more detail how Spinalonga's cultural heritage is shaped within underlying economic relations, as underlined earlier in this section.

3. THE MAKING OF SPINALONGA

This part of the paper offers a contextualised narrative of how Spinalonga has been conceived as a heritage site over time. In this way, it aims to reveal the various forces that have been constructing Spinalonga, producing discourses and cultural images, and defining the ways in which the islet is being historicized, heritagised, and managed since 1957 when the Greek state officially ceased the operation of the leper colony. With a particular focus on regional development, this part of the paper seeks to understand how developments in the region of Lasithi have shaped Spinalonga's treatment, both by the state and the public and private actors (i.e. civil society and economic base). As many historians and heritage experts point out, history and heritage appear when other uses stop or when something that has no use is threatened (among others, Liakos, 2007). Still, there is no such thing as 'heritage' until some community, social group or institution assigns value to it. Spinalonga's past at that time remained largely *terra incognita.* It was an incoherent mass of material remains and archival documents scattered around Crete and beyond. Through the last decades, our knowledge about the islet gradually expanded to cover fields of the Venetian, the Ottoman, and the more recent and difficult-to-deal-with past of the leper colony. As historical knowledge expanded and the manifold heritagisation processes progressed, Spinalonga was evicted from the familiar surroundings of the local communities of Mirabello. It became a *heterotopia* (Foucault, 1986) where local views and narrations co-exist with official historical and archaeological understandings and where conservation and protection at institutional level needs to negotiate with economic pragmatism and ever-increasing tourism activity. Thus, Spinalonga today, both as a physical space and as an imagined one, exists outside ordinary experience. It is a space where multiple perspectives and interpretations of the past are present and can be explored. But how is it constructed, and how does it acquire its meanings in global, regional, and local contexts?

From a cultural heritage point of view, Spinalonga has been framed and reframed within the last half of the 20th century in ways that include certain elements and exclude others. Tracking this balance between included and/or excluded elements, we attempt an ethnographic approach to Spinalonga's landscape while at the same time examining institutional changes and shifting political and economic frameworks. In doing so, we consider the islet as a landscape that is always *in the making* (Lekakis, 2023). In other words, as an experiential landscape that is being socially constructed and often contested (Bender, 1993; Tilley, 1994; Kalantzis, 2019; Solomon, 2021) and where we can observe acts of 'mnemeiosis', namely counter processes of heritage designation at a grassroots level that deviate from the national, abstract and often authoritative accounts of the past (Lekakis & Dragouni, 2020; see also GLAMMONS Deliverable 2.4 - Section 2).

3.1. Spinalonga as a leper colony

Before 1957, Mirabello's small, poor, and remote villages depended on the regular allowances and subsidies received by the Spinalonga lepers. Spinalonga offered a significant source of income back then; thus, taking care of the lepers was a primary economic activity for the locals, who delivered the needed supplies and services to the leper colony (see also Lekakis, 2023: 38). Although one might think of the islet and its leper colony as a place of confinement

demarcated by the sea and segregated by mainland Crete, Spinalonga was integrated into a field of social and economic relationships as in other small islands (see, for example, Olwig, 2007: 260). While the region suffered from the depopulation caused by massive emigration, the local community, left behind, struggled to survive depending on the leper's income. Conversely, lepers relied heavily on locals for daily sustenance and survival.

Supplies such as groceries, farm goods, and others were mainly produced locally and, therefore, were limited but essential. Services such as those of dressmakers and tailors, carpenters, cobblers, and builders were highly valued in the lepers' small but vibrant community. The locals of the coastal villages in Mirabello regularly provided all the above and many more. Therefore, at that time, health policy has been shaping hugely local economic relations between Spinalonga and its nearby settlements, as state allowances to the diseased were subsequently injected to the local atrophic economy. Moreover, the management of pain and human suffering (and by extension economic benefits flowing from it) had been rationalised and justified as commonsensical by the concurrent ideology and biopolitics, promoting the 'exile' paradigm as the only solution for public health and safety (for a more detailed account see Lekakis, 2023: 34-7). The said dynamic exchanges between base and superstructure, and their resulting practices, are the 'raw materials' in the making of Spinalonga's difficult heritage and troubling history (Macdonald, 2009). In addition, these two distinct but interdependent communities were connected by the sea that separates Mirabelo coast villages and the fortified settlement of Spinalonga. However, their linkage relied on the boats going back and forth, transferring goods and people. Boatmen of Elounda, who relied on this business demand, provided transport by boat to and from Spinalonga according to their wills and their expectations for profit and revenue. The interconnectedness was a matter of complex negotiations between local boatmen and the leper's community. Even today, although means of transportation, passengers, and their needs are utterly different (mainly tourists wishing to visit the site, and the workforce of the heritage site), going back and forth still involves complications regarding who wants and who needs to be transferred and at what cost.

3.2. Spinalonga 1957-1976

After 1957, the islet was abandoned for almost two decades. Spinalonga's ruinous landscape became a resource of ready-made building materials and was systematically despoiled. Despoliation of the islet of Spinalonga is remembered with regret by many of our interlocutors, mainly due to the irretrievable loss:

> The island was violently despoiled. I won't put it in quotes —at least until it came under the protection of Archaeology.
>
> [Publisher of a local newspaper]

> What is happening [before the archaeological designation of the site] is the systematic looting [...]. We know that "mesa" (inside, she means on the island), especially during the Junta, there was a special platform that arrived on the island and loaded all the construction material and went and unloaded it, opposite where the hotels, Elounda Beach, the expensive hotels were built. All the fireplaces, doors and gates, all that. So the island is an open space -an unprotected area, which is being plundered as a source of building material. This happened.

[Archaeologist of the local Ephorate]

> In other words, the place was looted by the hoteliers —was looted. That is, if you go to the big hotels, the five-star ones, you will see furniture, built-in Turkish coats of arms, whatever you want. [...]. I think that Spinalonga suffered incredible brutality both from society and from the businessmen afterward, who basically understood that it was something important and tried to fit it into their own interests afterward.
>
> [Local journalist]

This era of Spinalonga's dereliction coincided with the first days of tourism development in Mirabello Gulf and the construction of some of Greece's largest and most luxurious hotels (for example, "Elounda Beach", established in 1973 and others to follow). Large-scale hotels in Elounda saw Spinalonga as a rich *lapidarium* where wooden and stone parts of the ruins could be sourced as raw materials. These developments are in line with broader economic developments and politics in Greece as since 1961, national policy set out to promote a more massively appealing destination image, ‘no longer based only on the ancient monuments’ but also emphasising ‘modern comforts and amenities’ (Colonas, 2015: 79). In 1971, "Elounda Beach" –for the last time– addressed the Archaeological Service for a renewal of their permission to draw ready-made structural elements from Spinalonga [1]. Manolis Mpormpoudakis, an archaeologist and the director of the Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities in Crete, rejected the application after a decade of despoiling. An urgent telegram on the 25th of February 1971 from the Ephorate of Antiquities to local authorities in Mirabello asked for the immediate stop of resourcing of material of Spinalonga [as above]. The author of the telegram, Manolis Mpormpoudakis, acknowledged the fact that Spinalonga's despoiling was legit due to official permission issued by the Greek National Tourism Organization, which was the owner of the islet after it stopped operating as a leper colony. However, he demanded an immediate stop to despoiling, claiming *the archaeological significance of the material remains of Spinalonga's Venetian past*.

Spinalonga remained in this limbo state, outside of “normal places and lives” (Nelson, 2019) of tourists and locals alike, but at the core of strong local and international aspirations for future development and growth for almost 20 years. Within this time, the public sphere in the Mirabello Gulf and Lasithi was highly concerned with the islet's future use during the 1960s and the 1970s. Spinalonga had been, for more than half a century, one of the few sources of income for Elounda and the surrounding villages of the Gulf. Therefore, a new use that would substitute this income for the local communities settled on the coastline of Mirabello needed to be found. Ideas and visions for the future of Spinalonga were many and indicative of a good many different ideologies, priorities, and preferences. In the public sphere, as we can see in the local press of the time, locals and local authorities were faced with the question of what to do with Spinalonga. *How could a new use of the islet bring in the income that used to come from the lepers?* Ideas and visions expressed in the newspapers of the time included a Naval Base, a hotel, a conference hall, a research centre, and a cultural park. Eventually, archaeologists put a stop to all these ambitious ideas by designating Spinalonga as an archaeological site in 1976. Through their efforts, Spinalonga's archaeological significance and values, first as a Venetian fortress and later on as an Ottoman settlement, have been brought to light, enabling it to be appreciated and understood as a valuable piece of heritage.

This development is not particularly surprising considering that ‘the occupation of the present

by the past' and the privileged power of archaeology has a long tradition in Greece (see indicatively, Yalouri, 2001; Hamilakis, 2007; Damaskos & Plantzos, 2008), coupled with a general movement of 'heritage revivalism' arising across Europe at the end of the 1970s that led to the proliferation of 'historical places' (Yalouri, 2015: 220). Particularly in Greece, heritagisation processes have been traditionally mixed with Western romantic ideology (e.g. idealising Classical antiquity) and post-war pragmatism that crystallised the consensual hegemonic notion of monuments and heritage sites as tourism capital (Dragouni & Lekakis, *forthcoming*).

Beyond the newly sprouted archaeological interest in the Venetian remnants of Crete (Kokkou, 2009), in the 1970s, tourism interest also grew significantly in the region of Eastern Crete (Buck-Morss, 1987), and Spinalonga became one of the most popular tourist attractions of Lasithi. Almost two decades after World War II, tourism development in Mirabello and Lasithi radically transformed local communities and the place in fundamental ways. The local economy from agriculture and fishing, characterised by self-sufficiency to a high degree, turned into tourism. Tourism then became a major –if not the only– driving force of general economic development (Tsartas *et al*, 1995). This shift in economy signalled a "profound and rapid change" in society (Kosseris & Clutton, 1968: 64). According to a 10-year development plan for the island of Crete, drawn by an Israeli development consulting firm in collaboration with the Greek Ministry of Co-ordination in 1965, approximately 20% of the agricultural workers were to be absorbed by the service sector. What was envisaged for the future of Lasithi was the growth of the tourism industry, which after all, complied with the US hegemonic call for Greece developing tourism as 'the ideal export' (Alifragkis and Athanassiou, 2018: 599). The Development Plan of the 1960s set a major focus on the Gulf of Mirabello where "sea and sunshine, famous archaeological sites, and considerable scenic variety within a small area" were provided (Kosseris & Clutton, 1968: 68). The overall objective of the Development Plan was "to incorporate the 'backwards' Mediterranean countries into the capitalist system of northwestern Europe" (Kallus, 2015: 340).

In this larger context, even though the history of Spinalonga had not been officially established or recognized, the islet was open to free interpretation and representation by various groups and individuals according to their needs and aspirations. From 1957 until 1976, when Spinalonga was officially designated an archaeological site, it underwent a transformation in terms of its recognition and status. This shift marked a turning point in the formal acknowledgment of Spinalonga as a site. It wouldn't be unsound then to name this period, 'the period of Spinalonga's inception', i.e., the time of its establishment as a tourist attraction, a monumental insular landscape, and an archaeological site.

Since then, Spinalonga's interpretations and representations have been constantly negotiated and even contested, among the different groups of actors and agents. Thus, the "making of" Spinalonga can be narrated as a series of continual attempts to adjust its past, history, and heritage to diverse demands and needs, from economic growth pressing requirements to collective memory claims.

Within the decade of the 1970s, tourism had connected even the remotest villages of Crete to the rest of the world, particularly Western Europe and the USA. In the early years of tourism development in Crete after the Second World War, tourists followed non-institutionalized paths

that led them to establish the first “tourist receiving destinations” (Andriotis, 2000: 94). As it happened in other places in Greece (Nikolakakis, 2017), tourism played a pivotal role in shaping the heritage of Crete by introducing the island's historical and cultural assets to a global audience. Within this broader context, Spinalonga was “discovered” by tourists who were exploring Crete. Yet, the idea for a proper heritage site was not mature enough, and therefore other suggestions for the exploitation of this uninhabited islet seemed to be possible courses of action, as the following clipping from a local newspaper reveals:

> TODAY’S DRY-ISLAND, Spinalonga will turn into a paradise for tourists. The vivid interest of multiple tourism sector enterprises. Five tourism enterprises applied proposals for rent out and exploitation of Spinalonga to the Organization of Tourism. Spinalonga is thus going to be a paradise for tourism. According to the relevant decisions of the Organization, [...] Spinalonga is set to host: 1. 400-bed hotels. Three of them will be able to accommodate 130-150 tourists –and will be installed in suitably configured facilities on the west side of the island, and the two new luxury (hotels of) 80-100 beds on the east coast, 2. A complex of bungalows for 50-60 tourists, 3. Leisure centres, restaurants, cafes, and nightclubs, 4. A marina designed to accommodate small tourist boats and three beaches with water sports and sports facilities.
>
> [Newspaper *Anatoli*, 11-5-1967]

During Greece's military junta (1967-1974), tourism became a major economic and developmental aspiration (Nikolakakis, 2017), and therefore, plans for profitable uses of the islet of Spinalonga gained ground. Nevertheless, the heritagisation of the islet presupposed the study and understanding of its past. To be turned into a heritage site, an archaeological and/or historical narrative, and relevant meanings and values should be produced. As long as it wasn’t perceived as a heritage site, all kinds of courses of action were acceptable and legit. However, the increased influx of visitors in the decades of 1960 and 1970 attracted the attention of the local archaeological service and led to the designation of the islet as an archaeological site, which was the first and most significant step towards its preservation and the restoration of significant historical sites and monuments. The current prevailing conception of Spinalonga as a heritage site worth preserving and restoring is the result of great efforts made in scholarly and managerial terms.

3.3. Spinalonga 1976 - 1997

Ever since 1976, archaeology has been studying, analysing, and preserving evidence from the past of the islet (see, for example, Mpormpoudakis, 1977 on the first days of Spinalonga’s systematic study and preservation). Archaeologists' scholarly endeavours, often, when linked to managing a heritage site, result in fixed meanings communicated through various *in situ* representation modes. In one of the first systematic archaeological studies, Spinalonga was thoroughly documented and historically analysed as a Venetian fortress (Arakadaki, 2001). Maria Arakadaki's doctoral thesis focused on the architecture of the Venetian fortification of the islet of Spinalonga. It contributed significantly to its historical analysis covering more than a century (1571-1715) of Spinalonga's past. The inheritance of her scholarly work on Spinalonga was seminal and is still apparent in the ways in which we refer to and navigate through the island's architectural material elements. Since the Venetian era was the first and, up to early the 2000s, the only scientifically documented past of the islet, it rendered

Spinalonga primarily a Venetian fortress. Hence, specific architectural elements of the Venetian era such as the *Porta Maestra*, the *Rangone-portello de fuori,* and the *Pontone Bembo* were the first to be restored and became the first landmarks to be referred to ever since.

From the point of Spinalonga's designation, several contributions have been made by scholars to the heritage-making process. Following Maria Arakadaki's doctoral thesis on the Venetian fortification, Georgia Moschovi, an archaeologist with a background in political sciences, dealt with the Ottoman remains. In the late 1990 when she was assigned to the management of the archaeological site of Spinalonga and the writing of its official archaeological guide (Moschovi, 2005), as she confesses, she faced a significant archaeological deficit regarding the islet's Ottoman past. The primary interest of the Archaeological Service on the islet was the Venetian past, as an archaeologist, formerly in charge of the management of Spinalonga remembered in our interview:

> When I went to Spinalonga, I went because it was a Venetian fortress. This was the only reason why the Archaeological Service was there.

To deal with the material evidence of the Ottoman fortified settlement of Spinalonga, the archaeologist interviewed, had to reveal a story of continuous dismantlement and multiple reuses. Tracking how material remnants of the Ottoman past acquired new forms and uses through the 20th century was challenging. It demanded a transdisciplinary approach that transcended the archaeological methodologies. To do so, archaeologists had to grasp the arcana of the recent past of the leper's colony on the islet, which had yet to be documented or studied.

During the Ottoman times, Spinalonga was not just a place of confinement but rather a bustling village with significant interactions with the mainland (Moschovi, 2001; Sorou, 2013). It was not a well-confined islet settlement, as believed. It had a vibrant community with connections to the coast on the other side of the sea. The preservation of Spinalonga's Ottoman houses and remains was attributed to the gradual settlement of lepers after the establishment of the leper colony in 1904. This influx of residents led to the preservation of the existing structures and remnants from the Ottoman period. Ottoman things, objects, and surviving materialities themselves allowed their gathering, classification, and archaeological interpretation. The Ottoman past of Spinalonga was thoroughly studied by the archaeologists in the late 1990s and early 2000s and became heritage as a result of human care. Human care includes the lepers' community that preserved the Ottoman remains to fulfil their accommodation and life needs, but also includes archaeologists' care. Archaeologists, through various selective processes, intentionally addressed the Ottoman past of Spinalonga and by doing so, they pulled it out of "the 'raw', unfiltered legacy passed on" (Olsen & Pétursdóttir, 2016: 40).

Archaeologists found themselves out of expertise regarding the 'difficult past' of the leper colony. In addition to the lack of expertise, the leper's past bears the burden of stigmatisation, which makes it really 'difficult' to deal with. However, the leper colony's material remnants on the island were not something to ignore. They were there to challenge archaeologists to rethink their understanding of memory and confront ethical questions, expanding the concept of heritage to encompass unconventional or controversial elements. Still today, the lepers' past of the island forces us to reconsider who and what is deemed worthy of preservation and

commemoration and how narratives of the past are constructed. When the archaeologist mentioned above, took over the site's management on behalf of the Archaeological Services, the leper's past was—and to an extent still is—a lived past.

Archaeologists conveniently focused on the distant past of the Venetian fortress and the Ottoman settlement. With this focus, in the mid-90s, a restoration project received ongoing support from the Municipality of Ayios Nikolaos. This first phase of the restoration aimed at restoring the Venetian fortress, and it was just the beginning of a series of subsequent programs that lasted for more than 20 years. Restoration efforts radically transformed Spinalonga into what it is today. The archaeologist who managed the restoration from its very beginning, recalled the first days of her presence on the islet:

> When I went there [she means to Spinalonga], it was a garbage dump. The view was disappointing—to say the least—disappointing and shameful. It was an open island with no control. People entered and did whatever they wanted—throwing their garbage everywhere. Cisterns were full of trash—tins, cans, rubbish. Cannot imagine what it was like. Debris from houses that were ruined and accumulated weeds, woods, and ruins. But that is okay; seeing a ruined house and weeds around it may be appealing. But full of rubbish? Graves were open. A miserable thing.

For a couple of decades until the 2000s, the islet had a life of its own, with no rules and no one to watch how it was treated. One could argue that Spinalonga had a vivid social life in those days and was well integrated into the local community's social interactions and shared leisure experiences. Experiences of Spinalonga varied significantly from mere boat trips, walking around the island, and sightseeing to sea salt hand harvesting and foraging caper and other wilds. The island also hosted parties and other debatable behaviours. These activities added an air of mystery and intrigue to the island's reputation, making it an alluring but sometimes controversial destination for visitors seeking adventure beyond the typical tourist experience. Spinalonga was transformed into a public space where even the usual rules and policies had no authority.

Although one would expect that the lack of rules would lead people to manage Spinalonga collectively, this didn't happen. Instead, people sought to establish their own dominance and control (by excluding others; thus creating a ‘community’ that is not community-like and porous), and the overall treatment of the islet was to profit individuals rather than managing and producing the heritage site as a commons resource. Through these decades, the only collective subjectivity that emerged from the dense interaction with the islet were the boatmen who transformed their boats from fishing to passenger boats. In 1996, boatmen transferring visitors to Spinalonga established a joint venture in order to regulate the transportation services, coordinate their business operations more effectively, control the profit share and ensure a fair and transparent distribution of earnings among the participating boatmen. Archaeologists recall the time when the first guides arrived on the island as a part of the introduction of the admission fee in 1998. The boatmen opposed the idea of charging visitors an admission fee to Spinalonga, as they believed it would negatively impact their earnings. To express their opposition, boatmen refused to get the newly employed guides to the island, as some locals and some archaeologists still remember. This refusal was a statement of power over the heritage site and aversion towards a ‘top-down’ decision that was imposed centrally by the Ministry of Culture. What was made clear was that the site accessibility and the

livelihoods of the boatmen are so closely intertwined that one cannot exist without the other. This interdependence is often challenging and leads to tensions in the absence of a commoning culture that would enable the cultivation of a more equitable system between people and resources. A younger contract-based archaeologist described this dynamic relationship between boatmen and the working forces of Spinalonga. The reliance on the 'boat' as the sole mediator for any action, was commented upon emphasising the boatmen's tendency to act only when there is an immediate benefit for them.

> So, nothing can be done without the mediation of the boat, as they call it. Boatmen do something or only do something when they have an immediate benefit and so this situation exists.

Another archaeologist also commented that:

> This part about the boats and the boatmen is another huge story. We were paying for everything. The Ministry of Culture was paying money for the guards [she means to be transferred to Spinalonga], other money for the workers. We were budgeting an enormous amount of money for each restoration project for the transportation and the transfer of the materials and stuff needed. And we were obliged to do so. You get the feeling that in this place you cannot exist if the boat won't get you there.

Apart from the profit made by their involvement in transferring materials and the workforce of the islet, boatmen also derive indirect benefits from the scenic beauty and picturesque looks of Spinalonga and the surrounding seascape. Occasionally, they get directly involved in preserving and sustaining the islet's acceptable and adequate state. As an archaeologist commented:

> So, as soon as a tour guide took over, she posted a photo on Facebook. About the trash that had piled up on the beach. Because I had said "gather all the trash on the beach" to put some kind of pressure [he means to the authorities], [...] that the trash is piling up over there. What happens; Why isn't everyone mobilising? As soon as the tour guide took action, a boatman volunteered to pick up the trash so we wouldn't spoil our image again.

The point, made by the archaeologist here, is that Spinalonga has been rendered into a "moving, or beautiful, or sublime" site (Blackburn, 2016: 8) or in other words it has been aestheticised through various processes. As an example, in the early days of the Archaeological Service involvement with the site, four buildings of the 1930s were demolished in an attempt to cleanse Spinalonga of any negative connotation regarding leprosy. However, turning the island into an object adequate for aesthetic consumption "must involve a collective process of valorising the aesthetic" (Degalp et al., 2020: 47). This shared understanding of Spinalonga as an aesthetically pleasing place was gradually built on (or maybe under) the "tourist gaze" (Urry, 1990). The island within the tourism developments in the region of Lasithi and the Eastern Crete provided and still provides "a form of escape from a society" (Goulding, 2001: 567) into a "paradise" (Azcárate, 2020: 33). Locals and other involved individuals and collectivities are aware that Spinalonga must remain aesthetically appealing to visitors in order to attract tourists and maintain its high visitation. The role of aesthetics in the consumption of heritage is crucial for ensuring the sustainable promotion of its heritage value. Yet, what is implied in the young archaeologist's words is that this approach to Spinalonga lacks integrity

and depth. The shallow focus on the aesthetic aspect may overshadow the historical and cultural significance of Spinalonga. It seems that there is a need for a balanced approach that highlights both the aesthetic allure and the rich heritage value of the island. This balance can ensure that Spinalonga is appreciated not just as a picturesque destination, but also as a place with a profound historical and cultural narrative.

3.4. Spinalonga 1997-2020

In the last decade of the 20th century, only specific buildings and infrastructure within the fortress of Spinalonga received minimal restoration work, primarily due to limited funding from the Greek National Tourism Organization and the notable efforts of the architect Niki Kritsotaki (1977-1996) (personal communication with archaeologists of the local Ephorate, 21-3-2024). A programmatic agreement between the Greek Ministry of Culture, represented locally by the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lasithi (at that time the 13th Ephorate of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Antiquities), the Ministry of the Environment, Urban Planning and Public Works, the Greek National Tourism Organization, the Region of Crete (Decentralised Administration), the Prefectural Self-Government of the Prefecture of Lasithi, and the Local Community of Elounda was signed in 1996. Sadly, Niki Kritsotaki, who had handled much of the work done towards this collaborative effort between the involved authorities, died the same year.

The programmatic agreement was a milestone for changing the page in Spinalonga's heritage management. This collaborative effort between authorities paved the way for a comprehensive approach towards the preservation and promotion of Spinalonga's cultural heritage. The agreement set the stage for sustained efforts to conserve and showcase the archaeological and historical significance of Spinalonga and made possible for the local Ephorate to take over control of the site and transform it from an unruly public space to an organised heritage site.

Within this collaborative framework, which was regulated by the programmatic agreement, Spinalonga was included in the Regional Operational Plan (ROP) 1994-1999 and received 305,000,000 drachmas (equivalent to appr. €2,000,000 in current value) for the "Restoration and Promotion of the Venetian fortress of Spinalonga" as part of the "Touristic Infrastructures-Cultural Tourism" developmental aim of ROP. Another 200,000,000 drachmas (equivalent to appr. €1,300,000 in current value)[3] for the "Utilisation of Spinalonga" were used for the environmental strategic development aims of ROP. The primary goal of the collaboration, as stated in the programmatic agreement, mirrors the selective processes of heritagisation (Lowenthal, 1985; Smith, 2006; Silverman, 2011) and historicization (among others Trouillot, 1995):

> The purpose of this agreement is the preparation and implementation of an integrated program, which will aim at the specialized treatment of the general issues of the Venetian fortress of Spinalonga [Programmatic Agreement Plan, Historical Archive of the Archaeological Service, Box No 5171, File: "Π.Σ. ΥΠΕΧΩΔΕ-ΥΠΠΟ-ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑΣ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ-ΕΟΤ-ΝΟΜΑΡΧΙΑΚΗΣ ΑΥΤΟΔΙΟΙΚΗΣΗΣ ΛΑΣΙΘΙΟΥ-ΚΟΙΝΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΕΛΟΥΝΤΑΣ «ΣΠΙΝΑΛΟΓΚΑ»]

The purpose stated in the above document coherently articulated the preference for the

[3] "Greece Inflation Calculator: World Bank data, 1956-2024 (EUR)." Official Inflation Data, Alioth Finance, 24 Jul. 2024, https://www.officialdata.org/greece/inflation.

Venetian physical remains of the past, which were to be employed for a variety of uses, echoing the power inherent in professional archaeological practice and related policy. The selective processes of heritagisation involve carefully selecting and preserving elements from the past that are deemed to have cultural, historical, or symbolic significance. This process entails deciding which artifacts, buildings, traditions, or practices should be prioritised for conservation and promotion as part of a community or nation's heritage. Various factors, including historical importance, cultural relevance, and public interest, can influence the selective processes of heritagisation. In our case, the Venetian fortress was prioritised for several discursive and practical reasons. In general, the incorporation of modern monuments and sites in the heritage canon had been somewhat 'awkward' and understood as relatively inferior to the ancient and medieval remains (Lekakis, 2021). Furthermore, archaeology in Greece was hugely preoccupied with the chronological development and taxonomy of objects as aesthetic works of art, practised 'within the universalized epistemological paradigm of the 'authorised heritage discourse' (as termed by Smith, 2006), which reproduces nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century perceptions regarding the past that privilege material heritage over the intangible, emphasising monumentality and the aesthetically pleasing' (Stefanou and Antoniadou, 2021: 276). The past of Spinalonga was radically transformed and constructed, producing dominant histories and demonstrating some archaeological heritages over others. The Archaeological Service shed light on specific pasts, namely the Venetian and the Ottoman, producing the dominant narrative of the past of Spinalonga through the *in situ* material, while also playing a pivotal role in setting the principles of preservation and restoration of the materiality of the islet as a scenic setting providing aesthetic pleasure to its visitors.

For the first two decades of the 2000s, Spinalonga had been under massive restoration works. Following the ascertainment that the coastal zone of the Mirabello Gulf was being degraded due to the fact that the local economy relied one-sidedly on unregulated tourism development, funds and resources were allocated to the "protection and promotion of places significant for the natural and archaeological interest" (Greek Ministry of Urban Planning, 1984: 19). The local Ephorate of Antiquities managed a series of successive projects both regarding the restoration of material remnants and the infrastructure development to assist visitation. Starting in the late 1990s, the archaeologists in-charge of managing the site brought together a team of architects, conservators, craftsmen, local workers and other practitioners. This team established a way of working together, but also found a way to counterbalance the precarity of their working conditions as contract-based employees. In the words of one of the archaeologists:

> We were contract-based archaeologists back then. All of us. We worked as a team to ensure that we would be re-employed for the next few months or years. That's how it worked. From 1997 to 2000, we worked trying to obtain new commissions to large planning companies that would be able to plan the restoration of the fortress, for example. […] and that is how, almost till now, in every new "NSRF" scheme [she means funding opportunity within the European Structural and Investment Funds] we already had plans and proposals to submit. [...] We were trying in every way possible to have mature projects to submit and get funded, to start the new period of works. And that is the way it goes till now. There is no other way.

In the years to follow, people actively involved in the restoration and conservation works in Spinalonga were repeatedly employed on short-term contracts. Workers and skilled craftsmen needed for restoring all sorts of masonry that appear on the island, were mostly elderly locals.

Most of them, after many years of hard and intensive work in building up the tourism industry in the Mirabello Gulf, found themselves out of work. As they were growing old, they came to be seen by their then employers as inefficient and unable to cope with the levels of productivity of the labour-intensive tourism sector. Yet, many local workers needed some additional years of employment before reaching the minimum retirement age. Thus, Spinalonga's restoration works were an ideal option for them; their slow working pace was a much needed quality in the restoration and preservation works whereas a few years of employment would allow them to properly retire and receive a minimum of pension. An archaeologist remembering the first days of the restoration of Spinalonga in the late 1990s, sums up the reasons why local masons were a good match to the needs of conservation and preservation.

> The first group of them that came to Spinalonga in 1997, 1998, to work, was the generation of people that were indeed the old stone masons ('petrades') of Elounda. They were different. For them, it was a great opportunity that they found this job, because most of them were elderly people, with not enough insured employment years. And you know what a great pleasure it was for them to work, to be properly insured for every day of their work, to work at a slow pace –this is the pace of the restoration work. It's a totally different working condition, working in restoration of a heritage site and working in an intensive way to build hotels. I believe it was a great opportunity in their life, that they were given this chance. And it was with love that they worked. It may have been the first and only time in their life that they worked calmly, they were rewarded for their work, their good skills were acknowledged, they had the time to sit down and have a coffee without anyone to force them to work faster. Yes, this is the way we are working in the restorations.
>
> These people were wasted in the hotels, they were exploited to the marrow. They were not treated well. They were working uninsured and by doing so their pension was at risk. Luckily the Greek public sector was there to employ them. And it was because of this that they were able to cover the insured employment years that they needed to get a pension. But the difference is that these people, unfortunately, as soon as they retired, they were getting sick and dying. That was a horrible experience for me. Soon after their retirement, they died. These people had worked very hard for their lifetime.

Nevertheless, they left a notable mark on the island,

> Their contribution was huge. They left their mark on Spinalonga, let's say. They worked on things, and they brought practices from the past. They knew a lot. For example, we slaked lime. We didn't buy ready slaked lime. I mean we were buying lime but we were slaking it on Spinalonga. [...] We even had our own lime pits.

Different kinds of vernacular knowledge brought to the island by local workers and craftsmen, were necessary for restoring past constructions and buildings, not only because of the old techniques but also due to the lack of material and other resources, such as running water and electricity. A former worker of the restoration works in Spinalonga summed up the specificity of their work in the following extract of his interview:

> Necessarily and unavoidably, because you had to make a thing that was there, the same as the old one. Did you understand; And the whole story is the way they used to do things in the old days when they didn't have machines.

This local knowledge belonged to the group of the workers of Spinalonga and empowered them with the authority and skills to decide and act (Valk & Bowman, 2022: 1) upon the much celebrated materiality of the islet. This was not, however, recognised as expertise by established hierarchies and order, within the archaeological and heritage institutions of the local Ephorate and the Ministry of Culture but also by the distinction between intellectual labour and crafts. The latter are considered lacking intellectual efforts in the public realm (see for example the analysis of craftsmanship of Richard, 2008) in contrast to other professional engagements with Spinalonga, as is this of the archaeologists, the conservationists and the architects.

Skills, methods and practices such as the production of slaked lime, local stone masonry for which the so-called 'petrades' of Elounda were famous for, plastering, painting and paving were lived forms of knowledge and expression that provided workers with the authority 'to know better' at least regarding the material and structural preservation. The traditional craft community of the 'petrades' of Elounda, who passed on their skills from generation to generation until the days of the massive cement building of the hotels of Mirabello, found in Spinalonga a last safe for their skilled craftsmanship. Their resource-efficient ways of building and restoring did matter there, and this was a recognition of their knowledge and a legitimization of their merit in the hierarchical order.

Thus, playing an active role in the transformation of Spinalonga, from a neglected uninhabited islet to a heritage site, bore a formative power for local workers. Their vernacular knowledge, even though abandoned for years and years of building contemporary hotels in Elounda and the surrounding area, re-emerged in direct response to the needs of restoration, from a small group's 'obsolete' skills to a valuable local knowledge for restoring cultural heritage. This change of 'status' empowered workers to recognise themselves as members of a community that shared certain values, attitudes and a deeper understanding of Spinalonga, transcending the hegemony of scientific expertise and claiming an equitable position in heritage production processes. Moreover, Spinalonga became a place where they could practice and demonstrate the quality and worth of their work. This inner satisfaction and pride over the 'end product' of their work was characteristically commented upon by one of them:

> You know why… when you take the trouble with the chisel to make this thing, and you shape it and put it. And it's so arch-shaped and you put it on and you see it, it's so beautiful [...]. Especially, the elderly liked to see their work and say 'this, I made it with my hands'.

Almost all of our informants who were involved in the restoration works of the time commonly commented on the massive change that their work and presence on the island brought to the landscape.

> It is very gratifying for me because I saw it from its initial stage when it was all ruins, dirty, garbage, all torn down. You couldn't walk. Stones were falling from above, wood was falling, meaning [you could] get injured.
>
> One thing we did when we first went to Spinalonga, was planting the old… in the old flower beds. Even tomatoes, peppers, eggplants were planted by the workers to put their cucumbers in the colacio, they watered them, took care of them and at the same time I saw how interesting it was, how much the tourists were also interested. This,

> that is, a pepper, let's say, may have had many photographs because many times a visitor had never seen a pepper. So we did this systematically from a point onwards. We saw this and planted it like this.

One important physical aspect of their presence and 'dwelling' of the environment (Ingold, 2000) of Spinalonga became the expansion of planted trees and other species. Planting on a regular basis, gradually transformed the islet from a dryland to a place where workers, archaeologists, architects, conservationists and guards, along with the tour guides and visitors could take a break under the shade of a carob tree or a pergola. Although heritage management and restoration have been traditionally separate from nature conservation (see among others, Spek et al., 2006), on Spinalonga they were interwoven. This happened for several reasons, some of which are particularly noteworthy. The first and foremost was the need for shade, fresh groceries and cool water. Spending at least eight hours per day on a dry island with no electricity and no water reserves made people invest time and efforts to provide themselves with the essentials for making their life and work a little more convenient. At the same time, plants and trees became an attraction for visitors. A growing tomato was seen as a proof of 'real life' in the heritage site. So, nature became an integral part of the ongoing heritage management and restoration of the site, with the Spinalonga workforce taking care of the natural environment and landscape. Preserving Spinalonga not as a 'fossilised' archaeological site, but as a living place reflected an affinity to planting but also an understanding of the islet's landscape as a habitat.

Far outside this local system of heritage-making, the publication of the novel "The island" by the British author Victoria Hislop in 2005, marked a turnaround for the narratives and representations of Spinalonga. The novel, centred around Spinalonga as a leper colony in the 1930s, is a dramatic story of a 25-year-old from London, with a background in archaeology, tracing the origins of her leper ancestors on and around Spinalonga. In the first few pages of Hislop's book, young Alexis is faced with an inner controversy between her career interest on antiquities and her personal interest in the "more relevant" recent past.

> Of late, however, she had begun to feel that this was a past so remote as to be almost beyond the reach of their imagination, and certainly beyond her caring. Though she had a degree in archaeology and a job in a museum, she felt her interest in the subject waning by the day. Her father was an academic with a passion for his subject, and in a childlike way she had simply grown up to believe she would follow in his dusty footsteps. To someone like Marcus Fielding there was no incident civilization too far in the past to arouse his interest, but for Alexis now 25, the bullock she had passed on the road earlier that day had considerably more reality and relevance to her life than the Minotaur at the centre of the legendary Cretan labyrinth ever could. [Victoria Hislop (2005) *The island*, p. 3]

The above excerpt, ironically enough, raises an issue that has troubled archaeologists ever since their systematic involvement with the management of the site in the late 1990s. The recent past of the leper colony of Spinalonga was indeed a more relevant past to the present of the people and certainly a lived past that locals and others did remember. Thus it attracted much attention and interest despite the efforts of the archaeologists to demonstrate and highlight the archaeological significance of the site.

The great success of the novel, which sold over a million of copies and was translated in 25

languages[4] did much to galvanise a series of actions and reactions from several actors. By narrating a story of leprosy in a romanticised way, “The island” gave people a way to open up the discussion about the “difficult” past of the leper colony in Spinalonga. The heritage sector dealt hesitantly with the lepers’ past of the islet, taking into account and feeling intimidated by the hardships of isolation and life-long quarantine, the stigmatisation of the lepers and its descendants, and the fear of contagion. An earlier sociological approach to Spinalonga’s leper community, based on the autobiographical narrations of patients exiled on the islet, revealed the hard reality of lepers and the extreme cruelty they were faced with (Savvakis, 2008). It shed light on how the regime discriminated against those affected by leprosy and how they experienced the conditions of their isolation, while criticising the negative effects of the measure of isolation. In contrast, literature invested Spinalonga’s hardships with romance and highlighted the community practices and coping mechanisms that developed over time at the remote settlement of the islet, as well as the collective action and solutions to claim fundamental civil rights. Thus, the lepers’ past entered Spinalonga’s history in the form of its fictional representations offered by ‘The island’ novel by Victoria Hislop. A few years after the success of the book, a Greek TV series was produced based on the novel. The latter made an even stronger impact on the Greek audience.

This counter-process of heritage-making through literary and other cultural texts came to occupy a central position in the contemporary ideological construction of Spinalonga, while feeding economic/tourism processes in local territory. The number of visitors of the heritage site of Spinalonga increased in the years that followed these appropriations of its lepers past. Yet, this was not the most significant change Spinalonga as a heritage site was faced with. Public perceptions and interpretations of the site were those that were fundamentally altered by the fast and massive dissemination of the novel and the TV series. People were now visiting “looking for Maria’s lemon tree” as a guard of Spinalonga told us. Looking for traces of the lepers’ past as mediated by the novel and other elements directly related to the novel's narrative and characters, became—and still is—a common practice of the visitor’s experience of the islet.

Interestingly enough, while archaeologists of the Archaeological Service were thoroughly considering difficult issues, such as how to deal with this most recent and traumatic past of people isolated in the leper colony of Spinalonga or how to give them voice without further stigmatising them, as a former archaeologist explained to us, literature took over this past and opened it up to the public sphere with unprecedented impact. In the words of the heritage theorist Laurajane Smith:

> Heritage wasn’t only about the past – though it was that too – it also wasn’t just about material things – though it was that as well – heritage was a process of engagement, an act of communication, and an act of making meaning in and for the present. [Laurajane Smith (2006) *Uses of Heritage*, p. 1]

To bring this excerpt to our case: the popularity of Hislop’s novel brought to the fore that Spinalonga was not only about the Venetian and the Ottoman past and was not only about its archaeological and other material remains. It was about the experiences and stories of people

[4] “Meet Victoria Hislop, author of ‘The Island’”, Kathimerini, 29-11-2007 [https://www.ekathimerini.com/culture/53689/meet-victoria-hislop-author-of-the-island/]

who had lived there, and it was about the people who had a relative or a beloved one forced to move to Spinalonga's colony; it was about the local community of Elounda that had survived through difficult times on the income made by serving the needs of the leper's colony. As a representation, the novel was an act of making meaning or adding yet another layer of meaning to the heritage site of Spinalonga. The book brought to light hitherto untold stories of people being isolated and stigmatised for life. Literature provided a mode of engaging with the "difficult" (Macdonald, 2009) and, indeed, "dark" (Lekakis, 2023) past of the leper colony of the islet. Even further, the famous novel of Victoria Hislop offered a manner in which the leper's past, even when it impinged on individual lives, could turn from a shameful past into an experience that people shared.

The wide circulation of the representations of the leper's stories contained in Hislop's novel achieved a broad consent towards this past of the islet and inscribed it to the dominant narrative of the site undermining the role of traditional hegemonic agents, such as state archaeologists, who normally have the custodianship of the past and its interpretation. The book along with a Greek TV series broadcast in 2010, challenged and enriched the understandings of the islet, showing that cultural heritage is not only a repository of material remains but a dynamic narrative shaped by various representations and interpretations. Moreover, it facilitated empathy towards the leper's history, transforming the site of isolation and stigma into a space of shared human experience. The increasing interest in the leper's past triggered a broader public discussion on Hansen's disease, as the chronic infectious disease caused by a bacterium is officially named. The former mayor of Ayios Nikolaos explained Hislop's contribution eloquently:

> This book by Hislop is an easy read, I would say. A novel that softened the edges, and rightly so. Because with this book, we managed to have the difficult topic of leprosy discussed by people easily and simply. Her great contribution, which is a huge issue, is that she brought this topic into everyone's homes. Both here and in Europe. Especially for us here, during that period, for a year or two, everyone came to see the area where the work was filmed. Buses from Chania, Heraklion... I mean that with all these stories, the opportunity was given for the topic to be discussed extensively, and let's note here that we also dealt with the matter because, essentially, the visitors 'asked' for it. When you see, without any particular promotion, a certain issue - and at this moment we're talking about 450,000 visitors a year, and at the peak of the season, in the summer [...]

One of the tour guides that we interviewed in Crete commented that in contrast to the distant Venetian and Ottoman past, visitors are more interested in the recent 'dark' past:

> They have more interest. I'll tell you why; It's more familiar to them. It's not about history, it doesn't require knowledge, it doesn't require knowledge at all. It's familiar. Especially those who have read the book expect you to tell them the book. I explain to them from the beginning that these characters are made up. So please don't ask me for the houses of George, Eleni, Maria, and all that. [...]

On the momentum of the success of the book and the TV series, a significant effort by local authorities, collectivities and individuals emerged to inscribe Spinalonga on UNESCO's World Heritage Sites (WHS). Interestingly, the islet was proposed to be inscribed as "a monument of human suffering" and not only as a Venetian fortress or as an Ottoman settlement. This change

of direction in the production of the narratives, meanings and representations of Spinalonga's heritage marked a new era for the ways the islet is perceived and experienced. The recent past of Spinalonga emerged as a hegemonic discourse that was 'authorised' to be part of the official narrative of the island's biography. Until today it shapes the narratives around this heritage site, prioritising certain histories that conveniently fit with tourism consumption and an aestheticised experience of the island. Such selective representations reinforce existing power structures and social hierarchies because they remain largely uncritical and imbued in a romanticised easy-to-digest vision of the past, making heritage a tool for maintaining control and securing consent from the masses instead of a social terrain for negotiation and co-production as commons. By highlighting certain aspects of Spinalonga's past, this hegemonic discourse transformed the site into a symbol of collective memory of those that suffered from Hansen's disease and were treated as outcasts but in a rather superficial engagement with 'difficult heritage' by the modern visitor.

It seems that to further establish and perhaps perpetuate the discourse of Spinalonga's leper's past, institutionalised backing and support was needed. UNESCO could provide crucial support to further establish the discourse of Spinalonga as a leper colony. By inscribing Spinalonga on the WHS list, its historical and cultural significance as a "monument of human suffering" would be officially recognised and therefore beyond negotiation. At the same time, such a recognition would offer a global platform to share Spinalonga's story, and foster international awareness and dialogue.

Nevertheless, locals of Lasithi insist on being able to control the site through the local Ephorate and the local authorities. When asked about the ownership and control of Spinalonga, the former mayor responded at length, underscoring the depth of local sentiment. The islet of Spinalonga is a property of the Hellenic Public Properties Co. and by the Ministry of Culture or the local Municipality of Ayios Nikolaos. One of the researchers involved while interviewing the mayor posed the unsettling question whether locals were in fear of losing the islet to a possible investor interested. He replied that, at some point, during the 10-year long financial crisis in Greece, there were some concerns regarding Spinalonga's property status. When further asked if he believed that it was preferable for Spinalonga to be under state rather than municipal ownership, he responded thoughtfully and with a hint of frustration, indicating the complexity and importance of this issue for the local community:

> Are you serious right now? [...] All of this is nonsense. You can't manage these things impersonally. None of those people up there [he means in the government] know the real significance of Spinalonga. Only WE DO. So, we'll take care of it.

Despite their desire to maintain local control over Spinalonga, as expressed by the mayor, the locals paradoxically initiated the effort to inscribe the site on the WHS list. This perhaps evidences the powerful role of UNESCO as the 'foremost heritage authorizer' (Silverman, 2017: 18). This move required adherence to UNESCO's stringent framework for heritage conceptualization and management. By seeking this international recognition, they had to balance their desire for local autonomy with the obligations and standards imposed by UNESCO, which often entail specific guidelines on how heritage sites should be preserved and presented. This contradiction furthermore highlights the complexities involved in heritage management. The ambition to inscribe Spinalonga to the WHS list, was based on the local's desire to promote and legitimise the "universal" understanding of "their" heritage islet and the

benefits that come from the listing (mainly, economic by attracting more tourism). UNESCO's WHS framework, as it has been critiqued by scholars (Wright, 1985, Smith, 1999, Graham et al., 2000), often concentrates power among elite actors, influencing how we interpret the past (Carter et al., 2020: 2). This approach can overlook the intricate and evolving nature of cultural heritage, especially the more intangible and personal aspects. While the locals desire to maintain control, they would be obliged to adhere to strict international heritage management standards, which may not fully accommodate the community's activities and interactions with the site.

3.5 Spinalonga 2020-present

Although the application registered Spinalonga to UNESCO's WHS tentative list, it did not go through to the final stage of the complex evaluation procedure. To the disappointment of the locals who had invested several resources in this time-consuming procedure, Spinalonga was not positively evaluated by the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) which is one of the two Advisory Bodies mandated by the World Heritage Convention. Therefore, according to locals' testimonials, the Greek Ministry of Culture decided to withdraw the nomination. The former mayor of Ayios Nikolaos, who had a leading role in the preparation of the UNESCO application, when asked why this already widely known and acclaimed heritage site needed to get under the WHS umbrella, he replied "[...] out of fear. The islet is threatened by mass tourism today and 'growth'." This may sound self-contradictory, given that empirical evidence suggests that the WHS label attracts more tourists and often puts heritage sites and monuments at greater risk (see indicatively, Smith, 2002; Jimura, 2011; Adie et al., 2018 as cited in Dragouni & Lekakis, *forthcoming*). Regarding the aftermath of the UNESCO application and the lack of a proper protection framework against overtourism, an archaeologist commented that "the evil is already on the islet and no one can keep it out" referring to the café operating within the heritage site under the management of the largest hotel unit across Spinalonga, in the coast of Plaka, in direct view of the monument. "Do you believe that a hotel business of this scale needs the profits of a café in an archaeological site?" he/she asked rhetorically. Another contract-based archaeologist remarked on the current 'future' of Spinalonga as this is being planned 'from above':

> The game is now out of our hands. This is the game of the business world. [...] As you already know the possible uses of the island have been over-discussed. There were discussions for a naval base, a casino, artists' residencies and the like. To me, the issue is that we have to consider its overuse, how many tourists can enter and be on the island at the same time. And not other uses.[...] A gourmet restaurant where the leper hospital is now, and VIP galas is the vision for the 'future' of Spinalonga now. [...] And one day, we will remember the time when simple people like us could visit the island.

The feeling that locals and local archaeologists are losing control over the management of the heritage site is widespread lately as surrounding communities view their interests being marginalised by external actors operating at both the base (capitalist economic agents) and superstructure levels (central government). Moreover, this feeling seems to be aligned with the reluctance towards tourism growth by those who do not have stakes in tourism and care about

the future of the monument, its integrity and social life. Thus, current concerns about the future of the region and the heritage site of Spinalonga revolve around the goals and objectives of growth. Similarly to other saturated mass tourism destinations across Europe, Tourism in Greece is increasingly faced with sustainability issues and a broad social dissatisfaction (Oxford Analytica, 2024). Within this context, Elounda and Plaka locals are concerned about the impact of over-tourism on the natural environment and pressure on local infrastructure. On many occasions during our fieldwork, in the Spring of 2024, locals and representatives of local collectivities commented negatively on over-tourism and the consequent excessive development and construction works at the Mirabello Gulf. The soundscape of Spinalonga was indicative of the contradiction between the islet and its neighbouring coast of Plaka. The naturalness of the heritage landscape was interrupted by the noises of the heavy landscaping machinery operating in Plaka for the expansion of the luxurious hotels on the west coast of the islet. Fortunately, on the other side of the island, the silence and sea soundscape was restored.

4. From the base to the superstructure and back: the local tourism bloc and its hegemonic position

This working paper builds upon the foundational work of the GLAMMONS research, extending its scope to heritage sites and monuments. Here the concept of the 'commons' serves as a metaphor for the collective processes of heritage-making and emphasizes polyphony and the plurality of meanings, discourses, values and significance. The analysis presented here is original as for the first time, it brings together a considerable amount of ethnographic observations and historical findings with a variety of articulations of the commons in the heritage sector. Our approach to Spinalonga proved to be a significant and illuminating journey through which we have gained a comprehensive understanding of the multi-layered processes involved in the heritagisation processes that transcend the conventional heritage management. In line with scholarly developments in the field (see *inter alia,* Smith, 2006; Fouseki & Cassar, 2015; Silverman et al. 2017; Harvey & Wilkinson, 2018; Fairclough, 2019), we view 'heritage' as a realm where the past is being (re)made in the present, imbued with contestation and power struggles. In this light, Gramsci's 'hegemony' and its manifestation within the base-superstructure schema are useful analytical lenses for mapping the agents and the forces that determine how heritage is being used and put in motion to serve their contemporaneous needs and aspirations.

Our multi-sited research across different representations and contexts has enabled us to comprehend the complexities of Spinalonga's past and the various ways in which different entities treat and engage with its history. Our analysis offers a detailed account of Spinalonga's social biography, inscribed in its landscape across different layers and historicities. We see how heritage-making unfolds as a selective process, creating 'dissonant' narratives (Turnbridge & Ashworth, 1996) as different groups and individuals choose different legacies of Spinalonga's past. Most notably, we reveal how dominant and prevailing discourses by the State have sought to promote a purified version of Spinalonga as a Venetian Fortress and also as an Ottoman settlement, silencing its most recent 'difficult past' (Macdonald, 2009) as a leper colony. Heritage managers and state-employed archaeologists have for long been feeling discomfort towards the island's dark memories of modernity (a similar 'rejection' of the past revived in the early 2020s, when ICOMOS turned down the idea of Spinalonga as a 'monument of human suffering'). However, contrary to authorised heritage discourses that typically prevail in collective imagination, this official narrative did not receive popular consent, as literary and other cultural texts insistently brought to the surface Spinalonga's 'dark matter' (Lekakis, 2023), albeit largely through a romanticised manner. This counter-production of meaning created its own superstructure that supported the local economic interests of the tourism sector.

The local tourism industry, the base in Gramscian terms, started exploiting the site of Spinalonga from looting raw materials to making plans for building luxury hotels on site. Tourism in Southern Crete developed rapidly in the 1960's and Spinalonga was at the epicentre of that development. Former farmers were then employed in hotels and restaurants, whereas local craftsmen were employed in the construction of new hotels. The emergence of this local tourism bloc found their allies in the boatmen that transferred back and forth to Spinalonga tourists, as well as, other materials for the restoration works in the fortress and other preservation works in the island. The latter, organised and paid by the State through

European and National funding instruments, supported the visitation of the island. Furthermore, that strong tourism-oriented economic bloc was further supported by the gradual emergence of a narrative that developed a certain touristic image of Spinalonga. Firstly, the Ministry of Culture and the Archaeological Service aestheticised the island focusing on its Venetian and Ottoman past, while treating the difficult heritage of the leper colony with a degree of neglect. For instance, in the first years of archaeologists' involvement in the management of Spinalonga, buildings of the leprosarium were demolished in an attempt to cleanse Spinalonga of any negative connotation regarding leprosy. Secondly, Hislop's literary work on Spinalonga opened the black box of the island's difficult past. "The Island" and the Greek TV series that followed, romanticised the lepers' stigma, contributing enormously to the dynamic tourism narrative and heritagization of Spinalonga. After the success of the best-seller novel, Spinalonga became even more popular and the local tourism bloc reached a status of hegemony, as the majority of the local population consented to that hegemony. Only few locals see that development in a critical manner and along with researchers and some archeologists offer alternative narrations. The local development process in the area is dictated by the development of the tourism industry upon Spinalonga. Hegemony is then further galvanised as the Ministry of Culture gradually acknowledges and presents the leper's past of Spinalonga (see for example the designation of Spinalonga as a monument of human suffering on the tentative list for the for UNESCO, as part of the application to nominate the site as a World Heritage Site).

5. Concluding remarks: Whose Spinalonga?

In our examination of Spinalonga, we initially considered the question: Whose Spinalonga? Who does Spinalonga belong to? Who does Spinalonga hold significance for, and in what way? Who is authorised to speak about its past (including coercive and non-coercive civil society institutions)? And about which past? Defining the groups of actors and agents was essential in understanding the complex network of relationships that exists around Spinalonga. Each group brings unique perceptions and contributes to the island's heritage, and recognizing their roles is crucial for fostering collaboration and shared authority in its sustainable management and future local development.

Archaeologists, through their work in the Archaeological Service and based on state laws, are primarily interested in securing Spinalonga's current condition as both an uninhabited islet and an accessible archaeological site. Within this condition, the islet's materiality is strictly controlled and protected. All involvement with its tangible elements by the public and communities surrounding the site is limited to visiting and (passive) viewing. Nevertheless visitors actively create and distribute images through various media, such as social media etc. Although, 'tourism gaze' (Urry, 1990) contributes to interpretations and representations about Spinalonga through both top-down (images in leaflets of tour operators' "packages") and bottom-up processes (e.g. instagram), any effort to design and provide a new management mode that transcends the bureaucratic structure of the Greek Ministry of Culture and the

limitations posed by state's sovereignty may seem unrealistic. The role of state archaeology in Greece, within heritage sites with archaeological significance, is exclusive, which means that no other actor is partaking in the management of the site, and more importantly, no other actors are taking part in the decision-making for its present and future. This centralised control of antiquities, in our case of Spinalonga, more often than not, advances and promotes particular national and Western imaginaries in regards to the meanings and values of the sites.

However, beyond Spinalonga's's archaeological material, the monumental complex combines various other tangible and intangible elements. And despite Greece's strict and rigid regulatory frame of antiquities preservation, Spinalonga's imaginings and layers of rich biography remain accessible and 'open' to multiple interpretations. Intangible Spinalonga comprises memories, reminiscences, stories, lived experiences, and narratives. All these represent a body of knowledge shared among different parts of a hybrid community of interest and co-produced through informal processes of heritage commoning. In this way, it has attracted the interest of many artists. Among them are the leading figure of the New German Cinema, Werner Herzog, and the renowned Greek artist Costas Tsoklis.

Interestingly, within this body of knowledge, art and literature creative forces have been enhancing historical narratives with fiction. Spinalonga, thus, is seen as a set of resources for a diverse community that retains control over the most popular meanings and values of the islet's recent history as intermediated by popular culture and the arts. Collective superstructure has been formed through the engagement of various actors, with the recent past of Spinalonga. These approaches highlight the awkward or even "difficult" leper's past and value its history, stories, and narratives over the official archaeological interpretations. Although not intended from the side of the archaeologists and the official heritage management performed by the Archaeological Service, Spinalonga, within the last decades, became a cultural resource appropriated in various ways and different degrees by a local hegemonic bloc that comprises of tourism enterprises and hotels, locals, tourists, artists, and scholars undermining (perhaps intentionally or more likely spontaneously) the narratives, conservation practices and 'taxonomies' of the different historic layers and traces of Spinalonga. One area in our research that may need some more clarifications is the one on the recent history of Spinalonga that has been romanticised in creative representations, and the impact this has on public perceptions over the heritage site (and the subsequent appropriation of it, as seen above). And a question that arises is whether we could see all those actors forming a community that shares a common interest and the same preoccupations concerning Spinalonga's past, and whether we can discern some commons-oriented practices?

Archaeology has been studying and analysing evidence from the past of the islet, which results in fixed and sometimes narrow meanings communicated through various representation modes, primarily as a Venetian fortress and an Ottoman settlement. Conversely, literature, cinema, visual arts, and other artistic practices explore Spinalonga in unexpected and contradictory ways (mainly focusing on the recent biography of the island), producing and transmitting counter-meanings. The distinction between institutional archaeology and artistic practices lies in their approaches to communication and transmission. While archaeology tends to convey established interpretations, artistic endeavours foster a more fluid and inclusive dialogue, reflecting the diverse voices and perspectives contributing to Spinalonga's evolving identity. In that way, superstructure is primarily more open and inclusive of all those

different and sometimes diverse voices. Focusing on the creative practices and the subsequent bottom-up heritagisation processes, we argue that art effectively uses the discursive resources of Spinalonga, and by doing so, channels the untapped transformative capacities of heritage and GLAMs (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) (Avdikos et al., 2023: 6). Keeping in mind that this rich involvement of artists and other creatives is not intended by the official managers of the heritage site, like in other co-curatorial and co-creation processes, what we see in Spinalonga is a unique case of an unruled and potential counter-hegemonic active knowledge production where fiction is fused with facts, in ways that promote the site as a common heritage of humanity.

Today, as Spinalonga has developed into a major tourist attraction both locally and nationally, tensions have extended from narratives and heritage-making to on-site protection regarding issues of carrying capacity and sustainability. Amidst the significant increase in tourism in Greece and the concerning phenomenon of overtourism that strongly impacts the region of Lasithi, locals, including local archaeologists, fear of losing control by the private sector and the State that seem to operate alike by their hegemonic position, pushing for further exploitation of the site's scenic view and commodification of cultural heritage for tourism purposes. The fear of losing control is rooted in the understanding of cultural heritage as an asset that holds economic value, leading stakeholders to prioritize its material preservation as a visitors' site. But what a shift in this understanding of cultural heritage would bring? What if public perceptions of Spinalonga shifted towards heritage commoning?

To move a step back and view the broader picture, it is important to consider two different and even conflicting understandings of Spinalonga as a heritage site. On the one hand, private sector is exploiting Spinalonga for profit, and on the other hand creatives and scholars have been appropriating the meanings and the symbolic value the islet holds for humankind. These dynamics interact on multiple levels—disrupting the balance between economic pressures and the evolving role of communities in shaping their own heritage narratives.

Applying the concept of 'commons' to these heritage assemblages of multiple pasts calls for a re-evaluation of our responsibilities towards the diverse heritage elements that emerge from such commoning extensions. It prompts us to consider how we can ethically engage with and sustainably preserve heritage that may have been previously overlooked or marginalised. This shift in perspective invites us to explore alternative approaches to interpretation, and representation that prioritise inclusivity, respect, and a multiplicity of voices and where local development is more inclusive and open. Ultimately, the radical extension of heritage challenges us to broaden our perspectives, engage in difficult conversations, and cultivate a more inclusive and caring approach to the preservation and interpretation of our collective past. Yet, the issue of economic exploitation and growth poses significant challenges to any process of commoning heritage resources. The drive for profit most of the times conflicts with the goals of inclusivity, sustainability and sharing. This tension between economic interests and ethical sharing of heritage assets as resources complicates the efforts to create or even suggest a fair, equitable, participatory and inclusive framework for heritage management. And thus, in the case of Spinalonga such conflicting forces undermine the very principles of collective responsibility and care that the commons concept seeks to promote. To address these tensions, we argue that a management framework could create a space where diverse voices

can challenge hegemonic interests, ensuring that heritage is not commodified, but preserved and sustained as a shared resource for the future.

Having made all these analytical observations on Spinalonga's case, it becomes evident that commodification of its heritage threatens to overshadow its deeper historical significance, while the struggle for control between state authorities, private stakeholders and communities highlights the power dynamics at play. It is indeed true though that a shift of the understanding of heritage from being viewed as a state-owned asset or as a means only to make profit to a shared common heritage demands considerable effort.

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