



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



The possibilities for cultural entrepreneurship in Eleusis as the European capital of culture

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Abstract

The institution of the European Capital of Culture was established in 1985 and is one of the most important cultural events in Europe, contributing to the sustainable development of cities and their surrounding areas. Elefsina decided to compete for the title of European Capital of Culture for the year 2023 and transformed into a dynamic cultural center with positive impacts on the quality of life of its citizens and new development opportunities in the region. The aim of this study is to present Eleusis as the European Capital of Culture for 2023, highlighting the monuments that can attract today's visitors and lay the foundations and prospects for local development within the framework of cultural entrepreneurship. The impressions of the local community, the impact it has left, and more broadly the interest and reception of events, as well as the views of visitors on the contribution of the institution to local development, are examined through the collection of 320 questionnaires in December 2023.

Keywords: Cultural capital; Cultural entrepreneurship; Eleusis; Sustainable development

1. Introduction

Elefsina is a municipality in Attica and the seat of the Regional Unit of Western Attica. Historically, it has been a city of particular renown, as in antiquity it was one of the five sacred cities. It was one of the most significant religious centers of the ancient world and the site of the Eleusinian Mysteries, attracting worshippers from all over the then-known world (Mautis, 2005). Elefsina flourished from the Mycenaean period until the 4th century AD when the Eleusinian Mysteries were banned by Emperor Theodosius, after which the sanctuaries of Eleusis fell into disuse and the city was completely destroyed by Alaric in 395 AD. In modern times, in the 19th century, the city was transformed into an industrial center, while in the 20th century, high unemployment once again changed the face of Elefsina, and the degradation of the natural environment due to industrial pollution left its mark to this day (Alexopoulou-Bagia, 2005) (Mylonas, 2010).

2. Elefsina as a cultural capital

The organizers of 2023 Eleusis, drawing inspiration from the core principles of the European Capital of Culture, shaped the artistic and educational program of actions by honoring the city's past and reestablishing it in the present. Elefsina transformed by creating the factors for the development of cultural entrepreneurship, positioning itself as a leading city. (Fidani, 2012) (Gold & Gold, 2005) (Mayerscough, 1994).

In the first axis, they presented the evolution of society from antiquity and the Eleusinian Mysteries to the present day, highlighting the formation of European society.

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The second axis focused on the environment and its degradation, sustainability, and reshaping the relationship between humans and nature as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

The third axis of the event focused on the past and future of work, exploring the European challenge of uncertainty and cultivating a model of a modern, sustainable economy.

A significant highlight of this axis was the ephemeral museum titled "The Clay Army of Eleusis."

Special mention should be made of the Raw Museum: Its title indicating its content, according to Michael Marmarinos, artistic director of the event and creator of the title.

During the event, more than 350 cultural, artistic, educational, and training activities took place, engaging over 6,200 participants including artists, cultural associations, children, and residents of Eleusis (Griva, 2023).

The events were held throughout the city: at Agios Nikolaos (night events), at the archaeological site of Eleusis, the former Oasis campsite, the TITAN factory where a fully equipped digital fabrication workshop was set up, at Vlycha (ship graveyard), and various other locations.

3. Aeschyleia

Since 1975, the AESCHYLEIA festival has been a significant cultural event for Eleusis. Taking place in September, the same period during which the Eleusinian Mysteries were held in antiquity.

The festival's program is characterized by collectivity, active citizen participation, cultural spirit, innovation, and quality. The events are showcased on multiple levels (local, national, and international) bridging the relationships between artists and relevant institutions and organizations. This festival serves as a favorable occasion for presenting works by many artists and as inspiration for young creators.

Venues such as the Old Olive Oil Mill, the archaeological site, the Cultural Center "Leonidas Kanellopoulos," and the outdoor cinema are utilized for the festival. The Aeschyleia festival has been integrated into the European Festivals Association, acquiring a European dimension, and has been under the auspices of the Greek National Tourism Organization (EOT) for the past three years. The program includes concerts, theatrical performances, film screenings, visual arts and sculpture installations. . (Mercouris, 1986).

4. Contribution to local development - proposals for entrepreneurship

Eleusis, with its new data, has acquired a new identity and aims to continue attracting people through cultural activities and infrastructure. The municipality struggled to culturally utilize inactive factories with the goal of housing its modern industrial and technological history (Theodoropoulou, 2017) (Papaggeli & Hlepa, 2011). It succeeded in reintroducing itself to its citizens and becoming a magnet for its youth. Many spaces were renovated and used for institutional needs, which will serve as a legacy for the future, contributing to the sustainable development of the region (Sfyroeras, 2005) (Gkatzis, 2018).

Architectural facilities that were repurposed and will continue to operate culturally in future activities include:

- The Oil Mill converted into a space for sports and cultural activities
- The Iris industry renovated into a theater stage
- The former Oasis campground transformed into an open event space
- The X-Bowling Center
- The former refreshment house
- The town clock
- The old Oil Mill,
- The railway station
- The TITAN factory
- The Eleusis Cinema
- The renovation and re-exhibition of the Archaeological Museum of Eleusis is highly significant, showcasing impressive exhibits presented in a modern manner with careful lighting and audiovisual elements.

- The screening of the documentary "The Eleusinians" by F. Koutsafitis at the Eleusis Cinema was a special event and a starting point for new documentary events that will continue to highlight local history (Nikolakaki, 2023) (Belavilas et al., 2011).

Over 90,000 spectators - Greeks, foreigners, even from Japan (Griva, 2023) demonstrated that a beginning has been made, which will increase future tourism in the city of Eleusis. According to Griva (2023), many local clubs and the city's youth participated in the events, giving us hope that they will continue to be active members of the local community.

Significant parts of the projects were included in the Recovery Fund, indicating that there will be continuity, while many funded projects have been scheduled in the city, with completion times after 2023.

In addition to the points of the city that were illuminated through the EU funds, there are other cultural events that we can visit in the area.

- Inside the archaeological site of Eleusis, it is worth celebrating the church of Panagia Mesosporitissa on November 20, where in recent years the ancient festival has been revived with great success, with women preparing the "mesospori" and the faithful offering offerings.
- The statue in honor of hero Vasilis Laskos on the beach, which sank with the submarine "L. Katsos" during World War II, has its own history.
- The memorial events "Laskia" on September 14, where every year the anniversary of the sinking of the submarine is honored.
- The Roman Bridge, a monument preserved but not promoted, is at the eastern entrance of Eleusis.
- The ancient Roman aqueduct, which crosses most of the eastern side of the city and has also not been utilized.
- The Museum of History and Folklore of the Association of Asia Minor Greeks in Eleusis, housed since 2013 in a refugee home that is itself an exhibit and worth our visit.
- The "Aeschyleia," which has become a recognized festival of artistic creation since 1973, hosts significant theatrical performances every summer.

Following the above, the creation of new festivals in the city with theatrical and artistic events in renovated buildings, with guided tours of all museums and monuments of the city, would contribute to the sustainable continuity and development of cultural entrepreneurship in the "Sacred City of Eleusis." Due to its rich historical and cultural background and modern reputation, the transition to cultural and creative industries was significant and necessary to ensure a sustainable future. The creation of cultural paths, theme parks, the organization of cultural events, and the establishment of educational programs can encourage, in addition to the summer period, the preference of visitors to the rich cultural heritage of Eleusis, promoting at the same time the conservation and promotion of archaeological sites and cultural activities with the possibility of organizing cultural paths. (Manola & al. 2022), (Manola, 2019). These paths will offer visitors to the city the opportunity to experience various expressions of culture as well as local traditions, aiming to make the cultural diversity understandable and appreciated. Through these paths, cultural heritage is preserved and sustainable development is promoted. All of the above contribute to creating a connected and culturally and economically exploited world. (Manola & Vekri, 2021). (Manola, & Tsatambassoglou, 2021) (Mitoula & Astara, 2012) (Mitoula, 2014).

Moreover, tourism development based on historical heritage is not just an economic opportunity but also a bridge connecting the present with the past, creating a significant experience for visitors and simultaneously creating conditions for the development of cultural entrepreneurship. (Maniou, 2023) (Maniou, 2024a). In the context of "ELEUSIS 2023" focused measures were implemented in the city of Eleusis, effectively transforming the prevailing stereotype among both residents and visitors. At the same time, it upgraded its existing cultural assets, renovating and utilizing inactive industrial buildings, and was able to proceed with the enhancement of public spaces through revitalization and the creation of new infrastructures. (Maniou, 2024b) (Maniou, 2024c). Cultural activities are more productive and have a global impact and penetration, when they are accompanied by actions on the Internet and exploitation of digital technologies. In these cases, they foster the local economic development for all, more sustainable and productive [26-32].

5. Quantitative research in Elefsina

The questionnaire was distributed to 320 individuals. The sample consisted of people located in Elefsina. The time period was December 2023.

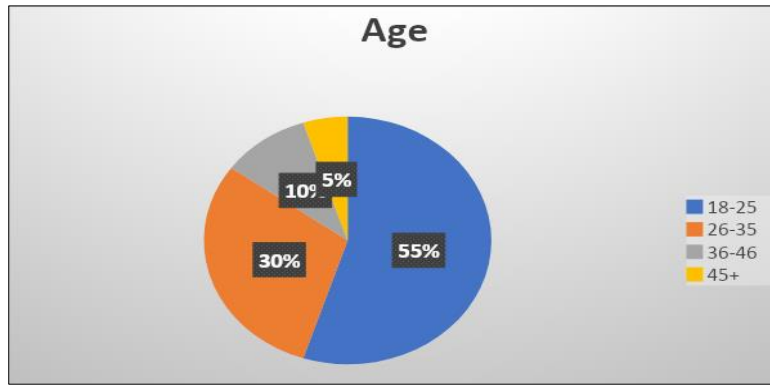


Figure 1 What is your age?

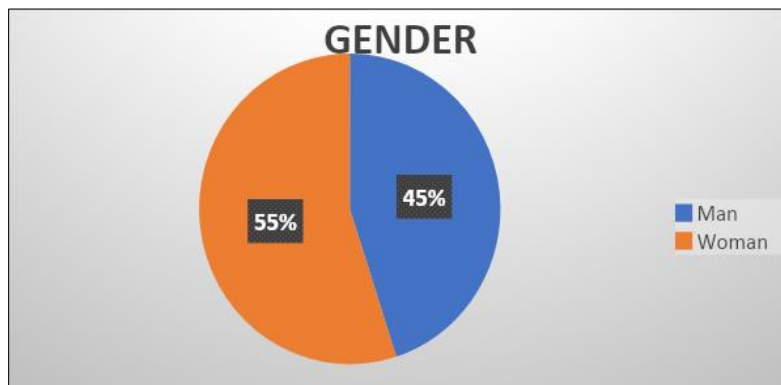


Figure 2 What is your gender?

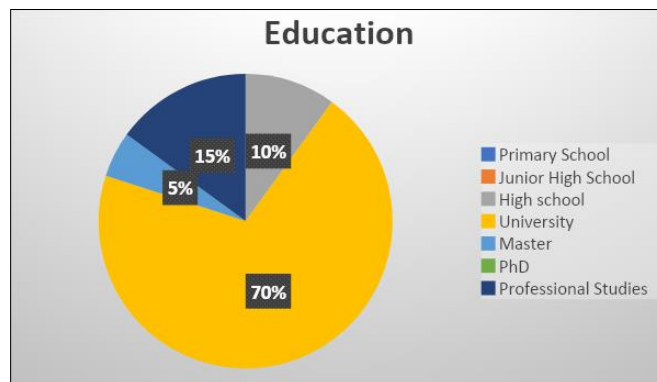


Figure 3 What is your education?

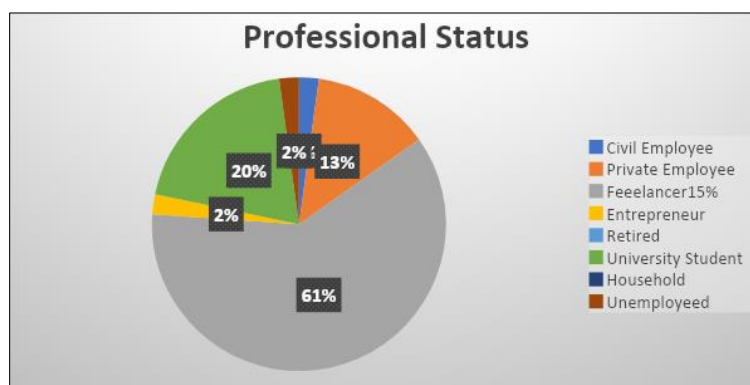


Figure 4 What is your professional Status?

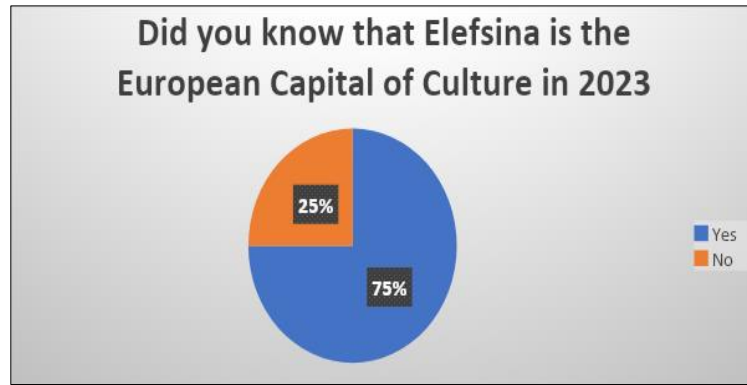


Figure 5 Did you know that Elefsina is the European Capital of Culture in 2023?

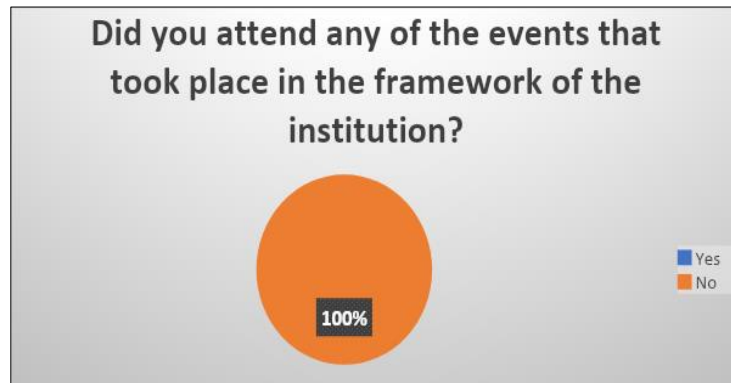


Figure 6 Did you attend any events that took place in the institution's framework?

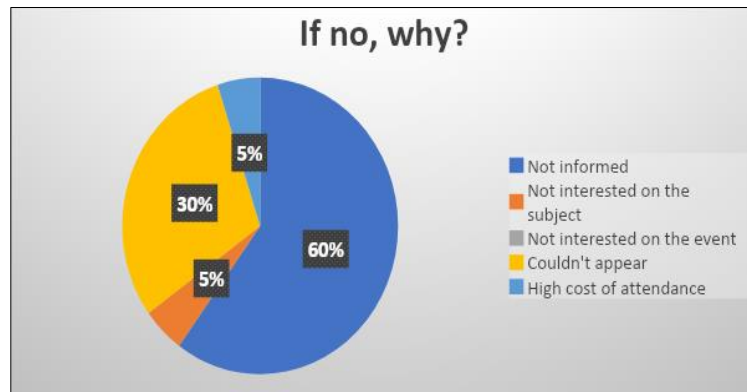


Figure 7 If not, why? -



Figure 8 Have you visited the museum and archaeological site of Elefsina? -

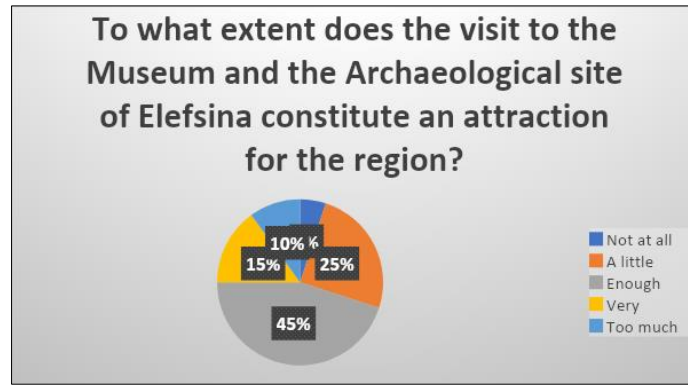


Figure 9 To what extent does the visit to the Museum and Archaeological site of Elefsina constitute an attraction for the region?



Figure 10 Do you think that the institution of the cultural capital helps in the upgrading and promotion of cities? -

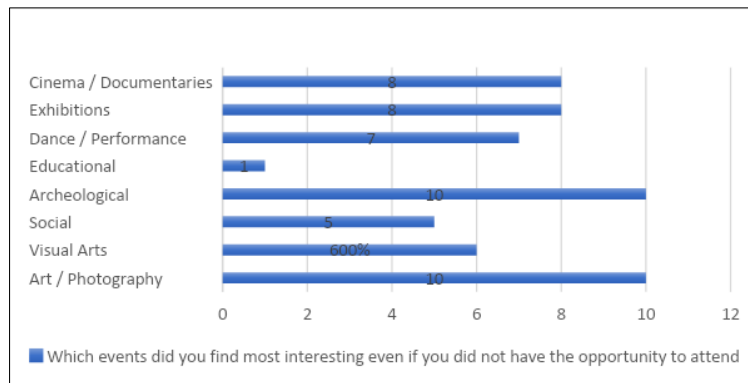


Figure 11 Which events did you find most interesting even if you did not have the opportunity to attend?

6. Research Discussion

According to the results of the questionnaire of the 320 sample participants, the majority of respondents expressed interest in the events.

- 55% were women aged 18-25.
- 75% of the total sample knew that Eleusis was the Cultural Capital of 2023. However, they could not attend because they were not informed about the event program.
- The events that garnered the most interest were Visual Arts/Photography and Archeological (50%), Exhibitions and Cinema (40%), Dance (35%), Performing Arts (30%), Social Events (25%), and a small percentage showed preference for Educational Events.

70% of the total sample had not visited the Museum and the Archaeological Site of Eleusis, while 45% considered them attractions. Almost half (40%) believe that the institution of the Cultural Capital significantly helps in the upgrade and promotion of cities, including their own.

7. Conclusion

According to the research by the University of West Attica on a sample of 320 people in Eleusis, the results showed that there is intense cultural interest from the residents, who largely believe that the institution of the European Capital of Culture will help in the upgrade of their city. Therefore, both the research by the University of West Attica and the literature review showed that Eleusis has transformed from a mere transit point into an exciting location worth visiting, as mentioned in the Final Candidature Dossier of Eleusis as the Regional Olympic Committee (ROC).

It timely recognized the decisive importance of cultural phenomena in influencing its existence as a city and the ability of the arts to stimulate social transformation and unity. Amid the transition from an industrial environment to a new form of production, the cultural and creative sectors emerged as critical elements for a new industrial and technical revolution in Eleusis.

The development of infrastructure, economic growth, the number of visitors, and cultural events within the framework of the Cultural Capital help and strengthen the prospects of cultural entrepreneurship. Improving the urban landscape, public satisfaction, participant experiences, and the festive atmosphere are some elements that contribute to the local development of the city. Eleusis successfully met the high demands associated with the title of Cultural Capital, proving that culture, with its multifaceted character, constitutes a fundamental component of progress and, more broadly, the transition to prosperity.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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