

Contribution of the Venetian Monuments of Rhodes to Cultural Tourism and the Local Development of the Island

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Abstract

This article examines the contribution of Italian monuments to the local development of the island of Rhodes. It is an island with tradition which is undoubtedly famous for its history as well as for the manners and customs that represent the contribution of culture to local sustainability. This particular island provides rich cultural as well as natural resources that contribute to tourism development. Our theme is connected to the active role played by the cultural heritage created by the Venetians, the Genoese and the Knights and which the Italians preserved, highlighted and utilized in the period 1912-1948. The quantitative research we carried out deals with the cultural tourism of Rhodes with a focus on the Italian monuments, the visitation and the tourist interest as well as the order of preference of the Italian monuments by the visitors.

Keywords: Italian monuments, Rhodes, cultural heritage, The Grand Master's palace.

1. Introduction

Rhodes is the largest island of the Dodecanese and the fourth largest island in Greece. It was and continues to be a cosmopolitan destination with amazing natural landscapes and historical attractions. It has a rich history but also modern infrastructure and also offers options for all tastes and ages such as impressive archaeological monuments, countless beaches and scenic attractions. The historical past of the island is widespread since each conqueror left a strong mark. Tourist traffic in Rhodes and current situation.

Rhodes has emerged as a special part of the global tourism and cultural industry. Every year there are thousands of tourists flows on the island and especially in the summer months we can notice a high tourist development. In 2019, according to Kalogirou's study (2019), the arrival of 2,343,299 tourists was observed on the island. According to official records tourism in Rhodes is preferred by many visitors from foreign countries in Europe, such as United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Sweden, Czech Republic, Russia, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway and many more and also from outside of Europe like Israel. In Rhodes, a rate of foreign tourism is observed that exceeds 50%, preferring to spend their summer holidays on this particular island (Logothetis, 2004).

Every part of the island is characterized by a multitude of cultural resources, signs, monuments, areas, which bear witness to a centuries-old history that reaches up to 2,500 years ago. In addition to the various cultural resources it has, it is also part of the development of rich events and festivals, many of which count several years of organization and offer various events

such as theater performances, music concerts, dance events and exhibitions that help in a further sustainable development and promotion of the island. Through these events (of cultural content), the island of Rhodes gains recognition and support from the Rhodian population, as well as foreign visitors (Konsola & Ioannidis, 2003).

The high tourist traffic also implies the development of the hotel infrastructure it has (Logothetis, 2013). For example, in 2006 the total capacity of the island of Rhodes is estimated at 80,500 beds, of which 16,500 (19%) in furnished rooms for rent and approximately 64,000 (81%) in hotels of various categories. Of this potential, in the city of Rhodes there are approximately 19,000 beds, a percentage of 24% of the total AN.ME., 2005 (Logothetis, 2012). Thus, it follows that this high and intense hotel activity in Rhodes is directly interrelated with the development of tourism industry that characterizes it. Rhodes holiday packages are closely linked to the local culture and aim to enhance and maintain the aesthetic quality, respect for nature and cultural heritage (Lagos, 2005).

In 1916 the Italians, who had conquered the island since 1912, began to intervene urban planning and architecturally since it was one of their favorite places in Greece. Under Mussolini's directions decisions were made to adapt the port, investigate the road network as well as apply defense structures of the island. Impressive changes took place during the time of diplomat Mario Lago in 1923. The Italian heritage from the 1930s continues to influence the character of Rhodes to this day and has given the city an interesting and atmospheric collection of buildings. However, the buildings in question are not only relics of an era of past regimes, but also symbols of the city's history and identity. They are living monuments and not museums because they continue to be used and often have the same or similar uses as the originals. The Italian public and private architecture of Rhodes is of a high standard and deserves every protection and promotion. The Italians dreamed of a city where Mediterranean fantasies converge and express themselves. Emblem of the era is the famous building of the former prefecture, now the South Aegean Region (Palazzo del Governatore), built in 1927 according to the plans of the architect Florestano de Fausto. The Italian heritage map is rich in attractions and is part of the long history of Rhodes (Kollias, 2007).

2. Italian occupation monuments and buildings

Mario Lago's work. Mario Lago was a diplomat with a passion for architecture. He was purposely sent by Mussolini, who came to power in 1922. Lago arrived on the island of Rhodes on 19 February 1923. The Italians wanted to restore the "Latin History" created by the Venetians, Genoese and Knights. The literature on new political theories is assigned to scholars of different specialties. First archaeologists, then geologists, then cartographers. Lago focuses on three points: (a) Supporting commercial exchanges; (b) Promoting the construction of buildings "to adapt the city to new tasks and developing hospitality"; (c) The creation of a radiant base of the Italian spirit and culture, where the center of all was created of Italian schools and hospitals and of all banks and commercial institutions in the Eastern Mediterranean (Farmakidis, 2020).

He assigns the promotion of building construction to the architect Florestan Di Fausto. The architect Florestan Di Fausto who was responsible for drawing up the plan for the city of Rhodes (1924-1926), arrived on the island in 1923, and his work was multi-purpose. The first step was the division of the city into districts based on different tribes that are almost separated from the rest: Muslims in the west of the old city, Jews in the east, Greeks in Marasia. Di Fausto characterizes his work by writing that: "The new Italian city will signal the Italian desire to leave a new power in this ancient and recent conquest." In 1927, Lago created an Institute of Historical Archeology, named FERT: Fortitudo Eius Rhodum Tenuit, which means: "Fate helped me to keep Rhodes", which is the motto of the Savoy family, the Institute. It is obvious that the architect

actively pursued the modernization of the island, and the influence he had on Rhodes and its architecture is of immense importance (Louloudaki, 2020).

Works by Di Fausto. Some more of the buildings that keep the memory alive of the years of the Italian period and give a new cultural form of tourism to the island of Rhodes until today: The Government House of Rhodes (1926-27) in Gothic Venetian style,/The Hotel of the Roses (1925-26),/ The New Agora of Rhodes (1925-26),/ The courtroom and its courtyard (1924),/ The Archbishopric (1925-29),/ The current Bank of Greece (1931-33),/ The Befotrofio Vittorio Emanuele III,/ The Gymnasium in Alexandrou Diakos,/ The current Port Authority (1926-27),/ The current Military Office (1926),/ The 1st Police Department today, with the arch (1925-26),/ The Italian camp today,/ The University of the Aegean (1924-26),/ The Academy complex and the entire Orphanage (1923-25),/ The Church of Saint John of the Knights,/ The Church of the Evangelism (1924-25),/ Today's Sanda Maria (1927-29),/ The Cemeteries of the three Religions/ The Post Office that resurrected was taken (1927). The process followed by the architect is critical and abstract in nature and aims to reconstruct and adapt the program to the requirements of the intended and symbolic architecture appropriate to it (Farmakidis, 2020).

The Archaeological Museum of Rhodes. It is housed in a Gothic style building built in 1440 by the conquerors of Malta which was completed only 49 years ago by them. The Italian archaeologists had a special interest in the care and beauty of the Museum, decorating it with Italian finesse and passion if timing and interventions were a vision for the benefit of the island during the years of Italian occupation. Today, the museum is decorated with finds from excavations of the Italian occupation (Koutsochristos, 2017).

Hotel of Rhodes and Casino of Rhodes. On 24 May 1927, the inauguration took place in the presence of local authorities as well as important personalities from Italy and Egypt. The casino opened in 1929, attracting a large number of tourists. On 22 November 1936, when the new Governor of the Dodecanese Cesare Maria de Vecchi Conte di Val Gismon took office, it was renovated and followed a simpler route. It is a place of reference for many important historical events, the signing of the treaty for the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. After the integration of the Dodecanese into the rest of Greece, the Grand Hotel of the Roses ("Grande Albergo delle Rose") became the property of the Greek state. It was renovated by the company "Casino SA", on 2 April 1999 and until today it is one of the most famous tourist destinations of the island with thousands of tourists choosing it every year (Filippou, 2016).

Italian ghost village. At the green foothills of Mount Prophet Elias near the village of Eliza lies an abandoned village, whose tragic history is directly linked to disease and death. It is about Agia Eleusa or Campochiaro, as its Italian creator named it in 1935 as an Italian colony from a forest village in the Italian Alps. Its first inhabitants were lumberjacks from northern Italy who were invited to build villages where rich Italians could spend their holidays. Today we are talking about a ghost village that has been abandoned since 1970. In 1947, after the peace treaty between Italy and Greece, the village of Agia Eleusa was deserted by the departure of the Italians and turned into a sanatorium of Rhodes and the school of the Italians became the "House of Death". The village functioned as a hospital for those infected with tuberculosis, who came from all over Greece to isolate themselves from all healthy people. Few of them make it out alive, which is why the name of the village is inextricably linked with death. The village has remained empty since 1970 as the nursing home permanently ceased operations (newsbeast.gr, 2020).

Hydrobiological Station of Rhodes. The Hydrobiological Station of Rhodes (YSR) was built by the Italians during the period of the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese in 1936 adopting an international architectural style. It is a preserved historical monument as it functions both as an aquarium-museum and as a research station. Its dual role as a research unit and as an aquarium-museum contributes to its importance, combining a research, creative and educational spirit. As a result, YSR attracts and raises awareness annually of thousands of people, tourists as

well as locals. The design and construction of the central building is the work of the Italian architect Armando Bernabiti. The particularities of the central building of the Y.S. Rhodes have classified it in the category of special buildings of Law 1469/50 and contributed to its declaration as a historical monument in 1997, as a representative sample of “eclectic” and “international” architectural style, protected. From the Tax Office of New Monuments (hcmr.gr).

The Grand Master’s Palace. The Palace of the Knights is located in the northwest at the highest point of the castle. The original form of the Grand Master’s palace was a 14th century building built by the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem shortly after they settled on the island. In the time of the knights, the ground floor contained utility rooms, a kitchen, storeroom and stables, while the upper floor contained the Master’s special apartment (known as the “Margarita”) there was also a ceremonial hall, a large council chamber, a dining room, and possibly there were still some offices for administrative services. Today, it functions as a museum. Between 1937 and 1940, the palace was rebuilt from its foundations and became the seat of the Italian government under the supervision of the Italian commander of the Dodecanese (Cesare Maria De Vecchi). From 1948, it was turned into a museum and the monument became a tourist attraction in Rhodes. UNESCO includes in the list of world heritage monuments, the Palace of the Grand Master of the old city (kastra.eu).

Kallithea thermal springs. In 1927, after a study of the thermal properties of the waters of the spring, which was also known as Cillonero, a recreation center was created by the Italians. Pierto Lombardi and the architect Armando Bernadetti undertook the design of the complex and the supervision of construction respectively in 1928. The baths were officially inaugurated on 1 July 1929, the same year that the road connecting Rhodes to Lindos was built. Very soon the bath became particularly famous among the Mediterranean population. After the Second World War, after Rhodes came under Greek rule, the operation of the baths continued until 1967 and today, after gaps in operation, with the trust and consent of the Ministry of Tourism, the municipality has assumed responsibility for the operation of the baths.

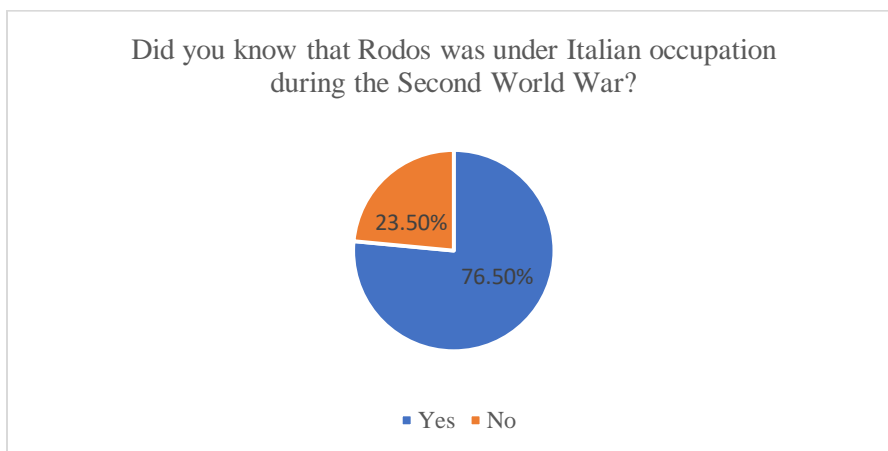
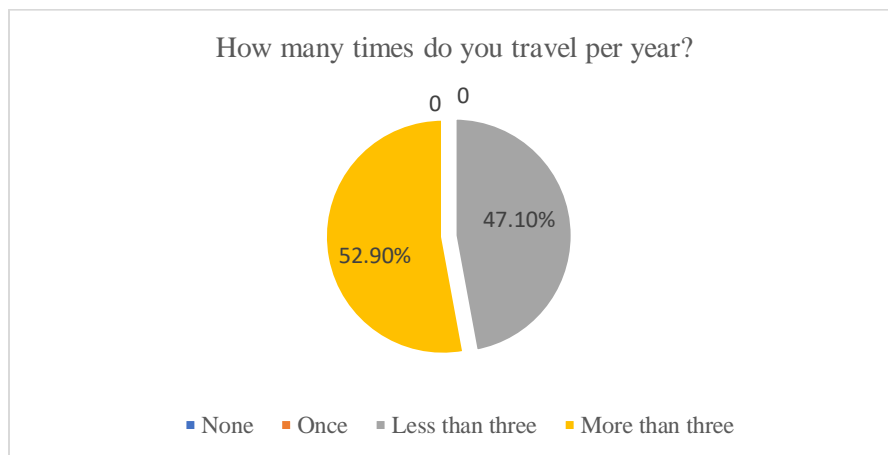
The ELLI building. The beach of Mandraki on the island of Rhodes was designed during the Italian occupation as a commercial and tourist center, perfectly implementing these predetermined functions even today, while maintaining an aesthetic, refined and at the same time practical environment. In the same area, in the period 1936-1938, the complex of the ELLI building was built, according to Armando Bernabiti’s plans, as a building that would house bathing facilities together with a refreshment room and a diving boat in the sea. The eclectic form of the building’s architecture, characteristic and distinctive of its time, is perfectly combined with oriental details, making the building stand out even today because of these special characteristics. Remarkable elements of the building’s architecture are its “powerful” floor plan which, however, does not prevent it from being harmoniously integrated into the area of the beach. To this day, the ELLI building is considered an exemplary construction of bathing facilities and a prime example of island aesthetics, significantly raising the cultural and aesthetic level of the area. As for the practical nature of the building, its ground floor housed storage areas for canoes, boats and sandals, offering easy and quick access to the nearby sea, while it also contained an ironing room and a kitchen for the staff, which joined the rest of the floor in the form of a staircase. Finally, in the north wing of the building there were changing rooms on both floors. The ELLI building was classified as a historical preserved monument by the Ministry of Culture in 1987, a title that is still valid today, as it is one of the biggest tourist destinations of the island of Rhodes, annually attracting countless travelers as well as locals (ronda.gr).

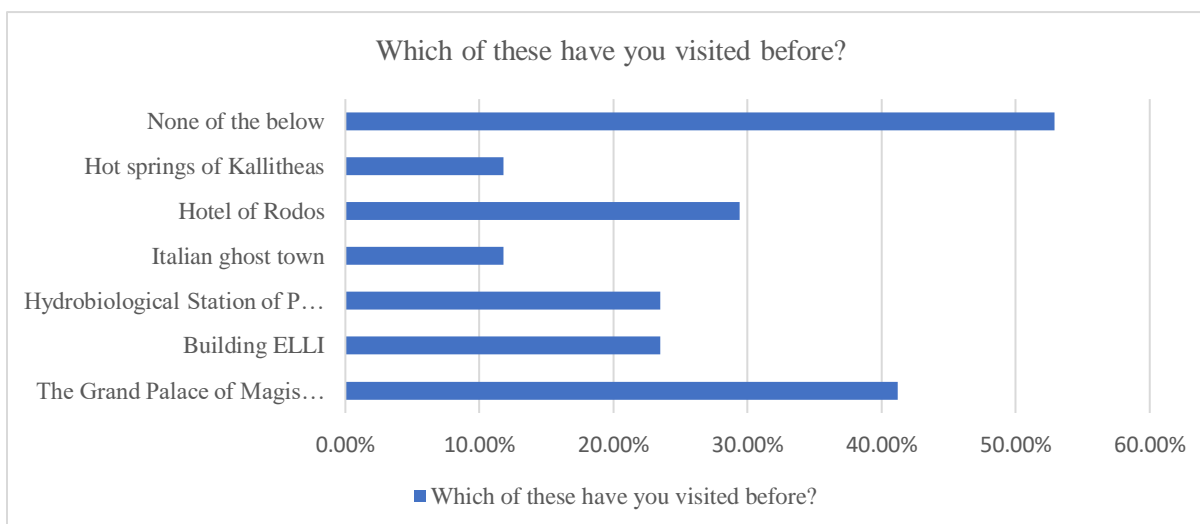
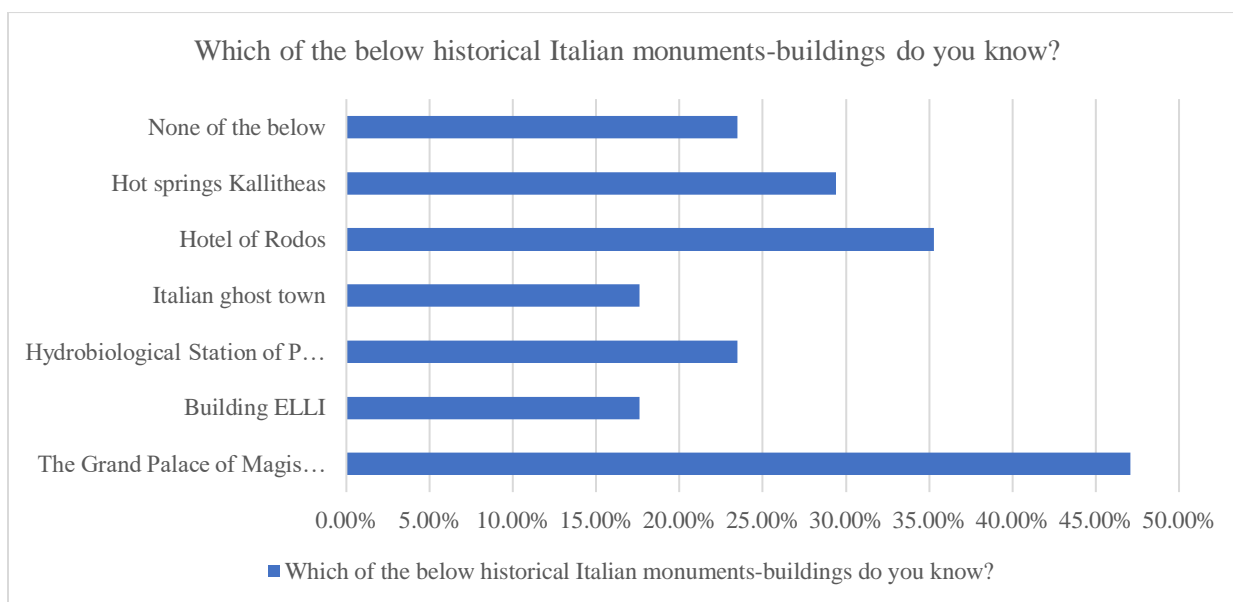
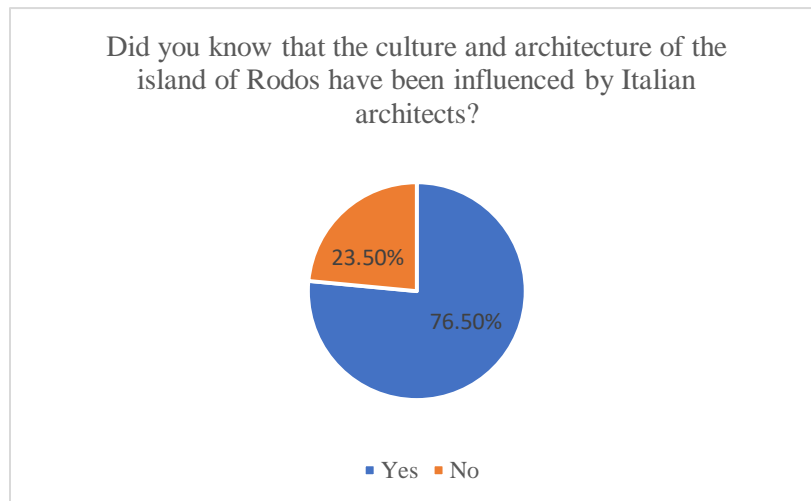
3. Research methodology

Quantitative research by the University of West Attica regarding the percentage of tourists' information about Italian monuments, the historical period associated with them as well as the order of preference in terms of interest and visitation of Italian monuments.

Of the sample that participated in the questionnaire, the majority consists of people aged 18 to 30 years (82.4%), and the sample is almost equally divided between men (52.9%) and women (41.2%). In addition, the majority travels more than 3 times a year (52.9%) or at least 2 times a year (47.1%), and they prefer to travel abroad (64.7%) instead of within Greece (37.3%). The same statistical proportions apply to the part of the sample that has visited the island of Rhodes (64.7%) compared to those who have not (37.3%). Regarding the questions concerning the history of Rhodes, the majority know that the island was under Italian occupation during World War II (76.5% YES, 23.5% NO). The same statistical proportions apply to the next question, which concerns the Italian influence on the architecture of the buildings and monuments of the island (76.5% YES, 23.5% NO). Finally, when asked about their familiarity with Italian monuments-buildings of Rhodes, the majority know the palace of the Grand Master (47.1%). It is followed by the Hotel of the Roses (35.3%), the Thermal Springs of Kallithea (29.4%), the Hydrobiological Station of Rhodes (23.5%), the ELLI building (17.6%) and the Italian ghost village (17.6%). From the sample, 23.5% answered that they do not know any of the above buildings-monuments.

4. Statistical analysis of questionnaire





5. Conclusions

Rhodes is an island that has clear influences from the Italian occupation on a cultural as well as an architectural level, as one can perceive by simply wandering around its beautiful sights, its busy and lively streets and its sophisticated museums. Neoclassicism, minimalism and Roman austerity came together and gave the island an authentic breath that visitors enjoy to this day. The reconstruction served the rise of craft and industry on the island, the regularization of its populations and the facilitation of state mechanisms. In this way, during the Italian period, the island was modernized, bringing prosperity and turning Rhodes into a brilliant tourist destination. The visitors of Rhodes, according to the research of the University of West Attica, are informed to a large extent about the history of Rhodes regarding the Italian occupation and about the Italian influence on the architecture of the buildings and monuments of the island. Favorite and well-known monuments based on the survey are considered in order of preference. The Palace of the Grand Master, the Hotel of Roses, the thermal springs of Kallithea, the Hydrobiological Station of Rhodes, the ELLI building and the Italian ghost village.

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