

Citizen Perspectives on the Development of Local Cultural Resources: The Case of the Municipality of Serres

Ioannis Samoladas, Charalampos Zilianakis, Katerina Lazaridou, Konstantina Papadopoulou, Eleni Tsolaki, and Dafni-Maria Nerantzaki

Abstract Nowadays, cultural development is considered to be a matter of high priority for a modern state. Local cultural assets play a major role in the design and development of a successful and sustainable national cultural development policy. The purpose of the current survey is to explore to what extent people who are residents at the Municipality of Serres realize the importance of cultural assets in the context both of national or regional economic development and which are these local cultural assets and resources. Additionally, the survey presented, attempts to gain insight into what are the factors that inhibit local cultural development and which are the main driving instructions responsible for the exploitation of these cultural assets and resources. In order to achieve its goals, the survey utilizes a sample of 121 responses to a comprehensive questionnaire, answered mainly by people who are permanent residents at the greater area of the Municipality of Serres. Analysis of the results gave strong evidence that the Municipality of Serres hosts and important number of cultural resources, which are not yet sufficiently exploited and promoted. In addition, citizens realize the important role cultural development can play in local economy and the value it can add in order to advance local economy as a whole.

Keywords Cultural tourism • Local development

JEL Classification Z1 cultural economics

I. Samoladas (✉) • C. Zilianakis • K. Lazaridou • K. Papadopoulou • E. Tsolaki • D.-M. Nerantzaki
Department of Business Administration, Technological Educational Institution of Central Macedonia, Serres, Greece
e-mail: samoladas@teiser.gr

1 Introduction

Modern states have realized and appreciate the importance of cultural assets and resources in their socio-economic development. Although the movement of cultural resource management can trace its origin to the middle of the past century and it was initially focused on the environmental aspects of cultural resources, nowadays it has become an important aspect of the development agenda, covering sectors such as archeology architecture, folklore actions and movements. The expression of the national policy on cultural development is mainly responsibility of local government bodies, such as regional governments and municipalities. The latter have identified the crucial role cultural resources exploitation can play and have initiated a rigorous approach to cultural assets and resources exploitation. However, there are cases where local authorities take actions without taking into accounts perspectives or views of their citizens. Thus, sometimes, their actions are moving to a direction rather different than that local citizens think or imagine.

The connection between cultural assets and resources management and tourism also stress the importance of taking into account local residents perspective and view in cultural development planning. In the present days of economic recession it is necessary for all the concerning bodies, citizens, organizations, institutions, enterprises and the local authorities to cooperate in cultural development planning in order to achieve a successful and profitable result.

The study presented is a first attempt to explore views and perspective that citizen have about regional cultural policy both nationwide or locally. It also tries to identify which are the main cultural assets of the Municipality of Serres and the factors that inhibit local cultural development.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Definition of Cultural Heritage*

According to the 1972 World Heritage Convention, which took place in Paris on 16th November, cultural heritage consists of the following:

- *Monuments*: architectural works, significant works of sculptures and painting, works or structures of archaeological nature, inscriptions, caves and combinations of features, of outstanding universal historical, artistic or scientific value.
- *Groups of buildings*: individual or groups of buildings, which their architecture, homogeneity or location, are of exceptional universal value from a historical, artistic, or scientific perspective.
- *Landscapes*: works of man or combined works of man and nature including archaeological sites of universal value from a historical, aesthetic, ethnological and anthropological perspective. (Lavvas, 2001)

2.2 *Cultural Resources*

Cultural resources are related to the remains and sites associated with human activities and natural surroundings including natural resources, natural environment, human capital and cultural services. Cultural heritage, folklore culture and tradition, digital culture, modern and contemporary production/creation, mass culture/creative industries, and multiculturalism-interculturalism belong to cultural categories (Tsiliras, 2010).

2.2.1 **The Concept of Culture**

In the modern era, cultural development and cultural resources management is one of the main priorities of a modern state. Therefore, any government should include, serve and recognize cultural rights for all as an indivisible part of individual and social rights.

Cultural heritage of each country is a common good, while its diffusion and indulgence is a fundamental right of citizens.

As mentioned above, cultural heritage is a multi-dimensional process, which more and more expands its content and meaning. This term does not refer only to contemporary artistic creation, but also to broader culture of everyday life: natural and structured environment, aesthetic and functionality of cities, landscaping (architecture and land planning), spiritual values of everyday experiences, multiculturalism of modern societies and especially digital culture (Gkefou-Madianou, 1999).

2.2.2 **Culture as a Productive Force**

The state should promote financing of private monuments which is currently left to the owners and they are often destroyed. The state also has to contribute to:

- Create conditions in favor of the development of the appropriate infrastructure capable for the production cultural products and services, with high quality standards and certified procedures.
- Promote and project, certified products and services in cooperation with private enterprises, and particularly small and medium sized enterprises and women cooperatives at a specified framework of principles and incentives with transparent procedures (copies from museums, food products, etc.).
- Promote research publishing related to the study and research of cultural heritage.
- Promote “smart” products and services in the tourist market.
 - With the formation of a special service for the presentation, utilization and promotion of the cultural capital (Tsiliras, 2010).

2.2.3 The Contribution of Culture to Local Development

Local society play an important role in times such as the current economic recession and can provide substantial help to mobilize development forces and thus overcome economic obstacles. This help, by the local community, is not limited to the supply of the necessary financial aid, but expands to providing the means and facilities, any volunteering work needed and above all the consensus needed in many cases in order to overcome obstacles posed by minorities. Municipalities are the first level of regional governance. Thus they have the main responsibility and should be the main driving force behind any actions to promote local cultural assets and resources. They are responsible for any attempts to draw new policies and strategies for local cultural resources exploitation. Municipalities are the link between central government (the state) and citizens. They are also responsible to protect local cultural assets and resources in a sustainable manner, trying to maintain a cooperation spirit between all the institutions, organizations and enterprises involved in the exploitation of local cultural resources. Finally it the Municipality which has to take into account citizens real needs and to inform them responsibly about future actions that need to be taken. Therefore a survey like the one presented, is rather useful for regional government bodies.

2.2.4 Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is one of the fastest developing sectors in the industry of tourism. Since 1970, the demand for cultural tourism in Europe has increased considerably, because of the “new middle class” with high levels of education and income (Wang, Fu, Cecil, & Hji-Avgoustis, 2008).

Culture is a factor of great importance for the design of the national policy of tourism. Cultural tourism is composed of mutually dependent activities and plays an important role in the development of the industry of tourism, even in the restoration and recovery of certain areas, zones and cities. Cultural tourism is not only the basis for the tourist boom in cities but also a promotion instrument of tourism, in rural and regional areas. It is the kind of tourism which is rapidly developed these days (Bachleitner & Zins, 1999).

Numerous studies have shown that culture and tourism can provide resources for socio-economic development in regional communities. The cultural development of the countryside can utilize natural and human resources of an area, community and family relations, heritage and lifestyle (MacDonald & Joliffe, 2003).

Cultural tourism has been defined as the movement of individuals to cultural attractions, away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences in order to satisfy their cultural needs. It is a kind of tourism of special interest, based on the search for and participation in aesthetic, spiritual, emotional and psychological experiences. It is approached holistically, but also with emphasis on heritage (monuments, archaeological sites, museums,

etc.), for example, performing arts are less likely to be reported as part of the cultural product of tourism. Cultural tourism includes tourism in urban cities (mainly historical and large cities) and their historical facilities (such as museums, theaters), as its subject is, the discovery of monuments and sites. It can also include tourism in rural and regional areas projecting the traditions of indigenous communities (e.g. festivals, observation of traditional dances or ceremonies, markets of handmade crafts, rituals), their values and lifestyle (Shamsuddoha, Alamgir, & Nasir, 2011). Finally cultural tourism can also include native language, gastronomy, and technology of the past, clothing and leisure activities (Asplet & Cooper, 2000).

2.2.5 Purpose of the Survey

Due to the fast and wide modern cultural development, it is considered a good practice for a local government, with a rich local cultural heritage, not to take advantage of it. In addition there are cases where local residents, or even organizations involved in local cultural actions, are unaware of their local cultural resources and their value. The purpose of the survey presented is to explore whether there are such conditions in the area of the Municipality of Serres. The questionnaire attempts to reveal any misconceptions citizens have, to find the degree they are aware of what local cultural resources exist in their area, their value and how local cultural development can help to advance local economy. Moreover, the aim of the current survey, is to acknowledge the local authorities how their citizens think about what local cultural development is, the problems they face and their priorities. Thus, they will be able to prioritize possible future actions in order to attract tourists interested in Municipality of Serres local cultural resources.

3 Methodology

This survey aims to explore the degree of exploitation of cultural resources by Municipality of Serres. In addition it tries to inform the citizens of Serres about the opportunity of local authorities to deal with economic crisis by exploiting cultural resources. Through this process Municipality of Serres will have the opportunity to develop the socio-cultural sector of the city, which in turn can lead to the increase in the number of tourists and ultimately the economic growth of the area. The answers of the participants to the survey indicate that the citizens are aware of the benefits, which emerge and they are positive to all the necessary changes, which can be achieved through the cooperation of all the responsible organizations.

The format of the research conducted is descriptive and the collection of primary data was made with a quantitative research that includes a poll with the use of structured prototype questionnaire.

The survey took place during the period 3–24 December 2014 with questionnaires shared and filled out via e-mails sent online. Questionnaires included a short covering intro for the information of the recipients about the purpose of research, assurance for the anonymity of respondents and instructions for completing the questionnaire. The survey was designed and hosted at Google Forms®. It contains 25 questions and it is divided into three parts. The first part (Part A) includes general questions about the topic, second part (Part B) some more specific questions on the subject, and finally (Part C) some basic demographic data.

The data collected from the questionnaires have been indexed in Microsoft Office Excel 2013 and subsequently the analysis of data was carried out with the use of the SPSS® Statistical Package.

The number of questionnaires sent was 160, the completed questionnaires were 121, and thus the number of the research response reached a rate of about 75 %. Due to the fact that the sample used is a convenience one, the questionnaire was sent to a random sample of our social environment. The survey included an initial pilot study, which was followed to minimize the errors. Some questionnaires were given to 4 friends in order to figure out the likelihood of possible difficulties, which might occurred during the completion process.

The collection of the survey data did not show great difficulty. The response was in a sufficient level, as the proportion approximates almost more 7 out of 10 respondents (75 %). The only constraint noted was that respondents hailing from the city, but which now residing elsewhere were not able to answer all questions, since they have not full impression on the current situation. Consequently, the sample were limited mainly to people not only hailing from Serres but also live in the city permanently.

4 Results of Our Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the sample of our research consisted of 121 fully completed questionnaires. The responders were 48 men (40 %) and 72 women (60 %). Two of them were below 18 years old (1.7 %), 54 were between 19 and 30 years old (45 %), 50 were between 31 and 45 years old (41.7 %) and 14 were above 46 years old (11.7 %). Information regarding their profession and their education are presented in Table 1. Regarding their origin, 111 of the responders come from the greater area of the Prefecture of Serres, while 10 come from the rest of Greece.

For the purposes of our analysis we used the SPSS® Statistical Package. In order to measure the reliability of our questionnaire, we calculated Cronbach's α , which for the whole questionnaire was $\alpha = 0.770$ a score that is considered sufficient (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

For the first part of our questionnaire, which refers to the general view about local cultural development, the majority of the responders, up to 75 %, believe that Greece's local natural and cultural resources are not exploited significantly. Around the same percentage of the responders believe that the Greek regional cultural policy is not sufficient. The majority also believes that local cultural resource can

Table 1 Distribution of responders according to their profession

Profession	Frequency	Percent	Education	Frequency	Percent
Freelance	33	26.7	Primary education	2	1.7
Private sector employee	18	15.0	Secondary education	22	18.3
Public sector employee	14	11.7	Vocational training	10	8.3
Unemployed	28	23.3	Bachelor degree	51	41.7
University student	18	15.0	Master degree	34	28.3
Retired	10	8.3	PhD degree	2	1.7

Table 2 Summary of the responses of the general questions of our questionnaire

	Completely disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither disagree nor agree (%)	Agree (%)	Completely agree (%)
1. Our local natural and cultural resources are exploited at a significant level	15.0	60.0	21.7	3.3	00.0
2. Greek regional cultural policy is sufficient	16.7	60.0	21.7	00.0	1.7
3. Exploitation of local cultural resources can advance its development	3.3	00.0	6.7	41.7	48.3
4. Alternative ways of tourism might be the answer to the present economic crisis	1.7	3.3	18.3	53.3	23.3

advance local economic development (90 %) and alternative ways of tourism can be the answer to the present economic crisis (77 %). Detailed results regarding the general views are shown in Table 2.

Regarding differences in answers of the general questions between gender, our analysis showed differences (significance level 0.05) only in the last two questions, with women being more positive (grouped median = 4.53) than men (grouped median = 4.00) that local resources can advance the local economy (Mann–Whitney's $U = 2224$, $z = 2.944$ and $p = 0.003$) and alternative tourism is an excellent opportunity in local economic development (women grouped median = 4.25, men grouped median = 3.46, $U = 2640$, $z = 5.364$ and $p < 0.001$). Running Kruskal–Wallis tests to examine differences (significance level 0.05) between age groups, profession, education and origin did not show any significant results (all p values were bigger than 0.35).

Next question (question number 6) is about “Who is main responsible for the exploitation of the cultural resources of our country”. The majority (82 %) of the responders believes that the main responsibility for the exploitation of the cultural resources of our country is equally distributed between the local government, cultural organizations and nonprofit organizations. There is a smaller percentage

of responders (26 %) who believe that the only responsible for the exploitation of the cultural resources are local governments, while a 12 % argues that this responsibility should be given to cultural organizations. Running a chi square analysis between gender, age groups, profession, education and origin did not give any significant results.

The responses regarding views about the Municipality of Serres are shown in Table 3. The majority of the responders agrees that the Internet is a great opportunity to promote local cultural resources (79 %), the local private sector could contribute to the development of the local resources (77 %), the Municipality of Serres is challenged by the economic crisis (69 %) and that the exploitation of local

Table 3 Summary of the responses regarding views about Municipality of Serres

	Completely disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither disagree nor agree (%)	Agree	Completely agree
6. Municipality of Serres is challenged by the economic crisis	1.7	6.7	23.3	38.3	30.0
7. By exploiting the benefits of cultural resources the Municipality of Serres could overcome the economic crisis	1.7	15.0	20.0	55.0	8.3
8. Cultural associations and other cultural institutions are sufficient to promote the cultural resources of the Municipality of Serres	6.7	53.3	23.3	15.0	1.7
9. The Municipality of Serres has the appropriate infrastructure for further tourism development	10.0	56.7	16.7	13.3	3.3
10. Local private sector in Serres could contribute to the development of cultural resources	1.7	3.3	18.3	61.7	15.0
11. Activities of existing cultural organizations are excellent	5.0	58.3	30.0	6.7	00.0
12. Advertising of the cultural resources of the Municipality of Serres is excellent	15.0	58.3	21.7	5.0	00.0
13. Promotion of the local culture through the Internet could be significantly beneficial	6.7	1.7	13.3	48.3	30.0

cultural resources could help the Municipality to overcome the economic crisis (64 %). On the other side, the majority disagrees with the view that the Municipality of Serres has the appropriate infrastructure for further tourism development (67 %), the local cultural associations and institutions are sufficient enough to promote the cultural resources of Serres (60 %), the activities of those afore mentioned associations and institutions are excellent (63 %) and that the advertising of the local cultural resources of Serres is sufficient (73 %).

Regarding differences of the responses between genders (significance level 0.05), women (grouped median = 4.14) agree more than men (grouped median = 3.5) that the Municipality of Serres is challenged by the economic crisis (Mann–Whitney's $U = 2227$, $z = 3.077$ and $p = 0.002$). Women (grouped median = 3.72) also agree more than men (grouped median = 3.25) that exploitation of the cultural resources could help overcome the crisis ($U = 2140$, $z = 2.435$ and $p = 0.015$). Women agree (grouped median = 4.31) more than men (grouped median = 3.37) that the Internet could be beneficial to the promotion of local cultural resources ($U = 2442$, $z = 4.13$ and $p < 0.001$). Women are less negative (grouped median = 2.67) than men (grouped median = 2.08) to the view that the Municipality of Serres has the appropriate infrastructure for tourism development ($U = 2296$, $z = 3.381$ and $p < 0.001$).

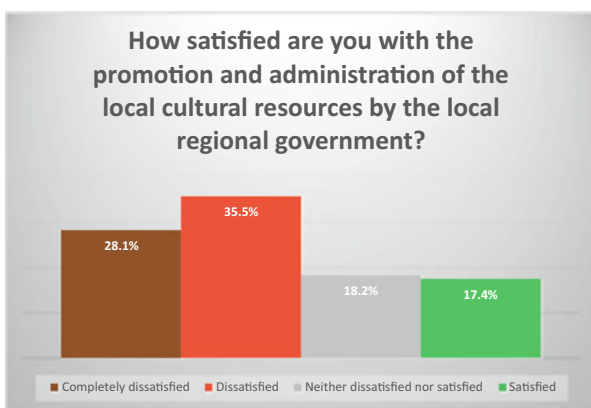
Analysis of the responses according to the age groups showed one difference between those who are up to 30 years old and those who are above 30 years old. Particularly, the first group has a more neutral view (grouped median = 3.25) than that of the second age group (grouped median = 3.78) regarding the benefits of the exploitation of local cultural resources ($p = 0.06$). Views about questions 6, 9, 10 and 13 differ significantly between different professions ($p = 0.005$, $p = 0.001$, $p = 0.004$ and $p = 0.011$ respectively). Education affects only questions 6, 8 and 13 ($p = 0.005$, $p < 0.001$ and $p = 0.009$ respectively). Profession and origin do not affect any of the views of the responders.

The responses regarding question 14 “Which of the following local cultural organizations do you believe they contribute to the development of the local cultural resources?” results are shown on Image 1. Responders believe that the Culture Department of the Municipality of Serres and the DIPETHE (Municipality Administered Theatre Organization) are two main contributors to the development of the local cultural resources with 73.6 % and 70.2 % respectively. Running a chi-square analysis showed that women tend to believe more in KEDIS (Municipality of Serres Non Profit Welfare Organization), DIPETHE and the Lyceum Club of Greek Women than men ($\chi^2(1) = 9.143$ and $p = 0.002$, $\chi^2(1) = 9.550$ and $p = 0.002$ and $\chi^2(1) = 7.208$ and $p = 0.007$ respectively). Age also has a positive effect on KEDIS, DIPETHE and the Lyceum Club of Greek Women, with more

Image 1 Results for the question “Which of the following local cultural organizations do you believe they contribute to the development of the local cultural resources?”

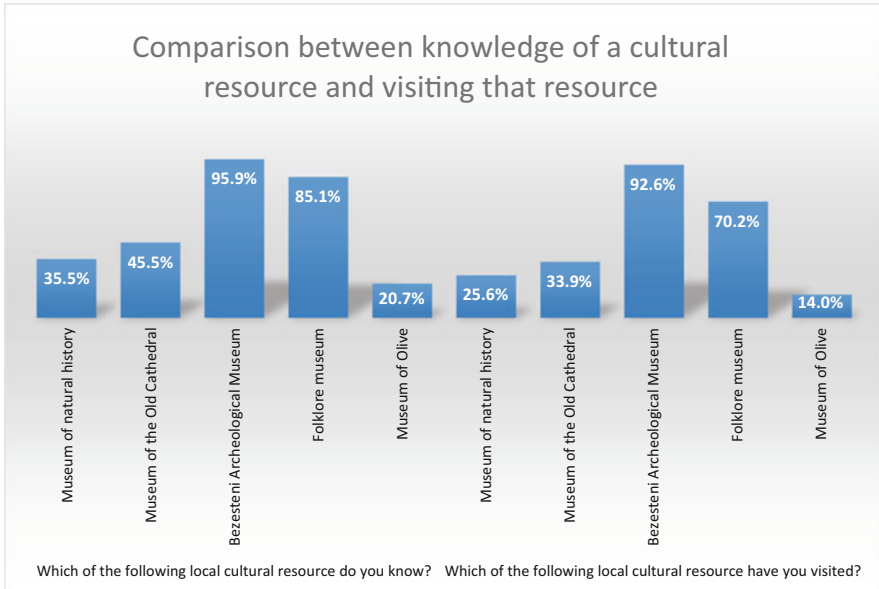


Image 2 Results for the question “How satisfied are you with the promotion and administration of the local cultural resources by the local regional government?”



preferences in the ages groups above 31 years old ($\chi^2(1) = 10.575$ and $p = 0.014$, $\chi^2(1) = 14.490$ and $p = 0.002$ and $\chi^2(1) = 17.340$ and $p = 0.001$ respectively). Profession, education and origin do not significantly affect the results.

The responses regarding question 14 “How satisfied are you with the promotion and administration of the local cultural resources by the local regional government?” results are shown on Image 2, with the majority of the responders to be either completely dissatisfied or dissatisfied (28.1 % and 35.5 % respectively). Gender, age, profession, education and origin do not significantly affect the results.



Next questions are about local cultural resources. The most popular cultural resources are the Bezesteni Archeological Museum and the Folklore Museum with 95.9 % and 85.1 % of the responders to be acknowledged of them respectively. Regarding those resources that responders have actually visited, the Bezesteni Archeological Museum and the Folklore Museum with 92.6 % and 70.2 % respectively are the most visited. The correlation of the knowledge of a resource and actually visiting it is rather high (for all pairs, correlation is significant at the 0.01 level with Pearson R^2 being 0.625, 0.640, 0.512, 0.540 and 0.504 for the five cultural resources respectively). Gender, age, profession, education and origin do not significantly affect the results of the two questions.

Regarding the frequency of the visits the answers are Never 3.3 %, Hardly (once a year) 65 %, Rarely (two or three times a year) 23.3 %, Often (four or five times a year) 6.7 % and Very often (more than six times a year) 1.7 %. Regarding analysis between factors than might affect the frequency, only gender has a significant effect on visit frequency with women to visiting cultural resources more frequent than men ($\chi^2(1) = 20.351$ and $p < 0.001$).

Next question is about “How are you informed for local cultural events?”. The results of the question are shown in Image 3. Analysis of the results reveal that women prefer more to be informed by their social circle ($\chi^2(1) = 6.690$ and $p = 0.01$), younger responders do not prefer local-television ($\chi^2(1) = 16.350$ and $p < 0.001$) but they prefer the Internet and Social media ($\chi^2(1) = 9.750$ and $p = 0.021$). Internet and social media is preferred by bachelor holders and graduates of secondary education ($\chi^2(1) = 23.404$ and $p < 0.001$). There is no other significant result that affect the answers of this question about factors.

Image 3 Results for the question “How are you informed for local cultural events?”

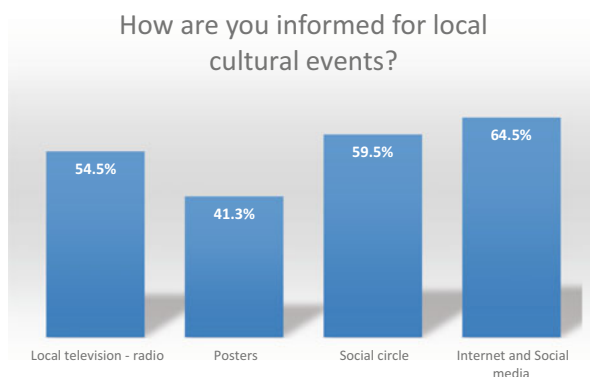


Table 4 Summary of the responses regarding the assessment of the inhibitory factors of the local cultural development

	Unimportant (%)	Of little importance (%)	Moderately important (%)	Important (%)	Very important (%)
1. Only road transportation and bad quality railroad	10.0	18.3	16.7	16.7	38.3
2. Low quality promotional activities	5.1	16.9	16.9	22.0	39.0
3. Promotional activities focused on Greeks (and not foreigners)	11.7	10.0	26.7	25.0	26.7
4. Bad internet usage	6.7	6.7	31.7	33.3	21.7
5. Abundance of local culinary identity	18.3	28.3	25.0	16.7	11.7
6. Few quality hotels	8.3	11.7	31.7	31.7	1.7

The last questions are about the assessment of the factors that inhibit the development of the local cultural development. The results are shown in Table 4.

Results show that apart from the abundance of a local culinary identity, all the other factors seem to be equally important for the responders. The gender does not affect the results. People between 19 and 30 years old and people above 46 years old believe that factors 1–4 and 6 are more important than factor 5 ($p < 0.003$ for all factors). Education, profession and origin do not significantly affect the results.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of the survey was to examine how citizens perceive the contribution of cultural resources in development of the Municipality of Serres and to gather evidence about the weaknesses in the management and administration of local cultural resources by the governing bodies or local cultural organizations. In addition, the survey tried to capture and measure disadvantages in the current status local cultural administration and give some evidence about which local cultural resources could be further exploited in order to advance the local economy.

According to the survey most of the responders believe that the cultural resources are not exploited in a sufficiently at a national level, while the majority of them are aware about their contribution in the further development of a place challenged by the current economic recession. Most of the responders also, share the belief that only through cooperation of all the organizations (public or private), exploitation of cultural resources could result in a sufficient and profitable level.

Furthermore, the results of the survey show that the promotion and advertisement of local cultural resources is not adequate mainly due to misuse of Internet marketing methods by the local authorities. There is substantial evidence from the results of the survey that the majority of the responders prefer the Internet and the social media in order to be informed for cultural activities. Moreover, our survey showed that the Department of Culture of the Municipality of Serres should take more responsibilities to advance local cultural development and play a more central role in local cultural resources exploitation, administration and coordination.

Regarding local cultural resources, the Bezesteni Archaeological Museum the most recognizable and most visited one while on the other side the Olive museum is the least acknowledged and visited one. The Olive museum is considered a wonderful cultural-natural resource and with the appropriate promotion from the local authorities can achieve higher recognition and attract more visitors.

An important part of our survey was the ranking of the importance of the factors that inhibit the advance of local cultural development of the Municipality of Serres. According to the results the poor road access and low quality railroad transportation that connects the city of Serres with the neighboring cities as well as the city of Serres with local sites of cultural importance (such as Amphipolis or the Kerkini Lake), and the low quality promotional activities are the two most important inhibiting factors. Additionally, the lack of a promotion to attract tourists outside Greece is of equal importance. On the other hand, the lack of a local culinary identity is considered not to be of great importance. Summarizing our survey showed that citizens realize that the Municipality of Serres has a substantial number of cultural resources, that are not yet sufficiently exploited. Citizens recognize the importance of cultural development in local economy and the value it can add in order to advance local economy as a whole. Of course, the study presented, is only a small step towards the understanding of how citizens perceive local cultural development, how they can benefit from it, what are the main driving factors behind its development and the factors that pose obstacles in further development.

It is certain that further work and research is needed in order to find more factors, both beneficial and inhibiting, to hierarchy these factors and discover new ways of exploitation of cultural assets.

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