



# Managing Cultural Heritage Festivals towards Sustainable Tourism Development: The “Aegean Methexis” Festival in Andros Island

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to address the contribution of the “Aegean Methexis” festival to raising awareness of Andros’ rich cultural heritage and building social bonds for locals and tourists, as well as attracting cultural tourists and providing opportunities for development to local tourism-related businesses.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research methodology was formed on the basis of deepening into the festival experience of locals and visitors and its impact on tourism sustainability. The paper opted for an exploratory study using both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Primary data was collected via: a. 58 online questionnaires addressed to festival participants; and b. participant observation during a six-month period.

**Findings:** The paper provides empirical insights about how festival participants perceive their experience in connection to cultural heritage and tourism. Findings consolidate that the festival provides a unique platform combining entertainment and familiarity with Andros’ rich cultural heritage based on a cognitive model experience. Participants seem to connect their experience with further tourism engagement in more authentic aspects of the island while seem to seize the opportunity for cultural interaction and building stronger social bonds with the local community. All the stakeholders warmly supported the festival, due to its contribution to cultural heritage awareness and tourism product enrichment.

**Originality/value:** The study fulfils an identified need to study how the “Aegean Methexis” festival may act as a catalyst for sustainable tourism development, how the destination can benefit from similar events, and how to employ them as original branding tools of Andros.

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism; Cultural heritage; Festival management; Sustainability; Andros Island; “Aegean Methexis” festival

## INTRODUCTION

Culture and tourism have a mutually beneficial relationship which can strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of regions, countries, cities and rural areas, forming a competitive destination identity [1]. Culture is increasingly an important element of the tourism product, which also creates distinctiveness in a crowded global marketplace [2]. At the same time, “tourism provides an important means of enhancing culture and creating income which can support and strengthen cultural heritage, cultural production and creativity” [3]. Cultural elements act on the overall value of the place and can exert influence before the decision to visit a destination and during the stay and remain as the strongest memory after the visit [4]. Therefore, culture is directly linked to place and tourism, as it feeds its competitive identity and strongly influences its brand identity [5].

In the field of tourism, cultural heritage has emerged as an important resource that can be used in the development of sustainable cultural tourism strategies [6]. Thus, “sustainable cultural tourism is the integrated management of cultural heritage and tourism activities in conjunction with the local community creating social, environmental and economic benefits for all stakeholders, to achieve tangible and intangible cultural heritage conservation and sustainable tourism development” [7]. Visitors search for authentic experiences through participation in various events and rituals, interaction with local people, acquisition of genuine handicrafts and creation of interrelationships [8]. Such trends shape the framework for the dissemination of heritage tourism. This new type of experiential tourism encompasses, beyond the usual activities which can be more environmentally friendly and are characterized by a more genuine respect for the destination. Hence, the tourist’s experience is transformed into an experiential memory through

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i.e., the cultural revival of traditions, philosophy, and way of living and local heritage, while is enhanced before, during, and after a visit to the cultural destination by innovative e-services [9].

The use of cultural festivals and special events as an instrument for measuring the social impact on host communities [10], and promoting tourism development has recently gained worldwide momentum [11]. The sociocultural impact of festivals is measured in order to be encouraged by public sector bodies, as a positive form of community development [12], and, thus, the need for a deeper understanding of their contribution to regional development, place marketing and place-identity has consequently emerged [13]. While an extensive literature on the various social, cultural and economic elements of festivals does now exist, festival research was mainly focused upon mega-events and other hallmark events, leaving regional and small community cultural events rather underexplored [14].

Festivals, once local celebrations of culture and heritage [15], often become international, spreading to countries outside their hosting region, attracting thousands of visitors and creating loyal audiences with multiple positive tourism and cultural impacts in the destinations [16]. This paper, therefore, focuses on the way local festivals represent some of the most attractive and comprehensive ways of displaying intangible cultural heritage. More specifically, the research deepens into the role of the “Aegean Methexis” festival as a contributor to raising awareness of Andros’ rich cultural heritage and building social bonds for locals and tourists, as well as a pull factor for attracting cultural tourists, providing opportunities for development to local tourism-related businesses.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Although cultural tourism definitions are nearly as many as cultural tourists, cultural tourism can be defined as the movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations, which include study tours, performing arts, cultural tours, travel to festivals, visits to historic sites and monuments, folklore and pilgrimages [17], “visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region or institution” [18], as well as “the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs” [19]. Cultural tourism covers both ‘heritage tourism’ (related to artefacts of the past) and ‘arts tourism’ (related to contemporary cultural production) and involves four elements which are: tourism, use of cultural heritage assets, consumption of experiences and products, and tourist [20]. Ashworth et al. [21] categorized three definitions of culture related to tourism: a. ‘Art Tourism’ (the simplest form of culture to be commodified for tourism, generally associated with art and artistic products and performance). ‘Heritage Tourism’ (mix of preserved buildings, conserved cityscapes and morphological patterns, as well as places associated with historical events and personalities); and c. ‘Place-specific Tourism’ (the common set of values, attitudes and thus behavior of a social group).

Heritage contribution in tourism development is based on the capitalization of cultural resources [22], widely known as cultural heritage. “Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and

places through time” Council of Europe [23], and is an “expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values” [24]. It creates the identity and image of the place and can turn a place into a destination, transforming it into an “outdoor exhibition” [25].

Centred on what we have inherited, which can mean anything from historic buildings to art works, to beautiful scenery, heritage tourism can be defined as “visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in historical, artistic, scientific, lifestyle, or cultural offerings of a community, region, group, or institution” [18], a form of travel experience and nostalgia for the past as well as cultural landscapes and forms [26]; a marketplace selling the beneficial feeling of consuming heritage through a heritage tourist attraction [27]; visiting places which have a significant cultural identity which makes these locations different from others [28] or a search for experiencing places and tradition through activities that represent both the past and present of specific communities [29]. Heritage tourism most commonly is measured, described, and referred to as tourists’ activities in heritage places, without looking at the actual relationships between a site’s attributes and the tourist [30]. It is considered a tool of economic development that achieves economic growth through attracting visitors from outside a host community, who are motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution [18]. Therefore, cultural heritage destinations have an enduring feature as attractions since they are not subject to seasonality [31].

Community-based tourism projects allow for direct communication between the tourism and heritage sectors and communities with regard to sustainable development or “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [32] of heritage assets as tourism products [33]. Engaging elements of intangible cultural heritage in tourism offer could bring multiple benefits to the sustainable development of tourism. According to Rozemeijer [34], sustainability in heritage tourism has four dimensions: a. economic viability; b. ecologic and cultural sustainability; c. institutional consolidation; and d. equitable cost and benefit distribution.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is fast becoming a significant resource in heritage tourism [35]. ICH has been described by UNESCO at the Article 2 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage [36] as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith-that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage”. The same Article states that ICH is evident in the following five domains: lral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the Intangible cultural heritage; b. performing arts; c. social practices, rituals and festive events; d. knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; as well as e. traditional craftsmanship [36]. ICH represents strong cultural authenticity and has been identified as a key component to developing as a sustainable tourism resource [35]. Also, facilitates a deep understanding of a destination’s culture, which in turn, strengthens the competitiveness of ICH within the broader area of cultural heritage tourism and creates socio-economic benefits for stakeholders [37]. The tourism industry, intergovernmental organisations, and tourism authorities are increasingly concerned with creating viable ICH tourism products

that retain and enhance destinations' cultural diversity to enrich its tourism offer and ensure product diversification [33].

The following strategies may be used when developing ICH assets as heritage tourism products: Building a primary attraction or a purpose-built facility to showcase ICH; bundling attractions for stronger market appeal; creating cultural spaces for living culture and performances; developing new linear routes, circuits or heritage networks; using existing or reviving linear routes, circuits and heritage networks; and using or reviving festivals and events [33]. Cultural heritage festivals can provide the continuance of the cultural traditions and historical knowledge of a community. For a heritage festival to be successful, it is important to have active involvement from local residents, which is based on finding the right people to conduct programs, to assist or sponsor the event, and to promote the event within the region.

Heritage festivals gain market appeal for tourists, due to: a. the satisfaction of multiple roles (tourism development, confirmation of cultural identity, community development, revitalisation and awareness raising); b. the satisfaction of basic needs (physical, interpersonal and psychological); c. festival spirit (sharing values and developing a sense of belonging); d. uniqueness (the creation of unique sights and experiences); e. authenticity (the representation of traditional cultural values and processes); f. tradition (the celebration of history or past ways of life); g. symbolism (honouring cultural rituals and their meaning); and h. nostalgia (reliving a feature of the past that can reinforce community bonds) [38].

### The "Aegean Methexis" festival on Andros Island

Famous for its natural beauties, and its long shipping tradition, Andros is the northernmost Cycladic Island, with an area of 374 sq. and 9,221 inhabitants [39], several archaeological sites, museums, monasteries and churches, Byzantine monuments, medieval castles and cathedrals, neoclassical buildings, shaping a destination with a strong cultural identity that extends beyond the narrow island borders.

Organised by the Plegma NGO, the "Aegean Methexis" festival first took place from June 16th to 18th, 2018, while the second festival organisation had to be postponed, due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Based on employing different aspects of the rich cultural heritage of Andros, the festival is a major innovative local event. The shared vision among festival organisers, volunteers and supporters can be defined as the creative exploitation of cultural heritage of the Aegean Islands in the frames of experiential tourism and their systematic connection to the three pillars of sustainable development; the environment, the society and the economy [40]. The festival's mission is the promotion of the cultural heritage, including folk dances and music, gastronomy, performing arts and social practices, traditional costumes as well local architecture and townscapes of Andros as a part of the Aegean islands while the unique selling proposition of the festival is built upon authenticity, and experience of Andros intangible heritage [41].

Addressed to any individual who seeks to experience cultural heritage of the Aegean islands and has a keen interest in dance, music and festivities [40], the festival attracted 1,200 participants (Andros residents and primary school students, Greek and foreign holidaymakers) while 85 persons from different parts of Greece (i.e., Attica, Thessaloniki, Volos, etc.) and abroad (i.e. Italy, Switzerland and the UK) booked a trip to Andros due to the festival. In total, the festival cost 11,732.20 and had a revenue of 10,293 euros [41].

Supported by the Region of South Aegean, it featured in the international event list of the 2018: European Year of Cultural Heritage, and was included in the marketing plan of the Municipality of Andros [42], since its theme and brand name was built upon environmental attributes, social and cultural heritage in order to help marketing campaigns and local culture, history and natural beauty of the island were creatively exploited in the festival's marketing mix [43].

**Product experience, programming and packaging:** The product experience is described as a journey into the intangible cultural heritage of the Aegean sea, including traditional dances workshops, musical instruments (i.e. violin, flute, tsambouna and lyre) workshops, folklore related lectures as well as participation in 'Vengera' (evening gathering at a friend's place) and 'Glenti' (public celebration), tasting of traditional products, spending time at the beach or walking in the picturesque Batsi village. Additionally, the festival package included accommodation, ferry tickets, traditional meals.

**Place:** The festival place played a decisive role in the choice of the program, while the natural environment shaped the way in which the festival is perceived both functionally and emotionally. Built amphitheatrical over the picturesque harbour, Batsi village has served as a tourist attraction since the 1960s. The festival took place in landmark venues (Old Slaughterhouses, Main Square and Agios Georgios church). Maps, road signs and festival volunteers guided the participants around the different venues and offered relevant information. Tickets could be purchased at the festival venues or online.

**Price:** There were six different participation packages varying from 45-210 euros; while there were also open events with free entrance for residents (adults and children) and tourists. Finally, the musicians and dancers who participated as volunteers in the open events attended the seminars for free.

**Integrated marketing communications:** Aiming to raise festival awareness and attract participants, an eight-month communication programme was performed, including public relations and publicity, advertising, digital marketing and personal selling with travel agencies.

**People:** The festival people consists of a group of 10 highly skilled artists and theorists of Aegean music and cultural heritage, assisted by a four-member management team and supported by 33 volunteers and supporters, 76 sponsors and 12 media sponsors.

### Methodological framework

The research methodology was formed on the basis of deepening into the experience of both locals and visitors in order to explore the festival's impact on the promotion of cultural heritage and tourism sustainability of Andros. The main research objectives are the determination of the contribution of the "Aegean Methexis" festival into raising awareness of Andros' cultural heritage and the formation of social bonds for locals and tourists, as well as of the attraction of cultural tourists and their impact to local tourism-related businesses. In order to answer these questions, the paper opted for an exploratory study using both quantitative and qualitative methods:

- Online survey: quantitative data was collected by the distribution of online questionnaires to the participants at the end of the festival. In total, 58 questionnaires were answered during 19 to 30 June 2018.

- Participatory Observation: a 3-phase procedure was followed by the main researcher and member of the festival team.

### Online survey-grounding and administration

A qualitative survey was conducted in order to empirically explore the research aims of this paper. After a thorough examination of UNESCO’s Framework for Cultural Statistics Handbook [1], the use of [10,44] frameworks were selected; while the survey used specific items based on a critical overview of the abovementioned frameworks which collectively addressed a total of two contexts (Table 1). These are explored both from the social/cultural and tourism/cultural perspective.

**Table 1:** Structure and dimensions of the survey questionnaire.

Questionnaire dimensions	Study items
Q.1 Demographics (Items N=6)	Sex
	Age
	City of residence
	Marital Status
	Education
	Professional Status
Q.2 Social/Cultural benefits of the festival (Items N=12)	Contributes significantly to the promotion of cultural heritage of the Aegean islands
	The activities provide important recreational opportunities for the participants
	Seminars and lectures of the festival provide important learning experiences for the participants
	Provides significant opportunities for promotion and recognition for the participating artists
	Provides important networking and information opportunities for the participating artists
	Is a source of inspiration and new ideas for the participants
	Contributes to the creation and maintenance of cultural infrastructure in Andros
	Contributes to the promotion of traditional music and dances of Andros
	Brings people of Andros closer to the cultural heritage of the Aegean islands
	There is a sense of "celebration" in the island during the festival
Offers meeting opportunities and brings residents of Andros closer to each other	
Makes people of Andros proud	

Q.3 Tourism/Cultural benefits of the festival (Items N=7)	Contributes to the promotion of the image of Andros and strengthens its value as a tourist/cultural destination
	Serves as an important pull factor for new tourists in Andros
	Is an important pull factor for tourists throughout the island
	The tourist inflows to the island increase significantly during the festival
	The tourism businesses benefit significantly during the festival
	Contributes to the development and improvement of tourism infrastructures
Visitors have the opportunity to discover to the local culture during the festival	

In order to assess the closed-ended questions, the survey measurement scale was based on a five-point Likert type scale which represented different levels of participants’ agreement or disagreement on specific constructs of the questionnaire (1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree). The survey took place from June 19th to June 30th 2018 including the participants of the “Aegean Methexis” festival in Andros. The survey distribution involved an online questionnaire developed via Google Forms software, which was initially tested out within a small group of experts.

Statistical analysis methodology: The IBM SPSS Statistics 26 was employed for the statistical analysis of the survey. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used for the questionnaire constructs’ scale reliability internal consistency assessment. Descriptive statistical analysis on festival participants’ assessments was used for the report of the results. For assessing statistically significant differences between two independent subgroups and for assessing differences among more than two independent subgroups respectively, Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric statistical tests were performed. Exploratory Factor Analysis was employed subsequently through Principal Components Analysis and Varimax rotation method, grouping the variables for each of the questionnaire constructs, and bivariate Pearson’s correlation statistics are reported for the grouped variables.

Survey results: Table 2 reports the questionnaire constructs’ reliability. The overall internal consistency of all of the variables included in the survey was estimated through Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient to be 0.969, quite adequate with no problematic variables identified through scale if an item deleted, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient estimates. The internal consistency of the variables included in the “Social/Cultural Benefits” construct was estimated through Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient to be 0.953, while the internal consistency of the variables included in the “Tourism/Cultural Benefits” was estimated to be 0.938.

**Table 2:** Questionnaire constructs reliability.

Questionnaire Constructs	Reliability (Cronbach’s alpha)
Overall Cronbach	969
Social/Cultural Benefits (Items N=12)	953
Tourism/Cultural Benefits (Items N=7)	938

Table 3 summarises the demographic characteristics of the survey participants, according to “Sex”, “Age”, “City of residence”, “Marital status”, “Education”, and “Professional status”. 58 festival participants were included in the sample, while three (3) questionnaires were removed after data screening of the survey responses. Table 2 provides in detail the survey demographics which may be summarized as follows: 48.3% of the participants were females; 6.9% of the participants belonged between the ages of 18-25, 32.8% between 26-40, 44.8% between 41-60, and 15.5% were over 60 years old; 46.6% of the participants had postgraduate studies, 39.7% undergraduate studies; 55.2% of the participants were residing in Attica region, 22.4% were residing in Andros Island, while 22.4% were residing in other cities as follows: (Thessaloniki, Volos, etc.); 67.2% of the participants were married; while 75.9% of the participants had full-time job employment and 17.2% part-time job employment.

Table 3: Survey demographics.

Q1. Demographics	Variables	Respondents	Percentage
Sex (N=58)	Male	30	51,7%
	Female	28	48,3%
Age (N=58)	18-25	4	6,9%
	26-40	19	32,8%
	41-60	26	44,8%
	<60	9	15,5%
City of residence (N=58)	Attica region	32	55,2%
	Andros Island	13	22,4%
	Other cities (Thessaloniki, Volos, Larisa, Heraklion)	13	22,4%
	Crete, Mytilene, Sifnos, Icaria, Methana)		
Marital status (N=58)	Single, Widowed, Divorced/ Separated	19	32,8%
	Married/ Domestic partnership	39	67,2%

Education (N=58)	Basic Studies (High School)	8	13,8%
	Undergraduate University Studies	23	39,7%
	Postgraduate / Doctoral / Research Studies	27	46,6%
Professional Status (N=58)	Unemployed	4	6,9%
	Part time job	10	17,2%
	Full time job	44	75,9%

Tables 4 and 5 summarize the descriptive statistics as well as the statistically significant differences for all group demographics with the items of the survey constructs. Table 4 summarises the results of the participants’ assessment regarding “Social/Cultural Benefits” constructs of the survey. In the majority of the survey constructs, the participants showed exceptional assessment in the “Social/Cultural Benefits” of the “Aegean Methexis” festival. In particular, the variables such as “Contributes significantly to the promotion of cultural heritage of the Aegean islands”, “The activities provide important recreational opportunities for the participants”, “Seminars and lectures of the festival provide important learning experiences for the participants”, and “Contributes to the promotion of traditional music and dances of Andros” were highly assessed (median=5.00) for the participants.

Statistical significant differences among the different sex and age group categories for participants’ assessment are reported in Table 4 as superscripts, identified through Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests; indicatively: a. “Contributes significantly to the promotion of cultural heritage of the Aegean islands”,  $p < 0.05$ , with a mean rank score of 34.82 for females and 24.53 for males (i.e. the recorded assessment for females is higher than males); b. “Seminars and lectures of the festival provide important learning experiences for the participants”,  $p < 0.05$ , with a mean rank score of 28.38 for 18-25 age group, 38.55 for 26-40 age group, 24.29 for 41-60 age group, and 25.94 for over 60 years old age group category (i.e. the recorded assessment for 26-40 age group is higher than the other three); c. “The festival brings people of Andros closer to the cultural heritage of the Aegean islands”,  $p < 0.05$ , with a mean rank score of 33.79 for females and 25.50 for males (i.e. the recorded assessment for females is higher than males).

Table 4: Level of agreement about the social/cultural benefits of the festival.

Q.2 Please note the level of your agreement with the following about the festival:	Level scale						
Contributes significantly to the promotion of cultural heritage of the Aegean islands (N=58) $\sigma$	0%	0%	24,1%	20,7%	55,2%	5,00	5
The activities provide important recreational opportunities for the participants (N=58)	0%	0%	15,5%	17,2%	67,2%	5,00	5
Seminars and lectures of the festival provide important learning experiences for the participants (N=58) $\alpha$	0%	1,7%	17,2%	29,3%	51,7%	5,00	5
Provides significant opportunities for promotion and recognition for the participating artists (N=58)	0%	1,7%	17,2%	44,8%	36,2%	4,00	4
Provides important networking and information opportunities for the participating artists (N=58)	0%	3,4%	25,9%	29,3%	41,4%	4,00	5
Is a source of inspiration and new ideas for the participants (N=58)	0%	0%	24,1%	34,5%	41,4%	4,00	5
Contributes to the creation and maintenance of cultural infrastructure in Andros (N=58)	0%	1,7%	20,7%	31%	46,6%	4,00	5
Contributes to the promotion of traditional music and dances of Andros (N=58) $\sigma$	0%	0%	15,5%	24,1%	60,3%	5,00	5
Brings people of Andros closer to the cultural heritage of the Aegean islands (N=58) $\sigma$	0%	1,7%	15,5%	36,2%	46,6%	4,00	5
There is a sense of "celebration" in the island during the festival (N=58) $\sigma$	3,4%	1,7%	20,7%	24,1%	50%	4,50	5
Offers meeting opportunities and brings residents of Andros closer to each other (N=58) $\sigma$	3,4%	1,7%	24,1%	25,9%	44,8%	4,00	5
Makes people of Andros proud (N=58) $\sigma$	3,4%	1,7%	37,9%	22,4%	34,5%	4,00	3

Note: Mann-Whitney U-test and Kruskal-Wallis H-test ( $\sigma$ :  $p < 0,05$  sex;  $\alpha$ :  $p < 0,05$  age)

**Table 5:** Level of agreement about the tourism/cultural benefits of the festival.

Q.3 Please note the level of your agreement with the following about the festival:	Level Scale 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree						
	1	2	3	4	5	Median	Mode
Contributes to the promotion of the image of Andros and strengthens its value as a tourist/cultural destination (N=58) $\sigma$	0%	0%	19%	31%	50%	4,50	5
Serves as an important pull factor for new tourists in Andros (N=58) $\sigma$	0%	0%	27,6%	43,1%	29,3%	4,00	4
Is an important pull factor for tourists throughout the island (N=58) $\sigma$	0%	1,7%	41,4%	24,1%	32,8%	4,00	3
The tourist inflows to the island increase significantly during the festival (N=58) $\sigma$	0%	3,4%	37,9%	36,2%	22,4%	4,00	3
The tourism businesses benefit significantly during the festival (N=58) $\sigma$	0%	1,7%	24,1%	29,3%	44,8%	4,00	5
Contributes to the development and improvement of tourism infrastructures (N=58) $\sigma$	0%	6,9%	22,4%	29,3%	41,4%	4,00	5
Visitors have the opportunity to discover to the local culture during the festival (N=58)	0%	0%	20,7%	17,2%	62,1%	5,00	5

Note: Mann-Whitney U-test and Kruskal-Wallis H-test ( $\sigma$ :  $p < 0,05$  sex)

Table 5 summarises the results of the participants’ assessment regarding “Tourism/Cultural Benefits” constructs of the survey. In the majority of the survey constructs, the participants showed exceptional assessment in the “Tourism/Cultural Benefits” of the “Aegean Methexis” festival. In particular, the variables such as “Visitors have the opportunity to discover to the local culture during the festival” (median=5.00), “Contributes to the promotion of the image of Andros and strengthens its value as a tourist/cultural destination” (median=4.50), and “The festival contributes to the development and improvement of tourism infrastructures” (median=4.00) were highly assessed for the participants.

Statistical significant differences among the different sex group categories for participants’ assessment are reported also in Table 5 as superscripts; indicatively: a. “Contributes to the promotion of the image of Andros and strengthens its value as a tourist/cultural destination”,  $p < 0.05$ , with a mean rank score of 34.05 for females and 25.25 for males (i.e. the recorded assessment for females is higher than males); b. “Serves as an important pull factor for new tourists in Andros”,  $p < 0.05$ , with a mean rank score of 34.32 for females and 25.00 for males (i.e. the recorded assessment for females is higher than males); c. “The tourism businesses benefit significantly during the festival”,  $p < 0.05$ , with a mean rank score of

35.55 for females and 23.85 for males (i.e. the recorded assessment for females is higher than males).

Grouping variables-correlation statistics: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Principal Components Analysis (PCA) were employed for reducing the variables of the questionnaire, as well as for assessing whether all the variables initially included in the questionnaire are representative of the underlying constructs. According to Table 6, the survey constructs were grouped to a single component, while the single-item factor loadings were quite high. As can be seen in the rows with the descriptive statistics of Table 6, the participants reported high assessment for both “Social/Cultural Benefits” (mean=4.21) and “Tourism/Cultural Benefits” (mean=4.08).

Table 7 presents Pearson correlation coefficients and the corresponding significance levels for the construct components, with Pearson’s test (2-tailed) at significance level  $p < 0.01$ (\*\*). Last two rows of Table 7 present descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of the examined constructs. It is worth noting that strong statistically significant correlations were identified between participants’ assessments for “Social/Cultural Benefits” with “Tourism/Cultural Benefits” of the “Aegean Methexis” festival ( $r = .873$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 6:** Principal components analysis results for the study constructs.

Items	Factors	
	1	2
<b>Social/Cultural benefits</b>		
Contributes to the promotion of traditional music and dances of Andros	856	
There is a sense of "celebration" in the island during the festival	849	
The activities provide important recreational opportunities for the participants	843	
Offers meeting opportunities and brings residents of Andros closer to each other	824	
Contributes significantly to the promotion of cultural heritage of the Aegean islands	817	
Is a source of inspiration and new ideas for the participants	815	
Brings people of Andros closer to the cultural heritage of the Aegean islands	813	
Provides important networking and information opportunities for the participating artists	803	
Seminars and lectures of the festival provide important learning experiences for the participants	803	
Provides significant opportunities for promotion and recognition for the participating artists	798	
Makes people of Andros proud	774	
Contributes to the creation and maintenance of cultural infrastructure in Andros	757	

Tourism/Cultural benefits			
Q.3	The tourist inflows to the island increase significantly during the festival		898
	Contributes to the development and improvement of tourism infrastructures		891
	The tourism businesses benefit significantly during the festival		887
	Contributes to the promotion of the image of Andros and strengthens its value as a tourist/cultural destination		863
	Visitors have the opportunity to discover to the local culture during the festival		855
	Serves as an important pull factor for new tourists in Andros		829
	Is an important pull factor for tourists throughout the Island		750
Factors' internal reliability			
	Cronbach's Alpha	953	938
	Mean	421	408
	Std. Deviation	704	721

Table 7: Correlation between grouped variables.

Factors	Correlations	
	Social/Cultural benefits	Tourism/Cultural benefits
Social/Cultural Benefits	1	
Tourism/Cultural Benefits	873**	1
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)		
Mean	4,21	4,08
Std. Deviation	704	721

### Participant observation

Participant observation or “the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting” [45] was utilized to record information about the festival characteristics and organization procedure. Initial qualitative data was collected by the main researcher who is also one of the festival organizers, serving as a complete participant [46]. Having the form of field notes about records of activities and informal discussions with participants, data were coded, forming a framework for analysis Munck et al. [47] including six discrete categories: a. expectations about the festival; b. festival organisation; c. festival participation; d. festival evaluation; e. festival's contribution to tourism; and f. festival's contribution to cultural heritage awareness.

The procedure started to be recorded at the beginning of 2018 while the festival was under development, during the festival dates (15-17 June 2018) and finally until the end of June 2018 (informal discussions with cultural and tourism stakeholders). The main axis of collecting data revolved around locals' intention and participation, tourists' response and involvement as well as the level of support from tourist stakeholders and municipal authority. Stakeholders included executives from “Andros Women Association”, “Andros Cooperative Enterprise”, “The Rural Women's Cooperative of Hydroussa”, “Hydroussa Dance Group”, “The Cycladic Tourism Network of Andros”, as well as the Mayor of Andros, the Regional Councillor of North Aegean and the Artistic Director of “Andros Festival”. The discussions lasted about 30 minutes and the questions focused on deepening into how the festival impacted cultural heritage, tourism and the local community.

Pre-festival period (January-June 2018): According to participation observation implications, the volunteers, who mostly live permanently on the island, functioned effectively in the context of the event, acting as the nucleus for the later establishment of

the Batsi Volunteer Cultural Group. The “Social Cooperative Enterprise of Andros”, welcomed and recognised the festival's potential of bringing a very promising and authentic cultural experience for both locals and tourists. The “Women Association of Andros”, also welcomed and supported the festival by participating as a dance group, seminar instructors and volunteers. The Mayor of Andros stated that the three-day “journey” of Methexis festival in folklore and traditional music and dance, would give festival's participants the opportunity to get an insight of Andros and the neighbouring Cycladic islands rich cultural heritage. According to the Culture Commissioner in the Cyclades Region, the festival provides an atmosphere of celebration and entertainment, on an island with an important music legacy. Additionally, Andros Regional Counsellor affirms that the festival has achieved its goals into transmitting the empirical knowledge through the experiential participation and interaction with the traditional musicians and dance teachers ensuring the continuity of tradition. Finally, according to “Hydroussa Dance Group”, “Aegean Methexis” achieve the experiential engagement of both locals and tourists with traditional culture and folklore.

Festival period (15th-17th June 2018): Participation observation also shows that local gastronomy and local products (i.e. olive oil, herbs, traditional sweets, beverages, cheese, honey, wine etc.) were promoted during the festival open events and ‘common meals. Furthermore, an open demonstration of the traditional production procedure of ‘pasteli’ and ‘fourthalia’ took place. It was also evident that the festival had significant indirect effects on the local economy, since the festival participants consumed products and services of local businesses (catering and retail businesses). A great number of visitors arrived at Batsi village to attend the festival's open events, combined their participation with a later bar and restaurant visit. At this point, it is worth emphasizing that the traditional get-together of ‘Vengera’ was revived with great success, fostering it as an element of the intangible cultural heritage of Andros and raising the interest for its later submission and inclusion in the national

list of intangible cultural heritage. Emphasis was also placed on traditional architecture and the importance of maintaining listed buildings, the dry stone technique or the traditional settlement of Batsi village.

Post-festival period (19th-30th June 2018): As far as tourism impacts are concerned, it is proved that the festival has enriched the tourist product of the island. The Mayor of Andros stated that: "As the tourist product is evolving and its enrichment is considered necessary, the Aegean Methexis is the ideal event to enhance Andros cultural tourism potential". The contribution of the Aegean Methexis festival to the promotion of heritage tourism was finally underlined by the president of the "Cycladic Tourism Network of Andros", who characteristically stated that "the Network and the festival's team aimed to highlight Andros as a tourist destination that can exploit the three pillars of a. Traditional culture and heritage; b. Traditional music and dance; and c. Authentic entertainment".

## DISCUSSION

### The festival as a contributor to raising awareness of Andros rich cultural heritage and building social bonds for locals and tourists

According to the participant observation, the local community played a significant part in the design and organization of the festival, aiming to highlight the island's authenticity, picturesqueness and uniqueness. In particular, local artists (19 folk dancers, 15 musicians and 1 visual artist) participated in the festival, confirming the fact that locals who identify with the theme of the festival, are more likely to have positive perceptions of its effects on the community, while the festival was also endorsed by 13 supporters, 76 sponsors and 12 media sponsors as well as 20 volunteers. The website and social media analytics are also indicative of the audience's additional online engagement to the festival's content, since a total of 3,727 unique visitors visited the festival's website ([www.aegeanmethexis.gr](http://www.aegeanmethexis.gr)) and looked up relevant information, from Greece (80,33%), United States (13,25%) and other countries (United Kingdom, Cyprus, etc.). Furthermore, 1,120 Facebook users, have liked the festival page coming mainly from Greece (92,5%), due to the fact that the majority of Facebook posts (85%), as well as all the Facebook advertisements (80%) have been launched in Greek; while the Instagram profile of the festival has a total of 651 followers coming from Greece (53%); Libya (34%); Turkey (2%); and USA (2%).

The findings of the study show that the festival has a significant contribution to the promotion of cultural heritage of Andros, providing unique recreational and learning experiences for the participants and enabling them to develop their cultural skills and talents. During the festival, a sense of celebration was spread among the community, highlighting its uniqueness, which resulted in the strengthening of its spirit, pride and image, as well as building social bonds between locals and tourists. Looking also into the festival program, it is evident that emphasis is placed on the promotion of music and dance tradition, local customs and traditional costumes, local products (wine, cheese, sweets, etc.) and gastronomy (meals, food tasting and public exhibitions).

Furthermore, Andros was projected as a heritage destination associated with the celebration of the European Year of Cultural Heritage, even before the start of the tourist season. In particular, promotion mix (including website content, blog posts, social media

posts, posters, banners, e-banners, flyers, promo videos and radio spots, etc.) incorporated various elements of the cultural heritage of Andros in the form of photos, graphics, videos, texts and articles. The festival has utilized its website and social media channels to inform and engage its audience while raising awareness about the island's rich intangible cultural heritage. The digital community has been acquainted with traditional musical instruments and dances, local fiestas, local gastronomy or architecture. The audience's desire to gain an insight of local culture is also manifested through their online media engagement and therefore both online and offline resources have contributed towards raising awareness of the festival and its showcase of Andros ICH.

### The festival as a pull factor for attracting cultural tourists, contributing to local tourism-related businesses

The findings of the study related to the participants' perceptions of tourism-cultural benefits of the festival show a significant contribution to the promotion of the image of Andros, as they had the opportunity to discover the local culture, strengthening its value as a tourist/cultural destination and serving as an important pull factor for new tourists in the future. Furthermore, according to the survey findings, the festival contributed significantly to the tourism businesses of Andros, by increasing inflows of tourists, giving at the same time great opportunities for development and improvement of tourism infrastructures in the wider area of the island. A total of 85 people from Greece, Italy, Switzerland and the UK; participated in the workshops while it is estimated that 1,200 participated in the open events. The festival directly stimulated the economy of Andros, by supporting tourism-related businesses. Indicatively, 1,065.00 euros were spent on accommodation, 832.32 euros on meals and 536.50 euros on ferry tickets. It also contributed to boosting employment in the cultural sector, as 6,507.02 euros (salaries and social contributions) were allocated to seminar contributors and artists [48]. Finally, since a great number of internet users searched information about the festival, their initial interest as potential festival participants can be easily concluded.

## CONCLUSION

The paper presented the "Aegean Methexis" festival as a heritage festival in the frames of which participants can combine entertainment and familiarity with Andros' cultural heritage. The festival experience is associated with a further tourism engagement, providing the opportunity for cultural interaction and facilitating stronger social bonds with the local community. A great range of tourism stakeholders warmly supported the festival, due to its social and economic benefits and its contribution to cultural heritage awareness and sustainable tourism development.

This study, restricted to a narrow group of participants, is considered as an initial step towards understanding how cultural heritage festivals can be assessed and how they affect the cultural and tourism sustainability of the destination. Thus, the results may be generalized with caution, presenting a starting point methodology for follow up research. It is, therefore, suggested that further future research could be undertaken at a larger scale and include various socio-demographic groups.

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