



54ème colloque  
**ASRDLF**

5-7 juillet 2017, Athènes, Grèce



15th conference  
**ERSA-GR**



Les défis de développement pour les villes et les régions dans une Europe en mutation

## **Perspectives for sustainable built heritage and urban regeneration towards cultural tourism development: A case study from Northern Greece**

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### **Référence à la session / reference to the session**

C8 - Urban regeneration: plans and policies / D7 - Tourism, Sustainable Regional Development

### **Résumé / Summary**

During the last decades modern societies are called up to confront a number of changes that concern human settlements in general, and urban conservation in particular. One of the areas of human activity with severe pressure on the environment is the management of urban space and more specifically, the degradation of historic buildings and urban areas. The lack of holistic planning for the conservation and protection of urban heritage is one of the factors hindering progress towards the sustainable city.

Sustainable development can be obtained by improving the quality of the urban space through social, economic and ecological factors, but also through the cultural assets, as the safeguarding of a place's heritage is a driver for future progress. Within what is now an international framework of reflection on urban conservation, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of cultural heritage and urban areas of historical importance.

Urban areas of historical value are spatial structures that express the evolution of a society and its local identity. Urban areas consist of intangible elements (functions, activities, memories, traditions), as well as tangible (architectural elements, open air spaces, buildings, landmarks e.tc.). The urban building stock is an

important part of these areas. The historical built environment with its connotative meanings is an important historic and cultural evidence of major significance for the society and the site. However, densely built city centers, urban sprawl, lack of planning and allocation of uses, are some of the factors that degrade urban built heritage.

Also, particularly important in the context of sustainability is the tourism industry, due to the substantial contributions to local and national economic development. During the last decades, as tourist physical and financial volumes are increasing, is noted a rising interest in alternative forms of tourism. Cultural tourism is a form of alternative tourism and an important factor of conserving and realising the value of cultural heritage. Cultural tourism enables cultural exchange and encourages local development to flourish. In this sense, it is crucial to consider cultural assets as part of tourism development, as history and culture are elements that attract tourism.

Urban regeneration describes the need for measurable objectives based on sustainability, and the use of natural, economic and human resources as well as upgrade and reuse of the available building stock. Historical buildings and their wider areas are important cultural assets and their revival is a driving force for tourism development.

In this study are investigated aspects of the debate about sustainable cities and prospects of upgrading buildings and their environment of historical importance. This work faces an important challenge in the field of cultural heritage protection, as the reintegration of architectural heritage into the urban fabric is a complex procedure with many aspects.

The main aim of this study is to explore the problems and opportunities presented by two sizable urban centers of Northern Greece, Xanthi and Komotini, with rich historical and cultural heritage. More specifically, as old buildings are major energy consumers, the study focuses on restoration and rehabilitation of selected historical buildings in the two city centres and their interconnection.

The suggested methodology is divided in two parts. The first part emphasizes at suggesting an approach of remodeling and reestablishing built heritage in Xanthi's and Komotini's urban space, matching modern design principles and sustainability with the conservation of the local identity. The suggested architectural methods and practices of sustainable intervention on the case study buildings intend to result in environmental, economic and tourism benefits. The result is an innovative aspect of construction management of historical building interventions, based on traditional restoration methods with an ecological approach.

The second part focuses on the identification of links between the case study buildings and potentials of creating an integrated cultural tourism product. Although there is a common history background in the study area, there are not noted many projects of linking these two cities regarding the regeneration of their built heritage. The ultimate goal of this study is the promotion of a new cultural network of upgraded historical buildings and urban areas in the light of sustainability.

Urban regeneration, cultural heritage, historical buildings, cultural tourism, network

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