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## Economic perspectives of intangible cultural activities

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to identify Greek folk-dance characteristics as intangible cultural activities attracting tourists, as an alternative form of tourism, and to investigate the potential impact of Greek folk-dance on the economic development of the tourism industry.

This study was based on a structured questionnaire. Respondents are a sample of individuals who are dedicated to Greek folk dance (Greek or foreign tourists). They are amateur dancers or professional folk dancing instructors but all of them have attended workshops of folk-dance in different parts of Greece. Results stressed the emergence of (a) a growing need for urgent assessment of market value for folk dancing which is associated with cultural tourism, and (b) a need to re-evaluate current educational perspectives to increase the academic status of folk dance to a certified degree level, in order to preserve and promote Greek cultural heritage.

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### 1. Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to explore whether the social groups attending seminars on traditional dancing in Greece - both Greeks and foreigners (non-Greek nationality) - consider that Greek traditional dances can become a cultural product, which have the power to affect the local tourism economy, as an alternative form of tourism. In other words, traditional dance may become a cultural product which can contribute to the transmission and conservation of the area's cultural spirit to its residents and visitors.

In order to investigate the research objectives a field study was conducted based on a structured questionnaire. The sample size consisted of 120 individuals whose vast majority were members of cultural clubs in Greece and abroad. Moreover, the respondents are interested in traditional dancing, follow traditional events, dance festivals,

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exhibitions of traditional clothing and collect publications in Greek music and generally in traditional songs. A common feature of all the individuals in the sample (apart from their participation in traditional cultural associations) is their participation in occasional dance workshops.

## 2. Traditional Dance – Cultural Tourism and Cultural Heritage

### 2.1. Traditional and Folk Dancing

Past and present-day dance (dance activity) as a popular event within a community or a class of people often faces difficulties in its conceptual approach. Particularly, when it is subject of study or research, the delineation of terms that describe it can cause theoretical controversies (see Ethnology, folklore, anthropology, cultural and social anthropology, sociology, ethnochoreology etc). The folk dance, with which our research deals, is bounded between the concepts of traditional (dance) and folklore (dance). That is between its first (old) and second (modern) existence. (Meraklis, 1989; Honko 1998).

Traditional dance has been considered as a spontaneous - or unconscious -dance activity exercised mainly by the rural communities and inherited by the next generation (especially for traditional Greek dancing see. Dimas, 2001; Zografou, 2003; Tyrovolas, 1999).

Folk dance has been defined as that dance which is mainly produced within an industrialized environment and bears processes of learning and teaching, i.e. somehow institutionalized education (particularly for folklorism and folk procedures see Dimas, 2004; Zografou, 2003; Kealiinohomoku, 1972; Koutsouba, 1991; Meraklis, 1989; Raftis, 1992; Meraklis, 1972). Nevertheless, the rural communities were not the only ones that exercised dancing in the past and the institutions cannot be considered as the ones that perpetuate the dancing activity these days. Accordingly, it could be safely concluded that the dimension of traditional folk-dance is not clear since the concepts repeatedly interrelate.

The present study aims to fit under the broader meaning of the dance each division of it, based on its operating characteristics, how it intertwined in the past and intertwines today, the human activity.

### 2.2. Cultural Heritage and Cultural Tourism

Cultural heritage as a concept is not limited to events which include tangible materials such as monuments and objects, which have been preserved over time. On the contrary, this concept embraces the living expressions and traditions of limitless groups and communities, which they have inherited from their ancestors and transmitted them to their offspring (UNESCO-Hellas, 2014, *Intangible heritage*, [http://www.unesco-hellas.gr/gr/3\\_5\\_2.htm](http://www.unesco-hellas.gr/gr/3_5_2.htm), accessed, 26/07/14).

Broadly, the concept of Heritage comprises tangible culture (i.e. buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, artwork and documentation), intangible culture (i.e. folklore, traditions, language and knowledge) as well the "natural" heritage (i.e. important cultural landscapes).

Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing global tourism markets and the cultural and creative industries are increasingly being used to promote destinations (Arsene, 2008). Furthermore, it has been noticed that mainly mid- and older aged groups characterized by high economic and educational level experience for enjoyment through the collection of new information and acquiring experience, acquaintance with the languages, customs, lore of other nations, gastronomy, visits to monuments and areas of outstanding beauty.

Cultural tourism includes four elements: a) tourism, b) the use of assets of cultural heritage, c) consumption experiences and products, and d) the tourist (visitor) (Mckercher & du Cros, 2002).

Since there is a growing demand for new forms of tourism with an emphasis on cultural tourism forms from both Greeks and Foreigners (non-Greek), the corresponding tourist organizations in Greece should set a priority for – the development of – cultural tourism.

Up to the present day, 1,007 sites have been documented globally of both cultural and natural interest protected by the global educational, scientific and cultural body of UNESCO. From these, 779 have been characterized as of cultural nature, 179 of natural interest and the remaining 31 combine both of them.

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