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Original article

The social aspects of rural, mountainous built environment. Key elements of a regional policy planning

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ABSTRACT

Mountain regions, world-widely, hold built environments of architectural value, preserved, mainly, due to a long time of natural and social isolation. However, the efficient protection and maintenance of this built heritage requires financial resources and management decisions. The issue becomes more complicated when restricted public resources are involved, necessary for other public needs as well. Among the main stakeholders of built heritage are its actual users: residents and visitors who either live in or travel to traditional settlements. In view of an effective management policy regarding the preservation of built heritage, attitudes and preferences of its actual users shall be documented and considered. Greek mountain regions hold important built heritage. Villages over 200 years old, maintain their initial building materials and structural patterns. Many of them are popular tourist destinations. Research on the morphological and structural elements of the local architecture of Greek mountainous settlements is rich. However, surveys examining the non-experts' perceptions and attitudes on built heritage are very scarce. In the discussion of the social aspects of built heritage and the extent or even the necessity of its maintenance, the view of people who actually live in or choose to visit traditional settlements matters. In this paper, we shed light on the users' of built heritage viewpoint. We present the results of five Contingent Valuation (CV) surveys that took place in two mountainous settlements examining the social dimensions of built heritage. The findings reveal that residents and visitors are strongly in favor of local built environment's preservation, as part of national cultural heritage. They justify public funding for preservation and recognize a developmental dimension at it. Residents appear more caring, attached to their built environment and more willing to contribute to its preservation, than visitors. Younger generations are more critical at heritage decay, while education level does not affect attitudes. Spending time in a traditional settlement determines an individual's view on decay level, raises his sensitivity and mobilizes his caring and willing to protect. The better-preserved built heritage generates higher affection for protection. Social attitudes provide key elements of a regional policy on built heritage preservation and management.

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1. Research aims

Preservation of built heritage is generally considered as socially beneficial. However, it requires certain monetary cost and management choices. Among the main stakeholders of built heritage are its users; people who live in it and those who spend time and money to visit it. Hence, management policy, regarding built environments, shall be based on users' attitude towards them in order to be effective.

The aim of this paper is to examine the social aspects of built heritage in mountain regions, in Greece. To this direction, five CV surveys were applied at two mountainous settlements, namely Metsovo and Sirako. The paper presents the values that residents and visitors, of the two places, attach to local built environment, expressed through certain preferences, choices and beliefs. It documents the social value of built heritage and it reveals certain policy affecting parameters deriving from this value.

2. Introduction

Built heritage constitutes a significant part of cultural heritage. Traditionally built environments, created in the pre-industrial era, reflect the social expressions of that time societies [1]. Greek

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Table 1
Data of the CV surveys.

Place	Metsovo	Metsovo	Metsovo	Sirako	Sirako
Year	2008	2009	2010	2009–2010	2010–2011
Population	Visitors	Residents	Visitors	Residents	Visitors
Questionnaires	305	260	366	175	240
Positive WTP (%)	41	38.5	43.8	46.5	72.6
Mean WTP value (€)	47.30	17.90	54.10	287.90	196.85
Mean WTP value as a percentage of income (%)	0.16	0.07	0.19	1.22	0.79

mountain regions are important reservoirs of traditional settlements, mainly created during the 16th and 17th centuries [2]. In order to justify and attract financial resources, the social necessity of built heritage's maintenance should be examined and documented.

Decision-making process in view of cultural heritage's management is a multi-complex procedure [3], especially since restricted resource allocation is involved. Social attitudes at architectural heritage are highly important when funding is part of public expenses. Public perceptions of what should be preserved or not and what constitutes the importance of architectural heritage may form a valuable tool in policy decision-making [4,5]. Residents and visitors of a place are among the most important stakeholders regarding the management of the local built environment. Residents' and visitors' choices and attitudes towards built heritage play decisive role in development policy making [6]. As Lourenco-Gomes et al. [7] mention, cultural heritage's valuation is justified because heritage represents an important cultural attraction and certain policy decisions need to be made.

Valuation of cultural goods has been the object of systematic research in the field of Cultural Economics, mainly, since 2000 [8]. Contingent Valuation Method, in specific, has been widely applied in cultural heritage goods due to its ability to estimate the "non-use" values deriving from such goods. Built heritage has been widely studied with the application of CVM in monuments, historic buildings and sites, etc. [5,9–19]. In this paper, we applied the CVM in order to elicit the social value of built heritage, through the stated preferences of residents and visitors, in the two settlements.

3. Research data

3.1. Methodology and survey data

Five CV surveys were conducted in a research that lasted from 2008 to 2011. Three were addressed to the visitors and two to the residents, aged over 18 years old in all cases, of the settlements of Metsovo and Sirako. In total, 1340 questionnaires were collected, from a randomly selected sample, through personal door-to-door and in situ interviews. The year, the place and the sample size, for each survey, are presented in Table 1. Initially, four surveys were designed. Yet, in 2009, Greece plunged into economic crisis. In view of examining the crisis's influence to the socioeconomic value of built heritage we designed a fifth survey, in 2010, addressed to Metsovo's visitors (in comparison to the one before crisis, in 2008).

There were five questionnaires of the same structure, one for each survey, with three sections of questions:

- introductory questions, familiarizing the respondents with the research's object, examining his/her attitudes and perceptions on built heritage;
- the CV valuation scenario, examining the respondents' Willingness To Pay (WTP) and the reasons for positive or zero WTP. Respondents were asked to state their maximum, voluntary WTP to an institution that would undertake the financial cost for the preservation of local built heritage;

- demographic data, i.e. gender, age, employment status, education, annual income.

Further analysis of the findings was made with the use of several statistical tests, in order for correlations and influencing factors on choices and attitudes to be examined. Most of the questions, in all surveys, were identical to allow comparisons. Elaboration on the econometric models applied to the surveys has been omitted from presentation, since it is out of the core aim of the paper. Results regarding WTP values and their influencing parameters are presented and analyzed, as well as the attitudes and preferences of residents and visitors. Results have been based on a variety of comparisons among visitors' and residents' preferences, choices and attitudes.

3.2. The two mountainous settlements of Metsovo and Sirako

The settlements of Metsovo and Sirako are both located at an altitude of 1200 m, in the mountain range of Pindos, in Epirus, at a 50 km distance from the city of Ioannina (Fig. 1). Their history dates back in the early 15th century, during the Ottoman Empire in Greece. They are both Vlachs' settlements [20]. Metsovo has held permanent habitation since its foundation. Sirako had gone through steady population loss since the 1940s, was abandoned in the late 1970s and was rehabilitated as a second-home settlement during the 1990s. According to 2011 Census data², Metsovo has 2500 inhabitants and Sirako 441. Tourism forms a main economic activity in Metsovo. According to local tourism stakeholders almost 200,000 people visit Metsovo annually. Sirako is estimated to have almost 10,000 visitors annually, mainly during Christmas and Easter holidays and the summer period.

Local built heritage in Metsovo has been largely altered. Several traditional buildings are preserved around the central square, the western and the southern part of the town. However, newer buildings have replaced the older ones, while successive changes of building legislation are evident in the built environment. However, the main structure of the settlement has been preserved (Figs. 2, 3). Sirako, on the other hand, is among the best-preserved traditional settlements, in Greece. Its architectural characteristics remained unchanged until its abandonment, in the 1970s. Later restoration works followed certain rules according to local architectural principles. The structure of the village remained unchanged and cars' entrance is not allowed (Figs. 4, 5). Both settlements were designated as "traditional settlements" in 1978.

4. Survey findings and discussion

The surveys' findings were documented on two different sets of comparisons:

- between the residents and the visitors in each settlement;

² Source: ELSTAT. (Hellenic Statistical Authority). 2011 Census of De Facto population 2011.

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