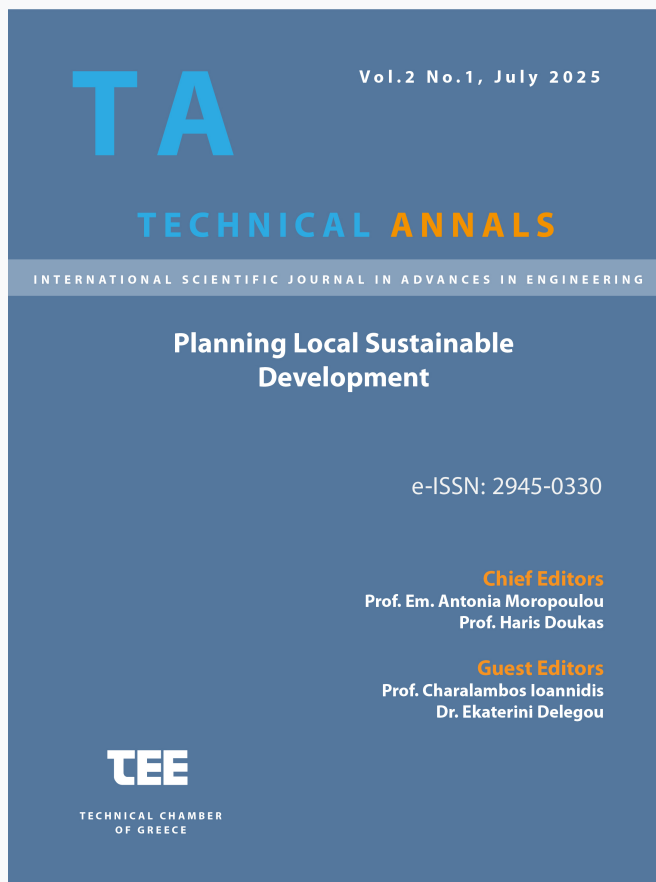


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Triantafyllia Pineli

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From Crossroads to Cultural Destination: Reimagining Lamia's Role in Greece's North-South Continuum Through Heritage-Driven Tourism

Triantafyllia Pineli

Civil Engineer – Architect – MSc “Monuments’ Protection”
Triantafyllia.Pineli@gmail.com

Abstract. The old city of Lamia, today the core of the enlarged (Callicrates’) Municipality of Lamia, is a medium-sized city located roughly in the heart of Greece. [Figures 1 – 2] Its advantages include its geographical location, its rich historical past, its monumental constructions and ruins, the beautiful nature that surrounds it and its interesting intangible cultural heritage. In the context of this research, an effort was undertaken to formulate a systematic methodology—delineated in the second part of this paper—aimed at addressing a pivotal question: to what degree, if at all, the contemporary tourist influx in the city correlates with the management practices of the cultural heritage within its broader region. The first impression that is easily given, therefore, is that Lamia is characterized by limited visitor numbers, which makes it introverted and contributes to the reduced pleasure of its citizens from daily life there. The last ones declare that they observe problems in aesthetics, urban planning, cultural activity and the way of protecting and promoting their cultural heritage. The methodical collection and evaluation of data from bibliography, on-site observations, interviews and official sources, such as ELSTAT (Hellenic Statistical Authority) and EUROSTAT, indicate that there is indeed a relationship between cultural and tourist activity and that taking various measures with the aim of strengthening the former in Lamia could contribute gradually, with patience and persistence, to improving its position on the cultural and tourist map of Greece, as has also happened in the case of other European cities in recent decades.

Keywords: Lamia, Phthiotida, Central Greece, Greece, Architectural Heritage, Cultural Heritage, Tourism, Greek Cities, Cities, City centers, Sustainability, Sustainable Development, Architecture, Preservation

1 Introduction

The awareness of the significant contribution of a place's cultural heritage to its development and prosperity is not recent. Already since the 1980s, several provincial European cities, including Hamburg, Cologne, Rennes, Grenoble, Nîmes, Montpellier, Bologna, Bilbao and Barcelona, implemented the policy of strengthening their cultural activities sector with the aim of revitalizing themselves and improving their image. In

the modern era, and specifically in the year 2019, ESPON conducted the research entitled: "Material Cultural Heritage as a Strategic Territorial Development Resource: Mapping Impacts Through a Set of Common European Socio-economic Indicators". According to this study, the existence of cultural heritage in a place contributes to the development of various economic activities in it, including archaeology, architecture, museums, libraries, tourism, construction, brokerage, IT and insurance. The tourism sector receives the strongest impact of heritage development. [1-4]

Having taken the above into account, it is quite interesting to examine the case of a Greek city, Lamia, which has reduced visitor numbers, with all the negative consequences that this entails. Is there therefore the possibility of addressing its social and economic problems to some extent by strengthening and exploiting existing nuggets of cultural potential? At first glance, it seems that there are the foundations on which its increase of visitor numbers could be based. These are none other than the central position that the city occupies on the map of Greece, its interesting historical past and its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which have not yet been exploited to the maximum extent possible. As a result, Phthiotida, the capital of which is Lamia, ranks 30th among the 51 Greek prefectures in terms of their tourist traffic. It is also noted that 15.73% of its residents are unemployed, a percentage that ranks it in 32nd place nationwide. [5-6]

At this point, it is necessary to note that the administrative unit of the prefecture ceased to apply in Greece in 2011, when the "Callicrates" bill was implemented. The country is now subdivided into 13 regions and 74 regional units. Lamia is now the capital of the Region of Central Greece and the Regional Unit of Phthiotida. However, for the analysis of this scientific topic, the previous administrative unit, that of the prefecture, was used, because in the ELSTAT data available on the internet, this organization still maintains tables presenting the visitation per prefecture and per month of the country's archaeological sites and museums from 1998 to the present. Moreover, the use of the previous administrative unit when approaching the issue of the correlation of cultural heritage with the tourist movement of a region in Greece also successfully serves this purpose.

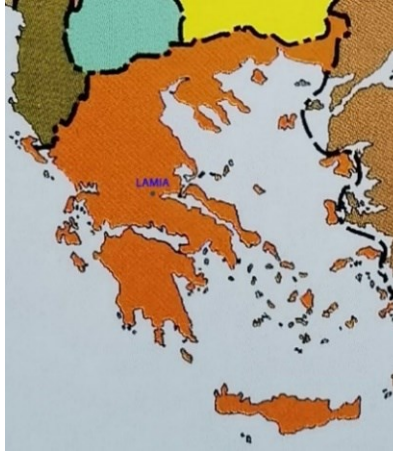


Fig. 1. Lamia's geographical position [7]

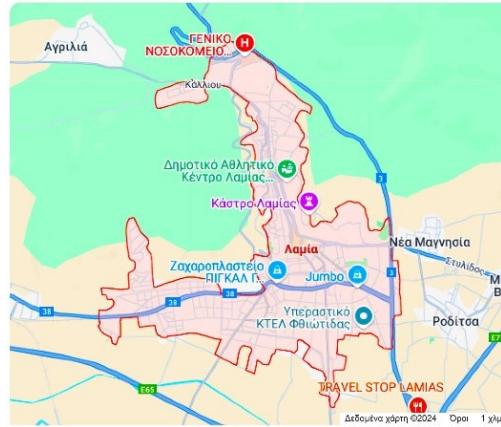


Fig. 2. Lamia's map [8]

In the following section, the methodology of specific steps developed in order to study the issue under investigation as comprehensively as possible is presented. Subsequently, based on the aforementioned methodology, the historical course of the city and the monumental wealth bequeathed to it over the centuries are investigated. The study continues with the presentation of data obtained from a relevant poll of 250 Greek and foreign respondents, which concern their views on various areas of everyday life in the city of Lamia. In addition, data derived from ELSTAT and EUROSTAT provide the opportunity to compare the current situation in the city with those of other Greek cities that share common characteristics with it. The aim is to draw conclusions on the adequacy of the degree of utilization of its cultural potential. Additionally, the application of the statistical method of correlation between various variables aims to quantitatively investigate whether the existence of exploited cultural heritage indeed contributes to the enhancement of touristic activity in a place. The answer seems to be positive, a fact that leads to reasoning for the implementation of various tactics aimed at increasing the level of well-being of the people of Lamia in their daily lives.

2 Methodological Framework for Examining the Issue at Hand

To explore the central question posed in this study—namely, the extent to which the management of Lamia's cultural heritage correlates with contemporary tourist activity—a tailored methodology was developed, comprising the following steps:

- a) Selection of the exact study site. This was decided to be the old Municipality of Lamia (until 1999) or now the Municipal Community of Lamia, which today constitutes the core of the enlarged (Callikrates') Municipality of Lamia. The reason for limiting the site was that an even larger area would require much more than the

available study time and perhaps the collaboration with other individuals. The spatial expansion of the study could, however, take place in a subsequent research work

- b) Bibliographic investigation of the history of Lamia from its birth to the present day. This is a step that is definitely carried out when examining a city
- c) Bibliographic study of the architectural works created in each historical period in Lamia and among them, those that have survived to this day
- d) Tour of the modern city with the aim of analytically recording its condition and its photographic representation
- e) Compilation of questionnaires related to topics such as:
 - i) Opinions of the respondents about the city of Lamia itself
 - ii) Opinions of the respondents about what they are looking for in an ideal tourist destination

In fact, a total of 3 types of questionnaires were compiled:

- i) Questionnaires for the residents of Lamia (100 in total)
- ii) Questionnaires for residents of other regions of the country (100 in total)
- iii) Questionnaires for foreign visitors to the country (50 in total)

The purpose of the questionnaires was as follows:

- i) To understand the way in which the citizens of Lamia view the issue of cultural heritage
 - ii) To investigate how the people of Lamia evaluate the aesthetics and functionality of their urban environment
 - iii) To detect the changes that the people of Lamia would like to see in their city
 - iv) To investigate whether and to what extent Greeks from other regions have visited Lamia and what their impressions of it are
 - v) To obtain answers regarding what the visitors of Lamia consider to be bad and changes that in their opinion should take place, so that it becomes a more attractive destination
 - vi) To examine whether the existence of Lamia is known to foreign tourists in Greece that is also located quite close to the capital, which most of them visit
 - vii) To detect whether respondents believe that the cultural heritage of a place is a pole of attraction for visitors
 - viii) To understand what elements all respondents value in the places they prefer to visit, in order to subsequently examine whether these exist or not in the case of Lamia and whether they should be acquired
- f) Finding respondents or otherwise a statistical sample. The 100 respondents from Lamia were approached randomly while visiting various neighborhoods of their city and the answers were given by personal interview. The remaining 150 respondents were approached randomly while visiting various areas of Attica. A large percentage of them (68%) were not permanent residents of Attica but random visitors, students from all over Greece or tourists. Also, 33% of the 150 respondents were permanent residents abroad. All 150 were given questionnaires to complete on their own. The ages of the respondents ranged from 12 to 84 years. 52.4% of them were men and 47.6% were women, percentages that arose completely randomly
 - g) Processing of the data of the completed questionnaires using the Microsoft Excel software and with the aim of drawing conclusions

- h) Searching the websites of ELSTAT and EUROSTAT for further information in order to study the city and its prefecture in more detail and to make comparisons between these places and other Greek regions. Among the most important information obtained were the number of visitors to museums and archaeological sites in all prefectures of Greece in 2023, the number of preserved old structures (built before 1919) in all prefectures of the country and the income of tourist businesses during the months of 2023
- i) Processing of statistical data from sources using the correlation method, in order to confirm or not that today in Greek territory the visitation of a place depends to some extent on the existence of museums and archaeological sites that function properly or old, historical structures that are witnesses to its history. It is, of course, known from the international bibliography of recent decades that this correlation is generally valid. Nevertheless, an attempt was made to verify this qualitatively and quantitatively for the case of modern Greece
- j) Making proposals to strengthen cultural activity in Lamia but also in the surrounding areas with the aim of increasing the visitation of the city to a reasonable level and consequently increasing the level of satisfaction of residents with daily life in it. Many, moreover, cities in the European Union have implemented similar measures with great success in previous decades, significantly improving their image

In conclusion, the proposed method of approaching the issue under investigation combines bibliographic study, personal observation, personal interviews with questionnaires and statistical data from official Greek and European sources in order to approach it as comprehensively as possible and to provide a first answer to it.

3 The Historical Trajectory of Lamia: From Antiquity to the Modern Era

According to Aldo Rossi, "No one can imagine seriously studying urban phenomena without referring to history." Additionally, Petros Martinidis declared that "Urban history seems more satisfying than any other research or analysis on the city, even if we want to deal with the structure of the city." The beginning of the history of Lamia (today: Municipal Community of Lamia of the Municipality of Lamia), therefore, dates back to the 5th century BC, after the end of the Persian Wars. In ancient times it was a city of limited power. The zenith of its prosperity dates back to the mid-4th to the mid-3rd century BC, a period that was followed by its vassalage to various Greek city-states. The most important historical event that occurred during the period of its prosperity in its lands was the conflict between the Athenians and the Macedonians, which became known as the Lamian War. (323/322 BC) [9– 16]

Unfortunately, the Middle Ages did not leave enough archaeological remains in Lamia. It is known, however, that in the 6th century AD the city was named "Zitouni". According to a convincing version, this name comes from the Greek word "Sitoni", which means wheat market. The continuation of history reserved the desolation of the city from the 7th to the 9th century AD while its reappearance in the spotlight took place in the 12th century, written sources of which present it as a commercial center of

the Byzantine Empire. Subsequently, Lamia fell into the hands of the Crusaders, in the year 1204, to be afterwards annexed successively to the Despotate of Epirus and the state of Great Wallachia. This was followed by its conquest by the Catalans in 1318, while from 1394 the city passed several times from them to the Ottomans and vice versa until it ended in its final conquest by the latter. [9, 17 – 20]

During the Ottoman period, Lamia was a multicultural city, where Greeks, Turks, Latins, Bulgarians and Armenians lived together. The bazaar that took place there already had a pan-Balkan reputation in 1673. Additionally, during this historical period, Lamia was the headquarters of many Turkish officers. [9, 21 – 22]

In 1833, the final liberation of Zitouni from the Ottoman yoke took place. However, the unpleasant situation of banditry followed this event. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the start of a remarkable social and economic progress of the city. Thus, in 1836, its weekly bazaar was established [Figure 3]. Also, by 1867, the first public services of the city were created. These included the Greek school, the high school, the hospital [Figure 4], the bank, a publishing house and the Turkish Consulate. In 1858, the names of the streets of Lamia were changed, which now became Greek. In 1886, the city regained its ancient name: Lamia. Finally, at the beginning of the 20th century, specifically in 1911, the city was electrified. [19, 21, 23]

The most notable historical events of the city during the 20th century include the German occupation (1941 - 1944) and the establishment of the annual Panhellenic Exhibition of Lamia in 1967. [19, 24 – 25]

Before the end of the 20th century, in 1999, twenty neighboring communities of the city were annexed to it, forming the enlarged Kapodistriian Municipality of Lamia. Twelve years later, this municipality was merged with those of Lianokladi, Ypati and Gorgopotamos, as well as with the community of Pavliani, forming the current (Calikrates') Municipality of Lamia, which has 75,315 residents. [26 – 27]



Fig. 3. Lamia's bazaar (1905-1910) [28]



Fig. 4. Lamia between 1890 and 1910 [28]

4 The Urban and Architectural Development of Lamia Across the Centuries

The centuries that have passed since the genesis of Lamia until today have inevitably offered their gifts to the urban fabric and its architectural and monumental wealth. What

has been preserved from each of its historical phases constitutes a synthetic element of its modern image. Let us, therefore, at this point take a look back into the past in order to understand how the diachronic evolution of its urban planning and architecture led to the formation of its current face. [6]

Ancient Years: Sports, Fortification and Burial Structures

Archaeological research has revealed that the ancient urban fabric of Lamia extended between the hills of Agios Loukas and the castle. In fact, the focus of public life was in the former. There were the city's market, the workshops of its artisans and other public buildings. Important ruins that have been excavated in this area are a fountain, in the basement of the Bank of Greece, as well as a Hellenistic memorial structure on Aenianon Street. In the southeast of the city, outside the ancient gate that was located there, there was the ancient Gymnasium [Figure 5], the ruins of which are still visible today on Thermopylon Street. The elements that made up the Gymnasium's palaestra were a changing room, a bath, an olive grove, a platform and an inner courtyard with a covered portico. As for religious buildings in ancient Lamia, no remains have been found to date. However, the discovery of many coins depicting Dionysus gives the impression that he was the god who was mainly worshipped in the city. Nevertheless, outside the ancient urban fabric, in the area of today's Anthili, ruins of a temple dedicated to Demeter have been excavated. In fact, the Amphictyonic Conferences were held there. Finally, another ancient temple, the ruins of which have been found outside the ancient city, was dedicated to Poseidon. [9-10, 29-31]

Due to the steep slopes of the terrain of Lamia, as archaeological observations show, many of its ancient buildings were constructed on terraces which were supported by strong retaining walls. [29]

The most imposing ancient structure of Lamia is, however, its castle, which, according to the majority of Lamia residents, is the most beautiful architectural work of the city from antiquity to the present day [Figure 6]. The ground plan of the castle seems to have remained approximately the same from ancient times to the present day, having the shape of an approximately right-angled triangle with a perimeter of about 600 meters. Its walls have an average width of 1.35 meters and a maximum height of 13 meters at its NW corner. Their structural method shows that they were constructed in different phases in terms of height. The oldest of these dates back to the 5th century BC. At their upper level, the walls end in dentils and a perimeter corridor. At their corners and next to the gates there are towers. During the Frankish or Catalan period, transverse walls were constructed inside the castle, dividing it into three parts. Access to the northernmost of these, the citadel, is through a third, arched gate with an arched lintel. [11, 19, 30 – 35]



Fig. 5. Ruins of the ancient gymnasium on Thermopylon street [36]



Fig. 6. Partial view of Lamia's ancient castle [36]

As for other notable remains of the city's ancient monuments, mention could be made of the Hellenistic baths, south of the castle, which were made of terracotta, and the fortification walls, at the current corner of Vyronos and Eslin streets. Finally, the most important ancient findings include the three cemeteries in the northeast, southeast and southwest of the city, outside its walls. [10-11, 29, 32-33, 37]

4.1 Medieval Era

Regarding the architectural findings dating back to the medieval period of Lamia, it should be mentioned that they are not rich in number. The ruins of an early Christian basilica with a mosaic floor, located in today's Diakou Square, belong to them. In addition, in churches located south of the castle, specifically in Panagia Despina, Agios Minas, Agios Nikolaos and Panagia Archontiki [Figure 7], built-in Byzantine architectural elements are preserved. Medieval findings have also been identified in the castle [Figure 8] and on the road around it. In fact, during the late Byzantine period the castle was inhabited, as evidenced by excavation findings in its eastern part. [9, 18]



Fig. 7. Part of a Byzantine iconostasis' epistyle, built into the "Panagia i Archontiki" church [9]



Fig. 8. Remains of a Byzantine frescoed chapel on the ring road of the castle [36]

4.2 The Era of Ottoman Subjugation

During the period of servitude to the Ottomans, Zitouni had the character of a well-groomed and hospitable city, which they respected. In the 17th century, the city was subdivided into thirteen Ottoman neighborhoods and eight "infidels's" (Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians and Latins) ones. In these there were 2,500 houses with tiled roofs, distinguished by their luxury and their surrounding gardens. Each one was at some distance from its neighboring ones. Among them there were famous seraglios [Figure 9], many of which had hammams and huts. On the slope of the castle's hill, Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians and Latins lived exclusively. On the other hand, on the hill of Agios Loukas there were Ottoman houses among houses of "infidels". The material of the city's streets was hard cobblestone. Along today's Ypsilantou Street there was a river with five bridges. On its banks there were houses. Inside the castle there were fifty houses as well as warehouses for military equipment. [22, 38–40]

Apart from residential buildings, of course, in Ottoman Lamia there were also architectural works of religious character. Among them was the "Molyvdoskepasto" (=Lead-roofed) or Kurshoum Mosque, which was located on the site currently occupied by the 6th High School of Lamia [Figure 10]. The Mosque of Sultan Mehmet Khan was another place of worship. It was built in 1488, had a tiled roof and a courtyard with broad-leaved, shady trees. In addition to these, the most remote mahals housed three mosques, madrasahs dedicated to students specializing in the interpretation of the divine word, mekteps for the education of younger children, and tekkes serving dervish communities. Moreover, the area was characterized by a significant number of Muslim pilgrimages. [22]

Other notable structures in Ottoman-occupied Lamia included inns catering to merchants, a hammam, and an imaret that provided daily alms to the needy. The city also featured approximately two hundred shops alongside a bustling marketplace. It is noteworthy that Lamia possessed a functioning sewage system during this period. [22]



Fig. 9. The residence of Zitouni's pasha [28]



Fig. 10. Kurshum Mosque (1843) [28]

In general, during the Ottoman occupation there was a flourishing of folk architecture, which was created by skilled craftsmen and came in dialectical contrast with the pre-existing ancient and Byzantine architectural works of Zitouni. [35]

4.3 The Modern Era

The centuries of Ottoman rule in Greece were followed by the years of the reign of the Bavarian King Otto. During this historical period, Zitouni had 4000 inhabitants. In 1834, it acquired its first urban plan, the study of which was prepared by Emmanuel Manidakis, who worked for the Architectural Department of the Ministry of the Interior. [40]

At this time, the construction of new buildings around the city squares, on the castle and Agios Loukas hills and in the plain took place at a rapid pace. These buildings were single or double storey with external masonry walls and wooden, hipped roofs. The interior walls were made of bricks or of chatma. The floors were wooden and the balconies marble or rarely concrete (from the interwar period onwards). [40–41]

Meanwhile, neoclassicism had already flourished in Europe. It was inevitable, therefore, that the new architectural movement would reach the now free Greece and the city of Zitouni. Thus began the construction of neoclassical houses according to European standards for its wealthier residents. These were built around the four squares of the city. The oldest among them seems to be the house of doctor Vakalopoulos on Satovriandou Street. Above its entrance there is an inscription that mentions the year 1865. [40, 41]

The construction of the neoclassical houses of Lamia, which regained its ancient name in 1886, was carried out using materials and entire structural elements from Athens and Volos. At the same time, the facades of many older houses were renovated and acquired neoclassical morphological characteristics. However, their interiors retained their folk character. [41]

Nowadays, in the center of Lamia, several dozen neoclassical houses are preserved [Figure 11]. An excellent example among them is that of Christos Elassonas, located in Diakou Square and built in 1890 to designs by the architect T. H. Helmis. In fact, in 1991 it was classified as a work of art by the Ministry of Culture [Figure 12]. [35, 42]



Fig. 11. Michos' neoclassical house on Aenianon street [36]



Fig. 12. Christos Elassonas' neoclassical house in Diakou Square [36]

Notable neoclassical buildings in the city of Lamia, with uses other than residential, are: the courthouse at 10 Kapodistriou street [Figure 13], the building of the Region of Central Greece (originally the National Bank of Greece, 1924 – 1928) at 1 Ypsilanti street [Figure 14], the building of the Bank of Greece at Diakou Square (originally

Dyovouniotis' house) [Figure 15] and the stone school on Ypsilanti Street (1911 – 1914) [Figure 16]. The latter was originally the "Girls' School" (primary school for girls), then it became a high school for boys (1938 - 1978), while from 1978 until today it functions as the 6th High School of Lamia. [38, 42]



Fig. 13. The courthouse of Lamia [36]



Fig. 14. The building of the region of East Central Greece [36]



Fig. 15. The Bank of Greece in Diakou Square [36]



Fig. 16. The 6th High School of Lamia [36]

At this point, it is worth mentioning that in addition to the neoclassical buildings of Lamia that have survived to this day, in the past there were other structures of the same style, which are now known only from photographs and other historical sources. Noteworthy are four hotels ("Hotel of England", "Hotel of Europe" [Figure 17], "Achilleion" and "Akteon" [Figure 18]), three of which were located in Eleftheria's Square, as well as the building of the "Elassonion" Hospital at 36 Athinon street. [38, 43– 44]



Fig. 17. Hotel of Europe [28]



Fig. 18. "Akteon" Hotel (on the left) [28]

At the beginning of the 20th century (1901 – 1902), Lamia also acquired a railway station, the buildings of which are neoclassical in style and were designed by French engineers [Figure 19]. In addition to the buildings of this style, during the same period the city also obtained important buildings of different morphology, such as the Krokou - Mouzeli mills on Eslin Street. Their construction was probably in 1901, while the equipment they acquired during the interwar period made them particularly productive. After the Second World War, their operation ceased. [18, 38]



Fig. 19. The railway station of Lamia (1900-1910) [28]



Fig. 20. Krokou – Mouzelli mills [36]

Regarding the architecture of 20th-century Lamia, insightful conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of pertinent data tables provided by the Hellenic Statistical Authority. It is obvious, therefore, that until 1960 most buildings were constructed of stone and covered with ceramic tiles. With the entry into the 1960s, this trend weakened, giving way to the construction of buildings made of reinforced concrete, covered with flat slabs. Another interesting observation is that during the period 1919 - 1960 there was a great increase in building activity. The reasons could be many. Among them could be the arrival of Asia Minor refugees in 1922. They settled in the eastern part of the city, where they founded a new community called Nea Magnesia. Another reason could be the optimism and desire for revival that followed the end of the Greek civil war in 1949. From 1960 onwards, the pace of construction activity in the city decreased. Nonetheless, it is indisputable that the latter played a significant role in the eradication

of numerous traditional and neoclassical structures in Lamia, which were supplanted by high-rise, concrete edifices—often lacking in architectural refinement—that profoundly diminished the aesthetic integrity of the city's urban fabric. [1, 45]

5 The Contemporary Image of Lamia

At the start of the 21st century, the Municipal Community of Lamia, part of the Municipality of Lamia under the Callicrates plan, is a modern Greek city with a population of 47,529. It provides all the essential services and functions needed for the smooth daily life of its residents. These include government administration, employment, housing, education at all levels (primary, secondary, and higher—both public and private), healthcare, commerce, sports, religious life, and entertainment. The city's economy is primarily based on commerce, followed by agriculture and small-scale industry. [1, 46]

When it comes to the architecture of Lamia, the overall aesthetic impression is, unfortunately, quite lacking. Since the post-war period, most of the city's traditional houses have been demolished. This has led to a near-total erasure of its architectural heritage and historical memory. In their place, apartment buildings were constructed—considered modern at the time, but generally lacking in both aesthetic value and distinctive character [Figure 21]. The vast majority of these buildings were built hastily, with little regard for design, often without the involvement of trained architects. They were never intended to be visually pleasing structures. As a result, this trend has contributed to a rather dull and unattractive urban landscape, devoid of charm, cohesion, and a clear identity. [1, 47-50]

Amid the unrefined buildings constructed in recent decades, a few pre-war traditional and neoclassical structures have fortunately been preserved. Some of these historic buildings are well-maintained and still in use, while others remain neglected and in a state of ruin [Figure 22]. [1, 47]

Notable examples of modern architecture in the city are uncommon; a noteworthy exception is the DEYAL building (Lamia's Public Water Supply and Sewerage Company) on Papapostolou Street. Designed in recent years by the distinguished local architectural firm "VTRIA", it stands out as a significant contribution to the contemporary architectural landscape of Lamia [Figure 23].

A defining characteristic of the city—common to many Greek urban centers—is the presence of extensive ancient structural remains beneath its surface. In select instances, fragments of these antiquities have been judiciously preserved and left visible within the modern urban fabric. However, this thoughtful approach is often undermined by the construction of contemporary buildings that lack architectural quality and aesthetic consideration over the ancient remnants, thereby severely compromising the visibility and significance of them. A representative example is an apartment block on Karaiskaki Street, which looms inelegantly over the archaeological findings [Figure 24]. [1, 47]

As far as it concerns Lamia's urban planning, it is marked by a dense city center with relatively narrow streets, where traffic congestion is a frequent issue due to the high volume of vehicles circulating within the urban fabric. Pedestrian zones are scarce—virtually non-existent—limiting walkability and public space. A notable improvement

in this regard was the pedestrianization of Riga Fereou Street in the 2000s, a vital intervention that significantly enhanced daily life. This street links the city's two busiest squares, Eleftherias and Parkou, and now serves as an essential pedestrian corridor. [1, 47]

Over the past few decades, Lamia's urban area has noticeably expanded in every direction. In 2007, the municipal authorities approved a new city plan extension based on a study prepared by the Athens-based urban design firm of Martha Housianakou. Nevertheless, the implementation of this plan has been stalled ever since due to the economic crisis that has affected the country, preventing any progress to date. [1]

Daily life in the city center largely revolves around its four main squares—Laou [Figure 25], Eleftheria's [Figure 26], Parkou, and Diakou—which serve as primary social hubs for residents. Generally, the city center is bustling only during regular working hours. Outside of these times, particularly when shops are closed, street activity and traffic are minimal. Exceptions to this pattern include Friday and Saturday evenings, as well as Sunday mornings, when the city sees increased movement. During the summer months, however, public activity in the city's communal spaces diminishes significantly, reaching its lowest levels. [1]



Fig. 21. The inelegant architecture of modern Lamia [36]



Fig. 22. Traditional architecture left to the mercy of time [36]



Fig. 23. A notable example of quality contemporary architecture in Lamia: The DEYAL building, designed by the architectural firm “VTRIA” [51]



Fig. 24. The inelegant presentation of Lamia's ancient architectural heritage [36]



Fig. 25. Laou Square [36]



Fig. 26. Eleftheria's Square [36]

All the above-mentioned characteristics portray modern Lamia as a city that operates smoothly and maintains a calm rhythm in everyday life. Despite this, it faces noticeable shortcomings in areas such as architectural aesthetics, urban planning, the showcasing of its long-standing history, and the breadth of its cultural activities. These limitations contribute to the city's failure to emerge as a major attraction or favored destination for both domestic and international visitors. [1]

To gain a deeper, data-driven understanding of these issues, a relevant survey was carried out between October 2024 and January 2025. The study gathered input from three groups: 100 residents of Lamia, 100 individuals from other parts of Greece, and 50 international respondents. Table 1 on this page presents the perspectives of Lamia's residents on their city. [1, 52]

As shown in Table 1, the residents of Lamia express a generally critical view of several key aspects of it. Ratings for the architectural aesthetics, the promotion of archaeological sites, the scope and quality of infrastructure projects, and services for individuals with mobility impairments all fall below the baseline average. Tourism performance is particularly low, receiving a score of just 3.55 out of 10. Slightly more

positive, though still modest, are the evaluations of the city's charm, the range and quality of cultural events, and the adequacy of tourist accommodations, which all receive scores just above the baseline. The city's few museums are rated more favorably, achieving an average score of 6.09 out of 10. Food services stand out as a stronger point, with residents giving them a relatively high rating of 7.30. Lastly, the overall satisfaction with daily life in Lamia is moderate, with an average score of 5.95 out of 10. [1]

When asked to identify the most attractive feature of their city, the majority of Lamia's residents pointed to the ancient castle, with 34.71% of respondents selecting it as the city's standout characteristic. Conversely, the most negatively perceived aspect was the poorly maintained streetscape and overall infrastructure, cited by 19.27% of participants. In terms of architectural highlights, the ancient castle once again ranked highest, with 52% of respondents naming it as Lamia's most beautiful structure [Figure 27]. The second most appreciated building was the one of the Regional Administration of Eastern Central Greece, located in Eleftheria's Square, selected by 13% of the residents [Figure 28]. [1]

Table 1. Average rating given by 100 residents of Lamia to various characteristics of their city

1. Aesthetic quality of the city's architecture:	2. Level of picturesqueness of the city:	3. Number and quality of museums:	4. Quality of presentation of archaeological finds within the urban fabric:	5. Number and quality of cultural events in the city:	6. Quantity and quality of infrastructure works of the city:
4.85/10	5.54/10	6.09/10	4.29/10	5.51/10	4.77/10
7. Accessibility level for individuals with mobility disabilities in the urban environment:	8. Level of tourist activity in the city:	9. Tourist Accommodation - Quantity and quality:	10. Quality of service in food services:	11. Degree of resident satisfaction with urban daily life:	
3.81/10	3.55/10	5.37/10	7.30/10	5.95/10	



Fig. 27. Lamia's castle is regarded by its citizens as its most beautiful building in the city [36]



Fig. 28. The building of Administration of Eastern Central Greece is regarded by residents as the second more beautiful structure in Lamia [36]

It is striking, however, that 42% of Lamia's residents are unaware of the existence of ancient structural elements uncovered through excavations across various parts of the city. At the same time, an overwhelming 96% believe that better promotion and utilization of Lamia's cultural heritage could significantly enhance its appeal as a tourist destination. [1]

Regarding the adequacy of the city's cultural spaces, a majority of Lamia's residents (62%) believe that the city lacks sufficient of them. When asked for more specific suggestions, 33.87% of respondents were unsure of what more could be done. Meanwhile, 12.90% expressed a desire for more museums, 11.29% wanted additional theaters and cinemas, and another 11.29% supported the creation of a multi-purpose cultural venue. [1]

When asked about the changes they would most like to see in their city, residents prioritized improvements in urban planning, with 43.24% expressing a preference for the creation of more green and recreational spaces. [1]

It is notable that the residents of Lamia favor Attica and Magnisia as their top travel destinations. Attica offers a wide array of cultural and entertainment venues and activities—amenities that, according to the survey, Lamia currently lacks. Magnisia, on the other hand, is admired for its picturesque landscapes and beautiful natural features, including its abundant water elements. Additionally, both regions boast significantly more monuments and museums spanning various historical periods than Lamia. For instance, Magnisia has nearly three times as many preserved old buildings (constructed before 1919) compared to Phthiotida. Accessibility also plays a role in these preferences, as both Attica and Magnisia are geographically close to Lamia, making travel easier for residents. [1]

Greeks from other regions rated Lamia's architecture below the baseline average, while they gave slightly above-baseline scores for the quality of its museums and urban planning/infrastructure. The city's food services received a more favorable rating, with an average score of 7.48 out of 10. Notably, 28% of these respondents explicitly stated they have no interest in visiting Lamia or the wider Phthiotida's area, citing a lack of

compelling information about the region. Despite this, the overall perceptions of Lamia held by residents and non-resident Greeks appear to be quite similar. [Table 2] [1]

Table 2. Average Scores Given by 100 Greeks (Non-Residents of Lamia) to Various Characteristics of Lamia

1. Aesthetic quality of the city's architecture:	2. Number and quality of museums:	3. Number and quality of infrastructure works of the city:	4. Quality of service in food services:
4,62/10	5,18/10	5,58/10	7,48/10

Among the 50 foreign participants, only one—a citizen from neighboring Albania—was familiar with Lamia and reported being quite satisfied with their visit. However, 8% of all foreign respondents clearly stated that they have no interest in visiting Lamia. [1]

Overall, just 0.85% of all survey respondents, including both Greeks and foreigners, identified any part of Phthiotida as their top tourist destination. Additionally, Phthiotida was mentioned indirectly once as a place of interest through a specific reference to Mount Parnassos, a region shared with Phocis and Boeotia. [1]

6 Employment, Culture, Tourism, and Movement in the Archaeological Sites of Contemporary Lamia: An Analysis Based on ELSTAT and EUROSTAT Data

Phthiotida is the fourth largest prefecture in Greece in terms of land area and ranks twelfth in population out of the country's 51 prefectures. Its capital, the Municipality of Lamia—as restructured by the *Callicrates Programme*—is the 18th most populous among Greece's 445 cities, while the central Municipal Community of Lamia ranks 41st. Although Lamia holds only a moderate demographic position, it possesses a significant cultural legacy, with historical and architectural landmarks that span from ancient times to the present. This makes it all the more surprising that the city attracts only average numbers of tourists and sees limited financial gain from visits to its museums and heritage sites. These circumstances prompt an important inquiry: What are the underlying reasons for this modest tourism performance, and is there potential—or a need—for meaningful improvement? [1, 37-44, 52-53]

Thus, a thorough analysis of data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority and EUROSTAT regarding the city of Lamia or the prefecture of Phthiotida reveals the following insights:

6.1 A Comparative Analysis of Lamia, the Capital of the Fourth-Largest Greek Prefecture by Area, with Ioannina, Larissa, Messolonghi, and Tripoli

According to the 2023 data from ELSTAT on employment and unemployment in the cities of Ioannina, Lamia, Larissa, Messolonghi, and Tripoli—capitals of the largest

Greek prefectures by area—it is evident that nearly all of these cities have economies primarily driven by commerce. The sole exception is Messolonghi, which relies more heavily on the primary production sector. However, Lamia stands out with the second-highest unemployment rate among these cities, trailing only Messolonghi. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that Messolonghi, does not serve as the economic hub of Aetolia-Acarnania. [1, 46, 54]

Regarding the employment rate of citizens in the cultural and creative sectors, data from ELSTAT for 2021 reveals that Lamia has a figure of just 1.1% of its total workforce in these fields, placing it in the lowest category among the four EUROSTAT classifications. For comparison, Messolonghi stands at 0.8%, Larissa at 1.3%, Ioannina at 1.4%, and Tripoli at 1.5%. [46, 55]

In terms of the proportion of preserved old buildings—those constructed before 1919—relative to the total building stock, Lamia ranks lowest among the five cities under comparison. Only 1.06% of its buildings fall into this category. The cities that follow, in ascending order, are Ioannina with 2.27%, Messolonghi with 3.26%, Larissa with 3.65%, and Tripoli leading with a notably higher percentage of 12.82%. [55]

When examining the tourism revenue of the five largest Greek prefectures by area, Phthiotida ranks second to last, just ahead of Arcadia. In 2023, tourism-related businesses in Phthiotida generated annual revenue of €9,4 millions [4]. Additionally, 8.96% of the region's workforce was employed in the tourism sector, according to the 2021 census. In comparison to the 67 regional units of Greece, Phthiotida holds the 21st position for the percentage of workers in this sector. However, between January 2019 and April 2024, the region was ranked 49th in terms of tourism business income, accounting for only 0.93 per thousand of the total income generated by tourism businesses across the country. This indicates that, despite a significant proportion of workers in the sector, Phthiotida produces an exceedingly small share of the nation's tourism revenue. [5, 46]

The ELSTAT data mentioned earlier aligns with the findings of a recent poll conducted as part of this study. According to the poll, Ioannina ranks as one of the most favored Greek destinations among respondents, while Arcadia and Phthiotida are among the least popular, or in some cases, not popular at all.

EUROSTAT data on the origin of tourists visiting Phthiotida show that they are predominantly Greek nationals. This trend is also observed in Aetolia-Acarnania, Ioannina, and Larissa. In contrast, Arcadia attracts a more diverse mix of both Greek and foreign tourists. [56]

According to 2021 EUROSTAT data, Phthiotida accommodates more tourists per capita than Aetolia-Acarnania or Larissa, but fewer than Ioannina and Arcadia. Moreover, the broader region of Eastern Central Greece records the lowest number of short-term stays booked through online platforms, ranking last when compared to Aetolia-Acarnania, Ioannina, Larissa, and Arcadia. [56]

When it comes to visits to archaeological sites across the five largest Greek prefectures by area, data from ELSTAT place Phthiotida in the middle of the ranking, with 2 accessible archaeological sites. In comparison, Aetolia-Acarnania, which boasts 8 visitable archaeological sites, and Ioannina, with its single site at Dodoni, both attract significantly more visitors. [57]

An analysis of museum visitor data across the five largest Greek prefectures reveals that Phthiotida, with its 5 museums, ranked last in 2023, attracting far fewer visitors than Ioannina, which, despite having only 3 museums, secured the top position. As a result, Phthiotida also ranked lowest in museum ticket revenue among these five prefectures, and 43rd out of the 49 Greek prefectures for which data is available. In fact, its income from museum tickets was just 3.5% of that of Ioannina and 23.9% of the revenue generated by Aetolia-Acarnania, which has 4 museums. [58-59]

According to a EUROSTAT study, the residents of Phthiotida, Larissa, and Ioannina report some of the lowest life satisfaction scores in the European Union, with ratings under 5.5/10, placing them in the lowest of six levels. In contrast, Aetolia-Acarnania and Arcadia score slightly higher, falling within the 5.5-6/10 range, or the fifth level out of six. However, a short survey conducted as part of this study indicates that **residents of Lamia express a higher level of satisfaction with their daily life, with an average score of 5.95/10.** [60]

6.2 A Comparative Analysis of Contemporary Lamia and Other Greek Cities of about the same population: Kavala, Kalamata, Katerini, and Komotini

In this sub-section, a comparison is made between the tourist activity and cultural site visitation in Lamia [Figure 30e] and the corresponding conditions in Katerini, Kavala, Kalamata, and Komotini [Figures 30a-d], all of which are mainland Greek cities with populations similar to that of Lamia. As shown by ELSTAT data, all five cities rely heavily on commerce as the primary driver of their economies. In terms of unemployment, Lamia performs better than Katerini and Komotini but has a higher unemployment rate compared to Kavala and Kalamata. About employees in cultural and creative sectors, ELSTAT data (2021) show that they are 1.1% of the total workforce in Lamia, 0.9% in Komotini and 1.2% in Kavala, Kalamata and Katerini. [1, 6, 46]

In terms of building heritage, the percentage of buildings constructed before 1919 is as follows: 3.13% for Komotini, 1.52% for Kavala, 0.16% for Katerini, 1.06% for Lamia, and 7.7% for Kalamata. This data places Lamia second to last in terms of preserved old buildings. Interestingly, Katerini ranks last, not due to significant destruction, but because the city underwent rapid population growth after 1922, largely driven by the settlement of Asia Minor refugees. This growth accelerated again after 1960 with the rise of local tobacco farming. As a result, Katerini, which was once a small community at the start of the 20th century, now has a population that surpasses Lamia's. [45]

Tourism revenues in Pieria and Messinia are significantly higher compared to Phthiotida, which ranks second to last, just ahead of the border region of Rhodopi. Similarly, Lamia holds the second-lowest position in terms of both the number and percentage of workers employed in tourism businesses, with only Komotini performing worse. [5]

EUROSTAT data also reveal that the majority of tourists in Lamia and Komotini are Greek nationals, whereas Kalamata attracts both Greek and foreign visitors. In contrast, Katerini and Kavala predominantly host foreign tourists. Additionally, Phthiotida sees more tourists per capita than Rhodopi but fewer than Pieria, Kavala, and Messinia. Furthermore, Phthiotida ranks last in terms of the number of short-term stays booked online. [56]

In 2023, Phthiotida again ranks second to last in terms of the monthly number of visits to archaeological sites among the five cities under study. In fact, both Phthiotida and Rhodopi experience significantly lower visitation numbers to archaeological sites compared to the other regions. [57]

In 2023, Phthiotida and its capital, Lamia, once again occupy the lowest positions among the five prefectures and their capitals in terms of the monthly number of museum visits. As a result, the revenue generated by museums in Phthiotida is significantly lower compared to that of museums in the other regions under study. [58]

Finally, regarding citizens' satisfaction with life in their respective regions, a 2022 EUROSTAT survey indicates that residents of Kavala, Rhodopi, and Messinia report higher satisfaction levels compared to those in Phthiotida or Pieria. [59]

7 Statistical Analysis on the Correlation Between the Promotion of Lamia's Cultural Heritage and Its Tourism Activity

7.1 Lamia Compared to the Capitals of the Five Largest Greek Prefectures

A qualitative examination of the data comparing the capitals of the five largest Greek prefectures by area reveals that, at the turn of the 21st century, Lamia occupies a decidedly disadvantageous position relative to its peers in both the stewardship and promotion of its cultural heritage and tourism sector. Geographically detached from key natural assets, such as significant water bodies, Lamia is characterized by a mere 1.06% of historic buildings (pre-1919) and an almost negligible proportion of its population engaged in creative endeavors. Consequently, the city experiences a paucity of tourist activity, with the overwhelming majority of visitors being domestic. This, alongside a host of other factors, relegates Lamia to the lowest tier—along with Messolonghi, Larissa, Ioannina, and Tripoli—in terms of museum visitation and revenue generation. Additionally, Lamia ranks second in unemployment rates, trailing only Messolonghi. [1]

Under these circumstances, the residents' level of satisfaction with their quality of life in Lamia stands at a modest 5.95/10.

7.2 Lamia in Comparison to Five Greek Cities of Comparable Population Size

Moving forward, the following preliminary qualitative conclusions emerge from the comparison of Lamia with other mainland Greek cities of similar population size:

Excluding Katerini for the specific reasons previously delineated (in section 6.2), Lamia occupies the nadir in terms of the proportion of historic edifices (pre-1919) within its urban fabric. It also ranks within the lowest tier concerning citizen engagement in creative vocations. Moreover, Lamia occupies the penultimate position, just preceding Komotini, in terms of tourism-related business revenues. In parallel, the prefecture of Phthiotida is relegated to the lowest rank for both museum visitation and the income derived from such visits. Additionally, Lamia exhibits elevated unemployment rates relative to Kalamata, Kavala, and Katerini. A plausible contributing factor to the comparatively modest tourist influx in Lamia may lie in its geographical positioning,

as it, much like Komotini, is not in immediate proximity to the enchanting natural resource of water—unlike Kavala, Kalamata, and Katerini, which are advantaged by their access to such attractions. [1]

7.3 Does the Cultural Heritage of a Region Ultimately Serve as a Catalyst for the Augmentation of Its Tourism Activity?

As previously articulated, this inquiry encompassed a survey conducted from October 2024 to January 2025, which provided the following empirical data. It is noteworthy that the survey engaged a diverse cohort of 250 individuals, representing a broad spectrum of genders, ages, origins, and educational attainments. Specifically, the sample comprised 100 residents of Lamia, 100 Greeks from various other regions, and 50 international participants.

The data suggests that the predominant allure for travelers to a given destination lies in its cultural heritage as a whole, as affirmed by 18.38% of respondents. This is succeeded by the appeal of natural landscapes (15.44%) and the economic viability of travel (14.71%). Significantly, elements such as architecture, museums, and monuments rank fourth, with 10.29% of respondents identifying them as pivotal factors in their travel choices.

The survey reveals that the preeminent Greek travel destinations for respondents are the Cyclades (12.18%) and Crete (9.33%). The principal allure of these locales, as articulated by 32.65% of participants, lies in their unparalleled natural beauty, while 14.28% attribute their appeal to the distinctive architectural heritage and monumental structures that define these regions.

The foregoing observations underscore that one of the most compelling factors driving a destination's desirability among travelers is its natural beauty. It is particularly noteworthy that, within the context of the aforementioned preferred destinations, the enchanting element of water emerges as a dominant feature. Nevertheless, architecture, monuments, and the broader cultural heritage undeniably exert a significant influence on travelers' decision-making processes. [1]

In order to procure additional quantitative metrics regarding the correlation between cultural heritage and the augmentation of tourist activity, an exhaustive analysis was undertaken across all Greek prefectures, drawing upon the extensive datasets provided by ELSTAT and EUROSTAT. [5-6, 44, 57, 59]

i. To begin, a comprehensive graphical analysis was developed to elucidate the correlation between the volume of museum ticket sales in each prefecture and the concomitant revenues derived from its tourism sector in 2023. The resulting graph compellingly illustrates that, as a prevailing trend, those prefectures exhibiting a markedly higher frequency of museum admissions concomitantly accrue a substantially greater influx of tourist revenues, thereby reflecting a clear amplification in overall tourist activity. Indeed, the data reveals a very strong linear correlation between the two variables, as evidenced by a Spearman's rank correlation coefficient of $R = 0.889$ [Figure 31].

It is incontrovertible that the destinations most frequented by travelers—namely the Cyclades and Crete—are islands that, beyond their cultural allure, present an exquisite amalgamation of scenic landscapes, an idyllic climate, opportunities for repose,

maritime activities, and vibrant entertainment. Indeed, a 2014 survey conducted by INEMY-EΣEE (The Institute of Trade and Services of the Hellenic Confederation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship) on Crete attests to the fact that the island's unparalleled natural beauty is the primary magnet for foreign visitors. Nonetheless, it is of particular note that 55% of travelers also cite the island's rich cultural heritage as a pivotal factor in their decision to visit. Moreover, the same survey reveals that among the most frequently undertaken activities by international tourists are visits to its museums and archaeological sites, underscoring the undeniable significance of its historical patrimony in attracting global interest. [1, 55-56, 61]

- ii. The second graph, constructed in a manner analogous to the preceding one, delineates the relationship between the volume of entrance tickets sold to archaeological sites and the corresponding revenue accrued by tourism enterprises across all Greek prefectures, with the exception of Attica, for the fiscal year 2023. In this case, a high linear correlation is again discernible, albeit accompanied by a slightly diminished Spearman coefficient of 0.58 (in contrast to the prior instance) [Figure 32]. This further corroborates the inference that the presence of a cultivated and effectively curated cultural heritage significantly contributes to the economic vitality of a given locale. [1]
- iii. In the third graph meticulously crafted, the relationship between the volume of museum ticket sales and the unemployment rate across the Greek prefectures is explored. Here, a discernible yet low negative exponential correlation emerges, with a Spearman coefficient hovering around 0.31 [Figure 33]. This suggests that while there is a faint association, the influx of museum visitors exerts only a negligible influence on mitigating the unemployment levels within a given region. [1]
- iv. Following this, a correlation graph was meticulously crafted to elucidate the relationship between the volume of ticket sales for archaeological sites and the corresponding unemployment rates within their respective prefectures. In this instance, a moderately pronounced negative exponential correlation emerges, with a Spearman coefficient of $R = 0.46$ [Figure 34]. This indicates that a discernible increase in visitation to a region's archaeological sites contributes, albeit to a moderate extent, to the alleviation of its unemployment challenges. [1]
- v. Another graph that was constructed delineates the correlation between the presence of historic buildings and the revenue of tourism-related enterprises across the Greek prefectures. The data reveals a moderate linear correlation between these variables, with a Spearman coefficient of 0.4. This suggests that the existence of well-preserved, traditional structures within a region exerts a discernible, albeit moderate, positive influence on its economic performance.

Therefore, while the magnetic appeal of a region's natural beauty—particularly the captivating presence of water—undeniably constitutes a key attractor for tourists, the preceding analysis incontrovertibly underscores that the safeguarding and astute promotion of its cultural heritage engenders a considerable, albeit nuanced, augmentation of its touristic influx. Furthermore, this cultural endowment exerts a perceptible, albeit moderate, influence in mitigating the region's unemployment challenges. [1]

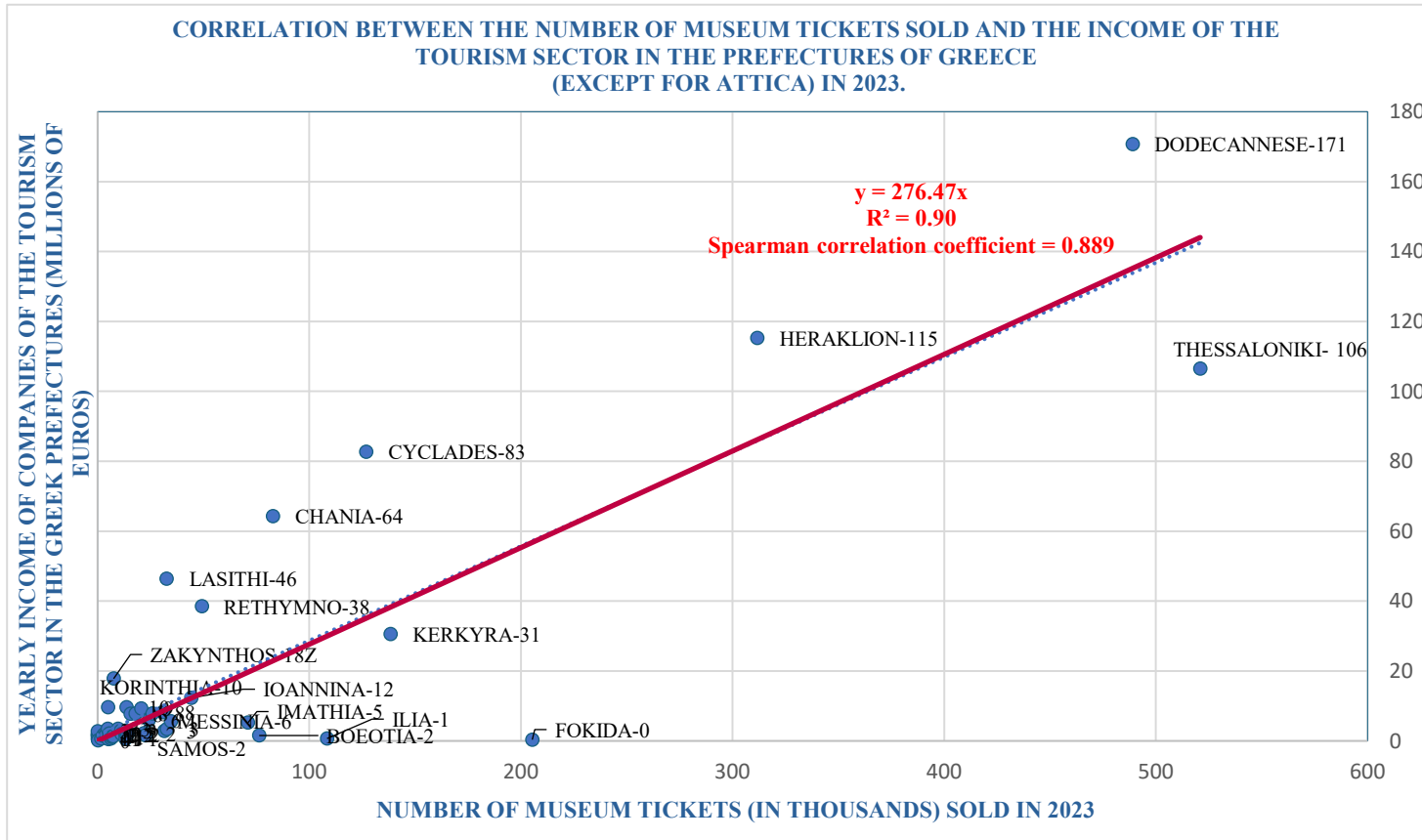


Fig. 31. A graphical representation illustrating the correlation between the volume of museum tickets sold and the annual revenue generated by tourism sector enterprises across the Greek prefectures in 2023

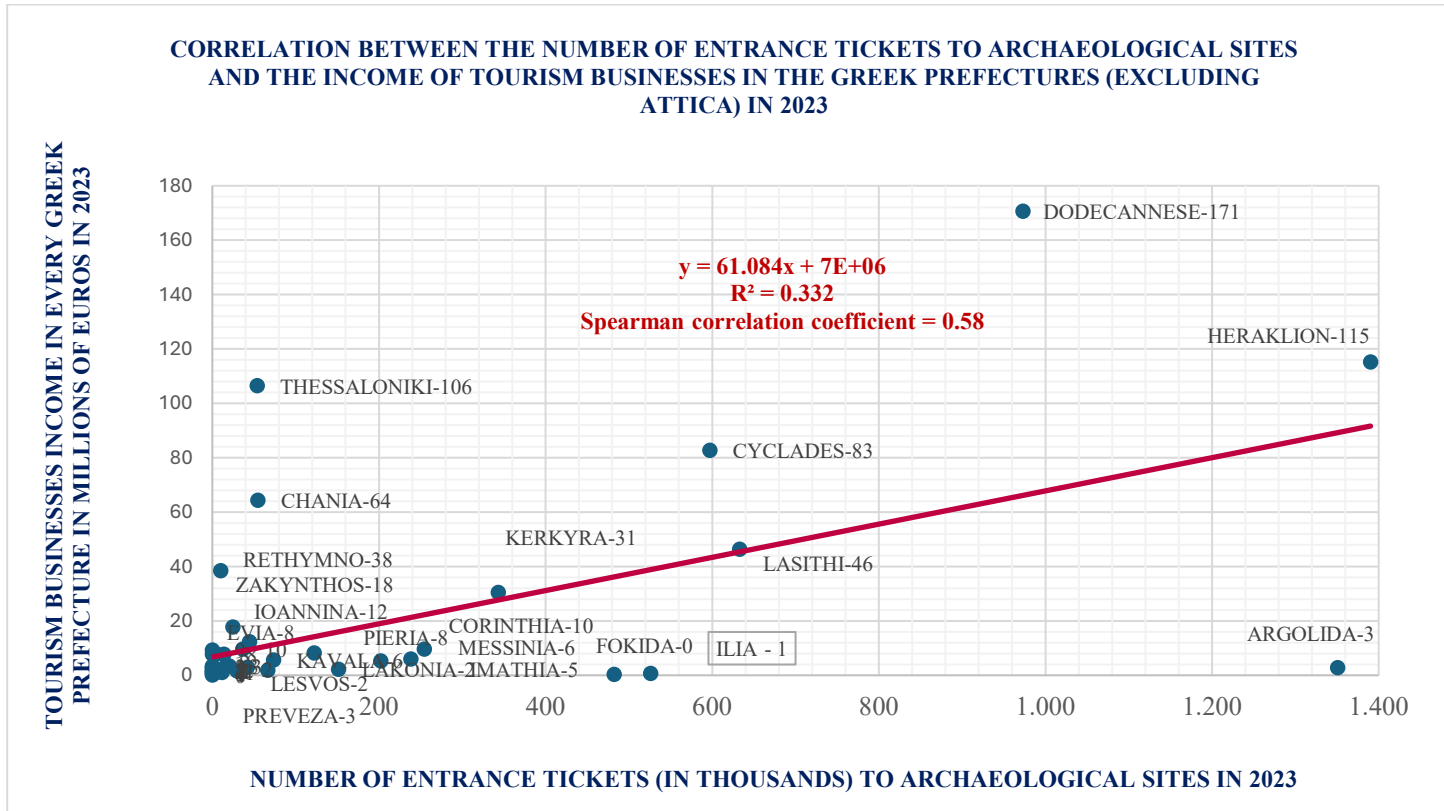


Fig. 32. Graphical representation illustrating the correlation between entrance ticket sales to archaeological sites and annual revenue generated by tourism enterprises across Greek prefectures in 2023

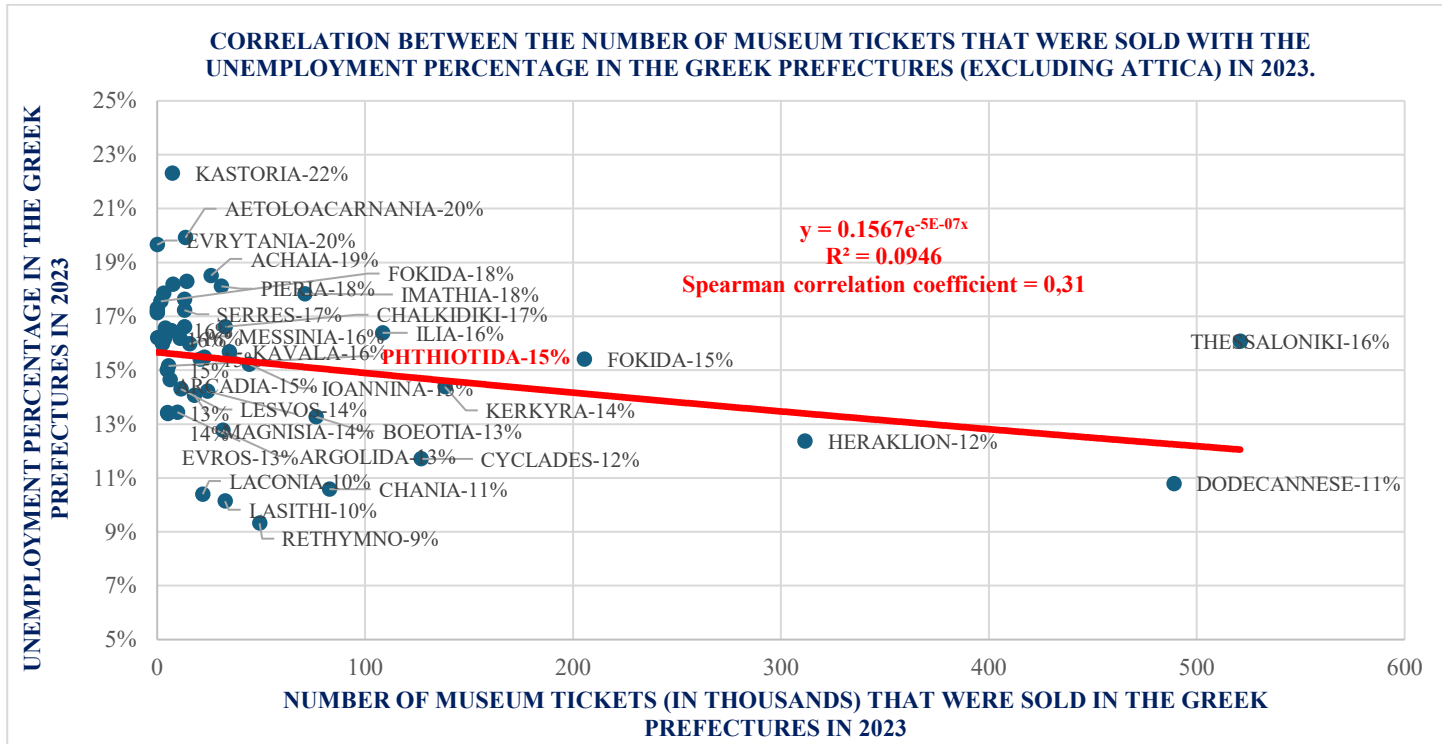


Fig. 33. A graphical representation illustrating the correlation between the volume of museum tickets sold and the unemployment rate across the Greek prefectures in 2023

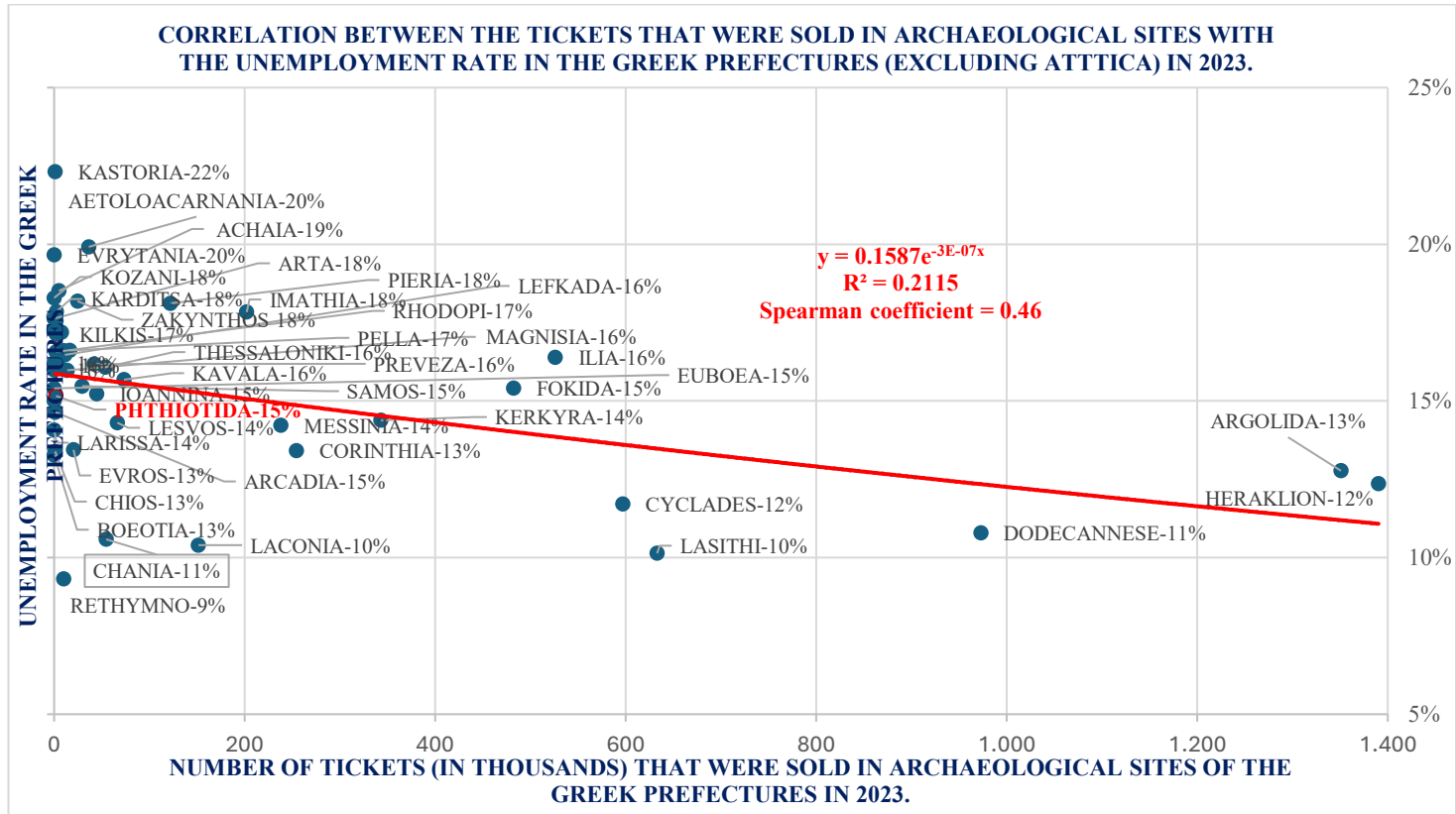


Fig. 34. A graph illustrating the correlation between the volume of entrance tickets sold for archaeological sites and the unemployment rates across the Greek prefectures in 2023

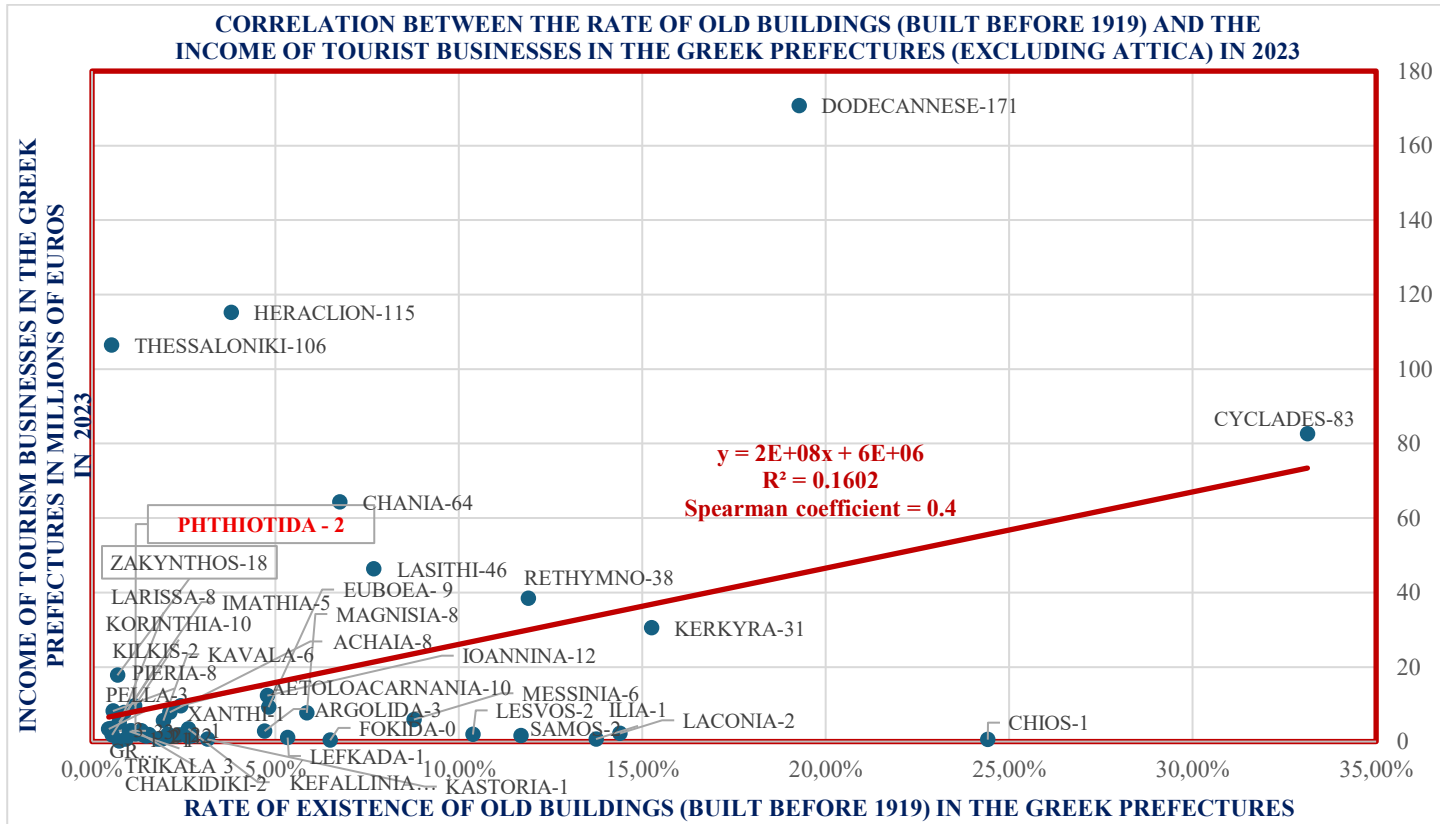


Fig. 35. Graph illustrating the correlation between the number of preserved historical edifices and the revenue generated by tourism-related enterprises across Greek prefectures in 2023

8 Strategic Initiatives for Augmenting Cultural and Touristic Dynamism in Modern Lamia

In the wake of the preceding empirical evidence, which substantiates the assertion that the astute leveraging of cultural heritage across various Greek prefectures catalyzes their tourism expansion, it is pertinent to deliberate on the requisite transformations that Lamia must undergo to bolster both its cultural and touristic spheres. These shifts must be situated within the broader context of the city's overarching urban evolution. Such an evolution, as widely recognized, seeks to elevate the quality of local life, optimize the efficiency of the regional economy, and ensure the enduring environmental sustainability of the city and its environs. Indeed, the pursuit of an equilibrium between the imperatives of cultural and tourism development, alongside the broader developmental objectives of the city and the diverse economic interests of its populace, presents an intricate and formidable undertaking. [1, 62]

It is worth underscoring that the safeguarding and conservation of the world's cultural heritage constitute a fundamental pillar of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) enshrined in the "2030 Agenda," which was ratified during the 2015 United Nations Summit in New York. Moreover, the city of Lamia has been strategically integrated into one of the thirteen Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) for the 2021–2027 programming period, within the framework of Sustainable Urban Development (SUD). This comprehensive initiative aspires to advance cultural vitality, preserve tangible and intangible heritage assets, and foster a resilient social economy. [63]

Thus, within the overarching framework of these programmes, a number of strategic interventions may be proposed, including the following:

- a. The formulation and implementation of local policies aimed at securing increased funding from national authorities, the European Union, or other pertinent institutions should be actively pursued. The objective would be to intensify efforts in the excavation, restoration, conservation, and promotion of the city's archaeological sites and monuments, as well as those in the broader Phthiotida region. It is noteworthy that Phthiotida is home to 14 archaeological sites, 5 museums, and at least 15 monuments of the modern era, all under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture. These cultural assets must be brought to the forefront—preserved, promoted, and rendered accessible to the public and visitors alike. [1, 63–64]

At this juncture, it is essential to underscore that, beyond their evident significance for scholars and tourists, these sites, monuments, and museums hold profound value for the very region in which they are situated, as they serve as tangible, didactic testimonies to its historical trajectory and cultural identity. [1, 65]

- b. Particular emphasis should be placed on the manner in which archaeological findings are showcased—ensuring that their presentation not only enhances public awareness and appreciation, but also contributes meaningfully to the aesthetic enrichment of the urban fabric. In this context, it is imperative that architectural committees and archaeological councils maintain a decisive role in all initiatives concerning the integration and display of historic architectural remnants, thereby safeguarding both their integrity and cultural resonance. [1]

- c. A stringent prohibition should be imposed on the demolition of the few remaining historic buildings within the city. Simultaneously, the state must provide robust incentives and adequate financial support to encourage their restoration and adaptive reuse, thereby preserving the architectural heritage and reinforcing the continuity of the urban historical narrative. [1]
- d. The organization of architectural competitions aimed at the regeneration of various segments of the city's urban fabric is of paramount importance. These initiatives should, without exception, prioritize the promotion of sustainable urban mobility—particularly in light of the city center's pressing challenges related to vehicular congestion and pedestrian circulation. The very notion of sustainable urban mobility entails, among other things, the systematic reduction in the reliance on private vehicles, especially within central areas; the revitalization and expansion of the currently inadequate public transportation network; and the strategic enhancement of pedestrian pathways and bicycle lanes. Notably, the implementation of pedestrian-only zones offers a multitude of benefits, including the safeguarding of pedestrians from vehicular hazards, the facilitation of comfortable and enjoyable movement, the mitigation of air pollution, the protection of the acoustic environment, the elevation of the city's aesthetic quality, and, ultimately, the stimulation of local economic growth and regional prosperity. [1, 62, 66]

With regard to the case of Lamia's public squares, it is worth noting that an architectural competition was conducted in 2021, focusing on the regeneration of three key squares. Building upon this initiative, future competitions and urban design studies should advocate for the complete exclusion of vehicular traffic within the area delineated by the imaginary quadrilateral formed by the city's four central squares, as well as within a surrounding buffer zone. Moreover, the development of clearly marked and signposted pedestrian cultural routes would be of significant value—routes that seamlessly connect the city's noteworthy archaeological sites, representative architectural landmarks from different historical periods, museums, and monuments. Crucially, all such interventions must be underpinned by a steadfast commitment to universal accessibility, ensuring that individuals with mobility impairments can navigate and experience the urban environment with ease and dignity. [1, 16]

It is to be expected that such measures may initially elicit resistance from residents, whose daily routines have, for decades, been shaped by an almost exclusive reliance on private automobiles. Nevertheless, historical precedents from other European cities—most notably Copenhagen—demonstrate that the long-term outcomes of such interventions are overwhelmingly positive, contributing decisively to the sustainable development, environmental resilience, and overall livability of urban centers. [55] Ultimately, it is imperative to respond to the burgeoning aspirations of the city's populace for green spaces that are not merely visually captivating but also architecturally avant-garde—sanctuaries that elevate urban aesthetics, invigorate the collective psyche, and serve as antidotes to the ennui often engendered by quotidian city life, thereby cultivating a profound sense of communal vitality and cultural resonance. [1, 69]

- e. It would be a compelling—if not somewhat utopian—prospect to secure state or European funding dedicated to the revitalization of at least the façades of the uninspiring and aesthetically discordant buildings that prevail in key urban loci, such as the

city's squares. In such instances, it is paramount that any restorative interventions be predicated upon the outcomes of rigorous architectural competitions, thereby ensuring both innovation and contextual sensitivity.

- f. The establishment of additional cultural venues—such as thematic museums—within the historic city center, alongside the thoughtful expansion and modernization of existing institutions to accommodate contemporary demands, is essential. These cultural spaces will actively engage with and reinterpret the city's historical narrative, contributing to its dynamic evolution. Crucially, the construction, adaptive reuse, or enlargement of public buildings designated for cultural purposes must invariably be preceded by architectural competitions, thereby fostering innovation, contextual harmony, and design excellence. [1, 67]
- g. The study and erection of new public buildings must be undertaken exclusively through the mechanism of architectural competitions, thereby guaranteeing the infusion of high-caliber, innovative architecture into a city whose aesthetic fabric has been significantly compromised by the unsightly structures that supplanted its traditional edifices. Such exemplary buildings have the potential to transform Lamia into a focal point for aficionados of contemporary architectural excellence. Let us mention as an argument for the aesthetic requirement the point of view of J. P. Kleinhues: "The downgrading of the requirement for aesthetic quality, with the justification of giving priority to the principled treatment of social demands, has as an effect the reduction of the effectiveness of this same social role of architecture." [1, 68-69]
- h. Enhancing the safeguarding and proactive promotion of the city's intangible cultural heritage, ensuring that its living traditions, practices, and collective memories are preserved and celebrated as vital components of Lamia's cultural identity.
- i. The sustainable development and holistic promotion of the entire natural and built landscape enveloping the Municipal Community of Lamia, under the jurisdiction of the Municipality, are imperative to safeguarding the region's environmental integrity and cultural patrimony. [1]
- j. The development and strategic promotion of diverse forms of alternative tourism—particularly those that preserve rather than disrupt the delicate environmental balance—are of paramount importance, given that the essence of tourism lies in the pursuit of distinctive natural and built environments. Such forms of tourism hold exceptional potential for regions endowed with environmental appeal and aspiring to strengthen their position within the competitive tourism market. Foremost among these is agritourism, particularly relevant in Phthiotida, where the primary sector of production predominates. Religious tourism also presents significant opportunities, as both Lamia and the broader Phthiotida region boast noteworthy ecclesiastical heritage, including venerable Byzantine churches on the castle hill and prominent monastic institutions such as the Agathonos Monastery in the surrounding areas. Nature tourism, too, could be cultivated, positioning Lamia as a gateway to the mountainous landscapes that encircle it, ideal for nature-based excursions. Furthermore, given the city's reputation for its exquisite traditional gastronomy, culinary tourism emerges as a highly promising avenue. Collectively, these alternative tourism modalities not only diversify the local economy but also serve as catalysts for the more systematic preservation and dynamic promotion of the region's tangible cultural heritage. [70]

- k. The systematic promotion and strategic dissemination of Lamia's historical, monumental, architectural, natural, and overall cultural environment must be pursued through all contemporary means, with particular emphasis on the effective utilization of digital technologies and information platforms, ensuring wide-reaching visibility and engagement at both national and international levels.

9 Conclusions

As 2025 unfolds, Lamia emerges as a city defined by a discernible inward orientation, with its economic vitality predominantly anchored in the productive spheres of commerce and agriculture—sectors which, by most indicators, exhibit commendable resilience and performance. Conversely, a comparative deficiency is evident in the domains of archaeological and architectural heritage conservation, cultural projection, and holistic urban management grounded in principles of functionality and aesthetic coherence. This disproportionate focus has, inevitably, relegated Lamia to a position of relative stagnation when juxtaposed with the capitals of similarly scaled Greek prefectures or cities of equivalent demographic stature.

However, the strategic enhancement of these underdeveloped yet high-potential sectors—primarily via targeted allocations from the Regional Operational Programme—holds the promise of catalyzing the city's modest tourism industry, which, according to ELSTAT data and recent analytical surveys, remains conspicuously limited. A carefully orchestrated cultural and urban revitalization effort could significantly contribute to both the expansion of employment opportunities and the elevation of residents' lived experience, currently quantified at a moderate 5.95/10 in terms of satisfaction. Tourism, intrinsically linked to openness, intercultural exchange, and experiential enrichment, may well serve as a vehicle for diminishing urban monotony and reinvigorating civic life with renewed vibrancy and purpose.

Concomitantly, the methodical preservation and strategic promotion of Lamia's cultural patrimony—coupled with the creation of new, architecturally and artistically distinguished interventions—can tangibly elevate the everyday spatial and sensory experience of its inhabitants. Immersed in an urban landscape replete with historical resonance, formal elegance, and intellectual stimulus, citizens would derive not only aesthetic pleasure but also meaningful cultural and educational enrichment from their quotidian surroundings.

Accordingly, while the direct economic yield from heritage-oriented initiatives may not be immediately quantifiable in dramatic fiscal terms, their intangible ramifications—ranging from enhanced collective identity to improved quality of life—are unquestionably far-reaching. The spectrum of feasible interventions aimed at unlocking Lamia's latent cultural potential is broad and compelling. Yet the scale and ambition of such undertakings necessitate sustained public investment, strategic phasing, and a long-term vision implemented with consistency and resolve. Crucially, the success of this transformative trajectory hinges on the emergence—or empowerment—of discerning and culturally literate local leadership: individuals imbued with an acute awareness

of the civilizational significance of heritage and an unwavering commitment to the systemic upgrading of Lamia through the confluence of culture, architecture, and sustainable urbanism.

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