

Continuous and Integrated Urban Preservation

*with Emphasis on Culture and Tourism –
Case Study of Arnaia*

Nataša Danilovic Hristic⁺ & Nebojša Stefanovic⁺⁺ (Serbia)

Abstract⁺⁺⁺

Plans and projects of restoration of cultural and historical heritage if implemented in systematic way, as in an integrated manner applied consistently overtime with long term objectives, can contribute to both architectural preservation and increases in attractiveness to new visitors. The culture and tourism's industry are significant parts of the economy and settlements have a chance to highlight their potential in particular regarding identity, history or their healthy environment along with possibilities for relaxation and entertainment. This is a way to combine traditional and inherited forms of the environment with the conditions of contemporary life and its demands. In this case study of Arnaia, Greece, the authors examine the process of renewal which was carried out in the last three decades, delineating its progress and positive effects. A focus on the competencies of authorities responsible for implementation of cultural heritage protection and tourism development along with budgeting concerns and the participation of the local population.

Keywords: *Urban Preservation, Cultural Preservation, Renewal, Heritage, Land Use, Culture, Tourism*

⁺ Nataša Danilovic Hristic, Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia, Serbia.
voice: +381 64 1428330, +381 11 3207346 fax: +381 11 3370203 email: natasadh@iaus.ac.rs website: www.iaus.ac.rs.

⁺⁺ Nebojša Stefanovic, Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia, Serbia.
voice: +381 63 8144530, +381 11 3207309 fax: +381 11 3370203 email: nebojsa@iaus.ac.rs website: www.iaus.ac.rs

⁺⁺⁺ Note: We regret that some characters and their accent symbols are not properly represented by our font family in this article.

Introduction

Arnaia (originally: Αρναία before 1928 Λιαρίγκοβη/Liarigkovi or Lerigovo), is a small urban settlement in the central part of Halkidiki peninsula (Handman, 1991), in northern Greece, about 70 km from Thessaloniki. It is part of the municipality of Aristotelis, with approximately 2,500 inhabitants (not including the surrounding rural settlements). The settlement was founded in the 16th century as a protectorate of the Konstamonit monastery located on the Holy Mount. It was named after the ancient village. Preserved houses, after the Turkish Army in 1821 burned Arnaia, constitutes its core protected area today. Located in a mountainous part of the peninsula at an altitude of 600m on Holomontas mountain 20 km from the sea it has the following natural characteristics: pleasant climate, clean air, and cold sources of drinking water. The town of Arnaia has 30 stone fountains. Its environment of pine forests provided the basis for the traditional cultivation of bees and honey famous for its quality. Additionally, Arnaia has long been a “capital” of handicrafts. It is known for the production of rugs and carpets made of wool, as well as clothing of leather and fur (Gounaris, 2015). This region of Greece, is also recognized for mining. According to census data, Arnaia in 1932 was the largest village of the Northern Halkidiki with about 3,000 inhabitants comprised mostly craftsmen and traders organized into 50 guilds. It also has one of the oldest schools in the area and has long been the center of education. A great number of festivals and traditional celebrations take place there annually (Handman, 1988). For a long time it was an important place along the route of the regional road from Thessaloniki leading towards the Athos peninsula a so called “third finger” and the monastic state Holy Mount (Agio Oros -Atos). However, the construction of new modern roads (Thessaloniki-Kavala highway) and the regional roads to Poligiros and Kassandra/Nea Mudania which were primarily due to address the needs of developing tourism in this part of Greece. They bypassed the mountain range and made a faster and more comfortable connection of the international corridor E 75 to the East coast of the Aegean Sea leaving Arnaia isolated. Development of a road network is based on the spatial plan for this region, many other aspects of this plan contributed to the preservation and restoration of the settlement (Kantemeridou, 2013).

The Process and Procedures of Renewal

Strategies and plans of revitalization had intended to preserve historical heritage, but at the same time to create content and events that will economically flourish Arnaia and provide the conditions for self preservation and protection (Serraos, et al, 2006). Projects are conducted with help of the European Union programs for stimulating development through co-funding, in the field of preservation of the architectural heritage and tourism development (Mpolos et al., 2010).

Heritage, ambience and lifestyle are the main characteristics of a creative city, so preservation of the authenticity and originality with the expansion and enrichment of functions to revive its historic core with new impulses (Danilovic Hristic, 2016). Appropriate land use is the best form of heritage conservation. If the settlement has a problem with the attrition of residents and the deterioration of structures, the solution is in a dynamic rehabilitation that involves integrating heritage

into contemporary trends of life and recognition of its value. Solutions are based on the transition from passive to the prospective position, the inclusion of the past and its specific achievements into contemporary life. Cultural, historical and ambient values are saved through the prescribed measures and regimes of protection of areas and individual buildings which are integrated into the urban planning and construction rules. For these reasons only, the coordinated work of the planners and conservators can produce satisfactory results.

Tourism is an industry related to leisure time and brings in a significant percentage of the revenues, so plans involving this area carry increasing importance and significance. Sustainable tourism is a special and very desirable category. It should be carefully planned and measured to make it different from mass tourism in its respect for the principles, characteristics and capacities of cultural assets as well as the community's tolerance threshold. Also for sustainable tourism it needs to be seriously engaged in the process of selecting and creating new activities, jobs and the utilization of local resources while informing tourists about the importance of respecting the region's cultural heritage. The estimations that the small town Arnaia could be attractive to tourists based on its original, well-preserved regional architecture was crucial in considering the potential of introducing new elements to contribute to its existing cultural offerings with the expansion of tourism infrastructure and overnight accommodations.

Urban Matrix

Ministry of Culture of Greece declared this city in 1987 as a historical place and traditional village, and on this basis, in accordance with the legal basis (Law of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage), it enjoys the status of protection (Giannakourou, 2005). Several individual buildings also received protection in the category of "art" or "traditional architecture." According to the Greek Constitution, the State is responsible for the protection of cultural monuments, archaeological sites and historical entities which are documented according to historical dates in the National list of Movable and Immovable Heritage.

Following its typology, Arnaia can be classified as a compact type of settlement that is conditioned by its geographical location, topography and climate. It has a fervent summer and winters with possible snowfall.

For these reasons, the houses are all platted in a compact array. Either on the border of plots or with very little separation. Some passageways are so narrow between two structures that one can hardly fit through. Moreover the narrow paved streets follows the topology of the terrain and often end with staircases, which creates special considerations in a street travel.

Climbing up to the higher altitude on Arnaia's perimeter, a beautiful view of the coverage of traditional roof tiles and its landmark church bell tower dating from 1889 can be seen. This bell tower is also its symbol (Xenariou Manassi, 2000). From this higher perspective one can perceive a radial matrix of settlement where most

of the streets inflow into the central square (Figure 1). It is also evident where problems with parking and access to individual buildings due to terrain are, but these could be rectified with centrally located parking spaces.



Figure 1. The town of Arnaia, an urban matrix and the locations of the most important public spaces. (source: <http://gis.ktimanet.gr/wms/ktbasemap/default.aspx>), with photos and drawing by the authors.

The biggest shift, except for the reconstruction and restoration of architectural heritage structures is the maintenance of the landscape in public and semi-public areas which are fully integrated with the environment and has made it extremely comfortable. (Figure 2).

On the major axis in the central part of the village, is a public square on a gentle slope that allows making spectacular visual explorations towards the space. The square is surrounded by buildings whose ground floors primarily offer a number of attractive commercial facilities including cafes and restaurants with some stores hosting traditional products sourced from the environment. Figure 3 has examples of renovation of the main facades on the square, especially parts of the stone walls, shop-fronts, constructive elements of the balconies with wrought-iron railings and the color pallets, according to the old photos and memories of its citizens. Special protection measures was conducted on the interior construction elements in order to fulfill seismic standards and on sensitive materials such as wood.



Figure 2. Public and semi-public spaces, pavement and greenery, 2017 (source: authors).

There is also a very old tree marking the location of cold water spring that offers refreshment for residents and travelers (Figure 1 bottom right). The local legend holds if a man drinks from it he will marry an Arnaia girl. The spring is located in the liveliest part of the village which serves as a meeting place for residents – especially on Sundays after worship in the nearby church of St. Stefano. The Church, built in 1821, has repeatedly perished in the fires only to be rebuilt. During its renewal it was determined that it lies on the foundations of a much older Christian temple from the 4-5 Century and a Christian basilica from the 10-11 Century.

Another public facility nearby is a school founded in 1872 which from 1990 onward housed the City Hall. A new modern school was built nearby. Arnaia continues its leading role in education with special environmental programs for young people, and regularly organizes workshops on ecology, traditional crafts and architecture.



Figure 3. Buildings in Arnaia's main square, left – before the second World War, left (source: www.dimosaristoteli.gr/en/village/arnaia) and in 2017 (source: authors).

Systematical Restoration of Architectural Objects

The architectural heritage of Arnaia is divided between very rare structures older than the 1821 disaster followed by then those incurred by 1900 and objects from the period up to 1945. Buildings, primarily residential, single floor and those with just one upper floor all have all characteristics of the architecture of the Balkans and are officially named “the traditional architecture of Macedonia.” Primarily they are built of natural materials i.e. wood and stone (Barboutis, Vasileiou, 2012). The lower section was usually made of stone, which has a dual function. On one hand it maintains the temperature inside the building, and on the other side increases safety as it resembles a fortress. By comparison of structures from different periods, one can spot a trend in porches after 1900 being converted to balconies and thus reveals the transformation of a rural settlement into being more urban. The living area consists of lounge and guest reception area and intimate bedrooms, as well as a mandatory part being reserved for the cellar.



Figure 4. The beginning of the urban renewal period 1991-1996. Initially it began slowly and only on a few buildings and mostly involved facade work (balconies), but the improvements were evident. (source: authors)



Figure 5. Typical Arnaia architecture, the use of natural materials and colors, 2017 (source: authors).

The architecture in this area is both sacred and profane as it is in the proximity of the Holy Mountain Athos, which is reflected in their form and decorative elements as well as the facade's colors

Proof of this is obvious, because the builders who went to Athos to build the monastery complexes, passed through and many stayed in Arnaia building houses. The colors of individual facades give a special atmospheric experience with their pastel shades of sky blue, yellow, ochre, red and pink that contrast with the white facades and elements of stone and wood (Figure 5).

Projects for the preservation and reconstruction of Arnaia's architectural heritage commenced at the beginning of the 1990s (Figure 4) and was nearly all completed by 2016. Old apartment buildings built at the end of the 19th century which were built of wood using the half timbered system where often the ground floor was made of stone and with characteristic porches, verandas and balconies upstairs and a mild Mediterranean roof were fully updated.

"Having assumed their former glory, interventions in the static structure were limited to the minimum necessary; new equipment were harmonically adapted to the original architectural structure; modern interventions were "absorbed" by the strong traditional character of the buildings; heating systems were adjusted to lo-

cal climatic conditions; fireplaces were used in mountain areas instead of electrical heating units; floors were paved by local stone or ceramic slates; and pin wood was selectively used in wooden interior fittings.” (Barboutis, Vasileiou, 2012)

The experts in the protection of cultural and historical heritage proposed the level of interventions in order to have the results resemble and be as faithful as possible to the original. Rare archived documents (blueprints and photographs), interviews with elderly citizens and examinations in situ of specific details were utilized.

Most buildings kept their original purpose, while one part changed to commercial use or home to cultural institutions to enhance offers, but to also encourage the active restoration of abandoned buildings (Hatzidakis, 1996). Renovated facilities in prominent locations have mounted on their facade an historical site plaque describing the original structure’s history, its owners and if available, an early photo. (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Highlighted circle shows an informative panel on facades of renovated buildings – the building’s date and original layout. Bottom right image shows it in context of new structures in the neighborhood (source: authors).

Progress and Effects

The best example of progress and its effects is the transformation of abandoned but worthy buildings for use by the public. The Historical and Folklore Museum and the Museum of Weaving were made possible through the initiative of the charismatic Culture Minister (the late) Melina Mercouri. The museums are located in two separate, fully reconstructed structures. One shows the typical way of life in the town, the old traditional crafts and home decorations while the second is dedicated to the weaving of mats, rugs and carpets. The building was constructed

by masters masons from Epirus in 1800 and is known as “Giatradiko - The Doctor’s House” (Figure 7) since the former owners practiced medicine. It is the oldest preserved residential building in Halkidiki Prefecture. It also was abandoned and in ruins for a long time till purchased by the Katsagelos family who heads the Greek national tourism organization (ΕΟΤ-Εθνικός Οργανισμός Τουρισμού). The ΕΟΤ is the well regarded ministry for culture and tourism (and sports under its new name). After the structure went through restoration and upgrades it became a public purpose property for the municipality.

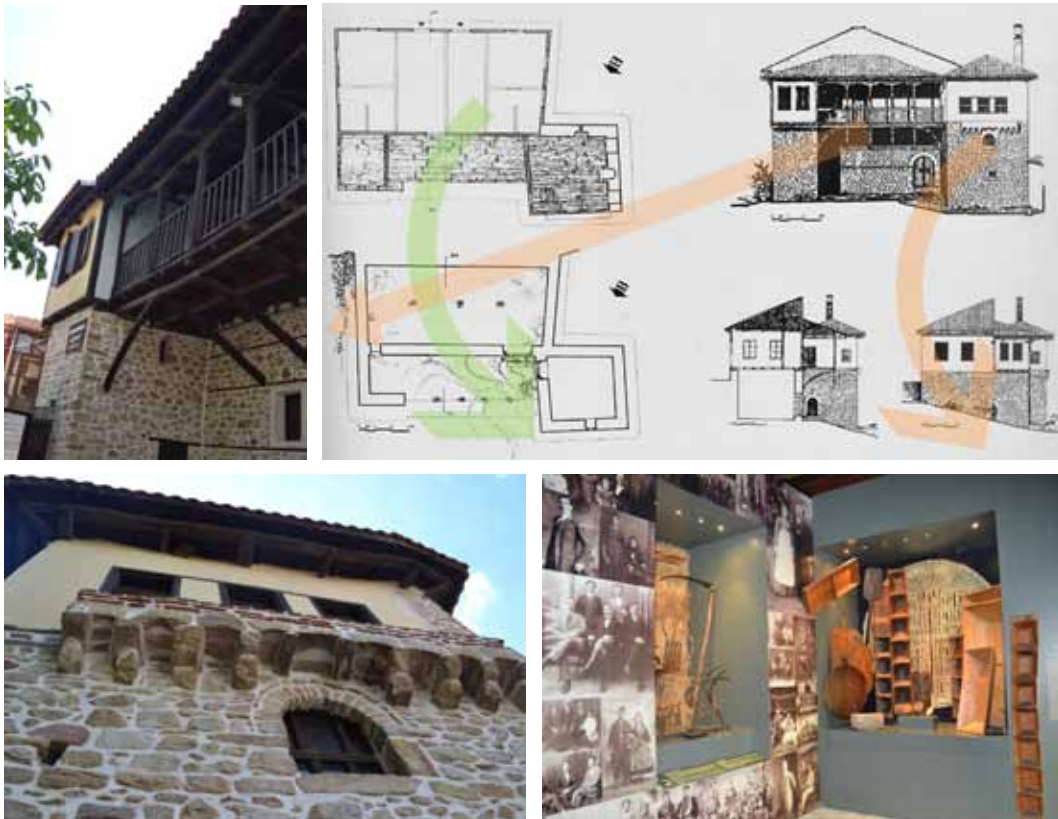


Figure 7. Details of the Historical and Folk Museum (source: authors, and <http://www.dimosaristoteli.gr/en/village/arnaia>).

The execution and budget of all public work projects concerning reconstruction is monitored through special institutions, depending on the degree of preservation needed and time of their occurrence. The 4th Ephorate of Modern Monuments and the 10th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities play key roles. The local government also participated in the reconstruction of several houses, through multiple programs, including the program “Leader” (EEC Leader Initiative) which emphasized the development of local and traditional forms of eco, agro and ethno tourism and absolute sustainable development (Karagiannis, 2011). In the case of Arnaia it meant the production of about 100 beds (living quarters) in reconstructed structures, of which a majority is owned by the local government with the balance held privately.

The local population's response has been absolutely positive in regard to the physical reconstruction of individual residential buildings and improvements in the maintenance of the public areas' infrastructure. Their worth taken either individually or as they contribute to the ambience of the historical core of the community as key indicators of aesthetic support and movement in a welcomed direction. This was evident by the fact that inhabitants raised and contributed the majority of the museum's funding.

Their donated items and photos make up most of today's collections in these two newly established museums. Their way of life has not changed that significantly from that of the past with the retention of traditions and gatherings and the arrival of tourists has created an opportunity for additional income through housing units in private homes. Additionally small hotels in some old authentic homes have provided opportunities. Both have furnished an opportunity for the placement of local craft products.

For the few new buildings that have replaced the old ones their design were based on interpolations from the surroundings and constructed in accordance to the city planning department's guidelines for the protection of cultural and historical heritage. Specifically the use of approved materials and the building's volume with respect to height, width and depth to minimize the contrast between the old and the new (Figure 6 bottom right).

Also notable in Arnaia specifically is the absence of mass illegal construction, which reflects the strong relationship residents hold towards their heritage and respect for the environment.

Conclusion

Traditional settlements such as Arnaia form an integral part of Greek culture and heritage, but previously the priority of the Greek state was to protect those dating from ancient Greek and Byzantine periods. Moreover pressure from the economic crisis made it more difficult to increase the protection and preservation efforts to more recent items of cultural heritage. In addition, according to Greek law, only when a listed historical building is in complete ruins is the owner allowed to build a new house at that location. Consequently, some owners lack incentive in maintaining the structure. However, there remain many examples of buildings beautifully restored, carefully arranged and fully involved in contemporary life; saved from the category of ruined and abandoned monuments. These buildings can serve as tourist accommodations, guest houses, restaurants or hosting other public uses such as community offices, museums, spaces for educational workshops, etc.

Systematic, integrated and continuous renewal provided the opportunity for the preservation of Arnaia's architectural heritage and gave new life to the community. Proof of this are the tourists, especially in the summer months that come to the highlands in order to enjoy the ambience of this historic place. Greece, which

has on offer so many cultural and historical monuments of world heritage status from ancient and Byzantine periods has again succeeded in Arnaia. Its success was through a variety of restoration and protection programs with supportive co-operation from its adept Ministry of Culture and Tourism and local government to create the conditions for the development of tourism in smaller and lesser known inland environments. Additionally the assistance of European Union funds and programs were essential, as their integrative approach and blend of strategic planning with technical reconstruction expertise provided new life to Arnaia's heritage through a change of purpose.

Many of the available scientific and professional articles on this topic embody concerns about environmental resources, protection from earthquakes and forest fires, while urban and architectural heritage, as well as the efforts to save it are not presented. This case study was an opportunity to focus and learn how to work effectively in a technical and organizational manner and through the process of financing to achieved the desired long term effects. One must not forget that the preservation and reconstruction phase in this case was gradual and proceeded continuously since Arnaia was proclaimed an historical place in 1987 more than 32 years ago.

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