

## **Bridging the gap between museums and historic center in Corfu town/Greece**

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This paper contributes to the discussion on the idea of a network between museums and education as a societal vehicle of cultural heritage through a case study, carried out to the Old Town of Corfu, Greece. Focusing on the comparative analysis of six museum organizations and the impact of the local university, this paper analyses the process of how the city and the region of Corfu might profit from culture-based development strategies, emphasizing that successful urban regeneration cannot be induced by only one flagship project, the position in the UNESCO World Heritage List (Decision 31 COM 8B.40) since 2007, as the so-called Bilbao effect demonstrated, without an appropriate local and regional context. These individual museums (Archaeological Museum, Museum of Asian Art, Municipal Gallery, Solomos Museum, Kapodistrias Museum, and National Gallery Annex) of special historical and artistic importance are located in the heart and the near surroundings of the city and form, together with the Department of Museum Studies of the Ionian University, a unique ensemble that serves purely museological purposes and constitutes a town-planning highlight in the urban fabric.

Due to its geographical position, the island of Corfu became a powerful fortress and transit port from the ancient years, adapting itself every time to the predominant conditions. This adaptation constitutes a continuous dialogue between East and West, presenting at the same time a diachronic cultural value for the Old-Town of Corfu, the most important center of the Ionian Islands in western Greece. On the other hand, the significance of Corfu and its contribution to the history of architecture, music, visual and plastic arts, and sciences is valuable and unique. A succession of events, including the establishment of the Academy of Sciences by the French in 1808-1809 and of the first university, the Ionian Academy, a few years later, in 1824, opened up the intellectual horizons in the Ionian Islands and is proof of the creative passion characterizing not only this period but also modern times. The discussion will concentrate on the role of these cultural and intellectual institutions in building the image and the attractiveness of their local and regional environment, the cross-fertilization of ideas and the integration of the city in networks. This cultural setting has to play an important role in building up “social capital”, creating networks between different groups and segments of society, bridging diverse social backgrounds.

Although the bibliography has been mainly dedicated to assessing the economic impact of museums in urban settings, this paper focuses on the museums of Corfu town and the department of Museum Studies of the Ionian University as a strategy model of social enhancement through the organization of cultural events. The role played by the museum and the University, the density and variety of events will be investigated. The resulting picture is that

of a proactive museum and University network located at the centre of institutional actors that can effectively contribute to the re-vitalization of knowledge and education representing a valuable example of a societal enhancement of culture.