

Historical Physiognomy of the City of Volos, Recognized by New Residents, First Years' University Students

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ABSTRACT

A city can be considered to have a historical physiognomy when the collective perception of it is mainly characterized by historical elements. The main hypothesis of the survey presented in this paper is the rate that 'The City of Volos maintains its historical physiognomy and the most characteristic elements of the city, through which it can be identified by new residents, are related to its historicity.' To carry out the survey, a questionnaire was addressed to a random sample of first years students of the Department of Planning and Regional Development of the University of Thessaly at Volos. There was followed the wording of Professor Joseph Stefanou, and the main aim was to obtain the most characteristic elements of the city's identity-through the frequency with which they appeared in the respondents' answers- and the hierarchical order in which they chose to indicate the elements or in which they were recalled in their memory. Questions about the historicity of the city's physiognomy and its association with the decision to settle in the city for studies, and those concerning the intention to recommend the city to new residents and tourists/visitors, were divisive/dichotomous. Using the SPSS Statistics program, the results of all the combinations of answers and characteristics of the respondents were investigated, and statistically significant conclusions were revealed.

Keywords: City of Volos, Historical Physiognomy, Identification Elements, Opinion Survey.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The survey presented in this paper is research about the Historical Physiognomy of the City Center of Volos, as it is recognized by new residents, in particular first years University of Thessaly Students. The survey was held in April 2022 at the Department of Planning and Regional Development of the University of Thessaly, Volos. The main hypothesis of the survey presented in this paper is that 'The City of Volos maintains its historical physiognomy and the most characteristic elements of the city, through which it can be identified by new residents, are related to its historicity.'

At the same time, there surveyed the views of students on:

- The recognition of a historical physiognomy at the City of Volos and its possible impact on its choice as the city for their studies,
- The intention is to recommend the city to others for visiting tourism or as a place of residence or work for potential new residents.

2. CITY'S PHYSIOGNOMY AND PEOPLE'S OPINION: CONCEPT OF RESEARCH

As "physiognomy" is the practice of assessing the character of a person or thing, a place/city, but also, in Greek, the word means, initially, an opinion or judgment for somebody or something based on appearance and external characteristics, "physiognomy" may be the opinion for the nature (ideological, emotional, material) of a place, but also this formulation of an opinion (in Greek: γνώμη



[gnomi]) about its nature (in Greek: φύση [physi]) (Stefanou, 2000). The physiognomy refers to the uniqueness of the entity of a place, as expressed through what its perceptive image offers (Stefanou, 2000). As the landscape is not an environmental entity that exists independently of man but is subject to the subjectivity of human perception (Sapounakis, 2014), in order to identify the basic elements of a city's physiognomy, as they exist in common consciousness, various experimental methods are used (Stefanou, 2000, p. 104), with the most common being the structured questionnaire with 'open' questions. The (mental, psychological, and practical) view of the nature of a place/city, when an individual is subjective and of limited importance, but when of a group, then one can speak of a collective perception of the place/city (Stefanou & Stefanou, 1999).

Kevin Lynch also made a theoretical approach to the subject of the image of the city (Lynch, 1960). Following his theory, both the resident as well the visitor experience and resultantly perceive city space in a certain way. This conception of space could be rendered schematically and diagrammatically through sketches, drawings, and charts, which could also be analyzed. Such an analysis could contribute to comprehending and understanding structured space. The main parts of the city that the above analysis concentrates on are paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Through observation and display of such points, there could be gathered interesting conclusions about the physiognomy of a city.

In the meanwhile, at the beginning of the 20th century, various architects and regional planners, for instance, Ruskin, Spengler, and Mumford-even before the Chicago school ecological theory (Park and Burgess), investigated urban morphology and concluded that the urban grid as meaning is based on the biological statement that a city is a living organism, which is born, grows up, transforms and even dies, implying natural law and evolutionary liquidity (Liakatas & Pehlivanidou-Liakata, 1982). Thus, the theory mentioned above seems to be-dimensional, since in the following decades, urban space was mainly shaped in accordance with social, financial, and environmental changes that occurred, changing the physical environment where man lives, acts, and evolves. In this sense, the natural law implied by Chicago school was eliminated once the market and social forces prevailed, configuring the city's physiognomy (Triantafyllidi, 2010).

The varied natural relief as well as the natural elements usually occupy an important place in the description of a place/city's physiognomy: Piraeus Kastella Hill, Acropolis Rock and Philopappou Hill of Athens, Palamidi-Akronafplia and Bourtzi Islet in Nafplio, while "the same, and with more frequent reference, occurs the water element" (Stefanou, 2000, p. 106). However, the above rule has its exceptions: "in the minds of the residents and the local authorities of Kozani," for example, "Polyfytos Lake and Aliakmon River are not the images of the city" (Municipality of Kozani/Laboratory of Tourism Planning, Research and Policy, 2015).

The British experience highlights the important role that civil society plays in people-managed places. They are sites that are developed through use-not by function-that foster collaboration and participation, without exclusions open to new members, and have the infrastructure for bottom-up management (Gower, 2008). Residents' involvement in the place branding process is seen as important, with three different roles that they play: as an integral part of the place through their characteristics and behavior, as ambassadors with undeniable credibility in communicating the message, and as citizens and voters for its political legitimacy. These three roles make residents a very important target group since only conscious participation and consultation can produce effective and sustainable-instead of an "artificial"-place branding (Braun, Kavaratzis, and Zenker), which to harness and enhance, inter alia, an experienced-instead of an invented-tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983/2000). They are, moreover, prerequisites for marketing as a long-term process: the collective understanding and appreciation of place/city marketing and the achievement of broad collaboration with clear role allocation (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008).

Moreover, the analysis of land use in the city center, as well as the formation of the spatial structure according to the layout and type of buildings, also affects the physiognomy of a city (Werwicki & Cudny, 2008). Besides, the functions of a site, the number of floors, the type of buildings, the architecture and the horizontal intensity of the building also contribute in a certain way to the city image formation (Cudny, 2008). Another element in the classification is the type and condition of urban greenery, according to Liszewski and Cudny (2008).

In conclusion, it is considered to be difficult for people to understand and describe current medium-sized Greek cities once they are usually constructed in an uncertain and unclear way. As regarding the morphological characteristics of the modern Greek city, it is certain that there is heterogeneity. Typically, the domino type of house prevails, according to Didier Rebois, with a beam structure on columns, which is differentiated by several variations (Aisopos & Simaioforides, 2001). Public space does not also emerge as a design and study product, but it usually is the result of the remaining, unstructured urban space. Roads and sidewalks also increase the percentage of empty space, along with greenery and open spaces. Nevertheless, during the last decade there have been made ambitious efforts

to reverse the situation and improve the disappointing picture. As Didier Rebois notes, “Greek city, like its inhabitants, is a boiling city, that is in conflict, a city with vitality, that is passion, a dynamic city, that is an irrational city, which in order to meet the modernization goal, usually limits its metropolitan development to superficial interventions, that save it from general chaos” (Aisopos & Simaioforides, 2001). Concluding with the morphological characteristics of Greek cities, Aisopos and Simaioforides add three more characteristics: anti-diversity, definition, and anti-landscape. The Greek city’s anti-diversity apparently occurs from the inability to recognize its dominant morphological characteristics. Thus, it would be interesting to discover whether the first years students of the University of Thessaly recognize morphological elements of Volos that refer to its historicity.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE HISTORICAL PHYSIOGNOMY OF THE CITY OF VOLOS. METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE OF RESEARCH

To carry out the survey, a questionnaire was addressed to a sample of 80 first years’ students of the Department of Planning and Regional Development of the University of Thessaly at Volos. Students answered the structured 22-question questionnaire, completed by the face-to-face method. Based on the responses of 80 respondents to the 22-question questionnaire, a database of 5200 values was created (sub-questions were added to 22 questions. Thus, a table of $80 \times 65 = 5200$ values was eventually created).

The question about the most characteristic elements of the City of Volos, through which it can be identified, was open-ended and allowed spontaneous responses from the interviewees, which were recorded in turn, they reported them. The final question of the questionnaire was also open-ended and allowed drawings or sketches of a symbol or a picture representative of the Volos city center. There was followed the wording of Stefanou (2000), and the main aim was to obtain the most characteristic elements of the city’s identity-through the frequency with which they appeared in the respondents’ answers- and the hierarchical order in which they chose to indicate the elements (or in which they were recalled in their memory), which of them would have more presence in the first position, which of them in the second position, which of them in the third position and so on.

Questions about the historicity of the city’s physiognomy and its association with residence, and those concerning the intention to recommend the city to tourists/visitors or even as a working place, were divisive/dichotomous. Using the SPSS Statistics program, the results of all the combinations of answers and characteristics of the respondents were investigated, and the statistically significant features were revealed.

The sample of students includes young people the most, between 18 and 21 years old. They are both male and female and live in Thessaly, mostly in Volos, where their department is situated. Their view of things is thought to be fresh since they live for one or two years in Volos, having proportional experience.

4. RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE PHYSIOGNOMY OF THE CITY OF VOLOS

4.1. Historical Physiognomy of the City of Volos

Regarding the question “Do you think Volos City Center has a Historical Physiognomy?”, out of 80 surveyed students, 19 (23.8%) answered YES, SURE, 26 (32.5%) answered YES, BUT NOT SO MUCH, 18 (22.5%) answered NOT SURE and 17 (21.3%) answered NO, NOT AT ALL (Table I and Fig. 1).

As for the next question “Choose a decisive historical element of Volos?”, out of 80 respondents, 13 (16.3%) answered “MONUMENTS,”, 44 (55.0%) answered “CULTURAL HERITAGE,” 17 (21.3%)

TABLE I: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO BELIEVE VOLOS CITY CENTER HAS A HISTORICAL PHYSIOGNOMY

“Do you think Volos city center has a historical physiognomy?”					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes, sure	19	23.8	23.8	23.8
	Yes, but not so much	26	32.5	32.5	56.3
	Not sure	18	22.5	22.5	78.8
	No, not at all	17	21.3	21.3	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

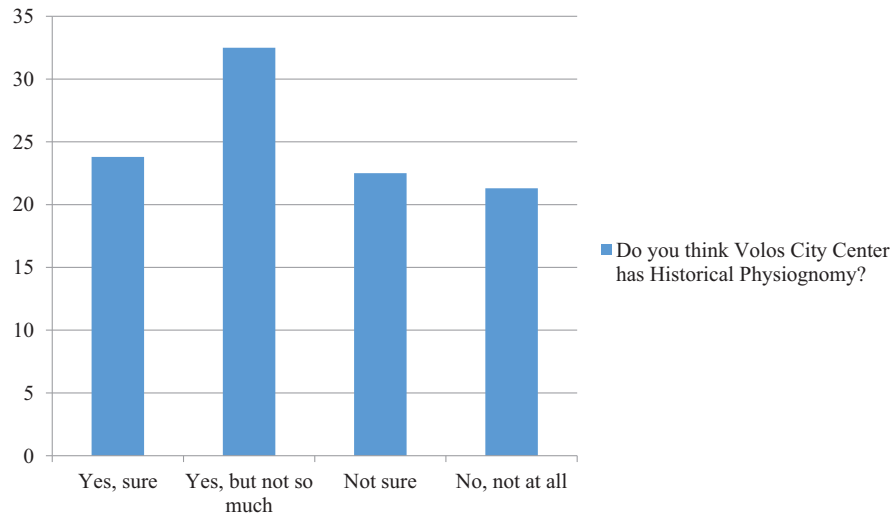


Fig. 1. Percentage of students who believe Volos city center has a historical physiognomy.

TABLE II: PERCENTAGE OF DECISIVE HISTORICAL ELEMENTS OF VOLOS

Choose a decisive historical element of Volos					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Monuments	13	16.3	16.3	16.3
	Cultural heritage	44	55.0	55.0	71.3
	Specific area	17	21.3	21.3	92.5
	Volos is not a historical place	6	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

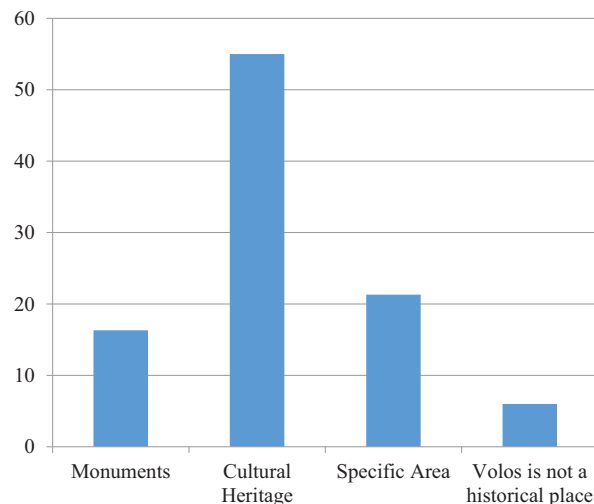


Fig. 2. Percentage of decisive historical elements of Volos.

answered “A SPECIFIC AREA” and 6 (7.5%) answered “Volos is not a historical place” (Table II and Fig. 2).

It should be underlined that the term “cultural heritage” in the case study of Volos mainly refers to industrial heritage because of the abandoned industries met within the city, some of which have already been restored, such as the Papastratos building that is being used as a Department of the University of Thessaly. Besides that, a specific area is meant to be a historical part of the city, for example, the area of “Palaia” (ancient Iolkos) or Nea Ionias’ city center (refugee settlement). Finally, the term “monuments” refers to specific buildings or landmarks remaining in Volos, such as “Paraskevopoulou buildings” (antiseismic housing), the Town Hall (D. Pikionis architecture), etc., and even the local train “Moutzouris” connecting Volos with Mount Pelion.

Moreover, as regards the question “Historicity as a residence factor,” out of 80 surveyed students, 6 (7.5%) answered YES, SURE, 8 (10.0%) answered YES, BUT NOT SO MUCH, 6 (7.5%) answered NOT SURE and 60 (75.0%) answered NO, DEFINITELY NOT (Table III and Fig. 3).

TABLE III: PERCANTAGE OF HISTORICITY AS A RESIDENCE FACTOR

Historicity as a residence factor					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes, sure	6	7.5	7.5	7.5
	No, not so much	8	10.0	10.0	17.5
	Not sure	6	7.5	7.5	25.0
	No, definitely not	60	75.0	75.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

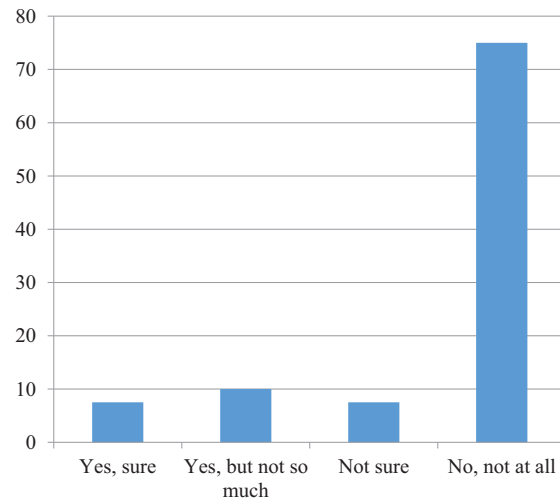


Fig. 3. Historicity as a residence factor.

TABLE IV: PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS TO "IS VOLOS A TOURIST DESTINATION BECAUSE OF ITS HISTORICAL PHYSIOGNOMY?"

Is Volos a tourist destination because of its historical physiognomy?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes, sure	9	11.3	11.3	11.3
	No, not so much	27	33.8	33.8	45.0
	Not sure	24	30.0	30.0	75.0
	No, definitely not	20	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

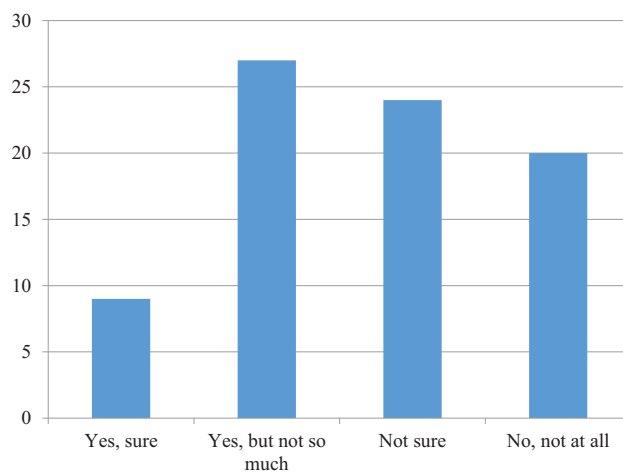


Fig. 4. Percentage of answers to "Is Volos a tourist destination because of its historical physiognomy?".

Likewise, for the question "Is Volos a tourist destination because of its historical physiognomy?" out of 80 surveyed students, 9 (11.3%) answered YES, SURE, 27 (33.8%) answered YES, BUT NOT SO MUCH, 24 (30.0%) answered NOT SURE and 20 (25.0%) answered NO, DEFINITELY NOT (Table IV and Fig. 4).

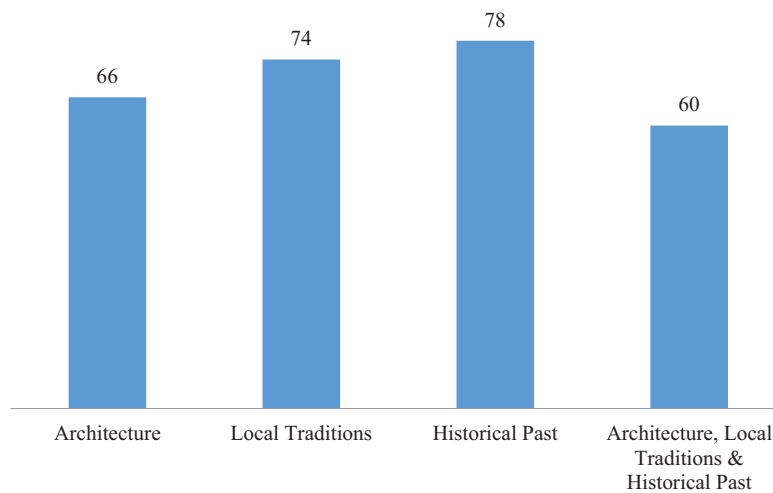


Fig. 5. Do all above (architecture, tradition, and historical past) relate to a places' historical physiognomy?.

TABLE V: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO WOULD RECOMMEND VOLOS FOR A FRIEND'S PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Would you recommend Volos as your friend's place of residence?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes, sure	45	56.3	56.3	56.3
	Maybe	22	27.5	27.5	83.8
	No, definitely	12	15.0	15.0	98.8
	Not sure	1	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

In addition, for the next question about the correlation between architecture, traditions and historical past and the historical physiognomy configuration occurred the following statistics out of 80 surveyed students: in the first position with 78 presentations or 97.5% comes Historical past of Volos, in the second place come Local Traditions with 74 presentations or 92.5% and in the third place comes architecture with 66 presentations or 82.5% and finally comes the answer “all of them (Architecture, Local Traditions and Historical Past)” with 60 presentations or 75%.

It should be mentioned that traditions also include intangible cultural heritage, i.e., local festivals, customs, traditional drinks (tsipouro), myths of the Argonaut expedition, etc., while Volos' historical past is connected with ancient Iolkos as well as ancient Demetrias, located in the area of Palaia and Nees Pagases, respectively (Fig. 5).

4.2. Intention to Recommend the City to New Residents and Visitors/Tourists

As for the question: ‘Would you recommend Volos as your friend's place of residence?’ out of 80 interviewed students, 45 (56.3%) answered YES, SURE, 22 (27.5%) answered MAYBE, 12 (15.0%) answered NO, DEFINITELY and 1 (1.3%) answered NOT SURE (Table V and Fig. 6).

Moreover, as regards the question: “Would you recommend Volos as a tourist destination?” out of 80 interviewed first years' students of the Department of Planning and Regional Development of the University of Thessaly, 52 (65.0%) answered YES, SURE, 20 (25.0%) answered MAYBE and 8 (10.0%) answered NO, DEFINITELY (Table VI and Fig. 7). It is noteworthy that in a similar question: “Would you recommend Volos as a working place?”, the answers differ to those of a tourist destination: out of 80 respondents, 17 (21.3%) answered YES, SURE, 38 (47.5%) answered MAYBE, 12 (15.0%) answered NO, DEFINITELY and 13 (16.3%) answered NOT SURE (Table VII and Fig. 8).

4.3. Reference to the Most Characteristic Elements of the City of Volos, Through Which It Can be Identified

Through the question: “In your opinion, what are the most characteristic elements of the City of Volos through which it can be identified? Name 7”, the most characteristic elements of the city's identity are sought from the frequency of their appearance in the answers of students. As the answers were to an open question, so too is the hierarchical order in which they chose to indicate the elements (or in which they were recalled in their memory), which of them would have more presence in the first position, which of them in the second position, which of them in the third position and so on.

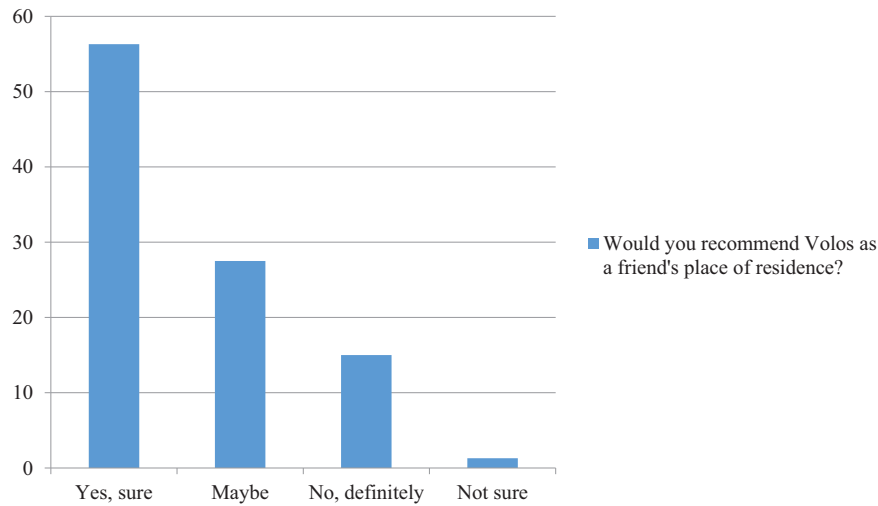


Fig. 6. Percentage of students who would recommend Volos for a friend's place of residence.

TABLE VI: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO WOULD RECOMMEND VOLOS TO OTHERS TO VISIT

Would you recommend Volos as a tourist destination?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes, sure	52	65.0	65.0	65.0
	Maybe	20	25.0	25.0	90.0
	No, definitely	8	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

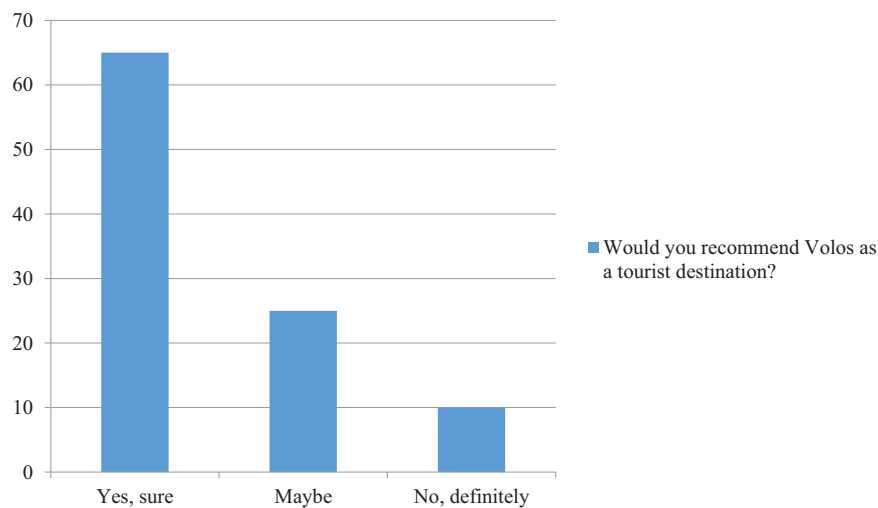


Fig. 7. Percentage of students who would recommend Volos to others to visit.

TABLE VII: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO WOULD RECOMMEND VOLOS TO OTHERS AS WORKING PLACE

Would you recommend Volos as a working place?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes, sure	17	21.3	21.3	21.3
	Maybe	38	47.5	47.5	68.8
	No, definitely	12	15.0	15.0	83.8
	Not sure	13	16.3	16.3	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Thus, the students, in the 1st position among the seven (7) elements, reported: Port/Quay/Kordoni-a cobble stones string perpendicular to the quay, where people have a walk, (1st with 74 presentations or 92.5%), Mount Pelion/Sporades islands (2nd with 52 presentations or 65.0%), Culture/Museum-s/Historicity/Churches (3rd with 42 instances or 52.5%), Urban space grid/Nodes/Neighborhoods (4th with 36 instances or 45%), Tsipouradika-traditional taverns which serve tsipouro (a local drink), (5th

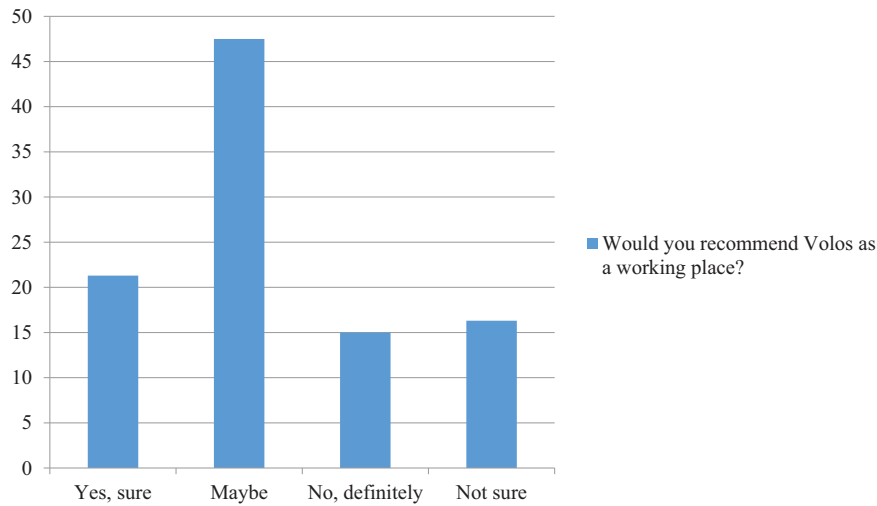


Fig. 8. Percentage of students who would recommend Volos to others as working place.

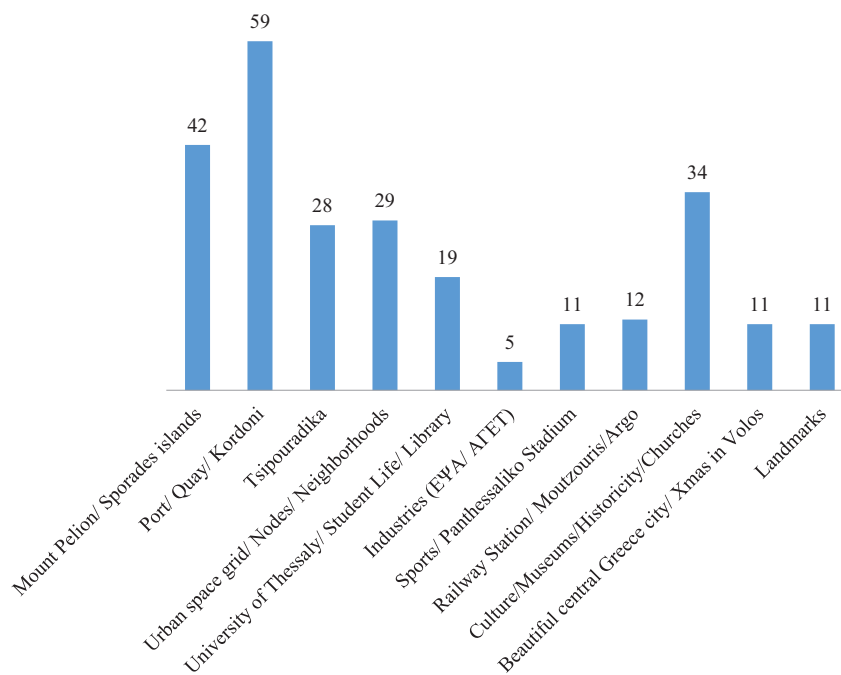


Fig. 9. Volos identification elements, displayed in the 1st position, in the choices of the interviewed students.

with 35 instances or 43.75%), University of Thessaly/Student life/University's Library (6th with 24 instances or 30.0%), Railway Station/Moutzouris-the traditional train from Volos to Milies/Argo-Jason's Mythical Trireme (7th with 15 presentations or 18.75%), in the eighth 8th place equalize three elements: Sports/Panthessaliko Stadium, Beautiful city of central Greece/Christmas in Volos and Landmarks (Neoclassical Buildings, the Town Hall, Ermou Street) with 14 instances or 17.5%, Industries (ΕΨΑ, ΑΓΕΤ) (8th with 6 instances or 7.5%) (Fig. 9).

For the economy of space, only the proposed elements in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd positions are presented from the responses of students.

Considering Fig. 9, one could mention that the most characteristic features of Volos City occur because of its physical relief. That is mainly why first years' students mainly refer to the Port, the Quay and Kordoni-a piece of artificial land which resembles a string (Kordoni means string in Greek) and people walk on. Moreover, the second most popular answer was Mount Pelion and Sporades islands, which also resulted from Volo's natural elements. This is obviously the reason why students insist on coming to Volos as tourists/visitors to enjoy physical beauty.

However, Volos is thought to be a historical place as well, along with a tourist destination, as shown in the third, fourth, and fifth rank of answers. Students identify cultural elements of the city (such as Museums, Churches, etc.) in the third position (52.50%). Then in the fourth place follows the

specific urban structure in accordance with Hippodame building system-a strict ortho-canonical grid perpendicular to the seafront, which also combines historical elements with the contemporary city. Moreover, in the fifth place we meet Tsipouradika, the famous traditional taverns, where tsipouro, the traditional drink, is served. Those specific taverns-tsipouradika, originate from Asia Minor and traveled to Volos following Nea Ionias' refugees and their traditions, which is also related to the historical physiognomy of Volos and its neighborhoods.

In the sixth rank, first-year students place the University of Thessaly and relative activities and buildings, like student life and the University's Library. Culture, but in a different way, is met here at the University of Thessaly, where contemporary thoughts, methods, and science are evolved through learning.

Following this, the seventh rank Railway Station and Moutzouris-the traditional 19th-century train-are met. Another aspect of historicity, Industrial Culture is also intensive in Volos city, where besides the Railway also abandoned industrial buildings are scattered in the city, but mainly near the port and the Railway Station.

Ultimately, in the last ranks, where Sports, Landmarks, and Industries in operation are placed, a special element should definitely be underlined: Christmas in Volos. During the last decade, Christmas celebrations have been organized, attracting people to visit Volos. Another aspect of culture is also mentioned here, combined with thematic tourism.

5. DISCUSSION-CONSIDERATION OF THE RESULTS IN RELATION TO THE HYPOTHESES OF THE SURVEY

Through the study of the results of the questionnaire, findings are presented which confirm the research hypotheses:

1. It is not absolutely clear for first years' students if the city of Volos, mainly in its center, maintains its Historical Physiognomy, as far as positive answers (56.3%) marginally exceed the negative ones (43.7%). This statement is also supported by their placement that historicity is not a strong residence factor (75%) for students at the Planning and Regional Development Department of the University of Thessaly. However, they would surely recommend it as a friend's place of residence (56.3%). Therefore, it is highly recommended that the public and private sectors improve the restoration and re-use of historical buildings, abandoned industries, and parts of the city in order to increase the historicity of Volos and attract new residents and students.
2. The city of Volos can also attract visitors/tourists, as shown in the above survey, once 65.0% of first years' students strongly recommend Volos as a tourist destination, mainly because of its physical beauty, combining sea and mountain and not because of its historical physiognomy, as shown by students' negative answers (58.8%).
3. At similarly high rates (68.8% in positive answers), students would also recommend Volos as a working place. Therefore, it would be a great chance for new investments within or around the city.
4. As for the decisive historical elements of Volos, in accordance with students' opinions, cultural heritage comes first (55%), specific areas of the city follow (21.3%), and last come the monuments (16.3%). Moreover, the historical past (97.5%) is considered to be strongly related to Volos's historical physiognomy; local traditions (92.5%) also contribute, as well as architecture (82.5%). One can notice that the history of Volos possesses the most important role in the configuration of its historical physiognomy, as it is expected, as well as the structured environment. However, the position that local traditions hold to the historicity of Volos cannot be ignored. Customs followed refugees from Minor Asia (tsipouro); Mount Pelion's traditional tastes and local festivals still take place in the nearby villages, as well as religious festivals.
5. The most characteristic elements of Volos City, which can be identified by first-year students, are related to its historicity. The only exception is the Port with the Quay, Mount Pelion, and Sporades islands, which appear in the answers of most of the respondents and has the most presence in the 1st place among their seven proposals, confirming the rule that natural elements referring to the natural relief, like water and land, hold an important place in the physiognomic description of a site. The University of Thessaly is also vicious for young people who also study there because of its impact on the physiognomy of Volos. Besides that, young students also believe that urban space and the relative facilities (urban grid, landmarks, festivals, sports centers, industries, etc.) contribute to the image of the city.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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