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PIRATE MUSEUMS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT THE CASE OF ALONISSOS

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ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage is one of the most important resources for differentiating contemporary tourist destinations, particularly in areas seeking to reduce their dependence on the mass-tourism model of 'sun and sea'. In this context, thematic museums can showcase local history, strengthen cultural identity, and create new visitor experiences. Museums devoted to maritime and pirate heritage are of particular interest because they connect historical interpretation with experiential engagement and destination appeal.

This study investigates the contribution of pirate museums to local development, focusing on the case of the Kostas and Angela Mavrikis Museum of Alonissos, also known as the Pirate Museum. The analysis draws on secondary data, international and Greek scholarship on cultural and heritage tourism, and available evidence concerning museum attendance and the museum's role in the tourism product of Alonissos. Comparative examples of European pirate festivals are also considered to illustrate the different ways in which pirate heritage can be linked to the local economy.

The findings indicate that the Pirate Museum of Alonissos has the potential to diversify the island's tourism product, reinforce its cultural identity, and generate additional visitor demand. Its contribution to local development, however, cannot be assessed solely by visitor numbers. The museum needs to be connected with local businesses, cultural routes, gastronomy, local products, and broader strategies for sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Pirate Museums, Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Local Development, Alonissos, Museum Experience, Sustainable Tourism.

1 INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism is one of the most important forms of special-interest tourism and is increasingly associated with the search for authentic, experiential, and differentiated experiences. Contemporary visitors are not interested solely in consuming a natural landscape or visiting a famous monument. Rather, they seek stories, experiences, and ways of

understanding the distinctive identity of a place. This shift has strengthened the role of museums, cultural events, and thematic forms of tourism as instruments of tourism development.

2 CULTURAL TOURISM AND PIRATE HERITAGE

Cultural heritage is not confined to the material remains of the past. It encompasses stories, memories, traditions, social practices, and collective representations that connect a place with its historical trajectory. Poria, Butler and Airey (2003) argue that the significance of heritage for tourism depends largely on how visitors perceive the relationship between themselves, the place, and the past. The tourism use of history therefore involves more than displaying objects; it entails creating meaning and experience.

Pirate heritage is a distinctive case in this respect. Piracy is historically associated with the Mediterranean, maritime trade, coastal communities, fortifications, and sea routes. At the same time, the pirate has acquired a strongly spectacular and entertaining character in contemporary tourism culture. The tension between the historical reality of violence, plunder, and insecurity and the modern romanticised image of the pirate creates a productive field for cultural-tourism research.

Alonissos is a characteristic example of a Greek island destination where maritime and pirate history can be connected with a contemporary tourism product. Located in Patitiri, the Kostas and Angela Mavrikis Museum of Alonissos is also known as the Pirate Museum and houses collections relating to piracy and the island's maritime history. Its presence creates an opportunity to connect cultural heritage with the visitor experience.

This paper examines the extent to which a pirate museum can contribute to local development. More specifically, it explores the museum's contribution to the tourism appeal of Alonissos, the diversification of its tourism product, the extension of the tourist season, the strengthening of the local economy, and the cultivation of cultural identity.

3 CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

The development of cultural heritage tourism is linked to visitors' growing interest in authentic experiences and meaningful connections with the past (Poria, Butler and Airey, 2003). Authenticity concerns not only historical objects but also visitors' personal experiences (Wang, 1999; Kolar and Zabkar, 2010). Pirate heritage can be presented through exhibits, narratives, fortifications, historical testimonies, and re-enactments, which may be perceived as authentic despite their staged character (Chhabra, Healy and Sills, 2003). The international example of Viking heritage demonstrates that museums, reconstructed sites, themed markets, and festivals can combine cultural promotion, commercial activity, and local community participation (Halewood and Hannam, 2001; Hannam and Halewood, 2006).

A Pirate Museum could also support the local economy through ticket revenue, sales, employment, and wider visitor expenditure. However, its actual economic impact may be smaller than visitor numbers suggest (Felsenstein and Fleischer, 2003). To create wider benefits, the museum should form part of an integrated tourism product developed in cooperation with hotels, travel agencies, restaurants, and local producers. Packages combining accommodation, museum and Old Village visits, gastronomy, and marine activities could extend visitors' stays and distribute tourism income throughout the local community. At the same time, the interpretation of pirate heritage should avoid stereotypes and highlight the history of coastal communities, maritime economies, defensive architecture, and the social consequences of piracy.

The core and constructive role of digital technologies within contemporary cultural entrepreneurship education warrants systematic integration rather than peripheral acknowledgment. As creative markets digitize rapidly, traditional frameworks fail to equip emerging creative entrepreneurs with requisite interdisciplinary competencies. To fortify this field and cultivate resilient innovators, academic institutions and policy-makers must strategically deploy advanced digital modalities across all curricular levels. Educational frameworks must systematically absorb established technological paradigms. Mobile learning environments [29] democratize access to instructional resources, enabling flexible learning beyond traditional classroom boundaries. Concurrently, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) [30-33] provide the infrastructure for interactive simulations and digital marketplace modeling. Furthermore, integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI), STEM, and Robotics [34-38] cultivates algorithmic thinking and technical fluency—skills indispensable for commercializing creative outputs within automated market landscapes. Rather than merely digitizing content, these advanced paradigms fundamentally optimize core educational mechanisms: evaluation, targeted intervention, and personalized instruction. Embedded within curricula, these modalities facilitate a transition from static instruction to adaptive learning pathways tailored to individual cognitive profiles and skill gaps. Crucially, implementing ICTs must not occur in a cognitive vacuum. Synthesizing digital tools with validated psychological frameworks, specifically models of metacognition, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence development [39-42] significantly accelerates learning efficiency and student outcomes. When technology supports

metacognitive self-monitoring, strategic reflection, and emotional regulation, learners cultivate psychological resilience, empathy, and cognitive flexibility mandatory for entrepreneurial survival.

4 MUSEUMS AND TOURISM APPEAL

Museums are important institutions of cultural education, but they have also evolved into experiential spaces. Contemporary museum policy emphasises visitor interaction, storytelling, accessibility, and the creation of emotional connections.

Chen and Chen (2010) argue that the quality of experiences at cultural-heritage sites affects perceived value, satisfaction, and visitors' future behavioural intentions. A museum can therefore contribute to tourism not only by attracting visitors but also by strengthening intentions to revisit and recommend the destination.

Brida, Meleddu and Pulina (2016) also note that museum visitors are not a homogeneous audience. Different groups seek different qualities in an experience. For a thematic museum, this means that its narrative must be engaging enough to attract families, tourists, and children, while remaining sufficiently well documented to preserve its cultural and educational value.

In the Greek context, Doxanaki and Linardakis (2022) demonstrate that opening hours, price, collection content, and the availability of multisensory experiences influence the decision to visit archaeological museums. These findings can also be applied to thematic museums.

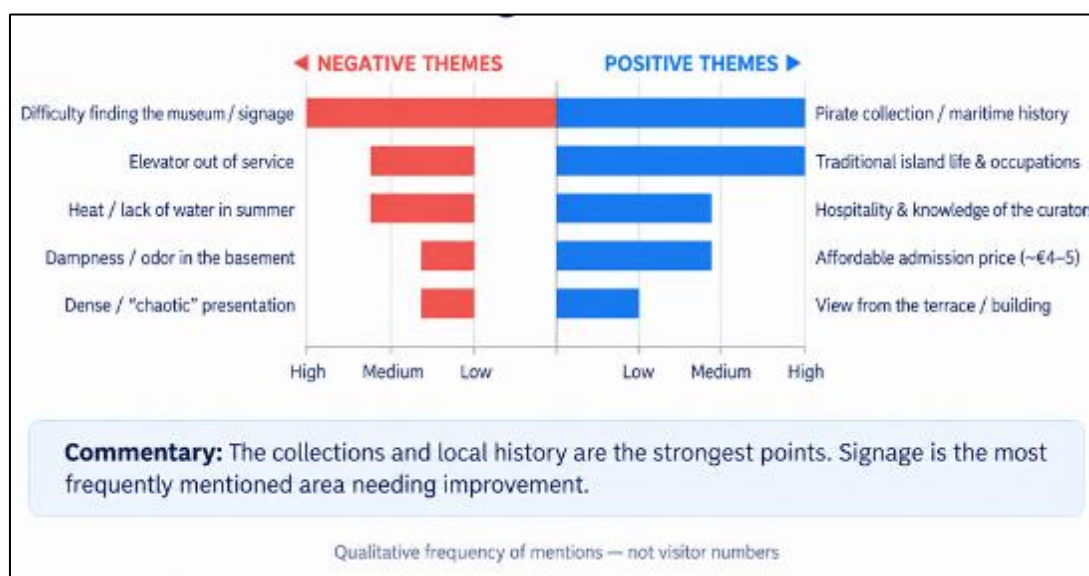


Figure 1: Positive and negative themes identified in visitor reviews.

The Pirate Museum of Alonissos is particularly noteworthy because it connects the history of piracy with the island's maritime tradition. It is not merely a venue for displaying objects; it can serve as an entry point for understanding the history of Alonissos and the wider maritime region.

According to the SPARKLE programme (2023), the museum receives approximately 4,500–5,000 visitors annually, with attendance heavily concentrated in the summer. This is a significant figure for a small museum, particularly one operating on an island destination marked by pronounced seasonality.

Visitor numbers alone, however, are insufficient for evaluating the museum's developmental contribution. The more important question is whether museum visitors connect their visit with other activities on Alonissos. If tourists visit the museum, spend money at local businesses, purchase local products, visit other cultural sites, and extend their stay on the island, the actual economic impact is substantially greater.

5 ALONISSOS AND THE PIRATE MUSEUM

Alonissos is a distinctive island destination in the Northern Sporades, with strong ties to the sea and maritime tradition. Its historical position and connection with sea routes created the conditions for a cultural heritage that incorporates aspects of maritime life and pirate raids.

The Kostas and Angela Mavrikis Museum of Alonissos in Patitiri is a characteristic example of how this heritage can be used. Known as the Pirate Museum, it contains collections relating to piracy and the island's maritime history. Its displays of objects from everyday life also connect maritime history with the social reality of the local community.



Figure 2: Ranking of the museum's positive points in visitor reviews.

The museum can help diversify the tourism product of Alonissos. In addition to natural resources, beaches, and marine activities, the island offers cultural content, thereby creating a more complex tourism identity.

Connecting cultural heritage with tourism development is particularly important for small island destinations. Dependence on summer tourism alone creates seasonality problems because demand is concentrated within a limited period. A museum can offer visitors an alternative activity that complements the 'sun and sea' model.

This potential does not mean that a museum can overcome seasonality on its own. Available data for the Pirate Museum show that attendance remains closely tied to the summer tourist season (SPARKLE, 2023). A broader cultural-tourism plan is therefore required.

Such a plan could include cultural routes linking the museum with the Old Village, historic sites, churches, traditional buildings, local businesses, and places associated with maritime history. The museum visit would then become part of an integrated visitor experience rather than an isolated activity.

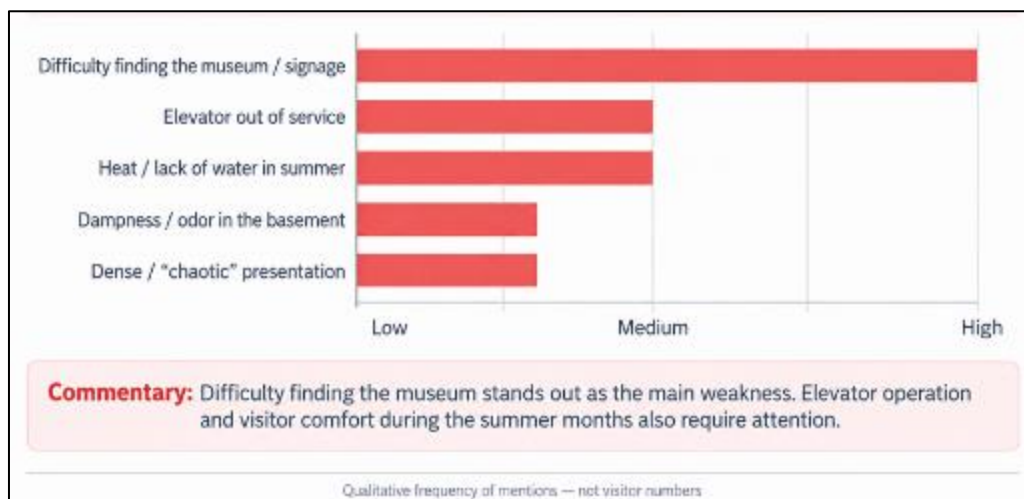


Figure 3: Ranking of areas for improvement in the visitor experience.

Digital promotion is also important. Digital applications, QR codes, digital maps, audio narratives, and interactive content could enhance the visitor experience. Digital technology can make the history of piracy accessible to different age groups.

6 THE MUSEUM CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Local development is not an exclusively economic process; it also has social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Festivals and cultural activities can strengthen social cohesion, residents' active participation, and a sense of shared identity (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006).

The same reasoning applies to museums. A local-history museum serves residents as well as tourists. Presenting the history of Alonissos can reinforce collective memory and foster pride in local heritage.

Community participation is essential to the sustainability of such an initiative. Residents can participate as volunteers, storytellers, professionals, producers, and cultural organisations. Personal testimony, family histories, and objects associated with maritime life can enrich the museum narrative.

In this way, the museum can serve as a bridge between past and present. Piracy is presented not as an isolated event but as part of the history of the people who lived and worked on the island.

Excessive commercialisation must nevertheless be avoided. The tourism use of pirate history risks idealising the pirate. Historical reality includes violence, plunder, destruction, and social insecurity; cultural interpretation should address these dimensions rather than being reduced to an entertaining image.

A balance between entertainment and historical documentation is therefore essential. As Halewood and Hannam (2001) argue, the tourism use of historical themes can combine authenticity and commercial appeal without either necessarily negating the other.

7 CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The role of the Historical and Folklore Museum of Alonissos extends beyond preserving and presenting pirate and maritime heritage and can also be examined through the theoretical framework of cultural entrepreneurship. This concept concerns transforming cultural resources, monuments, local narratives, and creative activities into organised experiences capable of strengthening a place's economic and social sustainability. In island destinations, where tourism is often highly seasonal, cultural entrepreneurship can diversify the tourism product and mobilise local resources.

Recent Greek scholarship presents several applications of cultural entrepreneurship in island settings. Research on industrial buildings in Lesbos and Limnos connects the adaptive reuse of built heritage with new cultural functions (Maniou et al., 2025d). For Alonissos, this example shows that a collection gains developmental value when it becomes part of a wider programme of cultural and tourism activities.

Research on literary festivals also links cultural entrepreneurship with sustainable local development (Maniou, Mitoula and Manola, 2025b). The Pirate Museum could apply this principle through thematic events, storytelling, educational workshops, and historically documented re-enactments. These activities would allow the museum to function as both an exhibition space and a venue for cultural participation.

Built heritage provides another relevant comparison. A study of the Italian monuments of Kalymnos examines how historical resources can support cultural entrepreneurship and sustainability (Maniou et al., 2025c). In Alonissos, digital maps, QR codes, audio guides, and digital storytelling could connect the museum's exhibits with island locations and maritime routes, extending interpretation beyond the museum building.

Studies of Kalymnos, Patmos, and the islands of the South Aegean show that cultural entrepreneurship can draw on monuments, local history, gastronomy, and production (Maniou et al., 2025c; Maniou et al., 2025e; Maniou et al., 2025f). This broader approach is relevant to Alonissos because pirate and maritime heritage can be linked with local food, traditional products, marine activities, and the Old Village.

A museum visit could therefore become part of an integrated cultural itinerary rather than remain a stand-alone activity. Its economic value would depend not only on ticket sales but also on its capacity to generate demand for local services and products.

Research on sustainable cultural entrepreneurship in Lesvos further indicates that cultural resources have greater developmental value when they are incorporated into an integrated destination strategy (Maniou et al., 2025a). Lesvos and Alonissos represent different applications of this principle: the former draws on dispersed historical assets, while the latter can organise activity around a museum collection and a distinct maritime identity.

The Museum of Alonissos could accordingly serve as a hub for cooperation among tourism businesses, producers, cultural associations, and educational institutions. Thematic routes, periodic events, and digital interpretation could strengthen its position within the island's tourism product (Maniou, Mitoula and Manola, 2025b; Maniou et al., 2025c; Maniou et al., 2025d; Maniou et al., 2025e; Maniou et al., 2025f).

Such a strategy should be evaluated through visitor research, local expenditure, community participation, and the protection of cultural and environmental resources. These measures would show whether the museum is contributing to sustainable local development rather than simply increasing attendance.



Figure 4: Priorities for improving the visitor experience.

8 A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO THE MUSEUM OF ALONISSOS

Lesvos provides a valuable comparative framework for interpreting the pirate and maritime heritage preserved by the Museum of Alonissos. Its strategic position connected it with the commercial, naval, and military networks of the eastern Mediterranean, while piracy and corsair activity influenced maritime life, settlement patterns, and collective memory (Anagnostou, 2026). The island's association with Hayreddin Barbarossa also places it within the wider Ottoman and Mediterranean maritime context and clarifies the distinction between piracy, corsairing, and state-organised naval action (Yılmaz Önder, 2026; Lowry, 2014). The medrese and imaret associated with Barbarossa in Mytilene further demonstrate how monuments and places preserve historical memory (Kiel, 2018).

The Alonissos collection gains interpretive value when it is situated within these broader Aegean networks. This contextual approach reduces the risk of romanticising piracy and supports a stronger relationship among place, historical evidence, and interpretation, which is central to perceived authenticity (Wang, 1999; Kolar and Zabkar, 2010; Park, Choi and Lee, 2019). Alonissos preserves maritime memory primarily through an organised museum collection, whereas Lesvos presents it through monuments, historic sites, and local narratives.

Cooperation between the islands could support an Aegean network of thematic routes, educational programmes, digital storytelling, and cultural events. Such activities can strengthen destination identity, encourage community participation, and contribute to local development (Getz, 2008; Getz and Page, 2016; Arcodia and Whitford, 2006; Alexiou, 2020; Manola, Maniou and Mitoula, 2026; Lachouri, 2026). Their effectiveness should be assessed through systematic research into visitor experiences and expectations (Chen and Chen, 2010; Brida, Meleddu and Pulina, 2016; Doxanaki and Linardakis, 2022).

9 CONCLUSIONS

The pirate collection of the Historical and Folklore Museum of Alonissos can develop from an individual attraction into a cultural resource with wider local value. Its interpretation should combine historical accuracy, authenticity, and a high-quality visitor experience so that commercial use does not reproduce a simplified pirate stereotype. The comparison with Lesvos places the collection within the broader maritime history of the Aegean and supports a more contextual account of piracy and corsair activity.

Cooperation with other islands could support thematic routes, educational programmes, festivals, and digital applications that strengthen the destination's appeal and provide activity beyond the main summer season. The museum's contribution should nevertheless be assessed through more than attendance figures. Length of stay, visitor expenditure, demand for local products and services, and the distribution of economic benefits offer more meaningful measures of its local impact.

Resident participation, systematic audience research, and protection of the natural and cultural environment are essential to this strategy. With these conditions in place, the Museum of Alonissos could serve as a regional centre for maritime heritage and contribute to a more distinctive and sustainable tourism product.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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