

# PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

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## PERFORMANCE & SPACE II

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### Pavillon Relancé: Re-Tracing Leisure Modalities – Inhabiting the Archive

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## ***Pavillon Relancé:*** **Re-Tracing Leisure Modalities – Inhabiting the Archive**

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### **Abstract**

This paper critically discusses the preliminary findings of our research on high-impact experiential learning practices, aimed at enhancing traditional classroom teaching. Our research focuses on interdisciplinary, participatory learning experiences designed to foster environmentally conscious approaches. Drawing on our experience of designing and running two week-long workshops for architects, engineers, and artists at the abandoned tourist pavilion of Mycenae, under the auspices of *Fichti Art - Pavillon Abandonné* (2022) and *Pavillon Relancé* (2023) - this paper considers the potential for pensive reflection, dynamic exploration, and creative experimentation as crucial educational elements of in-situ, hands-on and active learning practices. Furthermore, it discusses oral history and its interviewing techniques as potent methodological tools for immersing participants in the local social and cultural landscape: a fundamental prerequisite for environmentally sensitive planning and design. Our paper concludes with an in-depth analysis of *Pavillon Relancé's* closing learning activity - an impromptu performance at the abandoned pavilion involving students, tutors, and guests - as propeller of effective teaching. This approach combines historical and theoretical knowledge with practice-based research, imaginatively enhancing the potential for improved learning outcomes, compared to the traditional classroom experience. This nocturnal happening aimed at infusing the temporary installations, designed and constructed by workshop participants, with site-specific meaning, inspired by oral testimonies and relevant archival material. Hence, bodily movement as reenactment of now-lost spatial functions (i.e. leisure) became a medium for communicating both the past and the future (i.e. potential futures) of the tourist pavilion.

*Keywords:* education, workshop, tourism, environmental design

## Re-Tracing Leisure Modalities – Inhabiting the Archive

Recent shifts in formal architectural education and training acknowledge the growing need for specialised scientific knowledge and critical thinking in environmentally conscious design. Numerous undergraduate and graduate courses offer studio-based experiences that sharpen the analytical skills for an evidence-based design approach that combines intuitive creativity with informed decision making. Furthermore, environmental awareness describes a novel brand of architectural competence that is deeply rooted in trans-disciplinarity, as historical, cultural, and socio-economic aspects are combined with features of the natural environment into a holistic design approach for sustainable living. Thus, environmental design promotes in-situ quantitative and qualitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation, alongside various ex-situ methods. To this end, educational, intensive, interdisciplinary, hands-on workshops, specifically designed to foster experiential learning, have emerged as an experimental field for the creative application of effective teaching strategies outside the classroom (Kolb & Fry, 1975).

This paper summarises the initial pedagogical findings of two such workshops - *Pavillon Abandonné* and *Pavillon Relancé* - that took place in the summers of 2022 and 2023 respectively, at the abandoned tourist pavilion of Mycenae, under the auspices of *Fichti Art festival*,<sup>1</sup> attended by a diverse group of students, from different educational backgrounds (art, architecture, environmental sciences etc.). The overall aim was to outline potential strategies for the creative re-activation of the abandoned pavilion in the local socio-economic context with both long-term goals (e.g. restoration and adaptive reuse of the early modernist building) and short-term, reversible interventions (e.g. art installations, performances, and other happenings). As discussed below, the workshops were designed to complete Kolb and Fry's experiential learning cycle, starting with the concrete experience of the place and reflective observation in 2022, while moving to abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation in 2023.

### Pavillon Abandonné (2022)

The main objective of the 2022 workshop was to tackle aspects of resilience, adaptation and sustainable development, in relation to the management of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in vulnerable economic and social environments of the Greek periphery, where tourism has always been the driving force of the local economy. In particular, our workshop addressed key issues of local, sustainable development, improved quality of life and social well-being, through culture and its multiple manifestations in space, such as in recurrent,

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<sup>1</sup> *Fichti Art*, <https://fichtiart.com/en> (accessed June 21, 2024)

temporary or semi-temporary events or happenings with a strong spatial imprint (e.g. festivals).

The workshop examined two neighbouring communities in Argolis - Fichti and Mycenae - as distinct but interconnected “ecosystems” and, in particular, the potential for the development of a dynamic framework of focused cultural activities, centred around an abandoned, historical building, namely the tourist pavilion of Mycenae, with a view to spill over to adjacent, unclaimed sites, such as the late-19th century, decommissioned train station in Fichti, bringing the two communities together.

The long-abandoned tourist pavilion of Mycenae is a typical example of the early post-WWII efforts of the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO) to update Greece’s run-down tourism infrastructure, a vehicle for ushering Greece’s remote communities to modernity (Alifragkis & Athanassiou, 2013). It was completed in 1951 according to the designs of modernist architect Kimon Laskaris, in order to serve refreshments and light snacks to the visitors of the nearby prehistoric site of Mycenae. It served as a crucial node of an integrated local network of modern tourism facilities, built on sites of outstanding natural beauty and close or inside archaeological sites (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

The tourist pavilion of Mycenae, located south of the prehistoric site, on a natural hill with unobstructed views of the plain of Argolis, is a discreet, single-storey construction of square plan, with a small semi-underground space that hosted auxiliary uses. It accommodates a ‘T’ shaped restaurant that extends across the building, leading to a front porch to the south and to an elevated, due to the slope, atrium to the north, with subtle references to the typology of the Mycenaean megaron. The *pièce de resistance* of the restaurant’s decoration was a large-scale portable fresco by modernist painter Nikos Nikolaou, with prehistoric iconography rendered in an abstract style, hanging over the fireplace.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding the impact such infrastructure had on local communities highlights a niche area of research that has been minimally explored before, particularly from the viewpoint of an active investigation into the shared social and cultural elements that are embedded in the oral testimonies of locals who had experienced the pavilion in its prime. To this end, our students launched an appeal for personal memorabilia via a social media post, which, due to a shortage of time, was not particularly successful in itself. It did, however,

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<sup>2</sup> This included the tourist pavilion of Epidauros (1950) and the conversion of the fortress of Bourtzi into a guesthouse (1951), both designed by Laskaris, the hotel *Xenia Amfitryon* (1951 & 1956) designed by Kleon Krantonellis, the hotel *Xenia Acronafplia* (1958) and the organised beach of Arvanitia (1962) designed by Ioannis Triantafyllidis and, later, the hotel *Nafplia Palace* (1970-1975) designed by Thymios Papagiannis.

<sup>3</sup> For additional information see: Sotiriou (2016).

trigger various responses from locals who had lived experiences of the pavilion and agreed to be recorded on camera discussing their memories of the place (Figure 2).

### Figure 1

*The abandoned tourist pavilion of Mycenae, completed in 1951 according to the designs of modernist architect Kimon Laskaris for the Greek National Tourism Organisation. South façade. © The Authors, 2022.*



These semi-structured interviews, conducted in the manner of an oral history project, formulated the initial core of what we hope will become a rich, dynamic, and diverse digital archive of the voices, personal commentaries and individual memories of the local community that, despite their potential fallibility, malleability or tendency to nostalgia (Ritchie, 2003), will convey a deeper understanding of the place in the local context and help us re-trace the different leisure modalities of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s from a bottom-up perspective.

### Figure 2

*Elias Kavvadias, former employee at the tourist pavilion, interviewed on July 28 2022. © The Authors, 2022.*



Alongside the mapping of individual memories, students were urged to map their own explorations of the site, with a view to document and visually interpret spatial elements, such as pathways, nodes, districts, boundaries and other spatial events or environmental elements (e.g. soundscapes), that register various experiences of crossing thresholds. The cognitive, multimodal and multimedia mental mapping of the experience of walking across the site provided us with additional reference material.

As the 2022 workshop came to a close, students were prompted to reflect on different forms of memory, the principles and dynamics of individual remembering, alone or in a group, and, most crucially, the reciprocity between individual and collective memory (Barnier & Sutton, 2008). As the underlying mechanisms that regulate the transmission and transformation of memories across individuals are further studied, it becomes clear that the spaces of colloquial interaction are not mere reflections of social and cultural norms but active agents of narratives that represent, reconstruct or reinterpret the past (Lampropoulou, 2016). The agency of space was further explored in the workshop that was held the following summer.

### **Pavillon Relancé (2023)**

The 2023 workshop capitalised on the findings of the previous year. The overarching guideline to inhabit the archival database created in the previous workshop was interpreted by the students both literally and metaphorically. Using archival material (i.e. archival photographs) and oral testimonies, students attempted to reimagine the atmosphere of the pavilion and reinterpret its identity through a series of discreet, site-specific art installations. The process involved, among other temporary spatial interventions, the *mise-en-scène* of diverse movable articles of varied ontological statuses: used tables and chairs borrowed from nearby businesses; decaying pieces of furniture recovered from the site; and silhouettes of furniture traced on the floor with fluorescent tape, employing the metaphor of a real-life scale architectural blueprint and its related semantic content (e.g. dimensions, orientation etc.). The culminating event of the workshop was a non-scripted, semi-structured nocturnal performance that involved students, tutors and guests in a ritualistic procession across the site and inside the pavilion.

The interaction between people, places, and situated art practices lies at the very heart of site-specificity (Kaye, 2000). The locative function of site-responsive art describes a potent and dynamic pedagogical situation, whereby students gain a heightened awareness of the surrounding cultural landscape, while developing skills and practices that, in spatial terms, materialise the intangible network of relations that weave together the local social fabric. Our workshop experimented with site-generated art installations that engaged with the spirit of the place through the reconceptualization of three overlapping systems: (1) deep



history (i.e. prehistoric Mycenae); (2) political public sphere (i.e. the revitalisation of decommissioned tourism infrastructure); and (3) individual and collective memories (i.e. activating unofficial histories of the place). Our students 'mined' the local archive for memorabilia and personal narratives, with a view to render palpable the intangible materialities of the past and challenge the uncontested identities of the present. Within the broad framework of site-specificity, environmental and site-adaptive participatory walking events offer ways for experimenting through space with bodily movement as a medium for generating meaning.<sup>4</sup> These immersive, contemplative and performative practices are capable of composing meta-narratives about the place, its history, and the people who inhabit it. Driven by a non-hierarchical creative process, our students' experiential mapping of the pavilion led to an impromptu, nocturnal, audience-interactive experience, whose unsystematic choreography reconstructed the familiar but long-absent cultural geography of the place (Figure 3).

### Figure 3

*Closing event: an impromptu, nocturnal interactive performance at the tourist pavilion. © The Authors, 2023.*



<sup>4</sup> See the work of performer and researcher Anna Tzakou. Available at: <https://annatzakou-geopoetics.com/> (last accessed: July 2024).

## In Lieu of Conclusions

The two workshops offered valuable opportunities for critical reflection on several overlapping levels: (a) they tackled current epistemological questions of cultural resilience, local identity and social engagement; (b) they sharpened research tools and methodologies that were tested locally but may be scaled-up and replicated elsewhere; and (c) they provided an open platform for exchanges between an interdisciplinary group of students, the local community and various local stakeholders (e.g. the local authorities, the local ephorate of antiquities, local arts and culture societies etc.), in the framework of a week-long series of educational and cultural events, organised around the temporary, paradigmatic reuse of the tourist pavilion of Mycenae and its experimental integration in the local network of existing sites and routes.

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