

Case Report

Society and Culture: Cultural Policies Driven by Local Authorities as A Factor in Local Development—The Example of the Municipality of Xanthi-Greece

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Abstract: This research article examines cultural policies designed by local government authorities and their impact on social and regional development in the municipality of Xanthi, Thrace. It also analyzes and examines the cultural activities implemented by the Greek municipalities. In particular, it reflects upon events, changes, and concerns that involve cultural affairs, and evaluates their socioeconomic, political, spatial, and regional dimensions. Considering that the locality is part of the totality, the process of achieving cultural development in Xanthi is particularly interesting, as it is fundamental to the entire Greek cultural image. The regional element of the area can be also identified as national. Consequently, local cultural development becomes an essential part of national development. This study could trigger a fertile and constructive process of reflection on the role of local cultural policy in further achieving social and economic development. The issues raised by the research contribute to scientific research and dialogue and highlight the role of municipalities as active cultural assets with distinct cultural identities in the context of a Europe of Regions.

Keywords: cultural policy; cultural heritage; local development; culture; local authorities; Xanthi

1. Introduction

Considering that “culture” is a term that is difficult to define, in 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture, and collected 164 different definitions of culture, and the number has been increasing ever since [1]. There has long been a disagreement over the definition of **culture** as the term is used in a variety of ways. One commonly used definition is: “[Culture] is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society.” [2].

As culture relates to different forms of human life, it confers identity, meaning, worth, aspirations and a sense of place. It also comprises relationships between individuals, groups, ideas and perspectives. “Cultural development” denotes cultural life as it evolves compared to other forms of development. The objective in this case is the level of cultural development and the attempt to measure it by means of indicators. The term is especially ambiguous, because both words are ambiguous. It is given a positive color by its combination of individual and social development with the direct, quantitative evolution that scientific and economic development implies.

Cultural policy comprises the government activities, laws, and plans that control, protect, inspire, and economically support activities related to the arts and creative sectors, such as painting, sculpture, music, dance, and literature among others, whereas culture may involve activities related to language, heritage, and diversity. The idea of cultural policy was developed by UNESCO in the 1960s. Generally, this involves governments putting in place developments, legal classifications, regulations, legislation, and institutions (e.g. museums, libraries, etc.) that promote and facilitate cultural diversity and creative

expressions in a range of art forms and creative activities. Cultural policy can be implemented at a nation-state level, at a sub-national level, at a regional level, or at a municipal level.

Over the last 30 years, cultural policy has progressively become an important factor of economic and physical regeneration plans in many European cities. The cultural regeneration was fortified by national decentralization policies transferring authority and resources from central to regional and local government. As in every society, local ones, in all their forms (city, region), are privileged areas of cultural policy, since they incorporate historical, national, linguistic, and religious traditions, social and economic relations, and, in general, they are the places where social processes take place. The perception and shaping of cultural policy in the field of research depends upon how culture is understood and what it represents [3–6].

Regarding the role of the European Union (EU) [7], research shows that, mainly in the economic field, the EU complements state cultural policy. It also provides the legal framework, guidelines, and know-how, so that culture can be part of any sector of policy-making processes (mainstreaming), which is apparent in the municipality of Xanthi. When designing policies and support instruments at all levels, account must be taken of the particular role that culture can play in regional and local development [8–10]. Further effort could also be made in achieving the absorption of EU funds. The studies of the impact of the cultural sector on education and creativity, mobility, economy, intercultural dialogue, foreign policy, regional dimension, and various other subjects supported by the European Commission are also important [11].

As Bianchini reports [12], the cultural resources of a place incorporate the following elements: arts and media activities and foundations; the cultures of youth, ethnic minorities, and other ‘communities of interest’, including local festivals and other celebratory events; the tangible and intangible heritage, including archaeology, gastronomy, local history, dialects, and rituals; the local ‘image bank’, which is defined in detail below; the natural and built environment, including public and open spaces; the diversity and quality of places where people entertain, including marketplaces, clubs, cafés, and restaurants; local institutions for academic and scientific novelty, including universities and private sector research centers; the repertoire of local products, skills, manufacturing techniques, and services [13].

It is important to classify and build on characteristic local cultural capitals [14] for effective place branding and marketing, given that no place can be focused on just ‘one product’ [15,16]. A city, for example, is a multipart and multi-faceted unit, which can be defined as: (1) an area described by geographical limits, and gifted with natural characteristics; (2) a location formed by human involvement, including infrastructures, buildings, and a clear plan of streets, as well as public and open spaces; (3) a community of people, with specific social networks and dynamic forces (a society); (4) a system of economic actions and relations (an economy); (5) a natural environment, a society, and an economy ruled by an approved set of values and rules that result from the collaboration between different political players (a polity) [17].

Local culture can become a significant asset for the country’s promotion [18], aiming at the social development of its inhabitants [19]. Successful cultural planning can also be of a developmental nature [20], utilizing the comparative advantages and characteristics of each region, shaping a local cultural identity [21]. The development of grassroots and social movements raise new kinds of cultural demands, and present the need to familiarize with the social and economic transformations [22–24].

Economic change affects different cities and regions in various ways [25]. However, many city decision makers understood the development of cultural policies as an appreciated tool [26] in expanding the local economic base and better accomplishing social and territorial cohesion [27]. They gave priority to expanding economic sectors, such as leisure, tourism, the media, and other “cultural industries” [28]. For this reason, research into culture and the collection and processing of cultural data must be a policy priority at a local, regional, national, and supranational level [29]. In fact, achieving successful cultural policy is becoming increasingly important [30] as a component of strategies for economic and physical regeneration in many Western European cities. Plans of cultural

activities have proven to be an important asset for cultural managers. According to Bianchini [31], these activities were based on the needs of local communities and the management of their cultural capital. More studies of the cultural policies, positions, and attitudes of local authorities need to be conducted, and these will act as foundations for development through culture [32]. Also, they will contribute to the better understanding of the relationship between cultural policy, urban regeneration, and economic growth [33].

This paper explores the process of cultural development at the local level using as a case study the municipality of Xanthi (more details in Unit 2.1, Materials and Methods). Qualitative and quantitative analytical tools were used for the empirical research. These were combined with the scientific principles of social policy, regional development, communication, and cultural studies, as well as with a review of the relevant literature. Thus, it was possible to: i. examine sustainable regional development and urban regeneration as well as the means of cultural activities; ii. look into the European experience and paradigms with reference to the best practices of successful municipalities; iii. study the cultural policies of the municipality of Xanthi; and iv. analyze cultural policies and action tools generating socioeconomic benefits, so that the municipality can become a common ground where attempts to develop as well as to make social progress meet at both local and regional levels.

The process of the research survey is described in detail in Unit 2, but the general concept was the following. First, the important study aims and key steps were set, in combination with a systematic literature review on the cultural development, culture, and interconnections between local authorities and culture. This was accompanied by the documentation of available methods and tools. In the aim to study their importance to the key study objectives, this assessment was based on six criteria: data collection, data management, apprehension and communication of results, connection to the method, adaptability, and participatory nature. Second, further elements were obtained from primary and secondary research based on questionnaires and interviews, which were then ranked and evaluated in order to reach the final set of principles and criteria that provided a comprehensive overview of the approach, illustrating the sequence and relevance of steps. In other words, the main steps of the approach were neither rigid nor predefined. Initially, these steps were set in a successive mode for reasons of simplicity. However, in practice, this method is non-linear and rather complex; so, whenever required, an adaptation was made and the order of the steps was changed (e.g., return to specific stages and outputs). The procedure should be perceived as an iterative sequence, meaning that the central idea is to go through all the steps and revise work over time, taking into account the specific needs and changes. The research methodology is focused on an analysis of the current situation and formulation of a local cultural planning proposal.

Through an investigation of this area, a large number of features (land uses, policies, etc.) are gathered and analyzed, so that a complex issue such as cultural planning can be explored. The conclusions reached (Unit 5) confirm that the cultural policy of local authorities is a dynamic factor in local development.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The City of Xanthi: Context and Objectives

Since local authorities are an important agent of cultural policy, the social, economic, and cultural profile of the northern Greek municipality, in particular the city of Xanthi in Thrace, is investigated. The theoretical framework of this study is based on empirical research conducted in the city. Xanthi is a border region of Greece that bears various multicultural features, but has a central position in the prefecture, which enables it to develop networks with adjacent regions and strengthen its cultural presence, making it an active cultural player. Its customs and folklore not only have a long-standing tradition, but they have also managed to survive, and in fact constitute an integral part of local peoples' lives. The above features (historical, geographical, social, etc.) render Xanthi an ideal region for scientific research purposes.

Given that culture is the compilation of all aspects of social life from a symbolic point of view, the recording of the cultural profile of the municipality of Xanthi, with the infrastructure, events, and institutions that have developed over the years, is based on a critical perception of these factors, with particular emphasis on the impact of culture on the city's environment. The key element in achieving sustainable development, which will influence the quality of life of the municipality of Xanthi, is culture combined with the natural, social, and economic growth of the local available resources.

Xanthi is a city in Thrace in northeastern Greece. It is the capital of the Xanthi regional unit of the region of East Macedonia and Thrace. The city is built amphitheatrically on the foot of the Rodopi mountain chain and is divided in two by the Kosynthos River: the west part, where the old and the modern town are situated, and the east part, with its rich natural environment. Both sides still preserve their traditional characteristics.

In the north of its west side, the old town (Figures 1 and 2) is located, which constitutes its historic center. The "Old Town of Xanthi" is known for its typical architecture, which blends numerous Byzantine Greek churches with neoclassical mansions of Greek merchants from the 18th and 19th centuries and Ottoman-era mosques. The Metropolitan church is encircled by a dominating urban settlement.



Figure 1. The old town of Xanthi <http://www.pixoto.com/images-photography/city--street-and-park-/historic-districts/streets-at-old-town-of-xanthi-ii-4900522186244096>.



Figure 2. The old town of Xanthi <https://mapio.net/pic/p-23710176/>.

During the 19th century, Xanthi was economically prosperous due to the richness of the cultivation and distribution of tobacco and its products, but also due to its advantageous position between major trading roads. The city's economic growth was accompanied by a significant cultural and artistic development—a legacy that has been kept alive through the centuries, and is still visible today in the form of various cultural events and associations.

Nowadays, Xanthi is a modern cosmopolitan and multicultural city that is rich in history, traditions and customs, and is the cultural center of the area. Xanthi has a large population of Turkish-speaking Muslims dating back to the Ottoman period. In this multicultural environment, the different ethnic groups lived and worked together, contributing to the social and cultural mixture of Xanthi. The city of Xanthi has been characterized as *“the city of the thousand colors”* [34]. Xanthi's old town still preserves its traditional characteristics. The people and authorities of Xanthi have succeeded in maintaining its color and physiognomies just as they were at the time of its creation. Its rich architecture presents the opportunity to go back in time and at the same time understand the local way of living. Its cobble streets and the old traditional houses not only have escaped from modern construction trends, but they are also renovated and preserved by the locals [35].

Xanthi is famous for its annual spring carnival, which is one of the most popular carnivals in Greece and has an important role in the city's economy. Over 60 cultural associations participate in the carnival program. The festivities that take place include concerts, stay plays, dance events, exhibitions, a cycling race, street games, and re-enactments of old customs. It is very important that 60 cultural organizations of Xanthi were investigated trying to find the interrelation between them and the local authority. Finding synergies and common targets and plans was also one of the goals of the research.

Also, equally famous is Xanthi's Old town festival (in early September). Furthermore, the *“Manos Hadzidakis”* festival (Figures 3 and 4), in honor of the Major Greek composer who was born and lived the first years of his life in the city, attracts worldwide attention. *“I was born on 23rd October in 1925, in the old town of Xanthi, not in the other one, which was built later by the internally displaced migrants. The coexistence [of people] in that time, a copy of the Belle Epoque with authentic Turkish minarets, gave color and content to a kaleidoscopic society from all corners of Greek lands that happened to find itself living in a borderland . . . ”* [36]. So wrote the famous composer Manos Hatzidakis (1925–1994) in his autobiography, describing the city in which he was born and lived the first seven years of his life.



Figure 3. Manos Hatzidakis Festival at the Town Hall square in Xanthi
https://www.cityofxanthi.gr/episkeptes/εορταστικοί-θεςμοί/4123-polis_oneiron.



Figure 4. Manos Hatzidakis Festival at the Town Hall square in Xanthi
https://www.cityofxanthi.gr/episkeptes/εορταστικοί-θεςμοί/4123-polis_oneiron.

2.2. The UNESCO Statistical Measurement Model

The plan used in the analysis is a “flexible” research project that was developed during the collection of the data. It began as a project based on qualitative data, and in the process, it incorporated the collection of quantitative data as well. Starting from the local level, the research developed in multiple, interrelated fields. According to the survey, “The UNESCO Culture for Development Indicators (CDIS)” is a comprehensive set of 22 quantitative and qualitative indicators grouped under seven dimensions set out to illuminate the role of culture in development, particularly in low to middle-income countries. The CDIS aims to provide an evidence-based and informed approach to the introduction of culture into national and international development strategies as well as to cultural policy formulation” [37].

A framework for evaluating the significance of cultural policy of the municipality of Xanthi and an assessment of its impact on local development is provided. This is the first time that this type of research was conducted in a Greek municipality, and it was based on the application of the UNESCO

statistical measurement model. The UNESCO CDIS framework of analysis results in the choice of seven interconnected policy dimensions with particular relevance and explanatory power in addressing the central question of how culture contributes to growth and helps individuals and communities expand their life choices and adapt to change (Table 1).

Table 1. UNESCO statistical measurement model (2009). https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/digital-library/CDIS%20Methodology%20Manual_0.pdf.13.

7 Dimensions	That Measure the ...
Economy	... contribution of the cultural sector to economic development and its potential for growth
Education	... priority given by public authorities to support an education system that offers the broadest possible coverage, values diversity, and openness, and promotes a competitive and creative class
Governance	... public commitment toward creating the conditions to structure the cultural sector, strengthen cultural processes, and promote a diversity of views and voice
Social participation	... way in which cultural practices, values, and attitudes may orient behavior, inclusion, cooperation, and individual empowerment
Gender equality	... objective and subjective gaps between women and men in their opportunities and rights to take part in cultural, social, economic and political life Communication ... conditions of access, enjoyment of ... diverse content and freedom of expression
Communication	... public commitment to set up and enforce standards, policies, and measures to protect and promote heritage, while ensuring access and sustainability
Heritage	... public commitment to set up and enforce standards, policies, and measures to protect and promote heritage, while ensuring access and sustainability

Each dimension in Table 1 is comprised of at least one indicator, while some of them may include as many as five indicators. Following the analytical framework in the analysis of the municipality of Xanthi, a basis of 22 qualitative indicators and a tool for measuring the seven dimensions of cultural development in one place were developed [38].

In order to measure these indicators, the methods used to conduct empirical research drew primary and secondary data. Therefore, two kinds of research were conducted:

- **the primary one**, which includes the two methods of collecting primary data, i.e., questionnaire research and in-depth interview research, as it was chosen to use a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire was structured in a way that included participant's cultural actions. The stakeholders, the elected representatives, the cultural managers, the representatives of cultural associations and institutions, various professionals, and others were interviewed in detail. The interviewer's contribution was essential in the collection of qualitative data.
- **the secondary**, which is collecting data from the municipality of Xanthi. The sources for such data collection were on the internet, on websites describing best municipal cultural policy practices. At the same time, through the literature review, the structured knowledge for research issues, which is mentioned in books, magazines, and in the press has been examined. Data was also collected in Brussels for a week (20–27 January 2013) from the library of the European Parliament, other EU institutions, university libraries, as well as from the archives of cultural operators, which was an area of great importance for the purpose of the survey.

As far as the primary research is concerned, 200 questionnaires were structured and distributed in an equal proportion between the following categories: sex, age group, residence, economic status, professional status, and marital status. The questionnaires that cover a wide spectrum of the inhabitants (belonging to different social groups) of the region were distributed over a period of three months:

from August to October 2013. After the completion of the procedure, the questionnaires were collected, checked, counted, and classified.

In order to conduct the research, SPSS (20.0 Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used for both the descriptive and the quantitative statistical analysis. The differences were studied among respondents and citizens based on their origin, professional and economic status, and level of education, and were then correlated to several variables in order to assess the knowledge, participation, attitudes, and opinions about the cultural policy of Xanthi.

It should be noted that the dimensions of UNESCO may not cover the full range of our research area. This is because the cultural product escapes categorization and limitations.

3. Results

Xanthi has a long tradition of cultural activities that take place with the cooperation of several sectors: the municipality; the administrative region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace; cultural institutions (Folklore and Historical Museum of Xanthi, Ecclesiastical Museum Metropolis of Xanthi, Municipal Gallery of Xanthi, Museum of Natural History, Foundation of Thracian Art and Tradition, Museum of the History of the Greek Costume, Tobacco Museum, Manos Hadzidakis House, Balkan Art Gallery, etc.); over 60 cultural associations; and the local society. This is another element that makes this region a privileged study area, as preliminary research revealed that cultural operators in adjacent municipalities have not developed such a broad scale of synergies and actions. These were the challenges confronted by the city, years ago when a number of cultural mapping and ‘visioning’ exercises were directed by policymakers and planners in order to ground the specific culture and identity of Xanthi into a new master plan for development.

However, as Europe and especially Greece are undergoing not only an economic, but also a cultural crisis, both of these have contributed to an increase in social instability and economic insecurity [39]. The Greek crisis began on a global basis with broader economic upheavals and led to the country falling under international financial control [40]. This crisis has affected every area of cultural development, as new needs and new challenges have emerged [41].

This study helps to understand and develop an actual, fully integrated cultural policy [42]. According to the results in Xanthi (Figures 5 and 6):

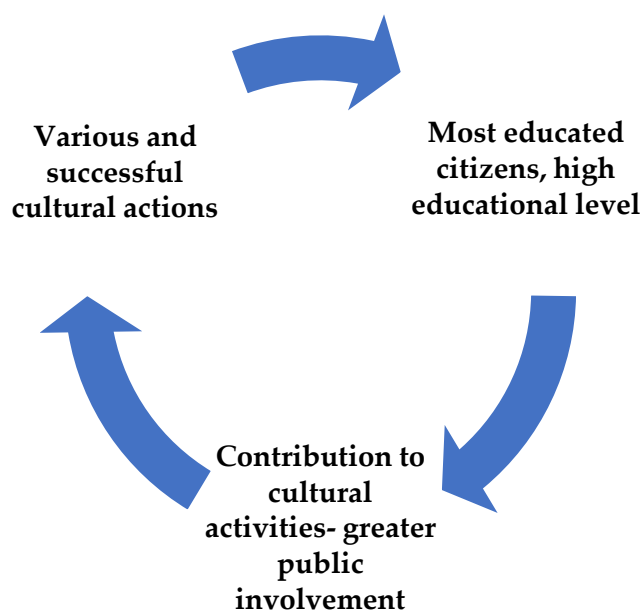


Figure 5. Successful cultural policy: Synergies.

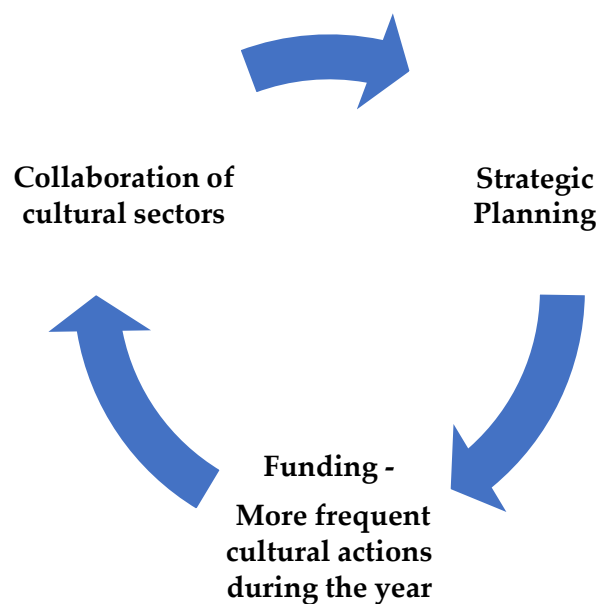


Figure 6. Development procedures.

The municipality of Xanthi, although displaying a multicultural character with different ethnic groups living in its suburban areas, exhibits significant elements of harmonious coexistence [43]. Citizens as a whole respond positively to the development of local policies and constantly demand the best for their town and their interests.

It is true that, “Since culture is intrinsic to society and permeates all aspects of life, it actually constitutes the environment in which development happens. Furthermore, culture creates the conditions which facilitate economic and social progress, and therefore, becomes an enabler of development. For example, it is now well understood that interventions in areas such as health, education, communications, social inclusion and environmental protection will be more effective if they are attuned to the cultural dimensions of the society in which they are being applied” (2009) [44].

Culture’s role in development energies in Xanthi is an ideal example of the above citation. The cultural sector of the city has a direct impact on economic growth and social development. It is a fact that the cultural actors produce revenues, employment, and other economic profits, while at the same time, they create development. In this and several other ways, culture can be taken not just as an enabler, but also as a driver of development procedures.

The study provides a historical, economic, sociocultural, and political contextualization for cultural policy-making in the city of Xanthi. Moreover, it highlights the growing use of cultural policy to achieve the regeneration of cities in Greece.

Still, nowadays, the cultural features of each region are becoming increasingly apparent [45]. The cultural institutions of Xanthi are under direct and indirect pressure to preserve, study, and highlight these particularities on the one hand, but also to be open to other cultural phenomena and units. Besides, art brings together different cultural identities [46]. All these elements have made Xanthi the “cultural capital of Thrace”—a pole of attraction. So, students from other regions of Greece do not leave the city after the completion of their studies and/or inhabitants of other neighboring regions choose to move to Xanthi. This may be one (among other) factors that have contributed to the observed population growth during the last years (from 41,779 people in 1991 to 63,083 people in 2011) (Table 2).

Table 2. Increase of the population of Xanthi (1981–2011) <http://www.statistics.gr/el/2011-census-pop-hous>.

	Population				Variation/Change '81–'91	'91–'01	'01–'11
	1981	1991	2001	2011	%	%	%
Xanthi	38,405	41,779	52,270	63,083	8.79	25.11	20.70
Stavroupolis	3916	3572	2785	2050	−8.78	−22.00	−26.40

According to Table 2, the municipality of Xanthi has recorded a large population increase amounting to 20.70%, while the other municipalities of the prefecture are stagnant or falling. According to the Observatory of the Egnatia Motorway, Xanthi has ranked 16th in the classification of urban centers at country level in 2011, while it ranked 19th in 2001.

As Xanthi is a combination of different cultures, its cultural organizations try to express themselves in these different directions and appeal to a multicultural audience. By organizing special seminars, educational programs, and actions, these organizations aim to encourage the participation of cultural, social, and religious groups without discrimination. It seems that this has not been entirely achieved, and mainly the Greek-speaking Christians participate the most in the cultural activities of the city, while the other social groups show different levels of participation. Table 3 shows the level of participation of three other social groups and the possible reasons for this.

Table 3. Participation of different social groups to the cultural actions in Xanthi.

Turkish Speaking Muslims of the City of Xanthi	Turkish Speaking and Pomaks, Habitants of Mountain Villages	Roma
Large participation	Small participation	Small participation
Proximity to the city where the cultural activities take place	Distance, mountain, bad weather conditions	Proximity to the city
The nature of their work allows participation (traders, shopkeepers, street vendors, private employees, etc.)	Due to the nature of their work they may not always be involved (farmers, ranchers, and others). During the Carnival period, the weather conditions are bad, and during the Old Town Festival, they are farming	Due to the nature of their work, they may not always be involved (farmers, street vendors, etc.)
Better financial situation	Worse financial situation	Worse financial situation
Higher education level	Lower education level	Lower education level
They feel that they are involved	They feel that the cultural activities are strange to them	They feel that the cultural activities are strange to them
They feel excluded from decision-making processes	They feel that they participate in decision-making processes	They feel excluded from decision-making processes
They speak Greek very well	Problems with the Greek language. The Pomaks speak three languages: Pomaks, Turkish, and Greek at a moderate level	They speak very well Greek

Concerning also the cultural diversity of the media, Xanthi has numerous television and radio stations covering all social groups (Christians, Muslim Turks, and Pomaks). Numerous newspapers and magazines are also published (including Turkish press, such as Millet, Eylem, etc.). It has been observed that the members of the Turkish-speaking minority are strongly influenced by the Turkish culture, and the Pomaks by the Pomak one. A possible way to overcome this differentiation in participation would be enhancing osmosis and collaboration between different peoples by using the cultural communication models. According to Holland and Quinn, the cultural models are defined as “*presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily*

to the exclusion of other, alternative models) by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it" (1987, p. 4).

The case study of Xanthi revealed the need for the interdisciplinary recording and documenting, as well as the evaluation and protection of the cultural elements of this border region. One aim of cultural diplomacy is to promote this heritage through the linking of the cultural spaces, the materials, the products, and the infrastructure of Thrace. In this way, cultural routes will be created and integrated into the Thracian, the National, the European, and the World Cultural Routes. All the above fall into the category of quality cultural elements, namely the conservation of culture [47], the revival of customs and traditions, and the promotion of heritage conservation [48]. The design and implementation of targeted cultural diplomacy in Xanthi may lead to significant results, which will contribute to cultural development.

4. Discussion

In the present research article, the focus was on how the implementation of successful cultural policies can enhance local development, using as a case study a multicultural city of northern Greece, the city of Xanthi, Thrace.

The empirical research of the present paper is original and constitutes a case study that investigates the cultural policy of the municipality of Xanthi as a factor in regional and social development [49]. The structure that connects the supranational–central with the local cultural fields, as well as the dialectical relationship between the past and the present in cultural events, characterizes the research. The study took advantage of the relevant good practices implemented elsewhere and especially in European cities such as Bilbao, Glasgow, Montpellier, etc.

In the light of the above aspects, the role of the local authority was studied, focusing on social and regional development. The question under consideration was whether cultural actions in Xanthi create synergies, or whether they are part of an overall development strategy, a vision, in combination with other actions. In particular, it was investigated whether specific cultural policies were able to activate other sectors of the economy, whether they could also integrate other adjacent or neighboring regions beyond the city itself [50], interacting with the peri-urban and rural environments. In addition, territory, as a natural background of human activity, functions as a palimpsest, in the sense that it builds on the discovered footprints of previous cultures. At the same time, space—as immaterial and implied by human actions—functions as an active resource, an activator of cultural development. In this context, it was examined how Xanthi can act as an animator of the development process and not as a passive follower [51].

Undoubtedly, the role of the city of Xanthi in promoting high-quality cultural work and in establishing healthy “cultural products” is essential and, in many cases, the most important one [52,53]. In this way, the creation of incentives through the development of proper strategic planning motivates the cultural institutions of the municipality of Xanthi to invest in important projects within the framework of a territorial vision. So, by inventing corridors that will facilitate investment and offer longevity, the ‘image’ of these institutions will be enhanced [54].

Another important tool in achieving the goal of cultural development is the implementation of a consistent organized state cultural policy, based on the European experience [55–58].

However, a possible change of power at the local level following elections may change or even interrupt the cultural policy of a municipality. So, it is essential that all parties involved in Xanthi comprehend the importance of following a steady and well-designed master plan and thus be motivated to integrate it.

Unfortunately, problems of administration, management, organization and staffing in the public sector affect the cultural policy of the municipality of Xanthi. In essence, the municipality is called upon to mobilize and to face internal and external competition with its own material and human resources.

Therefore, the state can play a role at the local level and intervene whenever necessary to save and promote the cultural heritage, create cultural infrastructures, strengthen and foster institutions,

and promote culture through educational programs [59]. The municipality can disengage from state financial support when the responsibilities and resources are transferred within the context of a successful decentralization [60].

At the same time, the research in Xanthi revealed that economic, institutional, administrative, and organizational problems can only be addressed if municipalities plan cultural activities in a strategic manner, study the internal and external environment, and secure financial resources. The contribution of specialized cultural executives and inspiring managers [61] that are trained and aware of the present situation, who will lead these activities, is of critical importance. In this context, the development of a successful local cultural policy by the municipalities is becoming very important [62], especially now that changes and developments occurring at a fast pace at the international level move toward the local level, and vice versa [63,64].

5. Conclusions

This research paper focused on the role of local authorities in achieving cultural development. In order to investigate the added value of this policy, the present study in the municipality of Xanthi in Thrace was carried out as an attempt to: Study good practices from areas that have already successfully implemented such policies; and formulate, based on this kind of policy, an integrated approach for the cultural development in the region of Thrace. The experience obtained from the research conducted draws interesting conclusions about the potential of the implementation of cultural policy in Greece, especially nowadays under the circumstances of financial instability. In this period, in which cultural changes occur at a national and supranational level, it is necessary to improve the understanding of the effects on the local society, as said effects are dictated by local policies. More specifically:

The cultural development has also as a target the sustainable local development: the attractiveness of the city. Therefore, the municipality can be the meeting place for all efforts to promote social development and progress at the local and the regional level, provided that there is an appropriate institutional framework for the implementation of decentralized cultural projects and similar actions that will lead in turn to corresponding socioeconomic benefits, and could also act as an antidote to the crisis. The role of the mayors is also very important as they organize, draw, and implement the cultural policy of their municipalities. As regards the cultural associations, research in Xanthi revealed that they have an important role to play in responding to and strengthening local authorities' policies. However, their lack of organization does not allow them to develop and promote new actions. Therefore, there is a need for an organized development framework, and the systematic study of their economic, social, political, and cultural supply is essential [65].

In order to achieve successful cultural policy, the European experience needs to be taken into account in order for sustainable development to be promoted and citizens and tourists to be attracted to the city. Applying good practices means learning through the experience of other cities in Greece or abroad. Besides, another important tool in achieving the goal of cultural development is the implementation of a consistent organized state cultural policy, based on the European experience.

As far as the present paper is concerned, it could trigger a fertile and constructive process of reflection on the role of local cultural policy in further achieving social and regional development. The issues raised here can contribute both to scientific research and dialogue, and also highlight the role of the municipalities in their capacity as active cultural assets with distinct cultural identities in the context of a Europe of regions.

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