

# Mass Tourism in West and South-West Halkidiki in the post 1950s

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## 1. Tourists and Sojourners

The history of tourism in Halkidiki is in several respects similar to the development of tourism in other parts of Greece,<sup>1</sup> while in others it has its own unique characteristics. In the early post-WWII period tourism in Halkidiki did not rest on any actual state policies on tourism development. As has been noted for the whole of Greece, tourism constituted a non-calculated activity, while the Greek state had failed to comprehend the socio-cultural transformations that were taking place at the time.<sup>2</sup> According to Angelos Vlachos, whose work provides a historical account of the course of the development of Greek tourism as an institution and of tourism as a conceptual category and multifaceted phenomenon, the emergent tourist institutions articulated the public and private initiative differently, and thus reconceptualised the predominant contradistinctive perception of state interventionism and liberalism.<sup>3</sup>

It was in this general context that in the second half of the 1950s the western and southern coastal villages of Halkidiki received their first tourists.<sup>4</sup> They were almost all

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<sup>1</sup> An interesting workshop on tourism in Greece was held by the Research Group on Mobilities and Tourism in December 2013; see Angelos Vlachos, Panagiotis Zestanakis, Michalis Nikolakakis, Nikolaos Papadogiannis, Alexia-Sophia Papazafeiropoulou, "‘To skoteino antikeimeno’ ton anaptyxiakon mas eroton: I touristiki anaptyxi stin Ellada tin periodo 1945-1974" [‘The Obscure Object of Our Developmental Desires’: Tourist Development in Greece, 1945-1974], *Synchrona Themata*, 125 (2014), 58-61. For an annotated bibliography on tourism research in Greece mainly from an anthropological perspective, indicatively see Vasiliki Galani-Moutafi, *Erevnes gia ton turismo stin Ellada kai tin Kypro. Mia anthropologiki prossegisi* [Research on Tourism in Greece and Cyprus: An Anthropological Approach], Athens: Propompos, 2002; Vasiliki Galani-Moutafi, "Prossengiseis tou tourismou: To epinoimeno kai to ‘afthentiko” [Approaches to Tourism: The Invented and the ‘Authentic’], *Synchrona Themata*, 55 (1995), 28-39.

<sup>2</sup> Vlachos et al., *op.cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> On the issue of the terminology and the differentiation between tourists and summer sojourners, see Eleftheria Deltsou, "Praxes of Tradition and Modernity in a Village in Northern Greece", unpublished PhD thesis, Indi-

permanent Thessaloniki residents, urbanites of middle-class status. One parameter relevant to their social status that played an important role in this first tourist activity was the possession of the rare luxury that enabled transport, a car. While KTEL, the regional bus network, covered the existing road network of Halkidiki, connecting the villages via the mostly dirt roads of the period, the difficulty of transportation made tourism a possibility particularly for those very few who had a car. Since road conditions were at the time rather basic (very few kilometres of asphalt road on the way from Thessaloniki to Halkidiki), the first villages to get summer visitors were those relatively close to Thessaloniki. Epanomi (at the time in the Halkidiki prefecture), Nea Kallikrateia, Nea Moudania, and some of the first villages on the Kassandra and Sithonia peninsulas received the first summer sojourners. At the time, those first tourists constituted sparse family “bullets” amongst locals in the village social-scapes. Informants mentioned that the arrival of those first summer sojourners derived from pre-existing relations that these people had with urban social acquaintances of village origin, who provided them with a social network in the village as to how to find where to rent, whom to socialize with, etc. Back then, but also for more than another decade, available accommodation took place primarily in the houses of the villagers, who used to empty their own bedrooms to rent them to tourists. In the 1960s this trend of summer sojourning started slowly to expand, as a result of the economic development that accompanied the decades after the end of WWII and the adoption of the vacationing practice by more and more people.

The 1960s was the “modernising” decade of Halkidiki that introduced “civilisation”, as several people called it, in the villages. Asphalt roads, however narrow, gradually expanded to most villages, water supply was brought into the houses and by the end of the decade electricity, too. Particularly the construction of asphalt roads constituted part of the process that, as Papazafeiropoulou notes, related the technological and social networks of mobility with the tourist gaze, connecting the urban centres with the archaeological sites and the post-war tourism commodity, the sea.<sup>5</sup> While in Halkidiki at the time no antiquities were considered important enough to be incorporated in the utilisation of the past as part of the modernisation and Europeanisation process Greece was undergoing, the plentifully available post-war commodity of the region was its clear-water seas and its beautiful sandy beaches.

The introduction of water supply systems in the early 1960s and electricity in the late 1960s in villages gradually enabled the incorporation of technological amenities, most important of which were a running-water toilet, room lighting, the refrigerator and later in the 1970s a water heater, thus facilitating the expansion of summer so-

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ana University, 1995. See also Eleftheria Deltsou, “‘Tourists’, ‘Russian-Pontics’, and ‘Native Greeks’: Identity Politics in a Village in Northern Greece”, *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, 9.2 (2000), 31-51.

<sup>5</sup> Vlachos et al., *op.cit.*, p. 59.

journing as urbanites anticipated their existence. Eventually, by the mid-1970s the preference of urbanites for the rooms to let depended on the required provision of those amenities, an absolute necessity being an in-doors toilet. It was this demand that played a crucial role in the transformation of the existing houses, as until then almost no village house had a toilet, let alone a bathroom, in the house.<sup>6</sup> As in previous decades, in the 1970s again the majority of the summer sojourners were Thessaloniki residents, some with origins from the particular villages, some not, who would come to spend a part or the whole summer in a coastal village.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, more non-Greek tourists came to Halkidiki as well. Those foreign tourists were in their vast majority Germans, followed mostly by Austrian, British, Dutch, French and Italians, the last coming in August driving their campers.

One aspect of the arrival of German tourists in Halkidiki relates to the migration of Greek workers to Germany as guest workers. In several cases the personal relationships that Greeks and Germans developed in Germany were carried over to Greece to the migrants' villages of origin during summer vacation. At the same time, migrants originating from coastal villages also travelled back to their villages, combining in that journey the analytic convergence of a temporary return to the place of origin with the vacation leave from work. That way, as Papadogiannis remarks, the travel practices of the Greek migrants who lived in Germany in the 1960s and the 1970s transcended and combined two mobilities that were considered incommensurable, tourism and migration – emphasising thus even further the conceptual complexities of tourism as a form of movement.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the 1960s and in the first half of the 1970s the first larger hotels and the first privately owned small summer houses, as well as privately-owned villas, were built, usually near – but not in – villages, quite often right on the sea front or very close to it. In some cases the smaller private houses were legally constructed; in other instances, however, they were built, as people described it, “overnight”. These illegal constructions, known as *afthaireta* were most often built on plots that did not have land enough for an official building permit, but always on the basis of state tolerance. Most typical was the case of the outskirts of Nea Kallikrateia, where the whole area was soon to be covered by *afthaireta*.

By the mid-1970s, even for those lower middle-class families who could not yet afford the acquisition of a small summer house, summer vacationing had been established initially as desired and then essential, as more people were able to afford a

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<sup>6</sup> In very few, by now, houses one can still locate the 1mx1m outhouse next to the main building that used to include what was called a “Turkish” toilet.

<sup>7</sup> For a self-referential ethnographic essay on the history of tourism in the coastal village of Nikiti in Sithonia, see Eleftheria Deltsoy, “Second Homes and Tourism in a Greek Village: A Travelogue”, *Ethnologia Europaea*, 37.1/2 (2007), 124-33 (special issue edited by Orvar Löfgren and Regina Bendix).

<sup>8</sup> Vlachos et al., *op.cit.*, p. 60. Cf. John Urry, *Mobilities*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

small scale vacationing expense. The significant expansion of tourism in Halkidiki in the 1970s could be seen overall in the continuously growing number of buildings with rooms to let that were appearing in coastal villages. Concurrently more, small in their majority, summer houses were getting built close to the coast; a landscape transformation that revealed the significant change that was taking place in the local economies with the increasing commoditisation of tourist land, initially only in the case of plots close to the coast and then in the whole area in general.<sup>9</sup>

From the 1970s onwards camping tourism also emerged, significantly less common as free camping and all the more common in the camping sites that started gradually to appear.<sup>10</sup> Free camping was rather rare at the time and never became very popular in Halkidiki with the exception of more or less remote and hard to reach coasts, which kept on attracting Greek and non-Greek tourists alike, who were looking for pristine environments away from middle-class social conventions. As somebody commented on the first appearance of free-camping in the 1970s, “back then there were few [free campers] but conscientious”; unlike present free campers, who “empty their chemical toilets in the sea”.

Free camping became more common in the 1980s and the 1990, and this was when locals and local authorities started reacting to the temporary use of either private or public land for camping, as it was also accompanied in certain areas by nudism, though really few particularly in comparison with the Greek islands. The rejection of nudism was often argued by locals on the basis of the area’s vicinity with the Holy Mountain, supporting that nudism was utterly incompatible with and offensive to the whole of Halkidiki as well, as all its lands are intricately and inexorably related to Athos. Parallel to the religious dimension of the justification, there was also another underlying expectation; that all those free campers would actually stay either in the camping sites that had been by the time organised or they would rent rooms, both options to the benefit of the local economy.

In the meantime, another factor played an important role in the development of tourism in Halkidiki. “Traditional” village architecture became entangled with the materialisation of national identity and the increasing value of an idealised rural past, simultaneously constituting itself as tourist commodity. As manifested in the architecture of old villages whose form had remained relatively unaltered in the second half of the twentieth century, rurality and traditionality, were officially instituted as valued national

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<sup>9</sup> This phenomenon of selling small pieces of coastal land for summer houses was associated with a new consuming culture in the villages (and in Greece in general) and was meant primarily for the purchase of a pickup car. In a rather self-ironical fashion people in Nikiti described it with the following rhyme: “Ena strema sto sfyri ena Datsun stin avli”, which translates as “A quarter of an acre under the hammer, get a Datsun in your front yard”; Deltsoy, “Praxes of Tradition”, p. 208.

<sup>10</sup> On the emergence of campsites in late 1950s Sweden, see Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, p. 129.

cultural heritage by being designated as “historic” or “traditional” loci/sites.<sup>11</sup> In specific, two mountain villages, Palaiokastros on Cholomondas and Parthenon on Mount Dragountelis in Sithonia, were officially designated in 1978 as “traditional settlements”,<sup>12</sup> whereas Arnaia<sup>13</sup> on Mount Cholomondas and Nikiti on coastal Sithonia<sup>14</sup> were designated in the 1980s as historic loci/sites. Even though Athytos in Kassandra alongside with many other villages have not so far acquired an overall official status either as “historic” or “traditional”, in tourist and other public discourses they are presented just so, as they are seen to incorporate not the formality but the essence of rural traditional-ity. It was in this context that sometime around the 1980s people started buying and restoring old houses. The abandoned old village of Parthenon over Neos Marmaras and Nikiti’s old village that since the 1970s had been also going through a process of abandonment, as well as other similar sites got a new, different from the old, “life” in the hands of bourgeois urbanites, mostly German and Greek.<sup>15</sup>

By the 1980s and 1990s tourism had become predominant in all aspects of life in coastal villages throughout Halkidiki; in the summer in the full speed tourist practices and economy, and in winter in the closed hotels, houses and shops that expected late spring to get a life again. Thus, in terms of the built environment it was not only impossible for anyone to miss the impact of tourism anymore, but, quite the reverse; in almost all coastal scapes in it was increasingly becoming more difficult to locate another life beyond tourism’s supremacy. Whereas, as mentioned before, the trend had started in the 1970s, in the next two decades the spatial transformation of Halkidiki’s coastal areas into tourist resorts was thorough. Not only rooms to let, but blocks of condominiums and later of small terraced houses were built all over coastal Halkidiki on the basis of the uniquely Greek system of *antiparochi*. This *quid pro quo* system of exchange between local land owners and contractors relied on the common interest of both parties to maximise the building capacity of a plot and, therefore, their profit as well.<sup>16</sup> This practice had been preceded by municipal decisions to expand village plans and thus incorporate lands outside of village boundaries as

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<sup>11</sup> On the discussion of the designation of historic loci/sites, see Eleftheria Deltsou, “O ‘istorikos topos’ ke I simasia tis ‘paradosis’ gia to ethnos-kratos” [The “Historic Locus” and the Meaning of “Tradition” for the Nation-State], *Ethnologia*, 4 (1995), 107-26, and “The Designation of a Historic Locus in Greece as an Exercise of Knowledge and Localism”, in S. Sutton and A. Stroulia (eds), *Archaeology in Situ: Sites, Archaeology, and Communities in Greece*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010, p. 241-66.

<sup>12</sup> Designated “traditional settlements” belong to the more general category “Traditional Buildings and Complexes” and currently fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, Department of Regional Planning and Urban Development. <http://estia.minenv.gr/EXEC>

<sup>13</sup> See the formal designation of Arnea in 1986 in [http://listedmonuments.culture.gr/fek.php?ID\\_FEKYA=4578](http://listedmonuments.culture.gr/fek.php?ID_FEKYA=4578)

<sup>14</sup> See the formal document of the designation of Nikiti’s old village in 1987 in <http://listedmonuments.culture.gr/monument.php?code=16461&v17=>

<sup>15</sup> On the procedure of the abandonment of the old village and its re-evaluation by German and Greek second home dwellers, see Deltsou, “Praxes of Tradition”, pp. 107-20.

<sup>16</sup> Deltsou, “Second Homes and Tourism”, pp. 131-2.

plots into a higher structure factor. At least in one case the rationale for such an action was the prevention of uncontrolled illegal building, Nea Kallikrateia being the example for avoidance. Thus, throughout coastal Halkidiki many condominium and “maisonette”, as they came to be called, buildings were constructed to house the widely accepted dream of summer-vacationing in a privately owned summer residence. This process was exacerbated in the 1990s, particularly when banks facilitated and expanded the granting of loans to the purchase of country houses, cars, not to mention consumer and vacationing loans.

Naturally, it was not just the built environment that changed the coastal village scapes in Halkidiki, but also all else that accompanies tourism; taverns and fast food restaurants, grocery stores and super markets, cafés and pastry shops, bars, discos, night clubs, and, what in the new millennium became from a trend into a generalised and widely established practice, beach bars – all had their spatial, social, and cultural counterpart. In the meantime, the nationality of foreign tourists had also changed and expanded. Package and all other forms of national and international tourism that covered all budgets – from exclusive boutique hotels to state supported “social tourism” in mass tourism hotels – brought more and more visitors to Halkidiki. After the 1990s the arrival of the first “East European” tourists from the former socialist countries marked a new phase in Halkidiki’s tourism. Some years later the integration of several of those former socialist countries in the European Union facilitated travel to Greece as a European member state. Thus the number of tourists particularly from the Balkans increased, as they could make the trip relatively inexpensive and affordable.

Since year 2000 the number of tourists from Eastern Europe and particularly Russia has possibly overcome those from the old “West”. Despite, however, this being a new and expanding market for tourism in Halkidiki, locals are not always happy about its existence. Their dissatisfaction derives from the lower European status tourists from the former socialist countries are attributed, which is seen to be reflected onto their lifestyle and, most importantly, their consuming practices. It is not insignificant, however, that even the really wealthy “Easterners”, who are in their majority Russians, some Bulgarians and even fewer Romanians, are not perceived differently.<sup>17</sup> The more recent arrival of a wide number of Serbians is perceived by several as an almost undesired form of tourism, as they appear to be in their majority the poorest of all others. It is thus considered that they do not really contribute to the tourist economy, as they look for really cheap accommodation and limit all other consuming practices to a minimum. This stance compares to the former dominant state – and not only – rhetoric on

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<sup>17</sup> On the issue of the obscurity and the ambiguity of the concepts tourist, European, Easterner and the permeability or impermeability of the relevant identities, see Deltsoy, “‘Tourists,’ ‘Russian-Pontics,’ and ‘Native Greeks’”, pp. 31-51, and “Greece, the Balkans and Europe in Anthropology”, in V. Nitsiakos, I. Manos, G. Agelopoulos, A. Angelidou & V. Dalkavoukis (eds), *Balkan Border Crossings: Second Annual of the Konitsa Summer School*, Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2011, pp. 45-61.

attracting “quality tourism”. In older times, this rejected backpack tourists, whom people sometimes used to describe as ‘vromiarides ftochotouristes’ (‘dirty poor tourists’), despite their West European origin. In this case, even though it is not backpacking and it is mostly, but not exclusively, family tourism that comes from former socialist countries, poverty is associated with the status of an “Easterner” to provide an almost inscribed lower and thus undesired form of tourism. At the same it is not unusual to hear locals criticise this stance, particularly on the basis of the recent crisis, which is considered to have affected tourism as well, a fact that does not allow anyone, as some locals remarked, to be “selective”, in all senses of the term.

In the meantime, since the 1990s European Union programmes together with state institutions and other agencies promoted the spread of alternative kinds of tourism; agrotourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism have been since then supported as alternatives to mass tourism, as these enable a year round and less resource-demanding touristic development.<sup>18</sup> In Halkidiki, just like in other places throughout Greece, ecotourism came mostly to be identified with mountain tourism, enabling the touristic development of areas that had remained out of tourism’s scope until then. Eco-, agri- and cultural tourism’s emphasis on nature, rurality and “traditionality” practically supported the reconstruction of older, “local” architectural village forms, the promotion of local history, and the introduction of more or less serious educational programmes on the biodiversity of local regions and the need to protect local species. All these always combine with a key aspect of alternative tourism, the appreciation of nature and culture through particular forms of entertainment, whether culinary or sports. In mountainous Halkidiki, alternative tourism developed as a trend building on and reinforcing pre-existing commodifications of nature and culture.

## **2. The Western Finger of the Halkidiki Trident: Kassandra, the “First Leg”**

In this ethnographic and historical account a presentation of tourism in Kassandra – the first finger and the most developed region of Halkidiki in terms of tourism – serves as a point of reference for the main foci of the research: a) Camping sites and a summer housing estate in Sithonia; and b) Mountain tourism in Halkidiki, as special, but not

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<sup>18</sup> Eleftheria Deltsoy, “I oikotouristikí anaptýxi kai o prosdiorismos tis fysis kai tis paradosis: paradeigmata apo ti voreio Ellada” [Eco-Touristic Development and the Designation of Nature and Tradition: Case-Studies in Northern Greece”, V. Nitsiakos & Ch. Kasimis (eds), *O oreinos choros tis Valkanikis. Syngrotisi kai metaschimatismoi* [The Mountain Space in the Balkans: Construction and Transformation] Athens: Plethron, 2000, pp. 231-48. See also Eleftheria Deltsoy, “Chronos, topos kai nostalgia se anaparastaseis tou enallaktikou tourismou” [Time, space and nostalgia in representations of alternative forms of tourism], in “*I oikonomia ke I koinonia mprosta stis nees proklisis tou pangosmiou agrototrofikou systimatos*” [“Economy and Society Facing the New Challenges of the Global Agrofood System”], Electronic publication of articles based on the papers of the 9<sup>th</sup> conference of ETAGRO (Greek Association of Agricultural Economists), 2007.

unique, forms of tourism utopias. The history of tourism in Kassandra shares the general trends of coastal tourism described above for south-west and central Halkidiki overall, with the particularity that it was the first part of Halkidiki to actively take on tourism in general, and mass tourism specifically on a large scale. It is quite indicative that whereas in Sithonia of the early 1980s very few organised tourist services (such as private tourist offices, car rentals, etc.) existed, in Kassandra's coastal villages these were already abundant. Websites<sup>19</sup> present the fact that Kassandra is the most touristic part of Halkidiki as an attraction in itself together with its endless sandy beaches, its crystal clear waters, the wooded hills, and the picturesque villages that draw Greek and foreign tourists. Its numerous historical and cultural sites – like a medieval tower and a castle, a traditional settlement, ancient ruins (an Ammon Zeus shrine, and ruins of four ancient cities from the eighth-sixth century BC period of ancient Greek city-states' colonisation) – hardly acquire equal importance next to its natural beauties and its tourist facilities. Indicative of the perspective, is the following quote from a site:

In the region you will find all that you may need during the day, but also at night. In daytime you can do sea sports, while at night the famous bars and clubs of the region expect you.<sup>20</sup>

Tourism took off in Kassandra roughly in the late 1960s–mid 1970s with road improvements that facilitated the arrival of tourists and the construction of several large tourist complexes along the coast line. An important part of this construction that affected the development of tourism was the replacement of the old pontoon<sup>21</sup> over the canal in Nea Potidaia that linked the Thermaikos Gulf to the Toronaios Gulf with a proper bridge in 1970. Before that, as some ladies who back in the early 1950s habitually spent their summer vacation with their parents in Kassandra explained, they used to cross the canal on some kind of a raft, a fact that gave great joy to the children. Characteristically, Pallini Beach Hotel, one of Kassandra's classic old hotels, was built in 1972 in Kallithea, a village which has become the most popular destination ever since the advent of package tourism in the 1970s. Since then the number of hotels increased dramatically throughout Kassandra, as did the number of apartments and rooms to let, package tourism being one of its most significant provider of clients, but not the most important. A British package tourism web site describes tourism in Kassandra as follows:

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, <http://www.campsite.gr/campsite/index.php/2013-02-16-10-47-01> and [http://www.campinggreece.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=61%3Akassandra-and-sithonia&catid=36%3Aregion-a&Itemid=34&lang=en](http://www.campinggreece.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=61%3Akassandra-and-sithonia&catid=36%3Aregion-a&Itemid=34&lang=en)

<sup>20</sup> In <http://www.campsite.gr/campsite/index.php/2013-02-16-10-47-01>

<sup>21</sup> In <http://kassandra-halkidiki.gr/people-gallery.html> one can see old pictures from Kassandra that also include the old pontoon that was in use before the bridge was built and the first summer sojourners.



As the nearest region to Thessaloniki, the Kassandra peninsula of Halkidiki has been the most heavily developed for tourism. Purpose-built hotels and apartment blocks have swamped once tiny villages, doing wonders for the local Halkidiki economy but little for traditional Greek culture. Restaurants have an American/ Italian bias with steak burgers and pizzas the staple offering. Holidays in Kassandra tend to be restricted to the all-in hotel and beach as there is not a great deal to see if you decide to venture inland, just mile after mile of featureless road with the odd tacky Halkidiki cafe or roadside club to attract the eye.<sup>22</sup>

However, critical the above words may sound, they are quite telling in their acknowledgement of the blunt truth accepted, produced and reproduced by both tourists and business people alike. Kassandra does not offer much "culture" as a tourist commodity (there are a few, relatively recently developed, notable exceptions, like the village of Athytos), except for the three classic "S" commodities: sun, sea, and sand.<sup>23</sup>

Together with foreign package tourism that got under way in the 1970s, domestic tourism, initially exclusively by Thessaloniki residents, began to expand as well. Small second home apartments were built in the coastal villages in the second half of the 1970s, together with privately owned villas on the coast line. It was also then that the first large scale summer housing estates were constructed, some of which were luxury summer houses bought by upper middle-class Thessaloniki urbanites, who valued an exclusionary class aesthetic. Those estates are still considered exemplary constructions by many, as they combined to a certain degree the preservation of the natural habitat with the building of houses, albeit on a large scale. One such case currently contains more than 450 summer houses that have been built over a course of more than 30 years, covering 5% of the landscape.<sup>24</sup> Condominium and maisonette buildings also followed soon and gradually covered the villages across the coastline of the peninsula. It is interesting how someone commented on the steady expansion of the built environment on the east coast of Kassandra:

When some years ago one watched Kassandra across from Sithonia, he could see the different villages as they were discernible at night from afar. You could tell by the dark

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.greekisland.co.uk/halkidiki/kassandra.htm>

<sup>23</sup> On the issue, see the classic by now analysis of these and some more related tourist commodities by Malcolm Crick, "Representations of International Tourism in the Social Sciences: Sun, Sex, Sights, Savings, and Servility", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 18 (1989), 307-44.

<sup>24</sup> Consider the presentation of the construction of luxurious summer houses in the formal site of Elani S.A.: "ELANI S.A. was established in 1975, as a developer of luxury holiday residences in Chalkidiki, Greece. Our first project, the FLEGRA settlement in Pallini, Chalkidiki became the layout model for the entire region. 106 luxury holiday residences were developed on an outstanding location, surrounded by Pinewoods forests and right on an exceptional beach. ELANI in Kassandra, Chalkidiki, began in 1980. Until today, 450 holiday residences were developed in just the 5% of a magnificent area while the remaining 95% is devoted to gardens, recreational and sports facilities, establishing 'ELANI' as one of the biggest and most renowned settlements in Chalkidiki. [...] Since 1975, ELANI S.A. builds luxury holiday residences in Chalkidiki for people with good taste and love for life"; <http://beta.homeview.gr/en/users/elani>

slots in between lit areas, which meant that no buildings with electric lighting existed there. This gradually changed and now you see no distance between the villages. It is just a continuous stretch of one tourist village from Nea Fokia down to Pefkohori and beyond. It doesn't stop.

### **3. Sithonia: The “Second Leg” and the Development of Camping Tourism and Camping Sites**

The development of tourism in Sithonia does not differ from that of Kassandra in a chronological sense, but in scale. Sithonia used to – and still does – receive fewer tourists than Kassandra, as well as different types of tourists. If Kassandra has been from the beginning a site of mass tourism and cosmopolitan lifestyle, in comparison Sithonia is seen simultaneously as a less tamed landscape and more family oriented, but at the same time more alternative, not lacking, however, as people assert, in popular attractions. The discourse analyses of Sithonia tourist websites<sup>25</sup> show how the perceptions, constructions and performativities of the touristic commodity and nature combine with the necessary popular attractions that concern entertainment. The following website descriptions are quite telling:

Sithonia is the second peninsula of Halkidiki. On this “leg” you will experience the perfect harmony of mountain and sea, a symphony in green and blue. Pine forests and blue waters in combination with the remote, but also the crowded beaches attract every tourist. [...] Just like in the first leg, in Sithonia as well the visitor can occupy himself<sup>26</sup> with all the summer activities, such as trekking, diving, fishing, mountain bike, water sports, even horse riding in the forests. Nightlife is located mainly in accommodation regions, but there are also many exotic beach bars hidden in magnificent inlets.<sup>27</sup>

And in another case,

Here the scenery and opportunities for seaside recreation are even more appealing than they are in Kassandra [...] in short, the whole peninsula, the landscape is enchanting and the resorts delightful.<sup>28</sup>

It is interesting to see how this particular natural anesthetisation of Sithonia appears in one form of tourist utopia; the various camping sites, all of which emphasise and advertise primarily the beauty of the natural landscape.

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<sup>25</sup> See Rick Hallett & Judith Kaplan-Weinger, *Official Tourism Websites: A Discourse Analysis Perspective*, Bristol: Channel View Publications Ltd., 2010.

<sup>26</sup> I translate using the male personal adjective following the Greek practice that tends to use the male gender for such generic terms.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.campsite.gr/campsite/index.php/2013-02-16-10-47-01>

<sup>28</sup> The camping guide “CampinGreece”,

[http://www.campinggreece.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=61%3Akassandra-and-sithonia&catid=36%3Aregion-a&Itemid=34&lang=en](http://www.campinggreece.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=61%3Akassandra-and-sithonia&catid=36%3Aregion-a&Itemid=34&lang=en)

The number of camping sites is clearly indicative of the type of tourism the different areas of coastal Halkidiki attract and the kind of relation to nature the particular regions demonstrate. According to the list that the Association of Owners of Camping Sites in Halkidiki displays, on the west coast of Halkidiki's main body and closer to Thessaloniki there are two organised camping sites, one in Nea Kallikrateia and another one in Nea Moudania, while another at Ouzouni Beach in Nea Moudania is not registered in the Association. On the Kassandra peninsula four are listed; three on the west coast of the peninsula (Potidaia, Sani and Posidi) and one (Kryopigi) on the east coast. On the way from Kassandra to Sithonia and right on the inner part of Toronaios Gulf one camping is listed in Kalyves. In Sithonia, on the other hand, one finds by far the largest number of organised camping sites in all of Halkidiki; sixteen are officially registered in the owners' association, whereas at least another four are not.<sup>29</sup> On the inner part of the Siggitikos Gulf, the least developed part of Halkidiki, there is none, while there is one in Ouranoupoli and one in Amouliani (the small island across Mount Athos). On the west coast of Halkidiki's main body, again there are another two, one in Komitsa and another one in Lerissos.<sup>30</sup>

As it has become obvious, campsites in Sithonia are by far more numerous than in Kassandra and all over Halkidiki, a fact that to a certain degree reflects the less life-style-centred kind of tourism one finds in Sithonia.<sup>31</sup> One of the first (if not *the* first) campsites in Sithonia, that of Mylos,<sup>32</sup> was established as early as 1964 between Metamorphosis and Nikiti.<sup>33</sup> Camping Lacara was the next to be founded in 1969 by people who were originally customers of Mylos. Those first owners of Lacara were described by an informant as outdoorsy nature-lovers, whose main interest was to build a campsite, where people would sleep under the plane trees in nature. Interestingly, the prefabricated sheds they installed under the plane trees actually constituted a, conscious on the part of the owners, violation of the designation of the particular piece as forest land, a fact that in the name of the protection of the forest prohibited any construction.

The expansion of camping practices from the 1970s, but mostly from the 1980s onwards and not so much by non-Greeks as by Greeks, led to the establishment of several campsites on Sithonia's coastal line. One key factor to this was the environmental restrictions that prohibited those areas from getting densely built, but allowed the small scale constructions of a campsite. Gradually, the campsites started to attract

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<sup>29</sup> A member of the association also referred to the operation of "illegal camping sites".

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.campsite.gr/campsite/images/map/map1920.jpg>

<sup>31</sup> It is not, however, a non-lifestyle centred kind of tourism anymore.

<sup>32</sup> Otherwise known by its first owner's name "at Vidalis".

<sup>33</sup> After years of misoperation, it eventually closed down approximately ten years ago. There are rumours that soon it will reopen but in a totally different form.

different types of clientele.<sup>34</sup> While some, like Lacara, emphasised a more “natural” state of being, by using natural materials like cane and wood and clearly stating the importance of constructing a campsite in an arboreal landscape<sup>35</sup> to offer “nature” and “coolness”, others put emphasis on providing a relaxed vacation lifestyle, targeting less to families and more to youths who looked for day and night entertainment. That is currently the case of Armenistis – or at least how it developed and expanded in the course of the years. While it started as a campsite that hosted a more “alternative” laidback youth culture, clearly signified by the trademark image of the Stone Age caveman with the club, who in the past also used to hold a huge joint, it has become an extremely popular campsite for all those youths who look for night entertainment. At the same time, Armenistis targets a wider clientele by providing daily activities and animation for children and adults alike, as well as by organising artistic, sporting and musical events.<sup>36</sup> While, in comparison, most other campsites like Isa at Tristinika that was established in 1987 are more family oriented, the lack of emphasis on night entertainment is a reason for negative comments by some youths.

Personally, I did not like the camping site at all. [...] Unbelievably many mosquitoes, quiet and family oriented, I would say (for some this is a plus), but expensive, since it has the same prices as Armenistis, which, I think, is far superior. If I went back again it would be just because I liked Tristinika and the bar “Ethnic”. But if one wants to stay on that side of Sithonia, s/he wouldn’t have the options offered on the other side.<sup>37</sup>

In the more “family-oriented” camping sites everyday life is constituted to a large degree as a replica of vacation life in privately owned summer homes.<sup>38</sup> No matter whether in a large tent, a trailer or a camper, for families with or without children modern amenities are an absolute necessity to be carried in a camping site; from beds, tables and chairs to coffee machines and TV sets, all are set on a plastic floor laid in front of the tent or the camper to prevent soil from turning into dust in the “home” environment. Even more, for some this summer home place is delimited by setting around the “yard” a small picket fence, in some cases even flower pots. Someone described this type of vacationing that he, his wife and their son experienced as “relaxed”, “building a shared but separate everyday life with people one may not see during the rest of

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<sup>34</sup> Löfgren (*op.cit.*, p. 130) remarked something similar for Sweden from the 1950s onwards: “After the feverish boom in early motorized tourism, camping sites slowly started to become differentiated. Many aimed for a family clientele, and the restless and party-seeking youths had to go elsewhere. The concept of ‘wild camping’ came to denote not only improvised sites, but also the uncontrollable youth life out there on the margins of the tourist landscape. [...] The media shock stories from the campsites continued on through the 1960s and into the 1980s”.

<sup>35</sup> An informant called it “one of the greenest campsites”. One should notice the ambiguity of the term “green” as it refers both to trees and to an environmental consciousness.

<sup>36</sup> Important part of the events is the Seawave Festival.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.e-camping.gr/component/jreviews/?url=discussions/review/id:5301>

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Löfgren, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

the year, but there you live next to each other with the relaxation and easygoing social-ity that summer time and a camping environment provides”.

A perception of life in a campsite similar to the above was expressed on a blog-post, where the author criticised the possibility that campsite Lacara might at the time change not only owners but target a different camping style and clientele:

The campsite itself is a family camping with kids and families and it is heard that [the owner] intends to upgrade it (which is evident in the last three years, [there are] gradual attempts) and to convert it into a youth campsite, Armenistis style, etc. It was also heard last year that he was going to shut it down and in its place (after uprooting trees and plants, thus destroying the unique scenery and the unique natural beauty that the second leg is famous for) build rooms, pools and small hotels. It [already] started with the entrance filled with rubble and the “serious company”. [...] This was the preferred camping for my parents for more than twenty years, to go there to calm down from the hard pace and the pressure of a difficult year, and probably that will also be destroyed and we should look elsewhere. [...] Pity, however, should the beautiful second leg become like the first, where the slightest free part of green was burned down and filled with hotels, with the result that, beyond the Balkan and the Russian tourists, no Greek dares to set foot [there].<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, the regular, stereotypical representation of Halkidiki's camping sites emphasises and presents camping sites to be a mixture of a fascinating nature that does not exist by itself, but together with all the classic conveniences and the newly-required services:

Every corner is a small paradise. The magic of nature and the purity of the landscape with its fantastic beaches, combined with the green of the pine that embraces the crystal clear sea in absolute harmony, characterise the uniqueness of the peninsula of Halkidiki. The goal of the camping businesses is to provide all the facilities for your convenience, comfort and entertainment, without removing anything from the natural beauty of this paradise. In the well-organised camping sites in Halkidiki, apart from the classic conveniences, you will also find bungalows for accommodation, restaurants, taverns, cafeterias, bars, grocery stores, playgrounds, sports facilities and water sports. Come to spend with us the most beautiful, relaxing and dreamy vacations that will remain unforgettable.<sup>40</sup>

As noted before as well, in this characteristic quote one discerns how camping sites are constructed as places through their physical/material construction, their representations, as well as the directions over how people may, or should, live their everyday vacation time there. While the above presentation reveals perceptions of nature by campsite owners, it becomes obvious that the construction of campsites as “more natural than other more cultural” tourist scapes does not quite promote experiences of

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<sup>39</sup> <http://troktiko.blogspot.gr/2010/06/camping-lacara.html>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.campsite.gr/campsite/index.php/2013-02-16-10-47-01>

“wilderness” nature. On the contrary, as shown earlier, the experiences of nature in these camping sites are quite normative, in the sense that people anticipate the provision of certain modern facilities by camping sites, as they make their choice of a camping site on the basis of the provided amenities, considering those amenities as well as the particular forms of entertainment indispensable from the experience of vacationing in nature.

In this respect the iconography of “nature” in campsite websites is quite telling. In all these websites the photographs portray picturesque landscapes with trees, beaches, the sun, the sea, etc., sometimes including humans as they enjoy “nature” and sometimes not, but also all the cultural imageries that concern the provided accommodation and facilities. The beach is pristine and green or bright blue, but there are also sunbeds with people lying on them, the sand is thick and white, but there are also people in their bathing suits that play beach volley or a simplified version of beach paddle racquet tennis. Such images of nature are accompanied by photographs of the available accommodation and facilities, as well as people involved in all aspects of everyday activities; eating, swimming, sitting in front of the tent, the camper, etc. with friends, but also any available forms of entertainment. These photographs provide a very specific visual substance to the ideal of vacationing in a camp site. Naturally, there are differences in how the “natural” environments of campsites are transformed into – in a sense – “acculturated” ones. In all cases, however, the landscaped sites for tents and campers are combined with pictures of the asphalt roads in the campsite, the provided ready-made tent or natural shading systems, etc., all seeking to provide an attractive image of the provided – and thus necessary– facilities and technological amenities for customers. At the same time, there is always an unintentional inclusion, therefore message, in the pictures; cars are in the majority of the cases parked right next to the tent or the camper, marking their physical presence in the camping site an absolute necessity.

To put it briefly, “nature” in Sithonia’s camping sites constitutes an aesthetic category that is anticipated to become experienced in certain ways when there, and becomes realised as a visible representation in websites. In the websites, the photographs produce an idealised version of living in “nature”, a utopian myth, which inescapably includes, however, elements that signify the absolute necessity and inevitability of “culture”, i.e., modernity. Thus, the website photographs of both “nature” and “facilities” embody the visual worth of already existing market goods, “nature” being a commercial image equal to technological modernity.