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Doing History at the Edge of the Map: The “Digital Thrace” Research Project

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Abstract: “Digital Thrace: Mapping the History and Culture to Enhance the Tourist Economy” is a three-year (2021–2023) research project conducted by the Democritus University of Thrace. “Thrace,” a geographical rather than a regional or political designation, is divided into three nation-states (Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey). Despite historical nationalist conflicts and ethnic stereotypes, Thrace maintains its multicultural character. This article shows that the Digital Thrace Project not only generates research but also transforms it into knowledge and cultural experiences for visitors. It bridges the gap between academic historiography and cultural studies on one side and the public space on the other. This multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary project employs cutting-edge technologies to provide two main components to its users: a digital platform primarily aimed at researchers and educators, and a digital tour application for the general public. Special attention is devoted to the project’s pedagogical section. Based on the principles and methodologies of intercultural and democratic education, over 30 educational projects have been designed for primary and secondary school classes. These projects aim to engage students in exploring not only the history and culture of their own communities but also those of the others.

Keywords: Thrace; interdisciplinarity; interculturalism; digitality; history education

1 Introduction

“Digital Thrace: Mapping the History and Culture to Enhance the Tourist Economy” is a three-year (2021–2023)

This paper has been composed as part of the research project “Digital Thrace: Mapping the History and the Culture of the Region with a View to Improving the Tourism Product,” which is funded by European and Greek resources (action “Supporting Regional Excellence,” program ‘Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship and Innovation,’ ops (MIS) 5047264). See <https://www.he.duth.gr/digthrace/en>.

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research project conducted by the Democritus University of Thrace. Thrace, situated in the southeastern Balkans, today spans across three modern states: Greece, Turkey, and Bulgaria. For thousands of years, Thrace has served as a crossroads of diverse peoples and cultures, resulting in a rich multicultural mosaic that persists despite historical conflicts and ethnic cleansing policies. The project employs cutting edge technologies for desk research and on-site exploration, contributing to the fields of area and intercultural studies. It operates on two main fronts: it (a) generates academic research, and transforms it into knowledge accessible to the public, and (b) fosters an inclusive historical education environment that encourages students with different ethnic backgrounds to explore their own history and culture as well as those of the others. The article is structured into three parts. The first and second sections delve into Thrace’s historical and cultural heritage, tracing its geopolitical evolution from antiquity to the present and examining its perceptions in the collective consciousness. The third section analyzes the project’s epistemological and technological aspects, addresses challenges encountered by researchers in the region, and outlines the pedagogical principles and methodologies of educational scenarios. Finally, the article discusses the project’s potential role in a region marked by profound ethno-cultural diversities, particularly at a time when it serves as a pivotal point on the boundaries between East and West.

2 The Historic and Cultural Heritage of Thrace

“Thrace” used to be a geographical rather than a regional or political designation. Located in the southeastern part of the Balkan Peninsula, Thrace is a region demarcated by the physical boundaries of the Rhodope Mountain range to the north, the river Nestos to the southwest, the Black Sea coastline to the east, the Sea of Marmara and the straits of Dardanelles to the southeast, and the Aegean Sea to the south.

In ancient times, within the Greek imagination, Thrace was regarded as a distant land on the northern fringes of the civilized Greek world. It was an uncharted region where, so

it was thought, the rational thinking of southern Greece encountered the more primitive cultures of the north.¹ Numerous myths and deities, including Dionysus and Orpheus, had their origins in Thrace and later found their way into Greece, holding a significant place in its religious beliefs. Both the name ‘Evros,’ which is the primary river of the region, and ‘Europe’ are linked through their shared Indo-European origin, as suggested by mythical accounts and linguistic research.² References to Thrace can also be identified in the Homeric epics.³ In ancient times, this territory was inhabited by formidable tribes characterized by mystical cultures and rituals that revolved around the veneration of horses.⁴ It was successively conquered by various powers, including the Athenians, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans.

The transfer of the capital city of the Roman Empire from Rome to Byzantium and the establishment of Constantinople radically improved Thrace’s position within the empire. It now became the terrestrial courtyard of Constantinople and the agricultural supplier for its ever-growing population. Many cities and fortresses were built, and critical battles took place against various so-called “barbaric invaders” who raided from the north and the west. The Crusaders crossed and occupied Thrace before it fell under the control of the Ottomans, a century before the final fall of Constantinople.⁵

The Ottomans granted Thrace a significant role in their empire when they moved their capital from Bursa to Adrianople/Edirne in the 1360s and to Constantinople/Istanbul⁶ in 1453 after conquering the European side. Over five centuries, many migration flows occurred and new

ethnic groups were settled in Thrace, such as the Sephardic Jews persecuted in Spain in the 1490s.⁷

The Thracian territory remained undivided until the beginning of the twentieth century. The emergence of nationalist movements in the Balkans, the rivalry between Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and the Ottoman Empire, and the enforcement of ethnic and religious groups to choose and declare national identities introduced Thrace to a decade filled with bloody wars among the Balkan peoples, with the interference of the opposing Great Powers (Great Britain, France, Germany, and Austria).⁸ These wars included the two Balkan Wars (1912–3), the First World War (1914–8, East front, the battle of Gallipoli), and the War between Greece and Turkey (1919–22), also known as the ‘Asia Minor War’ by the Greeks or the ‘War of Independence’ by the Turks.⁹

The Lausanne Treaty, signed in 1923, ended this tragic period and largely established the current borders of the neighboring countries.¹⁰ Thrace was divided and distributed among three states: Turkey (the eastern part of the region), Bulgaria (the north), and Greece (the west-south). In the new political geography of the Greek state, Thrace found itself at the northeast edge, in close proximity to its ‘hateful enemies,’ the Bulgarians and the Turks. The disruption of almost all communication and trade with the East (especially Istanbul) for a long time led to isolation, poverty, and underdevelopment of the Greek part of Thrace. For the southern Greeks, Thrace came to be seen as a kind of domestic land of exile – a place where ideologically opposed public servants and state officers were often transferred.

During the Lausanne negotiations in 1923, Greek and Turkish diplomats reached an agreement to ‘exchange’ the Greek and Turkish populations living in each other’s countries. The justification for this peculiar convention was rooted in the belief that, after enduring so much conflict and animosity, it would be impossible for these communities to coexist. Additionally, it was believed that lasting peace and security could only be guaranteed if both countries achieved

1 On Thrace and Thracians see Julia Valeva, Emil Nankov, and Denver Graninger, eds., *A Companion to Ancient Thrace* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).

2 Vladimir Ivanov Georgiev, *Introduction to the History of the Indo-European Languages* (Sophia: Publishing House of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1981).

3 Homer, *Odyssey*, 6.196, 201, 209; 9.197–212; *Iliad*, 2. 594–600, 844–50; 3. 130–40; 7.6–11; 10.433–511; 11.221–63; 20.484–9).

4 Vayos Liapis, “The Thracian Cult of Rhesus and the Heros Equitans,” *Kernos* 24 (2011): 95–104. <https://doi.org/10.4000/kernos.1938>.

5 For a critical overview on the religious encounters of the western with the Orthodox and the Islamic worlds see Dennis J. Dunn, *A History of Orthodox, Islamic, and Western Christian Political Values* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 13–24. On the impact of the crusades on the Byzantine Empire see Jonathan Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) and Christopher Tyerman, *The World of the Crusades: An Illustrated History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

6 The name ‘Istanbul’ applies from the 1930s onwards.

7 Heath Lowry, *The Shaping of Ottoman Balkans 1350–1550. The Conquest, Settlements and Infrastructural Developments of Northern Greece* (Istanbul: Bahçeşehir University Press, 2008), 15–106.

8 Fikret Adanır, “Ethnonationalism, Irredentism, and Empire,” in *The Balkan Wars from Contemporary Perception to Historic Memory*, eds. Katrin Boeckh and Sabine Rutar (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 13–56.

9 Nedim İpek, “The Balkans, War, and Migration,” in *War and Nationalism. The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913, and their Sociopolitical Implications*, eds. M. Hakan Yavuz and Isa Blumi (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2013), 621–64.

10 Jonathan Conlin and Ozavci Ozan, eds., *They All Made Peace – What is Peace? The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the New Imperial Order* (London: Gingko, 2023).

ethnic homogeneity. This marked the first instance in human history when people were forcibly relocated under the authority of an international treaty, sanctioned by the League of Nations, while they were assigned nationality and citizenship based solely on religion, not language, culture, or personal choice.¹¹ Approximately two million people were compelled to leave their homelands and migrate to the other side.¹² However, the population exchange excluded the Greek Orthodox inhabitants of Constantinople as well as the residents of the islands of Imvros and Tenedos on the one side, and the Muslims of Western Thrace on the other.¹³

In the ensuing years, amidst extreme nationalistic fervor and strict state policies promoting national homogenization, both minority groups were reduced to the status of second-class citizens and treated as remnants of a pre-modern era. Especially during periods of bilateral tension, they were identified as the “ethnic other” and viewed as an “enemy from within.” In Greece, changes began to take shape after the 1990s, marked by significant integration initiatives. Nevertheless, the minority continues to be subject to potential exploitation by neighboring countries, and occasional contentious rhetoric persists.¹⁴

Around two hundred thousand of the over one million Greek Orthodox migrants settled in western Thrace. The majority of these people lived for years with the hope of returning to their places of birth. In an effort to preserve their distinct cultural heritage within an exclusionary national context, they established refugee associations, constructed museums, erected memorials, and organized commemorative events. In brief, the second and particularly

the third generation of migrant descendants seem to have inherited the refugee identity of their grandparents and transformed it into a cultural one. Even some of Greece’s most famous football clubs have refugee origins, and a few of their fan groups appear to be sensitive to the contemporary migration crisis.¹⁵

During World War II, the Greek part of Thrace was occupied by the Nazis, who handed control to their allies, the Bulgarians. Over the four-year Bulgarian brutal occupation, the Jews of Thrace were arrested and transported to Nazi extermination camps in the Polish territory, with very few surviving. In their effort to eradicate any non-Bulgarian presence on the occupied territory, Bulgarian nationalists destroyed almost all of the Greek archives.¹⁶

The liberation of Greece in 1944 was followed by a harsh civil war between right-wing and communist forces that lasted from 1946–49, likely the first episode of the Cold War in Europe. After the victory of the pro-Western party in 1949, many individuals from the opposing side were imprisoned, lost their nationality, and were compelled to emigrate to Eastern European countries. Once again, the territory of Thrace was ravaged, and its people were deeply traumatized. Additionally, over one hundred thousand young men and women migrated to capitalist Europe and were employed as a cheap workforce, particularly in West Germany, often referred to as “Gastarbeiter.”¹⁷ After the collapse of the communist regimes during the 1990s, thousands of people with Greek origins left Soviet Union, migrated to Greece, and settled in Thrace.

11 Jay Winter, *The Day the Great War Ended, 24 July 1923. The Civilization of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 95.

12 Onur Yildirim, “The 1923 Population Exchange, Refugees and National Historiographies in Greece and Turkey,” *East European Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2006): 45–70. <https://hdl.handle.net/11511/54771>.

13 Featherstone Kevin et al., *The Last Ottomans. The Muslim Minority 1940–1949* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 11–53. Dimitris Kamouzis, *Greeks in Turkey. Elite Nationalism and Minority Politics in Late Ottoman and Early Republican Istanbul* (New York: Routledge, 2021). Also, Sevasti Troubeta, *Κατασκευάζοντας ταυτότητες για τους Μουσουλμάνους της Θράκης. Το παράδειγμα των Πομάκων και των Τσιγγάνων/Constructing Identities for the Muslims of Thrace. The Cases of Pomaks and Roma* (Athens: Kritiki, 2001).

14 Renee Hirschon, “History’s Long Shadow: The Lausanne Treaty and Contemporary Greco–Turkish Relations,” in *In the Long Shadow of Europe: Greeks and Turks in the Era of Postnationalism*, eds. Othon Anastasakis, Kalypto Nikolaidis and Kerem Oktem (Leiden & Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2009, 73–94). Bruce Clark, *Twice a Stranger: The Mass Expulsions that Forged Modern Greece and Turkey* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

15 Angelos Palikidis, “Tracing Roads of Nostalgia: Can There be a Shared ‘lieu de mémoire’ for the Turkish and Greek Refugees of the Population Exchange of the Lausanne Convention (1923)?,” *MuseumEdu* 6 (2018), 123–46. <http://museumedulab.ece.uth.gr/main/el/node/431> See, also “Τα παιδιά της Ιφιγένειας: Η Σύμβαση της Λοζάνης και η ανταλλαγή πληθυσμών στην ιστοριογραφία, τη μνήμη και την εκπαίδευση”/“The Children of Iphigenia: The Lausanne Convention in Historiography, Memory and Education,” in *Διεπιστημονικές Διαδρομές από το Παρόν στο Παρελθόν. Αφιερωματικός Τόμος για τα 25 χρόνια του Τμήματος Ιστορίας και Εθνολογίας/An Interdisciplinary Journey from Present to Past*, eds. Manolis Varvounis, Georgios Tsigaras, and Elpida Vogli, (Thessaloniki: Stamoulis, 2017), 307–32.

16 Xanthippi Kotzageorgi-Zymari, ed., *Η βουλγαρική κατοχή στην Ανατολική Μακεδονία και Θράκη, 1941–1944/The Bulgarian Occupation in East Macedonia and Thrace, 1941–1944* (Athens: Paratiritis, 2002).

17 Vasilis Argyriou, “Μετανάστευση και μεταναστευτική πολιτική στην Ελλάδα, 1946–1973: η πολιτική οικονομία της εξωτερικής μετανάστευσης εργασίας/Migration and Migration Policy in Greece, 1946–1973: The Political Economy of the Labour Immigration” (PhD diss., University of Crete, 2015), 343–48.

3 Thrace in Contemporary Context: Ethnic Diversity and International Challenges

The western, Greek part of Thrace began to experience significant development after Greece's integration into the European Union and the establishment of university schools and departments in four larger cities (Xanthi, Komotini, Alexandroupolis and Orestiada). However, the recent economic crisis in Greece (2009–2018) sparked considerable in- and out-migration flows. Following the Middle East crisis and the wars in Syria and Afghanistan, the River Evros once again became, and still remains, a passage to Europe for thousands of moving migrants.

Nowadays, from a geostrategic perspective, the ongoing war in Ukraine and the emergence of a new form of a Cold War between the East and the West appear to be reshaping the geopolitical position of Thrace on the world map. There are four key active agents influencing the contemporary political and economic landscape: (1) The realignment of alliance blocs in Southeastern Europe; this shift began following the dissolution of communist regimes in 1990. (2) Turkey's revisionist policy; Turkey has adopted a neo-Ottoman narrative that challenges existing peace treaties, questions the legitimacy of nation-state borders and attempts to establish in the public an imaginative culture of Turkey's imperial past.¹⁸ (3) Militarization of the region; this includes the establishment of an American military base at the port of Alexandroupolis. (4) The emergence of an energy hub; the region is becoming a critical energy hub connecting the Middle East and Western Europe. This shift in energy dynamics was prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the embargo on Russian fossil fuels, and the uncertain policies of the Turkish government. New energy roadmaps are being developed that bypass Turkish territory.¹⁹ Consequently, Thrace's position on the world map has transformed significantly. It has evolved from being a national border between two countries to becoming the boundary between two worlds. From a western perspective, it has become a bastion of the West against the East.

In terms of ethnic composition, in the present day, the Greek part of Thrace is home to three distinct ethno-religious communities, each with its own subdivisions: (1) the Greek-speaking Christian Orthodox Community; (2) Muslims (the majority adhering to Sunni Islam, with smaller number

being Alawites) who are divided into three ethnic groups: (a) those of Turkish origin who speak Turkish, (b) Pomaks, a unique ethnic minority living in mountainous settlements, whose mother tongue is Pomak, and (c) the Roma, who live on the outskirts of the cities and speak Romani;²⁰ and (3) a much smaller group of Armenian communities.

Accordingly, the educational system consists of two types of schools: the typical Greek-speaking schools and the Muslim minority schools, in which the teaching languages are Turkish and Greek. For decades, all research has revealed that the education of minorities in Thrace is underdeveloped; most are unable to complete secondary school, only a few enter university, and even fewer graduate.²¹ As a result, the social and cultural divide between communities remains unbridgeable. Although tolerance and mutual respect have been established towards any community, the society of Thrace is multicultural but not really intercultural.

Despite continuous reforms, the Greek education system remains centralized and inflexible.²² The same national curriculum applies to all schools in the country and to all students and does not take into account their specific characteristics and needs. Similarly, teachers have very little freedom to choose content and teaching methods. Moreover, especially at the upper secondary school level, school projects are “banished” to free time after the end of the formal school program.²³ This means that, in the case of schools in Thrace, teachers who want to differentiate themselves from the general norm and perform their social and pedagogical role effectively have two choices: either to design and implement a hidden curriculum, which will run parallel to

²⁰ Troubeta, *Constructing Identities*, 159–183.

²¹ Kostis Tsioumis, *Η μουσουλμανική μειονότητα της Θράκης, 1950–1960: πολιτικο-διπλωματικές διεργασίες και εκπαιδευτική πολιτική/The Muslim Minority of Thrace, 1950–1960: Political and Diplomatic Processes and Educational Policy* (Thessaloniki: Stamoulis, 2006). About the current situation and the latter efforts on the education of the minority students see Nelly Askouni, *Η εκπαίδευση της μειονότητας στη Θράκη: από το περιθώριο στην προοπτική της κοινωνικής ένταξης/Minority Education in Thrace: From the Margins to the Perspective of Social Integration* (Athens: Alexandria, 2006); Alexandra Androussou et al., “Educational and Political Challenges in Reforming the Education of the Muslim Minority in Thrace, Greece,” *The International Journal of Learning Annual Review* 17, no. 11 (2011): 227–39.

²² The most recently published empirical research is that of the Observatory on History Teaching on Europe; see “General Report on the State of History Teaching in Europe,” Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, 2023, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/observatory-history-teaching/general-report>.

²³ Maria Repoussi, “History Education in Greece,” in *Facing, Mapping, Bridging Diversity. Foundation of a European Discourse on History Education*, eds. Elisabeth Erdmann and Wolfgang Hasberg (Frankfurt am Main: Wochenschau Verlag, 2011), 329–70.

¹⁸ Catharina Raudvere and Petek Onur, eds., *Neo-Ottoman Imaginaries in Contemporary Turkey* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

¹⁹ See a brief description of the current situation in the article of Necati Demircan, “Could the Ukraine Crisis Be the Beginning of the New Cold War?,” International Institute for Global Strategic Analysis website, February 11, 2022, <https://iigsa.org/could-the-ukraine-crisis-be-the-beginning-of-the-new-cold-war>.

the formal curriculum, or to do it in their free time, yet following non-formal education models.

4 The “Digital Thrace Project”

The project, “Digital Thrace: Mapping the History and Culture to Enhance the Tourist Economy,” is situated at the intersection of academic historiography and cultural studies, as well as their practical applications aimed at the general public. In a broader context, it represents a sophisticated form of public history. This project not only generates research but also seamlessly converts it into knowledge and experiences for the region’s visiting public.

“Digital Thrace” was a project meticulously planned and developed by the Laboratory of Technologies, Research, and Applications in Education, which is part of the Department of History and Ethnology. It was developed in collaboration with the +MorPhoSe Linguistics Laboratory within the Department of Greek Philology, both of which are integral components of Democritus University of Thrace. This initiative spanned a three-year period, from 2021 to 2023, and was supported by national and European Union funding sources. It consisted of a diverse interdisciplinary research team composed of 32 experts, including academic professors, Ph.D. candidates, and post-doctoral researchers whose expertise spans various fields, including History, Archaeology, Anthropology, Art History, Museology, Public History, Literature, Linguistics, Archives, Pedagogy, Demography, Computer Science, and Heritage Management.

The project had two main deliverables:

- I. A digital platform with the following key structural features:
- II. Collecting, organizing, and converting historical sources (including texts, pictures, audio, and multimedia) into digital format.

- III. Providing information and disseminating academic papers covering the history and culture of Thrace from the prehistoric era to the present day.
- IV. Cataloging the status and locations of local cultural and historical institutions, including museums, libraries, galleries, and monuments. It was envisioned that this platform would function as a central hub, establishing connections with national and international counterparts, such as the aggregator searchculture.gr and the Europeana international network of aggregators (Figure 1). The platform’s target audience comprises researchers, higher educational institutions, educators, teacher trainers as well as primary and secondary school student groups. This constitutes the scientific and educational component of the project, and it will be accessible free of charge following registration.
- V. A digital tour application, freely available to all, primarily targets the general public and a diverse range of visitors. This app was designed to identify users’ profiles, enabling it to suggest personalized travel itineraries tailored to their specific interests and requirements. It leveraged cutting edge technologies, such as Augmented Reality (AR), with the aim of offering rich and immersive cultural experiences. AR allows the users to recognize the items of interest in their surroundings and to orient themselves towards them, regardless of the items’ distance. Also, using geographic coordinates, it displays the items of interest on a map for direct monitoring of their location and the users’ location (Figure 2). The map follows the users as they navigate through space (e.g. in a city) and informs them of the items that are nearby. Through constant communication with the “Digital Thrace” data server, the application retrieves information adaptable to users’ choices and profiles, thereby providing a personalized experience. This includes displaying photos, videos, and

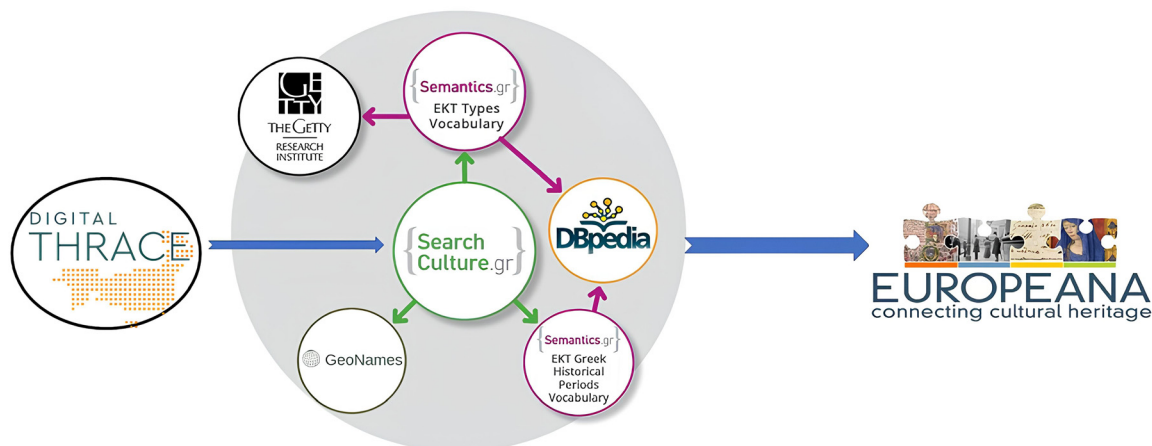


Figure 1: “Digital Thrace” in the semantic web.



Figure 2: “Digital Thrace” mobile app. Basic form of map activation.

information about selected items on the screen of the mobile device. The application serves as a kind of digital personal tour guide, accompanying users on their tourist or educational journey in Thrace (Figure 3).

Moreover, it ensures accessibility for visually impaired users. The participation of a visually impaired researcher in



Figure 3: “Digital Thrace” mobile app. Evidence display; Monument of National Resistance, Komotini.

the program facilitated two key outcomes. Firstly, it enabled practical testing of functional modifications and adjustments to the map, such as color contrast and audio-verbal description. Secondly, it sparked a fruitful discussion wherein various interesting ideas and proposals for the program’s future were put forward, including the

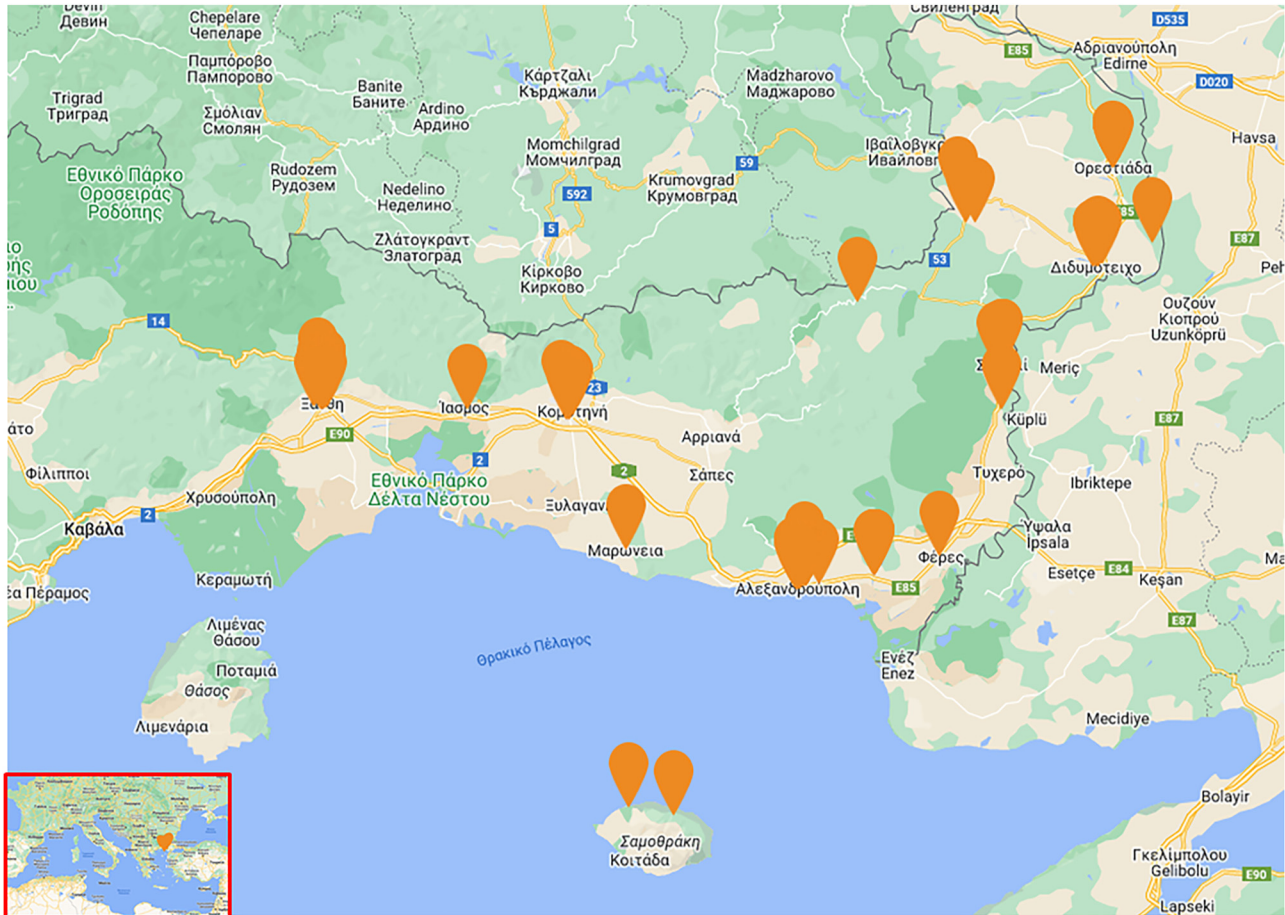


Figure 4: Evidence map display.

implementation of haptic feedback.²⁴ It is important to highlight that the app was designed to support on-site visits, encouraging users to explore the region and have authentic experiences within it.²⁵

²⁴ Konstantinos Papadopoulos et al., “Comparison of Three Orientation and Mobility Aids for Individuals with Blindness: Verbal Description, Audio-Tactile Map and Audio-Haptic Map,” *Assistive Technology* 29, no. 1 (2017): 1–7. See also: Claudia Loitsch et al., “Accessible Maps: Addressing Gaps in Maps for People with Visual and Mobility Impairments,” in *Computers Helping People with Special Needs: 17th International Conference, ICCHP 2020, Lecco, Italy, September 9–11, 2020*, Proceedings, Part II eds. Klaus Miesenberger et al. (Cham: Springer, 2020), 286–96.

²⁵ Alexandros Teneketzis et al., “Έξατομικευμένη πολιτισμική εμπειρία χρήστη με βάση τις θεματικές κατηγορίες και τα ενδιαφέροντα πολιτισμικού τουρισμού: η περίπτωση της Ανατολικής Μακεδονίας και Θράκης/Personalized User’s Cultural Experience Based on the Thematic Categories and the Interests of Cultural Tourism: The Case of East Macedonia and Thrace,” in *Ιστορία, Κοινωνία, Πολιτισμός. Ερευνητικά ζητήματα και προκλήσεις/History, Society and Culture. Research Issues and Challenges*, eds. Ekaterini Markou et al. (Thessaloniki: Stamoulis Editions, 2022), 465–94.

The entire structure of both digital tools, currently developed in Greek and English, was founded on two key methodological concepts: (a) *Evidence*: Each historical object, whether tangible or intangible, is movable or stationary and (b) *Landmark*: Every historical reference on the map represents a digital node containing information and hyperlinks (Figures 4 and 5).

Likewise, one of the project’s most demanding tasks has been to foster a relationship of mutual trust and productive collaboration between the academic staff and the local cultural institutions and museums. This has been particularly challenging due to the economic crisis and the ongoing pandemic, both of which have resulted in severe financial difficulties for these institutions. Many of them are on the brink of closure, relying primarily on small donations and contributions from their own members. It is worth noting that a significant portion of their archives and objects are at risk due to a lack of conservation and preservation measures.

With these challenges in mind, the “Digital Thrace Project” strived to enhance the visibility and accessibility of

Ερυθρόμορφη υδρία

ΣΥΝΤΟΜΗ ΠΕΡΙΓΡΑΦΗ

Κομψή στυκτική ερυθρόμορφη υδρία, που έχει συγκολληθεί από πολλά θραύσματα και διατηρεί το πόμα της. Η επιφάνειά της καλύπτεται με παράσταση που απεικονίζει σκηνή γυναικωνίτη. Χρονολογείται στα 430-420 π.Χ. Χρησίμευσε ως τεφροδόχο αγγείο και βρέθηκε μέσα σε πιθάρι. Το σύνολο αποκαλύφθηκε κατά την άρση αγρού και παραδόθηκε στην Εφορεία από τον ιδιώτη Λέανδρο Καρακατσάνη.

ΠΛΗΡΗΣ ΠΕΡΙΓΡΑΦΗ

Κομψή στυκτική ερυθρόμορφη υδρία, που έχει συγκολληθεί από πολλά θραύσματα και διατηρεί το πόμα της. Η επιφάνειά της καλύπτεται με παράσταση, που απεικονίζει τυπική σκηνή γυναικωνίτη.

Στο κέντρο μία γυναίκα παίζει με τέσσερα κουβάρια από νήμα, ενώ μπροστά και πίσω από το κάθισμά της υπάρχουν δύο καλάθια με μαλλί. Τέσσερις όρθιες γυναίκες, που φορούν χιτώνα και ιμάτιο, συμμετέχουν στη σκηνή. Η μία από αυτές κρατάει κιβωτίδιο, ενώ ένα μεγαλύτερο κιβώτιο βρίσκεται ακουμπισμένο στο δάπεδο ανάμεσα στις δύο γυναίκες στα δεξιά. Στον τοίχο υπάρχουν κρεμασμένα κομμάτια υφάσματος και στεφάνι. Η παράσταση πλαισιώνεται από ταινίες ανθεμιών στο πάνω μέρος και μαιάνδρου στο κάτω, ενώ το κείλος του αγγείου κοσμεύεται με ζώνη ιωνικού κυματίου.

Τεχνοτροπικά η υδρία ανήκει στον κύκλο του Ζωγράφου του Πηλέα, που χρονολογείται στην περίοδο 430-420 π.Χ. Χρησίμευσε ως τεφροδόχο αγγείο και βρέθηκε «ενταφιασμένη» μέσα σε πιθάρι. Το σύνολο αποκαλύφθηκε κατά την άρση αγρού και παραδόθηκε στην Εφορεία από τον ιδιώτη Λέανδρο Καρακατσάνη.

ΠΗΓΕΣ ΤΕΚΜΗΡΙΩΣΗΣ

Λαζαρίδης Π. Χρονικά. Αρχαιολογικό Δελτίο 19, Β2, (1964), σ. 377-8

Ερυθρόμορφη υδρία. Ανάκτηση 15 Νοεμβρίου, 2022, από Οδυσσεύς: http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/4/gh430.jsp?obj_id=6284

ΧΡΟΝΟΛΟΓΙΑ

430-420 π.Χ.

ΕΠΟΧΗ

Ιστορική αρχαιότητα: 1050 πΧ έως 330 μΧ

ΕΙΚΟΝΕΣ ΤΕΚΜΗΡΙΟΥ

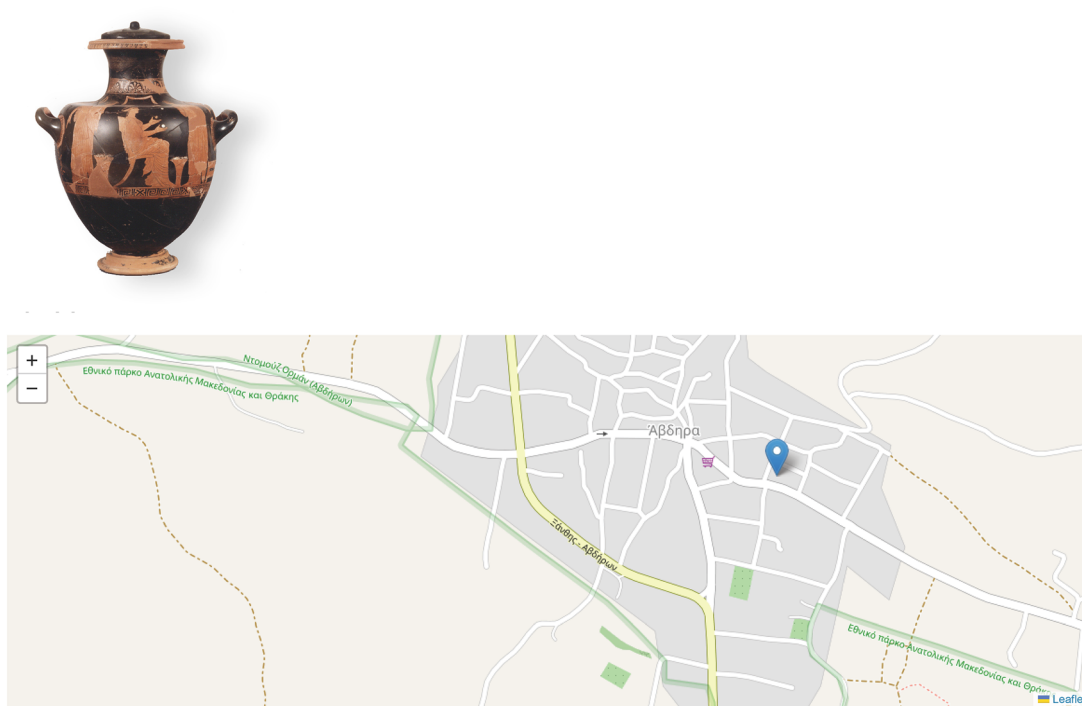


Figure 5: Evidence display form in digital platform; Red-figured hydria decorated with a women's quarters scene, 5th c. B.C., Archaeological Museum of Abdera.

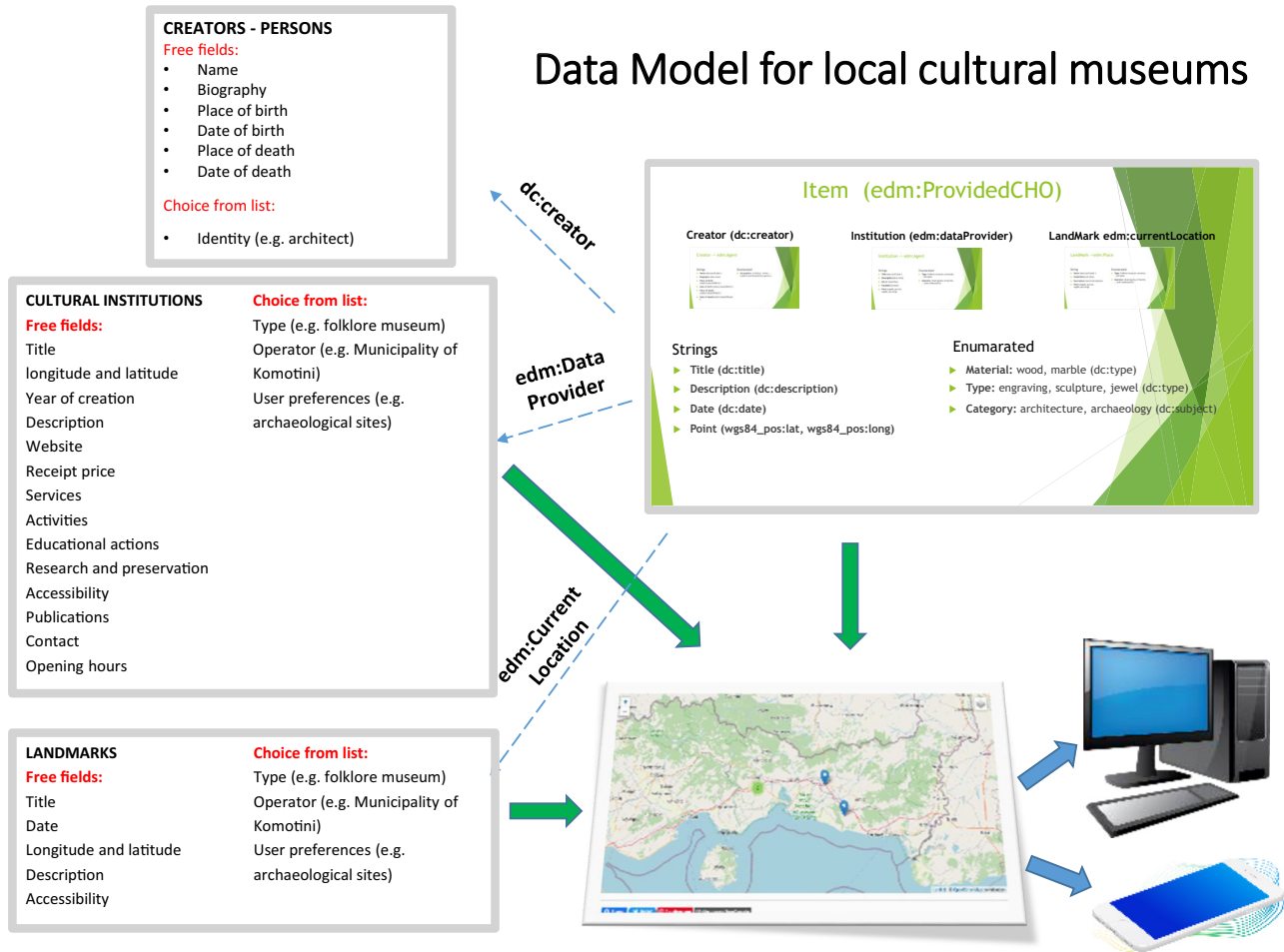


Figure 6: Data Model for local cultural museums.

the local cultural institutions while simultaneously promoting their sustainability through three key approaches: (a) research collaboration and the digitization of selected archives, (b) constructing a data model (Figure 6) and making entries, (c) developing local history education projects catering to all levels of school education, ranging from pre-school to high school classes.

One equally serious issue the Project had to deal with was the quality of research and publications conducted thus far. Mostly, amateur historians and folklorists remain active in the region, primarily collecting, posting, or publishing unprocessed historical and archaeological materials on the internet or in local publications. Meanwhile, more academic studies tend to follow traditional epistemological paths, often adopting ethnocentric and exclusive nation-centered perspectives. In any case, a notable deficiency exists in terms of rigorous academic research.

A research project with an interdisciplinary and multi-cultural nature, such as “Digital Thrace,” necessitates the adoption of modern epistemological principles and

methodologies that transcend conventional positivist considerations and linear historical narratives which have predominated in the region until now. Central to this approach are the concepts of space and time, which were approached through the perspectives suggested by modern historical and cultural studies and research in “area and regional studies.”²⁶ By definition, this is a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field in which various sciences coexist, converse, and interact within a regional reference framework. These new considerations, often referred to as the ‘spatial turn,’ are situated within the broader context of globalization and the decolonization of humanities and

26 See indicatively: Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, “Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization,” *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 1 (2010): 149–170. doi:10.1017/S1740022809990362; Bruce Cumings, “Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies during and after the Cold War,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29, no. 1 (1997): 6–26. DOI: 10.1080/14672715.1997.10409695.

social studies. They diverge from traditional forms of local and regional history, such as studies focused solely on towns, villages, or political-military histories at national, European, and Balkan levels. Instead, our approach alternately zooms in and out, exploring microhistories and macro-histories, while examining the position of the study area within broader geographical units and its interactions with other regions – conceptualized as “translocality,” an emergent theme within world history.²⁷ At the level of historical perception, it is evident that integrating history with social sciences, especially those studying the cultural aspects of human societies, requires overcoming the positivist perception of historical time and embracing complex temporal concepts and frameworks, such as Fernand Braudel’s time levels, and notions of continuity, discontinuity, change, and rupture. Therefore, challenging conventional assumptions about locality and temporality are critical issues of the project, which must be rigorously tested and evaluated in research practice.

On the other hand, in the fields of pedagogy and history education, the project adheres to the principles of constructivism, intercultural education, cooperative and problem-based learning, historical thinking concepts, and the theory of historical consciousness. Despite the suffocating character of the official curriculum, a pedagogical team of academics and schoolteachers has been formed within the framework of the “Digital Thrace Project,” which has so far created more than 30 thematic history folders with lesson plans, scenarios, and historical sources as educational material. This team made use of the scientific-academic knowledge produced by the other teams of experts of the project (historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, linguists, etc.). It selected, formulated, compiled, organized, designed, and evaluated, creating new, much broader contexts for communicating knowledge. Students leave the classroom to conduct field work in local urban communities and research outcomes are shared with those communities in the final phase of the project.

The whole program was based on modern pedagogical theories and follows a teaching methodology that responds to the socio-cultural context of the region. In particular, the educational projects were based on the following axes:

- (a) *Transformative pedagogy*. According to the UNESCO definition, transformative pedagogy is an innovative pedagogical approach that empowers learners to critically examine their contexts, beliefs, values, knowledge,

and attitudes with the goal of developing spaces for self-reflection, appreciation of diversity, and critical thinking. It also emphasizes the social implications of learning and fosters peaceful coexistence, which is why it finds a privileged field of application in modern multicultural environments.²⁸

- (b) The so-called *Pedagogical Content Knowledge Model*, in the context of which academic content knowledge is transformed into pedagogical content knowledge, while at the same time being adapted and responding to the needs and cultural profile of students.²⁹ The emphasis here is not on the transfer of content knowledge but on the critical processing of existing consolidated cognitive and cultural patterns, as well as on the construction of new, more open, complex, and, above all, dynamic mental schemas.
- (c) *Contemporary intercultural pedagogy and education for democratic citizenship and culture*, as described in the statutes of the United Nations and the Council of Europe.³⁰ This is a relatively new trend in global education which emphasizes the constructive role that education can play in heterogeneous societies, as they have been shaped in the past and as they are shaped today, especially after the impact of the migratory flows. Key concepts here are intercultural communication, inclusion, and democratic culture. The latter is considered the most crucial condition for an equal and fruitful coexistence of different groups in modern societies. How are cultures conceptually interlinked with democracy? First of all, cultures are by nature inherently heterogeneous, dynamic, and constantly evolving, while people, consciously or unconsciously, simultaneously inhabit many cultures that interact with each other in many ways, directly or indirectly. Similarly, when we talk about democratic culture, we notably refer to everyday life, imbued with democratic values, attitudes, and, above all, citizens’ social practices.

²⁸ UNESCO, *Transformative Pedagogy for Peace-Building. A Guide for Teachers* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: 2017).

²⁹ Menelaos Tzifopoulos, “Secondary Teachers’ Subject Matter Expertise, Pedagogical Knowledge and Digital Skills: The ‘Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge’ (TPACK) Model,” *International Journal of Scientific Research and Innovative Technology* 7, no. 2 (2020): 21–37.

³⁰ UNESCO, *Global Citizenship Education: Preparing Learners for the Challenges of the 21st Century* (Paris, 2014). Council of Europe, *Quality History Education in the 21st Century – Educating for Diversity and Democracy: Teaching History in Contemporary Europe. Principles and Guidelines* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2018), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/history-education/publications>.

²⁷ Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, “Introduction. ‘Translocality’: An Approach to Connection and Transfer in Area Studies,” in *Translocality the Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*, eds. Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1–21.

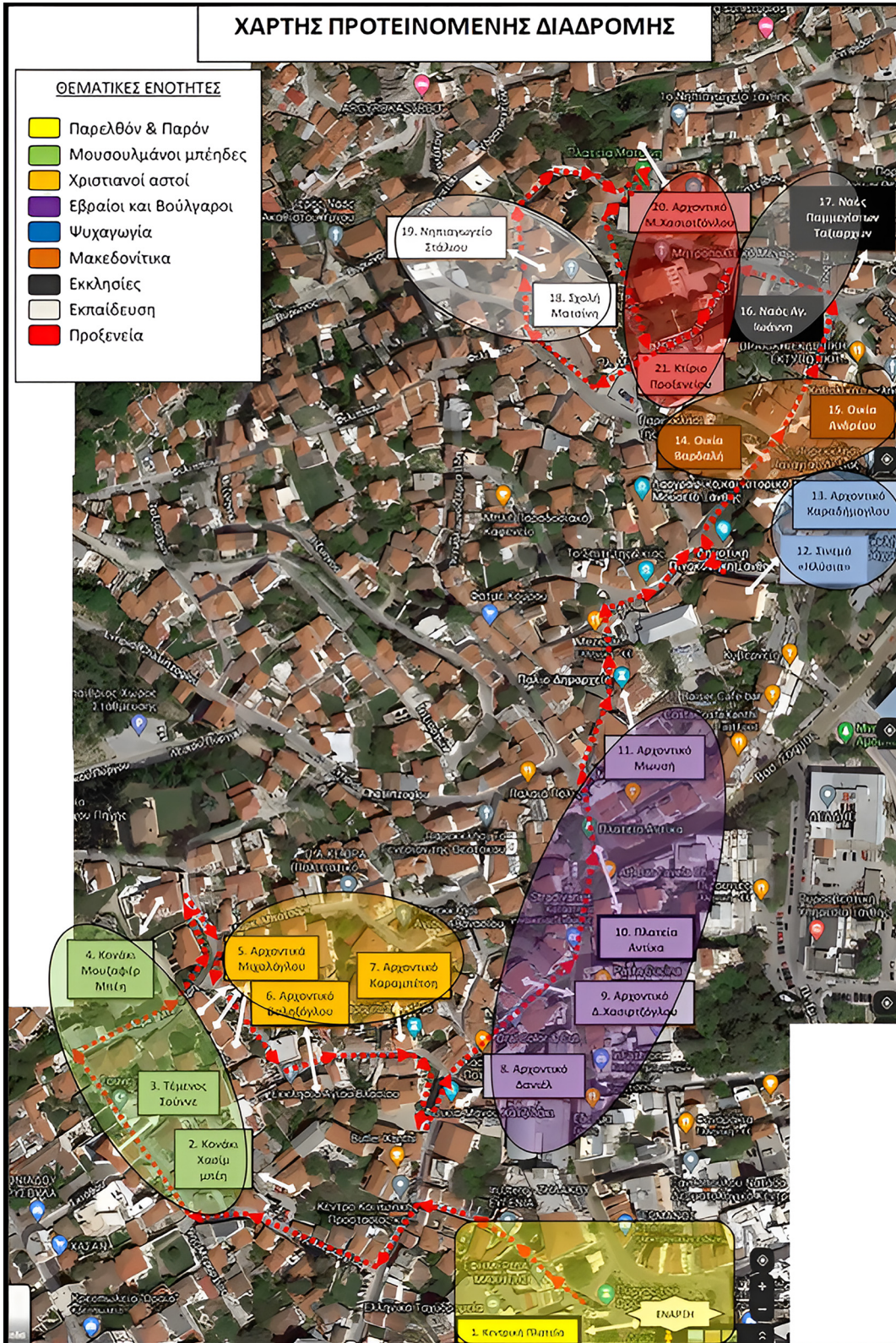


Figure 7: Educational project “A City Within My City, The Old Town of Xanthi”.

In today's heterogeneous, uncertain, and fluid socio-political context, which increases the collective sense of insecurity, generates identity crises, and makes citizens vulnerable to far-right propaganda and fundamentalism, education is becoming the most crucial institution for the cultivation of democratic attitudes and values. In particular the subject of history, precisely because it sheds light on people's lives and perceptions of the past, helps students to understand perspectives different from their own and to critically explain or even deconstruct the misuses of history that flood the public sphere.³¹ Especially in Thrace, teachers and students who are keen to use the proposed projects will be able to understand contemporary reality in historical terms. By knowing the anthropogeography, ethnography, social structures, local economies, objects and monuments of material culture, national and international politics, ideologies, and war conflicts of the historical past, without idealization and silencing, they will be able not only to understand in depth their own cultural identities and those of others, but also to consolidate a sustainable network of inter-cultural and *trans*-cultural relations. In addition, very positive consequences for schools and communities will be achieved through educational activities in local historical and ethnographic museums, visits to archives and acquaintance with ethno-cultural associations.³²

For example, an educational project that brings together almost all of the aforementioned features is titled "A City Within My City: The Old Town of Xanthi," and it is aimed at secondary school students (Figure 7). Children are tasked with locating and visiting 21 landmarks within the city, categorized into nine thematic groups: past and present, Muslim beys,³³ Christian bourgeois, Jews and Bulgarians, entertainment, Macedonians, churches, education, and consulates. They engage with historical sources and identify commonalities among landmarks within each category. Following this, a classroom activity involves a photo exhibition where student groups select the five most significant landmarks based on their criteria and present their choices

to the class for discussion. This particular project not only fosters historical skills and critical thinking but also allows pupils to explore the multicultural heritage of their city, challenge ethno-cultural stereotypes, and appreciate the cultural diversity of others. In a similar vein, numerous other educational programs have been developed, evident from their titles: "From an Ottoman Charity Facility of the 14th Century to an Ecclesiastical Museum Today: The Imaret of Komotini," "Dress: Past and Present – The Clothing Diversity of Thrace," and "Exploring the Ethnological Museum of Thrace: The Transformation of the Tobacco Factory into the Public Library of Alexandroupolis," among others.

5 Conclusions

From a region often forgotten, situated on the borders of the Greek territory, sometimes referred to as a land "lying on the pin of the map edge" in Greek vernacular, Thrace is currently emerging as a pivotal point on the international map, encompassing realms of energy, economics, migration, and military significance. Symbolically, Thrace, once considered a sort of "buffer zone" along the Greek-Turkish border, is increasingly perceived as a political and geographical bastion of the secular West in opposition to the Islamic East and Russian imperialism. The Russo-Ukrainian war, recent escalations in the Middle East, and Turkey's growing proximity to radical Islamic forces collectively create the impression of a world undergoing profound transformations across political, economic, social, ideological, and cultural dimensions. In times of crisis and uncertainty, as is typically the case, individuals and communities often turn to the past to seek answers to the questions posed by the present.

Regrettably, in multicultural and diverse societies like Thrace, the equilibrium among coexisting populations is delicate and susceptible to disruption. As the bloodiest and most inhumane conflicts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have demonstrated, particularly in the Balkan regions with ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse populations, the manipulation and distortion of history play crucial roles. History is instrumentalized in propaganda mechanisms, and narratives are crafted that emphasize the victimization of the national self while demonizing the other. Cultural distinctiveness is regarded as an existential threat to our own national and ethnic identity, thereby activating a form of collective pseudo-survival instinct that "justifies" the use of any type of violence. This is often portrayed as the sole means of achieving peace through the separation of communities and the division of territory.

The difficulties encountered by the "Digital Thrace Project" were serious and, in some cases, unexpected. The

³¹ Jill Ewing Flynn, "Discussing Race and Culture in the Middle-School Classroom: Scaffolding Critical Multiculturalism," in *Critical Multiculturalism: Theory and Praxis*, eds. Stephen May and Christine Sleeter (New York & London: Routledge, 2010), 165–76.

³² On teaching history in diverse and post-conflict Balkan societies see Angelos Palikidis "When the Past Meets the Present: Teaching the Contemporary History of the Peoples of Southeast Europe in School Classes," in *History Teaching as a Common European Challenge: The Southeast European Response through the Joint History Project (1999–2019)*, ed. Iannis Carras (Athens: Association for Democracy in the Balkans), 109–21.

³³ "Bey" was a senior administrative title in the Ottoman Empire with power to rule a specific region.

suspicion and reluctance of some religious institutions, the absence of systematically organized archives, even conventional ones, the bureaucracy and inflexibility of government agencies, the disinclination of local scholars to discuss reasonable revisions of traditional historical narrative or to talk about sensitive and potentially controversial historical issues, and above all the absence of modern research works in the area (mainly social, economic, and cultural history as well as anthropology) were the main challenges. Considering that the majority of the research team were young scientists, these difficulties seemed even greater. However, it became clear that Thrace is a region largely unexplored in research, which, precisely because it is located at a crossroads where peoples and cultures have met for thousands of years, opens

up exciting fields for research and education that transcend the boundaries of locality.

In this context, the Digital Thrace Project strives to contribute to a countervailing trend. It is designed for a broad audience, both residents and visitors, with the aim of facilitating the exploration of Thrace's histories and cultures. Leveraging digital tools and cutting-edge technologies, the project offers diverse stimuli, not only to facilitate learning but, more importantly, to encourage introspection on personal identities and those of others. At a collective level, this endeavor fosters a profound and mutually enriching interaction, thereby establishing the groundwork for intra-cultural and inter-cultural dialogues that bolster social cohesion, enhance the quality of democracy, and promote peace.