

TYOLOGY OF ART PRODUCED BY TRAVELING ARTISTS: ART-LED REGENERATION OF AN HISTORIC URBAN ENVIRONMENT

KONSTANTINOS ANDRIOTIS

Department of Marketing, Branding and Tourism, Middlesex University, London, UK

Taking as a case the art-led regeneration of the derelict district of Lakkos in Heraklion town (Crete), the purpose of this exploratory study is to add to the knowledge of art produced by traveling artists as an important part of the town's tourist offer by offering a rich contextual analysis of the mural images they produced and giving priority to their views. It adopts three data collection methods—photographic documentation (25 mural images), observations, and asynchronous e-mail interviews—with 21 traveling artists. By applying a typology in the main theme of each mural and by using traveling artists' narratives three main groups of murals emerged, namely heritage inspired, place inspired, and socially inspired. The data collected are discussed in relation to the problems accrued from the gentrification of Lakkos through mural-based development. Due to limited past research, the typology that emerged from this study is only applicable to the case under study.

Key words: Murals; Street art; Traveling artists; Typology; Cultural and creative tourism

Introduction

Art exhibited in galleries and museums has long played an important role in tourists' imagination (Rakic & Lester, 2013). Although painting on the walls can be traced back to early human civilization and classical antiquity (e.g., drawings on caves; Zebracki, 2013), artistic expressions on walls by amateur or professional artists became part of several urban landscapes only the last decade (Kljun & Pucihar, 2015). As a relatively cheap form of art, murals, defined as "pictures created by the application of paint upon a surface" (Frost & Laing, 2017,

p. 27), are the most popular street art expressions. Although murals are often painted on the walls for reasons unrelated to tourism, such as to beautify a building and to enrich the material dimension of a city (Andriotis, 2021; Koster, 2008), many of them have become tourism assets for places constantly trying to be differentiated, generate value by appropriating and transforming the undervalued districts of cities to "live galleries," and bring intangible values, such as cultural promotion and community pride (Halsey & Pederick, 2010).

Despite the scholarly attention paid recently to the contribution of murals to urban regeneration and

tourism development (e.g., Andriotis, 2021; Frost & Laing, 2017), typology of street art (murals) has tended to drop from tourism scholars research interest. This study comes to fill this gap, by operationalizing the art produced by traveling artists using as criteria the image of their mural and the narratives of their producers.

First, production of art by traveling muralists functions different purposes, not always aesthetic. Instead, they serve as a medium to explore illustrations of places, cultures, and particular groups of people, as well as for making political and social statements about a place (Frost & Laing, 2017). In this way, with the exception that murals are freely available for everybody to view, their pictorial functions are not different from the use of several other types of visual data, such as photos (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019; Santos, 2016) and postcards (Andriotis & Mavrič, 2013; Servidio, 2015), both of which have attracted an increasing research interest from tourism researchers. Although there is a plethora of studies using pictorial images as their main research focus, most tourism scholars fail to consider the value and content of murals as artistic images deserving further exploration from a tourism perspective and as touristic assets for neglected destinations.

Second, although the relationship between arts and tourism has been identified by various scholars (see e.g., Lester & Rakic, 2014; Tan, 2018), to the knowledge of the author there is a lack of research exploring artists' narratives on street art produced on a trip. Thus, by paraphrasing Thrash and Elliot (2004), it can be acknowledged that the processes through which ideas of artists are transformed into creative products during a trip have gained little research interest. In fact, although visual artists implicitly have the best knowledge of the expressive aspects of their murals, they are rarely being asked to discuss or give written accounts of their artistic works.

Third, in an anonymous world murals give a voice to artists (Spocter, 2004) who leave behind evidence of existence for others, tourists or not, to experience them haptically and bodily (Bowen, 2013). Thus, mural spaces emerge as a spatialized form of art best understood in situ and become a media for communicating nonconformist, mainly visual and rarely written, messages (Tunnacliffe, 2016). Although there are authors, such as Bell (2013), agreeing on

the communicative function of street art, the way that this communicative function is maintained by traveling artists producing murals remains undertheorized and lacks empirical credibility. Thus, giving priority to traveling artists' views to the production of their murals can enhance our understanding on art produced by traveling artists.

To overcome the aforementioned shortcomings of past research, this exploratory study attempts to remedy the bounded nature of artistic tourism research by looking at 25 noncommercial murals as an important part of the tourist offer of the city of Lakkos and grouping them based on their theme and the narratives provided by their producers. These murals were painted by 21 traveling artists as a part of the Lakkos project, an initiative where foreign artists work together to upgrade one of the most neglected areas in the town of Heraklion, Crete, Greece. Arguably, although public art in Lakkos is not officially sponsored, Lakkos provides the ideal conditions for the investigation of this topic because currently is being transformed from a dilapidated and polluted area (Zaimakis, 2011), to a center of creative art and alternative leisure practices that attracts an increasing number of specific forms of art-motivated tourists, as well as traveling artists who add to the neighborhood's atmosphere through mural production (Andriotis, 2021). However, up to now Lakkos is not a tourism destination in itself and no guide gives walking tours to the public.

Lakkos up to recently had a predominantly residential use with low-income old houses with small courtyards and some rubble (Art of Holidays, 2021). Many shops are closed and the district's little streets are being used by the locals as well as those who visit the town center for shopping and entertainment as parking lots (Andriotis, 2021). The last decades, developers have exerted pressures to demolish low-rise traditional buildings and to open the cleared plot to private development in a manner that has unnecessarily negative impacts on the traditional townscape of Lakkos (Cretazine, 2021). In addition, the neighborhood faces many problems from the fast pace of Airbnb development. Being in this situation, the district underwent some developments, mainly high apartment blocks, rising next to ageing properties. Thus, with the exception of a limited number of listed buildings that are safe

from demolition, the preservation of this historic neighborhood is not yet certain.

Therefore, several forms of street art are placed in a heritage framework and can be included in the category of heritage artworks (Merrill, 2015). This is substantiated by several scholars; for example, Sadatiseyedmahalleh et al. (2015), who support that street art can add to the attractiveness of heritage sites, as a subsidiary attraction of an urban space. For undervalued neighborhoods not having any alternative sight-seeing opportunities, street art can be placed on top of the attraction hierarchy by being the main, if not the only, attraction. In fact, mural-based developments have become an important part of the tourist offer of several destinations and offer to tourists original art experiences, admired either independently while walking, or organized in guided walking tours.

Arguably, because murals have been heritagized, an increasing number of communities view mural developments as place-making initiatives offering them the ability to express their past histories and interesting facets of their heritage (Skinner & Jolliffe, 2017). In fact, several forms of street art fit well within the heritage spectrum as contemporary art expressions enabling the art-led regeneration of derelict urban areas. This has been identified by Lehr and Kentner-Hidalgo (1998) in the case of Boissevain, Manitoba (Western Canada), where they found that murals span views of heritage. and by commissioning the painting of a series of large murals the townspace of Boissevain has been enhanced and historical legacy has been promoted.

Murals as a kind of street contemporary artwork directed towards communicating exhibition in public spaces outside of galleries and museums is functioning as an aesthetic and communicative outlet that attempts to democratize access to modern art (Derwanz, 2013). Thus, murals in Lakkos can be examined as artistic works offering various meanings and formulating thoughts and ideas about several topics of discussion, while at the same time they provide to traveling artists several opportunities to escape the mainstream and find inspirations from the places and communities they visit.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study reports on part of a much larger study on mural tourism that was conducted in

Lakkos, between June 2015 and December 2018. It performs a content analysis of mural images as well as discusses the views (descriptions and explanations) of their producers in an attempt to add to the knowledge of the typology of art produced by traveling artists and gentrification of Lakkos through mural-based development. Initially, secondary data were collected from various published sources. The secondary data were supplemented by information collected from blogs and websites where artists who participated in the study posted their experiences from Lakkos and provided detailed descriptions and explanations of their artistic works.

Following secondary data collection and realizing the lack of published tourism studies on mural images and the views of their producers/traveling artists, an attempt was made to facilitate triangulation and develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study as well as to test the validity of information through the convergence of primary data (Soni & Jain, 2018). In doing so, three sources of primary data were collected. First, participant observations have taken place during street walks where the artists under study presented their work to fellow artists and locals. Also, observations took place while artists were painting their murals, giving to the author the opportunity to decipher the transformation of the walls into a piece of art with touristic interest, as well as various other issues related to mural production.

Second, photo documentation took place. The photographic corpus contained a total of 25 mural photos taken by the author. All these mural photos were works of those traveling artists who agreed to participate in the study. Following artists' informed consent, some of the murals are illustrated in the text where appropriate. With the exception of three traveling artists (one produced three and two others two murals), all the others produced one mural each. The time limit for including mural images in the photographic corpus was set up to December 2018, even though new artistic works were constantly added in the area. Murals created by Greeks and foreign artists residing permanently in Heraklion were not included in the analysis, because these producers could not be considered as traveling artists. Also, the author looked at murals to feature as much information from their illustrations and texts, if any, and to uncover a certain aspect

of imaginaries and communication. These elements were further connected to various aspects of the history of Lakkos and its people that currently reside there, or resided in the past, as well as social practices and systems.

Third, due to the specificity of the context of research, besides the observations and the extensive collection of mural images, the collection of artists' personal testimonies offered rich contextual descriptions and explanations. In fact, this qualitative study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, by seeking to get inside traveling artists' "heads and hearts" (Wearing & Wearing, 2001). This was done by asking interviewees (i.e., foreign traveling artists who produced murals in Lakkos) to offer narratives and offer general descriptions of their murals from their own perspective. Because most, if not all, interviewees were competent computer and internet users in their professional lives, having webpages to promote their work, it was possible to approach them by e-mail. The use of a web-based semistructured qualitative method reduced the cost and made it easier to access geographically dispersed interviewees (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014). An e-mail was sent to a total of 36 artists who produced murals in Lakkos. In fact, the adopted data collection

method enabled participants who might not otherwise have been able to take part in the study to do so. In total, 24 e-mail interviews were conducted between October 1 and November 31, 2018, but only 21 of them were used for the purpose of this study. Follow-up questions helped to collect data on points that had been seemingly overlooked or only briefly responded during the first stage of the interview. All e-mail interviews were conducted in English because all interviewees were either native English speakers or spoke English fluently.

Although several quantitative data were collected through e-mail interviews—that is, the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (age, gender, marital status, nationality, and education) and their touristic profile (number of people in traveling party, previous visits, length of stay, and activities at the destination)—the aim of this study was not to quantify responses but to stimulate insights of mural production and themes and to emphasize their meaningfulness. For this reason, no general statistics are presented. Instead, the analysis presents as much as qualitative information as possible from and around murals and the narratives of their producers. Nevertheless, the background of respondents is summarized in Table 1 and an identification

Table 1
Profile of Respondents

Respondent No.	Age	Gender	Country	Marital Status
Respondent 1	33	Male	US	Married
Respondent 2	71	Female	US	Widow
Respondent 3	31	Female	Australia	Partnered
Respondent 4	50	Female	US	Single
Respondent 5	36	Female	Switzerland	Single
Respondent 6	46	Male	India	Married
Respondent 7	56	Female	US	Married
Respondent 8	65	Female	US	Single
Respondent 9	31	Female	US	Married
Respondent 10	57	Female	Australia	Single
Respondent 11	51	Female	UK	Single
Respondent 12	57	Female	Australia	Married
Respondent 13	29	Female	Belgium	Single
Respondent 14	25	Female	US	Single
Respondent 15	46	Female	Ireland	Single
Respondent 16	21	Female	Australia	Single
Respondent 17	31	Female	Netherlands	Single
Respondent 18	22	Female	Cyprus	Single
Respondent 19	31	Female	Singapore	Single
Respondent 20	60	Female	UK	Single
Respondent 21	56	Female	Australia	Married

code is given to each respondent to make it easier to attribute quotes to each respondent. It is surprising that although several males produced murals in Lakkos only two of them replied to the interview request. As a result, the sample is overrepresented by female respondents. Respondents ages ranged between 21 and 71 years old; artists were originated from Western countries, and the majority were single.

To gain a better understanding on various aspects of mural production a content analysis and a process of grounded coding was used (as suggested by Charmaz, 2006). At first, all data collected were incorporated in transcripts and were read and reread several times. Next data were bracketed, compared, and coded into the various themes and sub-themes that deserve further exploration, and links across the relevant literature were sought to support a more interpretive discourse, as suggested by Andriotis (2021). The most powerful and eloquent quotes that speak directly to the phenomenon under study are provided in the text where appropriate. To validate the analysis, two informants reviewed the findings of the research in order to confirm whether they correspond with the truth.

Typology of art Produced by Muralists and Traveling Artists Interpretations

Although it is not an easy task to indicate predominant themes from the murals that were available in Lakkos during December 2018, the purpose of this study is to categorize murals in groups and explore them as an important part of the town’s tourist offer. When applying a typology in the main theme of each mural the main difficulty was to identify the most appropriate group, because some murals could be incorporated in more than one group. To overcome such problems the descriptions and views provided by each traveling artist were used, and these narratives offer a better understanding of the content of the murals.

Place-Inspired Murals

Place is key to artists’ travel experience, as it affects consciously their creativity. Taking under consideration how artists dwell and find inspiration in their landscape and the local sense of space,

the first largest group (10 of total) included place-specific murals that reflected on the aesthetics of Lakkos and the island of Crete by mapping out the places that the murals under study connect. According to Jarman (2005), site-specific murals are designed with a particular location in mind and their power and symbolism are enhanced by their location. The very location of the murals under study situated in an urban undervalued landscape affects how they are interpreted and what they mean. Noteworthy, in all place-specific murals in Lakkos, with the exception of one, is the absence of people in the drawings, meaning that interviewees did not want explicitly to connect the place with the variety of people that used it in the past and continue to use it up to now.

One of the largest and most eye-catching place-based murals is found in the entrance of Lakkos, which was inspired by the artist’s traveling around Crete (Fig. 1). The following statement from the artist exemplifies his interpretation:



Figure 1. Abstract landscape depiction.

I tried to reflect the local surroundings. It's an abstract version of looking north from Heraklion. But I also added other elements that I saw from my travels around Crete. (Respondent 3)

From this quote as well as from several other narratives it is evident that the artists' attitudes on topography and built environment are revealing and have been a main source of inspiration. This was obvious mainly for those artists whose main artistic interest was connected to the natural and built scenery of the place and was also experienced by the author during a walking tour where three artists presented their work to fellow artists and locals. In the words of Respondent 8, who emphasized the dynamic ways in which the work can interact with its environment:

The mural sits side by side with its subject—a bend in the road with houses on either side, with cars parked in front of them. It anticipates the view, repeats it and hopefully draws attention to it. Here, I wanted to echo the passages I had discovered so that someone passing through, might see a little repeat or anticipation of that very curve or bend in the road and how the houses on either side fit into the hilly topography. I'm interested in the way the houses here in Crete are built into

the hills—built up over each other and around the rises. They accentuate the topography and lend their light and color and geometry to it.

The design of this mural was inspired by the artist's fascination with the Lakkos urban landscape and architecture. Due to this fascination this artist used as a model a view of Lakkos and painted exactly what was in front of her on the wall (Fig. 2). In contrast to this mural that was a reproduction of the “real,” other artists were inspired by visible objects found in the environment of Lakkos, such as pipes, and used them as a model, while at the same time some of them integrated in their work the complexities of their canvas (the wall), as shown in the following quote:

My inspiration comes always from the things surround the area and around the wall. Here it was the rain pipes, the grid on the window, the broken wall, the people I met, the Greek art of drawing things, and abstract them. (Respondent 5)

Heritage-Inspired Murals

Through the analysis of the murals' thematic content, one could conclude that the second largest



Figure 2. Drawing a view of Lakkos.

group of artists (8 in total) was inspired by the heritage and history of Lakkos and Crete. In the search of romanticized artistic inspirations several artists were motivated by the culture and history of the place and this has been reflected in their artworks. Early artistic works from the Minoan civilization were influential for artists as has been validated in some descriptions of murals such as the following (Fig. 3):

I am very interested in and inspired by the Minoan culture. . . . I am a feminist and have a special interest in early cultures that had goddess very prominent. I went to Crete to see and study the Minoan artifacts as I had seen some drawings of

early Minoan female figures in a book I had read a few years earlier which indicated they were in the museum in Heraklion. I was thrilled to see them in the museum as they are rarely reproduced and are the earliest indication of Minoan goddesses. The images I chose for the mural were figures all over a small altarpiece. In my mural, I “restored” the damaged parts that were not difficult to fill in. I thought it was a joyful image of the figures dancing and singing at the coming of spring. (Respondent 2)

For this artist, the oldest among interviewees, the conscious reception of the Minoan art was obtained by seeing Minoan art in a book and the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion or through her past trips, “I love Greece, lived there in my youth,” as she explained. In a similar vein, the youngest traveling artist in the sample who was studying at an art school made a mural that shows the relationship between two creatures of fantasy: the snake-haired Gorgon Medusa and her son, the flying horse Pegasus. In her own words:

I consider really interesting the fact that when Medusa was dying she gave birth to Pegasus and that is why I wanted to draw this mural. Medusa has been painted in a monotonous color which is symbolizes the death for me and in contrast, colorful Pegasus symbolizes the life. Two contradictory terms blending together and reflect the power that life gave to us by giving us a place to this planet. (Respondent 18)

In a different perspective, many heritage-based murals found in the little lanes of Lakkos form a visual link between Lakkos past and present. Because travel provides a connection with those who reside in a place and create its living culture (UNESCO, 2006), artists tended to use people and their contexts as form and content of their murals as was the case of a mural of a modern representation of a prostitute—an image illustrating the shady past of this district that was painted by Respondent 21, who was influenced by the past of Lakkos and portrayed the sense of entrapment that prostitutes had. As she explained:

When I started reading about the history of Lakkos I was intrigued by the proliferation of brothels, and I began imagining how it would feel to live within the constraints of a prostitute’s life. I wanted to convey in my mural the feeling of entrapment and

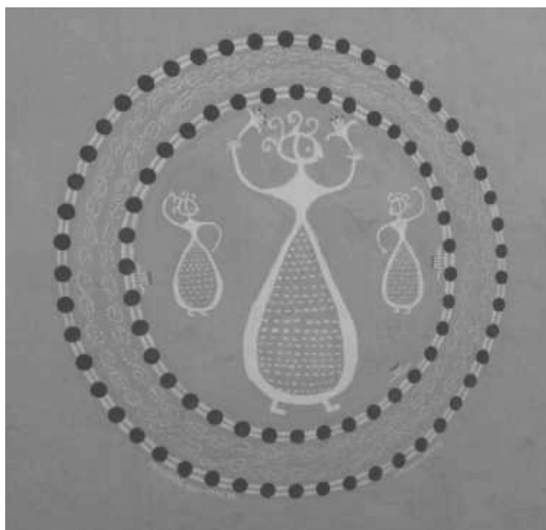
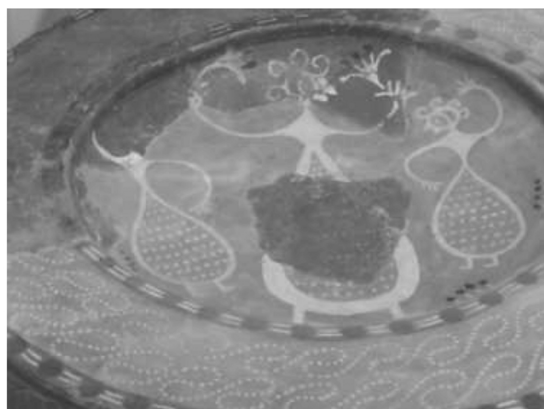


Figure 3. Illustrating a Minoan artefact: Original and replica.

despair I imagine most of those women would have endured and the sense of hopelessness in their situation that they must have felt. (Respondent 21)

Other artists used more traditional images in their mural such as indigenous folklore dancers. One such mural features a couple of Cretan dancers in traditional clothing completely foreign to the Western eye and according to the artist her work was influenced by her attendance at various dance performances during her 3-weeks stay in Crete. Following these attendances, she decided to make a representation of dancers which showed their pride in themselves and their culture, their energy and delight in dance, and to remind the residents of Crete of their own traditions (Fig. 4). As Respondent 20 said:

“Cretan Dancers” celebrates the tradition and strength of Cretan culture; “The Dance of Life between the cycles of the Sun and the Moon” is



Figure 4. Cretan dancers.

an allegory. We enter as babies, we dance with the animals, we leave bent but joyful, having participated in the dance of life. Why—because I am an artist who responds to possibility.

Apart from dance, another equally important theme of murals was music. One of the abstract murals having a musical theme was inspired by the “improvisation music” of Lakkos, and particularly rebetiko that according to Zaimakis (2011) is “a Greek popular musical genre commonly associated with stringed instruments, mainly bouzouki, and urban low life” (p. 1). The nonmainstream hybrid music scene of Lakkos’ past has influenced the design of Respondent 17, who explained that “music was important especially in the history of Lakkos, where people smoked hash and played music together.”

In contrast to the aforementioned mural that was influenced by the past of Lakkos and its people that are rarely being encountered in Crete nowadays, a few artists were inspired by the scenes they encountered while wandering in Lakkos, and their interactions with locals. The thoughts of the locals affected artists’ conceptions. This was strongly echoed by Respondent 7 in her account of her design:

Yota, the neighbor living next to the mural site suggested to me I put flowers in the right hand of Aglaia. I was so happy to oblige and thought that added a wonderful touch. I’m not positive, but I think one day she left me a handful of dried flowers stems which I did use as a model for the mural.

The significance of the local population as a heritage asset has been also vividly illustrated by Respondent 14 as follows (Fig. 5):

The mural depicting three men at a kafenio (traditional Greek coffee house) was inspired by the café across the street. It is common to see the people relaxing and spending time in the small eateries around the town. I found this to be quite charming and a contrast to the fast-paced, in-and-out dining culture I experience in New York. The figures depicted are actually three iterations of the same Cretan man. Their heads are proportionally a bit larger to their bodies because I wanted to purvey the men in a contemplative light; linking to the nearby tomb of Nikos Kazantzakis, a prominent Cretan writer, poet, and philosopher. I believed that this mural would be an aesthetically pleasing homage to the local people, and would fit well in the environment.



Figure 5. Three men at a kafenio.

There were also murals that involved artistic multicultural interventions. Among them Respondent 10 attempted through her mural to illustrate connections between the host community and her country of origin and as a result her imagery, as Dovey et al. (2012) reported in the case of graffiti artists, was both internationalized and locally inflected. The quote below indicates that the artist sought to somewhat blend his particular country of origin in her mural (Fig. 6):

I wanted to make a mural that I had designed in my home town in Australia as it was made in to a public art work here and translating it in to paint was a challenge I wanted to try while in Lakkos. There are a lot of connections between Crete and Australia and I felt this strongly while making the mural. . . . While making the mural I became more aware of the relationship between Crete and Australia due to the war and also the similar climate. The imagery and symbols were transferable for me and I found this interesting and unexpected. (Respondent 10)

The above quote demonstrates that scenes encountered at the home environment have been combined with those seen at the destination, showing the ability of the artist to critically engage with

artwork inspired from similarities in both cultures. Although the potential of murals toward the development of cross-cultural understanding remains questionable, from the above quote it emerges that this traveling artist desired to build bridges between her home and host country and to encompass both cultures in her mural. Her trip to Lakkos was a significant contribution to this end.

Socially Inspired Murals

Simoniti (2018) pointed out that art is not evaluated merely on aesthetic terms, but also in terms of its contribution to live debates. In fact, place is considered to be socially constructed (Huff, 2006). This is also the case of Lakkos, where the place is dependent on its urban environment and provides experiences built on context-specific attributes and human practices.

Thus, artists under study immersed themselves into the social context of the place they visited and worked, and at the same time they were accountable to several external influences, such as social movements or situations.

Rather than just presenting a place through a mural image, a third group of socially inspired



Figure 6. Connections between Crete and Australia.

artists (four in total) had a more diverse array of mural themes using their art as a form of social comment and a way to transpose a message to the public. In one such mural, the artist attempted to engage passers-by in a public urban dialogue with society by portraying the subordinate status of minority ethnic groups of refugees. Respondent 1 clarified in his blog that presenting his art in a public environment and sharing his artistic vision with the social change of the current period was the most efficient way to communicate his ideas and thoughts to his audience (Fig. 7):

It seemed like an appropriate subject for current events globally and in Greece (immigration and refugees). . . . In short, the reason I chose the theme for the mural was because of the current political climate. Not only was I coming from the States, where migrant camps and children in cages was and is a horrible reality that is getting little attention in the news, but similar challenges facing migration are happening directly in Greece. Greece seems to be one of the first European stops for refugees leaving Iran, Syria, and other countries in the Middle East. My art tends to bring to attention issues going on in politics, current events and culture in interesting ways. The mural itself depicts a girl behind a fence, crying as if caged and detained against her will. It is meant to be

a reminder of the humanity that we often forget about in the mass migration and refugee crises.

Although this mural does not relate to the place because Crete does not have any refugee camp, but most refugees in Greece are concentrated in a few Greek islands in the proximity of Turkey, as well as in the large Greek cities of Athens and Thessaloniki, illegal migration is one of the most significant problems facing the last years the Greek State (Paraskevaides & Andriotis, 2021), without any indications for solution in the near future. In fact, this mural significantly demonstrates that mass media broadcasting about Greece has influenced socially inspired artists, although the illustration shown in the mural is not among those encountered in Crete. Also, an important issue to be considered as far as the choice of a mural design is concerned is that although many roma families reside in the area some of them interacting with tourists in different ways (see, e.g., Andriotis, 2016) surprisingly Romas, as a socially deprived minority, have not been drawn in any mural, while several artists referred to them in their writings. Romas number has been lately declined after incensed citizens demand to cleanse Lakkos from their “contagion” and subsequent policing initiatives to control their



Figure 7. A girl in a refugee camp.

unauthorized settlement in the abandoned houses of Lakkos.

The meaning of a mural can be thought in different ways from asylum seekers and immigrants to holiday makers who may feel a strange sense of disconnect from their home culture, or at home in a foreign land, making their home country feel unwelcoming. This has been expressed by a 46-year-old female artist who was unsure whether passersby will get the meaning of her mural by just looking the deliberately obscure image consisting of two photos, one from Ireland and another one from Heraklion (Fig. 8):

“Too far from home” refers to the feeling that you are somewhere you don’t belong and looking for home, wherever that is. Obviously, that’s personal, but when newly painted, people understand that the mural was about migrants arriving in Europe, poor people on boats forced to go to a strange foreign land. . . . Perhaps (the mural) will make tourists consider for a moment the vast distances they’ve traveled for their holiday, and how amazing in that is. (Respondent 15)

Another socially inspired artist attempted to change the society according to her beliefs by

building upon the idea of a peaceful world (Fig. 9). In doing so, her mural was accompanied with the short title of what it illustrates: “Η Ειρήνη είναι εφικτή (Peace is possible)” written in two languages (Greek and English). The use of both languages in this mural indicates that the artist’s main intention was not only to communicate her message to Greek speaking passers-by, but also to all other non-Greek-speaking visitors and residents of the city. The message of this mural attempts to build a level of international understanding that can improve the world peace atmosphere.

The fact that Lakkos is slowly becoming an attraction for a small number of peripatetic tourists and Greeks (Andriotis, 2021) means that they will imbue with the messages conveyed in some murals allowing their own interpretation. As has been explained by Respondent 14: “The world, your audience, will take what you say and interpret it as it will.” Going further, Respondent 15 explained about the message on her mural making it distinctive compared to her other artistic works: “I’d been working on a series of paintings with phrases written over them, so the mural was an extension of the series, however the Lakkos one is the only one where I could paint exactly the



Figure 8. Too far from home.



Figure 9. Peace is possible.

subject I wanted.” From this quote it emerges that the lack of any form of monetary compensation for the artist offered her the freedom to do what she wanted and to explore different conceptualizations on the theme of her mural.

Conclusion

For the reason that mural images and their producers’ views deserve an article in themselves, this study employed an approach of gathering as much information from murals and their producers as possible. To add rigor, breadth, and depth of the inquiry of the phenomenon, this exploratory study adopted a multimethod approach. Following the review of relevant secondary data, a content analysis of 25 mural images was undertaken. Rather than merely offering a categorization and detailed analysis of murals’ thematic content the data collection went beyond the immediacy of the images by adopting an asynchronous e-mail interviewing. Twenty-one traveling artists from around the world who produced murals in Lakkos reflected their narrative accounts and provoked their in-depth reflections on their work. Although interviews were conducted, the focus of the interviews was the murals themselves, and not the artists. Instead, artists simply

interpreted their work. In addition, the data that emerged were substantiated by observations.

By using all these data collection methods, this study has shown the empirical richness of murals as contemporary form of street art and a way of looking at them through the prism of tourism. In addition, it was evident their capability to produce a rich source of high-quality historical, topographical, and sociocultural data that would probably have never been able to get otherwise. Moreover, from the findings it is evident that for traveling artists and perhaps for other forms of culturally motivated tourists, murals are significant assets and through their categorization and content analysis it becomes possible to identify traveling artists' choice of images that shape the imaginative travel. Also, it can be assumed that the murals of Lakkos represent what traveling artists believed to be local heritage alongside with site specificity.

From the images of murals and through the descriptions and explanations of traveling artists emerges that murals can be categorized in three groups. The most prominent was the place-inspired group that reflected a profound engagement of artists with the place and illustrated the scenes they saw while in Lakkos and Crete. This finding reflects themes that were similar to past studies. For instance, Valek (2018), in his study of an artists-in-residence, found that artists are required to create artworks related to the place. Thus, the place itself played a substantial influential role in the theme of the mural and the meanings of the place powerfully influenced artists' artwork and the kinds of relationships they experienced while in Lakkos. Murals should be represented as an integral part of the context of their location and they are also site-responsive art (Abdelrahman, 2015); that is, they were created not only to exist in a certain place, but also to deal with this space.

The second group was the heritage-inspired murals that emphasize the cultural authenticity of the place, and often illustrate the heritage place as woven through a much more diverse set of performative social and cultural relations, particularly the unusual attire and customs of past inhabitants of the island. The indigenous heritage of the place has played a substantial influential role in the theme of the mural with several murals in this group to have been inspired by the Minoan culture. Thus, the

history and archaeology still play a primary role for the selection of murals' themes, and perhaps for the decision of traveling artists to visit Crete, as has been reported by Apostolakis and Jaffry (2007) and Polyzos et al. (2007), who supported that foreign tourists in Crete interact with the islands past and present culture, mainly its archaeological sites and museums. This was not unexpected because murals can be considered as another manifestation of cultural heritage and therefore artists are required to create artworks related to the culture of the place (Frost & Laing, 2017; Valek, 2018).

The third and smallest group was the socially inspired group. Contemporary social problems encountering nowadays in Greece and worldwide influenced artists in this group to select the design of their mural and to familiarize and communicate through their artworks their ideas to the general public. Murals in this group use more diverse forms than the intricate elaboration of letterings, such as short sentences of what mural represents. Thus, murals illustrate the social problems traveling artists believe the host community faced and it can be assumed that traveling artists attempted to bring these problems in the front change the society according to their beliefs. However, murals in this group were not really specific to the place, but they could go anywhere.

From a place-making perspective, murals have become commonplace artefacts used to create distinctive tourism destination representations. Lakkos is not an exception because it has a strong reliance on the exceptional artistic skills of artists, as globally mobile professionals, to donate their time to various artworks. As a result of the traveling artists' creations, what was in the past ill-reputed neighborhood, just in the borders of the commercial center of the town of Heraklion, is witnessing nowadays an unusual activity. Mural-based development has taken up the challenge to revive and beautify this forgotten and underdeveloped area and to turn it into a tourist-friendly zone, with restaurants, bars, and cafés. Murals involve multiple colors and complex graphic designs on traditional usually neglected buildings and have created a landscape that tells the story of Lakkos' heritage. For the neglected neighborhood of Lakkos murals are the main attraction. However, most of the murals have been created on the walls of buildings requiring

renovation. These walls are being selected by the owner of Lakkos artist residency in collaboration with each buildings' owner. Although the consent of the owner of each property is obtained before each mural is painted, murals may disappear from the landscape at some point when a building will be renovated or demolished, or they can be destroyed due to weather conditions, passage of time, and vandalism.

Although murals have become a fashionable form of place making and have evolved to serve several functions in the urban landscape, this is not without controversy. Through murals, and in particular the process of gentrification and art-led regeneration of the neighborhood of Lakkos, this previously neglected area is slowly being incorporated into the tourism scene. As mentioned in the literature (see, e.g., Whiting & Hannam, 2014), artists are often the first who move into neglected neighborhoods in search of cheaper "avant-garde" spaces. Although artists are frequently the pioneers of the regeneration of these areas, often embraced by local authorities' strategy to foster tourism (Insch & Walters, 2017) and direct tourists to uncongested parts of a city, at the same time indirectly they generate various social problems. For instance, in Lakkos following the gentrification of the place and the removal of many Roma families, Airbnb has become an important reference point for tourists searching for cheaper accommodation options compared to hotels (Andriotis, 2021).

To conclude, by labeling a typology of murals, the aim was not to imply that each of their producers can only produce one type of work. Instead, traveling artists under study as creative people can generate art that is context specific and one artist may produce place-inspired art in one location and heritage-inspired art in another location. However, this study simply asked artists to interpret their murals. In fact, although it is too complex to group murals into rigid types, this study attempted to reveal several types of information that can be obtained from murals and the narratives of their producers. Nevertheless, more work is needed to replicate the findings of this study and extend them by comparing mural groups in other mural-based destinations. A much bigger sample of murals is needed to be consulted in order to identify whether the themes found in this study are also evident elsewhere.

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