

Greek and Roman Theatres in Mediterranean area International Seminar

Tuesday 11th June | Wednesday 12th June 2019
Palazzo Badoer, Aula Tafuri

Konstantinos Boletis

Ancient theatres and the “Diazoma” association:
Bridging cultural heritage with modern society and economy in Greece

(fig. 1) I thank Prof. Aldo Aymonino for his warm reception and the University Iuav of Venice for its hospitality. Following the presentation of prof. Monica Centanni, who introduced you to The international network of ancient theatres, I will speak about the Ancient theatres in Greece and the “Diazoma” association.

(fig. 2) Established in 2008, “Diazoma”, is a non-profit Greek association of active citizens, who work voluntarily to protect ancient sites and monuments of performance (i.e. theatres, odeia, stadia) and integrate them in contemporary life. Its mission is to promote and encourage excavation, conservation and restoration of this kind of monuments by raising awareness among all relevant parties.

(fig. 3) More than 1000 citizens and cultural associations in Greece have joined forces with it in order to support the integration of ancient theatres within the life of local communities. So, my presentation today before an academic and international audience is to publicize this association which works to bring closer the ancient heritage with the public.

(fig. 4) “Diazoma” acts as a catalyst in creating synergies among public and private sectors: civil services, specialist scholars (archeologists, architects, conservators and historians), local authorities, private sponsors and citizens. It opens new ground to the implementation of new programs for monuments’ maintenance and restoration, as well as their contribution to sustainability and sustainable development.

As an architect working actively to the restoration of ancient theaters, in particular the Dionysus theatre just below Acropolis, let me first introduce you to some professional jargon.

(fig. 5) The term “Diazoma”, in ancient and modern Greek, means either emicircular passageway dividing the cavea into semicircular sectors, or tier, like the upper and lower tier found in ancient greek cavea.

(fig. 6) Unlike other surviving ancient ruins, Theatres are immediately recognizable by the public for what they are. The theatres and their kindred monuments are a distinctive category of antiquities in need of protection due to their potential utilitarian value.

(fig. 7) Today there is wide consensus amongst specialists that an appropriate approach to their management is through modern intervention to restore the original form and usage. When the state of preservation permits, ancient theatres could support new activities evoking, even if with certain differences, the spirit of their initial function. The ancient theatre usage legally represents a temporary concession between state authorities - who are in charge of their protection and management - and specific event organizers, cultural production companies and groups.

(fig. 8) Integrated protection refers to the proper treatment of cultural heritage, which was confirmed by all latest European contracts; the integrated protection includes all stages of proper management of a monument:

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discovery, excavation, systematic study, publication, conservation, restoration, maintenance, creation of a organized archaeological site and, last but not least, economic sustainability.

(fig. 9) The Idea of holistic programs is promoted intensely by the European Union in its latest funding program All of us who participate in “Diazoma” think that sites and monuments in Greece may indeed have a great cultural and symbolic value, yet at the same time they may become the fuel of the Greek economy re-growth in conditions of recession.

The sponsorship of “Diazoma” includes:

(fig. 10) 1. Sponsors for the function of our association itself, 2. Sponsors for the restoration studies or small-scale works on the theatres, 3. Corporate Members.

(fig. 11) “Diazoma” commissions restoration research, it works to secure adoption of technical projects by the European Funding schemes and by this way ensures their direct implementation. The illustration on screen is from the ancient theatre of Sparta, the restoration project of which (through the sponsorship of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation) has recently been approved by the central archaeological council.

(fig. 12) Basically, “Diazoma” raises funding by combining European funds with resources from national and local authorities, sponsors, universities, non- governmental organizations and citizens. The table now on the screen shows the total funds that “Diazoma” managed to raise until some years ago (01.09.2012), after the first period of its activities. This money has all been spent with accountability for the preservation and enhancement of the Greek ancient theatres (fig. 13) In order to promote its work and disclose information related to the theatres, ou association provides a website (www.diazoma.gr) updated almost daily.

(fig. 14) Running a campaign for each theatre under the overarching motto “Adopt an Ancient Theatre”, “Diazoma” has opened bank accounts (“money boxes”) for each ancient performance site, where local authorities and ordinary citizens can help with the fundraising for any theatre they are interested in.

(fig. 15) Tables in subsequent windows are giving information on the bank statement of these accounts, which are managed by the Administrative Board of the association, to which I also belong along with distinguished academics as Prof. Vassilis Lamprinoudakis and personalities from other domains of expertise, as the Classical Music, Archeological Management, Financing etc. The 9 members of the Administrative board are elected by the member’s meeting every 4 years.

(fig. 16) A major partner of “Diazoma” is the Ministry of Culture and Sports, that by Greek law represents the official body of specialists who are in charge of protecting the Ancient Cultural Heritage of Greece. In table “At a glance” one may see the results of the synergy between “Diazoma” and the Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports. Thanks to the close cooperation and synergies promoted by “Diazoma” and the Ministry of Culture and Sports, a good number of projects are implemented in more than 50 ancient theaters. “Diazoma” also supported the production of more than 35 technical studies for restoration and integration in everyday life. The work in each monument is divided in 5 stages: geophysical survey, expropriation, excavation, restoration research and restoration work. The technical interventions developed have proven often to be both exemplary and pioneering. Let us see one example

(fig. 17) The project at Aptera theatre has recently been accomplished. The monument had suffered severe damage in modern times, due to the operation of a circular lime kiln built from rough rubble in the middle of the

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cavea. The deconstruction of the upper part and the uncovering of the eastern part of the cavea (the right part on the screen), which previously had been “trapped” within a neighboring property, were necessary.

(fig. 18) The project at Aptera included reconstruction of the central portion of the cavea using recovered seats in homologous positions, as well as the construction and installation of new benches made of natural stone. In the stage building, its masonry was consolidated and stones were restored to their original positions.

(fig. 19) During the process of fundraising and implementing of a project, “Diazoma” confronts many obstacles the main ones being bureaucracy and the Greek legal system, which hinder or delay its activities. In this context, “Diazoma” has worked to change the legal framework and achieved important policy changes. Likewise, “Diazoma” has managed to include activities that enhance awareness of the ancient cultural heritage in the political agenda and promote them as a fixed part of policies and development.

(fig. 20) Furthermore, during the current period of financial crisis, “Diazoma” has been promoting policies that reduce unemployment and secure financing for the excavation and restoration of ancient theatres. In addition, it prepares and submits proposals for the change of the legal framework of Non-governmental organisations (i.e. recognition of their service, facilitation of their actions and particularly fundraising, development of a legal framework for synergies with relevant governmental and public services). Associations such as “Diazoma” are now entitled to participate as partners in contracts with public authorities and services in the field of cultural heritage.

(fig. 21) Diazoma’s initiatives were strengthened by continuous encouraging citizens’ associations and Local Authorities to collaborate with each other. For instance, (fig. 22) in the case of the ancient theatre of Eretria Diazoma, in 2012, embraced and supported the efforts of the Association “MEDOUSA”, Active Citizens group of the Municipality of Eretria, which constitute a non-profit, non-governmental body, operating on voluntary participation. Members of MEDOUSA also contributed to the first archaeological vegetation clearance on site.

(fig. 23) “Diazoma” ordered the study of restoration and re-use of the monument, and paid it by money collected in the “money box”. To achieve the best possible result exploited all the studies carried out by a number of scientists, mainly from the Swiss School of Archaeology which has been undertaking excavation campaigns in the site since 1980’s.

(fig. 24) Distinctive are synergies in progress with the Hellenic Athletics Federation, Greece’s governing body for amateur sport., and the Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature (HSPN), founded in 1951, the oldest Greek environmental NGO which operates throughout the country for the protection of nature.

(fig. 25) In 2015 Ano Diazoma (which means Upper Tier) has been created, as a group of several young people who wish to offer their own dynamics. Upper “Diazoma” is an initiative for new activities by younger people who have more free time and familiarity with new technologies and digital culture. This group has already launched major training activities, as with Wikipedia. Interaction has been established with the free software company and academic institutions, so that order entries on ancient theaters be written. In parallel, this campaign helps university students to practice in methodology and research as a part of their digital literacy. There is also cooperation with the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation for monuments presentations by young guides.

(fig. 26) In order to achieve integrated protection and heighten the awareness of the public, “Diazoma” releases a collection of conventional and digital publications, scientifically accurate and attractive for the general public. “Diazoma” has delivered the fullest up-to-date catalogue of 125 ancient places of performance, located in

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modern Greece. This catalogue (“Panorama”) combines scientific documentation and comprehensive description of the monuments into Greek and English.

(fig. 27) In 2018 “Diazoma” signed a memorandum of cooperation for an international network of ancient theatres with the journal “La Rivista di Engramma”, the University Iuav of Venice and the University of Seville. Among the first fruits of this collaboration is the today's international seminar on the subject “Greek and Roman Theatres in Mediterranean area”. The scientific meeting entitled “Dormant theatres up for awakening” has preceded in Athens last March. Mrs Antonakou will talk to you in more detail about this event, directly after me.

(fig. 28) In the framework of our “Theatron network” Prof. Vassilis Lamprinoudakis participated into the I International Forum of Roman Theatres organized by our Spanish partners in Seville last October. Some of the main points of his paper entitled “Greek Ancient Theatres in Modern Use” along with key elements for our today's Seminar will be presented soon after by himself.

(fig. 29) “Diazoma” uses new technologies, making the ancient theatres part of the “digital age”. It created the EasyGuideApp, an innovative touring application for smartphones. The touring applications for both archaeological sites of ancient Messene and of the Asklepieion of Epidaurus, are already available for free use in the AppStore and Android Market, in Greek and English.

(fig. 30) Our Association has also launched a cooperation with the National Ministry of Education, for the implementation of a program named “Students guide students in the ancient theatres”. As part of the “Public School” program, it involves secondary education students and encourages them to learn, teach and guide other students about their own cultural heritage.

(fig. 31) “Diazoma” also works towards the emergence of new uses of the monuments. Promoting the usage for contemporary cultural performances, “Diazoma” takes into account the particularities and the state of preservation of each monument and respects the conservation of the authenticity of ancient theatres by safeguarding all conditions for their protection. For this reason, the audience in most cases is not guested in the caveas but in the orchestras or somewhere in the vicinity of the theatres in order to avoid decay.

(fig. 32) In the same context of cultural, tourist and economic development “Diazoma” proposes cultural routes and archaeological parks focusing at the ancient theaters. in selected regions in Greece. These strategies are at various levels of implementation and aim at monuments’ maintenance and restoration. As you may know. Cultura Route is a specialized and branded touristic product, developed on the basis of a specific binding element, which in our case is a cluster of ancient theatres.

(fig. 33) For example, a cultural and tourist pilot itinerary has been designed and is under implementation in North West Greece. The aim is to use this itinerary as a model for similar cultural routes in other parts of the country. It constitutes an Integrated Territorial Investment as well as a Specialized and branded product of cultural tourism This program has been approved and praised by the European Commission, which recognized it as an exemplary model for the implementation of smart specialization strategy in Greek Regions.

(fig. 34) Partners of this ambitious project are the Region of Epirus, the Diazoma Association, the Ministry of Culture, the Development of Epirus SA, the local Ephorates of Antiquities in Epirus, the Ministry of Tourism, the University of Ioannina as well as Research Centres, Professionals in Tourism and Local Producers

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(fig. 35) The main operator “Development of Epirus SA” is responsible for the Realization of several «Soft» actions, such as the security and cleaning personnel, the Operation of tourist enhancement actions, the Local quality agreements, the Certification of agricultural products and the Counselling, training, certification of specializations.

Other projects of “Diazoma” are related to the creation of integrated archaeological and environmental Parks organized and displayed as branded cultural tourism experiences.

(fig. 36) For instance the project for the general enhancement of the site of ancient Orchomenus in Boiotia, a site relatively close to Athens, which includes, except an ancient theatre, a Byzantine church of the 10th C and a well preserved Mycenaean tomb has been recently approved in the framework of the establishment of an extended archaeological park. The theatre was discovered in the 1970s and still remains in a poor state of conservation. The study calls for both the restoration of the ancient theater and the restoration of the landscape (slopes and natural rock, as much as has been revealed).

(fig. 37) To conclude, by raising awareness for ancient theatres, by sharing its knowledge and by attracting interest, “Diazoma” promotes cultural heritage. In today’s multicultural society “Diazoma” helps young generations to maintain an intimate relationship with their cultural identity, enhancing historical memory and creating a sense of common belonging. “Say: It is my duty, and mine alone, to save the earth. If it is not saved, then I alone am to blame”, wrote the great Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis. Putting a lot of soul into our efforts, we hope that ancient and contemporary culture can live together in a continuity of space and time.