

# Understanding 'Heritage Values': The Greek Perspective

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## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to the transnational understanding of the concept of 'heritage values' that the 'European Network on Heritage Values' aims to achieve. It will do so by looking at how 'heritage values' are understood and discussed within the Greek Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, the heritage sector and the public arena. In particular, the paper will investigate the Greek Law no. 3028/2002 'On the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in General', which is the main legislation document for the protection of cultural heritage in Greece. The paper will also briefly refer to the views and opinions of professionals working for the Ministry of Culture (mainly archaeologists, conservators and architects) and the wider public. This brief overview will allow, on the one hand, an interesting comparison of views between policy-makers, heritage professionals and the public in Greece. On the other hand, such comparative study will enrich the transnational study of the concept of 'heritage values' in Greece where– as it will be shown in the paper – the terms 'values' and 'significance' are often used interchangeably. As it will be noted in the following sections, the term 'values' is not frequently used in the official language of heritage organizations and relevant legislation documents in Greece. The term 'significance' is preferred to connote 'values' instead. Furthermore, the type of 'values' mentioned in the legislation or by heritage professionals in Greece very rarely relate to 'social values'. Indeed, in the case of Greece the otherwise worldwide influential 'ICOMOS Burra Charter for Places of Cultural Significance' has not influenced the Greek heritage practice (ICOMOS 2013).

## 2. Heritage Values in the Greek Archaeological Law

The Greek Law 3028/2002 'On the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in General' constitutes the main legislation document for the protection of cultural heritage in Greece. The title of this document is indicative of the governmental emphasis on the protection of Greek antiquities over other forms of heritage (see for instance Fouseki 2009). This emphasis on archaeological heritage has inevitably defined the set of values with which other heritage sites are largely imbued with the legislation text. This archaeologically-led approach to heritage does not constitute a 'Greek phenomenon'. It has occurred in several, mainly Western countries, as it can easily be observed by the number of archaeology departments that initiated the teaching of programmes related to heritage studies or heritage management (Howard 2003). This archaeological focus can possibly foster a materialistic approach to understanding heritage and its value and it is because of this that Waterton and Smith (2009) advocate in their edited volume for 'Taking Archaeology Out of Heritage' for removing for a moment the archaeological discourse from the heritage discourse in order to theorise

heritage beyond the material connotations with which archaeological heritage is often imbued.

Taking the materialistic approach of Greek heritage policy and practice towards the management of heritage as a starting point, it is interesting to note the absence of the term 'values' (*αξίες* in Greek) in the Greek Law. What occurs instead is the term 'significance'. In view of this, while for some Anglophonic authors in the field the term 'significance' differs from the term 'values' in that the former indicates the sum of all values attributed to heritage (see for instance Meul 2008), in Greece 'significance' is used as a synonym with the term 'values'. For instance, the Greek Law classifies two main types of monuments in terms of their 'age' including 'ancient monuments' and 'recent monuments'. 'Recent monuments' are defined as 'cultural objects dating after 1830, which deserve protection due to their historical, artistic or scientific significance' (article 2, ii) while 'ancient monuments' date prior to 1830. In the case of 'recent monuments', emphasis is placed on the historic, artistic and scientific values of those monuments while 'social significance' is mentioned later in the legislation document in association with 'recent monuments'. For 'ancient monuments' the significance is determined on the basis of their historical, aesthetic and functional values.

The first instance of the term 'social significance' occurs under the category of 'historical sites', which are distinguished from the 'archaeological sites' in that the 'historical sites' refer to 'areas on land or at sea or in lakes or rivers which have constituted, or there is evidence that they have constituted, the site of exceptional historic or mythical events' (article 2 (d)). The article continues by stating that historical sites that deserve protection are due to their folk, ethnological, social, technical, architectural, industrial or in general historic, artistic, or scientific significance'. The list of 'significances' outlined here provides a list of 'justifying criteria' for a preservation decision. It is in other words a list of criteria of significance which relates mainly to the past and not to the present values that are possibly assigned by contemporary communities. This list provides for most heritage organisations 'devices for identifying and protecting places we wish to keep. They are the primary means by which the heritage values of such places are articulated, and for guiding the management of these places'

<http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/heritage/about-australias-heritage/national-heritage/national-heritage-list-criteria>).

It could be argued that the criteria of significance reflect to some extent an 'empiricist-positivist approach to understanding the significance of a site although it is widely known that this approach does not comply with the subjectivity and fluidity of the term 'significance. Indeed, as Tainter and Lucas have pointed out since the 1980s 'we cannot speak of significance as an inherent attribute of cultural properties, waiting only to be discerned' (183:714). The authors continue by rightly stating that significance is 'a quality that we assign to a cultural resource based on the theoretical

framework within which we happen to be thinking. If significance is assigned rather than inherent, then, like meaning, it can vary between individuals and change through time' (Tainter and Lucas 1983:714). This empiricist-positivist approach implies also an implicit hierarchical order of 'values' and 'significance' in the Greek legislation text. A thorough look at the text will easily unveil that historic, artistic, scientific and monumentality significance/values are the priority values. Antiquities are mentioned as if they have intrinsic values and therefore they are not accompanied by an explanation or a list of 'criteria of significance'. In other words, they are significant purely because they are ancient.

The absence of the term 'value' from the Greek Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage mirrors the discourse adopted by those who work for the Hellenic Ministry of Culture as will be explained below.

### 3. Heritage Values described by professionals

In summer 2011 a survey was conducted by the author and the archaeologist Dr Niki Sakka at the ancient 'Lyzeum' of Aristotle in Athens in order to investigate in what ways the various archaeological layers and remains are 'valued' by archaeologists, conservators, architects and excavation workers (Fouseki and Sakka 2013). The research initially comprised in-depth interviews with heritage professionals. The interviews informed the design of a quantitative questionnaire which was circulated among various professionals in Greece. One of the key objectives of the research was to explore attitudes towards the archaeological remains identified with the 'Lyzeum' of Aristotle and the remains of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century military basis. The question was whether the military remains should be preserved or not in conjunction with the classical and Roman remains. During the interviews, the respondents barely used the word 'value' in their justification of their opinion about the preservation or not of the military basis. With the exception of an excavation worker and an archaeologist, the sixteen remaining interviewees did not refer to the 'values' of the site (Figures 1 and 2).

**Interviewer:** Could you see the remains of the 'Lyzeum' equally important as with the remains of the military installations?

**Excavation worker:** No because the military installation does not have the same *historic value* as the 'Lyzeum'

**Interviewer:** What does 'historic value' mean to you?

**Excavation worker:** The 'Lyzeum' of Aristotle existed in the ancient past while the military installations are only 50 years old!

Figure 1: Extract from interview with excavation worker

**Interviewer:** Would you keep the military installations?

**Archaeologist 6:** For what purpose? I don't think this particular finding has a particular *value* you can record it but you don't have to keep it ....

**Figure 2: Extract from interview with archaeologist**

While we were interrogating their respondents about their views on prioritising the scattered archaeological remains of the 'Lyzeum' over the remains of the 19<sup>th</sup> century military basis, none of the respondents made a particular reference to a specific 'value' or 'type of significance' as one might expect from heritage professionals working for the heritage sector. They though articulated their justification in their own terms and disciplinary or personal interests and knowledge. The interviews constituted the basis to extrapolate a series of 'justification statements' expressed by the interviewees in order to conduct the quantitative survey the results of which have been published elsewhere (Fouseki and Sakka 2013).

4. Heritage Values described by the 'public'

So far, we have seen that 'values' as a term is not commonly used in the Greek official rhetoric (i.e. the legislation and the practitioners' discourse), when it comes to heritage preservation. There is though a key difference between the legislation and the practitioners' discourse in relation to 'values' and 'significance'. The Greek Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage endeavours to be prescriptive in terms of the criteria of 'significance' for 'ancient' and 'recent' monuments while heritage practitioners adopt a narrated way of discussing heritage significance and heritage values. In both cases, significance and values have identical meanings.

Similarly to the heritage professionals, the wider Greek public will not use explicitly the term 'value' and, if prompted, they will assign particular values which move beyond the artistic and the scientific values outlined in the Greek legislation. In a study conducted by the author with Dr Georgios Alexopoulos and funded by the Initiative for Heritage Conservancy 100 residents living in the third biggest city of Greece, Patras, were interviewed in order to examine the ways in which they relate or not with their local archaeological heritage. One of the first questions was 'what is the significance of archaeological heritage for them in general' (Figure 3).

*What is the significance of archaeological heritage for you?*

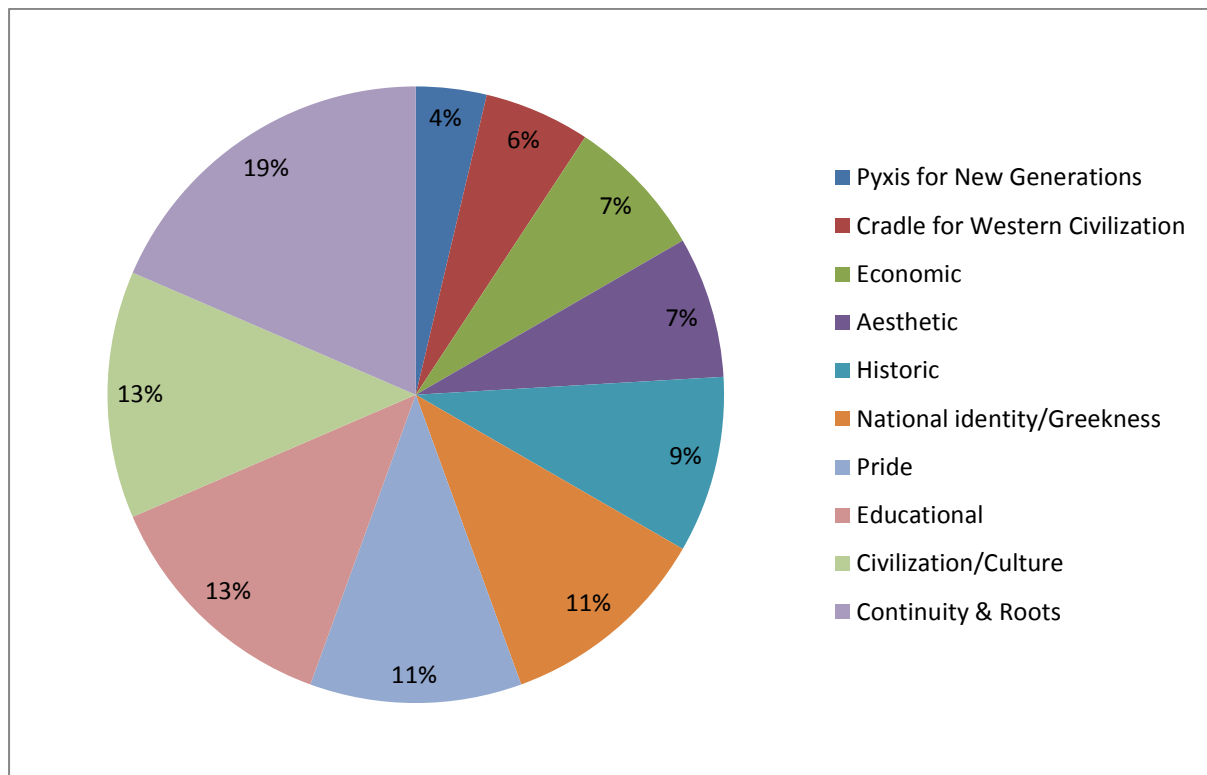


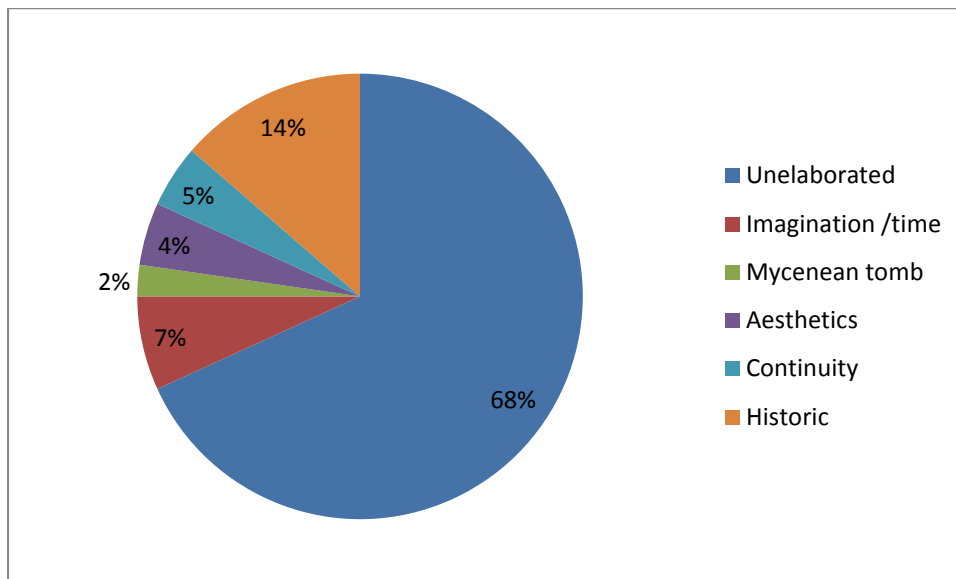
Figure 3: What is the *significance* of the archaeological heritage for you?

The most frequent response was that archaeological heritage is important because it signifies intergenerational continuity and symbolizes the roots and connection with ancestors (19%). The second most frequent response (13%) was that the significance of archaeological heritage is educational and symbolic because it is an emblem of the Greek culture. Other responses included that the archaeological past is important because it “makes me feel proud” (11%); it “symbolizes my Greekness” (11%); it is of historic significance (9%); it is beautiful (7%); it brings income through tourism (7%); it is the cradle of the Western civilization (6%); and it shapes the future of the new generation (2%).

It becomes apparent that the aforementioned responses may cover historic, artistic or scientific significance (as stated in the Greek legislation text) but they are also moving beyond those materialist values towards identity, pride and symbolism without excluding though economic values.

A similar pattern was also revealed when interviewees were asked: *what is the ‘value’ of the archaeological heritage of Patras in particular* (Figure 4). Only 43% of the respondents thought that the archaeological heritage of Patras is significant or of some ‘value’ partly because they felt that other areas – such as the nearby Ancient Olympia – is more important and partly due to the lack of tourism. Out of the 43 respondents, only 32% elaborated their response by mentioning that it is so because of its historic significance and its ability to ‘trigger your imagination by making you travel in the past’.

As one respondent stated characteristically: “when I pass by the ancient remains, I feel ‘small’ in the passage of time. I feel how time has passed by this place, how many generations have been through here...”



**Figure 4:** ‘Values’ assigned by the local community of Patras towards their archaeological heritage

What these first findings indicate is that the ‘social value’ or ‘social significance’ which is mentioned only in relation to ‘recent monuments’ in the Greek legislation and almost by none of the heritage professionals is a dominant value for the wider public. In view of this, there is an apparent gap between the ways in which the Greek legislation text refers and analyses ‘significance’ and ‘value, the heritage professionals and the public.

## 5. Conclusion

The above short analysis shows that the ‘term’ value is not frequently used either in the official or the unofficial heritage discourse. The term ‘significance’ is more commonly used instead. This indicates a discrepancy between the international literature -mainly Anglophonic- which has attempted to provide definitions of terms such as values, significance and criteria of significance and the Greek heritage discourse which tends to adopt a more simplified approach to such definitions. However, the gap does not only occur between the international literature and the regional practice. There is a wider gap within the context of Greece where Greek legislators promote prescriptive criteria for understanding the significance of cultural heritage while the Greek professionals and the Greek public are using a narrated way of discussing about the values of heritage. In the case of ‘Lyzeum’ the military basis was viewed by most professionals and segments of the public as of low importance and thus its demolition was justifiable. The lack of reference to ‘social value’ or ‘significance’ as well as the idea of ‘continuity’ stressed by the public in the policy documents and the heritage practice

discourse meant that the military basis was under threat. This proved to be more dangerous in terms of heritage preservation rather than the fluid definitions of 'values' and 'significance'. In other words, it is the 'criteria of significance' or the 'types of values' that are of critical importance for the heritage management practice and theory than the fluidity of the terms 'values' and 'significance'.

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