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## Italian occupation and cultural heritage in Akritiki Patmos: Potential for cultural entrepreneurship

Fotini Maniou <sup>1,\*</sup>, Roido Mitoula <sup>1</sup>, Vilma karagianni <sup>2</sup>, Ioanna Maniou <sup>3</sup> and Maria Manola <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sustainable Urban and Regional Development, Harokopion University of Athens, Greece.*

<sup>2</sup> *Department of Tourism and Management, University of West Attica, Greece.*

<sup>3</sup> *Medical School, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and University of Lausanne.*

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### Abstract

This study examines the impact of Italian occupation on the formation of Patmos' cultural heritage, with an emphasis on its monuments and its frontier identity. It analyzes how the political, ideological, and administrative practices of the period shaped the spatial and architectural character of the island, creating a unique historical and cultural context. Of particular interest is the photographic material of Italian archaeologist Giuseppe Gerola, which documents buildings, monuments, and urban views of Patmos at the beginning of the Italian occupation, offering valuable visual documentation for historical research and the promotion of heritage. Next, the possibilities for cultural entrepreneurship that arise from the exploitation of this heritage are explored, linking the protection and promotion of monuments with sustainable development strategies, the identity of remote areas, and contemporary cultural policies, including NSRF funding instruments. The article proposes a model of sustainable cultural tourism and local business development, which can serve as an example for other remote islands with a rich historical heritage.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage; Cultural entrepreneurship; Italian Monuments; Italian Occupation; Patmos

### 1. Introduction

The Italian presence in the Dodecanese during World War II shaped a unique spatial and architectural model, in which the production of space was directly linked to the political, ideological, and administrative aspirations of the Italian state. As Kostopoulos' study (2015) highlights, the design and construction of public and military buildings were not limited to functional needs, but served as tools of control and power projection, decisively influencing the spatial organization of the islands. Contemporary research focuses on the post-occupation dimension of this heritage, examining the possibilities for reinterpretation and sustainable exploitation of Italian monuments in the context of cultural entrepreneurship (Maniou et al., 2025). At the same time, digital technology is emerging as a critical factor in promoting visitation and social participation (Manola, 2024), while the contemporary use of Italian monuments, as recorded in the case of Rhodes, demonstrates their potential as active cultural resources rather than static historical relics (Manola, Tsatalmpasoglou & Geronymou, 2023).

The Italian occupation of the Dodecanese (1912–1943) left distinct marks on the architecture and cultural heritage of the islands, which are recognized as sites of historical and aesthetic interest (Kolonas, 2002; Giannopoulos, 2006). In Rhodes, the Italian presence was evident in public buildings, officials' residences, and fortifications that reflect the architectural logic of the Italian fascist state (Drakakis, 2021; Karamani & Chatzimichail, 2016). Similarly, in Leros, the development of the Lakki settlement demonstrates the military and administrative strategy of the time, although many monuments have been abandoned or fallen into disrepair (Dallari, 2017; Manola, 2024). The town of Patmos retains

\* Corresponding author: Fotini Maniou

elements of traditional architecture, while the application of tools such as Heritage Impact Assessment contributes to the management and sustainable use of cultural heritage (Dipasquale et al., 2020).

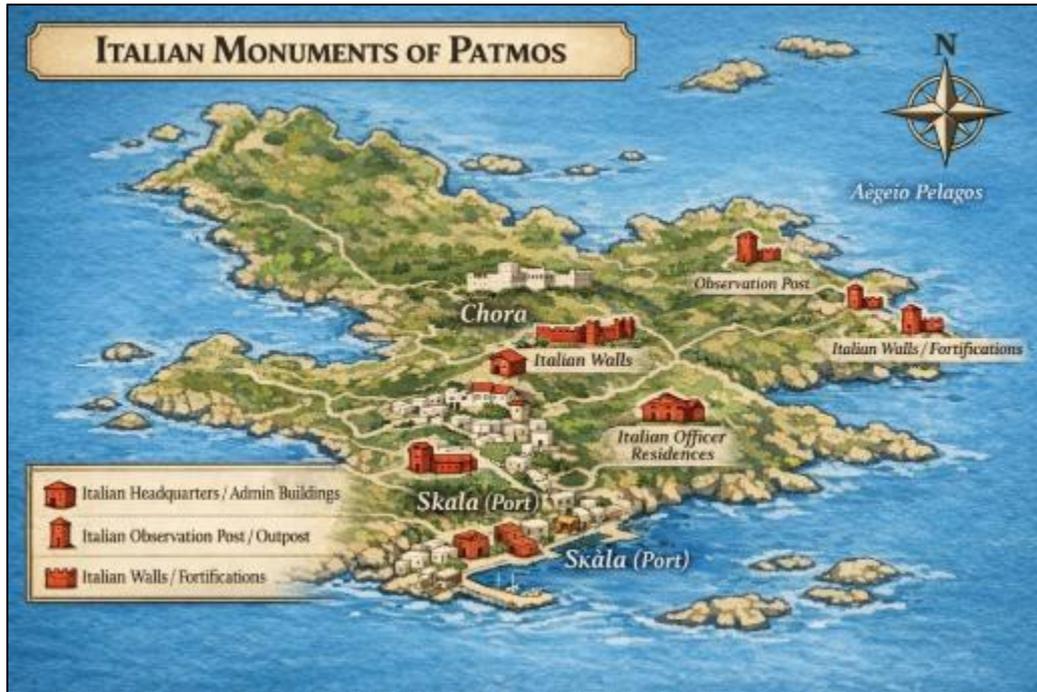


Source <https://patmosislandinfo.gr>

**Figure 1** The Italian headquarters today

Cultural policy and corporate social responsibility can enhance the promotion of monuments, while new technologies and digital promotion offer important tools for their promotion and protection (Gantzias, 2010; Manola, 2024). Italian architecture is also linked to the development of tourism, serving as an example of the interconnection between cultural heritage and sustainable economic development (Logothetis, 2004; Logothetis, 2012). Studies show that the restoration and promotion of monuments require coordinated plans for maintenance, management, and integration into tourist routes (Kollias, 2007; Campell, 2012).

The promotion of Italian monuments in the Dodecanese is both a challenge and an opportunity for the islands' remote identity, strengthening historical memory and cultural recognition at national and international level (Kostopoulos, 2005; Discover Rhodes, 2024; Greeka, 2024). Research on the influence of Italian architects and engineers shows the connection between military occupation, urban planning, and the formation of urban complexes (Orlandi, 2010; Wuyts, 2020). Consequently, understanding the cultural heritage of the Italian period is directly linked to management strategies, tourism development, and digital documentation (Insight Guides, 2023; Jones & Pilat, 2020). The combined approach of history, architecture, and digital promotion allows for the preservation of the cultural identity of the Dodecanese and the enhancement of visitability to monuments such as those of Patmos, Rhodes, and Leros (Komninos, 2002; Sigala, 2012; Habermas, 1971).



**Figure 2** The Italian Monuments in Patmos

## 2. Italian monuments in Patmos

The case of Patmos is particularly significant, as the Italian occupation left a strong and lasting mark on the island's built environment. The Italian administrative and military authorities carried out extensive infrastructure projects, which served the needs of defense, control, and administration of the area, while incorporating features of Italian colonial architecture. Most of these structures remain intact to this day, constituting authentic evidence of the era (Karagianni, 2013).

The monuments of Italian rule in Patmos are not merely historical relics, but carriers of collective memory and cultural identity. Emblematic examples are the Italian Command Headquarters in Skala and the Italian Observatory, which are directly linked to the administrative and military presence of the Italians on the island. This study attempts an analytical and documented approach to these monuments, while examining the possibilities of their integration into contemporary practices of cultural entrepreneurship, with the aim of promoting, protect and sustainably exploit them, in line with the international experience of the Dodecanese and the relevant literature (Kostopoulos, 2015; Maniou et al., 2025; Manola, 2024; Manola et al., 2023).

The Italian Administrative Building in Skala, Patmos, is one of the most important historical monuments from the period of Italian occupation on the island. The building was erected during the Italian occupation, during World War II, and is located in the settlement of Skala, in the port of Patmos, a key point for the administrative and strategic organization of the island. During the period of Italian rule, from 1912 to 1943, the Administration Building served as the central administrative body of the Italian government in Patmos, serving the needs of a long and systematic occupation.

The building housed various administrative services and authorities responsible for managing issues of administration, justice, policing, and taxation, demonstrating its decisive role in the functioning of the Italian administrative mechanism. The building was designed and constructed under the name *Delegazione di Governo*, on the orders of Italian commander Mario Lago, with the aim of meeting the spatial and functional needs of the colonial administration in the Dodecanese (Karagianni, 2013).

The architecture of the Governor's Office is distinguished by its imposing and aristocratic character, incorporating elements of Italian colonial architecture, which was widely applied in other islands, such as Rhodes and Kos. Despite the construction of later neoclassical buildings after the incorporation of Patmos into the Greek state, the Italian Administration Building in Skala retained its role as a key landmark and main building in the port, confirming its enduring importance in the urban landscape of the island (Karagianni, 2013).

Over time, it has become clear that the period of Italian occupation had a significant social and economic impact on Patmos. The Italian Administration Building is now a living historical testimony to that era, bearing vivid memories of power, oppression, and administrative control, which are reflected both in its physical presence and in the collective historical narrative of the place.

The Italian Administration Building is now the center of public services in Patmos, housing the post office, the Citizens' Service Center, the police station, and the customs office ([www.patmos.gr](http://www.patmos.gr), 2025). It is surrounded by neoclassical buildings of different styles, which were erected after Patmos' return to Greece and now house residences and shops ([www.patmos.gr](http://www.patmos.gr), 2025). Despite the discontinuation of its administrative function, the building remains an important attraction, drawing visitors who wish to learn about the history of Patmos during the Italian occupation (<https://patmosislandinfo.gr>, 2025). The Italian Administration Building highlights the island's cultural heritage and reflects the lasting influence of Italian rule on local architecture (<https://patmosislandinfo.gr>, 2025).

### **2.1. The Italian Observatory**

The Italian Observatory of Patmos is located approximately 2,100 meters from the port of Skala, in the northwestern part of the island, in a position of strategic importance. The building was constructed by the Italian army before the outbreak of the war, as evidenced by its name, morphology, and location. The choice of this particular location allowed for direct control of sea routes and navigation in the wider area of Patmos.

The Observatory played an important role in maritime surveillance and military oversight, as it enabled high-ranking Italian army officers to monitor ship movements and general activity in the island's territorial waters. Its existence is part of the wider network of military infrastructure of the Italian occupation and is an integral part of the historical journey of Patmos during the occupation (Exploring Greece). Today, the Italian Observatory has suffered significant damage and only its ruins remain. Access to the site is via the concrete road from the port to the north, for about 500 meters. Visitors are mainly attracted by the panoramic view of the Aegean Sea and the opportunity to see a unique monument of Italian-occupied Patmos (<https://www.exploring-greece.gr>, 2025).

### **2.2. Italian Officers' Residence**

The Italian Officers' Residence is located in various locations in Skala and Chora. These are residences of Italian officers, with a symmetrical design and construction of stone and brick, dating from the period 1912–1943. Many of these buildings are abandoned, with damage to the roof and openings, while some have undergone partial renovation for private use without a unified plan. The proposed development includes restoration with respect for the architecture and conversion into museums, exhibition spaces, or cultural centers.

### **2.3. Italian Walls / Fortifications**

The Italian Walls and Fortifications are located in Chora and consist of interventions on sections of the old walls with Italian military characteristics. Today, they show signs of erosion and damage to their foundations, while some sections have been incorporated into modern buildings and remain visible as tourist attractions without official signage. The proposed development includes maintenance and signage, as well as the creation of historical walking tours and photo spots.

### **2.4. Small Observation Posts / Guardhouses**

The Small Observation Posts and Guardhouses are located on the hills around Skala and Chora. These are military installations for monitoring the sea and the coastline. Many are collapsing or have been abandoned, access is difficult, and there is no signage or maintenance. They can be utilized by restoring them as historical observation points and creating trails of cultural interest and guard posts that can be visited.

### **2.5. Italian Post Office / Administrative Buildings**

The Italian Post Office and Administrative Buildings are located in Skala. They are smaller buildings typical of Italian fascist architecture during the period of Italian occupation. Today, some are used as shops or offices, while others are closed and show signs of deterioration, with limited use for cultural purposes. The proposed intervention includes their restoration and conversion into cultural spaces, with exhibitions on the Italian period and local history.

**Table 1** Summary table of Italian monuments

Monument	Location	Description / Chronology
Italian Administration Building	Skala (Port)	Central administrative building of the Italians, serving as offices and headquarters.
Italian Observatory	Skala / Port	Military observation post for sea surveillance, featuring typical Italian military architectural elements.
Italian Military Warehouse	Skala / Near the port	Warehouse for military supplies, characterized by simple Italian construction.
Italian Officers' Residences	Various locations in Skala and Chora	Residences for Italian officers, with symmetrical design and use of stone/brick.
Italian Walls / Fortifications	Chora	Modifications to sections of the old walls, displaying Italian military architectural features.
Small Observatories / Outposts	Hills around Skala and Chora	Military installations for monitoring the sea and coastline.
Italian Post / Administrative Buildings	Skala	Smaller service buildings, typical of Italian fascist architecture.

### 3. Potential for cultural entrepreneurship focusing on Italian monuments.

Patmos, as a remote island of the Dodecanese with a strong historical and cultural identity, is part of a unique spatial and developmental context, characterized by limited accessibility, seasonal tourism, and increased infrastructure costs. In this context, cultural entrepreneurship emerges as a strategic tool for sustainable development, in line with the principles of insularity and contemporary cultural policies at national and European level.

European Union policies, and in particular the financial instruments of the NSRF, emphasize the exploitation of cultural heritage as a lever for local development, social cohesion, and strengthening the competitiveness of regions. In the case of Patmos, the monuments of the Italian occupation can be included in actions concerning the restoration and reuse of historic buildings, the creation of cultural routes, and the development of digital applications with cultural content, taking advantage of co-funded programs aimed at strengthening island and remote areas.

Linking cultural entrepreneurship with cultural policies allows monuments such as the Italian Command Headquarters and the Italian Observatory in Patmos to be transformed into active cultural hubs, hosting exhibitions, educational activities, cultural workshops, and low-impact tourist activities. Similar practices have been recorded in other island regions, where the creative reuse of architectural heritage has contributed to the diversification of the tourism product and reduced dependence on mass tourism (Maniou et al., 2025b; Maniou et al., 2024d).

The concept of insularity is particularly important, as cultural interventions in Patmos must take into account local particularities, the carrying capacity of the island, and the need to preserve cultural authenticity. Cultural entrepreneurship, combined with digital technologies and innovative forms of cultural tourism, can contribute to extending the tourist season, create new jobs, and retain the local population, thereby enhancing the sustainable development of remote islands (Maniou, Mitoula & Kostakis, 2024).

The exploitation of the monuments of Italian rule in Patmos through cultural entrepreneurship strategies, in line with the financial instruments of the NSRF, cultural policies, and the principles of insularity, can constitute a comprehensive development model. A model that treats culture as an active development resource, strengthens the social and economic resilience of the island, and ensures the preservation of its historical and cultural identity in the modern environment.

The Italian occupation of the Dodecanese (1912–1943) left behind important monuments and public buildings, which are now valuable evidence of the historical and architectural heritage of Patmos. Buildings such as the Italian Command Headquarters in Skala and various military and administrative facilities are preserved as examples of the architecture and urban planning of the period, while their documentation by Italian archaeologist Giuseppe Gerola offers rare visual material for documenting the historical presence of Italians on the island (Vatopoulos, 2021; Ministry of Culture and Sports – Ephorate of Antiquities of the Dodecanese, 2021).

Gerola's collection of photographs, which documents public buildings, monuments, and everyday life during that period, is a valuable tool for promoting and protecting cultural heritage. This documentation can be used to create exhibition spaces, digital applications (AR/VR), thematic tours, and educational programs, linking historical memory with sustainable forms of tourism and business activities that strengthen the local economy and the island's identity.

Finally, we underline the importance of all digital technologies in education domain and for cultural entrepreneurship training and education. ICTs support education for everyone, give new methods for efficient teachers training, improve the knowledge retention, encourage collaboration, improve transparency, create learner-centered approaches, invent new teaching methods, and accelerate the knowledge acquisition. Moreover, provide new tools for knowledge representation and endorse the education activities and methods via virtualization, mobilization, artificial intelligence, and through new learning environments- worlds. More specifically in entrepreneurship training ICTs are very productive and successful, facilitate and improve the assessment, the intervention and the educational procedures via Mobiles which brings educational activities everywhere [37-39] and through various ICTs applications which are the core supporters of education [40-46]. The exploitation of AI, STEM & ROBOTICS raise educational procedures into new levels of adaptability, innovation and performance [47-48], while games transform education in a multisensory, very friendly and enjoyable interaction [49-50]. Additionally, the adoption, enhancement and combination of ICTs with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation and emotional intelligence cultivation [51-56] brings the mental abilities to the core of the education procedures and policies, and accelerate and improve even more the educational practices and results, especially in business and entrepreneurs training.

#### *Suggestions for utilization*

- Converting the Italian Command Headquarters into a cultural center or museum, with exhibitions on the Italian period and Gerola's archival material.
- Themed walking tours connecting the Italian monuments of Skala and the wider area, incorporating information signs and QR codes.
- Events and workshops highlighting the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of the monuments, attracting tourism throughout the year.
- Collaborations with ESPA and other funding programs to support small businesses, creative activities, and digital applications that leverage cultural heritage.

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## **4. Conclusion**

Through targeted actions, the Italian monuments of Patmos can serve as a lever for cultural entrepreneurship.

Their connection to historical documentation enhances the authenticity of the visitor experience. Monumental sites offer opportunities for educational programs and cultural events. Their utilization contributes to sustainable development and stimulates the local economy. Through organized initiatives, the promotion of Patmos at the national and international level is enhanced. These monuments can serve as a model for other remote islands with a rich cultural heritage. The promotion of innovative business activities harnesses the potential of history and culture. At the same time, it ensures the preservation of the identity of the place and local memory.

However, many of the Italian monuments show signs of neglect and deterioration. Their limited use for cultural or educational purposes highlights the need for planned interventions. Urgent maintenance is a prerequisite for their safe and sustainable promotion. A comprehensive management plan can effectively integrate the monuments into the cultural map of Patmos. This strategy promotes cooperation between public bodies, local communities, and entrepreneurs. The integration of monuments into thematic cultural routes enhances the island's tourist appeal.

The combined approach of history, education, and entrepreneurship strengthens the sustainability of the interventions. Overall, the exploitation of Italian monuments contributes to the strengthening of the island's identity and the development of Patmos.

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## **Compliance with ethical standards**

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The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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