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Being Dodecanesian. The Geopolitical Significance of a Regional Identity

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to discuss the articulation between the defining characteristics and the potentialities of Dodecanesian identity in a networked world. Rooted in a rich multicultural past, this regional identity has been organizing local populations at different geographical scales and has successfully been articulated with both Greek and European identities. After a long period of "introversion", due to geopolitical, geostrategic and economic factors (Cold War, Greco-Turkish dispute over the Aegean Sea, financial dependency), Dodecanesian identity seems to find its way into new forms of "opening-up" by putting forward its hidden political, cultural and institutional resources. The recent political and financial crisis urges for new interpretational concepts, which would take into consideration the alternative geopolitical space formed by the interconnections between cultural and spiritual signifiers and the influence of Globalization. In this new context, it is essential to revisit the ethnocentric and Eurocentric approaches in order to adapt them to other historic and geographical realities. From the perspective of an interdisciplinary approach and drawing upon field research material, the analysis explores the various ways in which Dodecanesian identity contributes –thanks to the comparative advantages of a rich historical and geopolitical path– not only to a better understanding of current stakes, but also to a reactivation of geo-cultural assets that reconcile divergent realities in the current unstable multipolar context.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Greece, Dodecanese archipelago, Regional identity, Globalization

Regional experience along Europe's south-eastern maritime borders

Situated at an important crossroads, the Dodecanese archipelago has recently found itself in the middle of old geopolitical oppositions (Greco-Turkish dispute over the Aegean Sea) and new regional dynamics (Energy agreements, migration flows). These situations should not be considered in isolation; if combined, they mirror the complexity but also the complementarities of multiple interactions at various scales. Since the early 1970s, the Aegean dispute between Greece and Turkey has been the avatar of the Cyprus Question. Despite the initially high expectations –fuelled by the post 1999 rapprochement–, the changing nature of regional realities blocks every effort of resolving the different facets of the dispute. In fact, long lasting negotiations between Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus regarding the Aegean zones of influence and the island's division usually end up by reaching a dead-end. Apart from the huge difficulties for the neighboring States, unresolved problems tend to generate external interference and, hence, conflict of interests at a higher level. Bilateral (Greece-Turkey) or multilateral (Syria, Middle-East) tensions produced on NATO's south-eastern flank implicate key players such as the United States, Russia, and China. The important role of the American diplomacy in the consensus processes (especially during the 1996 Imia crisis and the 2016 maritime security operation in the Mediterranean) as well as Russia's and China's strategic and economic penetration of the wider regional context (from the port of Piraeus to the naval bases in Syria and the investments in Cyprus and the

Dodecanese) reveal the high stakes involved in this complex geographical setting. The Dodecanese islands are also affected by the strategic rapprochement between Greece, Israel, Egypt and Cyprus (natural gas exploration and exploitation agreements) –both a challenging technical prospect and diplomatic task (Tsakiris 2014)– and by Turkey's political instability.

Since 2015, managing maritime resources and reframing regional balances efforts have been diversified by the urgency of the refugee crisis. By February 2016, close to one million Syrian refugees and Middle Eastern economic migrants have crossed the Greek maritime borders. National desecuritization strategies and the lack of a solid European foreign and security policy framework were immediately identified by professionalized criminal networks holding a good understanding of regional hubs and of transport geography. As a result, the population of the Dodecanese archipelago found itself, overnight, subject to the effects of the increasingly confrontational events that continue, until today, to destabilize the region. This new set of challenges exposed the Dodecanesian society to the vulnerabilities of the current regional and Stato-national context as well as to the pressures of Globalization (circulation, migrations). The question of opening to the world while working for a durable and self-confident identity-building re-emerges as a means to reassess the potentialities of the peripheries in the emerging multipolar world.

Cultures, an essential feature in the construction of identity process, ''do not constitute organic totalities with impermeable frontiers but are constantly wrought, shaped, and recomposed by a constant process of borrowing and exchange'' (Dieckhoff and Gutiérrez, 2011, 279). However, despite continual transformation, each identity system possesses its own set of values, symbols, practices, representations, and traditions or ''Mythistory'' (McNeill, 1986), which allows human groups to be identified and distinguished from others. As Dieckhoff and Gutiérrez (2011, 279) put it: ''without this minimum of internal coherence, cultural diversity would be unthinkable''. The fluidity and mobility that characterize the post-modern context seems to challenge the modern concept of fixed national territorial identities and push us to re-conceptualize underexplored infra-territorial and extra-territorial assets. In this regard, regions and regional identities play a crucial role. As a result of the institutionalization of regional spaces process (territorial, symbolic, institutional, and social shaping of the region), regional identities tend to promote various strategies of distinction that enable socio-historical production and transformation of regionality and meaning making mechanisms (Paasi, 2010; 2011). In addition, ''regional identities are relational, marking out the differences and contrasts between regions, and, whilst they are open to reinterpretation, they carry a legacy of meaning'' (Allen et al., 1998, 10).

In this context, the geopolitics of Dodecanesian identity constitutes an interesting case study as far as the relation between space, territoriality and forces of globalization is concerned. Greece and Europe are facing increasingly strong political, economic, and cultural challenges, which seem insurmountable if we use the dominant economic-oriented methodological tools. As the Dodecanese's historic background shows, regional and local experience may combine various identity mosaics with national and European consciousness and, thus, become a go-between for the concretization of a stable political and cultural ground of coexistence.

The Dodecanese archipelago in space and time: aspects of regional and national consciousness-building

From the Doric Hexapolis (league of six cities in the southeast Aegean Sea) to the Byzantine naval themes (districts), the Dodecanese islands have always played an important role inside larger geopolitical realities at various scales (Ahrweiller, 1966). However, it was not until under Latin rule (1309-1522) that a more systematic spatial organization and a significant emergence of regional consciousness took place. This process had a lot to do with the interplay between commercial opening-up and defensive introversion (against piracy and Muslim conquest attempts) strategies put forward by the Knights of Saint John.

With the capture of the Dodecanese, the Knights became an important member of the Frankish hegemony over Greek seas (Kasperson, 1966). Under papal jurisdiction, the archipelago served as a potential geopolitical asset for further expansion in the Levant as well as a European-oriented outer line of defense against the increasingly-powerful Ottomans. This political and institutional delimitation of the insular territory as military, cultural and commercial stronghold played a part in the shaping of a first solid identity mark for both the region and its population. At the same time, social and economic activities started to put their part into a timid yet ambitious process of regional symbolic shaping. The economic resurgence led to a growth of population, and islands like Rhodes, Cos and Symi became important regional shipping centers. Stability, gradual participation of local Orthodox inhabitants in island administration, and their contribution to the archipelago's defensive needs resulted in a more direct contact between the occupied and the occupant. Thus, the islanders became familiar with the Order's "cultural baggage" containing myths, symbols, and legends of chivalry as well as an ambition for landscape domination (massive fortifications, engineering works, churches and convents). As we will see later on, the far-reaching imprints of these aspects are to be found in recurring patterns of identity signifiers, which, blended with other pre-modern traditions at a local scale, are constantly reshaping Dodecanesian consciousness.

The introduction of Ottoman imperial rule (1522-1912) profoundly modified former structures of regional socio-political organization. The new decentralized forms of governance relied more and more upon locally rooted power elites in a context of bewildering variety. Nevertheless, political and administrative conditions varied significantly from island to island, the urban centers being kept under more control than the smaller "privileged islands". Collecting taxes and preserving domestic peace and stability being the main priority of the imperial administration, self-management practices were common among local religious communities (*millet* system). The cosmopolitan Ottoman port cities' - such as Rhodes and Cos- sociopolitical organization drew upon the interrelationship between societal dynamics and personal networks, mobilized by a multitude of cultural communities (Muslims, Greek Orthodox, Jews) within a framework of cooperation, interdependence, and occasional conflict (Guidi, 2017). On the contrary, the smaller islands of the complex and the insular world of peasants were largely dominated by Greek Orthodox populations, and benefited from measures of political autonomy (municipal councils/*demogeronties*) and certain immunities granted by the Ottoman overlords.

As in the other imperial lands that were later to be incorporated into the Greek state (Koliopoulos and Veremis, 2002), localism, religion, and language were among the key elements of identity for the Ottoman subjects of the archipelago. Religious institutions (such as the, dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Church of the Dodecanese) were important unifying actors for community members, whilst local loyalties and language also played a significant role. Furthermore, the Ottoman context provided unity in diversity,

expressed by a large network of personal and commercial alliances throughout the Mediterranean world (Georgikopoulos, 2017). These contacts made the Greek Orthodox ship-owners and the Jewish entrepreneurs of the archipelago receptive to new ideas, modes of production, and ways of life associated with Western habits and attitudes. As a result, the Dodecanese islands entered modern times as a maritime crossroads that maintained its cohesion while being exposed to other geopolitical realities.

The advent of the Greek independence movement –greatly influenced by both the Russian geostrategic considerations in the Mediterranean and the political situation in Western Europe- imbued the Orthodox islanders with nationalistic sentiment as representing elements of a shared Hellenic heritage (Prevelakis, 2006). Fervor to serve the Greek cause led to severe reprisals towards the seamen of Casos, Calymnos, and Symi, and coincided with the Ottoman Empire's internal change and gradual decline. By the late 19th century, what really unified the disparate Orthodox elements of the archipelago was the movement for incorporation in the Kingdom of Greece. It did so mainly outside the Sublime Porte's dominions in the flourishing Diaspora communities in South Africa, (British) Egypt, France, Italy, North and South America. Having benefited from the spiritual and intellectual advantages provided within the Ecumenical Patriarchate's international network and the Western democracies' liberal framework, this prosperous and educated Greek-Dodecanesian Diaspora formed the financial and diplomatic backbone of what was to be known as the ''Dodecanesian question''.

Pro-integration (*Ensomatosis*) ethnic lobbying abroad[1] and the domestic regional patriotic sentiment inspired by the consciousness of an imagined national unity became constant promoters of archipelago's Greekness, and important stressors for the Italian administration (1912-1943). Furthermore, despite the maintaining (until 1937) of the religious communities' privileges, Italian policy was promoting a centralized model of governance that was alien to Dodecanesians. The purposeful Italian development of the islands of Rhodes, Cos, Leros, and Castellorizo (major military bases throughout the Second World War) gradually reversed the traditional patterns of organization including local autonomy, and exploitation of land and maritime resources (Kasperson, 1966). However, wide acquaintance with multiscale realities (from local and regional to global), the vivid reminders of cross-cultural cohabitation, and the firm structure of nuclear family units continued to be the main features of Dodecanesian society.

This binary phenomenon of delayed exposure to modern forms of socio-political order (civic consciousness) and resilience of traditional values has led to a significant fragmentation of perceptions. Nowadays, the Italian experience has an ambivalent place in Dodecanesian collective memory (Doumanis, 2005). The inhabitants of urban developed islands such as Rhodes, Cos, Leros, and, to a lesser extent, Patmos and Telos hold a positive view of the colonial administration, whereas the perception of ''Italian-fascist enemy'' remains strong among more tradition-oriented insular communities like those of Karpathos, Calymnos, and Casos. The latter position continues to enjoy a general consensus in the Greek anachronistic nationalist official line on the past, as we can witness during the annual celebratory sessions of the Greek Parliament and the events that are held locally (on March 7th) due on the anniversary of the islands' incorporation into the Greek state.

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[1] Especially from the committed and active Dodecanesian League of America and the National Dodecanesian Council, under the highly skilled and effective leadership of Nikolaos G. Mavris.

Greek nationalism and the pressures exercised from the wider geopolitical environment have had a heavy role in the process of restructuring Dodecanesian identity and adapting it to the European ideological context of the first half of the 20th century. Although the turbulent past of foreign invasion and conquest seemed as a sufficient cause for an unperturbed transition from local and regional consciousness to a nascent modern sense of Greekness (as an anti-foreign ideology), the Italian framework and the relative absence of stato-national codes of practice provided alternative ways of introducing Dodecanesian identity into the competitive post-Ottoman era. In local representations, the colonial condition engendered both benefits (progress, employment, civic order, infrastructure development projects) and drawbacks (threats of brutal sanctions, oppression), while positive social interaction between the rulers and the ruled added to the varied character of the occupation in general (Doumanis, 2005). The regime's efforts to create a historical narrative that would promote continuities and connections between Dodecanese's medieval past and the locally applied modern administrative principles were not, however, capable to fill the void of deeper social and cultural roots. As for the option of regional autonomy (''Aegean state''), promoted several times in the past[2] and still encouraged by a small group of Rhodian inhabitants, it seemed to be lacking political expression and a meaningful connection to the exigencies of a rapidly changing geopolitical environment (war, decolonization process, regional instability, antagonisms between the great sea and land powers, policy of spheres of influence).

In this context, incorporation into the Greek state appeared compatible with regional geo-historical and cultural identity resources and, at the same time, corresponded the best to the geopolitical necessities of the archipelago (search for a stable frame in the post-Second World War and Cold War context). Greek nationalism provided a strong neo-Hellenic myth that could transform the traditional island communities into a homogenous nation and the fragmented geographical entities into a unified part of the Greek territory (*Helleniki epikrateia*). Nonetheless, this ideological project mostly concerned the islands' Greek-speaking Orthodox majority[3] and had little place for the religious minorities of Rhodes and Cos. Unlike the tragic fate of the prosperous Sephardic community –victim of the German *Judenpolitik* during the Nazi occupation of the archipelago (1943-1945)– Dodecanesian Muslims have been able to maintain their presence (Kaurinkoski, 2012)[4]. Following a brief period of British rule (1945-1947), Dodecanese's union with Greece gradually pushed, however, the members of this community to succumb to the steamroller of stato-national uniformity (Georgikopoulos, 2016; Tsitselikis, 2012).

After the 1947 Paris Treaty united the islands with Greece, several Stato-national identification practices were implemented in order to integrate the new maritime periphery into national homogeneity processes. To explain how this framework has been taken forward by the Greek State –so that internal unification and external recognition could be established– we need to look at the socio-political and economic mechanisms that have been reshaping, ever since, this regional identity.

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[2] E.g., project of the delegation of island political and religious leaders met on the island of Patmos in 1912.

[3] 107,292 residents out of a total population of 115,343, according to the 1947 general population census of Dodecanese. Source: National Statistical Service of Greece (ELSTAT).

[4] The Italian-ruled Dodecanese was not included in the Greek-Turkish exchange of populations (1923). According to the 1947 census, the members of the Muslim and the Jewish community were estimated at 6,368 and 71 inhabitants, respectively. Source: *Ibid.*

The shift from the abstract idea of symbolic ethnicity to the material aspects of national identity was not as simple a task as the Dodecanesians first thought it would be. The regional introduction of patronage politics and standardized academy-supervised education prepared the soil for the new socio-political condition (Georgikopoulos, 2016). Dodecanesian identity began to join, not without problems, the Greek political system and to gain contact with its multiple effects: administrative stability, regional representation in the Parliament, and civic participation but also gradual ideological polarization, particularistic benefits and ''disjointed corporatism'' (Lavdas, 1997, 17). At the same time, the active Greek-Dodecanesian Diaspora, having achieved the purpose of unification, started to lose its dynamic character and to buckle under the weight of the predominant image of a Greek presence outside Greece. For a long period, the role of the Diaspora was to be limited to the remittances flowing into the Greek economy as a means to improve the chronic balance of payment deficit (Koliopoulos and Veremis, 2002).

The economic growth occurring in the early 1960s also helped the long awaited official interaction between Athens and the strong regional bents. But along with the country's rising prosperity came political instability and a seven-year military dictatorship, which, even though theoretically rejected, had hardly affected the insular lifestyle and dependency. Despite primary efforts for political and social consensus, the new state orthodoxy and the debt-financed illusion of prosperity during the 1980s put aside most of the periphery's comparative advantages. Dodecanesians started to care less about the long-term management of cultural and natural capital and focused more on how to maintain and exploit personal or group privileges. In addition, since the early years of membership, Greece's European strategy was to use its geopolitical and symbolic significance in order to receive financial assistance and undertake structural reforms that lingered for decades as unfinished business (Prevelakis, 2017). The neglected outcome of this highly chameleonic centralization project was the deepening of clientelist relations (electoral accountability, distribution of benefits), a low level of local and regional History knowledge, and the decrease of economic competitiveness (Georgikopoulos 2016).

In this context, there has never been a ''death'' more foretold than the financial crisis of 2009-2010. The exclusively leisure-oriented tourism industry –Dodecanese's main source of income– was one of the most affected. Excessive and unplanned tourism-related development has long been supported by governmental funding and susceptible-to-bribery socio-political networks. This gradually led to a lack of awareness regarding the aesthetic, natural and cultural dimensions. Linked to overpriced mass sun-and-sand tourism activities, the destination image of the Dodecanesian cities became far less competitive than the diversified touristic offer of other European regions[5]. The experience of the financial shock reactivated, however, the traditional community and network-based characteristics of Dodecanesian identity. After a long period of introversion, new strategies of distinction at a local scale and a newfound regionalism among the Dodecanesians (Riak, 2013) reaffirm the significance of cultural heritage in the reshaping and evolution of the ''psychosomatic'' device that is territory (Gottmann, 1973). It remains to see how the return of maritime

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[5] Promotion of sustainable tourism activities -involving the preservation and enhancement of cultural and natural heritage, including the arts, gastronomy or the preservation of biodiversity, according to Eurostat's definition – was already the case for French Catalonia (département of Pyrénées-Orientales) and the Tuscany region in Italy.

''Mythistory''-oriented practices could play an important role in redefining the currently outdated national and European geopolitical mindset.

Bringing assets of pre-modernity into an unstable post-modern context

Nowadays, the Hellenic Republic faces sizeable threats and pressures like any other political construction. Related to the forces challenging the foundation of the modern territorial Nation-State (Gottmann, 1973), these threats mobilize, in the case of Greece, pre-modern values and institutions as factors of social progress. Unlike other European Westphalian nations, the functioning of Greek identity as a signifying practice is based on factors like family, education, language and religion (Prevelakis, 2017). These basic substances are mobilized at different geographical scales and produce varied outcomes. For example, local forms of solidarity and cohesion do not necessarily reflect the situation at the national level, where the distorted results obtained by the ambiguous relationship between the Greek State and the domestic small family cells include a paternalistic system of disoriented ethnocentrism and the promotion of rent-seeking and capture strategies.

The sudden collapse of the latter -highly profitable in the short run but costly in the long run- illusory system revealed the heterogeneous yet complementary idiosyncrasies of Greece and their potential role into a wider context. Ethnocentric and Eurocentric approaches, although useful in nation-building and European integration processes, have failed to explain the diverse geographical and ideological shifts that continued to take place while material prosperity was being perceived as something akin to spiritual values. Thus, analyzed from a cultural geography vantage point, regional historical paths and contemporary local realities can offer useful insights in order to rethink the dominant Stato-national and European paradigms, and adapt them to the challenges of the emerging multipolar world.

In this regard, Dodecanesian identity could serve as framework for understanding the geopolitical importance of pre-modern loyalties in a post-modern context of ceaseless change and fragmentation. Nonetheless, the role of modern constructions, such as national identity and the European project, in this process is not negligible. In fact, what might seem contradictory could in reality prove complementary. Nowadays, local identification patterns –important in defining, in a sort of regional mosaic, a Dodecanesian identity (Riak, 2013)– and regular cross-border activities exist concomitantly and interact with cosmopolitan localism (Appadurai, 1996) and Stato-national globalization (Astiz et al., 2002; Foucher, 2013) phenomena. Shaped by both continuity and rupture, this regional identity is constantly produced and reproduced anew through the opportunities and the challenges provided by the wider geopolitical environment, while projecting its preserved traditional resources into the contemporary era. Linked in the causal relationship (Dodecanesian identity), the annual Medieval Rose Festival of Rhodes (reproducing heroic history and folk tradition events), cross-border mobility between the archipelago and the Turkish coastline, the uninterrupted relationship of the Church of the Dodecanese with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the ''world wide web'' of the Greek-Dodecanesian Diaspora, and the multicultural experience in Rhodes and Cos are some examples of distinctive fragments of pre-modernity in the current post-modern context.

How could these features become a practical asset for both Greece and Europe? The fluidity that characterizes today's world order is challenging traditional structures, which are

particularly important for social cohesion. It is the reason why the recent migration flows towards Europe have, at first, been perceived as an invasion of foreigners and triggered a series of phobic reactions: national identities, the cornerstone of modern social organization and stability, are seen as being under threat. The forces of globalization have exposed the cracks below the surface veneer and are still testing Nation-States' limits in terms of adapting and evolving. Beneath a territorial-shaped reflexive reserve lie, however, regional history and cultural baggage. Europe's south-eastern borders connect with pre-modern realities, which, albeit neglected by the technocratic paradigm, tend to find their place into the current context. As part of the Mediterranean consciousness early on, the shared experience of integrating new elements into local communities paves the way for reassessing the role of peripheries in the process of national and European stability and change. In the Dodecanese, a region greatly affected by the refugee crisis, the first shock has been succeeded by practices and expressions of a deep-rooted culture of consensus. On the islands of Rhodes and Telos, Syrian refugees have already been hired by the locals who helped them acquire a Social insurance number. To this end, the presence of indigenous Muslim communities (Greek citizens) in Rhodes and Cos as well as the islands' interreligious urban landscape (churches, synagogue, mosques) could facilitate the socio-cultural integration of immigrants into Greek and European society. Hence, the resilience of traditional values seems capable of fostering an affinity with pluralism, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence, both tendencies being part of the archipelago's progressive conservative political culture.

From a geopolitical and economic standpoint, the characteristics of Dodecanesian identity could also contribute to the promotion of regional stability and development. The cross-border socio-economic contact (cultural interaction, trade, tourism, shopping) between the islands and the Turkish coastal towns of Marmaris, Izmir, Bodrum, and Kaş (Kaurinkoski, 2013; Georgikopoulos, 2017) shows the way in which the permanence of pre-modern attitudes and practices defies States' monopoly over border management. Local and regional stakeholders' growing share of influence underlines the urge for taking into account the bottom-up initiatives that, without erasing territorial borders, get to navigate the conflicting emotions and representations produced when it comes to the stereotyped opposition between Greeks and Turks as well as between the ''West and the rest'' (Ferguson, 2011). It is a fundamental challenge that involves the mobilization of local and regional elites, a minimum of bilateral political consensus between Greece and Turkey, an effective European framework of stability and protection, and a more focused United States implementation policy in order to balance Russian and Chinese economic penetration. If played out properly, this possibility could push forward the conversation of stability through mutual confidence[6] and create the basis for the promotion of bilateral (Greece-Turkey) and multilateral (European Union, private investments, interregional alliances) economic partnerships on regional development.

Last but not least, Dodecanesian identity contains a patchwork of symbols and images that has a role to play in our Global era. Stemming from various forms of territoriality and network organization, these features could be useful for Greek and European identities as far as cultural adaptation and opening-up processes are concerned. Whilst Orthodox Dodecanesians promote local strategies of distinction and, at the same time, cherish their

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[6] Regarding issues such as the Aegean dispute and Turkey's growing disagreements about energy policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

national culture, myths, and symbols[7], other realities re-emerge as reminders of the transition from a dual system (Ottoman-Westphalian) to fragmented structures of pre-modern origin. The Dodecanesian Muslim minority continues, for example, to identify itself with the local and regional levels rather than with the national one (Greek or Turkish). This population constitutes, therefore, a sort of Ottoman residue that –although refusing to enter national identity forms of expression– is very well integrated in the post-modern insular society through common memories and a shared sense of territoriality.

In addition to the attachment to land, the existence of cosmopolitan and religious networks interconnects the members of a wider Dodecanesian community through local, regional, and national Mythistory. The Dodecanesian Diaspora in Europe, the United States, Africa, and Australia expresses its global dimension through deep-rooted traditional values that are linked, since the Ottoman era, with Greek national consciousness and Orthodox Christianity (Mavrogordatos, 2003). The return of a regional patriotism and the growing politico-economic influence of these communities abroad have an impact on the host-countries' foreign policy towards issues of Greek and European concern (Bruneau, 2000; Sheffer, 2003; Laguerre, 2016), as the crucial mediation efforts of the Obama administration during the 2015 Greek political crisis (danger of ''Grexit'') have shown. Furthermore, third and fourth generation diasporic Dodecanesians tend to organize regular family tourism visits to their ancestral homelands in order to renew or (re-)discover their local and regional attachments. This is also the case for the descendants of the diasporic Rhodian Jews who escaped the 1944 deportations; since the early 2000s, organized group visits to the Jewish district and the Synagogue of the Old town of Rhodes have become a standardized practice for the members of this growing transnational network, linked through the development of a tourism of memory (Sintès, 2010). Concrete or symbolic ties with the ancestral homeland continue to be an essential element for the Dodecanesian Diaspora and an important promoter of regional identity. By establishing and maintaining international, trans-state, and trans-local networks, these communities enable exchanges of significant political, economic and cultural resources and contribute to the promotion of ''glocal'' strategies, which accord with the current post-modern stakes.

It is becoming increasingly clear that a re-interpretation of the diversified character of Dodecanesian identity would be useful to Europe from a geopolitical and a cultural point of view. Safety, security, and progress lie not only in finding the right set of partnerships around the maritime periphery (Stavridis, 2017), but also in assessing the advantages related to the conditions of the sea and its value system: risk-taker mentality, thirst for discovery and innovation, competence, resourcefulness, and a strong will for interconnection. Dodecanesians, in Greece and the Diaspora, represent a link between Western and Eastern realities within the constantly changing framework of Globalization. The multi-faceted regional Mythistory –perceived until recently as an obstacle to ''modernization'' and ''Europeanization''– could in fact function as an asset in order for Greece and Europe to reconcile themselves with complex ideas and practices overlooked in the past and, thus, to respond effectively to the challenges of our times.

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[7] In the Dodecanese, there is no secular tradition because of the specific geo-historic experience. The identification between religion and nationalism had gone unchallenged as a means of introducing, under foreign occupation, regional identity into modernity.

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