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Research in the communities – mapping potential cultural heritage sites with potential for adaptive re-use – Heraklion (Greece)

The island of Crete in general and the city of Heraklion has an enormous cultural heritage. The Arab traders from al-Andalus (Iberia) who founded the Emirate of Crete moved the island's capital from Gortyna to a new castle they called *rabḍ al-ḥandaq* in the 820s. This was Hellenized as Χάνδαξ (*Chándax*) or Χάνδακας (*Chándakas*) and Latinized as **Candia**, the Ottoman name was *Kandiye*. The ancient name Ηράκλειον was revived in the 19th century and comes from the nearby Roman port of Heracleum ("Heracles's city"), whose exact location is unknown. English usage formerly preferred the classicizing transliterations "Heraklion" or "Heraclion", but the form "Iraklion" is becoming more common.



Knossos is located within the Municipality of Heraklion and has been called as Europe's oldest city.

Heraklion is close to the ruins of the palace of Knossos, which in Minoan times was the largest centre of population on Crete. Knossos had a port at the site of Heraklion from the beginning of Early Minoan period (3500 to 2100 BC). Between 1600 and 1525 BC, the port was destroyed by a volcanic tsunami from nearby Santorini, leveling the region and covering it with ash.

The present city of Heraklion was founded in 824 by the Arabs under Abu Hafs Umar. They built a moat around the city for protection, and named the city *rabḍ al-ḥandaq*, "Castle of the Moat", Hellenized as Χάνδαξ, *Chandax*). It became the capital of the Emirate of Crete (ca. 827–961). The Saracens allowed the port to be used as a safe haven for pirates who operated against Imperial (Byzantine) shipping and raided Imperial territory around the Aegean.

In 960, Byzantine forces under the command of Nikephoros Phokas, later to become Emperor, landed in Crete and attacked the city. The city fell in March 961. The Saracen inhabitants were slaughtered, the city looted and burned to the ground. Soon rebuilt, the town remained under Byzantine control for the next 243 years.

In 1204, the city was bought by the Republic of Venice. The Venetians improved on the ditch of the city by building enormous fortifications, most of which are still in place, including a giant wall, in places up to 40 m thick, with 7 bastions, and a fortress in the harbor. Chandax was renamed *Candia* and became the seat of the Duke of Candia, and the Venetian administrative district of Crete became known as "Regno di Candia" (Kingdom of Candia). To secure their rule, Venetians began in 1212 to settle families from Venice on Crete. The coexistence of two different cultures and the stimulus of Italian Renaissance led to a flourishing of letters and the arts in Candia and Crete in general, that is today known as the *Cretan Renaissance*.



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The Venetian loggia (1626–28).



The Basilica of St Titus, the Patron Saint of Crete during the medieval times.

During the Cretan War (1645–1669), the Ottomans besieged the city for 21 years, from 1648 to 1669, perhaps the longest siege in history. The Ottoman army under an Albanian grand vizier, Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed Pasha conquered the city in 1669.

Under the Ottomans, *Kandiye* was the capital of Crete until 1849, when Chania (*Hanya*) became the capital, and Kandiye became a sancak. In Greek, it was commonly called *Megalo Castro* (Μεγάλο Κάστρο 'Big Castle').

During the Ottoman period, the harbour silted up, so most shipping shifted to Chania in the west of the island.



The Morosini fountain in Lions Square.

In 1898, the autonomous Cretan State was created, under Ottoman suzerainty, with Prince George of Greece as its High Commissioner and under international supervision. During the period of direct occupation of the island by the Great Powers (1898–1908), Candia was part of the British zone. At this time, the city was renamed "Heraklion", after the Roman port of Heracleum ("Heracles' city"), whose exact location is unknown.

In 1913, with the rest of Crete, Heraklion was incorporated into the Kingdom of Greece. Heraklion became again capital of Crete in 1971, replacing Chania.



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Out of all mapped sites, we selected the above 3 for which we would give proposal for adaptive re-use:

The Venetian fortress of Koules

The Venetian fortress of **Koules** dominates the entrance to the Venetian **harbour of Heraklion**. The Venetians called it the “Sea Fortress” (Castello a Mare or Rocca a Mare), but today it is known by its Turkish name, Koules, a corruption of Su Kulesi (Water Tower). It is one of the most familiar and beloved monuments of the city, and the symbol of Heraklion.

Today the fortress of Koules gazes proudly out across the Sea of Crete, reminding us of the glory of Venetian **Chandax**. It is haunted by legends that Cretan rebels were horribly tortured in its damp, dark rooms.

We do not know the precise origins of the history of Koules, but a harbour in such a strategic position in the Mediterranean could not remain undefended. The first fortress was probably built on the site of Koules during the Arab period (9th-10th c.), while there is a reference to a tower called the Castellum Comunis at the harbour entrance in the Second Byzantine period (10th-13th c.)

In 1462 the Venetian Senate approved an ambitious programme of fortification of the city, which was to defend both Heraklion and the burghs (suburbs) outside it, according to the principles of the new bastion front system. As part of this project, the harbour tower was demolished in 1523 and replaced by the Koules fortress still standing today.

Work on Koules continued until 1540. The outer walls are almost 9 metres thick, while the inner walls are up to 3 metres thick at some points.

The fortress is a two-storey building with 26 rooms. The ground floor also housed a prison and various storage areas for food and munitions.



The impact of the sea-corrosion on the monument and on the materials of the restoration of the '70ies was already obvious by the beginning of the second millennium. The project for the “Restoration and Conservation of the Venetian Fortress (Kules) of Heraklion”, which lasted from 2011 to 2016 was financed by the NSRF with 2.050.000€ and by the State Fund with 120.000€. The campaign was initially conducted by the Fund for the Management of Credits for Archaeological Works, and from June 2013 by a Scientific Commission subjected to the 13th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities (actually Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion). The project included three categories of interventions; a. restoration of the building, b. conservation of the stone surfaces, c. visitor facilities.



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The Monastery of St. Peter and St. Paul

It is situated approximately in the middle of the seaside wall. It was built from the first years of the venetian domination and belonged to the monastic order of Dominicans (Domenicani Predicatori). It was one of the most important and biggest Catholic monasteries of the city. The earthquake of 1508 caused a lot of damages to the temple. During excavations that took place recently in the wider area of the temple (area of Kastella) graves of the second Byzantine period came to light and underneath them an extended habitation of the Arabic period that gave a lot of information for the architecture and the style of life of that era. The finds from this excavation are exhibited in the Historical Museum. The whole area has been expropriated in order to conserve the antiquities and its historical character, as well as to preserve a free view of the venetian monastery.

The monastery, partly destroyed during the Turkish occupation, was made into a mosque of Sultan Ibrahim with a minaret at its southwest corner. Today it is reconstructed under the supervision of the 13th Archaeological Service and the Cretan Archdiocese.



Part of the excavations at Kastella, east of the church of St. Peter & St. Paul, where graves of the 2nd Byzantine period were uncovered as well as an extended habitation of the Arabic period beneath them.

New Venetian walls

Chandakas, after the Venetian occupation and settlement in 1211 (its name became Candia from the new settlers) developed into a very important centre of political, military, cultural and merchandise life of the whole island. It had a palace for the duke, big houses for the nobility, churches for the religious people and any other element that characterized a similar city of Venetian kingdom.

When the Arabs conquered Crete, they organized an important settlement in the area of today's Heraklion which they enclosed with walls built by raw bricks, based on a stone podium with towers and straight parts. On this stone base, the Byzantines of Nikiforos Fokas built their own fortified enclosure and expanded it on the course that is marked by the roads Chandakos, Daidalou, D. Bofor and the sea port.





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The Venetians, when they settled in Chandakas were, initially, contented with the existed fortification (Arab - Byzantine) parts of which are still preserved today (behind new buildings) along Chandakos, Daidalou, D. Bofor str. and the city port, by repairing them in order to be protected by internal upheavals. When, though, they realized that the Turkish danger was becoming very obvious, they started the planning and the building of the new fortified enclosure (the one that is still seen today) that would include the city and the suburbs, starting from the middle of the 15th century.

It is one of the most important historical monuments for the city of Heraklion.

Since 1989 there exists a special municipal office that aims at the reconstruction and restoration of the Venetian Walls within a statutory framework of a Policy Contract that has been signed among the Ministry of Culture, the Archaeological Revenue Office and the Municipality of Heraklion. The municipality is trying to reconstruct and bring into sight the fortified enclosure and the ditch, to create green areas, play grounds and sport grounds, as well as walking paths and recreation areas, so that the stroller and the visitor today can connect with the historical past of the city and the monuments.

We chose the 3 spaces because in all those three places no cultural or any other activities are happening regularly.

Today **Koules** is occasionally used for art exhibitions held indoors on the ground floor and plays or concerts on the top floor, weather permitting.

In the **Monastery of St. Peter and St. Paul**, after the reconstruction, the holy place is used as a festive temple and a meeting place for international, orthodox, Christian and religious congresses, that take place only once or twice a year.

On the **Venetian Walls**, only some sport activities are permitted, mostly just under the walls, of course it is open to visitors to walk up there.

We strongly believe that if the Archaeological Revenue Office and the Ministry of Culture would permit for example to organize an annual festival "On the Walls", something like Fridge Festival, the value of the monument would be increased, the historical past would get connected with the modern city and the citizens, who nowadays they don't feel these Walls as part of their city, they hardly visit them or walk on them.

Theatrical or music festivals, concerts, conferences, scientific meetings, projects on cultural heritage, exhibitions, cultural activities could take place in all the three places in regular base, not occasionally. Each time, at least 300 people in the open theatre of castle Koules, 300 in the Monastery of St. Peter and St. Paul, and about 5000 people on the Venetian Walls can benefit from the use of those spaces.

With our proposal we promote cultural development, social engagement, economic growth and sustainability.

Europe in the 2015 Council declaration states among other things: Culture is an essential component of the human, social, economic and environmental dimension of development and therefore a key element of sustainable development, given that:

– dynamic cultural and creative sectors, including cultural heritage, in partner countries can contribute to poverty reduction, as they are important catalysts for growth, employment, social cohesion and local development.

Although Heraklion is a city with a huge cultural heritage, on the other hand is the commercial and touristic center of Crete, which does not give significance to culture. With the exploitation of cultural heritage there will be the chance for people to develop, to express themselves and present new ideas, work on innovative projects and for the city to increase the number of tourists who will not come just to visit the famous Knossos but also other places and get familiar with the culture and history of Cretans that of traditional dance, music, crafts, Mediterranean cuisine.



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Final observation / Personal opinion

The idea of a big festival titled “On the Walls”, came up when we had the chance to visit and perform our street theater production “Orpheus & Euridice” in “Jazz – Theater Festival” at Nisville, Serbia. It is amazing how theatrical and music groups with the big help of the local community, are creating this huge festival where people from all over the world is coming to watch.

A monument of a big cultural heritage has been transformed to a cell of modern, innovative ideas on art. Hundreds of volunteers, and professional artists work in harmony together and the city after so many years has become well known because a crazy idea to create an international jazz festival, which finally helped not only in social development, but on economical and touristic growth too.

This is what we wish here in Heraklion to happen, culture to become our ambassador. Of course the community engagement is the key for success. We have noticed that when speaking of cultural heritage people feel proud and it is easier to get involved in an activity that concerns local history and culture. We have also noticed that people here are longing to re-use cultural spaces, they don't want to be just tourists in their own city, just visit the monuments once and that's all. They are very excited and supportive when new things are happening, so that is why we strongly believe that new possible projects of re-using several places in the city will have big success, not only concerning creativity but economical growth too.