

ORAL HISTORY - THE CITY OF KIFISSIA – ENVIROMENTAL ISSUES

I. Maropaki, L. Vatikiotis

Hellenic Open University

[*\(irmarop@gmail.com\)*](mailto:irmarop@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

Oral history is a little-known practice in Greece. Moreover, the usefulness of this methodology in dealing with ecological and environmental disasters is completely unknown. The present work, which forms part of a network of related theses with innovative themes of the Hellenic Open University, attempts to create for the first time a primary historical source, based on the collective memory focused on a Greek city, in this case, Kifissia. Guided by the basic theoretic literature and having as an asset only the adoration for her city and some rudimentary equipment, a civil engineer receives, transcripts, presents, and as far as possible, interprets eleven interviews with ordinary people that the official history would have probably ignored. Starting from the limited local literature, the researcher seeks out unknown information about the natural environment, the local infrastructure and the human factor, attempting to illuminate unknown aspects of the most famous, oldest and most beautiful suburb of the city of Athens. The vision is not only to preserve the memory of these people but also to highlight the possibility, or rather the necessity, of the scientific processing of this memory and the integration of its results into the current decision-making structures for the development of cities, the protection of their comparative advantages and the elimination of the risk of their downfall. The younger generation who respects their city are due to learn and embrace the idealized memory of the oldest. The necessary tools are there.

KEYWORDS

Oral History, Kifissia, Local Environmental Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

The value of oral history lies in the fact that it leads historians to realize that their activity takes place in a context, more "social" in nature, than that of "political", traditional history. Furthermore, the literature demonstrates many cases of using collective memory to repair an ecological disaster in a particular area.

The aim of the dissertation is to offer a methodological collection, procedure and synthesis of oral history data, which focus

locally on the Municipality of Kifissia, Attica and thematically on the environment, the infrastructure and the people. Its purpose is to demonstrate the potential of oral history as a methodology for preserving and interpreting the collective memory of the people of a city, incorporating this knowledge into current decision-making structures, in order to protect it. Kifissia is a typical example of a city with a history and comparative advantages that are worth protecting.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the work was based on the teachings of Paul Thompson (2008) and Lynn Abrams (2014) as well as a series of selected articles. Conducting the interviews required a preliminary preparation with an overview of the limited literature on the city and the drafting of an initial questionnaire. The narrators were sought through the close family and friendly environment and through contact with a Municipal Councillor who suggested suitable interviewees.

Making the interviews was a difficult process. The adaptation of the questionnaire to each different narrator, the understanding of its peculiar characteristics and limits, its treatment, the creation of trust, the presentation and explanation of the purpose of the work, the polite keeping of the narrator's thought in the context of interest (but without recommending his oppression), the equal conversation, the indication of appreciation to them, they each needed special attention.

Recording and archiving the audiovisual material was the most painful stage. Especially the transcription of the recordings was the most time-consuming work as every ten minutes record required about an hour of transcription. The time pressure made it necessary to simultaneously mix up interviews, recordings, transcriptions and syntax, instead of the more logical completion of each stage before the following one.

Presenting the interviews follows the model of "reminiscence" -according to Abrams-, leaving the narrators to speak for themselves, and to a lesser extent, the model of "interpretation". In both cases, the goal remains the emergence of raw material that can serve to redesign the environmental, urban and man-made elements of the city, in the direction of sustainable development, using, in a creative way, elements of its past.

The elements that make up the historical timeless concept of Kifissia are neither simple nor unambiguous. Its environmental characteristics are intertwined through man,

and his own constructions with its social history.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Kifissia through the official data*

This chapter examines the history of Kifissia as it emerges from official data. It also presents its history from antiquity and then to the Roman and the Byzantine era, the Venetian and the Turkish occupations and finally, the modern era, after liberation, with their individual stages, each of which contributes to its character as a luxury resort.

It is not insignificant that Kifissia was the place of recreation of emperors, conquerors of all kinds and kings but also the place of establishment of aristocrats and, later, well-to-do representatives of the bourgeoisie, especially expatriates, followed by the necessary followers, craftsmen and service personnel.

The modern urban history of Kifissia begins in 1882 when it is connected by rail to Athens and continues, initially, with continuous inclusion of surrounding areas in the city plan, which will be presented in detail. The current enlargement of Kifissia is a result of the last quarter of the 20th century. The "fully detached" buildings development system is a savior for the environmental character of Kifissia

3.2 *Kifissia through the interviews-Natural Environment*

This chapter of the paper is devoted to the informative details deriving from the interviews regarding the natural environment. The words of the narrators are redistributed and mixed up to present the geology, the climate, the water (perhaps the most important element of Kifissia), the seasons, the trees, the flowers and the gardens, with all the relevant culture created by the gardeners of the famous mansions of Kifissia. There are also details on crops of trees, vegetables, fruits and flowers, quite unknown to newer residents. The unknown fauna (wild and domestic) wealth of the area is also described. The chapter

concludes with a reference to the natural disasters that marked the city, earthquakes, floods and regional fires.

3.3 Kifissia through the interviews-Infrastructure

In this chapter the work focuses on infrastructure, private or public. The recollection of the narrators about the evolution of the small village of Kifissia into a modern economic center, mainly commercial, but also industrial (Kifissia has an industrial park) is graphic. The city's expansion brings along craftsmen, mainly quarriers employed in neighboring Penteli mountain, and then employees. Horse trolleys and mansions characterize the city, which generously offers entertainment to tourists, visitors and residents. Antiquities, exhibitions, mainly the well-known Greek Floriculture, cinemas, well-known patisseries and, from luxury hotels - many of which still exist - to cheaper campsites, are available to the public, whose access to the city is easy. Since 1882, when the railway commenced operating, as well as the Kifissias' Avenue of 1950 and later the Athens-Lamia National Road, all facilitated the transportation by buses, taxis and private cars, proving the value of sufficient transport axes for the development of a city. Equally important for each city, however, are the issues of water supply, sewerage and waste collection, as well as electricity, telephony and gas networks, for which two separate subchapters of this chapter are dedicated, concluding with the narrators' reports on educational issues (public and private), sports, music education and health-care.

3.4 Kifissia through the interviews - Man

The last chapter of the main, narrative part of the work refers to man. This is the chapter with the most impressive sociological revelations, without omitting urban development data. The narrators talk about the mansions and the listed buildings, they complain about the plethora of catering facilities (cafes, restaurants etc) and the lack of sidewalks and parking lots. They outline the expansion of the urban plan of the city, with special emphasis on

the areas of Politia, Nea Kifissia, Asty of Egypt and the Workers' Buildings. The narrators typically divide the recent history of Kifissia into three periods. A first period, the aristocracy, until 1930. A second period until 1950, that of the wealthy bourgeois. And a third, simpler one, which continues even today, in which romance has been lost. The younger ones do not know the past reminiscent of the older ones.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The chapter of conclusions is evolving on two levels. The first, relatively smaller, refers to the working procedure experience itself and oral history as a practice, trying to document the value of illuminating the dark spots of official history through modern and valuable means of developing and protecting a city. It turns out that oral history works in combination with formal history, but it cannot exist independently, it has limitations (obsessions, ambiguities, vagueness, distortions) but also important possibilities. Oral history is a new, extremely important, and more personal, more social, and more democratic primary source of history, confirms Thompson.

The second and largest part of the last chapter expresses the model of interpreting oral history. It composes the previous narratives and comes to some more general conclusions. Here reference is made to the course of Kifissia in connection with the parallel course of the nearby capital, as well as the choice of the royal family to install in the area its summer palaces and the corresponding attraction of the bourgeoisie, as confirmed by the narratives. Residential pressure creates settlements where there was arable land. The natural environment, fortunately without being destroyed, mutates. The people who flock are mixed under a cloak of noble rivalry and admiration for the most worthy and beautiful. A new bourgeoisie is slowly being created, perhaps less romantic but definitely creative and conscious. In a more modern phase, there are even more people who are attracted by Kifissia's fame, but are unconsciously not

interested in the city itself, because they take it for granted, and do not know its history, its evolution, its true beauty. There is an obvious generation gap, but it is not competitive. It is more a gap of negligence, which oral history could bridge.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abrams L. (2014). Θεωρία προφορικής ιστορίας. Αθήνα: Πλέθρον.
- [2] Thompson, P. (2008) Φωνές από το Παρελθόν - Προφορική Ιστορία. Αθήνα: Πλέθρον