



Narrative spaces, memory, trauma, and health: Asia Minor literature as a vehicle for cultural entrepreneurship

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Abstract

This study examines the literature of the Greeks of Asia Minor as a carrier of cultural memory and a platform for cultural entrepreneurship, focusing on narrative spaces connected to the refugee experience, health, and trauma. It explores how literary narratives reflect the psychosocial impacts of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, reinforcing collective memory and the historical identity of refugee communities. At the same time, it investigates the contribution of literature to the promotion of cultural sites, the development of literary tourism, and the formation of sustainable cultural entrepreneurial practices. By linking narrative landscapes, historical memory, and thematic tourist routes, the study highlights literature's potential as a tool for preserving cultural heritage and enhancing the psychosocial well-being of communities through experiential engagement. The findings demonstrate that literature can simultaneously function as a medium of memory, a driver of cultural tourism and entrepreneurship, and a mechanism supporting social cohesion and sustainable development.

Keywords: Memory; Trauma; Health; Asia Minor; Literature; Culture; Entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

The refugee experience constitutes one of the most decisive factors in modern Greek history, profoundly shaping both collective memory and cultural production (Nikolaidis, 2020; Aivaliotis, 2020). Following the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922, violent displacement, loss of homeland, and forced resettlement generated a powerful emotional and thematic framework that deeply influenced literary expression (Beaton, 1999; Hirschon, 2003). Refugee narratives, imbued with nostalgia and trauma, emerged as essential means for interpreting historical experience and preserving cultural heritage (Venezis, 2010; Georgiou, 2004).

In Greece's border and island regions, memory is increasingly transformed into contemporary cultural entrepreneurial practices through literature, oral history, and thematic cultural routes (Manola, 2019; Manola, 2020; Manola & Angelopoulos, 2020; Manola & Gioka, 2021; Manola & Tsatalbasoglou, 2020; Manola, Balerbas & Kuni, 2020; Manola & Teliopoulou, 2021; Manola et al., 2023; Manola, 2022; Manola, 2023; Manola, Tsatalbasoglou & Pappas, 2022; Manola, Tsatalbasoglou & Koltsikoglou, 2024; Manola & Tsatalbasoglou, 2022). The utilization of these cultural resources strengthens local identity, generates social and economic value, and contributes to sustainable cultural development.

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2. The Asia Minor Catastrophe and Its Impact on Literature

The Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922 represents one of the most traumatic events in modern Greek history, marking the end of centuries of Greek presence in Asia Minor. The defeat of the Greek army by the forces of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk led to violent expulsions, mass killings, and the destruction of flourishing Greek communities (Clogg, 2002). The burning of Smyrna in September 1922 symbolized not only material devastation but also the cultural annihilation of Asia Minor Hellenism.

Approximately 1.5 million Greeks were forced to abandon their ancestral homes and seek refuge in Greece (Mazower, 2021). The sudden influx of refugees created intense social and economic pressures, prompting large-scale state interventions in housing, land redistribution, and social welfare. Despite these efforts, poverty, discrimination, and political instability—exacerbated by the National Schism—complicated the integration process (Alexandris, 1992; Aivaliotis, 2020).

This historical trauma profoundly influenced modern Greek literature. Themes of loss, uprooting, survival, and adaptation became central narrative axes, giving rise to what is commonly described as “refugee literature” (Clogg, 2002). Writers recorded both personal and collective experiences of displacement, transforming historical catastrophe into literary testimony and reflective memory (Beaton, 1999). Memory and nostalgia functioned as mechanisms for preserving identity and resisting oblivion (Veremis & Koliopoulos, 2003; Hirsch, 2012).

3. Literary Narratives and the Psychosocial Impact of the Asia Minor Catastrophe

The literature of the Greeks of Asia Minor serves as a crucial medium for recording collective memory and capturing the psychosocial consequences of forced displacement. Through the works of Dido Sotiriou (*Bloody Earth*), Stratis Doukas (*Story of a Captive*), Elias Venezis (*Number 31328*, *Aeolian Land*, *Calm*), and George Seferis (*Eleni*, *Novel*), human suffering, trauma, resilience, and identity reconstruction are vividly portrayed.

These narratives depict captivity, loss of homeland, forced adaptation, and psychological endurance, transforming historical tragedy into lived experience (Vitti, 1977). Sotiriou’s *Bloody Earth* gives voice to anonymous refugees, emphasizing solidarity and survival under extreme conditions (Georgiou, 2004). Doukas’ *Story of a Captive* highlights the psychological reality of captivity and the complexity of identity through concise, first-person narration (Hoppen et al., 2014).

Venezis combines lyricism and realism to portray trauma, endurance, and the necessity of collective memory (Venezis, 2010; Beaton, 1999). Seferis’ poetry transforms the Asia Minor Catastrophe into an existential inquiry, linking memory and trauma with broader reflections on Greek identity (Vitti, 1977).

These works have also gained international recognition, functioning as universal testimonies against war and displacement. Their use in literary routes and cultural events in places such as Ayvalik demonstrates how literature facilitates the cultural and touristic utilization of historical memory (Lambrides, 1954; Tsatalbassoglou et al., 2024).

4. Asia Minor Literature as a Carrier of Cultural Memory

Asia Minor literature operates as a dynamic carrier of cultural memory rather than a simple record of historical events. Through narratives of exile, loss, and nostalgia, it preserves historical consciousness and reinforces collective identity across generations. Literary works function as “places of memory,” where trauma is recalled, reinterpreted, and integrated into cultural continuity.

Authors such as Seferis and Venezis reconstruct not merely lost geographies but entire cultural worlds of language, values, and everyday practices, contributing to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage (Beaton, 2003). Literary representations of places such as Smyrna and Ayvalik create emotionally charged narrative spaces that enhance experiential connections between memory and place (Herbert, 2001).

These narrative spaces have encouraged the development of literary tourism through thematic routes, festivals, and cultural events, strengthening the relationship between heritage and contemporary cultural practices (Manola, 2019). Educational programs and digital applications further enhance experiential learning and cultural awareness, linking memory with sustainable cultural tourism (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

5. Cultural Entrepreneurship and Narrative Spaces of Refugee Memory

Contemporary cultural entrepreneurship functions as a key mechanism for sustainable development by linking cultural heritage with innovative economic, social, and cultural practices. Narrative spaces of refugee memory are constructed through literature, oral testimonies, and cultural expressions, forming networks that transform displacement into symbolic and experiential resources (Maniou et al., 2025a).

Through literary routes, storytelling museums, digital platforms, and cultural festivals, collective memory becomes a living experience that enhances social cohesion and local economic development (Pagkalos et al., 2025e; Maniou et al., 2025f). International examples, such as Cinecittà in Rome and Casa Malaparte in Capri, illustrate how narrative spaces can generate cultural and entrepreneurial value (Maniou et al., 2025a; Maniou et al., 2025b).

In island and border regions, refugee memory plays a crucial role in shaping identity. Studies in the Aegean demonstrate that integrating literature, gastronomy, and local traditions can create coherent cultural products with strong narrative character, supporting sustainable development and cultural revitalization (Maniou et al., 2025i; Maniou et al., 2025a).

Finally, it's critical to emphasize how beneficial and productive digital technologies are for the field of entrepreneurship and education. The use of these technologies, which include mobile devices (42), a range of ICT apps (43-48), AI & STEM ROBOTICS (49-52), and games (53), facilitates and improves educational processes including evaluation, intervention, and learning. Additionally, the use of ICTs along with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation, and the development of emotional intelligence [54-62], accelerates and improves educational practices and outcomes, especially in the educational, managerial and entrepreneurial domain.

6. Conclusions

The Asia Minor Catastrophe, refugee literature, and contemporary cultural entrepreneurship constitute interconnected dimensions of a broader cultural ecosystem in which memory, identity, and creativity interact dynamically. Literature records historical trauma and supports psychosocial understanding, while cultural entrepreneurship transforms memory into sustainable cultural and economic practices.

By linking narrative spaces, experiential engagement, and cultural heritage, refugee memory becomes an active agent of social cohesion, cultural continuity, and sustainable development. In this way, historical trauma is reconstituted as a creative resource that bridges the past with the cultural and economic prospects of the present and future.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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