



**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS
OF FESTIVAL CELEBRATIONS ON THE ISLAND OF RHODES,
GREECE, DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to study the function of the traditional festivals on the island of Rhodes during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to explore community members and official institution representatives' views on their psychological and socio-economic consequences. A structured interview was designed, which was given online to 168 subjects, of which 96 community members in the villages of the island of Rhodes

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and to 72 official institutions, representatives of cultural and local authorities, within the context of the beginning of the festivities with some restrictions, in August 2021, in the light of the pandemic. The results of the research show that the majority of community members and official institution representatives of the sample emphasize the communicative, cultural, recreational, and social dimensions of the festivals, however, some claim that there are no longer events that arise interest. Regarding their cancellation during the pandemic period, the majority of community members answer that the entertainment - communication sector was most affected, while the representatives of the institutions emphasize the economic consequences. In general, regarding the consequences of the pandemic on the behavior and psychology of individuals, introversion, isolation, antisociality, belligerence, tension and nervousness, are emphasized, while mistrust seems to prevail even in close family settings. Moreover, the majority of community members and representatives emphasize that social offer and solidarity are not exhibited to a satisfactory degree, while volunteering activities are limited. Regarding the pandemic, vaccination is suggested as the most effective means, mainly by the official institution representatives. Regarding the events of 2021 that shocked them most, the community members focus on economic, social and psychological - personal problems, while the official institution representatives focus on environmental and economic problems. Finally, most of them state that they do not want the transformation of festivals, however, they regard the emphasis on tradition as a sustainable perspective of local festivals.

Keywords: festival celebrations, COVID-19 pandemic, impact, views

1. Introduction

The Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) were characterized by fragile structures and working practices, already pre-COVID-19. Since the pandemic hit Europe and the whole world, in March 2020, CCS has been among the sectors, the most affected in the performing arts and heritage (European Parliament, 2021: 9). In Spring 2020, a number of great lockdown measures were taken by the government in Greece. Measures also affected individual freedom, and work everywhere but especially in the CCS (Ibidem, 22). The lockdown affected the non-standard workers, artists or "*invisible workers*" holding a second job in the cultural field (Ibidem, 16). Cancellations of festivals and fairs had an important impact on the local economy as well as on local hospitality and tourism (Ibidem, 34).

Culture is an important driver for psychological well-being, because art opens up, due to social engagement, celebration, participation, cooperation, self-expression and meaning making, building social bonds among individuals. Art also opens up to enjoyment, amusement, and satisfaction as a pleasurable fulfillment (Oliver, 1997, cited Anil, 2012: 259· Xanthacou, Kaila & Papavasileiou, 2018) as "*a sum of the experiences the attendees had*" at the cultural events (McDowall, 2011, cited Anil ibidem: 282).

According to Fukuyama (1996), through cultural events like religion, and traditional historical habits, social capital is transmitted, with shared values and the need to assert one's own local identity. Social capital is location-specific (Kan, 2007, cited Attanasi et al., 2013: 4), particularly if the event is a regular one in a region. Getz (2009) defines these cultural events, fairs and festivals as a celebration of the values, ideology, identity and continuity of a community with a final purpose, the continuation of tradition, that is values that build the identity of the region. Festival tourism has popularity in tourist branches, what is called "*cultural*" or "*heritage tourism*" (Attanasi et al., 2013: 5). Inhabitants and visitors share values from tradition and history in the local regions in folklore-dance and music, culinary topic - local food, agricultural products, traditional craft, herb festivals of plants, historical heritage-tangible and intangible, religious event in the honor of a saint etc. (Stankova & Vassenska, 2015: 123).

Festival visitors are motivated by six domains: cultural exploration, novelty, recover equilibrium-rest, relaxation, escape-group socialization, interaction and family togetherness (Crompton & McKay, 1997: 438). Individuals attend these cultural events for utilitarian and hedonic reasons (Gursoy et al., 2006, cited Anil, 2012: 267).

A festival is a festive event held in the province, whether for religious, commercial or cultural reasons. In Greece, festivals are organized and held on the occasion of religious festivals in collaboration with churches, monasteries, local authorities and various associations such as cultural, commercial, official institution representatives of women, etc. Usually, the liturgy of the saint takes place, as well as the operation of the open-air market and they are accompanied by lunch, folk songs and traditional dances.

The festivals of Rhodes are mainly associated with religious ceremonies. With the liberation of the island in 1948 by the Italians, festivals acquired a role of meeting with the Rhodesian immigrants returning home from America, Australia, South Africa and Europe. Festivals were a common event of the village as a gathering that ended in entertainment, possibly observing the Dionysians of ancient Greece. Rhodes is a crossroad of cultures. For this reason, it has many influences from East, West and Africa. Its customs and traditions are a mixture of cultures, both from the time of the Knights and the nearby beaches of Asia Minor. The biggest festivals in Rhodes take place in the summer, because the outdoor space is offered for the gathering of more participants. The island is connected to the sea and the sun - Rhodes has been referred to as the daughter of the "Sun" since antiquity - and with the extroverted temperament, entertainment is turned into cultural expression, a society of contact, coexistence, optimism (Matzanos & Xanthacou, 2021a).

On March 23rd 2020, with officially 695 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 17 deaths, the nationwide lockdown was enforced in Greece as a key emergency public health measure (Giannopoulou & Tsobanoglou, 2020), with the cancellation of festivals. Human beings are fundamentally socially beings-according to Aristotle-and the need to belong as well as to gather with others is extremely important in our troubled world. COVID-19 pandemic has changed the lives of all of us, everywhere on the planet. Thousands died, millions became sick, and individuals remained locked in their houses deprived of

physical closeness. Research data indicate that mental health is affected by the general public (Vindegaard & Benros, 2020, cited Prati & Mancini, 2021: 2). Moreover, Luo et al. (2020:7) note that *“we have observed an overall high psychological impact of COVID-19 pandemic among healthcare workers, the general public, and patients with preexisting conditions”*. Similar, Salari et al., (2020, cited Prati & Mancini, 2021: 1) indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a number of psychological and mental disorders. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) notes *“the coronavirus disease 2019-COVID-19 pandemic may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a new disease and what could happen can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children”*. Symptoms of anxiety, depression, panic attacks, frustration, fear, worries, stress, boredom, irritability, restlessness, nervousness, uneasiness and the feeling of helplessness are among the psychological reactions to COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown, according to current research findings. Because social distancing is necessary for physical health, but *“unhealthy”* for emotional health (Cao et al., 2020; Lei et al., 2020; Li & Wang, 2020; Luo et al., 2020; Marmarosh et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2020; Mazza et al., 2020; Parks, 2020; Patsali et al., 2020; Saladino et al., 2020; Xiang et al., 2020; Jassin et al., 2021; Prati & Mancini, 2021, among others). Research in different populations and different countries. In addition, negative, the psychological impact is found in Greek data and surveys with empirical evidence in different populations, data influencing life satisfaction (Diamanti & Nikolaou, 2021; Fountoulakis et al., 2021; Giannopoulou et al., 2021; Matzanos & Xanthacou, 2021b; Papavasileiou et al., 2021; Strongylaki, 2021; Xanthacou et al., 2021, among others).

Finally, in August 2021, in Greece, many fairs and festivals reopened with new containment measures.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Purpose of the research

The present research aims to detect the views of official institution representatives and community members of the island of Rhodes regarding the reopening of local celebrations and festivals in Greece. The research took place between August and September 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, with officially 611.648 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 14.102 deaths from the beginning of the pandemic in Greece on September 10th 2021 and an increase in tourism in the country for 2021, 53.7% compared to 2020, as well as a decrease of tourism for 2021 which is calculated at 53.8% compared to 2019.

2.2 Research tool

Within the context of the pandemic and the beginning of the celebration of festivals in August 2021, a conducted online structured interview was designed, with open-ended questions, with the exception of a total of two closed-ended questions. The sample consisted of official institution representatives (local municipal authorities, cultural

associations) as well as community members in villages, where festivals are held on the island of Rhodes. The topics of the interview were mainly related to the festivals in the COVID-19 era and were therefore largely linked to the pandemic. We listen to people's stories, their own narrative: "what they know, what they like, what they believe".

The subjects answered a written, though an electronic version of the questionnaire (questions in a word file) and then sent their answers by e-mail to the researchers. The focus of the interview was to explore the views of respondents on:

- The observance of rules during the operation of the festivals within the context of the pandemic, as well as the actions of cultural official institution representatives during the pandemic at an educational, social, cultural, and environmental level.
- The possibility of transforming the cultural domains and particularly festivals as well as the role of digital technology.
- The relationship of festivals with entertainment, mental relaxation as well as tourism and the social, cultural and economic consequences of the cancellation of festivals during the previous year.
- The relationship of the pandemic to psychosocial behaviors, with emphasis on the description of conflicts in everyday life.
- Other related questions, such as the search for the most powerful weapon against COVID-19, the list of negative events in 2021, etc.

2.3 Research sample

The sample of the survey consisted of a total of 168 subjects from the island of Rhodes, of which 96 (57.1%) were community members and 72 (42.9%) were official institution representatives (representatives of Local Authorities and Cultural Associations).

2.4 Method of analysis and presentation of research data

After gathering all the answers of the sample to the questions of the structured interview, vertical analysis of the content of the answers to the open questions was performed, i.e., question by question. Initially, attempts were made to create basic response categories of the subjects to each question separately and then the accuracy of the categorization of the answers was checked and the system of the response categories was finally validated.

The answers to both open-ended and closed-ended questions were then coded for quantitative analysis, followed by statistical processing. Considering, on the one hand, that the main purpose of the present research was the comparative study of community members' and official institution representatives' views on the island of Rhodes, and on the other hand, the fact that all the examined research variables were categorical, in terms of inductive statistics, the Pearson Chi-Square statistical criterion was applied to test the relationship between two categorical variables. In fact, in all cases of statistical tests, $p = .05$ was used as the minimum level of statistical significance.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the distribution of the sample's community members and official institution representatives' answers regarding the knowledge of the rules of conducting festivals.

Table 1: Distribution of community members' answers and official institution representatives of the sample regarding the knowledge of the rules of performing festivals

Knowledge of the Rules of Conducting the Festivals	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
	They know the rules of protection	66.7		
They do not know the rules of protection	33.3	22.2		

Note: Statistical significance test of the differences.

Table 1 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the views of community members and official institution representatives regarding the rules of protection during the festivities ($p = .115$). The majority of both community members and official organizations (66.7% and 77.8% respectively), know the measures and can list them in detail: avoid crowding, keeping distances between tables and seats, performing in open spaces, banning dancing, wearing masks inside churches, placing antiseptics on tables. There is, however, a percentage of community members (33.3%) and a smaller number of institutions (22.2%), who state that they are unaware of the measures. The next question was related to the staging of festivals on the island of Rhodes during the summer of 2021, the community members and official institutions present a different reality in terms of their statements, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of the answers of community members and official institution representatives participating in the sample regarding the knowledge of rules of performing festivals

Implementation of Festivals in Summer 2021	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
	All festivals were performed	25.0		
Very few festivals were performed	41.7	11.1		
I do not know / I was not informed	33.3	5.6		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

As shown in Table 2, it appears that there is a statistically significant difference between the views of community members and official institutions regarding the performance of

the festivals ($p = .000$). The official institution representatives claim to a much higher degree (83.3% vs. 25.0% for the community members), that almost all the festivals took place. On the contrary, the community members, i.e. the main participants, show a reluctance to be informed and to participate in the festivities (33.3%).

Table 3 shows the distribution of the answers of the sample's community members and official institution representatives regarding the feasibility of observing the rules of protection at the festivals.

Table 3: Distribution of the sample's community members and official institution representatives regarding the feasibility of observing the rules of protection at the festivals

Feasibility of Observing Protection Rules at Festivals	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
	Yes, partly they were observed	25.0		
No, they were not observed	45.8	77.8		
I do not know	29.2	0.0		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

As shown in Table 3, there is a statistically significant difference between the views of community members and official institution representatives regarding the feasibility of observing the rules of protection at the festivals ($p = .000$). To a much greater extent (77.8%) than the community members (45.8%), official institution representatives claim that the protection rules were not observed during the festivities.

In addition, respondents were asked to estimate the financial losses from the cancellation of the festivals. That is, if they agree or disagree with the European Parliament (2021), which claims that there has been an immediate loss of revenue from the cancellation of cultural events (including festivals and fairs), and especially of non-permanent or seasonal workers during quarantine. The views of community members, as well as official institution representatives, are presented in the following Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of the sample's community members and official institution representatives for the loss of income from the cancellation of festivals

Loss of Income from the Cancellation of Festivals	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
	I agree for the loss of income	70.8		
I disagree with the loss of the income	12.5	16.7		
I do not know	16.7	0.0		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

As shown in Table 4, it appears that there is a statistically significant difference between the views of community members and official institution representatives regarding the loss of revenue from the cancellation of festivals ($p = .001$).

As there has been a lot of discussions lately about 5G digital technology, with its positive or negative connotations and suspicion of ignorance, we asked the sample to give their views on the possibility of using 5G digital technology in the festivities. Their views are listed in Table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of the sample's community members and official institution representatives for the use of 5G digital technology in the performance of festivals

Use of the Digital Technology 5G in the Performance of the Festivals	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
			No, I disagree with the use of 5G	41.7
Yes, I agree with some services	16.6	22.2		
I do not know	41.7	22.2		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

As shown in Table 5, it appears that there is a statistically significant difference between the views of community members and official institutions regarding the possibility of using 5G digital technology in the performance of festivals ($p = .030$). The detailed data of the table initially show that official institution representatives (55.6%) more than community members (41.7%) seem to disagree about the use of 5G digital technology at the festivals. On the contrary, the category of those who do not know or have no opinion has an opposing picture. 41.7% of community members were placed in this category compared to the percentage 22.2% of official institution representatives.

In times of such a health crisis, the topics of innovation and change are limited. However, the view is expressed that "*the way we think, socialize, spend our free time, work, shop and manage businesses will never be the same as before*" (European Parliament). The question is: can this be done with festivals? The views of the participants of the sample, based on their status, regarding the possibility of transforming festivals are listed in Table 6.

Table 6: Distribution of the sample's community members and official institution representatives regarding the transformation of the festivals

Transformation of Festivals	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
			No, they are not transformed	45.8
Yes, we will have to adapt	33.3	38.9		
Other	20.8	11.1		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

From the statistical data in Table 6, it appears that there is no statistically significant difference between the views of community members and official institution representatives in relation to the possibility of the transformation of festivals ($p = .242$).

Given that comedy, satire and socializing contribute to mental relaxation, the sample was asked to state "What kind of impact do festivals have on people – according to their opinion". The qualitative presentation of positive and negative views is outlined in the table below, with the percentages of institution representatives and community members being equal at this point.

Table 7: The contribution of festivals in the psychological and social domain

They contribute to mental health as:	They do not contribute to mental health as:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication, Socializing, occasions of community gatherings, Strengthening ties with friends, relatives, expatriates... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They belong to the past, nowadays is an indifferent event.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of a community that is expressed through the group as well as an opportunity for new acquaintances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In previous years it was one of the few entertainment opportunities for people, today it is not.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entertainment, "cure" for anxiety and fear, the natural psychologist of the lay person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festival is a means of joy and relaxation. In its current form it does not satisfy me. Cold stuff!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruption of daily life, routine, boredom, a pleasant break 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurgence of religious feeling 	

It has been found that the negative impact of the pandemic undermines not only the physical but also the mental health of people. The individuals in the sample were asked to state their immediate observations about possible changes in human behavior and psychology in the flow of pandemic reality. The responses of community members and official institution representatives are listed in Table 8.

Table 8: Distribution of the samples' community members and official institution representatives' responses to the possible changes in the behavior and psychology of people in the flow of pandemic

Possible Changes in The Behaviour and Psychology of People	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
	Trend towards introversion, isolation	45.8		
Trend towards unsociability, nervousness	41.7	33.3		
Other	12.5	11.1		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

The data in Table 8 show that there is no statistically significant difference between the views of community members in relation to those of the official institution

representatives regarding the possible changes in the behavior and psychology of people in the flow of pandemic reality ($p = .098$).

The data of Table 8, illustrate that both community members (45.8%) and institutions (50.0%) distinguish first of all elements of introversion. They look like they are used to isolation, they are distant. The percentage of community members (41.7%) and official institution representatives (33.3%) who discern antisocial behaviors in their environment is quite high.

The next question intends to support the observations of the subjects of the sample related to the behaviors that are most common in their social environment and to justify their choice. It is pointed out that they have only one choice. The choices of community members and institutions are listed in Table 9.

Table 9: Distribution of the responses of community members and official institutions to the behaviors that are most common in their social environment

Behaviours That are Most Common in Their Social Environment	Status		Statistical Significance	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
	Social isolation	37.5		
Social distrust	20.8	22.2		
Social offer	8.3	11.1		
Social pugnacity	33.3	5.6		
Social overcrowding	0.0	0.0		
Other	0.0	16.7		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

The data in Table 9 show that there is a statistically significant difference between the views of community members in relation to those of the official institution representatives in terms of behaviors that are more common in their social environment ($p = .000$). Social isolation and social pugnacity are the two poles of choice of the participants, with social pugnacity stated at a significantly higher percentage by community members (33.3%) compared to the percentage of official institution representatives (5.6%).

Participants were asked if local associations had developed during the pandemic additional volunteering activities, such as supporting vulnerable groups, fire observatories, stray animals' protection or something else. The views of the community members and the official institution representatives of the sample are listed in table 10.

Table 10: Distribution of the answers of community members and official institution representatives for the development of voluntary actions from local associations during the pandemic

Voluntary Actions of Local Associations during Pandemic	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
	Support of vulnerable groups	12.5		
Support of fire victims	16.7	11.1		
I do not know - nothing	70.8	55.6		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

The data in Table 10 show that there is a statistically significant difference between the views of community members and official institution representatives regarding the development of voluntary actions by local associations during the pandemic period ($p = .005$). The support of vulnerable groups is stated to a significantly higher degree by the official institution representatives (33.3%) compared to the degree of a statement by the community members (12.5%).

Another question is: Can summer festivals be combined with tourism? That is, to acquire a tourist dimension? In what way? The views of community members and institutions of the sample are listed in Table 11.

Table 11: Distribution of the answers of community members and official institution representatives regarding whether the festivals can be combined with tourism

Festivals and Tourism	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
	It is possible to be combined	70.8		
They have been partly combined	20.8	38.9		
Other	8.3	0.0		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

The data in Table 11 illustrate that there is a statistically significant difference between the views of community members and official institution representatives on the possibility of combining festivals with tourism ($p = .004$). The official institution representatives claim in a significantly higher percentage (38.9%) than the community members (20.8%) that festivals have already been partially combined with tourism. Participants, official institution representatives and community members were asked to indicate which of the proposed sectors was most affected by the cancellation of the pandemic festivals. The views of individuals are listed in Table 12.

Table 12: Distribution of the responses of the sample's community members and official institution representatives regarding the sector that was most affected by the cancellation of the festivals during the pandemic

Sectors That Were Most Affected by the Cancellation of Festivals during the Pandemic	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
	Economy	20.8		
Communication-entertainment	41.7	27.8		
Culture	25.0	16.7		
Other	12.5	5.6		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

The data in Table 12 show that there is a statistically significant difference between the views of community members and official institution representatives regarding the sector that was most affected by the cancellation of the festivals during the pandemic ($p = .001$). Official institution representatives seem to give a significantly higher priority to the financial sector than the community members (50.0% vs. 20.8% respectively). On the contrary, community members focus more on the field of entertainment - communication than the official institution representatives (41.7% vs. 27.8%).

The next question is related to exploring the views of community members and official institution representatives on the most powerful weapon against COVID-19. The results are shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Distribution of the answers of community members and official institution representatives regarding the most powerful weapon against COVID-19

The Most Powerful Weapon against COVID-19	Status		Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members (%)	Official institution representatives (%)	X ²	p
	General vaccination with observance of measures	50.0		
Proper nutrition, exercise, medication, precaution	20.8	22.2		
I do not know, I am wondering	29.2	11.1		

Note: Statistical significance test of the mean differences.

The data in Table 13 show that there is a statistically significant difference between the views of community members and official institution representatives regarding the most powerful weapon against COVID-19 ($p = .016$). As shown in the table, it becomes clear that in general there are three types of reactions-behaviors:

- Proponents of the vaccine, which to a greater extent are the official institution representatives (56.7%) rather than community members (50.0%). The subjects who are to the same degree official institution representatives and community members (22.2% and 20.8% respectively) and who intentionally try to

escape from the thematic “vaccination” and put emphasis on proper nutrition, exercise, calmness.

- People who show confusion, distrust, ignorance, denial, with a significantly higher percentage in community members (29.2%) than in official institution representatives (11.1%).

What are the views of the participants regarding the events that happened in 2021 locally, nationally and internationally and shocked them most and why. The data are listed in Table 14.

Table 14: Distributions of the responses of community members and official institution representatives to the various events that occurred in 2021 at local, national and international level and shocked them most

Events That Shocked People in 2021	Status				Statistical Significance Test	
	Community members		Official institution representatives			
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	X ²	P
Pandemic - vaccinations	37.5	62.5	72.2	27.8	19.886	.000
Natural disasters	33.3	66.7	50.0	50.0	4.744	.029
Psychological – personal problems	29.2	70.8	11.1	88.9	7.966	.005
Economic – social problems	45.8	54.2	27.8	72.2	5.688	.017
International problems	12.5	87.5	16.7	83.3	0.583	.445
I do not know / I do not answer	16.7	83.3	5.6	94.4	4.843	.028

The statistics in Table 14 show the existence of several statistically significant differences between community members and official institution representatives. Community members refer to a significantly higher degree: psychological - personal problems ($p = .005$), economic - social problems ($p = .017$), while they note a significantly higher proportion that they do not know or do not answer ($p = .028$). In contrast, official institution representatives note pandemics and vaccines ($p = .000$) as well as natural disasters in a statistically more important degree ($p = .029$).

4. Discussion-Conclusions

Festivals in Greece, the "layman's natural healers", "embedded in the Greek DNA", as members of the present sample testify, resumed (under certain restrictions) in August 2021. Official institutions confirmed that all customary festivals, especially the most prominent festivity celebrations, were hosted by various local communities across the villages of the island of Rhodes. On the other hand, the members of these local communities stated that, in comparison to the past, “these events were executed to a limited extent” and "were staged in an emotionally distant manner, in the absence of dancing festivities or any meaningful communication". These statements may be partly

explained by various testimonies indicating that individuals who attended the festivals did not adequately comply with the protection measures against the pandemic. It is also noteworthy that the majority of both official institution representatives and community members were aware of the protective measures and were capable of listing them. Moreover, the participants attributed any failure to adhere to the aforementioned measures to the undisciplined nature of the people, the mindless youth who discount the associated risks, the anti-vaccination protesters, the lack of information, the minimal inspection/enforcement by health services and confounding financial interests.

The association between festivals and mental health was assessed qualitatively, based on positive and negative reports of an equal number of official institution representatives and community members. Special reference was made to entertainment: as an antidote to the anxiety and the fear associated with the pandemic crisis, as a pleasant respite from one's daily routine, as the attempt of local social groups to collectively express themselves, and as an opportunity to form new acquaintances. It involves communication and bonding, as well as the strengthening of ties between family members, friends, and expatriates as well as a means of invigorating religious experience. It involves promoting the local area, through the prestige and pride that the locals feel for their region. In other words, festivals are instrumental in the integration of the social and symbolic capital of the region in which they are organized (Fukuyama, 1996; Getz, 2009; Attanasi et al., 2013).

From another point of view, festivals are nowadays regarded as "indifferent events, as opposed to the past, when they used to constitute one of the few forms of available entertainment", while other participants consider festivals "a means of gaining joy and achieving relaxation, even though in their current form, due to the pandemic, they seem to have lost their character". Finally, in their collective consciousness, festivals seem to harbor a sense of coexistence, fun and entertainment, rejoice and communication, social bonding and satisfaction, all of which are corroborated by international research (Crompton & MCKay, 1997; Getz, 1997; Oliver, 1997 cited Anil, 2012: 259; Getz, 2009; David et al., 2010; McDowall, 2011; Anil, 2012; Attanasi et al., 2013; Stankova & Vassenka, 2015; National Index of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2016; European Parliament, 2021; Matzanos & Xanthacou, 2021a, among others)

As stated by the sample's community members, the lockdown, which led to the cancellation of festivals from March 2021 to July 2021, mostly affected the entertainment-communication sector: "in many villages, festivals constitute the most important celebrations and perhaps the only opportunity to have fun and communicate with one another". On the other hand, official institutions emphasize the economic sector, stating that "whole families can live of festivity celebrations", that "... festivals serve as sources of income and boost local communities and their markets... due to the large number of visitors attending these events" and that "... vendors look forward to these events as a means of increasing their products' sales".

When exploring the possible behavioral and emotional impacts of the pandemic, official institutions and community members mainly point out the following themes: (i)

introversion and isolation: "people have become socially inhibited", "there is a lack of motivation to work, to seek company, or to engage in other kinds of entertainment", "...people have lost their extraversion, and have become emotionally distant and distrusting", "they are no longer spontaneous, they have cut off all kinds of communication, maintaining only the obvious", "... as if they were robots", "they appear more unhappy and full of ailments"; (ii) passivity, indecision and confusion: "sense of Insecurity, difficulty to plan ahead, under an invisible threat that overshadows everything", "one would say that there seems to be a generalized phobia, a distancing from human contact". Furthermore, official Institutions and community members report high rates of antisocial behavior, with belligerence, tension and nervousness, as observed in interpersonal relationships, on the road, during driving, and during social interactions. Finally, they point out people who behave "in psychologically erratic ways", "in an omniscient manner", and who are "bombarded in many ways through the use of the internet". With regards to their immediate social environment, participants highlighted the following themes: for the representatives of official institutions, the dominant themes were Isolation, dissent and distrust. On the other hand, community members commonly referred to irritability in relation to their social environment: "people have been confined to their immediate family...", "... with few friends", "visitations have become less often, even to their elderly parents".

Moreover, "I increasingly come across angry people around me, who get involved in quarrels, who talk in a nonsensical manner at my job, in the streets, at the market". Distrust and anger peak in individuals when tolerance for frustration decreases and stress and depression increase, which is confirmed by international research, also in Greece, investigating the psychological impacts of the pandemic (Luo et al., 2020; Marmarosh, 2020; Martinez; 2020; Mazza et al., 2020; Parks, 2020; Diamanti, 2021; Fountoulakis, 2021; Giannopoulou et al., 2021; Matzanos & Xanthacou, 2021b; Papavasileiou et al., 2021; Strongylaki, 2021; Xanthacou et al., 2021, among others).

In addition, social care and support "have been suspended". Relationships have been "lead to a standstill", as fear drives people away. This phenomenon is also evident in voluntary acts of support towards vulnerable groups, such as those performed by local associations offering services to wildfire victims, who stated the following: "nowadays, families and societies are introverted. They typically remember their fellow men when they have something personal to gain. Then they forget... and return to their daily routine...".

When participants were asked to state what they considered to be the most powerful defense against COVID-19, the majority of official institution representatives and a large amount of community members, offered the following responses; "vaccinations, personal responsibility and education", "our defense lies in research collaboration in the field of medical technology for the development of vaccines and drugs". Moreover, a small proportion of the present sample focused more on nutrition, on exercise, and on remaining level-headed, whereas official institution representatives and community members stated: "Let's change our diet, which is full of processed

ingredients and fast food... let's incorporate exercise in our daily lives... ", "a cure for the virus", "people's willingness to continue living in health and calmness", thus avoiding themes of vaccination to a certain extent.

A strong minority, mainly of community members, continues to exhibit confusion, a distrust towards research, science, medicine, politics and politicians, a denial regarding the existence of the virus and the pandemic: "...the defense? I do not really know. Trust towards scientists? Towards the government? Acceptance that the virus exists?" or "I wish someone knew... I do not know, let the truth prevail, at last". The beliefs in conspiracy theories, as a mechanism of dealing with anxiety and depression, or as a cause of depression and anxiety, corroborate research findings from other countries (Ahmet et al., 2020; Forsyth, 2020) and are worrying.

Finally, in a world where uncertainty and insecurity are the only certainty and where negative information is multiplying like the plagues of Pharaoh, locally, nationally and internationally, participants made reference to the events which shook them during 2021, giving priority to economic-social problems as well as psychological-personal problems regarding community members. Official institutions focused on the pandemic and vaccines as well as on natural disasters-climate crisis. With statements such as "I see properties being destroyed", "We fear unemployment and COVID", "I felt like the planet had turned into a vast Auschwitz, I learned about deaths that had been neglected by doctors".

A small minority, of official institutions and community members covered themes such as the abuse of women, traffic accidents, and the issue of Afghans. How can the tourism product be combined with festivals, based on the statements of the research subjects? It can be combined, they say "in collaboration with travel agencies, by being included in holiday offers", "in the form of fairs which include theatrical events, food tasting, within the wider spirit of the festival". This is widely known as "cultural" or "heritage tourism" (Attanasi et al., 2013).

When asked about the possibility of transforming current festivals as well as the possibility of using 5G digital technology for their staging, participants agreed that "if the festival undergoes a transformation, its purpose will be defeated". "Festivals are embedded in the Greek DNA, they provide joy and offer people the opportunity to dance, to sing, to escape. They have remained unchanged over the centuries". Most disagree on the use of 5G digital technology because "it constitutes China's penetration wagon in the Western world".

On the other hand, a minority of community members and official institutions seem more receptive to adjustments, because "everything evolves over time. Thoughts change, and our free time, work, and philosophy of life become differentiated. Festivals are the expression of our social life". There is also a small proportion of community members and official institutions who are working towards the inclusion of digital technology in traditional festivals, based on the rationale that "this can contribute to their promotion", "those interested can obtain information remotely about the history, the customs, the agricultural products, the traditional dances, the culture and the

physiognomy of the place". "So that they may wish to visit and share unique moments of joy and fun with the local people...».

It is worth noting that the interviews with community members and official institutions led to the collection of extremely rich content, they needed to express themselves and communicate with us, under the difficult circumstances of the pandemic. Moreover, this is due to the pleasant opening of the summer festivals in the villages of Rhodes, which offered a breath of life and relief after the lockdowns, the restrictions and the isolation.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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