Ilia’s Coast
Seaside Countryside

The development of tourism in Greece is an interesting and complex case study. In the 1950s, the Greek government fostered the belief that, instead of driving the country’s economic development through industrialisation, the main economic policy should rather focus on tourism. This strategy did not derive from the local economic traditions, but instead, it emerged as a result of the growing demands of the international leisure and travel industry.

It started from the premise that Greek tourism would be based on the economies of ‘history’ and ‘scenic landscape’, emphasizing the coexistence of archaeological monuments with nature. The construction of infrastructure, including ports, highways and airports, was an essential prerequisite for the economic strategy based on tourism. The areas with an ‘intact’ landscape became a synonym for modernisation and touristic development. Still, not all the regions developed in the same way. Some of them stayed blind spots to the international mass tourism, and these are the places where a ‘local kind of living’ could be found.

One of these regions is the coast of Ilia, a region to which international mass coastal tourism seems to be just arriving.
Local Coast

With the development of international tourism, beaches with local character, like the ones of Ilia's coast, are rarely found.

Coastal Settlements and Urban Networks

The juxtaposition of international tourism with local lifestyle is visible both in its infrastructure and in the patterns of local and international tourist influx seasons.

Coastal Landscape in Transformation

Last century's emphasis on agriculture has radically transformed Ilia's coast. Today, international tourism adds up to this transformation.

Local Coast under Pressure

Real-estate pressure for the development of coastal tourist facilities leads to the continual land deterioration and drying-up of lakes in the area.

Accessing the Local Landscape

The vulnerability of the local settlements and of the coastal landscapes of Ilia signals an urgent need for rethinking the relationship between tourism, locality and landscapes in the region.
Coastal tourism is transforming the majority of inhabited coastal areas around the world. The signs of this transformation can be seen and felt almost everywhere on the coasts of Europe, especially in the Mediterranean. Traditional local settlements as well as ‘natural’ coasts seem to be quickly disappearing, with mass tourism facilities replacing them. Relatively few regions, such as the western Peloponnesian coast, have averted the affects resulting from this kind of development, due to a limited accessibility and poorly developed infrastructure. As a result, these regions offer more local qualities and possibilities, in comparison to the coast developed for mass tourism.

In the Greek context, the western Peloponnesian coast could be characterized as more ‘local’. This can be explained by the relative inaccessibility of the coast. At the same time, eastern Peloponnesian coast, which can be better accessed from Athens, experienced an aggressive transformation into a tourist hub.
Historical Evolution of Urban Settlements

The coastal region of Ilia has traditionally been one of low density, owing to a prevalence of disease and infertility. This can be attributed to its warm and humid climate, as well as to the great frequency of conflict with foreign boats. Additionally, its location and topography offered little protection from foreign invasion. The sparse settlements occurred mostly on fifty terraces close to rivers, that connected the settlements with the sea. After the Greek Revolution and the subsequent liberation from Ottoman Occupation in the 19th Century, the coastal area became more safe, leading to new settlements springing up along the coast. Fertile but unirrigated plains turned into agricultural land. Railways became the primary export good of Ilia and they were shipped all over Europe from Port Katakion. The profitable export of agricultural goods in the 19th century, led to the growth of the region's central, Amalida and Pyrgos. The discovery of archaeological sites in Olympia opened the region for tourists in the 1920s and 1930s. It was not until the 1950s when newly extended tourist terminals brought a new wave of international mass-tourism. It still remains the main arrival facility for tourists in Ilia.

XIX Century Destination for Seasonal Migration

In 1883 the first railway line was constructed. It connected Pyrgos with Katakion and was mainly used for the transport of agricultural goods. Seven years later, it was opened to the public. The route, which connected Pyrgos with Amalida and Athens, was inaugurated on March 29, 1883. Later, in 1902, the route was extended towards south, connecting Pyrgos with Kyperounta. Shortly after, in 1895, the route between Pyrgos and Olympia was inaugurated. As automobiles became more affordable, Ilia's road network started expanding. This led to the emergence of sprawls across the region. In particular, the popularity of the 'second homes' close to the beach was one of the main agents of the change in physical and social landscape. Additionally, the new road network led to the intensified urbanisation in Pyrgos and Amalida, cities that emerged at the time as regional centres.

1883–1902 Introduction of Commuter Railways

1920–1960 Entering the Automobile Era

1967–1969 Agriculture as a State-Run Project. Lake Drainage

1978–2016 Infrastructures for International Tourism

Port Katakion was constructed for the transport of agricultural goods. However, since the discovery of ancient sites in Olympia, travellers started pouring to Katakion. Thus, the port was extended and adapted in order to receive and serve cruise ships during the 1980s. Following this trend, the National Road E55, that connected Ilia's coastal regions with the International Airport at Patras, was built in 1978. This stimulated the construction of resorts on the beach.
Searching for the Local Coast

By looking at the coast of life, we can identify certain characteristics of what can be labeled as a ‘local coast’. The coexistence of these characteristics adds the development of various local occupations along the coastal line. Nonetheless, there are only two kinds of international occupations that seem to be rather isolated from the rest of the coastline.

- Zone west of Second Houses
- Protected natural areas
- Limited areas
- Protected archaeological areas
- Agriculture
- Tourism
- Water-related
- Local homogeneous along the coast
- Type 1: Isolated Second Houses
- Type 2: Village Orchards
- Type 3: Coastal Agriculture and Fishery
- Type 4: Nature Protection

Types of the Local Coastline:
- Nature protection
- Leisure activities
- Agriculture
- Fishery
- Second residences
- Tourism
- Archaeological areas
- Water-related

Hour 1
Coastal Settlements and Urban Networks

International Coastal Settlements

Port Katakolo is the entry point for international tourists arriving by cruise ships, looking for the emblematic ancient Olympia. The beach resort is the main destination for these tourists.

Local Coastal Occupations

The predominant heterogeneity of life is immediately evident. Most of the settlements have preserved their local character and a way of living, even though new activities have been sprung up in these places. For instance, a new open-air cinema was built in a forest.

Type 1: Illegal Second Houses

The coastal settlement zone, which is approximately 12 km long, is mainly constituted from second homes of art’s residents, positioned between the sea and the former lake. In Mounia, these settlements are technically illegal as they are built on a public land. A significant intervention by the state is still expected by its inhabitants.

Type 2: Villas in Orchards

Villas are the most common types of second houses in the Katakolo-Mani region, and thus villages are usually built on a private land. Most of the villas are surrounded by olive groves.

Type 3: Coastal Agriculture and Fishery

For centuries, the manure of the field was used as the main fertilizer used in settlements. It represents one of the few sources points of the coastal area. The port has maintained its local character and is used mostly as a meeting point, or for fishing activities, especially for the gillnet fishery. It is also known as a camping destination for local tourism.

Type 4: Nature Protection

The forest near Katakolo is a coastal dune and is designated for nature protection by the European Union. On a normal weekday, it is common to see people walking dogs or jogging here. During summer, people build temporary huts out of wood from the forest to shelter themselves from the heat, sometimes even for the weekend.
Type 3: Coastal Agriculture and Fishery
Introducing Seasonality

In Ili, it is possible to differentiate seasonality in patterns related to international tourism and local living. The 'international pattern' consists of mass tourism, that concentrates in specific locations. This pattern is generated mostly during the summer months and reaches its highest frequency during the initial weeks of autumn. The 'local pattern' is maintained by locals from the nearby villages that use their seaside second houses during these months. During summer, most of the local people live in their second houses, as the beach provides a more comfortable temperature than inland villages. In winter, these villages are partially inhabited during the weekends.

Two different versions of international tourism are identifiable on Ili’s coast. The first type refers to the stop-over cruise ships at the Katakolon port that bring up to four thousand passengers per ship. The stop-over lasts approximately for six hours, just enough time for visiting the Olympian heritage sites. Consequently, the shops and touristic facilities in Port Katakolon are opened only during these hours. On the other hand, tourists looking for more exclusive beach holidays, arrive mainly at the Araxos Airport (Rafina) and are driven through national road 555 directly to their resorts. The resort provides all the needed facilities. As a consequence, souvenir shops can be found along the streets leading to the resort.

The local pattern refers to the small villages with populations between 200 and 800 inhabitants, whose residents, in order to fulfill their basic life needs, create a network of service-sharing between the old hill villages, smaller old village centres and beach centres. However, their autonomy is possible only up to a certain degree, as they still depend on the bigger centres, Pyrgos and Amalinda. This dependency mostly refers to the access to places of higher education, health care, shopping malls and other similar amenities.

Number of international visitors arriving via coastal ships or airports

Circulation of roads to "accommodation" inside Ili
International Pattern

Helmut (62), Engineer
Hanna (52), Secretary

“This is the second time we have taken the route with the cruise ship, that’s the reason we would like to ship through the Corinth Canal. The first time we went by bus and ferry and people from our cruise ship have gone there today. It’s really relaxing to travel on a cruise ship because everything is planned for you. We don’t have to worry about taking the wrong train or bus. That’s why we try to repeat this every year.”

Port Nikolaos

The shops in Nikolaos open only during hours in which cruise ships are docked there, thus serving only international tourists staying up to a few hours in town.

International Tourist Network

- Commercio conto
  - on the 15
  - hotel
  - Aegean
  - international linked route
Local Pattern

Nikos (35), Farmer

"I live here in Skoushori. I used to work in a shoe shop, but being a farmer gives me more freedom to enjoy my life. I don’t have to worry when I don’t want to. I can have a second house or the beach, as everyone else here does. I go there sometimes on weekends but I am mostly there during the summer."

Skoushori

Skoushori is one of the old head villages. All services here are located on the main road which leads up to Myrto. It represents a local center for the residents, and it serves as a key service area in the region, offering access to daily amenities."

Local Networks

- School
- Hospital
- Post office
- Market
- Municipal office
- Library
- Church
- Park
- Taverna
- Bakery
- Pharmacy
- Supermarket
- Lycabettus
- Local network
Coastal Landscape in Transformation

During the last century the coastal landscape of Ilia has experienced profound transformations. The construction of infrastructure for agriculture has been one of the strongest factors in this radical change. Urbanisation processes, such as the illegal occupation of land, have added to the transformation of the landscape, making it more fragmented. Aggressive and unregulated changes in support of the development for international tourism, are the new forms of pressure, making the landscape vulnerable.

Type 1
Coastal Dunes: in Transformation

Due to the unique biodiversity they offer, coastal dunes act as natural barriers that protect interior areas from water intrusion and from high seas waves. Together with the beach, they are considered to be public spaces. However, coastal dunes are at risk of disappearing if the construction of touristic beach facilities continues unimpeded.

Type 2
Fertile Flats: Ground for Touristic Growth

Fertile grounds are located close to the coast and have been nicknamed “California #2”, because of their ultra-fertile soil. These fields are under tremendous real-estate pressure and their value has increased manifold because foreign investors from countries like USA and Switzerland are interested in building beach resorts here.

Type 3
Hilly Coast: Protected Stability

Since the ancient times, the shoreline has been constantly retreating, leading the ancient city of Pheos to submerge in the rocky coast. Today, because of its character of an archaeological protected site, the hill has remained almost completely unaltered, with forest covering up the ground almost in its entirety. Still, few of the mountain trails, used by shepherds and hikers, remain.

Type 4
Dried Lake: Blocked Transformation

The large site where Mouria lake stood almost 50 years ago, spanning at approximately 6 square kilometers, is owned today by the Greek state and being used as a garbage landfill. The drainage of this lake has led to a fast downhill of the water table in the region and a deterioration of the groundwater quality. Additionally, it led to a diminishing agriculture production, owing to the soil erosion and an increasing abandonment of the fields combined with an enormous surge in electricity consumption.

Type 5
Afeios River: A Tool for Transformation

The Ladamos and Fikas irrigation dam was constructed during the 1960s. It redirects approx. 70% of the water stream for agricultural purposes and blocks most of the fluvial sediments. This has caused the retreat of the shoreline by up to 400 meters leading to the destruction of illegal settlements, as well as erosion of river banks.
Landscape Conditions

The main characteristic of Iaia's coast is the extensive agricultural production, which differs depending on the different layers of landscape conditions. The overlapping of these layers refers to two major conditions: one at the north and the other at the south of port Katakoton. In the northern part, the combination of a flat terrain, good irrigation infrastructure, sedimentary soil, and private land ownership, ensures ideal conditions for good agricultural production. The land towards south of port Katakoton is also characterized by a flat terrain, but unlike in the northern part, it is predominantly 2m below the sea level. The previous existence of the lake Mouna left a very unique soil condition.
The coastal landscape of X has experienced various transformations, mainly due to the infrastructure built for agricultural production and urbanization. As a result, coastal and deltaic areas are faced with a gridlocked and parceled landscape. They are becoming more and more fragmented, a state of things especially visible at the seafront, where illegal occupation is increasing. This contributes to the disappearance of the coastal dunes in some areas.
Hilly Coast

Hiking path near Galatas

Aerial view of the archaeological site
Dried Lake

Salt Water Intrusion

The drainage of the lake in the 1990s has caused the water table to drop down permanently. As a result, salt water intrusion has been facilitated. It has not only deteriorated the groundwater aquifer, but has also led to deterioration of the local soil conditions and to the abandonment of several agriculture fields.
Alfeios River

The landscape of the Alfeios River.

Aerial view of the area near the Alfeios River.
Local Coast under Pressure

Looking at the tendencies of transformation of Ilia’s coast, it seems that large-scale touristic facilities would be arriving here soon. This will fuel the expansion of the existing network of services and infrastructures for international mass tourism, which is mainly concentrated along the connections with the arrival area. They are being owned and managed by private investors. Therefore, a further fragmentation of the landscape will probably involve resorts replacing fields. As a consequence of this expansion, public access to the beaches will be greatly affected, as the beaches will become privatized, at least unofficially, with possible flattening of the dunes to allow for tourists to access wider beaches. Simultaneously, the ongoing deterioration of land in the area occupied formerly by the Lake Mounia is causing a slower, yet profound fragmentation of the coastal landscape. After the drainage of the lake, problems with underground water intrusion started to appear, affecting the fields in the area around the former lake and later extending the affected area up to the fields near the city of Pyrgos. The abandonment of the fields is one of the results of the ongoing deterioration particularly because agricultural productivity has significantly dropped.
Accessing the Local Landscape

In an attempt to counteract the ongoing fragmentation of the coastal landscape, pressured by the tourism real-estate industry on one hand and the ecological deterioration from drainage of lake Mouria on the other, the project aims to strengthen the coastal landscapes by designating some areas as protected nature zones.

Situated on publicly owned land, the project seeks to integrate the fragmented coastal landscape as one and uninterrupted landscape entity.

One of the interventions involves a network of paths that interconnect several fragments of dunes along the coast. The existing local activities in the ecologically protected areas of Ilia are supported, stimulating the local population towards a more diverse use of the landscape for new kinds of activities. Another intervention consists of a partial refilling of the former Lake Mouria, that would avert a further deterioration of the agricultural areas around the lake. The deactivation of the drainage pumping station and the recovery of the connection of the lake with the Alfos River are the key aspects that will help complete the restoration and prevent saltwater intrusion. The project, instead of solely focusing on the protection of eco-systems in the region, aims at considering the protected nature areas as potential public spaces. On a larger scale, these interventions can be integrated and even replicated through a series of interventions along the western coast of Peloponnese.
The unofficial occupation of the coastal dune by large scale tourist facilities is an ongoing process of stripping the dune of its function as a transitional buffer zone. The access to the beach for local people has become restricted. By designing the coastal landscape in order to increase the potential for local activities, this project aims to provide access back to the coast for locals and foreign tourists alike.
Refilling the Lake

The refilling of the lake provides a solution for the currently abandoned fields, representing an opportunity for the entire region. The lake is designed to be surrounded by a network of bike and walking trails, creating a green corridor through the area. An artist's impression of the refilled lake area is shown in the image.