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## Chapter 6

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# The Morphology of a Coastal Cretan Municipality

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### Introduction

After World War II the importance of the Mediterranean islands for the touristic movement, radiating mainly from Western Europe, enormously increased. This growing demand opened new opportunities for the modernization of these islands' economic base and has been seen as a promising opportunity for reducing the prosperity gap between themselves and developed countries. An increase in the real income of host communities, generation of employment, heritage, and environmental preservation, creation of infrastructure, cultural communication, and political stability via tourism expansion as well as the limited alternatives for industrialization and self-sustaining growth have led most (if not all) Mediterranean island governments to use tourism as a weapon for fighting underdevelopment (Andriotis, 2004; Carli, 1994; Ioannides, Apostolopoulos, & Sonmez, 2001).

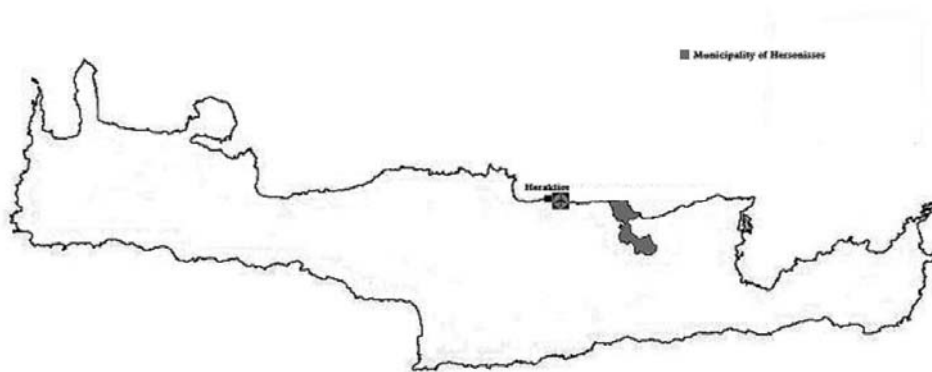
While tourism has undoubtedly brought substantial rewards to Mediterranean island destinations, it has often been accompanied by some inherent disadvantages and costs resulting from their insular character and uncontrolled tourism expansion. These include accessibility difficulties, external dependency for their resources, lack of autonomy in decision making, high leakage rates of foreign exchange earnings, dramatic landscape changes, and sociocultural and environmental problems (Akis, Peristianis, & Warner, 1996; Andriotis, 2001, 2002, 2004; Andronikos, 1979, 1986; Apostolopoulos, 1994; Apostolopoulos & Sönmez, 1999; Boissevain, 1977, 1979, 1996; Briassoulis, 2003; Briguglio & Briguglio, 1996; Ioannides, 1992, 1995a, 1995b; Kamas, 1993; Lockhart, 1997; Lockhart & Ashton, 1990; Loukissas, 1978, 1982; Marinos, 1983; Oglethorpe, 1984, 1985; Young, 1983; Zarkia, 1996).

Crete, with a population of approximately 603,000 inhabitants, is the largest Greek island and the fifth largest in the Mediterranean. With a coastline of 1,300 km, 15% of which consists of sandy beaches, and rich cultural and environmental resources, the expansion of the Cretan tourism industry was inevitable (Anagnos-

topoulou, Arapis, Bouchy, & Micha, 1996; Andriotis, 2003c). In 2005, more than 2.5 million tourists visited the island, approximately 12 million overnights were recorded, and the island had more than 200 thousand beds (Hellenic National Tourism Organisation, 2006). Tourism activity in Crete has resulted in various impacts to the economy, society, culture, and environment. As a result, there is an increasing research evaluating these impacts. Most of this research has been focused on community attitudes (Andriotis, 2000, 2002, 2004; Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Terkenli, 2001), seasonality (Andriotis, 2003a, 2005; Donatos & Zairis, 1991), dependency on tour operators (Andriotis, 2003a, 2003b), tourist preferences (Andriotis, Agiomirgiannakis, & Mihiotis, 2007, 2008), regional concentration of tourism activity (Andriotis 2006a) as well as the morphological change of the coastal landscape (Andriotis, 2003c, 2006b; Briassoulis, 2003).

Despite the increased interest in the impacts of tourism on Crete, most research, with only few exceptions (e.g., Kousis, 1984, 1989; Terkenli, 2001), has been focused on the island as a whole, with only limited research on specific locations. This negligence of past research is mainly due to the fact that data for single insular coastal municipalities are aggregated within the island as a whole and cannot be separated. Thus, most past research on the island of Crete is generic and does not provide proposals for the amelioration of tourism development problems for specific coastal municipalities. It is the aim of this chapter to overcome this research negligence by taking as a case the municipality of Hersonissos, located on the north coast of Crete (Figure 6.1). In doing so this chapter reviews the morphology of the municipality, discusses the processes having affected its morphology, and provides recommendations on the ways to preserve and enhance its current morphology and improve the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

This chapter is divided into five sections. Following this introduction, the second section reviews tourism development in the municipality of Hersonissos. The third section presents its morphology in relation to tourism-induced development. The fourth section discusses the processes and human actions having affected the



**Figure 6.1.** Municipality of Hersonissos on the north coast of Crete.

morphology of the municipality. The final section provides the conclusions and the policy implications of the study.

## Tourism in the Municipality of Hersonissos

During the 1960s the municipality of Hersonissos was comprised of a handful of small villages (Romanos, Triantafyllou, & Chifos, 2003). It was in this period that the first hotels opened in coastal locations. In the years that followed, the Greek government has considered Crete a top priority area for the systematic development of tourism (Andriotis, 2003) and a series of development plans concerning the tourism sector of the municipality of Hersonissos was given high priority. As a result of the various incentives given for relevant investment projects, the municipality—with 25,886 hotel beds, representing 17.6% of the island's total, and 19,969 beds in rented rooms and apartments, representing 37.7% of the island's total—is among the major coastal resorts of the island. In addition to the accommodation sector, the tourism industry of the municipality consists of two camping grounds with 282 sites, 29 travel agencies, 47 car rentals with 3,290 cars, 35 bike rentals with 1,125 bikes, 340 catering establishments, approximately 300 shops, two water parks, and one 18-hole golf course. However, the tourism industry of the municipality faces serious problems, similar to those faced by most resorts of the island. These include uncontrolled expansion of tourism activity, dependency on tour operators, seasonality, a considerable number of undeclared, unlicensed units and rooms, known as “parahoteleria,” and limited infrastructure (Andriotis, 2001; Andriotis, 2003a, 2003b, 2005; Andriotis & Vaughan, 2004).

The land area of Hersonissos is 70,984 stremmas (1 stremma=1,000 m<sup>2</sup>= 0.24 acres=0.1 hectare), and includes six communities: Limenas Hersonissou, Hersonissos, Potamies, Abdou, Gonies, and Kera. Among these communities, Limenas Hersonissou is where the majority of tourist facilities are located. All other communities are mainly rural with minor tourist development. The main strengths of the municipality for the expansion of its tourism industry include its close proximity to the airport of Heraklion, mild climate, beautiful landscape, antiquities, and the variety of facilities offered to tourist traffic. Every summer the resort attracts thousands of tourists, mostly from Western Europe. Although in the past these tourists combined their visit with culture, nowadays culture is not always a priority. Today, swimming in the crystal Mediterranean Sea, sunbathing, sipping wine or ouzo in a taverna next to the sea, and having fun in a nightclub are among the main activities of tourists visiting the coastal areas of Hersonissos. Thus, tourists today are mainly attracted by the four Ss (sea, sun, sand, and sex) offered at a reasonable cost.

Up to the mid-1960s agriculture was the main activity of the municipality. However, after the 1970s, when the influx of tourists increased, the situation changed, mainly in the coastal area. It is estimated that slightly more than half of the municipality's population is employed in the tertiary sector, mainly due to increased tourist arrivals. Agriculture also plays an important role in the interior of the municipality, with emphasis placed on the cultivation of olives. Even for those residents employed in tourism, during the winter they are involved in agricultural activities. Thus, much of the tourism workforce in the municipality displays pluriactivity. This

pluriactivity is considered beneficial, because there is a seasonal balance between tourism and agriculture that increases income and employment opportunities for locals (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2004).

During the summer season the coastal areas of Hersonissos attract a large number of incoming workforce. For instance, although the local population in Limenas Hersonissou in 1995 was approximately 4,000, the incoming workforce during the summer season exceeded 10,000 employees (Association of Hellenic Tourist Enterprises, 1995). Tourism has also resulted in an increase of the permanent population. In 1991, the municipality had 7,404 inhabitants, while 10 years later its population increased to 8,497 inhabitants, an increase of 14.8% (Table 6.1). However, despite the generation of employment through tourism, the unemployment rate in the municipality is 19.7%, 9% higher than that of the island's total.

## Morphology of the Municipality

In the tourism literature there is a plethora of studies on the morphology of coastal resorts (Andriotis, 2006; Barrett, 1958; Bollerey, 1986; Lavery, 1971; Meyer-Arendt, 1990; Pearce, 1978; Pigram, 1977; Smith, 1991, 1992a, 1992b; Stansfield, 1969, 1993; Stansfield & Rickert, 1970; Weaver, 1993). According to these studies the nucleus of development of coastal resorts is the beachfront surrounded by various zones of tourist activity, including the Central Business District (CBD) and the Recreational Business District (RBD).

In the case of Crete, Andriotis (2003c) identifies three main zones of tourism activity, having emerged as a result of unplanned and uncontrolled development. These zones include the high-density tourism activity zone, the low-density tourism activity zone, and the rural zone (Figure 6.2). These zones are analyzed further below in relation to the municipality of Hersonissos.

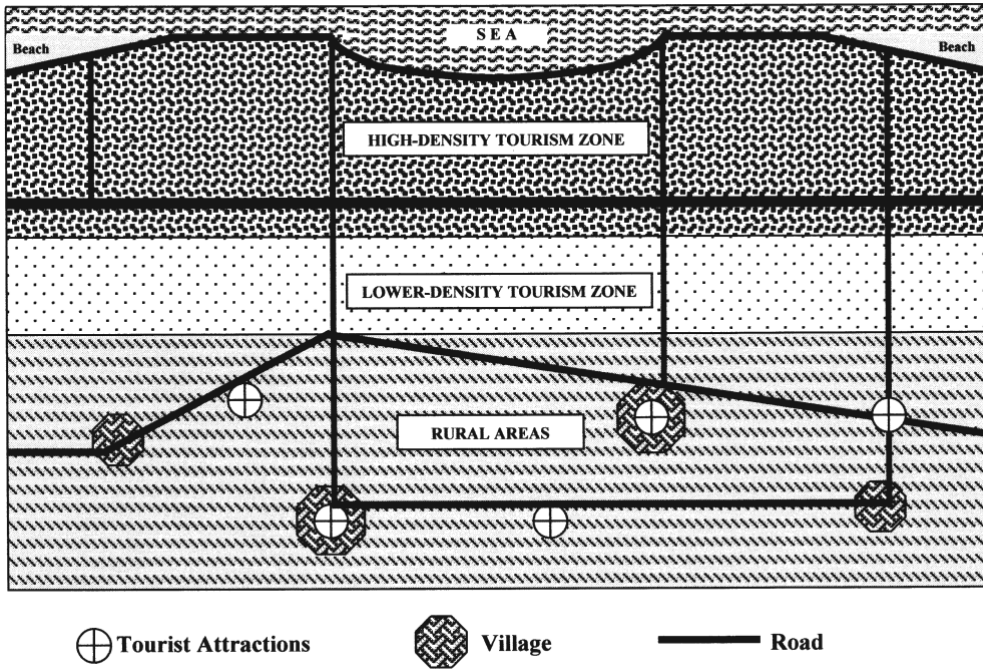
### Beachfront

For Hersonissos, as in most coastal resorts worldwide, the nucleus of development is the beachfront, where beach width has been reduced through the construction of roads and private developments built on the immediate seashore (Figure

**Table 6.1.** Population of the Municipality of Hersonissos by Community: 1991 and 2001

Community	1991	2001
Avdou	446	431
Gonies	537	519
Kera	151	161
Potemies	548	610
Hersonissos	1,647	2,468
Limenas Hersonissou	4,075	4,308
Total	7,404	8,497

Source: NSSG (2005).



**Figure 6.2.** Morphological zones of typical Cretan coastal resorts. Source: Andriotis (2003c).

6.3). Due to the increased construction of tourism enterprises only a small number of beach access points exist, and as a result, access for tourists to the beach is restricted. A major part of the beachfront is the port of Hersonissos. In the words of Romanos et al. (2003) the port is:

A major landmark and place for both local boats and tour boats, (and)...remains as a strong visual and aesthetic element that helps characterize Limenas. The port provides sources of maritime tourism with the opportunity to directly market this type of activity to visitors of Limenas. From here, boats that carry flocks of tourist seeking maritime adventure tourism leave and return on a regular basis. (p. 2.14)

### Beach Road

The main area of tourist consumption is the beach road, where for the convenience of tourists, limited vehicular access is allowed during the high season. This beach road is a major pedestrian corridor at all times of the day that follows the shoreline along the eastern periphery of the port (Romanos et al., 2003). The function of the beach road is not only to link the beach and the sea with the hotels, but becomes in its turn a place of consumption, of both objects and places. It is the main place of tourism activity, where holidaymakers walk, meet, talk, shop, eat,



**Figure 6.3.** The beachfront and the beach road of Hersonissos.

and play a variety of games. Many cafés and restaurants, hand in hand with Cretan art, leather goods, souvenir shops, and goldsmith shops, create a RBD, where small accommodation establishments are located and some others are found on back streets. At night, nightclubs and bars form the majority of the nightlife. The RBD becomes extended in both directions from its initial core where larger hotels and second homes exist, creating a virtual ribbon development.

### **Main Road**

At a distance from the beach road the main road exists (Figure 6.4), where accommodation establishments, restaurants, bars, shops, and services are provided for tourist traffic. This road is the main road for access to the resort and transfer to and from the airport and the port of Heraklion as well as the urban centers of the island. It includes the bus station, the community office, the post office, banks, drug stores, gasoline stations, groceries, bakeries, and minimarkets, as well as tourist shops, bars, and restaurants. However, lack of planning has resulted in serious traffic problems. According to Romanos et al. (2003), “fast-moving traffic on the main



**Figure 6.4.** The main road of Limenas Hersonissou.

road, combined with cars parked along its side, makes conditions dangerous for pedestrians and disrupts local vehicular movement” (p. 3-2).

### **Interior of the Resort**

The beach road, as well as the main road, contain only scattered pockets of residences. This happens because the once traditional village houses and small shops have been converted into rented rooms, bars, restaurants, and shops for tourist consumption. As a result, residences for locals and the seasonal immigrant workforce, as well as a few small accommodation establishments mostly offering rooms to rent, occupy the area after the main road. Roads in this area are very narrow, pavements almost nonexistent, and parking spaces scarce, making the locals’ life difficult (Figure 6.5). According to Andriotis (2003c):

Only adventurous tourists are apt to wander in this zone to experience what they consider authentic. The majority prefers to walk only short distances from their accommodation establishments. “Because of the physical hardship associated with the enervating effects of the climate; (tourists) may prefer to stay in areas where they will encounter desirable shops or attractions; and they may perceive areas with a large number of locals as difficult” (Weaver 1993, p. 138). (p. 72)



**Figure 6.5.** Limenas Hersonissou: interior of the resort.

### Interior Villages

In Hersonissos rural places, such as the traditional villages, are also visited by tourists, usually on day trips. A network of arterial roads connects the resort with rural areas that often attract tourists wishing to experience the culture and life of the islanders on day trips. Two of these villages, Koutouloufari and Piskopiano, located in close proximity to the resort, have been transformed partially for tourism consumption.

Although many of the interior villages have kept their rich cultural heritage (Figure 6.6), they are losing their population due to migration of the locals to the coastal area of Hersonissos and the city of Heraklion, in search for a better life and employment opportunities. In practice, the economy of most rural areas is directed to farming and small industry, with tourism playing a secondary role in their economy.





**Figure 6.6.** Koutouloufari: traditional village in the municipality of Hersonissos.

## Artificial Attractions

Large pieces of vacant land have provided potential for development and are being used as part of a strategy to attract better quality tourists through the diversification of the tourism product. Thus, the exploitation of previously untapped resources has resulted in the implantation of artificial attractions, such as a golf course and water parks (Figure 6.7). However, golf courses on Crete have been criticized for requiring a substantial amount of land, replacing natural vegetative cover by artificially created lawns and disrupting the scarce resource of the island—water (Andriotis, 2007c; Briassoulis, 2005, 2007). Therefore, nongovernmental organizations are against their construction, insisting that they do not fit with the Cretan environment.

## Processes of Morphological Change

The processes and human actions that have occurred from one period to another, and have affected the morphology of the municipality of Hersonissos, are discussed below.

Greece has almost no zoning and land registry system. Also, in the past the main tools to which the state resorted for dealing with the problem of illegal land development were reactive rather than proactive (Tsoulouvis, 1998, p. 18). Thus, zoning



**Figure 6.7.** Water park and golf course.

and construction laws have been openly ignored because they contradict market forces and social pressures (Patton & Sophoulis, 1983, p. 263) to the extent that illegal building is long-standing in the municipality of Hersonissos. As Peterson and McCarthy (1990) report, this is a result “of the practice of Greek political parties in electoral campaigns making promises and then enacting statutes declaring existing illegally constructed buildings to be in compliance with the law” (p. 168). Thus, for many years, one could build any type of accommodation as long as modest building restrictions were met (Peterson & McCarthy, 1990). A law will be obeyed only if citizens accept it; it has been proven that once a “literally unauthorized arbitrary” construction has been erected, no one will tear it, any restrictions undertaken are unsuccessful in discouraging land development (Herzfeld, 1991; Patton & Sophoulis, 1983). As a result, there is a highly visible physical transformation of the municipality of Hersonissos, as the building of more and more tourist enterprises dots the landscape. In practice, the lack of physical planning and the high concentration of buildings have transformed Limenas Hersonissou, the coastal resort, and some interior villages into urban space to the extent that today only low-budget tourists visit them.

In Greece land ownership is one means to wealth and a way to climb the social hierarchy (Patton & Sophoulis, 1983). Thus, after the expansion of tourism, prices of land nearest to the beach increased and a more intensive form of land use was

taking place. Under free market conditions, many coastal locations of Hersonissos have been occupied by tourism businesses that are able to maximize landowners' profit. On the other hand, there is a lack of green and public areas.

In order to support the high land prices the first line buildings are high-rise, constituting a visual barrier between the interior buildings and the beach. Buildings' architecture, mainly on the coast of the municipality, has been far removed from the traditional Cretan style. Reinforced concrete is simple to use and relatively inexpensive. As a result, Cretans have abandoned traditional building materials such as stone and wood. In practice, the local architectural and traditional character have been lost, only to be replaced by modern structures. As a result, the municipality lacks in authenticity and traditional character. Many of these changes are a result of tour operators' initiatives, who have used the island as cheap mass tourism destination to the extent that they contributed to the development of a destination, almost identical to most Mediterranean resorts.

## Conclusion

Ribbon development, degraded residential areas, loss of natural landscape, coastal pollution, and insufficient infrastructure are some of the negative impacts of the unplanned evolution of the municipality of Hersonissos, "with the hinterland having been affected in a roughly inversely proportionate way to its distance from the coast" (Terkenli, 2000, p. 4). Unregulated growth has resulted in environmental degradation, including narrow streets, lack of sidewalks, and a haphazard road network, all of them resulting in pedestrian and vehicle conflicts, lack of parking space, signage problems, and limited beach width (Romanos et al., 2003).

To overcome some of these problems rehabilitation of the environment is required. Limenas Hersonissou and some interior villages do not currently have much public space and they lack green space. Thus, an increase in the existing green areas, through the creation of parks on the periphery of the settlements, will enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. To alleviate pedestrian and vehicular congestion, new arterial roads should be added to the current road network. In addition, several of the existing roads should be realigned. To alleviate congestion from parked vehicles, parking areas should be constructed. Also the visual environment should be improved by stronger emphasis on traditionalism and tighter enforcement of building regulations.

The interior villages, mainly those not involved in tourism, face depopulation. To convince the local population to remain in their villages various economic incentives are required. The cost of restoration for old buildings is high. Thus, without incentives to do so, people will abandon traditional buildings and will continue to construct modern ones. According to Romanos et al. (2003):

To address irresponsible restorations and use of unsightly building materials within the core of the villages, it would be beneficial to apply to the central government for "traditional village" status, so that protective building regulations would be employed. If for other reasons this would not be feasible, then an attempt should be made for the villages to designate traditional districts

and protect them by specifying acceptable architectural designs and building materials.

Also, to support rural residents to stay in their villages it is important to provide financial incentives to invest in the establishment of small tourist enterprises. An effort should be made for the spreading of tourist accommodation facilities in the interior villages. More small-scale tourist facilities and tourism centers should be developed, incorporating small traditional lodgings, restaurants, shops selling local products, and enterprises offering suitable alternative opportunities, as substitutes to the 4S offerings. Great importance should be given to the attraction of alternative forms of tourism, such as cultural tourism, agrotourism, ecotourism, and mountain and trekking tourism. In doing so, there is a need for financial assistance policies to create the necessary infrastructure and facilities. Furthermore, the natural and cultural elements of the municipality, such as watermills, natural springs, monasteries, and mountains, should be maintained and used in a sustainable manner.

However, tourism expansion in the hinterland should not come at the expense of destroying its natural and cultural environment. Only if there is continuous and unprejudiced control will future investments be environmentally friendly, directed to the development of alternative and cultural forms of tourism and inspired by local culture and architectural tradition. In achieving the aim of sustainable development, the proposed interventions should be applied with consistency, continuity, and efficiency. Developers and planners should realize that people are attracted by the destination's resources, and the tourism industry depends not only on the quantity but also the quality of these resources, something that in the past has been ignored in the case of Hersonissos. Hersonissos, like any other community, has certain limits. Growth beyond these limits can exceed the carrying capacity for the local community and cause disastrous environmental effects. This can have a major influence on the future success of the destination, because community attitudes and environmental quality are the most essential determinants of visitor satisfaction and repeat visitation (Doggart & Doggart, 1996).

To conclude, to use tourism as a low-impact strategy for the municipality of Hersonissos, a coordinated master plan with specific policies backed by the whole community should be formulated. This plan should be directed towards the elimination of negative tourism impacts and should address policy aspects and strategies of future tourism development. Only then will harmonious tourism development that increases benefits for the local community be feasible and the morphology of the municipality be improved.

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