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# Cultural diplomacy and its contribution to management of tourism destination image and identity

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**Abstract:** Cultural diplomacy has proved to be a strong mode of communication between nations and constitutes a mechanism of exposure and influence, that introduces the notion of mild power. It refers to the ability to “convince” through culture, communicating values and ideas for the accomplishment of ideological goals and functional targets. Also, it is closely connected to the formation of the identity of a country or a city as a tourist destination. Taking the city of Edessa, Greece, as a case study, this work aims to study cultural diplomacy in the present international relationships, as well as its contribution to the formation of the image/identity of the city, finally reaching some conclusions on the current situation. This particular city was chosen as a case study as it has a rich natural and cultural heritage. The documentation of the work is based on two axes. Firstly, the recording of the natural wealth, the material and immaterial cultural heritage of Edessa, as evidenced by the literature review. Secondly, in the primary survey conducted with a structured questionnaire, which included closed type questions and was distributed to active members of the Edessa population, in particular to citizens who members of cultural organizations are or are working in the field of culture.

**Keys word:** cultural diplomacy, city branding, image/identity, development

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural diplomacy has proved to be a strong mode of communication between nations and constitutes a mechanism of exposure and influence, that introduces the notion of mild power. It refers to the ability to “convince” through culture, communicating values and ideas for the accomplishment of ideological goals and functional targets. Also, it is closely connected to the formation of the identity of a country or a city. Today the countries and cities are expected to form a particular image that will lead to a positive reputation, which results directly in positive effects in the life of citizens, applying nation branding strategies.

Taking the city of Edessa, Greece, as a case study, this work aims to study cultural diplomacy in the present international relationships, as well as its contribution to the formation of the image/identity of the city, finally reaching some conclusions on the current situation. This particular city was chosen as a case study as it has a rich natural and cultural heritage.

The documentation of the work is based on two axes. Firstly, the recording of the natural wealth, the material and immaterial cultural heritage of Edessa, as evidenced by the literature review. Secondly, in the primary survey conducted with a structured questionnaire, which included closed type questions and was distributed to active members of the Edessa population, in particular to citizens who members of cultural organizations are or are working in the field of culture.

Afterwards, the results of the survey are analyzed, as they were derived from the answers of respondents, which relate to the preservation and promotion of the natural and cultural heritage, participatory planning and cooperation among people in charge, the exercise of cultural diplomacy and

the ways of its application, while presenting the main advantages and disadvantages of the elements that shape the identity of the city.

Finally, the results of the survey present that Edessa doesn't have a strong identity, attractive enough for potential visitors, but has a number of positive factors that could significantly improve its image, benefits and operation if they are coordinated with one coherent plan and program. At the same time, the current situation leads to the conclusion that the creation of a city's competitive reputation based on its natural and cultural heritage, with the aim of tourist attraction and economic development, can be achieved by the city branding and cultural diplomacy.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Definition of Cultural diplomacy**

Cultural diplomacy has attracted the scientific attention through of its practices, in a wide range of subjects. Some scientists argue that cultural diplomacy is synonymous either with public diplomacy or with international cultural relations and even with propaganda. Other scientists believe that these are separate practices most of them agree that cultural diplomacy is a subset of public diplomacy (Christou & Sigala, 2001; Avdimiotis, 2004; Osgood & Etheridge, 2010; Kiehl, 2006; Mar, 2014; Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016).

The relationship between Cultural and Public Diplomacy lies in the notion of power. The American political scientist Joseph Nye (1990), who introduces the meaning of soft power, explains that soft power is "the ability to achieve a goal". The ability to "convince" through culture, values and ideas contrasts with the hard power, which is closely linked to the practice of violence (Melissen, 2005). In the past, the approach of "hard power" was the policy of governments in international relations. nowadays the need for cooperation on a new level is becoming more and more important. On this basis, cultural diplomacy is not a secondary factor for political or economic diplomacy, but rather acts as an integral and indispensable component of it (Sigala et al., 2002; Triantafyllou et al., 2011; Praher, 2014).

Therefore, most states recognize and appreciate the importance and role of cultural diplomacy as it has proved to be the strongest communication channel between the Member States (Slavik, 2004). As a means of promoting interest and exerting influence, cultural diplomacy has various forms, formal and informal, and depending on how it is exercised can be distinguished in bilateral and multilateral.

### **2.2 The role of Culture in the application of City Branding**

Globalization, the phenomenon of de-industrialization and the development of new technologies have not only increased competition between states but also the cities that exist in them. Cities compete globally to attract tourism, investment, talent, and to achieve many other goals (Dinic, 2011).

More and more municipalities are planning and implementing initiatives in line with the branding process to raise, promote and improve their image and reputation, both inside and outside the country (Christou & Kassianidis, 2002; Valachis et al., 2008, 2009; Colomb & Kalandides 2010). The terminology of branding- destination has emerged in recent years, and is an important subject of research for both the academic community and policy makers. City branding means creating a city's competitive identity system.

According to Milionis (2005) branding is a strategic plan to create a propitious image of the city in order to positively influence the perception of people around it. Culture is one of the main elements of city branding, giving a comparative advantage to the modern city (Florida, 2002; Christou & Nella, 2010), while serving as a source of added value (Mommas, 2002). Various cities have based on much of their efforts for the urban revitalization, on culture. With cultural production and consumption, they managed to shape their image and became a pole of attraction for visitors, investments and new residents.

Barcelona of Spain is one of the most successful examples of city branding. The city's branding strategy included extensive urban revitalization practices with new urban infrastructure, major projects, the emergence of each neighborhood, the creation of universities and businesses and the production of culture. The radical transformation of the city emerged with the hospitality of the Olympic Games in 1992, after the end of the Games, the city did not stop searching for creative ways of its emergence. Barcelona has continued to redesign, highlighting the heritage and culture of the city.

A typical example is the "Thematic Event", which also act as tourist attraction poles (Bilanakakis, 2011).

Another successful example is the city of Liverpool, England, which, following the strategy of city branding, managed to regain its old glory and become a center of business activity and opportunities. With proper civilian management, it has created infrastructure projects for the emergence of cultural and historical buildings and the development of business and commercial facilities to host the "European Capital of Culture" in 2008. The involvement of residents at all stages of the design and implementation of branding strategy through Liverpool Culture Company was a key success factor (Sigala & Christou, 2006; Anastasiades & Fliattari, 2015). While actions such as advertising, security, accessibility and cleanliness have been a priority for restoring the image and reputation of the city.

In Abroad, the branding strategy of a city is a popular practice which, through its techniques such as urban regeneration, culture, environment, economy, aims at the quality of life of the inhabitants, in establishing a strong identity of the place and in increasing attractiveness at international level.

### **2.3 City Branding: The case of Greek cities**

In Greece few are the cases that adopt the process of city branding. Usually, the strategies concern tourist projection, such as the Municipality of Rhodes and Corfu.

The image of Volos in recent years has improved significantly. The protection and promotion of the old industrial buildings, the tourist visibility of the place, the revival of the Argonaut Campaign, the organization of international events such as the European Music Festival, the World Association of Overseas Magnets (Christou et al., 2000, 2008; Nella et al., 2000; Nikolakopoulou, 2011) are some selected aspects that have contributed to the effort of competitive identity.

Another case of a Greek city that has embedded the branding strategy is Xanthi. This effort was combined with the Xanthi Carnival, the Old Town celebrations, the organization of national and international events from cultural clubs (Xanthi Filoproodoi Union), the web site of the Municipality of Xanthi, and the slogan "Xanthi Neighborhood of the Senses", in order to promote the unique multicultural identity and the emergence of tradition and cultural heritage.

Organized management for the commercial adaptation of the image of the city could be described as the case of Athens in 2004 during the organization of the Olympic Games. The organization of Olympic Games in view of the institution not only contributed to the formation of a positive image of the city but also strengthened other institutions (Christou, 2006, 2007, 2011; Karahalis, 2016; Chatzigeorgiou et al., 2017, 2019). Over the years this effort has been characterized by stagnation, since there was no organized management plan that could preserve the strong image of the city. At the same time, the unfavorable economic environment has aggravated the situation mainly in Athens, as the largest metropolitan center and capital of the country.

Regarding Thessaloniki, as the Cultural Capital (1997) missed the opportunity to enhance its image and reputation but recently made significant efforts to shape and promote an attractive image. Thessaloniki's City Diplomacy action is based on the rich cultural heritage, its modern culture (cinema, festivals, gastronomy creativity) seeks to broaden contacts with cities that are characterized by cultural relations to Thessaloniki, with the aim of re-establishing its image and increase its visits.

In general, city branding practices in Greece are characterized by a lack of coordination between governments, the private and public sectors and citizens. Also, the formation of a strong identity is directly related to the design of the space. The procedure of urban planning in Greece over the last decades has many implementation problems and deficiencies. The design and strategy of a branding project is a multidisciplinary practice and requires professionalism, relying on different scientific disciplines. In Greece to date, there was not relevant subject in curriculum, which is an additional obstacle to the design and implementation of such strategies.

## **3. METHODS**

### **3.1 Research Framework**

The documentation of the work is based on two axes. In the recording of the natural wealth, the material and immaterial cultural heritage of Edessa, as evidenced by the bibliographic overview and the primary research that investigate the contribution of cultural diplomacy to the image and identity of the city. Survey data were collected primarily through a structured questionnaire. The research is quantitative. The survey was conducted on members of the active population of the

municipality of Edessa particularly citizens who are members of cultural collections or work in the field of culture. The questionnaire was sent in electronic form to the respondents. The sample selected for the current survey relative to the active population of the Municipality of Edessa is 205.00 people.

<b>Sample</b>	25.619 people active population of Central Macedonia, Central Macedonia Region
<b>Sample size</b>	205
<b>Data Collection Method</b>	Questionnaires
<b>Time of Research</b>	20/01/2017 – 25/4/2017

The municipality of Edessa brings together unique elements of local identity, cultural and natural heritage. The Waterfall Karanos, Waterfall Park, Small waterfalls, Tall rock, The area "Thousand Pines", Colourful gardens, Hill 606, Water museum-Aquarium, Folklore Museum, Open-air Water Museum, , Ancient City of Edessa "Logos" , Old town of Edessa Library, Cultural Center, Edessa's Carnival, Spring Festival, Cultural Summer, , cultural associations (25 cultural clubs, who are the custodians of tradition, the history of the place but also of modern culture) connect the past with present of city's. The organizational and administrative structure of the Municipality, namely the local government, the Technical Service, the Department of Cultural Tourism and the Environment and the Department of Environment and Green, is responsible for preserving, safeguarding, promoting and promoting the natural and cultural heritage of the city.

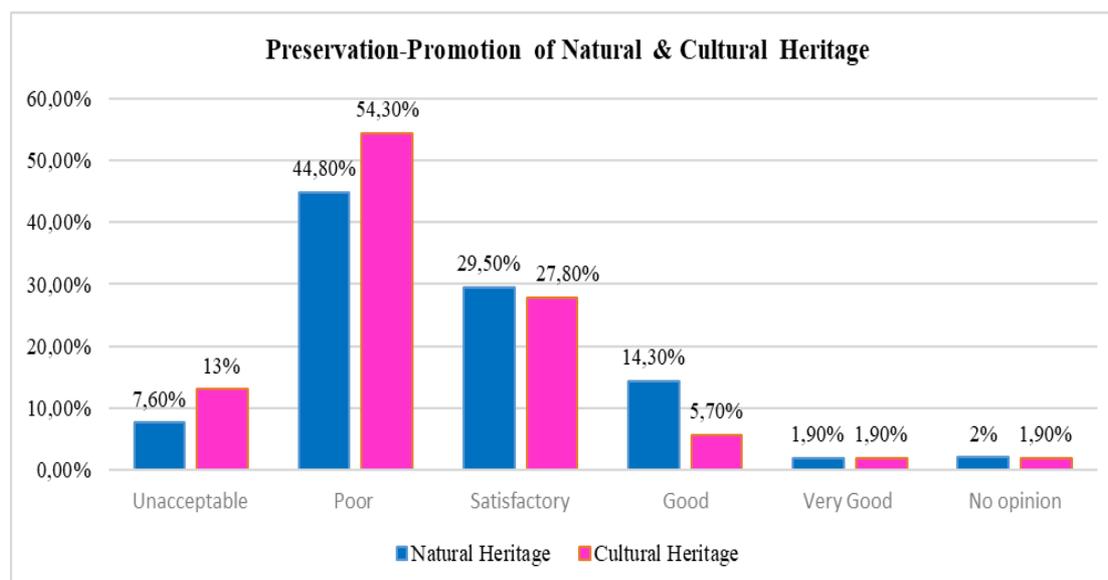
#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

##### 4.1 The preservation and promotion of the natural and cultural heritage.

The first diagram shows the results of the question about the preservation and promotion of the natural and cultural heritage.

The answer poor, it has the highest percentage in both cases with 44.80% (natural heritage) and 54.30% (cultural heritage).

At the same time, 13% consider that the cultural heritage is not exploited at all, while for the same answer on natural heritage, the rate is at 7.60%. In conclusion, the results show that there isn't concerted effort to promote Edessa's natural and cultural heritage. Therefore, the efforts to implement branding strategies are not a priority of the city



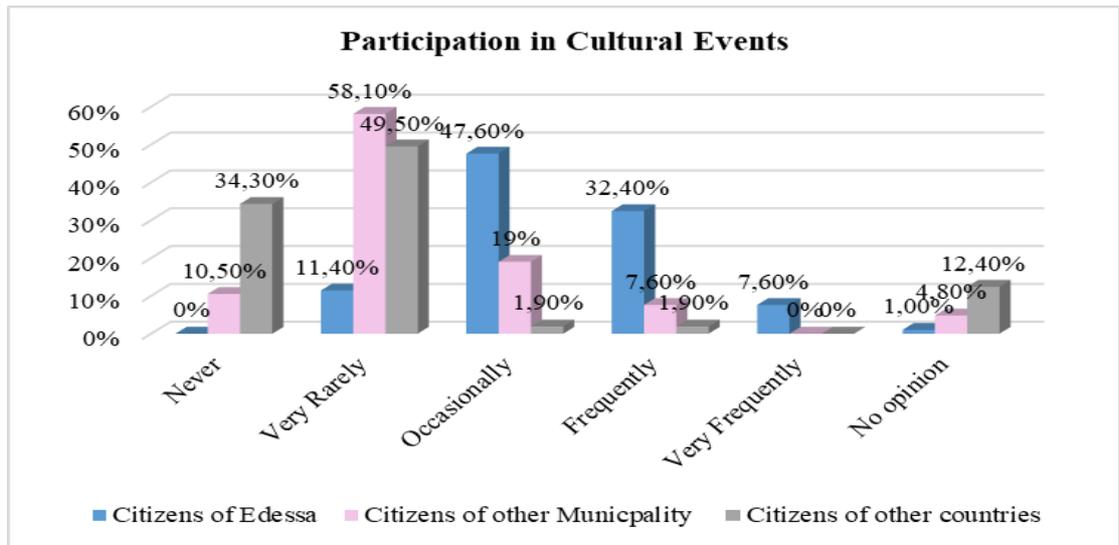
## 4.2 Participation in Cultural Events

The following diagram shows the participation of citizens of the municipality, citizens of other municipalities and citizens of other states in the cultural events of Edessa. According to respondents the citizens of other countries participate "never" with the percentage of 34,30%

A high percentage (58.10%) is noted in the Response "Very Rarely" for the participation of the citizens of other Municipalities

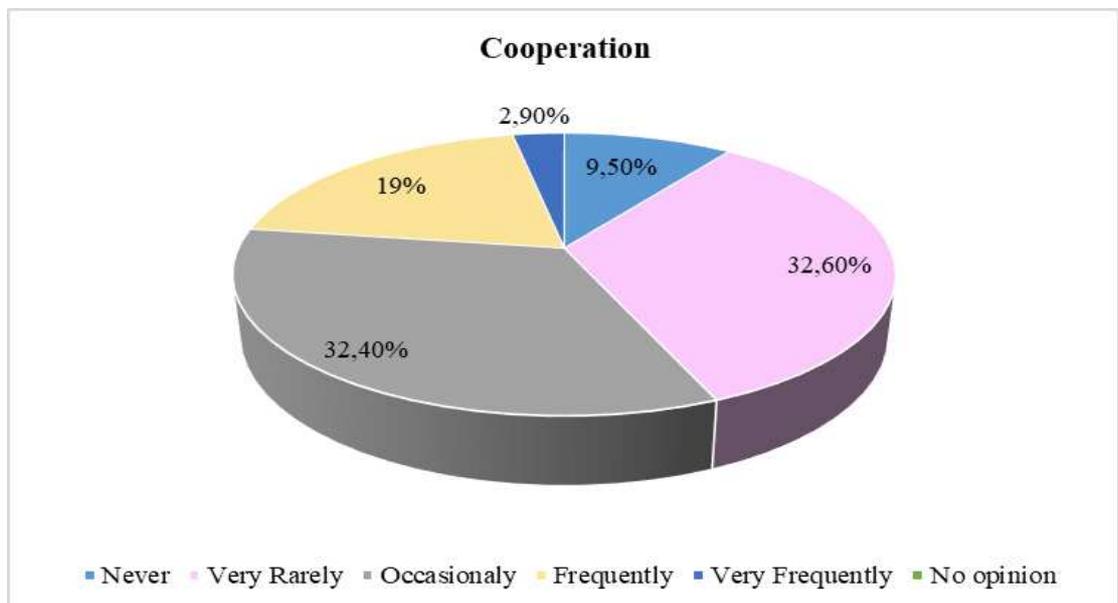
The almost non-existent participation of the citizens in other Greek cities and states confirms the results of the previous diagram about the preservation- promotion of the natural and cultural heritage and demonstrates that there is not philosophy of planning and a coherent policy.

Thus, the lack of proper methodology is an obstacle to attract new visitors

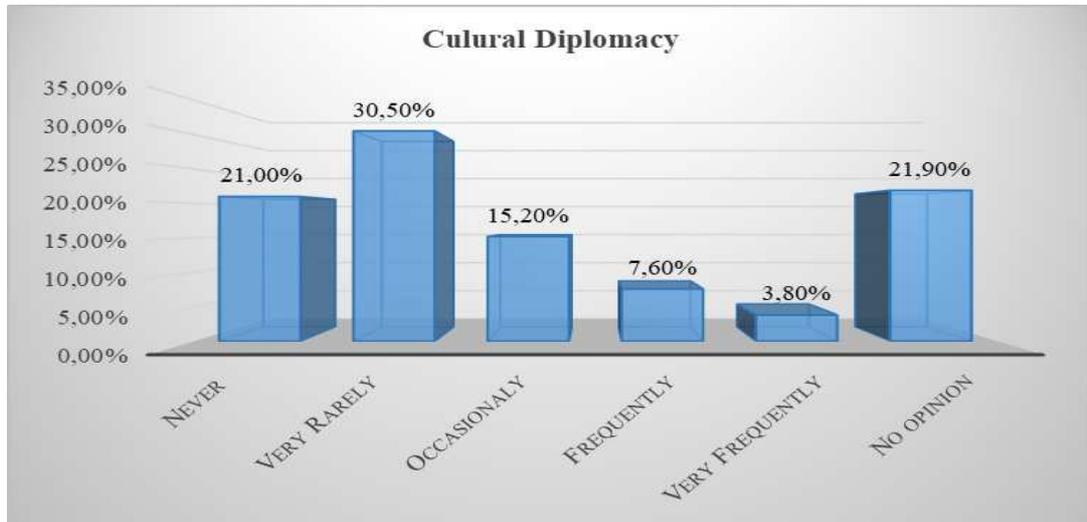


The Participatory planning and cooperation between stakeholders are an important factor for the city's image. The results show an unsatisfactory situation. The percentage of 2,90% of the respondents answered very frequently while the most of the them answered very rarely with percentage 32,60

the Lack of cooperation implies the fragmentation of actions to strengthening local identity. this situation probably is the cause of the unsatisfactory promotion of the natural and cultural heritage and the reduced participation of citizens (other municipalities and states) in cultural events

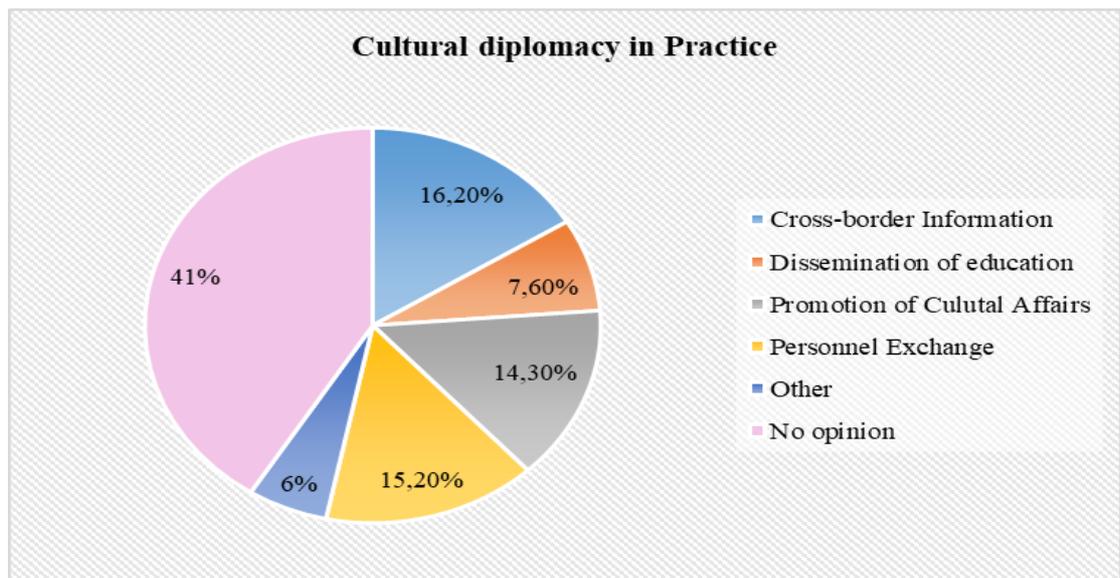


To the question "As cultural institutions, do you exercise cultural diplomacy" the majority responded "Very Rarely" (30,50%). The response No Opinion is (21%). the percentage 15.20% of them exercises cultural diplomacy Occasionally while just 3.80% Very Frequently. The results show the cultural organization' inability to exercise cultural diplomacy. Also, the results showed the ignorance of its importance and its contribution to shaping the image of the city. This is probably due to the inability to understand the work that goes beyond the narrow boundaries of the city, introversion, incomplete methodology and lack of training (culture professionals and stakeholders)



#### 4.3 Cultural diplomacy in practice

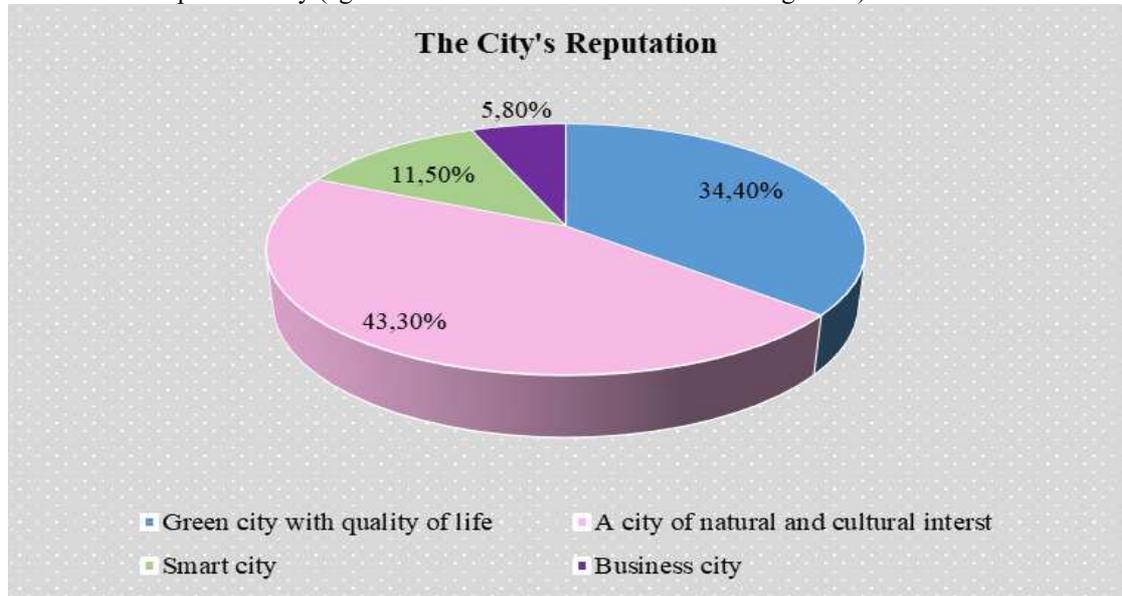
Concerning the cultural diplomacy methods, the largest percentage (41%) replied 'No opinion'. However, cross-border information amounts to a higher rate of 16.20% as a way of exercising cultural diplomacy. The fact that there is weakness and ignorance of the importance of cultural diplomacy, it is expected that there will be ignorance of the ways and means of exercising it.



#### 4.4 The city's reputation

To the question "What is the reputation that you would like Edessa to promote in the years to come," 43.30% answered "a city of natural and cultural interest".

The majority of respondents' desires to form and consolidate the city's reputation according to the elements that make up its identity (eg rich natural resources and cultural background).



#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

Natural wealth combined with the cultural heritage make up the elements that characterize the city of Edessa. According to the survey results, the low rates of exploitation, preservation and highlighting of these data have shown that there is no concerted effort to implement city branding strategies.

The lack of cooperation among the relevant sections of culture, the reduced participation in cultural activities inside and outside the country, the almost non-existent participation of citizens from other Greek cities and states in the cultural events of the city, the moderate visibility of the municipality of Edessa, the inability of cultural diplomacy practice, affirm that there is no planning philosophy and a coherent policy, creating barriers to the formation of a competitive identity and undermining of the tourist development of the area

As shown by the research, the role of cultural diplomacy is the margin, as respondents' answers have been ignorant of its importance and contribution. This was also confirmed by the results on how to practice cultural diplomacy, where there is a low percentage of such actions, which are likely to be made individually and characterized by stagnation.

Edessa does not seem to have a strong identity, attractive enough for potential visitors, but it also has a number of positive factors that could significantly improve its image, as long as they are coordinated in a coherent plan and program.

The creation of a city's competitive reputation based on its natural and cultural heritage, with the aim of enhancing tourist attraction and economic development can be achieved by implementing city branding and cultural diplomacy.

The implementation of city branding strategies with the soft power of cultural diplomacy are the main factors in building and maintaining the image of the city in the long run.

Therefore, the creation of an organization could be an essential contribution to the realization of planning in order to strengthen the elements that shape the particularities of identity and highlight the comparative advantages of a place in the effort to form a competitive image

Among other things, the organization's goal should be to coordinate citizens, businesses, public organizations, local collectives, focusing on learning, developing and disseminating knowledge to enhance empowerment, decision-making, normalization, and harmonization of values and the aspirations of the actors with the intended culture of the place

Given that it is a long-term and strategic activity, the organization must be characterized by consistency, authentic and synthetic ability, staffed by professionals who are constantly informed, seeking resources and upgrading and managing the public space and the elements of nature associated with them, while enhancing the visibility and promotion of the natural and cultural resources, products and services of the city and the creation of actions in Greece, and the abroad. It is necessary to set up an organization in order to coordinate all those procedures that related to city branding strategies and cultural diplomacy, with the primary purpose of creating a brand name that will represent a bit of all this place is supposed to offer.

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