



CITY PROFILE ELEFSINA JULY 2023

2023 ELEFSINA
EUROPEAN CAPITAL
OF CULTURE
2023ELEFSINA.EU

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CITY DESCRIPTION

GENERAL INFORMATION

Province: Western Attica

Country: Greece

Area: 36.589 km²

Population: 19.902 inhabitants

Density: 820 inhab/km²

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Mayor: Argyris Oikonomou

Website: www.elefsina.gr

CONTEXT

Elefsina (or Eleusis) is a historical city, one of the five sacred cities of antiquity, located 20 km outside of Athens. It has the Eleusis Gulf at its feet, creating a natural port that is protected by the island of Salamis to the south. It has been the centre of Western Attica since ancient times.

Elefsina was known for the worship of Demeter, goddess of agriculture, and her daughter Persephone. It has been an important religious centre since ancient times, since it was where the famous Eleusinian Mysteries, an institution that lasted more than 1,500 years, took place. The Eleusinian Mysteries were mystical ceremonies that took place in September of each year, in honour of the goddess Demeter and Persephone, and which were held consistently for over 2,000 years. According to Homer, the Mysteries were attended by "the whole of mankind", women and men, irrespective of race, social class or place of origin.

Currently a city of around 30,000 inhabitants, Elefsina has played and plays a major cultural and economic role in the writing of Greece's contemporary history. At the dawn of the industrial era, the city became the centre of heavy industry in Greece par excellence. Today, Elefsina continues to contribute to what is known as the "Hellenic construct".

Population-wise, Elefsina has developed as a workers' town, in the same way as industrial centres the world over, and in fact, it acted as the destination for many internal and foreign migrants. As a result, the city became a melting pot of experiences and ideas, as well as a field for common struggles. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the city was dominated by the concerns and constant efforts of its inhabitants to protect the environment and improve their quality of life.

Despite the fact that Elefsina is located on the Athens-Peloponnese road axis and it is close to Athens, culturally, however, the divide is huge. It receives fewer visits than its accessibility would lead one to expect, and this is because, in the conscience of the Greek people, it has been established as the city that was desecrated by industrial development.



ELEFSINA'S CULTURAL PROFILE

Faced with a unique city, both historically and archaeologically which has experienced a great decline in terms of its quality of life, its reputation and its environment, due to the reckless and unencumbered development of heavy industry since the late 19th century, the city manages to gradually change the stereotypical perception of Elefsina, from a place you would typically pass over, to a city worth visiting.

Culture has a significant role in this endeavour. Since the beginning of the 21st century, cultural development has been a priority for all municipal administrations in Elefsina, and is expressed through significant initiatives and reflected in the city's ongoing investment of around 5% - 6% of its annual budget on cultural activities. For example, the fact that the city has, for the last 12 consecutive years, commissioned the creation of original artworks and major installations associated with the area to pioneering artists, is probably a unique initiative by the standards of Greek local government. Also, the promotion of and investment in the important cultural resources it boasts, such as the archaeological site and its industrial heritage, proves very clearly that the city's sustainable future is inextricably linked to its cultural development.

The city's ten-year Cultural Strategy (2016-2025) is based on two documents that have been approved by the City Council, namely the adoption of the Agenda 21 for Culture and the Cultural Strategy 2016-2025 in 2016. With a 10-year plan, 2023 Eleusis programme is analysed yearly related to the way in which its activities contribute to the Cultural Strategy and the goal is to be updated through participatory processes, incorporating the ECoC legacy plan.

The 2023 Eleusis programme intends a) through highlighting, strengthening and supporting local potential and b) through Art, Cultural Heritage, research and Culture, as well as through initiatives with a direct impact on the daily life of the city to boost the confidence, the pride and the joy of creativity in the inhabitants as well as to strengthen the sense of community.

ELEFSINA AS THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE IN 2023

Elefsina won the title of European Capital of Culture (ECoC) for the year 2021, although it was made effective in 2023 because of the COVID-19 postponement. Elefsina became the fourth Greek city to carry the title. The showcasing of the richness, diversity and common aspects of the cultures of Europe, the exchange of knowledge, experience and emotions, the participation of the residents of Elefsina themselves, the networking of the city's groups, as well as the strengthening of ties and mutual understanding between European citizens are the main objectives of the institution.

Drawing inspiration from the rich history of the city, 2023 Eleusis forms a comprehensive artistic, research, and educational programme. Its Mysteries of Transition focus on three distinct and interconnected central programme themes – People | Society, Environment, and Labour – reflecting the unique features of the city and the contemporary challenges

facing both Elefsina and Europe. Therefore, through the artistic programme, the city is led away from its prevailing public perception as a disadvantaged industrial city and into its next phase, strengthening its position on the cultural map at a regional, national, and international level. This is being realised through wider synergies within the national and international contemporary cultural field, turning the city into a thriving cultural destination, one undoubtedly remarkable for the visitor.

LOCAL CHALLENGES

Environmental pollution is one of the main concerns in Elefsina; it has damaged the bond between the citizens and their city, and the reason why many people decided to abandon Elefsina in the second half of the 21st century. Towards the end of the 2000s, with de-industrialization having left its powerful footprint in the form of a series of derelict factories along the coastline, the city started to seek a new identity. The first objective was to create and enhance cultural institutions such as the Aeschylia Festival, celebrating its 49th anniversary this year, through which the city can take advantage of its historical and cultural background and attempt to build its new mythology and create a sustainable future.

With the candidature for the title of European Capital of Culture, culture, as well as the city's important initiatives to date for investments in the creative and cultural sector, are drawing attention to and initiate positive synergies between all stakeholders, both from the public and the private sphere, for the identification of solutions to issues that concern the quality of life of citizens. Local challenges such as environmental protection or the development of the city's coastal zone, which have been a cause of concern for Elefsina for decades, even after the de-industrialization of the area, are testing both the cohesion of the city itself and the endurance of its inhabitants.

CULTURAL ASSETS

The following are some of the tangible and intangible cultural assets present in the city today:

TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

- Archaeological site. This site includes the Archaeological Museum, where important findings of world cultural heritage are exhibited, such as the headless statue of the goddess Demeter, votive reliefs representing the mission of Triptolemos and the statue of the "Departing Kore".
- Hadrian's aqueduct and Hadrian's bridge, examples of the era's high construction perfection, together with the chapels of Panagitsa in the archaeological site and Agios (Saint) Zacharias, dating from the late Byzantine era, were the city's cultural reserves until the mid-19th century.
- The Kronos and Iris industrial buildings and Old Oil Factory, together with the current industries, constitute the city's participation in the industrial and post-industrial landscape of contemporary Greece.

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

- 21 November, celebration of the church of Panagia Mesopotitissa.
- Celebrations of Agios (Saint) Georgios.
- Birthplace of Aeschylus, the first dramatist.

- City of “Mysteries”, a celebration that led humans to experience happiness through reconciliation with death.
- 14 folklore associations that have brought their own music, dance and gastronomy in the city

VENUES AND INSTALLATIONS

- Old Oil Mill Factory, L. Kanellopoulos Cultural Centre, Eleourgiki, Iris Factory, Old railway station, X-Bowling Art Centre, Old Town Hall, Oasis - Former Camping, Municipal Library, Anapsyktirio, Open-air cinema club, Workers Union.

COMMUNITY CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS

- Municipal Cultural Organisation that incorporates visual arts departments, theatre, theatre stage, music departments (piano, organ, guitar), ballet, gymnastics, traditional dances, philharmonic orchestra.
- Folklore associations (14), Thriasian Plain Volunteers Association, Magoula Women’s Association, 17 Cultural organisations of various types (literature, theatre, road theatre, ecology, etc.), 13 local music bands, Environmental Education Centre, Friendship Nest (solidarity centre).
- Elefsina Film Club.
- Elefsina Photography Club.
- Groups of craftspeople, professional photographers, architects, graphics offices, printing businesses.
- 2 music schools, 10 dance schools, 1 publishing firm, 3 private city archives.
- 3 local newspapers, web community radio
- Aeschylia Festival, Folklore Festival, gastronomy festivities.
- Special Needs Association
- Creative Youth Group Cultterra have a mapping of 150 young local artists of thriasio era. (Painters, Dancers, Visuals Artists, Musicians, Writers)
- Skate, BMX, Rollers and Finger Skate community
- Pakistan Community
- Albanian Community
- 2 recording studios



CONTACT

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