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### **“Palmscaping Project: Tracing the journeys of the Palm tree in Mesolonghi, Greece”**

The main aim of this paper is to investigate the role of plants in the formation of urban landscapes. With the conviction that ‘nature’, specifically plant elements, plays a substantial role in shaping urban landscapes and social identities, a new reading of the contemporary Greek landscape is being proposed, seeking the tools of this new approach in the Palm tree.

Palms in their majority are considered as tropical trees, in the sense that they originate from tropical and subtropical regions. However, today Palms are found all around the world, which proves that they are great travellers. Thanks to their unique structure, Palms quickly captured the attention of the first Western travelers who arrived in exotic lands- where the majority of palm species flourish- as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The term *Palmscaping* is a new term, invented within the frame of a wider ongoing research project\*, and it is used to indicate that palm trees have been introduced in the Greek territory several times, each time in a different way, under different cultural conditions and in a different socio-economic frame. What makes the palm tree in Greece a unique case is that, unlike other imported trees, Palms manage to characterize the contemporary landscape, and in certain cases dominate it.

The introduction of new plants in new ecosystems, changes their evolution, their inflorescence, and sometimes results in new species, proving the creation of a new hybrid ecosystem. At the same time, a new balance is to be found on a social level as well. Transplantation of plants in different environments changes their content, their social role and they are called to play a new role there.

Palms, even though imported to Greece, managed to become a crucial part of the local landscape, collective memory, and local history. It seems that the palm tree can easily abolish, renew, or enrich its conceptual content, and manages to play an active part in the contemporary Greek landscape, in particular, it dominates that of Mesolonghi, a small historical town in Greece, where Palms are not only part of the cityscape, but also part of the collective memory and local history.

Mesolonghi’s rich history and unique ecosystem, coupled with the continuous and persistent presence of palms, offer a compelling narrative. Following the different journeys of Palms to Mesolonghi, this paper will investigate the role that the palm tree has played in the formation of the urban landscape of Mesolonghi, from the era of Palingenesis, when the creation of a national identity was rather crucial, until our days. Mapping tools are being employed experimentally to visualize the various transplantations of the different palms and their consequences on the cityscape of Mesolonghi.

#### NOTE

\* The *Palmscaping Project* is part of my wider ongoing PhD research project, entitled *Towards a New Methodology of Reading the Greek Landscape: The Palm Tree*.

**Charikleia (Haris) Makedonopoulou** (MAS UD ETH Zurich, MPhil NTU Athens, Dip. Arch. Eng. NTUA; Lic. TEE-TCG) is a contemporary architect who seeks challenges both in academia and in practice. She holds a postgraduate diploma and a MPhil in Architecture from the National Technical University of Athens, and a Master of Advanced Studies in Urban Design from the ETH Zurich. Haris has been awarded by the State’s Scholarship Foundation of Greece for her studies in Switzerland (ETH Zurich) and in France (Ecole d’ Architecture de Paris-la-Villette). Since then, she has been combining research and teaching [NTU Athens, Technical University of the Shannon (TUS/LIT/LSAD), University of Limerick] with professional practice, through independent projects, as well as a collaborator of various architectural firms, both in Switzerland and in Greece. She has participated in different international conferences, exhibitions, and architectural and urban design competitions, and has received several distinctions. Currently, she is undertaking her PhD research at the School of Architecture of NTU Athens, seeking a new methodology to analyse and read contemporary urban landscapes using as her case study Greece and the Palm tree. In 2022, Haris received the ELKE / NTUA scholarship, which has been supporting her research ever since.