



# BIOPOLITICS INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION

## *Southeastern Phthiotis*

### *Biotourism and New Opportunities for Development*

*under the auspices of the Lokron Municipality*

**Konstantineio Cultural Center of Atalanti**

**26 January 2014**

#### **PRESS RELEASE**

A conference themed **Southeastern Phthiotis – Biotourism and New Opportunities for Development** convened with great success on **January 26, 2014**, at the **Konstantineio Cultural Center of Atalanti**, under the **auspices of the Lokron Municipality**. The conference was held in the framework of a **European LEADER Program** aiming to promote the comparative advantages of the region of Phthiotis. The event was preceded by a TV interview for the dissemination of the project to the national and international media. The project's **innovative biotourism guide and biotourism map**, outlining the natural and cultural assets of the area, were distributed free of charge to all conference participants.

Discussions focused on best practices to facilitate and improve biotourism development. The **Biopolitics International Organisation made the following proposals:**

- Southeastern Phthiotis, the site of the **War of the Titans** and the **Battle of Thermopylae**, can attract the international film industry which is always seeking new inspiration. An **international film and literature festival** can draw the world's attention to the region. In the same spirit, a **Conference for Greeks Abroad celebrating the mythological birthplace of the first Hellene** can also **enhance international tourism**.
- **Trails of mythos and culture**, as upheld through biotourism, can promote **cultural wealth as a major comparative advantage**.
- **Agrotourism can support agricultural development** and enhance the comparative advantage of the region's agricultural products.
- **Green employment in biotourism can boost the local economy** and provide new opportunities for growth in the entire region.
- To **enhance education and life-long learning**, the **Biopolitics International Organisation offers e-learning courses completely free of charge**.

The conference was chaired by **Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis**, President and Founder of the Biopolitics International Organisation. Prof. Vlavianos Arvanitis emphasized the many options available for the promotion of the region internationally, and highlighted the importance of its cultural heritage in this endeavor. She proposed international festivals in film, poetry and literature based on the War of the Titans and the Battle of Thermopylae to stress that Southeastern Phthiotis is the birthplace of these myths and historical events which have inspired so many films and literary works. She also discussed the creation of a Biodiversity Bank to collect and preserve endemic plant species from Southeastern Phthiotis and the wider area. Additionally, she proposed a photography contest to promote the comparative advantages of the area and discussed

the connection of fashion trends to history and archaeology. In this spirit, she invited fashion designers to draw inspiration from recent prehistoric findings in the area and to consider holding fashion shows to promote them internationally. Southeastern Phthiotis holds great promise for the future and can attract scholars and tourists from around the world. This requires, first and foremost, the development of initiatives which respect and protect the environment and all forms of life, as propounded for many years by the Biopolitics International Organisation.



**Fani Papathoma–Gianniou**, Deputy Prefect for Lifelong Learning, Employment and Tourism, expressed her support of the efforts of the Biopolitics International Organisation and discussed the benefits of environmental tourism for the local economy, the protection of biodiversity and the development of local communities. She noted that biotourism is not only about recreation but also contributes to increased environmental awareness. Synergy and cooperation in supporting local products and services, as well as trust in local actors and members of the local authorities are crucial to the success of this endeavor. She also referred to upcoming projects for the promotion of the region as an international tourism destination, including international trade and tourism fairs in Athens, Brussels, Sweden, Russia, London and Israel. The project's material (Biotourism guide, map and CD-ROM) will be showcased at these fairs.

**Nikolaos Liolios**, Mayor of Lokron, highlighted actions connecting the primary production sector with the environment, biodiversity and other natural assets, as well as with the local cuisine and rich cultural heritage. One Greek, four German and two US universities have established archaeology branches in the Municipality of Lokron in order to promote the rich prehistoric findings and significant archaeological value of the area. The vision of the Municipality is to link culture and sustainable development and to help local private enterprise achieve this goal. The Konstantineio Cultural Center of Atalanti has already hosted two international literary conferences and a global congress for the advancement of the invaluable historical contribution of the area.



**Elias Kolomtsas**, Deputy Mayor of Lokron, thanked the Biopolitics International Organisation for its contribution and expressed the desire for concrete development results in the coming years.

In the same spirit, **Dimitris Panayiotou**, Deputy Mayor of Kamena Vourla, stressed the importance of tourism for Southeastern Pthiotis and commented that it is crucial to link tourism to viniculture, local agricultural production and thermalism in order to increase income and enhance economic growth. He also stressed that to succeed in this endeavor it is essential to elicit the cooperation of local entrepreneurs.



**Theoharis Provatakis**, f. Secretary General of the Ministry of Culture, spoke about the plethora of monasteries and religious monuments in the area, dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE. Southeastern Pthiotis is scheduled to appear in the upcoming edition of the annals of the Greek Church Commission on the most important Byzantine monuments in Greece. Frescoes, mosaics and icons from the area are among the most important and valued Byzantine artifacts.

**Dimitris Samaras**, Vice President of the Phthiotida Chamber of Commerce, underlined the importance of tourism for economic development and for the creation of new employment opportunities. Greece is a world leader in the field of tourism, and only if tourism works together with industry and agriculture will the Greek economy improve. The comparative advantages of each region must be properly deployed in order to make the best use of local production activities and the promotion of local businesses and employment opportunities.

**Matina Kanaki**, Agronomist, called on all concerned citizens to contribute their skills for the enhancement of social development. She focused on the importance of the social

economy, which represents 25% of all European enterprise. She also proposed the creation of a task force for tourism and the environment in order to achieve best results. Through the actions of the social economy in the European Union, 10,000 new employment opportunities are created each year in sectors such as the environment and culture, as well as in services for sensitive groups in need of specialized care.

**Constantinos Bouyouris**, Agronomist, addressed the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to take proper advantage of the reuse and recycling system for agricultural wastes as was the case in the past. It is essential to promote local products both through large- and small-scale businesses and to have added value where possible. Synergy holds the key to success. The abuse of social capital and the shunning of agriculture as an income generating activity lead to alienation and loss of cultural identity.

**Giannis Sarros**, Journalist, discussed the contribution of green fashion in efforts to improve rural development. Green fashion is not only about clothes. It begins from cotton cultivation and extends to food. The goal is to elicit the cooperation of all who are involved in these production processes. International collaboration and networking are crucial for the success of this endeavor. At the same time, we need to develop a sound agri-food culture that will put an end to current barbaric trends in food production and will support young farmers and entrepreneurs. Youth can be deployed in networks in order promote agri-food culture principles internationally.



**Loukas Prtilas**, Director of Nature in Action, made a very significant contribution to the project by supplying valuable information and photographic material for the production of the project's biotourism guide, map and cd-rom. He emphasized the need to improve the mapping of the area's hiking trails and paths, as only three such paths have been mapped to date. In the region of Phthiotis, the development of alternative tourism requires a dynamic approach, as the options currently available are minimal. For this reason the cooperation of local stakeholders (mountain guides, accommodation and hotel owners, etc) is vital in order to increase the quality and quantity of alternative tourism activities.

**Yannis Skoumas**, President of the Agrozefti Social Cooperative Business, discussed the Cooperative's goals and focused on a project themed "Gastronomic Agriculture of Roumeli," which combines food with the folklore elements of each region. The area produces about 250–300 agricultural products and approximately 150 manufactured

goods without additional funding. It is crucial to build on existing local reserves and invest in history, folklore and culture.

**Stathis Andrikopoulos**, owner of a local travel agency, highlighted the importance of alternative tourism development for the region. Tourism export patterns in Greece work for the benefit of large businesses only. Thermal spas are very important for the development of the area and need to be expanded by extending the water-pipe network and constructing more baths (approximately one for every 4 to 5 buildings). He also stressed the importance of a collaborative economy in boosting local development and benefiting SMEs.



**Stefanos Tsolakidis**, President of KLEOS SA, made the following development proposals in order to help strengthen the local economy: donation of farm animals to help needy households provide for themselves; creation of stray animal shelters; cultivation of land belonging to the local authorities and distribution of products to distressed individuals and social groceries; voluntary cleanups of shores, rivers and lakes; purchase of products manufactured by local cooperatives and their distribution to community groups in Athens; donation of dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese, butter) for the needs of the upcoming youth conference in Theologos.

The land of Phthiotis, the cradle of Greek mythology and history, combines modern life with ancient traditions and stunning scenery. “Fertile (Euphoros) Phthia,” still maintains the old strategic outposts and names of ancient Greek tribes. Cities, fortresses, temples, sanctuaries and battlefields create an exciting amalgamation of historical events which infiltrate the landscape, echoing with legends of the past.

The historical contribution of Southeastern Phthiotis in the birth and development of Western civilization is a source of motivation for the present and the future. Following the paths of the gods and heroes – those of Apollo, Artemis, Heracles, Deucalion and Pyrrha, Amphictyon, Achilles, Ajax – travelers will discover unsurpassed natural beauty and an infinitude of historical monuments that make up the colorful mosaic of Southeastern Phthiotis. The human race was renewed here by Deucalion and Pyrrha, and we can all draw inspiration from these hallowed grounds for the future renaissance of humanity.

Southeastern Phthiotis welcomes visitors throughout the year on the shady slopes of Mts. Oeta, Knimis and Othrys. Many paths traverse through the heart of nature, leading to mystical passageways and breathtaking landscapes. Forests, valleys, gorges, caves and springs, promise remarkable hiking and mountaineering adventures. Travelers are invited to explore Mt. Chlomo, the sandy shores of the Atalanti Islands, the gushing

waters of the Assopos and the Spercheios, the thermal springs of Kamena Vourla, and the crystal clear lakes of Nevropolis and Paliosouvala. Southeastern Phthiotis, blessed with breathtaking landscapes and with a wealth of natural resources, has attracted human settlement since the beginning of time. Let us approach this land as seekers and pilgrims, and let us become initiated into a time honored course of human heritage.

**More information at:**

<http://biopolitics.gr/phthiotis-land-biotourism-development>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Biopolitics-International-Organisation-BIO/194141584014085>

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