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THE SPIRIT OF RURAL LANDSCAPES: CULTURE, MEMORY & MESSAGES

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THE SPIRIT OF RURAL LANDSCAPES: CULTURE, MEMORY & MESSAGES

1. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

1.1 Core concepts & Definitions of Landscape

Rural landscapes form an essential part of our heritage; they are significant witnesses of the past and present relationship between man and his natural and built environment. They constitute an integral part of natural and cultural heritage being a timeless archive where are depicted the ways people have lived and organized themselves in certain places. Greece, due to its very long and important history is characterized by the richness and diversity of its cultural landscapes. They portray the cultural and socio-economical changes throughout the years, as well as the memories, the beliefs and the identities of the societies who live in them. Culture plays a leading role in contemporary societies, contributing to the network of relationships between people and their environment. This research text will try to present the different ways people express their relationship with the landscape and their relation to society and its development. Attention will be directed to the role of the environment as a whole. According to scholars environment includes art and history, myths and legends, the memory of the people. Within academia, any system of interaction between human activity and natural habitat is regarded as a cultural landscape. Therefore the main aim is to understand the complexity and the importance of the actual ways people construct their relation with their environment, having in mind that the way people live is directed by the certain place they live and that the way they are is because they live in such places.

For the purpose of this project a special emphasis will be given to insular Greece and especially to Crete and the Cycladic islands where we observe long established traditions and popular beliefs directly linked with the landscape and the environment. Monuments and historic buildings, although extremely important for a thorough landscape analysis, will not be included since they constitute a part for an individual study.

Landscape finds its origins in the European tradition of landscape painting, which has been developed between the late 16th and early 19th centuries. Artists depicted pictorial countryside aiming at reminding to people the ideal of simple life close to the nature. The word gradually got a broader meaning which “relates not so much to an actual
environment but to a way in which that environment is visualized. In the course of time landscape received different meanings, the most recent being that of the European Landscape Convention - also known as the Florence Convention, - launched in 2000 by the Council of Europe according which  

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\text{Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.}
\]

The first formal use of the term comes from the geographer Otto Schulter in the early 20th century who defined two forms of landscape:

- the **natural landscape** (*Urlandschaft*) or landscape that existed before major human induced changes and
- the **cultural landscape** (*Kulturlandschaft*) a landscape created by human culture.

The classic definition of **Cultural landscape** derives from a Human Geographer, Carl O Sauer “...The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural are the medium, the cultural landscape is the result.” According to P.J Fowler, within this definition, the physical environment retains a central significance, as the medium with and through which human cultures act.

In the 1990s special attention was given to cultural landscapes as historical documents, mediators of time and space. As Ken Taylor stresses “that cultural landscapes as an imprint of human history are the richest historical record we possess. They can tell us if we learn to read and interpret their stories something of the achievements and values of our predecessors, inform our own present day values and, incidentally, those of future generations.... They are a window onto our collective past, our culture on display..... In other words they are not merely what we see, but a way of seeing. We see with our eyes but interpret with our minds."

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2 As it is explained by W. Haber the word “landscape” itself combines 'land' with a verb of Germanic origin, "scapjan/schaffen" to mean, literally, 'shaped lands'.
3 It entered into force since 1st of March 2004, while a synopsis on landscape policies of the Council of Europe member states has been presented in 2003, revised in 2006 and 2007.
4 Defined in this way landscape should be protected. In light with this tendency natural Swedish landscapes were among the first to be protected as memories of an idyllic pastoral past period, see Knut Faegri, in The Cultural Landscape: Past, Present and Future, ed. Hilary H. Birks, Cambridge University press 1988.
6 Ibid. He also notes that “Interest in the efficacy of historical landscapes as comprehensive documents of history with concomitant heritage values was recently further emphasized by the international workshop – Conservation of Cultural Landscapes Workshop – held in Rome in June 2003, organised by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). Representatives from sixteen countries attended bringing mutually inclusive variations on a theme of what is heritage in the landscape including physical, ancestral, cultural and spiritual emphasis. This again underpins the importance of recognising intangible values based on cultural traditions that are apparent in historical landscapes alongside their physical fabric or form.”
In 1992 the World Heritage Committee adopted and used the concept of 'cultural landscapes' as an option for the list of heritage properties that were neither purely natural nor purely cultural in form. The 2006 academic review of the combined efforts of the World Heritage Committee, offers a broader understanding, of the term including almost the whole of the world's occupied surface, plus almost all the uses, ecologies, interactions, practices, beliefs, concepts, and traditions of people living within cultural landscapes. Following this “A landscape comprises the visible features of an area of land, including physical elements such as landforms, living elements of flora and fauna, abstract elements such as lighting and weather conditions, and human elements, for instance human activity or the built environment”.

Cultural Landscapes have been defined by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (2005) as distinct geographical areas or properties that uniquely "..represent the combined work of nature and of man.." This concept has been adapted and developed within international heritage organizations in an effort to reconcile "..one of the most pervasive dualisms in western thought - that of nature and culture". The World Heritage Committee (Committee's Operational Guidelines 2005) has identified and adopted three categories of cultural landscape, which are:

I. "a landscape designed and created intentionally by man";

II. an "organically evolved landscape" which may be a "relict (or fossil) landscape" or a "continuing landscape";

III. an "associative cultural landscape" which may be valued because of the "religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element".

In light of the above landscape is a complex issue that comprises many elements such as forms, relationships, symbols and meanings. Modern studies try to investigate the multiple meaning a specific landscape has for its inhabitants, how they understand their roots and how the relationship between the inhabitants and the landscape has been changed over generations. It is more about identity building, social relations, and communication of experience, values, customs and aspirations which comprise culture. The cultural landscape thus becomes not only the medium but the message. It is part of culture and may weaken or reinforce that culture. Landscape is a mirror into which its inhabitants peer to assess their own identity in the world. This is particularly important for Greek Cultural identity which is based not only upon the formations happened with the passage of time, but also on the cultural specificities of the Greek regions influenced

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7 A relict or fossil landscape in which an evolutionary process has come to an end but where its distinguishing features are still visible
8 Continuing landscape which retains an active social role in contemporary society associated with a traditional way of life and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress and where it exhibits significant material evidence of its evolution over time.
9 Hamish Forbes, ibid
10 Briaval Holcomb ‘gender and heritage interpretation” in Contemporary issues in Heritage and Environmental interpretation, David Uzell & Roy Ballantyne (eds), London UK 1998
by common practices and experiences and reflected as much as in the cultural tradition—
local customs and rites— but also in the linguistic expression and the different sorts of
entertainment or artistic expression, - popular theatre, dance, music as well as in the built
environment.

1.2 The anthropology of landscape

During the last decades the reading of landscape has received special attention from
different study fields, such as planning—spatial and urban— economy, ecology and of
course geography, art and landscape history, archaeology. Landscapes are not considered
any more “as the settings for historical events rather than as a source for the lives and
activities of past societies” but they are seen “both in terms of function and of
symbolism”\(^{11}\) as processes, establishing links between present and the past. Rural
landscapes are not any more neglected.\(^ {12}\) However, until recently, as it happens with
other Mediterranean landscapes, Greek landscapes, unlike other issues, have not been a
subject for study for social anthropologists. Folklorists and Ethnographers, only features
of rural landscapes have investigated so far, since they are more interested in the
inhabitants of landscapes rather than to the landscape and its meaning for people.
Although the situation has changed the documentation and interpretation of landscape
from a culture perspective still remains a complex issue. This derives mainly from the
fact that many are the factors that exercise their impact and influence in the formation of
landscape.

Main factors

Recent literature recognises two factors as the most important ones: the man and the
nature (natural and human resources, also known as tangible factors). Man’s influence is
much more wide through the modifications man makes in vegetation and the intensive
exploitation of land-use (filed, forests, mountains etc), agriculture and farming. Climate
and environmental changes, the rapid socio-economic growth of the last decades, the
uncontrolled urbanization and the tourism development has largely affected landscapes,
especially rural ones. Therefore landscapes are not stable on the contrary they are under
change based upon the interaction among natural and cultural forces and societal
demands. These changes are more or less radical according to the period they happen, the
values of the local community and that of the broader society, the perceived relations
between people and their environment as well as the particular meaning it has for a
specific community. Thus landscape is considered as a dynamic phenomenon where

\(^{11}\) TERKENLI Theano S., New landscape spatialities: the changing scales of function and symbolism, Department of
Geography University of the Aegean, University Hill, Mitiline, Lesvos 81100, GRECE

\(^{12}\) See research project Unlocking Historic Landscapes in the Eastern Mediterranean: Principal Investigator: Professor
J Crow, School of History, Classics, and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh Co-Investigator: Dr Sam Turner,
School of Historical Studies, University of Newcastle upon Tyne
natural and human resources are interacting, either through spontaneous processes or planned actions.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite the radical socioeconomic changes occurred during the last decades, the Greek rural landscape, especially the insular one, is keeping major characteristics some unchanged from ancient times: the austere beauty and the plasticity. It also keeps its Mediterranean characteristics:

- the sea as main source of communication and connectivity,
- the agricultural practices,
- the interaction between the man and the surrounding nature and culture.

Historians, architects, travelers, tourism writers, photographers have depicted the singularity of the Greek insular rural landscape.

However it has to be noted that the landscape has not remained unspoiled. The radical changes in agricultural practices, the establishment of new transportation and communication infrastructure (new motor ways), the new types of intervention in the rural constructions, the denudation due to incendiary fires and exploitation of soil for new uses, as well as other interventions for ecological reasons (e.g. new wind turbines generators) had as a consequence major “ecological, functional and esthetic problems” in many Greek rural landscapes\textsuperscript{14}. As it has been stressed above some characteristics still remain the same, keeping the memory alive and contributing to the building of cultural identity.

The Greek cultural landscape is rife with landmarks, symbols of time and space. The most visible ones are the settlements and the houses. For the purpose of this research we shall concentrate on the insular landscape of the Crete and the Cycladic islands. The climate and environmental features - dry summers and mild winters-, as well as the long periods of occupation- both by western conquerors (Venetians, Francs) and Ottomans have influenced the way rural settlements developed. The available material and the creativity of human nature primarily determine the choice of the architectural styles. The house and the settlement reflect all cultural characteristics of a society in one way or another. At the same time they are visible landmarks on the landscape, shaping the environment around them.

In the Cycladic group we see some common characteristics although each island has its own distinctive elements that constitute its local identity. The insular rural landscape is marked by the dispersed houses with very specialized usages and functions, which constitute the unique microcosm of rural insular society. Known with different names

\textsuperscript{13} M. Antrop, Why landscapes of the past are important for the future, Landscape and Urban Planning 70 (2005), pp. 21-34

\textsuperscript{14} See also Elias Beriatos, Uncontrolled Urbanization, Tourism Development and Landscape Transformation in Greece, 44th ISOCARP Congress 2008
(kathikies, thymonies, etc) they are remarkable vestiges of human activity. They were used, and some are still used, by farmers, land cultivators and shepherds (particularly the small ones known as kellia) and they include the rooms for the family, the wood oven and, in some cases, the stable and the wine press. The selection of the place for the establishment of rural houses depends of course on land ownership. However most of the rural houses have been established in the interior of the islands mainly for protection reasons, but also for the facilitation of rural activities. In the most prosperous islands (e.g Andros, Paros, etc) land owners used rural houses as secondary homes, mainly during summer. Others rent their lands to poorest inhabitants who could afford to pay the rent, mostly in goods. Most of the houses are built mainly on sunlit, leeward slopes, fertile, but not very deep, gullies and valleys, where they could better use the local climate as air-conditioning and lighting source, avoid the summer heat or the strong north winds and use the land for agricultural and garden products, fruits and vegetables, oil and wine. The main building material is stone and schist. The same material was used for other buildings, such as the stone huts —development from the ancient type of conical shaped twigs woven huts— used by the farmers as temporary houses or store rooms (the best examples are to be found in Andros). Such types of stone huts with conical roofs are still in use by shepherds in Crete while similar stone constructions (mitata or koumoi) with dome roofing constructed according to the Minoan tomb tradition are used for making cheese.

Close to stone huts there was the threshing floor, surrounded by schist stones and wisely oriented in order to protect the straw and the seeds from the north winds. The wine and oil press, the pigeon houses, the windmills and the watermills, are among the elements that characterize the rural insular landscapes while small rivers and fountains, some decorated with monumental sculptures (e.g in Kea, Andros, Crete) offered the valuable water for several uses. The most exquisite landmarks are the small churches, the monasteries (in some islands real fortresses —e.g Naxos, Crete) and the terraces. Votive offerings of the seafarers or their families, with simple or more accumulated forms, single, two or three aisles, with domes —with or without lanterns— and simple or more sophisticated wall joints the small churches are the most eloquent expression of humility and spirituality.

Among the most evident signs of time and space they characterise the local places which receive their names from them (Agios Minas, Agios Vlassis, Aghia Moni, Episkopi, etc). Small roadside shrines show the way to the churches. With an icon inside and a small oil lamp, they are lit every afternoon by women, locals or visitors. Terraces aiming at the creation of cultivated land, but also at the controlling of soil erosion, are mainly used for the cultivation of olive trees and of vineyards, both characterised by their acrobatic adjustability, but also for wheat and vegetables. Terraces are protected by dry masonry.

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15 In the building techniques researchers have seen similarities with the chamber tombs and the sacred house from Chamezi of the Minoan period.
(xerolithia), in different free shapes, horizontal, vertical, with small or big schist slabs (stimata), in parallel or successive schemes –especially in very sloping areas- dividing the territory in pasturage and fields and creating abstract forms of sculpture, when the sunlight is reflected upon them. Central or secondary roads, in many cases stone paved, with steps, dating from the medieval times lead to these terraced fields. This system of communication and land cultivation guided the forms and the function of customs related to ownership but also rules controlling the relations of neighbouring properties (customary law) and family matters (such as dowry systems)16. Finally water springs and fountains, small rivers and forests, either as forests in the strict sense or in altered states known as maquis or phrygana largely contributed not only to the formation of landscape but also to local economies.

Similarities with the Cycladic settlements we find also in Crete, the largest Greek island which has a unique rural landscape. Despite the climatic change occurred, some accelerated soil erosion and the technological developments in agriculture, depopulation of mountainous inland areas of the island Crete keeps its historical and scenic values of its landscape. As it happens in the Cyclades, rural settlements models contribute to the ecological understanding of the rural landscape since people showed –and still do in some cases – a great degree of respect and use control of the territory.

In Crete, more than in the Cycladic islands one can meet people still following the traditional way of life. This largely applies to the majority of population in the rural areas: farmers, olive, wine and vegetable growers, cattle breeders, and beekeepers. Many people in the rural areas still use traditional methods on olive-harvesting (using a stick the so called “katsuna”) or transportation (with donkeys). Traditional and modern farmers coexist and the latter are benefited by past knowledge in order to standardize rural traditional products in order to reach consumers with quality products. Old constructions also coexist with modern ones. A typical example is the uses of windmills for water drawing (e.g in Sitia) while the modern wind turbines generators are producing electricity out of wind power. These modern windmills near many villages strike the rural scenery with an ecological dimension.

Referring to wind power as a source of energy it has to be stressed that old fashioned windmills –mostly in Cyclades- are not any more used for grinding flour and have mainly become a tourist attraction as they fit pleasantly into the landscape and are considered reminders of a simple agrarian past life. It is not the same with their high-tech descendants used as a source for renewable of energy. For many people they are “a blight on the landscape” spoiling the view, for others it is a source of noise posing also a great danger to birds. Despite the obstacles wind turbines are installed in some islands and in a

16 See also Marmaras E., Influences of customs in the formation of the Cycladic vernacular settlements, in dr. E. Karpodini-Dimitriadi (ed) Ethnography of European Traditional Cultures: Society, Cultural Tradition, Built Environment, European Seminar II- proceedings, Athens, 1996
great portion in Crete since they are considered as a widely available source of energy that produces neither pollution nor climate changes effects.

Talking about rural landscape and its quality one should not ignored a very important modern element that greatly affects, informs and it is interweaved with human livelihood systems, that of tourism. The impact of tourist resorts or the rural tourism development is inscribed in the landscape both in the Cyclades and the Crete mainly affecting the local economies, especially those with a distance from the coasts.

The resources provided by rural areas to human communities settling in them include directly exploitable goods and indirect services and functions. Natural resources sustain numerous human activities, both non commercial and commercial, such as agriculture, livestock rearing, flood retention, nutrient and sediment trapping, use of wind and water energies, as well as local craftsmanship and the collection of natural products, tourism, etc. All these are valuable assets to the local economy, while their use has a direct or indirect impact on the formation of the rural landscape. The rural settlements, as shown above, may provide us a variety of information about the environment and the society at the same time, its activities and societal relations (grazing and/or intensive grazing, systematic husbandry, intense competition for scarce resources, land exploitation). Analyzing the rural landscape we find many “inscriptions” that can help us to decode cultural practices (what people do and do not do), norms and values (behaviours and respect of others) and accumulated knowledge (what people can do, what people know)\(^\text{17}\). Thus landscape becomes a “palimpsest of symbols” where very often socioeconomic evolution, migratory movements and religious symbols leave their mark. It is far more than an image or representation since it implies “shared identities”, strategies of intervention, systems that very often reflect an ambiguity between landscape crisis and societal crisis and of consensus which asserts that landscape is a heritage to be protected and preserved\(^\text{18}\).

\(^{17}\) See also Esteban Zamora A and Pulgar Luque E., Man makes Space, Space makes Man in dr. E. Karpodini- Dimitriadi (ed) Ethnography of European Traditional Cultures: Society, Cultural Tradition, Built Environment, European Seminar II- proceedings, Athens, 1996

\(^{18}\) See also Paysage au pluriel; pour une approche ethnologique des paysages, Collection Ethnologie de la France, Cahier 9
2. INTERACTION BETWEEN MAN AND LANDSCAPE

Some general observations

It is generally accepted that there is a close interconnection between man and the environment. Human social system and ecosystem include mutually interacting components such as climate, soil, water, organisms, social structure, agricultural production and settlement patterns etc which create linkages that are sensitive to changes. Thus the interaction between man and the environment is dynamic; environment exercises impact on the formation of human activity which in return affects the environment. However man does not only relate his existence to the environment in terms of natural resources that he uses and in many cases harnesses. He is also emotionally involved to some places either by admiring and preserving them or being fearful of others. Therefore the type of relationship man has with the environment “colours his perceptions and his decisions” and reveals the relative intensity culture is rooted in nature and imprinted upon the environment. This largely applies to agrarian landscapes and in our case to the Greek ones. Rural customs, myths, and traditions keep the memory alive and guarded through time have become the main determinants of rural cultural identity. Popular beliefs, feasts, expressions of social life even in cases that are structurally – due to societal and economical changes- and functionally transformed still store codes, signs and symbols. Different elements intervene and create the set of local distinctive characteristics; climate, space and soil are among them. They have affected the way humans used the materials for clothing, the way they organised their dance movements, the construction of musical instruments. Thus costumes in continental Greece are heavier than those in the islands and dances differ in steps and movements from those of the insular Greece. Rural areas form a very complex, specific system, the social and cultural components of which are interdependent. Some characteristic examples follow.

2.1. Signs and symbols: primeval relationships

Symbolisms of water

Greek landscape carries information not only of its uses but also of the human history, of the myths and the religion. There are landscapes or part of them which are associated with a specific value, with the remembrance of a past glory or a great misfortune, with a heroic action or even a war. The rural landscape is full of past instances like these, some commemorated by a landmark (physical or human-made, such as a monument) or thought stories and myths. Greek customs and rites, different kinds of festivities and manifestations, festivals, religious processions, folk art and folk music are closely related with specific areas and their landscapes (e.g traditional dances in the mountain villages

19 See UNESCO MAB report series No. 55 Paris13-16 June 1983
and those in insular ones etc.). Greek rural myths and popular stories are linked with a specific landscape and its elements, which within a certain moment obtain certain attributes, different from the original ones. Water belongs to this category.

**Myths and spirits of water**

One of the four elements of the ancient Greek philosophy, source of life and birth, **water** is associated with different uses and symbolisms, religious practices, myths and legends.

"Water is an intrinsic part of most spiritual beliefs. Its uses and symbolism in religion are many and varied; its spiritual and healing properties are seen in rites and rituals; and its representations are as numerous as they are diverse. These different religious and cultural aspects of water reflect the vast array of civilizations that have made water the central element in their practices" ²⁰.

In ancient Greek **mythology**, water separates the world of the dead and the world of the living (the River Styx) but it also largely contributed to the regeneration of the earth after the Flood with which Zeus punished the impious. Good spirits, the nymphs, either in the rivers and lakes (**Naiades, Kriniides, Potamides, Limnades**) or in the sea (**Nereids**), dominated water and were helpful to people. In the Greek popular tradition **Naiades** have been replaced by the Fairies, **Neraides**, who prefer places close to water springs, fountains and rivers. Usually they appear after midnight and like to tease people, who must avoid them, especially men who might loose their voice if they speak to them. Mythical creatures (dragons) dominate the places with water and prevent people from using it. In the Aegean islands people believed that water sleeps only one hour. Therefore if somebody wants to drink must softly wake it up, otherwise water becomes indignant and takes away the mind of the intruder. The epithet **Ydroussa** was common for some islands (Kea, Andros etc) that had many springs. Until today one of the sightseeing in Kea is the stone sculpture of a lion reminding to people of a local tradition; the Nymphs, protectors of the springs, flew away terrified by his appearance and on the island started a long period of dry spell.

Local place names remind traditions and beliefs related to supernatural creatures. As a characteristic example we refer to the Mainites village in Andros Island, the name of which derives according to the local tradition from the **Mainades**, the frenzy female followers of Dionysos.

The role and the importance of water in people’s everyday life is reflected by the different manifestations and representations

**Cleansing and purifying water**

Water is known for its cleaning power; from this natural use it obtains a metaphysical one. Water cleans the body, and by extension, purifies it. Therefore it has a high symbolic status and becomes a key element in ceremonies and religious rites. In Christianity, water is intrinsically linked to baptism symbolizing cleanliness purity and rebirth. Jesus Christ

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²⁰ UNESCO, World Water Day 2006, Water and Culture
has been baptized in the river. On the 6th of January, when Epiphany is celebrated, it is a common practice to bless the waters; sea waters in order to become favourable to the sailors and the sea travelers and the springs and fountains in order to be purified. In the rural areas on the Eve of the holiday priests should visit the rural houses and sprinkle with holy water the place, the fields, and the storerooms. This blessing has a symbolic meaning; to drive away evil spirits and facilitate the coming of the spring. They keep the blessed water in the houses and they are going to drink it in cases of illness or to sprinkle the fields and the animals, in order to secure fertility and productivity.

The water has a central role in shaping the popular rites and in many cases it receives magical functions. In some islands they used to sprinkle water over the woman who was going to give birth in order to facilitate the baby to get born. The newly married bride should offer bread or nuts to the local spring in order to propitiate the water. The custom known as “The treat of the fountain” was practiced in the Day of the New Year in many rural settlements in Crete. People used to pass by the spring, drink some water and throw in it a coin. Women prepared small baskets with sweets, fruits and nuts and a bottle of raki and they gave it to a child who brought the offerings to the spring and telling wishes for a good and happy New Year for the family collected the coins. In some places they used to throw small coins in the wells. Although water is intrinsically linked to life, vitality and fertility, it is also intimately linked to death and therefore it is a common element in funeral and death rites. In most islands they throw out of the house water and they must clean their hands by water after the funeral in order to rinse away the miasma of death.

**Healing and protecting water**

Linked to the purifying element is the belief in the healing and protecting properties of water. From the ancient times until today water was believed to possess medicinal qualities, while some waters are recognized with miraculous healing powers. In all islands there are rural places, known as “agiasmata” (either inside caves or springs and fountains) with blessed concentrated water which has special benign and healing forces. In most cases a small church is incorporated in the agiasma and gives and the local place name. Believers drink from the water in order to obtain its supernatural powers and protect themselves from illnesses or collect some of the water and they sprinkle the walls of their dwellings with it to prevent evil spirits from entering. Many churches have been established close to water sources dedicated to Virgin Mary Source of Life (Zoodochos Pigi). As a central element of life water is linked to immortality and from this dimension received miraculous prediction virtues (e.g. Klidonas custom, still in practice in many Greek islands –Siphnos, Paros, Small Cyclades etc).

For rural societies water is also seen as a **bringer of productivity**. Many are the religious practices traced back to ancient times almost as old as the origins of agriculture related to the productive force of rainfall. When agricultural activities were prevailed by certain conditions and people suffered of water shortages in rural areas they organized **rain processions** in the fields holding miraculous icons offering prayers to God. These
processions for bringing rain are well known in Cycladic islands (e.g Kea) and Crete. In Kea they used to organize such type of processions in the spring, either to ask for water or to thank God for sending rain. In Crete rain processions are still in practice (e.g rain processions in 2000 in Zaro and other places).

All these practices passed down from generation to generation and some of them have become part of the “common consciousness” of rural communities. Preserved partly or in total they are vestiges of indigenous knowledge characterized by a deep respect to the environment. Among the forms of traditional knowledge the use of water as a power machine in everyday life is common in the rural areas. Water mills, especially in the hilliest parts of the islands were used for grinding grain and other material. These traditional devices very simple in their constructions formed an integral part of people’s lives serving to the local economy and the development and quality of life of the society being meeting points for the inhabitants of the rural areas. Many examples can still be seen in the islands (e.g Kea, Andros etc)

2.2. Sacred trees and beliefs

Regenerating and healing powers

Symbol of fertility, vitality and immortality, the image of which is according to Carl Gustav Jung an archetype in the individual and collective unconscious, tree was bound very strongly with people in all ages.

The symbolic meaning of tree is deeply rooted in the Greek cosmogonic perceptions being an element that connects the social and natural environment. It combines many myths and popular beliefs, traditions and cultural representations. The tree, with its branches reaching up into the sky, and roots deep into the earth, has been seen as a link between heaven and the underworld, uniting above and below. As such it is also related to immortality fertility and regeneration. Therefore its worship was so prevalent in antiquity. Many are the representations of goddesses with trees on gold Minoan and Mycenaean rings. Trees are close to Gods and they are considered to possess a soul being inhabited by spirits (dryads) that must be respected. From this derives the idea of the sacred and divine tree but also of the sacred grove which achieved the status of a religious institution21. Many are the examples we have from Minoan Crete.

Trees were associated with the fate of a place but in particular with the fate of individuals. In most Greek rural areas it was – and in some places it still is- a tradition to plant a tree on the occasion of a child’s birth. Then the tree should be treated carefully in favour of the longevity and good health of the child. Trees were considered to “harbour the souls of the dead”. In ancient Greece they used to plant trees over the graves of the dead. This custom continues until today. The funerary tree in Greece is the cypress, a

21 Jaques Brosse, the sacred tree in UNESCO Courier, Jan. 1989
symbol of mourning since the Minoan era. Due to its shape and form it was thought to express prayer and immortality. Olive tree was also used by the ancient Greeks in funerary and burial customs, but also in mysteries as ancient historians and writers stated in their descriptions (Herodotus, Pausanias, and Plutarch).

Trees considered having regenerating virtues and their worship is evident in all the periods of Greek culture. Some parts of the trees are considered to have miraculous qualities. The “diavasmena” (blessed) palm, olive and bay leaves of the Palm Sunday was thought to keep away the evil spirits. In the rural areas they used to knock with the bundles the fields, the trees and the vineyards, while housewives used the olive and bay leaves as incenses against “the evil eye”. Trees considered to have regenerating powers that people wish to attract especially during spring. Therefore it was a common custom in the Cycladic islands to set up swings (aiores) on a tender tree (fertility) for young women aiming at good luck. The custom is still in practice in the Kythnos Island on Easter Sunday.

The worship of the trees

In Greek Folk tradition many are the examples of sacred trees. Societal but mostly religious factors guide people to characterize a tree as sacred. The majority of sacred trees are close to monasteries, churches or other respected areas and they receive the sacred characteristics either because of their relation to magic and healing virtues or because they are considered extraordinary in comparison to other trees of similar kind. The most representative examples come from Crete, where evergreen plane trees are to be found. In 1966 a Greek Botanist (El. Platakis) identified 29 plane trees of this kind, one of them in Gortyna, on the northern part of the building where the famous antique laws have been found.

Different are the ways people express their worship to trees. The most used are the prayers, the incensing, the hanging of icons and offerings over the trunk and the branches. Thus the tree becomes sacred because it is the symbolic epiphany of the God or a saint. Numerous are the popular beliefs for sacred icons of Christ, Virgin Mary and especially of saints miraculously found close or under a tree. Very often the face of a saint appears close or on a tree while the founding of a church or a monastery is in some cases related to a tree. The most characteristic examples also come from Crete (e.g Aghia Myrtia in the Byzantine monastery of Panagia Paliani in the Venerato village, which has healing virtues, the oak tree in the Monastery of Aghia Paraskeyi in Apezana, the pomegranate tree in the Agarathou monastery etc.)

More than a hundred are the sacred trees in Crete. In the island we find one of the rarest examples of sacred trees that are not close to a church or a monastery. They are known as “the apple trees of Kofina” and they plant in a very difficult to access place on Mount Ida. Young people collect them on the 13th of September, eve of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. They leave them in the water to get red and the following day they put them in side the baskets with the Holy Cross.

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22 For more examples see Nikos Psillakis, Monasteries and Hermitages of Crete, Heracleion 1994 (in Greek)
and the flowers. The blessed apples are distributed to the attendees by the priest and be kept at their homes, where the fried apples are offered as healings to diseased or are used as incenses to drive away the illness. The apples thus become sacred symbols and are the basis of the mystic relationship between the man and the tree. This relationship in order to give favorite results presupposes a kind of contact which can be achieved by different ways either by touching directly a tree (prayers and sleeping under trees) or being benefited by the power of its fruit. All these practices developed in the Aegean from early prehistoric times when the tree was considered as the predominant symbol of a religious tradition inspired by nature and the annual cycle of vegetation.

Local rituals, folk traditions and local place names related to trees

In the rural folk traditions we find many tree worship elements that relate ancient beliefs and Christian religious symbols. The most venerated tree in the whole Aegean is the olive tree. Many are the folk traditions and narrations referring or related to it and many are the ritual practices, some still in use. All are linked with people’s wish to protect the tree and secure its productivity. The most impressive one is “the petrification of the olive oil” (petroma). At the end of July the olive trees crop usually is strong enough to show that it has olive in it. Therefore people thought that through symbolic actions they could assist the olive to stay undamaged until the period of olive harvesting. On the 20th of July they used to go to the olive groves before the sun rise and put a stone on the trees.

Traditional people of rural areas due to their special contact with the environment and the landscape created narrations that offer very simple and understand explanations of the worlds around them. Folk narrations for trees are numerous. In the Cyclades fig trees are dangerous for people to sleep under them, because Judas hung himself from a fig tree. Very old olive trees have always a “dry heart”. According to a folk tradition from Naxos, during the Crucifixion of Christ all the trees left their leaves to fall down as an act of mourning. Only the olive tree kept its own, because the mourning was inside its heart. According to a Cretan folk narration the olive tree is blessed because Jesus Christ tried to find shelter under an olive tree which was steeped by His tears. Ever after the olive tree became the most blessed tree and the olive oil has so many functions.

The place names of many rural places draw their origin to trees. The most characteristic example comes from the Cyclades. The place name ‘orns’ comes from a variation of the ancient word ‘erineos’ which applies to the wild fig trees, a name still in use also in Crete.

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23 Nikos Psillakis, Folk rituals in Crete, Heracleion 2005 (in Greek)
2.3. Agrarian Toponyms as guardians of memory

In Greece as it happens with most countries of the European Mediterranean region place names (toponyms) of the rural areas have close links with the geophysical properties of the area but also with agrarian activities and the land, which must be farmed and cultivated. An overview of the place names (toponyms) of Greek rural areas offers a picture in which is reflected mythology, history, religion, values and details of everyday life, personal names and variable characteristics of the Greek world. Many rural places still keep their ancient names offering a thorough insight into the past human history of the relevant area. Therefore scholars agree that toponyms provide valuable information of a particular region. According to F. M. Powicke24 a toponym can enrich the discoveries of archeologists and historians and can illustrate settlement patterns or assist in identifying periods of human mobility or immigration.

Toponyms include natural features or other characteristics of a place. Similarly to countries that have not experienced repeated large-scale cultural and/or linguistic changes, Greece preserves many of its original toponyms. Even in cases where toponyms have been changed, or broken down the original meaning is not forgotten. Usually the place names (toponyms) are rich and diverse. This text examines mainly not the origins itself of place names in Crete and Cyclades but mostly the types of toponyms and their divisions from the ethnological point of view.

Many rural areas preserve names that have an ancient origin (prehistoric, archaic, roman, Byzantine, and in some cases Venetian and Arabic). As referred above the name of Mainites village in Andros Island, derives according to the local tradition from the Mainades, the frenzy female followers of Dionysos. Another characteristic example: in the Cycladic islands a typical rural toponym is Protoria that comes from the word Pretoria (from roman military camps). The same toponym can also be found in Crete. Similarly the toponym Sarakiniko (from the Saracens pirates) can be found in both the Cyclades and Crete.

Plants and trees mostly lend their names to various areas. Phytonyms (names of plants) are very common (for example Platanos, Kyparissi, Etia etc) in all the insular Greece. Particular trees (for example Agrilies – wild olive trees) or plants (myrtos) can lend their names to certain areas. Some toponyms have been elaborated from an ancient plant word which is modified keeping however its original meaning. As it is mentioned above the place name ‘ornos’ comes from a variation of the ancient word ‘erineos” which applies to the wild fig trees, a name still in use both in Crete and the Cyclades. The plant anagyros (a strong smelling shrub) also lends its name in a modified version to some places (azogyres). Due to the fact that it is very malodorous “to shake the anagyros” meant to cause trouble already in antiquity25.

Toponyms also derive their names from the formation of the soil and other natural features. This is mainly the result of people trying to distinguish the geographical features of a place—for example if it’s a mountainous or rocky area (Charakas, which means a very large rock), or surrounded by rivers (Nera, which means waters) or even a source of

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25 Lysistrata, 68
mountain water (Kali Vryssi, Kria Vryssi etc…) or a humble water reservoir (e.g Cavussi in Crete). Names of humans are also known to inspire rural toponyms (anthroponymy), especially in cases that certain fields should be identified (tou Giorgiou, tis Kalis). Small settlements established in rural areas derive their name from male, mainly from the name of the first settler and they are more often given out not by the settlers themselves but by neighboring villagers. Many of the settlements retain their name today, even when the families named after are long gone. Finally the most influential element lending its name to an area or even region is traditionally churches and monasteries. For this reason we often encounter the same toponym in different areas/regions across Greece (Agios Konstantinos, Apostoloi etc).

Rivers, lakes and other bodies of water, mountains and hills, bridges and ravines, the nature and fertility of the soil are reflected into toponyms which in return show the topographical, geographical and physiographical situation of an area.
RURAL CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Rural cultural landscapes, in general and those of the islands in particular, contain different forms and aspects and therefore compose a vast theme for research and investigation, especially in the case of Greece, where landscapes have been created through the ages and have a significant value and importance of the future sustainable development of most areas due to the high degree of reconnection of societies with the land itself.

The Greek rural cultural landscapes, even in cases that are under threat (e.g. devastation, building constructions, exploitation for economic growth, modification of rural and agricultural practices etc), are not an alienated element of a romantic past but a present reality which requires our immediate attention. Their values and tensions, which have been, from age to age, at the base of the construction of the Mediterranean space, always characterized by a widespread humanization of the environment close to and in respect of natural elements. Therefore the recent years are witnessing a wide range of protection and preservation efforts aiming at maintaining the landscapes for the future. People often start to value something when it is threatened and the recent consequences of extensive summer forest fires (responsible for the degradation of both soil and water systems and promoting desertification) in most Mediterranean regions prove that. As it is pointed out in the "Pathways to Cultural Landscapes" project “…its long-term consequences still not clear, raised the stakes on the future of the rural landscape. The countryside has long been highly valued, but rural policy has tended to focus on its natural attributes. Its historic dimension is neither well understood nor, as a result, adequately managed. Heritage conservationists have until recently been strongly focused on sites and monuments, treating landscape as the background rather than significant in itself”.

Consideration must also be given to the fact that examining cultural landscapes we deal with processes, and living processes in particular. Landscapes change due to geographic, morphological or climatic reasons. Time is also important because all the changes, slow or rapid, happen in time. Human beings also intervene and shape or change the landscape they live in, intentionally or unintentionally. They also shape the landscape in their minds and around their minds. The way people think, the things people believe in, have a crucial influence on how people treat the landscape, how they build and form the landscape. But one has also to bear in mind that landscape as such is a completely human concept. As landscape is a purely human concept, the way how we perceive the landscape is an important part of a landscape. For those who deal with the landscape professionally therefore the concepts of the people living in the landscape must be one of their major features. The mental landscape, the landscape in the mind of people, as a result of the
history of the landscape and the actual state of the people living in the landscape, is not only crucial for understanding the landscape and how it emerged, but as well for planning the future development, for managing the change and the process of change.

In light of the above special attention must be made to the current consumption of cultural landscapes mainly due to tourism, which is a great promoter of culture. It is well known tourist mainly visit places for the monuments and the landscape. Therefore protection of cultural landscapes is of crucial importance. As regards the rural landscapes in the islands the strong link with the tourism development should be stresses. The natural and cultural resources are the basis of the tourism development. Radical changes or destroys of these resources create unfavorable conditions from which tourism must sustain its existence.

Rural Cultural landscapes are important for the future. They present models that can be used to create new strategies of technological and socioeconomic processes to produce livable and sustainable environments. Considering that in the past relationships between economic capital and natural capital were maintained by cultural capitals, traditional landscapes and the manifold relations people have towards the perceivable environment offer valuable knowledge for more sustainable planning.

Cultural Landscapes include a vast Environmental capital. As it is stressed by EEAC organization “the impressive diversity of the European cultural landscape and the wealth of biodiversity contained within it are dependent on a diverse combination of soils, open waters (and systems of water management developed through centuries), traditional breeds of livestock and crop varieties as well as the human ability to use and combine these assets in a way that creates valuable and resilient ecosystems”. They also compose a significant Social Capital. Again we quote “A majority of European inhabitants live (and often work) in rural and semi-rural areas. Such areas comprise a richly differentiated tapestry of communities featuring a variety of identities and cultural repertoires, which are connected by a range of mutual networks, collective memories and common challenges. Such networks also possess the ability to solve common problems, often through innovative solutions generated at a local level. The paradox of the old agricultural and rural policy was that it failed to take account of this rich and diverse social capital”. The maintenance and development of social capital in rural areas is critically important for young people in order to be encouraged to believe that rural areas have a real future.

The Economic capital must not be ignored. Certain rural areas feature enterprises and activities grouped around one or more special products (e.g. production of cheese in some

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26 Cultural landscape as a model for ecology and economy integration, BioScience, Vol.50 No.4
islands, olive oil in Crete, local plants and traditional food products etc.). In many rural areas, tourism and recreation is also an important economic sector. Therefore cultural landscapes are far more than a concept attractive to the landscape ecology. They are a special element of cultural identity and in order to sustain a major challenge is the understanding of the social groups’ views that have shaped them. Despite the efforts made the last decades the crucial question still remains and implies not only to the kind of policy settings needed to ensure their survival but also on the mechanisms that will guarantee their efficient application. This is particularly important for the rural landscapes of the islands which are more vulnerable to environmental changes, as part of the general process of globalization. This is the greatest challenge for current and future generations.
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