

## **CULT-RURAL**

### **Promotion of a Cultural Area Common to European Rural Communities**

"Culture 2000"

Framework Programme in Support of Culture

1<sup>st</sup> Transnational Workshop

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## **PRISMA**

### **Centre for Development Studies**

#### **0. Introduction**

##### *PRISMA*

PRISMA is an independent consultancy, which was founded in 1989, and it specializes in the areas of local and regional development, the labour market and the SMEs, public and social sector management planning and research, as well as in the evaluation and management of development programmes and projects. Its research work covers the areas of human resources, social policy and culture.

PRISMA is now one of the leading Greek consultancies in its field. It undertakes research and consulting in Greece and also has strong links with other consultancies and research institutions throughout Europe with whom it undertakes joint development projects, comparative studies and evaluation work at European level.

PRISMA has a long experience in cultural projects and a very good experience in the setting up of cultural exhibitions and museums. Previous projects include: ACRINET (The European Acritic Heritage Network) [www.acrinet.net](http://www.acrinet.net), Living Castles, Silver Art, the Forest Museum etc. More information could be obtained from the following website: [www.prismanet.gr](http://www.prismanet.gr)

##### *Museum of Cretan Ethnology*

The Museum of Cretan Ethnology, placed in the village of Vori in the southern coast of Crete, aims to preserve and promote the cultural values of the traditional Cretan rural society. The Cretan culture is extremely interesting, given that the society has preserved its typical cultural characteristics and ancient ancestral memories unchanged during the ages, in spite of 700 years of uninterrupted occupation by the Venetians and the Turks.

The museum, founded in the 1980s, follows the exhibitive model of G.H. Rivière. The museum displays 2500 objects, which reflect the lifeways of the Cretans during the last two millennia. The exhibition is divided in 7 main sections: Nutrition, architecture, weaving, arts and crafts and commerce, transportation, customs and ceremonies, and social organisation.

In 1992, the Council of Europe awarded the museum with the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA).

Besides the museum, there is the “Museum of Cretan Ethnology” Foundation, which aims at the continuing development of ethnographical research in Crete. It promotes interdisciplinary research and education through European projects, publications etc. More information could be obtained from the following website: [www.cretanethnologymuseum.gr](http://www.cretanethnologymuseum.gr)

#### *Folklore museum of Komotini*

The folklore Museum of Komotini, belongs to the Association of Education of Komotini. It was founded in 1962. Since 1989, the museum is housed in the mansion Peidi, which is a characteristic example of local architecture. Through its exhibits, the museum reveals the liveliness and the beauty of Thracian art of towns and the countryside. The traditional costumes, the embroideries, the crafts of copper, timber, clay and silver, the agricultural tools, and the tools of other traditional professions and the objects of domestic use lively portray the picture of traditional Greek Thrace. Many of them originate from the Eastern and Northern Thrace as well as from the regions of M. Asia.

More information could be obtained from the following website:

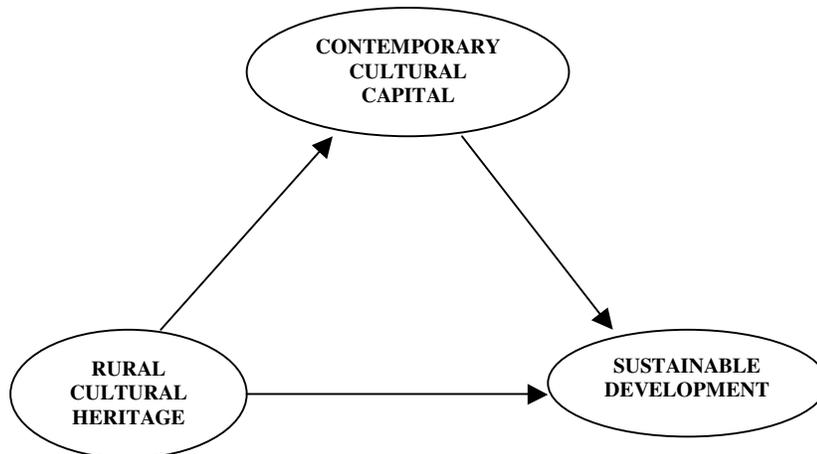
<http://alex.eled.duth.gr/laografiko/mu.htm> (*website in Greek*)

## 1. Central concepts

The understanding of culture in Greece varies considerably from organisation to organisation. In order to avoid confusion PRISMA chose the following analysis as the most objective and holistic approach to the matter.

### 1.1 concepts

A central concept that permeates the description of the project and its activities is that of “culture” in the context of European rural communities. Undoubtedly, rural culture consists of several aspects, all closely interrelated. It consists of both the contemporary cultural capital and the cultural heritage that is bestowed in each community from previous generations. Moreover, it captures the dynamics of the community to sustain themselves in the future and develop further. Thus, we may argue, that rural culture should be studied on the basis of a conceptual triangle, whose peaks represent roughly the elements of past, present and future:



### 1.2 the definition of culture

It is also essential to define culture as such. There are numerous definitions of culture in the literature. We quote one here, provided by Guillaumin (1988):

*“the totality of the knowledge and practices both intellectual and material of each of the particular groups of a society, and of a society itself as a whole. From food to dress, from household techniques to industrial techniques, from forms of politeness to mass media, from work rhythm to the learning of*

*family rules, all human practices, all invented and manufactured materials are concerned and constitute in their relationship, culture”.*

Whatever definition of culture we may adopt, there would be two elements that we need to incorporate to it: firstly, the holistic character of culture (like the one stated in the definition provided above); and secondly, the rural context in which we set this definition, a context that provides the focus of this project.

Culture is usually manifested through its tangible and intangible products. When comes to rural culture, all aspects (material and non-material) provide us with information about rural people’s lifestyles, their beliefs, their ethics and aesthetics, their ways of using their land and of living harmoniously with their surrounding environment, their habits and customs, their architecture and arts (fine, applied and performing), their songs and festivities, their rituals and myths.

Apart from presenting and preserving the material heritage, the oral testimonies, the sounds and movement of past cultural expression in the European rural areas, it is also worth approaching the concept of rural culture from a contemporary angle, linking in this way the past with the present and future, the old with the new. Without doubt, in most European countries, contemporary rural culture differs a lot from the one that could be observed in the past. One may argue that rural areas today do participate in the global culture, and at the same time they have their own distinct cultural character, which makes them different to urban areas and gives their communities a unique sense of identity, part of which is based on their rural cultural heritage. Or, one may take the opposite view, and wonder whether European rural areas are gradually losing their identities and distinctiveness due to the various pressures (national, global, or other) that disrupt the traditional lifestyles and the rhythms of the natural world.

This brings us to another important issue: the role of rural cultural heritage in contemporary culture and contemporary life of rural communities and its links to sustainable development of rural areas.

### *1.3 rural cultural heritage and sustainable development*

The role of cultural heritage in rural areas as a source of identity for the rural communities and as an input to contemporary rural culture is an important issue, representing one of the links in the triangular diagram above, namely the link between contemporary cultural capital and rural heritage. An equally important issue is brought forward by another link, the one that bridges rural heritage with sustainable rural development. Sustainable development may be promoted through rural heritage in two ways: Acknowledging the contemporary potential of rural heritage as a resource which can bring economic benefits to a rural area via the development of tourism; and capitalising on the lessons that rural heritage brings to contemporary communi-

ties by demonstrating valuable practices of sustainability in the use of natural resources, the organisation of living space and the conduct of economic activities, especially those that relate to nature. Moreover, rural heritage, to the extent that it reinforces individual and community identity, represents a driving force for sustainable development, by binding together rural communities and offering an additional incentive both for the development effort and for the preservation of the local cultural and natural assets.

## 2. Research outline

### 2.1 Background

Until recently, as rural areas were considered all those, which were not urban. Such a definition, though, based on available statistical and geographical data, has at least the merit of simplicity. Instead of placing ‘rural’ against ‘urban’ it would be better to examine the former in association with their resident population, that is, with the people engaged in rural activities.

Acknowledging this the Council of Europe, for example, approaches ‘rural’ as (I quote): *"a stretch of inland or coastal countryside, including small towns and villages, where the main part of the area is used for:*

- *agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries,*
- *economic and cultural activities of country-dwellers (crafts, industry, services, etc),*
- *non-urban recreation and leisure areas [or natural reserves], other purposes, such as for housing."*

Therefore, when we discuss about rural culture, we have to associate all rural activities with cultural values and heritage. All rural activities become part of the cultural heritage because of the “meaning” with which they are invested. In order to decide what is to be done with them, their relationship to time, as vectors of memory, to space, as a geographical identifier and to a society, as an indicator of belonging, must be assessed.

In Greece, exactly as in the rest of Europe, humanities’ scientists view rural heritage in a broad perspective and conclude that all material and immaterial components of rural cultural heritage related to a variety of human activities. From habitation patterns, to primary and secondary human activities, and from social activities to artistic expression, leisure and tourism, anyone could recognise a wide spectrum of actions that result in a great variety of cultural values and heritage aspects.

It is difficult to select just few distinctive aspects of rural heritage, which could represent Greek ruralities. Rural heritage exists in the variety of the Greek rural landscapes, of its built traditional architecture, on traditional skills and techniques of agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting. Heritage aspects can be found in the songs and fairy-tales of the Greek rural inhabitants, in their dances and music, in their beliefs and memories.

During the years there have been several approaches to the issue and several projects that attempted to promote rural cultural heritage. The existence of over 60 ethnographical museums in such a small country as Greece, proves exactly this, the need of rural areas to continually define themselves and their heritage and when heritage is given meaning and scope according to a society’s expectations, it is then that this heritage has the potential to remain alive and in turn provide the foundations for the sustainable development of a saleable and/or non-saleable cultural and touristic product.

## **Selection of themes**

PRISMA in connection with its associate partners would like to concentrate on one or more of the following themes of rural heritage:

### ***a. Traditional bio-climatic architecture***

Greek traditional architecture fulfils many bio-climatic criteria. Although there are various traditional architectural types in the different rural areas of Greece, they all share the following common characteristics:

- Orientation relative to the shining of the sun and to the direction of the dominant winds;
- Minimization of the quantity of fuels used, through a proper design of the house and of the stoves;
- The use of shading elements in the warm season

The traditional rural buildings, in general, and in Greece in particular, are the product of two main factors: the natural environment – cold winters and warm summers – and the creative human nature. In our case, the latter is definitely defined by its rural character. The rural habitat is the product of an anonymous collective creation, consequence of a long evolution and accumulation of existential experiences.

The cultural background is delineated by the following aspects: the limited division of labour, since most of the products are usually the result of the efforts of the entire family; the relative isolation, which ensures a unitary character of the handmade creation; and the interdependence of the various rural occupations, such as sheep and cattle husbandry, agriculture, fruit and vine growing etc.

Apart from the societal dimension of traditional bio-climatic architectures, issues like the use of materials and of natural resources, the structural design and the protective measures against and management of natural catastrophes are few more of the aspects that PRISMA would like to address in a exhibition.

Both PRISMA and the Museum of Cretan Ethnology have experience on bioclimatic architecture and habitation in rural areas. Especially the latter could provide a potential exhibition both with information material and objects to display. These objects vary from whole architectural elements, tools used in architecture, traditional building models to designs, photographs etc. Access to other display objects or photographs and information could be most probably obtained by other collections of various museums around Greece. Depending on the area where an exhibition like this could take place, tours through the according traditional village could also provide a living example of traditional bio-climatic architecture.

### ***b. Gesture and speech: everyday communication in rural areas***

The idea for this topic originates from a photographic exhibition that was organised by the Museum of Cretan Ethnology. PRISMA would like to propose to develop this idea further by including it as one of the thematic topics of CULT-RURAL exhibi-

tions. Although that the previous subject is a material aspect of rural cultural heritage, this one is at large an immaterial one.

Thinking about gesture and speech in a rural areas, one could consider issues like everyday human relations, trade relations within the rural markets, gift exchanges, mating and marriage expressions, dances, songs, fairy tales, body movement, games, religious signs (like the Christian cross) etc. For example festivities and celebrations like *panygeries* have always given the opportunity to rural people to come together, to celebrate, to communicate and to exchange products, gifts, experiences etc.

It is usually a great challenge to present a subject of intangible heritage. A topic like this, though, comprises important aspects of rural life. For this reason, subjects like this fairly deserve our consideration. Especially in Greece apart from the use of audiovisual material and information, objects like embroideries, which represent the gift gesture, or depict heroes of traditional fairytales, jewellery and other artefacts and / or art works, religious objects etc could very well illustrate the topic in an exhibition. Materials like these are available both in the Museum of Cretan Ethnology and the Folklore museum of Komotini.

### ***c. Rural cultural landscapes and water: from the aesthetics to the function***

The reason we suggest this topic is because is it a combination of both tangible and intangible heritage. It is a topic that monopolises the modern theoretical approaches of many disciplines from spatial planning to archaeology, and from geography to art.

The rural landscape, in general, can be seen as a vast and complex cultural object fashioned by humankind and nature over the centuries. It is also the lived context experienced and perceived by humans, while it simultaneously determines human attitudes towards the continuum of space and time.

Rural landscape is a limitless archive that could be used to increase our knowledge of the culture, the climate and the vegetation of an area, either in the past or the present. It is the depiction of the techniques that have been used and the way rural communities have lived. It portrays the cultural and political changes throughout the years, the memories, the beliefs and the identities of the societies who live in them.

What we would like to propose, though, is not a broad approach to the subject. We would like to limit it in those rural landscapes, which contain the element of water. Water, an invaluable element essential for the existence of most living entities, characterises many rural areas and provides the basis for their specificities. Water has movement, caused either by flow or the action of wind. This movement gives to the landscapes a dynamic nature visually and it becomes a natural driver of change through flooding, shore erosion, and riverbed modifications. Water experiences seasonal changes, by turning into snow and ice, or large and powerful sea waves, and in this way it impacts dramatically on the visual aspects of rural landscapes. In addition, it affects functionally flora and fauna and their ecosystems and thus indirectly landscapes. Therefore, vegetation cover is determined by the water regime of each area, and may be modified drastically once this regime is changed.

The role of societies in these sensitive landscapes is crucial; from the one hand they have been gifted with a precious resource, which provides them the potential of economic development, and on the other hand they have to deal with its sustainable use.

Water has been a source of inspiration as much as a source of living. In such rural areas the development of fishing co-existed with the emergence of myths for water fairies, hunting in the nearby forests gave birth to imaginary stories for heroes. In the same way catastrophic events like flooding or wars filled societies with unforgettable memories.

Various objects that could relate to activities like fishing, water carriage, water transportation, aquaculture, salt extraction, use of natural resources and food gathering, management of waste, stories and fairy tales as well as murky memories of wars could support a theme like this. Objects such as tools, artefacts, war remains as well as photographs, maps, historical documents etc could be found both in the Museum of Cretan Ethnology and the Folklore museum of Komotini. Greek historical archives could also provide us with material if necessary. Furthermore, we could encourage artists from rural areas to exhibit their works. In this way we could present in an exhibition the contemporary artistic perception of rural inhabitants.

#### ***d. Rural routes: a cultural dimension***

This subject can be a combination of the previous three plus all other aspects, which comprise it. To become more specific, the initial concept was to demonstrate in a visible way, by means of a journey through space and time, how the heritage of rural areas in Greece and elsewhere in Europe represents the European rural cultural diversity and identity, the dialogue, the mutual exchange and the enrichment across boundaries and centuries.

The idea of a rural route is innovative, complex and multidimensional in nature. From a scientific point of view, routes, in general, represent interactive, dynamic, and continually evolving processes of human intercultural links that reflect the rich diversity of the contributions of different peoples to cultural heritage. Within this context, the notion of rural routes constitutes a new concept that illustrates the tendency to approach cultural heritage from a multidimensional perspective, and contributes significantly to our understanding of rural heritage.

Our scope is to choose a specific rural activity that relates to movement from one place to the other, such as stock-breeding, trade, travelling and pilgrimage, and reconstruct it within the set environment of a museum by displaying both the objects that relate to it and audiovisual material. Especially in Greece, we find a large number of traditional occupations which have to do with movement and travelling: Travelling pottery maker (Crete), resin agriculture (Euboia), fishermen (moving Fishermen of Prespa), tradesmen, stock-breeders, woodcutters, hunters, sponge collectors, painters carriage driver etc.

Specific indicators could guide our rural cultural route choice and exhibition scenario:

- the structure of the route and its physical substratum;
- historical data about its use;

- the existence of cultural manifestations of shared origin along (or at given points of) the route;
- any physical structures associated with the functionality of the route (landmarks, landscape features);
- practices, traditions, customs, and common uses of a religious, ritual, linguistic, festival, culinary, or similar nature;
- reciprocal influences in activities such as music, communication elements, games, and
- other material and immaterial cultural assets, such as utensils, clothing, and carriage equipments, whose full understanding derives from the historic function of the route itself.

Materials varying from traditional moving occupations tools, transportation means, clothing and equipment related to the activities mentioned above can be found both in the Museum of Cretan Ethnology and the Folklore museum of Komotini.

#### *e. inside-outside*

Our final proposal is an approach of the idea that rural occupations and the distribution of work activities are in many ways defined by the location, which they are taking place, inside the house or outside (in the fields etc). We would like to show the interdependence of various occupations in rural areas, for example the relation between culinary traditions (inside) with primary sector activities (outside), and gardening, food gathering and hunting. We are also interested on the selection of place of tool manufacturing, for example there are tools which are manufactured inside the house but are used in agriculture or fishing or elsewhere outside of it, while other tools are manufactured outside but are primarily for domestic use.

Besides the economic and technological dimensions of the topic, issues like gender, the role of the two sexes, the symbolism of these roles within the family and the surrounding society can be addressed. Also, we should consider the biorhythms of a society inside and outside the house, the seasonal cycles and their effects to rural biorhythms and lifeways, and the role of domestic architecture (the use of space).

An exhibition with a theme like this could be illustrated by presenting drawings and small scale 3D representations of domestic architecture, tools and utensils, clothing etc. Both the Museum of Cretan Ethnology and the Folklore museum of Komotini own objects like these.

### **Methodology**

The methodology we propose is a general type of methodological approach followed in most social sciences research (anthropology, ethno-archaeology, sociology, cultural studies etc.). It could be divided into three basic stages that work almost in parallel: a) desktop research/study, b) fieldwork / in-situ research, and c) evaluation and interpretation.

### ***a. Desktop research /study***

As its name suggests, this is an office-based investigation using existing records. At the beginning of this stage someone could determine whether there is enough materials to use for the proposed exhibition subject. The sources for desktop study may be:

- Historical sources
  - Legal documents
  - Tax records
  - Economic records
  - Written accounts
  - Anthropological and/or archaeological records
  - Oral accounts
- Nineteenth and twentieth century documents
- Directories
- Newspapers
- Population records
- Surveys
- Pictorial records
  - Maps and plans
  - Blueprints
  - Photographs
  - Paintings and engravings
  - Audiovisual archives

All these are usually available in the museum's archives, in National archives, the world wide web, in private archives etc. Some or all of them may be used for the approach of the topics that will be selected during the first transnational workshop

### ***b. Fieldwork / in-situ research***

This stage may start in parallel with the previous one. It is usually complementary to the previous one and allows gaining first-hand information and filling the knowledge lacunae, which emerged during the previous stage. This stage may include:

- Questionnaires and /or interviews with local population, traditional craftsmen, cultural sector etc
- Photography and other audiovisual recording
- Record of standing buildings
- Collection of objects that locals would like to contribute to the exhibition

### ***c. Evaluation and interpretation***

When all these data and objects are collected then we have to go through an evaluation and interpretation procedure. We have to draw our main conclusions and start to design our exhibition scenarios.

Evaluation is a very important stage at the end of our research as it brings us to the position that we have to consider how we will use the material that we have collected and how this material and our objectives will become comprehensive to the visitors of the exhibitions.

Interpretation, on the other hand, is the process of explaining, translating and finding ways to present our personal understanding about a subject and the objects related to it. A good interpretation will seek to teach and reveal meanings, will be based on original objects whether animate or inanimate, will be definitely supported by our sound scientific research, will make use of all necessary sensory perception means, and it will be simple, comprehensive and informal.

### **3. Conclusion**

Our main scope is to explore new approaches of presenting strictly ethnographical / anthropological themes. We want to attract the contemporary visitor, irrespective of age and educational background. It is our aim to think of modern ways to contribute to the promotion of cultural rural heritage and show that rural heritage is not something firmly traditional and static, but it is an amalgam of elements we inherited by past generations and views and techniques of our current lifeways. We want to think rural heritage not as a cultural object not longer in use, but as an object, which is constantly being transformed and modified according to each generations perspectives and expectations.