



Fig. 1. The Venetian Castle and Port of Nafpaktos. Image by the author (Heritage time photographic archive).

WORKING LOCALLY, THINKING GLOBALLY. EFFORTS TO ASSESS MUNICIPAL NEEDS FOR EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

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Valorization, protection and enhancement of local cultural heritage is a challenging task, as one usually works with limited resources and with communities which often have a conflicting attitude: on the one hand eager to protect their identity and heritage, on the other reluctant to resume action, apprehensive of strangers and often lacking the background which would help them understand why the proposed solutions are the right ones. The paper demonstrates that, when working in this field, the real need is to work with local communities and not only, in order to help them bring their own heritage up to European standards and connect with a broader network, profiting from best practices developed elsewhere.

Keywords:

valorization – protection – communities – heritage – Greece

1. INTRODUCTION

When Time Heritage, a Greek Small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) offering services in the field of cultural heritage management and enhancement, was established back in 2003, the founders' team aimed at undertaking projects on a municipal level, namely working FOR municipalities, as sub-contractors. We soon realized that the needs of the municipal authorities regarding the management of their cultural resources were of a deeper kind: local agents needed not only to assign part of their projects to specialized professionals, but to rather be assisted in prioritizing their needs and setting their goals regarding the valorization of their cultural heritage and historic past. What they actually needed was people to work WITH them.

Hence, since 2012 part of our activities focused on Research and Development (R&D) projects as well as EU projects, with the aim of involving local communities and municipal agents in the process of understanding and protecting their own cultural heritage resources while planning for their sustainable valorization.

2. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Our first endeavour was the project MoCaCu in 2013-2014 (Kamára et al. 2015). It was the first attempt in Greece to establish a mobile unit for the Documentation, Characterization and Conservation of Movable Cultural Heritage in remote areas of the country. It was during that project, carried out under the auspices of the University of the Peloponnese, when we realized that local communities needed to be empowered to better understand and protect their own heritage. Remote communities felt cut-off from the main sources of funds and information and abandoned by the central government. They had a specific (often “heroic”) view of their own past but could not effectively protect their own artifacts or built heritage. The project, in the course of which two missions were accomplished, one in the region of Tzoumerka (Church of St. Nicholas in Kalarrytes) (Fig. 2) and one in the region of Alagonia on the slopes of Mt. Taygetus (various ecclesiastic icons and artifacts from local churches) (Fig. 3), uncovered for us the necessity of raising educational standards regarding preventive conservation and cultural heritage management. In this manner local communities would



Fig. 2. The MoCaCu conservators' team in the courtyard of St. Nicholas' church in Kalarrytes. Image by the author.

be able to claim their share of funds and target future sustainable development.

Further collaboration with municipalities through the “Amphictyony - Network of twinned cities and areas of the Mediterranean” (“E.G.T.C. Amphictyony”), consisting of twinned towns and regions of the Mediterranean, urged us to think of a way to create roadmaps and toolkits for local municipalities, so that they could plan their own steps towards the enhancement and protection of their heritage and assets (Grimwade & Carter, 2000: 33-48).

Hence the project “DIAPLASIS” was born and carried out: it consisted of an R&D project, co-funded by the Greek General Secretariat of Research and Technology (GSRT), aiming at a survey of the needs of Greek municipalities for drafting their own cultural policies and cultural heritage management plans (Καμάρα, 2017)¹. Questionnaires were answered by municipal staff, who seemed to face a series of problems. Funding was, of course, the bottom line, in a country deep down in the economic crisis. Yet, what the research revealed was that the actual problem rather lay in the fragmented, non-linear way of funding various activities. Most municipalities' policy seemed to be drawn by the desire to submit proposals to frame other programmes or funding opportunities (mostly EU funded programmes such as INTERREG, URBACT etc.) rather than proposals based on a structured development plan, where needs and resources were clearly defined and balanced.

In order to assist Greek municipalities to remedy this, we developed a basic handbook of cultural heritage management (Time Heritage, 2016) accompanied by two case-studies; one on the archaeological site “Rahi Koutsogilla” (close to the port of Kenchreai in Corinthia) (Fig. 4), excavated but not properly protected and enhanced thereafter) and one on a historic city-centre and port, namely that of Chania (Fig. 5) (Time Heritage, 2016).

Throughout case studies a series of functional problems emerged, which had to do with the broader notion of management and with the collaboration between stakeholders. DIAPLASIS led us to the conclusion that, at least for Greece, the most crucial problem is to achieve synergies among local stakeholders involved in the management of cultural heritage assets, following the suggestions of modern Heritage Management discipline (Vu Hong, 2016: 614-626; Zemite, 2016: 97-103). Any collaboration between civil society, municipal authorities, state authorities and think-tanks such as Universities and Research foundations is blockaded by unsurmountable obstacles: rigid legislation, corporate or union interests, the eternal antagonism between private and public sectors and the inability to formulate regulations binding all parties involved. DIAPLASIS, which was completed in 2016, laid the grounds for a way by which Greek local agents could be led to match international and EU-standards of managing and presenting local heritage, both tangible and intangible.

¹ <http://timeheritage.gr/r-d/>

In order to overcome these difficulties we moved on to the next step by setting up a Strategic Partnership with municipal authorities, NGOs and Research Institutes in Greece and in other countries, for the establishment of DEN CuPID, a Digital Educational Network for Cultural Projects' Implementation and Direction². The project, implemented under Erasmus+ KA2 SP, lasted two years (2016-2018) and attracted a number of trainees from four participant countries (Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Spain) and from different social segments: young entrepreneurs, Museums, local cultural organizations, NGOs, municipal authorities. The main aim of the project was to provide trainees with a set of the best practices for managing local cultural heritage and local cultural events, of helping them develop skills essential for the abovementioned activities and of creating a digital network (Fig. 6) where individuals and authorities could communicate, exchange ideas, create partnerships and try to solve problems together.

The result was the creation of a vibrant collaborative community. Participants first realized where the actual root of their problems lay; then they acquainted themselves with techniques of proper management and innovative ways of approaching such difficulties; lastly, they proceeded to form new partnerships as well as a constant think-tank, approaching all in a non-formal, creative conditions of education and communication.

The most exciting, however, result of the DEN CuPID project was intermingling trainers and trainees in a team, which generated more ideas and projects submitted for funding to Erasmus+ and other



Fig. 3. Conservation in action in St. John's chapel, Nedousa, Mt. Taygetus: Dr. C. Karydis, Dr. E. Kouloumpi and Ms. K. Papakonstantinou working on icons from the local church.. Image by the author.

² www.den-cupid.eu

³ <http://edu.den-cupid.eu/>

framework programmes (Fig. 7). It offered a unique opportunity for all participants to align themselves with at least some of the prerogatives of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 and to connect local initiatives with the broader framework of actions.

The legacy of the project will, hopefully, last for long and shall be available to all through the project's e-learning platform³, where a useful Handbook for Cultural Policies' and Cultural Heritage Management is to be found, along with an up to date collection of relevant books, articles and on-line material (Kamara et al., 2018).

3. CONCLUSIONS

The initiative undertaken with projects such as DEN CuPID and DIAPLASIS needs to be further followed up and propagated, in order to intensify the potential of focusing on local projects, yet with a wider, global perspective and, whenever possible, with the collaboration of international teams, highlighting best practices and developing common policies and a sense of "belonging" (CulturePolis, 2012). The enhancement, protection and further preservation of elements of local cultures should be considered in light of a complex set of needs, relations, barriers and opportunities on a local level (Diadrasis, 2011; Chitty, 2017). In such projects the greatest difficulty is to help local agents change their frame of mind and develop "lateral thinking" so as to realize that through maintenance and protection of heritage and through focusing on culture they can achieve a certain level of sustainability for the future. This can only be achieved



Fig. 4. The submerged port of Kenchreai, in Corinthia, is currently in urgent need of protection and enhancement as it attracts thousands of pilgrims each year following the Footsteps of St. Paul... Image by the author.



Fig. 5. The old port of Chania, a declared historic settlement, is a touristic goldmine but suffers from social frictions and lack of protection. Image by the author.



Fig. 6. Working in the municipal library of Cori, Italy, during the third Workshop of DEN CuPID, February 2018. Image by the author.

when cultural heritage management and valorization are carefully planned and thoroughly discussed with the local communities and when, other than actions, locals are offered knowledge and information on the potential that cultural heritage has for their own lives.

Part of such initiatives, which presents some difficulty though, is the adoption of an extrovert policy, investigating the needs of potential visitors or investors and the discovery of sustainable solutions that have been applied in other parts of the world (Messenger & Smith, 2010; Sigala, 2011: 335-337). EU-funded framework programmes, such as the DEAR initiative (Development Education and Awareness Raising Programme)⁴, offer opportunities for enhancement of knowledge and raising of awareness

on several issues, including culture. This does not mean that one has to compromise local values or find “prescription” solutions to problems related to local cultural heritage resources. However, reaching out to the global community offers different perspectives and helps solidify long-term cultural policies, based on a well-founded understanding of what may bear long-lasting results against what is whimsical, precarious and “modern” just for the sake of modernity (Logan, 2001).

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Fig. 7. Trainers and trainees during the fourth DEN CuPID workshop in Varna, Bulgaria, May 2018. Image by the author.

⁴ <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/dear>

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