

THE DIMENSIONS OF HISTORY: VILLAGES AS HISTORICAL OBJECTS

Andrew Murphy¹

¹ Faculty of Information, University of Toronto

andrew.murphy@mail.utoronto.ca

Abstract. When one looks at the Attendance figures from October 2017's Survey on Museums and Archaeological Sites, it is apparent that sites dating from antiquity are receiving the vast majority of attendants per year. According to UNESCO, funding for the Ministry of Culture, which allocates funds for preservation, has been cut by 50% as of 2015. In addition to these monuments, Greece is dotted with rural villages, some of which are centuries old, which are disappearing. There has been work done to preserve and document the architecture, history, genealogy and linguistic peculiarities of these villages, but these efforts have been frustrated by a lack of support and large-scale organization. This paper seeks to propose that there are two steps that can be taken to address this problem. The first is to create a framework oriented both towards communities and state/local government that addresses the villages' preservation and documentation needs. The second has to do with re-contextualizing, on an institutional level, the concept of provenance in terms of the relationship between environment, objects, and ideas.

Keywords: Preservation, Villages, Regional, Ecomuseum, Greece

1 The Primacy of the Treasured Past

In 2013, the fate of a Byzantine city was being decided. It was discovered under Thessaloniki during excavations intended to make way for a new metro system, and had precipitated heated discussions between local politicians and archaeological groups. The Greek secretary for public works was quoted as saying: "We realize how important this find is, but it is impossible to keep it there. Everything else is hot air" (Christides 2013). The plan, as of 2013, was to relocate all of the finds to an "ex-army camp" (Howery 2013, p.230), removing them from their context and potentially irrevocably cheapening the key find, a well-preserved marble street. By 2017, however, a group of civil and structural engineers had developed and proposed alternative solutions to the removal of the antiquities. All parties agreed, by the end of negotiations, that the ultimate goal was to "exhibit the unique archaeological findings *in situ*" (Anagnostopoulos et al. 2017, p.552), a decision that was influenced by the engineers' ability to provide concrete solutions to problems involving planning, preservation, and the ever-present bottom line: money. As of April 2018, a statement from the chairman of Attiko, the state metro construction contractor, suggests that the plan to preserve contextually dependant artifacts *in situ* is still being pursued (The Straits Times, 2018). The discovery and recovery of these artifacts was high profile, well-documented in newspapers and critical articles, primarily due to the stunning nature of the finds and the controversy they generated. It is due to this coverage, the national and international attention, that a compromise was finally reached.

Though this story has a relatively happy ending, it belies the fact that, in relation to other countries in the EU, Greece has consistently trailed behind in its cultural spending, spending between 0.6 and 0.8 of its GDP on culture, religion and recreation in the past eleven years (Eurostat, 2018). This being the case, the government still provides subsidies for cultural institutions, which increased 570% from 2013-2014 and has subsequently been halved (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2017). The Hellenic Statistical Authority (hereafter HSA) does not provide clear information about who receives these subsidies. It takes a very short look through the Ministry of Culture and Recreation's website to determine that Ministry funds, at least, are being allocated primarily towards excavation and the maintenance of sites from antiquity or the Byzantine era. A similarly brief look through the HSA's data on receipts of museums and archaeological sites shows that a high percentage relate to Antiquity and the Byzantine eras with very few relating to regional or post-Byzantine artifacts. According to the website for the 2014-2020 National Strategic Reference Framework (hereafter NSRF), the European Union's program for strategically allocating funds to Greece, from 2007-2014 only six heritage projects, almost all restorations, were undertaken. Five of the six were related to Classical and Byzantine sites, with only one project focusing to heritage relating to post-Independence Greece ("Projects"). These figures make it clear that funds are being allocated, in relation to culture and heritage, primarily to pre-Ottoman sites. Post-Byzantine and modern history, then, tends to be under-represented both in terms of funding and institutional support. This post-

Byzantine history, starting with occupation and moving through Independence, the World Wars, the Civil War, the junta and the last 25 years, is etched most clearly in architecture, culture, and belief. In Athens, the National Technical University still bears signs of the student uprising, in Exarchia a mural commemorates the death of a teenage boy at the hands of the police; hundreds of kilometers away, in Gytheio, memories of the recent past rest silently behind glass at the Historical and Ethnological Museum of Mani. These are the things that are, relatively speaking, simple to preserve and curate— events that are central to the national consciousness, material culture. While objects and memories like this are preserved, left behind are the sources of some of Greece’s most recent history and its most direct connection, in some cases, to its past.

1.1 Heritage in Rural Greece

According to a fact sheet published by the European Network for Rural Development, rural areas account for 94.3% of the total area of Greece, containing 54.5% of the total population and 52.6% of the total workforce (The European Network for Rural Development, 2016). Despite this fact, the disposable income per capita (hereafter DIPC) in predominantly rural areas is around four to eight-thousand dollars less than in regions that are primarily urban/suburban (OECD, 2016). West Greece, for example, has a DIPC of 7,902 USD in comparison to Attiki’s 14,073 USD; West Greece is also in the bottom 19% in regard to income when compared against all other regions surveyed by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, which includes Turkey, all of Western Europe, North America, and South America (OECD, 2016). While agricultural development has been part of the European Union’s activity since 1962 (Anonymous), their broader rural development policy was not instated until the year 2000 (Anonymous, 2016). The most recent rural development programme (RDP), is being pursued in co-ordination with the 2014-2020 partnership agreement between the EU and its member states. The European Commission, in its factsheet on Greece’s 2014-2020 RDP, identified “six Rural Development priorities” (European Commission) as the focus of the programme. These are:

1. “Knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.”
2. “Enhancing Farm viability and competitiveness in agriculture and promoting innovate farm technologies and the sustainable management of forests.”
3. “Promoting food chain organisation, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture.”
4. “Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry.”
5. “Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors.”
6. “Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction, and economic development in rural areas.” (European Commission)

Each priority is subdivided into “measures”, which are budgeted individually. What is conspicuously missing from each priority, each set of measures, is any mention of heritage.

The rural areas of Greece, especially the small villages dotting these rural and mountainous regions, are the source of rich veins of tangible and intangible heritage. Vernacular architecture, ritual, folklore, agricultural practice, linguistics, and diet are all aspects of heritage that find unique regional and bucolic expressions. It is these small villages, however, that tend to be at the greatest risk of disappearance and desertion. While focusing primarily on agricultural rural development will assist areas with high potential for agricultural development, it will do little, in the short term, to help villages whose populations are primarily elderly, or whose environment is poorly suited to large-scale crop production or animal husbandry. A development program like this may help stall the sometimes quick, sometimes slow decline of village populations and their eventual desertion¹, but will not, in itself, provide strategies for the long or short-term preservation or description of at-risk tangible and intangible heritage. It is the author’s belief that any programme designed to focus on development of rural areas should seek, as well, to offer solutions to problems of heritage preservation and/or description. Museological and archival professionals have a unique role to play in the development of a heritage focused arm of a given development program. Specializing in the conservation, documentation and arrangement of heritage objects, museologists and archivists have conceptual tools at their disposal to:

1. Assist in the centralization of disparate documentation and preservation efforts
2. Provide *pro bono* professional consultation for communities attempting to preserve heritage *in situ*
3. Consult with local governments and communities regarding the documentation of heritage in high-risk communities

¹ See Foy, 2017.

4. Assist in the development of a comprehensive framework for community and state engagement with matters involving the preservation and description of regional/rural heritage

This paper will primarily address items one and four, but will necessarily engage with items two and three. In order to justify the need for the first item, it will be necessary to provide an overview, by no means comprehensive, of recent preservation/documentation efforts by communities² and the state.

2 Existing Strategies

2.1 Development and the State

From 1976-1996, the National Tourism Organization of Greece implemented a preservation plan for “traditional settlements in Greece” (Hatzidakis 1996, p.1). Alexis Hatzidakis, an architect who worked on the project presented a seminar on the program through the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property’s (ICCROM) 1996 Architectural Conservation Course. The project was ostensibly focused on using tourism as the impetus for the development, and preservation, of chosen rural villages in Greece. The NTOG developed a set of assessment criteria, which indicated how fit the village was for possible tourist development. Through this assessment process, six villages were chosen: Fiskardo (Cephalonia), Mesta (Chios), Oia (Santorini), Papigo (Epirus), Vatheia (Peloponnese), and Vizitsa (Mount-Pilion). While a full-scale report on the current state of these villages is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that the population has decreased in every village other than Oia between 2001-2011³. Vatheia in particular is included in the “Atlas Obscura”, an internet database of obscure and exciting destinations, as a “mostly-abandoned town”, which was the subject of an “unsuccessful attempt” at redeveloping the town as a tourist destination (“Vatheia”). Though the NTOG program failed, in some respects, to turn the villages into viable tourist destinations, they did succeed in doing quite a bit of restoration work, as well as installing some necessary infrastructural upgrades (Hatzidakis 1996).

The NTOG program was primarily focused on villages as assets. Of their listed goals, only one dealt with the importance of villages as loci of culture and heritage (Hatzidakis 1996). This is not to suggest that the NTOG were not concerned with development, the improvement of living conditions, and harmony between the project and the community. In spite of this concern, their ultimate goal was the development of these communities as tourist destinations; preservation of culture and heritage was important only insofar as it served that goal. The LEADER program, developed by the European Commission and implemented in its member states, was in many ways a successor to the NTOG development program. The program was designed to encourage the sustainable development of rural areas and functioned, in Greece, primarily through attempts to introduce “economic activities” which were not primarily agricultural to rural areas (Iakdviddu et al. 2002, p.34). Another strategy for development was recasting the area as a tourist destination— this recasting involved building accommodations, developing “recreation activities”, and advertisement and promotion (Iakdviddu et al. 2002, p. 34). Like the NTOG program, LEADER had a set of “Programme Measures” that set out the goals of a given initiative; the final measure, measure 6, is the only one to reference conservation and preservation efforts (Iakdviddu et al. 2002). It is telling that, in this measure, conservation and preservation are framed as ways to “promote” heritage (Iakdviddu et al. 2002, p.36).

Without arguing for the relative merits of either program, which would require an analysis of the success of the program’s measures, it is important to note that both LEADER and the NTOG program were primarily concerned with economic revitalization and development. Though both demonstrated concern about the village populations, both in terms of incentivizing habitation and creating a harmony between program and population), and the preservation of heritage, neither of the programs made those aspects their primary focus. The current development plan, under the EU Partnership Agreement, consists of a union-wide Rural Development Program, which is primarily concerned with economic development, or “sustainable competitiveness” (“Partnership Agreement (PA) 2014-2020”). The LEADER program continues to be employed as a “Community-Led Local Development” initiative (Paneva 2014). There are currently 70 “Local Action Groups” receiving funding from the European Network for Rural Development with open projects in Greece (“LAG Database”).

² With the term “community” I am including professionals and private institutions (trusts, privately operated museums, and semi-private universities) who are involved in preserving/documenting/curating heritage relating to rural areas. It is perhaps problematic not to make a distinction at this level of terminology, but it will be made clear in the text when preservation/documentation efforts are the result of partnerships between communities and private institutions, or the pursuits of professionals for the benefit of the community.

³ Please see National Statistical Service of Greece, 2001 and Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011.

2.2 Cultural Heritage Programs

As mentioned in the introduction, it takes only a short investigation of the Ministry of Culture and Sport's website to determine that the Ministry's activities, as concern cultural heritage, are overwhelmingly directed to projects concerned with art, architecture and historical sites from Byzantium and Antiquity. While some of the restoration projects, like the restoration and excavation of the temple of St. Elias in Petrokerasa ("Ανοσθηλωτικές [...]"), have taken sites located in small communities as their priority, the cultural heritage that is being targeted is almost exclusively pre-independence, and certainly pre-WWII. This trend does not hold, however, with the Directorate of Modern Cultural Assets and Intangible Cultural Heritage (or AYLA), a branch of the Ministry of Culture and Sport. In 2003, UNESCO introduced the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The convention was crafted to "safeguard", "ensure respect for", "raise awareness [...] of", and "provide for international cooperation and assistance [in relation to]" intangible cultural heritage, which is defined as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills [...] that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (UNESCO 2003). The convention was ratified by Greece in 2006 with Law 3521 ("Unesco and the convention [...]"), and a process began, mediated by AYLA, of adding entries to the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" list, curated by UNESCO ("Greece and the Convention [...]"). AYLA has also taken it upon themselves to create their own inventory (εμπτηρίου) of intangible cultural heritage which overlaps, at points, with UNESCO's list. AYLA's inventory consists of sixteen elements as of August 2018, some of which are trans-regional ("The Art of Drystone Walling", "Rebetiko"), and some of which are region-specific ("Polyphonic Singing in Epirus", "Sacred forests of the villages of Zagori and Konitsa") ("Purpose of the National [...]"). On their website, they provide background information on each element of their inventory; UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage online portal provides similar information, accompanied by photographs and video relating to each entry.

AYLA's project ostensibly satisfies some of the criteria of item one— it provides a relatively centralized locus for the organization and presentation of documented cultural heritage that primarily relates to rural areas. There are two major problems, however, that preclude AYLA from being the final word on the matter of regional preservation and documentation. The first relates to AYLA's mandate. UNESCO's convention is a document which is meant to be equally applicable to all members of the UN. It doesn't, therefore, contain guidelines for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage which are specific to Greece. The text of Law 3521, similarly, does not set out any guidelines for policy development related to urgency, standards for preservation. AYLA, being a public entity, is best poised to use the convention as a basis for the development of a national action plan. Here is where the second major problem intersects with the first— AYLA, being a public entity, is also subject to the vagaries of bureaucracy. The process for having an element added to the inventory consists of three phases: the first consists of soliciting notices of intent to submit proposals from communities, the second of publishing these notices of intention on AYLA's website, and the third of receiving the submissions and making decisions about what will be added to the inventory ("Procedure of Inscription [...]"). One issue is that this process puts the onus on communities to present their cases to the directorate. This does not create a barrier for communities with strong local voices, but it does for those without effective political/municipal representation. The other issue is that AYLA ultimately controls decisions about what is added to the inventory. They articulate quite clearly, in their F.A.Q, that they are not the only inventory for intangible cultural heritage, nor do they make the claim that they should be ("F.A.Q."). They are, however, the most visible and sole publicly owned inventory, and the decisions they make regarding what is admitted to the inventory and not implicitly create a standard for what is "important" to remember. AYLA's model, too, is ultimately unsuited to handle urgent preservation matters, their primary functions being solicitation and the review of submissions. What is needed is a structure which allows for dynamic responses to the preservation of endangered and marginalized cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible.

3 Community Projects, Responses, and Strategies

3.1 Existing Strategies

Community-based responses create this dynamic structure, insofar as they construct a mosaic of different approaches to, or strategies for, the preservation and documentation of cultural heritage. The format of community-based projects ultimately depends on the source of the funding and the mandate of the individual or entity primarily responsible for planning and executing the project. The latter determines the focus of the project, and the former the scope and medium of presentation. Institutionally supported projects, of which we have mentioned some instances in the preceding sections, often have a base of funding which derives from the

associated academic institution, or a state/private granting institution. The final result of this is often a paper or a monograph on the subject that funding has been granted for. The scope of these projects is thus invariably narrow, but deep. While projects like this are integral to documenting rituals and other cultural practices, assessing the economic stability of an area, and fixing linguistic peculiarities, the issue with predominantly academic work is that it tends to be produced for an audience which is not the community and does not serve the community. The peculiarity of the preservation mechanism, academic discourse, ensures that the material appeals to and is available to a select group of people. While this process has merit, the product of the preservation and documentation of tangible and intangible heritage should be available to as many people as possible.

An example of a widely available documentation and preservation effort is the “Maniatika” website. Unlike academic projects, the site is funded solely by donations, and is, as far as the website suggests, maintained by a group of private individuals. The website is a blog of assembled historical, genealogical and ethnographical information, reports on current events, recipes, and interviews, all centered around the Mani peninsula in the Southern Peloponnese. The sources for this information are manifold— some entries cite scholarly texts, archival documents, while some cite other specialized blogs, or have no citations at all. The Maniatika website can be compared to a carefully assembled family album, a mnemonic device that provides a history of a close-knit social and cultural group. The main benefit of this approach does not lie in the medium, but in the fact that the documentation effort is done by a member of the community for other members of the community. The information is written in a vernacular that is accessible to other members of the community and, ideally, contains information which other members would deem relevant. The main problem with Maniatika is that, to extend the album analogy, though dates are written on the back of the family’s photos, and outsider would have difficulty creating a narrative from the dispersed shots. Small entities with limited resources can lack a professional understanding of how to organize and curate information, how to contextualize it and rigorously source each instance. There is a greater potential here for information to be recorded and preserved incorrectly; not in terms of the *way* it is preserved, but in its factuality, or lack thereof. Another danger is that information will become lost between conceptual cracks; that, by under-classifying or misclassifying objects and information, they will remain hidden to the targeted audience.

3.2 Museological Strategies

It is difficult to make generalizations on the basis of the small preservation project mentioned above; particularities like format and delivery method will change from project to project. A strategy like this can take the form of a blog, an audio or video recording of a family member telling a story, a collection of old clothes, or a personally written family history. It is equally as difficult to make generalizations about more robustly funded ventures. Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation (PPF), which has a static physical museum in Nafplion, is partially supported by the European Regional Development Fund, the 2007-2013 National Strategic Reference Framework, and a number of private benefactors, both individuals and foundations (“Supporters”). The PPF pursues a preservation mandate which is similar to Maniatika’s: it has a research component, a museological and exhibitional component (broadly conceived of), an educational component, and encourages the documentation and preservation of a subset of Greece’s regional cultural heritage. Unlike Maniatika, however, a solid financial base provides for luxuries like a physical space to house a collection, the ability to afford the time of consultants and professionals, and the time to develop both organizational and practical infrastructure. The PPF is able to publish two journals (“History”), house over 45,000 artifacts (“Collections”), and until 2003 was able to provide grants to postgraduate researchers in fields like ethnomusicology, library science, social anthropology and ethnology (“Timeline”). The PPF is thus able to avoid the main problems which plague small-scale projects, as well as some of the issues that surround academic preservation projects, such as the unavailability of the research to the community and the general public. In the final analysis, however, the PPF is a privately-funded museum, and presents the same challenges to preservation to modern heritage that any traditional museum does: it aggregates heritage in one place while removing objects from their context, tends to center on material heritage, and detaches preservation activities, at some level, from communities. Part of this is a function of detaching a set of objects from its environmental context using concepts— the further objects are from their particulars, their villages, their ritual, customary, or religious use, the further they are from being understood.

The Ecomuseum

There is another museological approach that overcomes some of the problems inherent in the practices of traditional museology. While the concept of the ecomuseum has been expressed using different models, the museologist Peter Davis defines a set of principles common to all: “self-representation”, “full community participation in, and ownership of, heritage resources and the management process”, “rural or urban

regeneration”, and “sustainable development and responsible tourism” (Davis 94). Greece already has one self-described ecomuseum, the Ecomuseum Zagori in Epirus. Founded in 2014, the ecomuseum is an attempt to refocus “social awareness” on “collective memory and [...] heritage” (“About”). They advocate for the “development of a communal identity” through attention to the past, its “values”, and the present and future of the host area (“Synergies”). The ecomuseum is also interwoven with a number of institutions, both state and community, which help provide an intellectual and spatial structure for the museum. As an example of spatial structure, one partnered organization is the Monodendri Exhibition Center, a large example of traditional architecture which provides exhibition space for historical projects. An example of intellectual structure is provided by their partnership with the Metsovian Center for Interdisciplinary Research, which engages in research about the Epirus region, and outputs papers, databases, and holds exhibitions (“Untitled”). The website doesn’t provide any specific information about how these organizations are integrated. Their business plan, available in Greek on their website, does provide a good overview of the activities they desired to pursue as an organization, including the provision of educational programs, collection of archival materials, development of research projects, and the encouragement of the production of local products (“Business Plan [...]”). As of 2018, the region has seen two items related to their cultural heritage included in AYLA’s inventory (“Κατηγορία: Εγγεγραμμένα Στοιχεία.”), heard proposals for the development of a hiking trail network, and hosted a group of Portuguese students for a month of educational programs (“News”). While it is difficult both to find information on how the ecomuseum is performing and to construct a measure of performance for such a decentralized entity, it is clear that, at the very least, the existence of the ecomuseum has allowed the region a measure of self-advocacy, and encouraged the union of various organizations under the banner of ecomuseum.

The ecomuseological approach offers potential solutions to some of the problems inherent in the state and community approaches addressed above. Unlike the state projects, ecomuseums are centered on heritage preservation, but engage with heritage as a way to “link the past with the present as a strategy to deal with the future needs of that particular society” (Fuller 1992, p.328). Thus, the preservation and documentation of heritage is not seen as a venture separate from, or one inimical to economic development; heritage is here directly linked to the potential of reshaping a community in consideration of its past. Indicators for the success of ecomuseums, it has been suggested, differ from the indicators of success for traditional museums. Rather than acquisition and attendance-based indicators, Corsane et al. suggest that assessing “capital” gains is a more fitting way to determine the success of ecomuseums (Corsane et al 2007b). “Capital” gains include skills and opportunities (“human capital”), building relationships between members of different social spheres (“social capital”), and the opportunity for engagement with cultural activities (“cultural capital”) (Corsane et al 2007b, p.235-236). The success of ecomuseums, then, is dependent on the perceived gains of the population it supports and its facilitators. The ecomuseum also provides an opportunity for the unification of the individual and institutional project. Both traditional museums can be involved, as in the case of Zagori, as can individuals and households. Unlike in traditional museums, members of the community are often empowered to become professionals, or are provided with the opportunities to consult professionals. In Nancy Fuller’s article on her work with the Ak-Chin indigenous community of Arizona, she details how members of the community received tailored education in fields like museum studies, anthropology, linguistics, and archaeology (Fuller 1992). Even before this training program, and the subsequent training program for staff members, the Ak-Chin community had the chance to consult with other ecomuseums and other members of the greater museological profession (Fuller 1992). The ecomuseum is thus often “by the people, for the people”, but with added institutional support which can obviate the burden of large-scale preservation and documentation projects on the community.

Limits

There are limits to the effectiveness of the ecomuseological model. One problem is that, at least historically, the ecomuseum has been conceptually ill-defined. Peter Davis, in his textbook on ecomuseums, notes that even Hugues de Varine, the inventor of the term “ecomuseum”, said in 1998 that “[w]e should not use this word anymore... some words can create misunderstandings” (quoted De Varine in Davis 2011, p.78). There have since been further attempts to clarify what an ecomuseum is and is not, most notably Corsane et al.’s 2007 paper, “Ecomuseum Evaluation: Experiences in Piemonte and Liguria, Italy”. In the paper, they used twenty-one indicators to assess the extent to which professed “ecomuseums” aligned with what the authors understood to be the ecomuseological philosophy. These indicators provide an important conceptual frame for the term ecomuseum, one that stabilizes the criteria for its application. The question that remains to be proven, however, is whether or not working backwards from these indicators indeed creates an “ecomuseum”. In other words, the indicators may be useful for the assessment of an existing project, but fail to provide a set of criteria that is practically relevant in the creation of an ecomuseum. The indicators overwhelmingly address relationships—between the site and the community, the site and its members, the site and the environment (Corsane et al. 2007a). The issue is that, in each community, these relationships will be of a different character. Different local

government structures, community isolation, lack of professional infrastructure in the region—all these have to be considered and addressed by the entity pursuing an ecomuseological project. While the concept of the ecomuseum is now more fixed, the availability of the concept to non-professionals and the process of constructing one are problems that have not been addressed. Another issue that tends not to be addressed is the need for support, either of the local government, other institutions, or members of the community. The Zagori ecomuseum is integrated with twelve organizations, the Ak-Chin had the support of consultants and members of the Smithsonian (Fuller 1992)—many of the small villages in Greece are isolated from administrative, research, preservation and cultural centers. While the ecomuseum concept doesn't require every institution to exist in close proximity to one another, it is grounded in the idea of interconnectedness and holism. Many of these villages, without external support or guidance, will not have the ability to undertake projects like restorations, data collection, or the establishment of small museums or collections. If the villages, or regions, are located close enough to these institutions, the formation of an ecomuseum is still dependent on the co-operation of all parties, and this co-operation cannot be taken for granted.

Applications

Communities

Any potential solution to the current problem of regional heritage preservation has to take into account community needs. Vatheia and the NTOG program demonstrated that architectural and material heritage cannot solely be utilized as potential sources for revenue from tourism, and that transforming a village or region into a tourist destination is not the ultimate goal. Tourism is seasonal and has the potential, no matter what data might suggest, to exhaust the village and their emotional, financial, and natural resources. The ecomuseological approach is, at its core, based on community needs, and provides the best foundation for future regional heritage preservation projects in Greece. The two limits described above can be addressed and resolved through processes initiated by professional museologists, archivists, other relevant specialists, and members of municipal, regional and national government. The first limit, the conceptual unavailability of the ecomuseum to the communities that require it and the need for practical specifications for the institution of said ecomuseums, can be resolved by the formation of a committee, task force, or small organization of professionals who will 1) develop a framework, which can be modulated by region/municipality, for the foundation of ecomuseums, 2) assess the risk level of disappearance for as many municipalities and villages as possible, 3) establish an inventory of at-risk villages, 4) formally and personally consult with elders, leaders, and younger members of the community about the possibility of founding an ecomuseum. The terms of what an ecomuseum *is* should be negotiable, but must necessarily adhere to some basic criteria: the ecomuseum must be primarily community based, facilitate the education of community members regarding archival and/or museological technique and theory, and should work for the community, allowing them a continuous or advanced level of self-sustainability. These are, essentially, the principles held by Peter Davis to be central to any ecomuseological project. There is the potential for many communities to be resistant to the idea of forming an ecomuseum, or of others telling them how to go about preserving and communicating their heritage, and this relates to the second limit mentioned above. If that is so, and a community, region, or municipality is averse to the idea of instituting an ecomuseum, this same organization mentioned above should take the education of those community members who desire to be educated on museological and archival principles as their responsibility and use the aforementioned inventory of at-risk villages to suggest focused preservation, documentation, and research efforts to colleagues and groups of professionals.

Professional and Theoretical

The worth that this level of community engagement can provide for museological professionals does not reside solely in the knowledge of a good deed done. On the website of the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation, there is a section which is concerned with the documentation process of items in their collection. It starts off with the acknowledgement that:

[...] πολλά εθνογραφικά μουσεία προήλθαν από συλλογές ιδιωτών συλλεκτών, που αντικειμενικές συνθήκες τους εμπόδιζαν πολλές φορές να αντιμετωπίσουν τα αντικείμενα ως φορείς πληροφοριών μιας άλλης κοινωνίας και να ερευνήσουν συστηματικά για τη μαρτυρία του κοινωνικού και πολιτισμικού συνόλου απ' όπου προερχόταν το αντικείμενο. [Many ethnographic museums emerged from private collections, which stopped them many times from addressing objects as information carriers of another society and systematically investigating the testimony of the social and cultural entity from which the object originated] (“Τεκμηρίωση”)

While the PFF has created their own descriptive system, one which categorizes objects by the material they are constructed from when possible, there is an acknowledgement made here that such a descriptive system is always incomplete, and that there is an advantage to understanding objects and customs through the testimony of the people who created the object or maintained the custom. The level of community engagement provided by a traditional or modulated ecomuseology means that professionals will be able to provide “testimonial” context, both provenancial and narrative, for physical objects that may eventually be ceded to the care of static collections. Professionals also have the opportunity to see contemporary objects being used *in situ*. These objects will inevitably be historical, and the opportunity to gain culturally grounded knowledge about an object is an opportunity to complement professional knowledge with the society’s implicit and explicit knowledge about the object and its use.

If one considers the importance of this project in terms of its potential solidification of provenancial and contextual information about *objects* from modern regional history, it is a short step to begin reflecting on what constitutes the provenance of an intangible object like a story, cultural or traditional knowledge, culturally specific ideas, or a mental framework. In recent archival theory, the idea of the provenance of a fonds has been reframed as a process rather than the result of a fixed moment of creation. The archivist Jennifer Douglas, in her PhD thesis, proposed that different “contributions” are made to a given fonds at any point in its custodial history (quoted Douglas in Douglas 2017, p.41). These contributions are made by both individual agents and social forces. Thinking of an object this way renders a limited amount of insight: that an objects form and function is determined by the culture in which it was created, that custody of said object can change the object and its meaning, and thus that the object does not have as fixed a meaning as we would care to apply to it. Intangible heritage, however, is deeply susceptible to change, addition, and subtraction by its nature. In some ways, it is sensible to think of intangible heritage in terms of an ur-act, ur-ritual, or ur-story. This is the structuralist approach. The historical or philological act of tracing the evolution of the device is sensible here too. From a museological perspective, however, it is also important to think about instantiations of these stories, rituals, or ideas as “objects”; their manifestations stand in relation to a tradition, but reveal something about the creator and the context of creation. Noting this dual provenance is necessary to the understanding that to preserve intangible heritage is to preserve the people enacting it, and the context of that enactment. This doesn’t mean that everything must remain the same; societies, national and regional, undergo changes, and museology cannot prevent that. In the case of Greece, what museologists are able to provide is the possibility of creating “museums” that render, through the fact of their existence, the relationship between past, present, and future; an opportunity to promote local development while learning about the rituals, stories, ideas, and objects that have permeated rural Greece and have undoubtedly migrated piecemeal into the urban population.

4 Conclusion

Through this recognition of the role of villages and rural regions as incubators of a part of the national consciousness, as well as being sources of custom, stories, belief, knowledge, and material culture, one can begin to see that the subtitle of this paper is inaccurate. Villages are, ultimately, *systems* of aspects that one can call objects, systems that are in some sense enclosed, but in others permeable to the greater regional, national, and global systems of objects. They are objects only insofar as they are to be curated in one of the original senses of the Latin root, *curo*: they are to be healed, cared for. The practice of regional heritage preservation in Greece, as it now stands, is fraught with issues. Internal disorganization, un-coordinated efforts, and the constraints of bureaucracy, combined with economic distress and the political and spatial isolation of villages have resulted in the failure to address, at a national level, heritage preservation in the villages most at risk for abandonment. The ecomuseological approach has the potential to preserve the best aspects of existing projects, provide a rallying banner for disparate organizations. The approach will make communities into stewards of their heritage. Communities will be able to maintain their own preservational, cultural, and documentary activities while also having a different set of conceptual tools available to them. Likewise, museological professionals will have a unique chance to be involved with and learn from communities on their terms and in their space. The resulting distribution of the workload of heritage preservation has the potential to take unneeded financial and emotional strain off of both communities and institutions. That is *curo*. Whether or not ecomuseology is the final word on regional heritage preservation in Greece doesn’t particularly matter. What does matter is that it provides the basis for a constructive response to the very real problem of regional heritage preservation, a possible salvation for dying villages.

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