



How can cultural heritage and the environment create economic opportunities for communities and vulnerable social groups: The Karitsa incident as an early version of the “Comm.On Heritage Project”

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Abstract

This article promotes the implementation of the “Comm.On Heritage Project” as a means of assistance to national and local authorities and in general to all relevant stakeholders so that they can deal with social injustices in peripheral, inaccessible or marginalized areas. An attempt is made to present the project as an innovative tool which under the catalytic presence of the Community Manager is suitable to identify inequalities and vulnerabilities, mobilize all participants, use specialized staff in appropriate positions and give specific guidelines for the common good, economic development and human prosperity. Using the example of Karitsa village we show one of the many possible cases that can be applied, providing solutions and perspectives and certainly revealing the way for a better future.

1.Introduction

People around the world recognize that current trends in economic growth are unsustainable and that public awareness and education are key factors that can move society towards the necessary redefinition of the development path. One of the biggest challenges that most governments around the world have to deal with, is the social inequality and lack of access to equal opportunities (work, education, health, information etc.) between different social groups, simply because of the differences that may arise from their place of origin, or (due to external factors) the place they were forced to settle (terrain morphology, geographical location, local microclimate etc.). This fact unfortunately contradicts the idea of social justice because it challenges the



fundamental principle that everyone deserves equal social rights and opportunities. As it is understood, there is an immediate, urgent and vital need to provide alternatives and try to discover all those methods and tools that will allow us to create and consolidate conditions of social justice and prosperity.

2.Objective - Purpose

In this article our aim is to deal with vulnerable social groups in inaccessible or marginalized areas living in similar or different demographic - topographical and environmental conditions of different backgrounds and cultural heritage. To highlight the problems, difficulties and peculiarities they face and using new methods, techniques and tools, show how their interconnection - interaction can pull them out of stagnation, giving birth to new different paths that will be used to emerge innovations and skills that in turn will lead to opportunities for social integration cultural development and economic growth that have been deprived so far. In this context we will use the example of how a small community of unaccompanied minor refugees was integrated with the local community, in a semi-mountainous village near the city of Larissa in Greece called Karitsa during the strict restrictions on the movement of people between Nations due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and how initiatives like the "Comm.On Heritage Project" can really be implemented.

3.Case area

Karitsa, is a small village built on a slope of mountain Kissavos at an altitude of 272 meters above sea level and is characterized by dense vegetation and endless sea view. It is located northeast of Larissa near the mouth of Pinios river to the Aegean Sea, at latitude 39.8420014109 and longitude 22.7602680245 and has 535 inhabitants, based on the 2001 census. The main occupations of the permanent residents of the village are the production of chestnuts and olives, fishing and tourism. The flora and fauna of the area is very rich, which someone can enjoy, taking walks on the peaks of "Ag. Trinity", Prof. Elias "and" Dragasta "and on the paths to the small and picturesque beaches (Platia Ammos, Panagitsa, Kalivi, Psarolakas).



4. Definitions

Since cultural heritage, environment and vulnerability of social groups are three of the fundamental principles of this document, let's see what these concepts define.

Cultural heritage: Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historical, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible heritage (movable, immobile and underwater), intangible cultural heritage (ICH) embedded into cultural, and natural heritage artefacts, sites or monuments. The definition excludes ICH related to other cultural domains such as festivals, celebration etc. It covers industrial heritage and cave paintings. [1]

Environment: The term 'environment' is widely used and has a broad range of definitions, meanings and interpretations. In popular usage, for some people, the term 'environment' means, simply, 'nature'. In its most literal sense, 'environment' simply means 'surroundings' (environs); hence the environment of an individual, object, element or system includes all of the other entities with which it is surrounded. However, in reality, individuals, objects, elements and systems rarely exist in isolation; instead, they tend to interact to varying extents with their surrounding entities. Therefore, it is not particularly helpful to conceptualize the 'environment' without including in that conceptualization some notion of relationship. Individuals, objects, elements and systems influence - and are in turn influenced by - their surroundings. [2]

Vulnerable social groups: A vulnerable group can be defined as a “population within a country that has specific characteristics that make it at a higher risk of needing humanitarian assistance than others or being excluded from financial and social services. In a crisis such groups would need extra assistance, which appeals for additional measures, i.e., extra capacity, as a part of the emergency phase of disaster management”. [3]



5.The “Comm.On Heritage Project”

The project “COMM.ON HERITAGE”. Community Manager for Inclusive Development of Vulnerable Areas based On Heritage” is based on the role that cultural heritage can play in contributing to social inclusion and economic growth in specific context: mountain, semi-peripheral and rural areas. Cultural heritage offers opportunities, but the marginality of the areas prevents the community to benefit from them. These areas need specific competences (merging heritage expertise, community building skills, business modelling, design thinking, new media and social networks, system thinking) aimed at mobilizing community members to make use of their common resources and promoting cultural heritage focusing on the community with a dynamic approach.

In particular, the project aims to contribute to the following initiatives:

- 1) Common heritage: the cultural heritage belongs to all of us, including adults from third countries who have resettled in Europe in recent years.
- 2) Sustainability: Heritage in transition: redesign, recovery and preservation of industrial, religious, military sites and landscapes. Tourism and heritage: responsible and sustainable tourism around cultural heritage.
- 3) Innovation: Heritage-related skills: better education and training for traditional and new professions.

And has three specific objectives:

- 1) To create opportunities for economic development, giving value to the cultural heritage.
- 2) To renew the motivation of local communities, promoting participation and the business approach.
- 3) Promoting inclusive local development, enhancing social and cultural diversity. [4]

Of course, in order for projects like this to be implemented, two basic parameters must be met. Firstly, the willingness of the communities to participate in it and secondly the existence of an individual who will be able to organize and manage the whole project. This person is the so-called Community Manager. Community Manager is intended here as new and hybrid



figure, from an organizational and professional point of view. He/she contributes in redefining several approaches connected with community and territorial development and he/she take the leadership at several levels:

- in the organization in which the community manager works
- in the local community in which he/she interacts with local leaders
- in open innovation processes, which requires to reinvent organizational models.

The community manager works in a new and fluid environment, because his/her task is the promotion of change and innovation.

6.The example of Karitsa village

At the end of 2019 a small shelter for minor unaccompanied refugees was set up in Karitsa as was done in other similar areas around Greece. The locals did not want the young refugees to settle in their village and resisted fiercely in many ways. They staged protests, blocked roads, wrote articles in the local press and expressed their dissatisfaction to the local authorities in a rather repressive way. Some residents addressed the children with racist comments, demanding that they should not appear in the village square and in fact the owner of one of the two mini markets in the village refused to sell them products (thank God the other one did not). Their main concern was that the young refugees would disrupt the peaceful life of the village with delinquent behaviors, thefts, robberies, etc. Of course, there were some residents who did not have a problem with children, but unfortunately, they were very few. As time went on the resistance of the locals diminished after they saw that nothing of what they initially feared was actually happening.

As mentioned above in the text, one of the main economic activities of the inhabitants is the cultivation of chestnuts. Chestnuts are harvested from mid-September until the end of October. The fruits are harvested from the soil. It can be done either by hand or with suitable collection machines, but in our country, it is done primarily by hand. [5]



So, in September 2020 the locals were faced a very big problem which threatened to significantly affect their annual family budget. As the Nations severely restricted the movement of people from one country to another due to the coronavirus pandemic, the seasonal land workers who traditionally used to come from neighboring countries (Albania, Bulgaria, etc.) for chestnuts harvesting were unable to do so. Due to this situation the locals had no choice but to look for workers among the young refugees. The teenagers, who were in great need of money, responded immediately and worked hard showing great zeal.

From then on, since everyone had to work together during the harvesting process, everything changed for both sides. On the one hand, the locals felt that they helped by providing paid work and saw that the children were not what they initially thought, and on the other hand, the children saved some money while managing to integrate into a hostile society. That's it! An early version of the "Comm.On Heritage Project" was accidentally implemented.

At this point, we must mention that in this case the role of community manager was played by the coordinator of the shelter who had minors' custody and also handled all the proceedings between the stakeholders.

7. Conclusion

As we can see from what is written above, the fundamental right of people to access equal rights and opportunities is not a given and in fact depends on a number of factors such as area of residence, environmental - climatic conditions, existing infrastructures, economic activity, level of education, etc. It is therefore understood how great need there is for the existence of new tools such as the "Comm.On Heritage Project" capable of doing case analysis and evaluation, creating ways of cooperation, promoting innovation in entrepreneurship and making appropriate use of human resources, if we want there to be significant chances for a better future. In the end we could say that many times life itself shows us the way, as long as we humans have our eyes wide open to see it.



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