

Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation
International Meeting, Athens 10 October

EUROPA NOSTRA and Cultural Landscapes
A New Initiative: the ENtopia Programme
Talk by Costa Carras, Vice President, Europa Nostra

At our 2012 conference in Lisbon, Europa Nostra honoured the Cultural Foundation of the Piraeus Bank Group for the most impressive contribution it has made in presenting to the Greek and European publics the industrial heritage of Greece, with a Medal in the category of Dedicated Service. Today, it is my pleasure, as Europa Nostra's longest-serving Vice President, to salute your Foundation's new initiative and to speak on Europa Nostra's behalf on a new policy of our own for the integrated management of cultural landscape and the natural heritage, first however conveying warm greetings from our Executive President, Denis de Kergorlay, and our Secretary General, Sneska Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic, whom many of you know.

Cultural landscapes, whether within or outside of Natura 2000 areas, have always been important to Europa Nostra. As an organisation we have historically been most closely associated with the pan-European Award Scheme which we ourselves initiated, under the Chairmanship of Lord Dundan-Sandys, as long ago as 1978 and which we nurtured until it became the European Union Prize/Europa Nostra Award Scheme in 2002. From the beginning landscape conservation was included in our concerns, and you will allow me to mention three such Medals awarded in recent years, namely:

- In 2011, the Restoration of Hackfall Woodland Garden, Yorkshire, United Kingdom
- In 2013, the landscape restoration project of the Forest of Saint Francis in Assisi, Umbria, Italy
- And in 2014, the Historical Landscape of El Senias Ancient Olive Trees, Aragon, Spain

Equally, cultural landscapes have featured in our choices, together with the European Investment Bank Institute, of sites we consider to be among the 7 Most Endangered in Europe. Here I shall mention a Greek site, namely Tatoi, for which indeed Europa Nostra has produced a preliminary Management Report and on which urgent overall action is in our view overdue.

There is however a third ongoing initiative by Europa Nostra in this field, a new initiative all the more impressive because it stems from the demand of our membership, and in many European countries at that. This is the programme ENtopia, "Our Places in Europe", a Greek name given to the project by an Irish architect. Philip Gheoghegan had read the work of the great Greek town and country planner, the late Constantine Doxiadis, who used the word "entopia" to denote respect for the natural and cultural characteristics of a particular place, in contradistinction to any "Utopia" which in Greek means "no place", and refers therefore to an imagined paradise.

In Europa Nostra however we do not use the word "Entopia" only in contrast to "utopia" but to "dystopia", a phenomenon all too common in our modern world, where the natural and cultural characteristics of a landscape have been consciously or unconsciously debased, whether out of a lack of respect or an exploitative approach which has degraded it as a whole in order to enhance or extract some feature considered as of overriding value in itself.

ENTopia is an excellent example of the collaborative spirit that inspires the European conservation movement. An idea born in Ireland has been adopted to date in no less than ten other countries, England, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Romania, Greece, Albania, Serbia and Turkey. Its first full conference was in Chios at the end of March and the next organising committee meeting will be in ten days' time in Rome, with as chief item on our Agenda, the ENtopia website, which will be sited in The Hague and is being designed here in Greece.

Why has this project advanced so rapidly to date? I believe there are several reasons. The first is that quite naturally European funding tends to go to those areas where there are concentrations of population or alternatively to monuments, whether of culture or of nature. Yet many of the most beautiful landscapes of Europe cannot be counted as monuments and yet are "topoi" or places which manifest precisely that respect for their very own characteristics, both natural and cultural, that sum up what is meant by the word "ENTopia".

The second reason is that precisely because the inhabitants of such places are usually few – in fact Europa Nostra has placed an upper limit of 15,000 on any wider region nominated for inclusion in the ENtopia network – they both need and desire to stand together and to assist one another. Here they already have the benefit of the network of Europa Nostra Council members and soon will have the further benefit of a well-designed and interactive internet site, which it is reasonably hoped will encourage individual travelers and small groups of visitors from all over the world to choose to respect places that respect themselves. Here is the third reason for the "ENTopia" project's rapid advance.

There is a view, widely held for instance in Greek but not only Greek society, that ordinary people want extensive and extractive development at all cost. The argument is based on a certain amount of past experience. And the conservation movement's first response has been to seek out and to protect exceptions. In the instance of monuments, this includes monuments of nature, which many of the Natura 2000 protected areas can claim to be, monuments of endemic or unusual species or of clusters of species so valuable that they deserve to be preserved from the dystopia brought about by various forms of commercial exploitation.

And yet as the debate in capital cities has spread down to each country's remoter localities, as the disastrous consequences of extractive and extensive development have become clear to many local communities, as the positive values of respect for the natural and cultural heritage have gained strength, there are increasingly local communities which themselves desire a future different from that perhaps planned for them by central governments in a mad chase for higher GDP figures whatever the long-term cost. A dramatic example of this is the local opposition and the massive but entirely peaceful demonstration in Bucharest which have led to the cancellation of the unacceptably extractive and destructive gold-mining project in Rosia Montana.

This means that there are today local communities in Europe which positively desire to be part of such a project. This explains also why the ENtopia project will not operate as a badge of quality, the equivalent of a monument or a nature conservation area, but as a response to an invitation. A local community can be part of the ENtopia network for three years if it is nominated and so desires but this status is reexamined at the end of the three-year period, at which stage either side can withdraw.

In just a few slides you can now catch a glimpse of the Aran Islands in the windswept Atlantic, west of Ireland; the meadows and lakes of the Irish midlands; a little village and landscape just south of

Hadrian's Wall; windswept Cantabrian uplands in Spain; two mountain-top fortresses, one in Umbria, the other in Abruzzo; wetlands and a township in the Danube delta; and the famous case of Rosia Montana in Transylvania where an extractive gold mine proposal that would destroy the finest surviving example of a Roman gold mine – and much else – has been and is being successfully resisted first by local communities and then by tens of thousands of Romanian citizens.

Here in Greece, three of the four islands so far proposed for ENtopia contain substantial Natura 2000 areas. In Skyros, a massive majority of the population, with the support of the Hellenic Ornithological Society and Elliniki Etairia, Europa Nostra's Representative in Greece, successfully resisted a proposal for 111 huge wind turbines that would have destroyed the Natura 2000 protected area and diminished the attraction of the island's distinguished architecture, which was praised as outstanding by no less an architect than Le Corbusier. To his credit, Mr Maniatis, the Minister for the Environment, when signing several other decisions in favour of renewable wind installations correctly refused to sign this one. Their experience has led many people on Skyros to understand that the only future that can satisfy both their sense of the island's identity and their future economic prosperity will be one based on a consistent pursuit of sustainability and respect for their cultural heritage.

Sikinos is an island of stunning beauty, well over half of which is in a Natura 2000 area. Here you can see the ceremony outside the little church built according to the last will and testament of Greece's Nobel Prize-winning poet of the Aegean, Odysseas Elytis, to celebrate the opening of a new network of footpaths, the work of the Municipality and Elliniki Etairia's programme "Paths of Culture".

Skopelos, a considerable section of which also forms part of an extended Natura 2000 area, is a well-forested island in the north of the Aegean and the third likely ENtopia candidate from the Aegean islands.

The fourth candidate, the region of the Mastihohora in Chios, has no Natura 2000 area but features the traditional cultivation of the mastic bush and superb Genoese period architecture of the 14th and subsequent centuries. Furthermore Chios, an island of over 40,000 people, sent us the most positive message of the year, when in May it elected as Mayor a distinguished architect restorer, active in the conservation movement and a prominent participant in Europa Nostra's ENtopia conference on Chios in March. The message is very clear – in the future we shall not be protecting only monuments, whether of nature or culture, or both, although of course we shall protect these with the same passion as in the past. We shall now also be protecting those communities which have chosen as their way of life respect for their landscapes and cityscapes, love for their cultural heritage and determination to live in a sustainable manner. That is the message of Europa Nostra's new programme, ENtopia. Thank you!