

**Integrated management of the cultural and natural heritage**  
**The cultural landscapes from the environmental point of view**

Konstantina Giannakopoulou

*Secretary General of the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change*

First of all, I would like to thank Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation and everyone responsible for organizing this International Meeting, for inviting me to speak today.

It is a pleasure and an honour to be among such distinguished guests. We've heard many interesting propositions so far and I'm especially looking forward to hearing the remaining contributions.

Allow me to begin with a rather general observation.

The current economic crisis calls for a re-evaluation of the predominant policies which seek long-term growth and the creation of new jobs.

The conventional growth model needs to be replaced by a new one.

A model which places the wellbeing of citizens at the center of policies, instead of plain economic growth.

Unfortunately, the EU still tries to tackle these issues through the framework of the EU2020 Strategy, which was embraced as the predominant EU strategy, instead of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, which follows a more holistic approach.

We allowed the economy to become the overarching goal rather than the means.

We focused on austerity measures, national debt decrease and tackling fiscal and financial challenges, neglecting all other dimensions of growth.

Ecological values, environmental quality and cultural assets are equally crucial to our wellbeing, along with our economic prosperity.

Natural and cultural heritage are integral parts of the EU's territorial capital and identity.

In responding to fiscal and financial challenges, we are obliged to bring forward the issue of sustainability, which is interlinked with natural and cultural capital.

If these were recognized as part of the national and the European capital, we would have a different view of the countries' potential.

It is high time that we replaced the GDP as a measure of our success by more holistic indices.

Those indicators would describe the high diversity and quality of natural ecosystems in the same way that historical diversity and rich cultural heritage could showcase the potential for sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Human intervention in European ecosystems has been continuous and widespread throughout history.

Natural capital and Cultural Capital are in dynamic synergies that often have a positive impact.

However, over-exploitation of these resources is recognised as a threat to territorial development.

Changes in land- and sea use, urbanisation and mass tourism threaten cultural assets and landscapes.

They may lead to fragmentation of natural habitats and ecological corridors.

The “character” of an area, whether it is a historic or cultural environment, or even an area designated to new construction and development, cannot be underestimated.

It can significantly improve the coherence and quality of the built environment.

Well-functioning ecological systems and protection and enhancement of cultural and natural heritage go hand in hand.

Working with natural assets and in harmony with the local landscape, using a “place-based” approach to deliver essential goods and services, including those generated through Green Infrastructure projects, is cost-effective and preserves the physical features and identity of the spatial context.

Areas rich in natural and cultural landscapes need special attention in order to make best use of these assets.

We do not perceive nature conservation and the overall cultural and economic environment separately. On the contrary, we must look for possible synergies.

In Greece, cultural landscapes are almost always present in Natura 2000 areas.

We need to improve our knowledge on their state, their values, their transformation processes, the driving forces, the risks and pressures, as well as the links between cultural and natural heritage.

Environmentally friendly job creation and strengthened recreational functions can complement conservation.

The local, regional and trans-regional management of cultural and natural heritage is of key importance.

We support the protection, rehabilitation and utilization of heritage through a place-based approach.

Improving regional and local identity by raising awareness and responsibility of local and regional communities towards their environments, landscapes, cultures and other unique values is also of great importance.

Greece is a country of overwhelming historical and architectural heritage and extremely rich biodiversity.

We cannot afford to treat and manage the natural and cultural landscapes and their elements as independent systems.

The dynamic interaction between cultural and natural heritage at the landscape level emphasizes the necessity of using a single integrated set of management criteria.

Cultural landscapes in Natura 2000 sites must be used as a supportive framework for land use management, regional planning and cultural tourism.

This is our strategic advantage. So far this advantage has not been identified and utilized to its full potential.

We are well aware that implementing policies that will deliver long-term results cannot be done in a vacuum.

Our country is blessed with a great variety of examples where Natura 2000 sites and cultural landscapes go hand in hand – Pelion, Zagorochoria, the Arcadia Highlands, Mani, the Prespes Lakes, Nymfaion, Agrafa.

This co-existence could be the driving force for sustainable tourism in rural areas year round.

It is therefore self-evident that our policies should follow a holistic approach.

Recognizing this axiom, the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change has elevated the cultivation of synergies to a cornerstone in its policy making.

Promoting the integrated management of natural and cultural landscapes is a top priority for our Ministry, and we are in the process of implementing these strategies.

These steps will be announced in the coming months.

Our aim is to combine the identification, evaluation and promotion of our cultural and natural elements, in order to integrate the management of cultural and natural landscapes.

Interlinking natural and cultural landscapes to create new thematic touristic products in rural areas can lead to long term job creation.

Along with the primary sector, this can contribute to our main policy objective for sustainable growth and prosperity.

This is our great challenge, not only for our Ministry, but for our country as a whole.

The key question is how we could integrate the natural and cultural landscapes at the spatial level, considering that natural landscapes serve as the spatial matrix for economic activities, populations and ecosystems.

By extension, the question becomes, how do we readjust our policies to encompass these elements?

How do we promote these valuable synergies?

With that in mind, we are currently planning pilot case studies in various regions of Greece, whereby natural and cultural elements will be interlinked along a network of natural and cultural routes.

These projects will result in a unique touristic product, which will become the standard for sustainable development for every region of Greece.

A product which combines showcasing our cultural heritage, motivating local communities and promoting collaboration with healthy entrepreneurship.

A product which will eventually lead to new job creation and higher living standards.

The main tool at our disposal for the realization of this strategic action is the new programming period for cohesion policy 2014-2020.

To that end, we have included a specific target for pilot interventions for the improvement and expansion of tourist flows through networks of touristic and cultural trails, especially in Natura 2000 areas as one of our main priority actions.

The elaboration of an integrated management approach for our unique cultural and natural heritage in Europe, and especially the Mediterranean, as a product of collaboration and participatory processes, is the great challenge for the establishment and viability of a new growth model.

A model comprising all these elements in perfect harmony.

That, after all, is the all-encompassing concept of culture;

The total way of life in any society.

A mosaic, if you will, which balances natural elements, physical components resulting from human activity, and patterns created in the landscape over time.

That is the real challenge, if we want to move forward, to overcome the hardships of recent years.

It is a challenge we are eager to take on, with the confidence that we will succeed.

Thank you very much.