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DOES GREEK CONSERVATION POLICY EFFECTIVELY PROTECT THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES? A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF POLICY'S EFFICIENCY IN TRADITIONAL GREEK SETTLEMENTS

Abstract. The paper discusses the role of Greek conservation policies in protecting the cultural landscape with focus on traditional Greek settlements. Drawing on secondary data but also on empirical evidence the paper examines the contribution of above policies to the protection of cultural landscapes.

The first part focuses on the legislative framework, providing a critical examination regarding the way that cultural landscape is approached. The second part discusses the effects of this policy on a group of traditional settlements in central Greece, presenting the achievements and drawbacks of conservation policy as viewed by experts and residents in the area.

Key words: cultural landscape, conservation policy, traditional settlements.

1. INTRODUCTION

The interest in cultural landscape has been particularly increased during the last two decades, as noted by the European Landscape Convention (2000) and the Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005). However, the issue of cultural landscape is still overlooked or underestimated in some countries, even in those that have rich cultural resources, such as Greece.

According to the European Landscape Convention, Article 1 (2000), 'Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'. Similarly the World Heritage Committee defines Cultural Heritage as the 'combined works of nature and of man' (World Heritage Convention, 1972, Article 1).

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Hence, three aspects are crucial for the composition of landscape: the spatial, the environmental (natural and manmade environment) and the human/perceptual aspect. Article 5 of the European Landscape Convention further highlights the importance of integrating landscape into spatial, environmental, cultural and other policies, promoting also the participation of the general public and local authorities. Thus, taking into account all the above aspects is crucial in shaping effective landscape policies.

Despite the acknowledgment of public's perspective to cultural landscape and its conservation there are still gaps in research on lay people's perceptions of heritage places. Townshend and Pendlebury (1999, pp. 315) characteristically note that 'while public opinion may have been instrumental in the advent of conservation areas, however, conservation planning has largely remained the preserve of the "expert professional" stressing further that little attention has been given to those whose daily lives are affected by conservation area designation. What are the perceptions of those who live, work and recreate in conservation areas?' Larkham (1999) also identifies the lack of knowledge about local communities' perspectives on conservation stressing the need for lay people's input while Ashworth (2002, 2012) cannot even perceive conservation without taking into consideration communities' perceptions of it.

Furthermore, despite the evolution of cultural landscape there are also countries which still present a restricted approach to cultural heritage, as is the case with Greece.

In the context of the above gaps the current paper aims to examine how conservation policies impact on cultural landscape, by reviewing the current legislative framework and involving both experts' and residents' perceptions on the issue, in the area of Mount Pelion in central Greece.

2. METHODOLOGY

The examination of the legislative framework regarding cultural landscape is based on a secondary data analysis. Legislative documents and acts relevant to cultural landscape are examined. Concerning the effects of particular policies on the cultural landscape, data from a case study and in particular a multiple case which has been conducted within a context of a wider study regarding inhabitants' perceptions of their heritage have been useful for the purpose of the research. In particular, 6 traditional settlements in Mount Pelion in central Greece have been selected as the main area of research and the fieldwork has been carried out between May and October 2013 (figure 1).
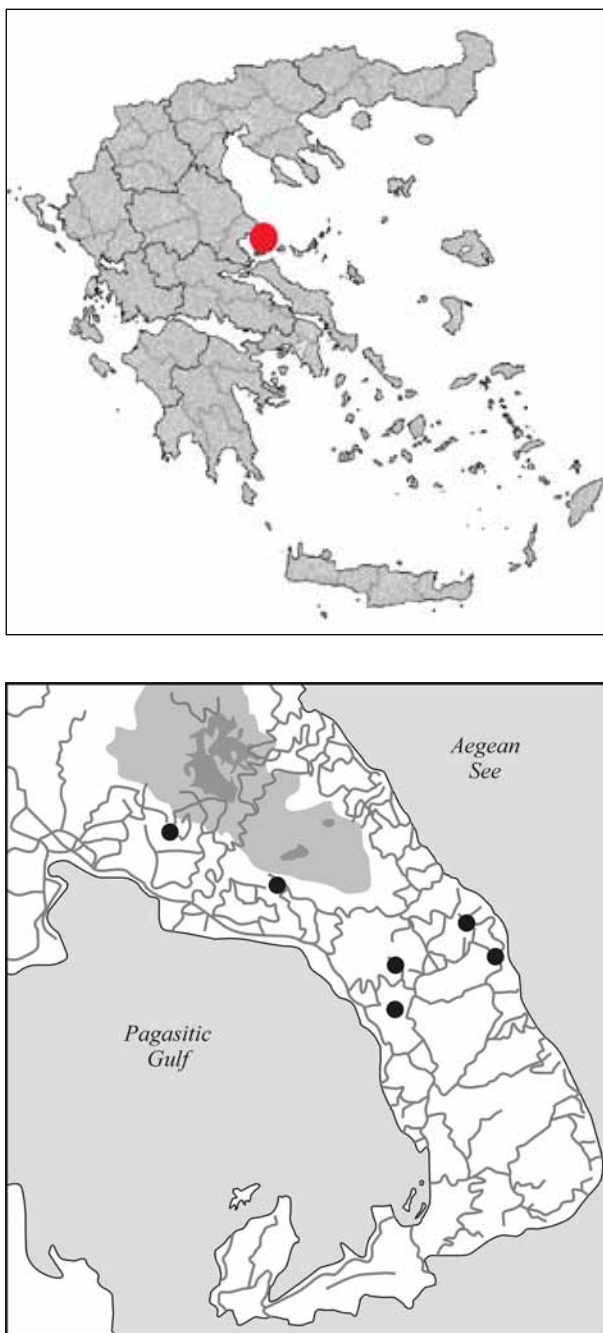
Fig. 1. Case studies settlements

Source: http://filotis.itia.ntua.gr (10.02.2013)

The selected settlements are similar in terms of size, ranging from 300 to 700 inhabitants, as well as their natural and built environment characteristics, representing typical traditional settlements in the area. In addition, the population is quite homogeneous in a sense that there are no major social, cultural and economic diversities. In an attempt to identify the various perceptions and issues that may exist, 90 semi-structured in depth interviews with locals of different ages and occupations as well as 8 interviews with experts at central and regional level have been conducted. In the context of this paper, the relevant questions relate to viewpoints of the value of cultural landscape and of relevant policies. The data have been transcribed, coded and continuously compared in order to identify main themes for analysis. These are combined and further juxtaposed to those identified from the review of legislative documents. The main themes presented here focus on the effectiveness of conservation policy in dealing with the cultural landscape.

Finally, observation and site visits not only in 6 settlements but in the wider Mount Pelion area, in order to 'detect' tangible effects of relevant policies on the landscape, have further enhanced the findings of this research.

3. POLICIES RELEVANT TO CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN GREECE

Landscape policy in Greece is still in its infancy; Greece ratified the European Landscape Convention with ten years delay, in 2010. Landscape in general, and cultural landscape in particular, tended to be viewed as a dimension complementary to spatial and environmental aspects. Cultural or not, landscape tended to be approached by the following policies:

– conservation policies for the natural environment;
– conservation policies for heritage;
– planning policies.

Regarding the first one, until the 1970s the most pertinent regulation was the Landscapes of Exceptional Beauty referring to landscapes of high aesthetic value. Almost 500 Greek landscapes have been characterized as Landscapes of Exceptional Natural Beauty. However, neither the criteria of characterisation nor the protection and control mechanisms had been clearly specified, while the identification of such landscapes was based on experts' 'objective' criteria constraining thus the possibility of pluralistic views and interpretations (Vlantou, 2012).

The interest in landscape was intensified during the 1970s in the light of concern about the protection of the environment, reflected in the Constitution (1975)

which sets the protection of 'natural and cultural environment as State's obligation and everyone's right'. Furthermore, new acts were released. The legislation regarding conservation of natural environment (Acts 1650/1986, 3937/ 2011) touches directly upon the issue of the landscape, focusing on natural areas, including also extensive areas such as villages or settlements due to their natural or cultural characteristics.

The legislation regarding heritage places as well as the planning and spatial policies touch upon the manmade and cultural aspect of landscape. The General Construction Code (Act 4067/2012) has a reference to the protection of architectural heritage while the Act for Conservation of Cultural Heritage (Act 3028/2002) draws further but indirectly on cultural landscape, by expanding the notion of cultural goods, placing also the protection of monuments, archaeological sites and historic places among the priorities of planning bringing thus together the notion of cultural heritage with that of space and place (Vlantou, 2012). However, both of the above acts do not target directly at cultural landscape as they serve different purposes. Furthermore, while the spatial and environmental aspects of landscape are taken into consideration in both cases, the human/perceptual aspect of landscape, such as local communities' perceptions, is overlooked.

Concerning the planning policies, the most pertinent to landscape is the Act for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development (Act 2742/1999), which requires the recognition of landscape as a distinct parameter in spatial plans. In 2011, new specifications regarding the principles of updating and amending the Regional Spatial Plans require equal to other spatial aspects attention to landscape. However, the methodology followed is a copy of parts of Landscape Convention and as such it is too general, while similarly to environmental policies the examination and management of landscape is based on researchers' personal interpretations with no involvement of the broader community.

In total, the issue of landscape is addressed by a number of different acts relevant to conservation and planning policies, which however do not provide a comprehensive approach (Beriatos, 2007, pp. 123–133). This is due to three main reasons (a) those policies have different aims and priorities and thus landscape is a secondary issue, (b) even in cases where landscape seems to be a priority, policy consists in generalisations without setting specific criteria and priorities for its protection and (c) the identification and characterisation is based only on experts overlooking the contribution of communities in selecting and interpreting cultural landscapes. Furthermore, there is no coordination among the above policies, while the lack of a data base, such as a registry, makes the venture of landscape protection even more difficult.

4. THE CASE OF PELION MOUNT IN GREECE

4.1. Setting the Context-introducing the Area

The Mount Pelion in the region of Thessaly has been characterized as a site of out-standing aesthetic value 'due to its exceptional character, its unimagined variety of colours and the outstanding combination of dense vegetation and views to the sea' (Act 1469/1950).

Regarding the natural environment, the Mount presents rich vegetation with high trees especially at the northeast side while it is also surrounded by the sea. With regard to the built environment, the settlements located at the mount are small size villages (most of them with 100–800 people). A great number of these settlements started to develop during the 18th century and they now compose an ensemble of special architectural and cultural interest, having been characterized as traditional. Although differences exist among the villages, the small scale of buildings which rarely exceed three storeys with characteristic roofs made of local stone, the cobble-stoned roads and the squares at the centres of the villages in which old cathedrals are located constitute the main elements that characterize the settlements.

While attempting to examine a broader area, a more in depth research was carried out in 6 selected settlements, Mouresi, Tsagkarada, Makrinitsa, Vizitsa, Afetes and Agios Lavrentios, to achieve the purpose of this paper (see figure 1).

4.2. Conservation Policies in the Area

Similarly to the national level, cultural landscape in Mount Pelion has been in-directly addressed by conservation policies for the natural environment and built environment. Concerning the first one, a big part of Pelion Mountain (see figure 2) has been included in Natura Network[1] as it has been characterized as a Site of Community Importance (SCI) (Natura, 2000).

Concerning the second one, from the almost 110 settlements located in the area, 52 have been characterized as traditional according to two Presidential De-crees (11.6/4.7.1980; 85185/11.4.1997). According to an older Act (1469/1950), these settlements are viewed as

[…] sites to be protected as they have maintained their character since the period of Turkish occupation, presenting a large number of traditional architecture houses/residences and houses of distinctive architecture such as those called 'arhontika', picturesque public squares and cobbled roads/paths which all combined together constituting a unique identity, while they also remind and depict the rich past.

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[1] Natura is an EU-wide network of nature protection areas which aims to 'assure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats'.
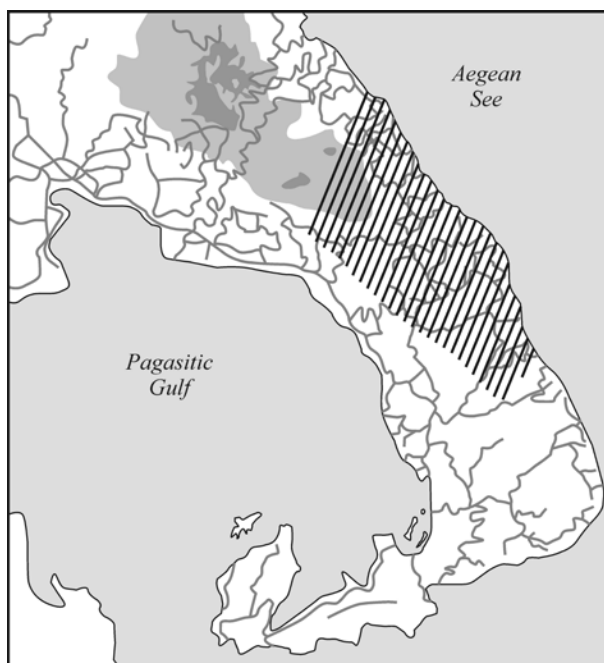
Fig. 2. Natura area

Source: http://filotis.itia.ntua.gr (10.02.2013)

The Presidential Decrees aim at the protection of built heritage and the maintenance of the physical state of traditional buildings and structures, setting directions and restrictions regarding construction and interventions in buildings and land uses. Depending on their traditional character and the extent of distortions, settlements fall into three categories with different level of protection from the strict provisions of the first category to the more flexible third category. Currently only three settlements belong to the first category, which means less distortion, 2 of which are included in this study, while the great majority belong to the second category from which I selected the remaining 4. Among the top policy priorities are the scale and the pattern of settlements. Further regulations refer to size and geometrical characteristics of the buildings as well as to construction materials and to aesthetics of new buildings in order to adjust to the traditional character of settlement.

Regarding the legislation that refers both to the natural and manmade environment, six big parts of Mount Pelion have been characterized as landscapes of exceptional natural beauty (see figure 3). However, the inclusion of the particular areas in this framework seems to be just a label as no specific regulations have been set for their protection.
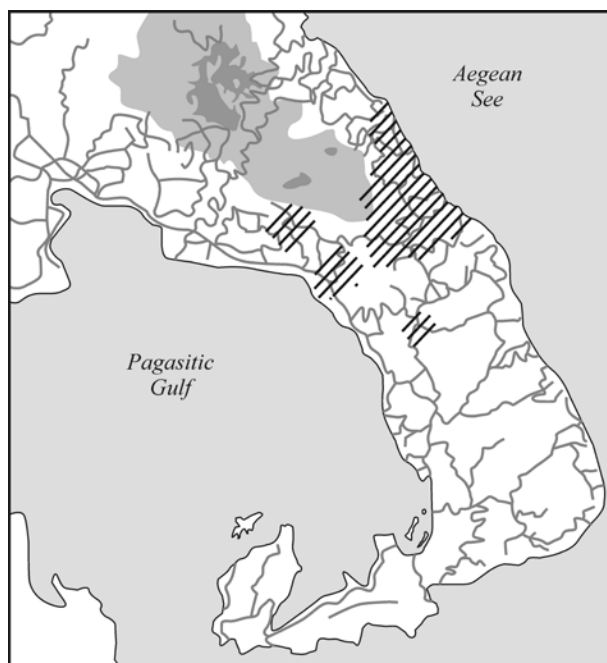
Fig. 3. Landscapes of exceptional natural beauty

Source: http://filotis.itia.ntua.gr (10.02.2013)

In general, the legislation at this scale reflects the situation at national level. Landscape policy is usually applied indirectly via the legislation for conservation of built and natural environment keeping separately these two elements rather than approaching it as an entity. What constitutes cultural landscape as a whole has yet to be addressed, while elements worthy of protection are missed due to the lack of public engagement, as revealed by residents and experts. Indeed, while the protection of elements of landscape is divided between the natural and cultural elements residents usually do not separate these two when they talk about the qualities of their place and the elements which appreciate most referring for example to views and sites in total. In addition, some residents refer to individual elements of appreciation which are usually missed or overlooked by legislation and experts. For example, a number of residents in the case studies referred to small agricultural houses most of which are nowadays derelict. Although they were built at the same time as other very appreciated constructions such as the mansion houses, they are usually disregarded by policy, experts and often other lay people who tend to give more attention to the more dominative structures. Similarly, other 'visual' elements of cultural landscape which are identified by residents due to their personal experiences, memories and stories are often missed or disregarded by the relevant policies.

Furthermore, although the new legislation requires the embedding of such policies in spatial planning, this has not yet applied in the area. Indeed the review of legislation as well as the interviews with experts indicate that both the regional plan for the widest area and local plans have only minor statements with regard to cultural landscape, which are restricted to general comments relating to its importance. Hence, both of the main aspects of landscape, the spatial and perceptual. are to a certain extent overlooked.

4.3. Conservation Policies for Pelion Mount: Achievements and Risks for the Landscape

The lack of appropriate basis and tools as well as the recent incorporation of Landscape policy only in legislation has made the assessment and monitoring of landscape a difficult task, while there is lack of data concerning local residents' and experts' perceptions on the issue. Hence, this section attempts to provide an overview of conservation policies' achievements and drawbacks in the particular area as understood by experts and residents, triggering further research in the field.

The contribution of conservation policies to landscape relates mainly to the containment of threats for the cultural landscape. Concerning the natural environment, participants claim that the characterisation of a big part of the area as 'landscape of exceptional natural beauty' as well as its inclusion in Natura Network has averted large scale and disturbing projects, which could potentially pollute and distort the environment and landscape. Furthermore, participants point out the prevention of the intense exploitation of the area due to the rich natural resources, such as massive logging and mining. Participants also point out the abolishment of the use of streams and other natural areas as places for waste disposal, although illegal action is usually observed. Finally, the particular legislation has increased the sensitivity and awareness of local people, who have only recently started to realize what assets they have. Indeed a number of residents admitted that it was when rules were established that people started realizing the quality of their area, while previously they tended to take things for granted. Residents' and especially long stay residents' habituation of the place impacted on their appreciation of elements of landscape. Legislation, however, provided in a way new information, triggering thus residents' awareness of the natural elements of the cultural landscape. What is interesting to note here is that a number of residents, particularly in second category settlements, refer to the particular legislation as the main and only 'conservation' policy in the area, not being aware of other regulations such as the conservation framework for the built environment. It is worth mentioning here that all the above is due to the environmental concern, while elements of the natural environment have never been regarded as cultural landscape by the relevant policies, although a number of residents referred to elements of natural environ-

ment as their heritage. In a number of cases residents refer primarily to the natural resources as elements of high value rather than to built environment, despite the cultural and architectural importance of the last one. This is particularly evident in second category settlements where built heritage is not as dominative and non-distorted as it is in the first category locations.

Regarding conservation policy for the built environment, the characterisation of settlements as traditional and the rules that this entailed is recognized to have played a significant role in protecting the manmade aspect of cultural landscape. Both residents and experts acknowledge that specific regulations have contributed to the maintenance of human scale, pattern and open spaces as well as typical characteristics of those settlements. For example the limits determined for the size of plots in which building is allowed as well as for the height of buildings contributed to the maintenance of human scale. Furthermore, the obligation to use specific materials such as the local stone in roofs has been important in maintaining the uniformity in the area, which has been pinpointed as an important positive element of landscape in the area by both residents and experts. Participants in general claim that conservation framework has been important in restricting locals' 'distortive' interventions in the built environment – they tended to use any sort of materials and constructions so as to accommodate their needs with limited or no concern at all about the built heritage. There are even residents who admit that they would use other cheaper materials in their buildings even though these may not be aesthetically as appropriate as those imposed by the current policy, if there was not the conservation framework.

These attitudes may be attributed to three main reasons: lack of awareness/ knowledge of the value of historic environment in the area, habituation and economic restrictions. Indeed, with regard to the first one, many residents and especially the older ones claim that before the adoption of the conservation framework the majority of residents did not know that old buildings and constructions had historic, architectural or in general cultural value. Hence it was quite usual the people were intervening in the built environment without any concern about appropriate ways of avoiding distortions. In addition and in the light of massive urbanisation during the 1980s there were many cases of residents who either abandoned or sold their old houses, believing that those houses are not worth much. However, the characterisation of their settlements as traditional made them understand that these may be of value, starting thus to gradually change their attitude, as both experts and residents denote. Residents started to be more careful when intervening in the built environment due to the restrictions but also due to the fact that they started to appreciate its aesthetic qualities. Indicatively, in all the interviews I had with residents, they all support that traditional materials are much more aesthetically pleasant than other artificial ones. Habituation and economic restrictions on the other hand may surpass the appreciation of aesthetic qualities, but conservation framework balances the situation by its rules as recognized by a number

of participants. Furthermore, the characterisation of the particular settlements and noticing the qualities of the area stimulated the feeling of pride in many residents.

Despite the contribution of the above policies to landscape, the inadequacies of those policies paired with the challenges and threats for the area, indicate that the current legislation is inadequate for dealing with cultural landscape (Sapounakis, 2007). The problems and challenges identified may be grouped in two categories: (a) officially legal, in the sense that the current conservation frameworks have allowed their emergence and (b) illegal in the sense that other forces surpass the relevant policies. Within the first category, problems and challenges may be further subdivided to those resulting from development, those from underdevelopment and those relevant to administrative issues.

4.3.1. 'Legal' Problems and Challenges

A. Problems resulting from development. Among the most often mentioned problems in this category are the big bulky touristic complexes that have been built especially in the most touristic areas. Although the Presidential Decree for traditional settlements does not allow the development of large scale buildings within the settlement there is an exception with regard to tourist-oriented units out of the settlements' borders. The legislation allows the development of larger units and is more flexible as regards the distances among buildings and their layout. Claiming that they have incorporated 'traditional' elements in their structure, such as local materials and architectural elements, these units present a bad imitation of village's traditional character, as noted by both experts and residents (e.g. figures 4 and 5). It is similarly with smaller units; a number of participants pinpoint new buildings which imitate the old ones as harmful to the character of their village, distorting the authenticity of the 'traditional'. My personal observation of such cases indeed affirms such claims as looking at these buildings made me feel that something is wrong at least in terms of aesthetics.

Another problem pointed out mainly by experts is the development – construction outside the settlements' borders. The legislation, by setting minimum sizes of plots, allows building in areas out of the borders of settlement. As a result buildings and constructions have been put up in purely natural areas, giving the sense of an abrupt violation of the natural landscape. A typical example provided by two interviewees is building on the ridge of the slopes. They also underlined that the disruption of landscape is further intensified due to the networks necessary for those constructions, i.e roads.

The destruction of traditional elements within settlements is another main problem for the character of villages and landscape as participants and observation show. Many interviewees for example refer to the replacement of the typical cobblestoned roads with conventional ones in order to facilitate the vehicular access. Although those elements are supposed to be conserved, if they are not listed

Fig. 4. A typical traditional house

Source: phot. Ioanna Katapidi

they can be legally destroyed, as it has happened in many cases. On the other hand, there are residents who although they acknowledge this problem in terms of aesthetics they do not consider it as important as they believe that functionality is crucial and has priority.

Finally traffic and parking is another issue raised by residents, who point out that vehicles are disorderly parked anywhere within the settlements, creating thus a serious aesthetic problem. The situation becomes even more problematic in touristic areas during specific seasons.

B. Problems resulting from underdevelopment. Problems in this category are mainly attributed to economic shortages, resulting in the 'creation' of derelict landscapes. For example dereliction of historic, architectural and cultural significant public buildings, structures and spaces is among the most often mentioned and observed problems in this category. Due to inadequate economic sources, as claimed by mayors in the area, a number of significant public buildings and spaces suffer from dereliction. Churches and monasteries that date back centuries, historic public buildings, traditional bridges and more rarely public squares and even

Fig. 5. A new building, imitation of traditional old ones

Source: phot. Ioanna Katapidi

castle have been in a state of constant degradation and negligence. The same is also apparent in private properties. The lack of funding or the restricted incentives paired with the high costs of maintenance, due to the expensive materials and often the high labour costs, make their maintenance unaffordable as both residents and experts claim. Hence, a great number of these properties have been abandoned, constituting now elements of a derelict cultural landscape (e.g. figure 6).

C. Problems relating to administrative issues. The unification of conservation framework is criticized by experts at regional and local level as problematic in incorporating the variety of heritage. According to them, the attention to uniformity without taking into account the various architectural characteristics disregarded different elements and styles of built heritage. As they note, traditional settlements in the area have been put under the same conservation framework with no attention to the peculiarities of different cases. The framework has taken into account some as claimed by experts 'characteristic' examples of settlements as a basis for shaping the particular rules, which apply more or less to all traditional settlements in the area, missing the elements of the various architectural styles in

Fig. 6. Abandoned derelict properties

Source: phot. Ioanna Katapidi

the area. What is more, due to this omission the conservation framework does not in many cases allow the incorporation of those different 'traditional' architectural elements, which contributed to the uniqueness of settlement, in new constructions.

4.3.2. 'Illegal' Problems

Illegal issues constitute further threats for the cultural landscape as revealed by the research. Illegal constructions and interventions in the built environment are among the first mentioned in this category. These include flimsy constructions and the use of other than the allowed materials. A typical example is the use of ceramic tiles instead of the local stone for the construction of roofs due to the high costs of the second one or even the construction of flat roofs. One more usual example of illegal and flimsy constructions relates to 'secondary' spaces such as store houses and henneries, which are made from cheap materials such as zinc and plastic. What is interesting to note here is that despite the fact that most participants refer to the above illegalities, many of them, including experts, do not consider them as great problems to landscape, especially those in the small scale buildings and constructions. Stressing the high cost of construction and materials, as well as the fact that the settlements protected today are the result of spontaneous construction in the past and thus current residents should have to some extent the same right nowadays, many participants claim that small scale constructions using different materials do not really distort the landscape. On the other hand larger scale con-

structions such as retaining walls made from cement instead of local stone have been more easily referred to as harmful.

Public networks such as those of electricity and communication, which were supposed to be underground, have been also identifies as destructive to the image of traditional character by some participants, who further highlight that if the state acts illegally how citizens can be legal.

Another noticeable destruction of landscape is the use of bright and extraordinary colours on buildings as well as signs and labels of different sizes and colours especially in the touristic areas.

Finally, threats for the natural environment were identified by a number of participants. Fires in the area, during the summer season, which are in many cases purposeful, for obtaining land for development in a high quality area, illegal logging, which threatens the density of vegetation and thus the 'green' colour of landscape, and the illegal disposal of waste in rivers and other natural areas have been pointed as serious threats to the quality of landscapes.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the richness of cultural landscape in Greece, landscape policies are still in its infancy. Cultural landscape has been directly and indirectly addressed mainly by a number of conservation policies, which however are not adequate especially in the case of especially sensitive areas as the case of Pelion Mount.

The review of relevant policies as well as the interviews with participants indicate that although conservation policies have contributed to the protection of cultural landscape they have not been sufficient as they do not provide a holistic approach, addressing the various elements of landscape as a totality. In addition to that the review of all the relevant to landscape policies reveals that the perceptual aspect of the cultural landscape is systematically disregarded.

Concerning the impacts of conservation frameworks on the cultural landscape as perceived by participants, it is important firstly to note that not all of the participants, residents in particular, are aware of conservation frameworks in the area, so it is difficult to examine their perceptions on the issue.

Regarding the advantages of conservation frameworks to landscape there is an agreement between experts and residents on the restriction of certain actions and interventions as imposed by current policies for aesthetic purposes. On the other hand, however, aesthetics may impede functionality or may not be possible due to economic shortages, and consequently, participants are willing to 'sacrifice' aesthetics or may value this aspect less. Hence while the wide majority agrees on the 'beauty' of traditional elements and materials as suggested by conservation policy, a great

number of them would 'sacrifice' them to a greater or lesser extent for functionality and economic purposes. Being thus aware of this, most participants assert that conservation framework for the built environment has been important in restricting this kind of actions and maintaining the character and integrity of the villages.

In relation to the problems for cultural landscape two main categories have been identified: those that are legal in the sense that they are not prohibited by conservation framework and those that are illegal. Concerning the first group of problems, they may be further subdivided into those posed by development, those resulting from underdevelopment and those that relate to administrative issues, showing the multiplicity of challenges that cultural landscape faces and which current conservation policies cannot effectively address. It is interesting, however, to note that in all categories a great majority of participants pinpoint problems which are most obvious and noticeable, such as those that are of big scale, extensive, frequently repeated or 'eye-catching'. Less obvious issues are also raised, but these are usually not perceived as a big problem or important distortion to cultural landscape, by both experts and residents.

In sum, while conservation policies contribute to the protection of cultural landscape they are not adequate in dealing with such a complex issue, especially when different judgments, needs and interpretations are involved. This calls for more holistic approaches which do not only focus on the elements of landscape in an objective way but they further work on the inter-subjectivism among the various viewpoints.

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