

**HOLISTIC APPROACH AND UNIVERSAL BEST PRACTICES
AS KEY TOOLS OF ANY ACTION FOR
A SMART, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH.
THE CASE OF MASTOROCHORIA VILLAGES, EPIRUS, GREECE**

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Abstract

The area of the mountainous Mastorochochia villages in NW Greece is an outstandingly representative region of unique natural beauty and distinctive cultural identity with high competitiveness and development potential. A number of villages in this territory have been included in a series of development programs and initiatives. However, a precise look has revealed a lack of comprehensive analysis and integrated evaluation of the assets and potentials of the Mastorochochia villages. The scope of this paper is to stress the contribution of comparative approach as a necessary tool for evaluating and implementing any future actions, that beyond meeting their specific objectives will contribute to achieving the goals of the wider schema for a smart, inclusive and sustainable growth of the area. Practically the comparative analysis will be used as the basis for interlinking all projects and actions and implementing cohesive and holistic approach. The connecting thread for fostering cultural, social and economic dynamism of the territory is the traditional knowledge of the important culture that emerged from the activities of craftsmen who lived and interacted in this region.

Key Words

Regional intelligence, holistic approach, sustainability, networking, traditional knowledge, development, growth, comparative approach, hierarchies, priorities.

1. Introduction

The area of 28 Mastorochochia¹ villages in the Northwest of Greece is a consistent region of great cultural and natural richness. Although several projects have been implemented in the area, the significant cultural heritage is still under threat. This motivated a research project (MaNet Project) that focused on promoting the assets of the Mastorochochia through a development perspective, as part of a large-scale Strategic Plan. The MaNet² Project has identified a gap in previous development actions. The engagement of local community and a value-centred methodology has played a passive role. Since cultural identity is a prerequisite in any development action, this paper aims to underline that a holistic approach is one of the most crucial tools for achieving it. Key parameter for the holistic approach is the comparative analysis of the best practice case study (Lecha-Marzo 2012: 14-16, 325; COPTA 2011; COE 2008: 27-29, 144; Fairclough 2002: 6; Festas 2002: 14; Science and traditional knowledge 2002).

The methodology chosen for the needs of this study adopted as a starting point the experiential analysis of the territory. Additionally, a series of innovative practices embedded in order to conceptualize Mastorochochia in a holistic way. The in situ survey was conducted sporadically during different seasons, in a multi-sited and even transborder fashion, by interconnecting ‘multiple socio-political sites and locations’. Inevitably, following the epistemological framework of ethnographic thought, the project moved from the notion of the field to the notion of the net. Consequently, it adapted practices like ‘a thick description³ of the network, its dynamic and the interplay of relations between people, things, activities and meanings’, as well as a theoretical framework that considers ‘oral histories⁴ as methodological and analytical

¹ Mastorochochia means villages of Masters.

² MaNet: Mastorochochia Network.

³ Quoting Greenblatt (1999) we use the notion of ‘thick description’ as ‘the writing method proposed by Geertz that transcends the simple description of the ‘mute act’ present in the act of ‘thin description’ to give the act being described ‘its place in a network of framing intentions and cultural meanings’ (Panourgiá 2012).

⁴ Overall, oral histories, as defined by Thomson, ‘provides a means for a radical transformation of the social meaning of history’ (Thomson 2000: 23-24).

tools'⁵. The methodology chosen for the interviews as more appropriate for extracting crucial details and authentic ideas was mainly open, unstructured, in-depth interviews of participant observation (Lecha-Marzo 2012: 14; Kravva 2011: 85-90; COE 2008: 27; 2000: 9; Nitsiakos 2008: 11, 22; Principe 2002: 27- 29; Torre 2002: 20; Thomson 2000:3, 23-24; Wittel 2000: 2-3; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995: 2-5).

The culture of the Mastorochochia villages emerged in the 16th century from the activities of the male population who was devoted to specific crafts and frequently represented entire villages. This phenomenon arose from the local social traditions of patriarchal structures and the influences of the corporative organizational forms of other European cultures' craft guilds. The acquisition of skill-based knowledge was transmitted from father to son or to apprentices through monitored tutoring. The master craftsmen formed groups of experts, called 'Bouloukia', that were based on a strict hierarchy and travelled periodically from spring until Christmas over an extended geographical area. They used an economy of monetary exchange that was secured by private contracts. The management of agro-pastoral activity was left to the women and, thus became secondary. Nevertheless, it remained extremely important for the survival of the permanent population. Consequently, forestry activities were focused exclusively on the needs of the construction works (Nitsiakos 2008: 31, 123-125; 1998: 75-76; Filippidis 1984: 61-64).

This irreplaceable cultural activity of the Mastorochochia was once developed and thrived under certain unique natural conditions. The concave landscape of Mastorochochia area consists of majestic green mountain volumes, ridges, hillsides, gorges, crags, boulders, and massifs crossed and almost curved by fluvial networks. The rich aquatic elements do not only seem to play a decisive role in giving life to the continental territory by enabling the affluence of plants and animals, but also become the nodal point that unifies the natural and cultural forces of the area. Mountainous locations alongside the river flows and close to subalpine meadows have been nourished by man 'with human forms and functions, dreams, expectations, feelings and meanings' that nowadays compose the visual and morphological manifestations of the Mastorochochia cultural activity (Nitsiakos 2008: 9-25; Papaioannou 2008: 8-22, 160; Skoulidikis et al. 2008: 422, 432; Fytikas et al. 2000; Stefanou n.d.).

⁵ Oral histories contribute in a significant way to illustrate the area of Mastorochochia as a 'crucial process in perceiving and evaluating the present'. Moreover, they can 'reveal the constant interplay between the national, the local and the personal' (Kravva 2011: 91, 101).

2. Cultural & Natural Heritage Values Analysis

The evaluation of the Mastorochochia heritage is based on natural configuration and human activity, which become significant methodological tools ‘to bridge the gap between parts and wholes, traces and entities, the values of a monument to the reality of the monument itself’ (Ganiatsas 2011). This process aims to assess the Mastorochochia heritage for the collective memory of the society as well as for the economic and territorial development by evaluating its intangible and tangible traits, by defining its universality, integrating all levels (local, national, global), and by considering the varied and different apprehensions and experiences connected to the place (Dümke & Gnedovsky 2013; COE 2008: 27-28; CEO 2000: 3).

Focusing on a holistic framework, a Strategic Management needs to adopt the relevant theories and integrate them with the innovative regional intelligence concept. Meanwhile, tailor-made in depth diagnosis and evaluation procedures are designed as a dynamic equilibrium. Crucially, all the researches and analyses represent ‘full knowledge of the values of a site’, and underscore the importance of the research agenda, local involvement, and the monitoring mechanisms (COPTA 2011: 9-10; Mason 2006: 30-40; Nitsiakos 2003: 73, 82, 168-172).

The perpetual fermentation between nature and humans in the Mastorochochia area formed exceptional and inseparable natural and cultural interconnections and produced a unique ‘intelligent system’⁶. Therefore, the strong network of cultural and natural values with the critical knowledge of craftsmanship as the core ‘leads to an interlocking set of value chain activities’. The dynamism the different but interrelated elements divert into a solid evidence at all levels creates potentialities for development at global, regional and local level based on technological intelligence, regional intelligence and local laboratories (Lasserre 2012: 42, Calafati 2005).

⁶ ‘Intelligent systems are systems in which a ‘critical’ amount of knowledge is comprised in the system at any moment in time. The knowledge in the system is ‘critical’ in the sense that it ought to suffice for the production processes required to produce the commodities needed to feed into the system itself, either directly (self-production) or indirectly (through exchange of the commodity produced or the resources commanded)’ (Calafati 2005).

3. MaNet Intelligence

The MaNet Project managed to gather huge amount of information provided by the territorial analysis and thus crucial data and values recovered from the fieldwork that revealed significant dimensions of the Mastorochochia area's physiognomy. The local knowledge is a product of absorbed traits from prior cultures combined with the ability to adapt and exploit creatively the natural environment. In this framework, the tangible heritage is released by its materiality and creates 'images purely symbolic' (Ganiatsas 1996: 103-104; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995: 188-189).

Thus the slow pace of these procedures resulted in a dynamic cultural capital becoming a latent form of intelligence that was integrated into the Mastorochochia as part of the landscape. A landscape, which is not just a 'passive receptor'. In contrast, it represents a filter which distilled distinct changes and concrete evolution 'according to their Genius Loci'. This significant capacity to cope with changes in various aspects of life is almost identical to the concept of "regional intelligence"⁷. Hence, this innovative approach based on the designated heritage of the Mastorochochia territory, as a common thread that has defined the collective identity of the communities, 'is recognised as a precondition for individual and social well-being [...] and for sustainable development, as well as a resource conducive to economic activity' (COE 2008: 30; Drury 2002: 13; Ganiatsas 2011).

3.1. Potentialities

The definition of the objectives for any project linked to sustainable growth for the cohesive Mastorochochia area must be in accordance with the traits, qualities and values of the territory. The identification of their dynamics and their potential is thus the key endeavour. In order to bring forth the full potential, this procedure also includes local perceptions that reflect their aspirations for Mastorochochia. Three fundamental and lasting traits provide the outline of the designated culture of craftsmen, **the crafts, itineraries and appropriation of the natural environment**. These traits have led to the identification of a series of 'dynamics and potentials that

⁷ 'Regional intelligence can be defined as the capacity of a region to both anticipate socioeconomic change and manage the knowledge derived from such change for the purpose of developing policies'. This concept is introduced by the European Association of Development Agencies (EURADA), an advisory body that aims to promote regional economic development (2004: 1).

contribute to the socioeconomic development and foster societal and institutional participation' (Lecha-Marzo 2012: 33).

The **traditional crafts** represented ways in which the skilled masters established their reputation and their economic development. The knowledge that has been absorbed through the passage of time seems to be awaiting a renaissance. Locals are making individual efforts to revitalize it in various ways. This fact stresses the extraordinary potential of polycentric policies focused on crafts training and safeguarding. Additionally, investing in traditional crafts is interlinked with a series of benefits. Lifelong learning, rooted in the culture of the Mastorochochia is still a strategic objective for the information society and this local tradition has enormous potential that can be exploited. Another very important dimension is that branding the area with these skills enhances the tourist development in the niche market of cultural tourism. In addition, investing in the cultural and creative industries is in line with the objectives of various European strategic plans (European Commission 2012: 13-37; COPTA 2011: 7-8; 2010: 17; Petronotis & Papageorgiou 2008: 167; Nitsiakos 1998: 115).

The second trait is related to **mobility**. The routes were the foundations for the itineraries of the 'Bouloukia' that over the decades spread the fame and the art of the craftsmen all over the world. The detailed topographical research and study of the historic routes has an archaeological significance and can motivate further research. Moreover, the historical routes have the potential to be the core of attraction of a network of 'itineraries for the development of motivational policies' related to sites of tourist interest (European Commission 2012: 7-9; Kaliabakos 2012: 147-161; Lecha-Marzo 2012: 34, 144).

The routes network by definition also incorporates itineraries and sites that are significant in terms of their **natural environment**. The location of the Mastorochochia in an area with extensive biodiversity and surrounded by natural parks provides vast potential to appropriate natural resources.

- It is vital to support tourism sector with activities of the primary and secondary sector of production. Arable terraces, livestock and forestry resources can be combined with the latest technologies and provide products and renewable energy, which will enhance the well-being of the locals, provide alternatives to

the economic crises by attracting young people to the area and reinforce the attractiveness for visitors with strong ecological principles.

- Investments in smart innovative activities for the cultivation of organic dietary goods and handmade products in accordance with practices of self-sufficiency that have a long and viable tradition in Mastorochoia, will revitalize the economy and combat depopulation through entrepreneurship and new job opportunities.

Overall, the challenges created by the ongoing economic crisis are an opportunity ‘to transform the[m] into potentials for’ smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, in line with European aspirations and designed strategies (Kaliabakos 2012: 77-85; Lecha-Marzo 2012: 33-34, 256; COPTA 2011: 5-7; European Commission 2010: 3; 2007).

4. Comparative Approaches

The identification and study of best performances of non-competitive organizations within the cultural heritage industry constitute the basic preparatory stage in order to develop an enhanced, efficient and effective Strategic Management Plan in alignment with the dynamics and potentialities of the Mastorochoia (Stapenhurst 2009: 5-81).

The research project for ‘Evaluation Proposal of the Regional Heritage of Nansa Valley’ is identified as the state of the art and the most methodologically compatible exemplar for the MaNet Project. The Botín Foundation in Cantabria has designed an innovative, successful, future-oriented and globally implemented research model of rural development and regional activation. Its strategic plan of action was prepared to achieve ‘community sustainability’ by proposing realistic alternatives for economic development and quality of life of the inhabitants. The programme succeeded in accomplishing its ultimate goals through the implementation and execution of several key decisions and methods. First and foremost, its philosophy is based on the contemporary approach of ‘regional intelligence’. Regional intelligence was used as a tool to strengthen both intangible aspects and the local business based on the region and to maximize their added value by implementing the regional strategy in accordance with the anticipated socioeconomic changes. Taking the advantage of universal implementation of Nansa Valley’s action model, MaNet could transfer practices relatively straightforward. However, it is very important to note that legal,

socio-economical and financial aspects differ between the regions in question. As a result, only the ‘key success points’ of the comparative approach are proposed as a means for improvement (Agora Urban Institute 2013; Lecha-Marzo 2012: 13-36; Richards & Hall 2010: 1):

- Alignment with official frameworks
- Consistency and Reliability
- Transversal approach - Combine/Converge/Interlock/Interlink
- Involvement/Collaboration/Participation
- Advanced Technology
- Creativity and Innovation (Appendix: table 1)

Taking into account the above analysis, we are able to draw conclusions and proceed to suggestions for the MaNet Strategic Plan. This holistic approach could lead to profound knowledge of the area and its values. Alongside to networking, the ability to generate intersecting links of the strategic actions, based on innovation, creativity and invention, facilitates and secures the transversal approach of the Project. The most successful tactics for economic development and strengthening or enhancing the dynamism of the territory are those that develop recreational actions, support the traditional activities of production, the exploitation of natural resources, and recognise alternative ways of economic activation, such as tourism or the industrialization of local products. It is important to stress that the support of social fabric secures the success of any action.

5. Hierarchies and Priorities

Taking into consideration the holistic research of MaNet, which encompasses a great variety of aspects, related to Mastorochoia territory, the formation of a set of priorities is crucial in order to efficiently implement the objectives of the MaNet Strategic Plan. Although each project should be based on tailor-made criteria, cohesiveness cannot be achieved if ‘theoretical principles [are not organised with] structure and hierarchy according to a particular intention to mediate between theory and practice’. Thus, the hierarchy of priorities could comprise the primary point of reference for the selection and execution of future projects. For this reason, the MaNet Project has designed the subsequent synthesis of criteria following a broader pattern

in order to develop a motivational and driving baseline, which encourages the creative and not mechanical implementation (Ganiatsas 2011):

1. Safeguarding local knowledge, monuments under threat and the natural environment.
2. Financial feasibility of the actions as a guarantee for affordable performance and positive results.
3. Generation of new job opportunities and long-term employment through sustainable use of territorial assets - Promotion of entrepreneurial potential.
4. Inclusion of innovative technologies for educational and touristic services, human and communication networking.
5. Fostering accessibility to public services.

The Mastorochoia cultural and natural heritage is the datum line of the MaNet Project. Consequently, the safeguarding of cultural and natural values of the territory is the first priority that should be addressed by any future project in all phases. The cultural and natural assets of Mastorochoia have the capacity to gather sufficient funding at local, regional, national and international level, such as funds from local associations, national public sector and European programmes. In the meantime, it is considered necessary to include additional priorities in this section concerning the evaluation of projects that must be funded as a priority. The creation of educational activities that focus on traditional crafts is considered a crucial action. This should be prioritized by taking into account the depopulation problem, one of the biggest threats for the genuine preservation of traditional local knowledge. This action will not only contribute to the safeguarding of Mastorochoia intelligence through the transmission of local knowledge, but will also create a dynamic human network between old and young generations (holders of crafting knowledge and apprentices), the local community and other communities, such as scientists and academics at national and international levels. Moreover, the preservation of monuments under threat is also of high significance. The natural environment and abandonment have a negative impact on the old structures in the Mastorochoia cultural landscape. Small-scale projects would ensure the immediate implementation of conservation treatments in order to secure their future preservation. There is an additional factor that has a decisive effect on the combined preservation of cultural and natural resources. The structural elements of Mastorochoia craftsmanship within the impressive natural setting could

play a key role in the development of projects linked with the historic routes of the area by enriching their cultural content and ecological interest (Hellenic Ministry of Rural Development and Food 2014: 338; Marrie 2009: 171).

Furthermore, according to the MaNet Strategic Plan quantitative evaluation of performance of future projects under the economic estimation method of budgeting is also of vital importance. Each action should be accompanied by strong financial arguments guaranteeing funding and forecasting its accomplishment over specified periods as well as the viability of promising results after its completion. Despite the fact that the economic crisis in Greece is in transition towards recovery -with time of reference the year 2018- the MaNet Project foresees that small or medium projects provide more reliable results (Lucintel 2014). Thus small-scale actions that are easily funded and executed within short periods are of high priority, since they contribute to the steady and gradually increasing achievement of the MaNet objectives and they can motivate accelerating development projects (Ross, Westerfield & Jordan 2003: 37).

The third priority negotiates the balanced relationship between economic and social needs, and is directly connected with the economic criterion of the second priority. Undoubtedly the management of cultural assets of the Mastorochochia territory can lead to the creation of new job opportunities, but it could not ensure the sustainable growth of local communities as a major source of economic development. According to recent research by international advisory bodies and, the shared experiences of rural communities, only a holistic and balanced approach to all the productive sectors could ensure long-term sustainability. As a result, investments for smart growth in the primary and secondary sector are deemed crucial, especially in this particular territory that has a long tradition in effective agricultural and pastoral activities (Hellenic Ministry of Rural Development and Food 2014: 110- 119; COPTA 2011).

The fourth criterion stresses the need for the inclusion of innovative technologies in the primary, secondary and tertiary sector. Any future project should encourage the adoption of smart technology by the production, manufacturing and service provision units. In this way, the local investments will be modernized facilitating the expansion of the human network, the creation of cultural and entrepreneurial links beyond the local level and encouraging young people to re-inhabit the territory. Furthermore, future proposals should promote renewable energy combined with innovative

technologies, since it contributes to the smart green/ecologically-minded exploitation of the natural resources and simultaneously foster its protection (COPTA 2011).

The design and implementation of projects related to the aforementioned priorities are conducive to the formation of several centres of attraction to the territory. The gradual economic regeneration of the Mastorochochia villages will subsequently produce a need for permanent residence, initially by entrepreneurs. Considering this sequence of effects, the MaNet Project emphasizes the fifth priority. Almost at the same time with the realization of financially approved projects for the protection of the cultural and natural heritage and the economic regeneration of the territory, other projects should make efforts to promote an open dialogue with the public sector by encouraging the creation of public services in the remote area of Mastorochochia. Accessibility, the operation of schools, the sewerage and water supply system, and sanitation services are some of the fundamental factors that should be met in connection with the third criterion. All these issues should be transformed into challenges and opportunities for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (COPTA 2011).

6. Conclusions

The scope of the paper is to underline the importance of a holistic approach in designing any actions and projects with a development inclination for the coherent Mastorochochia area. This area has attracted a wide range of projects and programs regarding rural development focusing on partial not future-oriented solutions. The lack of comprehensive understanding of the area and of strategic coordination of the values is an obstacle for the progress towards sustainable development. The MaNet Project by applying holistic comprehensive approach aims at bringing back to life the whole 'body' of the area and not just separate 'joints' of it.

The values of the unique legacy of craftsmanship reveal the potential to create new values despite the dereliction of tangible heritage and threatening depletion of the intangible heritage. Only by applying this approach the potentialities and the dynamic of the territory can be understood and adequately assessed. In addition, the comparative study of Nansa Valley in Spain, as a model project showcasing the comprehensiveness of territorial development, enables MaNet to maintain an objective and global perspective on the development of the Mastorochochia dynamic. The mentioned dynamic originates from cultural capital, which with slow pace of time became regional intelligence. This regional intelligence is posed as a skeleton all actions can be attached to. Based on local knowledge, the fundamental three traits - crafts, itineraries, appropriation of nature- are hubs that create a framework for identification of potentialities, which give a basis for developing Strategic Plan.

The MaNet study is applicable for the selection, evaluation, implementation and monitoring projects in a holistic and comprehensive way. Thus, MaNet simultaneously designs hierarchies and priorities for future projects in order to 'mediate between theory and practice' (Ganiatsas 2011). A synthesis of five criteria was developed with aim to encourage future projects to implement the development guidelines of MaNet not mechanically, but innovatively and creatively.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Recommendations for MaNet

<p>Alignment with official frameworks</p>	<p>Integrate Greek and European guidelines and laws in MaNet Project in order to succeed in establishing authorized support, maintaining both an even pace and progress in its processes and securing the future subsistence and development of its proposals.</p>
<p>Consistency and Reliability</p>	<p>The MaNet Project's consistency should not only address the dimension of time, which though a fundamental factor for success, should not overshadow the significance of reliability.</p>
<p>Transversal approach - Combine/Converge/Interlock/Interlink</p>	<p>In view of the fact that MaNet is a large-scale project, it is vital to synthesise a mosaic of relations and to create intersecting planes and a combination of actions in all phases.</p>
<p>Involvement/Collaboration/Participation</p>	<p>The hortatory, voluntary or contracted participation of local communities, experts, professionals, universities, institutions and governmental agencies could enable the MaNet Project to perform both qualitatively and quantitatively.</p>
<p>Advanced Technology</p>	<p>The wide range of valuable knowledge about Mastorochoria can be gathered and managed efficiently and effectively only with the contribution of technological support that is not affordable for a non-profit organisation. Consequently, this obstacle could be overcome through collaboration with universities that possess social-benefit motives as well as appropriate knowledge and equipment.</p>
<p>Creativity and Innovation</p>	<p>'Adapt to and create with the existing resources' (Lecha-Marzo 2012:21). Thus creation becomes inextricably linked with innovation. Innovative practices and efforts should be used to coordinate the actions, to experiment with new and to revalorize and redeploy the cultural and natural assets of Mastorochoria.</p>