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Heritage policy meets community praxis: Widening conservation approaches in the traditional villages of central Greece[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Disparities between experts' and local communities' notions of heritage constitute a key area of concern in narratives on democratic and inclusive approaches to heritage conservation. However, the differentiating underlying reasons for heritage delineation remain underexplored. By examining official and local understandings of heritage in Greek traditional settlements, the current paper interrogates the factors behind heritage ascription and classification. Focusing on rural living heritage places and breaking through the ancient glorified Classical past, the paper sheds light on a less known, contemporary and lived heritage which is however equally important for the modern Greek identity. In the context of a profound authorised heritage discourse, the paper questions the tension between official heritage policy and community notions of heritage, revealing multi-layered and not necessarily contrasting knitting of heritage meanings, problematizing its role in fostering heritage co-production.

Author statement

Ioanna Katapidi: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft preparation, Writing- Reviewing and Editing, Funding acquisition.

1. Introduction

Despite an increasing concern for public engagement and involving local communities in the production and management of heritage¹ disparities persist between 'official' heritage agencies and localised understandings of what actually constitutes 'heritage' and what heritage actually means in the context of daily life. As Smith² has suggested, the institutional apparatus for designating, protecting and caring for heritage is largely a product of nation-building, orchestrated in a top-down way that relies on the cultivation and application of technical expertise. Most nations have established policy and management frameworks that reflect the authorised heritage discourse³ and work with notions of

'traditional' heritage in an 'official' way. At the same time, in a far less-structured way, new categories of heritage continue to emerge that are more directly shaped by the needs, interests and preferences of local (and changing) communities.⁴ Thus, a tension emerges that reflects a shift away from received understandings of what heritage is or should be, as embedded in the structures of the state, toward a more fluid interpretation of what constitutes heritage as practiced and lived by communities.

Drawing upon research undertaken with rural communities in central Greece, this paper examines this tension as it expressed through the official discourses that have categorised their villages as 'traditional', heritage settlements and the discourses of those who live there. The paper interrogates the degree of convergence, or divergence, in official and lived notions of heritage in this rural context uncovering the variant factors behind the identification of something as heritage. The term rural in the context of this research refers to thinly populated areas where at least the 50% of the population lives in rural grid cells⁵ as defined by the European Commission. Rural settlements in the Greek

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¹ Aas et al., "Stakeholder Collaboration"; Cohen, "Public Involvement"; De la Torre, "Values and Heritage Conservation".

² Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; Smith and Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dragouni and Fouseki, "Drivers of Community Participation"; Robinson and Silverman, "Mass, Modern and Mine".

⁵ Grid cells outside urban clusters. Urban clusters: Clusters of contiguous (6) grid cells of 1 km² with a density of at least 300 inhabitants per km² and a minimum population of 5000.

context stand essentially for villages with a population of less than 2000 people.⁶ Rural communities therefore relate to the local population of these villages, which in the case of this study does not exceed 800 people. Another characteristic element of rurality in the area is the predominant economic reliance on agricultural activities, although the tourist sector has been increasing the past twenty years.

A focus on the heritage of living rural communities itself breaks with the usual concerns of ancient and ‘classical’ archaeological, and most often urban sites that have characterised both Greek heritage policy and academic research over the previous years. At state level, pre-occupation with the remains of the ancient past has been dominant in (re)building national identity after Greek independence in 1830. Concerns with the protection and the promotion of Greece’s classical heritage are firmly embedded in national heritage frameworks and indeed in the external image of the country. With the context of international tourism Greece is persistently associated with its classical past as signified through its ancient monuments and heritage sites⁷ promoting the ‘heritage’ with the greatest international prestige as Mackridge⁸ notes. In counterpoint, the heritage of ‘modern’ and rural Greece has only recently received serious attention. It was only in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s that the idea of traditional settlements were officially recognised as possessing heritage value and thus being worthy of protection and management. As examples of more recent heritage, these traditional villages play an influential role in the shaping of modern Greek culture and identity and reflect the cultural significance of a large proportion of the rural landscape. However, they have generally been under-researched in the face of more privileged attention given to the ancient world. The obvious distinguishing feature of these villages is that they are living heritage sites with patterns of multiple property ownership and open to the normative social and economic changes that impacts all settlements but which tends to be highly visible in smaller rural communities.

This research expands the wider discussion on the shifting landscape of values and factors that underpins the selection of heritage and the processes of heritage construction, providing considerable range and depth in the underlying reasons for heritage delineation.⁹ It also develops our limited knowledge regarding the relationships between living heritage communities at local level, in the rural context, and national policy frameworks and understandings regarding heritage.¹⁰

Despite the acknowledgment of the role of public engagement in heritage¹¹ and in the sustainable development of rural communities¹² expert-designed criteria still dominates heritage production with considerable weight given to architectural and historic significance.¹³ With the context of Smith’s ‘authorised heritage discourse’ experts involved in the official processes of tangible heritage selection and listing tend to naturalize heritage, focusing on physicality and materiality.¹⁴ As a result, it is often the ‘great and the grand’ that is selected as heritage while the ordinary and intangible are often overlooked, at least

in official designations,¹⁵ or presented in opposition to the monumental characterisation of heritage.¹⁶ Despite the work undertaken on the ways in which local communities construct their own heritage by-passing the authorised heritage discourse,¹⁷ there still remains limited research regarding local understandings of heritage, especially in the context of lived rural heritage. Indeed, the vast majority of literature on heritage co-production and its role in socio-economic vitality of a place focuses on urban areas although the understanding and mobilisation of heritage in rural areas can contribute significantly towards their sustainable development and management.¹⁸

In terms of the dimensions behind heritage delineation, although research has highlighted some factors that may affect heritage selection, such as interaction with heritage,¹⁹ and the educational, professional and socio-cultural background of individuals and groups²⁰, these factors alone are insufficient to interpret differences and commonalities in notions of heritage or account for its multiplicities of meanings.²¹ By in-depth exploration of official and local views of heritage, the research provides a major expansion of the range and the depth of delineating factors for heritage ascription which span beyond predetermined expert shaped criteria. Unravelling the similarities and differences in what constitutes heritage between experts and residents the paper argues that there is a complex reality in defining the nature and values of that heritage, which spans beyond the usual ideological division between these two groups, analysing the implications of this for a more holistic urban planning and conservation approaches.

2. Traditional settlements and Greek heritage policy

In Greece ‘traditional settlements’ are defined as “settlements or part of settlements which retain their special historic, folkloric, urban, aesthetic or/and architectural character”.²² With the integration of Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe in 1985 in Greek Legislation²³ traditional settlements have been viewed as homogeneous entities of urban or rural constructions which are important due to their historic, archaeological, artistic, scientific, social or technical interest and which are related with one another in a way that they compose entities within a delineated geographical area. Greece has 924 listed ‘traditional settlements’, spread across Greece with high concentration of them in the Aegean Islands, Peloponnese and Magnesia (see Fig. 1). These settlements vary greatly in terms of structure, urban-rural layout, architecture and size, constituting living villages or in some occasion parts of an urban area. ‘Traditional’ settlements have been recognised as ‘heritage’ quite late, in the seventies and early eighties. Until then they were considered as ordinary places with no special value, at least officially defined. Traditional settlements have been developed organically using mainly local materials and building techniques and they are defined as “complexes which maintain their traditional urban grid and their traditional structures and features”.²⁴

Despite the wide use of the word ‘traditional’ in legislation the term is not clearly defined and it is ‘subject’ to mainly architectural committees at the central level to decide upon the ‘traditionality’ of an area and their listing. The term first appears in Greek legislation in 1973, in

⁶ Hellenic Statistical Authority.

⁷ Kavoura, “Politics of Heritage Promotion”.

⁸ Mackridge, “The heritages”, 34.

⁹ Smith and Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology*; Myrdland and Grahn, “Identifying Heritage Values”; Gibson and Pendlebury, *Valuing Historic Environments*.

¹⁰ Waterton, “Whose sense of place”; Waterton and Smith, “The recognition and misrecognition”.

¹¹ Pendlebury, *Conservation in the age*; Waterton and Watson, “Heritage and Community Engagement”; Grimwade and Carter, “Managing Small Heritage Sites”.

¹² McKee, “Legitimising the Laird”; Mathambo Mitka, Kistler “Contiguous community development”.

¹³ Dicks, *Heritage Place and Community*; Waterton “Whose sense of place”; Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; Graham et al. *Literature Review*.

¹⁴ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

¹⁵ Tait and While, “Ontology and the Conservation”.

¹⁶ Schofield, *Who needs the experts*.

¹⁷ Chitty, *Heritage Conservation and Communities*.

¹⁸ Di Fazio and Modica, “Historic Rural Landscapes”.

¹⁹ Zancheti and Similä, “Measuring Heritage Conservation Performance”.

²⁰ Green, “Involving local communities in assessing”; Green, “Notions of Town Character”; Tweed and Sutherland, “Built Heritage and Sustainable”; Sutherland et al., “Sustainable Development”, Svensson, “Consuming Nature”.

²¹ Clavir, *Preserving What is Valued*.

²² Greek Law: FEK 40/9.6.1975 A’

²³ Greek Law 2039/1992.

²⁴ Komilis, “Regional Development and Maintenance”.

Fig. 1. Distribution of listed traditional settlements in Greece.

the General Construction Code (GOK) determining essentially general construction rules and regulations at national level. The GOK,²⁵ states that settlements or part of settlements of special historic, folkloric, aesthetic and architectural character and/or planning layout may be listed as ‘traditional’ and protected by specific rules and regulations.

The responsibility for designation and conservation of traditional settlements is subject to the Ministry of Energy and Climate Change. The process is state centred with little, if any, space for local community involvement. Specifically, designation is proposed by the relevant Ministers and issued in a form of regulations through a Presidential Decree. Regional and local ‘specialised’ Boards of Planning, Housing and

Environment²⁶ may provide a report in support of the traditional character. Local authorities can initiate the process of designation, contacting the relevant Committees of Planning, Housing and Environment in their area and the Ministry of Energy and Climate Change.

The conservation framework in the form of Presidential Decree delineates essentially the building rules, regulations and uses in traditional settlements in order to protect and maintain their traditional ‘character’. Individual buildings and structures or certain uses within the settlement may be listed separately. Local communities are rarely and indirectly involved in the designation process, through their representation from local authorities who have purely advisory role. Local communities are instead loaded with the responsibility for conforming to and applying

²⁵ updated as the New Construction Code, Greek Law 4067/2012.

²⁶ In Greek: Συμβούλια Χωροταξίας Οικισμού και Περιβάλλοντος ΣΧΟΠ

the designed rules and regulations. Conservation therefore follows a purely top-down technocratic approach, comprising general rules regarding the built environment and lacking consideration of the particularities of different types of settlements or their local communities.

3. Traditional settlements in Mount Pelion

Mount Pelion is located in central Greece (see Fig. 1) and it is well known for its rural character with rich natural assets while traditional villages exceed fifty in number constituting a complex of conserved settlements. These villages flourished during the period of Ottoman occupation in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, due to a form of an autonomous state of local governance granted to them, as a result of the difficult mountainous geomorphology which made the exploitation of the area challenging and inconvenient for the occupiers. Today their population ranges between 200 and 800 people and their economy depends mainly on agricultural and tourist activities. The great majority of the population consists of permanent residents with long established roots in the area (long stay residents) and a small proportion of new-comers, essentially temporary residents in their second homes (short stay residents). The majority of residents are occupied in agriculture, whilst tourist related activities, often provide a supplementary income. The nearest urban centre in the area is Volos, a city with a population of about 150000 people which is in a symbiotic relationship with these villages; the city serves as the main commercial hub for these villages while the villages serve as the main short gateways for the city. The built environment is characterised by the so called ‘Pelion’ architectural style which refers to vernacular architecture of the area incorporating local materials and building techniques. The local stone and wood are prominent elements of the built environment with the stone slate roofing and the network of cobblestone-paved road (kalderimi) originally built for donkeys and horses, as dominant characteristics of the built environment (see Fig. 2). Traditional settlements in Mount Pelion were designated in the late seventies and early eighties and they are subject to three Presidential Decrees.²⁷ Drawing on the legislative framework,²⁸ the words ‘traditional’ and heritage refer only to physical objects of the built environment, such as the stone roofs, the stone walls, the scale of the buildings and the distance between them.

Depending on their traditional character and the extent of physical distortions in the built environment, settlements fall into three categories with different levels 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, two of which, Makrinita and Vizitsa, are included in this study. Some of the rules and restrictions vary depending on the category that a settlement belongs to. Specifically, first category settlements are characterized as settlements of ‘absolute’ protection due to their impeccable character and the low degree of distortions in their built environment, falling under stricter measures, compared to those in second and third category settlements. Planning permissions can be obtained more easily in third and second category settlements than in first category ones, due to the flexibility on the rules regarding the geometrical characteristics and dimensions of the buildings.

Whilst indeed the conservation framework values and protects the built environment, the traditional character of the area goes beyond its physical representation, incorporating intangible aspects such as local cuisine, music, customs, and crafts which however are not officially protected as heritage. From the local building technique to forms of public and personal celebrations including local festivals, food, songs and dances, to local norms and practices that are still prevalent in the local lifestyle, traditional settlements in the area go far beyond the ‘physical’ representation of a specific architectural style, although this is

the mere focus of the conservation framework.

4. Research approach

This study focused on six listed traditional settlements in Mount Pelion in central Greece: Makrinita, Visitsa, Agios Lavrentios, Afetes, Tsagkarada and Mouresi (see Fig. 3). In order to examine the official and unofficial notions of heritage in-depth interviews were conducted with heritage experts, policymakers and local residents. Eighty in-depth interviews were conducted in total; seventy two with residents across the six settlements covering a representative range of population in terms of their sex, age, occupation and background (i.e locals or newcomers, short stay and long stay residents), as these characteristics can affect perceptions of heritage²⁹. Achieving a good balance between short-term and long-term residents was important in the selection of the interviewees due to their different experience of the place as dominant theories on sense of place suggest³⁰. According to Tuan,³¹ Relph³² and Green³³ greater length of residency results to stronger place-based associations with the past and greater place attachment which in turn leads to qualitative different sense of place. The development of experiences and memories of a place especially during childhood and the continuation of individual’s interaction with this place are considered as key factors in the establishment of strong emotional links with a place.³⁴ Based on the above, long term residents were considered as those who were born and grew up in the area whereas short term residents were considered as the newcomers, especially temporary residents in their second homes, natives or foreigners, who do not have family links in the study area and have not lived permanently in these villages for more than ten years. The majority of interviews with residents were conducted in cafes at the central square of each village, allowing for further casual conversations on the topic with more residents. After establishing a sense of mutual trust between the local communities and myself I was also invited to some locals’ houses, where the lengthier interviews took place. Additionally, two to three walking interviews were conducted in each village in order to prompt people to show me instead of merely telling me what constitutes heritage in the area. On the other hand eight interviews were conducted with experts, in their offices, from: the Department of Traditional Settlements in the Ministry of Energy and Climate Change, the Regional ‘specialised’ Boards of Planning, Housing and Environment and the main Heritage associated NGO in Greece.

As the focus was on the grassroots production of heritage investigating how people select and give meaning to heritage, the research was attentive to the language used. Specifically, ‘heritage’ as a term is used in official documents, legislation and/or between experts but it is rarely used in spontaneous conversations. When people speak about heritage, they do not necessarily name it as such; rather they more likely refer to particular buildings, monuments and structures or objects in relation to tangible heritage or practices, customs and crafts within the context of tradition in regard to intangible heritage. In order to understand what heritage is in “*the realm of ordinary talk and everyday discourse*”³⁵ the research allowed a more “*messy language that is capable of free-forming*”³⁶ and uniting with the vast range of heritage constituents as those identified by participants. Therefore participants were able to identify ‘heritage’ in their own terms instead of me imposing ‘heritage’ as the key theme of our conversation. Listening to locals’ daily conversations and

²⁹ See note 17.

³⁰ Tuan *Topophilia*, Relph *Place and Placeness*.

³¹ Tuan *Topophilia*.

³² Relph *Place and Placeness*.

³³ Green *Coastal Towns in Transition. Local Perceptions of Landscape Change*.

³⁴ Altman and Low *Place Attachment*, Seamon “Humanistic and Phenomenological Attachments”.

³⁵ Robinson, “Talking of Heritage”, 197.

³⁶ Robinson, “Talking of Heritage”, 201.

²⁷ Presidential Decree: FEK 594/Δ/13.11.1978; FEK 374/Δ/4-7-1980.

²⁸ Greek Law 1577/1985.

Fig. 2. Traditional settlement in Mount Pelion.

Fig. 3. Case studies.

engaging with them was a key step in unravelling and understanding the different terms that people use in reference to heritage. The vast majority of local people would systematically use the term ‘traditional’ to refer to elements of their heritage. For this reason, I have deliberately chose to use this term instead of ‘heritage’ in order to further prompt our discussions. Being flexible about the terminology and observant on the ‘vocabulary’ that frames heritage in the local context facilitated the conduct of the research as it eased the conversations with the participants while also challenging the discourse on heritage definition and delineation.

By attending community events, a number of which revolved around heritage, such as local festivals and community meetings I engaged with locals in an informal way gaining a deeper understanding of what they value and what their concerns are in relation to their heritage. I was invited to two events where people celebrated specific saints, having a special service in the church followed by a series of festivities including local food and dances. I was also invited to two community meetings in Agios Lavrentios and Afetes, focused on issues around the improvement and promotion of these villages by identifying key priorities a number of which revolved around heritage issues. Being able to communicate in a more casual way with locals and gaining their trust allowed me to immerse myself in the context and discover the emergent issues regarding their understanding of and engagement with their heritage by going beyond the verbal testimonies and comprehending the depth of heritage embeddedness in the local lifestyle as it is further unravelled in the following sections.

5. Unravelling what lies behind heritage delineation

5.1. The official approach

The official approach to heritage delineation in the studied traditional villages is based essentially on historic and architectural criteria relevant to the built environment. Six specific characteristics clearly framed the expert evaluations of these settlements and will be discussed further below: i) the undistorted representation of the past, ii) the special physiognomic character, iii) homogeneity in the built environment, iv) public character, v) architectural complexity and vi) rarity or uniqueness of the built forms.

5.1.1. An undistorted representation of the past

Heritage from the experts’ point of view depends heavily on an ‘undoubted’ and ‘undistorted’ representation of the past regarding the ‘physical’ appearance of settlements. Age plays a decisive role in what experts select as heritage who view built elements with no structural and architectural changes as representations of the village at a certain period of time. According to them heritage in traditional settlements consists of buildings and structures built before the early 20th century and which have not been modified.

The capacity of an ‘old’ built structure to crystallise a certain period of the past is mainly the reason for which age matters in heritage selection by the experts. Although the legislation does not explicitly pose any chronological limits on the listing of settlements, older settlements and ‘intact’ built structures within them are usually prioritised over more recent and ‘modified’ ones.

5.1.2. A special ‘physiognomic’ character

The argument on ‘special’ character has been consistently used by officials on their justifications about heritage listing. The legislative framework states that a settlement may be listed as traditional when it ‘bears’ a special aesthetic, historic, architectural and/or ethnologic character. This character is expressed through the built forms, layout and structures of the settlements. Interestingly enough, the conservation framework does not clearly define this character and its special characteristics but instead poses directly regulations and rules in terms of land uses and interventions in the built environment in order to ‘protect’

this character. The analysis of the conservation framework and the interviews revealed that the key elements contributing to special character are: homogeneity of the built environment, the public character of buildings and spaces, architectural complexity and rarity as unfolded below.

5.1.2.1. Homogeneity in the built environment. A number of elements identified as heritage by most experts present a common characteristic, that of homogeneity. Homogeneity relates to similarities across the patterns and the character of built elements. The majority of elements identified as heritage by experts are homogeneous in terms of architectural structure and material. Specifically, they refer to structures made of local stone, such as the majority of roofs, walls, fences and other constructions (see Fig. 4), as typical characteristics of heritage locally which synthesise a homogeneous picture of settlements with clearly ‘identifiable personalities’. The combination of local stone with wood in constructions results into a harmonious coexistence of the built and natural environment and portray the development of an exquisite type of vernacular architecture. Homogeneity essentially relates to the tangible aspects of heritage in experts arguments as echoed in the following statements.

A traditional settlement is this that acquired some ‘homogeneous’ standards in terms of architecture, those that are worth of protection which have coherence, homogeneity, which are made by local materials in the past and those have not been distorted (Officer 1 at the Ministry).

The importance of ‘visual’ homogeneity in traditional settlements designation is also clearly reflected in relevant laws³⁷ which clearly state that it is a main requirement for listing.

5.1.2.2. Public character. Public buildings and spaces, such as central squares, churches and monasteries, public built fountains and schools (in old buildings) were unanimously mentioned as key constituents of heritage in these settlements by experts, stressing their ‘impeccable’ architectural and historic value as well as their value for the settlements’ layout (see Fig. 5).

Public elements were acknowledged as the ‘mirror’ of these villages,

Fig. 4. Elements of the built environment.

³⁷ such as Greek Law 2039/1992 and Greek Law 3028/2002.

Fig. 5. Central squares.

as important signifiers of the establishment of the settlements highlighting their centrality as the ‘core’ of an organic spatial development. Experts particularly stressed that most settlements have been organized and developed around the main squares, usually located in the most favourable areas within the village, with the church, constituting usually the most important and oldest building in these settlements. Most experts explained that the church and central square were usually the ‘starting’ points of these settlements, and a typical characteristic of the Pelion-type spatial layout which still remains almost ‘intact’ and therefore it reflects the ‘original’ character of these villages.

5.1.2.3. Architectural complexity: Scale and detail. The predominant factors for the inscription of a settlement as traditional depend strictly on physical aspects of the built environment. Following the discussions with experts it became clear that individual buildings and structures are identified as heritage due to their architectural complexity which is often witnessed in the scale and detail of these buildings. Scale relates to the size of a structure while detail relates to its ‘structural’ complexity as it is explained below.

Experts were very descriptive about the built elements of heritage and their physical qualities, elaborating on architectural typologies as determinant of heritage in those areas. As most of the experts are architects or civil engineers, detail in the built environment is central when identifying heritage, as their selection highly depends on criteria cultivated during their education and their specialisation in the subject.³⁸

From the same kind of built elements identified as heritage, such as houses, experts tend to favour, or refer first to, the bigger and more detailed ones. For instance, they refer to the typical Pelion style mansions (arhontika/αρχοντικά) as characteristic elements of heritage (see Fig. 6). Larger scale buildings with details, such as mansions represent elaborate expressions of the architectural style in the area. Painted windows, the protrusion of the top floor supported by wood (sahnisia: σαχνησιά in Greek) (see Fig. 7), the carved marbled ‘bearers’ of the balconies (see Fig. 6), double-sided stairs (see Fig. 6), wooden carved ceilings and metallic doors, are some of the most usual details highlighted by experts when talking about heritage in the area.

Apart from their ‘architectural value’, larger and structurally more elaborate buildings also represent an affluent past which in the Greek context is systematically ‘officially’ chosen to be remembered over the past of difficult times and that of everyday people as captured in simpler and smaller scale constructions and as it is clearly portrayed by the ‘promotion’ of ancient heritage over the recent one.

5.1.2.4. Rarity or uniqueness. Rare and/or unique built structures have been raised as important elements of heritage by experts as they provide

the opportunity to witness a ‘typical’ architectural style of the area. For instance, the few remaining tower houses of the 17th and 18th century have been pinpointed as unique elements of heritage in the area showcasing a style of housing built also for defensive purposes. Only few tower houses have survived until today, being reference points for Pelion style architecture amongst the experts and a separate typology when describing area’s building stock.

5.2. A community view of heritage

The official approach on what constitutes heritage is clearly shaped by a framework focusing on ‘architectural’ and ‘historical’ significance translated in specific morphological characteristics in the built environment as analysed in the previous section. This section explores local understandings of heritage, the extent to which perceptions vary and the explaining reasons behind the identified variations.

Despite the clear distinction between heritage experts and local communities and the apparent disparity in their notions of heritage in relevant studies³⁹ this research has revealed a general consensus on heritage elements between these two groups, which interestingly enough is not based on the same underlying factors. Indeed, the elements identified as heritage by experts were also recognised by residents, although the reasons for their identification were different as it is further analysed below. Elements of old age, which present homogeneity, elements with public character, large scale buildings and structures with architectural details and/or rare elements were pinpointed by local residents. The general agreement on the above elements is attributed to the influence of experts’ notions of and decisions on what is important and worth of conservation on locals’ perspectives. Indeed, a number of locals admitted that there was lack of awareness regarding the architectural ‘value’ of their villages before their official designation. They particularly highlighted that a high proportion of residents in these villages abandoned or sold their houses at a very low price prior to the designation of their settlements as traditional, moving to city centres in seek for job opportunities. However, the local opinion gradually changed with the realisation that their area attracted the attention of ‘high’ qualified but most importantly ‘high’ positioned people, who initiated the inscription of their settlements.

Notwithstanding the similarity in the ‘object’ of selection experts and residents differ in their reasoning about heritage selection. Specifically, age plays only an implicit role in the identification of heritage by locals. Residents will point to ‘old’ elements without specifying their age, the period they belong to or their historic association. Most residents use the words ‘characteristic’, ‘typical’ ‘representative’ of their village rather than a signifier of a particular period of time when selecting ‘old’ elements as heritage. As in the case of experts, homogeneity appeared to be central in residents’ arguments about heritage selection. However,

³⁸ Tweed and Sutherland, “Built Heritage and Sustainable”; Sutherland et al., “Sustainable Development”; Svensson, “Consuming Nature”.

³⁹ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; Schofield, “Who needs the experts”.

Fig. 6. Mansions.

Fig. 7. Protrusion of the upper floor and window details.

residents also raise the intangible aspect of this homogeneity. Characteristically, in conjunction with the idea that local stone in constructions is an important element of heritage and key for the homogeneity in the built environment locals also stress the ‘art’ of treating the stone and the building technique as being equally important, although it is not officially protected or recognised as intangible heritage. Similarly and in relation to the aspect of ‘rarity’ as crucial in selecting heritage, despite the agreement on ‘rare’ built structures as heritage between experts and residents, locals also pointed to ‘intangible’ rare elements as important constituents of their heritage. For instance, they pointed to local costumes, dances and the language idioms.

As in the case of experts public elements, such as public squares and cobblestoned paths, were the first to be pin-pointed as heritage by residents too. However, residents did not really focus on their role in the planning layout and development of their settlements but they instead emphasised their role in public life and local lifestyle in the area. Public life is inextricably linked to and sometimes exclusively concentrated within the squares and churches, with the most important events as well as informal socialising happening in these public spaces. Local residents also pointed to intangible elements as part of their heritage, such as

certain traditions-usually related to life events’ and customs that take place in these spaces indicating the importance of these elements in their current lives and therefore the strong connection of tangible and intangible heritage with ‘public’ or communal character as opposed to individual properties.

In accordance with heritage experts, residents pointed to old, large scale buildings with conventionally striking architectural details when defining their heritage. Specifically, mansions were immediately recognised as important elements of heritage by residents, who spoke proudly about them. However, unlike the experts, scale and detail as determinants in heritage selection were not solely linked to an appreciation of formal aesthetics and architectural significance, but rather to ‘status’ connotations conveyed through these aesthetics. Mansions, which belong to wealthy families in the area, depict an affluent era during which the particular villages and their communities flourished. Therefore, they provide a ‘glamorous’ status to the villages which residents like to associate with. A great number of these mansions operate now as luxury guest houses or holiday houses for wealthy people. Larger scale buildings with details tend to be more eye-catching and architecturally ‘elaborated’ symbolising a ‘high’ social status in contrast to that of small ordinary buildings. Hence, as in the formal, expert designation process the ‘grand’ and the great⁴⁰ has been generally prioritised among the elements of the same type (i.e dwellings) by locals too.

Despite the agreement between experts and residents on what constitutes heritage in the area as revealed above, a number of differences were also identified in heritage selection, not only between the two aforementioned groups but also within them, such as between short stay and long stay residents or younger and older people. Differences however, do not necessarily depend on the internal characteristics of the individuals such as age and background (i.e locals or newcomers) as relevant studies suggest⁴¹ but instead they may be attributed to the following factors: personal contact and experience, familiarity, knowledge and information.

5.2.1. Personal contact with and experience of heritage elements

The incremental role of personal experiences in heritage

⁴⁰ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; Ashworth, “Using heritage: let’s begin”; Lowenthal, “Environmental Perception-Preserving”; Tait and While, “Ontology and the conservation”, 722.

⁴¹ See note 17.

identification has been stressed by a number of studies.⁴² Indeed, personal memories, stories and interactions with our environment often affect what one may identify as heritage. A number of differences in heritage selection not only between experts and residents as one may expect but also amongst residents themselves can be attributed to and explained through their personal experiences. Differences in heritage selection in the context of this study have been observed in a) the way in which heritage is ‘comprehended’ and b) the elements ‘identified’ as heritage.

A characteristic example in the first case is the distinction in participants’ perspectives on heritage as a totality in contrast to heritage as distinctive constituent elements. Specifically, a number of long-stay residents comprehends heritage as an amalgamation of tangible and intangible elements which are inseparable from each other and make sense only when viewed holistically within the particular context as captured in the following phrase:

What comes to my mind in relation to what is traditional in the village is the cobblestoned roads, the fountains the plane trees in the square, the square, all these together ... To see an old 90 years old man sitting next to a young child in the coffee shop at the square ... the same with the festivals and our traditional dances, people hold each other, the same circle is made by people of different ages celebrating together ... the stoves in the coffee shops and the old men who sit around them ... the cobblestoned roads where you see the people and horses passing by ... it is not certain objects alone, it is the way of life and how we connect with them ... it is you know.. a sense of how things have worked in this village (Woman 19, Vizitsa).

This gestalt where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts dominates on long-stay residents’ understanding of their heritage. The difference between long stay residents and the rest, short-stay residents and experts, in this case is not the ‘elements’ identified as heritage but the way in which these are identified and understood. Indeed, whilst a number of commonly agreed upon elements appear in the above statement (such as architecture, central squares, cobblestoned roads), these are not identified as distinct elements but as inseparable and interdependent elements of a unity; the traditional settlements and their ‘special’ character. Tangible aspects are entangled with intangible aspects, in fact they are presented as a whole encompassing unity as further portrayed in the example of built fountains (see Fig. 8).

Specifically, while most participants identify the ‘object’ as heritage, a number of long stay residents, refer to them as a fully integrated phenomenon, consisting of the object as well as its use and social meaning reflecting a traditional way of life. Old long-stay residents speak about built fountains (tangible aspect) as places of socialisation for the local women in the past, as a ‘social place’ where they used to informally meet and spend some pleasant time away from their demanding chores (intangible aspect) with the ‘excuse’ of sourcing water or washing their clothes. It is the way of life that makes ‘something’ traditional and as such heritage, in this instance and not separated elements. It is the combination that creates the essence of ‘tradition’ and not the object of the fountain as such. For those who have experienced it themselves or have direct or indirect (through family members) memories of these interactions, the selection of fountains as heritage involves the tangible element along with what it ‘hosts’ (social relations in this instance), rather than the object alone, in contrast to those who do not have similar experiences.

Personal experience and interaction with heritage may further explain differences in separate elements selected as heritage. Indeed, the study reveals that specific elements were identified as heritage only by those who had experiences related to them whilst they were forgotten or ignored by those with no such experiences. For instance, and in relation

Fig. 8. Built fountain.

to an intangible aspect of built fountains, the custom of ‘treating’ the built fountains on New Year’s Day, was identified only by some old long - stay residents. The custom was common in the past when built fountains were the main source of water. An old woman in Mouresi recalled the custom associated with these fountains:

I remember myself waking up on the New Year and the first thing I had to do is to ‘treat’ the fountain with some sweets ... I would take a jar and bring back some water ... on our way back we shouldn’t talk to anybody ... once we were back to the house we had to say these words: as the water runs from the fountain so may happiness run in the house (Woman 74, Mouresi).

Neither short - stay residents nor younger residents or experts referred to this particular custom as heritage. It was only after my prompt that a couple of them affirmed that they knew about it, but only as something they randomly heard from locals.

Likewise built ovens pointed out as heritage only by certain participants due to their direct experiences with them. The lighting of the wood fired oven and what this involved, was identified as heritage especially by old women and few younger people who have ‘witnessed’ or participated in this activity. They describe the ‘ritual’ of using these ovens, when the neighbours would gather together in order to bake their bread and prepare some special food. The whole procedure of using (intangible aspect) this oven (tangible aspect) as well as the type of food (tangible and intangible) prepared, are considered as inextricably linked traditional elements. The physical object along with its use, the one as the reflection of the other are together identified as heritage by those bearing these experiences: ‘the lighting’ (intangible aspect) of the oven (tangible aspect), the gathering (intangible aspect) around the oven (tangible aspect), cooking together (intangible aspect), the particular kind of food that was made there (tangible and intangible aspects).

⁴² Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; Ashworth, “Using Heritage”.

However, these built ovens have not been ‘officially’ listed neither have they been mentioned by experts and other residents. Furthermore, as reflected in both examples, fountains and ovens, the issue of tangibility and intangibility is often ‘invisible’ in long - stay residents’ minds, supporting the idea that this is something “*of a false distinction*”.⁴³

The previous examples clearly show that experience influences selection of heritage, both regarding the elements perceived as heritage and the way in which these are perceived as heritage. However, these experiences are not taken into consideration in the official processes when defining and managing heritage missing therefore a) aspects of heritage within the settlement and b) opportunities of valorisation for these ‘organic’ aspects of heritage. Indeed, intangible aspects of heritage, such as certain customs, as well as local tangible elements of heritage such as the built fountains and their interrelations with intangible aspects are not considered by the current conservation framework. However, this inextricable link between the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage is crucial in framing the traditional nature of these villages in locals’ perspectives and in essence ‘securing’ the continuity of the traditional ‘atmosphere’ of these places. Crucially, within a rural context as opposed to cities, heritage features frequently remain tied to local owners and retain their narratives of use, linked as this is to the living and ‘active’ aspects of village life. This overlay of intangibles, memories and stories demarcate the unique character of these villages and can inform conservation and planning approaches so as to enhance the capacity of these settlements to mobilise rather than to ‘museumify’ their heritage.

5.2.2. Familiarity as a result of use and frequency of heritage elements

Differences in selection of heritage may also be attributed to familiarity, by an extension of continues experience, with the ‘object’ due to frequent interaction with it. The issue of familiarity arose when some elements were mentioned as heritage, by local residents, while others of the same typology were omitted. Indeed, among the built elements of the same type, such as mansions, residents tend to refer to those that they see or have a contact with on a more regular basis. For example, centrally located mansions and built fountains in locations of frequent passage were pinpointed by a number of residents. In contrast, similar elements, in less central or hardly visited areas were often missed. A number of residents within a certain neighbourhood in Mouresi and Tsagkarada pointed out to mansions close to their house and daily activities, missing often others located in areas that they rarely visit. Similarly, other elements such as the stone flour mills located in remote areas were missed although they are quite rare:

Researcher: “You told me about the churches, the cobblestoned roads, the stone roofs of the houses ... Is there anything else?”

Participant: “What else? Hmmm ... I don’t know ...”

Researcher: “Some people told me about the old mills ...”

Participant: “Ah yes right! I forgot about them ... you see they are in the mountain, who sees them? I don’t even know if they are still there ...” (Woman 45, Mouresi).

Even quite unique elements are barely mentioned due to the fact that they are hardly ever seen. For example, most resident forget the few arched bridges as most of them are located in remote areas out of residents daily routes. Indeed, when those located in more central and visited areas such as in Afetes, they were identified as heritage by a number of residents.

5.2.3. Knowledge and information about heritage

Differences in the identification of heritage may also appear due to knowledge and information that one may have about heritage.

Expanding the arguments on the role of knowledge and education in shaping notions of heritage,⁴⁴ this study shows how these factors may explain differences in heritage selection.

The study particularly reveals that short stay residents often prioritise tangible elements of heritage, in comparison to long stay residents. This is often due to the extra information that a number of short stay residents may have. In particular, short stay (non-local) residents deliberately chose to live in the area in contrast to a number of long stay residents, who were born raised and continued to reside in these villages. Since the area is quite expensive to invest in, short stay residents considered carefully its qualities acquiring relevant information before choosing to move in the area. Short stay residents therefore were fully aware of the distinctive character of these villages due to their heritage. According to them, heritage in the area and the potentials it provides has been one of the most important reasons for choosing this area.

A number of long-stay residents also noted that short-stay residents, or in general those who initially came to invest in the area, were educated people who had access to knowledge not only regarding the elements of heritage but also to financial sources which could help them ‘exploit’ heritage as a resource. On the contrary, the majority of long-stay residents had neither this level of education nor the information about the qualities of old structures and the economic sources available. Hence, knowledge and information may explain differences in the identification of heritage not only between experts and residents but also amongst residents.

6. Discussion and concluding remarks

Greece, as in most parts of the world, upholds a system of heritage production that relies on experts and established criteria that is dominated by a concern for the material attributes of the remains of the past, along with their historical significance and age. The country’s preoccupation with its ancient heritage and the markers of the ‘classical’ world is understandable, linked as it is to a distinctive national narrative and importantly to a vital tourism industry that demands the iconic, the highly visible and the accessible. However, this privileging of ancient archaeology has not prevented Greece from slowly embracing other dimensions of its valued past and so the authorised heritage discourse has extended to demarcate the more recent and vernacular heritage forms of ‘traditional’ villages. Unlike the temples and theatres of ancient Greece, this heritage is lived with and lived in and, is intimately linked with the identity of modern, rural Greece. Yet, the designation of selected villages as heritage, and thereby worthy of protection, conservation and management, is framed by the same policy principles that apply to the monuments of the ancient past.

What is revealed in this research is that unlike studies that stress disparities between experts and residents regarding what constitutes heritage⁴⁵, the communities of these villages generally shared the values of the experts as practiced through heritage designation. There is identifiable deference to and influence of, the knowledge of the experts and the educated authority they exhibited in the inscription of the villages as ‘traditional’. There is no resistance, indeed, there is an acceptance of the authoring process through which heritage is produced; a shared understanding that these villages have value by virtue of their architectural identity. The experts’ delineation of heritage value was, by and large, based upon an assessment of the tangible elements of the villages, their aesthetics and architectural and historical significance. Local communities also recognised these elements as having value but often for different reasons. Their reference points for valuation from their everyday engagement with the built environment and the direct and indirect associated memories and personal stories. Indeed, local

⁴⁴ Sutherland et al., “Sustainable Development”; Hardy, “Historical Geography”.

⁴⁵ Hubbard, “The Value of Conservation”; Schofield, *Who needs the experts*.

⁴³ Graham and Howard, *The Ashgate Research Companion*, 4.

accounts of heritage are strongly related to the daily life of these rural communities which identify heritage elements not through the lens of the ‘extraordinary’, architectural and historical significant but through the meanings and continuation of what is viewed as ordinary but characteristic (tangible or intangible, cultural or natural) feature of their settlements, as a result of personal and often trans-generational interaction with it. Hence, heritage plays a dominant role in the character of these rural places. Unlike the experts, the residents were able to provide their own narratives for heritage elements; additional insights into the meanings and significance of the buildings that in effect adds to their value. In similar vein, local people were able to reach beyond the physicality of the heritage and connect it to intangible practices of craft and artisanship. The community is engaged in its own ways of valuing its past, drawing as it does on the functionality of the built environment and linking it to intangible practices that only come through lived experiences. However, differences also exist between members of the same community; mainly between long-stay and short stay residents. The high degree of long stay residents’ rootedness in the area, their involvement in the continuity of certain elements of local lifestyle and as a result the inherited communal memories lead to a whole embedding view about heritage, according to which tangible and intangible elements mingle together composing what is viewed and characterised as ‘traditional’ providing a certain ‘atmosphere’ of the rural living places in the area. On the other hand, short stay residents’ notions of heritage are shaped primarily by their knowledge of the ‘value’ and capacity of architectural heritage in the area, which constitute main reasons for investing in these villages. However, the underlying factor in both cases is the utility-social, economic or emotional-of heritage, which is critical for the lively and sustainable continuation of these rural settlements.

While technocratic views of heritage valuation focused on measurable factors, such as homogeneity, scale and detail, rarity and uniqueness, the community bears witness to the utility of heritage elements. Individual elements have less social utility, thus while the church and market square are valued by experts for their architectural and planning features for the community their value is principally as public goods; spaces for communal activity and meetings. This again reaches into the realm of intangible cultural heritage and the performance of local tradition as practiced by local people.

It is therefore clear that while the outcome of heritage designation may be agreed, the reasons for ascribing value vary. This means that instead of focusing on the dichotomy between official and experienced notions of heritage, or the variations between the lived notions themselves, we can instead argue for complementarity between these ends. This has implications for on-going conservation policy and for the allocation of resources. This organic surfacing of ‘new’ heritage forms, that represent vernacular, progressive and localised values can inform the structures that protect, manage and fund heritage at national level. Indeed, locals can add layers of meaning to the heritage by their sharing of local knowledge relating to intangible aspects and stories that can bring heritage to life. Experts working with locals can co-produce meaningful places for the community and for the visitor, enhancing further the character of these rural villages and the contribution of this living and contemporary heritage to the national narratives of Greek heritage and its diversification. Recognising heritage as an active agent and a potential driving force for the liveability of rural settlements can enhance its appropriate mobilisation, given that the various voices are being heard and the local needs are being respected and met.

Addressing the gap between local and official understandings of heritage this paper suggests that the underlying factors behind both the similarities and differences in heritage selection are not mutually exclusive. The same heritage element is selected simultaneously and by different groups of people but for various reasons. Exploring the wider range of values that underpins heritage delineation within living heritage places can lead to more informed, holistic, inclusive and creative approaches to heritage production and management. Understanding the wider spectrum of values that are practised on a daily basis can help

shape rural conservation policies and elaborate more meaningful approaches for both community and visitor engagement. This understanding may further inform and enrich rural policies, especially those targeting at areas with rich heritage by encountering their cultural value and its potential in conjunction with their agricultural and forestry use, which traditionally have been the focus of such policies. Heritage and its multidimensional utility by local actors may be regarded as an important resource for rural areas, which can potentially lead to the integration of (heritage) conservation and rural policies and a more holistic planning approach towards rural settlements, allowing for a development of an inter-sectorial profile capable of attracting more activities and contributing to their economic and social viability.

The research raises questions regarding the dynamics between the multiple underlying factors for heritage ‘ascription’ and the potential dominance of some of them over others which is subject to further research. While this paper by no means exhaustively addressed all the potential factors that determine official and unofficial notions of heritage in their full depth, it uncovers and synthesises some critical issues in agricultural cultural homogeneous living heritage places, underlying the need for further research on the subject.

Declaration of competing interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.09.012>.

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