

The Revitalization of Mt IDA (Psiloritis) in the Digital Age: A Glocal Approach to Cultural Planning for the Rural Communities of Mt Psiloritis Crete (Greece)

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Abstract In an era where digitalization has become integrated into the real world, it is now feasible for municipalities, communities, cities, and villages to gather the elements that constitute them as cultural entities, with the ability to develop multidimensional perspectives for their human resources. Cultural Planning emerges as a methodological and participatory process aiding authorities, institutions, groups, stakeholders, and citizens in recognizing, safeguarding, and leveraging cultural assets within their regions. By fostering a human-centric approach, this planning framework aims to enhance quality of life and nurture cultural vibrancy. My paper introduces an innovative adaptation of Cultural Planning, originally conceived in urban settings in Europe in the 1960s, to rural areas and cultural landscapes of mountainous Crete, Greece. Focusing on the rural expanse of Mt Psiloritis (Psiloritis UNESCO Geopark) in Crete, mostly characterized by pastoral communities, my study proposes a collaborative roadmap facilitated by Cultural Planning, digital tools, and the strategic exploitation of cultural resources. Embracing a “glocal” approach—balancing global influences with local needs—this model seeks to redefine the socioeconomic dynamics of the region by use of creating the Digital Psiloritis platform.

Keywords Cultural planning, digital culture, rural communities, cultural democracy, cycling economy, social innovation, cultural heritage.

Introduction: the repositioning of culture in a digital-local nexus

The current era has already manifested elements of speed, complexity, and interaction as its structural characteristics. Concepts of space and time nowadays acquire hybrid characteristics with the idea of digitalization spreading as a dominant condition in an ever-expanding, constantly changing social, economic, political, and cultural environment (Schwab and Malleret 2020; Catapoti Oktōvrios 2022).

The approach, management, and handling of COVID-19 have provided valuable insights and studies on a range of issues, prompting a re-evaluation and reframing of matters concerning our overall outlook and approach to life. Simultaneously, the approach to culture has changed, coupled with the cultural and creative sectors, whose activities have transformed almost more than any other sector of the economy.

The rapid decline in cultural activity at the economic level for organizations engaged in such activities is globally contracted by \$750 billion according to a 2021 UNESCO report, compared to 2019, resulting in the loss of approximately 10 million jobs. Similar studies by major organizations such as EY and Deloitte have quantified the reduction in cultural business volume, contributing amid the pandemic to the exploration of recovery methods and the adoption of cultural activity as a genetic substance for future societies (Lhermitte 2021; Kouvidē and Maroulē 2023).

Specifically, as early as November 2020, four significant European organizations presented the manifesto “A Cultural Deal for Europe,” emphasizing the horizontal importance of culture not merely as a sector (sometimes even a sub-sector) but as a vector of positive change, necessitating its integration into all policy areas. From green transition to Europe’s geopolitical ambitions, and from digital transformation to the design of a Union of Values, the concept of culture is now established as the primary determinant and cohesive substance for the recovery of societies, aiming to build a new model of the future Europe (Kouvidē and Maroulē 2023).

The concept and factor of everyday culture now emerges as vital issue for the quality of life of individuals who seek new experiences, knowledge, and perspectives to upgrade their socio-economic life model (Hellmanzik 2022).

Alternative forms of work (remote, digital), education, and digital penetration or integration, dissemination, and networking in our daily lives are now constants of a new reality for which the pandemic is recorded as a historic milestone, the moment of implementation as an intermediary period that served as a lever and accelerator of developments.

Thus, the period of the pandemic and the digital leap into new technologies brought a significant turn in cultural planning and new cultural plans in the post-pandemic era, utilizing cutting-edge technologies (AR, VR, mixed reality, blockchain and NFTs, digital repositories of oral local history, and cultural heritage recordings) to leverage the cultural wealth of the past and sometimes the present with the tools of the future (Hellmanzik 2022).

In today’s digitally expanding world, there is a rich opportunity to rediscover localities, redefining intercultural dialogue. New technologies can act as catalysts, bridging cultural capital with emerging social innovation, posing a contemporary challenge with far-reaching implications. The methodology of cultural planning explored in this paper serves as a guiding framework for communities to construct a tomorrow founded on grassroots efforts, outwardness, and collaboration, with culture at its core.

The cultural planning methodology: a participatory tool of regional transformation, empowering communities for urban regeneration and rural development

Cultural planning stands as a collaborative methodology aimed at reinvigorating urban centers and fostering development in rural areas by harnessing the power of cultural resources, wealth, and activities. It entails a participatory process of identifying and leveraging a community's cultural assets, encompassing its history, art, music, traditions, and natural resources, to drive economic and social progress (Hellmanzik 2022).

Originating in Europe during the 1960s, cultural planning emerged as cities faced the challenges of transitioning from industrial hubs to post-industrial landscapes. It gained momentum in subsequent decades as communities sought innovative strategies for regeneration amid shifting socio-economic dynamics. Initially focused on urban revitalization, cultural planning gradually expanded its scope to include rural development initiatives (Pavlogeorgatos 2018).

By adopting bottom-up approaches and participatory governance models, communities embarked on a journey of self-transformation, repurposing industrial infrastructure into cultural heritage sites and fostering the growth of creative economies. As a modern scientific tool, cultural planning emphasizes the formulation of coherent cultural policies, capacity-building in cultural resource management, and the promotion of citizen well-being. It underscores the qualitative enhancement of everyday life culture, promoting alternative economic models and participatory governance structures.

The methodology encompasses diverse cultural projects, ranging from analytical plans to targeted initiatives tailored to specific sectors or communities. It prioritizes geographical and administrative contexts, stakeholder engagement, and data-driven decision-making, ensuring inclusivity and sustainability. Cultural planning's impact extends beyond urban settings, with successful implementations witnessed in rural regions worldwide. By fostering community engagement, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting entrepreneurship, cultural planning contributes to the sustainable development of rural economies and communities (Pavlogeorgatos 2018).

In my PhD thesis, which focuses on the development of cultural planning methodology for the rural communities of Psilortitis (Crete, Greece), characterized by its rich cultural heritage and natural landscapes, cultural planning holds promise as a catalyst for rural revitalization.

By harnessing local assets and fostering collaboration, it aims to create a model of participatory rural governance that integrates agriculture, tourism, digital innovation, and cultural entrepreneurship. Through strategic partnerships and innovative initiatives, cultural planning seeks to enhance the well-being of rural communities, preserve cultural and natural wealth, and stimulate economic growth. By embracing cultural planning principles, rural areas can unlock their potential as vibrant, sustainable, and resilient communities, enriching the lives of residents and visitors alike.

Creating the digital mountain: Mt Psiloritis as a glocal case study for cultural regeneration

My research delves into the intersection of social innovation and cultural heritage, particularly in the context of rural communities. This exploration is coupled with the development of a novel model of cultural design tailored to rural communities, focusing on the case study of the cultural landscape of the UNESCO Geopark of Psiloritis.

The mountainous communities of Crete at Mt Psiloritis present an initially contrasting case study for cultural planning methodology, as the majority of existing methodologies were primarily developed for urban centers and industrial areas. Hence, this approach signifies a pioneering departure within the region where I both reside and operate professionally, particularly as the founder of Androidus Argastiri (<https://www.androidus.gr/en>), a cultural organization specializing in digital culture. The mountainous communities surrounding the current UNESCO Geopark of Psiloritis, including Mount Psiloritis itself, manifest distinctive mountainous characteristics (altitude, geographical coordinates), socio-economic demographics, and cultural peculiarities within the scope of my research as a network of a unique cultural confederation (see fig. 1).

The originality elements underpinning this research commenced with data collection for the development and establishment of a new cultural plan-management model for Psiloritis within the administrative boundaries covered by the current Geopark.

The anthropogeography of the area, covered by the mountain massif of Psiloritis as the present Geopark, spans an area of 1,272 sq. km, encompassing eight municipalities, 96 settlements, and approximately 40,000 inhabitants, formed the basis for selecting communities based on mountainous criteria as case studies.

Specifically, the mountain communities of Psiloritis I selected and examined through the Geopark of Psiloritis establish a cultural network with similar socio-economic structures and cultural activities within a unified framework of documenting human and cultural resources, as well as specific elements for development and utilization (see fig. 2).

Primarily pastoral and secondarily agricultural, these mountain communities have populations that appear not to be abandoning the area (based on data from ELSTAT census), in contrast to other mountainous regions in Greece where depopulation predominates (see fig. 2).

Simultaneously, within this cluster of mountain communities, there exists a particularly strong and active cultural imprint through iconic archaeological sites, historical monuments, and traditions of a vibrant intangible cultural heritage, which is revitalized through cultural activities and production.

The fundamental absence of new forms of economic activity, prospects for employment in new sectors, modernizing primary production through innovative combinations of primary and tertiary sectors, as well as the upgrading of everyday culture for citizens, constitute a vital triptych of purposes for creating a new model of cultural



Figure 1 Panoramic View of Anogeia Village (Anogeia Municipality), one of the main rural communities of Psiloritis UNESCO Geopark. © Georgios A. Kalomoiris



Figure 2 The drystone pastoral houses in the Psiloritis Geopark region at 1,400 meters altitude. © Georgios A. Kalomoiris

design. This model aims to be digitally designed and locally implemented, developing prospects for interconnection and dissemination.

The new cultural model of the mountain communities of Psiloritis will be based on the development and enhancement of creative production, networking among communities, utilization of cultural and natural environments, and activation of the human potential of the region through international examples.

This cultural heritage, combined with the active human potential of the area, constitutes a reservoir for creative exploration in terms of contemporary cultural entrepreneurship in an interconnection of creators and primary sectors, digital tools, and authentic experiences, gentle forms of tourism, and sustainability.

An outcome of this research is the idea of Digital Psiloritis emerging as an inspiration for creating a multidimensional website and forum where visual, auditory, and written documents, virtual tours, interviews, landmarks, and techniques will be gathered to vividly and contemporarily depict what Psiloritis is from antiquity to the present day.

The concept of the Digital Summit as an initiative to create a Digital Multispace capable of hosting all applications related to the utilization of the cultural heritage of a vibrant mountain with active human activity.

This mountain preserves, through oral tradition and generational succession, cultural elements, traditions, customs, practices, and techniques that can contribute to the creative reconstruction of today with a green imprint, terms of sustainability, circular economy, and new work prospects.

The purpose of this research is to comparatively study international examples in conjunction with the Greek reality, local peculiarities, and the participatory design of involved stakeholders, through the synthesis of a new cultural plan with common goals and collaboration among the different communities surrounding Psiloritis.

This constitutes a developmental field of substantial and creative social dialogue, with outcomes that incorporate the views of the local community, thereby ensuring the necessary consensus in final decisions and the policies that implement them. For this reason, it is understandable that there is no specific form, no ready-made model for implementing cultural planning, but rather a continuous formation of strategic planning with gradual steps, implementation stages, and the core participation of the area's citizens.

These stages must be meticulously crafted with a focus on specific steps, incorporating flexibility and adaptability to accommodate the diverse local conditions and nuances of each community. It is imperative to draw insights from international case studies to inform our approach effectively. At Androidus Argastiri, our role, guided by applied research, is to pioneer the development of digital tools aimed at the preservation, management, and dissemination of our region's cultural heritage through cutting-edge technologies, audio-visual media, and innovative cultural productions. Collaborating closely with esteemed institutions such as the University of Crete, FORTH, and local municipalities, we have spearheaded the creation of ground-breaking applications in virtual and augmented reality, including IDAology (<https://>



Figure 3 A complex of activities and initiatives of Androidus Argastiri in the field of digital culture. © Georgios A. Kalomoiris

idaology.gr/en/home-english/) and MetARTum (<https://metartum.site/en/>) as well as the Adractus Virtual Museum and Oral History Repositories. By intricately piecing together elements from our natural and cultural surroundings like a mosaic, we are shaping the Digital Psiloritis (see fig. 3 and 4).

This endeavor encapsulates a holistic approach, encompassing a network of organizations, initiatives, and dynamic applications that define the mountain's digital presence in the metaverse era. Its overarching objective is to cultivate and nurture an ecosystem characterized by digital architecture, local installations, and translocal connectivity, thereby showcasing the enduring cultural history of the mountain in synergy with local human factors. Local communities, thematic communities, and digital communities are being formed and returning to an open-access discussion and collaboration, harnessing the commons through a revised global-local perspective of things (glocalism, design globally, manufacture locally).

Based on the above context, the common goal of research and implementation via the cultural organization Androidus Argastiri is the utilization and networking of a set of research projects and apps revolving around the documentation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, the connection of craftsmanship and cutting-edge technologies, and the recording of the oral history of the mountainous communities of Psiloritis. This effort aims at preserving, disseminating, and interacting with local culture within a global context.

As a second outcome of my applied research, which operates on the principle of fostering local-to-global engagement, with a central emphasis on the exchange of cultural elements and the facilitation of intercultural dialogue, our efforts are poised to culminate in the inaugural Crete Biennale. Scheduled for August 2025, this landmark event will unfold amid the mountainous communities of Psiloritis.

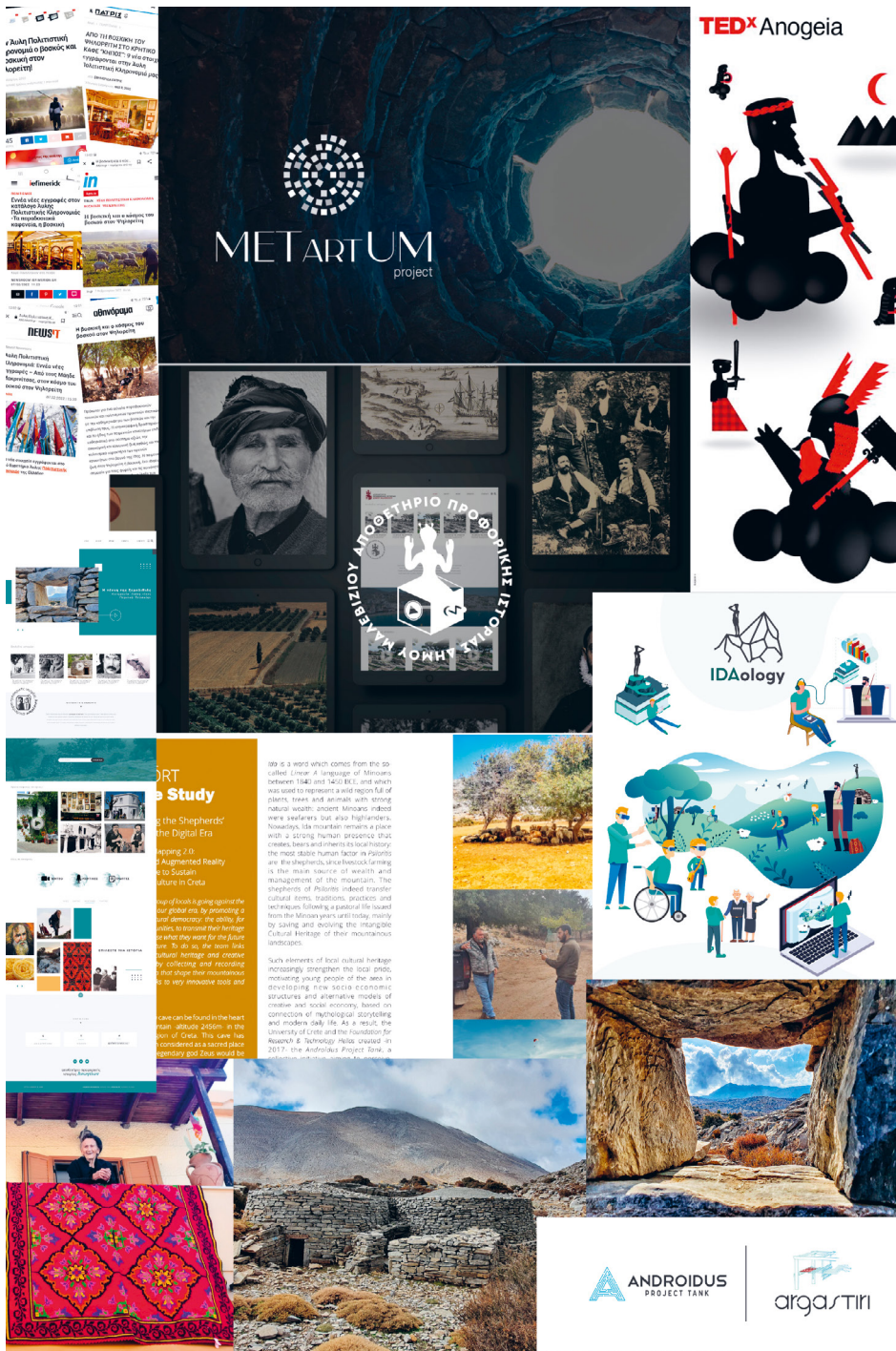


Figure 4 Idaios Adron Cave Archaeological Site (Nida Plateau in Anogeia Municipality) during the Ikesia Festival in 2022. © Georgios A. Kalomoiris

The above initiative symbolizes an active endorsement of rural areas with a vibrant cultural footprint adopting a policy of outward orientation and intercultural exchanges with the rest of the world. Through an open invitation to artists, creators, and artisans from around the globe, space will be provided for inspiration and the creation of artworks that will remain in the region, essentially following the philosophy of the emblematic artistic event of the Biennale.

Inspired by the primal elements of creation such as stone, soil, wood, and wool in interaction with oral history, living cultural heritage, and digital cultural applications, both the Biennale Crete and the Digital Psiloritis emerge as strategic moves in cultural policy at the local and regional levels. Both initiatives of cultural strategy are significant to operate synergistically as accelerators for development and enhancement of creative production, community networking, and the exploration of ways to leverage cultural and natural resources.

Through a combination of research and participatory design, the activation of the region's human potential becomes a top priority, with a focus on international examples and best practices that embody the global-local approach for Psiloritis. With international observation and the domestic dynamism of a human force seeking perspective, the Digital Psiloritis, through the esteemed branding of artistic creation by the Biennale, is crucial to serve as a milestone for establishing the cultural model of the mountainous (rural) communities of Psiloritis.

Conclusions

Cultural planning at the research level and digital culture as an emerging field of work jointly open new prospects as applied research to enhance collaboration and bottom-up participation, reinstating communities as the most favorable new domain for exchanges, diversity, resilience, and development.

Further research shall be undertaken, and first results implemented through the following initiatives:

- a) The creation of a new distinct model of cultural planning in Greek rural communities, with a case study focusing on the cultural landscape and the communities of Psiloritis (Greece, island of Crete).
- b) The establishment of a digital culture platform that aggregates actions and applications primarily designed and implemented by the cultural organization Androidus Argastiri, focusing on showcasing cultural heritage and oral history for the region.
- c) The organization of a large-scale creation exhibition, Biennale Crete, as an open challenge for outwardness and cross-cultural exchange, bringing together artisans and craftspeople from around the world to the Psiloritis region in August 2025.

All of the above represent stages of a philosophy emerging due to research and actions in the field, serving as a bridge between cultural heritage and social innovation in the era of the metaverse, paving the way for glocal approaches.

With selective change and a repositioning of countries on the map of the emerging new era, the prospect of building new glocal networks is dynamically brought back to the agenda through organized local communities, models of participatory governance, and initiatives of cultural democracy at local, regional, national, and even global levels.

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