

Sustainable Landscape and Community on the Greek Island of Tinos

By Maria Vidali*

Abstract

“At the area of Polemou Kampos, land was mainly public and belonged mostly to Isteria and Kalloni communities. There, a man has been constantly buying land; he may be actually a businessman who wants to sell this land to a corporation, presenting himself as an ‘ecologist’. This man is in fact searching for very old contracts when things were not very clear. But, problems of access have started to arise in the area; villagers usually took shortcuts, jumping over the low boundary stone walls of each property to reach their own properties when there was no direct path. Where pathways existed in the past, representing a communal gesture of goodwill on the part of the villagers that had no objection to this kind of communal use, there this man is now putting fences. Purchasing a large part of the land, fencing it and creating enclosures, this man has been blocking villagers’ access and has broken the continuity of the network connecting village land with other villagers’ property. A very new, uncommon situation has started to arise for the villagers of the area, something that alters what existed there before.”¹

Keywords: Socio-Cultural Sustainability, Farming landscape, Village life, Village communities, Sustainable communities

1. Introduction

This research paper examines the farming landscape on the island of Tinos, a landscape that is still sustained because of the village communities but that also faces situations as the one described at the interview above. What does actually sustain this landscape? Tinos’ landscape is a combination of blurred boundaries between natural and man-made features. This situation dates as late back as the 14th century, when travellers often referred to Tinos as the best farmed island of the Cyclades. To allow farming the steep and dry land, hills and mountainous areas had to be landscaped using terraces. Some of these terraces are ancient, but most were created under Venetian rule and expanded after the 18th century when the island fell under Ottoman rule. Heavily populated at that time, the island needed to be intensely farmed in order to cover the daily needs for food, which caused the further expansion of the network of terraces. This paper focuses especially on the farming landscape of the village of Kampos as it is today, at a time when farming no longer holds the same key role in the island’s commercial and cultural life as in the past. Being one of the oldest villages of the island, Kampos is part of the Middle Lands, which consist in mostly catholic villages with rural economies. The land has been divided into small plots allocated to each family member so as to continue the family name in the area but also for those who either farm professionally or produce goods for their family; having a piece of land develops a kind of a connection and bonding with the village area and community. Therefore, the quotation above drawn from an interview reveals what happens when this spatial but also social and ethical situation of small neighbouring plots of land and their network changes.

¹ Interview, Tinos, 20th of February 2015

Within a landscape that seems semi-artificial, land and water boundaries become an essential element for villagers. This ongoing research explores the presence and the negotiation of these boundaries as they lead to understanding ownership and bonding within village culture. The fluidity of most of these spatial boundaries reveals the existence of ethical and emotional limits. The conclusions are tentative as the research is ongoing. However this study of boundaries, which determine ownership in daily practice, leads to seeing boundaries as creating contact zones and spaces of ethics, which sustain village communal life, identity and bonding.

2. The Land Agreement

In the 14th century, we have the first written proof of land ownership on the island. Since that time, hierarchy and land distribution have played a key role in the feudal system prevailing under Venetian rule (1390 - 1715). On Tinos, feudalism was implemented in a different way than in any other area or island, or the rest of Greece and similar countries of the Byzantium. Some of the public land belonged to the feudal lords, who awarded powers at the request of the parties concerned². In 1700, the *legato* -a type of covenant which connected land and ownership with the church- was the first attempt to create some kind of a land registry on the island, at the request of bishop Giustiniani. This established a different reading of the landscape and the land's production. Land fields were described by the seeds and products they were producing. Contracts, *legata* and testaments reveal an understanding of the value of the land, at the time they were compiled.

On the other hand, neighbours still in our days create the boundaries of owned land, while also defining the area of the village community and its boundaries. The meaning of good neighbour in land/ *siblios* - as characteristically commonly referred to in the island talking about land - is as important as water, considering that there have always been agreements between the neighbours that stone walls cannot define. The agreements could involve the permission to pass through the neighbour's land if there was not a pathway attached to the farmer's land, could also involve collaboration in terms of farming, or co-operation where boundary walls are destroyed by passing herds of animals or weather conditions. An unwritten law applies in that case: when the supporting wall of a terrace located at a higher level than another terrace collapses because of heavy winter rainfall, then the wall must be rebuilt by the owner of the land on the higher level. His or her neighbour can help him or her recreate together their boundaries, but only if this is his or her will. When the properties stand at the same level, then both land owners need to rebuild their common wall together. When the boundaries of a land ownership are unclear, when there are doubts as regards a property because of usurpation³, then the oldest man of the village is called in to confirm the boundaries and the ownership of the land.

The fact that the stone walls of each property do not necessarily point to a "fixed boundary" since further verbal agreements needs to follow most of the times allows the creation of a contact zone, an intermediate space of communication, a space of conflict and agreement. The owners need to conclude an agreement. The flexible in some cases boundaries create a threshold of communication, a different need for claim of ownership, which extends to villagers' everyday life, but also creates a situation of coexistence and cohabitation. True stories as narrated by Kampos' villagers talk about how conflicts and agreements on disputed and indefinable boundaries or village common land create a different type of bonding/ownership for the villagers not only with

² Marcos Foskolos, Tinian Issues, Volume 3, The land registry of Tinos' churches and the records of their *legata*, AKT, Code 4, Filippotis editions, 1998, p.18

³ This is about the law of the 20 years about the usurpation, which was saying that if someone was using a piece of land for 20 years without the proof that it belongs to someone else during this 20 years, then he or she can claim it as being his or her land.

their land, but also with the area of their village.

3. The Water and Air Agreement

Moreover, the use of water in the village unravels a similar situation. In Kampos, there is private, communal and public water; water as a boundary creates a different situation each time. In the water narrative, water first appears as a communal good in the village, a place where nowadays women wash their carpets or heavy fabrics at the laundry rooms [*phystres*] of the village. Leaving the core of the village houses behind us, we find water tanks and hoses along the pathways dividing the gardens and the fields. Those are connection hoses to the village's central water spring that establish a time relationship with water for as long as the connection remains and express the private use of water in everyday life.

The common understanding of water as property in the village, but also as “a common good”, not measured as matter but as time -in the contracts and covenants-, but also the creation of conflicts and agreements create another discourse regarding ownership. The different perception of time in relation to the ownership of water creates conflicts and agreements both in the private and communal use of water in the village. This discourse involves conflicts and agreements based on the prolonged used of the flow of water, beyond the time limits set by each owner's contract. A different situation of ownership unfolds with the ownership of “air” as right to use in the village, related to a communal space of the village. The new village square had been donated to the village association and was constructed with the voluntary work of the villagers. Until 1996, the village did not have a square; villagers would meet at a plateau of the street, an open space called *chorefta* or dancing area. The recent claim of a local businessman to buy the “air value” or the “right to use the air” of the new square, open a coffee shop and put tables and chairs on the square raised a big controversy among villagers. In terms of law, this project was not possible, unless it would be based on a broad-based consensus, as evidenced by the villagers' own signatures. The Municipality that had initially caused the issue refrained from interfering in the controversy and stalled its decisions for reasons of political cost. A large portion of the villagers claimed that the square, as a public space, had been created by them and it belonged to the village, as they said. The square might be empty during the day, but on feasts everyone could be there. Who would be the actual owner of the “air” of the new open square? The land boundaries of the new square were clear, but the lack of “airspace” boundaries created the need to claim ownership. At the end of summer, on the day of the Honey Festival, the air smells honey, a communal smell that escapes through the open windows of village houses. On that summer day, the women of the village work together in the kitchen of the communal hall [*leschi*] of the village so as to prepare delicacies and sweets made of local honey. They clean the village together and they bake and decorate their last honey sweets together. Everything must be ready to welcome the visitors on the night of the feast. That night the village air vibrates with the smell of honey and the sounds of music, folk dancing, clapping and laughing. On the day of the preparation of the honey festival, the public and private boundaries of village life blend in, while the communal space in Kampos, through the concept of missing ownership because of lack of air boundaries, becomes a space of identity for the village community.

4. The Village Network Agreements on Animals and Cultivations

Most of the inhabitants of the village own an animal. Although professional farmers living at the village are principally three and their herd consists of 15 to 17 cows producing 100-150 pounds of milk per day, most of the villagers have animals too. Their day starts at 5 am, both in winter and summer time. By 6 am, the stables must be clean and the cows ready for

'transportation', as they say. The animals must be guided from the fields, an area far away from the village, their grazing place, to the nearest village stalls to be fed and milked. After this ends, the herd will 'move back' to its original location. The farmer will also 'move' to another direction, feed the sheep and then return to his house and rest. At 4 pm, he will repeat the same routine again, another 'transportation' of the cows from the fields to the stables so as to be fed and milked.

During this daily procedure of "transportation" -which the farmer will repeat in the afternoon after taking care of his garden and crops- there is constant movement, not necessarily within the village boundaries, as village boundaries become blurry depending on the farmer's daily needs. However, this daily itinerary creates a bond with his plants, his animals and the land he is headed to in his daily route. On the other hand, when animals cross the low stone wall among the properties and reach the neighbours's fields and eat the grass, a huge conflict may arise that may lead to court or to a series of agreements among the villagers. The crossing of spatial boundaries of a property can give rise to huge controversies and discourses among villagers.

In the afternoon, the farmer goes to rest, only to repeat the process of transporting his animals again later in the afternoon. Kampos' farmed land produces a small amount of crops for use in the family, although the farming method respects an organised, annual schedule similar to the one followed by professional farmers, such as the ones in the village of Komi.

Farming establishes a different understanding of the landscape as space. "Each farmer has 4-5 plots of land, which means a distance of 15 minutes to 2 hours to move from one to another."⁴ This is because the property of each family is divided into small pieces spread all over the landscape surrounding the village. The farmer has to follow a specific route everyday to reach his land.

Working with nature, which in terms of the island and the village's setting means dry land and lack of rain, the farmer appears to be nurturing everyday a perpetual bond with what he can actually never own, nature. They constantly work on the earth: farmers follow an annual schedule for sowing each plant, wait for the rain, plan fallows for their land, share machinery, share their water, share their land and establish agreements with people who own wells to be provided with water, offering them farming products in return. All these activities are based on the need to farm. Boundaries become permeable by farmers to allow them own the products of nature, to allow them have their wine, their olive-oil, their vegetables and fruits. That is probably why there is a tacit acceptance that everything must be created through a process of constant making -even if people are using agricultural machinery to farm their lands. The surface area is though never big enough to accommodate a proper tractor and smaller machinery cannot perform all the work that needs to be done.

"Everything comes from the earth and the sea: the bread, the vinegar, the olive-oil, everything needs work in order to be produced. Only God speaks and creates, man needs to make", says Marcos, an old farmer of Kampos. Although living at a time when everything is available at the supermarket, they dedicate their time and effort to plan well their own production of vegetables, vinegar, wine and olive-oil. People often say "Do whatever you can in order not to sell you land, but pass it on to the next ones", meaning younger family members. This represents a different way to connect with nature and the passing of time, but also confirms the boundaries of their properties and connects them with the continuity of their family name in time. In an effort to own the products of nature, village boundaries disappear in villagers' everyday itineraries, their house and family name extend to the fields, water and land boundaries at their property merge to ensure a bountiful production.

⁴ Presentation of the agronomist Ioannis Aspromougos, Tinos, September 2011

5. The Village Religious Life and the Imaginary Life

However, a different set of boundaries are negotiated and emerge on the day of the village's religious festival. This is the day when women of the village "open up" the doors of their house to welcome the village's community and other guests who have come to join the village celebration, to share a festive meal at the houses of the village.

A few days before the feast of the patron Saint of the village, St. Trinity/*Agia Triada*, village streets are cleaned and painted with white lime; so are the exterior walls of the church. On the day of the festival, the church and the streets are decorated with flowers. The mass involves a procession of priests, villagers and visitors, passing by the broadest, but still small streets of the village. After the end of the procession and the mass, selected houses of the village (whose owners wanted to offer festive meals) are ready to welcome their friends, relatives, neighbours, fellow villagers, villagers from other communities, as well as strangers who visit the village on that day. Both guests and hosts know that guests have to visit all the "open houses" of the village, sit on every house's table and savour their festive meals. The priest of the village will make his turn on each and every one of the "open houses" to bless the meal. This meal involves a particular menu and particular food decorations. Boundaries of privacy dissolve and communal and religious bonds are revealed to express the identity of the village through the celebrations for its patron saint.

A similar feast also takes place to celebrate the outlying chapel of St. Georgios, which is located among the fields of the village. On the day that the outlying chapel of St Georgios celebrates its patron saint, a similar procession connects the village with the fields and its surrounding areas. Among private properties of land, the outlying chapel of St Georgios, like other chapels that belong to the church or private owners, marks a specific un-objectifiable boundary on Kampos' landscape. The fact that outlying chapels are always located within nature, outside the limits of the village's settlement, but connected via routes with the core of the village, creates a bond and a sense of identifying with the unknown land of the village area and landscape.

On the other hand, there are different sort of stories, which were once "animating" the daily lives of village people, when after the dusk they all gathered at the "*chorestra (dancing space)*" of the village. There was no electricity or lights at the time. Today's story-tellers, just children at the time, were afraid to return home alone. Nowadays, children listen to those stories but do not reproduce them. Imaginary stories, setting in time a particular space and time outside the boundaries of the residential area of the village, are connected to fairies and death. As boundaries start to dissolve by the silence of nature and the darkness, stories like that come to connect the space of the village with an unknown boundary, which nobody owns; the village this time becomes a shelter for its community. Boundaries between the real and imaginary world are weaved at the borderline between village houses and nature. Nevertheless, fictional stories always gave away hints to true stories, such as black market deals made at the edges of the village, secret love stories and love affairs, but also served as a way to keep children close to their village as a nest.

As Ingold says, "*Only because they already dwell therein, can they think the thoughts they do.*"⁵ As a part of the natural world and the unknown, real or imaginary stories come to knit another definition for the village beyond its actual structure and physical dimension and sustain another form of bonding among its inhabitants.

⁵Tim Ingold, *The perception of the Environment, Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, p.186

6. Ending Remarks/ Conclusions

The village of Kampos emerges as a living organism formed through the daily discourse about the existence or lack of boundaries, seen through the lens of property and ownership, but also in the sense of bonding and living together. This finding indicates the lack of clear boundaries, which creates an in-between space of communication, as well as claims and agreements among farmers. In fact, spatial boundaries are clear and solid, but when inherited by the offspring of a family, conflicts arise in the process of defining the boundaries of their individual portions of land. However, the life of the village as a living organism generates the need to negotiate different sort of boundaries. The small plots of land, the water shared in terms of time, the claim of air as the right to use, the village network with its religious and imaginary life create a spatial, social and ethical network of a series of boundaries and contact zones, which still today sustain the community life and farming landscape of the village. These observations tend to support the claim that there is a space “in-between”, which often appears where the lack of a physical boundary is replaced by social, ethical or even emotional boundaries.

Using the methodology of archival, research work on the history and anthropology of Tinos, complemented by observation and a series of interviews and local narratives, this research focuses on the boundary connected with ownership through daily practice, as revealed by official and unofficial narratives.

In support of the findings, Steinberg argues that “[...] *the law of property penetrates everywhere in the realm of daily affairs. It is for example, deeply implicated in our sense of place.*”⁶ It appears that ownership in the sense of place is deeply rooted and connected with very essential, cultural elements of our daily life. Furthermore, Fustel De Coulanges claims that: “*There are three things which from the most ancient times, we find founded and solidly established in these Greeks and Italian societies: the domestic religion; the family and the right of property - three things which had in the beginning a manifest relation, and which appear to have been inseparable.*”⁷ Kampos villagers sustain the rural context of their region supporting property, religion and family. Focusing on the meaning of boundaries as contact zones, the complexity of the village life and the way this is sustained through daily routine as this takes place in the village core and rural landscape are revealed.

Selected Bibliography

Foreign Bibliography

- Coen, Enrico, *Cells to Civilizations, The Principles of Change that Shape Life*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2012)
- De Certeau, Michel, *The practice of the every day*, Translated into Greek by Kapsambeli Kiki, (Smili Publications, 1990)
- De Coulanges, Fustel, edited by Ashley W.J., M.A., translated by Ashley Margaret, *The origin of property in land*, (Messrs. George Allen & Company, Ltd., London, 1902)
- De Coulanges Fustel, translated from the latest French edition by Small Willard, *The ancient city: A study on the religion, laws, and institutions of Greece and Rome*, (Third Edition, Lee and Shepard, Boston, Charles T. Dillingham, New York, 1877)
- Detienne, Marcel and Vernant, Jean-Pierre. *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, translated into Greek by Papadopoulou Ioanna, (Daidalos, Zacharopoulos Publications, Athens, 1993)
- Dubisch, Jill, *Gender & Power in Rural Greece*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1986)

⁶ Theodore Steinberg, *Slide mountain or the folly of owning nature*, University California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles, London, 1995, p.9

⁷ De Coulanges Fustel, translated from the latest french edition by Small Willard, *The ancient city: A study on the religion, laws, and institutions of Greece and Rome*, Third Edition, Lee and Shepard, Boston, Charles T. Dillingham, New York, 1877, p.80

- Hanson, Davis Victor, *The Other Greeks, The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization*, (The Free Press, 1995)
- Haraway J. Donna, *When species meet, Post Humanities, volume 3*, (University of Minnesota Press, Mineapolis, London, 2008)
- Illich, Ivan, *H2O and the waters of forgetfulness, Reflections on the Historicity of "Stuff"*, (The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, Dallas, United States of America, 1985)
- Ingold, Tim, *The perception of the Environment, Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*, (Routledge, London and New York, 2000)
- Roset M. Carol, *Possession as the Origin of Property*, Article, (The University of Chicago Law Review, v52 n1 (19850101))
- Sennette, Richard, *Together, The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, (Yale University Press, new Heaven & London, 2012)
- Steinberg, Theodore, *Slide mountain or the folly of owning nature*, (University California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles, London, 1995)

Greek Bibliography

- Georgantopoulos, Epam. (1885), Introductory note - Index, edited by Sofianos Z. Dimitrios, Damirali N.M., translated from French, *History of the Cyclades*, Athens, Perris publishing, *Tinian issues, or ancient and contemporary geography and history of the island of Tinos*, (Athens, 2005)
- Dorizas, Georgios, *Ancient Tinos*, Part One (Athens, 1974)
- Dorizas Georgios, *Medieval Tinos*, Part Two (Athens, 1970)
- Dorizas Georgios, *Tinos during the Turkish Empire and the War*
- Lamnatos, Vassilis, *Months in our people's rural and pastoral life* (Dodoni publications, Athens-Ioannina, 1987)
- Loukatos S. Dimitrios, Introduction to Greek Folklore, Third edition, (National Bank Educational Institute, Athens, 1985)
- University of Thessaly, *Claiming back the countryside; nature and practices in contemporary Greece*, (Indictos publications, 2009)
- Sarafi, N. Ekaterini, *Tinos, Maps - Costumes*, (Diatton publishing, 2008)

Greek periodicals

- Giannisopoulou, Maria, *Tinos, the island of contrasts; a challenge for the researcher*, *Tiniaka Symmeikta*, Period B – Issue 1 (April -June 2000)
- Tiniaka Symmeikta*, A quarterly periodical publication on the research of the history and culture of Tinos, Period B-Issue 8, (April-June 2007)

