

Paxos - 2004



Bert Kisjes

This year the island Paxos will leave its impression on the movement Cultural Village of Europe. We had a taste of it on the opening conference of april 16th through 18th.

On Paxos I noticed a few things. I was once again fully conscious of how different the twelve villages are. The pluriformity of the world of the villages was once again very clear. When I said so at the opening conference on Paxos I got the impression that this insight was shared by the villagers present. And that everyone thought these differences interesting.

But at the same time it turns out that many problems, despite these differences, are very similar and that it is useful to hear the solutions. But there is no impulse to force solutions on one another. Everyone knows that you need to use what and who is available locally. And the people and circumstances are different everywhere.

Pluriformity is currently a value that is being claimed by modern western culture. In a scientific report of the Council for Government Policy of the Netherlands, that appeared in 2003, this pluriformity is called one of the most important values of western culture.

The Orthodox church is functioning on Paxos. There are four priests on the island. There are as many priests as police officers. During the opening ceremony the priest was the first person spoken to. After him the members of parliament and the governor.

Paxos has 2500 inhabitants, as many as Wijk aan Zee does. Wijk aan Zee has one supermarket, one flower shop, one news agent and two souvenir shops. That's it. Paxos has a large number of shops and small independent entrepreneurs. You get the impression that every family is a small independent enterprise. And such a family lives from this. This means that there is hardly any unemployment. The large store chains know how to seduce people from Wijk aan Zee into shopping at their big markets, making small stores not viable even relatively far from the big stores. On Paxos a large store cannot be sustained and the island is an interesting example of how things develop in our time when there are no big stores in the area.

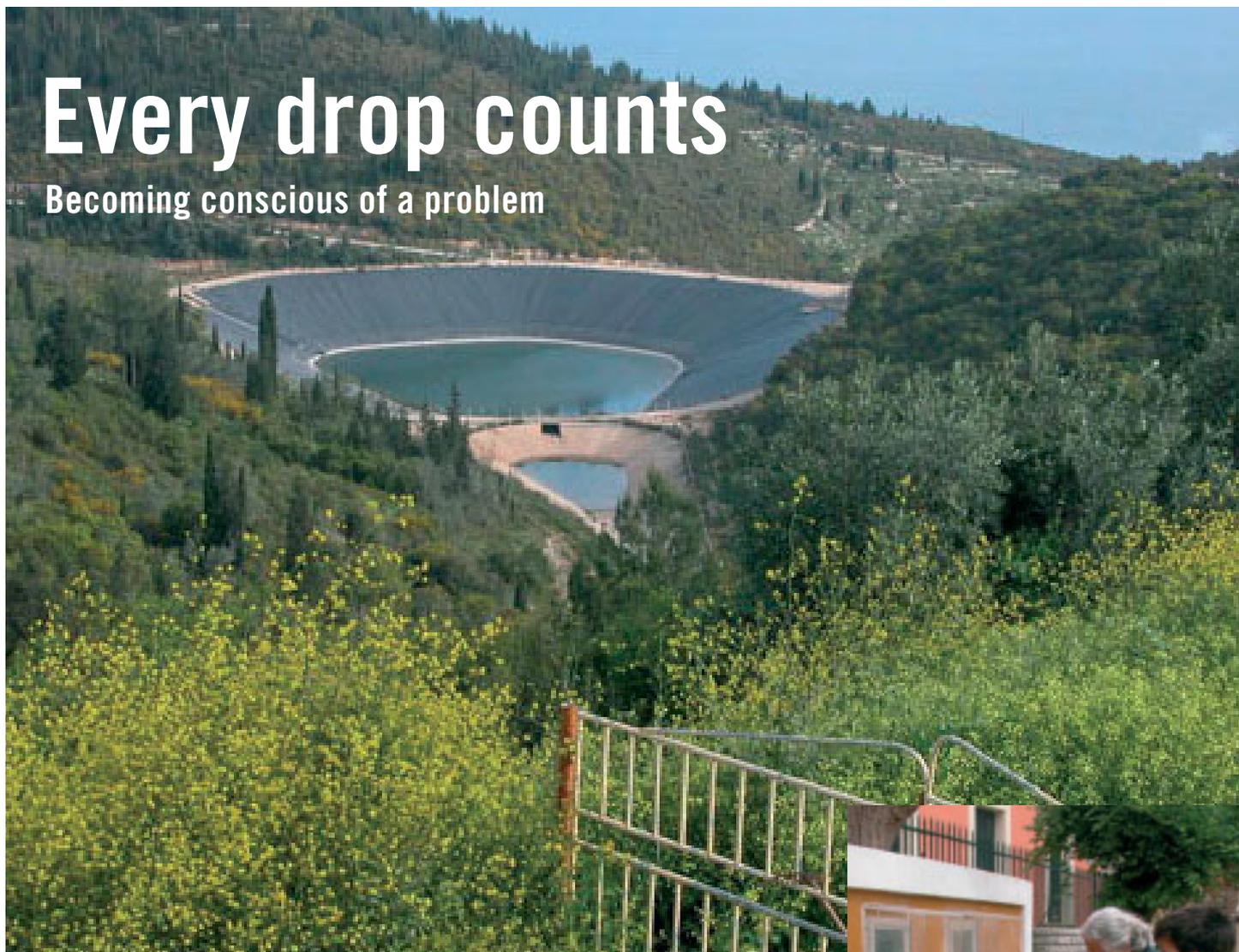
On Paxos I found several people who went to Corfu or Athens after their secondary school to enroll in high school or university. After their studies they returned to the island. To them, life on the island with all its limitations was more attractive than life in a metropolis. That is an important fact for villages. Some are involved in the villages' government now.

We came to Paxos after a long journey. Only from may until september there are direct connections to Corfu. We had to fly to Corfu via Athens. We spent the night there in a hotel to take a boat (maximum 30 passengers) to Paxos the next day. After an hour and a half on the boat we arrived at Paxos. An island, to many people, is synonymous with isolation. But here, all the European flags were out. The island turned out to be a lively center that had invited all of Europe.



Every drop counts

Becoming conscious of a problem



The water stock of the island

Public water place

Jan de Wildt

Water is something to think about. That much was clear on the opening conference of Cultural Village 2004 Paxos. On the island, with its rocky soil and relatively little rain, people noticed this long ago, but in large parts of Western Europe people unthinkingly turn on the faucet. There is no doubt that there is drinking water. On a global scale this is very different: three billion people on earth have too little drinking water or the water they do have is not too fit for drinking. It is a number that, because of its magnitude, defies imagination. But it is also clear, that water facilities have become vitally important in large parts of the world.

The villages of the circle of Cultural Village have often spoken about the theme of 'water' and reduced it to a small and overseeable scale, so people can be persuaded to dealing with water consciously.

Very different experiences were related at the Paxos conference. To mention the extremes: in Paxos, in the tourist season, water has to be hoarded, while Austrian Kirchheim has so much water that it uses it to make snow for skiers.

The contribution from Spanish Porrúa emphasized the inhabitants' participation in water facilities. In many countries it has become a business-like enterprise, far removed from the people. However, many countries, including Holland, Germany Denmark and England called for continuing involvement of the state in water facilities. In various countries good ways have been found to combine government control with efficient organization. The French contribution emphasized the environment. The pollution of surface waters is a direct threat to drinking water systems, despite progressing technologies of filtering and purification. Bystré and Killingi Nömme chose to use the great significance of water to human existence by speaking about it lovingly and poetically. In the Estonian language there are 28 different words for water. The significance of water cannot be stated more to the point.

An important part of the conference was taken care of by the Greek division of the World Wildlife Fund. This organization—usually associated with protecting panda bears and other endangered species—has launched a large campaign to



encourage dealing more consciously with water. This meant leaving pamphlets at all pumps in Paxos with tips to save water. Many a conference goer has consciously turned off the faucet while brushing his teeth. It is like so often: it has to start small to become big. Every drop counts and there is no better place to start than in a village, where small things naturally turn out to be of great importance.



Short notices

Passport

Cultural Village in Brittany has presented its passport on Paxos. The passport is meant as an encouragement to travel along all twelve villages. All twelve villages have their own page. People should get a stamp in their passport when they visit a village.

The passport is available at the organisation in Mellionec (address: Mairie 22110 Mellionec; fax 02 96 24 21 13; e mail: mellionec@villages-culturels.com)

Planting trees in Estonia

In Estonia we started the campaign - to plant by volunteers 1 million young trees during 2-3 weeks. We have many forests, but during last 15 years we have cut many of them, now we need to recultivate many areas. Even the people from the bigger towns take part in this action, among them the people of Kilingi-Nõmme too.

Chess education

Schachdorf Ströbeck is working diligently on a compromise about the chess education in its school. They are investigating whether the number of hours dedicated to chess education can be maintained, but in lower classes than before.

Kilingi Nõmme in 2005

On the Paxos conference Kilingi Nõmme declared that it prefers to concentrate the activities in Kilingi Nõmme in the period of may through august as much as possible, when the weather allows events outside.

Wine festival Palkonya

The tenth wine festival in Palkonya takes place on may 30th. Everyone is welcome. It is the most

popular festival in the village. It takes place on Pentacost sunday. The festival with open wine cellars is organised by the inhabitants and the village government. There are wine tasting areas, a children's programme, carriage turns and a barbecue.

Night of Europe

Wijk aan Zee is preparing a big welcoming feast for the countries being admitted to the European Union. On June 12th/13th, on the village meadow, the Night of Europe will be celebrated with lots of music. We are expecting about 500 guests from the ten new countries. And everyone is bringing musicians. The festival will start and end with a grand meal.

Paxos in the press

We managed to gather so far 3 pieces from local (Corfu) newspapers, one from a national one, one in a national magazine (with political, social and cultural interests), one in a Corfu magazine (about things to do and see in Corfu) and a photographic piece at a tabloid with pictures of our beautiful new Parliament member Mrs Angela Gerekou photographed among the all smiling girls of the Dancing Team of the Paxos Cultural Society.

All the articles in the newspapers covered fully the weekend activities and tried to describe the goals and aims of the "Cultural Villages of Europe" Organization. They were all quite accurate and to the point and all very positive. They were accompanied by photos of either the conference or of the visit at the archeological site, the Sunday festivities with all the officials etc. The magazine articles spoke mostly of the Organization in general, its aims and its history. One of the local

newspapers is going to print a follow up with larger articles about the April weekend and the Organization in general in May.

Faye

People, dances, trees and water

Paxos was really wonderful, specially the people and their dances. I liked the areas with old olive trees, thanks to them is the island so green.

I hope that people will not cut them, even if they do not produce olives. Tourism is very important, but its very good to maintain the island not over-civilized; not to allow to build big hotels and other attractions. About water - I understood that in Estonia we do not value our water enough.

Kalle Kiipus

CULTURAL VILLAGE of EUROPE

Colophon:

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Perfect hospitality



Jan de Wildt

With the mayors' conference last april 16th through 18th Paxos - Cultural Village of Europe 2004 - has set the tone for the next year. The village representatives, who will visit the island in the coming months, can be assured of perfect hospitality. The inhabitants of the island are naturally tuned to their role as host. The harbor of Gaios lies, as it were, waiting expectantly for any stranger, who will soon feel right at home amongst the small-scale shops, restaurants and guesthouses. Paxos is one big invitation to meeting people, certainly at the start of the tourist season when all is being set in motion.



Procession

The natural hospitality - a highly valued asset in the Charter of the Villages - is one of Paxos' strong points, but it is also its Achilles' Heel. Some 200.000 tourists come to the island each year and it is doubtful whether, with so many people visiting, the scale and intimacy can be preserved. Too Many and Too Big are the natural enemies of a village and also of Paxos. The human measure that we find so emphasized in the island's facilities, is a quality that cannot disappear.

Like most other villages in the circle of Cultural Village Paxos, too, has some government issues

to resolve. A small staff under the enthusiastic leadership of mayor Spiros needs to know about many things, but cannot exist without the support of regional government. Facilities are costly on an island. The governmental center of Paxos lies on the island Corfu, an hour and a quarter away by boat. Economically, however, Paxos is mainly dependent on the mainland, and a ferry exists to carry people to and fro. The connection to Corfu is much more vulnerable. You can get there only by using small boats or water taxi's which do not have regular schedules. There is now an initiative from some people at Paxos to start a ferry to Corfu.

Taking care of everything themselves as much as possible is characteristic of the island inhabitants, who know how to use the informal and short circuits between inhabitants and government.

It is one of the many initiatives of the island government, that also values culture highly. Education on the island - both primary and secondary - are now concentrated in one place. The school buildings thus remaining empty have been fixed up magnificently, turned into a museum, artist's workshop or gallery. Important archaeological sites are cherished by the island's government. The imposing fortress off the coast of Gaios has been opened to visitors and offers an interesting glimpse into the rich history of the island, that has known many foreign conquerors.

In all villages on the island there are beautiful small churches, cared for lovingly.

A remarkable aspect of Paxos is certainly the small scale economy. While in many villages shops are disappearing, in all village centers on



Oliveyard

the island there is an abundance of different shops, run by families. Olive oil production is of course the pride of the island. It has become a vulnerable branch of the economy because of falling prices on the European market. It is thus tempting to use land, meant for olive trees, for building tourist accommodation. The olive groves, so characteristic for the island, are eroded because of this.

Hospitality, cultural heritage, short-circuit democracy, small-scale economy; these are important elements from the Charter of the Villages. Paxos embodies these vividly and that will certainly inspire visitors from other villages.