

Energy Investments, Historic Environments and Local Communities: Lessons from the Greek Experience

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ABSTRACT

Renewable energy investments are high on the political agenda of Greece, in an attempt to comply with the EU regulations and trends and also as a potential outlet from the current financial crisis. However, local communities, especially those in historic environments, keep a negative attitude, often causing the cancellation of major investments.

This presentation examines the impact of renewable energy investments to the historic environment in relation to the attitude of the local communities, using a variety of case studies from Greece.

The aim is to provide a theoretical methodology as well as practical steps of a broader applicability on how a renewable energy investment can succeed, respecting the historic environment and engaging the local communities.

KEYWORDS

Renewable energy investment; heritage conservation; historic environment; local community; community involvement; Greece

RENEWABLE ENERGY INVESTMENTS, HISTORIC ENVIRONMENTS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES: THE GREEK CONTEXT

Renewable energy investments (henceforth cited as REI) are high on the political agenda of Greece, in an attempt to comply with the EU regulations and trends and also as a potential outlet from the current financial crisis. As the Prime Minister of Greece has stated,

‘a planned long-term policy for the promotion of the Renewable Energy Sources and for the gradual detachment from oil and conventional fuels, in parallel with the creation of new business opportunities and employment positions, consists a strategic objective’ (Papandreou 2011).

REIs in historic environments in Greece are controlled by a strict legislative framework. The ownership, as well as the protection, of the monuments and sites within the territory of Greece recognised as national heritage is in the hands of the state (Greek Government 1975, article 24; Greek Government 2002). Heritage protection aims at ‘the safeguarding of [the monuments’] material substance and their authenticity’ (Greek Government 2002, article 40). The responsibility for heritage protection lies in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism; even in the cases that other government bodies (such as the Ministry for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works) are also involved, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism retains the final responsibility. Heritage protection is centrally administered: the Ministry sets the policy, while the local offices deliver this policy at local level (Ministry of Culture 2003; Greek Government 2002, articles 49-50). Heritage protection has to be taken into account and incorporated within any REI (as with any type of urban, environmental and development project), in the context of sustainable social and economic development of the local communities and in accordance with the principles of ‘integrated’ and ‘holistic’ conservation (Greek Government 2002, article 3; the ratified by the Greek state Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, known as the Granada Convention: Council of Europe 1985; and the ratified in 2010 by the Greek government European Landscape Convention: Council of Europe 2000). On this basis, a REI presupposes the conduct and acceptance of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

At a practical level, the conduct of an Environmental Impact Assessment faces a number of difficulties. The guidelines on the criteria that comprise the ‘material substance and authenticity’ of the monuments (see above) and on the ways to safeguard it are lacking. There is no complete national archive of the listed monuments, and a large number of listed monuments remains unpublished to date. The responsibilities of the differing government bodies involved, as well as the cooperation between the investor with the Greek government bodies and the local communities, remain unclear (on a more detailed account of the difficulties: Konsola 2004).

Despite this rather difficult context for the planning of REIs, certain projects succeed in moving on to the stage of implementation, only to face a usually negative attitude on the part of the local communities, often resulting in considerable delays and even the cancellation of the projects.

RENEWABLE ENERGY INVESTMENTS, HISTORIC ENVIRONMENTS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES: EXAMPLES FROM GREECE

The Acheloos River Diversion Scheme close to St George Monastery at Myrofyllo, Prefecture of Trikala

The Acheloos River Diversion Scheme intends to divert water to irrigate the cotton crops of the region of Thessaly. The full scheme calls for the construction of a major diversion channel, two tunnels, a water intake system, and also a hydroelectric power station, with a series of large dams being built by the Public Power Corporation of Greece (DEH).

The Scheme has been restrained several times by the Council of State [the highest court in Greece] for several reasons, as for example: in 1994 on the grounds that an integrated Environmental Impact Assessment for the full scheme was required, instead of various Environmental Impact Assessments for smaller, individual parts of the scheme (Garozzi 2000); in 2000 on the grounds of the destruction of important historic monuments in the area, principally St George Monastery at Myrofyllo. The story is as follows: St George Monastery is a 17th-century monastery that is no longer living, in the sense that it does not host a monastic community. The monastery is operated by the local community on certain occasions every year (eg. on the feast day of the patron saint). The monastery also has a symbolic value, given the role it played in the Greek Revolution (1821-1832). The Environmental Impact Assessment had referred to the Monastery, but had considered its archaeological value not significant and had not taken into account its symbolic value. Thus, the flooding of the monastery, as a result of the construction of one of the dams, was proposed as unavoidable for the implementation of the Scheme. The Ministry of Culture and all the government bodies involved gave their consent because the Scheme was considered vital for the development of the region, and the Scheme was about to start being implemented. However, after the intervention initially from environmental NGOs and then from the local community, the Council of State decided that alternative options that would save the Monastery should be considered (Garozzi 2000). Therefore, the initial plans had to change, with the proposal for the construction of a protective wall around the monastery (Konsola 2004).

The operation of a Wind Park near Hosios Meletios Monastery, Prefecture of Boiotia

Hosios Meletios Monastery, founded by Hosios Meletios the Younger, dates back to the 12th century and is associated with the reformation of the monastic life in Greece. Today it continues to function as a living monastery.

A proposal for the construction of a Wind Park in an area near the Monastery was approved by the Ministry of Culture on the grounds of its considered sufficient distance from the monument and the avoidance of any considerable optical disturbance to the monument, and was completed. However, the monastic community argued that the noise generated by the wind engines hindered them from the conduct of their religious rituals and their everyday-life duties, and called for the cessation of the operation of the Wind Park. The view of the monastic community was supported by an NGO. The Council of State decided the cessation of a number of the wind engines, something that would decrease the noise generated (pers. comm. Stelios Lekakis; pers. comm. Eirini Gratsia).

Proposal for the construction of a Wind Park on Gyaros Island, Prefecture of Cyclades

Gyaros is a small, arid and unpopulated island. It was a place of exile for leftist political dissidents in Greece mostly during the Greek Civil War and the Greek military junta (in various periods between 1948 and 1974). The main prison building and ruins of the camps are still to be seen. The symbolic value of the island is vivid and strong. The former prisoners and their friends have established an association for the safeguarding of the memory of the place, 'Gyaros Historical Memory', and once a year pay tribute to their departed colleagues by visiting the island and holding a ceremony in the cemetery. In 2001 the entire island, including the remaining structures, was listed as a historic place of memory, associated with the struggles of the Greek people for freedom and democracy.

In 2009 a proposal for the construction of a Wind Park on the island, specifically on a part of the island where there are no remaining structures, was submitted to the Ministry of Culture. It seems that the proposal had the silent consent of the Municipality of Syros [to which the island belongs]. The proposal met the strong disagreement of the 'Gyaros Historical Memory' Association. The Ministry of Culture rejected the proposal on the grounds of the effect on the symbolic value of the island as a whole (Myrilla 2010; pers. com. Stelios Lekakis).

The construction of a Wind Park on Naxos Island, Prefecture of Cyclades

A proposal for the construction of a Wind Park on Naxos Island was approved by the Ministry of Culture, and the project began. The transferring of the wind engines to the area of interest was conducted without any prior study, causing the destruction of non-listed roads and bridges at the village of Chalkeios and having a relatively minor effect upon the surrounding environment of the listed aerial railway (Naxos Blog 2008). The local community did not react, at least in an active way, while the Ministry of Culture missed the incident, and thus the project moved on. In the opposite case, it is not certain under what circumstances and whether in the first place the project would have proceeded.

The revival of the traditional system for the collection and management of water resources on Amorgos Island, Prefecture of Cyclades

Amorgos Island has a traditional system for the collection and management of water resources, which consists of cisterns, fountains and tanks. An NGO, with the support of the Municipality of Amorgos and the Prefecture of Cyclades, succeeded in restoring some of the monuments of the system that were under the threat of collapsing, and reviving the system as well as the associated practices and traditions. This was achieved through benefiting from the local knowledge on the importance and use of the system and engaging the community from the very beginning of the project (Kioussis 2009).

RENEWABLE ENERGY INVESTMENTS, HISTORIC ENVIRONMENTS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES: A THEORETICAL METHODOLOGY

The concept of the historic environment (in relation to the local community)

A REI should take into account the historic environment as a whole. A historic environment, as a combination of both culture and nature, can be seen in terms of: a) the specific monument/site; b) the surrounding environment of the monument; and c) the broader landscape. The usual practice is that REI are concerned about the specific monument rather than on the surrounding environment let alone the landscape, as shown in the case of Hosios Meletios Monastery and Gyaros Island.

A REI should consider and treat a historic environment as inextricably linked to its local community, which means that every heritage environment is unique and should be treated differently and that the local community should be taken into account from the very beginning of the planning process. Specifically, a historic environment is defined through its relationship with the local community, and consists of the following elements: a) material. Material includes: the material type, construction technique, and decoration of a monument; any structure that exists on the surface and underneath the monument;

the internal and external space of a monument; the surrounding environment; the broader landscape; b) intangible / less tangible elements. The intangible elements include: myths, habits, customs, traditions, beliefs, rituals associated with a monument; c) values, inscribed by different interest groups to the monument (on the concepts of value and interest group: Mason 2002, 27; Mason and Avrami 2002, 15). Values include those associated to the material, such as historic, aesthetic, scientific/research, and economic ones; and those associated to the intangible elements, such as religious and symbolic ones (on the different ways of categorizing values: Mason 2002, fig. 1, p. 9); d) authenticity, as expressed through material, intangible elements and values (on the concept of authenticity: Stovel 2004, 131-32). The usual practice, however, is that REIs tend to concentrate on the material, as well as the values and the aspects of authenticity associated with the material, and neglect to a considerable extent the intangible elements. This is evident in the cases of Hosios Meletios Monastery (whose authenticity is primarily linked to the continuation of the monastic function through the presence of the monastic community), Gyaros Island (whose authenticity is primary linked to its symbolic value as a former place of exile), and St George Monastery (whose authenticity is primarily linked to its religious value as a place of worship for the local community and to its symbolic values as a place that played a role in the Greek Revolution).

A REI should take into account the effect of the entire planning, construction and operation process on the historic environment, including the pre- and post- construction phases, as learned from the experience of Naxos Island.

A REI can also consider examining and exploiting the existing energy resources and the traditional energy management systems of a historic environment, as derived from the experience of Amorgos Island. In these cases the knowledge of the local community should be regarded as invaluable, and the community should be actively engaged.

The evolution of the historic environment over time to present (in relation to the local community)

A REI should take into account the historic environment not only in its present situation, but also in its evolution since its creation up to the present. A historic environment, through its dynamic relationship with the local community, continually evolves over time. This evolution can be seen through the following criteria: a) the function of the environment, i.e. whether the environment retains its original function or has acquired a new function; b) the definition and arrangement of the space of the environment. Space refers to the physical one (associated with the material) and to the social one (associated with the intangible elements); c) the management of the environment (on these criteria: Poullos 2010, 175-76). The management of the environment includes the ownership status and the management systems and processes. These can be

traditional ones (such as customary law, sacred and pragmatic controls, and traditions: Edroma 2001, 55-56; Ndoro 2004, 81; Wijesuriya and Wright 2005, 24) or modern, scientific-based ones. The evolution of a historic environment over time defines to a considerable extent the strength of the local community's association with the environment at present. The usual practice, nevertheless, is that REIs do not examine the evolution of the historic environment over time and treat local communities in the same way. In the case of Hosios Meletios Monastery, the monastic community retains its original, particularly strong connection with the site and manages the site through its abbot and the monastic council, and thus reacted promptly and firmly to the investment's effect on their monastic life. St George Monastery is not a living monastery, and the local community's association with the site is a much weaker one and is expressed mostly through the local municipality – hence its reaction only after the intervention of the NGOs and in a rather supplementary and supportive way to the intervention of the NGOs. In the example of Naxos Island, the local community's association with the site proved to be rather weak, judging from the absence of an active reaction to the destruction caused by the transferring of the wind engines. Gyaros Island has no 'local' community in the sense that the island is unpopulated. The community with the closest geographical proximity to the island, that of the other Cyclades islands, does not have any special association with the place, as expressed through the Municipality of Cyclades' consent to the investment proposal. It is the former prisoners and their friends who have a particularly strong connection with the site, as expressed through the opposition of the 'Gyaros Historical Memory' Society to the proposal.

Towards a new historic environment (in relation to the local community)

A REI should not be simply seen as the addition of certain structures (eg. water dams or wind engines) in an existing historic environment; it is another stage in the evolution of the historic environment over time, through its dynamic relationship with the local community. The existing historic environment is transformed into a new one, consisting of a new material, new intangible elements, new values, and a new authenticity, and leading to a new association of the local community with the historic environment. The Acheloos River Diversion Scheme, for example, would have led to radical changes in the agriculture of the broader landscape and the economy, life, tradition and practices of the broader community in the area. It is important to note that this new stage in the evolution of the historic environment is most probably not the final one, and will be followed by other stages in the future. The usual practice is that the aftermath of a REI is not sufficiently considered.

RENEWABLE ENERGY INVESTMENTS, HISTORIC ENVIRONMENTS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES: PRACTICAL STEPS

For the understanding of a historic environment and the approaching and engaging of a local community, a REI could take a series of practical steps. First, a REI could conduct

a mapping of the historic environment in question, through its relationship with the local community, over time and at present. Second, a REI could identify the local community's concerns, both those about life in general (eg. unemployment, human conflict) and those about the historic environment in specific, and examine possible ways in which the investment could fit within and serve these concerns. It is important to define and communicate the specific benefits of the investment to the local community, and at the same time discuss the possible local community's worries about the investment. Third, the key figures, the leaders, the (legal) representatives and the decision-making process of the local community could be taken into account. It is important that the cooperation with a local community takes a legally binding form. Fourth, the resources of the local community (eg. human and material resources) could be mobilized and utilized. This could help in creating a stronger linking of the local community to the investment – a sense of 'belonging'.

For the understanding of the historic environment, a REI could cooperate closely with a heritage consultant. It is advisable to have the heritage consultant as a member of the committee for the planning and implementing of the investment. The approaching and engaging of the local community could be attempted through a third person that does not have to be a member of the local community – actually, it would be better to be outside the local community –, but would be aware of the context and the concerns of the local community, and be respected and approved by the community. This person would act as a 'mediator' between the REI committee, and specifically between the heritage consultant, and the local community.

RENEWABLE ENERGY INVESTMENTS, HISTORIC ENVIRONMENTS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES: CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to demonstrate the importance of the local communities in the definition of historic environments, and the need for their engagement with regard to a REI. A local community should be seen and treated as an inseparable part of the historic environment, inextricably linked to the material, the intangible elements, the values and the authenticity of the environment, and as unique, depending on the evolution of the historic landscape over time to present and into the future. A local community should be thus engaged from the very beginning of the planning process of a REI.

This is a topic that has not been thoroughly examined in the literature so far, with considerable practical implications for the planning and implementation of REI projects. Hopefully this paper succeeded in motivating a further discussion in the field.

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PERSONAL COMMENTS (pers. comm.)

E. Gratsia, 'Monumenta' magazine for the protection of natural and architectural heritage in Greece and Cyprus, and 'Hellenic Society for the Protection of the Environment and the Cultural Heritage'

S. Lekakis, 'Monumenta' magazine for the protection of natural and architectural heritage in Greece and Cyprus, and 'Hellenic Society for the Protection of the Environment and the Cultural Heritage'

NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTOR

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