

## XVII International Congress on Dry Stone

### “Dry stone perspectives: challenges after the UNESCO inscription”

Cavtat, Croatia, October 1-2 2021

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## Dry Stone Workshop on Amorgos Island, Greece: „The Amorgian Craftsmanship“

### Summary:

*The Dry Stone Workshop „The Amorgian Craftsmanship“ was organised from 11 to 15 October 2021 on the island of Amorgos, Greece. The project aimed at transferring the knowledge between the older generations of dry stone artisans to younger craftsmen, recognising the significance of preserving the tradition of dry stone building. It also aimed at engaging the general public into the importance of dry stone techniques and structures, their historical value as an essential cultural and landscape element of the Aegean and the wider Mediterranean region, as well as their application in modern day uses. The use in terrace and cobblestone path building was particularly stressed through the restoration of terraces (supporting walls) and the construction of a path realised during the Workshop, under the guidance of local stone masons. Lectures presented by experts in the relevant fields further enriched the understanding of the importance of dry stone as a cultural element listed in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, its current situation and prospects. The Workshop was extremely successful into bringing together older craftsmen with a younger demographic of several backgrounds, locals and visitors, in a common appreciation of dry stone practices and structures as cultural heritage but also as tools to mitigate environmental challenges, such as increasing desertification, erosion and flooding.*



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## **Introduction**

The Non-Profit Partnership “The Mitato of Amorgos” organised “The Amorgian Craftsmanship”, a complete project culminating at the Dry Stone Workshop, held from 11 to 15 October 2021, and the restoration of the dry stone structures involved. The purpose of the project was to promote dry stone masonry through the experience of local craftsmen, the passing of knowledge to the younger generation of professionals (builders, producers etc) and the presentation of the craft to a wider audience, emphasising on youth. The goal was to familiarise the public with dry stone structures and their multidimensional importance, as well as the interpretation of the island landscape, as it has been shaped by such elements. It also aimed at presenting the opportunities related to the application of dry stone to modern day uses, such as walls and terraces, for hiking, agritourism, wine production and more, in order to ensure their constant use and sustainability.

The project was the first complete dry stone workshop realised on the island of Amorgos and one of the first of the kind in Greece. Since the inscription of dry stone in the Greek National Index of Intangible Heritage in 2015 and in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2018, initiatives towards dry stone conservation have seen a significant rise internationally. Scientific literature, theoretical approaches and relevant publications had already been increasingly available, however there has been a growing realisation of the importance of practical implementation and particularly the conservation of dry stone masonry as a living craft. Therefore workshops are becoming the main way of conservation approaches locally, involving the leading participation of local craftsmen and the training of younger individuals on site, following the traditional, practical method of apprenticeship that has existed for centuries.

## **Historical and technical research**

Considering the importance of dry stone structures on the island scenery, the site was selected based on its inclusion in the official path network of Amorgos; the frequency of use by local producers but also tourists as there is no road access in the area; its suitability in safely hosting large numbers of people.

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Three of the stone masons still active in the nearby village of Langada confirmed availability for teaching during the Workshop, with a fourth craftsman assisting them. Assessment of the site and preparation works (selection of appropriate stones, transfer of materials to the site etc) were realised in close contact with them and the local authorities.

The organisers researched similar projects that could serve as guidelines. To that end, the organising team attended the Participatory Workshop realised by the group “Boulouki” in Therasia, Greece, in September 2021. The Workshop offered valuable experience on planning such events, as well as technical knowledge.



*Picture 1: The intersection of path 4 towards Stroumbos and Drys/Epanochoriani before the works.* Meanwhile, the theoretical and historical background of dry stone was also studied, as well as its wider Mediterranean and worldwide context, particularly following its registration in the UNESCO Tentative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003). Scientific literature has confirmed the importance of dry stone practice, studying a wide range of parameters (Ghadban, 2015), such as its physical behaviour and its interaction with the environment (in terms of hydrology and climate); the cultural dimension, with dry stone walls as rural monuments; its historical importance and the study of its continuous presence and evolution (Petanidou, 2021); the anthropological parameter, with dry stone structures as elements of folk



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tradition and adaptation to local conditions; their morphology and typology; the spatial dimension, with the landscape formation involved; the economic dimension, particularly through the increasing touristic value of the dry stone craft but mainly of the landscapes created (Mallafre Balsells et al. 2020); the engineering dimension, through the static study of works (Vicens 2016); the application of new technologies in registering and maintenance of dry stone structures.



*Picture 2: The intersection of path 4 after the works.*

### **Methodology and stages of implementation**

The project was realised on three axes:

- 1) The restoration of dry stone sustaining walls and the construction of new cobblestone pavement in part of marked path 4, outside the settlement of Stroumbos, in the area of Langada, Amorgos Island, Greece;



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*Picture 3: View towards the north before the works.*



*Picture 4: View towards the north after the works.*

- 2) The Dry Stone Workshop and its associated apprenticeship at the above mentioned location;
- 3) The lectures presented during evening hours at the old school of Langada, which were open to the public.



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*Picture 5: View towards the south before the works.*



*Picture 6: View towards the south after the works.*

The organisation timeline was divided in the following steps:

- 1) April 2021: Announcement of the workshop and call for participation;
- 2) April-September 2021: Online promotion, organisational and theoretical preparation, funding;



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3) 20 September-10 October: Preparation works on site (clearing, material transfer etc);

4) 1 October 2021: Project presentation at the 17<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Dry Stone in Croatia;

5) 11-15 October (extended to 16/10 due to rainfall on 15/10): Dry Stone Workshop, apprenticeship and lectures;



*Picture 7: The new cobblestone path on the way to Stroumbos.*

6) 18-30 October: Completion of site works, project assessment and report.

The project was realised under the auspices of the Municipality of Amorgos and it was funded by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sport, the Secretariat-General of the Aegean and Island Policy and the Cyclades Preservation. More local businesses and associations offered partial or full sponsorship of services and goods.

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*Picture 8: The old cobblestone path after restoration, on the way to Drys/Epanochoriani.*



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### Participation

In total, the Dry Stone Workshop “The Amorgian Craftsmanship” involved the participation of:

- 4 local craftsmen: master mason Antonis Vlavianos, masons Michalis Theologitis and Antonis Synodinos and craftsman Dimosthenis Theologitis
- 9 speakers
- 1 stone mason from the region of Epirus, Greece
- 1 stone mason from Mallorca, Spain
- 6 volunteers
- 25 participants/apprentices at the working site
- More than 40 people attending the evening lectures



*Picture 9: Moments from the Dry Stone Workshop.*

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*Picture 10: Moments from the Dry Stone Workshop.*



*Picture 11: Stone mason Michalis Theologitis working on the site.*

Participation in the Workshop has been absolutely satisfactory, with all people present at the site playing an active part in the restoration and construction works. What is more, the presence of the guest speakers and masons contributed to the organisation of working groups on site, through their extended experience in similar apprenticeship programs.



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Most of the participants/apprentices were Amorgos residents, among whom 2 French and 2 German nationals living on the island. Three participants were from other islands, namely Syros, Ikaria and Paros.

It is worth noting the mostly young demographic of participants, a very promising element as far as the preservation of dry stone knowledge and structures is concerned.



*Picture 12: Stone mason Antonios Synodinos showing dry stone techniques.*



*Picture 13: Moment from the interview of the masons, part of the filming of the project.*



*Picture 14: Master mason Antonios Vlavianos.*

Another interesting element was the professional background of participants. Seven of them (28% of the total) engage into activities related to dry stone structures (either as producers or as builders, workers, architects etc). A significant proportion (32%, 8 participants) involved tourism related professionals, an expected fact considering the heavy reliance of the local economy on tourism. Although seemingly unrelated, the presence of tourism professionals was a pleasant outcome, indicating the interest of the sector towards traditional, sustainable practices. The remaining 40% comprised of various occupations, including doctors, university students, private employees and more.

### **The works**

The following works were completed during the Dry Stone Workshop “The Amorgian Craftsmanship”:

- 1) **Restoration of a dry stone sustaining wall** of 11.80 m length and height ranging from 0.90 m to 1.30 m, west of marked path 4.
- 2) **Restoration of a dry stone sustaining wall** of 8.30 m length and height ranging from 1.00 to 1.50 m, east of marked path 4.
- 3) **Construction of a dry stone sustaining wall** of 4.20 m length and height ranging from 0.30 to 0.90 m, east of marked path 4, below the 8.30m long restored wall, at the path section.



- 4) **Clearing of existing cobblestoned path**, of 15.50 m length and width ranging from 1.20 to 1.50 m, on path 4, starting 6 meters approximately east of the intersection (towards Drys and Epanochoriani).
- 5) **Construction of first new cobblestone step (“kadena”)**, 1.40m long and 1.20 wide, 16 meters east of the end of the cleared existing cobblestone path.
- 6) **Construction of second new cobblestone step (“kadena”)**, 1.50m long and 1.20 wide, 10 meters east of the first one.
- 7) **Construction of new cobblestone path**, 5.80 m long and 1.50 m wide, east of the intersection of path 4, ascending towards Drys and Epanochoriani.
- 8) **Construction of new cobblestone path**, of 30.00 m length and width ranging from 1.20 to 1.50 m, south of the intersection of path 4, between the restored and new dry stone walls and continuing to the south (towards Stroumbos).
- 9) **Construction of new cobblestone path – landing**, with a surface of 2.50 m<sup>2</sup> approximately, at the intersection of path 4 towards Tholaria, Stroumbos and Drys/Epanochoriani (position coordinates: 36.911, 26.000)

The above locations and works are schematically shown in Picture 17.

The works were coordinated by local masons Michalis Theologitis, Antonis Synodinos and craftsman Dimosthenis Theologitis, led by the master mason Antonis Vlavianos.

The presence of Mr Dimitris Lagos, stone mason from Epirus, Greece, and Mr Lluç Mir Anguera, stone mason from Mallorca, Spain, was very helpful as far as the coordination of working teams was concerned, due to their experience in similar programmes.

More local craftsmen visited the site and voluntarily assisted with the works, such as Yannis Synodinos and Christos Nomikos. Their presence was considered an acknowledgement of the significance of the project towards the saving and promotion of dry stone techniques.

The largest part of the works was completed during the apprenticeship, within the Dry Stone Workshop “The Amorgian Craftsmanship” held from 11 to 15 October 2021. Due to rainfall, works on Friday 15 October were postponed and realised on Saturday 16 October.

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The cobblestone path construction works towards the south (path 4 towards Stroumbos) were completed within the following two weeks, with the work of the 4 local craftsmen and the presence of many of the Workshop participants, who continued attending and actively participating in the works on a voluntary basis.

**The lectures**

Lectures were presented during the evening hours at the old school of Langada village, attracting a large audience.

On the morning of Monday 11 October, at the site and prior to the beginning of works, architect Mrs Eleni Pangratiou-Alexaki presented her speech *Basic principles for the construction of stone walls*, an introduction to the upcoming works, at the same time presenting examples of projects and practices from abroad.



*Picture 15: Mr G. Koutropoulos and Mr P. Kostoulas presenting their lecture.*



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*Picture 16: Mr Rigas Zafiriou presenting his lecture.*

On the evening of the same day, the opening ceremony was held, with introductory speeches by the Mitato of Amorgos partners Mrs Semeli Drymoniti, Mr Yannis Gavalas and Mrs Maria Nomikou, the Mayor of Amorgos Mr Eleftherios Karaiskos and the Manager of Cyclades Preservation Fund – CPF, supporter of the project, Mrs Anny Mitropoulou.





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- Mr Ioannis P. Lagos, President of the Panhellenic Confederation of Social Economy Unions. *Forest Social Cooperatives: A driver of growth for local economy.\**
- Dr V. Metallinou, Dr architect. *The elegy of stone on the highlands of Aegiali, Amorgos.*

*\* The presentations of Dr T. Petanidou and Mr I. Lagos were realised via teleconference.*

On Friday 15 October 2021 the closing ceremony was held, with the presentation of the works completed during the Workshop, as well as the greetings and presentations of certificates and souvenirs to all participants and invited speakers.

### **Results and conclusions**

The Dry Stone Workshop “The Amorgian Craftsmanship” was the first large scale project of the Mitato of Amorgos, a non-profit partnership founded in July 2020, aiming at the preservation and promotion of the natural and manmade environment of Amorgos and the Cyclades in general.

The project has been successfully concluded, exceeding the goals and expectations of the organising team.

The first and perhaps most significant challenge referred to the localisation of masons that would be available to assume the role of masters/teachers, but also to their very presence on the exact dates and times of the Workshop. This was a new type of project and role, which they had never been asked to play before and which was met with different reactions. An important parameter towards these mixed reactions was the obligation of being present at the working site on very specific dates and times, an obligation many of the craftsmen are not familiar with. On Amorgos, works still follow the mandates of natural parameters, such as the weather, the needs of agricultural fields and cattle etc. The craftsmen, who usually engage into several professional activities, adjust their works according to these conditions, as they are shaped day to day. Therefore, the final presence at the site of at least three craftsmen on a daily basis was considered a big success and proved that with good will and a right approach, the realisation of such projects is possible.

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The second challenge referred to participation in the Workshop. A very important parameter is related to the fact that Amorgos, along with the total of the Greek islands from where participants mostly originated, heavily relies its economy and professional activity on tourism. Thus, the selection of suitable dates for the Workshop was carefully studied so that it would coincide neither with the touristic season and its period of preparation, nor with other activities in which the majority of the island population is involved, such as the olive harvest. Indeed the selected dates proved to be ideal, with the largest part of the population financially active during summer season still being on the island and participating in the Workshop. The third, equally important challenge was related to the merging of the above mentioned two, namely the coexistence of local craftsmen, mostly of an older age, with a varied audience of apprentices and other participants. Perhaps this has been the most significant success of the Dry Stone Workshop “The Amorgian Craftsmanship”: the creation of a common field of cooperation, a project where everyone worked towards the same goal, with joy, with a will to cooperate, where people who for years had only known each other by sight finally came to meet and cooperate, where the older remembered and the younger learned the concepts of solidarity and social cohesion that so thoroughly characterised human activity in the past, in the harsh conditions of the Greek countryside.

The wide participation in the field works, as well as during the lectures presented in the evening hours, proved that our intangible heritage, the rural landscape filled with humble yet majestic structures, still evoke strong feelings within the local community and visitors. Through the lectures presented, several issues were addressed, relating to the environmental and cultural approach towards dry stone structures, in which the audience showed great interest. Examples and approaches from other locations in Greece and abroad were also shown, triggering further the interest of the audience. It is worth noting that the masons of the project also attended the lectures.

As far as the practical aspect of the project is concerned, namely the field works, expectations were exceeded in this sector too. The restoration of dry stone sustaining walls was realised very fast, due to the experience of the masons as well as the presence of a large number of apprentices participating in the works.



Therefore there was significant time available for the construction of cobblestone path, which in fact covered a much larger area than originally estimated. The adjustment of costs due to the cancellation of parts of the project (for example the educational activities, see below for details) allowed for the purchase and transportation of bigger quantities of stone, covering the new needs.

Furthermore, thanks to the presence of a large number of participants, further works were realised, such as the clearing of the existing cobblestone path and the construction of two new steps in parts of the path where the need for their filling due to erosion had been assessed.

On the downside, perhaps the most important deficit has been the cancellation of the educational activities that had been originally considered for the Secondary Education pupils of Amorgos. The original planning, also shown in the printed schedule of the project, included the presentation of part of the lectures in the High School of Amorgos and the presence of pupils at the site, in the context of an educational outing. The goal was to engage pupils into the environmental and cultural value of dry stone structures, while presenting alternative professional options in this sector.

In the end, the educational activities were not realised due to bureaucratic complications. This experience will lead future projects, so that the necessary actions are directed towards the relevant administrative bodies appropriately and in time.

Finally, the limited presence of young people professionally involved in the construction sector can be mentioned, as these people could form the next generation of masons and craftsmen. The majority of participants attended the workshop in the context of general knowledge and skills, not within the framework of professional development. Of course, many of them have acquired knowledge which they will be able to apply, for example in their rural fields, while others were architects or tourism professionals, who will certainly incorporate part of the knowledge and experience in their professional activity, at least on a theoretical level. However, ways and incentives to attract professionals more actively related to construction could be explored for future projects. For example, in cooperation with the Municipality of Amorgos, the attendance of workers responsible for path

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clearing and restoration could be deemed mandatory. For self-employed contractors or freelance workers, more ways to attract them should be explored.



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**Short biographies of authors:**

*Semeli Drymoniti has studied Architecture, Geograph, Secondary Teaching and Tourism. Through her studies and professional activity, she has dealt with issues related to urban planning and sprawl, architectural heritage, sustainability and conservation. She lives permanently on Amorgos Island, where she owns an alternative travel agency, specialising in hiking tourism, local culture, gastronomy and agritourism. She is a co-founder of „The Mitato of Amorgos“, a Non-Profit Partnership aiming at the preservation and promotion of the natural and cultural environment of Amorgos and the Cycladic islands in general.*

