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## The Museums Network Model of the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation

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## **“The *Museums Network* model of the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation”**

**Stella Demestiha**

The Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation is a non-profit organization, which aims at studying, preserving and promoting the traditional technology and cultural identity of Greece by focusing particularly on pre-industrial heritage. The Foundation organizes and manages a network of thematic museums established in the provincial areas. The network already consists of three operating museums: the Silk Museum in Soufli, the Open-air Waterpower Museum in Dimitsana, and the Museum of Olive and Greek Olive Oil in Sparta.

The *Silk Museum* in Soufli is housed in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century mansion. It opened in 1990 and is exhibiting all the stages of the pre-industrial process of sericulture and silk-making. A re-exhibition of the Museum’s enriched collection is currently under way as well as the creation of a multi-purpose hall.

The *Open-air Water Power Museum* in Dimitsana opened in 1997. It is the first open-air pre-industrial museum in Greece; it is a restored complex, where the basic pre-industrial techniques that use water as the main source of power for the production of various products, are presented. At the moment, a multi-purpose hall as well as the creation of a parking are under construction.

The *Museum of Olive and Greek Olive Oil* in Sparta opened in 2002. It aims at highlighting the culture and technology of olive oil, which is very closely linked to the greek and mediterranean identity. Unique in Greece, the museum is located in the heart of Laconia area, one of the main olive producing areas in the country. A multi-purpose hall and an open-air exhibition are under construction in this museum as well.

Besides the above-mentioned museums that are in operation, the Network of Foundation is going to be enriched with five other museums, already under construction:

- *The Museum of Industrial Olive Production* in Lesvos island. It is housed in an old steam-powered oil press plant in Aghia Paraskevi, a village in the inland part of Lesvos.
- *The Museum of Marble Crafts*, which is being constructed in Pyrgos, a remote traditional village of Tinos island, with long history in the tradition of marble

crafts. The Museum examines the history of quarrying and processing marble using traditional methods.

- *The Museum of Traditional Crafts and Environment* in Stymphalia area, Northern Peloponnese. The Museum, which is currently under construction in a specifically chosen area that views the lake Stymphalia, has -as a main theme- the interrelationship between environment and human activities around the wetland of the lake, as it was developed throughout the centuries.
- *The Museum of Paper Technology and the History of Greek Typography* in Thessaloniki. It is the first museum of its kind in Greece, where paper-making technology and the evolution of typography are presented as a whole with emphasis on the stages as observed in Greek reality.
- *The Rooftile and Brickworks Museum*, at the Tsalapata complex in Volos, about which we will talk in detail below.

All of the above-mentioned museums are going to have a multi-purpose hall. In their premises, the Foundation will organize educational programmes, exhibitions, talks, seminars and other activities, important for reinforcing the role of museums as active cultural cells in local communities. For the successful operation of the Foundation's Network, a management model was developed adapted to meet the special needs, which arise from a number of facts:

1. The museums are situated in the provincial areas of Greece and actually most of them are based in remote areas.
2. Specialized staff is recruited to manage the collections, refresh the exhibitions, and renew the material sold in each one of the museum shops.
3. Promotion and international collaborations with other museums are essential in order to remain constantly active.
4. The financial management of the museums is complex in both stages of creation and operation as most of them have been financed by the European Union (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> European Framework Programmes) and are in accordance with the Greek Law 2039 for non-profit Foundations.

In order to achieve these, each one of the museums has to be staffed –besides the museum front-of-house staff- with a general director, an accounts department, secretarial support and scientific personnel.

Skipping the dull financial details, it is easily understood that a network of that kind would increase dramatically the maintenance budget of each museum, making it, thus, hard -if not impossible- to survive economically. In addition, the budget of the Foundation is covered totally by the subsidy of Piraeus Bank, which means that the fixed costs for each one of the (soon to be) eight museums of the Network are limited. Therefore, some strategies were developed in order to anticipate this:

- a) Avoid cutting down on any of the above-mentioned parameters that secure good operation of the Network Museums.
- b) Combine two apparently opposite tensions: on the one hand, the application of a common policy and, on the other, the individuality that each one of these museums has.

Within this context, the Foundation has created a model for managing the Network:

1) The Foundation organizes and co-ordinates all the actions, which correspond to the *social role* of the museum, following three key points: research – exhibition – publishing, which means that:

- It organizes and attends research programmes that relate to the thematic content of each museum.

- It organizes temporary exhibitions and all the activities relating to the education, communication and promotion of the Network.

- It publishes guides, books, CD-Roms, post cards, posters e.t.c., related to the themes of each museum.

All the above-mentioned activities are commissioned to specialized external researchers who collaborate closely with the staff of the Foundation, who –in the end- have the supervision of the production of these activities.

2) In parallel to this, the departments of the Foundation are securing the interior management of the Network. In this way:

- The Departments offer managerial and secretarial support.
- The Department of Accounts (with 5 specialised employees) secures the financial management of the museums.

- The Technical Department of Piraeus Bank (staffed with qualified engineers) secures the maintenance of the buildings and supervises all actions needed for the construction of new museum buildings.
- Permanent museum (front-of-house) staff welcomes the visitors and becomes the link with the local community.
- The Museums Department (with 5 employees) has the total responsibility for running the Network.

This model of museum management results in the formation of a *network*, which is so-much desired when it is successfully run by many small museums. To mention some of the advantages of the network:

- A common policy is emerging from the experience that each one of the network museums is offering.
- Inter-promotion among the network museums.
- The financial support of the whole network by the most successful of its museums, which –in turn- supports the rest of them.

Each one of the network museums is treated as a unit considering that it is part of the local community in which it belongs and with which the Foundation is closely related. One such example is analyzed below: the *Rooftiles and Brickworks Museum* in Volos, a model example of the conservation and establishment of industrial monuments in Greece. This museum is part of a wider approach to regional development, leisure and cultural tourism followed by the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation.

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Industrial archaeology is a rather new concept in Greece. In recent years, however, researchers and various institutions have started with the conservation and presentation of the country's industrial heritage. As part of this, special aspects of these vintage industrial operations are re-discovered. Most were founded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the support of foreign technicians and specialists. The technology known in Europe at that time was introduced into Greece and adapted to local conditions. In this context, the Tsalapatas Brickworks is an example of industrial heritage conservation.

The Tsalapatas Brickworks was founded in 1926 by the Tsalapatas brothers under the direction of Belgians engineers, on a site of 22,000m<sup>2</sup>. Until 1976, when it ceased its operation, constituted an important production unit of national range. Today, the factory is a unique example of a preserved industrial complex.

In 1995, in the context of URBAN programme, the Municipality of Volos bought the complex. During 1998-2001, the Volos Municipal Enterprise for Urban Studies (DEMEKAV) restored the factory buildings with the aim of creating a cultural centre dedicated to industrial tradition and artistic creation.

In 2004, the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation was commissioned to create the Rooftiles and Brickwork Museum, in the premises of the main factory building, soon to be made public. The Museum aims at elevating the historic identity of the factory and the progress of brickwork-making both nationally and internationally, always in close connection to the industrial history of the city of Volos. Besides the museum, the new facilities are going to house another 20 workshops for handicrafts, exhibitions, sales outlets for traditional products, function rooms, a library, a cinema and recreation rooms.

The Tsalapatas Factory was created with cutting-edge technology that has been gradually developed in Europe, while in Greece the field was still completely pre-industrial. In Germany, for instance, the museological elevation of such a unit is contextualized by the history of the progress of technology in each one of the production stages that one is able to follow by looking at the still preserved small units that became gradually industrial within the span of 200 years.

Instead, in Greece, the Tsalapatas Factory was equal to the European ones. Yet, before the foundation of the Tsalapatas Factory, in 1925, bricks and tiles were exclusively produced with manually methods, which differed very little to those of antiquity. This parameter, the sudden modernization of the field in Greece as well as the insufficient study on the subject to date, led the Foundation in the decision of conducting a detailed research programme so that we, at first and then our visitors, begin to delve, for the first time in Greece, into industrial brickwork-making. The Tsalapatas Factory is, moreover, the only greek brickwork plant that has its shell and its machinery so well preserved that allow us this venture.

Besides the uniqueness of the monument and the museum for the greek standards, the Foundation has to deal with two more particularities:

1. the reconstruction that had already been performed so that the building gets its secondary uses apart from the museological ones
2. the fact that one part of the complex is not museological anymore but is currently been converted to an entertainment facility and department stores.

The new concept behind the Rooftiles and Brickworks Museum is based on the following criteria:

- common use of the facilities with the existing sales and recreational activities
- some of the old plants and parts of the brickworks have been lost
- presentation of the operational functions of the brickworks

The museum concept features the following:

### **1. MAIN ENTRANCE – SHOP**

A special entrance had to be made to differentiate the museum from the general (east) entrance of the complex. For this reason, a new ticket-office was built next to the south gate.

### **2. INTRODUCTORY UNIT**

Whereas in other factories that have been turned to museums there are secondary rooms with no special use and identity, in our case those rooms do not belong to the museum. For this reason, we created an exhibition unit, under the old sheds, to introduce the visitor to the Tsalapatas family, the founding of the factory and the industry of Volos.

### **3. CLAY BACKS**

During the first 35 years, the clay was processed by the reservoirs of the factory. The blending of earth and water was done by using mechanical methods in the area where today is the restaurant. Then, the slurry was channeled to the built clay reservoirs; there, it dried and was cleaned by all the unnecessary material that remained at the bottom of the reservoir. Today, the museum owns only the two rows of reservoirs, which will be reconstructed as were originally.

#### **4. DECAUVILLE**

Between the two preserved rows of reservoirs, we have placed a Decauville steam engine, one of the few remaining of its kind. It was owned by the Factory and was used to transport earth from the clay fields to the main building. Given the fact that today there is a restaurant in the place where it was once rested, it was decided to be placed among the clay banks, as its usage was directly linked to the raw materials.

#### **5. NEW GRINDING MILLS**

Next, the mechanisms of the new grinding mills have been restored and their function, that is the mechanical process of the raw material, is presented by descriptive panels.

#### **6. INCLINE OF THE WET PAN MILL**

The earth was, then, transported in this area after being grinded. It was, channelled to the mill that was placed exactly underneath the production room. This was a rough construction with openings in the floor that allowed communication with the mill. During the first restoration of the complex, the area was restructured to serve as a bar. Today, this is part of the museum and in order to present in the best possible way its uses:

- a) a completely modern shell was made, which undoubtedly is a new intervention
- b) a copy of the old earth feeder to the mill was reconstructed and placed under a newly made hole on the floor
- c) a scale model will be placed there that will represent the function of the room and the new grinding mills with which it is functionally linked.

#### **7. BOILER ROOM**

Then, the visitor enters the main area of the factory starting from the boiler room. The three steam engines which secured electricity for the building, heating for the drying chambers, and motion to the machines were placed there.

#### **8. PRODUCTION ROOM – DRYING CHAMBERS**

In this room, the visitor watches the process of giving shape to the products of the factory, that is the bricks and the tiles of various styles. Images, plans and texts explain, on the side the function of the mill and the presses and, on the other side, the function of the driers. So, after getting the final shape, the products were processed in



specially designed areas to dry completely. The heating coming out from the steam engines speeded the process.

## **9. HOFFMANN**

Then, the products were transported to the kiln, ready to be fired. The type of kiln in this factory is the one used throughout Europe since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and got its name from its inventor, Hoffmann. The originality of this kiln is that it could operate continuously and, in consequence, ensure the normal flow of the production in the factories.

This is the most attractive area of the factory but also the most difficult to explain. I would like to express the Foundation's concern on the most appropriate way to present the kiln. Without commenting upon the atmosphere of the premises, we will represent the different but simultaneous functions of its interior (burning, emptying the kiln from the products and placing in the raw ones). The loft of the kiln was initially full with carbon and dust, while during the first restoration it was partly turned to a reception hall. This ample and functional space, where once the kiln was fed with fuel, is now being reshaped. The surface of the floor will be earthen just as the original one, but completely stable so that visitors can easily move around. All the functional components of the kiln will be displayed, while panels will be showing information on the uses of the room and, more broadly, on issues that regard brickwork-making.

A small shop and a café will cover one side of the room. A hall for temporary exhibitions will be created around the Hoffmann kiln. Finally, groups of products will be stored outside the Hoffmann kiln, so that the visitor gets the impression of the final stages of the process.