

Study tour report

Group 2 . Sfakia – Anapoli - Vamos Peninsula

6-th Euracademy, Chania, Crete, 2007

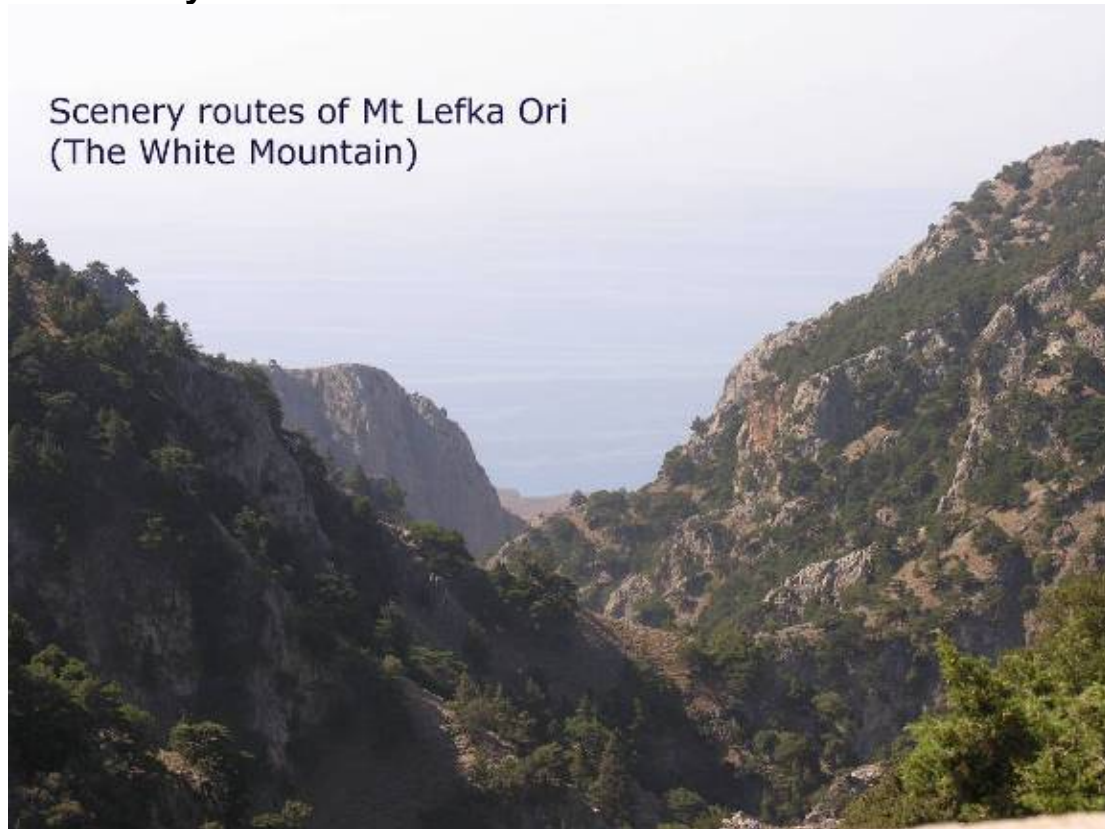
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Our study tour was to describe the economical, cultural and biological aspects of the island from Chania city straight to the Southern part of the Crete Island. During two days we could follow the changes in landscape, agricultural and other activities as well as in people's minds and political situation along this transect.

1. First day.



Our trip started from Chania and first we followed the middle southern coast of the Crete. The area has been populated regularly during last centuries (thousands of years?) and therefore everywhere the traces of the human impact can be seen. The land is being cultivated for olives, grapes and other crops, the rest of the landscape gives evidence of goat and sheep farming. The vegetation is secondary, combined of cultivated trees, native grasses and bushes, shaped and distributed by men, sheep and goats and probably by winds and rainfall. The buildings and infrastructure has a big toristic impact, concerning good roads, coffee-shops, petrol stations and the number of new and/or modern buildings, not connected to agriculture or bigger units of land. The possibility of irrigation is used everywhere. Turning to the South from **Kalani** and following the valley to South-East, the same features in landscape and development could be described as above.

The turn to the South near **Vrissos** makes a difference in landscape and also in settlement and land use type. The meandering road through the **Lefka Ori** (White Mountains) mountains gives an idea of the possible primary vegetation of the region. A lot of coniferous trees (*Pinus sp*, *Cupressus sp*) and others could be seen as well as bushes and grasses. The pressure of grazing had

not been enough to prevent the trees growing on the steep slopes of the gorge and mountain tops. However the slopes provide traces of terraces therefore one can think of abandoned cultivation of crops in that region as well. The area is sparsely populated and has few small scattered villages around. This kind of picturesque landscape opened up to **Liviko Pelagos Bay** and its coast near **Imbros**. The mountains reduce to a lowland plateau with no trees or higher features. All land seems to be used for goats and sheep, the original few villages are hidden in the shade of the mountains and valleys or gorges near mountains. On the very coast towards the **Francocastello** direction a number of new houses and small settlements could be recognized and also few olive plantations. To the direction of **Chora Sfakion, Anapolis and Aradena** also few traditional villages with traditional dwellings and large animal sheds could be seen.



The impact of tourism development was also only on the beach, where parking places and restaurants and coffee shops could be found. The slopes hide the traces of old and abandoned terraces but everywhere, where possible, coniferous trees had established and in the shade lot of other trees as well, as other local vegetation. The plant cover was strongly influenced by grazing of the sheep and goats. Except the improving the road to the mountains, eclectic parking places and restaurants and few new houses one may say, that the region is untouched from the new development and has the looks of a traditional landscape with traditional architecture, including the ruined or abandoned old villages with abandoned terraces, quite overgrown by now. **The Aradena Gorge** is significant as a representative of the original biodiversity of the region.

Iron bridge and the gorge of Aradena



The coastline is uneven, steep rocky slopes give way to the short sandy stripes with sky-blue clean water. The hidden beaches are not discovered by mass-tourism and therefore most pleasant places to stay.

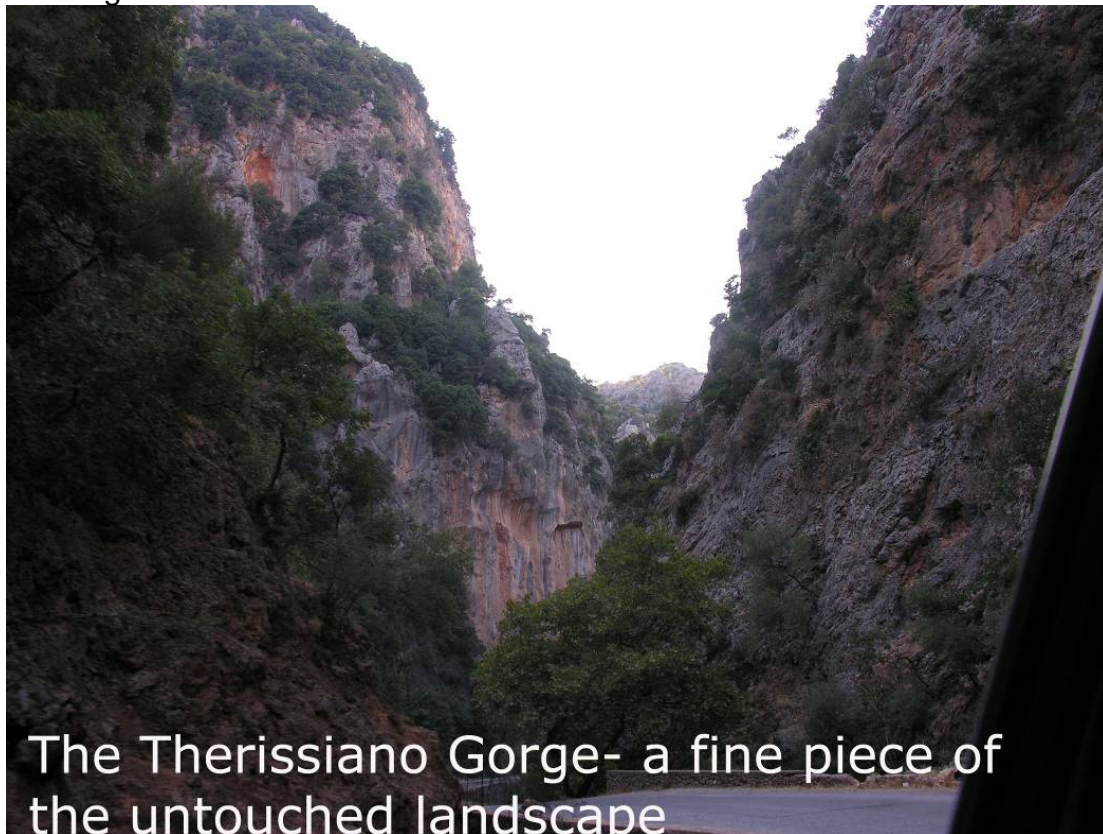
As by literature, the Southern part of the Crete island has rather North African type of climate than Mediterranean, the draught and other features of the different climate are more limiting factors for the nature as in the Northern part of the island.

2. Second day.

The start to **Vamos Peninsula** is the same as described above. Near the **Kalani** it is recommended to turn to the **Old Rethymno** road following the coastline. There opens the view of well cultivated landscape with vineyards, olive plantations, cereal fields vegetable fields and others. The mountain slopes, embracing the valleys are all terraced and most of them are in some agricultural use. There is a significant number of modern buildings in the region, both belonging to the local original population and also to the new inhabitants, mostly from the UK and Scandinavia. A lot of new buildings as well as other structures are built of local stone rather than of concrete as seen elsewhere. The climate and also irrigation systems make the valleys and slopes to look green and flourishing. The old road goes meandering through the old villages, giving one the idea about the size and structure and shape of the old villages and houses.

The drive to the centre of the peninsula, to the biggest village **Vamos**, gives the nice overview of changing the natural conditions with the height of the place. More goat and sheep breeding, more abandoned terraces and plantations (maybe due to the reduced access to the water). The secondary vegetation is predominant. The preparations of building new houses are evident everywhere, the stone quarries can be seen. Some road improvement has been made to increase the access to the places and bare the load of increased local traffic.

Leaving the peninsula through Ag. **Pantes** – Neo Chorio and Stilos – the entrance of the mountains a lot of abandoned agricultural landscape could be seen. In the lower parts of the slopes olive plantations dominated. Driving through the slopes and valleys of the mountain range a significant difference to the Southern part of the Lefka Ori Mountains could be observed. Most of the slopes had been made to terraces where possible and 90 % of them were in active use. The area looked flourishing and green, besides the conifers platan trees and other broad- leaved occurred. A lot of vineyards, also new ones caught the eye and also cereal fields and vegetable gardens. The settlements were scattered and comparatively small. The sheep- and cattle farming is seemingly of not that importance than in Southern part of the island, however the landscape provides an evidence of burning, to clear up the plantations and mountain slopes of higher vegetation to provide more grass for the sheep. Some remote villages like **Thimia** and **Dracona** present the landscape and surroundings of nature taking over the manmade landscape. Before **Therisso Gorge** the terraces are again empty and only goats and sheep are roaming around.



The Therissiano Gorge- a fine piece of the untouched landscape

The Gorge provides a shady and beautiful journey through the natural landscape with the native vegetation. The sheep and goats are the gardeners there as well as the rainwater, collected in the river in the bottom of the Gorge. Coming out of the Gorge also means the meeting of the Civilization, as the suburbs of Chania will start.

3. From micro to macro level

3.1 Micro- level:

ANAPOLIS

The village in the South Crete, in Sfakia Province. Main activities: Honey, goats and sheep, cheese.





Demography: increase of population (not clear in numbers). Descendants of the locals. Young people back in the village. Houses were in comparatively good order. Some modern dwellings can be found among the old ones. Architecture differs from the North.

Aradena – the Gorge and Iron Bridge and the Old Church (repaired by EU money) visitors cannot get inside, the ruins of old village, a marked trail in the ruins and to the Gorge. There was no information or signs about the place (tourist information) however local young men were at coffee-shop, friendly and providing information. People are disappointed in regional and Cretan government, because they want to get some support (in tourism) to survive and stay in the region. However, they want to stay in the region rather than leave.

The other places like **Chora Sfakion** and **Francocastello** did not show any other specific (to the region) tourist development. In Chora Sfakion there was a street of restaurants at the beach with NOT local traditional food and Francocastello was not provided with any information about the place or the legends.

Glass Workshop of Tzompanakis family was started in 1985 as a family business which now employs about 12 people. They produce a variety of glassware such as decorative bottles, glasses, ashtrays, lamps. The employees are Polish experts living in the area with their families for about 30 years. Mr Tzompanakis is the head of the workshop and his 2 sons also work for the company. Originally, Mr Tzompanakis was working with steel, however, later he decided to do experiments with glass and he became very successful in that field, therefore he abandoned steel. He is the designer of

his company and he insists on producing only those shapes and products that he likes. He believes that quality is more important than quantity. In addition, the way he sees his work or profession, is not only producing their products but also as a kind of art, creating a piece of art.

Vamos Ltd can be found in the small village of Vamos, not far from the northern Cretan sea, on halfway between Hania and Rethymnon, at the foot of the beautiful White Mountains. It was started 12 years ago with 10 people, actually friends, full of enthusiasm in order to develop the village which is rich in cultural heritage. They started as volunteers and were working hard on their projects. They are all well-educated with university degrees and had loads of ideas and plans what to do, improve and renovate in the village and, of course, how to create new workplaces for the locals. Their great advantage was that they owned the houses they renovated and changed into guest houses. They had to face a lot of unexpected problems, thus if they had the chance to restart it, they would employ a perfect book-keeper and do it professionally, not as a part-time job. Now only two and a half people work on maintaining the project, two full-time and one half-time.

In the **village of Thymia**, which was not easy to find, we met only one old woman who still lives there with her family. She told us that formerly there had been more families but they all abandoned their houses and left the village many years ago. Interestingly, she was happy to see us, strangers and wanted to invite us for some raki into her house but we had to fulfill our task and find our next village, Drakona.

Drakona is high up in the mountains. We arrived at their newly-renovated square with a beautiful church in the middle. A local man welcome us immediately and invited us kindly to his house to taste some home-made honey. While we were having a discussion with him and his family, we had the chance to have an interview with the present mayor of the municipality that covers 17 villages and 1000 inhabitants.



3.2 Mezo-level:

The political situation in the region is stable. The clan (or community) based approach to the politics has unified different political parties, which cannot afford changes. The community is united and closely tied. The orientation is towards Chania not Iraklion. As a community they have 1 cheese festival in a year in August. Other activities for this year were cancelled because of an accident of one young person. They have primary and secondary education available in the region. Further studies were told to be popular.

Mr Tzompanakis is part of the community in which he lives but he is considered to be crazy because of his innovative ideas. Some years ago he started recycling glass but only strangers, tourists and outsiders have given him empty bottles as raw material. In this way, he could compile plenty of bottles in his yard.

The village of Vamos has a population of 800 people. Vamos Ltd is a company which provide all the services, including walking tours, cooking lessons and giving exhibitions and also does all the advertising, booking, etc. The Ltd has 25 guest houses, shops, restaurants, exhibition halls and as they have developed a lot, they have 96 shareholders at the moment. More and more British and Scandinavians bought houses there, thus the population has grown mainly because of incomers and not Greek people. In the beginning, the population of the village was divided into 3 groups. A small group of shopkeepers welcomed the idea of developing and more tourism, while a large group of inhabitants was rather indifferent in connection with this project and there was also a small group which did not like the idea of making changes. In the beginning, running a restaurant was very important and a brilliant idea along with the developing project as their own restaurant was the best place of doing marketing for their fully-equipped guest houses.

We could not have any experience on this level in the **village of Thymia**.

In **Drakona** they want to build sustainable development only on local products, as honey, wine and olives. The village is in the middle of the mountains and the roads are in rather bad condition. The locals do not want to sell their land or have a lot of tourists. They have only one school a few villages away, but only some pupils attend it, so it is not sure they can get high-quality education.

3.3 Macro- level:

The development of the region is limited due to the limited access to the region- the serpentine road is not wide and safe enough for the cars, buses and heavy vehicles. The road is also not long enough (further to Aradena). People believe the road improvement is the crucial thing to promote the

tourism in the region. They want the tourism to be developed slowly and sustainably.

Mr Tzompanakis intends to start a school of glassware but he has been facing challenges from the part of the authorities. This workshop is open for anybody, everyone can come and learn there. He has been selling his products on local, national and also international level, in Chania and Athens, in England and even in Miami. You can reach him on the Internet as well, and can have an insight of his products on his website. /www.artofliving.gr/

Vamos Ltd has been cooperating with big travel agencies like TUI to attract more and more tourists, however at the same time, they tried hard to remain independent. They have an all-year-long season but, of course, in summer more foreigners visit them as a result of the large number of charter flights while in winter time their guests are mostly Greek, mainly from Heraklion. They succeed in building up their tourism away from the sea. In their traditional restaurants they provide not only the famous Greek salad, moussaka or souvlaki as usual, but real local dishes. The environmentally-sensitive English people pushed the locals to be more environmentally friendly, which is a key element of their development as they still have to face the problems of water and electricity supply and narrow roads which should be solved very soon to be able to maintain as many tourists as they would like to. More courage is needed for the locals to make the necessary measurements. There is a shop with local products such as olive soaps, organic olive oil, cheese in olive oil, pasta in various flavours (with spinach and beetroot), pickles, wine, raki, fruit liquers, jams and thyme honey. These products are all without any chemical additives or other preservatives. If you are interested, you can reach them on the following website: www.vamossa.gr.

We could not have any experience on this level in the **village of Thymia**.

Drakona is open to have cooperations with other villages to be successful in selling their own products.

Special thanks to our local informers

