



## ANNOUNCEMENT

**Euracademy Association invites you to take part in the**

**23<sup>rd</sup> Summer Academy**

On

***Protected Areas: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Rural Development***

**to be held in Anogeia, Crete, Greece from 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> September 2026**

***in cooperation with the Local Council of Anogeia and AKOMM – Psiloritis Municipal Development Agency S.A.***

***The theme:*** *How protected areas can contribute to sustainable rural development while addressing key challenges related to European and national policy, governance, local livelihoods, climate change, and balancing conservation with socioeconomic needs.*

### **Background and aim**

Euracademy Association is delighted to announce its **23<sup>rd</sup> Summer Academy**, dedicated to the challenges and opportunities facing rural stakeholders and communities in a period of profound environmental, technological and policy transition.

Rural areas across Europe are undergoing rapid change. Climate change, biodiversity loss, demographic decline, economic pressures on farmers and small rural businesses, technological transformation and uncertainty surrounding future European policies and funding frameworks are reshaping the conditions under which rural communities live and develop.

These challenges are particularly visible in protected areas and other environmentally sensitive rural territories. Protected status plays a vital role in conserving biodiversity, landscapes, natural resources and cultural heritage. At the same time, local communities and their key economic stakeholders may perceive environmental regulations and conservation requirements as restrictions on economic activity, infrastructure development, agriculture and the use of local resources.

**A key challenge** is therefore to explore how protected areas and other rural territories with high natural value can move beyond the perceived conflict between conservation and development; and how policy can set the framework for turning challenges into opportunities.

Farmers and land managers have a particularly important role in maintaining rural landscapes, biodiversity and ecosystem services. Current agri-environmental schemes and other public support mechanisms have provided important incentives for environmentally responsible practices, which, however, are non-sustainable, as many such schemes depend on limited programming periods and temporary financial support. In particular, the approaching end of the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) programming period, and the uncertainty surrounding the next European Union funding cycle, provide a timely opportunity to discuss the long-term sustainability of development initiatives in protected areas.

At the same time, technological change is creating new opportunities and challenges for rural territories. Digital technologies, including artificial intelligence can support environmental monitoring and provide guidance for sustainable agriculture and rural entrepreneurship, as well as improving the provision of services in rural areas and enhance the quality of life. The issue is, however, how sustainable development in protected areas can exploit such opportunities, given the serious challenges posed by accessibility to digital technologies and related ethical questions.



The 23rd Summer Academy aims to explore the future of sustainable rural development within protected areas from multiple perspectives: environmental, social, cultural, agricultural, economic, technological and political. Through lectures, workshops, study visits, discussions and collaborative problem-solving activities, participants will examine real challenges faced by rural communities and work together to identify practical and transferable solutions.

By bringing together participants from different European countries and professional backgrounds, the Summer Academy aims to create a space for mutual learning, critical reflection and the exchange of innovative approaches to building sustainable and resilient futures for both protected areas and the rural communities within them.

### **Discussion topics**

Questions to be addressed by this year's Summer Academy are grouped under three main themes:

#### **1. Protected Areas: conservation policies in the framework of sustainable rural development**

- Does conservation policy answer the needs for economic and social development of rural communities, with special reference to European Union's policy?
- What do we learn from successful policy models that have been devised to protect environmentally and culturally sensitive areas?
- What are the most common barriers to local development presented by conservation policy?
- How can conflicts between conservation objectives and local economic interests be prevented or resolved?
- What economic opportunities can arise within protected areas related, e.g. to sustainable ecological and cultural tourism, ecosystem services and nature-based activities?
- How can local communities become more actively involved in the governance and management of protected areas?

#### **2. Farming and local community sustainability**

- What role do farmers and land managers play in protecting biodiversity, landscapes and natural resources?
- How effective are current agri-environmental schemes in supporting sustainable farming and environmental protection?
- What challenges will rural communities face after the end of the current EU programming period?
- What alternative financing mechanisms, business models and forms of cooperation could support both environmental conservation and sustainable rural development?
- How can rural communities diversify their economies while preserving their natural resources and local identity?
- How can local knowledge, community participation and bottom-up approaches influence future rural policies addressing both conservation and local development?

#### **3. Spatial Planning, Governance and Participatory Management**

- What can we learn from successful protected area governance models?
- Can digital technologies enhance governance of protected areas by integrating sustainable development practices?
- What is the role of spatial planning in resolving conflict and confronting challenges in protected areas, regarding the sustainable development of the territory?



- How can stakeholder participation and co-management, in the context of community engagement, be established in protected areas?
- Can citizen science make a contribution to planning and governance procedures?

### **Target group**

The 23rd Summer Academy welcomes participants from all over Europe and beyond who are involved in rural development, environmental protection, agriculture, community development, innovation, education and public policy.

The Summer Academy is particularly addressed to:

- managers and staff of protected areas and nature parks organisations;
- representatives of rural municipalities and local and regional authorities;
- managers and staff of Local Development Agencies and Local Action Groups;
- farmers, land managers, farmers' organisations and agricultural advisors;
- rural entrepreneurs and representatives of social enterprises;
- NGOs and civil society organisations working in rural areas;
- professionals working in environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, natural resource management, spatial planning, town and regional planning;
- educators, researchers, and students in tertiary education;
- policy makers and decision makers in the fields of environmental policy and all aspects of rural development, and;
- project managers and professionals involved in European cooperation projects.

The event is designed for approximately 30-40 participants who are invited to share their experiences, acquire new knowledge and skills, explore innovative approaches to rural development and benefit from the wide networking opportunities offered by Euracademy Association.

### **The format**

The summer academy includes lectures; discussion groups in the form of workgroups of up to 8 participants following each lecture; study trips to the rural areas surrounding the summer academy venue, focusing on specific local development issues related to their protected area status; study trip reports which the participants prepare and present; panel discussions and special-topic workshops. Collective work is strongly promoted during the summer academy on the principle that all participants learn from one another, equally sharing knowledge and experiences.

We adopt a strong emphasis on "problem solving - finding solutions" and give a high profile to the study visits and great importance to meetings with the communities. Thus, following initial lectures and panel sessions with expert lecturers, the study trips will be designed as topic-specific case studies to investigate real community-based challenges. The participants will be tasked to explore these challenges and identify and present potential solutions during the summer academy. In this way, we hope participants will be able to develop their skills of community-based investigation/appraisal, analysis and solution/action plan presentation.



## **The Programme**

This summer academy will benefit from the experience of 22 previous Summer Academies held in an equal number of different locations around Europe, on different themes relating to sustainable rural development. We are using all our previous experience to organise a similar event this year and bring you an equally strong experience.

Following the greetings and introductions, participants will listen to expert presentations on the given day's main topic. Then, participants will work in facilitated small groups, which will run concurrently, in different rooms, giving plenty of space and opportunity for exchanging and sharing ideas. Workgroup reports, in the form of a poster, are prepared by participants, describing the outcome of their discussions, and presented in a plenary session following the workgroups' session.

About half of the time to be devoted to the Summer Academy will be spent on study trips to destinations in the surrounding protected area of Mount Idi, including some very interesting, designated villages, with valuable architectural and cultural heritage. Meetings with local stakeholders will be arranged in each destination.

The detailed programme will be announced at a later stage.

## **Location and organisation**

### **Anogeia – Crete, Greece**

The 23rd Summer Academy will take place at the Environmental Education Centre in Anogeia, a mountain village located in the heart of Crete, Greece, on Mount Idi (Psiloritis). The Centre offers accommodation facilities with around 30 rooms, all equipped with private bathrooms, as well as suitable spaces for lectures, workshops, group work and other activities of the Summer Academy. The building also includes a dining area, where meals will be provided by a local women's cooperative, offering participants the opportunity to experience local cuisine and products.

Anogeia and its surrounding area provide a particularly relevant setting for this year's Summer Academy. Located at the heart of the protected area of Mount Idi, it provides access to both environmental and cultural locations of particular significance, including the Psiloritis UNESCO Global Geopark and the archaeological site of Idaion Andron - the cave where Zeus was born, according to mythology.

Cooperation with the local authority of Anogeia and the Geopark management organisation "AKOMM – Psiloritis Municipal Development Agency S.A." will enable the Summer Academy to organise thematic study visits and meetings with local stakeholders. Participants will have the opportunity to explore practical examples of protected-area management, sustainable agriculture, local entrepreneurship, tourism, community initiatives and the use of natural and cultural heritage as a resource for rural development.



The venue of the summer academy in Anogeia (source: Municipality of Anogeia)



Mount Psiloritis (source: Euracademy)



Designated village in the area (source: Euracademy)

### **Course Support**

Course materials are provided during and after the Summer Academy in electronic format. They include a Participants' Handbook, containing practical information and the methodology that will be used in the Summer Academy, as well as tasks for participants to prepare before joining the Summer Academy. Administrative and tutorial support will be offered by Euracademy Association. Lecturers and facilitators are recruited among Euracademy members and other experienced professionals in sustainable rural development.

A Thematic Guide on "*Protected Areas: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Rural Development*", will be published after the event, which will draw on the lectures, the discussions and the conclusions of the summer academy, as well as on the research carried out prior to the summer academy by Euracademy members and other experts.

### **Participation Cost**

The cost of attending the Summer Academy is kept to a minimum. There is no attendance fee, but only a charge to cover accommodation and full board for 4 nights, and travel for the study tours. The cost is **400 Euro** per participant for accommodation and meals, in a single room. For a shared room (2 people) the cost is **300 Euro** per person. A number of scholarships (200 Euro each) are available, covering a significant part of the participation cost.

### **Registration**

In order to participate in the Summer Academy, please fill in the online Registration Form, or alternatively fill in the Registration form (text file) you will receive by email and return it to us. **The deadline for registration is 5<sup>th</sup> September 2026.**

*Please, register here (click on the link below):*

[Registration Form](#)

**We look forward to your participation!**



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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