

Welcome speech to the Chios Conference
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**Welcome to
“ENTopia: Our Places in Europe”**

As you can at once tell “entopia” is a Greek word, in fact drawn by Philip Gheoghegan from the work of Constantine Doxiadis, one of the greatest post WWII town and country planners. “Entopia” at once sets up a contrast with two other words that share the same root: “utopia” and “dystopia”. “Utopia” means literally “no place”, i.e., a place that does not actually exist. For all that, Western European thought since the great humanist and Roman Catholic martyr in 16th century England, Thomas More, has provided us with a whole series of imaginative, suggestive and indeed often programmatic “utopias”, describing places of supposed perfection, which at their best serve to encourage us to do better in the world we have.

It is clear there can be no one “utopia” and indeed no utopia at all, exactly as the word’s meaning suggests. By contrast, we know all too well there is a whole variety of “dystopias”, places which have lost the finest characteristics afforded them either by nature or by the work of previous generations, places where we feel acutely uncomfortable, because they are not, or are no longer, what they could and should be. “ENTopia” is an important concept, precisely because it is simultaneously the antithesis both of “utopia” and “dystopia”. It is the antithesis of “utopia” because it can and does exist, not in the imagination of one man or woman, but as the result of the contribution of innumerable men and women and in many different forms at that. It is the antithesis of “dystopia” because these are the places, the very different places, where we feel and indeed are at home, precisely because although they are very different they equally manifest excellence, not an excellence of unincarnate human imagination but of human creativity expressed in and through the most varied natural and cultural environments we meet around the world.

It is the ENTopias of Europe that Europa Nostra is celebrating this weekend in Chios. It is appropriate we should be celebrating in Greece an idea rooted in the Greek language: appropriate also that we should be celebrating it on a Greek island that can and does give us an example of “entopia” in practice, as well, of course, as of a number of “dystopias”, which are, human nature being what it is, rather more common.

Why are dystopias in fact more common? Why does it require such an effort, sometimes over generations, to create a valid example of an “entopia”? I suggest it is because our powerful human imagination, combined with the innate human faculty and drive to create, works most frequently to serve immediate human needs, fantasies and desires, thus forcing natural landscapes and the heritage of previous generations alike into moulds inappropriate to themselves but supplying us with more immediate results in terms of the pleasure, power or profit we habitually seek. By contrast, the old but newly rediscovered ideal of respecting nature,

of preserving the spirit of a place, of conserving its cultural heritage, of honouring the creative and transformative role of human beings, not through exploitation but careful adaptation, urges us to adopt a different, if less usual approach, namely to seek out and protect existing entopias and to help create new ones. Through an appropriation of the concept of “entopia” with its contemporary significance, we can hopefully come to live more in harmony with the immense variety of the natural world and the wealth of our cultural heritage. In this way we shall come to acknowledge in and through many different and differing examples those places which are truly Our Places in Europe, places very different from one another but where we feel equally at home.

ENtopia as an Europa Nostra programme is an Irish proposal, originally put forward by Philip Gheoghegan. Its adoption by Europa Nostra was a decision first of our Board and then of our Council, under the leadership of Denis de Kergorlay and John Sell. The Board appointed Rossana Bettinelli to follow the ENtopia programme on its behalf, a most appropriate choice given the acknowledged Italian excellence in preserving and conserving so many outstanding small towns and villages.

Our conference here in Chios is the consequence of the enthusiasm the concept has stirred in many countries around Europe, mainly in the west, south and east. It is also a response to the particularly warm support by Greek donors of Europa Nostra’s 50th Anniversary in Athens last year and of many other Greeks to the prospect of implementing the idea of ENtopia with all its positive implications for candidate areas. I wish to thank the most active members of Elliniki Etairia’s ENtopia Committee in Athens, Pavlos and Kaiti Kremezis, Michalis Proios, Vassilis Ganiatsas, Maria Christina Mylonadi, and most obviously Miltiades Lazoglou, who has enthusiastically and painstakingly visited and studied the possible candidates for the programme from the Greek islands. All have consistently given a large amount of their precious time to developing the ENtopia programme in close coordination with Philip Gheoghegan at the other end of Europe.

Equally warmly I wish to thank those who have organised this conference itself, most obviously Lenia Kontogouri, who has been tireless and most effective in preparation, in negotiation and in implementation. The response here in Chios could not have been more positive, from the Maria Tsakos Foundation and Mr Michailidis, who are our generous hosts; through the Ephor of Byzantine Antiquities in Chios, Mrs Olga Vassi, who is opening to us this evening both the Museum and the recently restored Ottoman hamam in the Genoese and Ottoman fort; to the Deputy Regional Governor of the North Aegean, Mr Constantine Ganiaris, himself a son of the masticha producing area of Southern Chios with its superb Genoese fortified villages, who will be our host at this evening’s reception. Last, but far from least, allow me to mention the Local Committee of Elliniki Etairia, particularly its Chairman, Mr Vassilis Agiannides, and its secretary, the architect Manolis Vournous, whose incomparable knowledge of Chios’ cultural and natural heritage encourages me to express the hope that sooner or later the concept and practice of ENtopia may be applied in Chios as a whole. George and Alexandra Prokopiou are providing us with the finest conceivable conclusion to our conference by hosting a reception at their superbly restored house and orange orchard in the Kambos of Chios, combining the best of Chian hospitality with the best of contemporary European conservation practice.

Well beyond Chios, however, the idea and emerging practice of ENtopia has aroused much enthusiasm. We have here with us today the Mayors, or representatives of the Mayors, of Sikinos, Skopelos and Skyros, all Aegean islands, all candidates for the ENtopia programme. Long before ENtopia was introduced to Europa Nostra by our Irish colleagues, Elliniki Etairia’s “Sustainable Aegean Programme”, which obtained the European Union’s Grand Prix for

Education and Awareness-raising in Taormina in 2009, led at that time by Kriton Arsenis, now a member of the European Parliament, and since by Georgia Kikou, has been working hard to save the Aegean islands from becoming what much of southern Europe's coastline has indeed so tragically become, a series of touristic dystopias, in the long term destructive alike of the economy, the environment and the once creative societies that had originally moulded them. International developments helped cause this particular damage, one of the most hideous destructions of the European cultural and natural heritage in our or indeed in any generation. It is entirely appropriate therefore that today the European Commission, and more particularly the Directorate-General for Culture, an institution intrinsically committed to the conservation of our most varied cultural heritage, is joining with us all, private individuals, public servants and environmental organisations, in this conference. Our long-term objective is to make Europe's smaller communities, those with less than 15000 in population, neither examples of neglect nor objects of shameless exploitation as they have so frequently been in the recent past, but subjects that draw forth both our fullest admiration and our determination to enjoy or even perhaps live in them, fully conscious of the fact they are among the finest exemplars of our past and, even more important, beacons for Europe's future.

What shall we be attempting to achieve at this conference? We shall look at examples or potential examples for the programme "ENTopia" from ten countries across Europe. Second, for the first time we shall be able to discuss the programme's development, procedures, networking and funding. Third, we shall examine how it can fit with the other elements of European cultural and regional policies. There is no doubt that until today smaller communities have enjoyed less attention than regions and large cities. This is not at all surprising. Regions and large cities possess critical demographic mass. Smaller communities are not however any less significant for the lack of it. Many of them are amongst the most distinguished examples of conservation in Europe, a potential instance of the power of example both in preserving our shared cultural heritage and in pointing the way to a healthy and sustainable future. It is long past time they should receive their fair measure of attention. So – welcome to ENTopia! – and let us begin.