

Revitalize Your Community Through a Grass Roots Movement **August 1, 2010**

I have been involved in planning for the proposed Parrhasian Heritage Park since 2005 working closely with Costas Casios and David Romano. In studying the region during this period it has become clear to me that a heritage area is the ideal type of park for this place. Having worked on park planning for over 17 years I have now worked on over 50 park plans covering a wide range of classifications. In the last 10 years I have become involved in creating a new type of park, a Heritage Park. My experiences creating this type of park indicate a heritage area is not like any other park because it encompasses the full range of typical park classifications including archaeological, natural, recreation, scenic, and cultural. It also does something that is not typical for parks, the boundary encompasses the towns, villages and agrarian areas that surround the major natural, cultural or scenic resources in an area. In doing so, it enables these communities to benefit most from their surrounding resources. These type of parks are also different, in that the local community leads in managing the park; typically a local organization forms to oversee the park made up of people from the region including citizens from the towns and villages, business owners, farmers, as well as local and national government officials. In addition, this type of park does not just protect the physical resources of a region, it promotes traditional ways of life, local festivals, locally made products, and strengthen community identity. In short, I have come to realize that a heritage area offers great potential to revitalize an area through a grass roots movement that can increase pride in peoples home region and ensure the wealth generated from these efforts is returned back to the local community.

The purpose for establishing the Parhassian Heritage Park is to commemorate, conserve, and promote important areas that include natural, scenic, historic, cultural, and recreational resources. A Heritage Area of this kind is a partnership between the citizens from the towns and villages, business owners, farmers, as well as local and national government officials and organization to support state and local conservation. The people that live in the heritage area will run the heritage area. Typically, the values they place on living in the area will seek:

- To protect the unique vernacular features of the region that have developed over time to exemplify the Greek agricultural landscape.
- To preserve and provide access to the areas of outstanding natural beauty found in the area, such as the Neda River gorge.
- To highlight and protect significant archaeological sites including: the first Greek sanctuary to be recognized on the World Heritage List, the Temple of Apollo Epikourios at Bassai; one of the famous Pan-Hellenic sanctuaries, Mt. Lykaion, that features the only visible hippodrome in the Greek world, and an altar that may have been used over 5,000 years ago in the Sanctuary of Zeus.

- To allow citizen and government collaboration on planning to share their concerns about localized needs.
- To encourage economic growth associated with tourism, bringing an estimated one million new visitors to the area.
- To establish guidelines for managing change in the region.
- To protect the integrity of the existing cultural and natural landscape.
- To support the traditional culture that exists in the modern day.

In this talk today, I will use examples from other parks that describe how a heritage area approach can benefit the local community and still protect resources. These examples were inspired by walking the proposed park and seeing first hand people and places that reminded me of the examples I have laid out below. A heritage area is not the answers to all our problems in this region, but it does offer hope and goes a long way to benefitting the people and protecting the wonderful character of this place.

For my first example we will look at a US National Park in California. This park was known for it's beautiful natural scenery, but prior to becoming a park a portion of the land was used for dairy farming. In seeing the goat herding in this region, it dawned on me the example set by Point Reyes National Park in California may serve as an example of how local farming practices can benefit from a heritage area by creating what is often referred to as "value added" products. This is where locally produced goods that follow a traditional method of production can charge premium prices to a market that is served by heritage tourists. These heritage tourists will visit a region for not only its physical resources, but are interested in a traditional ways of life that are becoming rarer in a world of diminishing diversity.

It is easy to see why Point Reyes was originally designated as a National Park because of its scenic beauty. Dramatic cliffs rise up to meet the pacific ocean and the land sloping down from the cliffs is interrupted by a clearly visible portion of the San Andre's fault line. In creating this park, the government initially closed the dairy farms that had been ranched by generations of local families. However, in the late 1990's planning studies were initiated into how best to manage the former dairy farms that were now dilapidated farms and furloughed fields. After initial planning efforts it was decided to change the emphasis of the park to encompass not only the natural resources and scenic beauty of the area, but reconsider the former traditional way of life in the park, and see if it was possible to bring back dairy farming. To do this the local community was asked to get involved in the planning effort

Based upon input from the local community it was decided that the traditional produce, milk, from the former farms was no longer sustainable as a business enterprise. However, a few of the former farming families, working with park planning staff, decided that dairy farming may work if the product produced was local cheeses made using traditional practices for the region. Not all of the

former families wanted to come back, so traditional families combined with new farmers, including the Point Reyes Cow Girls Company, and the organic cheese making business in the park was born. The cheese from Point Reyes was initially sold in local markets like San Francisco, but soon demand for them grew. Today, through marketing assistance, they are sold on the web as “value added” products and have become famous, as well as highly demanded, on the West Coast of the US.

My second example is from a heritage area in Mexico that is on the UNESCO World Heritage list, Oaxaca and Monte Alban. The Spanish Colonial town of Oaxaca and the adjacent ancient site of Monte Alban were renowned for their historic and ancient architecture. However, less well known were the local people, the Zapotec’s, who had lived in this area for thousands of years and formerly occupied Monte Alban

Despite the World Heritage recognition for the architecture of Oaxaca and the archeological site of Monte Alban, the Zapotec culture was struggling to be recognized in the region. In spending time at Mount Lykaion and the nearby villages of Ano karyes, I was struck by the festivals that are still held and the fact that, similar to the Zapotec culture, the ancient sites are well known, but the people who inhabited them are less well known. Therefore, this example highlights how a local community can regain control of its own destiny. The community can reclaim their heritage in a way that outsiders understand the ancient sites do not represent a lost way of life, but are still part of the local’s people culture; a culture that is still thriving.

The Zapotec community began to organize themselves a few decades ago. They marched through the center of Oaxaca to show not only the outside world, but to themselves, how strong they were. This new organization promoted leaders who were in charge of protecting the communities way of life, their festivals, and their traditional working methods along with the local goods produced.

The early initiatives focused on protecting and promoting their way of life in downtown Oaxaca. They ensured that the farmers surrounding the town can continue to serve a thriving market that sells their goods to heritage tourists as well as the local inhabitants. The restaurants became quickly known to tourists and thrived on the selling of local cuisine. It was through this effort they were also able to prevent a McDonalds from opening up in the local square.

Today, the heritage area now encompasses farmland surrounding Oaxaca and Monte Alban. This is important as sprawl from urban development was beginning to consume the former farmland. The sprawl is threatening to lead to development on the lower slopes of Monte Alban, the most important archaeological site in the region. Through local initiatives, traditional crafts are promoted and today, a tourist is able to take a day trip out of the city to watch local rug making or the making of the local Mesqal Liquor, with the possibility of

making something themselves and also buying the locally produced products at the end of the day.

Through the Zapotec's efforts to protect and promote the traditional farming and industry around the lower slopes of Monte Alban, local people may no longer be willing to sell their land for urban development. In addition, the Zapotec people are now clearly associated with the archaeological site of Monte Alban, they see it as their original home, it is no longer just a physical ruin. This new found pride in their heritage means they will no longer sell the land on the lower slopes of the site, they want to protect what the rest of the world now sees, not just the impressive physical architecture, but also living culture that inhabits this place.

The animal shelters in this region are numerous, I have often come across them while hiking across remote hillsides in the Neda valley or walking between Mt. Lykaion and Bassai. They immediately remind me of a project in the UK that looks to benefit local farmers, local school children as well as creating a point of interest for tourists. The area is located within the Lake District National Park in northern England. This park is a mixture of towns, villages, farmers, private land owners and government ownership. The area is known for its beautiful stone buildings, scenic lakes and craggy mountains as well as the traditional ways of farming. In 1996, many people noticed that the traditional sheep folds in the countryside were starting to fall apart. Farmers could no longer afford to maintain them and many locals were saddened to see this once taken-for-granted fixture in the region begin to disappear.

Working together, the local government, farmers, a local land artist, stone masons and village school children began a project to inject new life into the run-down sheep folds. The land artist worked with the school children on redesigning the sheep folds, making them into landscape art. However, importantly, they also still had to function as sheep folds so the farmers could continue to use them in winter time for protecting the sheep. This partnership led to the restoration of nearly 100 sheepfolds, which was funded through grants from the UK government and European Union.

Today, these pieces of landscape art or functioning sheepfolds, whatever you prefer to call them, are popular destinations for hikers from outside the region. Their popularity has grown to the point where they are listed on a web site by the local government. Tourists go out of their way to find them and it is a popular hobby to try and visit each one of them over a period of years. They bring visitors back to the region on an annual basis, which in turn brings in more tourists dollars. More importantly though, the farmers still have sheepfolds they can use, and the school children in the region are more aware of their heritage.

My last example is a heritage area project in the United States covers the John Day River and the surrounding communities in Oregon. This project in many ways parallels the area covered by the Parrhasian Heritage Park. The region

has an impressive river that cuts through steep canyons. Ancient sites are spread along the river, especially in caves on the canyon walls and the upland areas are connected by country roads and trails that lead from the river to nearby towns and farms.

In setting up this project in 2008, the park was initially focused on protecting and restoring the natural resources only, but input from the local communities led to a change of emphasis whereby the cultural heritage would receive true recognition and therefore emphasis. The communities along the John Day River wanted to ensure that people visiting the area would not just be coming to take a recreation trip down the river. They wanted them to experience what life was like in the area. Either working on a ranch in the American West, hunting and fishing for your own food, or spending some times in the nearby towns eating the local food and participating the local festivals they enjoy every year.

The park is due to open in 2013, this year is the final year to set the mission and goals for the park. With this in mind, a series of public meetings have been conducted where the local communities, working with government officials, professionals, and park planners have created a series of goals for the park that will guide implementation and will be used to manage this new heritage area. To create these goals 12 public meetings with between 50 and 100 people attending are being held. At the meetings the various stakeholders work in small groups to decide what they thought was important for the park. These ideas were translated into seven values that are now accepted by all the stakeholders as the major goals for the heritage area.

These values for the heritage area represent not just the people that live along the John Day River, they cover goals for the natural environment, protection of the scenic beauty, promotion of the archaeological sites, education for the areas youth, and support for traditional ways of life. By using heritage as the driver behind the park area it has enabled the diverse groups of people associated with the heritage area to work together. They have discovered a series of common values that represent the region's identity, hopefully strengthening it.

As you can see from the examples, creating the Parhassian Heritage Park will lead citizens from the towns and villages, business owners, farmers, as well as local and national government agencies and organizations to agree on ways to manage and enjoy the local natural, historic, cultural, educational, scenic or recreational resources that are important to the heritage of the Greece. The major areas the community can focus when developing the park on include:

- Community Revitalization
- Cultural Conservation
- Economic Development
- Education and Interpretation

Heritage Tourism
Historic Preservation
Natural Resource Conservation
Recreation
Stewardship Building
Strategic Engagement

In addition, the park community will strive to introduce legislation that will be adopted and passed by the Greek state to create national recognition for the Parrhasian Heritage Park. In addition, the coalition will work to gain international recognition for the park through a UNESCO World Heritage designation.

Through focusing on the above goals a successful coalition will promote regional identity, improve community life, and oversee planning projects that enhance the character of the region. There is also a focus on community pride in its history and traditions, and the encouragement of residents' stewardship in retaining and interpreting the landscape for future generations. Educational and inspirational opportunities will encourage visitors and economic development will occur in the form of cultural tourism, local museums, festivals and visiting university groups. Most importantly, the park offers a way to protect a lasting legacy that balances between resource protection and economic development through tourism. The three areas covered below summarize how the success of a Parrhasian Heritage Park might be measured:

1) Regional Identity: The Parrhasian Heritage Park is a name that associates important historic, archaeological and natural features within the context of culture, tradition and geography.

- Fosters pride and stewardship
- Encourages connections to local history and place
- Supports continuation of cultural traditions
- Promotes interest in the region and invites tourism

2) Community: The success of a heritage park depends upon the participation of individuals in the region.

- Working together towards the social well-being of the region
- Collaboration between local and national governments

3) Planning: Strategies that work towards the highest vision of health and prosperity for the region.

- Natural resources – Protect nature while balancing with human needs
- Cultural resources – Recognize customs, foods, and handicrafts unique to the region
- Archaeological resources – Protect the irreplaceable national heritage
- Recreational opportunities - Promote enjoyment of resources for the community and outsiders

To conclude, I have come to realize that a heritage area offers great potential to revitalize an area through a grass roots movement that can increase pride in peoples home region and ensure the wealth generated from these efforts is returned back to the local community.