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## Sustainability as culture: The quiet transformation of how we live.



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From the Athenian Agora to the Cretaquarium and the Aegean islands, sustainability emerges as a cultural force — shaped by memory, awareness, and innovation.

In this newsletter, we find ourselves traveling through stories and places:

- at the [Cretaquarium](#), where science becomes experience and knowledge transforms into a deep awareness of marine life;
- at the [Stoa of Attalos](#) and the [Athenian Agora](#), where every step echoes with history and the past speaks directly to the future of democracy;
- across the [Aegean islands](#), where [desalination units](#) bring the most precious resource — water — in ways that respect and protect the natural environment.

Together, these stories remind us that sustainability is, above all, a **matter of culture**.

Sustainability is not just an environmental goal—it is a cultural transformation rooted in democratic values, where economic resilience and ecological balance create thriving communities for generations to come.

[Dr. Dimitra Kouparou, Communications Officer for the EEA Grants 2014–2021 “Water Management” programme and author of the book *From Common Use to Collective Action: Commons, Nature and Democracy* ("Από

την κοινή χρήση στη συλλογική δράση: Κοινά, φύση και δημοκρατία", εκδ. Παπαζήση.)]

## ➲ Where the sea becomes culture: the Cretaquarium and the green transition

On the island of Crete, the creation of Greece's first large-scale, modern aquarium was more than a scientific achievement — it was a cultural milestone, made possible through co-funding from the EEA Grants 1994–1998 period, with a total budget of €10,004,380.

What began as a bold vision of the former Institute of Marine Biology of Crete, and continues today under the [Hellenic Centre for Marine Research](#) (HCMR), has become a living gateway into the Mediterranean world.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of visitors walk through the doors of CRETAquarium — a sign that this project is not only successful, but deeply needed. Because here, the sea is not simply observed. It is **understood**.

At CRETAquarium, the Mediterranean becomes a storyteller. It speaks of balance, fragility, beauty — and responsibility. Every visit is an invitation to reflect not only on marine life, but on our own role within it.

A window into the Mediterranean — the sea that shaped civilisations

With 62 tanks, 1.8 million litres of seawater, more than 1,500 marine animals, and 130 Mediterranean species, CRETAquarium recreates — with scientific precision — the ecosystems that have supported life and culture in this part of the world for millennia.



Awareness begins with wonder.

Here, knowledge becomes emotion — and emotion becomes responsibility. Beyond its impressive scale, CRETAquarium is also:

- a centre for **environmental education**,
- a hub for **scientific outreach**,
- a shelter for **injured marine animals**,
- and a place where awareness grows naturally through experience.

Visitors do not simply see the sea. They **feel connected** to it. They leave with new questions, new concerns, and

— often — a new respect for marine life.

The Aquarium's work shows that the green transition is not only about technology or infrastructure. It is also about:

- how we learn;
- how we behave;
- and how we redefine our place in the natural world.

### Where cultural memory is a common good.

Reviving the Athenian Agora: The cradle of democracy comes alive again.

In the heart of Athens lies a place where democracy took its first breath. Today, the Athenian Agora is not only an archaeological site — it is a story revived.

Through a remarkable restoration and digital transformation project, implemented by the [American School of Classical Studies at Athens](#) in collaboration with the 1st Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities — and co-funded through the EEA Grants 2004–2009 funding period — the Agora entered a new chapter in 2012.

### A museum reborn inside the Stoa of Attalos

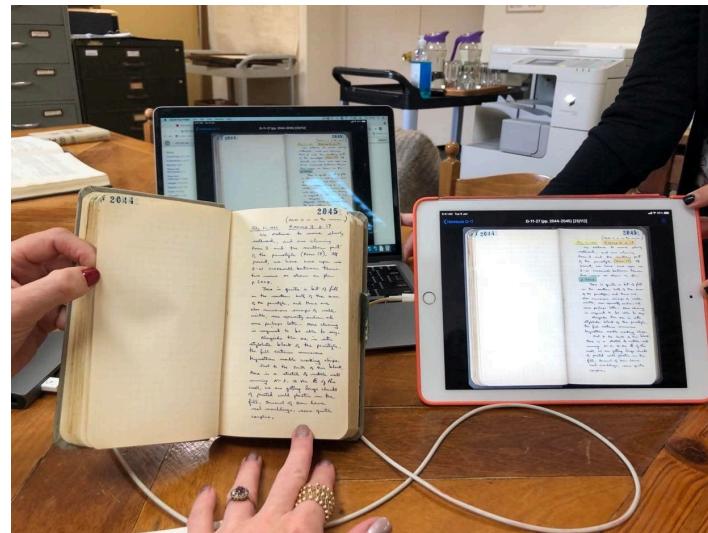
After 30 years of silence, the first floor of the Stoa of Attalos opened again. A completely renewed exhibition welcomed visitors with **52 stone antiquities**, including Roman portraits and sculptures never displayed before. A **1,000 m<sup>2</sup>** gallery — twice the previous space — now hosts temporary exhibitions, lectures, and educational programmes, bringing ancient stories back into public life.



Inside the Stoa of Attalos, the restored heart of the Athenian Agora

### Digitising a world beneath our feet

Another part of the project took place behind the scenes: the Agora's vast archaeological archive — photographs, excavation notebooks, drawings, plans, and reports — was digitised and made freely accessible through [www.agathe.gr](http://www.agathe.gr). For the first time, scholars and visitors from anywhere in the world can walk the Agora virtually and explore material spanning 5,000 years of history.



From fragile pages to open access: the digitalisation of the Agora archives

### 🏛️ Why the Agora still matters

Since 1931, more than 160,000 objects have been unearthed here. But the true significance of the Agora lies not only in what archaeologists found — it lies in what it represents: **the origins of public life, civic debate, and democratic participation.**



Conservation at work: restoring the sculptures of the Athenian Agora

The project "Reviving the Athenian Agora" has done more than preserve heritage. It has reconnected us with the cultural foundations of democracy — and opened new paths for learning, research, and global engagement.

A reminder that the green and social transitions we speak of today began long ago, in places like this, where **culture, citizenship, and collective memory were born.**

### Where innovation becomes culture: islands shaping the future of water

Across Greece, the green transition is unfolding not only in laboratories and technical drawings — but in the daily lives of communities. On the islands and in remote municipalities, water is more than a resource. It is identity, resilience, and continuity. And when innovation meets this deeper cultural meaning, the result is transformation.

#### 💧 Thirassia — an island powered by the sun and the sea

In the Municipality of Thira, a collaboration with the University of Stavanger in Norway has reimagined how Thirassia meets its water needs. A new desalination plant, powered by renewable energy, now offers autonomy to a small island long defined by geological beauty and water scarcity. Here, technology does not stand apart from nature — it works with it.

### ☀ Kimolos — turning sunlight into water

On the quiet Cycladic island of Kimolos, the Municipality joined forces with the Agricultural University of Athens and Norway's Vista Analyse AS to secure a stable and sustainable water supply. Their new Reverse Osmosis unit, an extension of the island's existing plant, runs on photovoltaics and introduces an innovative brine treatment system — a challenge for most island desalination projects. Kimolos shows that small communities can pioneer big innovations.



Innovation that respects the island's natural balance.

### ✿ Mandra-Idylia — where resilience becomes innovation

In Attica, the Municipality of Mandra-Idylia operates a prefabricated desalination unit equipped with brine treatment and powered by renewable energy sources. It stands as a model for regions facing water stress, proving that smart solutions can emerge wherever there is determination to protect local life and resources.

⌚ Want to explore more desalination projects? You can find them all on our [digital map](#) — select the **Water Management** programme.

Care for natural resources and respect for future generations turn innovation into culture — and the green transition into a way of living.

✉ Subscribe to stay connected as we move from the 2014–2021 results to the new 2021–2028 funding period.

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