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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 Koumparou, 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.

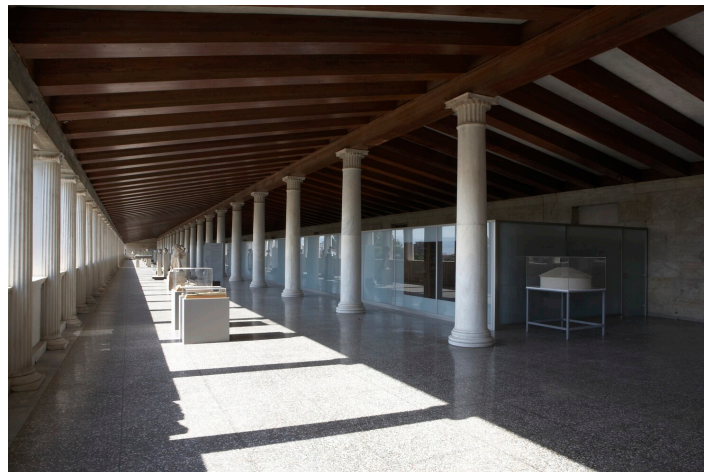
Reviving the Athenian Agora: The cradle of democracy comes alive again.

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

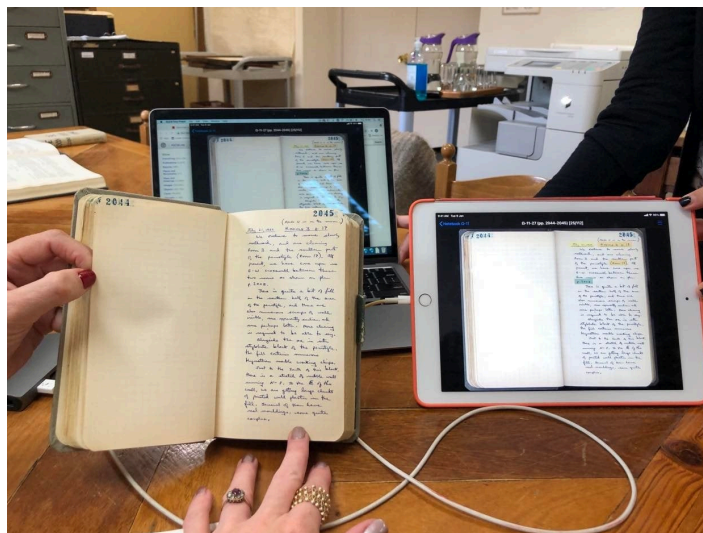
After 30 years of silence, the first floor of the Stoa of Attalos opened again. A completely renewed exhibition welcomed visitors with **52 stone antiquities**, including Roman portraits and sculptures never displayed before. A **1,000 m² gallery** — twice the previous space — now hosts temporary exhibitions, 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. 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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This newsletter brings forward stories of impact, cooperation, and change across Greece.



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