

Vassilis Nitsiakos

Peklari

Social economy in a Greek village

LIT

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Monograph III

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Vassilis Nitsiakos

PEKLARI

Social economy in a Greek village

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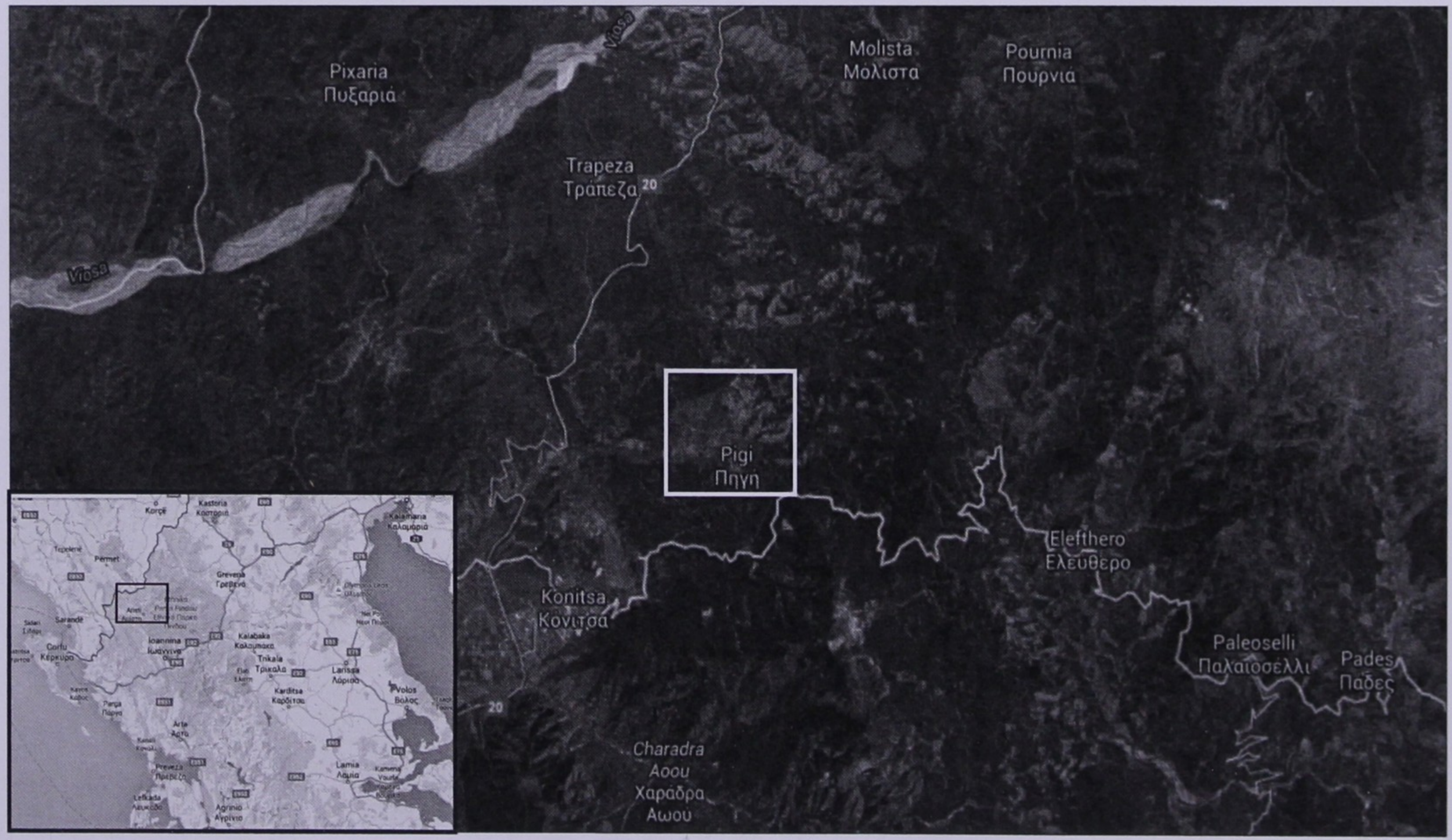

MAP OF THE RESEARCH AREA (Source: www.google.com/maps

PROLOGUE

This book did not even exist as an idea in my mind one year ago. Whilst conducting field research in the broader Konitsa area, this time in the context of the THALES[1] research programme of the University of Ioannina, entitled *Nature conservation through religion: The sacred forests of Epirus*, I realised that, beyond the specific object of the study (the forests protected by religious practices), there are other related topics which have not been given their due in scientific research. Speaking to people in the village about the trees, the coppices and forests, which are protected in various ways and for a variety of reasons, I "discovered" that aside from the dedicated, excommunicated, sacred etc. trees and forests, which really are protected by religious practices -fundamentally folk ones which have been adopted by the local church and ministry- there are other more important productive practices which protect clumps of trees. They do this not for the protection of the settlements, as with the "sacred" ones, but for the very survival of the community, in which these trees, the *kladera*, play an important role as winter fodder for the animals.

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[1] The present research has been co-funded by the European Union (European Social Fund - EST) and by national resources via the Operational Programme "Education and Lifelong Learning" of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) - Funded Research Project: THALES. Investment in society of knowledge via the European Social Fund.

Gradually focusing my research interest on this topic, therefore, I realised that the *kladera* do not merely constitute a very important productive practice, but a kind of social phenomenon, on the basis of which one can study the system of the local economy in a given, long-lasting historical period. The *kladero* represents the distillation of the combination of agriculture and animal breeding as well as of the whole relationship between local society and the natural environment. It gives us the capacity to penetrate the secrets of the community's survival strategies and through these the very process of the appropriation of nature, a process which refers to the concept of culture itself, in the holistic sense of the term. Consequently, the *kladero* is a means to study the economic, social and generally cultural foundation of the community. Moreover, this specific process of the appropriation of nature, which could be characterised "experiential sustainability", is linked to a particular kind of social egalitarianism. This renders the whole object not simply of specific scientific interest but also highly pertinent in a time of general crisis in our society.

We could say that this phenomenon prevails in all the agro-pastoral communities found in the "oak zone" and is imprinted on their cultural landscape, which is characterised by clumps of trees, mainly oaks, in a specific spatial arrangement and with particular morphological characteristics. These are owed to their periodic pruning, in order to use the dried branches for feeding domestic animals during the winter. We find this in all the villages of this zone in the Konitsa region. It is absent essentially only from the Alpine zone, where transhumant animal breeding prevails. In the villages known as *Mastorochoria* (Craft-villages), which make up the basic

population of the region, the basis of the economy is a combination of agriculture and domestic animal breeding, out of which arises the turn to technical specialisation at a specific historical juncture.

Peklari (now Pigi) belongs to this group of villages. Why this one and not another? My second home has been Konitsa for the last fifteen years and more, and I had the opportunity in my neighbourhood - which took its name from the settlement of a number of inhabitants of Peklari and is called *Peklaritika* - to meet and associate with many of them. Thus, informally and without them realising (often also without me realising), I carried out research by discussing with them various topics of their village. The village itself is only seven kilometres from Konitsa and thus, each time I wanted to go for a short trip, by some twist of fate the road took me there. When, therefore, I had to decide on my example for the case study, I chose Peklari without a second thought.

From this position I would like to thank all the villagers who helped me in one way or another (often without realising it). I would particularly like to thank, however, Antonis and Lefko Tefou, my dear neighbours and regular interlocutors, Nikos Kefalas, former secretary of the community, Galateia Vourdouka, Pavlos Propodis, the former and current presidents Panagiotis Choupsias, Christos Kontos, Ioannis and his son Vassilis Spanos, Apostolos Zotos and all those who responded positively to my proposal and spoke with me on the relevant topics.

Warm thanks are also due to my colleagues Kalliopi Stara and Rigas Tsiakiris for our creative collaboration and their help in general, to Joshua Barley for the translation and Thodoris Kouros for the editing.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr W. Hopf, who willingly agreed to include the book in his publications.

As the book was coming to an end, my father passed away. By his actions he taught me something without which neither this book nor my other books would exist: To carry out my work with love and enthusiasm.



INTRODUCTION

NATURE AND CULTURE

The nature-culture dichotomy has left its mark on anthropological debate since the very beginnings of the scientific discipline. Even today, in a way, it occupies an important position in various discussions on a broad range of topics. The same can be said of the environment-society dichotomy, which in one way or another appears again and again in various contexts of sociological and environmental narratives.

Oddly enough, these dichotomies are reproduced even in post-modern contexts, essentially perpetuating a conception of culture as a reality external to nature, and vice versa. Culture, whether as a product of the appropriation of nature by human society or as a means of mankind's adaptation to its environment, remains a distinct entity; nature, on the other hand, continues to be portrayed as something external, an objective reality "somewhere out there", to be made into an object of use, management, exploitation etc. in one way or another.

It seems to be somewhat difficult to free ourselves from this deep-rooted dichotomous idea, which is found in the very foundations of western thought since the beginning of modernity. We could perhaps also claim that the same dichotomy is to be found in the roots of the discipline of Ecology itself. The objectification of the environment cuts it off from human society and experience in a