

THE ART OF DRYSTONES RECOGNIZED AS INTANGIBLE HERITAGE IN CYPRUS

In 2015 the [Cyprus National Commission inscribed the art of drystone in the list of the Intangible Heritage](#) recognized by UNESCO.

Terracing is one of the oldest means adopted by farmers all over the world of cultivating slopes while saving soil and water. Dry-stone terraces characterise a large part of the landscape in Cyprus, and especially in mountain areas where large surfaces have been converted to agricultural terraces. The terraces are supported by walls, whereby stone is the only construction material without any binding mortar.

The Cypro Government currently coordinates the joint application to UNESCO by the governments of Greece, Italy, Spain, France and Switzerland to incorporate these ancient and traditional rural architecture technologies into universal heritage. In all these countries dry stones have been regularly used in the past to build simple constructions like retaining walls, road surfacing, partition walls between properties, animal housing or to build more complex installations like agricultural terraces or houses.

These techniques, abandoned due to the rural exodus and the diffusion of industrial methods of agricultural production, are currently being re-valued for the great contribution they can make to the shaping of the natural landscape, in preventing landslides and floods, in fighting desertification and preserving biodiversity.

In particular drystone walls perform the following fundamental functions in landscape and ecosystem:

- Built with stones removed from the ground, the drystone wall is an ecological corridor, hosting insects, small reptiles and amphibians that contribute to husbandry by keeping the environment healthy and free from pests.
- With spontaneous vegetation growing between the stones or close to the walls, dry stone walls are an important ecosystem. In the dry season, they create a special microclimate for the survival of plants, providing greater water availability.
- The establishment of terraces acts as sediment trap storing the washed-off soil material within the slope. In general, terraces were created to stop or reduce the degrading effect of soil erosion by



intercepting and controlling the surface run-off velocity and by facilitating its slower infiltration. In such a way, the sediment that accumulates behind the terraces has created suitable land for farming.

- Drystone walls allow to reduce the desertification of the soil, using the stones as a surface for water capture. In many countries characterized by water scarcity, dry walls are constructed with special criteria to be used as air duct collectors. Moisture is captured by disposing dry stones with wide interstices acting as a condensation surface and carefully choosing stones with surfaces capable of collecting water and gradually shedding it to the ground. These ancient techniques reproduce, like modern biomimetic, the principles of nature. In this case the wall reproduces the formation of dew, capturing and condensing the vapour contained in the air through the surfaces of the stones.
- Drystone walls can assume other specific functions required by the ecosystem. During 2015 in Cyprus, for example, 366 meters of drystone-walls have been built inside agricultural fields in order to provide food and shelter for several small bird species that the country wants to protect and multiply.
- Finally, drywalls are an example of sustainable architecture and play an important role in protecting the landscape. Constructed with natural materials of the territory, with minimal energy use, drystone walls enrich the beauty of the landscape and enhance traditional knowledge and abilities of local people.

Today drystone constructions are assuming greater importance in planning landscapes, contributing to the management of land and water resources. Their recognition as an *Intangible Heritage* represents for the proposing countries a commitment to rehabilitate the existing drystone walls system and to expand it into rural areas.

These initiatives are involving international organisations like the SPS (Société scientifique internationale pour l'étude pluridisciplinaire de la Pierre Sèche), the International terraced landscapes Alliance, the DSWA Dry stone Wall Association, academic institutions and governmental departments, environmental organisations, local community associations, professional groups of architects, civil engineers, archaeologists, biologists, environment scientists and specialists, geologists and hydrologists.

These initiatives are generating the emergence of new trades, inspired by the tradition and enriched by modern knowledge. In all these countries there is a growing number of training opportunities for young people interested in learning these technologies and creating companies for the construction of dry stone walls at the request of public administrations of the concerned farms.



To know more

[Drystone in Cyprus National Commission website](#)

[Drystone technical information in qcat.wocat.net](#)

[Drystone walling in Greece](#)

[SPS website](#)

[Terraced Landscapes2016](#)

[Paisages de la piedra seca en Catpaisadge.net](#)

[Article in Repubblica.it](#)

[Murettiasecco.com website](#)

[Murettiasecco.com presentation](#)

[Taller de formación in casadepaja.org](#)

[Manuales en piedra seca in Youtube](#)

[Pierreseche France website](#)

[Perreseche France articles](#)

[France Pierre seche patrimoine rural blog](#)

[DSWA United Kingdom website](#)


[Dry Stone Walls in explainthatstuff.com](#)

[Drystone.org website](#)



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DRYSTONE AS AN ELEMENT OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE
INFORMAL EXPERT MEETING
Nicosia, Cyprus, 22-23 January 2016



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