TERRACES OF CYPRUS

Culture, Climate & Community

High School Edition

Developed from material

TERRACT

Prepared by

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2026

An ancient solution to a modern problem

What if a 300-year-old stone wall could help fight climate change?

Across the hills of Cyprus, terraced landscapes stand as evidence that traditional societies developed sophisticated environmental solutions long before modern engineering. Today, as climate change intensifies droughts, wildfires and soil erosion, these historic systems are gaining new relevance.

This book explores how terraces connect culture, ecology and community — and why they matter in the 21st century.



A Living Terraced Landscape in Cyprus
Photo by Glyn Edwards

WHAT ARE TERRACED LANDSCAPES?

Terraced landscapes are human-made agricultural systems constructed on sloping land.

In Cyprus, farmers built dry-stone retaining walls to create flat cultivation areas on steep hillsides. These structures transformed rocky terrain into productive farmland.

Terraces are both:

- Agricultural infrastructure
- Cultural landscapes

They reflect human adaptation to environmental constraints.



A Living Terraced Landscape in Cyprus
Photo by Timmi Tilllmann

Cyprus is mountainous and semi-arid. Rainfall is seasonal and unpredictable. Soil erosion is a constant threat.

Faced with these conditions, rural communities engineered terraces to:

- Maximize arable land
- Retain soil
- Conserve water
- Stabilize slopes

Terraces represent necessity transformed into innovation.

Dry Stone Wall, Salamiou Village, Moutti Area
Photo by Sevina Floridou



A LANDSCAPE SHAPED BY NECESSITY

Environmental Engineering

Terraces function as integrated ecological systems.

They:

- Slow surface water runoff
- Increase water infiltration
- Prevent soil erosion
- Reduce landslide risk
- Create stable planting zones

The dry-stone wall absorbs pressure while allowing drainage and preventing structural collapse.

This is engineering without concrete — built through observation and experience.

Photo by Sevina Floridou



HOW DO TERRACES WORK?



Argyris Panayiotou
Stone Mason EDTL 2023

Terraces create microclimates.

Stone walls absorb heat during the day and release it at night, moderating temperature fluctuations. This allows cultivation of:

- Grapes
- Olives
- Carob
- Almonds
- Vegetables

These crops shaped Cyprus' rural economy and food traditions.



Terraced Lanscapes and Dry Stone Wall , Salamiou
Photo by Christodoulou Photography

MICROCLIMATES AND CROP DIVERSITY

Terrace construction required:

- Geological understanding
- Soil management knowledge
- Water flow observation
- Skilled stone placement

This knowledge was passed through generations.

It is known as "traditional ecological knowledge" — practical environmental expertise developed over centuries.



Photo from Mesana Community

TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Building terraces was labour-intensive.

Communities worked collectively:

- Clearing stones
- Transporting materials
- Constructing walls
- Maintaining fields

Terraces reflect cooperation, shared responsibility and collective resilience.



Construction of the Dry Stone Walls at Kamilostrata in Salamiou Village during the EDTL 2023
Photo by Vas Petropoulou Panayiotou

TERRACES AND COMMUNITY COOPERATION

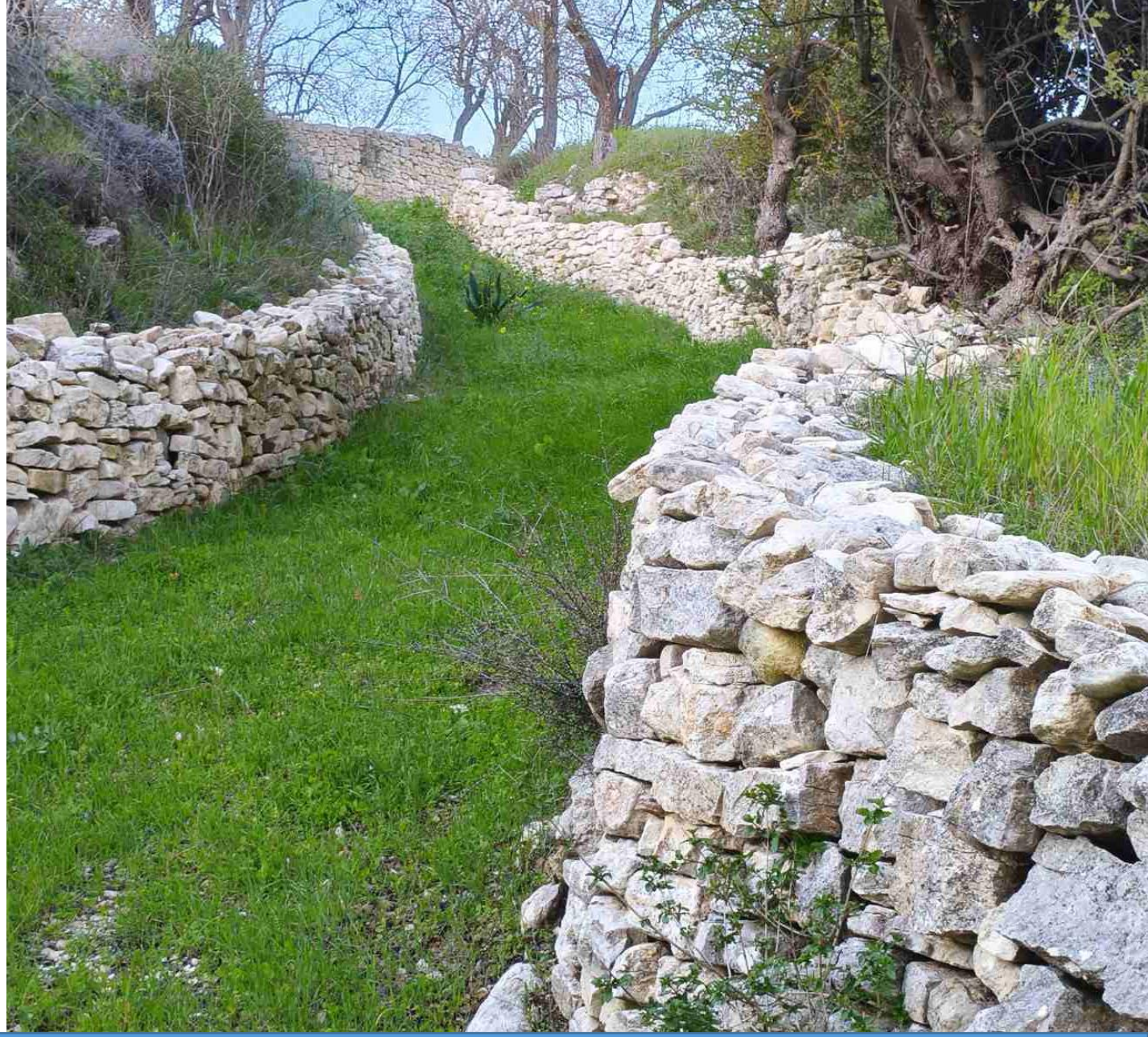
Terraces are part of Cyprus' rural identity.

They represent:

- Historical survival strategies
- Agricultural heritage
- Landscape aesthetics
- Intergenerational continuity

They are "living heritage" — not monuments but working landscapes.

Kamilostrata, Salamiou Village
Restored dry stone walls EDTL 2023 and ETL 2024
Photo by Andri Kedariti 2026



In the 20th century, urbanization and economic shifts led to rural abandonment.

When terraces are neglected:

- Walls collapse
- Soil erodes
- Vegetation becomes unmanaged
- Fire risk increases

Landscape degradation accelerates.

Abandonment transforms resilience into vulnerability.



Result of a fire in the Paphos region
Photo by Glyn Edwards 2023

ABANDONMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Climate change intensifies:

- Heavy rainfall events
- Prolonged droughts
- Wildfire frequency

Terraces help mitigate these impacts by:

✓ Slowing runoff
✓ Retaining moisture
✓ Breaking fire spread patterns

They function as nature-based climate adaptation infrastructure.



A Living Terraced Landscape in the Paphos Area
Photo by Glyn Edwards 2023

Terraced landscapes support biodiversity.

Stone walls create habitats for:

- Reptiles
- Insects
- Small mammals
- Native plants

Terraces increase ecological diversity compared to unmanaged slopes.

They are cultural landscapes that enhance natural systems.



Cyclamen, National Cypriot Flower
Photo by Andri Kedariti 2026

Across Europe, terraced landscapes are increasingly recognized as green infrastructure.

Green infrastructure refers to natural or semi-natural systems that provide environmental services such as:

- Water regulation
- Climate resilience
- Soil protection
- Carbon storage

Terraces demonstrate how heritage landscapes can support modern sustainability goals.



Terraced Landscapes and Dry Stone Wall In Salamiou Village
Photo by Timmi Tillmann 2024

TERRACES AS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

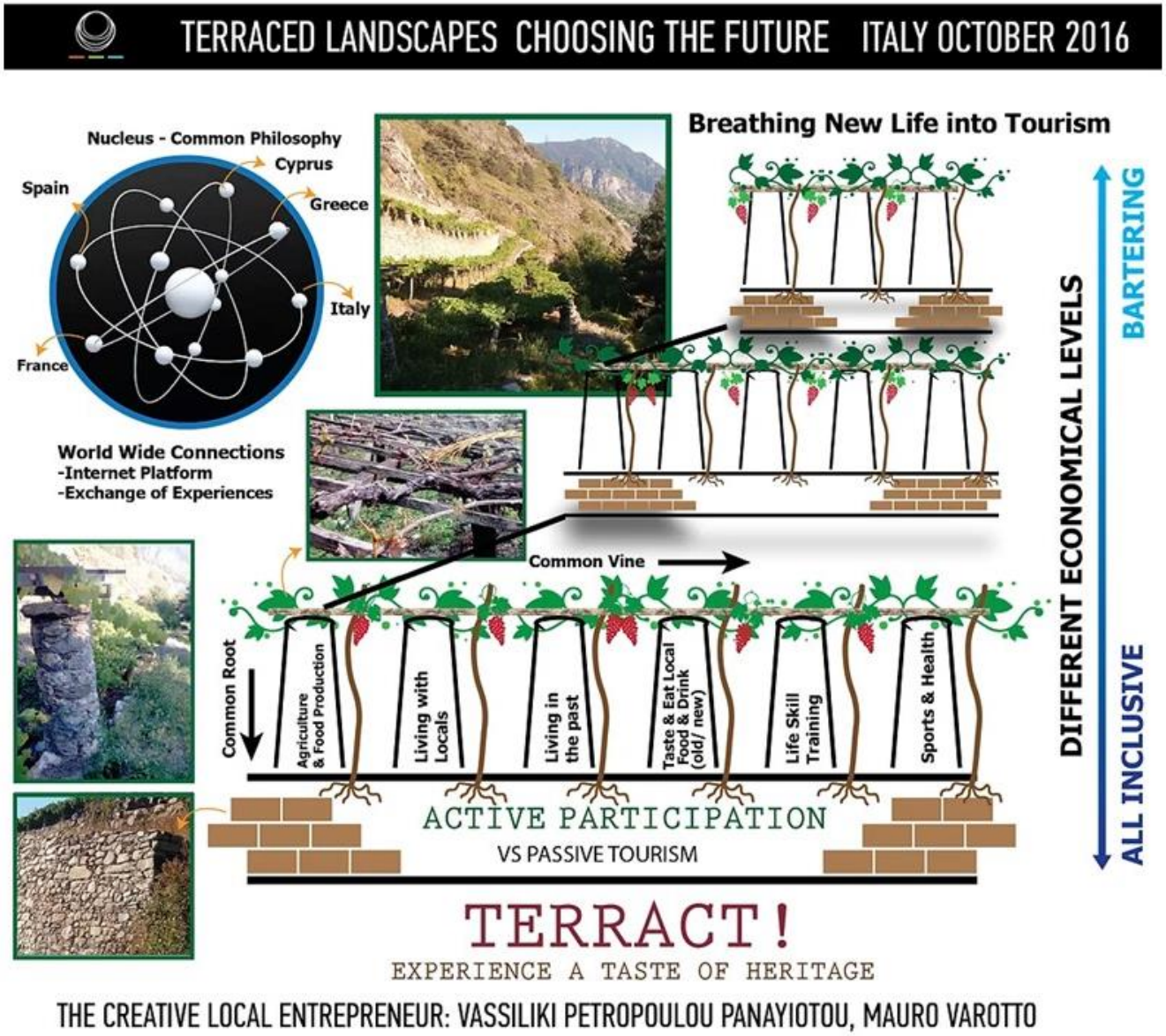
Many European regions share terraced traditions.

Countries such as:

- Italy
- Germany
- Spain
- Portugal
- Greece

have similar systems adapted to Mediterranean climates.

European initiatives support terrace restoration as part of rural sustainability and climate policy.



TERRACT initiative presented in Padova, Italy during the ITLA Conference 2016

Restoration in Practice

In several Cypriot villages, terrace restoration projects have:

- Repaired collapsed walls
- Revived abandoned farmland
- Reduced erosion risk
- Encouraged agrotourism
- Created local employment

Restoration connects environmental protection with economic opportunity.



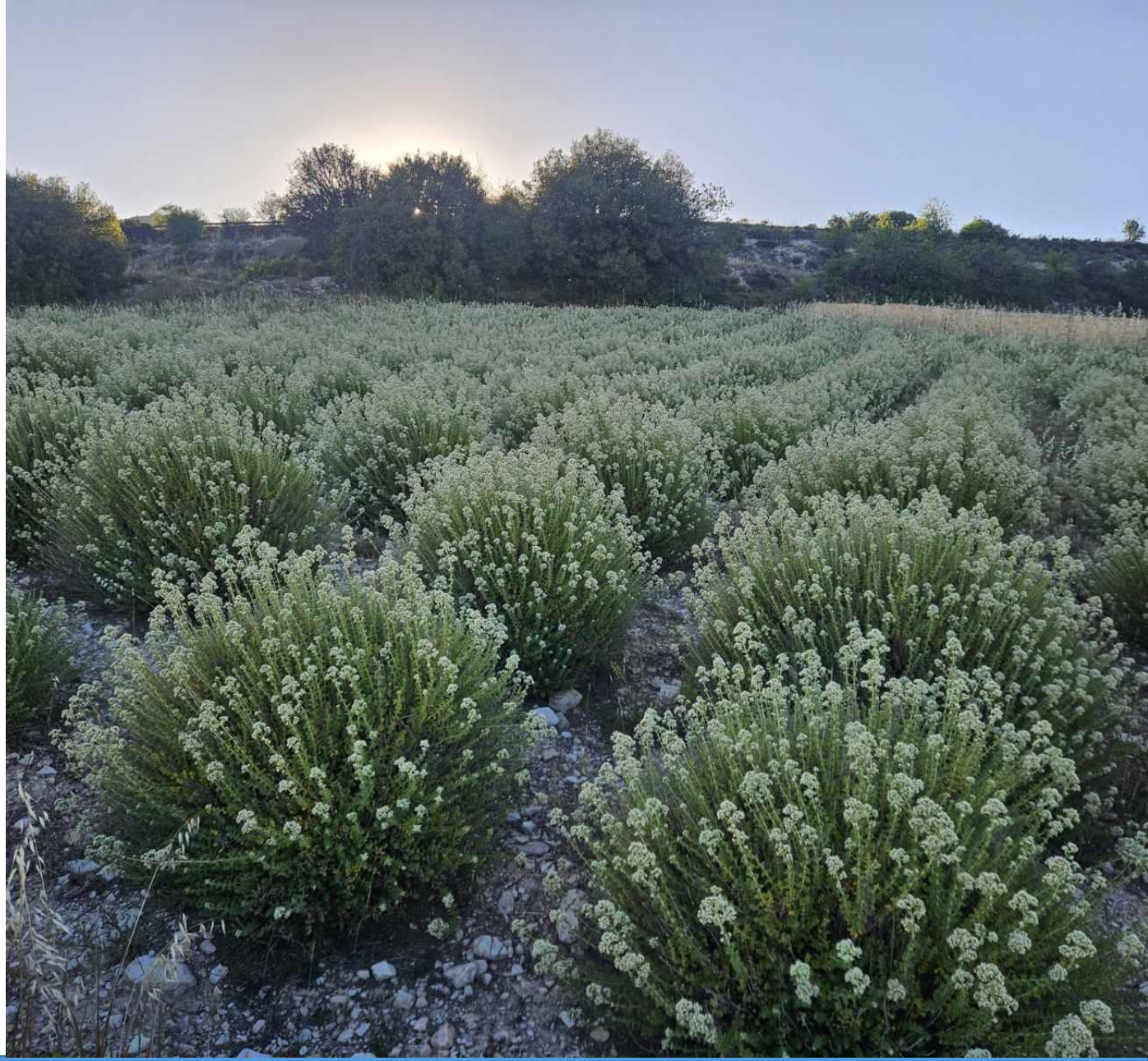
Restoration of a stiadi in Inia during ETL 2024
Photo by Sevina Floridou

Terraces contribute to:

- Sustainable agriculture
- Local food production
- Rural tourism
- Landscape branding

They add cultural and ecological value to rural regions.

Heritage can become a driver of sustainable development.



Oregano plantation in Salamiou Village
Photograph by George Papadopoulos



Example of a Terract Event
Created by Vassiliki Petropoulou Panayiotou

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL VALUE TODAY

Young people play a key role in:

- Raising awareness
- Supporting restoration initiatives
- Studying environmental sciences
- Engaging in sustainable agriculture

Terraces offer opportunities for future careers in:

- Environmental management
- Landscape architecture
- Climate policy
- Heritage conservation



Student interaction
Biennale Architecture 2025, Venice
Cypriot Pavilion
Photograph from Gaestano Di Gregorio

Consider the following:

- Should governments fund terrace restoration?
- Are traditional systems more sustainable than industrial agriculture?
- Can cultural heritage be part of climate policy?
- How do we balance modernization with preservation?

Discuss with evidence.



Collapsed wall in Salamiou Village
Photo by Timmi Tillmann 2025

Research Project:

Investigate a terraced village in Cyprus and assess its environmental challenges.

Field Study:

Visit a terrace site and analyze wall condition, vegetation and erosion.

Policy Exercise:

Design a proposal for a youth-led terrace restoration initiative.



Student interaction
Biennale Architecture 2025, Venice
Cypriot Pavilion
Photograph from Gaestano Di Gregorio

PROJECT IDEAS

Landscapes of Resilience

Terraced landscapes are more than stone walls.

They represent:

- Adaptation
- Knowledge
- Cooperation
- Sustainability

In a time of environmental uncertainty, they remind us that resilience is built — stone by stone — through community and care for the land.

The question is not whether terraces matter.

The question is whether we will value them enough to protect them.



Distrata restored Dry Stone Wall ETL 2025,
Salamiou Village
Photo by Sevina Floridou



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