

## **PIOP's museums network and library: Cultural economics**

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**Abstract:** Standing at a crossroads, in a critical era and from a post related to providing information of any kind, writers focus their research on information itself and the formulation of new conditions related to access and dissemination of information in the field of cultural heritage institutions.

The Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation (PIOP) is a non-profit institution that aims to safeguard record, study and promote the traditional technology and industrial culture of Greece. PIOP realises its statutory goals by conducting research on traditional craftsmanship, industrial archaeology, inventorying their remnants, and disseminating the results by any means available. In this context, the creation and functioning of a Network of thematic technological museums covering the whole of Greece constitutes an essential tool. Each of these museums highlights the diverse aspects of a productive activity that upheld the economy and stamped the identity of the corresponding region. Under the scope of empowering local communities by activating sustainable development in the Greek periphery, PIOP organizes cultural public outreach activities in the Museums Network: temporary exhibitions, educational programmes, lectures, seminars, craftsmanship presentations, film screenings, dance, music, story-telling etc. To the present, the Network comprises seven operating museums, while two more are “on the making”: their creation has been financed by E.U. Programmes (European funding and national funds) and by the Piraeus Bank Group, and their functioning is financed by the Piraeus Bank.

PIOP, operating a network of museums, a variety of research programs, various publications and a central library specialized, among other fields, in cultural heritage, museology and economic history, is trying to overcome the consequences of the ongoing economic crisis on cultural production and society's relation to cultural activities, by active participation and involvement in the Information Society, where the key issue is the need for direct access to provided information.

**Keywords:** Museums network (PIOP), Library (PIOP), Cultural economics, Information Society

### **1. PIOP: Museums Network and Library**

The main axis of action of the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation (PIOP), which is a non-profit institution, is the study and valorisation of the pre-industrial and industrial culture in Greece. In this context, the creation and functioning of a network of thematic technological museums covering the whole of Greece constitutes an essential tool. Each of these museums highlights the diverse aspects of a productive activity that upheld the economy and stamped the identity of the corresponding region.

The Network's museums come under two basic categories: A) "Museums of their own selves", which evolve in the authentic shell that housed the corresponding activity: a) The Open Air Water-Power Museum in Dimitiana (Peloponnese), highlights the importance of hydraulic power in traditional societies, presenting the basic pre-industrial techniques that use water as the main source of energy for the production of various products. b) The Museum of Industrial Olive-Oil Production in Lesvos is housed in the old communal olive press of the village of Aghia Paraskevi and presents the industrial phase of olive-oil production in Greece. c) The N. & S. Tsalapatas Rooftile and Brickworks Museum is housed in the premises of the main Tsalapatas factory in Volos (Central Greece). d) The Silk Museum is housed in the traditional mansion of the Kourtidis family (built in 1883) in Soufli (Thrace). It presents all the phases and stages of pre-industrial sericulture and silk production. B) "Thematic museums" that present the diverse (economic, social, cultural) dimensions of a single subject diachronically, that is to say through the passage of time: a) The Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil in Sparta (Peloponnese) presents the varied uses and economic and symbolic aspects of the olive and olive oil, from antiquity to the present. b) The Museum of Marble Crafts in Pargos, on the island of Tinos, presents the technology of marble, a material with a special place in the architecture and art of Greece from ancient times to the present, while also describing the nexus of the different tools and techniques. c) The Environment Museum of Stymphalia (Peloponnese), on the shores of the lake bearing the same name, aims to highlight the interaction between human activity and the environment thanks to a broad inter-scientific approach.

The creation of two new museums has already begun, financed by the National Strategic Reference Framework of the European Union: The Masticha Museum on the island of Chios and The Museum of Silver-craft in Ioannina (Epirus).

PIOP has created a model for the creation and management of this Museums Network, which is developing its presence in the Greek provinces, on the basis of the Foundation's continuous and fruitful collaboration with local authorities and the Greek State.<sup>1</sup> The Museums Network's activity is also supported by the Foundation's Departments of Publications, of Research and Promotion, of Historical Archives and of Library, while the necessary legal support is provided by the Piraeus Bank's Legal Department.

In this paper we will also refer to the Foundation's Library. The PIOP Library is specialized in the acquisition of bibliographical resources related to the Foundation's research areas, which are defined in its statutes. The Foundation's scientific and research interests are twofold: highlighting the history of technology and pre-industrial archaeology through the creation and functioning of a Museums Network in the Greek provinces, and publishing works concerning these subjects. The Foundation's Library, until February 2013, was divided into two sections, aimed at improving its organization and functioning: a) the Central Library, and, b) the [Specialized Library of the Historical Archives Department](#). The Central Library held 7.000 books and periodicals; its reserves were constantly expanding through the addition of new publications and periodicals from both Greece and abroad with an emphasis on topics relating to: industrial archaeology, museology, the history of technology (and of various productive branches), folklore and cultural material, ethnology and anthropology, economic history, as well as new technologies concerning cultural research. It was also the repository of educational material regarding museums and archaeological sites. The Specialized Library of the Historical Archives Department contained material from the libraries of The Economic Development Financing Organization (EDFO), the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), ETBA bank Group and Chios Bank. Its collection totalized approximately 10.000 Greek and foreign titles (books, periodicals and brochures), offered specialized information on subjects relating to economic history and the history of banks and businesses in Greece.

February 2013 was an important turning point for PIOP's Library. Due to the merger of Piraeus Bank and ATEbank, the Foundation had to deal with the unification of its two Libraries with the Library of ATEbank. During the writing of the paper, this unification was in progress trying to formulate the new conditions related to access and dissemination of information in the field of cultural heritage institutions. The purpose of the Library of ATEbank was primarily to provide the necessary scientific support and information to executives of ATEbank, but also to researchers and students, according to the purposes of the bank. The topics covered by the collection were mainly finance, banking, economics, agricultural economics, agricultural policy, geotechnical engineering, management, computer science, history, literature, etc. The library's collection consisted of 28.000 volumes of books, 250 journal titles, and special collections.

When the union of the three libraries is completed, the new unique Library will be play a dual role. On one hand it will support the Bank's services and PIOP's personnel, on the other hand the wide research community, promoting the concept of the "Information Society".

## **2. Corporate Social Responsibility of Piraeus Bank through PIOP**

One of the main convictions of Piraeus Bank is that the development of its activities will be optimal if achieved in a socially robust environment. With the aim to operate in harmony with society, it attaches major importance to the issues of Corporate Social Responsibility, including [Corporate Governance](#),

[Social](#) work, [Cultural](#) contributions and [Environmental](#) issues. The issue of corporate social responsibility is an emergent research field with lots of bibliographical references, such as Kotler (2009), Mallin (2009), Mullerat (2010).

According to the Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility “Corporate Social Responsibility is the voluntary commitment of businesses to include in their business practices social and environmental actions, further to and beyond any legal obligations, which are related with all their stakeholders (employees, shareholders, associates, suppliers, investors, consumers, communities where they operate, etc.)” (Feb. 2005).

Therefore, Piraeus Bank with a view to operating in harmony with society, attaches particular importance to corporate social responsibility issues, including social, environmental and cultural questions. Piraeus Bank has met the FTSE4Good index criteria since 2003, while in 2007 it became a full member of the Hellenic Network for Corporate Social Responsibility. Since this integration, the Bank received an award by the international Corporate Responsibility Index (CRI) in 2009 and 2010, placing it in the golden category, while in 2011 it was placed in the platinum category. This is the highest distinction awarded for a first time to a business corporation in Greece. Moreover, the Bank also received a special commendation for its social work, which is mainly carried out through the multifarious activities of the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation (PIOP).

Instead of a simple sponsorship, Piraeus Bank opted for a permanent and continuous involvement in the field of culture, a stance that is obviously more substantial and profitable as regards the real support of both the cultural affairs and the economy and society of the abandoned regions. It is a case of a unique, far-reaching cultural intervention, which allows the Piraeus Bank Group to decisively mark the «culture» question with its own stamp: through PIOP, a large financial institution plays an active part and consolidates itself socially by investing in the country's cultural affairs. The Foundation's activities are the means by which the Bank exercises an explicit cultural policy, possibly the most substantial and effective one because it is elaborated and originates from the centre, adhering to strict quality specifications, but is adapted to the needs and bears fruit only with the cooperation of local societies.

Several issues arise here, in the discussion of cultural policy; a policy decision is not necessarily an economic one. This is an important start point for economist. Cultural economics is the application of economics to the production, distribution and consumption of all cultural goods and services. What all cultural goods and services have in common is that they contain a creative or artistic element (Towse, 2003). In the case of PIOP, cultural goods are both tangible (books, archives) and also intangible objects, such as the visit in the museums of its network. The most common distinction is between those cultural organizations that are publicly owned, those that are privately owned and those that they are concerned non-profit. From this point on begins the conversation about cultural financing. Another issue that one should take under consideration is that the last years many countries, including Greece, are trying to reduce the

size of the public sector, and as consequence are forced to change their cultural policy. From this perspective, PIOP as a non-profit organization was prepared to overcome the new reality through its actions. While considering cultural economics, their study is not motivated by the size of the cultural sector, nor is it important because of the amount of public money. The analytical approaches that have been taken by cultural economists are identified and explained in detail in the work of Ruth Towse (2003), *A handbook of cultural economics*, which contains all the topics included in that subject.

### **3. PIOP in the Information Society**

Museums and libraries, as well archives, serve society in increasing human knowledge through their activities (research, exhibitions, and programs).

According to Gorman (2009, 9), “The world ‘library’ is a concept that embraces library service, library collections, library staff, and a range of activities that take place inside and outside the physical plant that is the most visible manifestation of the concept of ‘library’.” From the International Encyclopaedia of Information and Library Science (Feather and Sturges, 1997, 252-3), one can understand that the most important role of a Librarian is the management of collections, information organization and processing, all delivered via intermediary and user services. This means that librarians are no longer the custodians of information or information intermediaries in the digital age; they can actively take part in the creation as well as dissemination of knowledge (Chowdhury, Burton, McMenemy and Poulter, 2008).

What shapes the special character of the museum and differentiates it from other cultural organizations are its collections of objects. According to the ICOM Statutes (Vienna, Austria, 2007): “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”

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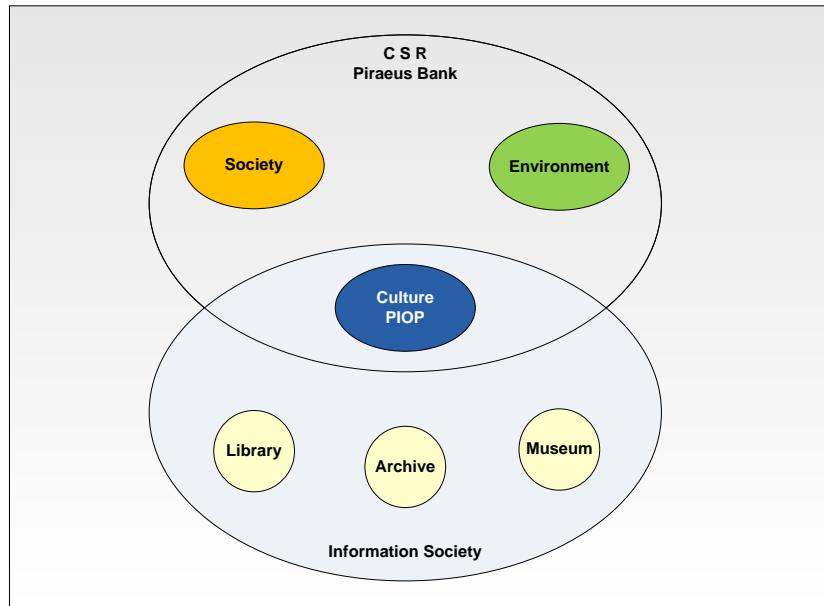
The Information Society is a society in which the creations, distribution, diffusion, use, integration and manipulation of information is a significant economic, political, and cultural activity (Miller, Vandome and McBrewster, 2011). The concept of Information Society is not a new one, but is under discussion since the 1930s. The idea of information society is usually held to originate from the work carried by Fritz Machlup (1962). Since then, there have been various concepts in literature about that issue, which is not our purpose to introduce in this paper. The Information Society is a new societal model (Methnani, 2010), which it is based on information. Information has become the

basic standard and the primary indicator of progress in any given society. The management of this information is the responsibility of the services, foundations and organizations that could be characterized as information services, including an extensive set of processes, tools and techniques to gather, process and storage information materials and to provide information for easy access by interested user.

From this perspective, information policy is not only a part of government policy, but can also be a part of individual organizations (Cornelius, 2010). The information policy of the Foundation includes all the ways that affects the generation, dissemination and use of information, according to the corporate social responsibility of the Piraeus Bank. PIOP strongly believes that people should have access to knowledge and information, without inequalities and social - digital divides. The foundation is taking part at this procedure with the Network of Museums in Greek provinces and the Library in the metropolis of Athens.

At the same time, the Foundation promotes the development of cultural tourism (Bonet, 2003), which is an important factor of growth for local economies. An effort to preserve the quality of cultural and patrimonial resources is being made from the specialized staff. Cultural tourism, according to the definition of the European Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) is the movement of people to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs. At this sense cultural tourism is not only associated with visits to museums, monuments, etc., but also includes participation in any manifestation of a cultural tradition (such as local celebrations, educational programmes), offering an interactive relationship between the Foundation's museums and local population.

On the other hand, by developing its Library, the Foundation promotes the link between the museums network and the research community, demonstrating the fundamental goal of a library that is the delivery of the best service to the user. The demand of The Cultural Heritage Information Professionals (CHIPs) in the workshop in April 2008 was to explore the ability to meet the information needs of cultural heritage organizations, and to encourage a closer cooperation between information science, museum studies and archival studies, jumping over all the traditional boundaries. The Foundation, according to this demand, has created a new organization model, in relation to the study and valorisation of pre-industrial and industrial culture in Greece, so that its Library, Archive and Museums network can collaborate to better serve their users, offering universal access to information about material culture.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure: PIOP as connecting ring among CSR of Piraeus Bank and Information Society**

#### 4. Conclusions

The Foundation’s Museums Network and Library is a good example of how the goal of “information for all” could be implemented in a European society and can also serve as a guide for other, public or private, institutions. The preservation of cultural heritage and knowledge must be upheld, transforming into a new role according to the innovations and changes in ways of collection, management and dissemination; the ultimate goal is to ensure a smooth transition to the information society, a society of culture and education, providing free and instant access to information.

#### Notes

1. The museums created and managed by PIOP usually do not belong to the Foundation itself but, rather, their ownership is in the hands of public entities (the Ministry of Culture, local government, etc.). Consequently, the building in which each individual museum is going to be housed is ceded for use to PIOP for 50 years in application of Law 2039/39 On national bequests. To this end, a case-by-case Programme Contract is signed between the entities concerned. In this contract, PIOP undertakes the commitment of funding the functioning of the Museum and the responsibility of managing it for fifty years, while the details of concession and the composition of the Monitoring Committee as regards the Museum's functioning are also laid down. The cost of creating the Museums is essentially covered by European programmes (2nd and 3rd Community Support Frameworks, National Strategic Reference Framework) and supplemented by Piraeus Bank. In order to ensure that the projects meet the requirements for inclusion in these programmes, the Foundation carries out all the necessary technical, museological and museographical studies, and is also responsible for obtaining building and other

permits, drafting the Technical Report of the Project/Subprojects and for all the required preliminaries. The expenses resulting from these procedures are covered by PIOP and Piraeus Bank.

2. PIOP and Europeana, <http://www.europeana.eu/portal/search.html?query=piop>.

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