

PENELOPE GANDHI

1) What is the job that is being done in the frame of “Penelope Gandhi” mission and how women are supported within this project?

Penelope Gandhi mission is not actually a job. Penelope Gandhi mission comprises one more innovation, a nonprofit activity of the University of the Mountains, the revival of the sacred Art of Weaving.

When the University of the Mountains started ten years ago, in our frequent visits to the various highland villages, we prophetically referred to the situation we are now confronted with. Many heard us, but no one believed us. We were talking about the need to produce and to create ourselves; with our own hands, whatever was needed in our daily lives. We deeply believe that everywhere there are people who can make the difference. The team of the Mission Penelope Gandhi consists of a group of pioneers, who promote ideas and proposals, which are already in the process of being materialized. Nowadays, we’ve managed to bring older and younger weavers together, so that they can meet each other, exchange knowledge, techniques and know – how and expand the weaving art all over Crete. Unique masterpieces which were hidden and locked up in the closet, as folklore and old – fashioned, now they are again on the edge; making the house women proud of them again.

We have cultivated and produced local flax, silk and woollen threads, paint them with natural dyes and with these materials we have weaved unique masterpieces inspired by ancient patterns certified by the **University of Crete**.

Nevertheless, the sacred art of Weaving is now a formal lesson in secondary and primary schools around Greece and our mission has been presented to the glorious Benaki museum in Athens and other museums and galleries all over Crete and Greece.

2) The Project started in November 2012. In how far does it help to defy the crisis and makes people, especially women, believe in better times?

In the passing time, the daughters of Crete weaved, garnished and embroidered woolen, silk, cotton and linen fabrics, with colors from various plants and royal red. Their artisanal, samples of exquisite skill and virtuosity, have supported the heroic memory and the historical duration of our Island.” Nowadays, the woman in Crete struggles to remain unsaved - with arms held high -and continue this great tradition of prayer, worship and creation. “But Penelope Gandhi made women do not give their hopes away, especially the younger ones, who realize that they can contribute to the conservation of tradition on to the generations to come, but they will be able to assist their households. By investing personal time and production, they will develop a small scale economy, however, invaluable.

When the Mission was first introduced, the women’s response and participation was reserved. However, as time passed, especially this past year, there has been a major change in their attitude. This may be due, to the difficult times they are faced with currently at multiple levels and we believe that this is a unique chance offered to the women of Crete who have to make the most for keeping their households, their families, their tradition and their souls alive.

Crete created weaving masterpieces long before the rest of the world, invented money. The artisanal, weaving masterpieces of craftsmanship are the true heritage of the island and the whole country. In fact these are Greece's history and past, its present and at the same time Europe's future.

What was once the objective of a materialised world has now fallen apart. We lost our connection to our nature, roots and family, trying to pursue money, because this is what we thought it would make us happy. And nowadays this became clear as more and more people realise that the most important thing is ... time. We managed to defeat time, as we managed to save our souls our past and tradition, so this made us rich. This is a richness that no one can take away from us. The true feelings of the satisfaction of creativity are the only way to be on the upper level of your existence. Women should make the difference and put their mark on the present and on the future and they won't do it through their external fake beauty, faded by time but through their inner beauty, through their souls and their skills and their inspired handmade masterpieces.

We should lead a different life, based on kindness and justice, embraced by wisdom so that we can enjoy love and the pure light of the truth.

3) How many women are involved in the weaving-project in the meantime? How old are the youngest one's, how old the oldest one's? What training do they have? And how long does it take to learn weaving?

I cannot tell you how many people and more specific how many women are involved within the Penelope Gandhi mission, because not only weavers are involved, doesn't mean that someone is a weaver too. When we started this project, three years before approximately 50 weavers were ready, from Grambousa to Zakro, to start using again the pedal and weave the exceptional designs. So you realize that after three years, full of exhibitions, workshops, meetings and several actions, our weavers are more than 100. To be a weaver can take you a... lifetime. So even the oldest and most experienced weaver is learning and practicing constantly. Most of the times, a younger weaver should spend a lot of time with an older and more experienced one. It's up to her if she will manage to optimize the methods and the first guidelines, as the time passes.

4) Are the women working at home or in work-shops?

Cretan weavers used to weave alone, and most of the times they also used to sing at the same time. Things have not changed lately. To create a handmade masterpiece, you have to be focused and devoted. So the most common for a weaver is to create masterpieces in her house to her own loom.

However over the last years, most of the looms were burned in woodstoves, some were left neglected in village basements and very few exhibited in museums. So now we are looking for looms all over Crete in order to be repaired, so that each weaver can have one in her house. The outmost goal of the Mission is to placement - set up and function of 100 looms in homes of young Cretan women.

Apart from all the above , the loom can be also a gathering point, par excellence for the previous and next generation; a point of organizing and coordinating the mind and body; a place of creation and belief, where negative thinking, anxiety and insecurity have no place.

5) How do older women (pensioners) react to the crisis and what do younger people think of it?

Up to thirty years ago, Crete's micro economy was in the hands of women. Very few were the households where women did not produce whatever was needed in their homes. They decorated the walls, produced handmade utensils for their daily necessities, their daily worship (housework)...They cultivated the land, they were humble; they buried their loved ones and worshiped God. Their elegant dresses were weaved on their looms. They weaved everything needed; from their baby's first piece of clothing, as well as their own shroud, which they took to their graves.

So older women in Crete believe that they do not suffer from crisis, because for them, there is no crisis! They still live simply and produce what they eat and within Penelope Gandhi mission they started weaving again, so that they create again a small scale economy, which will enable them to buy almost anything.

6) How much money (on average) do weavers earn with their independent work in a week?

As far as we speak all of our weavers are volunteers. Now we are our weaving production in museums and private collections all over the world and our weavers are certainly gaining from this procedure.

7) Are the other Greek Islands or towns on the mainland, that are inspired from Penelope Gandhi and start similar projects?

We accept invitations from all over the country to present the Penelope Gandhi mission and hope that this volunteer effort will cultivate same initiatives throughout Greece.

8) What are the main goals?

Penelope Gandhi is a social and collective narrative, with the thread connecting the past with the future. She fights with her Greek mind, life has granted her, with all her might, to ever demand honor and glory indissolubly. Our first and main objective is to escape mimesis and mimicry of the Fool, who produces boredom and traumatizes. When you produce with your hands, you play with light; you produce life proposal. Far from the prevailing logic of surplus "zero," we all have become habitually accustomed to. The outmost goal of the Mission is to placement - set up and function of 100 looms in homes of young Cretan women. For one year approximately, the Mission organizes and materializes all kinds of different activities, such as, visits to sites, exchange of knowledge, recording of events and narrations, as well as documentation of artisanal still preserved in chests. In addition, the Mission organizes events; exhibitions, innovative instructive interventions in primary and secondary schools in Crete, in corporation with the Department of Education of the University of Crete. At the same time, it oversees the circulation and publication of the precious material collected by the team of Penelope Gandhi. The sensitization of the people, both men and women, is the Mission's main concern, which will not only contribute to the conservation and passing on to the generations to come, but it will also assist urban and rural households. By investing personal time and production, they will develop a small scale economy, however, invaluable. The introduction of this innovative activity into the school's curricula is of paramount importance to us. The cultural heritage, the connection of the past with the present, the bridge of the generations and their value systems, as well as issues pertaining to ecology, aesthetics and music, the re-internationalization of the Cretan/Greek culture etc., could be only a few of the benefits and goals of such an activity of art and culture in the school environment.

The enhancement of this would result in a real breakthrough in education, within the framework of cultural values. In this endeavor the State ought to assist financially and institutionally. This incorporation could initially be at an experimental level and later would be permeated to every aspect of Greek life, along with the training and retraining of teachers, who will assume the implementation of this innovative action. Penelope Gandhi and Economy When the University of the Mountains started five years ago, in our frequent visits to the

9) What does Penelope Gandhi need most?

We do not have any financial assistance up to date. This, however, may have been our comparative advantage. Up to now, all of us, who participate on the Penelope Gandhi team, improvise with our own money. We hope that people will be inspired from our efforts and will support this sacred Mission, which aims to preserve and promote our national roots, through the handmade tradition of our country. The textile art, as all folk art, conveys the same symbolic meaning as the one carried by our heritage, our value system, our soul. Our Dream is to see Crete “weaving and unstitching,” as time unfolds, along with the rest of Greece. And to be absolutely certain that what was done, made the difference. This is our only ambition, aspiration, hope and dream... This hyperbole enabled us to come to terms with our destiny, for “we were never satisfied”...

“As Demosthenes the most important rhetor of ancient times has mentioned, the most productive fund is trust, on which all of us must build on”.

