



PIKNIK Curatorial Text

Gathering around a PIKNIK, where sharing becomes a cultural system, as ritual and as embodied energy, this initiative links the body to the earth and water, memory to future, and collective experiences to cherished memories. PIKNIK recognises the interconnections between cultivation, consumption, and care around food. It proposes the PIKNIK as an opportunity for critical reflection, encounter, and action around the systems that sustain us and the multispecies communities we are dependent on. PIKNIK also explores how artistic, land and water-based collaborative processes may catalyse ecological empathy and a recognition for the need of mutual support networks.

Through multisensory experiences PIKNIK reclaims slowness, intimacy and co-hosting as radical tools for ecological awareness. It encourages artistic practices that bridge sensory and social perceptions and processes, where art becomes an act of collective remembering and reimagining the now and the future. Through sound, taste, smell, texture, movement and tacit knowledge sharing, participants are invited to reimagine facets of local ecologies such as food, not only as nourishment, but as an aesthetic, ecological, and political experience — a living medium for awareness and connection. By moving between locations, the PIKNIK project mirrors the cyclical processes of cultivation and regeneration, inviting reflection on the relational dynamics sustaining rural micro-regions at times of increasing climate crisis.

This initiative offers a transdisciplinary perspective when it comes to ideas around co-production of culture and collaborative learning, unlearning and reclaiming of the commons via multi-modal assemblies hosted by communities with rural heritage. This initiative is situated in a hyperlocal and 'do-it-together' context that carries unique characteristics.

Assemblies under Xarkis are conceptualised as communal gatherings, rituals for sharing and as portals for possible futures. Thus, the macro-vision is to explore these spaces as spaces for mutual learning, healing and transformation. To assemble here is to put ideas and actions together as a bricolage (Strauss, 1962), to eventually come together aligned.

Significantly, this is a platform for people to say what they want to say, giving space for fluid and reciprocal encounters. The unconference PIKNIK as the culminating, public-facing event, also functions as an *agora* of relief, as there



tend to be many formalities and hierarchies in typical academic conference settings.

Then perhaps this becomes about creating your own novel space to be in. One that we believe in and to co-create the type of world we want to inhabit, whilst also holding space for agonistic (Mouffe, 1999, 2000, 2005) perspectives.

PIKNIK thus intends to work through ideas in practice on how we are connecting, gathering, hosting and are being hosted in certain communities. Eventually, the long-term ambition is that this initiative can form part of 'an infrastructure of publics' to communicate local needs in public settings, and align together in action to deal with them proactively (Le Dantec, 2016, p.25). Building on ideas around actions and interactions in the process of forming a public, as initiatives that may lead to social innovation, infrastructuring then becomes about aligning interests of diverse actors through a practice-based design research process (Salinas & Malpass, 2020 p.22).

Perhaps we can challenge this notion of assembly, by first reflecting on its scope and boundaries. What are the limits of assemblage and assemblies, be it temporal, geographical etc?

The residency

Each residency functions as a collective experiment, open-air studio and performative space where the gestures of gathering, listening, walking, making and doing, become forms of practice, research, demonstration and expression. Participants are invited to think of food-land-sea-bodies as interconnected systems of nourishment and care. Through fieldwork, workshops, performative actions, and reflective gatherings, participants will learn with the landscapes, histories, and communities of Peyia, and Droushia, and cultivate situated perspectives of cultural and ecological heritage, sustainability, food sovereignty, and collective imagination. Public interventions led by participants may include:

- Performative meals as spaces of exchange;
- Picnics within the PIKNIK;
- Performances connecting sound, texture, and smell;
- Interactive installations or community-based interventions;
- Workshops, and "open table" formats rethinking picnics as a medium for care and social transformation, through sharing and co-hosting;



The Residency program will also include collective, site-specific, and experiential activities including:

- Experimental fieldwork
- Collective walks, workshops, and performative gatherings
- Dialogues, storytelling, and ephemeral interventions
- Introduction to co-design methods
- Introduction to permaculture and ecopedagogical methods
- Creation of a "seed diary" and artistic herbarium
- Public presentation and co-curated reflection session

The unconference

The PIKNIK unconference is inspired by feminist philosopher Judith Butler's performative theory of assembling (Butler, 2015) and Bruno Latour's socio-material assemblies comprising humans and non-humans (Latour, 1999). It aims to create a space where people across disciplines, genders, abilities and backgrounds can engage in dialogues around ecological justice, circular design, knowledge commons and food sovereignty. By treating the picnic as a political and poetic site of encounter, the project hopes by the end to propose tentative proposals towards a just transition. Key focus areas include:

- Environmental and climate justice
- Slow living and circular practices
- Feminist and intersectional approaches to care
- Decolonising knowledge and amplifying local wisdom
- Art as a catalyst for socio-ecological transformation

Through performative meals, participatory rituals, and sensory practices, the unconference becomes a space for dialogue between disciplines and communities, merging artistic imagination with ecological awareness.

About the Framework

PIKNIK aligns with the principles of the New European Bauhaus and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), integrating sustainability, inclusivity, and aesthetics as fundamental values for reimagining the future. Through shared learning, art-making, and sensory exchange, the project cultivates new forms of coexistence, solidarity, and imagination, inviting participants to gather around the



metaphorical — and literal — table of care. *PIKNIK* is part of an ongoing commitment by Xarkis to cultivate participatory ecologies, artistic experimentation, and the co-creation of sustainable futures.

References

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Hosts

Droushia

Located in the Pafos region, the little village of Droushia sits at an altitude of 630 metres in the mountainous area of Laona. The word “Droushia”, comes from the term *δροσιά* (pronounced drosia), meaning coolness, temperature-wise (Dion. K. Paroutsas, 2022).

It is home to the Regional Museum of Droushia, situated under Akamas region which is one of the last remaining Natura areas of Cyprus. A combination of crafts including silk, cotton, textiles, alongside baked goods, wine products, and representations of local community members including shepherds are displayed in the museum.

The Museum is linked to the *Akamas Rural Life and Traditions – Crafts Training Centre* also in Droushia.

Contrary to many museums made in rural communities, this museum does not present crafts in isolation to the community of Droushia, but extends the exhibition to include elements from the wider Paphos region and is further connected to exhibits from the island in an effort to explore craft practices more holistically. The museum was built on a thematic framework, diving into Akamas Peninsula's key features, including the region's terrestrial, marine biodiversity and birdlife, whilst touching on some of the myths and local legends, antiquities, and folk architecture.

It is dedicated to regional villages and local people. In this light, the exhibits, pictures, and allusions place emphasis on agricultural production and processing, traditional clothing and professions, objects of daily life, and handicrafts, and the human-made agricultural landscape.

One key issue that exists locally in terms of craft preservation, is the lack of craft heritage education, especially in formal education contexts and in schools. To this effect, the *Akamas Rural Life and Traditions – Crafts Training Centre* offers workshops and collaborates with schools, bringing children and teenagers to learn the how-tos of weaving and gourd decoration.



Peyia

Peyia is a town and municipality in the Paphos District of Cyprus. It is located 14 km northwest of Paphos, at the southern end of the Akamas Peninsula, and is situated mainly on steep coastal hills near Coral Bay. The main issues affecting this area are commodification of land, touristification, gentrification and illegal construction over protected natural sites.