

Alcohol as a Commodity and Anti-Commodity.

Understanding food sovereignty and cultural sustainability in the Lasithi Plateau, Greece

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of traditional raki making in sustaining food sovereignty and cultural continuity in the Lasithi Plateau of Crete. Set in a rural, mountainous region known for its strong communal ties and seasonal agricultural rhythms, the practice of raki distillation extends beyond alcohol production. It serves as a cultural institution where social bonds are renewed, ecological knowledge is passed on, and community identity is reinforced. Raki production in Lasithi operates as a form of anti-commodity—its primary purpose is not profit but maintaining a shared way of life rooted in cooperation, care, and circular use of natural resources.

The findings reveal that while raki is often viewed externally as a simple product, it represents a living tradition deeply embedded in the local community's culture and nature. However, challenges arise from regulatory frameworks that treat raki like an industrial good, overlooking the profound cultural functions and communal values behind its production. Licensing systems, taxation rules, and geographical indications fail to account for this practice's unique, non-commercial nature. These regulatory pressures risk restricting the product and the culture from evolving, adapting, and continuing to serve the community.

Moreover, the research highlights a fundamental gap between top-down market logic and the lived cultural reality of rural communities. While policymakers often focus on regulating output and compliance, locals are more concerned with preserving tradition, maintaining ecological balance, and ensuring that cultural practices remain meaningful for future generations. This disconnect mirrors broader tensions between uniform policies and diverse, place-based ways of life.

The thesis reveals that safeguarding traditional practices like raki making requires a shift in how we value and govern culturally originated products. Recognising such practices' distinct origin, function, and evolution is essential for supporting sustainable and just rural development. By protecting the cultural processes—not just the final product—we preserve ecological wisdom, social cohesion, and community-led innovation. Traditions like raki making can quietly resist homogenisation and offer valuable lessons for rethinking sustainability, resilience, and progress in a rapidly changing world. This study highlights that agricultural products act as a tool in displaying and preserving culture, where cultural activities embedded in a place show signs of how complex community cultural systems work.

Keywords: Food Sovereignty, Food Commons, Commodification, Anti-commodity, Cultural Commons, Cultural Sustainability, Lasithi Plateau

Abbreviations

ABV – Alcohol By Volume

CJEU – Court of Justice of the European Union

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organisation

FS – Food Sovereignty

FSM – Food Sovereignty Movement

IFAD – International Fund for Agricultural Development

IMF – International Monetary Fund

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

TFEU – Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

TSG – Traditional Speciality Guaranteed

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

VAT – Value Added Tax

WTO – World Trade Organisation

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1. Introduction

Current geopolitical and climatic challenges are reshaping global economies with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities. Despite ongoing international conferences and policy meetings, the global agenda often fails to address the root causes of these crises. A key driver behind this failure is the deepening commodification and standardisation of life under globalisation, where cultural practices, knowledge systems, and everyday products are increasingly reduced to marketable items (Wheatley, 2024). This homogenising tendency sidelines the complex diversities from which new ideas, innovations, and sustainable alternatives could emerge. As global systems push toward uniformity, the erosion of cultural diversity threatens not just heritage but also the resilience and creativity necessary for human progress.

Cultural practices are now subject to excessive regulation and market logic, leading to the loss of embedded knowledge and local innovation (Morgan, 2005; Hudson, 2000). This is particularly evident in food systems, where traditional products and methods are transformed into regulated commodities, often stripped of their original ecological, social, and symbolic significance (Grewal, 2008). The resulting corporate control over food knowledge and production systems, facilitated mainly by transnational actors, has provoked the rise of food sovereignty movements as calls for re-localisation and re-commoning (Pimbert, 2009; Vivero-Pol, 2019). However, these efforts continue to face homogenising pressures from global market forces.

To better understand the depth and implications of these pressures, new academic frameworks are needed—ones that examine the economic and cultural dimensions of production and consumption. The anti-commodity approach expands on food sovereignty by foregrounding the social and cultural logic of traditional practices, tracing how value is generated beyond markets and money (Maat & Hazareesingh, 2015; Curry-Machado & Stubbs, 2024). Food production is more than subsistence—it is a site of cultural identity, social organisation, and collective memory. When these are commodified, traditions are severed from their origins, and cultural continuity is disrupted. A global market saturated with standardised commodities also risks stagnation: when all cultural expressions are reduced to consumable formats, we inhibit the development of new knowledge and practices. Cultural erasure thus becomes a silent crisis (Schanbacher, 2010).

Within this context, food sovereignty emerges as a resistance movement and a lens to reframe culture, tradition, local autonomy, and resilience. When the term '*sustainable development*' was coined, the committee working on agriculture and food for the Brundtland Commission simultaneously introduced the term '*sustainable livelihoods*' as the signifier of '*development*'—a concept that continues to influence debates on cultural and food systems today (Scoones, 2007). My thesis explores this terrain by **critically examining how dominant global frameworks—particularly those of the European Union—fail to adequately protect or even recognise such embedded diversity in culture and food systems**. This phenomenon is particularly acute in countries lacking economic and political strength. By 'economic and political strength', we refer to a country's ability to influence global trade policies and regulations,

as well as its economic resilience in the face of market pressures. Countries with less financial and political strength are more vulnerable to the effects of the globalised market.

Greece, often regarded as the cradle of civilisation and one of the EU's earliest enlargement members (joining in 1981), finds itself at a crossroads. Despite its contributions to global thought, its cultural sustainability is threatened by regulatory and economic integration into a homogenised market system. This is more evident in regulating traditional agricultural practices, where economic activities are deeply intertwined with cultural knowledge.

Greek agricultural and food-related traditions, especially in rural and insular areas, are rooted in collectivism, sharing and cooperation; values increasingly under pressure from individualistic and globalised cultures. The economic crisis and its aftermath increased the dependence of the Greek state on external financial aid, exacerbating its vulnerability to globalised market pressures (Hatzimalonas, 2017). This has made cultural preservation a form of resistance. The production of traditional alcoholic beverages embodies this struggle, since it retains community-based methods, reflects ecological embeddedness, and resists the drive toward commodified uniformity. An indicative example is *raki* production in Crete, Greece. Made from the distillation of pomace, the leftovers of grapes' skins and seeds after winemaking, *raki* has never been a significant sector of economic development in Crete—as compared to other sectors such as agriculture, livestock farming, and tourism—but rather a symbol of social life, companionship and hospitality. It is mainly intended for local consumption and small-scale family or community-based production, holding significant cultural and social value.

Regulation 2019/787 and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruling in Case C-91/18 (European Commission vs Hellenic Republic, 2019) standardised the production of distilled alcohols like *raki*, under a framework that ignores cultural specificities. This provoked significant criticism in Greece, particularly among small-scale *raki* producers who argued that the regulation misunderstood the uniqueness of their product and traditions. Commodifying products like *raki* exemplifies the shift from sustainable local livelihoods and cultures to large-scale, homogenised market products. This thesis aims to explore precisely these dynamics: **what makes *raki* in Crete distinctive, why it is central to local culture, and how its production reflects a broader narrative of cultural sustainability and resistance to commodification.**

Crete, the largest island in Greece, is divided into four regional units: Chania, Rethymno, Heraklion, and Lasithi. While all regions have their own distinct identities, Lasithi¹—situated in the island's easternmost part—distinguishes itself through its rugged mountains, strong rural traditions, and comparative remoteness. At its heart lies the Lasithi Plateau, an elevated agricultural region marked by rich self-reliance and continuous settlement since the Minoan era. Shaped by its unique climate, mountain topography, and enduring rural practices, the plateau has cultivated cultural knowledge and resilience over centuries (Watrous & Blitzer, 1982; Nowicki, 1999). Its relative insulation from market-driven pressures—unlike more urbanised or touristic coastal areas—helps preserve traditional practices and informal systems, making it an

¹ In this thesis, the use of 'Lasithi' or 'Plateau' both refer to the Lasithi Plateau.

ideal setting to explore cultural transitions, food sovereignty, and resistance to commodification. raki here is not merely an alcoholic beverage—it is a cultural artefact that accompanies everyday life, seasonal transitions, and communal gatherings. Yet the cultural role of alcohol in food sovereignty and anti-commodity discourse remains underexplored. This thesis seeks to bridge this gap, offering new insights into **cultural commons**, shaping identity, community, and continuity in Lasithi. It presents the uniqueness of raki by challenging its homogenisation within EU frameworks and tracing how its unsimilarity with other distilled spirits stems from its embeddedness in the cultural fabric of Lasithi. Through the **conceptual lenses of anti-commodity theory and food sovereignty**, the thesis explores the following research question:

To what extent and how does raki making as a cultural activity sustain food sovereignty in the Lasithi Plateau and resist commodification pressures?

Supporting sub-questions further explore:

1. How does raki-making showcase food sovereignty as a modality of the past?
2. What are the state-market pressures toward raki commodification?
3. What forms of resistance to commodification are emerging through raki making?

Through a case study approach grounded in ethnography and interviews, this research investigates the past and present of raki in Lasithi, uncovering the tensions and negotiations between tradition and market logic. The analysis is organised into five thematic sections: the tradition of raki making in Lasithi; the formalisation process and state role; market pressures and resistance; food sovereignty as cultural display; and anti-commodity as a cultural sustainability pathway.

Ultimately, this thesis explores how raki resists commodification not simply as a product but through the processes of cultivation, distillation, and communal sharing that embed anti-commodity characteristics. It highlights how Lasithi's cultural logic offers insights into sustainable futures, illustrating how traditions can serve as innovations. By examining EU regulations, local resistance, and the evolving markets and community life, the thesis contributes to broader debates on cultural sustainability, anti-commodities, and food sovereignty. It calls for urgent recognition of diverse knowledge systems and community-based traditions that are in danger of being appropriated and integrated into mere market commodities.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Food Sovereignty: from lived autonomy to resistance

2.1.1. Past experiences of autonomy and globalisation pressures on locally governed food systems

Historically, local communities inherently practised what is now referred to as food sovereignty. These food systems, resilient and adaptive, were not structured around market economies or formal governance structures, but were instead embedded in ecological rhythms, communal

norms, and kinship-based labour. Sustained through ritual, reciprocity, and shared cultural values, food production was deeply rooted in the community's everyday life (Vivero-Pol et al., 2018). These communities did not need to demand sovereignty — they lived it. As custodians of land, seeds, and seasonal knowledge, smallholder farmers built resilient systems through technical know-how and everyday “how-to” skills, which Appadurai (1994) identifies as key to grassroots agency and innovation. These farmers were also cultural stewards, preserving food traditions while practising ecologically sustainable methods. Hughes (2016) shows that crops like rice carried not only nutritional value but also symbolic, ritual, and status-related meanings—reflecting the embeddedness of food in culture.

In local food systems, production functioned as a social resource that sustained individual households and the broader community. Entire villages participated in harvesting, gathering, and distributing food, creating a web of interconnectedness and shared purpose. This turned agricultural activity into a collective celebration of agrarian knowledge and autonomous life (Maat & Hazareesingh, 2015). It is based on indigenous and locally adapted crops grown primarily for household, relatives and future needs, never sold as surplus to market. This signalled a deep ontological orientation where food production was less about profit and more about sustaining life and community.

Hazareesingh & Maat (2024, p.78) observe that such practices were situated within “complex interactions and reciprocities between people, natural environments, and spiritual domains.” This underscores the cultural and spiritual significance of traditional food systems, invoking a sense of reverence and respect. Morgan (2005) emphasises how such traditions are produced at a place by and for a particular people and are governed by local customs, beliefs, and intergenerational wisdom. These are passed on through lived experience rather than formal education, while produced knowledge is sustained through continued community engagement. The state or market did not confer the sophisticated knowledge over seeds, soil, sustenance, microclimates and autonomy. It was inherited as part of ancestral heritage and embedded within ritual and ecological cycles.

Such forms of autonomy, however, have been increasingly eroded by the expansion of state apparatuses, market logics, and global trade regimes. As centralised institutions formalise, regulate, or absorb traditional systems, the embeddedness of food in place, people, and culture has weakened. Moreover, globalisation has long been promoting an interconnected economy structured around capitalist logics, which pressures local economies to compete on unequal terms with industrialised, standardised and mass production commodities, marginalising culturally significant practices and undermining the sustainability of local systems (Morgan, 2005). These shifts have exposed local products to the demands of international markets, constrained food sovereignty, and disrupted the preservation of place-based knowledge.

Historically, the key pressures of globalisation have been rapid commodification and cultural homogenisation. As Paterson (2013) explains, commodified objects are produced for market exchange, stripped of the social and cultural contexts that once shaped their production. Similarly, Williams (2002) argues that globalisation displaces non-monetised, socially embedded practices with monetised transactions devoid of symbolic meaning, thus penetrating previously

untouched rural and social spheres. Dominant global norms increasingly overshadow local food traditions, although hybrid cultures occasionally emerge in response (Wheatley, 2024). According to Morgan (2015), indigenous knowledge—often developed outside formal Western institutions through intimate, intergenerational community relations—is commodified and co-opted by institutions and corporations that are dominant market exchange systems. Grewal (2008) observes that local is becoming global, where selected representations of local culture are marketed worldwide, often distorting or erasing their original significance. Arya (2021) calls this the “Pizza Effect of Bharati,” in which rural cultural objects are appropriated, repackaged through colonial lenses, and sold back to their origins with altered meaning. In tourism, as Shepherd (2002) highlights, cultural practices are transformed into consumer products detached from their cultural contexts and meanings.

Standardisation and regulatory frameworks further intensify and consolidate globalisation pressures in contemporary contexts. International institutions promote global legal and economic norms that marginalise small producers and local systems, reinforcing corporate-led systems prioritising global trade over local sustenance. Regulatory frameworks institutionalise externally defined cultural and market values, contributing to a global food regime undermining local distinctiveness and autonomy (Hudson, 2000; Grewal, 2008; Johnson & Endres, 2011; Tilzey, 2018). The modern industrial food system facilitates centralised institutions to define agricultural priorities, sidelining context-specific needs and eroding regional embeddedness. Current agricultural strategies are highly shaped by intergovernmental institutions such as IFAD, FAO, WTO, World Bank, and IMF, which foster a corporatised model of food production. Schanbacher (2010) explains that these policies have industrialised food systems, decoupling them from local ecologies, cultural practices, and small-scale farming traditions. This approach severs the ties between food, place, identity, and community resilience (Feagan, 2007) on the altar of homogenisation, mass production and profit.

In response, the concept of food sovereignty today is mobilised to support a counter-narrative to economic and cultural globalisation. This alternative paradigm supports smallholding and traditional agriculture, oriented towards domestic consumption, embedded in local resources, and sustained through cultural and ecological harmony (Schanbacher, 2010). As a bottom-up model, food sovereignty calls for the re-localisation of food systems and the revival of traditional, place- and context-based practices and dynamics (Fonte & Easterly, 2008; Marchi, 2019). It promotes autonomy while recognising the need to navigate commodification pressures and ensure traditional knowledge remains rooted in community life. Therefore, sovereignty today has shifted from being an invisible norm in community life to a form of resistance—an attempt to reclaim food from the disembedding forces of market, state, and global institutions, and to reassert its place within localised, culturally-rooted, and ecologically sustainable systems. What was once an implicit way of life has now become an explicit struggle for survival and, simultaneously, a means of resisting commodification, detaching from market logic, and challenging homogenising forces.

2.1.2. (Re) Conceptualising Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty today stands as a political demand for something historically a lived reality—a condition of autonomy, cultural embeddedness, and ecological adaptation that existed long before the rise of the modern state-market complex. In 1996, the International Peasant Movement *La Vía Campesina* introduced the concept of food sovereignty as an alternative vision for sustainable agriculture and food security based on local farming in harmony with culture and traditions, and producing food for family and domestic markets (Figueroa, 2015). This was institutionalised in the 2007 Nyéléni Declaration, formulated by *La Vía Campesina*, which defines food sovereignty as:

"The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Leventon & Laudan, 2017, p.1).

Over time, the notion of sovereignty has shifted from a broader national focus to one grounded in community-level governance. This shift rejects commodification and reclaims food as a cultural right, not a tradable good (Dekeyser et al., 2018). The Food Sovereignty Movement (FSM) encompasses two key dimensions of resistance: preserving cultural practices and initiating new strategies to counteract market pressures. Food sovereignty challenges dominant knowledge systems by rejecting top-down, profit-driven research models, favouring decolonised, community-based ways of knowing (Pimbert & Claeys, 2024). It recognises that much of the global economy operates through informal, cooperative, and unwaged systems that sustain culture and ecology but are marginalised or erased by industrial agriculture. At its core, FSM demands political self-determination—empowering communities to govern their food systems free from external interference (Trauger, 2015). It provides a people-centred alternative based on cooperation and sharing, realigning food production with ecological and cultural contexts, unlike market-driven industrial agriculture models of competition and profit (Figueroa, 2015). By centring Indigenous and peasant knowledge, food sovereignty resists commodification and redefines who holds power over food, land, and life (Pimbert & Claeys, 2024).

The **seven pillars of food sovereignty** widely used by activist movements are: (1) Focus on food for people as food is more than a commodity, (2) Build knowledge and skills as traditional knowledge is essential food local food systems and future generations, (3) Work with nature as diverse agro-ecological methods improve ecosystem resilience and adaptation, (4) Value food providers as sustainable livelihoods depends on farmers, (5) Localise food systems as the gap between producers and consumers should be reduced to resist dependency, (6) Put control locally to reject privatisation of natural resources, and (7) Food is sacred as its life supporting and cannot be commodified (see *Annex 2.1*). Underpinned by these principles, FSMs resist cultural homogenisation and economic exploitation by advocating for protective trade policies, such as tariffs on genetically modified food imports, which safeguard local preferences, practices, and production systems (Andree et al., 2014). The Food Sovereignty Movement (FSM) critiques the corporate food regime, which falsely equates free trade with food security

(Burnett & Murphy, 2014; McMichael, 2014). Instead, FSM promotes localised food systems, asserting that agriculture must first nourish communities before serving global markets (Schanbacher, 2010; Burnett & Murphy, 2014). The movement calls for policy interventions that protect and promote local food systems to realise these goals. These include import regulations, fair pricing mechanisms for small-scale farmers, and trade rules that support local economies rather than corporate interests (Byaruhanga & Isgren, 2023).

While food sovereignty has begun gaining policy traction, these principles have evolved and gained academic relevance (Pimbert & Claeys, 2024) (see *Annexe 1.1*). However, they also acknowledge that they remain more akin to objectives or guidelines than a fully developed theoretical framework. A conceptual gap persists: **existing scholarship often lacks analytical depth in understanding how local communities relate to and resist market pressure.**

From *Pillar 1*, which sees food as more than a commodity—as culture—to *Pillar 3*, which calls for localisation of food systems, and *Pillar 4*, which demands local control, **new concepts such as food commons and anti-commodities have emerged as theoretical expansions of food sovereignty.**

Food Commons builds upon the foundation of food sovereignty by reimagining **food as a commons—a shared resource embedded in social relationships of care, autonomy, culture, sharing, and collective stewardship.** It emphasises shared cooperation for the community's well-being and the common good rather than profit (Rundgren, 2016; Pimbert, 2013; Vivero-Pol, 2018).

“Food commons refers to the management, production and distribution of food resources and it is based on shared customary and contemporary models of social organization, non-monetized allocation rules and sharing practices, principles of peer production based on commons (resources, knowledge and values), social economy and the importance of the commonwealth, happiness and well-being of our communities” (Vivero-Pol, 2019, p.127)

Alongside this, the concept of **anti-commodities** sought to revisit commodity histories through a subaltern lens (Curry-Machado & Stubbs, 2024) and has gained ground. Anti-commodities emerged from alternative food networks rooted in sovereign traditions—such as seed sharing, collective tasting, social solidarity, and local knowledge exchange constitute "alternative social worlds" or "happy landscapes" where small farmers and traditional practices become central to resisting commodification (Hazareesingh & Maat, 2024, pp. 69-70). These practices affirm food's role in identity, community, and socio-ecological resilience.

“Anti-commodity is defined as *an enduring form of production and action in opposition either to actual commodities and their existing functions, or to wider social practices of commodification, rather than simply a momentary form of protest or reaction. It refers to a range of local productive processes associated with values other than the purely economic, that are either maintained from the past or originally created to confront the various modes of commodification, primarily but not exclusively unleashed by European colonial hegemonies.* (Maat & Hazareesingh, 2015, p.6)

Food commons and anti-commodities complement and deepen the food sovereignty framework by anchoring it in lived practices of collective stewardship, cultural embeddedness, and resistance to commodification. Thus, they advance a more holistic understanding of how communities sustain control over food, land, and life.

Achieving food sovereignty requires more than activism—it necessitates a new academic discourse, rooted in empirical studies and theoretical rigour. Thus, we explore the food commons and the evolution of anti-commodities as critical academic frameworks that extend the reach of food sovereignty beyond activism and offer pathways to articulate localised policy systems based on place-based knowledge, resistance, and resilience.

2.2. Food as commons and anti-commodities

Contemporary food systems are increasingly shaped by the intersecting forces of state policy and global markets, which standardise products, codify quality, and adjudicate disputes through institutions such as the European Commission and CJEU and the WTO globally. Instruments like patents and geographical indications (GI) materialise these regulatory landscapes, institutionalising particular value systems in the process. While the EU's GI regime promises to protect local names, terroir and know-how through a common framework for production, labelling and protection, it can also intensify commodification by turning situated knowledge and practices into tradable legal assets—accelerating the shift from tradition as lived practice to “brands sold by experts” (Hudson, 2000; Hazareesingh & Maat, 2024). **However, commodification is never total. As Manno (2012) argues, an object's “commoditisation potential” depends on material and social conditions; some foods remain firmly embedded in community life and resist homogenisation even when market instruments such as labelling, certification and credence claims alter their consumption patterns and cultural significance** (Glover & Stone, 2018).

Against this backdrop, anti-commodities are not merely reactive refusals of markets. They are the persistence of moral and gift-based economies grounded in culture, cooperation and autonomy in which production and exchange are organised around communal obligation, reciprocity, local meanings, identity and care rather than market logic (Smith, 1985; Carrier, 1990; Lapavistas, 2004; Hazareesingh & Maat, 2024). Anti-commodities represent a form of lived commons where people grow, process and share food primarily for themselves and their communities, even as they may selectively engage external markets on their terms (Clarence-Smith & Vos, 2024; Glover & Stone, 2018). **Commodities and anti-commodities often coexist in place-specific ways**—sometimes even for the same product across micro-ecologies and elevations—illustrating continuity rather than contradiction (Glover & Stone, 2018). This difference demonstrates that “In contemporary times, the idea of anti-commodities is articulated through multiple approaches, forms, and functions that reflect varying sociocultural and economic conditions (see *Annexe 1.2*).

Food commons scholarship deepens this lens by foregrounding commoning: the everyday practices of sharing, mutual aid and shared governance that link socioeconomic and

socioecological processes across cultivation, preparation, distribution and consumption (Vivero- Pol, 2018; Manganelli, 2022). Through these lived commons, food is embedded in social structures that reproduce cooperation and autonomy and value nourishment over exchange value. Social cohesion is the set of forces that bind groups through belonging, trust and civic participation. It anchors these relations, where members participate voluntarily for the common good while accommodating multiple cultural values. This cohesion is essential for economic prosperity and sustainable development, and it supports diversity in values, lifestyles, cultures and languages (Friedkin, 2004; Fonseca, Lukosch & Brazier, 2010; Moustakas, 2023; Jenson, 2002). Social capital, understood as networks, reciprocity and norms, both arises from and reinforces this cohesion (Dayton- Johnson, 2003; Kay, 2006). Together, they sustain a social economy that prioritises social and environmental needs and lays knowledge and solidarity over profit maximisation, even as pressures from industrialisation, regulation, and bureaucratisation push practices toward market metrics. In essence, the social economy works closely with communities, respects lay knowledge and emphasises solidarity, empowerment and cultural sensitivity (Tomás Carpi, 1997; Amin, 2009). In this sense, **commoning practices generate and protect anti- commodities by keeping food's value relational and community-defined rather than price-determined.**

Building on debates about cultural value which originates from specific place and people for a particular purpose (Schumpeter, 1909; Angelini & Castellani, 2019), food can be understood as a cultural commons: the collectively created, maintained and governed ensemble of food- related skills, varieties, tools, symbols, tastes and rituals whose access and reproduction are regulated by shared norms of reciprocity and recognition rather than by price alone; its value is co- produced as social and cultural value—symbolic, historical, aesthetic, spiritual—through ongoing participation, conversation and shared understandings. This conception clarifies why protective instruments such as GI can highlight cultural specificity and, paradoxically, commodify it when detached from the commoning relations that give it life.

In this process, commodities are frequently detached from the lifeworlds in which they are produced and then circulate as objects of exchange, a detachment that obscures the ecological and cultural relations they embody (Tsing, cited in Robins, 2024; Lynch, 2012). Nonetheless, global commodity production depends on local methods, traditions and knowledge systems (Pretel, 2024). Ian Cook's "follow the thing" methodology provides an analytical bridge by tracing how goods accrue and transform meanings as they move across sites and social contexts; the same approach is well-suited to anti- commodities whose value exceeds exchange (Curry- Machado & Stubbs, 2024). Top- down interventions frequently misrecognise local traditions in cultivation, processing or exchange, overlooking the diverse actors and knowledges that co- produce commodities through coevolution processes (Chambouleyron et al., 2024). Situating foods within their lived commons is therefore essential for recovering the social and ecological relations of commodities.

Rice provides a clear illustration of framing cultural and market contexts. Because of its agroecological diversity, local varieties, production methods and trading systems, rice resists homogenisation and standardisation; its meanings and uses vary across places (Hughes, 2016). In many settings, rice lives a double life: it retains anti- commodity roles in subsistence

contexts while becoming an export commodity or a luxury cultural commodity elsewhere. It is marketed through narratives of exclusivity, tradition and identity. Place shapes not only taste but also the collective experience and identity associated with food, accessible primarily to culturally embedded eating communities (Glover & Stone, 2018; Zaroni, 2024). Following the thing across these settings shows how rice is sustained by commoning relations in one context and revalued through market logics in another. These are not contradictions but strategies for continuity that enable communities to navigate, appropriate and withstand market pressures.

Although food sovereignty has traditionally been framed as a political movement, anti-commodities offer an alternative economic lens to examine it further. Historical studies underscore how communities have leveraged long-standing ecological knowledge and social solidarity to subvert commodification (Maat & Hazareesingh, 2015). Colonial systems, in misunderstanding or deliberately erasing these human–nature relationships, accelerated the erosion of holistic food systems. Yet, the persistence of food commoning practices speaks to these agrarian cultures' enduring knowledge, cohesion, and harmony. As Glover & Stone (2018) emphasise, the visibility of anti-commodities becomes increasingly critical as generational transmission of cultural practices declines. Understanding the social life and visual significance of objects—including their form, symbolism, and embedded narratives—is essential (Arabindan-Kesson, 2024). These objects carry stories of production, resistance, and memory, and their physical qualities narrate their origins and values.

A notable gap in this literature concerns drinks, especially alcoholic beverages. Often stigmatised as uncultured or harmful and subject to regulation aimed at disciplining consumption and public behaviour, traditional drinks are marginalised despite routinely accompanying food in ritual and social life. In many contexts where their monetary value is modest but their socio- cultural value is high, drinks operate as paradigmatic cultural commons: they are made, shared and governed through commoning practices; they support social cohesion, identity and memory; and they exemplify how anti- commodities endure outside price- driven logics. Bringing drinks, being a value-added product of community circular economy, into the analysis **connects food sovereignty, food commons and anti- commodities through a cultural lens.** It opens an underexplored field for empirical work.

2.3. Cultural food commons and their intrinsic sustainability

Culture may be understood as collective social practice arising from shared ideas, feelings and knowledge, including creativity, innovation and norms (White, 1959). Cultural practices are reproduced in specific places by particular people for particular purposes that are not organised by markets. For such practices to remain authentic, their reproduction must occur outside market exchange (Shepherd, 2002). This non- market reproduction sits squarely with the commons perspective developed above, where food is provisioned and governed through relations of reciprocity, recognition and care.

Social dynamics in places of cultural origin reproduce practices through embeddedness. People are ecologically embedded in place and develop a sense of place through ongoing integration with local environments. This embeddedness supports care, ecological reciprocity, local

knowledge, climatic adaptation, cultural enrichment and sustainability (Whiteman & Cooper, 2000). The contexts in which people operate—geographical, social and institutional—shape social action and resource governance. Over time, this produces cultural embeddedness, understood as an extension of individuals through social ties that connect them to their surrounding contexts (Wigren- Kristoferson et al., 2022). These ties guide how communities manage resources, configure food chains, and reproduce local institutions.

Innovation and creativity are central to culture and are visible in the ways producers and entrepreneurs act within cultural networks that facilitate access to resources, enable innovation and sustain continuity. Agriculture generates food and, in many places, a sequence of value- added products that are culturally embedded. A culturally embedded product carries national, ethnic or local identity and helps shape attitudes and intentions (Jakubanečs & Supphellen, 2016). Such products and brands can become symbols of political resistance or national pride as they accumulate meanings over time. The notion of Cultural Embeddedness of Products captures this process and shows how goods become carriers of values, histories and collective identities (ibid.). This dynamic contrasts a corporate logic aimed at efficiency and reproduction with a community logic centred on reciprocity and shared values (Greenman, 2013).

Because production and products are ecologically and culturally embedded, **culture as sustainability can be described as the capacity of communities to maintain identity while adapting to change** (Soini & Dessein, 2016). Throsby, Angelini and Castellani (2019) articulate four principles that guide this view: **inter- and intragenerational equity, stewardship of cultural and intellectual capital, the advancement of well- being and recognition of the interdependence between economic and cultural systems**. Soini and Dessein extend this toward an eco- cultural civilisation in which sustainability is internal to culture rather than a separate policy goal. This perspective also clarifies the limits of policy- led integration, since market economies, even under strong regulation, struggle to account for cultural relations and values. They distinguish between “culture for sustainability,” where culture is mobilised as a resource for development, and “culture as sustainability,” a lived practice supporting societal transformation.

Culturally sustainable entrepreneurship emerges as a natural extension of sovereign traditions. It describes how living cultures use embedded norms, traditions and beliefs to guide community decision- making and economic activity, especially under the pressures of tourism and external influence (Swanson & DeVereaux, 2017). Here, entrepreneurship is not separate from culture but an expression of it. This depth of cultural sustainability supports cultural continuity, strengthening well- being and resilience. Evidence from remote, low- income regions shows that life satisfaction can remain high where cultural continuity is strong and participation in household, family, informal and community networks sustains employment and subsistence (Martin, 2012). Communities with long histories of reciprocity and cooperation often fare better under changing circumstances because they have developed their own institutions to manage transformation while maintaining values and identity.

As communities develop culture around entrepreneurship, value addition and production, these activities operate as forms of resistance to commodification and to regulatory regimes that prioritise market metrics. While food sovereignty calls for policy interventions and alternative governance, the anti- commodities lens invites attention to how culture and society organise economic life from below by tracing the multiple lives of goods back to their social, technical and aesthetic knowledge (Appadurai, 1994). Indigenous and rural communities possess critical insight for managing risk and vulnerability in place- specific ways. This knowledge evolves through the selective integration of external innovations and enhances adaptive capacity (Shava et al., 2009). Bottom- up development strategies that empower communities to design responses to their challenges and to cultivate locally arising economic potential foster resilience and innovation (Crescenzi & Rodríguez- Pose, 2011). An integrated macro, meso and micro approach better captures real- world growth dynamics and clarifies how policy choices affect local economies.

At the same time, local products that gain global appeal are vulnerable to appropriation by corporations and outside experts, a process that strips cultural and ecological context (Fonte, 2008). A culture- as- practice perspective resists universal institutional models and instead recognises the importance of locally rooted institutions and context- specific solutions (Easterly, 2008). Given the continuing importance of agrarian societies, food systems remain a vital arena for sustainability, cultural preservation and knowledge generation.

While food sovereignty traditionally foregrounds autonomy, ecological sustainability, and resistance to neoliberal food regimes, it often operates within a framework of rights and governance that can risk abstraction or top-down institutionalisation. However, the emerging paradigms of food commons and anti-commodities ground this struggle in the relational, affective, and communal practices that sustain food cultures from below (Bollier, 2025).

Drawing from Bollier's (2015) conception, **commons** are not merely unowned resources, but living systems of governance, identity, and stewardship manifested through commoning (giving emphasis to the verb rather than the noun): acts of mutual support, negotiation, and shared responsibility for sustaining the collective good. In this light, **cultural food commons** can be understood as social and ecological practices of provisioning, embedded in kinship, ritual, ecological feedback, and care, challenging the fragmentation and instrumental logic of commodification. The concept refers to food systems, practices, and meanings that are communally governed and culturally embedded, not organised through markets or private ownership but through collective care, tradition, and localised knowledge. The lens of cultural food commons offers a **conceptual bridge that links food sovereignty and food commons** (further expanding the latter). It strengthens their articulation with the lived, place-based realities of local food systems and embedded cultural practices. **Anti-commodities** further enrich this understanding by foregrounding resistance not simply as rejection of the market, but as the continuation of food lifeways that reject exchange-value logics in favour of moral economies, reciprocity, and local knowledge (Maat & Hazareesingh, 2015). These anti-commodities, such as shared seeds, collectively processed foods, or community distillation practices, **do not merely signify protest; they are living enactments of alternative value systems**, often

formed through historical entanglements with colonialism, market expansion, and ecological adaptation.

Food commons and anti-commodities amplify the food sovereignty paradigm, not by supplanting it, but by deepening its theoretical and empirical scope—connecting culture, sustainability, and sovereignty within the shared rhythms of lived experience.

3. Methodology

3.1. Overview

This thesis adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine the field of study and gather relevant data. Through in-depth inquiry, case studies allow for a nuanced understanding of the contemporaneity of raki in Lasithi by investigating historical and present-day contexts (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Analysing the current landscape in Lasithi is essential for defining the research problem and formulating precise research questions. Qualitative research, with its emphasis on context and meaning, employs diverse data collection methods. In this study, semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observation, and literature reviews have been primarily utilised to explore the socio-economic history of Lasithi, academic frameworks, cultural practices, public perspectives, and the role of the state (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This methodological approach is beneficial for uncovering the complexities of social life, especially in settings where existing knowledge is limited or fragmented (Liamputtong, 2009). Given the scarcity of information on the cultural and social dimensions of contemporary food production in Lasithi, a qualitative case study is both appropriate and necessary.

3.2. Data Collection Methods and Sampling

This research is guided by the following overarching and sub-research questions:

Main Research Question: *To what extent and how does raki making as a cultural activity sustain food sovereignty in Lasithi Plateau and resist commodification pressures?*

Sub Research Questions:

1. *How does raki-making showcase food sovereignty as a modality of the past?*
2. *Which are state-market pressures towards raki commodification?*
3. *What forms of resistance to commodification are emerging through raki making?*

A combination of qualitative sampling techniques, as outlined by Liamputtong (2009), was employed to address these questions. Several participants were selected through **convenience sampling** (e.g., R2, R4, R6, R8, and R9) due to their availability and willingness to engage. Others were chosen through **purposive sampling** (e.g., R1, R5, R7, R10, R11 and R12) based on their relevance, expertise, or experience in the subject matter. Additionally, **emergent or on-**

the-spot sampling was used (e.g., R3, R4, R5, R7 and R12), wherein participants were included during or after informal conversations once their potential contribution to the research was recognised.

Table 1. The table below presents details of the participants and data collection events:

Participant Category	Date of Sampling	Languages Used	Remark	Code
Farmer	16/10/2024	Greek and English	Conversation led by the supervisor and translated to English; notes taken	R1
Informal conversation (group of 3 people)	17/10/2024	Greek and English	Conversation led by the supervisor and translated to English; notes taken	R2
Current Vice Mayor	18/10/2024	English	Notes taken and recorded; manually transcribed	R3
Informal conversation at the tavern (group of 3 people, including a former vice mayor)	19/10/2024	Greek and English	The conversation was led by the supervisor and translated into English; notes were taken. Conversation recorded and manually transcribed	R4
Farmer	16/10/2024 20/10/2024	Greek and English	The conversation was led by the supervisor and translated into English; notes were taken. Scheduled a longer interview in Greek, which was recorded and transcribed using Descript software	R5
Informal conversation at the tavern using translated questions (group of 5 people)	23/10/2024	Greek	Recorded and transcribed using Descript software	R6

Founder and co-owner of the Lasinthos tourist accommodation centre with a restaurant, a farm and a museum	23/10/2024	Greek and English	A translator came with the interviewee, and responses were recorded and transcribed using Descript software	R7
Teacher	23/10/2024	English	Notes taken and transcribed	R8
Academic Expert at HMU	14/10/2024 24/10/2024 05/11/2024	English	Internship supervisor and multiple conversations; Notes taken	R9
raki producer	09/12/2024	English	Recorded and manually transcribed	R10
Member and president of the traditional raki producers union of Greece from Crete	17/12/2024	English and Greek	A translator came with the interviewee, and responses were recorded and manually transcribed	R11
raki producer and cultural expert	01/12/2024 19/12/2024	English	Met during a raki making festival attended with Erasmus students and scheduled a longer interview; notes taken and transcribed	R12

This study employed a combination of semi-structured interviews (see *Annexe 3*), informal conversations, ethnographic immersion, and document analysis to explore the cultural, economic, and regulatory dynamics surrounding raki production in the Lasithi Plateau. These methods enabled data triangulation (Miller & Brewer, 2003), enhancing the reliability and depth of the research findings and framing them logically.

Semi-structured interviews (Miller & Brewer, 2003) provided a balance between guided inquiry and flexibility. They included key themes and questions, allowing the interviewer to pursue probing and follow-up questions based on emerging insights. This was particularly effective in interviews such as with R5, where unexpected themes like state pressure in raki production surfaced and informed subsequent research directions. The semi-structured nature allowed interviewees time to reflect and elaborate, enhancing the responses' richness.

Informal conversations, on the other hand, followed an unstructured approach (Miller & Brewer, 2003). These were especially valuable in unfamiliar cultural settings, enabling participants to direct the conversation and introduce topics the researcher might not have anticipated. In the case of R4, informal exchanges in a tavern setting revealed contextual and unfamiliar insights. These conversations prioritised flow and spontaneity; when significant themes emerged, the interviewer pursued them more deeply to gather additional data.

An interview guide comprising questions for various samples was developed in English and translated into Greek to accommodate the linguistic and cultural context of the fieldwork. While the guide provided a foundation, it remained dynamic—new questions were introduced in response to emerging information, and insights from one participant often shaped subsequent interviews. Questions were tailored according to the expertise or lived experience of each respondent. Most interviews were recorded with notes taken throughout. Some were translated during the interaction, while others were translated and transcribed later using tools such as Descript.

Ethnographic engagement throughout the fieldwork and extended internship allowed for a deeper understanding of raki within its lived social and cultural contexts (Miller & Brewer, 2003; Liamputtong, 2009). Long-term presence in the community enabled sustained observation, participation in everyday life, and inclusion in cultural events such as raki making. These experiences contributed to a more holistic grasp of meanings, practices, and resistance embedded in raki production. Through prolonged interaction, the researcher moved from an outsider to what Liamputtong (2019) describes as an “in-betweener”—a position that enabled empathy and analytical clarity, ensuring trust with participants while being unbiased.

Literature reviews provided a historical, legal, and academic context to complement primary data. Search engines and academic databases such as LIMO and Google Scholar were used, along with targeted keyword searches on general web platforms (Grant & Booth, 2009). The process included identifying and reviewing relevant laws, regulations, academic literature, and media reports on raki, food sovereignty, anti-commodities and culture.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

Given the complexity of data collection across diverse methods and within a culturally distinct setting, appropriate ethical measures were taken throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were aware of their involvement and the intended use of the data. In several cases, especially where participants were unfamiliar with formal research processes, verbal consent was sought in place of written consent to ensure comfort and clarity, while maintaining ethical integrity. All data were collected with a commitment to confidentiality and protecting participants' privacy. Participants' time and contributions were appreciated, and efforts were made to foster an environment of trust and mutual understanding. The researcher deliberately approached the field without extensive knowledge of the region or its sociocultural dynamics. This intentional choice enabled an open-minded, curiosity-driven exploration, free from preconceived notions or external biases.

While many conversations extended beyond the core research questions, primarily due to the hospitality and openness of the local community, only those directly relevant to the research scope were documented. At no point were the researcher's personal opinions imposed on participants or the research process.

Ultimately, this research is grounded in deep respect for the culture and traditions of Lasithi. It takes the position that raki, as a cultural expression, is best understood through how local communities allow it to evolve—whether as a source of value addition, sustainable livelihood, or cultural continuity—while remaining attentive to the tensions and contradictions accompanying these processes.

3.4. Challenges and Limitations

The research faced several challenges, beginning even before fieldwork commenced. Food sovereignty in the Lasithi Plateau is a largely understudied area, and limited prior documentation made it difficult to identify relevant sources or design targeted research questions. As a result, the researcher adopted an open-ended, curiosity-driven approach to explore multiple dimensions of food sovereignty in the region, a term either unknown to most interviewees or differently perceived, mainly with a notion linked to food self-sufficiency as they experienced it in the past. It was only during fieldwork that more context-specific and literature-supporting information emerged, which helped refine the focus and depth of the study.

A significant logistical challenge involved scheduling and conducting interviews. Pre-arranged interviews often did not proceed as planned, as local routines were subject to change based on farming duties or availability. On-the-spot interviews proved to be more frequent and fruitful. Consequently, the researcher had to remain constantly prepared—carrying translated questions, a fully charged phone, and necessary applications for recording, transcription, translation, and note-taking. Simultaneously managing recordings and note-taking during spontaneous conversations was particularly demanding, especially when maintaining the natural flow of dialogue without disrupting the participants' insightful contributions. Transportation within the plateau was another limitation. Sparse connectivity between villages restricted the researcher's ability to conduct ethnographic interviews across a wide geographic area, limiting the ability to capture a holistic view of the region. Most interactions with residents took place in the evenings, after they returned from farm work. These conversations often occurred during or after dinner and extended late into the night. As a result, both participants and the researcher sometimes had to pause conversations with the hope of continuing later. However, follow-up meetings were not always possible due to changing schedules or emerging priorities.

A significant barrier was language. The inability to speak Greek fluently limited the initiation of new conversations, the depth of engagement with unfamiliar individuals, and the potential for nuanced, spontaneous follow-up questions. This significantly reduced the number and richness of interviews and hindered deeper cultural immersion. While assistance with translation was available in most cases, dependence on others for communication added layers of interpretation and occasionally slowed the exchange of information. In addition, limited internet access at the

accommodation posed technical constraints. With no Wi-Fi available indoors, the researcher had to rely on mobile data and create a hotspot by placing the phone at specific locations to obtain a signal. This made it challenging to conduct literature searches, translate materials, or prepare efficiently for the next day's fieldwork.

Despite these challenges, the researcher adapted by remaining flexible, responsive, and committed to ethical engagement with the local community. These constraints also highlighted the importance of humility, patience, and local rhythms in researching unfamiliar cultural contexts.

4. Case study

4.1. The Lasithi Plateau: Then and Now



Figure 1. The landscape of the Lasithi Plateau.

SPRING (March–May)		Planting potatoes, cucumbers, beans, and onions Grafting fruit trees
SUMMER (June–August)		Harvesting wheat, barley, oats, and plums
AUTUMN (August–October)		Gathering apples, pears, grapes, almonds, and walnuts
WINTER (October–December)		Plowing and sowing for the next year Livestock moved to lower elevations

Figure 2. Agricultural Seasons in Lasithi.

The Lasithi Plateau (Figure 1), nestled within Crete's Dikti Mountain range at an elevation of 840 meters above sea level, is a region defined by its rugged terrain and resilient mountain culture. Shielded by towering peaks, the plateau developed a self-sufficient way of life over centuries, adapting to its unique non-Mediterranean climate—marked by cool summers, cold winters, and abundant rainfall (1,150 mm annually). These conditions fostered a strong agricultural tradition and season (Figure 2i) dating back to the Early Minoan period, when communities thrived on a **mixed economy** of farming, herding, and crafting. Archaeological evidence reveals that Lasithi was not only a hub for producing grains, wool, dairy, pottery, and textiles but also part of broader trade networks, as seen in imported goods like obsidian and metal daggers (Watrous & Blitzer, 1982).

Lasithi's history is marked by cycles of upheaval and renewal. Venetian rulers depopulated the plateau in the 14th century to quell rebellions, but repopulated it in the 15th century to fortify against Ottoman invasions. This led to deforestation, land fragmentation, and intensified wheat cultivation. Despite these disruptions, the plateau regained vitality in the early 20th century. During the Ottoman period and until the 1930s, forests still surrounded the area, although they gradually receded. Apart from olive oil and salt, Lasithi was largely self-sufficient in producing staple foods and artisanal goods. It imported essential materials such as iron, tin, lead, copper,

and dyes, while raw wool was sent out for processing and returned as finished textiles (Watrous & Blitzer, 1982).

Lasithi is Crete's only permanently inhabited high-altitude region (over 800 meters), though its population has dwindled to 2,500 residents living across its 16 traditional villages (see Figure 3). These include Pinakiano, Lagou, Tzermiado, Marmaketo, Mesa Lasithi, Mesa Lassithaki, Agios Konstantinos, Agios Georgios, Koudoumalia, Avrakontes, Kaminaki, Magoula, Psychro, Plati, Agios Charalambos, and Kato Metochi. These villages, situated mainly along the base of the surrounding mountains, are connected by a circular asphalt road that enters the plateau from the north at Selli (Watrous & Blitzer, 1982). Over the years, Lasithi has also emerged as a notable tourist destination. The Dikteon Cave—believed in Greek mythology to be the birthplace of Zeus—and the iconic traditional windmills continue to serve as enduring symbols of the region, attracting both local and international visitors.



Fig. 3. Map of Present Day Lasithi with division of villages (Dong et. al, 2025).

Historically, the Lasithi plain was self-sufficient in basic food production and artisanal crafts, except for olive oil and salt, which were sourced from outside the plateau (ibid). The rural diet was rich in natural and seasonal products, including mountain greens (*chorta*), wild fruits, snails, cheese, olive oil, and bread. Livestock-based food production was particularly significant, with annual yields of 1,200–1,300 wheels of sheep's cheese (Nowicki, 1999). Smallholder farmers remain the backbone of the local economy and cultural identity, but globalisation and tourism have reshaped agriculture (from growing for the community to developing for the market). Over the past 20–30 years, farmers have shifted toward market-driven crops like potatoes, strawberries, and lentils while crafting value-added products (e.g., herb-infused olive oils, artisanal soaps). Field interviews revealed that market pressures and ageing populations have reduced social interaction, with land increasingly leased and labour gaps filled by migrant workers (e.g., from Pakistan). Mechanisation and chemical fertilisers further disrupt old practices.

Despite modernising pressures, grape cultivation and raki production (a traditional distilled spirit made from the pomace, or leftover grapes from wine-making) remain vital cultural practices in the Lasithi Plateau, passed down through generations. Families maintaining inherited vineyards continue domestic winemaking, while the communal use of *kazania* (traditional stills) preserves raki distillation from grape pomace. Though land fragmentation challenges traditional methods, and vineyards have declined—from 3,000 acres to just 500, leading to reduced grape yield—some old vineyards continue to thrive in Mesa Lasithi, Tzermiado, and Marmaketo. Today, most Cretan raki production is a mix of large industrial producers, small-scale producers, and traditional farmers making the rest, primarily for personal use rather than sale (R10, Interview, October 2024). Community members are contributing labour and resources to keep the tradition alive. Raki-making serves as an essential cultural praxis that reinforces social cohesion and Cretan identity. The collaborative production process counters modern isolation by creating spaces for intergenerational knowledge transfer and community bonding. This enduring tradition has adapted to contemporary challenges, and collective action ensures its continuation, demonstrating the community's resilience in preserving cultural heritage amid globalisation's pressures.

4.2. Origins and process of raki-making

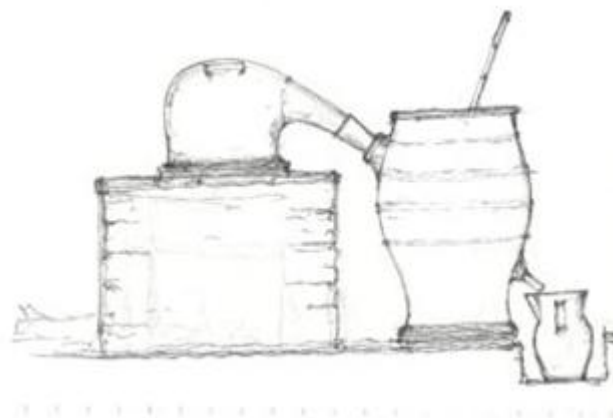
Distilled spirits like raki (see figure 4) have historic roots worldwide, but Cretan raki is distinct.



Figure 4. Raki is stored and served in glass bottles (Greek Flavours, 2024)

in its single-distillation process and cultural role. While similar beverages exist across the Balkans—often linked to Ottoman influence—Cretan raki resists industrialisation, preserving its artisanal character (Travel Gr, 2024). In Lasithi, wine production has been documented since Minoan times, and historical records suggest that raki production and export date back to at least the 15th century. Although its exact origins remain debated—with Turkey often cited as the birthplace of modern raki—local Cretan tradition holds that the spirit has ancient roots on the island. Nevertheless, in the context of globalisation, disputes over cultural ownership and commercial branding have increasingly threatened the recognition and preservation of raki's unique role in Greek heritage (ibid).

The production of raki begins with winemaking, as it is distilled from the leftover grape pomace (known as *strafylla*, or *tsipoura*) after the wine has been made. The process starts in summer when grapes are harvested and crushed for wine, relying on traditional knowledge, experience, and locally crafted equipment. Once the wine is ready, the pomace is left to ferment for about 40 days before distillation begins. The distillation takes place in a special vessel called a *kazani*², which consists of four key parts: the Louloua (the pot holding the pomace), the Tsoukali (a large lid that seals the steam), the Loulas (a long pipe directing the steam), and the Rouha (a barrel filled with cold water where condensation occurs) (See figures. 4 and 5). Once ready, the fermented pomace (called *tsikouda*) is transported and placed into the *kazani*, which is mounted on a base with an intense fire lit underneath to begin boiling and eventually vaporisation (Petsagkourakis, 2024).



Figures 5 and 6. From right to left and bottom up: Kazani, Amvikas, Loulas (pipe), Rouba
Sources: maleviziotis.gr and Federation of Amari Province Associations.

When the *tsikouda* is placed and spread evenly in the *kazani*, a lid called the *amvikas* (still head) is placed on top. Around this lid, dough is applied to seal it tightly and prevent steam from escaping during the boiling process. At the top of the *amvikas*, a pipe is attached, which passes through a cooling tank filled with cold water. The fire is carefully controlled—not too strong and

² The Turkish word *kazan* meaning 'cooking pot' was adapted into Greek as *kazani* which generally means 'boiler'. More specifically, it refers to a 'still for distillation' and, by extension, to 'the entire distillation setup', and even to 'the (usually makeshift) structure that houses it'.

not too weak because there's a risk that the tsikouda will get scorched and the raki won't turn out well. As the kazani heats up and boils, the alcohol in the strafyla begins to evaporate due to its high sugar content. The steam travels through the pipe (Loulas), which starts at the kazani. As the steam moves through the pipe, it cools down due to the cold water surrounding the pipe system and condenses into liquid. The resulting distillate then drips slowly, drop by drop, into a container. The process lasts around three hours, with the first drops—called protoraki (70-90% Alcohol by Volume (ABV))—being high in methanol and discarded as the "head." The middle portion, or "heart," is the finest part, ideal for drinking, while the bitter "tail" is discarded. A well-made raki typically has an alcohol content of 37-40% ABV, measured using a Baumé hydrometer (Greek Flavours, 2024).

Traditionally, raki production was a communal activity, with villages having 10-15 skilled distillers. Monasteries also once produced raki, continuing the island's deep-rooted tradition. Families and neighbours gathered around the kazani, contributing firewood, food, and assistance while enjoying raki *meze* (see figure 6)—a spread of dishes served alongside the drink. The ideal distillation temperature is 300°C, allowing precise control over alcohol content. From 80 kg of pomace, distillers yield 12-15 litres of raki, though modern kazanis can process 200-300 kilograms, producing 100-150 litres per batch (R10, interview, December 2024).



Figure 7. Rako meze (from field work)

In 1929, under the leadership of Eleftherios Venizelos, the Greek government officially recognised traditional distillation by enacting Law 4171/1929. What had been a freely practised home distillation tradition became a state-controlled activity, granting small-scale producers, especially in Crete, the legal right to distil raki for personal use or limited sale, using traditional copper stills known as '*rakokazana*'. Under this system, approximately 50-100 licenses were granted in the Lasithi Plateau, with each village typically maintaining around 10 traditional kazanis for communal use (see figure 8). (R10, interview, December 2024). These producers became known as "two-day distillers," referring to the limited period of licensed distillation (*Crete Insider*, 2024). The law helped preserve a deeply rooted Cretan tradition, but initiated a process of regulation and commodification that is accentuated nowadays. Now, the cultural and

social value of raki and raki making is at stake as tourism and market-oriented meaning is being attributed to it, replacing those values with economic ones.



Figure 8. Depiction of raki-making & the kazani (from Folklore museum of Agios Georgios, Lasithi)

4.3. Current regulatory and production landscape

Today, the production of traditional Greek spirits like raki operates under strict EU and national regulations that significantly impact both large and small producers. Raki has become just a conventional name among people, and in the market it is sold as *tsikoudia*³, which follows industrialised production and is solely produced for sale where traditional raki producers are not present. Under Article 4(3)(b) of Law 3845/2010, Greece applies a reduced excise duty rate of 50% (€1,225 per hectolitre of pure alcohol) for spirits like ouzo, tsipouro, and tsikoudia. Licensing remains a significant hurdle for producers. The tax burden varies significantly between producers. However, all producers face an additional 24% Value Added Tax (VAT) on final sales.

Since the establishment of the licensing system, the landscape of raki production has become hierarchical. The emergence of industrial producers alongside small and traditional producers has created distinct categories within the production system. Each classification operates within a different economic and power structure, which influences the culture of raki production in unique ways.

i). Industrial Producers

This category represents the dominant players in the commodification journey of raki, enjoying significant production capacity advantages, ranging from “60,000 to 500,000 litres a year, produced by 17-25 large producers in Greece” (R11, interview, December 2024). These

³ In this thesis, tsikoudia is synonymous with a market product, while raki is synonymous with a traditional product.

producers benefit from the freedom of a competitive market, allowing them to brand, label, and market their products as tsikoudia, both across Greece and internationally. Characterised by mass production, they also benefit from high sales, which contribute to increased revenue for the state. Industrial producers hold long-term licenses that are easy to renew, further consolidating their position in the market. They can procure grapes or pomace from a wide variety of sources, typically purchasing pomace from wine producers, and also **enjoy reduced taxes**. Their presence floods the market, significantly impacting the market share of small producers and contributing to the decline of traditional producers. While regular inspections are not enforced, safety and quality checks are conducted to ensure compliance. These producers also have the flexibility to purchase grapes directly from farmers. Highly modernised, their production processes incorporate advanced technologies, including electronic steam systems and multi-stage distillation methods. Large commercial distilleries pay €5.50 per litre of final product at 40% ABV, while small farmers are charged a reduced rate of €1.50 per litre. On the surface, this appears to privilege small farmers. Yet, the tax structure overall favours industrial producers: they can manufacture up to 60,000 litres annually at a 50% tax rate, which remains highly profitable at scale. By contrast, farmers are restricted to 1,350 litres at a 15% rate—meaning that although they pay less per litre, their limited production volumes prevent them from generating comparable profits (R11, interview, December 2024).

ii). Small Producers

They occupy a middle position in the raki production hierarchy. They are permitted to produce up to 1,350 litres annually and are eligible for tax concessions if production stays within this limit. Many of these producers follow traditional methods and sell their products through local taverns, restaurants, and other informal channels, often without branding, marketing, or labelling. Production is also restricted by regulations stipulating that producers must have their own vineyard. The licensing process for small producers is burdensome and frequently requires renewal, as the state generally does not favour small-scale production. These producers typically operate small stills and, until 2019, were subject to only a 15% tax rate. Their payment structure is based on hourly production, at a rate of €12 per hour (R11, interview, December 2024). However, they are not allowed to package or sell their products commercially, nor can they purchase grapes from external sources. The product they create is often referred to as a “traditional distillate,” and their production capacity is limited by the requirement to use only the grapes from their vineyards, preventing them from increasing output. The production process is typically single-distilled. Article 7(E) of Law 2629/2001 restricts small distillers to just eight 24-hour production periods annually, requiring customs authorisation for each session. The product can only be sold in bulk to local taverns and restaurants without standardised packaging. These regulations have made small-scale production increasingly difficult, particularly as no new licences have been issued since the Venizelos era, forcing many traditional producers to abandon their craft. This system has particularly hurt small-scale operations, with many ceasing production entirely. Production monitoring is highly rigorous. Each traditional copper still (kazani) must be registered with serial numbers and inspected regularly. Authorities seal stills after each production season and conduct unannounced checks on grape quantities, distillation hours (charged at €12/hour), and final outputs. Combined with €150 safety inspection fees

every five years, these controls have made small-scale production economically unviable for many. Small "occasional" distillers face different rules under Article 82 of Law 2960/2001, paying a flat rate of €0.59 per kilogram of finished product, with taxes paid upfront based on declared production quantities.

iii). Traditional producers

They are at the bottom of the production hierarchy but are custodians of traditional knowledge and local autonomy in raki production. Their production is based on social gatherings that mark the end and beginning of the agrarian community's life. Due to heavy licensing regulations, the "raki season" has become the "licensing period" due to heavy licensing regulations. Traditional producers are informally regulated through licensing, but "licensing and taxes make production hard." They are limited to producing 300 litres and cannot sell their product. There are ongoing discussions at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) regarding a potential ban on bulk transport and trade of raki (eKathimerini, 2015). They provide an authentic cultural experience, often attracting tourism.

However, traditional producers face significant bureaucracy and costly inspections. Although the production remains a tradition, it is financially challenging. Some sell excess raki to cover costs, but it is insufficient. Referred to as "2-day/48-hour distillers in the EU," they are not respected due to their traditional methods, though they are retained for tourism purposes. Market pressures and legal restrictions are slowly eroding this practice. Production is highly regulated, with stills sealed after use and only reopened with a new production permit. Licenses are passed down through inheritance and are long-lasting, but new applications are required each season. To get a license, producers must submit a report detailing land, grape, and still ownership, along with inspection results to get a license. Inspections cost 150 euros every five years. Despite having traditional licenses, producers need annual applications to produce. Traditional raki is produced for community consumption, with ingredients shared among family, friends, and neighbours, meant to be shared and enjoyed collectively rather than exploited for market profit. However, "many producers no longer continue due to the state's regulations" (R11, interview, December 2024). Production remains single-distilled, reflecting the cultural and communal aspects of the practice.

The market reflects these challenges. While raki remains affordable at €3-5 per litre wholesale (€12-24 retail), most production serves local Cretan markets, with less than 1% exported (R10, interview, December 2024). The regulatory burden has caused a dramatic decline in traditional producers - from 150 during the Venizelos era to just 3-4 remaining in Lasithi today (R10, interview, December 2024). Many family operations have disappeared as younger generations migrate to cities, unable to sustain production under current rules. This trend is recorded not only in Lasithi and Crete but also in the broader Greek territory (Österberg, 2002). Moreover, traditional events, like *rakokazano*⁴ are now becoming part of commodified festivals for tourism and consumption.

⁴ The traditional practice and process of making raki

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. The tradition of raki and raki making in the Lasithi Plateau

5.1.1 Raki-making: a sustainable cultural activity that survives

In Lasithi, the agricultural season ends with the distillation of leftover grapes from wine-making to produce raki during winter. Households shift from outdoor labour to gatherings around the still, and the display of foods from the season and cultural activities (See Annexe 2.2). Diets adjust to what the plateau yields at different times of the year; knowledge to produce, process, and store food is developed locally and passed within the community. Techniques that make food last, such as drying bread (ntakos), fermenting vegetables, or preserving in vinegar, sit alongside foraging for greens, snails, and mushrooms. Waste is minimised: what people do not consume is shared or directed to animals, whose manure returns to the fields. Rituals around producing and sharing food and drink are part of social life, not separate from it. The raki produced is saved, shared and served for all events and activities until the next raki-making season (R12, interview, December 2024).

Raki-making is a clear expression of food sovereignty that has continued from the past. It begins with the leftovers of wine-making, since grape pomace is the central ingredient, the primary input is a by-product rather than a purchased commodity (R12, interview, December 2024). Distillation is organised collectively; neighbours, relatives, and friends bring what they have grown, foraged, stored, or processed across the year. Meze plates assembled around the still and in taverns⁵ display a locally controlled food economy—potatoes baked or fried, cheeses, tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, dried bread, foraged herbs, snails and mushrooms, and mountain tea—while participants exchange techniques and stories about foraging and preservation and culture in general. These foods are part of the shared culture that connected people to land and culture. The raki-making process acts as a platform to share traditional food products. In short, raki-making converts surplus and residues into value while reinforcing shared stewardship of land, animals, and knowledge.

Raki is much more than just an alcoholic drink—it is a symbol of cultural identity, tradition, and social connection. It is often called a “glass of Cretan culture” (Ancarola, 2024). It serves as a bridge that connects people, fosters conversation, and plays an essential role in cultural rituals and social events such as weddings, funerals, agricultural breaks, and family gatherings, sustaining reciprocal ties rather than commercial profit. Raki is produced primarily for family and friends, while taverns extend these practices into public settings where it is paired with local foods. Older generations identify raki with history and self-worth, using it to socialise, remember stories, and maintain cultural ties (R12, interview, December 2024).

Raki is also attributed with medicinal uses in local knowledge, including soothing colds, aiding digestion, and disinfecting wounds; the view is often summarised in the saying that “if you

⁵ Taverns in Lasithi are hubs of traditional cuisine and community, where people sit together, exchange conversation, and drink raki with meze.

cannot treat this illness with raki, it is serious” (R12, interview, December 2024). While some value-added products now reach tourists and local markets, interlocutors emphasise that the core orientation of production remains what Ancorla (2024) calls communal and non-commercial.

These gatherings are closely linked with *mantinades*, the 15-syllable rhymed couplets in the Cretan dialect that articulate memory, emotion, and commentary, and are still performed in rural settings (Vlatakis-Gkaragkounis, 2022). Where raki flows, *mantinades* often follow, renewing oral tradition and providing a socially accepted mode of wit, debate, and reconciliation in village life; they are also performed during raki-making itself, turning production time into cultural reproduction and passing down traditional messages and enriching local folklore (R12, interview, December 2024). Some examples are:

Table 2. *Mantinades* showing social values and value of raki in everyday life (*mantinades.gr*, 2000; (Ball, 2000); (Vlatakis-Gkaragkounis, 2022))

Mantinades	Greek version
<i>Friends do not say thank you, Friends do not owe in their takings and givings, any notebooks, they do not hold</i>	Δεν λένε οι φίλοι ευχαριστώ... οι φίλοι δεν χρωστούνε, στα πάρε και στα δώσε τους τεφτέρια δεν κρατούνε
<i>Only Eros can change the law of nature, To change a moment in time, to turn a moment into eternity</i>	Μόνο ο έρωτας μπορεί ν' αλλάξει τον κανόνα, να κάμει χρόνο τη στιγμή και τη στιγμή αιώνα
<i>I love you dearly, that is true, but to raki I'm loyal too, If I had a lake of raki's glow, you'd be the lily floating low.</i>	Εγώ εσένα αγαπώ μα στη ρακί έχω μπέσα, Να είχα μια λίμνη με ρακί, νούφαρο να ήσουν μέσα
<i>With gunshots, lamb upon the fire, raki and dance in flight, I ward off evil every time — may it not come back tonight.</i>	Με μπαλοθιές, αρνί ψητό, ρακί και πεντοζάλη, ξορκίζω κάθε τι κακό να μην ξανάρθει πάλι
<i>I don't drink raki, for it stirs the mind and memories deep, and wakes the feelings born for you, that in my heart I keep</i>	Δεν την πίνω τη ρακί γιατί ξυπνά τη σκέψη, μα και τα συναισθήματα που έχω για σένα θρέπει

These facts show how raki-making discloses a locally autonomous food system. Materially, it is low-waste and circular, because residues from one process become inputs to another and surplus is redistributed through kin and neighbourly networks. Socially, it organises care and reciprocity through gifting and shared labour, converting agricultural time into occasions for teaching techniques, honouring producers, and planning the next season. Culturally, it refreshes

expressive traditions and anchors collective memory while integrating raki with household economies. Raki-making survives because it concentrates the plateau's sovereignty in one practice: it turns leftovers into value, keeps food and knowledge circulating locally, and binds people through hospitality, song, and mutual help.

5.1.2 Raki in enhancing socio-economic values

Apart from forming part of the food cultures and food sovereignty of the place, raki enhances socio- economic values that are moral, unquantifiable, and tied to the cultural and social fabric of the community. These values are anchored in the lived culture of *philotimo*⁶. People gather around the kazani (the still and the place of distillation), each assuming a role for the greater good, from supplying grapes and firewood to managing the boil and tasting the raki, without anticipating anything in return. People share grapes and the kazani (machinery and the place); today they even share licences. What one lacks, another offers, so everyone has access to the products and infrastructure of raki- making. The same ethos applies to agriculture, windmills, and everyday life.

In contrast to individualistic societies, producers describe a responsibility to the common good; by engaging in productive processes together, they feel belonging—"we are happy and never feel lonely" (R10, interview, December 2024). Those who have moved away return for raki season to reconnect ties and "feel the culture," and civic participation continues. Raki sustains this social coherence, as emotional connections are forged through making raki and through the conversations that flow while drinking it: "our culture is connecting people, and if someone comes home, we serve raki and we start talking" (R12, interview, December 2024). Raki also sustains local know- how and its transmission. Producers rely on practical knowledge—how much distillate a given harvest should yield, how to control heat, and how to judge quality and safety—passed across generations during work. As R10 points out, "people trust producers," without branding to define the value of raki, reflecting the deep bonds of trust within the community. In Lassithi, raki is more than a product—it is a social tool, an expression of hospitality, and a way of fostering community ties. The social and cultural dynamics of raki production drive the community to act in unison without expecting personal profit. Younger villagers continue the practice alongside other jobs because, as one explained, "if there is no one to do it, the culture will end" (R10, interview, December 2024). In the same spirit, raki is produced for the community and shared freely, without commercial interests.

Economic life around raki follows values that differ from market logic. Production is primarily for family, friends, and neighbours, and raki circulates as a gift or in barter—exchanged for vegetables, fruit, or other help—rather than through formal sale (R1 & R5, interview, December 2024). It is also offered to guests as a sign of hospitality. Although some people make a living related to raki—by distilling for others for a fee or selling surplus after community distribution to taverns or others who need it—the drink is not produced solely to generate income. Where

⁶ Philotimo is a compelling drive to do what is right, not for recognition but out of an inner sense of honor and empathy. Someone with philotimo will go out of their way to help others, behave ethically, and uphold personal and communal values—even when no one is watching.

money enters, it usually covers licensing and other costs or provides modest supplementary earnings; earning from raki is not condemned (R5, interview, October 2024 & R12, interview, December 2024). In everyday terms, the worth of raki is measured by meaningful, reciprocal relationships rather than by money and profit. The value of raki is further visible in taverns, through traditional production in villages, and in daily conversations that emphasise its socio-economic roles. It serves as a gift, a drink, a social connector, and a source of cultural enrichment, embodying an alternative economy

5.2. Formalisation and the role of the state

Although the production of raki underwent formal institutionalisation in 1929, major state interventions emerged through a monitoring process using numbered customs seals that were applied before and after each production cycle, serving both to control output and generate revenue. While this initial commercialisation was not detrimental to traditional practices, subsequent regulations have significantly constrained small-scale production. Today, the Lasithi Plateau has only 3-4 licensed producers, despite most villages containing at least one person with the license (R10, interview, December 2024). The current regulatory framework creates stark disparities - small producers face strict annual limits of 1,000 litres. They must use their grapes, while industrial operations producing over 500,000 litres benefit from tax advantages on purchased pomace (R11, interview, December 2024). Even personal use distillation now requires fee payments, leading to widespread illegal production punished by equipment confiscation and fines (Travel.Gr, 2024). This evolving regulatory landscape has created tension between preserving traditional production and meeting commercial demands, with industrial producers gaining significant economic advantages while small-scale practitioners struggle against increasing constraints.

5.2.1. Patent, Labels and Geographical Indications for raki

In response to Turkey patenting the name "raki," Greece patented the name "tsikoudia" (Travel.gr, 2024). As a result, the term "raki" no longer exists in the market economy, as tsikoudia replaced it. Raki, a product deeply tied to tradition and culture in Greece, has thus been rebranded. While offering legal protection, this rebranding has unintentionally distanced the product from its cultural and social roots. As many locals emphasise, "raki is a rural name; it's what we use daily" (R11, interview, December 2024), underscoring its deep connection to everyday Cretan life. The rebranding of raki under the name tsikoudia has led to a symbolic shift—from a community-based tradition to a market-driven identity. This transformation affects its consumption and how the product is valued and exchanged, disrupting its embedded role in local hospitality and social rituals.

Currently, tsikoudia is protected under the European Union's Geographical Indication (GI) system, but only when produced using traditional methods in its place of origin. However, the GI framework presents contradictions. While it is intended to preserve traditional know-how, it often benefits industrial producers who appropriate cultural methods to market mass-produced versions. In contrast, traditional raki production, centred on the *kazani* (communal distillation cauldron), embodies living cultural knowledge that evolves within the community. These

practices are largely excluded from the industrial processes now associated with GI-labelled tsikoudia. Given this discrepancy, there is a growing argument for establishing two separate GI labels: one for industrial tsikoudia and another for traditional, non-commercial raki. The current framework, which lumps both under a single category, erodes the cultural specificity of traditional raki and privileges mass production. Gounari (2024) notes that the shift toward standardised industrialised products under the GI system undermines regional culinary identities by detaching products from their taste, texture, diversity, and cultural context.

Traditional producers in Crete now face growing competition from industrial producers within Greece and global markets. Meanwhile, official mechanisms to protect authentic traditions, such as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) heritage designation or Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) status, remain underutilised. Calls for UNESCO recognition have surfaced, but the lack of political initiative and the high cost of certification limit access for small producers. EU Regulation (EC) No 509/2006 offers a potential avenue through the TSG label, emphasising traditional character and distinct production methods. Applying this status to traditional raki could restore its cultural symbolism and ensure protection outside purely commercial frameworks.

The formalisation and marketisation of raki have intensified with EU regulatory developments. Since its reclassification as tsikoudia, raki is officially listed under product category 6 ("grape marc spirit") in Annexe III of Regulation (EC) No 110/2008. Although the EU does not directly fund spirit production, it supports a unified regulatory system for labelling, production, and name protection through GI status. This framework highlights unique geographical and traditional characteristics while helping producers market their products. However, the commodification process has continued. The 2024 amendments to Regulation (EU) 2019/787—which replaced Regulation (EC) No 110/2008—introduced simplified registration procedures and voluntary sustainability standards. While beneficial for industrial producers, these updates are largely redundant for traditional distillers in Crete, whose methods are already inherently sustainable. Despite commitments to safeguard traditional practices, the current system remains skewed toward large-scale production, threatening to marginalise artisanal producers and the intangible cultural heritage they uphold.

To protect traditional raki, Greece must pursue differentiated legal recognition and resist overreliance on market frameworks. Clear separation between industrial tsikoudia and traditional raki in terms of labelling and GI designation would allow both to coexist—one as a commercial product, and the other as a living cultural tradition embedded in community life.

5.2.2. Enforcing Standardised Excise Duty: Decade of intense European Commission Regulation

The European Commission Taxation and Customs Union explains the regulatory framework for alcohol excise duties, established under Directive 92/83/EEC, that sets standardised structures, categories, and calculation methods for taxation while allowing reduced rates for small producers/distillers and specific regions. Amended in 2020 by Directive 92/84/EEC, these rules define minimum duty rates for each beverage category, with spirits subject to a standard rate of

€550 per hectolitre (a unit of measurement equal to 100 litres) of pure alcohol (effective since 1993). However, member states may apply reduced rates—up to 50% below the national standard—for small distilleries producing under 10 hectolitres annually (European Commission Taxation and Customs Union). Further refinement came with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/2266, which introduced certification rules for independent small producers. To qualify for reduced rates, distilleries must not exceed production thresholds set by member states and must operate without third-party patents or trademarks. Notably, cooperative production among small brewers is permitted, but this exemption does not extend to distilleries (European Commission Directorate-General for Trade).

According to the Ministry of Economics and Finance, in Greece, these EU directives are implemented through national legislation, particularly Law 2960/2001, which incorporates excise duty regulations. These duties apply to domestic and imported products at the time of consumption release. The standard rate for ethyl alcohol is €2,450 per hectolitre, but traditional products like Ouzo, Tsipouro, and tsikoudia (Cretan raki) benefit from a 50% reduction (€1,225 per hectolitre) (Independent Public Revenue Authority, 2022). Excise duties apply upon production or importation but are only payable upon release for consumption, with exemptions for denatured alcohol, medicines, and vinegar production (Ministry of Economy and Finance, Hellenic Republic). The EU's framework aims to balance market fairness by allowing member states to set higher rates while ensuring small producers remain competitive. For instance, distilleries producing under 1,000 litres of pure alcohol annually qualify for reduced duties, reflecting the EU's effort to protect traditional methods while standardising taxation (European Parliament Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services, 2018). However, this regulatory approach creates fundamental tensions for communities like Lasithi, where raki production remains deeply embedded in social rather than commercial contexts.

This regulatory landscape highlights the tension between standardisation and cultural preservation. While EU policies aim to create a level playing field, the strict production thresholds and certification requirements pose challenges for small-scale tsikoudia producers, who must navigate complex compliance measures to benefit from reduced rates. The system's emphasis on commercialisation contrasts with traditional practices, where small-batch distillation has long been a cultural staple rather than a taxed commodity. Nonetheless, the reduced rates for traditional Greek spirits acknowledge their cultural significance, even as broader EU tax harmonisation reshapes local production dynamics.

The Greek state has faced significant legal challenges regarding its preferential tax treatment of traditional alcoholic beverages. In Case C-475/01 (2004), the European Commission - supported by the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland - successfully challenged Greece's reduced excise duty on ouzo before the CJEU. The court ruled that Greece's tax scheme violated Article 90 of the EC Treaty (prohibiting discriminatory internal taxation of products of member states) and Article 21 of Directive 92/83 (requiring uniform duty rates on ethyl alcohol). Notably, the court rejected Greece's argument that ouzo deserved special treatment as a traditional drink distinct from "luxury" products like whisky, finding both were traditionally produced and culturally significant (Case C-230/89). The controversy escalated in 2015 after the European Commission expressed dissatisfaction with Greece's response to a 2011 letter

reiterating its failure to comply with EU directives. The Commission threatened Greece with legal action over reduced rates for tsikoudia (Cretan raki) and tsipouro, with an ultimatum of 2 months to comply with the regulations. Greece currently applies a 50% reduced rate for commercial products and a "super-reduced" rate (about 6%) for small "two-day distillers" - arrangements the Commission deemed illegal protections for domestic products (Hurriyet Daily, 2015). This stance sparked concerns that equating raki's tax with imported spirits would dramatically increase prices, potentially pricing out local consumers while undermining cultural practices where raki serves as a traditional hospitality offering. The issue took on additional complexity when the OECD, as part of Greece's bailout conditions, proposed banning or strictly regulating bulk sales (unbottled) of raki and tsipouro - a move that would disrupt centuries-old traditions in regions like Lasithi where home production and storage remain vital and could lead to rise in illegal production and sale (eKathimerini, 2015). Current tax rates already show stark disparities: while standardised raki/tsipouro pay €12.75/litre of alcohol (half the standard €25.50 rate), bulk versions enjoy an ultra-low €1.40 rate. By comparison, beer is taxed at €6.50/litre and wine escapes excise duty entirely. These ongoing conflicts highlight the tension between EU market harmonisation and preservation of traditional production systems deeply embedded in Greek rural life and culture.

In 2016, Greece proposed national legislation to cut excise duties by 50% for products from other member states and limited small distillery production to 120 litres. However, in 2017, the European Commission referred Greece to the CJEU for failing to comply with Articles 19, 21, and 22(1) of Directive 92/83/EEC, Article 3(1) of Directive 92/84/EEC, and Article 110 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The case proceedings started in 2018 (C-91/18, European Commission v. Hellenic Republic, 2018).

During the court proceedings, Greece was reminded of the relevant EU regulations defining spirit drinks, particularly the prohibition under Article 110 TFEU against imposing higher taxes on similar imported products. However, the definition of "similarity" remains contentious, as it relies solely on categorical classification (e.g., grape marc spirit) rather than actual production methods or cultural distinctions. While protectionism stifles competition, Greece's tax policies have disproportionately reduced sales of imported spirits.

In its defence, Greece acknowledged the Commission's claim that its excise duties on tsipouro and tsikoudia violated Articles 19 and 21 of Directive 92/83 but maintained that these beverages belong to a distinct category (grape marc spirit) under Regulation 110/2008, separate from ouzo (distilled anis). Greece contested any breach of Article 110 TFEU, arguing that tsipouro and tsikoudia—flavoured or not—are dissimilar to imported spirits like whisky, gin, or even other grape marc spirits (e.g., grappa), due to differences in raw materials, distillation methods, and organoleptic properties. Greece further rejected allegations of protective taxation, dismissing the Commission's consumption data (2010–2012) showing a decline in imports of foreign spirits as unreliable due to the economic crisis and denying proof of discriminatory effects.

The European Commission contested Greece's excise duty regime for traditional spirits like tsipouro and tsikoudia, arguing it violated EU directives by imposing a preferential tax rate of €59 per hectolitre - significantly below the 50% reduction threshold permitted under Article 22(1)

of Directive 92/83 from the standard €550 minimum rate set by Article 3(1) of Directive 92/84. Greece defended its policy by emphasising the traditional nature of small-scale "occasional" distilleries, whose bulk sales between private individuals had never entered intra-EU trade, and cited a symbolic flat-rate duty under Article 22(4) meant to monitor this strictly regulated domestic practice. However, the CJEU ruled decisively against Greece, finding that while the 20th recital of Directive 92/83 acknowledges traditional products, it doesn't exempt member states from their EU obligations. The Court determined Greece had breached Articles 19 and 21 of Directive 92/83 by failing to apply the mandated minimum excise rates and production limits, stressing that national traditions cannot justify non-compliance with binding EU law, particularly when the absence of cross-border trade was deemed irrelevant to the legal violation. Consequently, Greece was directed to align its taxation system with EU regulations, clarifying how traditional production practices must still conform to standard market rules.

The CJEU's ruling against Greece made international headlines, with Reuters (2019) reporting the European Commission's successful challenge backed by the EU's top court. Simultaneously, the case sparked debates in the European Parliament about protecting traditional distilling practices. Greek Member of European Parliament (MEP) Georgoulis raised pressing questions about the Commission's plans to support small distilleries employing unique European techniques that sustain local economies across Greece's mainland and islands. His parliamentary inquiry (2019) specifically asked what measures the Commission would implement to safeguard these disappearing artisanal professions and traditional methods - distinct from industrial processes - as part of Europe's intangible cultural heritage. This dual development highlighted the tension between EU regulatory enforcement and preservation of cultural practices, putting pressure on the Commission to address how traditional industries might be protected while maintaining single market rules. The case thus evolved beyond a simple tax compliance issue into a broader discussion about balancing economic integration with cultural preservation in the European project.

5.3. Pressures from globalisation and tourism

Besides regulation and standardisation, globalisation (Wheatley, 2024) now places intense pressure on raki production and the broader culture of Lasithi. The landscape is changing, with increased use of imported chemicals and fertilisers affecting soil quality and agricultural output. This shift impacts traditional practices, such as cultivating grapes essential for raki production.

The vineyards in Lasithi are ageing, and with reduced local involvement in agriculture, reliance on external sources for agricultural products is growing. Weather patterns have become increasingly unpredictable, and frost threatens harvests in some years. As one producer explained, "If there is frost, we cannot harvest grapes. Some years, no grapes and next year a lot" (R10, interview, October 2024). This variability makes planning difficult and discourages long-term care for ageing vineyards. Farmers increasingly turn to chemicals and fertilisers to recover yields, further degrading soil quality. The landscape is losing the biodiversity that once supported resilient practices. As local supply declines, producers become more dependent on

external sources of grapes and other inputs, weakening the connection between raki and the land that once gave it meaning.

Land ownership patterns further intensify these challenges. Inheritance divides property into small, scattered plots, with holdings split among family members. Many fields are left idle or farmed only intermittently. As young people migrate to cities, fewer return to engage in agriculture. This same pattern appears in the inheritance of raki-making licenses. Historically, a family collectively held a license and a kazani regardless of size. With joint families becoming nuclear, only one license remains, yet they lack the equipment, labour, or interest to use them within families. Kazanis are also divided among siblings, dividing the inherited kazani into different parts and complicating production. One person may continue the tradition, while another may stop. In families with only daughters, licences pass through complex marital arrangements (R10, interview, October 2024).

The older generation, once stewards of the raki tradition, is increasingly disconnected from youth who now prefer modern beverages like beer or whisky, often driven by status. The younger generation shows less interest in raki as a social tool for conversation, and it is no longer central to their gatherings. As one local noted, “The youth now go to bars for whisky or vodka; raki is no longer the drink of choice in parties” (R8, interview, October 2024). With many younger people relocating to cities such as Heraklion or Athens, their connection to village life weakens, and raki production fades. As the population ages, farm labour is increasingly replaced by migrant workers, reducing the active hours and opportunities for intergenerational contact and the transmission of traditional knowledge (Hazareesingh & Maat, 2024). The local economy reflects these changes. Lasithi once balanced subsistence, small-scale sale of produce, and seasonal off-farm work. Globalisation has eroded this mixed structure. Income from agriculture has declined. Many households now depend on tourism or other services. The shift to market-oriented production in agriculture leaves fewer youth to focus on foraging for traditional foods, inheriting local know-how, and practising the skills that supported the community’s self-sufficiency. The few who still care for the full cycle of raki production do so with great effort. They face high costs, strict rules, and uncertain returns. A few young people still learn the craft, but often as a hobby rather than a business. They value raki as family heritage. They keep it alive for love, not profit.

Tourism, while boosting local economies, is also accelerating the commercialisation of raki and displacing it from its original cultural context. New tourism-driven products such as wine tourism and grape syrup have entered the market, overshadowing traditional methods of raki production. The emphasis has shifted from preserving local practices to curating tourist experiences. However, this transformation is not fully embraced as the curation presents raki with an image different from the cultural practice. Local producers increasingly feel the encroachment of foreign interests, as external companies attempt to appropriate raki or displace it in favour of branded alcoholic products. Locally produced raki is being replaced by foreign alcohol, and with it, the communal essence of its production is eroding. The influx of foreign spirits has begun to overshadow raki’s identity as a traditional drink. Some local producers have even started ageing raki, akin to whisky, to cater to the tourist market. Tourism has opened the door to raki’s commodification, as evidenced by the emergence of cafes and food

establishments targeting younger consumers, where raki is marketed alongside contemporary trends (R7, interview, October 2024).

Rakokazano festivals, once deeply rooted in the agricultural calendar and centred around raki-making as a communal ritual, are increasingly transformed into cultural performances for external audiences. These events are becoming spectacles in urban centres and cities, with portable distillation pots brought in for display and musicians or singers hired from outside the community. Larger festivals, especially those supported by government funding, feature foreign alcohol. This commercialisation is seen as symbolic exclusion, in which the authentic and lived traditions of villages like Lasithi are replaced by staged versions of culture designed to appeal to tourists and sponsors. The emphasis has shifted from cultural continuity to a commodified and aestheticised representation of tradition, severed from its producers and community roots.

Although such festivals draw in tourists, students, and foreign visitors, they are frequently criticised for placing external commercial interests above local, authentic practices (R12, interview, December 2024). Despite growing commodification, the fundamental process of raki production, rooted in local knowledge and community labour, persists, though it increasingly struggles to differentiate authenticity from cultural appropriation.

With fewer individuals engaged in agriculture and value addition, Lasithi's social economy is transforming. Traditional practices once integral to the local economy are fading as younger generations pursue urban-based careers. The result is a growing disconnection from the land and culture that once sustained the community, placing its cultural and economic foundations at risk, unless a new generation can meaningfully reconnect with these traditions. As the cultural landscape evolves, raki production is often relegated to the past. While tourism and external markets may offer new economic opportunities, these developments frequently come at the expense of cultural autonomy and local heritage. As one local producer remarked, "Raki production is culture for us; if it is stopped, we will lose our culture. And if there are no obstacles, the production continues" (R7, interview, October 2024). In the face of such pressures, the future of raki as a cultural symbol remains uncertain—particularly if younger generations move away from traditional practices and gravitate towards urban lifestyles and mass-produced alcohol.

5.4. People's response to the market

The Greek government's enforcement of EU-mandated excise duties has sparked significant resistance from traditional spirit producers. Since 2019, authorities have increased restrictions on small distillers, confining production mainly to cultural events during the wine harvest season and discouraging commercial sales. These actions were met with opposition led by the Traditional Distilleries Union of Greece, representing 200–300 registered producers fighting to protect tsikoudia's Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status and traditional methods.

A more profound disagreement about how traditional spirits are defined is at the heart of the conflict. Small-scale producers and communities see raki not as a commercial product but as a cultural expression integral to hospitality and social life. By contrast, EU institutions treat these

beverages as taxable commodities subject to market regulations. Traditional producers argue that this misunderstanding of Greek drinking culture risks eroding centuries-old practices. As one Cretan distiller warned, tax harmonisation would raise prices to the level of whisky (€15–16 per bottle), fundamentally altering the role of tsikoudia in everyday life (AFP, 2015).

i). Protests and Monologues

Organised resistance to these regulations primarily comes from the Traditional Distilleries Union of Greece. Following Greece's defeat in the CJEU in 2019, the union launched nationwide protests. One member recalled, "Meetings with ministers were held, petitions submitted, and protests organised, but nothing changed. There was some support from the then minister to reduce tax rates, but political instability and corruption led to reshuffles, making negotiation impossible" (R11, interview, December 2024). Protests, interviews, and open letters became the only tools for expressing dissent. Critics highlighted state-sponsored hypocrisy, such as foreign alcohol being served at rakokazano events, and noted shifting youth preferences toward imported drinks. One protestor commented, "Raki is the cheapest, but foreign drinks are preferred by the youth" (R12, Interview, December 2024).

Others framed this struggle within a broader critique of global power structures. "Lack of money in Greece is used as a tool to control it by others. The government supports big industries where the money comes from" (R11, interview, December 2024). Another remarked, "Big companies want market control and try to restrict small production" (R10, interview, December 2024). Although local farmers wish to expand production, they face land and policy restrictions favouring industrial-scale outputs over community-based methods.

ii). Informal raki making and continuation of raki tradition

Since the regulations, informal raki making has emerged, where distillation is carried out by avoiding licensing and tax requirements and using someone else's kazani without registration. Large amounts of production are often gifted, shared to show hospitality or kept for personal use, and surplus is usually sold informally, typically in plastic bottles without labels or proper branding. Much of this exchange continues through cash transactions. One participant noted, "People buy raki from family or friends to avoid tax" (R11, interview, December 2024). While such practices carry risks, including fire hazards, explosions, and occasionally violent confrontations, they are widely perceived as a continuation of cultural norms rather than deliberate lawbreaking. However, some non-traditional producers exploit this system for moonshine operations, which pose significant health risks and result in revenue loss for legal producers, including a sharp decline in production due to the unavailability of grapes or pomace. Such practices have led to crimes like the theft of distillation pots, adulteration, and lead poisoning (SpiritsEUROPE, 2024).

Despite these challenges, many communities in Lasithi continue legal raki-making through the proper licensing channels. The few remaining licensed stills often host social gatherings, where entire villages and city-dwellers return home to participate in cultural activity. As one distiller put it, "raki-making is a social event, not a commercial one" (R7, interview, October 2024). It is

continued as a tradition that connects people, shares history, and enriches their culture, keeping it alive. This tradition is also sustained through generational continuity. “Licenses from grandfather are transferred to son” (R11, interview, December 2024), preserving not just the right to produce, but the cultural practice itself. For many, raki-making is not a response to policy but a continuation of a way of life, carried out with the same communal energy and reciprocity as in the past. While some are aware of the regulatory tensions, others are not; they simply keep the tradition alive through everyday practice.

6. Conclusions

This chapter critically engages with the central research question:

To what extent and how does raki making as a cultural activity sustain food sovereignty in the Lasithi Plateau and resist commodification pressures?

Supporting sub-questions further explore:

1. *How does raki making showcase food sovereignty as a modality of the past?*
2. *What are the state-market pressures toward raki commodification?*
3. *What forms of resistance to commodification are emerging through raki making?*

The discussion synthesises the empirical findings with the conceptual frameworks of food sovereignty, anti-commodities and cultural commons. In doing so, it demonstrates how raki-making operates simultaneously as a product of cultural process, sustaining autonomy and identity while navigating through the tensions created by regulatory frameworks and market logics.

Raki-making in the Lasithi expresses a lived cultural system where food sovereignty is sustained through collective labour, ecological embeddedness, and intergenerational knowledge. It is a seasonal practice tied to the agricultural calendar, transforming grape pomace—a winemaking by-product into a valued cultural good without waste. Around the still, food from the plateau’s own fields, gardens, and wild foraging is shared, techniques are exchanged, and stories are told, weaving together social cohesion and ecological reciprocity. The value of raki in this context lies not in its price but in its role as a vessel for identity, memory, and community life.

Against this backdrop, state and market forces impose frameworks that disrupt these embedded relations. European Union legislation, national licensing systems, and excise duties treat raki as an industrial spirit rather than a culturally embedded product, grouping it under the homogenised label tsikoudia. This formalisation privileges large-scale producers, whose operations can absorb regulatory costs and capture market share, while marginalising traditional and small-scale distillers. The measures intended to “protect” the product risk-erase its distinctive identity and detach it from the communal and ecological systems that have sustained

it for generations. For instance, excise duties are justified as a means of regulating alcohol consumption and ensuring quality, yet in practice, they make small-scale seasonal distillation economically unviable. Similarly, the patenting of the name tsikoudia was framed as a measure of protection. Still, it diluted raki's local identity and opened pathways for industrial production under a generic label, disrupting its embeddedness in communal and ecological traditions.

With such pressures, local actors employ quiet but persistent resistance strategies. Some continue producing raki within traditional two-day licensing periods, retaining control over methods, ingredients, and distribution. Others rely on informal sharing networks that keep the drink within community boundaries, away from market logic. This culture of sharing operates not only through the exchange of the product itself but also through practices such as sharing licenses, infrastructure, and distillation spaces, reinforcing the communal nature of production. By distributing both the labour and the outcomes, these networks ensure that raki remains embedded in seasonal cycles and collective life, functioning as an anti-commodity—produced for social, cultural, and ecological reasons rather than profit.

The case of raki in Lasithi reveals a broader truth about cultural sustainability: that the survival of such practices depends not only on their technical or legal protection, but on maintaining the social and ecological relations that give them meaning. Commodification often severs these relations, reducing products to standardised units for trade. In contrast, anti-commodities like traditional raki retain their value precisely because they operate within a moral economy where reciprocity, place-based knowledge, and shared responsibility prevail.

6.1. Raki as a tool to display food sovereignty

In Lasithi, food sovereignty is expressed through the collective social enterprise of raki-making—a culturally rooted practice that reinforces sovereign traditions. Raki is almost always accompanied by food, which is often traditional, and these dishes carry embedded messages about their origins. This way, raki becomes a gateway to Lasithi, introducing and showcasing the region's sovereign food traditions. It not only leads us to a deeper understanding of localised food systems and the cultural practices associated with food, but also reflects the continuity of heritage passed down through generations. Recognising the cultural significance of an alcoholic drink like raki reveals that food sovereignty is not confined to food alone but extends to accompanying drinks. Raki helps display the region's commoning practices and enriches food sovereignty through shared networks and collective enterprises.

As a widely available and consumed product in Greece, raki offers multiple insights when traced back to its origins and cultural significance. Every product carries the story of a culture, its traditional origins, and its importance. Following Ian Cook's "follow the thing" methodology to understand a product's meaning beyond its immediate or widespread image (Curry-Machado & Stubbs, 2024) brings us to Lasithi, where raki-making demonstrates food sovereignty that has persisted from the past and been enriched through this cultural distillation practice. This shows how the origin of a product is deeply connected to local knowledge and traditions. Raki-making exemplifies the region's food sovereignty in ways that top-down approaches often misrecognise, failing to understand and acknowledge diversity and regional processes.

Examining Lasithi through the seven pillars of food sovereignty reveals the following:

1. Food and drinks are more than a commodity. People work the land to produce items of local value used in daily cooking and shared with neighbours, relatives, and others. They gain monetary value only after surplus is shared and traded, not as a predefined goal. Raki-making illustrates this distinction, as traditional foods are served during specific cultural events, and certain items are unavailable in markets. Even market-grown products, such as potatoes, are also freely shared.
2. Traditional knowledge is important. Raki-making is a venue for sharing knowledge about food systems. It facilitates knowledge exchange, seed sharing, and mutual assistance in harvesting and other agricultural activities. The next generation witnesses these processes and learns about the various foods that form Lasithi's food systems.
3. Diverse agro-ecological methods. Lasithi's food and drink production is geographically, culturally, and ecologically embedded. Local innovations, such as windmills to pump water, fertile valley agriculture, and the use of animal manure, support production. Grapes are grown in highly suitable areas and used for value-added products like raki and grape syrup. Rakokázanos gatherings feature foraged and cultivated foods, demonstrating adaptation to global food systems while preserving local products.
4. Sustainable livelihood depends on farmers as part of a wider socio-ecological system and as part of interdependent people who constitute the local community. Farming is respected as a livelihood and a repository of traditional knowledge—covering crop cultivation, herb sourcing, food preservation, and value addition. Farmers also organise rakokázanos, where they present their own products.
5. The gap between producers and consumers should be reduced. In Lasithi, producers and consumers are often the same individuals, though each may grow different products to share within the community. This interdependence builds autonomy and resists market pressures. Farmers take pride in presenting their food and drink as self-reliant products of Lasithi.
6. Implementing local control and rejecting the privatisation of natural resources. Raki production remains deeply traditional and continuously enriched by value additions such as honey, pomegranate, and medicinal herbs. Other products, such as bread, cheese, and dried goods, also remain under local control and the value addition process. These products are also available in traditional places like taverns, where traditional foods often accompany raki. Hence, the display of food systems outside rakokazano is seen in taverns where locals continue exercising control.
7. Viewing food as sacred. Food is not seen as a mere commodity but a generator of traditional knowledge, innovation, and relationships. Waste is avoided, and foods are transformed into unique dishes that enrich tradition. Food production connects people to the land, imbuing it with spiritual significance. Diversity in production prevents monotony in both diet and way of life.

Food sovereignty, as understood here, fills a conceptual gap by recognising the role of drinks, with evidence from the study of raki showing how such beverages contribute to and expand the concept beyond its established principles. Food sovereignty in Lasithi is not a distant policy

aspiration but a lived reality expressed in seasonal cycles and daily rituals. Even for those who are not grape farmers, the agricultural year culminates in the raki production season—an annual celebration of resilience, gratitude, and hope. Raki production thus becomes a powerful tool for enriching cultural identity, sustaining traditions, and fostering community cohesion. Through cooking, sharing, and storytelling during these events, traditional knowledge is actively transmitted. While globalised food habits have entered daily life, the persistence of local foraging and food processing in Lasithi represents a conscious cultural choice to protect its agrarian identity through everyday acts. Therefore, Raki-making emerges as a form of collective entrepreneurship that serves social and nutritional functions. It strengthens ties to nature, nurtures shared knowledge, and sustains cultural continuity.

Despite engagement with globalised food markets and supermarket purchases, communities continue age-old practices such as foraging wild greens, collecting snails, and sourcing wood for raki distillation. These acts preserve biodiversity, maintain ecological knowledge, and reinforce relationships with the land. In raki production, while the drink is central, the surrounding food becomes a vehicle for transmitting ancestral knowledge—rooted in instinctive, place-based traditions. The people of Lasithi take deep pride in products that carry their identity, origin, community, and resilience. Food and drink are not merely consumed—they serve as vehicles of heritage, social relations, and alternative economies. Lasithi's food philosophy prioritises nourishment, community-building, and cultural continuity over profit or commodification (Dekeyser et al., 2018). Here, food symbolises peace, solidarity, and prosperity, not conflict or competition.

However, this sovereignty faces challenges from market pressures, product influx, and demographic changes, particularly youth migration. Raki-making continues to unite villages, encouraging knowledge exchange and pride in showcasing the best of their produce. It should be preserved and supported to enable cultural continuity. Within this tradition, people have the right to healthy, culturally appropriate food and to define their food systems (Leventon & Laudan, 2017). Top-down policies often threaten these traditions. The greater the degree of intervention by the state or international organisations—regardless of whether such efforts are framed as attempts to align cultural practices and traditions with sustainability criteria—the more they risk perpetuating a misleading sustainability framework. This framework, often developed within a market-oriented logic, tends to neglect the strengths, dynamics, and potentials inherent to local contexts. As a result, such interventions may fail to account for the adaptive capacities, embedded knowledge systems, and cultural resilience that sustain these practices. Moreover, regulatory measures framed as “protective” can, in practice, have counterproductive effects: instead of safeguarding cultural heritage and environmental integrity, they may erode community autonomy, disrupt long-standing socio-ecological relationships, and incentivise behaviours—such as commodification or illicit production—that undermine the very values they claim to protect. As predicted, 2019 regulations have driven up illegal production of tsikoudia, though raki in Lasithi remains resilient due to its deep cultural embedding. Each year, returning generations—many drawn by slow living and degrowth ideals—participate in raki production, blending tradition with new knowledge and integrating tourism as a livelihood strategy.

The production of food and alcoholic drinks in Lasithi is driven by a social cohesion that has evolved, where members naturally come together with shared values, belonging, trust, and civic participation. This contemporary reality highlights raki's role in extending food sovereignty into the realm of food commons—where food is understood as a shared resource embedded in social relationships. Commoning practices are intrinsic to the culture, reflected in cooperation and prioritisation of community well-being (Vivero-Pol, 2019). This is a “culture of commons” in which symbolic, historical, aesthetic, and spiritual values are intertwined with participatory practices and shared understanding (Angelini & Castellani, 2019). Supportive policies emerge only with a grounded, bottom-up understanding of the role of food.

From this perspective, every product and activity in Lasithi is part of an alternative way of life, where people identify themselves through cultural practices and locally valued products (Hazareesingh & Maat, 2024). These forms of production—distinct from standard market functions—are anti-commodities (Maat & Hazareesingh, 2015): produced for reasons other than profit, their value is primarily social. The continuity of raki and its accompanying foods is a form of resistance to the commodification, globalisation, marketisation, and standardisation of food. Food commons and anti-commodities thus offer a way to understand food cultures from the ground up. In Lasithi, food systems operate as living commons, where cultural food traditions resist commodification through shared stewardship and responsibility (Bollier, 2025).

6.2. Anti-commodity as a way forward

Raki in Lasithi is more than an alcoholic drink: it embodies the region's food sovereignty, community cooperation, and connection between past and present. Yet this cultural product faces market pressures. European Union and Greek regulations treat raki like any other spirit drink, subject to labelling, standardisation, taxation, and restrictions. The name *tsikoudia*—used for industrially produced grape marc spirits—has been patented and applied to raki, blurring its identity and eroding its authenticity. Industrial producers often misrepresent *tsikoudia* as traditional, while regulatory measures aimed at protecting regional spirits risk sidelining the original cultural practice.

Understanding raki-making in this way also deepens the concept of food sovereignty. It is not simply about securing local control over food systems in the face of global market forces, but about safeguarding the cultural processes, ecological wisdom, and social bonds that underpin those systems. In Lasithi, raki acts as both a tangible product and a cultural medium, linking agricultural self-reliance with seasonal festivity, environmental stewardship, and mutual care. Its endurance demonstrates how rural communities can navigate and sometimes subvert the pressures of standardisation and market integration while retaining autonomy over their food and drink traditions.

Traditional raki exists for social meaning, not for market gain. It can therefore be understood through the concept of the anti-commodity—a way of seeing products as carriers of cultural value beyond their market price. In Lasithi, raki reinforces collective life and values such as *philotimo*, a sense of honour and mutual responsibility. Its making and sharing strengthen community bonds, preserve oral traditions like the *martinades*, and display the region's

sovereign food traditions. The social and cultural value of raki production far outweighs its commercial potential, as it is also used in medicine, cleaning, and everyday functions, embedding it within household and communal practices.

This embeddedness links raki directly to the plateau's landscape, climate, and social fabric. People are connected to nature in ways that foster belonging and encourage innovation. Raki production follows the agrarian calendar, reinforcing seasonal rhythms and community ties. Even as globalisation promotes individualism, mass production, and cultural appropriation, Lasithi maintains a slower, culturally grounded approach to development. Wherever raki is made, culture comes alive. For a market-based system, such collective enrichment challenges the logic of commodification, making raki an inherent form of resistance.

Raki-making reveals layers of meaning unseen in market analysis, linking the drink to the region's food sovereignty, traditions, and environment. The same alcohol product, when mass-produced, becomes tsikoudia—a commodity—but when made traditionally, it is raki, an anti-commodity. Both may coexist, yet market forces threaten this balance by encouraging rapid industrialisation. Raki's "double life" (Glover & Stone, 2018) as both an anti-commodity and a symbol of Lasithi's traditions highlights the need to recognise how culture shapes production and consumption, resisting uniform views of homogenisation and asserting alternative worldviews. Its true meaning lies in the practice: while tsikoudia is sold as a taste of Crete, it often directs attention back to the original form of raki, where production is an act of cultural preservation and continuity and its true meaning is confined to its practice. Anti-commodity thinking reminds us that not all goods are born in factories, produced for money, or intended for sale. Many emerge from centuries of tradition, resilience, and adaptation to local conditions. These goods cannot be commodified without distorting the culture that sustains them (Manno, 2012). Products with cultural origins can facilitate culture, but interference in how these cultures continue affects continuity and resilience. The anti-commodity approach helps to show the visual significance of objects, from symbolism to embedded narratives (Arabindan-Kesson, 2024). These objects carry stories of production, resistance, and memory, and their physical qualities narrate their origins and values.

Even when meeting high regulatory standards, the commodified version competes in a market dominated by large companies and is often misrepresented as traditional. The 2024 amendment to Regulation (EU) 2019/787 introduced voluntary sustainability standards, but while tsikoudia might adopt these, traditional raki already meets them by its very nature. The Greek government is responsible for distinguishing between the two, granting protections such as geographical indication status to the traditional drink and safeguarding the work of traditional distillers. Tsikoudia is a commodity marketed with an imposed cultural image, while traditional raki is a genuine cultural product created within and for the community.

This resilience stems from its deeply local, non-commercial nature, where production is tied to seasonal and communal rhythms rather than market demand. External regulations—whether from the state or international bodies—often overlook these differences, imposing uniform frameworks that fail to recognise or respect cultural diversity. This oversight arises from

ignorance and the dominance of market-oriented thinking, which undervalues alternative ways of understanding, seeing, knowing, and doing.

When Greece strengthened excise duties and alcohol regulations, traditional raki-making was largely unaffected because it is not a market-driven activity. It is produced and consumed within the community, functioning much like home cooking, which continues despite the growth of restaurants. Raki's role can be compared to home cooking, a tree that gives shade, or a stream that offers water: difficult to assign economic value, but deeply sustaining of life, memory, and knowledge. In the same way, raki-making sustains practices, values, health, and education—things that would otherwise require formal investment or external research.

Anti-commodities like raki remind us that production is not only about profitability; it is also about continuity, resilience, and meaning. Even when similar drinks are made elsewhere, their meanings differ because of their cultural setting. What makes raki in Lasithi unique is not only its taste but the stories, rituals, and values it embodies. Commodified alcohol is often linked to harm, but here, raki fosters well-being, respect, and cooperation. It strengthens social economies through kindness and shared honour, contributing to cultural continuity. Anti-commodities endure as living resistance, holding layers of meaning in their production and use. They help communities withstand the pressures of privatisation, patenting, and enclosure of commons that often accompany globalisation.

The community has never found it necessary to commodify raki, though it retains the option to do so on its own terms. The product is a tool for interactions and knowledge exchange within the culture and a measure of cultural progress. It is a tradition that has advanced without compromising its foundational values. Cultural progression naturally evolves—moving from foraging to agriculture, innovation and entrepreneurship to trade and business—as a process of cultural co-evolution. Anti-commodities are not simply products but repositories of memory, place, and ancestral knowledge. Unlike commodified goods that carry face value at the point of sale, anti-commodities carry intrinsic values layered through rituals, stories, and ecological understanding. They enable localised production, build resilience to global instability, and actively shape cultural evolution.

This becomes particularly crucial in the context of globalisation, which often promotes privatisation, patenting, and enclosure of commons. Communities like Lasithi resist this erosion by simply living their culture and embodying non-linear, undisturbed progress that cannot be easily disrupted. Some cultures progress faster due to geographical advantages and networks, while others remain more isolated, preserving slower but equally meaningful trajectories. Forcing homogeneity or exporting dominant models erodes what could have been vital contributions to global knowledge and innovation. Undisturbed cultures possess unique offerings that commodified and standardised systems cannot replicate. Their voluntary, fulfilling, and sustainable practices reflect a continuity that promotes collective sustainable growth.

Unlike industrial systems, where producers and products are alienated, traditional raki production entails extended producer responsibility. Producers are embedded in every step—evaluating taste, adjusting distillation, ensuring quality—all through tactile care and lived

knowledge. This hands-on, collective approach reinforces raki's socio-economic and symbolic value, far exceeding its identity as an alcoholic beverage. The producer, product, and consumer form a triadic relationship grounded in trust, care, and continuity, contrasting sharply with automated, profit-driven models that ignore ecological and cultural values. Anti-commodities challenge dominant economic assumptions that reduce everything to price and profit. They demand a rethinking of production, consumption, and development as culturally embedded processes. Commodified alcohol may be linked with negative health and social outcomes, yet raki in Lasithi promotes intimacy, mental well-being, and cooperation through rituals of care and community. Its continued production reflects a commitment to heritage, where agriculture and cultural production are organised around use first and surplus second. Just as milk becomes cheese or grapes become wine, raki is made not primarily for sale but as part of life itself—any surplus being stored, shared, or reinvested into collective needs like community events and infrastructure.

Rather than replacing traditional practices with a single prescribed model, places like Lasithi could chart their sustainable development paths—integrating contemporary innovations and resources into traditional systems, ensuring cultural continuity while enhancing socio-ecological resilience to contemporary challenges like climate change. Globalised, profit- and fame-oriented market cultures often replace local systems, but Lasithi's strength lies in building upon its traditional knowledge base and adapting it without eroding its cultural foundations.

The generalisation or standardisation of cultures erodes their value. As countries seek to export commodified products into markets where traditional goods carry cultural significance, they often encounter culture-in-practice as resistance to external models. These embedded products cannot be replaced without displacing the cultural practices tied to them—a morally and ecologically destructive act. Imposing foreign goods often requires detaching communities from their roots in agriculture, nature, and local knowledge systems. Products that serve as anti-commodities become vital agents of cultural continuity and resistance. They hold meaning, satisfaction, and community beyond monetary exchange, unlike commodified goods that often fail to deliver value beyond surface appeal.

Anti-commodities reveal alternative ways of being human. Human behaviours are not uniform—they are shaped by geography, exposure, knowledge, and cultural dynamics. Even within regions, they differ significantly, making homogenisation difficult and undesirable. The products, their production processes, and the values they embody have meaning only within their cultural contexts. Globalised development must therefore reconsider how it perceives culture, cultural activities, and cultural products. To understand anti-commodities, one must experience cultures without judgment, seeing them as they are rather than as they ought to be. These products—rooted in culture, autonomy, and collective care—persist as quiet yet powerful forms of resistance and alternative development, offering identity and ways of sustaining life and livelihoods. Safeguarding such traditions requires governance that recognises their intrinsic worth beyond economic metrics. This means moving away from one-size-fits-all regulatory models and towards approaches that respect diversity in production systems, encourage cultural continuity, and enable communities to define their sustainability.

Raki's continued life in Lasithi is a reminder that resisting homogenisation is not only possible but vital—because in protecting these practices, what is preserved is not just a drink, but an entire way of life.

6.3. Raki's value as a cultural food commons

Beyond its role in food sovereignty and its character as an anti-commodity, raki also embodies the qualities of a cultural food commons. It is not merely a drink but a collective practice in which production, knowledge, and meaning are shared across generations. Around the kazani, people bring grapes, contribute labour, share food, and exchange stories, turning distillation into a lived commons. Its value lies not in price or market exchange but in the social cohesion, ecological reciprocity, and cultural identity that it sustains.

As a cultural food commons, raki links ecological cycles with community life: grape pomace, a by-product of winemaking, is transformed into a drink through collective effort; accompanying foods are gathered from fields, gardens, and foraging; and nothing is wasted, with residues reintegrated into farming or animal care. This zero-waste, circular system mirroring contemporary sustainable needs illustrates how older practices combined ecological care with cultural expression, producing not commodities but cultural goods embedded in moral economies of reciprocity and care.

Revisiting this dimension highlights how past food sovereignty practices offer crucial lessons for sustainability today. Communities in Lasithi show that food and drink can be organised for nutrition or profit and as cultural commons that bind people to land, resources, and each other. Approaching raki and its accompanying foods as anti-commodities within a common framework demonstrates how social and cultural values can be integrated into food systems. The values of sharing, cooperation, respect for nature, and intergenerational stewardship are as relevant to addressing today's crises of sustainability and globalisation as they were in the past. At the same time, it also shows that culture is a diverse form of expression with shared values and practices that are intrinsic to it and different from other cultures.

In this sense, raki is more than an emblem of tradition: it is a living commons that teaches how communities can resist homogenisation, preserve ecological knowledge, and shape futures based on solidarity and cultural sustainability. Protecting raki, therefore, means protecting the cultural commons that sustains it—recognising that resilience arises not from external regulation, but from the everyday practices of sharing, reciprocity, and care that continue to define life in Lasithi.

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Annexe

1. Tables

1.1. Spectrum of Principles and Pillars of Food Sovereignty (links in activist movement to academia) Source: (Pimbert and Claeys, 2024)

Food Sovereignty: Seven Principles for a Future Without Hunger (1996)	Food Sovereignty: the Six Pillars of Nyéléni (2007)	Food Sovereignty: An Agenda for System Transformation (eight domains)
1. Food—a basic human Right Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. 2. Agrarian reform A genuine agrarian reform	1. Focuses on food for people Puts people’s need for food at the centre of policies—insist that food is more than just a commodity. 2. Values food Providers Supports sustainable livelihoods— respects the	1. Reinventing modernity Reject the idea of development as an ever-expanding process of commodification of nature and social relations. Adopt pluralistic definitions of “the good life” and modernity (e.g., Buen Vivir). 2. Guaranteeing rights to lands, seeds, and natural resources

is necessary that gives landless and farming people—especially women—ownership and control of the land they work and returns territories to indigenous peoples. The right to land must be free of discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, race, social class, or ideology; the land belongs to those who work it. 3. Protecting natural Resources Food sovereignty entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources, especially land, water, seeds, and breeds. Long-term sustainability demands a shift away from dependence on chemical inputs and on cash-crop monocultures and intensive, industrialised production models. Balanced and diversified natural systems are required. 4. Reorganising food trade Food imports must not displace local production nor depress prices. This means that export dumping or subsidised exports must cease. 5. Ending the	work of all food providers. 3. Localises food Systems Reduces distance between food providers and consumers—rejects dumping and inappropriate food aid. Resists dependency on remote and unaccountable Corporations. 4. Puts control locally Places control in the hands of local food providers. Recognises the need to inhabit and to share Territories. Rejects the privatisation of “natural resources”. 5. Builds knowledge and skills Builds on traditional Knowledge. Uses research to support and pass this knowledge to future generations. Rejects technologies that undermine or contaminate local food systems. 6. Works with Nature Maximises the	and control over the means of production Promote and protect individual and collective rights to land, water, seeds, and natural resources. Democratise natural resources governance. Redistribute land through agrarian reforms and regulate land-based investment. 3. Healing the metabolic rift (i.e., the delinking of agriculture and nature) Transform food systems through agroecology to regenerate biodiversity, soils, and water. Re-localise agri-food systems based on short food chains and circular models and move away from globalised, fossil-fuel intensive, linear supply chains. 4. Decolonising knowledge and research Transform knowledge production through power- equalising research based on cognitive and intersectional justice. Democratise, transform, and fund public research to serve the common good. 5. Supporting local organisations and networks and the convergence of struggles Build networks of local organisations to strengthen the voice and agency of small-scale producers through the use of
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globalisation of hunger Food sovereignty is undermined by multilateral institutions and by speculative capital. Regulation and taxation of speculative capital and a strictly enforced code of conduct for transnational corporations are therefore needed. 6. Social peace Everyone has the right to be free from violence. Food must not be used as a weapon. The ongoing displacement, forced urbanisation, repression, and increasing incidence of racism against smallholder farmers cannot be tolerated. 7. Democratic control Smallholder farmers must have direct input into formulating agricultural policies at all levels. Rural women, in particular, must be granted direct and active decision-making on food and rural issues.	contributions of ecosystems. Improves resilience. Rejects energy-intensive, monocultural, industrialised, destructive methods.	critical pedagogy and popular education methods. 6. Achieving gender and intersectional justice Eliminate all forms of gender-based violence and construct new gender relations free of oppression. Tackle the multiple, overlapping, and intertwined structures of oppression, using an intersectional Lens. Ensure gender equitable participation in food Governance. 7. Rethinking economics Reimagine economics outside capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. Holistically integrate productive labour with the reproductive labour of care of both women and of nature through an economics of care. 8. Democratising governance Enable people's participation in the coproduction of knowledge and policies. Decentralise and redistribute power in polycentric and horizontal governance webs, both in and between territories. Address the corporate capture of agri-food system governance and the conflicts of interest inherent to multi-stakeholder governance.
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Source: La Via Campesina, 1996. http://www.viacampesina.org	Source: Nyéléni 2007 (full report, https://nyeleni.org/en/synthesis-report/	Source: Developed by Pimbert and Claeys, 2024.
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1.2. Diverse Academic Approaches to Anti-Commodity (evolved from the food-sovereignty movement) (Maat & Hazareesingh, 2015).

Approach	Key Focus	Example
Original/Oppositional Forms	Original products, alterations or departures from existing commodity forms	Indigenous rice varieties preserved for cultural use
Anti-Colonial Nationalism	Anti-commodity functions are rooted more in the anti-colonial nationalist movement than mode of production or local use	Peasant uprisings against cash-crop systems
Local Autonomy	Assertion of traditional local ways of life against modernisation and market pressures	Community seed-saving networks
Local Livelihood & Cultural Function	Based on its local uses and cultural functions as basic livelihood and community crop	Staple foods reserved for household consumption
Anti-Dependency	Broader view of local development—sustainable crop diversity, education and healthy institutions	Polyculture farms resisting plantation models
Ecological Reciprocity	Sustainable modes of production deriving from peasant experience and knowledge of their environment	Rain-fed agriculture guided by traditional forecasting
Sanitary/Life-Affirming Practices	Reverse unhealthy conditions rooted in colonial production for market	Organic methods avoiding chemical inputs

Post-Colonial Collective Action	To protect livelihoods and an alternative to dominant commodification-based growth models	Cooperatives maintaining local food sovereignty
Luxury/Elitist Identity Markers	Anticipation of luxury branding of domestic goods serves as a marker of privileged social status symbols.	Heirloom rice varieties as cultural prestige

2. Figures

2.1. The Seven Pillars of Food Sovereignty Activist Movement (Source: Concordia Food Coalition)

THE SEVEN PILLARS OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



1. Focus on food for people

Food is more than a commodity. People's need for—and right to—food must be at the center of policies.



2. Build knowledge and skills

We need to build on traditional knowledge, using research to support this knowledge and pass it to future generations. We also need to reject technologies that undermine or contaminate local food systems.



3. Work with nature

We need to optimize the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience through the use of diverse agro-ecological production and harvesting methods that improve ecosystem resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change.



4. Value food providers

We need to support sustainable livelihoods for farmers and everyone else involved in food production or harvesting, and we need to respect their work.



5. Localize food systems

We need to reduce the distance between food providers and consumers, to reject inappropriate food aid, and resist dependency on remote and unaccountable corporations for food and seed.



6. Put control locally

We need to place control over food systems in the hands of local food providers and reject the privatization of natural resources. We also need to recognize the need to inhabit and share territories.



7. Food is sacred

Food is a gift of life, not to be squandered. It cannot be commodified.

2.2. Different shades of food systems in Lasithi (from field work)





3. Interview Guide

Introduction

I am a student from Belgium researching food traditions in Lasithi

I value your knowledge and traditions as important to our research and would like to interview you.

Can we also record the interview so that we can translate it later?

You can read the questions below and answer accordingly.

Give a thumbs up when you are ready. I will start recording.

.....

Είμαι φοιτητής από το Βέλγιο που ερευνά τις γαστρονομικές παραδόσεις στο Λασιθί

Εκτιμώ τις γνώσεις και τις παραδόσεις σας ως σημαντικές για την έρευνά μας και θα ήθελα να σας πάρω συνέντευξη.

Μπορούμε επίσης να ηχογραφήσουμε τη συνέντευξη ώστε να τη μεταφράσουμε αργότερα;

Μπορείτε να διαβάσετε τις παρακάτω ερωτήσεις και να απαντήσετε ανάλογα

Δώστε ένα μπράβο όταν είστε έτοιμοι, θα ξεκινήσω την ηχογράφηση

Can you tell me a little about yourself? What do you do for work? How long have you lived on the Lasithi Plateau?

Μπορείτε να μου πείτε λίγα λόγια για τον εαυτό σας; Τι κάνεις για τη δουλειά; Πόσο καιρό μένετε στο Οροπέδιο Λασιθίου;

Questions - ερωτήσεις

Historical and Cultural Origins:

Ιστορικές και Πολιτιστικές Καταβολές

1. Πόσο χρονών είναι η παραγωγή ρακής στο Λασίθι και πώς ξεκίνησε; Υπάρχουν προφορικές ιστορίες ή αρχεία από το παρελθόν σχετικά με αυτό και τη διαδικασία;

How old is raki production in Lasithi, and how did it start? Are there any oral histories or records from the past about it and the process?

2. Πότε ξεκίνησε η πρακτική του αρωματισμού της ρακής και τι ενέπνευσε την εισαγωγή συστατικών όπως ο κάκτος, το λεμόνι, το ρόδι και το μέλι; Και πώς παράγεται, συντηρούνταν και πωλούνταν το μέλι τότε και τώρα;

When did the practice of flavouring raki begin, and what inspired the introduction of ingredients like cactus fruit, lemon, pomegranate, and honey? And how honey was produced, preserved and sold then and now?

3. Από πού προέρχονται παραδοσιακά τα σταφύλια και άλλα συστατικά και πώς άλλαξε αυτή η προμήθεια με την πάροδο του χρόνου;

Where were the grapes and other ingredients traditionally sourced from, and how has this sourcing changed over time?

4. Η ρακή έγινε δημοφιλής σε περιόδους κατοχής ή σημαντικών ιστορικών γεγονότων και πέρασε τα περιφερειακά σύνορα;

Did raki become popular during periods of occupation or important historical events and cross regional borders?

Παραδόσεις και κοινωνικοποίηση

Traditions and Socialisation:

5. Ποιες παραδόσεις έχουν αναπτυχθεί γύρω από τη ρακή με την πάροδο του χρόνου; Υπάρχουν συγκεκριμένα έθιμα που συνδέονται με την παραγωγή ή την κατανάλωσή του;

What traditions have developed around raki over time? Are there specific customs associated with its production or consumption?

6. Πώς συμβάλλει η Ρακή στην κοινωνικοποίηση στο Οροπέδιο Λασιθίου, παίζουν ρόλο παραδόσεις όπως οι Μαντινάδες και η έννοια του Φιλότεμο;

How does raki contribute to socialisation in the Lasithi Plateau, does traditions like Madinadas and the concept of Philotemo play a role?

7. Η ρακή είναι κεντρική στις παραδοσιακές εκδηλώσεις και έχουν εμφανιστεί κάποια νέα γιορτή ή φεστιβάλ τα τελευταία χρόνια για την προβολή της;

Is raki central to traditional events, and have any new celebrations or festivals emerged in recent years to promote it?

Οικιακή παραγωγή:

Home Production:

8. Ποιος έφτιαχνε ρακή στο σπίτι στο παρελθόν και πώς έχει αλλάξει αυτό στη σύγχρονη εποχή;

Who used to make raki at home in the past, and how has this changed in modern times?

9. Υπήρχαν ξεχωριστοί χώροι που κατασκευάστηκαν ειδικά για την παρασκευή ρακής στο σπίτι και πώς εξελίχθηκε αυτή η πρακτική;

Were there separate places constructed specifically for making raki at home, and how did this practice evolve?

10. Ποια αγγεία χρησιμοποιούνταν για την παρασκευή ρακής στο παρελθόν και έχουν αλλάξει αυτά τα αγγεία με την πάροδο του χρόνου; (Ποιοι είναι οι ελληνικοί ή λασιθιώτικοι όροι για αυτά τα αγγεία;)

What vessels were used for making raki in the past, and have these vessels changed over time? (What are the Greek or Lasithi terms for these vessels?)

Παραγωγή και Τεχνολογική Εξέλιξη:

Production and Technology Evolution:

11. . Πώς έχει εξελιχθεί η τεχνολογία παραγωγής ρακής με τα χρόνια και ποιες είναι οι βασικές καινοτομίες που έχουν διαμορφώσει τη διαδικασία;

Are grape plantations still prevalent in Lasithi, and what role do they play in the local raki industry?

12. Πώς έχει εξελιχθεί η τεχνολογία παραγωγής ρακής με τα χρόνια και ποιες είναι οι βασικές καινοτομίες που έχουν διαμορφώσει τη διαδικασία;

How has the technology of raki-making evolved over the years, and what are the key innovations that have shaped the process?

13. Χρησιμοποιούν τώρα οι παραγωγοί καυσόξυλα ή ηλεκτρικό ρεύμα για να φτιάχνουν Ρακί και έχουν αλλάξει οι γλάστρες και ο εξοπλισμός που χρησιμοποιούνται (ποιοι είναι οι ελληνικοί ή οι λασιθιώτικοι όροι για αυτούς;) με την πάροδο του χρόνου;

Do producers use firewood or electricity for making raki now, and have the pots and equipment used (what are the Greek or Lasithi terms for them?) changed over time?

14. . Έχουν αλλάξει οι μέθοδοι αποθήκευσης της ρακής και πώς αυτές επηρεάζουν τη γεύση και τη μακροζωία της;

Have storage methods for raki changed, and how do these affect its flavor and longevity?

15. . Πώς παράγεται το σιρόπι σταφυλιού, ποια είναι τα οφέλη του; Ποια είναι η τιμή του, επίσης ρακί και κρασί;

How is grape syrup produced and what are its benefits? What's the price of it, also raki and Wine?

16. . Ο έλεγχος της πρόσβασης και του ελέγχου της γης άλλαξε την παραγωγή σταφυλιού ή την παραγωγή ρακής;

Did control access and control of land changed grape production or raki making?

Εμπορευματοποίηση και επωνυμία:

Commercialisation and Branding:

17. Ποιος είναι ο εκτιμώμενος όγκος ρακής που παράγεται ετησίως στο Λασιθί και πώς έχει αλλάξει αυτό με την πάροδο του χρόνου;

What is the estimated volume of raki produced annually in Lasithi, and how has this changed over time?

18. Υπάρχουν εγχώριοι παραγωγοί, μικρές επιχειρήσεις ή μεγαλύτερες επιχειρήσεις που εμπλέκονται στην παραγωγή ρακής και ασχολούνται με το branding και τις εξαγωγές; ποιοι είναι αυτοί

Are there home-based producers, small businesses, or larger enterprises involved in raki production, and do they engage in branding and exporting? Who are they?

19. Η ρακή Λασιθίου κυκλοφορεί διαφορετικά σε σύγκριση με άλλες περιοχές της Κρήτης ή της Ελλάδας;

Is raki from Lasithi marketed differently compared to other regions of Crete or Greece?

Νόμοι, Κανονισμοί και Ποιοτικός Έλεγχος:

Laws, Regulations, and Quality Control:

20. . Υπάρχουν συγκεκριμένοι νόμοι, πολιτικές ή πρωτοβουλίες για την υποστήριξη των παραδοσιακών αγροτών ρακής και την προστασία της παραγωγής μικρής κλίμακας;

Are there specific laws, policies, or initiatives in place to support traditional raki farmers and protect small-scale production?

21. Πώς λειτουργούν οι άδειες και οι πιστοποιήσεις για την παραγωγή ρακής και είναι προσβάσιμες σε παραγωγούς μικρής κλίμακας;

How do licenses and certifications for raki production work, and are they accessible to small-scale producers?

22. Τα σταφύλια που χρησιμοποιούνται για τη ρακή καλλιεργούνται βιολογικά και πώς ρυθμίζεται αυτό;

Are the grapes used for raki grown organically, and how is this regulated?

23. Υπάρχει διαδικασία βιολογικής πιστοποίησης για το ρακί και ποια πρότυπα πρέπει να πληρούν οι παραγωγοί για να πληρούν τις προϋποθέσεις;

Is there an organic certification process for raki, and what standards must producers meet to qualify?

24. Ποιοι μηχανισμοί ποιοτικού ελέγχου υπάρχουν για την οικιακή ή εμπορική παραγωγή ρακής;

What quality control mechanisms are in place for home-based or commercial raki production?

Ζήτηση αγοράς, τουρισμός και κατανάλωση:

Market Demand, Tourism, and Consumption:

25. Έχει αυξηθεί η ζήτηση για Ρακί λόγω της άνοδος του τουρισμού και πώς αυτό έχει επηρεάσει τους ντόπιους παραγωγούς;

Has the demand for raki increased due to the rise of tourism, and how has this affected local producers?

26. Ποια είναι τα παραδοσιακά φαγητά που σερβίρονται με τη ρακή και καταναλώνεται κυρίως το βράδυ;

What are the traditional foods served with raki, and is it mostly consumed during the evening?

27. Πόσο κερδοφόρα είναι η παραγωγή ρακής για μικροκαλλιεργητές και μεγαλοπαραγωγούς και ποιοι παράγοντες επηρεάζουν την τιμή της στην αγορά;

How profitable is raki production for small-scale farmers and large producers, and what factors affect its market price?

28. Υπάρχουν ερείπια, μουσεία ή τοποθεσίες στο Λασιθί που παρουσιάζουν την ιστορία της παραγωγής ρακής, όπως παλιά εργαλεία ή τεχνικές απόσταξης ή πίνακες ζωγραφικής;

Are there any remains, museums, or sites in Lasithi that showcase the history of raki production, such as old tools or distillation techniques or paintings?

Επιπτώσεις στην υγεία:

Health Implications:

29. Υπάρχουν οφέλη ή κίνδυνοι για την υγεία που σχετίζονται με την κατανάλωση ρακής;

Are there any health benefits or risks associated with raki consumption?

30. Η κατανάλωση ρακής επηρεάζει το προσδόκιμο ζωής των ανθρώπων στο Οροπέδιο Λασιθίου ή σε άλλες περιοχές της Κρήτης;

Does raki consumption influence the life expectancy of people in the Lasithi Plateau or other regions of Crete?

Συγκρούσεις και παγκοσμιοποίηση:

Conflicts and Globalization:

31. Υπήρξαν ιστορικές συγκρούσεις για την παραγωγή ή τη διανομή ρακής και υπάρχουν παρόμοιες συγκρούσεις σήμερα με μεγαλύτερες επιχειρήσεις ή εξωτερικές επιρροές;

Were there any historical conflicts over raki production or distribution, and do similar conflicts exist today with larger businesses or outside influences?

32. Σε ποιο βαθμό η παγκοσμιοποίηση έχει επηρεάσει τις μεθόδους παραγωγής, τη διαθεσιμότητα των συστατικών και τη διανομή της ρακής;

To what extent has globalization influenced the production methods, availability of ingredients, and distribution of raki?

33. Υπάρχει ανταγωνισμός μεταξύ της ρακής και άλλων αποσταγμάτων, είτε από τοπικούς παραγωγούς είτε από εξωτερικές εταιρείες που προσπαθούν να παρουσιάσουν τις ποικιλίες τους;

Is there competition between raki and other spirits, either from local producers or outside companies trying to introduce their varieties?

34. Προσπαθούν εξωτερικές εταιρείες να οικειοποιηθούν τη ρακή ή επιδιώκουν να μειώσουν την παρουσία της στην αγορά υπέρ άλλων προϊόντων;

Are outside companies attempting to appropriate raki, or are they seeking to reduce its market presence in favor of other products?

Τρέχουσες και μελλοντικές ανησυχίες:

Current and Future Concerns:

35. Ποιες είναι οι τρέχουσες ανησυχίες σχετικά με την παραγωγή, τη διανομή, την πώληση και την κατανάλωση της ρακής;

What are the current concerns surrounding the production, distribution, sale, and consumption of raki?

36. Ποιες μελλοντικές προκλήσεις θα μπορούσε να αντιμετωπίσει ο Ράκι λόγω των μεταβαλλόμενων απαιτήσεων της αγοράς, των παγκόσμιων εμπορικών πολιτικών, της κλιματικής αλλαγής ή των αλλαγών στις πολιτιστικές πρακτικές;

What future challenges could raki face due to changing market demands, global trade policies, climate change or shifts in cultural practices?

Κάτι άλλο που θα θέλατε να προσθέσετε;

Σας ευχαριστώ για το χρόνο και την υποστήριξή σας.

Anything else you would like to add? Thank you for your time and support.

The end - το τέλος

4. Internship Report

Position and Tasks

During my internship at the Hellenic Mediterranean University (HMU), I worked in the Wind Energy Lab as a project research assistant. My primary responsibility was to bring social science and transdisciplinary knowledge into the construction and deployment of frugal prosumerist technology, such as windmills designed in the lab. These designs were inspired by the traditional Lasithi windmills and embedded cultural knowledge from the region.

The social acceptance of such technology required comprehensive research into the traditions of the region, the deep connection of people to windmills, and the associations tied to their aesthetics, which differ significantly from modern wind turbine designs. A significant aspect of my work involved introducing different theories, perspectives, and global knowledge, and testing their relevance through scenario analysis.

Through exposure to the Energy Community Project—an EU-level initiative in Greece—and the Interdisciplinary Research Project, I was able to analyse various local knowledge systems. I also studied the construction of traditional windmills, their assembly, repair, maintenance, and associated costs. In addition, I explored the legislative aspects of innovation and certification, and conducted interviews that provided further insights into the project and Horizon Europe engagements. Some interviews were conducted from the perspective of an outsider with both first-hand knowledge of the place and broader academic expertise, which allowed me to share unbiased views on the windmills of Lasithi.

Thesis Value

The internship at HMU was highly valuable for my thesis. Discussions with my internship supervisor exposed me to various concepts and theorists, ranging from monotonicity, value addition, and social cohesion to ideas that eventually led me to explore the concept of the anti-commodity.

This emerged from the realisation that windmills in Lasithi exist as a kind of anti-commodity in contrast to industrial wind turbines. Whereas turbines are associated with industrialised energy production, the traditional windmills have been upgraded from pumping water to generating electricity for community use. This value addition is culturally and socio-ecologically embedded, rather than driven purely by market logic.

Tracing the origin of windmills to agriculture revealed how community interaction with nature created these structures. This way of living also shaped local food systems that were

community-centric and value-adding, giving rise to different products, one of which is raki—a drink that integrates cultural traditions under a common identity.

The conceptual contributions and research environment at HMU helped me refine my thesis, brainstorm new directions, and connect ideas across disciplines. The connections I developed also facilitated interviews and participation in local events, such as rakokazano, providing unique access to the cultural and food systems of the region. Moreover, I gained insights into EU regulations that posed challenges to just transition, particularly those concerning raki and their impact on local culture.

Through a combination of desk research, fieldwork, interviews, and intellectual discussions, my thesis gained the theoretical and practical grounding it needed.

Self-Evaluation

This was my first time working in a university research lab, and specifically within STEM sciences. Initially, I thought it would be difficult to follow, given my background in policy research and grassroots engagement rather than in technical laboratory settings. However, I found it to be an intellectually stimulating environment, and I was able to follow the technical aspects—particularly those where engineering intersected with policy gaps.

The experience highlighted the importance of non-specialisation and transdisciplinary knowledge as key elements for resilience building and sustainable transitions, especially when these technologies are rooted in culture.

The work improved my research abilities, nexus thinking, and strategic communication skills. It also exposed me to critical and relevant topics aligned with my academic and personal interests, while stimulating intellectually challenging discussions. The guidance I received also helped me refine my thesis approach and meet the high expectations of my supervisor.

One challenge was following multiple concepts simultaneously without becoming sidetracked into tangential areas. I had to learn to limit the “explosive” intellectual curiosity that pushed me beyond the requirements of my internship. Nevertheless, this helped me gain valuable insights into the gaps in research, law, and policymaking—especially when contrasting the experiences of individual EU member states with EU-level regulations.

Personal Reflection

This internship took place in a challenging environment, marked by a different culture, language, and academic focus compared to my thesis. Although I could draw relational connections, it was often difficult to manage two different topics at once while also taking notes and starting the writing process. Navigating such complexities, including different theoretical frameworks, was

challenging, but it built my resilience and taught me adaptability, flexibility, and agility under mounting tasks.

Beyond the academic scope, the experience offered additional opportunities: learning about the region's history, attending Greek lessons, and gaining exposure to diverse knowledge systems. These broadened my worldview, improved my critical thinking, and added both intellectual and academic value.

The internship also strengthened my position to pursue an academic career aimed at bridging research and policy gaps. It deepened my interests in culture, sustainability, resilience, transition, and conservation, while equipping me with valuable skills and motivation to continue bottom-up research and policy work. Ultimately, this experience prepared me to contribute to progressive resilience, just transition policies, and broader societal transformation.

5. Scientific Integrity Certificate



Certificate Scientific Integrity

The undersigned hereby grants the scientific integrity certificate to:

John Paul Jose

Leuven, 06/06/2025

The tutorial that you completed to obtain this certificate gave you more information regarding the specific definitions of information literacy, scientific integrity, and plagiarism as understood by KU Leuven and the Faculty of Science. This certificate proves that you have successfully completed the corresponding test and that you thus know why it is important to refer correctly and how to do this.

Dean of the Faculty of Science

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Muchez', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Prof. dr. Philippe Muchez

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