

The e-fikardou Digital Platform was delivered by the UNESCO Headquarters of TEPAK



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NEWS-ANNOUNCEMENTS

Digital Technologies in the promotion of Cultural Heritage and rural tourism development.

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The **e-fikardou Digital Platform** was handed over for public use on Wednesday, August 28, 2024, by the specialized scientists of the UNESCO Chair for Digital Cultural Heritage of the Cyprus University of Technology, with Director Dr. **Marino Ioannidis**, to the representatives of the local community, which highlights the rich history, unique architecture, local traditions and vibrant culture of an iconic village, with a rich history and centuries-old architecture, the village of Fikardos in Cyprus.

The event was attended by important representatives such as Mr. **Charalambos Christofinas** - Commissioner for the Development of Mountainous Areas of Cyprus, Mr. **Christos Pittaras** - President of the Nicosia Development Company, the Community Council of **Fikardos** headed by Mr. also Mr. **Dimitris Dimitriou**, A/Community Chief of Fikardou, Mr. **Georgios Pehlivanis** Member of the Community Council, Mr. **Theodosios Bakalios** Member of the Community Council and the professor and Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs of TEPAK, Mr. **Nikolaos Tsapatsoylis**.

The digital representation of Fikardos contribution to the history of Cyprus

An encouraging development for the once degraded village, which could not be disconnected from the broader and intensive efforts made in recent years to preserve, safeguard and highlight its cultural heritage. Efforts that are certainly due to the inclusion of Fikardos, in the context of the work done in the Laboratory for the Digitization of Cultural Heritage at TEPAK.

The digital representation of Fikardos is a tribute to its past, a gift to the present and an investment in the future.

In particular, through European funded projects, the Digital Heritage Laboratory of TEPAK, which hosts the UNESCO and European Research Area Chairs in the field of Digital Cultural Heritage, is trying in collaboration with the Department of Antiquities to help in the digital and holistic recording of the memory of Fikardos. The platform was developed in the framework of the EU H2020 European projects **TEXTOUR**, **MNEMOSYNE** and **IMPACTOUR**, which are under the UNESCO Chair in Digital Cultural Heritage. The participation of the Chair in these projects has highlighted the value of digital technologies in the preservation of cultural heritage and sustainable tourism development. It is the first time that TEPAK has delivered a functional digital product with such significant social and cultural value, making this initiative particularly important for the university and the wider community.

Fikardou has been included in the above programs as a leading case study of a settlement that is on the Provisional List of UNESCO World Cultural Heritage.

In this context, the interdisciplinary team of TEPAK has created an electronic platform called "e-fikardou", which offers a comprehensive educational and interactive experience of both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Fikardou.

The platform includes digitized models of the entire village and its monuments, an interactive e-book, digital 3D guided tour, virtual tour, as well as mapping of Fikardos' cycling and hiking routes.

It is worth underlining that one of the main objectives of the H2020 TeXTOUR project (<https://textour-project.eu/>), which is the pre-eminent European program that included this protected settlement in Cyprus, together with the settlement of Anfeh in Lebanon, as case studies, is the development and revitalization of degraded cultural sites and destinations with the active involvement of local communities.

The ultimate goal is to strengthen both cultural tourism and our cultural diplomacy.

The project aims to present a comprehensive digital depiction of Fikardos, capturing its rich history, unique architectural style, local traditions and vibrant culture.

Fikardou is a village steeped in history, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its well-preserved traditional architecture, which offers a fascinating glimpse into rural life in Cyprus from centuries past. With a strong focus on preserving the authenticity of this unique village, our project uses state-of-the-art digital technologies to document and showcase every detail of Fikardos, from the cobbled streets to the characteristic stone-built houses and Byzantine churches.

Through this project, the digital literacy of the community will be enhanced by promoting a seamless interaction between the villagers and modern technologies. There is close cooperation with the local community, encouraging them to actively participate in the digitization process and providing them with the necessary tools to thrive in the digital age.

The holistic digitization approach extends beyond the physical features of the village. It delves into the living history of Fikardos, traditional crafts, local customs and folklore. Using immersive storytelling techniques and interactive digital exhibits, the project aims to create an engaging and educational experience for visitors around the world.

'E-fikardou' - A Digital window to the world - tourism development tool

The project also aims to boost local tourism by enhancing the visitor experience. Digitized exhibits can serve as an information and navigation aid for tourists, making their visit more enriching and educational. In addition, the interactive AR features will provide an immersive, fun and exciting way to learn about Fikardos' history and culture.

The digital transformation of Fikardos is a pioneering effort to project the beauty and uniqueness of the village to a wider global

audience. Leveraging cutting-edge technologies, we have created an interactive and immersive digital landscape that brings the village's history, architecture and culture to life. Users from all over the world can now explore Fikardos's narrow streets, ancient structures and picturesque houses without leaving their homes, gaining a deeper appreciation for its unique heritage.

While the digital village offers an innovative way to experience Fikardos, it also serves a secondary purpose - promoting tourism. Offering a tantalizing glimpse into the magical world of Fikardos, it aims to inspire potential visitors. It offers an immersive digital journey that piques curiosity and encourages tourists to visit the village up close, to experience first-hand the charm and hospitality Fikardos has to offer.

The President of the Fikardos Community Council Mr. Christos Tyrimos, moved, added the following:

"As Fikardou enters its digital age, we are at the intersection of tradition and innovation. We are excited about the new opportunities this digitization project will bring - increased global awareness, improved visitor experiences and a boost to tourism. The digital representation of Fikardos is our tribute to its past, our gift to the present and our investment in the future. We warmly invite you to join this journey, explore the digital Fikardou and hopefully be inspired to visit this enchanting village up close.

By bringing Fikardo into its digital age, we also celebrate the harmonious fusion of its rich past with a vibrant future. The digitization project is not only about heritage preservation, but also about revitalization and evolution, catalyzing a new chapter in the life of this historic village.

This is more than just a digital exhibition - it is a preservation of heritage, a celebration of culture and an embrace of future possibilities. Join us to celebrate the past, present and future of Fikardos, a place where history and technology meet.

We invite you to explore the digital Fikardos, discover its unique charm and learn about its rich cultural heritage. As you embark on this digital journey, we hope to provide a vivid insight into traditional Cypriot life and the timeless beauty of Fikardos. <https://efikardou.eu>

With TEPAK's global leadership in the field of Digitization of Human Cultural Heritage, which led, in fact, to the honorary assignment of the corresponding UNESCO Chair and through major events (EuroMed World Conferences , international Forums , seminars, European projects of tens of millions which create new jobs in Cyprus and produce excellent national work for Cyprus etc.), which gather the interest of the scientific community from all over the world, TEPAK and Cyprus have become a global point of reference in New Technologies and production knowledge and creation of cultural heritage management and rescue policies".



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