



CHAPTER

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1. View of Istrian landscape from our guesthouse
2. The writing team in Mazerige

MEET THE WRITING TEAM IN MAZERIGE



Welcome to Mazerige, a small village in Slovenia. We have just arrived from all four corners of Europe in order to write this book and to be your guide in this journey. We are happy to have found this place.

Mateja Hrvatin Kozlovič's guesthouse offers a breathtaking view of the slow undulations of the Istrian landscape as it meets the Adriatic Sea. Istria straddles three countries: Croatia, Slovenia and Italy and has a historically moving story. It is just

the right place to be wading into the unknown, with our collective writing. Our host offers us pasta with wild asparagus and sour cream, paired with her delicious, homemade white wine. The dark green of the asparagus tastes a little bitter. "No worries," she smiles. "The internet tells us the poison only really kicks in, if it is harvested too late in the season." We give it a try... and it's divine! Perhaps our hope to write this book collectively is a riskier endeavour. After all, we have

ten authors from eight countries, 25 years of Forum Synergies history and an endless future to somehow cover. What about our very different personal and professional histories, writing styles, thematic preferences and tastes? Whom do we want to reach in the end? Will we be talking too much of our exciting past and be boring for the young generation? What are we going to tell YOU to make you curious about rural Europe and tempt you into travelling with us?



3. Helene Schulze
4. Philippe Barret
5. Hannes Lorenzen

The average age of the 10 of us around the table is 45. In EU terms that is the limit to be considered as a young farmer and to qualify for special juvenile support. **Helene Schulze** is our youngest. Tonight is her birthday. She will be 24 - the same age as Forum Synergies - a happy coincidence indeed. She should be our team leader because her future is the longest. Born in London to German parents, Helene studied geography and environmental governance, directs the [London Freedom Seed Bank](#), is engaged in food justice and works as a writer on food, farming and rural development, particularly at [ARC2020](#).

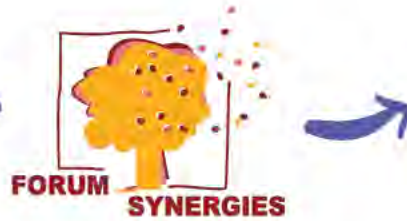
Helene draws our story to a close in [chapter 13](#).

Travelling is also **Philippe Barret's** passion. In fact, he is a nomad of our time from the beginning as he spent half of his childhood in North Africa. His grandmother is from Napoli, his father from Provence in southern France, where in 1983 he founded [GEYSER](#), an organisation for sustainable development of rural areas. Apart from travelling through France, Europe and the wider world, he always has a curious eye on farmers' ecological knowledge and dreams. From time to time he withdraws for '*randonnées*', walks through wild nature with just enough to eat and drink. In his professional life he is environmental mediator.

We will hear from Philippe in [chapter 8](#).

Together with Philippe, **Hannes Lorenzen** is co-founder of Forum Synergies. His roots are almost on the other extreme, in the far North of Europe, on the North Frisian island of Pellworm, where he founded and leads an association for sustainable island development. He served 35 years as a civil servant in the [European Parliament](#) in Brussels. Besides his work inside European institutions, he has founded and animated local, European and international civil society movements. As a reward for this he received a sculpture called '*Crazy Dancer*'. The artist of the sculpture is revealed at the end of this chapter.

Read more about Pellworm island and European networking in [chapter 9](#).



forum  synergies

6a. the ENESD logo

6b. 1st Forum Synergies' logo

6c. Current Forum Synergies' logo

For Philippe and Hannes, the image of Forum Synergies, as one of these *'ideas whose time has come'*, came not as some abstract concept but through a personal experience.

One day in 1994, Philippe was walking through the lavender fields of St Michel l'Observatoire, his home village, dreaming about travelling Europe. He wanted to meet people with experience and a vision of Europe's future. A vision that included local initiatives, working out the best possible balance between nature protection, social engagement and experimenting with new partnership

and governance strategies between farmers, environmentalists and local entrepreneurs.

Was it that same day that Hannes peered from the dike of his home island into the rough North Sea, reasoning how the young but strong ecological movement on his island and many other across Europe could be supported by their governments, administrations and European institutions?

Maybe it was. What we know is that, at about the time that Helene's parents decided in London to call their new baby Helene, Philippe and

Hannes met at a rural conference in Manosque, Provence. They grasped that moment of synergy between their visions and ambitions and decided to launch a process that has now lasted for more than 25 years. They called their new baby the *'European Network of Experiences in Sustainable Development'* (in short ENESD), which five years later was renamed Forum Synergies, as a non-profit organisation. That was in November 2000, at the turn of the Century. Now, and here at Mateja's guesthouse in Slovenia, we try to harvest the fruits of that long journey.



7. Camille Dressler

"ENESD is almost impossible to pronounce...taste some of our excellent Scottish Whisky! That will ease your tongue," suggests **Camille Dressler**. She has had a long journey to come here. She is of French origin, but lives on the Isle of Eigg in Scotland. Have you heard of Eigg? It lies in the Scottish Inner Hebrides, south of Skye and carries a population of 87. Camille has written a book about the history of the island, the danger of depopulation, and the Scottish law which allowed landowners to buy and sell a place like Eigg without asking the local population. In 1997, we visited Eigg as a European delegation of ENESD in order to support the islanders in their struggle to stop the place being sold to a millionaire. *"That was immensely important for us",* says Camille. *"We were desperate and we felt encouraged by you to keep going. We wanted to buy the island, bring it into community ownership. This was a huge challenge and many expected us to fail,"* recalls Camille, *"we needed all the support we could get! Your visit provided just the encouragement needed at the time!"*

Read more about the history and future of the Isle of Eigg in [chapter 3](#).



"I found it," **Simone Matouch** looks up from her screen, "wild green asparagus is very healthy and was also used over 2000 years for medicinal purposes."

It contains vitamin K, which is crucial for your body to stop bleeding after a cut, as well as for your bone health. Greeks and Romans believed it could heal a wide range of diseases, and today much research is being done on it to strengthen disease resistance.."

Simone is our 'herb witch' as she calls herself. She moved from Vienna to Lesachtal, Austria, a small valley of Hermagor District, in the state of Carinthia. Together with Marina she serves Forum Synergies as part-time staff. She has a lot of hands-on experience with medicinal and aromatic plants and runs a small business for natural cosmetics and food supplements harvested and processed in her own garden.

Read more about Lesachtal and Simone's experience with herbs in chapter 10.

"Should we reuse the logo with the tree spreading its seeds out of a frame?" says **Mónika Pakot**, skipping through the archive files on the table. "I prefer this one instead of the symbolic icon with round tables. Forum Synergies is about travelling, not just sitting in meetings, and seeds are travelling too." Mónika lives in a small village in Transylvania, Romania. Together with Simone she has recently organised the second European Herb Gathering with exciting projects from across Europe. "I believe our tree logo is more



8. Simone Matouch
9. Mónika Pakot

dynamic. Our creative practices are opening the frame of often narrow and restrictive EU legislation which makes local people lose and forget their own traditional knowledge and wisdom."

Read more on Mónika's work with traditional knowledge in Transylvania in chapter 6.





"Good idea," reasons **Marina Guédon**, "we have gathered a remarkable collective intelligence by now of what 'rural sustainability and resilience' may include". Marina was raised on a French farm and now lives in Valencia on the coast of Spain. She kept her links to farming and rural life through her food sovereignty activism, her involvement in consumer groups in Valencia and her work on a small, collectively managed garden. Besides being staff in Forum Synergies, she has also worked on rural projects to attract newcomers to rural villages, while also training in group facilitation.

Read about Marina's engagement in civic dialogue in [chapter 4](#).



"For me the role of young people in rural sustainability is vital," says **Anita Selicka**, opening a map of Latvia. She is coordinator of the [Latvian Rural Forum](#) and also co-manages the international network [PREPARE](#) (Pre-Accession Partnership for Rural Europe – see [chapter 11](#)). "We have been working on a tourist map for a trip through rural Latvia, with many stops at projects supported by our Rural Forum. It was immense work doing interviews and collecting information, before we could put it all together. But I love mapping and info-graphs and I believe we have brought many people together by linking them on a single map. Meeting people where they live and where they struggle for a better life is the best place to understand what is possible beyond our daily routine."

Read more about rural youth and the Latvian Rural Forum in [chapter 12](#).



"That is all fine, but please do not forget," smiles **Oliver Emmes**, Forum Synergies' treasurer, "it's not all about work." He opens a box of Belgian chocolate. "We have always shared food from across Europe at our European buffet, every time we met. Food does not need any translation. It's the attention and value we give to the diversity of our food culture and the hospitality that is so important in rural regions." Oliver is a civil servant in the European Parliament and has been a facilitator of Forum Synergies since the early days of the network. "As I must spend much of my life in meeting rooms and administrative gatherings of the European institutions in Brussels, I enjoy getting in close touch with the reality of people in the countryside, their problems and solutions."

10. Marina Guédon
11. Anita Selicka
12. Oliver Emmes

MEET THE WRITING TEAM IN MAZERIGE



13. Jenny Gkiougi
14. Liljana Tanevska
15. Michael Dower

Darkness has almost descended when **Jenny Gkiougi** arrives. Her flight from Thessaloniki was late. "It was a nightmare," she sighs, "now I really need some food and some rest." There is still some dark green asparagus left for her. Jenny is a food activist who runs [AGROECOPOLIS](#) - The Hellenic Network for Agroecology, Food Sovereignty and Access To Land working on food justice, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and social inclusion of vulnerable groups like refugees in crisis-stricken Greece. Jenny, who organised the Permaculture Caravan in 2014, works (mainly) on advocacy, research, dissemination and training both on local and national, as well as on European and international levels through the NYELENI Forum for Food Sovereignty, [URGENCI](#) (the international movement for CSAs), the Mediterranean Network for Local Solidarity Partnerships for Agroecology ([MedNet LSPA](#)), and the [European Access To Land network](#), - a broad range of responsibilities.

Read more about Jenny's civic engagement and our gathering in Karditsa, Greece in [chapter 2](#).

We miss among us at Mateja's place **Liljana Tanevska** and Michael Dower. Liljana is Forum Synergies board member. She holds a degree in comparative local development and has over 19 years of experience with community development of rural areas in North Macedonia and the Balkans. A strong believer in the EU, she hopes she may soon count her country to its members.

Read more about Liljana's involvement in the Local Food Matters workshop and its outputs in [chapter 6](#).

Michael Dower is a climate and forestry activist, retired Professor for Rural Development and former Director of the Countryside Commission in England. He came into the work of Forum Synergies through the travelling workshop to Estonia and Sweden, which he describes in [chapter 11](#). He loves working in woodland, and with wood ... and he

made the sculpture of the 'Crazy Dancer' for Hannes.

These are your travel guides for rural transition. Will you join us? We will guide you in slow motion into the past, present and future, through some examples of our work and some places that serve as exciting cases for what a transition could look like. We'll be drifting through time, looping back to reflect and forward to hope. So don't get worried if the timing is confusing, we have a timeline to help you, should you get lost.

We all started working on this transition in different places and at different times. We approached it from all sorts of angles. Some were worried about climate change, others wanted to halt the loss of small farmers. Access to land, fair work and social inclusion were the real drivers for others. How could we approach that wide a palate without good democratic rules and governance?

Let's take a look.