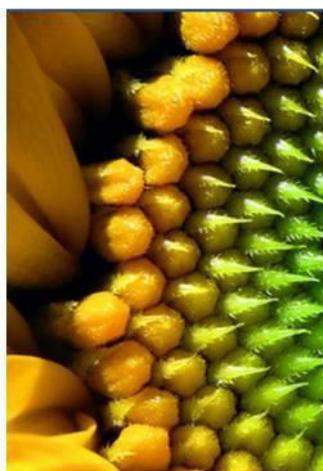
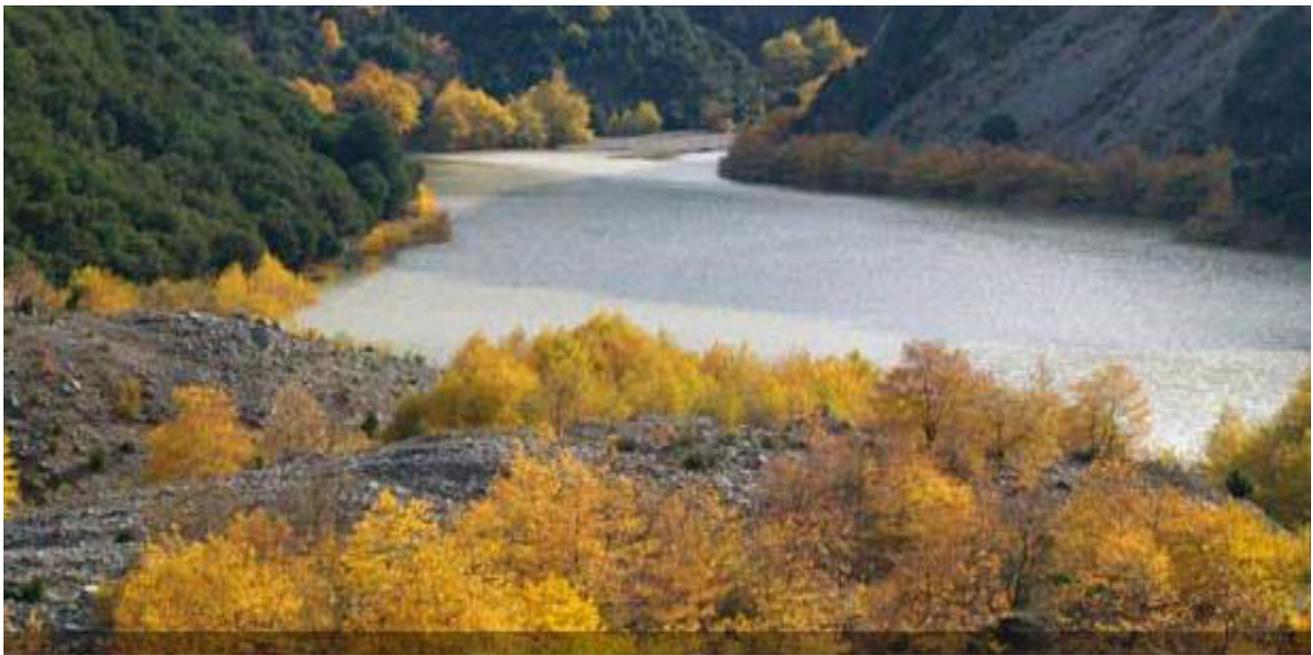


European Rural Sustainability Gathering 2017

17.-21. May 2017- Karditsa – Greece

PROCEEDINGS



EUROPEAN RURAL SUSTAINABILITY GATHERING:

May 17 - 21 2017, Karditsa, region of Thessaly, GR

in co-operation with Karditsa Development Association (ANKA)

“We invite you to listen, understand each other, share, dream contribute, enjoy and act to change and improve our societies.” With these words of Forum Synergies’ Philippe Barret, so began three days of deep engagement by a wide range of actors in the Greek mountains on Thursday 18th May.

CONTENT

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN TIMES OF CRISIS	2
Problems and dreams in the 4 corners of Europe: “Rural Greece, Social Economy & Pathways Out of Crisis”, <i>Article written by Oliver Moore, ARC2020 (link)</i>	2
RELEVANT TOPICS FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT	4
New Farming Systems	4
New social links in rural areas	4
Cooperation positive and negatives aspects of cooperative	5
Crisis of democracies	6
Training and knowledge transfer	7
Market of initiatives	7
DISCOVERING THE RURAL REALITY	9
Lake Plastira and the Karditsa region	9
Karditsa’s Social Economy - an Ecosystem of Collaboration, <i>Article written by Oliver Moore, ARC2020 (link)</i>	10
Further background information: ANNEXES	12
CREATING POSSIBILITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	13
A model region for agro-ecology	13
How to use indigenous species for economic activities	14
More innovative ways of making decisions in a democratic way in cooperatives	15
Trust in rural areas	15
3rd agricultural revolution	15
Crisis as an opportunity and raising resilience	16
OTHER WAYS TO SHARE AND BUILD EUROPEAN CONNECTIONS	16
The European Buffet	16
Market of tools	16
The festive dinner	17
Media work	18
EXPECTATIONS AND OPTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP	18
The main keywords	18
Feedback	18
Follow up	19

From 17 - 21 May 2017 the "Rural Sustainability Gathering" was held in the region of Karditsa, Greece. The 3-days meeting was full of enriching experiences and lively multinational exchanges with about 75 participants coming from 16 different countries and different backgrounds - from local to national and European activities, ranging from farmers, entrepreneurs, NGOs and development agencies.

Besides discovering the rural reality in the region the main goal of the bi-annual Forum Synergies' event was to discover the potential for future activities.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Problems and dreams in the 4 corners of Europe: "Rural Greece, Social Economy & Pathways Out of Crisis", *Article written by Oliver Moore, ARC2020 ([link](#))*

With the looming context of the fourth Greek bailout, the European Rural Sustainability Gathering 2017 kicked off in Karditsa, Greece, last week. The event saw the social economy, cooperatives and grassroots initiatives take centre stage, as tools and approaches to address the crisis. The location displayed the best of progressive rural development, the methods employed were aptly mixed, and the participants came away very energised. Here we explore one element of the days in mountainous Greece - crisis, problems and solutions.

Certainly, the crises are manifold -from migrant/refugee to economic to ecological - but a number of grassroots and bottom up approaches have emerged. What's more, they were contextualised and connected up with each other in noteworthy ways.

Problems facing Europe and the world, as well as a range of solutions were outlined at the gathering's opening. Participants presented and then placed photos that represented their ideas onto the wall.

Out-migration from and general de-population of rural areas was cited as a major problem by many of the 80 participants from 20 countries. Rural sociologist Maria Partalidou refereed to "hidden homelessness", whereby young families return to their rural family homes out of necessity.

The benefits of an inclusive, welcoming countryside, where different ages and backgrounds can work together emerged as source of hope - against the voices that encourage borders and walls. Rural areas can work to welcome refugees, to fight climate change, to bring about better food security and food sovereignty, it was noted.

Ways to "hack loneliness" - Pavlos Georgiadis - were presented, which included community supported agriculture and the use of affordable technology to build agroecological communities.

An especially strong element that emerged was the ecosystems approach pioneered in the Karditsa region itself. Here, collaborative institutions frame more robust approaches to how rural spaces can and should function. Taken together, an integrated approach to rural development has much potential help society transition to a more sustainable place. And it was very noteworthy how many people from initiatives in this region made reference to "the ecosystem" - buy in is clearly very strong. In this, individual entities like energy co-ops, farmer co-ops producing specialised products, rural tourism initiatives can all be part of something bigger than the sum of its parts, with its own collective momentum.

Vasileios Bellis of the Development Agency of Karditsa explains "since the economic crises, which began in 2008, there has been a severe shortage of capital. There is no foreign capital invested in Greece. Local businesses have no cash, neither do the banks. The state has nothing to invest either. So we've tried something different in Karditsa. We are collaborating more, having developed an ecosystem of collaborative institutions."

The Development Agency has managed and implemented a budget of almost E30 million over three LEADER phases.

Crucially, this ecosystem includes the establishment of a credit union, which is now a fully fledged cooperative bank. This is lending to local initiatives even in these straightened times. It is both a Greek financial success story, and more socially engaged than a typical bank: for example, newly established farmers' coops with innovative ideas on crops, products and markets, from Stevia to superfoods, are among those supported. This is quite an achievement in the Greek economic context.

When addressing the session "sustainable development in times of crisis" some interesting solutions emerged. Anastasia Vasileiadou is with seed saving organisation [Peliti](#) and the organic oregano farm [Aetheleon](#). She made reference to farmers being too dependent on subsidies and expensive inputs from Multi National Organisations. However help is at hand with Peliti, which "tries to help farmers be more

self-sufficient, using a different model". Peliti emphasise the local economy and traditional, well adapted seeds, seed saving and sharing and building soil quality.

[Yiorgos Psychas](#) of [Iliosporoi](#) (*sunflower seed*) emphasised development via non formal education, de-growth, transition, land as a common possession and responsibility, and, more deeply, access to land and working the land.

Fouli Papageorgiou of the [Euracademy Association](#) pointed out that, on the one hand, Greek holdings were small, fragmented due to subdivision and unproductive: but on the other, land grabbing is happening in Greece and elsewhere. Small holdings and family farms are the reality, and there are opportunities to employ immigrant populations. Moreover, agriculture did not suffer in the same way as the other sectors in the Greek economy, rural unemployment is not as severe as urban, while there are some positives to young people returning to home farms. They often bring new ideas and skills, whether in energy, farming or other areas. While there is still underemployment, co-ops can help bring small holdings together in useful ways.

These framing positions were both agreed with and in part critiqued - as they should be at dynamic events. Participants pointed out that there is a severe lack of data, and that data is often misleading: there are no figures on organic farming since 2010, it was claimed, while others pointed out that women owners of farms are often in name only. The need for co-ops to go deeper than just a single product focus was also emphasised - more agroecological and regenerative, holistic approaches were highlighted. Inter-generational justice was also spotlighted - young people lead in business in other parts of Europe, but not in Greece, contributors claimed.

There was a real eagerness to work on these imperatives. Over the three days, people also clustered for discussions as proposed by enthusiasts such as the crisis as an opportunity, the third agricultural revolution, transitioning a region to agroecology, traditional plant knowledge and uses and more.

Another approach taken to problem-solving could be experienced in the art and tools sessions. Here, a wide range of ways to engage with each other - in fun, creative ways - were showcased. These included Salsa, Art, Qi Gong and Pottery.

There was more to these three days, as you'll see in the coming days and weeks here on the ARC2020 website. Undeniably, there is a long and deep seated crises in modernity - its not just economic it didn't just start in 2008. And Greece is stuck it seems in an ongoing tragedy of bailout after austerity after bailout - with [real human consequences](#).

But even as the seeds to our crisis - or more aptly, crises - were sown, so too have resilient and resourceful approaches emerged, at multiple levels. There is much to be said for bringing people together to, in novel ways, think about things differently by spending time with each other respectfully. Greece, birthplace of so much we look to for inspiration throughout history, is showing its ingenuity today too.

RELEVANT TOPICS FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In working groups participants focused on a series of topics identified as being important for sustainable rural development:

New Farming Systems

Keywords: Benefit and profit, what does it mean? Biodiversity; Quality of life for farmers (keyword "holidays"), make a living/ prices

Trends for New Communities

Keywords: Community Supported Agriculture - *CSA* (see www.urgenci.net)

Alternative certification : *Participatory Guarantee Systems* (<http://www.ifoam.bio/en/organic-policy-guarantee/participatory-guarantee-systems-pgs>) are an alternative for small farmers, not for the industry.

Promote & leverage best practices to foster European biodiversity

Need to market collectively

Prices: need to find a way to make people appreciate food and alternatives to money can be found too for an easier access.

New farmers & farming: what drives someone to become a farmer (concern for our planet earth?)

Important to leave space to experiment and learn by doing
"The environment makes agriculture and vice-versa"



New social links in rural areas

Some sentences from the exchange

Social links mean community networks

Situation of "social links" and rural areas in some of the participants countries

Serbia and Bosnia: wars, everything changed, family ties and new ties

Greece: labour force immigrants; integration of refugees; with families, without families ; Roma

France: local markets, daily movements & seasonal ones; link between generations (new plans for community)

Germany: going back to the land

"Networks & social links need trust"

These networks can be of different kind:

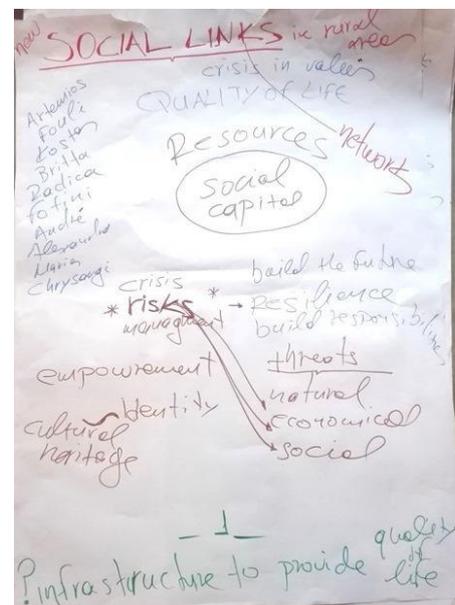
- Interfamily relatives
- Different groups of people
- Different cultural background
- Friends

In rural areas, villages need people (what kind?) ; links need people ⇔ people need links

Mobility can be a threat to new social links

These new links are still to be built:

- With rural urban division?
- Rural idyll?
- Social constructions?



Cooperation positive and negatives aspects of cooperative

Do we need cooperation? YES

Decisions made by the members

Marketing the products

Common state subvention

State support

Move cooperatives with different activities supporting each other

Can cooperatives solve all problems? No but:

Move change to resolve problems

Negative experiences changed in new approach (ex: no board members)

Voluntary work, personal involvement

Problems

Certification of products

State support

Extra work in cooperative

Cooperation with other entities

Universities

Cooperation with other cooperatives

Research bodies

Cooperation with society

Development agency

Cooperatives:

Catalyser

Innovator

Problem sharing

Reshaping the society

7 principles for success of cooperatives/ cooperation

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

3. Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4. Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

5. Education, Training and Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6. Co-operation among Co-operatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. Concern for Community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

Cooperatives like football teams and championship: It is impossible to organise a championship with only one team: you need a group of cooperatives!

You cannot plan and win if you do not train: you need coaching!

The Greek vocabulary has different words to refer to *competition (the championship we mention)*

“Amila”: struggle to succeed with other participants/ partners

“Synagonism”: effort to be better and achieve a target

“Antagonism”: negative, fight against the others

Crisis of democracies

DEMOCRACY is a Greek word: “Demos” (people) + Cratos(State) => the people ruled their state

Open vs poor/ not open nor participative processes in government at national and local level: lead to negative vote in referendum(s) by people who feel they are not heard.

Our “democratic systems” are **disempowering**; it seems you can only influence through political parties (most people are not members).

People don’t see the way to effective change: the raise of populist/ right wing movements are a reason why this is happening and to think about the system.

=> need to listen to these people to move to changes.

=> need to evolve from an aggressive to a collaborative relationship.

Passive vs informed electorate: with a passive electorate, people follow leaders without taking informed decisions; opinions and votes can be manipulated by powerful people and at the end, someone else decides.

=> need to educate and prepare people to be active citizens / democrats

We started electing “KINGS” - we need systems to control their power (every 4 years) and also continuous participative processes

Recommendation:

give power at local level, it is where people can influence and where they can participate ; and people like to feel directly involved

Democracy is not one but many things: different scales and processes at different levels are needed

Use of IT to aid democracy?

Democracy today is completely different to when the Greeks invented it (it was also different in the 1920’s until now)

Now we are very influenced by media and powerful voices (often negative)

Lobbyists control policy outcomes

Politicians buy votes

Democracy is an ideal, which we never completely reach. Remember achievements:

Female emancipation

Educated electorate

More open information systems

Examples / references:

French documentary “Tomorrow” that shows alternatives (as the feeling is that a few control processes and money)

Swiss model of direct democracy VS 4 years election model (closer to the original Greek model)

Norwegian model of educating children to be participative, democrats and representatives.

Work in parliaments through negotiated agreements NOT adversarial conflict.

2009 UN opened up to public involvement based on civil society organisations and also private to work alongside governments:

Multi actor

Civil private sector negotiate but governments take decisions and can be held accountable

VS multi stakeholders approaches

Everyone has an equal stake but no attention paid to relative power-> lowest common denominator outputs

Training and knowledge transfer

NEEDS

Science and practice

Exchange experience between different parts of Europe with different background

Transnational and trans-sectorial synergies

Capacities of experts

Need how to transfer knowledge - skills

Methods and tools of transfer

Goals and target group

Identification and preparation of experts

Increase of demand and awareness of knowledge (financing of education)

How to make use of traditional knowledge in an innovative way

Same level of understanding

TOOLS

Bridges between experience and knowledge (equality)

Strengthening the role of women

Create interest - motivation- inspire for change

Promote best practices

ICT

Co-creation of knowledge

Learning by doing

Support to promotion of activities

Create and offer guidelines

Market of initiatives

The Market of initiatives is dedicated to discover rural realities, problems, projects and solutions in different countries and contexts.

We offered to the participants the opportunity to share their project/ experience with other participants in a "market place". Sitting at a table they could put posters, leaflets etc. in order to present their initiatives.

This market was organised in different rounds with 5 minutes presentations running at the same time. The other participants visited these tables to listen and discuss the presentations before changing after approx. 20-25 minutes. The atmosphere of a fair or a "market place" opened the space for some lively discussions and exchange of experiences in small groups.



Topics presented during the Market of initiatives

Most of the Market of initiatives' presentations will be available on Forum Synergies website and resource center.

Topic	First Name	Last Name	Organisation	Country
The work of VIS Albania for a sustainable rural development	Katia	Zene	VIS ALBANIA	ALB
Belarusian experience in the field of sustainable rural development	Aleg	Sivagrakau	Sustainable Development Center, NGO	BLR
Organizing access to land for community connected organic farms in D	Titus	Bahner	Kulturland eG	DE
Presentation of the "Ecosystem of collaboration" of Karditsa	VASILEOS	Bellis	Development Agency of Karditsa	GR
Co-operative Ippokratiki Diaviosi- Life's holistic approach through nutrition and clinical hypnotherapy	Chryssanthi	Dafopoulou	CO-OPERATIVE ENTERPRISE IPPOKRATEIA DIAVIOSI	GR
Northern Greece Organic Farmers Association	Giorgos Chrisoula	Doumos Skorditi	Northern Greece Organic Farmers Association	GR
GROW Observatory: focusing on saving our soils and adapting to climate change	Pavlos Nikos	Georgiadis Vrantis	GROW Observatory	GR
a. Introducing AGROECOPOLIS: Hellenic network for Agroecology Food Sovereignty & Access to Land. b. Presenting CSA as a way to obtain Rural Sustainability	Jenny	Gkiougki	AGROECOPOLIS	GR
Gousiaris products	Alexandros	Gousiaris	Gousiaris products	GR
Organisation of the supply chain of the legumes (pulses)	Dimitrios	Malkas	Legumes Farmer's Cooperative	GR
Sustainability and social-economy movements in Greece and abroad	Kostantinos	Mavrias	Cinergies	GR
The energy cooperative body of Karditsa	Georgios	Papadimitriou	Cooperative Bank of Karditsa and a member of the Energy Cooperative Body of Karditsa (ESEK)	GR
The Euracademy Summer Academies as a tool for capacity building in rural communities	Fouli	Papageorgiou	Euracademy Association	GR
What drives networking in rural areas, the role of social capital building and social learning.	MARIA	PARTALIDOU	Dep. Of agricultural economics, Aristotle University Of Thessaloniki	GR
Access to land in Greece Iliosporoi network activities and objectives	Yiorgos	Psychas	Iliosporoi	GR
Supporting groups and individuals to start business initiatives at personal or cooperative level	Popi	Sourmaidou	Ergani Center	GR

Topic	First Name	Last Name	Organisation	Country
1st Greek biodynamic Demeter certified farm for annual crops	ALEXANDRA	TSIADI	The Trinity Farm	GR
Irish community setting, putting a local operation together at small-scale - Food in Ireland, its history of and present failings.	Eimhin	Shortt	The Growery	IRL
Hands on the Land for Food Sovereignty	Sylvia	Kay	Environmental and Agrarian Justice	NL
Transilvanian herb garden project	Monika	Pakot	Civitas Foundation	RO
captalks.eu : online sharing knowledge and inspire by the best available approach	Homola	Miloš	Ekotrend Slovakia	SK
Intangible heritage as a resource for sustainable development	Radica	Gligoric	NVO Center for development	SRB
Industrial hemp production	Nikola/ Sinisia	Jovanovic	Forestry and related sector cluster	SRB
The work of Transition Black Isle	Vanessa	Halhead	Transition Black Isle	UK
Development of rural families through berries production and joining in cooperatives	Andriy	Halyas	ARD "Kamula"	UKR

DISCOVERING THE RURAL REALITY

Lake Plastira and the Karditsa region

Plastiras Lake lies on Nevropolis plateau in Karditsa prefecture (25 km west of the city). It is 325 km far away from Athens and 250 km from Thessaloniki. It was formed in 1959, when the dam of the river Tavropos or Megdovas was completed.

The dam is an **impressive arched construction**, 200 meters long and 83 meters high. The surface of the lake covers an area of about 24 square km, the maximum depth reaching 60 meters and the round of the lake being approximately 100 km.



The lake took its name from the military officer Nikolaos Plastiras, as he was the one who had the idea of its formation.

Although the lake was constructed in order to solve the irrigation problems of the area, it induced the formation of a beautiful landscape, surrounded by special vegetation.

The area all around the lake is characterized by rich biodiversity and because of its great environmental value it has been added to the **Natura 2000** Protected Areas Network.

Map of the region [link](#)

There are various **small villages** all around the lake with sufficient infrastructure to welcome and accommodate visitors. Some of them are Moshato, Kerasia, Anthohori, Krioneri, Kalivia Pezoulas, Neraida, Filakti, Neohori, Mouha, Kastania, Lampero - Agios Athanasios, Tsardaki and Karditsa.

Karditsa's Social Economy - an Ecosystem of Collaboration, *Article written by Oliver Moore, ARC2020* ([link](#))

An important part of the recent European Rural Sustainability Gathering in Karditsa, Greece, was diverse set of field trips into the region. Nine places were visited, in the agricultural, economic and social spheres. These showcased some of the rural development initiatives in the Karditsa region - and how they are connected via an ecosystem of collaboration. Much was learned by participants - here we present a snapshot of the day.

In Karditsa, Greece, a well developed, interconnected "ecosystem of collaboration" allows for the social economy to flourish. This integrates economic, social and cultural aspects into a framework, with many rural and farming initiatives in particular being supported. Participants at the *European Rural Sustainability Gathering* (ERSG) 2017 had the opportunity to visit some of these while at the gathering. There were three places visited by each group, with three types of places within this. Each of **Agricultural, Social and Economic** categories were covered. Typically, this meant farmer cooperatives or processing units; social/cultural/educational initiatives and local economy/cooperation/networking initiatives.

In practice, the neat separation of these into three types belies the level of interconnectedness on display in Karditsa rural development. This is because what is referred to as the *ecosystem of collaboration* brings many aspects together, while also operating as a kind of network for rural betterment. These field trips were structured around the three pillars - of the ecosystem: ANKA (Development Agency of Karditsa), the Cooperative Bank, a range of social enterprises in agriculture and development/inclusion.



Economic

The *Development Agency of Karditsa* operates an incubator - ANKA - hosting collective schemes and offer supports to a range of organisations. To date, this includes two civic cooperatives, five agricultural cooperatives, three social cooperatives, two networks of local small to medium enterprises and two NGOs. Services offered include:

Technical support during the initial phase (pre-startup).

Organisation and support of the communication campaign (meetings in the villages, press releases, etc)

Hosting of the cooperative for 1-4 years, until the completion of the investment plan

Traditional incubator services (secretary, bookkeeping etc)

Investment Readiness Capacity Building (Business plan, Marketing plan etc)

Preparation and submission of grants requests

Networking with the Research Centres, Universities or Technological Institutes or specialists, depending on the needs of each social enterprise.

It works in conjunction with the *Cooperative Bank of Karditsa*, which was initially established as a credit union in 1994, becoming a bank in 1998. The bank is described as the healthiest in Greece - loans, deposits and memberships are all up since its founding. It is a pioneer in social financing tools, with mentoring and micro-financing provided. Any Greek citizen can become member but only 30% can be from outside Karditsa. Participants heard that, with four branches opened, people trust the co-operative bank more than other banks. The incubator, bank and local social enterprises work together as Pillars in the ecosystem of collaboration. For many of the initiatives outlined below, both LEADER and the co-operative bank were involved in generating financial supports, within this Three Pillars structure.

Agriculture

For Agriculture, we saw examples of farmers coming together to access supports to value add in innovative enterprises. Superfoods, Stevia and energy coops were encountered, as was a socially engaged organic farm (*see above, more on this later*). This displays forward thinking and innovation - rather than produce what's always been produced, why not change to suit market and societal trends?

The *Superfoods' Cooperative* has 113 members from 19 regions in Greece. It was established in 2012, and grows goji berries, blueberries and other nutritious berries. Moreover, funding was accessed to construct a processing unit, which allows them to develop products such as jams and dried berries.

Interestingly, they find that the “organic” and “sugar free” lines sell best - while some of their products are already full symbol organic, they are still in conversion to organic for others. Organic is also more labour intensive. The co-op has non-farmer members. The recession was tough initially - in the words of co-op President Kotsiopoulos Konstantinos “people could not afford potatoes never mind jam!” Capital controls due to austerity measures have also inhibited their early growth.

Now they work closely with supermarkets in product development, while they intend to diversify both their product lines and the factory itself - this will involve processing Stevia.

The *Stevia co-op* too found alternatives in face of crises. The Stevia farmer's cooperative is the first unit in Greece that will produce steviol glycosides from the leaves of the plant Stevia. A group of 13 local farmers were spurred on by a conference on the topic in 2012. Today there are 64 members of the cooperative, growing 40ha of the crop, with research support from the Technological Educational Institution Thessaly. The shares that one farmer can have from the cooperative are a maximum of 4 (3 voluntary shares and 1 obligatory that holds one vote). Members suggested that the secret of their success was that they didn't know each other before getting together - new co-ops represent a fresh start.

The *Energy co-operative* is a civic co-operative established in 2010, with 350 members. Initially the idea was that it could help utilise the existing biomass in the area, from forestry and post harvest residues. Different types of biomass have been trialed. The unit is already constructed and its inauguration is expected soon. They hope to service local markets' renewable energy needs. The impact of the cooperative to the local economy and especially to the employment in mountain areas, through its cooperation with the forest cooperatives, is expected to be very significant.

Questions

Questions from visitors to these farmer cooperatives included asking about the level of social and ecological innovation. For sure these initiatives involve technical innovation, but how deep is the socio-ecological innovation? So a next step could be deeper engagement again, in terms of waste/resource use, soil replenishment, engagement of communities, deeper participation and other opportunities. Are social and ecological goods being provided at a deep level?

Others wondered about the size and/or location of the factories - building the biomass factory on highly productive land was concern for the planning authorities initially. How connected are these factories are to useful infrastructure - other factories, goods and services? Will they reach capacity? Different products displayed different levels of market readiness. Some also questions the wisdom of focusing on niche products - is this a risk? How agile or nimble are these co-ops in the face of fickle, volatile and variable markets?

So while there was much to laud in these quite new farmer co-ops, visitors were also interested in how to develop deeper social, cultural and ecological engagement and impact.

Social

The Women's Centre was established in 1992 by Municipality of Karditsa. It is the oldest women's support centre in Greece and the only one that operates under the control of the Local authorities. It organises national, regional, local and European projects aiming at promoting equal opportunities, fighting against discrimination and inequality. Its focus is on working, professional environments, family life, and on all-ages citizen education.

They pointed out that they are busier since the crises, with both unemployment and domestic violence increased. There are problems for women with unpaid rural and agricultural work, while women from minority groups do not avail of their services, despite real needs.

Roma Without Borders is an NGO working in Karditsa region, whose objective is to administrate, guarantee and protect Roma' rights in education, employment, health and housing. Newly registered in 2017 and part of the Ecosystem of Karditsa, it has however been working informally for the past 15 years.

Greece has between 250 and 300,000 Roma people, while the Thessaly region itself has about 27,000. Their socio-economic situation is poor, while social inclusion is still very much a work in progress. A settlement of 1200 inhabitants exists 3km far from Karditsa and is the main focus of the NGO activity.

Their work in the settlement is very specific - many Roma, especially women, rarely get to leave. Opportunities for work and education are limited, again especially for women. Men who typically

engage is scrapping (working with recycled materials, typically metals) are finding their opportunities limited through regulation; women are married younger than is typical in Greece. *Second Chance School* has been established to help both grandparents and their grandchildren to learn together. The NGO also organises opportunities for socialisation outside of the settlement, including via cinema tickets, and with non-Roma, from outings to summer camps.

The NGO also wants to highlight the talents and positive elements of the Roma culture such as music instruments, crafts as a potential for a local museum and to transfer knowledge.

For most of the European participants, this exchange was an opportunity to open their minds on an unknown situation. The feeling is that it could be a good source of inspiration for other Greek Roma communities regions

Oikosfaira is both an organic farm and a socially embedded initiative. There are allotments, a children's garden, free seedlings, and community gatherings every Thursday. There, people discuss environmental and social issues, organic agriculture and health. They are also growing a community - collective laughing is used as a tool in their gatherings - a form of laughter therapy/laughter yoga which is quite infectious. They have also organised an ecofestival for the last 16 years, and invite organic farmers from all over Greece to attend, including from Peliti, the seed saving NGO they work closely with. ANKA were the first members of the legal entity that organises the festival.

Visitors found these initiatives fascinating. They again asked about the depth and participatory nature of the projects. Why is the overall boss of the women's initiative a man, and why is this accepted as the norm? What is the role of the women's centre - to bring families back together or to help women in unacceptable situations? How integrated into the NGO are the Roma themselves?

These and many other considerations kept people animated for the day, while feeding into the rest of the gathering.



Further background information: ANNEXES

see annexes for:

- Fact Sheet on Agro-Economy in Greece, by Fouli Papageorgiou, Euracademy
- Fact Sheet on the Eco-System Approach, by Vassilis Bellis, Anka
- Field visits - a chance to explore, to learn and to exchange with local people
- Current challenges - Interviews with Greek partners
- Stepping deeper in Greek realities: A Mini Greek Odyssey with ARC2020 | #ERSG17, Article written by Oliver Moore, ARC2020 (link)

CREATING POSSIBILITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Focusing on what we intended to take home for our future work participants focused on (Open Space session):

- a) the Greek reality
- b) other regions
- c) the European level
- d) and finally on implications for the future work of Forum Synergies on the following topics, developed through the Open Space session



A model region for agro-ecology

Keywords of the exchange:

What is agroecology ?

Way of living not just producing

Commons

Biomimicry

Permaculture (respect nature/humans)

Community

Democracy / Participation

Ecosystem services

Sustainability

No chemicals / No external inputs

Collaborative

Mutualism

Health and quality of life

Traditions (food, medicine, recourse management)-> farming

Diversity

Fair

Women's knowledge

What is a Local food system

Local economy

Innovation

Retail

Multi stakeholders

Independence

Community building

Public Health

Intergenerational exchange

Products/crops/ animals-> farming/
manufacturing, processing /Distribution
systems/ consumption

Public food

Identity needs and resource

New set of values

Education

Steward knowledge /Recover lost wisdom

Collective intelligence

Waste to Taste

Ecological footprint

Place identity: gastronomy / Cultural
heritage/ history / destination/ tourism

Youth: entrepreneurship / vision for the
future / stay - back to land

WHAT to do?

Increase public understanding / awareness/
interest/engagement

Create guidelines

Knowledge example / dialogue

Create & connect the first movers

Public consultation

Understand quality vs quantity

Stakeholder/ Situation mapping

Feasibility study

Collective definition of measurable goals ->

Data research

Identify needs/ Risks / Opportunities/
Resources

Ensure legislation exists

Build a team

Identify/ connect with more examples

Bring/Motivate innovation

Develop a progressive vision

Create gardens

Tradition + technology
Local currencies

HOW/

Openness
Bottom-up / Inclusive / Integrative
Non-formal education
User-friendly
Build trust
Commitment of local authorities
Participatory Guarantee Systems
Soft skills
Involve consumers

Embrace multi-skills approaches
Valorise local skills
Transparency
Break the loneliness
Focus on the Human aspects of development
Community -led infrastructure
Make it relevant / Attractive / Trendy
Responsible Resource Management
Empowering Businesses
Create win-win
Commons management (federation + replication)
Design feedback coops

How to use indigenous species for economic activities

Exchange

How to preserve old autochthonic sort of variety?

How to keep knowledge of our old knowledge?

The traditional way of harvesting and drying herbal in aim of protecting the ecosystem.

Checking of traditional receipt with institutions (university, medical)

Organic farming

Working on laws

Conservation

Local varieties -> local markets (IMPORTANT)

Connecting urban - rural

Situation in some countries

Biomedicine (Latvia): big pharmacy companies do not recognise small local producers

Salvia (Albania) : big USA companies investments

Heritage (Ukraine): keeping of heritage via touristic attraction

Local traditional products (Romania): interesting field for big companies. Hybrids use image from traditional variety

Proposals

Networking ; Media ; Growing our herbs; re-ownership ; “Amila” way of doing

Examples of preserving and using of autochthonic variety (for purpose on influence on land)

Substitutes for autochthonic varieties

Resistance, don't use pesticides

In local community, recognize the quality of autochthonic products (let's sell first in our place)

Controlling from big companies touches democracy

Using natural ways of protection

Conclusions

EU: we have to focus on big companies; not only our state

Let's use natural protection / practices

Forum Synergies: spread local actions on seeds to influence, show there are good practices in other places.

More innovative ways of making decisions in a democratic way in cooperatives

Exchange:

Learning from the Greek experience

Cooperatives should start from the bottom

People should understand why they are there and why it is beneficiary (commitment)

Need to train members on decision-making process

Horizontal decision-making processes: GA decides and Board executes but should also be applied to help facing the crisis, involving members so they actively participate.

Conclusions

FS: promote our ideas & transfer them to other countries

Trust in rural areas

Exchange

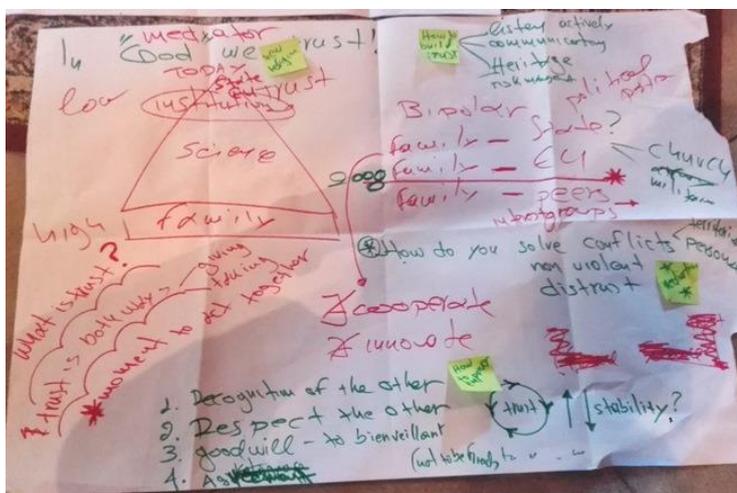
What is trust: giving and taking ;
moment to act together

Level of trust today: High >> Family >
Science > Institutions > State & EU >>
Low

How to build trust: listen actively;
communication, heritage, risk
management

How to empower: recognition of the
other; respect of the other, goodwill;
Agreement

How to solve personal & territorial
conflicts (non violent, with trust):
through mediation "in God mediator we
trust"



Conclusions

For me: define trust, ideas and different levels of trust

1/ Local & Regional level:

- Community Supported Agriculture/ AMAP
- Participatory System
- Mediation role: no more the state, the church but "Philippe" : another profile for the mediator

2/ EU: common heritage

3/ Forum Synergies: new tools to build and measure trust

3rd agricultural revolution

Urban population can demand better food

Farmers cannot change the system they always eat good food

1st revolution: was from hunting to women picking seeds

2nd revolution: was the Green revolution

3rd revolution: has to be done with consumers

"We need to keep in mind our visions and dreams, maintaining them close to our heart."

Crisis as an opportunity and raising resilience

Exchange:

Negative aspects:

Dragon = crisis: pensioners and public officials interact in more precariat
 Vicious circle of high consumer society
 Imposition of EU austerity policies

Positive aspects:

Agence innovation : actors catalysis ; similar to the ants: they work together with the principles of trust and solidarity
 Diversification
 Balance from profit / capitalism to people needs and other values

OTHER WAYS TO SHARE AND BUILD EUROPEAN CONNECTIONS

The European Buffet

Preparing food together, experiencing different tastes and learning the different stories and histories behind products is another essential element of Forum Synergies' events also offering time for informal exchange.



Market of tools

An innovative approach - Interview with Philippe Barret

For the first time the "Market of Tools" was part of a meeting Forum Synergies has organised. Can you briefly explain what the idea is behind?

"The idea for the Market of tools evolved from three main inspirations:

During our meetings we mainly use our brain - so no other dimensions of being human are addressed. This coincides with the feedback from participants we often receive who express their wish to do other things apart from discussing.

This is an important point - to address other dimensions of being human. It is closely related to the overall concept of sustainable development that includes the collective dimension and the personal dimension. Sharing different activities - from salsa dancing to soil studying - is improving our personal wellbeing and is tightening our personal relationships. The activities we shared during the ERSG (Salsa dancing, Tai Chi, painting, potting, filming with Smartphone, soil studying...) have proven to be a rich pool of inspiration and trust building. Sharing these tools can contribute to build a better balance between environment, economy and the social dimension promoting a better capacity for cooperation between individuals.

During our last workshop on Civic Dialogue (Poland, June 2016) we had a very positive experience when we organised and dedicated an extra day to the exchange of different moderation tools. This enriching experience also inspired me to think about some new element for the ERSG

What impressed you most when you think about how it evolved in Karditsa?

I was really very impressed. It was amazing to see how quickly this session shaped with very limited instructions. Within 5-10 minutes different workshops started, under the guidance of voluntary participants. The moment of this happening was very nice: It was a sunny midday, outdoors in the surrounding garden; people had already built up some mutual confidence. It was a big moment of joy."

The festive dinner

We use to celebrate the end of the meeting with local music, dances and songs, including participants songs from their country or their own production !



I WILL SURVIVE - THE FARMER'S VERSION

Once I was a farmer
 I was subsidised
 Kept thinking I could never live
 Without the direct payment side
 Then I spent so many years thinking how this was all wrong
 And I grew strong
 And learned how to get along
 And so you're back, from Brussels place
 I just walked in to find you here
 With that look upon your face
 I should have changed that stupid lock
 I should have made you leave your key
 If I had known for just one second
 You didn't like AGROECOLOGYYYYYY
 Go on now
 Walk out the door
 Just turn around now
 Cause the CAP is on the floor
 Sustainable intensification
 Leads to soil degradation
 Do you think I'd crumble
 Leave my farmland there to die
 Oh no not, I will survive
 For as long I know how to farm
 I'll keep the soil alive
 I've got all my seeds to give
 And I've got earthworms to live
 I will survive
 I will survive
 Hey hey

Media work

Media coverage was provided through ARC articles, FB, twitter and video production. Written articles and videos are or will soon be available on our Forum Synergies and/ or ARC website.



- Rural Greece, Social Economy & Pathways Out of Crisis (<http://www.arc2020.eu/rural-greece-pathways-crisis/>)
- Karditsa's Social Economy - an Ecosystem of Collaboration (<http://www.arc2020.eu/karditsa-field-trips/>)
- A Mini Greek Odyssey with ARC2020 | #ERSG17 (<http://www.arc2020.eu/mini-greek-odyssey-arc2020-ersg17/>)

EXPECTATIONS AND OPTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP

The main keywords

TRUST - NETWORKING - COOPERATING



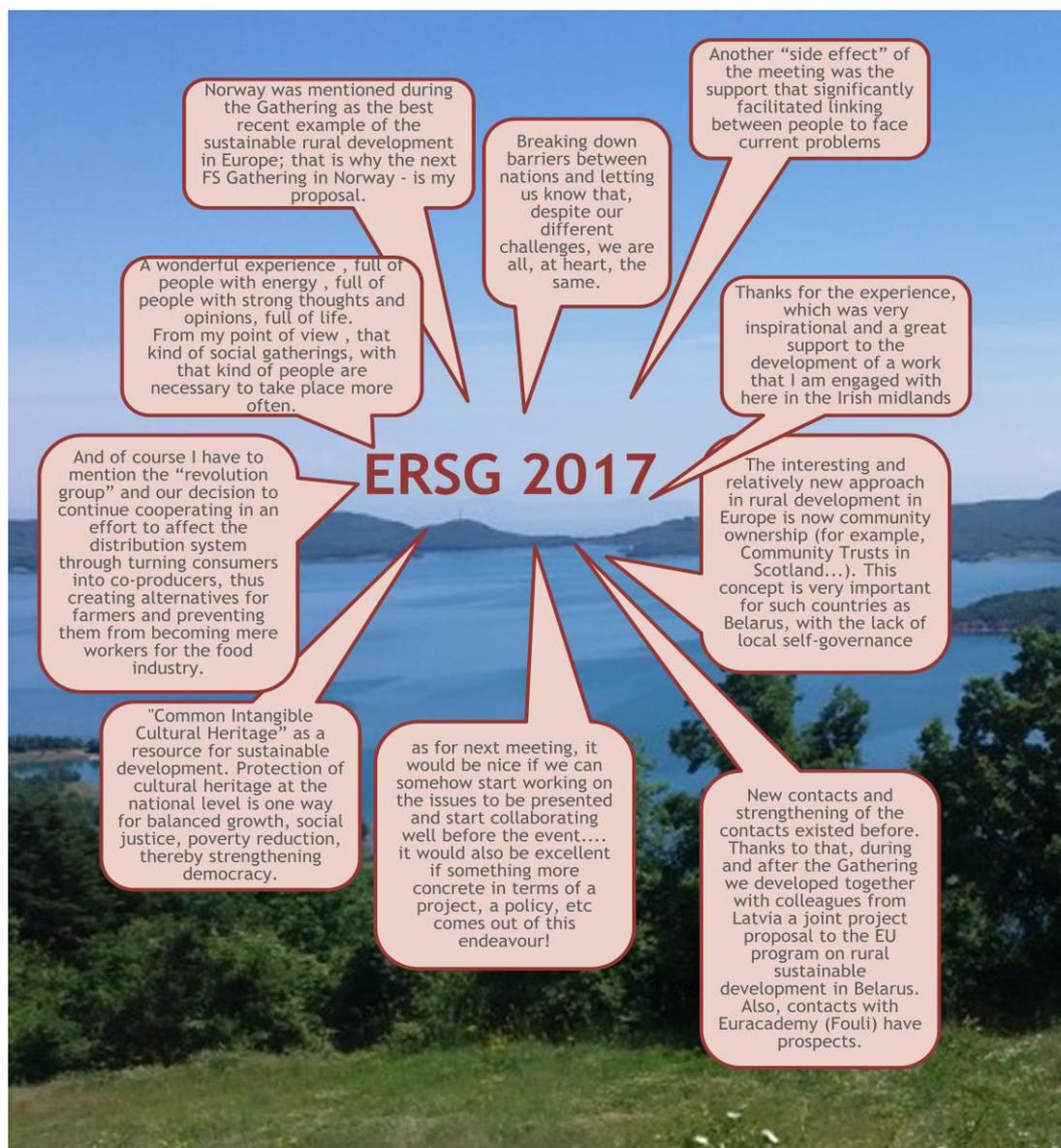
Feedback

After the meeting participants were asked to answer to these main questions:

- 1/ What could you take home/ what was most useful for you?
- 2/ What are the projects you are currently involved in?
- 3/ Do you have any proposals/ suggestions what we could improve for a next meeting

Apart from internal evaluation in order to improve our work the follow up process to be initiated will take into account ideas expressed by participants.

Some selected points taken from the feedbacks received:



Follow up

The follow up includes

- activities launched or initiated by participants bilaterally without FS involvement (e.g. the joint project proposal to the EU program on rural sustainable development in Belarus)
- ideas and planned activities with FS involvement as organiser or partner

Topics that have been identified so far:

agroecology/ seeds/ herbs (also as follow up of the 1st European herb gathering 2010)