

I arrive in Larissa the 20 of January. It was a cold day. My final destination was COB, a farm in Nessonas, a little village nearby of less than 50 people, almost impossible to find in the map. I took a bus and 30 minutes later I reached the place.

Few houses and a little triangular square was the first image that I have of the village.

Some dogs came towards me and sniffed me with curious eyes. "Who was I?", "What was I doing there?" they seemed to ask.

I passed by the square.... Men voice were coming out, chatting, from the bigger building (but still quite small) of Nessonas. Later I would have find out it was the only café of the place and a meeting point for all the people there.

I kept going towards the fields, following my GPS, on my right and on my left only almonds grooves. Finally I reached my destination. I wooden door surrounded by pines was in front of me. No doorbell was there and I stared at the entrance a little bit before finding the courage to just open the door and enter. Inside was something completely different from the landscape around! Little path were diving in a green sea made of trees, grass and small bushes of every shape and dimension. I was following them surprised of all that green in this time of the year and then another surprise come to my eyes. The little path were keeping going unrolling around small colored building, hidden in the vegetation. It was like to find a secret village in a village, like to open the door of Narnia (if somebody knows the story) and find yourself in a completely different world.

I met Xristos and he introduced me to the farm. If I was captivated by the atmosphere of the place, the explanation ad the reason of every building or construction or system of trees in the farm made me excited.

I don't think a book will be enough for describing all the things and the technologies that are in the farm but still I would like to make a short description, so that is possible to understand my enthusiasm.

The farm is not so big, is about 15.000 m², and is divided into 3 main part.

The first part, that is the oldest (4.000 m²) is were all the building and constructions are concentrated and were all the plants and bushes reflect the natural farming approach: everything grows were it wants, without any planning at all, in a messy and beautiful tribute to the randomness of nature.

Here you can find the colored and little houses, builded with natural material mostly during whorkshops. Clay, stones, straws, reed, sand make up the walls and the foundation of every building, of which the shapes are not squared and straight like you are used to see but rounded, curvy, they just follow the fantasy, and the gut, of the creator.

All the electricity that powers this mini village comes from solar panel, and in this term the Cob farm is completely independent from the net.

The drinkable water instead comes from the aqueduct, but all the grey water (showers, toilet sinks, kitchen sinks) is collected and send to a bioremediation system composed by a fat-trap and a vertical reedbed. This is a super interesting technology, inspired by nature, that mimic the natural environment of the wetland for purifing the water. After this the water is collected and re-used for watering the garden.

For the toilet in the farm there are two different types, and only this blew my mind. We are not used to think that there are alternative to the normal water toilet and we also think that this is the best way ever. But after coming in the farm and discovered the existence of compost toilet and biogas toilet I see things in a different way. These two types of toilets, environmentally speaking, are much more sustainable. They don't use water (compost toilet) or almost (biogas toilet) avoiding to waste a very important resource and they produce fertilizer for the plants. The biogas toilet, moreover, produce small quantity of gas that can be used even for cooking!

The second part of the farm is only 2.000 m² and is a young fruit forest. The land, was apparently bought 3 years ago and the plants in there have a little more that two years. Despite the young age they

grew tall and entering inside you can see vigorous trees try to reach the sky with their branches full of life.

This fruit forest follows a different philosophy compared to the natural garden around the houses. It is realized following the syntropic approach. It is organized in lines, very densely planted. Each line has a specific fruit tree (like apple, cherry, figs, apricot, peach, vines) and different support species, that means plants that have the function to help the fruit trees to grow whether providing mulch (like eucalyptus or cotone aster) or fixing nitrogen in the soil (like acacia or broom).

Between every tree line it was left enough space for a vegetable line. In this way it is possible to have a big vegetable garden for some year (5-6) until the trees will be full grown and the shade will be too much.

The vegetable garden is a very interesting part of the COB farm. In fact they produce vegetables both for self-consumption that for delivering, through the basket project, to some family in the near city of Larissa.

The third and last part of the farm is the youngest and bigger. It is composed by 9.000 m² and was bought just at the end of the last year. It was a conventional almond field (like you can see everywhere in the area) that now they are converting in a fruit forest. So in the beginning of the year was planted between the almonds with a lot of other different types of fruit trees and support species. In this case, since the area is bigger, the syntropic philosophy was not followed and the plants are much less dense than in the previous fruit forest. Anyway four lines of vegetable were settled among the trees to enlarge the old garden and a precise plan for cover crop has been scheduled for never leave the soil bare.

So this is the farm in short, for what concern the structures, and only making a tour and let people that know explaining you all the technologies that there are you can learn a lot. I was feeling my mind exploding and I just wanted more time for deepen or study all these stuff!

But of course the farm was not (and is not) only building and treesbut much more.

First of all the people! In the farm there are few people that live permanently there (and not all of them are Greek) and then there are volunteers, short and long term, that stay for few days or almost one year. And visitors passing by to see the project and participants to the workshops.

All these people, coming from every part of Greece but also from every part of Europe, create in the farm a wonderful net, an exchange of knowledge and experience, a sometime messy coming and going where you give and take and you never get bored.

This for me was a very important part of the experience because it teaches me a lot about the other and about myself.

After the structures and the people there were, of course, the activities! My day was full and I enjoyed it.

The daily routine was starting at 8.00 when all the people were meeting in the Red House (the biggest and common space) for having breakfast together and deciding about the tasks.

Every day was different and every time there was something new to do: weeding, preparing the vegetables bed, mulching, making a nursery, seeding or planting, pruning, cutting wood, taking care of the chickens, turning the compost, making bread and taking care of the sourdough, learning how to do kefir, plaster with natural material, building a wood shelter, making marmalade and pickles.

The normal routine was not the queen of the farm, there were the "special" days, the workshops ones. During my stay I had the fortune to assist to all the three different kind of short workshop that COB organizes: natural building, self-sufficiency and permaculture. All of them were in Greek but the people of the farm were very kind and they found some translator for me so I could understand what was happening. During the workshops I learned and made new things.

In the natural building one we build a small underground house so I could learn how to make cob (is the mixture from which the farm take the name!), the principles of natural constructions and different techniques.

In the self-sufficiency workshop we made soap, toothpaste, wax cream, marmalade, pickles, bread, fermented vegetables, kombucha, we learned a little bit about mushrooms (which one is edible and how to reproduce them), and also about passive heating system, solar oven, root-cellar and food preservation and preparation in general.

In the permaculture I had a more theoretical and deep explanation about all the techniques applied in the garden, I learned how to make a hot compost, how to reproduce microorganisms of the forest (Teku-kana), how to make compost tea and what are the layers and stratification in a forest.

The amount of information and experiences that I had in Cob was really big and for me was wonderful to had the opportunity to live these two months in the farm. I learned so many stuff and get so motivated by this kind of life and now I feel I just want to keep going in this direction.