



AGROECOPOLIS

Lush Spring Prize 2018: **Young Project**

Greece

Project started: 2017 (formally)

Project Summary

AgroEcoPolis is the focal point for the Agroecology, Food Sovereignty and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movements in Greece, for the Mediterranean Network for Local Solidarity Partnerships for Agroecology (MedNet LSPA), and is an affiliated partner of the European Access To Land network (EA2L).



7th International Community Supported Agriculture Symposium, Thessalonika, November 2018.

Movement building through campaigning linked to networking, events, basic and in-depth agroecology training, impact-focused research and reports.

AgroEcoPolis Education Lessons

AroEcoPolis demonstrates the significant value of:

- An organisation that provides a focus for organising and supporting education activity that helps in building a national movement within an international movement;
- Using interactive and innovative methods to engage people;
- Support beyond training is vital to increase the likelihood of new endeavours and enterprises being viable and long lasting.
- Our Perma-Caravan is effective for both disseminating knowledge and gathering knowledge and information.

The Changes Achieved (High Level Outputs & Outcomes)

- Ongoing support for networking and skill-sharing amongst agroecological practitioners; participating in research projects with partners; helping establish practical land-based projects in Greece.
- Hosted and organised the 7th International Symposium, the 4th European CSA Meeting and the 2nd Meeting of the Mediterranean Network for Local Solidarity Partnerships for Agroecology together with URGENCI in Thessaloniki.
- Collaboratively presented the report '*Democracy Not For Sale: The Struggle For Food Sovereignty In the Age of Austerity In Greece*' on the effects of austerity and the crisis to the Human Right to Food of the Greek people, which led to an international legal team being formed to pursue the violation of these rights by those involved.
- Created a new social space 'To PerivOLOI mas', involving groups working on young refugee housing and on refugee induction and food waste management.
- Supported a solidarity exports initiative whereby citrus fruits and olive oil are exported to food initiatives in the EU, supporting small agroecological Greek farmers.

Key Project Information (at 2018):

Climate: Mediterranean, temperate.

Key words: Food Sovereignty; Access To Land; Community Supported Agriculture (CSA); Solidarity Movement; Networking; Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS); Social Solidarity Economy (SSE); advocacy; awareness raising; action research; participatory methods; systemic change agents; perma-caravan.

Primary Beneficiaries: Producers & Consumers; Agroecological / Organic Farmers.

Core Education Activity: empowerment of producers & consumers for CSA and PGS; skill-sharing in agroecology & food sovereignty; networking & knowledge transfer; action research, participatory video; advocacy training.

Alexandra's Story, a Beneficiary

Alexandra Tsianti is a biodynamic grower in central Greece. She is a third generation (female) family farmer and runs the first DEMETER certified Greek farm: "The Trinity Farm". She grows cereals, vegetables and animal feed in an area of 40ha, just outside of Farsala - near one of Greece's main 'chemical agriculture seas' in the Larissa basin. She also has a small herd of about 100 sheep.

"I was very lucky to be invited by AgroEcoPolis to participate in a farmer to farmer training on CSA in Italy in January 2018. It was very interesting and useful experience... The important thing was that I was able to meet with farmers practising CSA already, and others who are making their initial steps."



An IPEN Case Study

International Permaculture Education Network (IPEN)

IPEN Case Studies have been enabled by the Lush Spring Prize

Case Study date:

August 2019



Jenny Gkiougi, AgroEcoPolis Director in Chief & Project Manager

Alexandra’s story continued: “Interacting with people in various stages of CSA development was very beneficial as is the fact that, with the help of AgroEcoPolis, I am able to contact farmers in other parts of the country and in Europe to exchange knowledge and experiences. I wish more such activities would be available for farmers... The work AgroEcoPolis is doing is vital for a country like ours... to help us set up structures like CSA and PGS for our collective well being as a society.”

Jenny Gkiougi, Director & Project Coordinator

“When we created Agroecopolis I was quite elated! Almost three years down the line, I can say we have accomplished much more than I could have dreamt of when we were starting. Nothing comes easy of course, and the ferryman always demands his payment. This period has been very taxing for me personally... Would I do it all over again? I have to say YES! Would I perhaps do things differently? Probably! Do we still need to keep going? For sure! Agroecopolis is the voice that needs to be heard... so, unless you want to join us and add your voice to ours, grab some ear plugs and stay tuned!”

The AgroEcoPolis Story and It’s Team

AgroEcoPolis is the product of collaboration with between formal and informal groups, collectives and individuals over the past decade or so, working across the areas of Food Sovereignty, Access to Land and agroecology. AgroEcoPolis was formally established in February 2017 and is the first Greek grassroots NGO focussing on these areas. One main task in the beginning was therefore mainly networking and spreading information. Since before its inception, AgroEcoPolis has been promoting CSAs, organizing workshops on sustainability topics, PGS, small scale farming and the connection between farmers and consumers.

“We cannot give high salaries, and what we do needs a level of social commitment to our goals. We work with many people remotely, which requires familiarity with decentralised tools and a work ethic that is responsible and proactive.” Volunteer working is extremely valuable, but requires realistic expectations about what can be achieved. “At times a high employee turnover has set us back in many ways, however we have pulled through and now are at a better stage, with employees that are here to stay and ready to face whatever comes our way.”



Training workshops

Vision, Mission and Values

The AgroEcoPolis Vision: A society characterized by mutual help, solidarity, (agro)ecological values and social integration, in which people have the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food and are able to define their own food and agriculture systems.

The AgroEcoPolis Mission: Strengthening of small scale farmers and consumers to develop and try out collectivistic nutrition strategies to bring food production back into the hands of the people and to get organised and work towards social justice and a better life in a meaningful and joyous manner.

AgroEcoPolis Values: cooperation, solidarity, agroecology and humanity.

Good Practise: What AgroEcoPolis Has Done

At the frontlines of the Greek agro-eco-social movement: By focusing on alternative ways to produce, distribute, procure and consume food AgroEcoPolis shows that solidarity is a two-way street. It supports both rural (Agro) and urban (Polis) and creates sustainable communities based on the ideas of the Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) and resilience (Eco).

AgroEcoPolis has organized workshops, trainings & skill-sharing to support producers & consumers on local-national level to create CSA and PGS initiatives. November 2018: hosting and organising the 7th International Symposium, the 4th European CSA Meeting and the 2nd Meeting of the Mediterranean Network for LSPA together with URGENCI in Thessaloniki.

November 2018 in Brussels: formal presentation of the report ‘[Democracy Not For Sale: The Struggle For Food Sovereignty In the Age of Austerity In Greece](#)’ in collaboration with TNI (Transnational Institute) and FIAN (food and nutrition rights organisation) on the effects of austerity and the crisis to the Human Right to Food of the Greek people. This led to an international legal team being formed with the aid of Amnesty International, CADTM, Olivier De Schutter and others to pursue the violation of these rights by the institutions involved.

Creating and adapting educational material in Greek (videos, webinars, moocs, booklets, trainers guides, etc) on CSA and PGS has helped seed systemic change.

Created a new social space ‘To PerivOLOI mas’ (‘an orchard for all’), involving the association “Ethos” working on young refugee housing, and the group “Pervolarides” working on refugee induction and food waste management (another LUSH donation beneficiary, aided by AgroEcoPolis), where activities like composting, and workshops on urban permaculture gardening, food processing and agroecology will be realized, to help transcultural and generational exchange.

AgroEcoPolis contributes to these SDG’s (Sustainable Development Goals) being achieved.



In September 2018 we started an Erasmus+ (EU funded) project with some of our partners from the [European Access To Land network](#), enabling us to commission a legal and historical survey of Greece as one of the outcomes of the project. This first survey of its kind, has the aim of being used to identify precedents that can help our advocacy work. Though this project we aim to create a national core group that will set the strategy for the issue of protecting and safeguarding farmland from grabbing, GMOs etc.

A training of CSA trainers / catalysts organised for the summer of 2019.

AgroEcoPolis Ways of Achieving Good Practise: How It Is Done

As the focal point for Food Sovereignty in Greece, we aim to be the hub for the movement's growth. We actively network and support anyone working in relevant sectors around the country, and are active at local, regional, national and international levels.

AgroEcoPolis uses effective models of participation in decentralised workgroups, that are largely autonomous.

For everything AgroEcoPolis is doing, it consults with relevant stakeholders from informal groups, cooperatives, activists and campaigners to universities and local authorities, and continues to expand the base. Research, networking and dissemination of knowledge is realized through workshops and skill-sharing by using offline and online tools.

AgroEcoPolis has coordinators rather than managers - this has a lot to do with the voluntary work that takes place. It offers a platform and acts as a hub for interaction and exchange. As part of a movement it is always open and relies on constant feedback.

AgroEcoPolis dissemination, education and training activities also reach out to rural areas, marginalised people like refugees, youth and people on low incomes. The main issues are inclusion and access to knowledge, community building and an alternative model of living.

The research results help to understand the context and provide better solutions/tools, and also strengthen our advocacy work. The connectivity and networking with other countries, areas and regions as well as the open source sharing policy, tools and skills that are available across different regions, help self-sufficient communities withstand the onslaught of tax-raids, fast-track privatisation of commons and the dismantling of social state.

Strategy: If you are in a boat, you won't go far if you're only paddling the oars on one side - similarly, achieving Food Sovereignty means work on different levels at the same time.

So, on the one hand, AgroEcoPolis works to educate consumers on matters relating to ethical consumption and how food relates to climate crisis issues; and trains farmers on agroecological techniques as well as the politics of food - aiming at making them entirely independent from the big players (like pharma companies, intermediaries and the agrifood industry in general).

On the other, AgroEcoPolis creates directly connects producers and consumers through forms of agriculture where the members and farmers share the risk of farming, in order to build new forms of cooperation, economy and solidarity. CSA is creating strong resilient communities while at the same time securing farmers' income and making rural communities sustainable.

Using innovative, interactive methods has been essential - organising AgroEcoPolis' first webinar has been a very different approach, taking advantage of a useful and convenient tool.

AgroEcoPolis has run (in 2014) and will revive the perma-caravan: a strategy with a methodology and tools to disseminate knowledge, whilst also collecting knowledge and information from a) agroecological farmers around the Med basin, and b) older generation farmers and peasants who are the living link with our agroecological past, when people worked together with nature and knew how to treat diseases in plants, animals and humans.

Introducing tools like [Participatory Guarantee Systems \(PGS\)](#) and working in order to secure farmland from land- and debt-grabbing, together with advocacy and research work, we aim to fulfil our vision and mission to achieve Food Sovereignty in our country and our region. PGS are locally focused quality assurance systems that certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders. They are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange and offer an alternative to third party certification, that is adapted to local markets and short supply chains. They can complement third party certification with a private label that brings additional guarantees and transparency.

Delivering our first training for CSA Catalysts with people from all over the country is helping create a network of activists who are working in their local environments.

As a final step we envisage the creation of Food Policy Councils, so that we the citizens play an effective and direct role in policy making, thus truly enabling the systemic change we dream of!

OUTCOMES Achieved

- Small farmers and communities have created more resilient food growing systems, are more financially self-reliant and more self-organising to meet their needs.
- Farmers can apply and share experience of agroecology methods effectively, improving their livelihood and that of others, and their families' food security in so doing;
- An international legal team formed to pursue violations of the Human Right to Food in Greece;
- The food sovereignty, agroecology and the CSA movement has been expanded and supported in Greece, during a time of great need under conditions of extreme austerity.



Democracy Not For Sale
The Struggle for Food Sovereignty in the Age of Austerity in Greece



Permaculture Principles & Design in Action

AgroEcoPolis embodies the ethics of Earth Care, People Care and Fair Share from local and national to transnational levels. While not currently involved in permaculture education, we ran two PDCs in 2014 and 2015 (before our formal start), and the Permaculture Caravan in 2014, which will be revived. We plan to start free urban permaculture courses in our social space 'To PerivOLOI mas'; and to collaborate more with the PermaSchool Greece.

ALL perma-principles play a part in *what* we do and *how* we do it. With limited resources it means we are extra careful about their allocation and the yields to be created. To build resilient systems we need all of these to be in place.

Small change for big effects: being a hub for information and activity means single actions or training events can create many benefits for many people.

Principles in Action: Design from Pattern to Detail; Creatively use & Respond to Change; Use Small Slow Solutions; Use & value diversity; 'The edge is where it's at'; Observe & interact; Catch & store energy (mostly people's energy in our case); Obtain yields (ie. farmers trained, initiatives created); Integrate; Self regulate; Use and value renewable resources (reduce dependencies).

From Inspiration to Action

As its country's first agroecology, food sovereignty and community supported agriculture NGO, AgroEcoPolis provides lots of inspiration on how to build a national movement, as part of an international movement, in challenging political and economic conditions.

They provide examples of how to steadily build connections through training, events and networking, which have multiplied and grown the diversity of beneficial impacts they produce.

What experience from AgroEcoPolis could help your project, community or network? For example:

- Helping to grow a national movement through practical training and skill-sharing in areas such as agroecology and CSA methods?
- By researching historical and legal land issues to help inform campaigning and activity linked to access to land issues and related advocacy work?
- Using training in agroecological cultivation, food preparation and preservation techniques to help assimilate marginalised social groups, migrants and displaced people?
- Creating and developing your own Perma-Caravan to disseminate information and gather valuable dying knowledge from farming elders?

The Difference arising from the Lush Spring Prize

2018 was an awesome year for AgroEcoPolis! We achieved so much and feel so grateful and honoured by the trust placed in us from URGENCI to organise the 3-in-1 'CSA Beyond Borders' meeting; from LUSH in receiving the 2018 Young Project Award; and from [TNI](#) (Transnational Institute) and [FIAN](#) for the production of our report on the Human Right to Food in Greece. Collectively all these have brought us in the spotlight and it is difficult to separate the effects of one against the rest.

Having said that, whenever we mention that we have received the Spring Prize award, we are welcomed more positively, with bigger smiles and a notion that we can be trusted at face value - particularly at the international level. We are taking part in project proposals with some serious European organisations presently, and the award has definitely helped our credibility and trustworthiness!

We would also like to do more things with the one and only LUSH shop in Greece that happens to be in our city. It is a pity we did not do anything with them in 2018, but hope something can be organised for the future.

Legal Status, Structure & Size: formal project start date: 2017

AgroEcoPolis is a Non Profit NGO, established formally in February 2017. It has 6 part-time employees, teams of volunteers, and follows a consensus based decision-making process, with Board members present at weekly staff meetings. We have a constant feedback loop with the movements, collectives, assemblies, networks etc that we participate in.

Funding, Finance, Resources

Funding comes mainly from European Erasmus+ and one AMIF project. We received the Lush Spring Prize in 2018 (Young Project Award, £20,000) and a small grant from the Guerrilla Foundation. AgroEcoPolis is a member of FundAction - a funding experiment that is run participatively by a community of activists. We need core funding to help us achieve our goals, without the restraints of project-related funding. Until now donations have played very small role in our finances.

Potential Areas for Collaboration with Project (Local, Regional, National or International)

Local to Regional: producers & consumers who are interested in building CSAs; exchange between regional groups and initiatives; creating PGS scheme; **National to International:** research; networking and skill-sharing with transnational networks; advocacy for CSA, CAP, Agroecology, biodiversity; trainings;

Universally: agroecological / permaculture trainings; research; advocacy.

Contact Information

Website: <https://www.agroecopolis.org/> **Email:** bethechange@agroecopolis.org

Address: AgroEcoPolis, Konstantinoupoleos 83, Thessaloniki 546 44, Greece

Phone: +30 2310 867602



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