

My journey into rural Greece with the Forum Synergies Scholarship Program - Mara Locatelli



Last June 2024 I had the unique opportunity to travel and experience life at Cob Farm as a volunteer through the Forum Synergies program.

Cob Farm is located in central east Greece, in the small village of Nessonas, 20 km away from Larissa city.

The project has been existing since around 20 years, when the first hectares of land have been purchased and slowly being planted (mostly using seed bombs). Not long after that, Kostas and some of his friends started getting interested with natural construction and, after studying the theoretical part of it, went on with the practical part, giving life to the first natural tiny house which is still proudly standing in the main square of the farm.

From then on, the project has organically but extensively developed with the creation of other natural cute tiny infrastructures, the implementation of a food forest, the recent acquisition and revitalization of an ex-abandoned almond field and some more renovations that has expanded outside the boundaries of the farm til the heart of Nessonas village itself.

Many years have passed since the first steps into sustainability and regeneration have been moved in the land and now Cob Farm has a stable community of around 10 people living permanently.

The core ideas that have shaped the farm through the years are still characterising Cob project: a place to experiment with low-impact technologies and sustainable practices, a training centre for people to meet, share knowledge, inspire and getting inspired, a community that works through self-sufficiency and self-production as much as possible. For all these reasons, Cob Farm is very active in many disciplines, all interconnected one to another.

Below, I will shortly present what for me are the main pillars of the Cob project.

The permaculture, food forest system based on regenerative and syntropic agriculture that, not only provides all the cobbers' and the volunteers with fresh organic goods to fuel their body everyday, but it is also a 'green gym' where workshop participants can have (dirty) hands-on practices during the various seminars and exchanges that take place all over the year.



The natural building activities, both inside and outside the farm, promote, also through seminars and volunteering opportunities, a different way to conceive a house, through all the senses and through observation, in order to create a shelter connected with the surroundings, in harmony with the forces and the elements of nature.



The social aspects of community life, the organisation of the farm to host and guide volunteers into a learning experience, the work with the Erasmus+ and the European programs to promote the values of environmental awareness within an alternative education frame. With this aspect came all the hosting and facilitating part of schedule organisation, maintenance, care and reception of everyone's needs, keeping the

common spaces clean and preparing healthy meals for everyone.

Another important aspect is the self-sufficient effort to produce as much of the needs of the farm from bread to preserves and pickles, to natural cosmetics, vinegars and fermentations and to be able to share this knowledge with anyone who is interested.



Last (not in order of importance), the active willingness to involve the local rural community



into the creative process and the social life of the farm both during leisure activities (as open farm days, movie nights, etc.) and during seminars and courses organised by Cob project.

In this regard, since January of this year Cob has undertaken the renovation works and the management of the local village kafè with the aim to offer to the villagers a space to meet and entertain after the work in the fields.

I've spent 3 months volunteering at Cob farm and I can say that it has been a very intense dive into many different areas of knowledge all in equilibrium into the idea of a community that keeps experimenting new ways to live in balance with nature by giving and receiving from her.



I have been really surprised to discover how many different things can happen on the same day at Cob farm! How all the people there are enthusiastic about the projects and how fast new exciting projects are coming up!

My activities were very varied from gardening and harvesting to natural house's renovation works to helping with the facilitation of an event (cooking fresh vegan meals, maintenance of the spaces, welcoming and giving farm tours to new arrivals).

In general, I'm very satisfied with my experience because of the wide range of activities and knowledge I've been able to observe; a variety that made every moment unique where you could never get bored of!

I believe that, after these 3 months, I'm coming back richer than before, with new tools for observing and interacting with the natural environment around me but also with new social approaches that will help me on the way I relate and I'm able to listen other's needs.

The Forum Synergies' scholarship has been a real support for me, as a way to feel 'secured' while exploring and connecting with a world that I wish could be part of my future.

Mara