FORUM SYNERGIES SCHOLARSHIP REPORT
Tjorven Bertolatus AT COB (22 April – 22 June 2026)

Introduction

Tjorven Bertolatus joined COB through the Forum Synergies Scholarship Programme 2026 for a two-month learning residency centred around her Master's project *Bread Complex*, exploring bread as a commons and baking as a participatory practice.

From the beginning, the residency was designed as a mutual learning process: while Tjorven sought to understand how bread connects people, landscapes and communities, COB offered a living laboratory where regenerative agriculture, natural building, community living and local food systems are practiced daily.

During her stay, this initial research focus naturally expanded. Bread became a starting point for exploring wider questions of food sovereignty, regenerative rural development, intergenerational knowledge transmission, gender roles, community participation and commons-based practices. Rather than remaining an observer, Tjorven gradually became an active contributor to several community projects and educational activities, enriching both COB and the wider local community.

She integrated naturally into everyday life at COB, participating in daily community tasks, educational activities and collective responsibilities and collective decision-making, while documenting the experience through photography, interviews and audiovisual material. Her curiosity, initiative and willingness to share her own knowledge created a genuine exchange between local traditions and contemporary perspectives on food, care and community.

Main Activities

Daily Life and Regenerative Food Systems

Throughout the residency, Tjorven became fully integrated into the daily life of the community. She participated in communal cooking, gardening, food forest maintenance, food preservation, community meals and everyday responsibilities that sustain life at COB.

A central part of her experience was following the complete journey of bread, from field to table. During her stay, she participated in harvesting wheat grown at COB, learning how the community cultivates local wheat varieties before transforming them into stone-milled flour.

She explored how this flour is then used to prepare sourdough bread, pasta, couscous and other traditional products, illustrating a complete local food cycle rooted in self-sufficiency and regenerative agriculture.

She also experimented with solar baking, maintained and baked with COB's long-established sourdough starter, and explored bread making as both a practical skill and a social practice that brings people together.

Alongside these activities, she documented stories, recipes and conversations with community members, creating a valuable archive of local knowledge.

Contribution to the Zímōsis Project

During her stay, Tjorven actively contributed to Zímōsis, COB's Rural Youth Voices 2030 initiative promoting soil care, circular food systems and youth participation.

She supported the organisation of the World Disco Soup Day community event, helping prepare and cook meals using rescued vegetables while contributing to community facilitation, documentation and participant engagement.

She also participated in activities exploring natural food dyes and creative reuse of food resources, demonstrating practical approaches to reducing food waste and reconnecting people with local food traditions.

This experience allowed her to observe how collective cooking can become an educational tool that combines environmental awareness, creativity and social inclusion.

Participation in the Erasmus+ Master Builder Training Course

During the international Erasmus+ training course for youth workers: **Master Builder – Rebuilding Heritage**, Tjorven supported the hosting team throughout the activity while participating in several practical, hands-on workshops herself.

She assisted with participant support, daily logistics and community organisation while also taking part in natural building sessions, gaining first-hand experience with earth construction techniques and regenerative building practices.

The coexistence of regenerative agriculture and regenerative architecture offered an integrated understanding of how rural communities can combine ecological food systems with sustainable housing and collective living.

Community Bread Workshop – Roots of CARE

Building upon the relationships she had developed throughout her stay, Tjorven designed and facilitated an open bread workshop during a neighbourhood gathering organised within the framework of the Roots of CARE project at the community food forest in Thessaloniki.

Participants were introduced to the principles of sourdough fermentation and the cultural, ecological and social significance of bread making. Together they prepared dough, experimented with shaping techniques and baked chapatis on-site, while also sharing sourdough bread that had been prepared beforehand using COB's own wheat flour and long-established sourdough starter.

To encourage participants to continue baking after the workshop, everyone received a small jar containing a live sourdough starter from COB, accompanied by a beautifully designed care guide and simple bread recipe created by Tjorven herself. In this way, the workshop did not end when participants returned home; each person left carrying a living culture that could continue to grow, be baked with and shared with others.

The workshop created an open space for dialogue around food, care, commons and community. More than a baking session, it became a practical demonstration of how knowledge can spread through generosity, participation and the sharing of living resources. This simple act of gifting sourdough starters perfectly embodied the spirit of the Forum Synergies scholarship: creating lasting connections that continue to multiply beyond the duration of the exchange.

Intergenerational Knowledge Exchange

Another particularly successful activity was an intergenerational workshop organised together with women from the village.

Through the preparation of traditional recipes and pie making, local women shared techniques, memories and stories that are rarely documented but continue to shape everyday rural life.

Rather than presenting knowledge in a classroom setting, the workshop created a space where learning emerged naturally through cooking together, conversation and shared experience. Participants discussed ingredients, seasonal food traditions, family recipes and changing food cultures while preparing meals collectively.

The workshop strengthened connections between generations and highlighted the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through active practice rather than documentation alone.

Outcomes and Contributions

Personal Development

Throughout the residency, Tjorven significantly expanded both her practical and social competences.

She deepened her understanding of regenerative agriculture, sourdough fermentation, grain production, food sovereignty and community-based learning while gaining confidence in facilitating workshops, documenting participatory processes and engaging with diverse groups.

Her Master's research evolved considerably through direct interaction with practitioners, local residents and international volunteers, allowing theoretical questions to be explored through lived experience.

Community Contribution

Tjorven contributed consistently to the everyday functioning of the community while bringing her own knowledge and creativity into the learning environment.

Rather than simply participating in activities, she initiated educational workshops, documented local knowledge, facilitated exchanges between international volunteers and local residents and created lasting educational resources that will continue to be used after the completion of the scholarship.

Her work demonstrated how individual research can generate meaningful benefits for the wider community.

Educational Outputs

Completed:

- Comprehensive trainee report
- Community bread workshop
- Intergenerational women's workshop
- Bread and sourdough educational zine
- Collection of photographs and audiovisual documentation
- Short video documenting Tjorven's experimentation with COB's prototype solar oven

Currently under final editing:

- Dedicated social media posts and reel presenting the scholarship outcomes
- Documentary contribution: footage from the community bread workshop will be included in the upcoming *Roots of CARE* documentary, extending the visibility of the Forum Synergies scholarship to a wider audience.
- Illustrated recipe zine booklet in Greek, featuring traditional local recipes collected during the residence.

Forum Synergies Themes in Practice

Access to Land

Throughout the residency, bread became a practical entry point for understanding access to land. Throughout the residency, bread proved to be much more than a daily food; it became a medium for participation, dialogue and community building. By participating in the cultivation, harvesting and processing of wheat grown at COB, Tjorven experienced how local food production depends upon long-term stewardship of healthy soils, biodiversity and shared resources. Her observations highlighted the importance of preserving local food systems that reconnect communities with the land from which their food originates.

Intergenerational Relations

Intergenerational exchange became one of the strongest dimensions of the scholarship. Through daily community life, collaborative cooking and the workshop with local women, traditional knowledge was shared naturally across generations. Bread and traditional recipes became vehicles for storytelling, cultural memory and practical learning, demonstrating how rural knowledge continues to evolve through participation rather than preservation alone.

Gender Dynamics

Food preparation and bread making also opened meaningful conversations around gender and care. Through observation and dialogue, Tjorven reflected on the often invisible work traditionally carried by women in sustaining households, communities and food cultures, while also witnessing how these roles are gradually being reimagined within contemporary community initiatives such as COB.

Evaluation of the Experience

We consider Tjorven's residency an outstanding example of what the Forum Synergies Scholarship seeks to encourage.

Her project moved beyond observation and developed into a genuine process of co-creation with the host community. She combined academic curiosity with practical engagement, contributing not only to COB's daily activities but also to several parallel educational projects and community initiatives.

The flexibility offered by the scholarship allowed her interests to evolve organically throughout the residency, resulting in educational workshops, documentation, community events and learning resources that will continue to benefit both COB and future participants.

At the same time, COB benefited greatly from her perspective. Her reflections encouraged us to look more closely at everyday food practices, inspiring new ways of interpreting bread not simply as nourishment, but as a commons capable of connecting people, knowledge and place.

Dissemination and Next Steps

The scholarship has generated a diverse collection of educational and communication materials that will continue to be shared over the coming months.

Completed outputs include the trainee report, the sourdough educational flyer and extensive photographic documentation.

Additional dissemination materials currently under final editing include a documentary-style video, an illustrated recipe booklet featuring traditional local recipes, dedicated social media posts and a short reel presenting the scholarship experience and its outcomes.

Several moments from the residency, including the community bread workshop held during the Roots of CARE neighbourhood gathering, will also appear in the upcoming *Roots of CARE* documentary, further extending the reach of the scholarship and connecting Forum Synergies with wider audiences.

COB looks forward to continuing its collaboration with Tjorven and hopes this residency will become the starting point for future partnerships exploring regenerative food systems, community participation and the role of bread as a cultural commons.

Recommendations

This residency demonstrated the value of allowing participants enough flexibility to shape their learning journey according to emerging opportunities within the host community.

Some of the most meaningful outcomes,including the intergenerational baking workshop, the community bread workshop and the documentation of traditional recipes, were not fully planned in advance. They emerged naturally through trust, participation and ongoing dialogue between the trainee and the community.

We therefore encourage Forum Synergies to continue supporting participant-led learning journeys that allow curiosity, local relationships and community needs to guide the process. In our experience, this flexibility leads to richer learning, stronger local engagement and more meaningful long-term impacts for both trainees and host organisations.

We sincerely thank Forum Synergies for making this exchange possible. Experiences like this demonstrate how small, flexible scholarships can generate meaningful learning journeys, strengthen rural communities and create lasting relationships that continue well beyond the residency itself.