

After leaving my permanent job, I got involved in art groups and developed the Hermitage Sykaminea on Lesbos into a residency. The following chapter documents this process.

It was not only my desire for exchange with other people that moved me to work artistically in a group, but also the desire to grow beyond my well-rehearsed working methods. I was interested in art that comes from many people's hands and thus perhaps creates a kind of objectivity already in the making. The exchange with other artists gave me new perspectives and I learned about dynamics of a group. Painting together on canvas allows an immediate exchange. We react directly to the brushstroke of the other person and become one unit in the process. From our points of view a new one is created and presented in the form of a painting. These experiences in turn influenced my personal artistic work. I became more playful. I enjoyed moving single sculptures in space and bring them in combination with others. They became elements and their positioning became just as important as the individual sculpture itself. After expanding my individual work in a painting group, I began to design programmes where creative people meet and exchange ideas. I took on the role of the organiser. I designed a place that provides freedom for artistic exchange. A residence.

20. Joint foundation of an art group
January 2019, Berlin
21. Individual artistic activity
December 2019–July 2020, Berlin
22. Organisation and implementation of an artist residency
July–September 2020, Sykaminea
23. Fundraising for a building enterprise
September 2020–July 2021, Berlin/Athens
24. Regular meetings with a group to create ceramic objects
October 2020–March 2021, Berlin
25. Research on the material wool together with a friend
October 2020–February 2021, Berlin/Athens
26. Organisation and implementation of an artist residency
July–October 2021, Sykaminea
27. Construction work
October 2021–July 2022, Sykaminea
28. Organisation and implementation of a seminar
March 2022, Athens
29. Grant applications, marketing work and founding of
an association
September–December 2022, Sykaminea/Kulfal
30. Individual artistic activity
December 2022–June 2023, Sykaminea/Kulfal
31. Construction work
February–March 2023, Sykaminea

20.

I have known Ute, Micha, Christl and Ole for over twenty years when we began the artist group. We studied together and often worked together artistically. At the beginning of our formation as a group, we concentrated on art in construction competitions. Later, painting came to the fore. In the first year we met often. But disagreements did not stay out. Ole soon left the group and we started group therapy, which we stopped after only three sessions. We still meet to paint. But usually only when there is an occasion, such as a scholarship.



Artist group discussion round, 2019



Painting together, 2020

21.

Christopher Knights is the name of the video I have been working on intensively and later on included the video into an installation of ceramic objects with the same title. Christopher Knights is the plural of the name Christopher Knight. Knight was called the „North Pond Hermit“ after living alone in the forest for 27 years without any human contact.

I spent so much time in front of my computer and saw so much footage that I eventually got tinitus. Finally, in March, the pandemic lockdown came. What frightened me most about it was that not much changed for me from before. I sat at home alone just as much.



Installation Christopher Knights, 2020

22.

I have often travelled to the Berlin countryside and visited friends who have moved there. I have been looking for a plot of land or an allotment garden to rent. Partly on my own, partly with friends, perhaps to move to the countryside in the long term. I was settled in Berlin. My flat was furnished, I worked artistically with different groups and hoped to find a teaching job. My little wooden house on Lesvos was far away and I was thinking of getting rid of it. I did not see the point in taking care of a place that is about 2000km away. It would not have been easy for me, because I put a lot of energy into this place and therefore I felt connected to it. I decided before I give up the Hermitage to create a summer programme where I invite friends to bring each a project and work on it over the summer.



Reading during the summer programme at the Hermitage Sykaminea, 2020

23.

Acquiring funds for the new building enterprise at the Hermitage has become my main occupation, because I had decided to expand it to be able to accommodate groups. Rather than getting rid of the Hermitage and live completely in Berlin, I moved to Lesvos.

24.

Gay leisure is what I called afterwards the series of meetings we had. We were a bunch of guys that met to make pottery, drink coffee, eat biscuits and talk. These meetings lasted for a few times and then faded out.



Ceramics created from the „gay leisure“ meetings, 2020-21

25.

I came to work with wool after I found sacks full of sheeps' wool by the roadside. The farmers throw it away because it is not worth processing. Together with a friend who lives on the island, we started researching the wool market, the characteristics of wool and possible concepts for reviving wool processing on Lesbos. The motivation for working with wool was to work on a local issue and, in the best-case scenario, to start a wool production that on the one hand brings finances to the farmers, but also revives a traditional craft. The implementation needs a lot of work, which I could not do besides running the Hermitage. So, I am glad that my friend has taken up wool and produces felt objects, offers workshops and is involved in the wool network.



Workshop during the second summer programme at the Hermitage Sykaminea, 2021

26.

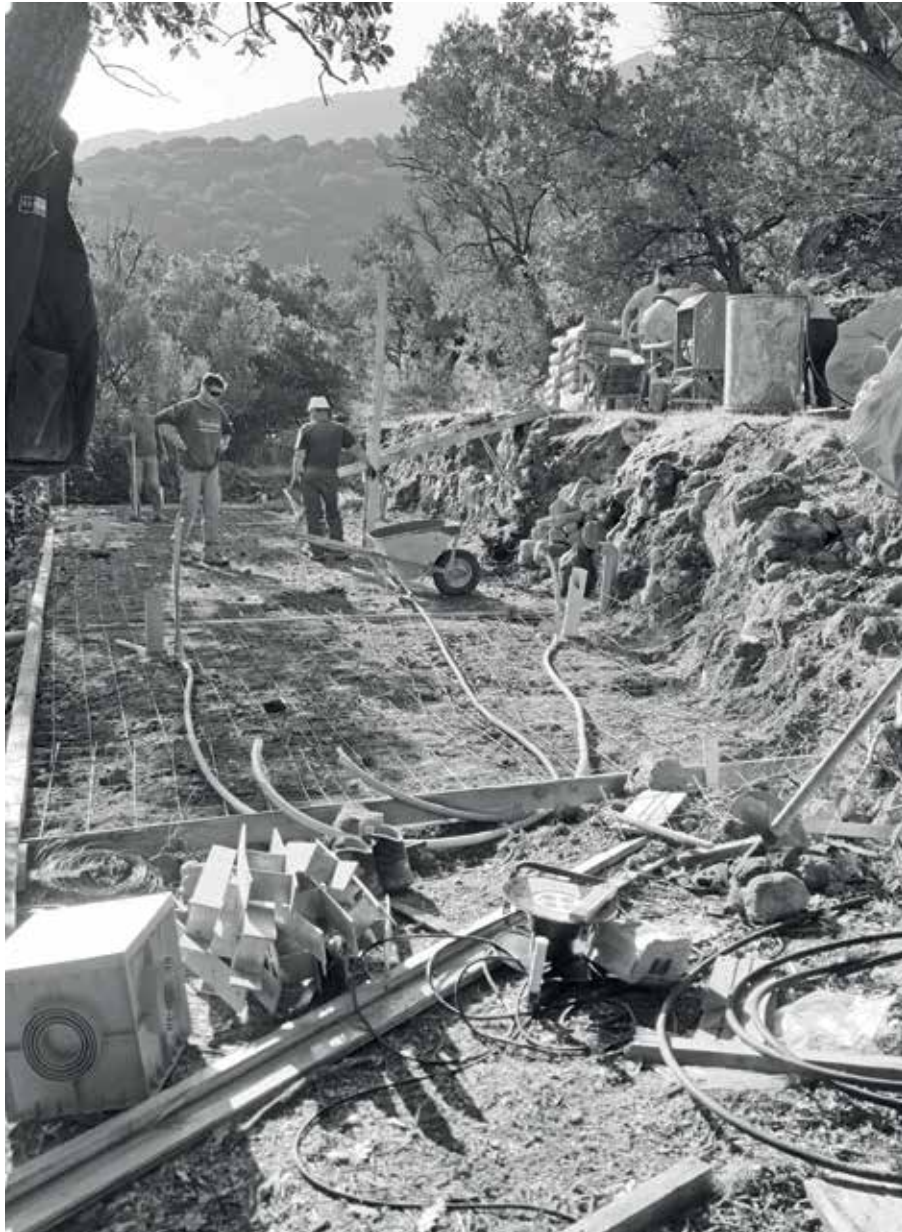
After the last summer programme, I began to doubt the way I was designing the residence. For three months I received artists, architects, designers, photographers and curators. I took care of them. In the end I was burnt out. They all disappeared by autumn and I no longer knew why I had organised all this.

27.

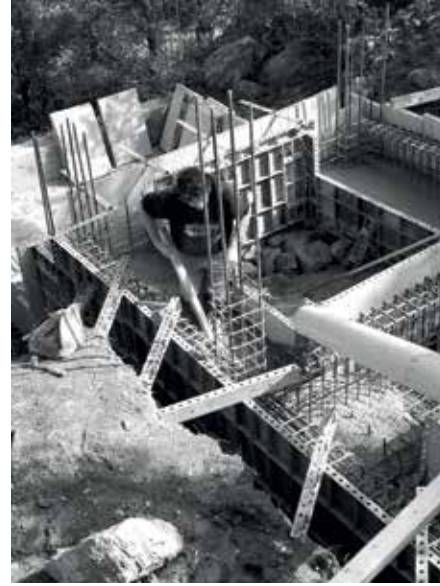
After the planning phase, the construction work at the Hermitage began. I started with the pergola because it falls under a different building code than the planned wooden house and I could start it without a final building permit. Permission for the other timber house had not yet been granted. So far, I prepared the place where the pergola would be built and the builders could pour the ground slab. I built the wooden construction mostly on my own. Only for the heavy work, which one person cannot do, friends helped.

The place where the wooden house was to be built was difficult to reach with vehicles. In addition, the rain made the soil so muddy that even a small excavator had difficulties reaching the site. It was a big effort to build the foundation and to bring the wood to the construction site. Partly alone, partly with a helper, I carried all the wood up the slope for three terraces. The two carpenters built the shell for a month. I took over the interior finishing and the fine details of the building in the next three months.

After completing the interior work, I was exhausted. I desperately needed a break from the Hermitage.



Ground slab construction for the pergola, 2021



Timber house construction, 2022



Workshop during the Hermitage Sykaminea Gathering, 2022

28.

The preparations for the Hermitage Sykaminea Gathering in Athens began five months before the meeting. We were a team of four people who organised the programme, finances and venues for the meeting. It was a lot of work and in the last month I had to take myself out of the preparation, due to the building preparation of the wooden house. One week the participants of the summer programmes and new invitees met. It was a full programme that we had and a lot of exchange took place during the meeting.

29.

Over the last few months, I thought about how a year at the Hermitage could look like and I slowly designed a structure for the Hermitage. Then, at the end of the summer, I started to implement it. In spring and autumn there are group residencies, in summer the Hermitage is rented out to holiday guests and in winter I take care of the maintenance of the buildings as well as the production of everyday objects and art works. I have created a place in the countryside that gives people the opportunity to exchange ideas for a limited period of time and to create together, but also to simply relax. I am caretaker and manager of this place.

30.

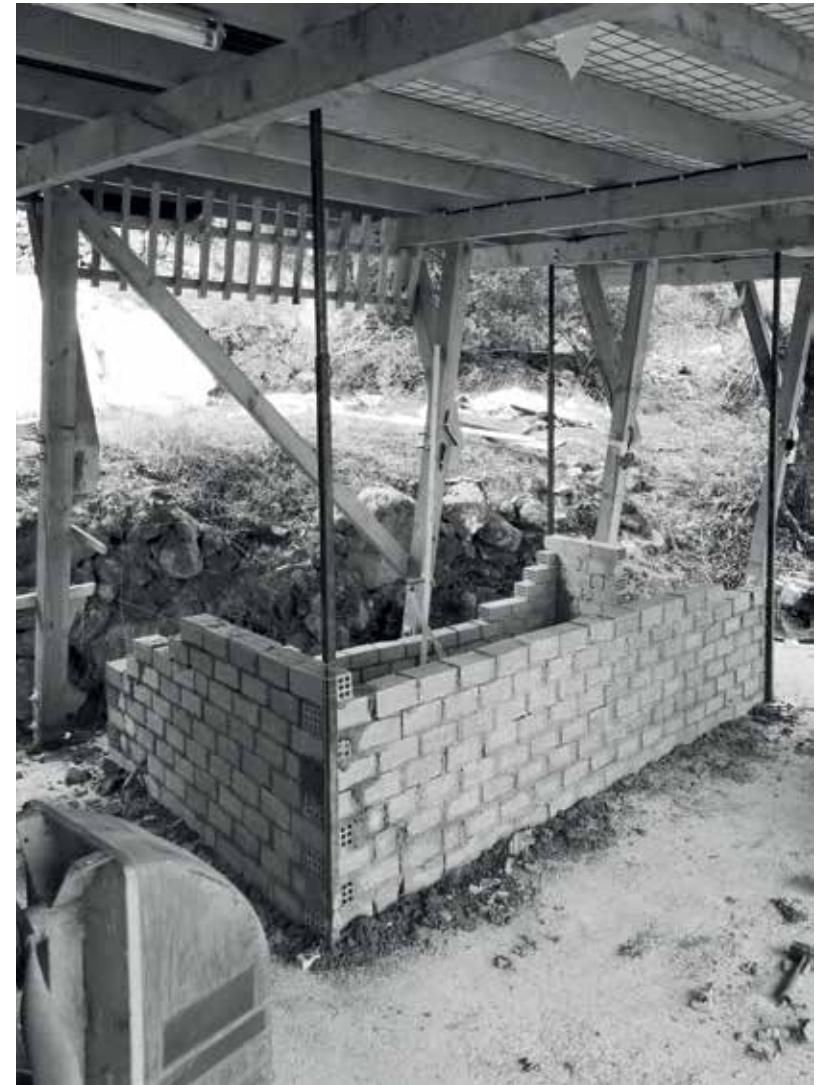
Last winter I spent alone in the Hermitage and built an installation out of ceramics.



Ceramic Sculpture from the „In the Forest“ series, 2023

31.

Early spring a friend showed me how to lay bricks and I built another bathroom for the Hermitage.



Construction of the bathroom, 2023

In the last few years I have looked at different kinds of alliances of people. I was interested in how groups are organised and what holds them together. I extended the definition of a group and spoke with people who are in various kinds of relations. I talked to couples, families, self-organised living and working communities, circle of friends, villagers about their neighbourhood and employees in large companies. In all the conversations I found change of the togetherness to be a common characteristic. It seemed every situation needs new decisions to adjust to the given.

Conversations with different kinds of alliances

Couple

Conversation with a couple in Munich (Bavaria)

We live in a house with a garden. It is 34 years that we are a couple. Each of us has their own room in the house. I have everything that is valuable to me in this room and my partner Carola also in her room. Our son lives with us and now sometimes his girlfriend too. We live together in loose structures. There are no fixed household rules. I think there is a lot of diversity in our relationship because we are very different characters. Carola is an early riser. She does the housework in the morning. We see each other, if at all, only very briefly in the morning. Because I am not communicative in the morning. I often stay up late at night. We have different rhythms. Our relationship takes place where our rhythms intersect. The rooms in the house play a role in this. Our terrace is our living room in spring and summer, when our rhythms overlap and we often sit together. Our old timer, which is a hobby for us, is also one of them. We go on car trips together. In this sense our structures are also dependent on material and spatial conditions.

We see each other in the evenings between 5-10pm and on the weekends when neither of us is away. From this point of view, purely in terms of the time structure, our relationship is a weekend relationship. What has changed our relationship is that our children are now independent. We are still very close to them, but they lead their own lives. Therefore, as a couple, we are challenged to redefine our relationship and to look for and maintain intersections. For a while we used to go out for coffee together every Friday after work. Our relationship is fruitful and alive. And I would be happy if we had more time

together. But I have to say that our relationship also lives from the distance between us. Proximity - distance conflicts no longer matter after so many years. Each of us accepts when the other undertakes something alone and we do not have to agree on that beforehand. If I am hanging out with a friend, I might let Carola know, but I do not ask if she is okay with it. There was a time in the early days of our relationship where that was a problem because we had not yet accepted each other's individual needs. We have come to accept that we each go our own way at times, and I think that is vital to a long-term relationship. I think it is important not to want to change Carola in terms of my own needs and interests. I trust her. We each have our own best friends, but we also have mutual friends. I think separate friends are necessary confidants and I am glad Carola is letting me have them. In the beginning, our relationship was very symbiotic. We did most things together. Until everyone slowly developed their own spaces and we found out how much closeness and distance we need to each other. It was like this in the past and will always be a process that has to be redefined and will never be a finished state. As we slowly found a routine in this regard, our first child and two years later our second child came. That was a big turning point for us. We were severely restricted in our freedoms and needs and faced new challenges. We had less time for relaxation or pleasure. We were only focused on the children and then we got into a relationship crisis. We had reached our limits of resilience. When our first child was born, Carola took maternity leave and I worked. When I came home in the evening, she was often exhausted and I took care of the child. Conversely, Carola felt the same way when I went on maternity leave and she worked. I have seen other relationships fall apart when couples take on too much. The children, then building projects for their own homes. I believe that when a couple overburdens themselves and can no longer

cope with the tasks, then there will be separation. Love does not play such a big role in times like this. It is about the family functioning for the sake of the children. I think it is important not to focus on very big goals in the relationship, but to focus on the basics of interpersonal relationships.

It is not like the spring of a relationship anymore. In our relationship, emotions are no longer paramount. We have not argued in years. We accept and appreciate each other and if we do not see each other for a while we miss each other. Our relationship is characterized by balance and equanimity. We used to fight because of our diversity, but also to develop our diversity. In the meantime we have learned to live in a certain balance between I, you and we. Martin Buber puts it this way: Through the thou a person becomes I. A reflection of Carola, not herself, has become part of my identity over the years. My identity is made up of many parts, but she became the biggest part of it. We have become one because we accept each other's differences. But we are not just one in our differences. We are like two sides of a medal. In the early days of our relationship, we missed each other a lot when we did not see each other. We now enjoy doing things on our own. Because we know that we will meet again, that we will share our lives. I could live without Carola, but I do not know if it would be good. I believe that our selves are made up of many images of other people's identities. But nevertheless there is a core of a primal self in me that exists independently of these identities of others. If Carola did not exist anymore, then a part of me would certainly be cut off. But not the image of her in me, but her as a physical person. If Carola dies before me, I will remain related to her until the end of my life, since she continues to exist as an image in me. Even if she is no longer there as a physical counterpart. A friend asked me why our relationship lasted so long. I think it also needs a culture of hate. That

is overstated, but there are moments in the relationship when you hate the other. Precisely because you know each other so well and often bump into your partner's wounds. I believe mastering these moments is vital to any relationship. There are sore spots in everyone. It is good if you know who your partner is and where you are and learn not to bump into them out of love for one another. Otherwise the hate can increase. It helps me to realize that it is not the other person who annoys me, but that I am always annoyed with myself. I ask myself which parts of me are triggered by the other and what I can learn from it. I believe that hate and anger mostly builds up on the sidelines or outside of the relationship. For example, do I get angry about something at work and then project it onto Carola, or am I dissatisfied with myself and project it onto Carola. Then I might let the open tube of toothpaste become the cause of an argument and do not name my actual annoyance. Carola and I could bring each other unconsciously into a feeling of powerlessness. Not physically, but mentally with words. In such moments, I think distance is needed. Because distance in a relationship is also important in order to be able to reflect on what happened and to recognize one's own parts that led to the quarrel. The distance helps so that you can get involved and listen to the other again. After our relationship crisis, we needed a lot of conversations, sometimes with friends, in order to be able to approach each other again. Our friends were important to our relationship.

Family

Conversation with a mother of three children in Lafionas (Lesvos)

At the present moment my family is scattered around. The structure is still there, but the family is scattered around. In

our family my husband made the decisions and our children were doing what was in their parents' interest. You can say there were patriarchal structures. Our family consists of a father, me - the mother, and three children. But for most of the years that we considered ourselves a family, we also involved in the family three elderly persons. Parents and uncle of my husband.

My daily routine was to get up early, send the children off to school in weekdays, work in the fields with my husband and his parents, preparing food for the children when they come back from school, then going out again together with the children to work in the fields in the evenings when the weather conditions were good enough. When my parents in law could not work anymore, my daytime would also involve taking care of them. Our children were straight away involved in our daily work at the farm from an early age. During the week and weekends. In the 20 years that I would say we were a family, in the period when the children still were living at home, we had twice holiday. We were work and family wise bounded. Also, we were economically very restricted.

We always were selling in a small scale. Of course, agricultural products. We sold our olive oil, but now not anymore. If you are living off the land, you do not need to spend much money. The land feeds you. We earned a little income, not really much though. But you can live in a good way with it. You support yourself and your family with what you produce.

Over the years a very strong feeling of tradition kept us as family together and as well a strong family feeling. I think that one has to take care of each other. It is what kept our family together. And then of course when you have children that are growing up, at one point it is just time for them to go

and they chose to go. So maybe their family feeling was not stronger than their urge to leave the family. The tradition was broken. My husband stayed helping his parents and I was the one leaving my family. I did not stay to live with my parents. And now, here the tradition is also broken. The first generation that they left. Families depend on each other in simpler societies like this. Our land will just dry out. That is it. It does not make sense to sell of pieces because we will get too little money for it. That money will not help us. We are not the first ones in such a situation. It happened to many farms and lands like this around here. It is a huge thing.

I taught my children to be good and honest, those are the two most important things for me. To be good means to me to try to help and to create positive relationships with other people without having in front of your eyes the benefit for yourself. To be honest means to me, not to cheat and lie. If you do a mistake, go for it, say I did it, and I am sorry. I am sure my husband would say it was important to teach our children to be hardworking. I would also say hardworking is a good attribute. But perhaps not as strongly as he means. Besides all of our work, we did very few other things. It was always related to works, things that needed to be done. Picking potatoes, planting, counting potatoes, doing something that is always related to work on our land. I remember we did rarely other activities. It happened that we spontaneous just for a day went camping close by on the island.

The time we had as family I would define as quality time, because we were spending a lot of time with the children. It was not like that they would come home, eat and go off somewhere. We were spending like almost all the time together after school and all the weekends. We were planting potatoes, watering them, seeing them grow and harvesting them. That

is quality. It would be a misunderstanding to see this as pure work. There are many good things in that. We have shown our children something fundamentally important. We ran the farm with them on our own premises.

I think it is much better for children to not be so stressed. When they come home, they can be around with their parents, rather than having to go to different kind of activities away from home. In comparison to city life there are so many benefits in the countryside. For sure you can not compare it, but I believe maybe the simpler is the better. And here we have a simple life. We have less expenses, less stress, less competition. They had nothing to prove towards surrogates or towards society. It is a whole different way than I was growing up, at least. I do not know, if my children agree with me about this. Maybe we together managed to make them strong enough to go and look for something else, to see what they really prefer. They left and I do not know if it is because they do not like it here or if it is because we made them confident persons, that they have the possibility to go somewhere else. Maybe they will come back. Maybe not. Maybe they will make a similar life somewhere else to keep the traditions somewhere else, not towards us, but somewhere else.

The center of our house was the kitchen with an opening onto a table where homework could be done or even crafts for the children like painting and stuff when they were younger and did not go to school. They could be together with me in the kitchen. Thus, I could do my work and I would still be close to them. Also, there was an opening from the kitchen into the living room, so they could be there as well. We had no closed doors and the kitchen was the center. That is the way we created our house.

I shared everything with my family. Except after the children were growing a little, I would work sometimes outer house. That was for me. But that was of course also to get money into the family.

I have so strongly the feeling that when you marry somebody here and start a family, it is like you go into all the family. It is not only your partner but as well his parents and complete family. You are fully enclosed. You somehow stop being a person yourself. For so many years I was referred to by the elderly population in the village as the daughter-in-law. And some would say she is the wife of Dimitris. And then after 20 years, they would refer to me as the mother of my daughter. They have never referred to me with my name. I was the daughter of my mother-in-law and then I moved on to being the mother of my daughter. I do not know if other women even observe this or if they believe it is natural and do not give it any thought. If women talk together, I mean mostly, you talk with your own gender. I talk with women. My husband talks with men. That is the usual thing. If I talk to men, it is much more about practical things. "Did you water your potatoes today?" That kind of things. Short conversations. Practical kind of conversations. No family or feelings or things involved. Just very seldom.

When women talk about other women in the village, they refer to other women in your family to define you, not males. They wouldn't say she is the daughter of her father-in-law. They would refer to the mother-in-law. And they wouldn't say she is the mother of her son, but they would say she is the mother of her daughter. It is like a position in the network. I can not tell how men refer to each other, because I simply do not know their conversations. There is a clear separation. I am living here for 35 years and just the other evening my hus-

band and me were in a taverna. There were two men coming in and I both knew them. They asked my husband something and I answered. Then one of them said to my husband. "Is she a foreigner?" They know me and they know that I am my husband's wife. But they never talked to me. As a woman you do not speak to a man, if you are not asked. Only a foreign woman would do that. Everybody says around here that women are the really bosses in the family. Personally, I do not think that is true. I think most women, they just do what their husbands tell them to do. You try to behave and keep things going.

Our village is shrinking. What is left behind in the village is the old-fashioned kind of things. I thought with economic crises in Greece people would return from Athens or other bigger cities to settle here again. You can economically manage to live here if you have a house and grow your vegetables. Sure, you can not have too high expectations.

There are good things about being absorbed by the structure of a family. Work wise, you find your place, you have a job, you have a place to stay and also maybe it is good you are somebody like the daughter of this mother. When you come in as a stranger into the village and you are referred to being part of that family, it is also an honor in a way. When I first came, I did not plan to have a family here. I was 23 years old at that time and I saw many of my friends establishing families. I did not want to go into that kind of life. My intentional coming here was having a free life full of adventures and as long as my husband's parents, were still working, I had a freer kind of life. I was going back and forth to my home country. I was working there in the winters for months. But then the children came and my parents-in-law also needed more support.

If you come as an outsider into an agricultural family, I believe you always will have the feeling that they have the upper hand, especially if you work on the farm because it all belongs to them. It is very difficult to be heard at all. This continues into the family life as well. I do not think I ever managed to get a voice in the family. But as it was my job to take care of the children they grew up with my culture, which is different from their father's culture. So, in this respect they would hear me in many ways, but not in other concerns. Besides they are not so used to listen to what women have to say, and especially if it is a woman coming from abroad. In the beginning I was laughing about this. I thought, it is funny. But then looking back at it, I think I was very naive and very stupid. Just going along laughing about it, it was like digging a grave for myself. It was my own fault because I gave up my own way of living. I felt safe being in the family, absorbed not to worry and being made part of the ready existing family. The family did not extend their horizon, they made me a part of their family structures. I grew up in an urban area close to the city. We did not really own something. If you go into a family that they own land, their own animals and trees and machinery for generations and you go in there bringing nothing but yourself, you are accepting all there is. In the countryside there is not much individuality. Parents keep control of the younger generation for a long time until their children are 30-35 years old. I learned a lot from my family. I learned a lot of practical things that I did not know about before. I was also growing with the bigger extended family. We had my grandmother-in-law living in the living room, in a hospital bed. I knew these kinds of things. Family is important, but perhaps more than that, I learned that I would encourage my children to be individuals. I broke out from my family when I was young and then I learned from my children later on that it is always possible to break out. So maybe we learned from

each other that it is possible to break away. I am always happy to see them. I think we are just good friends.

Circle of friends

Conversation with a friend in Athens

The definition of a close friend has to do with the connection that I feel towards that person. It is the feeling of being connected. I have difficulties defining the difference between a close friend and an acquaintance. I think there is no strict border. There are periods a friend is very close and at other times he/she is in distance. Closeness is not related to how often you meet or for how long you know each other. It is not built up in a linear way. But of course, the more time a relationship has, the more space it has to develop closeness. On the other hand, the relationship that has a fond connection, will come to a point where it will face difficulties and it needs to be defined again and a new balance of closeness might appear. Trust and closeness are going together. These things I can not separate. When you are close, you also put some trust into it. You put trust and take the risk to be hurt. It is faith that you put into the other. You are inspired somehow by the other and then you trust. It has a high risk. But with time the risk is diminishing. Trust changes in time, but I do not know if it grows.

I have between five to ten friends that I would say are close friends. They all know each other. They are friends. Some are close friends, the others not. We are a network of friends. If I should disappear the network will continue to exist, but maybe the form will adjust new. Some of my close friends I know for 25 years, some I know only five or seven years. The time we spend together is tense. And it is tenderness that I believe is precious in our friendships. With them I feel simple and just

the way I am. We meet in bars or we go to the beach. When we meet, we undertake leisure activities like drinking, eating or attending events. But also, we do some smaller endeavors. With some I work together. I mean, it is not our professional work, but it is projects related to it. There are some close friends that I work with and some close friends that I do not work with. We have no barrier between each other to ask for help for anything that is needed, according to what one or the other can provide.

I learn from my friends by observing them and also by asking them about myself. I mean there are innumerable things that I learned. For example, I learned to extract something from reality and look at it from a very abstract point of view. This I did not do before. Like looking at something in front of you abstractly. I learned to understand different viewpoints. Some friends of mine helped me to be aware of my sensitivity. Through each of my friend I learn. I care about my friends and if there is anything, of which I know that triggers bad feelings in them, I would not speak about it.

I have friends, because I can not survive alone. I always prefer to have them, even if sometimes I need to be alone. It is a matter of distance. I always want to know that they exist, even if they are far away. As a kid I did not have friends. Just when I came to Athens, I found friends. I do not remember who was the first, but Kostas is one of the really first ones. He is the oldest of my close friends. We were at the same university and I saw this very lovely face and I kind of liked to meet. And when he was talking and presenting things, I found it very interesting and smart and that there was a path there. So, I followed the path and we met.

My friends definitely influenced me. We share our views and

opinions of what is going on in the world. They shape my point of view. But also, I shape theirs. Because we talk, we somehow save commonly aspects of life. The day that I meet a friend is a good day. It is like this. When a friendship does not go well, I worry about and fight for it. But also, I accept the situation, which in my opinion is the best to do. It is okay to have disagreements, but it is important to then find the space for understanding. When I am with my friends we speak about our problems and the joy we have in life. We laugh and cry together. There are all kind of emotions. If one of my friends had financial issues, I would help. I would trust that we will find a solution. My only fear would be that I cannot financially support long term and I might disappoint my friend. This means, we would need to talk about that upfront. What I can do for longer periods is being there as a friend.

Work/live community

Conversation with the founder of an eco farm in Oderberg (Brandenburg)

We started our eco farm in 2015 and this was at time when I was working in financial services and also it was when I met my partner with whom I founded the farm. We imagined what we would do if money was no object. We had some visions around this and discussed what kind of community we would like to live in. I had saved money to a point where I did not have to work for one or two years and that gave me time to find a sustainable way of living that is away from my career path that I had taken. Now, after four years we still have no financial sustainability yet. We are still in the transition phase, where we need to worry about money. In the beginnings of our farm we set up a volunteer system so that we could get helpers with the work because lots of stuff needed cleaning

and repairing to make the farm more habitable and welcoming for people. This process is still ongoing as the farm buildings are very old.

We started in the first year with some events to raise awareness for our farm to make sure the local people know that we are here. We formed a network. We came in touch with some neighbours who had access to a pneumatic wood splitter, which we were in need of. Another neighbour offered us a trailer so we could transport some heavy items. In exchange we share the maintenance cost. Thus, we are a kind of loose community that helps each other with small things. Then we have an intentional community. These are people who are interested in our farm and intend to visit or help. Furthermore there is our wider international community that supports us from afar. It is a circle of people that knows our farm by attending talks that we give publicly.

For now, it is my job to take care of the farm, which means first, I am the property manager. I make sure that if there are rentals or anything like this, that the property is in good condition. I take care of the bookings, the cleaning and managing how the space is accessible to others. We have a task management system, which I assign and then the volunteers, that visit, can execute. That is also part of my job and I make sure that the volunteers do their jobs right. My boyfriend helps with getting resources. We take care of our animals of course too. Besides this, one of the projects that I am taking care of is to develop our retreat center. I built a website for this. Ultimately, we want to have meaningful events here and meaningful connections with people. We want to develop our retreat center to replace the most of the Airbnb bookings that we at the moment rely on. I would rather, for example, book a group of people who are here for a seminar on permaculture

than booking two weeks of holiday makers who only give me their money. I am still working on this and it requires a lot of my time. I am investing into the social part of this capital.

The repairs that come with the old buildings are quite high and the expenses are large too. I believe it is important to be aware of the costs upfront because when people start communities, they might not realize the fringe costs that come with running such a thing. Also, I encounter a lot of people who want to visit our place for free. When you tell them that we need them to pay a contribution because of the costs they cause, i.e. for food, they find it capitalistic. But it is not. We are just trying to make sure that our expenses are covered and that we can pay back our debts. So, there is always this balance between being welcoming and being clear about our costs.

My boyfriend has a salary job with a company. His income pays our basic necessities and when I do not make enough money for my health insurance, he also pays that. He is giving up the pleasure of doing other things he would prefer to do on our farm because of the money. This is one reason why I believe our farm needs to become financially more self-sustainable and to be able to make money from doing what we love. Next to building up a retreat center, we are also planning to have more long-term community members so the expenses can be split between more people. This is going to be a slow process and will depend on the people who visit us. A new guest will be arriving soon. He is interested in beer brewing and mushroom farming. The mushrooms we might sell in an organic shop in town. We are very cautious about inviting new people and there is also a long, what is called profit site trial period. We assess how we fit well together in terms of an interpersonal level and the possibilities our living together gives us. There are often too few similarities. It happened that our

visitors were put off that the farm is our private property.

In the first two years we organized events in order to create awareness of our farm. Now, we are focusing on building up more self-sufficiency. The three of us, soon four, are involved into the farm in different levels of energy. Robert works on his master's degree and Anton who is coming soon also has a job like my boyfriend. We decide together on subjects that affect everyone. Or if someone makes a decision and later it affects everyone, then we try to talk about it and resolve it. We try to solve our conflicts. I am the most committed, but it does not mean that the others do not do their share. As we live in the middle of nowhere, we have to find solutions for our problems. We have two kinds of meetings. We have the internal meetings, which are only taken with the people who live here and the eco farm meetings, which include the wider community.

Sometimes I am getting nervous and feel we move too slow in what we want to do and I realize that the others do not want to go as fast as me. Then I step back because I do not want to feel like I am wasting my time. And sometimes I ask myself, when I see all the climate problems, what am I doing here? This farm is a waste of time. I should be doing better for climate problems. What are we changing by running the farm? I have no way of measuring the effectiveness or impact that my behavior is having on other people. And then I think to myself, even if I do not reach anyone with what I do, I would still behave the same way. So, I need to stop feeling frustrated about how effective or ineffective I am. I can not deal with people who just want to party but do not care about our planet. Not everyone is idealistic or as driven as I am and sometimes I am left alone with this feeling that I am surrounded by people who do not care about the environment. I have

to do this for myself. I have to do this for my own mental health and sanity. I have to feel like I am doing something and that what I am doing is meaningful to me.

For me community means that people are living together and trying to treat each other in the best way.

Village neighbourhood

Conversation with a village inhabitant of Tsonia (Lesvos)

I would describe my life in the village very differently than a local woman would. The first years here were really difficult because I did not have anyone and I was very young. I had my first child at the age of eighteen and I needed my friends, my family, but there was no one. I wasn't unfamiliar with the place, though, as my foster father was from a neighbouring village. He was very young when he left for Macedonia, and he only had some olive groves here. Every two years when he came to harvest his crop, I would come along and do two months of school here. So I knew the people, I had childhood memories of this place, it was not foreign to me.

The new thing was when I came to start a family. It was one thing to be a kid in the playground and at school and another to be married with child. Relationships get different. Here, family was, and still is, more important than anything else, and I was a stranger. If there was a problem or a misunderstanding, everyone would take the side of their family and I would be left alone. That was very difficult. Of course, that is how they grew up here, that is how they were raised. For me, it was different.

What brings people together in the village is gossip. Over

the summer months, in every neighbourhood, people gather at their doorsteps and talk. You can not escape from gossip, sooner or later you will become a topic whether you like it or not.

With all these people, we were friends since childhood. Things changed after we formed the Cultural Association, in 1984. I was on the board from the beginning. The first year as treasurer, the second year as secretary, the third year as chairperson, etc. I was advancing at work, but also as a person. Some people, however, could not go beyond themselves, go the extra mile, and learn something new. The frictions were constant. They blamed me for things I was not responsible for, so that is when I realised that the friendships were not real, that they did not want me on their turf. Eventually, I dropped out of the association, I walked away for good.

Through my political activity, I found a deep meaning in life in general. Not only to vote but to be an active member of society and to be busy with important things. I felt more grounded as a person, as an entity. But this made me further distant from certain people. How can you possibly be concerned with your neighbour, with what he said or what she wore, when there are so many important matters affecting our lives, our society, our children's future? I do not mean talking exclusively about politics, but about the issues that have plagued society today, the essentials in life.

Unfortunately, there is a lot of conflict in the local community, but the problems are not getting resolved, they are being perpetuated. This is also the case for professional fishermen. For example, my husband had a fishing trawler with his partners and a larger seiner. When they worked and caught loads of fish, there were fishermen in the area who wanted sardines

as bait for their longlines. „Will you save some sardines for us, Kostas?“ „Sure.“ They would come in the night, bring out the sardine crates, put tags on them, which one was for each, and they would not take money from them. At some point, the fish were getting scarce in the sea, and we had no work. The trawler is allowed to go at least a mile offshore. They were not catching fish, they did not make their living, so they would break the rules and go a little further out. And those that we gave the bait without taking any money, these same people, would give them away to the Coast Guard and chase them down to fine them for fishing illegally. That is something Kostas will never forget.

Another such case was when we cut the seiner because our finances were not going well. We had to literally cut it, destroy it, to get the subsidy from the European Union. But the nets, which were huge and very expensive, we needed to find a way to sell them and until then, we put them in the back of a cafe here. The man who owns the cafe, although he had a very good relationship with my husband and the others, was bothered by the nets because he wanted to put tables at the back. So instead of going to them and saying, „The nets are bothering me, I do not want people to see them, etc“, like people do, he pressed charges to the authorities. The Coast Guard finds my husband and says, „You have to take your nets away“. „Why should I take them?“ says Kostas, „it is a fishing port and I have my nets here. They will not be there forever, we will sell them. I have nowhere else to put them“. „I do not care,“ says the officer, „take them in your field, at your house.“ And they got to a point where they loaded the nets on the truck trying to find a place to take them. One said „Not here“, the other „Not to me“ and finally they brought them to our house. Of course, the mice did a lot of damage and we sold them for pennies. When my husband finds out who it was

that made the charges, he walks up to him and says, „Why didn't you talk to me? Why did you report me and make me load the nets on the truck not knowing where to go? You came here and set up businesses without being from here, but you didn't respect the fishermen. The fishermen didn't get in your way, but you did. The restaurants and the cafes have their tables all the way down the beach and we can not approach the cars to get the fish out of our boats.“

Then things became more tense with the refugee problem, masks fell off from people you thought you knew. This is, of course, global and it is related to the crisis. In general, crises show the true face of people everywhere. But the difficulty in small societies is that you see these people every day. You go for a coffee and you know that this person, when the refugees came here thirsty, he did not give them water. They asked to buy it and he did not sell them. And when you ask him, „Why did not you give these people water when you have enough bottles?“, he says „You mind your own business“. You can not forget that. If something goes wrong, you will remember it. You will say, „I know you, I know what you did in the moment of need.“ But then again you try to distance yourself from those things in order to continue existing in society. Otherwise, you can not get out of the house, you have nowhere to go. I can distance myself. My husband can not. I walk around and I know they are talking behind my back. But I do not care anymore. That is the most important, that is my personal success. The new people coming into the community are shocked by these things, they get overwhelmed. That is why foreigners do not come to stay here anymore. Before, society was different. The place to go here was the kafeneio, not the restaurant. All the fishermen would keep some meze for the evening (small fish or calamari). They would bring it to Paraskevas, who had the kafeneio above, he would make the

meze, people would take their ouzo, talk about their sea stuff, watch the weather on TV and say: “Paraskeva turn on the volume so we can listen to the forecast, see if we are going to work tomorrow.“ It was more intimate, warm. Now the places have changed, they have become restaurants, there is no more meze. The habit of men going to the kafeneio after work has died out. You would sit down, you would buy a round, they would buy a round, you would have a few words. Now we are alienated. Now if you say, „ Bring me an ouzo with meze,“ there is no meze. He will come in with a notepad and say, „What will you have?“. But people do not have the money to order so many things, it is very difficult financially. They do not understand, though, that this way they push the local away, and the local is the best salesman. Meaning, that when people see a local sitting someplace, they will say „he knows where he is going“, so they will go there too. The local will bring company later. That is the culture of meze. You go out not to eat because you can not afford that, but you will get a meze for the drinks and the company. That is a very important part of the local culture and it is not happening anymore.

Company

Conversation with an employee in home office in Kocaköy (Çanakkale)

I started my work life in a big German internationally working company and I did not choose it. My aunt had a very good network and while I still was studying in university she arranged for me to start there. Till now I have been working for six companies. I never believed in working at a single company throughout my life. There have been different reasons, why I quit employment positions in the past. They include heavy work overload, an unsatisfied employer, no career

opportunities, delay in salary payments or unpleasant work environment. It is 24 years, that I work in my profession. For two years I am working for a Swiss company in home office, thanks to the Corona Pandemic. My position is sales director of Turkey and my general task is to find new customers. Part of my job is visiting those customers. Sometimes there are also travels abroad for fairs or sales meetings. My work tools are the internet, mobile phone and laptop. I am actually trying to make a bridge between the customer and the supplier.

The company I work for is a group of companies and they have eight different entities mainly in the section of market food and pharma. The Group is able to find solution from A to Z and fabricates lines that bring together the manufacturing, for example, of food and its packaging. It is located in Switzerland, Germany and Spain.

The Cooperate Group, like all companies, consists of a purchase, product planning, sales, financial, shipment and packaging and human resources department. The leadership of the Group is central. The individual subcontractors are controlled through it. Subcontractors may also carry out their own projects as long as they do not compete with the Cooperate Group. The Group consists of about 1000 employees and was established three years ago. It is a private owned company with four bosses and a board. The single subcontractors exist much longer. In average about 70 years.

We have certain rules to follow as employees. There is a dress code for events, but way more important is that we secure our equipment and keep the companies' documentation safe. A machine of ours requires huge investments, distribution systems and very good know-how about the final product. Once we have a customer, it has to be a long lasting collabo-

ration. It creates some friendship in time. I have been in this business for 18 years and I see always the same people.

My work is in general calm and pleasing. It is not heavily loaded, but sometimes it is very stressful. I have no defined working hours. I can arrange them myself, but I am always available for my clients and my work colleagues. So, I never completely switch off from work. I always worry, when I do not sell well. I need to be aware of the short- and long-term developments. I need to report those to my company, as this is part of my job. Accordingly to my information the company can structure itself. In case we do not sell well, I need to find out why. If it is related with the conditions of my country, then I do not worry. But if it is because of mistakes of our company, then I worry. It is important that we set up ourselves depending on the specific country's economic, cultural, and social conditions. If we cannot adapt our strategies, we will have no success. It is not only about how good the technology that we sell is. I am focusing on my work to do it best. This is my personal approach. The only binding and connection with my company is this exchange. I bring them money and they share it with me. That is the only binding in fact.

Once in a year our company gives a financial statement to its employees. Thus, we get an understanding of the financial situation of the company. Also, we as colleagues speak with each other about how the company is doing. When it comes to that we have to reduce our expenses, we know that this is a clear sign for a financial crisis. In order to prevent such a moment, I warn my colleagues and top management and take it to the board, if something goes wrong. The board members have to decide and find solutions. It happens that they do not listen to my advice because they are ambitioned in earning more with one sale, not seeing that this might be a bad stra-

tegy to enter into a new market.

Throughout my career I learned how I can handle the anger and dissatisfaction between customer and seller and go friendly out of a tense meeting. It needs patience, understanding and a certain voice while speaking with your customers. In team work I learned to recognize when I should be rather a part of the group or when I should lead. I positioned myself in the team. It is all like a game. I know the rules and have accordingly a roadmap. My company has this too. There are phases when I need to push and phases when I need to accept. You should expect for every step upfront the reaction and overall, you should have always an empathy with your clients.

I would describe the company I work in as a very decent German enterprise. It has highly skilled workers, but it is blind of ambition and starving to earn. They act dynamical and aggressive. They belong to the top in their branch by the base of their products. The core of our togetherness is money. They are not a charity and me neither. They do not give their products for free, so they cannot ask something without paying.

I am not only working for my company, also I work for my clients and the minimum for myself. Since short I started giving myself more time. Not necessarily only financially, but also on an emotional level. My satisfaction, my happiness, my sadness, my disappointments, everything is a kind of earning.

Alliances of people
Andreas Sell

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