

Sowing Dreams

“Fantastic !!!

Greece is a great country as it is able to recognize the importance of your work. It would be impossible in France such an honor to be given to Dominique Guillet from Kokopelli for instance or any other comparable person.....”

(Quoting from the letter of the president of the organization “[Terre Humaine](#)”, which is headquartered in France and Switzerland, regarding the award given to Peliti by the President of the Hellenic Republic within the frame of “Models of Excellence 2013” a ‘competition’ which is collaboratively organized by the Citizens’ Movement and the Greek Guiding Association)

When I started looking into local seeds I knew literally nothing about the subject and its implications. For the last 22 years (1991-2013) it has been a journey of continuous discovery and learning the secrets of this extraordinary wealth we have in Greece. It all started when Yiannis Diamantopoulos asked me to buy a packet of various seeds he had brought with him from Latin America (January 1991). Inside the packet there were seeds from indigenous Indian tribes. The tribes had already disappeared, but their seeds continued to be cultivated. The thought was overwhelming. After that, through the “Ecological Practice Workshop” in Thessaloniki, I organized the first action for local seed varieties at a non-governmental level.

The second impetus came in 1992, in my village, Vamvakoussa (in the north of Greece, near Serres). I was distributing my brother’s wedding invitations, and in the courtyard of a house I saw a maize plant with small black kernels. I asked the old lady what she did with it, and she said she made pop corn for her grandchildren. I asked for a few seeds, which she gave with pleasure. I got the idea that in every house I would go to, I would ask what seeds they have, and ask to be given a few. I went all round the village, and came back with an armful of beans, squash, melons, etc.

In 1995, in a moment of soul searching, it came to make me a centre for the preservation of local seed varieties. I was living in Dasoto village (in the very north of Greece, near Nevrokopi) at the time, and a large oak tree in the village gave me the name of the group “Peliti” which in the Pontus dialect means oak. The oak tree in the village was a meeting place for the people, and I wanted my own “Peliti” to be a meeting place for all.

I started travelling on foot and by hitch-hiking, collecting seeds and meeting people. I travelled wherever I learned that there were people saving seeds. I owned nothing but I had everything, as all my needs were met by the universe. For this reason I lived in various places (1995-2001), and my last abode in this big quest were the Pomak villages of the Rodope mountain region (northeastern Greece).

It was then I realized that I had to go out into society to convey the message of the seeds to the people. Until that time I was living without working (for money), without electricity, and I hitch-hiked wherever I needed to go.

In 2001, I organized the 4th Panhellenic Seed Exchange Festival in the central square of the city of Serres. This festival marked the opening of Peliti to society.

In 2002 I married Sophia Gida, and our marriage strengthened the work of Peliti. That year with Sophia we set up the Panhellenic Network of Exchange of Goods and Services without money, and published the book "From Hand to Hand and from Heart to Heart" which was the first of its kind in the world.

In the same year (2002), with Nicos Dombazis, we started to establish the 7th of April as a day of local seeds for Greece. Today there are many celebrations throughout Greece on that day, where seeds and plants are given away for free.

In 2005, Aris Pavlos started the first local Peliti group on the island of Aegina. Today there are 12 such local groups all around the country (komotini, Vassilika in Thessaloniki, Lemnos, Kozani, Ioannina, Almyros, Euboaia, Peratia, Aegina, Ancient Olympia, Milos, and Herakleion).

In 2009 the organization "Biodiversity International" and the Mayor of Rome honoured me with the award of "[Guardians of Diversity in the Mediterranean](#)". It was a great acknowledgement and reward.

In 2011 Peliti took part in the International Seed days in Brussels. This meeting opened the way for us to connect with the other European organizations dealing with local seed varieties. This made us feel and put us on the map, as a part of a greater movement.

In 2012 and 2013 we hosted the International Seed Days in Greece, which drew in thousands of people from all over the world. The little village of Mesohori near Paranesti, home to about 70 people, which is the home of Peliti today, has become a worldwide reference point for the preservation of local seed varieties. Michel and Jude Fadom of Australia, who founded the organization "Seed Savers" (www.seedsavers.net) and have been working on preserving local seed varieties around the world since 1986, talking about the International Seed Days of 11, 12, and 13th May 2013, declared that we organized the biggest worldwide local seed exchange in the world.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLIS7wiwl7yw2DnyI1fUad4gtUIDWmfs1P&v=zqC1sMpGHDM> Through these meetings that we have organized, Peliti now plays a global role for the preservation of agricultural biodiversity.

On the [7th October 2013](#), we co-organised with the Municipality of Athens, the Ministry for the Environment and the Global Movement for Seed Freedom(<http://seedfreedom.in>), a series of events for seed freedom and the preservation of local seed varieties, in Athens. Addressing the Greeks from Syntagma (Constitution) Square, Dr Vandana Shiva said “Greece, the country who gave birth to democracy and the country with the greatest biodiversity in Europe is going to be affected the most by the unjust laws against biodiversity, and it is the country which *can* and *must* play a determining role in the preservation of the biodiversity of Europe”.

The basic annual edition of Peliti “Local Farms”, where we present the Panhellenic Network of Preservation and Promotion of Local Varieties and Indigenous Farm Animals, with its 13th edition this year, has sold over 22,000 copies.

During all these years we have offered seeds to over 120,000 amateur and professional farmers. All these people were able to be partly self-sufficient regarding food production when the present crisis hit the country. They had food and seeds which they could propagate freely, and thus had the means to live in dignity.

Every time a seed is lost, a part of our History and our memory is lost. Every time a seed is lost, a part of our Democracy and freedom is lost too.

We have chosen this day that the President of the Hellenic Republic Karolos Papoulias is offering us an honorary award for voluntary service in “Models of Excellence 2013”, to announce our four major projects for the coming year.

1. International Caravan of solidarity for the seeds. It will start from Peliti on 27th April 2014, and it will end up in France, at the [Kokopelli](#) organization, who will be hosting the International Seed Days. Dr Vandana Shiva and other important international personalities will be part of this Caravan.
2. “No Patents on Life”: It is the first time that Peliti shall be taking part in a campaign against the patenting of plants, specifically against the patenting of the pepper plant by Syngenta.
3. Right now the standing committees of the European Parliament are starting to discuss the reform of the seed laws. Peliti, together with the other European organizations for seed freedom says “no” to unjust laws which are tailored to the needs of the seed industry (on our website there is an Open Letter to the Greek Euro-MPs who are part of the committee for the environment in the European Parliament).
4. If we lose our land, our seeds will have no longer meaning. So we would like to ask the president of our Republic not to sign, and thus authorize, laws which will take away the Greek land from its people.

Our country has the largest biodiversity in the whole of Europe. Every one of us, wherever we stand, must stand up for it. Biodiversity is a free resource, which all citizens have a right to have access to.

Closing, I would like to thank all the people, the grandfathers and grandmothers, the men women and children who have supported the work of Peliti all these years. I would also like to thank the people of ERT (former national radio and television authority) for showing the work of Peliti and making it known throughout Greece.

"I am a grain of wheat, hold me in your hands, close your eyes, and let me tell you the story of my life"

We eat every day. What do we eat, what do we set upon our table, where does it come from, who and what are we supporting with our forks?

We are important and great, regardless of our political, financial, or social position. Let us dream of a better world and let us walk a little every day in this direction.

Sowing our dreams and looking after them daily, one day they will sprout and bear fruit.

This text was written by Panagiotis Sainatoudis, who is the inspiration behind Peliti and its present coordinator, for the occasion of receiving, on behalf of Peliti, the award for "Models of Excellence 2013" by the President of the Hellenic Republic, for his voluntary contribution to Greek society, on the 19th November 2013.

For more information on Peliti, please visit the webpage

<http://www.peliti.gr/>

[Face book](#)

[YouTube channel](#)

Or write to: info@peliti.gr

If you would like to be part of the international caravan of solidarity to seeds, write to: caravan@peliti.gr