

## Cultural Village of Europe

### Economic Conference in Ströbeck 6 – 9 October 2006



## Contribution from PAXOS, GREECE



### PRODUCTION AND MARKETING FOR REGIONAL PRODUCTS

by Faye Lychnou      Photo Processing: Nikos Grimanis

#### Local production through the ages

The Paxos and Antipaxos area is a complex of 7 different small islands of which only 2 are inhabited. However a walk on the remaining 5 islands (St Nicholas, Virgin Mary, Daskalia, Kaltsonisi, Moggonisi) and a peek through various written information about the islands' history and culture would offer one a very accurate idea of what the whole complex of islands looked like long before Medieval ages. Narrow strips of land in the middle of the Ionian sea, almost barren, waterless, almost without soil; thick bush of many different types, shaped from the strong south west or north west winds- depending on the particular area – white limestone coming out of bottomless blue water, shining under a ruthless sun, with only a few cypress and fig trees offering their sinister shade, a few other kinds of fruit trees and many lemon trees - low in need for water - scattered here and there.

Locals carved flat rocks to capture rain water, built dry stone walls to keep the soil from disappearing under heavy rain, cultivated wheat even at the remotest, more abrupt hillsides, above the sea, so as to put bread on the table. They were forced to taste every green growing plant to add some flavor to their otherwise boring diet. Paxos goats drunk sea water to survive. Draught resistant wild flowers enriched all the 7 islands' flora. Only Antipaxos was blessed with endless wild vines along with certain fruit trees, like pear, fig, plump and almond trees.

Historical coincidence brought the olive tree on Paxos along with the Venetians around 1500. Since then olive groves have covered most of the Paxiot land adding populations of fauna and flora and changing our islands' natural environment for ever. Sheep and goats were the only type of cattle being raised on the islands, but they were enough for the locals to produce extra tasty meat – because of the salt water – absolutely pure dairy products and wool, with which they made clothes, bed linen, blankets etc. Farming was almost solely involved around olive trees. Cypress trees were restricted in small alleys to produce wood for fishing boats and house roofs. Salt was gathered from the sea caves. Honey was made from bees feeding out of thyme and wild flowers. Fish was enough to cover local demand and was also exported in other parts of Greece, carried in boxes of ice to the mainland. Origano, basilic, laurel, caper, chamomile and a large number of other Mediterranean herbs were gathered by locals on all our small islands to be used at home.

Always growing local knowledge of local fauna turned local cooking into a unique experience. Wars and other unfortunate incidents in other parts of Greece and the world brought refugees on our islands, who intergrated into local society and enriched local culture in every way. Distance from mainland Greece kept diseases and viruses away from birds, beasts and cultivations. Olive oil produced on Paxos was abundant and of excellent quality, producing jobs and a steady income to all locals, even when only a small minority of nobles owned the olive trees. At the beginning of the 20th century Paxos oil was receiving awards in world wide competitions. Anemogiannis factory in Loggos created ethereal oils, scents and soaps sold all over the world. Housewives kept their own soap and detergent recipes.

Pine trees were planted on St Nicholas island only about 70 years ago and almond trees about 45 years ago. The rest of the small uninhabited islands remained untouched by any kind of evolution up to our days.

### **Tourism as a local industry**

In the late 1950s the first tourists arrived on Paxos. Forty years later tourism is the largest industry on the island. Villas with luxurious swimming pools appear like mushrooms from inside the abandoned olive groves. Cypress and pine trees are growing wild everywhere, stopping any other cultivation from flourishing. Cattle is sold away, as people no longer have the time to take care of their domestic animals. Wooden boats are sold or destroyed and new EEC regulation inhibits "amateur" fishing. Anemogiannis factory is in ruins, sold from one rich Englishman to another. Enough olives are picked only to make the olive oil to cover each household's needs. It became too expensive to take care of the olive trees and too poor a quality oil produced out of the tired and neglected olive trees dating back to the middle ages. Paxiots stopped being farmers, cattle raisers, fishermen. They just render services. Central government told them they could not be farmers and rent accommodation to tourists at the same time. Since they receive their main income from another source, they are not allowed to benefit from various EEC regulations and subsidies concerning environmental friendly cultivation methods, restoration of dry stone walls etc. **Facing the dilemma of choosing between returning to their farming past with the risks, low and uncertain income and with low on information local authorities and waiting on various holiday makers 3 months a year, locals chose the second option.**

### **Dissalination and terrorism**

During the last few years unexpected developments have influenced local life and economy: a) water is no longer a rare commodity on Paxos, b) economic crises in Europe and terrorism acts gave serious blows to world traveling and tourism.

Because of the first development locals stopped looking in the sky for rain and started growing vegetables in their back yards for the first time. Due to the second the tourist season diminishes every year along with the island's annual visitors and their spending capacity.

Paxiots are faced with new and complicating realities affecting their well being. House owners are being pressured into accepting low budget deals by foreign tour operators. Business owners are being pressured by dangerously small seasons. Comfortable and well paid work positions are becoming scarce and ordinary untrained labor positions are already taken by Albanian economic refugees. Olive oil cooperatives are almost inactive. Very few families keep goats in their households and less and less locals remain in the old farmers registries.

However, walking around local market squares one can observe just a few small shops selling local products like wine, oil, soap, marmalades, honey, olives, all in label-less jars and bottles. Gift shops offer handcrafts made on Paxos from local raw material among various things from Thailand, Turkey or Taiwan. In a few souvenir shops a potential client will be welcomed by the artist himself; sometimes the artist is a local. After asking around, one can find original Antipaxos wine, fresh white cheese, fresh local meat and eggs, lately even local vegetables.

Evidently local products do exist; then, why don't they circulate openly, freely? Cultural Villages events have uncovered a large number of local artists, craftsmen and artisans, who either work at home or live and create outside their native island keeping their talents to themselves. Why are they so reluctant to reveal and circulate their work? How can those people be encouraged to surface and enrich local economy?

## Live examples of today's local market

**Katina, 42** years old is born and raised on Paxos, married and mother to a young man, studying away from Paxos. She has been keeping a gift shop close to Gaios square for many years. The last 10 years she only sells artifacts made of olive wood. Her goods are created elsewhere. **She cannot persuade local artisans to create enough and in a steady pace so as to keep a shop running. So she buys from Corfu and other parts of Greece.** Her goods are everyday useful items, not ornamental and the fact they are made of olive wood give the impression to customers that they are made locally. By observing her customers over the years she can now influence her suppliers by letting them know which items sell the



most.

**She started selling her own work quite out of chance.** After having cleaned her vineyard a lot of dead wood remained useless. The long slender old vine branches looked very pretty and she had felt it would be a shame to throw them away. The simplest thing to create out of them would be wreaths. And she did. She ornamented them with shells from local beaches and she let them lie around in her shop along with all the other items. She never believed they would sell. Not only did they sell very fast but soon she started accepting orders from various clients. She then went on to create mirrors out of vine branches or bamboo sticks. She also ornaments in her own personal style some of the artifacts she buys from elsewhere turning them into special art gifts.

While working at her shop, tourists entering to buy a souvenir gather round her and watch her work for hours and finally prefer to buy one of her own works, even though they are more expensive compared to the other items in her shop. She now has regular customers especially among the foreigners who own houses on the island.



**Except from her husband hardly any local knows that Katina makes beautiful mirrors out of such simple material. I found out quite by accident after noticing a half finished mirror on her work table, while searching for a gift for my Stroebeck host, Karina Knopp's house. She was very shy and talked about herself with difficulty. However she strongly believes that her shop's commercial success has been positively affected by the fact she started creating and selling her own work.**

**Two sisters, Amalia and Irene,** at their early thirties, managing their own small tourist agency, are talented decorators and make beautiful mirrors, create and ornament paper items etc. When asked why they are so secretive about their talents, they denied having any special talent or inclination. **Being artistic seems to still be shameful on Paxos.**



**Magda Rokkou**, on the other hand enjoys being considered an artist. She has lived all her life outside Paxos, her father being from Athens. She studied interior decoration and advertising a famous Athens art school and has taken courses in stained glass and religious icons painting under a well known professor. She knows the world of photography, painting and advertising very well and has exhibited her work in Athens, Crete and Paxos – thanks to 2004 Cultural Villages Events.

Three years ago she decided to open a shop in Paxos and sell her glass creations – which she makes at her workshop in Athens during winter time. While in Athens she creates as many items as possible and sells them to her Athens clients. They are usually individuals and small companies, which like to offer memorable gifts their own clients on certain occasions. The remaining items she sells during the summer in Paxos shop. Every item in her shop is handmade.



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The variety of colors might seem the same but each artifact differs from the other. “People prefer the particular glass technique, because it combines transparency, different intense colors and games with different lighting. Although glass objects seem fragile or even cold, through the particular technique they take shapes, they mold into useful objects, which at the same time can also be defined as fine art”, Magda told me picking up each fine object and holding it towards the light.

“I find exhibiting my work particularly fascinating most of all because it is a way to enter the private space of each of my clients. Nowadays only a minority of people can enjoy true art. In the past I have made my living out of selling my paintings and stained glass creations to just a few. Today I feel a lot happier selling small, useful artifacts affordable by everyone, who can appreciate them. Especially

foreign tourists appreciate their personal contact with the actual artist. On many occasions I was asked to sign on the paper bags, inside of which I put the bought glass creations, like an autograph” she reports proudly. She insists that Greeks are her best clients. She also observes that economic recess has influenced the whole of Europe: “Tourists calculate carefully the money they can spend on life style items, unnecessary things’. She admits that she has done almost nothing to promote her work.

She refuses to print any advertising leaflet, because she is afraid of her antagonists copying her designs. “I have seen some of my original designs copied and sold in well known Athens stores”, she complains. And she avoids taking part in international exhibitions of tourist souvenirs, as something like that would demand mass production of certain items, when: “each of my

creations is unique; I put a bit of my soul in each one and I would not like to lose my personal relation with each customer'. Besides she has not enough time to create the amount of work needed to take part in such an exhibition and fill her Paxos shop as well. "I would very much like to move to Paxos permanently" she says with dreamy eyes. "I would like to live on the island the whole year round, move my workshop there, create and sell on the spot".

She claims she does not mind losing her Athens clients. "I am not afraid to take the risk. I believe I will easily find enough new admirers here, to keep my store open and to be able to live comfortably. Besides I would like to invite locals and tourists to my workshop, to watch me work, become fully aware of the whole creative process.

I believe I have a lot to offer to local society especially during the winter. I am willing to give art lessons to children and adults, help restore religious icons and create stained glass windows for our island's many churches. But I need the right space to work with people. Art lovers should have a place where they can work and exhibit their art.

I only hope that the Community will hear my cry for help, will believe my desire to contribute is sincere and shall take me up for my offer"!

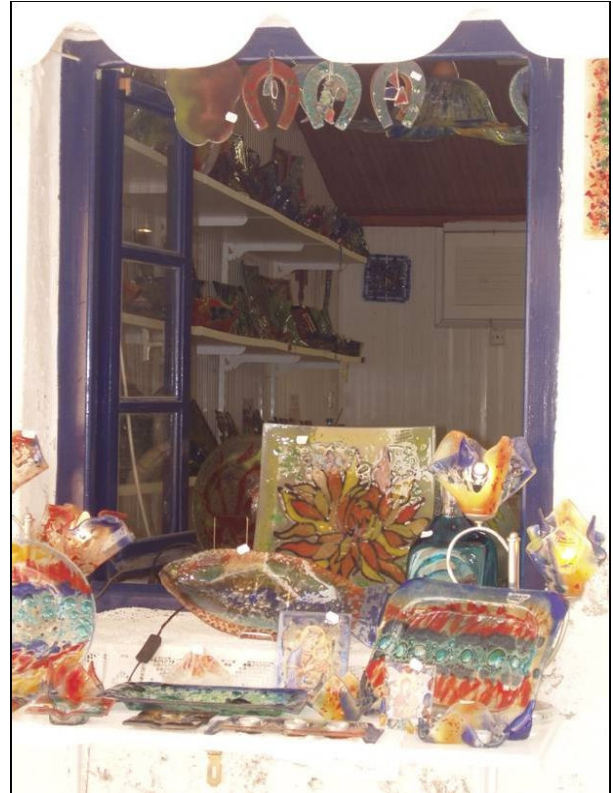
### **Babis and Katerina Doui**

During my research for local products and for the people behind them I got invited to the farm house of Babis and Katerina, at their early fifties, proud of their married daughter and their 27years old electrician son, who still lives with them. Their farm is located at one of the most beautiful spots on the south west coast of Paxos enjoying an all day lasting sun, which sets inside the Ionian Sea over the horizon.

Babis inherited the land from his great grandfather. The farm was first created in 1826 and the dry stone walls surrounding it were built in 1880. Nowadays there are 130 olive trees inside the farm. Babis was among the first 70-80 local farmers who fought for the ecological movement and environmentally friendly cultivation methods 15 years ago. He took part in the successful fight against spraying the olive trees with chemical pesticides with helicopters and from the ground.

'We won the battle but we are currently losing the war", he says, while showing me around his beautiful farm land. "Four years after we had thrown the paid groups of people from Corfu - sent to work

at the spraying process - in the sea four of us olive oil producers – including today's Mayor – exported 1000 kilos of olive oil to Austria for industrial use. They were going to make ecological







me realize that the earth needed extra calcium to be able to enrich itself properly. Look at how healthy and full with fruit my trees look!

Eventually however I was forced to realize that the production of olive oil on Paxos was and still is commercially profitless. Maybe it is the type of local olive tree to blame; maybe it is the way we pick the olives; maybe it's the fact we have not yet discovered a safe way to protect our trees from various diseases. I do not know. What I know is that my other colleagues stopped cultivating and I had to turn towards the production of eatable olives and stop producing oil. This type of production is more profitable and easier to sell than oil. And why? Because although it is organic, I have no means to prove it is. I cannot market it as organic olive oil from Paxos, because I cannot afford on my own and with the small amounts of my personal production a label and the expenses of bottling it properly. Teaming with a few other producers using the same organic methods would not do the trick, because then we would need to have our own olive oil press. Our organic olives could not be pressed and mixed with non organic ones. So we would need the money to build a modern olive oil mill, which will not "kill" the substances and taste of the olives during the process.



Up to now this is exactly what is happening in our olive oil mills. Oil gets destroyed in the process of its making and deteriorates within a month from its production. All Paxiots must be persuaded to change the cultivation and harvesting methods of their olives. They must understand that organic methods bring real money, as the demand worldwide is enormous for olive oil products of all kinds. Laboring on our olive trees only between the end of October to the end of February and then abandoning them because of the preparations for the coming tourist season, simply is not enough for a healthy olive and a good oil production.

What do I do to harvest my olives? At the end of November I hire workmen who climb each olive tree and pick the olives one by one. Hitting the branches with sticks from the ground – like they do in other parts of Greece – just won't do on Paxos, because our olive trees die. Each man picks 4-5 buckets in every 8 hours of work, which means 70 kilos of olives for 30-40 euros per day per workman. At night we gather friends at home with my home and check every olive, for its color – it must not be green and it should have the same color all over – and for its health – it must not have holes or look sick – and we cut the stem, because it alters the olive's taste inside the jar. We then take all the perfect olives and put them in jars with salt water. In about 45 days they are ready.



This year the olives were larger because of the rain during the summer. I usually hire one to two workmen for 20-25 days of harvest. A usual production of eatable olives would amount to 1500 kilos per year. I sell my jars of olives in local restaurants and at the 2 Corfu stores with ecological products. Each year I make a lot more money with this type of production than if, I would sell the same amount of olive oil”.

Except the olive trees the Douis - family cultivate vegetables, like tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and fruit like melons and water melons. These they serve as “mezes” (snack) at a private bar they have

created for their clients at their family’s complex of rented apartments, which they manage with Babis’s brother and his wife.

Katerina takes personal care of 70 goats and 15 sheep, which live in the same farm. She visits them every morning and afternoon daily. She has her hands full feeding some of the baby goats, so Babis does the talking. “When we had just 8-9 animals, I realized that for just a bit of fresh milk and yoghurt those animals burdened the family budget by 1-1,5 million drachma (3000-4500 euros). So we decided to sell them. But Katerina was very attached to them and could not live without them. So we decided to buy them back and to increase them, so as to create a viable business out of their raising. I started collecting the best breeds of goat I could find in my travels through Greece. I once bought from the mainland a mail goat for 800 euro. We now have mainly 3 breeds, one Indian and two German. During summer and winter, when the animals are pregnant, they need to walk more and eat fresh weed. So we hire a shepherd to be with them. Otherwise they are looked after by my wife’.

Douis family sell meat especially in Easter time and during summer and fall they mainly sell fresh cheese, which Katerina makes in the old Greek traditional way. Katerina proudly explains that Paxos goats and their dairy products are unique in quality as they live close to the sea. Saltiness protects them from certain types of animal fever. “In other parts of Greece animals stop producing milk in the fall. Not here! Our animals eat and live well, so they are rich in milk” she boasts.

She also makes fresh white cheese and oil cheese, which is fresh cheese remaining in oil for 2-3 months. It becomes harder and especially tasty. The family sells this cheese for 20 euro per kilo and milk for 10 euro per kilo. “I know it is expensive but it is also absolutely pure, of excellent taste and quality. I cannot afford to sell for less” Babis explains. They also have hens and raise mainly roosters. They are fed solely on corn, grain and stale bread. When a rooster reaches 3-4 kilos of weight, it is killed, cleaned and ready to sell for 10 per kilo of meat.



“To work the land and with the animals, one needs to truly love being a farmer. If myself or Katerina hesitated, we would have not been able to continue. I would very much like to enter one of those projects for modern stock farming. I would like to organize my farm better and built a proper cheese factory for my wife, who prepares cheese in our home kitchen. I know of relevant EEC programs but prefecture authorities simply do not function. I have visited the Agriculture Office of Corfu Province for information about procedure to get a proper license issued, only to hit on brick walls of ignorance and indifference. However I believe that the time is coming close, when the Paxiots will be forced to return to working their land. Our island is small. It offers nothing else but natural beauty. Tourists are demanding nowadays. They get bored of lying in



the sun. And there are other parts in the world with a hot sun and a blue sea. Locals' income from tourism diminishes with the years. We have to search for new ways to lure tourists to Paxos and ways to keep them here longer. Our walking paths must have a leading role in this effort. When new farm roads are created to help the farmers, it is wrong to use enormous graders to do the job. Farm tracks should be opened by man labor. And every time a dry stone wall falls to the ground, we should mend it. We could even broaden the foot paths with dry stone walls at both sides by rebuilding those walls". And Babis concludes: "I am against creating highways in small places like ours. One cannot wear a large ring on a small finger".

### Sia Keikidi and Babis Tranakas

They are a young, beautiful couple with a 12 years old son and a new baby daughter. Babis works at his family's oil mill during the winter and does odd jobs usually in construction during the summer months. Sia renovated an old shop belonging to her family very close to the main Gaios square with the help of her husband and is now a proud shopkeeper of one of the most beautiful little stores in Gaios. Babis creates the raw material (olives and oil) and Sia sells its products among other local products in her small shop.



**The local products store** opened in 2001. Demand

by the tourists gave the idea to the couple. They worked side by side to renovate and decorate it, choose the colors, make the shelves, set up the products in the right way etc. "I wanted everything in the store to have a strong relation to the store's purpose. Since olive oil is the main local product, I tried to build the store's character around it. I chose carefully the pottery, where I stock the oil. It is hand made and hand painted; the olive wood candle sticks, the honey jars, the Antipaxos wine bottles, the practical -for table and kitchen use- oil bottles, everything should smell and taste of Paxos.



My suppliers are exclusive. They sell only to me and I take it to Corfu and bottle it. My suppliers are not professional farmers. They cannot legally sell their products to me. I risk facing all kinds of tax problems by buying from them, knowingly that there are no professional producers on the island. I take full responsibility for choosing the material I buy from those local producers. I personally check it before it is taken to Corfu to be put in attractive jars, bottles or cans. I refuse to sell lower quality olive oil to my customers. Last year when Babis did not do first class quality oil, I had no oil in the shop. I never sell the bottles I keep at the shop's window. Their quality becomes poor after a few days in the hot Paxos sun.

My ambition is that everything exiting my store in the hands of a customer is good for one's health, pure and tasty. By maintaining high standards I have regular customers especially among the foreign permanent residents on the island. They are mainly those who buy their olive oil, their marmalades and honey from my store.

The marmalades are prepared by my mother and myself from local fruit according to the



usually make 20 to 30 jars out of each type of fruit. This time of the year we make marmalades and sweets out of grapes and quince.

Same thing happens with soap. My mother in law usually prepares local soap as it is a complicated recipe, needing a lot of experience. We need approximately 3 days to produce a few bars of local soap. The most difficult part of the whole procedure is to keep a large fire going on for many hours. With two small children, a husband, a household and a shop to keep, I would not be able to do all these things without the help of

my mother and mother in law. Our next soap production will be in April. My mother in law also prepares vinegar from rose petals. It is also a very special recipe and we only make a few bottles. Financially Sia is not pleased with what she earns from the store. "Tourist season is too small. I truly make some profit during 20 days in August. During the rest of the months I just earn my day's wage. By the end of the day that money is gone. I cannot save. The customers I count on are passers by and foreign house owners. Locals do not need to buy from me because they already have their good quality oil and they make marmalades etc at home".



When I asked whether she had plans for the future for marketing her products she smiled with a spark in her eye. "I have a lot of ideas, she said. I would like to enlarge the shop and create proper preparatory facilities so I will not have to take local oil, wine, marmalades, soap etc to Corfu. And I need to make every part of the chain from production to putting the staff on my store's shelves absolutely legal. I need my own label for the products my family produces. My products deserve a better price and a more general recognition in the market.

This summer especially I noticed many wine bottles with a label marked "Antipaxos wine" on the shelves of local super markets. When I tried one, it was undrinkable. I had the same experience with an Antipaxos wine producer, who tried to persuade me to buy some of his already bottled and labeled as genuine Antipaxos wine. I refused for two reasons: first because it tasted horrible, as it was full of preservatives and second because he wanted to sell each bottle to me for 6 euro. How much higher should I sell his wine at my shop? People would buy once and then never reenter my shop again.

People with such a mentality, who only care for quantity and for more money, are bad for the local market. They defame local products and finally they damage local commerce".

She would very much like to contribute and be part of a women's cooperative. "Local women could prepare all their different recipes using local raw material at common preparatory facilities and then they could sell them at a cooperative's store", Sia says. She gave me the impression that she would prefer being under the protective umbrella of a team, rather than being on her own, straggling with market laws. "Everybody on Paxos needs the extra income. Tourism is not enough any more. My family is the same. I have the store and my husband works in construction and keeps the oil mill. We consume our own products at home: cheese, meat, eggs, oil, milk, yoghurt. We do not have to buy everything from the super market and yet at the end of the day we still cannot save a single penny"!

### **Babis is eager to talk about his family's oil mill and about local olive oil production in 2006:**

"I work the mill with my father and brother. It is one of the oldest on the island. We do not use the old methods of the stone presses any more. We apply centrifugal techniques in all stages of oil production. Olives are first washed, then smashed. Then they pass through 3 different stages of massaging. Then they go through a centrifugal machine, from where olive oil comes out.

Current techniques and the way they are applied are bad for the quality of oil. Olives are heated into too high temperatures even though the centrifugal machinery manufacturers recommend a lot lower temperatures. However individual olive farmers force us to heat the olives more, so they can make more oil out of the same quantity of olives. All oil mills have been recently informed by the Agriculture Ministry to change all parts of our centrifugal machinery from

common iron into stainless steel. Most of us will comply. But it will not do much good to oil quality produced as most people's mentality remains the same. I cannot protect the farmer that brings his organically cultivated olives to my oil mill from pressing them together with others, full of chemical fertilizers or others, which have remained on the olive nets for more than 2 months and have gone bad before they are even pressed.

People who still use chemical fertilizers take their instructions by special agriculturalists.

Although they advise not to put more than 4-5 kilos of fertilizer per tree, Paxiots think: the more fertilizer I use, the larger crop I will get. So they put 15-20 kilos of fertilizer per tree especially at trees, which are particularly large and tall".

### **And what about the local oil market?**

"There are 2 or 3 oil merchants on the island. They buy oil from individual local farmers who press their olives at our mills. Most of those farmers keep their best quality oil for their own use and sell to the merchants the rest. The merchants knowing the situation, are forced to buy olive oil from other areas of Greece to mix it with local production in an effort to improve its quality. But low quality oil is like water. It is lighter so it comes to the surface and better quality oil remains at the bottom. Its taste and aroma are spoiled by the time it reaches the consumer's table. Storage conditions are also an important quality factor. Oil is really as sensitive as wine. It must be kept in a cool and shady place in very clean cans and should be changed from can to can at least 2 times a year. Last year a local farmer brought to my mill cans that had been used for car oil and asked me to put his oil production into those cans. No matter how hard I tried to persuade him that those cans could not be cleaned enough for his own oil production to be placed in them and be taken off to his family, I could not change his mind.

Some years ago my brother and I decided to start procedures for cultivating organically our olive trees, producing organic olive oil and getting a label for it. We soon realized that it would be impossible because we could not meet with all the legal and scientific terms needed, mainly because we could not keep our soil from being contaminated by fertilizers used from our neighbors. We were even prepared to ask for loans in the local bank, but how could we take so high a risk, when we were not sure if local farmers would be trusted to bring us good quality crops"?

### **How about the local olive oil cooperatives?**

They are inactive, unable to take any kind of initiative. I am a member of the Gaios cooperative for many years and in my family's oil mill since childhood and I have realized that the cooperative's board members think like they have: "their finger inside the honey jar". People have stopped trusting them but they have also stopped trusting private oil mills. I listen to the same accusations in the coffee shops every morning about how private oil mills raise prices every year. Then why haven't they supported the cooperative? On the other hand although the cooperative always had the proper installations and machinery to do what my brother and I are only dreaming of doing, they only follow in our footsteps, unable to take local production one step ahead towards the right direction in national and international marketing.

The current situation is very sad, mostly because it did not have to be this way. Our type of olive, "lianolia" (thin olive) is one of the best in the world. If people made up their minds to change cultivation methods and start behaving responsibly and with common sense, Paxos olive oil could restore its fame and find a position in the stores world wide".

His personal goals? "I would like to return to my grandfather's tradition of making olive oil. I would like to be able to take the "first oil", without heating it at all. My family owns about 600 olive trees. I could produce enough extra vergin oil in this old fashioned method, so as to gain enough profit from selling it, since I could control its price. Up to now I make about 20 to 30 kilos of that first oil, which I keep for my family and about 70 kilos of eatable olives. From the rest I choose the higher quality oil to sell through Sia's shop.

Things could be a lot better for all of though. My fellow countrymen are used to the security of tourism. But not even that is so secure any more. We have natural resources on the island, we just have to use them. Maybe we need a leader, someone with a dream in his mind and guts in his stomach to unite us all and push to the next level. Being and thinking in misery is what



terrifies me the most. I do not feel miserable going about all dirty and dusty from all the day's hard work. I don't mind that at all! It's the other kind of misery, misery in the state of one's mind, which scares me to death! That is my biggest fear and our island's larger problem"!

### **The official point of view:**

The Mayor, Spyros Bogdanos was more optimistic on the subject than I thought and made rather harsh comments after reading the above interviews and listening to what local producers had to say.

He does not believe that a real problem exists in the sectors of production and quality of local products. Paxos earth offers many different products in abundance and excellent quality. Water is no longer an issue. "Many people have started growing vegetables in quantities. Couldn't they furnish local grocery markets with their products? What is needed is coordination and marketing".

A cooperative is needed with the appropriate facilities, financial and legal aid, which could gather all local products from vegetable and fruit, to dairy, artifacts, cooking, pastry etc. Producers could sell their production legally to the cooperative, earn a legal income, pay the state the proper tax and create new job positions inside local economy.

All those who claim they cannot find proper information or that they are faced with endless bureaucracy, simply do not really want to know how to act. All information sources lie in Corfu and actual successful examples are there too. Twenty odd producers started making organic food products and selling them through a store, they had opened themselves, uniting their small private funds. Now they have a large cooperative and two stores and the demand is constantly rising. Babis Douis himself sells his olives to them.

People who say that local olive oil is of low quality are also mistaken. Our oil is not of poor quality. It deteriorates because farmers believe in quantity and not in quality. If all farmers picked olives from their healthiest trees on time and put them together with everybody else's healthy crop, then we would have an excellent quality local oil, which could be sold as Paxos oil at antagonistic prices, that producers would certainly find profitable.

For the first time in centuries Paxos has the chance to be self-reliant, depending solely on local food production. Farming and cattle breeding, some of the oldest and most basic professions worldwide can nowadays be practiced on Paxos easily and successfully and on a broader, viable scale.

A hall where local artists could also expand and practice their skills could also be created. A local cooperative could exhibit and market local art as well.

And since local oil cooperatives are inactive and motionless, the Municipal Development Company should take the responsibility to organize and realize the whole effort. Current Municipal authority considers this project in its top five most urgent priorities".

### **A note from the researcher:**

During my short research I stumbled on very significant realities and strong emotions. I saw lots of honest hard work, loving and caring of the earth and the animals, lots of good taste, of ambitions and dreams, of ideas and creativity but also of fear of responsibility, of lack of team spirit, of pessimism, of simply living the way we are used to, of seeing only problems and no solutions surrounding us.

Do you recognize similarities in your own villages? Are we hopeless? Are your villages doing better? Do you also have resources but no facilities? Do you also have ideas but no leaders to see them through?

Maybe yours is a totally different problem!

Whatever the case might be, we all have love for and knowledge of our small homelands. Those two are basis enough for all of us to move towards the right direction of a viable local economy, even a prosperous one, without having to compromise local environment and culture.