

## Hopeland – an educational eco-community in a Greek rural area

### SUMMARY

Founded in 2009 in Argolida, northeast Peloponnese, Hopeland (el: Ελπιδοχώρι) is an innovative eco-community which serves as a hub for educational activities and volunteering. The initiative combines natural building, permaculture, mindfulness and community-led projects to create immersive learning experiences for people of all ages. Since 2017, Hopeland has hosted 28 Erasmus+ projects and welcomed hundreds of volunteer.



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### CONTEXT

The northeast Peloponnese is a predominantly rural area characterised by small settlements, agricultural land and limited local services. The region faces several challenges: increasing water shortage and recurrent droughts, underpopulation and youth outmigration.

These issues create multiple need: more sustainable approaches, opportunities and skills. The area also needs stronger community ties and more diversified, resilient forms of rural development. Hopeland responds to these needs by promoting a way of life based on permaculture principles.

**Themes:** Education and training, nature and environment, land use

**Country:** Greece

**Organisation:**

> Hopeland (el: Ελπιδοχώρι), non-governmental / civil society organisation

**Start & end date:** 07/2009 - Ongoing

**Budget:** EUR 150 000 per year

**Funding sources:**

> European Solidarity Corps

> Erasmus+

> Private donations

**Website:** <http://elpidohori.gr/>

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### OBJECTIVES

- > Create a space where people can explore, create and learn from each other and from nature;
- > Promote sustainability, accountability and synergy as core values, guiding eco-conscious practices, committed ownership and diverse perspectives;
- > Welcome a diverse community of young people, educators, volunteers and local farmers to foster personal, social and environmental growth;
- > Build capacity and sustain long-term community support through engagement of residents, volunteers and partners;
- > Provide immersive learning experiences in eco-building, permaculture and community-led initiatives to strengthen skills, creativity and environmental literacy;
- > Offer a replicable model for rural education and eco-community development that inspires social cohesion, innovation and sustainable rural practices.



## ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

- > **Founding purpose and early programmes** (2009-2016): Hopeland was founded in 2009 by family consultant Erato Hatzimihalaki to **create a space where parents and children could live close to nature while engaging in educational activities**. The initiative focused on fostering harmony, positive relationships, equality, mutual respect and environmental awareness through early programmes and community-based learning.
- > **Infrastructure building and experiential learning** (2017-2024): from 2017, Hopeland expanded its activities through Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, offering experiential learning on personal development, community and environmental topics.
- > **Long-term residents model** (2025-ongoing): since 2025, Hopeland has been developing a model of long-term community presence, supporting young people in **experiencing communal living while contributing to land restoration and cultivation**.



## RESULTS

- > Over **100 initiatives implemented**, engaging **over 2 500 visitors** from Greece and abroad through non-formal and lifelong learning activities.
- > Activities carried out in construction, regenerative farming, personal development, and experimentation with natural building and farming techniques.
- > Hosting of **19 volunteer teams** and delivery of **28 Erasmus+ learning activities**, alongside eco-building and permaculture workshops open to the local community.
- > Since 2025, **five young residents have lived and worked on site**, contributing to the revitalisation of the local area.
- > Creation of **functional, low-impact infrastructure and regeneration** of previously underused land.
- > Workshops and volunteering programmes equipped hundreds of participants with practical skills in eco-construction, organic cultivation and collaborative living, while strengthening environmental and community responsibility.
- > Activities supported **connections between new volunteers and existing rural communities**, contributing to broader community engagement.



## SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > The initiative has been sustained by deliberately creating **space for experimentation and risk-taking**, both in community life and in land cultivation. It relies on **trial and error** paired with **accountability and regular reflection**, reviewing what works, what does not and what should be adapted.
- > The site and relationships are treated as a **shared learning space** where participants test alternatives to conventional ways of living, working and growing food.
- > Key challenges include **limited funding**, the time needed to build trust, and the emotional effort of accepting failure as part of learning. These constraints have also encouraged **creative problem-solving and low-cost, low-impact ways of organising and cultivating**.
- > Financial sustainability is supported through **shared resources**, modest infrastructure and diversified small-scale income, while environmental sustainability is pursued through practices that support **soil health and biodiversity**.
- > The approach can be transferred because it is **based on principles** (safe experimentation, peer learning, ecological awareness) **rather than fixed techniques**, allowing adaptation to local conditions.
- > A core lesson is that **long-term change depends on trust, patience** and a collective willingness to test and adjust together.



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