

Sarantaporo community network: a social innovation to connect people

Back in 2010, a young group of people in Sarantaporo (central Greece, near the Olympus mountain) decided to take action to develop connectivity in their village, where telecom operators had found no interest and viability to invest in connectivity in this rural area. In this area, located 1-hour drive from the nearest city of Larisa, Sarantaporo.gr emerged as a social innovation which built on collective knowledge to provide a resilient Internet network.

Providing high-speed Internet to remote mountain villages

With one objective, bringing Internet access in Sarantaporo, but without any specific skills in connectivity, leaders of the initiative started to look for solutions from other regions and heard about community networks (Internet access settled and managed by and for local communities) Thanks to information found online and guidance provided by experts, the community managed to build a wireless community network for the village. A 1 Gbt wireless line was transferred from Thessaly University to Sarantaporo. The [backbone network](#) therefore relies on the nodes installed through the mountains, connecting Sarantaporo with the University network, and on the nodes installed in the village, providing Internet access to inhabitants within 1km around each node.

The University of Applied Sciences of Thessaly provides a free connectivity to the community network. The University committed to support unconnected local communities in a Memorandum of Understanding signed with Sarantaporo.gr. The internet feed average reaches 100 Mbps and maxes out at 150 Mbps – which is a very good connectivity level (in 2018, 57.2% of the total EU population had an Internet access of at least 100 Mbps but only 0.4% of households in Greece, according to the [European Commission Study on Broadband Coverage in Europe 2018](#))

Neighbouring communities witnessed the success of the initiative in Sarantaporo and got interested in community networks too. From 2010 to 2013, Sarantaporo.gr Wireless Community Network helped 15 villages in the Ellassona Province to develop Internet access on their territory. Internet is now provided to 3.500 inhabitants – a figure which can go up to 10.000 in Summer. In 2013, the group of volunteers decided to institutionalise their social innovation and created the non-profit organisation [Sarantaporo.gr](#).



Credits Sarantaporo.gr

Empowering local communities with digital skills

But what would be digital access without digital skills? Members of Sarantaporo.gr quickly realised that providing Internet access to remote villages was not enough if local communities did not have sufficient digital skills. Thus, the association decided to start organising training workshops. These sessions aimed at improving digital literacy among local communities, to learn how to use online public services in a secure way or to teach people about the protection of personal data.

The individual use of Internet is however only one dimension of the action led by Sarantaporo.gr. The initiative is not only about bringing Internet access and main skills to inhabitants of remote villages but building an operational Internet network for and by local communities by relying on their ability to learn and collectively innovate. The association therefore also organised trainings to understand deeper how the community network works, far beyond the average level of understanding of a mere

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consumer. Each new access-layer node is installed on a local resident's house. This person thus becomes "guardian" for this piece of equipment and needs to learn how to maintain it. To do so, Sarantaporo.gr organises training sessions but also created an instant messaging tool for people to exchange their problems and knowledge. This approach not only empowers end users in using and expanding connectivity but also considerably reduces maintenance costs and ensures the resilience of the community.

Improving daily life and attractivity

Credits Sarantaporo.gr



Expanding connectivity in remote mountain areas improves local communities' quality of life in many dimensions: it enables new health innovations to work and allows older people to use wireless health devices, opens up new market opportunities for farmers to promote and sell their products online, makes teleworking possible and encourages the settlement of new companies and supports students in their work.

Connectivity benefits therefore take on different dimensions, all of which contribute to bridging the digital divide, increasing equality and cohesion between territories and maintaining mountain villages' attractivity.

Resources

The total project costs amount 156.000 euros (not estimating the volunteering work). The initiative was supported by EU funds, with 92.000 euros from the EU FP7 [CONFINE project](#) (Community Networks Testbed for the Future Internet) to which Sarantaporo.gr Wireless Community Network was part of. The [2007-2013 EU FP7](#) was the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development and aimed at developing technology to improve competitiveness.

Sarantaporo.gr also received support from the Greek Free / Open Source Society, a Greek organisation promoting open technologies which donated equipment and helped in the dissemination of the initiative's results. The international organisation Internet Society also provided funding through its "Beyond the Net" programme, which helped Sarantaporo.gr to renew the equipment.

More information

For more information please visit [Sarantaporo.gr](#) or the European Commission's [webpage](#) dedicated to this initiative, which also won the 2019 European Broadband Award. For more examples of social innovation in marginalised rural areas, please visit [SIMRA](#).



Innovative aspect

Sarantaporo.gr initiative combines a tri-fold approach. It deploys and ensures the maintenance of Internet network in remote mountain villages. It trains local communities on the use of technology and the whole structure of the community network. It connects people and builds strong relationships in communities sharing the need for Internet connectivity. Sarantaporo.gr brought together people with the same problem and managed to collectively bring a solution for the well-being of 15 villages thanks to the engagement of civil society.



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