

IEF

Thank you and hello everyone – what a wonderful turn out and show of support for what I staunchly believe is an inspirational phenomenon: 3 foundations across our beloved Greek isles all working incredibly hard to support small local action groups in their fight to protect and promote awareness for the precious and treasured environment of Greece.

I can say this confidently – having morphed myself from the grassroots position of local activist on Paxos supported by the IEF, to my current position of overseeing and supporting myriad local projects as the Interim Executive Director of the IEF .

When I wrote the school programme WAAW from my home in Paxos it was part of an ongoing gut-wrenching reaction to the total absence of coordinated waste management on these islands, as well as a final outrage in response to the toxic stench of the burning mismanaged Paxos landfill - an experience sadly all too familiar to those that have lived on these islands. At the time I worried that such a programme, which aims to teach children and their communities about the implications and solutions to poor waste management, would never pass through the complex Greek bureaucracy to be infiltrated into the local schools as intended. But within the space of 6 months, with the support of the IEF, the programme was formalized into a proposal and accepted by the Greek Ministry of Education to be incorporated into their National curriculum. It has since been delivered to over 50 schools across the Ionian islands. The importance of feeling heard, supported and then facilitated to

actually mobilize this positive change in attitudes and actions that I'd intended, was so incredibly motivating... and so here I am - hoping to provide the same positive guidance and support for other local groups and all their brilliant projects across the Ionian Islands.

During the past 2 months in which I have been propelled into this new role, my overriding sense is one of pure inspired excitement and hopeful anticipation for the IEF and its future. I have met with the most passionate

and best-intentioned people all working like crazy on diverse projects that aim to make a real difference in the Ionian islands – I feel privileged that they would come to us for support and guidance with the desire to create meaningful partnerships that will help them in their endeavors to protect the environment of these precious islands. I am so looking forward, in the coming months, to seeing an energetic and impactful relaunch for the IEF.

There is so much to do: The IEF has identified a strong need and appetite for the empowerment of local environmental organisations in the Ionian Islands and as such strives to facilitate the participation of such groups in an array of capacity building activities. In fact, we are entering into the 8th cycle of our partnership with Social Dynamo in the coming weeks where, through their ‘Hosting and Empowerment’ programme, the Bodossaki Foundation is providing capacity building activities to support and strengthen these organisations all active in the field of environmental protection and sustainability. This is absolutely fundamental to the IEFs aims of facilitating the autonomy and resilience of grass roots projects to make a positive impact in their environmental endeavours.

And in just 10 days from now we will be supporting the final seminar with the independent, non-profit making environmental think tank *Green Tank* in which a series of workshops that again, have worked with small local groups, will ensure they understand how they can effectively apply for and access the 21 billion euros on offer to Greece from the EU’s Green Deal over the next 7 years - a deal that aims to make Europe the first Climate Neutral continent in the world. This is an important time to invest attention to the current global focus on our environment. Never before have governments and businesses been so exposed in their decision making processes to make sustainable choices that prioritise the environment and never before has so much capital flowed towards them in the name of this European Green Transition. And as such, never before has it been so important to support the small organisations that really do care that the vast funds of this Green Deal directly benefit the earth as opposed to fueling the desires of capitalists with far from altruistic, *green* intentions.

With all this in mind, the IEF has achieved much to be proud of in its first 2 years. The projects and groups we have supported have ranged from this focussed awareness raising and capacity building programmes, to active and impactful, on the ground projects. For example, the Mediterranean Clean Up Project this summer saw the largest amount of marine waste ever collected in Greece with nearly 8 tonnes removed from the Ionian sea by fishing trawlers. This is so impressive as an immediate positive environmental action to directly improve the health of the Ionian sea's marine ecology, but crucially the project raised awareness amongst the fishing communities about marine plastic pollution and the effect on their profession and how the professional fishers can in fact be part of the solution.

Many projects we support have a much longer term goal and vision for change. For example - supporting Iseas mapping of Posidonia meadows, or Ariana's monitoring and recording of turtle habitats, Archipelagos' research into monk seal habitats, The Ionian Dolphin Projects' tracking research - all these projects cumulatively aim to build a bank of critical biodiversity data, of which there is currently such an absence in this region, which will all serve to inform EU policy making decisions that can in turn lead to the creation of marine protected areas across the Ionian Islands – a mission that we are all striving for in a desperate bid to recover the former bountiful biodiversity of the Mediterranean.

These research based projects have also been supported by the IEF to reinforce the all important Erimitis Campaign in Corfu. Evidence of marine biodiversity and its threats will strengthen the legal case that the Corfiots based action group 'Erimiti Plous' has been preparing to be filed at the European Court of Justice in the coming weeks, with the ultimate aim of protecting the outstanding natural beauty and species habitats of Erimitis... and at the very least - showcasing an active resistance to unsustainable, unplanned developments that show a total disregard and disrespect for the unique beauty and ecosystems of the ionian islands.

The one overarching commonality in the IEFs approach has to be the engagement and participation of PEOPLE. People, right from the policy makers down to the school children, must be aware, informed, engaged,

incentivized and motivated to change their attitudes and relationships with their environment. If the IEF can play a role in planting these seeds for change across the Ionian Islands then I cannot think of a more worthwhile foundation to work hard for. And, of course, as I said at the beginning of this talk, your presence before me is the most reassuring and encouraging show of support. So thank you, sincerely.

Finally, I would like to say a huge thank you to Ben and Jade – watching them in action over the last months has been nothing short of inspirational. I can assure you that they have the future health and sustainability of our beloved Greece at the very root of all that they do. And they do it with such zeal and determination. I am so thrilled to be part of their team.

Thank you all, enjoy your evening and I hope to speak to as many of you as I can!