



• Creativity • Collaboration • Continuity • Community

## IN THIS ISSUE:

### FEATURE STORY:

**VILLAGES ON THE RISE: NEW EMERGING COMMUNITIES** [Page 1](#)

### LET'S FOCUS:

**THE FIRST "PERMACULTURE CARAVAN"** [Page 2](#)

**UPCOMING EVENTS** [Page 2](#)

**GREEN RESOURCES** [Page 3](#)

### LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS:

► **THE ART AND SCIENCE OF BAKING YOUR OWN BREAD** [Page 3](#)

**VILLAGES ON THE RISE**

► **GHALBOUN: HIKING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT** [Page 4](#)

► **SAIDOUN: ENGLISH COURSES TO EMPOWER LOCALS** [Page 5](#)

**PHOTO OF THE MONTH** [Page 5](#)

## FEATURE STORY

### VILLAGES ON THE RISE: MODELS FOR NEW EMERGING COMMUNITIES

Looking back over a little more than a year of sharing with new friends and old ones, we observed a number of interesting patterns. By combining our efforts, we saw the first batch of "home-grown" **permacultivators** get their wings this year when we organized the first **Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC) course** in Lebanon.

One definition of permaculture is that it is revolution disguised as gardening. Like any revolution, it starts with a single individual, similar to the "one straw" that **Masanobu Fukuoka** talks about. This could be a dreamer leaving the city and its artifices behind to swim upstream back to the countryside, or an environmentally-conscious activist initiating a waste sorting plan for his residential building, or a full-time employee running a home-made natural peanut butter business after work hours.

It is only natural that many of those heroes have started to feel the call to work on a grander scale and put their new skills and knowledge into practice. In doing so, they are seeking a simpler way of life and a closer connection to nature. Permacultivators are designers, and what they need to design are "villages". Our cities' structure does not instill a sense of community in us; they have proven to be unsustainable and they are definitely not the ideal social models we would want our future generations to live in.

Villages have centers, areas where people of different ages and backgrounds can come together and interact. This is where community life springs and thrives. A village can stand on its own, several villages close to each other can make a town, and even evolve into a new type of city. A village can even exist within an asphalt city; it is wherever a community exists.

We are lucky to even still have villages we can enjoy and learn from. Sadly, that is no longer the case for other parts of the world. A recent article described how a Swiss project was designed to encourage villagers to interact with each other. The project encouraged them to put stickers on their mailbox to indicate the goods they're willing to lend to their neighbors. The reason behind that project is the erosion of community life; "neighbors used to simply knock on a door to ask to borrow something, but now they're too engrossed in their smartphone screen to even know who lives next door." (to read the full article go to [www.springwise.com/neighborhood-mailbox-stickers-communities-display-items-share/](http://www.springwise.com/neighborhood-mailbox-stickers-communities-display-items-share/))

This issue of L.E.T.S. Lebanon is dedicated to villages, old and new, in cityscapes or the countryside, and to the people who make them up.



*Neighborhood mailbox stickers in Switzerland*





## LET'S FOCUS

### GREECE STARTS THE FIRST "PERMACULTURE CARAVAN"

*Thanks to Joey El Khoury from the SOILS community, we've met wonderful people in Greece who are promoting permaculture there. This year Jenny Gkiougki, one of our new friends, organized the first ever "Permaculture Caravan" in Greece and was happy to share her experience with us.*

Greece's population shows high concentrations in big urban environments - Athens alone is home to more than 50% of the country's residents. So the recent trend for city people to migrate back into the rural areas is a hopeful sign on the one hand, but it is wrought with a multitude of problems on the other. These people realise the need to move out of the cities, and strive to achieve different levels of self-sufficiency and sustainability; but they are lacking so many essential resources to achieve it - from money, to land as well as knowledge.

It was with this in mind that the idea of a 'Permaculture Caravan' came to me and, with the aid of the sprouting eco-community of **Elpidohori (Hopeland)**, **Peter Cow** (a perma-tutor) and **Thyoni** (Probiotic Effective Microorganisms importer and producer), it became a reality.

For a little over a month, between **May and July 2014**, I roamed around Greece with Peter, spreading the word on sustainable living and self-sufficiency via alternative agriculture techniques that don't rely on fossil fuels and chemicals. We passed through a very diverse set of places and gave talks and day-long workshops in cultural centers, small farms, an urban rooftop, social cooperative enterprises, grassroots operated social spaces, the oldest and most successful organic producers co-op, and a branch of the biggest seed savers network of Greece. We also reclaimed an ex-army barracks and turned it into allotments.

The point of this was to show that no matter where you live, what your surrounding conditions are, and irrespective of how many people you have with you, permaculture and sustainable living are applicable and real, reconnecting people to techniques their grandparents used, combined with the latest technological advancements.

The caravan campaign was picked up and reported on by some alternative media, and we are glad to say that it stirred up some commotion and got many people interested in using permaculture in their daily lives - whether it is about cultivating their land, building their home, or creating a community. At present there is interest in promoting these ideas as scaled up agricultural projects - something that could really turn the tables for the whole country.

The success of this endeavor makes us think that it should be repeated, and there is even talk of expanding it outside the borders of Greece and spreading into the whole of the eastern Mediterranean as we have many things in common in terms of climate, culture and history.

For more information on the caravan, its schedule and the organisations that participated, visit the Facebook event page: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1479533875614667/?source=1> Or go to <http://www.elpidohori.gr/index.php/en.html>

If you are interested in participating in the organisation of next year's caravan please contact me at [kikkerjen@gmail.com](mailto:kikkerjen@gmail.com)

Shared by Jenny Gkiougki



► [back to contents](#)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### "DISCOVER SOUR UNDERWATER HERITAGE" EXHIBITION, DEBATE AND DIVING SESSION



**SEPTEMBER 20, 2014**  
3:30 a.m. - 7:30 p.m.  
Islamic University

Presenting archaeological discoveries and future explorations

**SEPTEMBER 21, 2014**  
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.  
Diving expedition

[https://www.facebook.com/events/303215543192651/?ref=br\\_tf](https://www.facebook.com/events/303215543192651/?ref=br_tf)

### "BEIRUT YOGA FESTIVAL" FULL DAY EVENT/WORKSHOP



**SEPTEMBER 20, 2014**  
7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Pleine Nature - Mansourieh

Full day of yoga practice and meditation by experienced Lebanese yoga teachers

<https://www.facebook.com/beirutyogafestival2014/timeline>  
<http://beirutyogafestival.com/>

### "CALL TO ACTION FOR SEED, FOOD, AND EARTH DEMOCRACY"



**SEPTEMBER 20 - OCTOBER 20, 2014**

Worldwide - Online

Spread the word and plan your own local action for alternative economic and agricultural models

[https://www.facebook.com/events/512401492126208/?ref=2&ref\\_dashboard\\_filter=upcoming](https://www.facebook.com/events/512401492126208/?ref=2&ref_dashboard_filter=upcoming)

► [back to contents](#)





## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### THE ART AND SCIENCE OF BAKING YOUR OWN BREAD

**Samir Hatem** is a relative newcomer among our friends at **Souk el Tayeb** where he sells his bread every Saturday. As an agricultural engineer, Samir knows well the value of good nutrition. He bakes his bread at home, patiently and passionately working on perfecting his art.

In Lebanon, we describe a really glum person as "someone who won't smile, not even at the sight of a hot loaf of bread" (ما بيضحك للريغيف الساخن). Just saying that is enough to put a smile on most people's faces as their mind immediately evokes the sight, touch, smell and taste of fresh bread. This sensual pleasure is probably the main reason why Samir started baking his own bread. Another reason, of course, is that in home-baked bread, you know exactly what you're eating and how healthy it is.

It goes without saying that the quality of the ingredients you use in bread is crucial. But going beyond this, and probably the reason why bakers have started producing lower quality bread, is the fact that the process itself has been abused at its various stages: kneading, bulk fermentation, proofing and baking. Resorting to "shortcuts" in baking has led to the use of more additives and intensive mixing machines that over oxidize dough and destroy beta-carotenes, the pigments that give good "white" bread its creamy color. Such shortcuts considerably reduced or even eliminated the bulk fermentation step, increasing the development of the bread's volume at the expense of its flavor. This is what earned white bread its bad reputation. Today's trends have placed whole-wheat bread as the item of choice. While it is true that a fair amount of fibers is essential for health and flavor, it is worth noting that "white" bread prepared the proper way also has its place on our dinner table. There is a lot of talk about consumer awareness these days, and this could lead us to something more important: producer awareness.

Apart from the sheer sensual pleasure of working with dough, it makes a lot of sense to understand the artisanal process involved in baking bread. For the first loaf he ever baked, Samir spontaneously picked the recipe on the back of a flour bag and simply followed the steps conscientiously. Sure, this can work, but it will still be missing something. The recipe for bread is simple: it just requires flour, water, salt and a raising agent such as yeast or sourdough. However, the process requires technique and a fair amount of science. Using the same ingredients could produce a range of divergent products, just by varying their proportions and the processing steps. Baking is really an art when you come down to it, and like art, it requires dedication and perseverance. But Samir was hooked. It took him a fair amount of research and experimentation to start really understanding bread. In that time he often had questionable results. His friends and family served as "test subjects" and they were very supportive. Finally, they gave him the confidence and encouragement he needed to take baking seriously. Two years ago he enrolled for a baking course in France and did an internship there. That was a real quantum leap for him. He was baking!

Samir acquired a professional oven and set out to improve his personal interpretations of classical recipes. The breads that he currently makes can be divided into 2 broad categories: lean bread made from the basic ingredients, and rich bread in which you can incorporate milk, butter, yoghurt, canola oil, etc. His lean breads come in 2 varieties: the ones leavened by commercial yeast, and those leavened by sourdough, a co-culture of wild yeast and lactic acid bacteria.

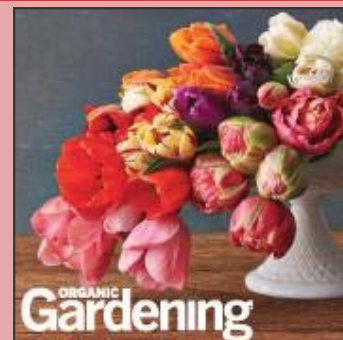
Baking is a continuous work in progress, but it is definitely an enjoyable one. If you're thinking of giving it a try, do not hesitate. Knowing and caring about bread means that a home-baker - even an amateur - can produce much higher quality bread than industrial machines.

*Reported by the Editorial Team*



### GREEN RESOURCES

#### ORGANIC GARDENING - MAGAZINE



Gardening website and magazine - Sign up for the free newsletter

<http://www.finegardening.com/>

#### LEBANON CLEAN & GREEN - WEBSITE



Conservation and recycling resources sharing platform (articles, books, photos, videos and pdfs) for individuals, NGOs, municipalities

<http://www.lebanonclean.org/>

#### BIRDS OF LEBANON AND THE MIDDLE EAST



One of the best and most up-to-date resources for photos and detailed information sheets on birds of the region

<https://www.facebook.com/birdsoflebanon>

► [back to contents](#)



## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### VILLAGE ON THE RISE: GHALBOUN HIKE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The (not-so) small village of **Ghalboun** in Mount Lebanon (above the Phoenician port city of Byblos) is on its way becoming a prized rural tourism destination. Thanks to the efforts and dedication of its people, especially younger generations, Ghalboun is preserving its natural and historical heritage, and showcasing it as an example of sustainable development. Slowly, but surely, the tide is turning as more city dwellers originally from Ghalboun and their friends from across the country are making it a point to visit the village more often and experience life in the countryside. It has also reinforced our sense of pride in Ghalboun and given us a better understanding of our identity.

This movement picked up momentum only a few years ago when the newly elected **municipal council** started pouring private resources into the village to organize festivals and fairs. The annual summer festival in particular, named "**Ghalboun aal bal**" (غليون عالبال - Ghalboun on my mind), succeeded in putting Ghalboun on the map and features local and international artists. In the beginning, private companies provided the organization, entertainment and concession stands. Then, as the activities grew in importance and renown, the "Ghalbounites" eventually became encouraged to take a more active role and get involved. The hardest part was done; now it was just a matter of replacing hired companies with locals, so we tapped in to our human capital. If you were from Ghalboun and you could cook, you would hold a concession stand during events and celebrations, if you had artistic inclinations, then you'd be an official photographer or play music or sell your artwork and crafts. Eventually, we formed committees to oversee the different aspects of events in the village.

I carry an unconditional love for my native village, its land and its soil. In fact, it is the reason why I became an agricultural engineer. So, naturally, I took charge of the "**hiking committee**" in Ghalboun. This summer our work really kicked off with the help of the municipality and young people with an outdoors spirit. Since June, we have decided to map and habilitate hiking trails around the village to highlight the natural beauty and biodiversity of the area, as well as its historical landmarks. On **the last Sunday of every month**, while the weather is good, we organize a different hike for people originally from Ghalboun and visitors. Every time we try to set a trail with a different difficulty level.

"**Ghalboun Hiking**" days start early with a gathering at the church square where the hikers can have a small snack and listen to instructions before going out "into the wild". A hike should be fun, enjoyable and even educational for participants. It should also be safe both for them and the ecosystem, so it is crucial for them to understand the importance of preserving the beauty of the landscape for future hikers and all living things. Upon returning to the square, there are always opportunities to hang around, have lunch or listen to some of the villagers playing music. Eventually, when we have completed all the local trails, we aim to reach out to other nearby villages and propose a sort of cultural/touristic collaboration. We would help them organize similar trails around their land and join forces to create a comprehensive **cultural map** of the region, complete with sites of interest, guest houses and places where visitors can purchase local produce and crafts.

What motivates us to stay the course is the municipality's continued support for sustainable development. Recently, we had the location of our natural spring rehabilitated and made more accessible to the public. We also collect rainwater in tanks, which we then use to water new trees as part of our reforestation efforts.

I feel we have really covered the **ethics of permaculture** in our hikes. We **care for the earth** by preserving plant and animal life, we **care for people** by providing them with a safe and enjoyable outdoors experience, and we give everyone their **fair share** by having as many "Ghalbounites" as possible participating and benefiting from the event.

**The next hike is scheduled for September 28, 2014. To stay informed about our hikes and future activities, like our page:** <https://www.facebook.com/GhalbounVillage>

*Shared by Tony Chahine*





## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### VILLAGE ON THE RISE: SAIDOUN EMPOWERS LOCALS WITH ENGLISH COURSES

I am really excited to have witnessed so much activity in my native village of **Saidoun** in the Jezzine caza (South Lebanon) over the past year. The old public school that had stood abandoned for years after most families left the village to seek opportunities in the cities now has a new lease on life. In May this year, the school hosted the first **Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC) course** in the country, organized by **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon**. Only one month later, I succeeded in introducing **English language sessions** under the supervision of the **ALLCih (American Lebanese Language Center international House)**.

Thanks to the **Saidoun municipality**, we successfully rehabilitated an entire floor of the building and equipped it with high-tech teaching equipment. The municipality also offered financial support for participants from the village. The **Union of Municipalities of Jezzine** secured transportation for students in the caza. The ALLCih provided us with accredited and very capable teachers who were grateful for the chance to spend time in the countryside and contribute to building capacity for locals. We welcomed more than **55 students** between the ages of 8 and 62 years old from different villages of the Jezzine caza for the first courses session. We just completed the second session and will soon start a third with new and returning students.

What motivated me to start these sessions in Saidoun was the situation of many students from the region. When I worked at the ALLCih between Beirut and Saida, I had noticed that the English language skills of most students who apply to universities do not qualify them to enroll in major universities with English as the main language of instruction. They are therefore forced to dedicate a whole year to improving their English. In parallel, more and more young people are becoming aware that fluency in English can help them be more competent in their jobs and greatly increases their professional chances through knowledge and research. In cities most people speak English quite well, however in rural areas English is not very common and learning it can be challenging. But it can be a crucial asset in social and economic development. For this reason, I decided to put my experience to use in organizing English courses in Saidoun for residents of my native village and neighboring ones who often find difficulty to get to the nearest ALLCih center in Saida to learn English. This way I could provide quality learning for them and help them build their capacities locally.

I cannot express my joy on the first day of courses when I saw the school buzzing with life again. Children and older students alike really enjoyed the interactive and dynamic teaching style of the ALLCih teachers. At 62 years old, *Jeanette* - our senior student - was excited about learning English so she could communicate better with her relatives in Australia via Skype.

For now our teachers come from the ALLCih team in Beirut and Saida, but some locals have expressed their interest in earning their teaching diploma.

*Shared by Sylvana Khawand*

#### GET INVOLVED- - - - -

In addition to English, we will soon be offering other courses based on demand and villagers' needs. We have already arranged computer and social media sessions, and we are looking for instructors to teach music, dance, photography and other classes to help locals learn new skills close to their area of residence. I hope the school building will eventually be turned into a community and activity center.

If you wish to share a skill or conduct a workshop on weekends, I'd love to hear from you. Please email me at: [sylvanak@allcs.edu.lb](mailto:sylvanak@allcs.edu.lb)



*Before and after: The Saidoun school's amazing makeover and new lease on life.*



## PHOTO OF THE MONTH

You sent us your submissions and you voted for your favorites. Here it is, the PHOTO OF THE MONTH:  
To send us your photos, email us on [contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com](mailto:contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com)



*Rudbeckias (coneflowers or black-eyed-susans)*

*"Taken at one of the most beautiful gardens I've ever had the pleasure of experiencing; Claude Monet's garden in Giverny." (France)*  
Photo by George Debs

► [back to contents](#)

## GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED


### Do you enjoy reading this newsletter?


Send us your feedback and suggestions, share your news, photos, tips or thoughts, or find out more.


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Heading photo courtesy of Saad Robert Saad

## A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

**"I just think cities are unnatural, basically. I know there are people who live happily in them, and I have cities that I love, too. But it's a disaster that we have moved so far from nature."**



**—Alice Walker**

► [back to contents](#)

