



Greece is in the news often these days - threats of defaulting on loans from the European Commission, unrest in the streets, poverty spreading. AND there is another kind of news coming out of Greece - citizens working and talking with one another to solve their own problems. This month we are pleased to offer a circle tale that represents the work of four colleagues from Greece: Maria Bakari, Maria Scordialos, Sarah Whiteley, and Vanessa Reid. This circle tale (written by Maria Bakari) and its postscript serve as a powerful reminder that to enrich our understanding of any situation we must engage local people.

These four women are friends from our international Art of Hosting work and have worked to establish Axladitsa (<http://axladitsa.org>), a farm and place of learning, inquiry, and retreat in Pelion, Greece.

Circle Tale, January 2012 The Athenian Circle

*"Να αξιοποιείς το ελάχιστο για να του αποσπάζ τα μέγιστα,
είναι το πιο δύσκολο και το πιο Ελληνικό μυστικό."
~Οδυσσέας Ελύτης, Τα Μικρά Έψιλον
"To utilize the least so that you can gain the most,
this is the harder and the most Hellenic secret."
~Odysseas Elytis, The Little Epsilons*

Life's ride is fast and curvy these days. Time is more and less... condensed, embracing seasons and years in the length of one week. This is the feeling in this corner of the word, commonly referred to as "the cradle of Democracy": Greece ~ Ελλάδα. And most definitely, or at least as definitely as can be, that weird sense of truth in our bones that this time is kairos.

We three, Maria (Bakari), Sarah (Whiteley) and Maria (Scordialos) are offering this story to you while being in two different areas in Greece: Axladitsa, in southern Pelion and Rhodes, an island in the SE edge of the Aegean. The turbulence and cracks of the old towards the new paradigm are opening the entrance to the new (yet still pretty much unknown) future of this country, Europe, and the World. Yet, invisibly we are holding this process in the richness of a diverse weave, unpredictable, surprising and oh so fascinating. All possibilities are there: crying and smiling.

The Athenian circle was a gathering that emerged in synchronicity, desire, beauty and love. It was in our conversations for some time as we followed, participated, attended, and wove ourselves through the great uprising of the Greek people in Syntagma (Constitution) Square, with the whole of Greece demanding a fair system, a humane society. A spiral of developments occurred with varied speed, social resistance, loud voices for justice and sometimes traumatic incidences of violence. There was a confrontation of anger and frustration in the midst of helplessness and fear. We all were there in the scene of a huge, unmanageable public debt and the fierceness of a multileveled crisis.

Greece is in the sharpest edge of her modern History.

Kairos blessed and we all gathered in Athens in the second weekend of October 2011. Our intention was to meet with friends: friends, family and colleagues... meet each other and unlock our hearts: *"What do we see happening in our Land? How do we feel? What do we practice? What can we do together? What do we see possible?"*

Friends responded to the invitation with anticipation... like they were longing for this gathering. Some of them we had never met before. They were people from the professional networks, involved in process or systemic change work that others have referred to as "good contacts" This was the perfect chance to connect... and they all responded with a big yes—like they have long been waiting for this. We organized the circle organically... the Greek way... in the warmth and hospitality of the Scordialos Family house in

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Nea Smyrni... with food and drinks, “meze” dishes (offered by the gorgeous Scordialos sisters) being a part, like they always are in our social gatherings. Bringing in taste, deliciousness and the art of cooking and serving, we tapped into the meaning and essence of the ancient “symposium”. As we started, we felt the ancestors present. Socrates was smiling from above.

We followed the plain way: simplicity, spontaneity, authenticity, and emergence. The holding was strongly there by all of us in the ground. We used the talking piece—a marvelous citrine stone brought to the meeting by a friend. (Sevi brought it because it helps clarity and flow.) Maria S. welcomed us to the space, the family home and spoke to the centre... the need and purpose. She introduced the talking piece and invited us to speak from the heart. We were 22 in number. The space felt light & focused. We were all present in our care and love for the Land and our own selves.

As the stone started to travel, hearts opened. Language found the words. We spoke of the edge, the war that we felt we are in, the need for the “the art of war”, the depth of our weapons being our heritage, culture and spirit. We spoke of compassion and passion for our own practices. We spoke of the powerlessness and helplessness widely felt in the country. We remember the preciousness and quality of this kind of space and we are moved and delighted to be here now. We empowered each other and began to get glimpses of the system change initiatives that are called forth. We felt the resonance that the process enables.

We all witnessed a new possibility.

Circle Tale Postscript

The groundbreaking work done at the meeting above set in place this follow-up conversation from the “cradle of civilization”.

On December 17, 2011, thirty Greeks of all ages and backgrounds came together to **imagine the Greece we wish to create and leave to future generations**. It was a powerful day of participatory conversation, collective visioning and practical, hands-on learning. Out of that day came a desire to **widen the field of participation** and scope of skills, create new actions, learn and practice collaborative leadership.

We invite you to learn more about Maria B., Maria S., Sarah and Vanessa and the Katalysis Initiative for Systemic Transformation in Greece. Visit the international Indiegogo site (<http://www.indiegogo.com/S-Initiative-Katalysis-Phase-II>) and consider helping to enable these next gatherings to happen:

1. An Art of Participatory Leadership Learning Event:

A 3-day training for up to 45 new innovators, active citizens, artists, business and community leaders and those ready to step up into new forms of leadership and innovation that are aligned with the Greek psyche and culture.

2. A Collective Conversation in the Commons/ Agora event (Αγορά):

An art-based, conversational marketplace to bring together 200-300 people in a collective conversation for networking and connecting to see a bigger picture and inspiration for creating a collaborative future.

If you have a tale to tell, contact the PeerSpirit office and we'll help you share it.

*For more information on many applications of circle, visit our web site at www.peerspirit.com and subscribe to our monthly Circle Tale newsletter. Your e-mail address will **not** be shared or used by anyone other than PeerSpirit, and you can unsubscribe yourself at any time.*