

# Sarantaporo.gr Community Wireless Network

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Meet the team. See the impact. Get inspired.

Building telecommunications infrastructure  
**as a commons**



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since 2010

## Sarantaporo.gr Community Wireless Network: a short version of our story

We came together as a team in the Summer of 2010 to promote our village, Sarantaporo, Elassona municipality. To do this we started creating a website. In the process we realized that the website was unreachable by the people of our village because they did not have Internet access. In the year 2010, an entire region around our village, was living in the shadow of digital isolation. Soon we realized that this shortcoming was not just a "privilege" of our own village. Thousands of remote, rural areas across Europe and the world, half the world's population in fact, remain "unconnected" even as we speak.



We are not accustomed to passivity. We do not expect others to solve our problems. From early childhood we were a very creative companionship. Once more, driven by a creative attitude, we set forth to solve the problem of our village. For us it was not a time to despair, but an opportunity to give something back to the place of our childhood.

Looking for solutions in other communities, such as the free software realm, the hackerspaces and elsewhere, we learned about community networks. Making the most of freely shared information by online communities and guidance from people with the relevant

expertise we managed to build our own wireless community network, Sarantaporo.gr.

We build our first community network in Sarantaporo village, but news traveled at lightning speed in the area. Soon people came from neighboring villages asking our group to do the same at their villages too. During 2010 to 2013 we managed to deploy local community networks in 15 villages in our area.

We incorporated in 2013 as a non profit and since then we have been developing our infrastructure, training people in digital literacy and building and nurturing our Sarantaporo.gr local community.



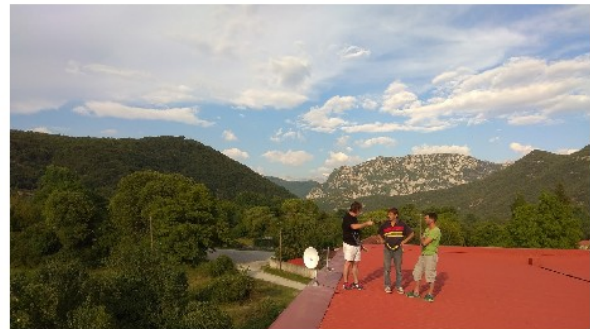


## About

Sarantaporo.gr is a community wireless network in the remote, isolated area of Sarantaporo village, central rural Greece. Since 2010 we offer open access internet connectivity to the villages of our region working with the local community to deploy the telecommunications infrastructure, provide digital literacy skills for local inhabitants and nurture and develop our community. Our intervention fills the cracks of a system, in which the market is not interested and the state is unable to ensure connectivity for the citizens of our area.

Sarantaporo.gr Community Wireless Network is part of a global trend of community networks, which are expanding both in remote areas and in cities, offering affordable, quality connectivity for those who remain unconnected. Half of the world's population remains unconnected even today, with no internet access whatsoever. Connectivity, for the other half, is defined and measured as "access to the internet via any type of device at least once in the past three months"! Things are not looking good in the global front of meaningful connectivity and the human right to access the internet, but they are getting better!

In the course of years we have witnessed our lives improve in unexpected ways. Connectivity enables the visiting doctors in our villages to prescribe medicines online. Elder people in need of medication thus perceive the wireless devices (routers) that we deploy as the enabler of this medical service. They also get to have their grandchildren visiting for longer periods, since the young ones now can enjoy internet connectivity in the village. Local farmers discover new markets for their products and raw materials, and locals communicate with friends and family abroad, which makes them feel less isolated.



Driven by our vision to revitalize our villages and create opportunities for young people to stay or return to their birthplace we are set on a mission to bridge the digital divide. Our

intervention builds on three pillars: deploy the infrastructure, develop digital literacy skills and empower people, and create a strong local community. These pillars are the stepping stones of our roadmap towards meaningful connectivity, where people are not mere “users” or consumers, but rather they are actively engaged, technology literate digital citizens who use technology to improve their lives.



## What fuels us?

### Our vision

*A lively, creative, booming and solidary Greek province, which provides its people with opportunities and motivation to stay in their birthplace, and enjoy a flourishing life in a sustainable and environmentally friendly manner*

### Our mission

*To eradicate the digital divide and provide local communities with equal opportunities for access to the digital economy and citizenship*



## Impact

In the non-profit (as also in business) world, impact is usually measured in numbers: this many users, that download speed, so many Tbytes of data traffic etc. Although we understand the necessity to use such metrics, and in fact we do use them ourselves, we prefer to measure our impact via the anecdote stories of our local community members. Eventually any numeral metric must be translated to insights, to real people's behavior, to social trends etc. So we thought "Why not listen to their stories? Why not use these story bits to draw the big picture?". This is how we, in Sarantaporo.gr Community Wireless Network, measure our impact to the local society. So, don't expect to find many numbers in this section. Be prepared to be inspired, instead!

**Health** – public healthcare is a challenge in these remote areas. The nearest health center is 30km away and the closest hospital 80km, via an uphill and downhill winding road. Thus our local community members do not enjoy the health services available to all urban dwellers. The Sarantaporo.gr Community Network (CN) helps improve things in this domain. Visiting doctors are using it to access the online medicine prescription platform providing patients with the public healthcare service they are entitled to.

Taking our intervention one step further, in 2015 we collaborated with the Thessaly University Medical School to run a local survey under the title "Web-based questionnaires: Connecting a tertiary care hospital to remote areas giving the opportunity of awareness and smoking cessation". This survey enabled the researchers to reach a wide audience from the area and eventually it led to organizing a two-day free medical examination for anyone who wished to be examined at a mobile healthcare unit.

Currently we are further examining ways to create even more services for our communities in the field of remote healthcare and active health aging.

- Digital medicine prescription
- Health-related questionnaire research
- Active health aging

**Social cohesion** – our villages are aging. For the past 30 years an ongoing population bleeding has resulted in the aging of the remaining population, since young people either move to cities or migrate abroad in search of a better life. Those staying behind crave to see their children and grandchildren. The most obvious impact of the Sarantaporo.gr CN, the one we expected to see, was the ability for the locals to learn how to use teleconferencing to keep in touch with relatives who live in the city or abroad. "I used to see my grandchildren once every two years, when they came to visit from the States. Now we drink together our morning coffee via Skype, says one "giagia" (granny) from one of the villages.

The impact we hadn't anticipated, though, is stronger. By making internet connectivity openly



available to everyone, grandchildren from the cities were not reluctant to visit their grandparents in the village anymore. Their parents could even do remote working for a few days. This led to relatives visiting more often and for longer periods. It is also the primary reason why the majority of our community network's members, the ones deploying the infrastructure, are the elder people: they are offering their grandchildren what they need, so that they are willing to visit them.

Many, perhaps the majority, of the crops and animal workers in the region are immigrants, mostly from neighboring Balkan countries. Connectivity for them means to be able to daily keep in touch with their families back home. So profound is the impact of this simple and available to most of us service that one can tell who is connected and who is not just from looking at their expressions.

In a sense, our community network overlays the human emigration and immigration flows with a digital pathway where data emigrate and immigrate, travelling from all the places around the world.

- Local elders connect with their emigrant family members
- Immigrant workers connect with their families back home



**Local economy** – agriculture and breeding are the pillars of the local economy. Small family businesses pass from parents to offsprings who are always looking for opportunities to improve their work, taking advantage of any advancement in their field. Lack of internet connectivity used to confine professionals to local markets for raw materials or machinery spare parts or when looking for customers to sell their produce. Today they use



Sarantaporo.gr CN to discover customers and resources online, to do their tax declarations and e-banking, or use webcams to monitor their farms remotely. The community network further provides an infrastructure which can be used for Internet of Things applications and services.

- e-banking, digital tax declaration
- Farmers: raw materials, spare parts, new markets
- Animal herders: remote animal monitoring
- IoT in agriculture



**Education** – the villages of our region used to have schools. Not any more. Students are being bused back and forth to the nearest town every day. When returning back to the village they used to “shut down” for their peers in the town. There was no communication between them until the next day. Sarantaporo.gr CN enables students to keep in touch with their distant peers, which leads to strengthening the friendship networks within classes. Village students are able to attend online courses, organized by their teachers, and get access to online knowledge resources for their homework.

- Students keep in touch with peers
- Online information for school homework
- Attend online classes (student who succeeded in medicine school)
- Reduce drop-out from school

**Digital citizenship** – since the Internet appeared in cities in the 90s, people living in remote, rural areas with no connectivity fell behind with even greater speed than the one caused by

their geographical isolation. Not only can they not access the public infrastructure, but since they have been further excluded from digitally engaging in society, politics and governance. Sarantaporo.gr CN not only provides internet connectivity, but also organizes digital literacy workshops to empower local communities through the use of digital technologies and the Internet.

- Participate in online consultations
- Join online communities
- Share digital resources
- Use digital public services

**Digital (local) services** – community networks are not just “gateways to the internet”. They are local infrastructure which is built by the local community to serve its digital needs. Needs that range from communicating across villages via VoIP, deploying IoT sensors (for example a connected weather station) to produce useful services, sharing their mobile phones’ digital content, live streaming local events, remote monitoring of properties or animal stock and many more. All of these services do not necessarily require internet access to function. They can be provided as local services, run by community members.

- Remote monitoring of houses for security
- Remote garden watering
- Local weather station



**Digital literacy** – this is the second pillar, along with telecommunications infrastructure, that needs to be in place in order for people to be empowered to have a meaningful connectivity.

Getting online is not just about accessing social media platforms. One needs to be aware of opportunities and threats and be knowledgeable enough to know how to make the most out of the vast digital resources, without compromising their privacy and personal security. Via workshops and training courses we strive to educate and build digital skills to our community members. These skills range from basic computer or smartphone use to advanced networking skills. The participants range from elementary school students to elders in retirement.

**Personal fulfillment** – most of all we are having a good time and feel that we are contributing to something larger than all of us! First and foremost, we are a community of people who channel their creativity in ensuring a basic human right, which is access to digital content and equal digital citizenship. By doing so we are bridging the digital divide in our area, further creating opportunities and motivation for young people to stay or return back to their birthplace. Keeping our villages alive is our vision, which fuels purpose to our intervention. We grow with our community and celebrate our achievements in unison.





## Our members



George Kleisaris is Dipl. Engineer in Production Engineering and Management from the Technical University of Crete, Greece and holder of a Master's Degree in Marketing and Communication from the Athens University of Economics and Business. He is the initiator of Sarantaporo.gr NPO and the establisher of the first networks in the area. He is a marketing expert in a large group of Greek companies. Information technologies are his great passion and a field for volunteering work for common public benefit. He is currently in charge of the technical support for operation and maintenance of Sarantaporo.gr WiFi Networks. He is responsible for the general coordination of tasks within the Sarantaporo.gr NPO.

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/gklis/>



**Achilleas Vaitsis** is co-founder and administrator of Sarantaporo.gr. He holds an engineering degree in Planning and Regional Development. He has research experience in rural space development. His role in the team is the operations management and outreach. He is the primary contact with the local community members of the rural areas concerning the deployment and expansion of the Community Network and of the services that are offered. He is one of the hands-on persons for the actual deployment of the CN nodes and the contact person of the NPO with the local communities.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1468539434>



**Vassilis Chryssos** is co-founder and administrator of Sarantaporo.gr, a social enterprise which is building a Community Wireless Network in remote, isolated villages of central Greece. Vassilis is responsible for the development of strategy proposals and ensuring the implementation of adopted strategies. As a public speaker of Sarantaporo.gr Vassilis helps grow the international network of the organization and build a wide and respectful global reputation, which has led to numerous collaborations worldwide until now, securing grant funding for the organization.

In earlier years he was very active in organizing and orchestrating multiple social, environmental and digital citizens' initiatives, initially on a grassroots level and later via organizations such as Medicines San Frontieres (MSF) Greece and Greek Free Open Source Society (GFOSS). He is an open technologies strategist, entrepreneur and an open data certified instructor by Open Data Institute, London.

He holds a BEng in production engineering and management and an MEng in production systems from the Production Engineering & Management dpt. and an MEng in quality control

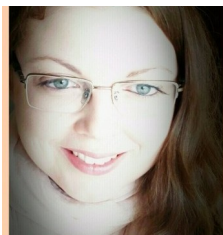
and environmental management from the Environmental Engineering dpt. of Technical University of Crete.

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/vassilischryssos> | Twitter: @vchryssos



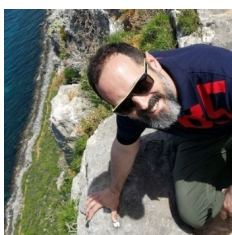
**Fotis Kleisiaris** holds an Electrical and Computer Science Engineer diploma from National Technical University of Athens, possessing also MBA-Techno Economic systems degree from NTUA & National University of Athens, with more than 19 years of experience in wireless cellular networks planning, design and optimization in Greece and Belgium. He is a founding member of “Sarantaporo.gr Non Profit Association”, contributing to the planning, implementation, growing and maintenance of the wireless networks in the area, supporting and participating in its various cultural and educational activities, while also impersonating a communication link towards local communities, press and authorities.

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**Rossie Simeonova** is Dipl. Engineer in Environmental Engineering from the Technical University of Crete, Greece, Master MSc in Investment Project Management from the University of Structural Engineering and Architecture L. Karavelov, Sofia, Bulgaria, Associate at the Sarantaporo.gr NPO. She works on various environmental projects. She is interested in building sustainable communities not only in environmental, but also in socioeconomic terms. Her role in the NPO is the search for funding opportunities, proposal writing, and participation in the organization, implementation and coordination of tasks.

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**Nikolas Kourtzis** holds a B.Sc. in Computation from UMIST in Manchester, UK, followed by 16 years of professional experience in systems/networks design and administration. He is active Mikrotik Certified Associate, Routing Engineer and Internetworking Engineer certifications and is passionate for computer networks and their huge potential in bridging distance, knowledge and society gaps. He joined Sarantaporo.gr in late 2016, contributing since in the design and administration of the technical infrastructure as well as training the members on networking principles.

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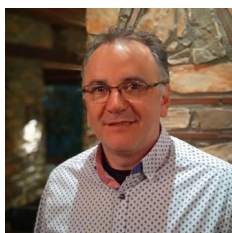
**Antonios Broumas** is a technology lawyer, an independent researcher and a digital rights activist. He studied law at the University of Athens, Greece. He holds LL.M. degrees in philosophy of law from the University of Athens and in information technology and electronic communications law from the University of Strathclyde, UK. He is a PhD candidate at the University of Westminster. His main areas of interest, research and writing focus on the interaction between law, technology and society.

Antonios currently practices law with emphasis in electronic communications, intellectual property and data protection law and administers the website [www.lawandtech.eu](http://www.lawandtech.eu)

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## Our community

Meet some of our most active community members from the villages of our Community Network!



**Sakis Katis**, from Pithio village

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sakkatis>



**Jannis Milothridis**, from Lofos village.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/jannis.milothridis>



**Giorgos Papazisis**, from Kokkinopilos village.

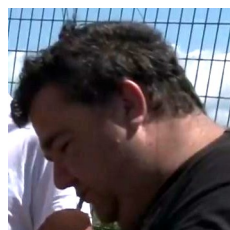
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/georgios.papazisis>





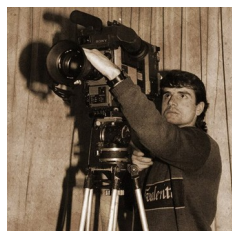
**Dimitris Dallas**, from Milea village

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/canc3r77>



**Vassilis Papakiriakos**, from Flambouro village.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1394421270>



**Dimitris Gravanis**, from Mikro Eleftherochori village


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## Contact us


If you want to contact us use one of the following ways:

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