Asterousia Case Study

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University of Crete - Natural History Museum of Crete and Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature Lead Efforts to Combat Land Degradation in Asterousia, Crete

Heraklion, Crete – February 15th, 2026 - The University of Crete - Natural History Museum of Crete (UoC-NHMC) and the Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature (HSPN) are leading the Asterousia Case Study as part of the MONALISA project. The MONALISA project under the EU Soil Mission brings together leaders from industry, policy, government, research, academia, and science across the EU and Mediterranean. Coordinated by the University of Sassari (UNISS), the project aims to identify and promote innovative, tailored solutions to prevent and reverse LDD while showcasing their socio-economic and environmental effectiveness.

Asterousia: A Region Facing Environmental Challenges

Located in southern Crete (Regional Unit of Herakleion), the Asterousia area is characterised by mountainous terrain and a blend of natural and agricultural landscapes. The area's primary land uses include rainfed crop cultivation and livestock farming (sheep and goats). Despite a warm Mediterranean climate, the high evapotranspiration rate poses significant challenges for water availability and agricultural productivity. Key drivers of LDD in Asterousia include land use intensification (primarily overgrazing), wildfires, soil erosion, and the impacts of drought and climate change.

UoC - NHMC & HSPN: Leading the Asterousia Case Study

The University of Crete - Natural History Museum of Crete (UoC – NHMC) and the Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature (HSPN) are leading the Asterousia Case Study within the MONALISA project. Their efforts focus on implementing and assessing various Nature-based Solutions (NbS) - utilising ecological restoration practices and conservation agriculture practices.

A participatory approach is central to the project, involving co-design, co-implementation, and co-assessment with local stakeholders to

ensure the impact, relevance and effectiveness of the solutions.

As part of the ongoing activities of the MONALISA project, a field visit to the Asterousia area was conducted in April 2025. Representatives from 14 MONALISA partners attended the visit during which potential solutions to reduce LDD were proposed based on the characteristics of each targeted site. The involvement of local communities and stakeholders is critical to the project's success. Therefore, knowledge was transferred from other areas of the Mediterranean Basin regarding co-design techniques and methodologies. Read more about the Asterousia Case Study.

MONALISA Consortium
Universita Degli Studi Di Sassari (UNISS); Universita Degli Studi Di Roma La Sapienza (Sapienza); Panepistimio Kritis (UoC); Centro De Investigacion Ecologica Y Aplicaciones Forestales (CREAF); Hellenic Society For The Protection Of Nature (HSPN); Ethniko Kentro Erevnas Kai Technologikis Anaptyxis (CERTH); Istituto Superiore Per La Protezione E La Ricerca Ambientale (ISPRA); Consiglio Nazionale Delle Ricerche (CNR); Institut Des Regions Arides (IRA); Centre International De Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Mediterraneennes (CIHEAM); Agricolus Agritech Spain Sl (Agricolus); Fondazione Medes (MEDES); We World-Gvc Organizzazione Non Lucrativa Di Utilita' Sociale (WeWorld); Aarhus Universitet (AU); Asociacion Adroches Para El Desarrollo Rural De La Comarca De Los Pedroches (ADROCHES); Universitatea Din Bucuresti (UniBuc); Inosens DOO Novi Sad (InoSens); Cooperativa Produttori Arborea - Societa Agricola (CoopArb); Ente Parco Nazionale Alta Murgia (AltaMurgia); Reseau Pour La Recherche Internationale Sur La Desertification (DNI); Commissariat Regional Au Developpement Agricole De Medenine (CRDA); Universitat Basel (UNIBASE); Universite De Geneve (UNIGE).

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   Responsible for crafting and executing strategies to promote a project’s activities, findings, and results to a wide range of stakeholders, from the general public to specialized experts, ensuring that project results are not just produced, but used, maximizing the project’s overall impact.

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