

**Title:**

**La Casa dei Semi / The seed's House,  
Nuoro(Sardinia, Italy)**

*Author:*

**Occupy Climate  
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FORMAS



## **La Casa dei Semi / The seed's House, Nuoro (Sardinia, Italy)**

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*People gather seeds from chickpeas's pods. Picture by La Casa dei Semi ©*

### **Where this grassroots initiative is implemented? Who are the promoters?**

In the city of Nuoro (Sardinia, Italy), tomorrow's sprouts took up residence at La Casa dei Semi della Sardegna (The Seed's House of Sardinia). The Casa dei Semi was founded by a spontaneous group of a dozen people, 'farmers' with different backgrounds and skills (agronomists, teachers, for example), united by the idea of producing food through its direct cultivation, with the aims of self-consumption and the protection of agro-biodiversity, first and foremost, but not only!

### **Who are the beneficiaries?**

Beneficiary are those people who cultivate and produce their own food directly, share information with the Casa's community on what seeds and how they cultivate, what they can observe on the ecology of growing plants, fostering relationships growing together with

plants and fruit among the network of people, of the 'seed bearers' who refer to the Casa.

### **How does this initiative engage with climate? Does it tackle mitigation, adaptation, both or other dimensions of climate change?**

The initiative takes on a further commitment: to collect as much as possible seeds of cultivars or plants (including wild ones) that are generally arid-resistant, with an eye to adaptation and cultivation techniques with limited availability of irrigation (dry farming practices), in full adaptation to the conditions often imposed by the increasingly drought-prone Mediterranean climate, exacerbated by climate change. Production for self-consumption also reduces the impacts of food losses (and wastes), first and foremost about water, and due to food wastes, as happens in agricultural supply chains of economies of scale: 'from farm to folks' vs "from farm to fork". Unlike a germplasm bank (e.g. those of institutional biodiversity centres), they come to you through people who want to have them tested and shared with the community, but they can go out to reach those in the community who ask for them. They are not locked up in a vault for the purpose of 'storing' scientific material. *"The House is an open place, where the seeds are free to stay and to go"* and represent in the meantime not only food in potency but also the seed of a commitment at different levels, for those who share them or pick them up.

### **What are the main objectives? What are the main values?**

Maurizio Fadda, agronomist, teacher and activist of the movement is one of the founders of the House<sup>1</sup>, describing the initiative, he first of all specifies how 'the main objectives of La Casa dei Semi are the creation and consolidation, seed after seed, of an informal seeding system, where who share and request seeds are farmers, informal farmers, there not reason to be an agricultural entrepreneur. *"The first level of commitment, in fact, is to physically reach the city of Nuoro and the House: seeds are not sent by post to anyone"*, Maurizio explains. One moves to Nuoro where she/he meets seeds. And people, such as Maurizio. *"But that is not enough"*. Maurizio explains that when one arrives at the Casa dei Semi for the first time - now hosted in a space he shared to the members, in Nuoro - *"the seed 'bearers' receive information on how the initiative works, and are then interviewed about the seeds they bring to the Casa: where seeds come from, what are the environmental conditions of where they were produced, who grew them, since when, if any vernacular name fruits have, what observed agro-ecological characteristics the plants and products possess"*, from the perspective of a participatory guarantee system. A name is thus given to the new seeds' resource that recalls the vernacular name of the cultivar and the name of its grower. The seeds are described in cards, with gathered information, and are tested by the House's members. *"Seeds cannot be sold: they must be socially available. Perhaps one should remunerate those who have cultivated them for 80 years' allowing them to be perpetuated to this day as 'socially available' seeds, sustainable over time and perpetual in the long run"*, Maurizio says.

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<sup>1</sup> He is more like a "growth hormone", because it support germinating not only seeds but also many other grass-roots initiatives in Sardinia [ed. note]

Thanks to the sharing information approach, agro-ecological adaptation is thus promoted, fostering a growth in a hand of plants, in the other hand of a new agri-culture. Acquired skills of those new people approaching direct cultivation, could promote an agro-ecologically aware and active food communities, as well as a food citizenship.

*”Testing seeds, through their cultivation, takes time and seasons of sowing and harvesting”* Maurizio underlines. “Seeds are political subjects in their own right because by their status of 'freedom', they belong in power to everyone. The assumption that they are free, i.e. socially available, therefore requires that they are also free from royalties. The Casa dei Semi is committed, together with its members, to making reproducible seeds available, from the community for the community. In this sense, the informal and social seed system approach underpins a food sovereignty approach”.

In the guidance given to members, our guide recommends that “seeds must be collected from the 'best' plants or fruits. Not from 1-2 seedlings or fruits, but from 20-30 if possible, to favour greater germinability. Collecting seeds from different plants of the same cultivar, furthermore, favours a greater genetic variability. This also gives greater genomic robustness”.

### **What is the timeline? Are there already visible effects?**

From a few dozen seeds in the early stages of the establishment of the initiative (2016) to today, thousands of seeds of cultivars/plants/fruits are available. Not only fruit and vegetable seeds but also and greatly cereals (resilient cultivars), and wild species that have utility in agro-ecological systems, such as trees and shrubs used for agroforestry purposes.

### **Who are the actors involved? What is their background?**

The Casa's beneficiaries are not just those who cultivate today, but also through this system in the future, for a food sovereignty that starts from sowing to prosumers. The Backgrounds of Casa's members are agricultural science and practice. On the other hand, no particular skills are required to cultivate food or renovate seeds, just a piece of garden, orchard or some pots at home, available to make plants grow and to follow the suggestions from the Casa's coaches.

**Which limits does it encounter? Are any shortcomings or critical points visible? What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?**

The Casa dei Semi is self-sustaining by returning some of the seeds that have been shared. Thus the seeds are continuously renewed and the Seeds'House does not become depopulated.

In the House, the management of seeds stocks ensures temperature and humidity control, as well as the use of conservation protocols (e.g. freezing seeds in case of insects, etc.). The opportunity for the seeds to be simultaneously in the house and in the people's land because they are grown and multiplied by the members, makes the shape of this low-cost seed system, also a high value conservation system like.

Critical issues include the continuous search for cohesion within the group of people sharing the initiative. Horizontal organisation is not always easy. At the beginning the founding group was larger than the current one. Managing a group is not always easy either: "initially, we gave ourselves as members, no rules to follow. And this has its limits over time. Another further difficulty lies mainly in distance: reaching Nuoro to pick up seeds or to bring them to the Casa may not be easy for everyone, and moving around Sardinia considering limited public transports (as well moving outside the island [editor's note]) has always been a limitation.

Last but not least, self-funding (lotteries, crowdfunding etc.) and/or the availability in general of resources (funds, facilities, places, boxes, etc.) to encourage seed exchange, implies costs that are likely to be covered essentially by the members alone, including the time to donate to the initiative.

**How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?**

The Casa dei Semi initiative, for 'geographical' reasons, has regional character (Sardinia is a Mediterranean island), but it is networked with the Italian informal movement of "Alleanza dei Custodi dei Semi" (Alliance of Seed Keepers). It represents more than a replicable initiative: as seeds, the Alleanza looks like an emergent property of other Casa dei Semi-like informal initiatives, according to the heterogeneous Italian regional contexts. The National Alliance, born in 2024, counts a dozen initiatives throughout Italy.

**Is this initiative conducive to broader changes? If yes, which?**

The House of Seeds, while remaining an informal initiative, interfaces with public and institutional ones thanks to join the Nuoro's Sas Radichinas Biodiversity Protection Committee ("sas sadichinas" is a sardinian plural word for "roots"), of which Maurizio Fadda is also currently the president. *"There are not only agronomists who make applications for CAP subsidies on behalf of professional farmers, but also those who make themselves available for the community and for their territory. The Seed's House is an initiative that is seen by institutions as a bit like a hippies movement ('seed children' better than 'flower*



*children' at this point, we might say), but it is not fanciful but political, and above all it is free. This aspect can be seen as limit by the institutions' approach to the initiative, but is our intentional choice”.*



*La Casa dei Semi's affiliates and supporters during a seed-exchange morning. Picture by La Casa dei Semi ©*

## **References**

This contribution has been realised thanks to the availability to be interviewed of Maurizio Fadda, soul and precious seed of Nuoro's grassroots initiatives.