



*Living and learning on a  
Spanish eco-farm*

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developing organisations



**Edition Editor: Alison Piasecka**

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**Cover image:** Early morning view in rural Andalucia.  
Photo: Alison Piasecka

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# Living and learning on a Spanish eco farm

Alison Piasecka



'Open Source Thinking' (OST) is our current shorthand for how better to contribute to, work with and learn from each other's thinking and experience within and across different generations, countries and cultures.

Since 2013, a group of us has been gathering together to experiment with creating temporary communities for learning and exchange to take place, somewhat within a zeitgeist that embraces the spirit of [Creative Commons](#).

We have, variously, and with [AMED](#)'s support and help, explored some of these ideas and beginnings in their journal e-Organisations and People ([e-O&P](#)), as well as at our annual OST gatherings - initially in Brighton, then twice in France, and this year, 2018, in Spain.

We have also created our own OST website, [www.opensourcethinking.org.uk](http://www.opensourcethinking.org.uk), which contains more information about our journey from there to here, and which conjectures about what might lie beyond. Our project is only too well aware of the United Nations' International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s [most recent findings](#) on the imperative to limit global warming to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels by 2030, and that this will require drastic and immediate action. So basing ourselves on a Spanish eco-farm this year has been timely.

## About this special edition of e-O&P

At this stage in the development of our thinking and practice, we thought it might be interesting to compile our responses to the 2018 OST Gathering, and share them with the wider AMED membership and others, through this experimental edition. It's experimental in the sense that we have encouraged contributions from the 2018 Gathering participants in differing forms and formats. We've invited them to share their own 'moments of significance' with a wider readership, according to their individual preferences. Each contributor has chosen their own topic and their own way of doing that. Hence, here, you can see a variety of photographs listen to a soundscape of human and natural life in an olive *finca* (Spanish farm) over a long weekend, read some poems, reflect on a self- and a recorded interview, and consider some thought-pieces concerning the experience and relevance of OST as a particular form of 21<sup>st</sup> century organising.

Most of us are not normally writers who write 'for publication'. So on this occasion, you won't find as many footnotes or references as you might expect in a 'typical' edition of e-O&P. Taking advantage of the online nature of e-O&P, however, you'll find plenty of visual images and hyperlinks.

We hope that readers will find this edition a bit of a surprise, and also, that it will prove enjoyable and engaging as we introduce you to our story of creating a temporary OST community on [an organic off-grid farm deep in the Alpujarras in Southern Spain](#).

### **Why La Burra Verde in 2018?**

The choice of OST2018 in Spain goes back to 2017. In 2017, in our second year in Tostat in France (and our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual OST gathering), two important themes began emerging in our discussions and working together. We realised that we were, as originally a group consisting mainly of members of Generation X or Y, beginning to discover younger, NetGen people in their 20s who were – gratifyingly - interested in working and being with us. And we realised that we were all, youngsters and oldsters alike, passionately concerned about environmental issues such as food, climate change, community generation and more humane forms of organising.



View from Casa Luna, one of the eco-buildings at La Burra Verde, OST2018. Photo by Alison Piasecka

Anna Fairtlough, an OST participant in all of our Gatherings so far, offered us the idea of finding a way to 'live our idea' by holding the 2018 Gathering at her sister Kate's organic, off-grid organic olive farm in Andalucia, Southern Spain. And we were immediately grabbed by the idea of being able to do that. You can read the full story of Kate's rejuvenation and creation of La Burra Verde in the Summer 2017 edition of *e-O&P*.

### What you will find in this experimental edition

We thought it would be good to start this edition with **Tim Whitworth's piece**, which is actually about the very last session of the OST2018 Gathering. Tim has also chosen to write about his immediate reactions and responses to arriving at the farm, so this seemed a good place to start from a reader's point of view. Tim's article offers more on the principles of *Ikigai*, inviting us to reflect on our very reason for 'being'. This challenge blew some of us away as it gently unpicked some of the more conventional stories we carried of ourselves.



Casa Luna, La Burra Verde, OST2018. Photo by Alison Piasecka

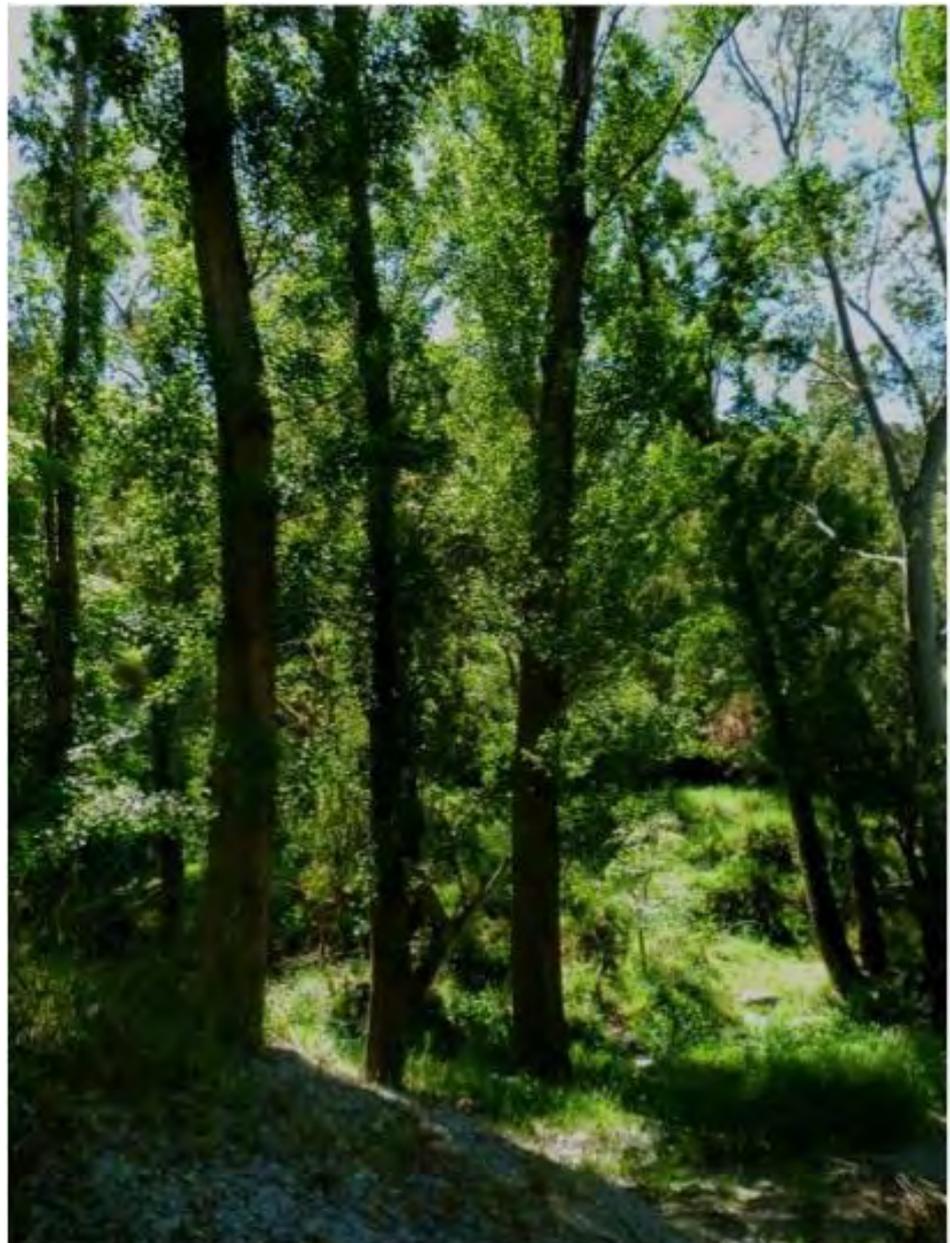
Hosting an OST Gathering is a really key activity – encompassing all the before-during-after considerations - and involves elements of planning and organising all the housekeeping essentials to enable a group to begin to be together, as well as facilitating and supporting the emergence of the programme for the Gathering, and assisting session leaders to create the conditions for exchange and learning.

**Anna Fairtlough** and **Shelagh Doonan**, in conversation with **Steve Dilworth**, expand more on the

experiences of hosting and holding OST together as a temporary community. Steve, who participated in the first Brighton Gathering, was not with us at La Burra Verde, but we all felt Steve's 'outside eye' would help Anna and Shelagh to reflect on their local hosting experiences in a rewarding and enjoyable conversation, which turned into their article.

Providing for ourselves – aiming to be as self-sufficient as possible - brought us to cooking and cleaning in ways we would never have thought of far from the ease and comfort of our modern fitted kitchens and electric-powered domestic gadgets. **Tanya Fairtlough** was an inspiring chef and organiser of our meals together, as well as being a vital and engaging new younger member of the group. Tanya's article takes you close to what she did and how well she took care of us all.

The silence of the landscape at night was, at first, disconcerting for those of us living in towns, but soon we realised that this apparent silence was full of sounds. **Phil Di Palma** came with his passion for recording and the significance of natural sounds as sensations we often fail to hear. Listen with wonder to Phil's soundscape for a sense of how complex and beautiful the sounds were when we paid them due attention ...



Light and shade in the spring forest, La Burra Verde, OST2018.  
Photo by Alison Piasecka

Sleeping in various small eco-buildings around the farm, using basic but functioning eco-toilets and washing facilities, we all experienced the long, rough, dusty paths as we walked back and forth across the farm for our meals and sessions together. We gave our voluntary garden-working back to the farm as very partial thanks for our experience of being there.



Building the new garden, La Burra Verde, OST2018. Photo by Alison Piasecka

I have never before felt so close to the planet as I did at OST2018. At the same time, the shaping of our modern urban world around convenience, speed, consumerism and the easy way in which we access our resources without effort, seemed very damning and dangerous by comparison. Dangerous to the planet and to our future as human beings. **Kate Lake's** article on parasitic plants, and subsequent reflections, expands more on this, challenging us to start with knowing where we are personally with the demands of saving the planet.

As a group, we once again found ways in which younger and older people could be together, think together, experience together, sharing passions, energies and laughter. The optimism created by such co-existence is undeniable and almost palpable. **Beth Davis** was our first younger OST member three years ago, and she has been a lynchpin in helping us reach other younger people to connect with. Her article takes us on her journey towards OST in the form of a self-interview.



Straw bale house and the vegetable garden, La Burra Verde, OST2018. Photo: Alison Piasecka

Walking was an essential daily activity: it could take 10 minutes to wind your way from one part of the farm to the other, and this gave us repeated experiences of the incredible landscape, and also some scheduling difficulties in rounding us all up for group sessions. Cue **Andy Piasecki** to lead us on a meditative walk through the farm landscape. His poem, '*Primitivo*' captures some of that experience.



Getting ready for meditative walking, La Burra Verde, OST2018. Photo by Tim Whitworth

**Rosemary Cairns** has been a key member of the OST family since before 2013, although this year she was unable to join us in Spain. As part of the core OST curating team - the team who hold the principles and emerging understanding of OST on behalf of us all – she has contributed some reflections that she wrote initially in preparation for OST2017. We think they serve as a good reminder of what we are trying to do when we host gatherings, including next year's OST2019 in Yorkshire.

Finally, **Barry Oshry's** epic poem on *Encounters with the "Other"* is hugely appreciated by **Alison Piasecka** and **Bob MacKenzie**, especially in the context of the raison d'être of [International Holocaust Day](#) and the worrying rise of nationalistic and xenophobic sentiment.

### What next? [OST 2019](#)

It feels to me that Open Source Thinking (OST) is becoming, in its own small but significant way, something that is beginning to draw more and more people - younger and older - towards it. For me, OST affords a deep, thoughtful experience that fosters communality and generosity, and creates an environment in which we can learn from each other. I am so grateful for the encouragement and support that OST offers. In a world that is increasingly fraying and divisive, we OST-ers stand for taking the time to allow reflections and connections to emerge in a way that can strengthen us to action, personally and locally. I really like that.

### Acknowledgements

In addition to **the authors** who appear here, this edition could not have come about without the invaluable contribution of many different people. So many, in fact, that it would be difficult to name them all personally. However, we cannot let the vital backroom contribution of **David McAra** pass unrecognised. As he has been doing on AMED's behalf for many years, David has patiently and expertly fielded all the pre-formatted versions of individual articles with which guest editors bombard him towards the end of any particular publication cycle, and burns quantities of midnight oil in creating the particular aesthetic form for which e-O&P is noted. As a member of the e-O&P editorial board, along with **Bob MacKenzie**, he has also been a cornerstone of AMED's publishing enterprises for well over a decade.

The AMED editorial support team of **Linda Williams** and **Ned Seabrook** have also played their largely unseen part, as have all the participants in our various **OST** and **AMED Writers' Group** Gatherings and exchanges so far. To everyone who has contributed wittingly or unwittingly to our project, we offer our grateful acknowledgements, and invite your continuing participation. Watch this space for more details.

### About Alison

Alison has worked in organisational development and learning for thirty years. Now a passionate gardener who enjoys OST as a way of bringing people together to share with, support and develop themselves and others to facilitate change, starting with the ripples we can all make.

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# A note about AMED



AMED stands for the Association for Management Education and Development, [www.amed.org.uk](http://www.amed.org.uk). We are a long-established membership organisation and educational charity devoted to developing people and organisations.

Our purpose is to serve as a forum for people who want to share, learn and experiment, and find support, encouragement, and innovative ways of communicating. Our conversations are open, constructive, and facilitated.

Through AMED, we strive to benefit our members and the wider society. Exclusive Member benefits include excellent professional indemnity cover at a significant discount, free copies of the quarterly journal *e-O&P*, and discounted fees for participation in a range of face-to-face events, special interest groups, and our interactive website. We aim to build on our three cornerstones of **knowledge**, **innovation** and **networking** in the digital age. Wherever we can, AMED Members, Networkers and Guests seek to work with likeminded individuals and organisations to generate synergy and critical mass for change. [www.amed.org.uk](http://www.amed.org.uk), or contact **Linda Williams**, our Membership Administrator, E: [amedoffice@amed.org.uk](mailto:amedoffice@amed.org.uk), T: 0300 365 1247