

# Young street paper a safety net for Greeks

BY BASTIAN PÜTTER  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**S**hedia, Greece's first street paper was launched two years ago to support those most seriously affected by the country's crippling financial crisis. Today, the street paper is still going strong, and has helped many of its vendors off the streets. But one-third of Greeks still live below the poverty line and the number of people looking to Shedia for help – it now has around 160 vendors – continues to rise. The street paper's editor Chris Alefantis speaks about the current situation in Greece, Syriza's election victory – “a triumph of hope over despair” – the work Shedia does, and its inspiring vendors.

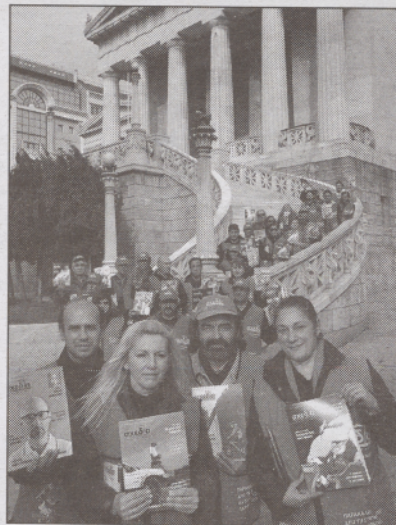
**Bastian Pütter:** *Two years ago, at the height of the financial crisis, you launched Greece's first street paper. How is Shedia doing?*

**Chris Alefantis:** Shedia came about from the desire to support those who had been most seriously affected by the economic and financial crisis. One could also say that Shedia is a result of the rage surrounding injustices which have happened to the vast majority of Greek workers and the middle class. We had to do something to help those affected. The same goes for the thousands of people across the country who have set up networks of solidarity and who are helping in every possible way. These are grass roots answers to a bigger problem.

We measure our success in terms of the number of people we are helping. These people are discovering newfound courage because they no longer feel invisible and earn some money in a dignified way.

**B.P.:** *What can you do for your street paper vendors?*

**C.A.:** Apart from running a street paper, Shedia has a wide range of programs and support services for our vendors. In the last year and a half, we ran a vendor photography project which culminated recently in an exhibition held at one of the most important cultural venues in Greece.



SHEDIA VENDORS PHOTO COURTESY OF SHEDIA

And, of course, we support our street paper vendors in their search for jobs and accommodation. Seventeen formerly homeless street paper vendors already have their own small flat paid with the income that comes from selling street papers. We are delighted when it works. For us, this is a common victory. It's our readers who make this happen when they buy a street paper.

**B.P.:** *How has the social situation in Greece developed in recent years?*

**C.A.:** If you look at the figures, it becomes clear that not much has changed over the past five years. The unemployment rate continues to be around about 26 percent, and the youth unemployment rate is 50 percent. People have been job seeking for years without success. We are especially concerned about those who are age 45 and over. Their job prospects are particularly bad. At the same time, the queues outside soup kitchens are continuing to grow. Hundreds of thousands of people don't have health insurance anymore. How can we allow this to go on?

You know, there's a difference between being unemployed for six months and being

unemployed for three years. The number of long-term unemployed people is so great, and that's dreadful. If you walk around Athens, you don't see many people smiling, which is sad in itself.

On the other hand, we support each other in everyday life. In an interview with us, the famous Greek author Vassilis Alexakis said, “We have no other option than to be optimistic.” We should try that and continue to fight for a better future, both individually and collectively. This is also the stance taken in our street paper vendor meetings.

**B.P.:** *Who are your vendors? Who comes to Shedia?*

**C.A.:** Ninety-nine percent of our vendors are victims of the financial crisis. They had a job, a place to live, a family. They lost their jobs, then a few months later they lost their homes, and then they lost everything. Our vendors are from all walks of life. Architects, former publishers, tradesmen or shop owners work at Shedia, as do people who have worked in unskilled labor. They were the first victims of the financial crisis. Their stories are those of completely normal people. On the one hand it's sad, and on the other their determination to get their old life back is impressive. They are fighting. Shedia's vendors never give up.

**B.P.:** *How do you think things will progress with regard to Shedia and Greece?*

**C.A.:** Our dream is that Shedia becomes superfluous, that all of our vendors find “regular” employment, through which they can earn their living. We also dream that we will reach the point where we will no longer need a street paper.

We have to make a difference ourselves. We all look forward and work hard towards a better future, be this with our friends in a united Europe or in whatever form this may take. It's hard work, but we'll manage to do it. As Vassilis Alexakis says, “We have no other option than to be optimistic.”

*Translated from German into English by Dominique Mason. Courtesy of INSP News Service [www.street-papers.org](http://www.street-papers.org) / Bodo*

## Why Just a Taste

by Avendor

Why do fears feel real  
When I don't believe they're true  
Why must I bear this burden  
When there is so much else I could do  
Why must I walk in darkness  
When I prefer the light  
Why must I be all alone  
When I could be with you tonight  
Why must I be stuck on spin cycle  
When I have dreams I could realize  
And why when I am set on atonement  
Can I not look you in the eyes  
Help me God or someone or something  
This seems like such a waste  
Why not give me a full bottle  
Instead of just a taste

## Transitions

by j.mccurdy

She smiled  
at him  
instead of ...  
with him...  
tenderly Screening  
Forever  
And its complications  
Out of her expression...  
And he knew  
By the lack  
Of  
Memories  
Waiting to be made  
That his  
Heartbeat  
Wasn't welcome  
Against her skin  
Anymore

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