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RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES IN THE EU FRAMEWORK: THE CASE OF THE DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION OF TEMENOS AND PEDIADA (OATEP S.A.)

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KEYWORD

Rural Development, Integrated Rural Development, Integrated Rural Development, Project Design, Project Management, Project Evaluation

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Development Organisation of Temenos and Pediada-Iraklion-Crete-Greece (OATEP S.A.) is a non-governmental organisation created because of the need of the Municipalities and Communities of the Provinces of Temenos and Pediada (at the hinterland of Iraklion prefecture) for a flexible organisation able to undertake and implement development projects and effectively assist in the formulation of regional policies on their behalf in the area.

The Company was created in 1989, initially including 4 villages and towns of the area but was later enlarged to include at present 20 municipalities and communities. It is expected to further increase by the end of 1996 to include more than 60 participants and cover most of the inland areas of the Prefecture. Except for the local authorities, the two largest Agriculture Co-operatives and Associations of the area (namely those of Peza and Archanes) also actively participated in the creation of the Company in its recent form.

All participating Organisations keep a number of shares and they are accordingly represented at the General Assembly and the Administrative Council of the Company.

The headquarters of OATEP S.A. is located in the town of Archanes, 15 km from Iraklion.

The main objectives of the Company may be summarised as follows:

- To contribute to the multisectorial and integrated socio-economic development of the area and improve the quality of life of its inhabitants and visitors by planning and carrying out local and/or regional projects in close co-operation with the authorities and Institutional organisations in the area and making effective use of local forces and infrastructure.

- To design strategies, draw up programmes and actions and set targets to encourage the endogenous development
- To propose and support measures and undertake actions aimed at the protection and upgrading of the natural environment and to promote development approaches which respect the natural resources and aim at their sustainable use
- To assure that the private or public development projects realised in the area are compatible with the principles of environmental protection
- To create the appropriate infrastructure and networks capable of allowing direct and fast access to required information offered by regional, national or international networks, process and distribute it to all interested parties, citizens, enterprises and local authorities. This infrastructure will also assist in the development of data bases to support decision and policy makers in the area.
- To identify, propose, undertake and carry out, supervise and assess programmes, projects or studies on behalf of National or International bodies concerning local or regional development.
- To participate with similar or other organisations (educational or research Institutions) in broader scale projects or studies either as contractor, subcontractor or end user.
- To undertake projects of vocational training and further education for the citizens of the area, and the staff of the local companies to improve local capacities.
- To promote the local culture and civilisation and support tourism development actions
- To promote initiatives which support a collective and solidarity spirit between residents of the area, by promoting the common interests and traditions, the common inheritance and spirit of protection of local values be they natural, aesthetic or humanitarian.

ADMINISTRATION - INTERNAL ORGANISATION OF OATEP S.A.

- LEGAL STATUS

OATEP S.A. is governed by its General Assembly, a body in which all participating local authorities and Institutions are accordingly represented. The General Assembly elects the Administrative Council of the Organization for a period of 3 years. The Manager of OATER S.A is assigned to deal with the administrative work of the Organisation and to introduce the issues for decision to the Steering Committee and the General Assembly. The director of OATEP also co-ordinates its activities and represents the Organisation together with the President of the Administrative Council where required and depending on the level of representation required.

OATEP is organised internally in five Departments, namely:

Dpt of strategic planning for the Regional Development, mainly dealing with the long term planning and the formation of policies preparing the several scenarios for the decision making bodies

Dpt of Environmental protection and promotion, dealing with the projects referring to the environment and the quality of life in urban, rural or forest areas

Dpt of Tourism and Culture, preparing the policies and informing locals about the possibilities in the field while acting as holiday broker contacting alternative tourism offices in Greece or abroad.

Dpt of Agriculture Information, disseminating information and assisting the preparation of projects with a special interest in the agriculture sector.

Dpt of Economics and Financial Affairs, it is following up the projects executed by the organisations and prepares the economic reports, while keeping the accounts of the Organisation functioning.

THE AREA OF OATEP S.A.

The Organisation is spreading its activities over a large area covering almost the whole Iraklion Prefecture in Crete. This area is actually the same as the one where the "LEADER II programme for Iraklion hinterland" is approved. The city of Iraklion is also participating in OATEP S.A. The area is inhabited by 65.000 people while Iraklion is of 140.000.

The main activities in the area are related to agriculture with main products being olive oil, grapes and wine. There is a long tradition in their cultivation, continuously practised since the Minoan era, that is for more than 4000 years, with evidence of this fact scattered around this area. Iraklion prefecture is today the largest producer of olive oil and raisins in Europe in proportion to its size. This has certain implications on the local economy, the culture as well as on the environment.

The landscape is very diverse, rather mountainous with the typical Mediterranean flora and fauna. Main threats to the ecosystem come from the use of agrochemicals, olive oil extraction by-products, mismanagement of urban wastes and sheep grazing (although this is not as widely exercised as in other regions in Crete). It is only lately that some efforts have been undertaken to protect and manage certain areas of natural beauty and importance due to their biodiversity. Problems of severe environmental degradation are not present except in limited areas.

The area does not include the tourist resorts developed on the Northern sandy beaches of the prefecture, however it receives rather large numbers of visitors mainly touring around the island on day-tours.

Industrial activity in the area is very limited and it concerns small factories mainly dealing with olive oil extraction and to a lesser extent with wine production. They are either cooperative or private.

The private services sector in the area is also limited to a very small number of taverns, coffee shops and restaurants while there are negligible numbers of small family run hotels. The main trading activities are situated in Iraklion and in a few small towns in the hinterland.

THE ROLE OF OATEP S.A. IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

OATEP S.A. plays a central role in the global development of the area. Governed by a General Assembly where the local authorities are represented and staffed by a number of highly experienced personnel it is capable of bringing together the politicians with the know how which results in viable planning of the development procedure. Working as a private company has the flexibility required to bring in action effective projects which have brought already promising results.

The organisation is currently running four main projects:

1. "Renovation of the central part of the village of Archanes". Joint project run together with the Region of Crete and the Municipality of Archanes. 1995-1997. Budget 1 million ECU's funded by EU and the Greek state. The project is aiming at the restoration of old houses, creation of urban parks, restoration of the old town centre. Archanes is a historic town nearby Iraklion, the capital city of the prefecture of Iraklion.
2. "Ecological - Archaeological park of Jouchtas". Joint project run together with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment of Greece and the Municipality of Archanes. 1995 - 1999. Budget 1,6 million ECU's funded by EU and the Greek state. The project is aiming at the protection of the natural

environment of Mount Jouchtas and the surrounding area, famous for the presence of the large vulture, a magnificent "island" of Mediterranean preserved biodiversity and scenery in the middle of a widely cultivated land. The mountain was a holy place during the prehistoric era with temples, graveyards, farmhouses and palaces showing the civilisation of the Cretans in the Minoan era (2000 BC). All these elements are brought together in a single project aiming to establish a unified management plan while certain works are planned to protect the environment from fire, grazing etc., improve the surrounding area in the archaeological sites, create pathways and viewing spots for the visitors and create a small Environment Information Centre and Museum.

3. "Master plan for the sustainable management of water resources in the Municipality of N. Kazantzakis". Joint project run together with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment of Greece and the Municipality of N. Kazantzakis. 1997-1999. Budget 1 million ECU's funded by EU and the Greek state. The project is aiming at the establishment of a system enabling the Municipality to manage the scarce water resources of the area effectively and have control over them through a central system. This is a pilot project in Crete where water is a key factor governing its development.

4. LEADER II project for the Hinterland of Iraklion prefecture. 1996-2000. This is a 5 million ECU project with an EU contribution of 3 million ECU's. Its main areas are development of Ecotourism, support to SME's activated in the field of cultural heritage and the processing of agriculture products of high quality.

When the Leader project was in the preparation phase several thoughts were brought to the discussion table. After a long series of debates the following lines were adopted and presented to the local population.

The area of the LEADER project lies next to the highly developed coastal tourist zone and efforts should be made to meet the possible threats from a "tourist invasion" for which local population and infrastructure should be prepared. Tourism development should not be excluded but should be developed alongside the natural environment protection, the rural people activities and the promotion of a large number of cultural sites clearly showing the long presence of people in the area. All these should be presented following certain rules while projects falling in this category should be in line with a general plan where local culture and colour should be clearly incorporated. Tourism development should be ecological, cultural, promoting the history of the area and its continuation and promoting the local high quality production.

A second area of intervention concerns the SME's, either those involved in handicraft or those involved in the manufacturing of agricultural products. With handicraft production the main goal is to support those enterprises which are mainly seeking to improve their capabilities and produce products characterised by quality, which are typical of the local colour and which incorporate innovative approaches in their production line to make them more competitive. In the manufacturing sector the main approach is to improve the image of the local agricultural products and the achievement of products with higher added value which can command a higher acceptance in the market.

There has been a certain effort to combine actions and achieve an integrated result. For example, there are three areas which are producing wine of controlled origin. The need to support and promote the local producers has been combined with the efforts to promote the ecological and cultural tourism in the area. The creation of a local 'wine road' has been realised as a need for the area and there has been an invitation for proposals to build this project which includes vineyards, small manufactures, cellars and places of archaeological interest. It needs to remind that the most ancient vineyards and farmhouses in the Continent are in the area of Archanes while other wine making devices from the medieval years are also scattered in the area proving that the area has been continuously producing wine for more than 4000 years.

The LEADER II programme has been realised as a chance to exchange ideas at a European level especially in the fields of developing and promoting local products and ecological tourism both integrated in a masterplan which has as a recognisable identity the promotion of the local and unique cultural characteristics.

The fields of interest of OATEP S.A.

The Organisation is oriented towards development projects which have as their central element the environmental viability, the promotion of the local identity and culture and the reinforcement of traditional agricultural activities where long experience in quality production may be the key factor for their positioning in a demanding market.

OATEP S.A. would seek to participate in EU projects which are in accordance with its targets as described briefly above.

The main fields of interest are related to global environmental planning, taking into account socio-economic considerations so that environmental interventions would turn out to be profitable activities for the local population.

The creation of the Park of Jouchtas has presented certain problems related to the management of many different entities which at first glance seem to be contradictory; natural environment, farmed land, villages, industrial activity, historic sites, tourism development need to be skilfully managed in order to achieve the sustainable and harmonious development of all these sectors.

In this sense the help from highly experienced groups from other EU countries could prove of vital importance.