



Koi.S.P.E. To.PS.Y. for the Dodecanese

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The Social Cooperative with Limited Liability in the Mental Health Sector for the Dodecanese has been operating since 2002, and is based on Leros (an island of 8 000 inhabitants). The economy of the island is principally and solely dominated by the operation of the State Mental Institution and is in consequence completely dependent upon it. In accordance with EEC Regulation 815/84 for Psychiatric Reform in Greece, it is planned that the State Mental institution will cease to operate in its current form within the next few years. It is therefore imperative to support types of economic activity with scope for development and action in the long-term that are compatible with the social and economic criteria integral to the specificities of island policies. KoiSPE is operating and being developed with this aim in view as its remit is the vocational and social rehabilitation of psychiatric patients and as such it constitutes a ground-breaking initiative in Greece's socio-economic sector.

In the scope of its activities, KoiSPE has developed activities in the following areas:

- **Patisserie production unit - catering,**
- **Refectory,**
- **Agricultural crops (in greenhouses and fields),**
- **Honey processing and standardisation unit.**

In addition, the following actions are also being launched:

1. **Partridge farming (to enrich the island's fauna) in collaboration with the Municipality of Leros.**
2. **Setting up a group to clean and upgrade the beaches.**

Leros has a century-long tradition of agriculture and bee-keeping. Collective knowledge and practice of this tradition has waned and is being lost on account of the "easiness" of finding work and the high number of jobs generated by the State Mental Institution.

By functioning as a back-up and not in competition in the local economy, KoiSPE, without forgetting the primary purpose for which it was established, namely the vocational and social reinsertion of people with psycho-social problems, endeavours to integrate its activities in the community. In parallel, it strives to offer employment opportunities to young people in the primary sector, involving and including them in the

new strategy for employment and development, which has to redirect the island's economy, in association with other activities (such as tourism for example) and with the main priority of protecting the environment. More specifically:

Agricultural Crops

We have focused on traditional crops and strengthened them by enriching them with new varieties. We have given particular emphasis to restricting the use of fertiliser by substituting it with "compost" that we produce ourselves. We have thus succeeded in producing better quality products at extremely attractive prices. For the first time on the island, we have introduced seed production, greenhouses and drip irrigation, thus solving the serious problems related to the restricted amount of water available and the exhaustion of water reserves and improving the water table thanks to the rational use of water. We have also transferred this experience to a group of local producers with whom we have built up cooperation as regards the organisation, coordination and distribution of their production.

Unit for processing and standardising Honey

Leros has a unique and rich flora. The existence of thyme which grows on large areas of the island, eucalyptus, pine trees and tens of other plants creates a unique environment for developing beekeeping, with an end-product of high therapeutic value. Honey production on Leros is restricted and based principally on a single annual collection, on account of the dry climate and restricted rainfall. Lack of coordinated production, its fragmentation across various small producers and the considerable problem of marketing and distributing the product, on account of restricted market access, were conspiring to keep a strong production sector frozen in a mode of operation which was piecemeal and without prospects. In 2004 we received funds from the LEADER+ programme to set up a unit for honey processing and standardisation. The successful implementation of this programme has yielded tangible results from the outset, which augurs extremely well for the prospects for developing apiculture on Leros. KoiSPE, working with the members of the Leros Beekeepers Association, collects approximately 70% of the island's honey production, processes it and standardises it using HACCP (*Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points*) food production control procedures, and then markets it under the exclusive trademark "Artemis" (Leros is traditionally reputed to be the island of the Goddess Artemis).

This unit has been operating for three years now and the product has secured a share of the market in the Dodecanese and is making inroads into other markets. The whole of the unit's annual production (five tonnes) is sold in its totality during the year of production.

New producers, liberated from the worry and difficulties of selling the product, are now exclusively and actively employed in beekeeping, supported and inspected both technologically and scientifically on a continuous basis by KoiSPE, and thus continually improving the quality of the final product.

Our aim is, on the one hand, to standardise the entire island's honey production and, on the other, to steadily increase production annually, even though this is not always easy, given that bees and honey are directly dependent upon weather conditions and are particularly sensitive.

The creation of this particular establishment and its positive impact upon a whole sector demonstrate that entrepreneurial and social initiatives that are cooperative in nature,

whose size is such that they do not interfere with the implementation of European Programme schemes, can operate in complementarity and bring many positive results. This is particularly true of small isolated societies such as island communities.

MARCH 2007