

GREECE - TRIKALA

The Mantania Tower Traditional Hotel at Aspropotamos

The case study described here can be characterised as a typical example of a successful rural tourism characterised by links with primary agricultural production and the wider rural economy in the study area of Trikala (Greece). This project has resulted into the utilization of local agricultural resources, the increase of local value-added, the diversification of the local economic-base and the generation of rural jobs.

1. Project details:

Nature of the project

Purpose: The establishment of a traditional medium-sized rural accommodation unit in the unspoilt area of Aspropotamos, characterised by its high natural and aesthetic value.

Content: An accommodation unit of 31 rooms (70 beds) with several supporting facilities (common room, reception, cafeteria, restaurant serving traditional local cuisine, pool bar, small shop selling local food products).

Inspiration: The owner was inspired by his affection for the area (place of origin) and the positive prospects of such a professional activity located in this area.

Policy coherence: The project is in accordance with the objectives of Leader+ as well as of the National Development Law 3299/2004 (rural economic diversification; development of rural tourism).

Links between agriculture and the rest of the economy

Main agricultural sub-sectors involved: The project is linked to local agriculture rather indirectly, through the food processing and trade sectors of the local economy.

Description of these links: These links mostly occur through the unit's traditional restaurants which uses local (to a proportion) farm products as ingredients, and to the unit's small shop which sells local food products to customers.

Scale of the project

Size: Medium-size rural tourism unit

Time scale: The plant was built in two stages; the first accommodation building was built between 2002 and 2003 and the second, between 2005 and 2006. The unit started its operation in 2003.

Coverage: Local but attracting visitors in the area.

Beneficiaries and supporters

Beneficiary: Two owners originating from the area.

Supporters: The families.

Finance

Funding: The project was funded by Leader+ and the National Development Law 3299/2004. The total cost amounted to 4 million EUR. Private contribution amounted to nearly 2.3 ml EUR.

Budget: 4 million EUR.

Results

Direct results: Results are very positive. The unit gross revenue has been raising since it started its operation. In the context of a national survey on the best accommodation units in rural Greece, Mantania was ranked amongst the top 10 units.

Main target: Individuals from major urban centres (Athens and Thessaloniki). Corporate tourism groups, gastronomy tourism, nature tourism.

Wider benefits: This is a modern, well-organized rural accommodation unit. It is a unit offering high-quality service which does not only refer to accommodation but also includes specific services and activities for gastronomy tourists and nature lovers (local traditional cuisine, truffle days, trekking, forest walks, mushroom gathering, excursions in local falls, etc.). This differentiation of activities is driven by a marketing concept which aims at creating an autonomous "castle" environment for visitors.

2. Relevance of case study experiences for others

Problems:

- The indifference and inefficiency of local development institutions, which are fragmented and lacking a modern, coherent strategic focus. Development action promoted by local institutions does not act in a complementary way with such a project ("....nothing has happened that could bring more tourists to the unit").
- Bureaucracy in the case of licensing.
- This project was constructed inside a vastly depopulated area of Trikala. These results into difficulties on the availability of (small-area-specific) local products, inadequacies regarding infrastructure, difficulties to valorise local culture and a very high construction cost.

Transferability and mainstreaming potential: The project can be replicated successfully elsewhere taking into account the existence of a strong tourism attraction. However, a most important pre-requisite for the success of such an initiative is the supply of a variation of services to customers.

Innovation: The project can be termed as very innovative for this particular area. First, the architectural style is very traditional. Second, the service offered is modern and of a very high standard. Third, the unit aims at approaching multiple target-groups of customers through organizing various events and offering a wide range of services.

Institutional aspects: The assistance and support by local development institutions were non-existent.

Social aspects: The project has created 4 full-time and 11 part-time jobs. In terms of full-time-equivalents, it has created 10 jobs. While other local units have been recently shredding jobs, employment in Mantania has increased.

Environmental aspects: The project, due to its small size, did not have to comply with strict environmental legislation applicable only to large projects. However, due to its location the project had to comply with the architecture and the landscape of Meteora.

Sustainability: The unit is very sustainable financially, mainly due to the high quality of facilities and the wide range of services offered.

Lessons to pass on: The entrepreneurial spirit and abilities of the investor and the modern business planning are the most important determinants of this success story. Continuous efforts to diversify and target several customer groups are also of paramount importance. Finally, the affection of the investor for this area acts as a significant motive.