

Title

Cooperativa Terra Chã – rural sustainable development initiative

Short description

The Cooperativa Terra Chã emerged at a time when Portugal was experiencing the depopulation of the interior zones due to rural exodus and emigration. Based on the factors underlying this problem, they sought to create solutions that would make the village more appealing and capable of integrating the recent skilled workforce.

The scope of the project has increased to the point where it currently integrates catering, accommodation, rural tourism, training, production of various products, nature preservation and rehabilitation of the physical structures and spaces of the village. In 2015 this small village with about 120 inhabitants received around 7600 visitors, which proves the innovative character of this practice and its quality.

The focus on the more tourist slope is balanced by the investment in the villagers. The cooperative uses the village's human resources, works hand in hand with local producers, as in the case of the restaurant where local agricultural production is used to make meals, and it seeks to preserve the village's history and the biodiversity that surrounds it. In addition, by generating revenue - 400 000 euros of gross revenue in the last year - it is boosting the local economy, which is also beneficial to the inhabitants. In short, the practice belongs to the population.

This practice is well known in Brazil - it has a partnership with the Fundação Casa Grande at the level of community-based tourism - it has partnerships in Milan at the level of the solidarity economy, maintains links with Burgundy following the exchange programs, and a partnership with Catalonia at the level of cooperatives linked to ethical/solidarity finance and projects of solidarity inclusion of people with disabilities in agriculture.

Topic

Consuming – food.

Characteristics (type, level)

Local/Regional Intervention.

Country/Countries of implementation

Portugal

Aims and Objectives

The cooperative aims to promote local development in a social and environmental sustainable way. Has the objectives of create jobs for the region's young people who complete their studies; avoid depopulation of the village; preserve the region's biodiversity; promote the regional economy by fostering domestic services and products; strengthen community spirit and active participation.

Target Group

The targeted groups are all the villagers and their visitors.

Status

Implemented on a continuous basis.

Start and Completion dates

Since 1984.

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

The exchange programs carried out under the project motivated young people to obtain higher levels of education. In addition, the inhabitants have become more participatory in community life, caring about issues affecting the village.

Effects on:

<p>Health and Wellbeing</p>	<p>The practice promotes contact with nature which is beneficial to health and well-being of individuals. The consumption of products produced in the village, resulting from more biological agriculture, also contribute to health. In addition, there have already been times when the practice has intervened in deciding on issues such as where to put wind power towers, preventing them from getting too close to the dwellings, which would be detrimental to the health and well-being of the inhabitants.</p>
<p>Vulnerable populations</p>	<p>In the case of the restaurant, the reinforcement of employees during the weekend (usually two persons) allows some of the families to have a source of extra income. The sale of products to the restaurant by local producers also increases the incomes of several families.</p>
<p>Environment</p>	<p>The practice contributes to the preservation of a protected natural area. Regional production also diminishes CO2 emissions.</p>

Initiated and/or implemented by

The initiative came from a group of young people who realized the richness of the exchange experiences. Subsequently, they found that it was necessary to create jobs so that young people could apply in the village the acquired skills. In the scope of their actions they created the cooperative.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

The Cooperativa Terra Chã involves multiple programs, stakeholders, and sectors:

- AGRIS program - restoration of village buildings and remodeling of façades;
- ISCTE PROACT Research Center - development of new manufacturing processes;
- Several initiatives with the Municipality of Rio Maior;
- The cooperative is also connected to a network of active and innovative villages.

Financial support

Initially the financing was based on a cooperative development program carried out by the Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social.

Evidence-base

This practice is based on examples of good practice from other cooperatives. It is supported by notions of rural development, social innovation, sustainable development, social economy or circular economy.

Main activities

The cooperative ensured the construction of a restaurant and a place of accommodation for visitors. Other activities include: visits to the village, nature tourism (mountain biking, mountain tourism, visits to a grotto), training in apiculture, creation of a section of goat breeding, cheese and honey production, restoration of village buildings and remodeling of façades.

Evaluation

In the scope of the És Social project, qualitative methods were used, such as individual interviews and group interviews with villagers. Also, in the scope of the evaluation carried out by the cooperative, quantitative methods were used, such as small inquiries made to clients of the restaurant, lodging and visits.

Main results

The practice has resulted in the increase in the number of visitors, the creation and maintenance of jobs in the village, and cultural and environmental preservation of local specificities. Also the Cooperativa has contributed to an active participation of local community on these issues.

Key success factors and barriers

The intervention of Terra Chã is supported by the constant appeal to the participation of the inhabitants; the creation of small leaderships in the various sectors, in a kind of self-management, in which the participants know that they have to ensure the continuity of the process itself; and equal treatment between the members of the management and the workers at the times when they cooperate. In opposition, the fact that the creators of the project were too young initially generated some disbelief on the inhabitants of the village. Currently, the bureaucracy associated with the sale of local agricultural products (e.g., having to emit an invoice) and the need to declare these values to the state lead some producers not wanting to sell their products.

INHERIT Perspective

This project has been chosen for inclusion because of its role in promoting more sustainable forms of food production and consumption. Terra Chã encourage the consumption of products produced in the village, resulting in an increase of organic agriculture practices with environmental and health benefits. The practice contributes to the preservation of a protected natural area, with responsible agricultural and tourism practices. Also, it created work places and new income sources for the residents (in the created local services and in food production).

More information

<http://www.cooperativaterracha.pt/>

Contact

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