

S u m m a r y

The River Valleys Project, Eastern Paphos, Cyprus (1999-2003)

The River Valleys Project: A demonstration action to promote sustainable development

Budget: €297395, Funders: LIFE programme, Leventis Foundation and Riverine Development Committee

Aim: To check the environmental degradation and economic decline of a rural area in eastern Paphos, Cyprus, by preparing an integrated plan of social and economic development for the area, based on principles of sustainable management and conservation of the area's natural resources. To refine this plan so as to develop a model of more general Mediterranean applicability, given that this area is typical of the eastern Mediterranean basin.

The Project arose from the desire of a group of rural communities in the Diarizos, Xeros and Ezousas river valleys, of Eastern Paphos, to protect their landscape and their environment, and to develop a common management plan in the face of serious challenges. The communities are facing conditions of scarcity (in e.g. man power, water, funds) and conflicting concepts as to land use, at a time when, due to legislative changes, more powers and responsibilities are devolving on local authorities. However, because these authorities lacked both experience and expertise to deal with development issues in a sustainable way, there was, and is, a real danger of further degrading the environment and its resources in the development effort, especially if unsustainable tourist activities are introduced.

There are important biotopes along the river beds and one quarter of the island's 139 endemic species are to be found there. The area, composed of some 16 villages, is designated as a landscape of exceptional beauty, but with little effective protection. In 1998 seven villages formed a body which in turn sought funding and technical guidance. The guidance was provided by the Laona Foundation, for the Conservation and Regeneration of the Cypriot Countryside and the funding by LIFE '99 and other donors.

The work undertaken was composed of three elements:

- . Developing an environmental and socio-economic inventory on which the formulation of a sustainable Action Plan for the area was based (including, inter alia, proposals for village improvements, appropriate tourism, agriculture and common activities).
- . Developing a voluntary, but effective, management network scheme, to include a wide range of local stake-holders, so as to ensure the Plan's implementation and monitoring.
- . Cooperation with local agencies in Greece, from an island and a mainland group of communities, to develop this work into a model of more general applicability within the region, and to disseminate it through a publication and a specially developed web-site.

The whole concept of an integrated area management plan, and the notion of sustainable development, were little known or understood when the project started. The project lasted three years and every effort was made to 'carry' the people of the Valleys by obtaining the views of all ages and involving them fully.

The Project's main achievements lie not only in its integrated proposals, but in providing seven adjoining, but formerly quite separate, village communities with a common identity and a common concept of space to which they, and others, can relate. A number of neighbouring villages have since applied to become part of the project, while others, more distantly located, would like to replicate it.

This has been a ground-breaking experience for Cyprus. For the first time, a group of communities have at their own initiative and with their own means (rather than with Government funds) prepared an overall plan for their future development. This plan can now be incorporated wholemeal or piecemeal into the state budget and if approved, puts the communities in a position of advanced readiness to take advantage of EU programmes.

A digital presentation of the Project work and proposals will be presented, including 'before and after' scenarios.