

Executive summary

“Analyzing the existing social reality: Exploring the problems and the perspective of local community. The electives’ point of view”

This study formed part of the LIFE-Envifriendly Project which has developed a framework to assist in planning for sustainable development, and particularly for utilization of environmental friendly technologies around Evrotas River.

The overall purpose of this study was to identify the local electives’ understanding for the management of Evrotas River. Information was collected from representatives-electives from all local Authorities around Evrotas River (nine Municipalities and the Prefecture of Laconia). The research method used was interviews with the assistance of a pre-structure questionnaire. A total of 89 questionnaires were collected. The sample designed respectively with the number of the electives in each Local Authority. The study was carried out between June 2006 and September 2006 by the Environmental Team IAAK/EKKE.

The objectives of the study were on one hand to examine the current social conditions and on the other hand, through the research process, to boost social connections between all institutions related to environmental issues. Research team supposes that the cooperation of all public authorities it is the cornerstone for a successful utilization of LIFE-Envifriendly project. International experience shows that the role of local electives is very important for the acceptance and implementation of sustainable policies, especially by enhancing social cohesion, extending social connections and by organizing public awareness campaigns.

Firstly, electives institute laws and by doing that they can support local initiatives. Secondly, local services are the major energy consumptions and electives have the power to decrease energy consumption. Particularly in small communities, electives know better than anyone else the needs and the problems of local population and so they can be the driving-forces and the opinion-makers for an implementation of policies respectfully to the particular needs of local population. Particularly, they can: a) build trust and confidence, b) motivate people better to get actively involved, c) establish a personal rapport and d) provide opportunities for socializing.

This study, together with other practices like one to one discussion, field visits and meetings of research team with electives of Local Government, seeks to understand social situation of the area and to open a discussion about the potential of further sustainable local development in Laconia.

Findings suggest that within the communities studied, electives consider that there is a need for a wider application of the proposed technologies especially “for reducing pollution”. Furthermore, all electives interviewed point out that “there is a need for sustainable water management of the Evrota’s basin”. The floods two years ago, this year’s water scarcity, and the obligated implementation of European Regulation for Water, all contribute to an understanding that there is a pressing need for such application. In this respect, it is encouraging that the vast majority of electives seem to be well-disposed toward supporting and promoting sustainable orientated policies (95.0%).

They also seem to be well-informed about sustainable agriculture, since the 62.4 per cent of them state that is “very well informed about sustainable practices for agricultural production”. However, electives would like to inform further about sustainable agriculture (75.6%).

Another one noteworthy finding is that electives consider “irrigation” as the main contribution of Evrotas River to the local development (39.8%). At the same time, they rank “pollution” as the fundamental obstacle for river’s development. Particularly, they mainly finger out “pollution which coming from industrial and household waste” (35.9%) and the current “ineffective water management” (29.9%).

In this respect, the vast majority of electives wants LIFE-Envfriendly project to focus on these two parameters; that is, to “pollution control” (81.0%) and “water management” (77.0%).

To conclude, from the interpretation of the findings some significant issues are emerged. Firstly, it is obvious that Evrotas River mainly is understood as a natural resource primarily used for agricultural production. Accordingly, river’s potential, which the long-history of Laconia is given for a further development of eco-agro tourist and cultural services, is underestimated.

The on-going construction of the “Observatory for Local Sustainable Development” is being designed in a way that will incorporate all the experience of several previous local actions. In this way it will constitute an organized mechanism which will a) develop a knowledge base, b) ensure the messages are understood in the way they are intended, c) encourage mutual understanding and d) it will lead to longer lasting solutions for a sustainable local growth.