

SOCIAL COOPERATION Ltd. Mental Health Sector Dodecanese

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The first Social Cooperation in Greece

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Short History

In the early nineties, when actually the first attempts of de-institutionalization and reform were made in the Leros State Hospital, new Cooperative Therapeutic Work Units were created. Their main objectives were a) intervention in the psychiatric reality of 'black labour' and b) the social and work rehabilitation of the patients. Very soon the first positive results on a therapeutic and productive level could be observed, resulting in an improvement of the general picture and behavior of the patients as well as a quantity and quality increase of the production. However, in the further development of these units a number of problems came on our road, especially in relation with the legal status of the commercial activities of the cooperatives. The Greek law nr.2716/99 legislated the Social Cooperations Ltd., aiming the social integration and the financial autonomy of people the psychosocial problems.

It concerns a new, more socially orientated kind of enterprise, with as particular characteristic the invention of new and dynamic solutions for the unemployment and social isolation of people with psychosocial problems.

In 1999 when the Support Office of the program 'Special Action Leros' is started up in cooperation with the Leros State Hospital and other local organizations, one of its obligations is the completion of actions for the foundation of a Social Cooperation Ltd.

More specific, until 31/12/01 when the program 'Special Action Leros' is finished, the following actions are taken:

- ✓ The foundation of a pilot group of candidate members.
- ✓ A process of sensitizing and inspiration of patients, mental health workers, organizations and other private persons.
- ✓ Information meetings.
- ✓ A business plan is worked out.
- ✓ The composition of the internal regulations (articles of association).
- ✓ The value of the cooperative share is defined at 150,- Euro.

From 1/1/02 the efforts to establish the Social Cooperative are taken over by a team of staff members of the Leros State Hospital. More specific, they continue:

- ✓ To submit an application for the establishment of the Social Cooperative Ltd. Dodecanese at the Ministry of Health and Welfare.
At 15/5/02 the Ministry of Health and Welfare approves the intention to establish the Social Cooperation.
- ✓ To organize meetings with the psychiatrists and other mental health professionals in order to discuss the participation of patients as member and employee of the Social Cooperative.
- ✓ In June 2002 the founding general meeting takes place and a temporary Board of Directors and Supervisory Board are elected.
- ✓ The first official share holders meeting is prepared for the end of the year 2002.
- ✓ The registration of members starts.
- ✓ The Court of Peace approves the articles of association.

At November 23rd the first Shareholders Meeting and elections for the Board of Directors and Supervisory Board are realized. From then until 31/12/2002 the foundation was completed with:

- ✓ The transfer of staff the Leros State Hospital to the Cooperative.
- ✓ The transfer of property and equipment to the Cooperative.
- ✓ The organization of administration and accountancy.

The Social Cooperative Ltd. Dodecanese today:

Members: 456

Total of cooperative shares: 1425, with a value of 213.750 €.

Obligatory cooperative shares: 456

Optional cooperative shares: 969

Compilation of Cooperative members:

A category (people with psychosocial problems)	194
B category (mental health workers)	158
C1 category (organizations, municipalities)	14
C2 category (private persons)	90

Employees of the Social Cooperative:

Employees of A category	30
Employees of B category	20 (2 part time)

Activities (enterprises) of the Social Cooperative:

Agricultural cultivations
Sweet & pie confection
Canteen in Lakki
Canteen in Lepida
Administration office

At 1/1/2003 the enterprises of the cooperative start to function.

The commercial activities of the Social Cooperative Ltd.

1. Agricultural Cultivations:

Here 16 workers of the A category and 7 workers of the B category (of which 2 part time) are employed. The cultivations are outside as well as in a green house and stretch out over an area of 8000 m² (1000 m² in the green house).

The first year the production of vegetables is expected to be approximately 20 tons, and is sold to the Leros State Hospital (80%) and at the free market (20%).

The prospects for further development of the cultivations are positive taking on account that a few sales problems are being solved in future.

2. Sweet and pie confection:

This unit employs 5 workers of the A category and 4 of the B category. They produce sweets and snacks on daily base. These products are being sold in the two canteens as well as on the free market. The prospects for the future are very encouraging according to the increasing demand of the general public.

3. Canteens of Lakki and Lepida:

The two canteens of the hospital employ totally 9 workers of the A category and 5 workers of the B category. They serve the daily needs of patients, employees and visitors of the Leros State Hospital.

Objectives

Besides the objectives described by law nr. 2716/99, that relate to the social, economic and professional integration of people with psychosocial problems, the Social cooperative Ltd. has formulated the following aims:

- ✓ To create employment for members of all categories in Leros and later in other islands of the Dodecanese.
- ✓ The economic viability of the enterprises.
- ✓ The projection, social valuation and acknowledgement of the Social Cooperative Ltd.
- ✓ The de-institutionalization of the economy of Leros through creating other forms of employment.
- ✓ The support and reinforcement of the local economy.
- ✓ The stimulation and development of social enterprising in the Dodecanese.

Prospects – new actions – collaborations

The development prospects of the Social Cooperative Ltd. are mainly based on several subsidy programs for establishment of new enterprises or improvement of the already existing.

At this moment the Social Cooperation Ltd. is expected to incorporate in the following programs:

1. Measure 4.9 < Reinforcement of new forms of commercial enterprises in the South Aegean > of the district authorities of the South Aegean Sea.
2. LEADER+ South Aegean of the Ministry of Agriculture.
3. Article 6 of the European Social Fund: “Strategy for employment development in the Dodecanese Area through the support of social enterprising” through the prefect of the Dodecanese.

Already the Social Cooperative Ltd is participant in the mentioned programs 1. and 3.

Proposals for new enterprises/ activities that are signed up until today:

- ✓ Cheese factory
- ✓ The processing and packing of honey.
- ✓ The edition of a monthly review/magazine.
- ✓ Cleaning firm.
- ✓ Upgrading and transformation of the former 15th department of the Leros State Hospital, a building with special architecture and historic value into a unit of lodging and multiple events.

Problems

Without doubt, any discussion about development and prospects of the Social Cooperation Ltd. is directly linked to the appointment of staff coming from the Leros State Hospital. Moreover, the search for alternatives for the decreasing employment of hospital staff in Leros was one of the main motives for the establishment of the first Social Cooperative Ltd. in Greece. Unfortunately until today the hospital is not able to realize that yet and in result we have to be careful with our estimations for further development of our enterprises. In fact this is the most basic problem for our Cooperative.

However, after 9 months of functioning we have defied a number of problems, which in general terms every new Social Cooperative in Greece will meet:

- ✓ The absence of similar experiences in Greece.
- ✓ The Secretary of Mental Health of the Ministry of Health and Welfare did not activate a cooperation/support mechanism on the level of supervision and policy in the development of the institute.
- ✓ The sections of law nr. 27616/99 about possibilities of subsidy and financing from the state budget are not activated.
- ✓ The incapability to create a sales network for our products.
- ✓ The lack of trained staff in relation with social enterprising and business in general.
- ✓ The challenge of the institute “social cooperative” from the side of ‘traditional Psychiatry’.
- ✓ The fear/reservation of the Greek society for this new kind of operations.
- ✓ The ‘civil servant behavior’ had to be overcome.

As in all reforming operations, the Social Cooperative Ltd. meets easily reservation, fear and criticism. It is our duty to formulate adequate answers for the questions that the society expresses, that we line out the prospects of our effort and that we create all the conditions to succeed, in order to make a vision reality.