

## GREECE

### Diversification & job creation

#### Location

Emporeios

#### Programming period

2014 – 2020

#### Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

#### Measure

M06 – Farm & business development

#### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 586 419.50

EAFRD 245 185.34

National/Regional 43 268.00

Private 297 966.16

#### Project duration

2011 – 2018

#### Project promoter

Triantafyllos Triantafyllou

#### Contact

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#### Website

n/a

Rural Development Programme (RDP) support contributed to the revitalisation of an almost abandoned village in the small Aegean island of Nisyros.

### Summary

Emporeios is a remote village located on the small volcanic island of Nisyros, in the southern Aegean Sea. Due to the catastrophic earthquake of 1933 and the post-war immigration wave in the 1950s, the village had almost been abandoned. It slowly became a ghost village, full of ruins.



Triantafyllos Triantafyllou grew up in Emporeios, finished the local high school there and then left the village to study and work. However, years later he decided to return to his roots and find a way to revive his birthplace. He bought four houses, which he restored into guesthouses using RDP support. In addition to this investment he also started a restaurant and a series of activities for guests, such as gardening, beekeeping and horse riding. As a result of this process, he managed to turn an almost abandoned village into a vibrant and attractive destination.

### Results

The restoration of the four houses contributes to the economic growth and upgrade of housing in the region.

The RDP funding received to implement the project offered the opportunity to create jobs in different professions such as craftsmen, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, architects and suppliers, giving financial support to many families during a period of economic crisis.

On a personal level, this project has improved Mr Triantafyllou's standard of living. His revenues have increased and are set to rise further as time goes on.

## Context

Emporeios is a remote village located on a small volcanic island of Nisyros, in the southern Aegean Sea. The word “Emporeios” means place of trade. Due to the catastrophic earthquake of 1933 and the post-war immigration wave in the 1950s the village had almost been abandoned. It slowly became a ghost village, full of ruins.

The beneficiary of RDP support, Triantafyllos Triantafyllou, grew up on the island, finished the local high school and then left and graduated from the University of Athens, with a Bachelor’s degree in Physical Education. He then went to the US and acquired a Master of Arts in Coaching and Sports Administration. When he came back to Greece, he worked in Athens for a number of years, but he later returned to Nisyros, because life in the big cities no longer pleased him. He came back to nature and the calm life a small place offers to have more time for himself. He started cultivating the land and producing honey. He had a vision of how this destroyed village of Emporeios could be in 30 years’ time and started buying old ruins to restore them. He thought that this could be a way to help the rebirth of this location.

With his brother, he also opened a small restaurant in the same village, which is open all year round. Every day, for six months, tourist boats bring numerous tourists to visit the volcano, as well as the archaeological and religious sites. Through his contact with these travellers, he saw the need to create accommodation, because there was demand but no facilities to host guests in the village.

The project to create the guesthouses coincided with Greece’s worst ever economic crisis that started in 2009. As a result, he had many difficulties during the implementation phase, such as a lack of funding from the banks and delays caused by the authorities due to the political instability of the period.

## Objectives

Through this investment, Mr Triantafyllou wanted to stay permanently at his birthplace, improve his income and attract more people to visit and eventually stay at the village. His vision was to create the conditions for successful living through the stimulation of the local economy by attracting new visitors and creating new jobs.

## Activities

When Mr Triantafyllos returned to Emporeios, he started buying ruined houses and when the conditions improved, in 2009, he met two architects who specialised in the restoration of traditional buildings and discussed his plans. One of the issues during this initial conversation was that, despite the architects’ knowledge and experience, they needed to study and combine the local architectural elements so that the result would be in keeping with the village’s residential character. Together, all three of them started to prepare the final project proposal.

The process to apply for support was launched, and in October 2010 the applications were submitted. Although the timeframe to implement the project was supposed to be six months, the final decision of approval came a year later, in October 2011. During that time, the political and economic situation in Greece became very difficult, unstable and uncertain.

The first two building permits were issued at the end of 2012 and the other two at the beginning of 2013.

The work on the first two sites started in 2013, continuing in 2015 with the third house and in 2016 with the fourth. The difficulty was enormous because the land had to be cleaned, the existing stones had to be sorted so they could be reused during the building process and all the useless material had to be transferred. The structure of the village does not permit the use of machines and so all the building works (scrub removal, transfer of building materials for the construction, plastering, jointing and roofing) were carried out manually. This increased the cost and the time needed to complete the buildings.

Meanwhile, the economic situation had changed for the worse. Even though the central government had announced various investor funding programmes, the banks, due to a lack of liquidity, had almost stopped lending to the investors. However, the work was continuing, albeit slowly, and each house was getting built. During that period, Mr Triantafyllou was searching for old furniture that was used in the village to restore it and place it in the houses. A carpenter, who had the know-how and the experience, repaired all the old furniture and made it functional again. His goal was for each house to be simple and to keep some old items to take the guests back in time.

### Main Results

The restoration of the four houses contributes to the economic growth and the housing upgrade of the region. The RDP funding received for the implementation of the project offered the opportunity to create jobs in different fields, including craftsmen, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, architects and suppliers, giving financial support to many families during a period of economic crisis.

As a result of the restaurant and the new tourist accommodation, the ability to visit the island and stay overnight increased. More people got to know the island and the village in particular, and some of the visitors have started to show an interest in buying a property there. New houses started to be built, breathing new life into the construction sector, which had suffered greatly during the recent recession. In the end, the strict building regulations, that were so burdensome during the renovation process, were able to help preserve the unique aesthetic qualities and integrity of the local architecture.

Emporeios is now a picturesque holiday destination which combines authenticity and tradition with moderate and controlled development. At the same time, a new series of activities began as a spin off from the original accommodation project. Notably, agricultural pursuits, abandoned for years, have started to reappear, giving visitors the opportunity to collect vegetables and fruit from Mr Triantafyllo's dryland farms and to actively participate in the cultivation process. Holidaymakers can also experience honey production and collection from Mr Triantafyllou's beehives, visit other small animal farms in the area, drink fresh milk from the stockbreeder and assist with traditional cheese-making.

A series of sports activities also got off the ground, including the launch of a half-marathon and three races for different distances and ages. Another proposal that was inspired and made possible by the moderate development of the village was horse riding. Horses were bought to teach people how to ride on the old paths of the island. This is a first step towards the development of equestrian tourism in the region.

Emporeios is located in the centre of the island, and from that point many paths lead to other parts of the island. Hiking along the old paths, you can see various monuments of religious, archaeological and traditional agricultural heritage. The volcano is the main tourist attraction on the island. It is unique in the world because, even though it is active, it is possible to walk in the crater.

Throughout this project, the local economy has been boosted through the consumption of locally produced goods and the creation of new jobs. The village started to grow, with more people living there permanently or seasonally, and has become a source of life for the local traditions, customs and culture.

Today Emporeios has two restaurants. One is open seasonally during a five-month period, and the other, run by Mr Triantafyllou and his brother, remains open throughout the year. After the houses were constructed, another coffee bar is also functioning during the summer months. The guest accommodation created thanks to the project can now host 22 guests.



On a personal level, this project has improved Mr Triantafyllou's standard of living; his income has increased and is set to rise further in future. This has motivated him to be more concerned about preserving the local character of the village, not only in relation to its special architectural particularities, but also in the revival of the old traditions that have almost been forgotten. For example, the local festivities today attract more people, and this stimulates the village's economic and the cultural activity. New visitors appear each year and a growing number of them show an interest in buying a ruined house for restoration purposes. The construction and the service sectors are getting a boost and hopefully more jobs will be created in the near future.

### Additional sources of information

[www.nisyros.gr/index.php/en/](http://www.nisyros.gr/index.php/en/)