

# REVES EXCELLENCE AWARD 2017

*Application form*



▪ **Part A: APPLICANT'S DETAILS**

Name of the organization: .....Municipality of Karditsa.....  
Type of organization: .....Public Administration.....  
Address: .....Artesianou 1.....  
City: .....Karditsa.....  
Country: .....Greece.....  
Contact person: .....Bakalakov Sotiria.....  
E-mail: .....sotibak@gmail.com.....  
Mobile: .....00306976973723.....

▪ **Part B: DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIATIVE**

1. Name of the initiative: ..... ecosystem of cooperation .....

2. For which topic(s) are you applying?

- Integration of migrants/refugees
- Digital economy
- European Structural and Investment Funds(in particular the implementation of Community-Led Local Development, CLLD)
- Youth capacity building
- Child poverty and vulnerability
- Transfer of enterprises (e.g. worker buy-out phenomenon)

**3. Please describe the context of the initiative, providing also information about the identification of perceived needs and constraints in the target group(s).**

**(Max 7 lines)**

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Karditsa had a long tradition in cooperation and social economy but has also a bad example of cooperatives that had failed in the past. The idea of collaboration was questioned and the crisis found local population unprepared without tools to cope with it. In a total population of 130.000 inhabitants of the Karditsa's prefecture, the 9.000 of them are threatening by the absolute poverty. The "development" or the "growth" has the capital as a prerequisite, but it is unavailable, due to the deep crisis. So the only way to initiate a "development process" is the "collective gathering" of capital and the use of innovative organizational and financial tools.

#### **4. Which are the main objectives of the initiative?**

*(Max 5 lines)*

The main objective of the initiative is to form a network including cooperatives, groups of citizens and stakeholders that could plan and develop supportive services in favor of its members towards the innovative entrepreneurial activation. It is functioning as an "Ecosystem of Cooperation" searching for solutions on common problems faced by the cooperatives and the Social Economy sector, attracting and encouraging many new collective initiatives to occur.

#### **5. Please describe the initiative, including the actors involved and the concrete activities.**

*(Max 25 lines)*

In 2010, after the crisis, a "new-style" of cooperatives emerged locally, having strong regional characteristics and an entrepreneurial orientation. These cooperatives develop their activities in sectors of the food industry (production and processing of stevia, superfoods, pulses, snails, wine and brandies, tomato, milk, cereals) and energy (use of biomass). The "new style" cooperatives inspired from the successful function of cooperative bank, established in 1994. Their emergence enriched the social economy sector made up until then by some viable -but old "fashioned" - cooperatives, networks of micro-enterprises, associations of professionals, NGOs etc.

Local authorities have supported traditionally the collective schemes that established in the administrative area of Karditsa to cooperate each other regardless of their turnover, know-how, age, size or the sector where they belong. This has resulted in an excellent cooperation network between the collective schemes and the Local Authorities (Municipality, Chamber of Commerce, development agency). So, the idea of the establishment of an "ecosystem of cooperation" emerged, including cooperatives and other bodies of social economy as well as local authorities.

The members of the "ecosystem", except their mutual cooperation, develop common services in favor of their existing or candidate members, such as education, common promotion of the products, innovative financial tools (microfinance, contractual agriculture, procurement contracts, investment facilities etc.) and technical support. Finally, they develop hosting services to new initiatives formed by citizens that are in the pre-startup or in the startup phase. Today, already 15 cooperatives and other social economy organizations have been established and many other collective schemes are under establishment.

The common services are decided or suggested by the assembly and organized by specialized bodies as following:

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1. The support services, the hosting services to start ups (incubator), are organized by development agency
2. The financial tools are organized by the cooperative bank
3. The investments support services are organized by development agency in cooperation with the cooperative bank
4. The common promotion of products is organized by the Social Cooperative “Ilakati”, which is member of the “ecosystem” etc.

**6. Please highlight the strengths of your approach, stressing also the elements that make it a real partnership.**

*(Max 10 lines)*

The strengths of the approach are:

1. The offer of technical support and mainly the hosting of any collective initiative encourages the citizens to participate, eliminates the startup costs and increases the trust to the “collective” search for solutions for the common problems.
2. Social Economy is the only way to motivate local capital when the private sector is too weak to undertake investment activities, the banking sector has not the liquidity to offer loans (even in not risky interventions), the state has not the capital to finance public investments and the foreigner investors has not the will to invest in an unstable economic environment.

The initiative “Ecosystem of cooperation” is a real local partnership that includes all the local authorities and the collective schemes which make common decisions through their (unofficial yet) assembly. Especially, local authorities and the cooperative bank (the older members of the “ecosystem”) make decisions for strategic plans and visions through their participation in the General Assembly of development agency.

**7. Please explain who are the partners, what exactly is their role and what is their concrete contribution to the initiative.**

*(Max 10 lines)*

The partners of the initiative are the local authorities, like: Municipalities and their regional union, the regional authority, the Chamber of Commerce and the already established and experienced cooperatives, like the Cooperative Bank with 7500 members. They altogether participate in the Development Agency (Anaptixiaki Karditsas, AN.KA SA), established in 1989. During the last decade the municipality of Karditsa became the main shareholder of AN.KA, holding the 26% of the shares, and the mayor of Karditsa is elected, usually, as the president of its Governing Board. The role of him is to coordinate the local partnership from a political and strategic point of view. The role of AN.KA is to support the introduction of knowledge and innovation in the local productive system, and to support or/and undertake, in cooperation with the local authorities, local collective initiatives. It also plays the role of “incubator” in every new

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venture. Finally, it hosts the activities of “Ecosystem of Cooperation” offering technical support to it. It is the “entrepreneurial part” of the local partnership.

**8. Which are the main results – if already visible – resulting from the described initiative; and how do you imagine the continuation of this action?**

*(Max 10 lines)*

The existence and the effective function of the “ecosystem of cooperation” facilitate the creation of new cooperatives and other collective schemes accelerating the local development, the participation and the empowerment of citizens. It has become the subject of study as a “system of introduction and management of the innovation” and as an organized system of Social Economy. Several productive units that were built during the crisis, are considered to be a result of its influence. Some of these units are unique in the country (superfoods, energy cooperative) or even in Europe (stevia extraction unit) and they were supported by LEADER program

Moreover, the common services, that are developed in favor of the “ecosystem” by Development Agency, such as: the education, technical assistance, the host of collective startups, the host and support of local initiatives, (like “Kartditsa restart”, a contact group of young, a Roma association etc) have an innovative character.

Finally some services and financial tools developed by the Cooperative Bank, which is an active member of the “ecosystem”, applied for the first time in the country, like microfinance (in cooperation with EIF), establishment of a fund in favor of Social Economy etc. the dissemination of this model all over the country through the program CLLD/LEADER. The dissemination of this model all over the country, through the program CLLD/LEADER, is a priority of local authorities

**9. Please provide some details on how you raised the resources for the initiative. (This is not an element to be judged by the jury – however, it is important to readers of our Yearbook in which eligible initiatives will be presented.)**

*(Max 5 lines)*

The initiative is a result of a long-lasting strategy and it was implemented, mainly, based to volunteer work. Occasionally, a mixture of significant resources was raised, like:

1. LEADER (now CLLD) to finance the investments of cooperatives
2. EaSI and EIF guarantees to support the microfinance program of Cooperative Bank
3. Erasmus+ to cover some of the training needs of the cooperatives
4. H2020 to participate in researches related with the plans of the cooperatives themselves or the “ecosystem” as a whole.
5. Own contribution of the cooperatives’ members to the investment plans (motivation of local capital)
6. ESF programs to support the networking and the extroversion of the social economy sector