

'Honey Routes' project: revitalising rural Cyprus through sustainable tourism

SUMMARY

The 'Honey Routes' project, led by Troodos Network, operates in the Larnaca district mountainous areas facing depopulation, low incomes and weak tourism coordination. Using the **Structured Democratic Dialogue Process (SDDP)**, communities identified priorities and agreed practical actions.

On this basis, the project developed a **honey-themed destination**, supported by a **simple brand** and **management set-up**. **Training and small-business support** – especially for women and youth – helped create new experiences and products. The Larnaca Tourism Board and Deputy Ministry of Tourism adopted 'Honey Routes' as a regional offer.



CONTEXT

In the mountain villages of rural Larnaca, long-term depopulation, low incomes and weak infrastructure have left a fragmented visitor offer and few year-round opportunities. Small businesses operate in isolation, with limited coordination between communities, scarce branding and uneven signage, so day-trippers seldom stay or spend.

The area faced low local skills and capacity, particularly for product development and hosting; youth outmigration; lack of organisation of distinctive local assets such as beekeeping and rich bee flora into a coherent destination model. These conditions highlighted the need for a shared process to identify priorities and practicable ways of working together across villages **to turn local heritage into sustainable livelihoods**.



OBJECTIVES

- > **Regenerate mountain villages** by developing a honey-themed rural destination rooted in local nature, culture and craft;
- > Build a **clear identity and shared brand** across participating communities;
- > Empower residents – especially women and youth – through **training, entrepreneurship and cultural initiatives**;
- > Improve basic **accessibility** for visitors and connect micro-experiences (trails, centres, events) into coherent offers;
- > Establish multi-stakeholder cooperation and a simple management set-up to sustain and scale actions.

Themes: Entrepreneurship; social economy; tourism and heritage; employment; bioeconomy & circular economy; agriculture & food; value chains

Country: Cyprus

Organisations:

- > Troodos Network, non-profit organisation (NGO)
- > Cyprus Academy of Public Administration, public authority
- > Larnaca Tourism Board, NGO
- > Nine community councils, public authority
- > Honey, tourism and hospitality sectors, private business
- > Honey Producers Association, private business
- > Ministry of Agriculture, public authority
- > Deputy Ministry of Tourism, public authority

Start & end date: 03/2018 - ongoing

Budget: EUR 150 000

Funding sources:

- > European MED Programme 2012-2020 (MEDFEST)
- > MedBees -European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme 2022-2024 (ENI CBC MED)
- > Cypriot Deputy Ministry of Tourism
- > Larnaca Tourism Board

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

- > In 2018, the Troodos Network launched the 'Rural Larnaka Honey Villages' project which piloted the entire Honey Villages process, and involved nine mountain communities in rural Larnaca – Kato Drys, Kato Lefkara, Vavla, Vavatsinia, Agioi Vavatsinias, Odou, Melini, Layia and Ora. Through two **Structured Democratic Dialogue Process (SDDP) workshops**, councils, beekeepers, SMEs and public bodies identified and prioritised **40–60 challenges**, mapped an **influence tree** and agreed an **action plan**. A core team and a simple management group were set up to steer delivery across villages.
- > In 2018–2019, the partners created a **shared brand**, renaming 'Honey Villages' to 'Honey Routes', mapped experiences and designed **initial signage** to make the offer coherent for visitors moving between villages.
- > From 2018 to 2021, the focus shifted to the **on-the-ground offer**: installation of nature trails and thematic signage; honey festivals hosted by villages (e.g. the Beekeeping & Honey Festival in Odou in 2018, the Honey Kids Festival in Melini in 2020, and International Bee Day events in Ora); and hosting and product development training for residents and small businesses.
- > From 2022 onwards, the team added **bee-friendly planting along routes**, made small **accessibility improvements**, and began developing a **Honey & Beekeeping Thematic Centre**. The Larnaca Tourism Board, supported by the Deputy Ministry of Tourism, adopted '**Honey Routes**' as a **regional product**, supporting promotion and event funding, while the management team continued trainings and familiarisation visits to keep the destination active year-round.



RESULTS

- > **Participation and capacity**: more than 350 residents joined workshops in 2018; over 200 participants attended trainings between 2019 and 2024, resulting in strengthened skills in product development and hosting.
- > **Destination offer**: set up of multiple trails, signage and thematic events; a Honey & Beekeeping Thematic Centre under development; a management team coordinating actions across villages.
- > **Visitor reach and income**: three annual festivals (in Odou, Melini, Ora) have collectively attracted **over 9 000 visitors per year**, boosting local revenue for producers and tourism actors.
- > **Empowerment and entrepreneurship**: women and young people launched new honey products and services, diversifying local income and reinforcing identity.
- > **Governance and uptake**: the Larnaca Tourism Board integrated 'Honey Routes' into its official offer, supporting scale-up and visibility.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Structured participation works**: the Structured Democratic Dialogue Process (SDDP) provides a clear, inclusive way to surface local challenges, prioritise them and agree actions, building ownership and a shared plan;
- > **Identity first**: a single, honey-based brand and simple governance help many small villages act as one destination;
- > **Bundle micro-experiences**: connect trails, workshops, tastings, festivals and a thematic centre for visitors to plan full days and producers to gain visibility;
- > **Invest in skills**: short, practical trainings for residents – especially women and youth – raise service quality and support entrepreneurship;
- > **Small improvements matter**: bee-friendly planting, signage and basic accessibility improvements make rural offers usable and attractive;
- > **Work across levels**: cooperation between councils, SMEs, tourism bodies and ministries aligns funding and promotion;
- > **Replicability**: other regions with strong identities (such as herbs and crafts) can replicate the method and tools.



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