

# Industrial relations for a green economy

Innovative bargaining processes for a sustainable growth and a quality employment



Project VS/2014/0405 co-founded

by

DGESAI - DG EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS and INCLUSION

## Greek Case Study: Informal industrial Zone of Oinofyta

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## PRESENTATION (IDENTITY CARD OF SIGNIFICANT STUDY)

### ▪ **Name of significant study**

“Informal industrial zone of Oinofyta”, Beotia region.

### ▪ **Short description**

The case was selected as a meaningful “case study” within the project, because it highlights a serious conflicting situation between industrial development, jobs in polluting plants, the environment and the local communities. The informal industrial zone of Oinofyta is the largest industrial concentration in central Greece; what makes it significant is the lack of planning whatsoever in the area, the uncontrolled growth and the resulting pollution of Asopos River which crosses the region.

In this case, the efforts focus on:

- the obligation by law of the existing plants to adopt innovating anti-polluting industrial processes in order to stop further pollution,
- the creation of the necessary waste treatment facilities,
- the conservation of job places along with the clean-up of the area,
- the protection of Occupational Health and Safety of workers and
- the improvement of locals’ health conditions.

It’s all about a multi-task and challenging target for both state and social partners (employers, trade unions), and local civil associations.

### ▪ **Geographic, territorial, sectorial localization,**

The Zone is located at the Oinofyta - Schimatari - Tanagra area in the Beotia region, bordering Attica. More than 1.000 plants are located at the zone.

### ▪ **Period of activity**

The creation of the zone began about 45 years ago in 1969; in the mid of 80s the industrial zone of Oinofyta experienced the biggest boom with more than 300 factories and 60,000 employees, and over the years the growth has continued.

### ▪ **Players / promoters**

Industry management, Local community (actors and civil associations), employees, Trade unions.

### ▪ **Players/ partners involved, their main functions**

- The process of activating more and more of the residents to participate in the efforts to transform the zone.
- An effort to make the problem widely known.
- Legal actions undertaken before Greek and European courts.

### ▪ **Types of Beneficiaries (direct/indirect):**

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- The large number of industries in the zone offer jobs in the local community and the surrounding areas. The jobs bear a cost though, since health problems for the workers are common.
- The local residents have a lot to look forward to, in terms of improving their living conditions. The struggle has already resulted to decisions of European and Greek courts that recognize that the Asopos problem is a health problem and not an environmental one, which automatically means that the polluter must prove that he does not harm residents and not the vice-versa.

## ▪ **Human resources involved in the bargaining process and their competencies**

Individuals, actors such as the ITAP of Oinofyta (Institute for Local Development and Culture of Oinofyta) and the CISD (*Citizens' Inspectorate for Sustainable Development*) and the trade unions.

## ▪ **Indicators for monitoring and evaluating activities**

- The concentration of hexavalent chromium (Cr (VI)) in the drinking water of the area. This shows the level of pollution caused by the zone and the health hazard for the public. Therefore a reduction of this concentration automatically shows a green transformation of the zone.

## **DESCRIPTION of the significant study/conflict**

### ▪ **Starting point of the conflict as related to the territorial context (societal, economic, political)**

The informal industrial zone of Oinofyta is characterized by uncontrolled growth due to lack of rules concerning urban development and planning in the ordinances that freed the establishment of industries there. This has resulted in the lack of infrastructure in water supply, sewerage and roads but mostly lack of processing facilities in industrial waste and sewage. This fact, in combination with bad practices from industries and poor control from state apparatus have created a major environmental problem in the Asopos River (that flows through the industrial zone), the aquifer and the surrounding area.

According to the Ministry, waste of 60 metal industries end in Asopos, most of which are located in the surrounding area of Oinofita - Schimatari. These industries divert their waste in Asopos. The concentration of chromium in Asopos' waters increase with time. Typically, the metal industries are required by law to have facilities to physiochemically treat their waste; this is not happening. The environmental damage from uncontrolled waste in Asopos is huge.

Similar are the risks to public health, for people who consume contaminated water. Scientific studies have shown that hexavalent chromium (Cr (VI)) is absorbed from the gastrointestinal track and reaches many organs of the body, causing serious damage and cancer, while inhaling hexavalent chromium (Cr (VI)) causes cancer development, mainly lungs'. Measurements in the waters of Asopos and detection of hexavalent chromium (Cr (VI)) sounded the alarm and led to discontinuation of use for drinking water in many areas. Given that the aquifer is uniform, the

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problem of water pollution of Asopos concerns both Eastern Attica and Viotia, and specifically the towns of Tanagra, Schimatari, Oinofita, Avlona, Sykamino and Oropos.

- **Description of the socio-economic, territorial, corporate context in which the initiative is based.**

In the region, there are located more than 1.000 plants, which have a significant contribution to the local employment. A significant number of locals work in these and economic migrants have settled permanently in the area, as well. In addition, many others move daily from the surrounding areas. However these businesses generally are headquartered in Attica, and source raw materials and services outside the area of their residence; interfacing with it is relatively weak and corporate profits as a result leaks outside.

- **What problems/ general needs the interventions are trying to address? What the specific ones are?**

General: The need to reduce health and environmental hazards, while maintaining job positions.

Specific: The change of industrial practices in order to achieve the reduction of the concentration of hexavalent chromium (Cr (VI)) in the drinking and the underground water of the area.

- **What goals/ends the intervention is trying to achieve? What bargaining dynamic had been in place?**

The bargaining process includes the struggle of the local community mostly to sensitize the rest of the community and the media, and to achieve through negotiations with the industry association and the authorities better living conditions.

- **What activities and instruments the intervention is operational through?**

- In this particular case, as shown above, the intervention is the negotiation process and the efforts made from part of the local community and the trade unions mostly to change the environmental-health issue of Oinofita-Asopos. In these efforts they are mostly organizing informing activities, gatherings and talking to the media in order to sensitize more and more people. Furthermore they organise meetings with all the involved parties. In a second degree they have managed to win cases in Greek and European courts getting the Asopos problem recognised as a health problem, as well and not only as an environmental problem.

- **How the actions can increase knowledge and support overcoming specific problem**

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- **As concerns the territorial context what the most innovative aspect of the initiatives is? Why?**
- **What the “internal quality factors” of the initiative are? (Sustainability, internal efficiency, effectiveness?)**

- **Is it possible to transfer the initiative in other context?**

The initiative in terms of trying to achieve environmental protection against bad practises/ cases of conflicts is possible to be transferred in other contexts, since it sets examples of ways to unite the torn local society.

- **Is the initiative reproducible in different contexts?**

The initiative in terms of trying to achieve environmental protection against bad practises/ cases of conflicts is possible to be transferred in other contexts, since it sets examples of ways to unite the torn local society.

- **Are joint monitoring instruments involving also the stakeholders contemplated?**

No there are not.

- **Please point out communication instruments (website, documents, and booklets) concerned with the initiative-conflict.**

<https://sites.google.com/site/itapoinofyta/>

<http://www.cisd.gr/>

<http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=397284>

<http://www.haci.gr/>

- **Please write your final considerations.**

- The local community is living under the threat of death as fellow citizens are constantly dying of cancer that may now be attributed to pollution from the informal Industrial zone of Oinofyta. They also run the risk of mutation of their DNA from the constant exposure to carcinogen factors, such as hexavalent chromium (Cr (VI)).
- Informal Industrial zone of Oinofyta contributes significantly to employment in the region and the residents of the surrounding areas invest most of their working future on it, selecting related skills. Normally these are not green jobs and often intensify the workers' exposure to harmful agents. But there are companies that comparatively qualify being called green and have as main target adding intangible value to the local community, even those of course stumble upon the reaction of the rest companies of the zone, as far as the implementation of these policies are concerned.

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- The local community is now at a very high level of knowledge of the subject and while activists-collectives of citizens have as main goal to integrate the local community to their struggles, due to the high degree of interconnection of the informal Industrial zone of Oinofyta with them, they often raise dikes to the various actions undertaken.
  - Existing legal framework has significant shortcomings, deliberately one might think, in order ultimately to service polluting industries to hide toxic waste and sewage and to avoid the cost of detoxification in their plants.
  - The environmental problem of Asopos has some consequences that are already irreversible.
- 
- **The role of Trade unions:** From the very beginning trade unions have been involved in the actions along with other actors and have participated in all steps and procedures to tackle the problem. The most representative trade union organization in the area is the territorial one, based in Thebes the capital of Boeotia region. Representatives from the **Labor Center of Thebes** have participated in the meetings with the Ministry of the Environment, the Technical Chamber of Greece (TCG), the General Inspectorate for the Environment and other factors which were dealing with the problem. The Greek General Confederation of Labor (GSEE) through the Committee of the Environment has also had an important contribution to the issue. The whole problem of Asopos river pollution is a topic that is taught in the Academy of Labor of GSEE as an eloquent example of combination of environment, production processes that is necessary to turn green more or less, employment, Occupational Health and Safety and public health.