



Summary of the Project

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COOPWEM (Cooperative Water and Renewable Energies Management) is a project funded by a European Reintegration Grant (ERG). It allowed a former Marie-Curie Experienced Researcher that worked in the host institution from 2005-2008 to stay in this enterprise for further three years.

COOPWEM started in April 2008 and was closed in March 2011. It aimed to develop integrated approaches in three complementary research areas: a) new instruments for the management of natural resources, b) local innovation systems and c) solidarity economy.

In the first 18 months of the project, literature on the issues at stake was reviewed and concepts have been clarified. A main focus of the work was the analysis of practical applications of the concepts "Communities for Sustainable Energy" (CO4SE) and Water Users Associations (WUA) in Portugal.

We wanted to find out to which extent this type of instruments (cooperative management) is helpful both to implement sustainable management of natural resources at regional level and to improve local innovation systems.

Concerning the agents involved, we expected that private investors would be especially interested in building CO4SE, while main interested parts in WUA would probably be municipalities and farmers associations. However,

no appropriate examples for an empirical study could be found. Cooperative solutions are normally regarded with suspiciousness. We analysed the reasons why cooperative solutions (CO4SE and WUA) are not popular in Portugal and re-directed the scope of the research to other applications that seem better appropriate to address the key questions of COOPWEM (new instruments for the management of natural resources; local innovation systems based on cooperative solutions).

Analysing the reasons why the model “producers’ and consumers’ cooperatives” is not very popular in Portugal as an instrument to promote the use of renewable energies and save water resources, we concluded that there are historical and cultural reasons that may explain the barriers we have found.

To re-direct the scope of research to more promising fields, we have been searching for other (cooperative) instruments that could promote a sustainable management of natural resources. Fortunately, at that time the host institution became involved in a large European Collaborative project, ZeroWIN - Towards Zero Waste in Industrial Networks (Grant Agreement No 226752); the main objective of this project is to develop and assess new and innovative approaches and effective strategies for the reduction of resource usage and waste prevention based on industrial networking.

As the project focuses on waste, energy and water, the scope of this project overlaps, to an important extent, the initial objectives of COOPWEM; synergies between both projects could therefore be exploited.

Although some adaptation has been made during its implementation, COOPWEM’s main objectives could be achieved. The project had an important positive influence on the strategic goals of our enterprise and the development of our research and consulting capacities. Due to the great efforts made in communication with stakeholders, it strongly promoted the discussion about the suitability of cooperative solutions for sustainable regional development in Portugal. Synergies with other European projects could be explored, as well as new educational activities that have unfolded wider societal impacts and new opportunities for international networking. For the ERG-researcher, important improvement in her professional carrier could be achieved, too: since a few months, she has become member of the direction of the host institution, and main responsible for the scientific and management coordination of our scientific and educational activities.