Title of the Story: Ecocampus Program

Destination Name: Paisagem Protegida Local das Serras do Socorro e Archeira

Country: Portugal

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Position: Senior Technician - Responsible for the destination application

Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)

☐ Localizing the destination supply chain
☐ Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
☐ Culture & Communities
☐ Environment & Climate
☐ Nature & Ecotourism
☐ Tourism Reset & Recovery
☒ Other

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Issues faced
With the global commitments approved at the Paris Summit in 2015, it is clear that the time has come for a fundamental change in the behavior of all, particularly in the business landscape. In this context, it is important to foster a new entrepreneurial movement that incorporates precisely this spirit and the commitments made.

To protect the climate and guarantee the limit of 2 degrees of heating provided for at the aforementioned Summit, a common and binding agreement between the entire entrepreneurial community is essential, clarifying common objectives and directives, encouraging a greater commitment by all to promote a green economy, where the environment and economy can grow hand in hand. For this, it is necessary to take advantage of our natural resources, infrastructure and our entrepreneurs, fostering the ability to link research, development and innovation to the productive fabric, products, services and processes, and also to the mechanisms of existing financing.

However, looking for a balanced model in territorial development, it is considered essential to bring more knowledge, employment and wealth to the rural areas where the Local Protected Landscape of Serras do Socorro and Archeira is located, in order to complement and establish synergies with others projects in the municipality such as Torres Inov-e, which intends to allocate companies in the historic center of the city; and ecoMar, developed in partnership with the Municipality of Lourinhã, aiming to enhance the Atlantic coast.

Methods, steps and tools applied
The Municipality of Torres Vedras, which is responsible for managing the Protected Landscape of the Serras do Socorro and Archeira Mountains, has made a strategic investment in the field of the Green Economy, seeking to create privileged conditions for the emergence of more and better companies and start-ups focused on the development of an economy that values and protects the environment while being competitive, stable and prosperous.

Thus, with the objective of creating entrepreneurial opportunities that generate economic, social and environmental value, the “Ecocampus – Torres Vedras” program was developed, which was established as one of the first Incubation and Entrepreneurship Platforms for the Green Economy at national level.

The “EcoCampus – Torres Vedras” is a program that aims to encourage entrepreneurship and promote the creation of innovative ideas in the areas of green economy, circular economy and environmental sustainability. The incubation of companies plays a very important role in the business ecosystem of the municipality of Torres Vedras and in this program, the incubation of projects takes place in two ways:

1) Physical incubation - Includes technical guidance for the implementation and development of the project in an incubation pole, with a duration of 24 months. The 3 incubation poles available correspond to the former Public Schools of Cadiceira, Casal Barbas and Figueiredo, located in the respective villages on the limits of the protected area.

2) Virtual incubation - Designed for projects that during development do not require a physical space, resulting in the hiring of a set of administrative and tax domiciliation services for companies.
Key success factors

With the "Ecocampus – Torres Vedras" program, an entrepreneurship platform was created that included the rehabilitation and reuse of public buildings using the traditional physical method of incubating companies and start ups. The initiative allows to give a second life to buildings that were deactivated and unoccupied and, on the other hand, to value the local communities and give a new life to the localities and to the Local Protected Landscape of Serras do Socorro and Archeira through the activities developed by the companies and start ups, namely in the context of visits, workshops and training.

For this reason, it is understood that this approach to business incubation fits perfectly into the context of promoting the green economy, sustainability and circular economy, capitalizing on the economic and environmental policy that has been pursued by the Municipality of Torres Vedras.

On the other hand, this example of rehabilitation of public heritage and attraction of qualified human capital to less densely populated areas represents a good practice with potential for replication in other territories, aiming to promote territorial development based on the transformation of economic dynamics that will benefit the entire community.

Lessons learned

For the success of this initiative, prior work is essential regarding the inventory, structuring and selection of new business entities and start-ups through a benchmark exercise, identifying potential institutional, business and financial partners, as well as structuring different lines and forms access, as well as availability of know-how to different entrepreneurial segments in the themes of green economy, sustainability and circular economy.

Thus, each company or start up to be developed in the Ecocampus Program must have characteristics that make them unique and specific for this Incubation and Entrepreneurship Platform for the Green Economy. However, without prejudice to the new sustainable entrepreneurship practices being an example of the implementation of the green economy policy, this type of initiatives is, as a rule, dependent on the interaction with various sectors, national investment priorities, institutional barriers they face and implementation risks and costs.

For this reason, they demand high levels of entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency, supported by strong management skills and capacity to attract partners and search for funding sources.

Results, achievements and recognitions

Since the beginning of the “EcoCampus – Torres Vedras” program in 2016, the following entities have benefited from the incubation process:

1) AFLOESTE – West Forest Interprofessional Association and West Forest Certification – Entity that aims to enhance the forest sector and is responsible for implementing the sustainable forest management standard and obtaining forest certification for the western region.

2) Floresta – Association of Agricultural and Forestry Producers of Extremadura – Entity that aims to support forest producers and owners in the region of Extremadura, through Associative Action, in the sustainable management of the forest.

3) Aquaponics Iberia – Organization that develops consultancy, training, design and implementation services for aquaponics and sustainable aquaculture projects (closed circuit).

4) Live With Earth – Organization for Global Sustainable Development that develops research projects, social
intervention/innovation and environmental education, adopting Circular Economy models.

In accordance with their scope of action, these entities have developed work in recent years that reflects the spirit of the program and adapts to the rural context in which the incubation poles are located.

More recently, in the first semester of 2021 a tender was launched for a new project dedicated to the circular economy that will be incubated in the old Figueiredo School.

Considering the success that has been the implementation of the project, on March 16, 2021, the municipal executive approved the partnership agreement for the continuity and management of the “EcoCampus – Torres Vedras” program between the Municipality of Torres Vedras and the ESTUFA Association – Cultural Platform. The agreement aims to take advantage of the Association’s knowledge regarding the monitoring and development of incubation projects, thus creating a structure that has privileged conditions for the start-up and development of projects and benefits from the synergies between the various programs.

Additional references

Agência Investir Torres Vedras  
https://www.investir-tvedras.pt/programas/Ecocampus

AFLOESTE – Associação Interprofissional da Floresta do Oeste e Certificação Florestal da Região Oeste  
http://www.afloeste.pt/

Aquaponics Iberia  
https://www.aquaponicsiberia.com/

Live With Earth  
www.livewithearth.org