

Policies for the development of the Greek mountains

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1. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Travelling through Greece's mountain villages, one can get the impression that time moves differently and more slowly. Indeed, despite the progress that has been achieved and the many social, political, and economic changes, which have influenced the world in the last decade, this impression remains acute. The peace and quiet, which formerly contributed to the economic and social liveliness of the mountain villages, today pose obstacles to the efforts made for their development.

These feelings, though they cannot be interpreted in any way, are present and have a crucial meaning for the future of the mountain villages. Consequently, the planners of development projects must recognise that incorporating the mountains in new economic and social trends will imply the availability of diverse types of qualitative data and an ability to understand the requirements for concrete proposals for the mountains' sustainable development. Positive results will require the consideration of political, social and cultural criteria, which differ considerably from simple economic criteria.

A quick review of history shows that the mountains are the foundation not only for the Greek people but also for the existence of the Greek nation through difficult periods. Indeed, the concept of 'mountain-refuge' nowhere had such a meaning and application as in Greece. Mountain people, living in relevant autonomy due to inaccessible terrain and the freedom they enjoyed, developed social, economic and commercial activities that were so significant that, in the difficult period of the Ottoman occupation, they were the main providers to the Greek population, especially of animal products. The Greek people, realising the meaning and importance of the mountains, bound themselves to them - which has offered mountain people freedom as well as financial independence. These ties are obvious even today, especially during the population censuses, when many people from the urban centres and the plains return to their native areas.

Today, the absolute freedom that the Greek people won and enjoy, the transformations in the agricultural economy and society due to industrialisation and infrastructure development, the political directions for the country's

economic recovery which focus on important development projects for the plains and coastal areas, have cut off from the rest of the Greek state the most important part of the country; the 'mountains and disadvantaged rural areas'.

2. THE POLICIES

On the national level, the state authorities have realised, but slowly, that the mountains constitute a productive domain that requires the development of diverse activities in order to support their populations. Nevertheless, many state officials, as well as many mountain people and tourists, regard the mountains simply as a place for holidays and solely for the benefit of urban people.

Every type of support for the mountain regions is conceived and implemented with their main consideration given to the needs of the urban population - who are considered as more productive and with less cost - over mountain people, who mainly live from agriculture but are thought to be less productive, requiring continuous subsidies and support in order to survive. These views persist, and continue to be strengthened by the application of strictly economic criteria that cannot incorporate the social costs of urbanism or the costs of restructuring mountain land uses. Moreover, while these views while taking into account the support the society must offer to the mountainous areas and their inhabitants, they largely ignore or disregard the mountains' contribution to the society and the economy at national level.

While it is possible to measure the economic benefits occurring through the exploitation of the mountainous wealth-producing resources - which are unfortunately invested in non-mountainous areas - it has not been possible to measure the qualitative characteristics of the many benefits they provide: the quality of the water resources, the landscapes of unique beauty, the quality of traditional local products, and especially the tourism resources. Consequently, it is easy for the statistical services to give a negative impression of the mountains, to such an extent that is impossible to calculate the mountains' importance.

The need for continuous assistance to the mountains also affects the planning of agricultural policy. In particular, the planners of agricultural development policies recognise that the mountains cannot offer returns on investments that are comparable to those in the plains where agricultural policies do not have to give special consideration to the type or area of agricultural land. Thus, agricultural policies and their accompanying development plans must consider not only the mountains, and their society and the economy, but also their problems, if such plans are to contribute decisively to their alleviation.

The absence of a state concern, that will clearly recognise the need for continuous assistance and the reduction of agricultural activities in the

mountains, which in turn requires such assistance, implies that the mountainous economy will continue to decline. This trend cannot easily be reversed unless this assistance is reinforced. For many years, the added value of mountainous agricultural production has declined, but increases in subsidies have generally covered this decline, reducing disparities in agricultural income.

In many cases, the primary policy for the mountains is to provide financial assistance. Regulations for the urbanisation of the mountains seem to be related mostly to the protection of the mountains from mountainous people themselves. This policy has never been explained or discussed with them, but has been imposed "from above" after they had to accept a tourist development model, often linked to the development of settlements.

Agricultural and Regional Policies are the basic policies that mainly affect the mountains. With historical hindsight, and considering how both policies were implemented in Greece before its accession into the European Union, one can observe that they did not include measures that differentiated mountainous areas from the rest of the rural areas. One possible exception concern the special measures adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1975 for the farming of the mountains and islands, especially through the subsidisation of small-scale producers of soft and durum wheat and barley, as well as the provision of special subsidies for mountainous goat and sheep breeding.

With Greece's accession into the European Union in 1981 and the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy, the application of the Directive 268/75 for the "mountainous and disadvantageous areas" began. In this context, the income of farmers in these areas is subsidised in order to balance their income. These policies aim at strengthening the agricultural income and at limiting migration. In Greece, 78% of the national area is eligible for these subsidies, which were available to 190,000 farmers in 1993. The average income support per farmer amounted in 1993 to about 200,000 drachmas (625 ECU) as compared with 660,000 Drs. (2,063 ECU) for Germany, and 780,000 Drs. (2,438 ECU) for England (European Commission, 1995).

However, the most important aspects of the policies implemented in the contexts of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Regional Policy remain horizontal and generalised; mountainous and plain areas are not clearly differentiated since the investment supports are not spatially differentiated. In addition, the system for monitoring the subsidies from the Structural Funds does not include information as to the proportion of the development resources allotted to the mountains.

Thus, the conditions under which the main orientations for mountainous areas were established have not always favoured the choice of the best solutions. Coming "from above", the measures that were chosen are not always in accord with the dynamics or the needs of the areas to which they were applied.

Furthermore, development models should also be appropriate to the region to which they are being applied. It is risky to try to apply a development model that was successful in one case/location to another (e.g., holding winter sports events in Tyrol and in Greece). The development process of a particular mountainous area or country must take into consideration its local dynamics and needs, and its historic, geographic, climatic, demographic and economic characteristics as well as a comparative dimension (i.e. how these differ from other areas to which a model may have been applied).

To date, development policies for the Greek mountains have mainly referred to the need to make socially acceptable what is also financially acceptable. However, such a policy at the national or international level cannot possibly favour the Greek mountains and reverse the existing negative effects of marginalisation. The policy for the mountainous areas should be specialised and specific to their characteristics, leading to the maximum possible level of development, without at the same time exhausting the natural resources.

Notes to readers

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