

ZAGORI : AN ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL AND MAN-MADE ECOSYSTEMS OF A MOUNTAINOUS REGION IN DEVELOPMENTAL DILEMMA

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Zagori is a region of small mountainous valleys, ravines and high peaks in the Pindus range (N-W of Greece). Its area is 1000 km², 1/5 of the prefecture of Ioannina, and is surrounded by a triangle that has as peaks the towns of Ioannina (50,000 inh.), Metsovo (3,500 inh) and Konitsa (3,000 inh.).

The climate is humid with high rainfall (1300 mm/year) and few sunny days. The flora is very rich with many endemic, rare and endangered species. The region is a refuge for both southern and northern plants, that is, it is the southernmost distribution limit for many central European plants and the northernmost distribution limit for many mediterranean plants. Characteristic of Zagori, is the presence of large mammals that are rare in Greece and in many parts of Europe, such as the brown bear, roe deer, wild goat, wolf, otter and others.

There are 45 communities in Zagori within the county of Dodoni of the prefecture of Ioannina with a total population of 2600 inhabitants. The largest village has 350 inhabitants, the smallest has 12 and the density of the population is 2.6 inh/km. Our interest in Zagori comes from the fact that the region is underdeveloped, but has a long historical tradition without any breaks in the social and urban structure. Its other points of interest are human settlements of high architectural value and a rich natural environment.

The present-day position and the number of settlements dates from 1500 BC and were determined by climatic and political factors. The period of its highest development started from 1750 AD, reached its peak during the reign of Ali Pasha and ended with his fall (1822) and the foundation of the Greek state.

From that period, the region of Zagori declined until 1946-1949. Since then, the economic stagnation and the population decline are rapid and fatal for the area.

Zagori is inhabited by 4 large social groups.

- a. the Zagorians
- b. the Sarakatsani
- c. the Wallachs and
- d. the Gypsies

The decisions about the region are taken outside its limits and often from Athens.

The only sector of economy where a small activity can be seen is that of primary production, with most important areas being forestry and animal raising. However, the methods of exploitation are traditional and cannot contribute to the social and economic development of the area.

The pyramid of ages is old, 80% of the total population being pensioners, 15% active ages and 5% young people.

METHODS

The research group included three researchers and 17 young scientists from various fields. The selection of this group was not based on scientific competence but primarily on the desire for knowledge of the region. The same criteria were applied on the detection of the problems and the alternative solutions that were proposed.

The group started with a three-day seminar in the village of Kipi where the historical, economic and social presentation of the region was made. Then followed the presentation of the natural environment and a questionnaire was formulated for the study of the man-made environment.

The group was supplied with maps, tables and paper material and split into smaller groups for the collection of the data. One member kept a diary of the activities of the group. Each member filled daily a special card with his or her name, date, aim of visit, visits to villages and interviews with people, on it.

During the third week, the group- visited the prefect of Ioannina, the director of forests and other authorities and followed the activities of the fourth Open School organised by the Research Centre of Zagori in the village of Aristi.

Two days of the program were devoted to the summing-up of the results of the study. On the last day, the conclusions that came out of the work of three subgroups were presented in a public debate, to the local people and to those participating in the Open School.

The study and the proposals of the group were met with the almost total agreement of the local people and every one made a wish that these proposals could be put into action and not remain on paper.

We must note that the best places for the collection of data were:

- a. the villages' square
- b. the café
- c. the rented rooms
- d. the festivals and
- e. the municipal offices

In 20 days, the group visited 29 out of the 45 villages of Zagori, talked with 1/4 of the total population and walked more than 100 km.

THE PRESENT STATE

According to the results of the research as well as previous data collected by the Research Centre of Zagori, the present state of the region is as follows:

1. Many productive activities are being abandoned, the population is declining and becoming old. This phenomenon has been stable for about 30 years. People who permanently live in Zagori do not exceed 2600 individuals, with 70% of them being more than 65 years old. Only 3-4 villages still have significant numbers of young people. Most of the agricultural activities have been abandoned. Forest exploitation is the only activity which employs personnel. At the same time, industrial activities do not exist and services are badly organised.

2. The region is gradually transformed in a holiday and convalescence ground. During the 3-4 summer months the population increases many fold. Most of the

houses which are constructed or repaired will serve as a secondary residence for people living in Ioannina or in Athens. Tourism in this case is different from the tourism of the Greek islands because the most important phenomenon in Zagori is the residence for a period of up to 6 months a year, of people originating from this region. These people are mainly pensioners who consider the region as a holiday resort and have their own opinions about the development and conservation of Zagori according to their specific interests.

3. Several public or private organisations have proposed during the last years, ambitious projects for the development of the region through its inclusion in the developmental model of the whole country. They plan intensive forest exploitation, the creation of large hotels and skiing centres, the construction of dams for hydroelectric power, the intensive exploitation of pastures etc. The main characteristic of these programs is the transfer of large-scale models which correspond to different situations and the proposing of solutions which do not take into account the particularities of the region. At the same time they do not analyse the causes of the underdevelopment and the real existing needs.

4. The natural and man-made environment of the region has degraded at a fast rate during the last decades. The populations of many rare species of the fauna and flora are decreasing and many are threatened with extinction. The main reason for the degradation of the ecosystems is the destruction of biotopes due to the continuous opening of new roads, the uncontrolled tourism, the overgrazing, the small dams etc. The excessive and illegal hunting and fishing and the collection of rare species by collectors have had equally catastrophic consequences. A large number of traditional houses have already been destroyed or are being destroyed now and repairs are not made because of the abandonment of the houses and the high price and scarcity of the necessary materials and workers.

PREREQUISITES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT

The main cause for the abandonment of productive activities is, according to our observations, the fact that the production of the region is not competitive within the market economy which is a determining parameter of the developmental model of the country. This is in a great extent true for agriculture, manufacture, industry, services etc. The necessary investments for the creation of the basic infrastructure, the development of activities etc., have not been made because they were not considered efficient according to the prevailing criteria. An immediate consequence was the continuous emigration of the population which was also connected to other historical events like the civil war of 1946-1949. This has played an important role in the uprooting of most of the active people of the region and in the large increase of the percentage of not only the old but also the conservative and passive part of the population. As a result we had a quantitative and qualitative degradation of the human potential of the region which can explain not only the abandonment of the productive activities but also the lack of creation of new ones, the refusal of establishing agricultural, animal raising and other cooperatives, the conservative attitude towards all kinds of novelty, the expectance of initiatives from the state, and in general, the passive acceptance and the lack of reaction to the phenomenon of degradation. The tendency of degradation of the natural and man-made environment, despite the fact that no important constructions and interventions have been made in the region, is mainly due to the abandonment and the lack of interest of the local people, together with an unfriendly attitude towards nature and

towards these elements of the environment which seem to hinder the acquisition of immediate benefits or a rapid turn-over. Therefore, the largest part of the population, but also the public bureaucracy, consider the environment as the biggest obstacle to development and they are entangled into the dilemma "strict protection or intensive development". This dilemma leads unavoidably to an impasse, since the great value of the natural and man-made environment does not permit the removal of the protection measures, while on the other hand, the projects for an intensive development of several sectors mean catastrophic intervention to the environment. The same dilemma is expressed by the remark that the real cost (and not only the cost which is calculated with narrow economic criteria) is big in both cases: first when productive activities have died out by the transformation of the whole area in a kind of museum or convalescence ground, as well as in the case of activities inconciliable with the sensitivity of the environment. The only possible way to avoid the impasse is to consider the environment as a given frame from which arise all the possibilities for the development of the area and at the same time their limits. In the concrete examples, the environment presents the only effective resource for the region if it is managed reasonably. The irrational exploitation will lead to a definite degradation of the natural as well as the man-made ecosystems. Therefore, the developmental possibilities of the region have to be looked for in the soft, small scale activities, towards a development where the accent will be given more on the qualitative aspect than on the quantitative one. This alternative way does not mean the automatic rejection of all non-traditional activities but in the opposite, it favours the adoption of new productive methods and activities according to the criteria of their harmonisation with the needs of nature and the people of the region.

The promotion of the soft development of the area is, however, not possible without the active participation of the population. The state of human potential today is not favourable for this objective and it needs the overriding of the principal obstacles like the unwillingness for taking initiatives and collective action, the adherence to classical developmental models, the interests which favour only the tourist or recreational function of the region, the competition between people or communities, the backward beliefs about the way of life etc. At the same time, the ageing population presents, beyond the ideological difficulty, a determining physical weakness to respond to developmental initiatives. That is why the creation of opportunities and motives for the attraction of young and active individuals, seems to be a necessary prerequisite. The arrival of such people attracted mainly by the rich environment and the expectance of a different way and better quality of life, could become the motive force for the developmental processes. It is however necessary that drastic reforms must precede, like the intervention to the ownership status, the reformation of the organisation structure and the enforcement of the unity and autonomy of the region.

According to this analysis, the proposals that follow are not so much the consequence of certain a priori ideological positions but rather results from the immediate contact with the region and constitute a consequence of an in-the-field observation of concrete needs and possibilities of the environment and of the people.

PROPOSALS

As far as primary production is concerned all sectors related to the natural resources of region must be developed and must be based on a cooperative basis. Agriculture must survive even if it is not economically competitive, provided it can

cover a part of local needs and tourism. It is evident that the model of intensive agriculture with monocultures etc. cannot be applied here and only small-scale cultures with good quality products can be developed. This principle applies generally for all productive activities of the region such as animal raising where a variety of low forms of exploitation can be developed such as bee-keeping, snail raising etc.

One reason that forestry has caused considerable damage to the environment (erosion etc.) is the lack of a general management plan instead of the isolated management studies that exist up to now. This plan will not only help towards a more effective forest protection but will also improve exploitation.

Another example of low form of development is tourism. This must not include large recreation facilities, hotels and other forms of intensive use, but must concentrate on small groups near or with the communities having as basic source of attraction the natural landscapes and the traditional settlements. If large units are built, this source of attraction will be destroyed the same way as the web of the social structure of the area. The development of tourism must be carried out by the communities and the local organisations. The infrastructure such as roads, sewage, telephones etc. must follow the lines of development and not be carried out haphazardly.

The secondary sector of industry must be closely related with the area and be based on primary production exploiting the forest, agricultural and animal products. Naturally, it must be tied in with the landscape and must not pollute.

Especially about the national park of Vikos-Aoos, since it represents a capital not only of local but of national interest, a series of proposals have been laid-out in order to achieve its better exploitation, the rendering of service to the visitors and most of all to achieve the conservation of natural equilibrium. We must note that the national park does not mean prohibitions that are against the interests of the local people but is an important asset for the development of the area than can bring together the natural and man-made environments and our cultural heritage.

The most important point that we believe should precede any activity, is land-use planning of the Zagori region embodied in a larger area planning. This planning will determine land use as well as social, economic and cultural activities.

At the same time, an organization must be created in order to coordinate all activities that will take place in Zagori. This organisation which must be based there, must include the local communities and other local organisations. Among its activities can be providing information to the local people, creating a fund for building materials and managing the national park.

Finally, and during all the phases of development, the people of Zagori must be informed on all activities related to development so that both the plans can be widely accepted and there will be possibilities for criticism and fruitful exchanges of ideas.

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