

A European Conference on insular mountain territories in the Mediterranean

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Opening Remarks: The proceedings of the Troodos-Cyprus conference, organized and financed with the support of the John Papadouris Foundation under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Cyprus, are now available in the three languages in which the sessions were held: Greek, English and French. This has not been without difficulties in translating and consolidating the different versions. We hope that these will meet the expectations of participants and stakeholders. Furthermore, if this publication is of some importance, it is because this conference was not conceived as an operation in itself but as a moment in a dynamic of analysis, collective work, project construction and the exchange of experiences. This introduction, written after the event and during the final editing process, would like to restore, at least in part, this dynamic. We therefore thought it would be interesting to offer potential readers some key explanations on the why and how, regarding content and form, as well as possible applications. We believe that we have created a compact and comprehensive tool, consistent with the discussions and presentations that took place during the conference, but also useful for the later stages that we are contemplating and will outline in the conclusion.

Genesis of the European conference

The idea for this conference gradually emerged at the end of diagnostic work carried out in the Troodos region of Cyprus. This diagnostic work, funded by the John Papadouris Foundation, aimed to define a *National Strategy for the Development of Mountain Communities* (NSDMC-ΕΣΑΟΚ), an inclusive development plan for this mountain region of the island-state. It also aimed to consolidate the desire of the Cypriot government and local actors to give mountain issues a renewed and legitimate place, not only as a result of the resources (natural, economic, cultural, landscape) that these zones possess, but also the functions they can perform in national territorial management, as well as new sustainable development opportunities which can today be developed for this kind of territory.

This diagnostic and analytical work was undertaken by a Greek and Cypriot team during the years 2018-2019, coordinated by the Rural Space Laboratory of the University of Thessaly, under the responsibility of its director, Dimitris Goussios. Many Greek and Cypriot researchers conducted surveys, processed data and produced analyses in order to complete this work which has created a dynamic in the building of knowledge and an interest shared by a number of local actors. This strategy, widely discussed at different territorial levels and in various communities and institutions, has been validated and adopted by the Cypriot government.

Therefore, at the end of this diagnostic work, and numerous feedback sessions with national and local actors, it seemed to the organisers of this research-expertise that a conference or event on a local-national scale was neither necessary, nor the best solution. The idea of holding an international conference with a strong European dimension to address mountain issues, was thus gradually born. It seemed important that the work accomplished, as well as the Greek and Cypriot researchers involved, be included and discuss their thoughts in a broader methodological and analytical framework. Indeed, Troodos and other Cypriot and European mountains share a regulatory and legislative framework, common policy instruments and often, relatively, closely-related problems and dynamics which are important.

It also seemed necessary to maintain a Mediterranean and even insular focus two important characteristics of the geographical circumstances of mountain areas in the Cypriot Republic. The organising committee therefore insisted, on the one hand, on the “European Conference” dimension in its title, and on the other, on identifying in particular the “Mountain Territories of the large Mediterranean Islands” By “large islands”, we mean the

five largest: Cyprus, Crete, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica (to which the Balearics were subsequently added). But this choice of a certain insularity and “mountainness” is not limiting. It represented here an opportunity and a possible grouping based on the fact these large islands are also, from an administrative and governance standpoint, regions (and in the case of Cyprus, a State). It was not a question of excluding reflections (and networks) concerning other European mountain territories (Alpine, Pyrenean or Carpathian for example), non-insular Mediterranean mountains, nor the common mountain issues on an international scale. It seemed important to insist, for this conference, on Mediterranean mountain areas in that they are, in European Union discussions, very largely underrepresented in spite of their common recognised specificities. The construction of a “focus” on Mediterranean and insular mountains therefore seemed useful and coherent in contextualising the Cypriot issue while marking a step in the construction of collective reflection on this specificity so as to bring it into the European, or even international, debate.

This was a means of including the issue of mountain areas in large Mediterranean islands into a broader institutional, methodological-analytical and strategic debate. For this purpose, it was important to define mountain issues on different levels, hence the conference’s multi-scalar subtitle: “European issues, national and regional policies and local mechanisms”.

A scientific committee was established, under the aegis of Dimitris Goussios, to undertake the work of identifying and inviting researchers and practitioners able to provide substantial input to the theme of the Conference as this was developing. From the Greek and Cypriot side, Elias Beriatos, George Vlahos and Menelaos Stavrinidis worked on the construction of the programme; on the side of other Europeans: Thomas Dax from the Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research in Austria; in France, Laurent Rieutord from the University of Clermont-Ferrand and Francois Lerin from the AIDA Association; and Dominique Barjolle from the Federal Institute of Technology ETH in Zurich, Switzerland.

Thanks to the combination of the different knowledge networks of the scientific Committee, and the funding of the invitations by the Cypriot authorities, the Conference was able to select around 40 participants from seven European countries. Of course, a number of Greek colleagues (some from Crete) and Cypriots, but also Italian and Spanish colleagues – for there to be, in a way, a marked “representation” of the large Mediterranean islands (for Sicily and Sardinia on the Italian side, the Balearics for Spain). French colleagues were also particularly approached. There is of course the fact that Corsica is one of the large islands/regions in Mediterranean Europe. But the French “over-representation” is a result of two factors that can be explained: One is that the Rural Space Laboratory of Volos has a long-standing collaborative relationship (in teaching as well as research) with French institutions, and in particular in developing programmes with Clermont-Ferrand and Montpellier. This cooperation is not Franco-Hellenic merely by chance, but is also explained by Rural Geography being a core module in the Volos Lab and is associated to the substantive background in research and analysis in France, and more widely in French-speaking countries. This relates specifically to the importance, established long ago, of the “rural” in traditional French geography (and history). It also concerns, concomitantly, the tradition in “agriculture-agronomy” for research in rural economics and rural sociology to involve detailed field work-regarding agrarian systems, the place of the “environment” and more recently, work in terms of landscapes and agroecology.

Finally, it should be noted that the Volos Laboratory and its French colleagues share an approach that is organised by “territories” and the construction of “territorial projects” with local actors, and notably but not exclusively, farmers. This research stance leads to particular attention to cognitive tools and imagery which allows and facilitates this co-construction with actors and stakeholders.

From a point of view of the scientific disciplines covered by the presentations, the presence of many geographers is therefore not unusual, but also economists- as well as colleagues referring more directly to sociology, anthropology, political sciences and management...Given our working themes, it is not strange either to have established a dialogue with agronomists and ecologists.

However, the scientific multidisciplinary of this presentation must not obscure two interesting aspects regarding the collective that was brought together for this conference. On the one hand, the presence of many “practitioners”, in other words people who, regardless of academic background, undertake intervention work with organisations of very different statuses (international networks, regional authorities, public administrations, non-governmental organisations...). On the other hand, it should be noted that a number of participants discarded strict affiliations to disciplines in favour of: either a more general reference to the humanities and social sciences (HSS), or (and often in a complementary way) being defined less by disciplines than by the “object” and “issue” of scientific enquiry. This, in a way, gives priority to the “field” and the questions that it raises regarding a discipline’s referential framework, all the more so in a process where the researcher is most often

“involved” through the assignment and the implemented intentional perspective (in particular, inclusive and sustainable development).

Conclusion

The 26 papers that follow have been calibrated for a concise reading presenting, in a compact way (between two and four pages), a work perspective, an organisation, an experience. The authors submitted to this difficult exercise and we thank them for this. Despite the apparent dispersion of approaches and disciplines mobilised, of actions carried out or the type of activity, there is a sort of “convergence platform” among participants which allows us to present this resulting volume as the beginning of a network of skills regarding the issue of Mediterranean insular mountains and its inclusion in Mediterranean, European, even global, debates. This network’s functions and operation have not been established; it is of course not closed and can be enriched by other colleagues and skills as it is used. This network is defined beyond an “epistemological community” as a “community of practices” that are certainly different but have common perspectives.

This convergence agreed on the interest in a Mediterranean geographical scope (mountainous, insular without necessarily being limited to “large islands”); a methodological scope which insists more on a “discourse on method” than on a methodology in the form of a “model” (of development or implementation). Several points of convergence that have already been addressed in this introduction can be reiterated here as they are widely shared in this collective: the need for a territorial and local approach, but with a multi-scale conception of strategies and understandings; the combination of multiple issues and the complexity of dealing with this set of nexuses; the approach to certain tools (Geographical Indications or quality marks for example) as “boundary objects”; a stance - in research or in brockering - of facilitation (and at the heart of this brockering, that of knowledge). Finally, the objective of this pooling is not to identify “good practices” or scalable or exportable solutions but rather the networking of experiences.

Finally, it is stimulating to be able to announce in the final sentence of this introduction that our colleagues from Crete, in attendance and interested in the Troodos-Cyprus European conference, are proposing to host a second meeting in 2022.

Dimitris Goussios

Activities, research themes and areas of interest:

His research centres on the questions of territoriality, ownership of territorial resources, governance and diagnosis. The Laboratory focuses more specifically on diagnostic methodology, emphasising visualisation and 3D representations and their contribution to the sensitisation and active participation of local actors in the development of territorial projects.

Indicative author bibliography :

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2. Goussios D., Anthopoulou Th., (2016): Relocalisation de la feta AOP par la coopération des petits territoires laitiers en Thessalie : de la coordination de la filière à la coordination territoriale. In : *Au cœur des territoires créatifs. Proximité et ressources territoriales*. Eds. Pecqueur B et Glon E. : PUR (Presses Universitaires de Rennes).
3. Goussios D. Rieutort L. (2018). Politiques d’accueil et dynamiques collectives dans les territoires ruraux de montagne en Grèce. In : *Les campagnes européennes : espaces d’innovations dans un monde urbain*, pp. 183-196. Presses universitaires du Midi, Toulouse,

Francois Lerin

Activities, research themes and areas of interest :

François Lerin, social sciences, member of AIDA (International Association for agro-environmental Development). Senior researcher on environmental and agro-environmental challenges and methodological issues in social sciences (the issue of scales and transdisciplinarity). As scientific administrator in an international Mediterranean organisation for a number of years, he coordinated numerous network “embedded” research programmes

(French and European). His work is currently focused on the Western Balkans, member countries and candidate countries based on the relationship between environmental regimes and local situations and mechanisms.

Indicative author bibliography:

1. Lerin, F. (2015). The Scale Issue in Global International Environment Governance: For a Transdisciplinary Perspective. In : O. Charnoz, V. Diaz Pedregal & A. L. Kolata (Eds.), *Local Politics, Global Impacts. Steps to a Multi-Disciplinary Analysis of Scales* (pp. 39-66). Surrey, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing
2. Lerin F., Tubiana L. (2020). Climate Change: Anticipated Risk or Heralded Catastrophe? Questions from a thwarted Public Enquiry. In: *Society Under Stress: A Pluridisciplinary Approach* (ed.: D. Jodelet, J. Vala, E. Drozda-Senkowska), *Springer Publishing* – pp. 161-176