

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR RURAL AREAS*

Rural areas have always suffered from competition from towns. While the latter enjoy many attentions and are a centre of political, economic and cultural activities, rural areas find it hard to build an identity and a future. During the last two centuries, the countryside in western countries has been steadily emptied of its economic activities and its population, giving way to a rural desert scattered with ever-larger, more mechanised and more “inhuman” agricultural businesses. Who, in the early 1980s, ever reasonably considered settling in the countryside to earn a living there from anything other than agriculture? In the South Mediterranean, the virtuous circle of industrialisation, followed by a rural exodus and modernisation of farms did not happen. The demographic dynamic remained strong and today we have densely populated rural areas that we do not really know what to do with, which we would sometimes rather forget but which force the attention of governments because of the social instability which they engender: rebellions, migrant flows and extremism. But the world is changing. Both in the North and the South, the next decade could see a shift, if not a reversal, in the rural paradigm which would open up these areas to new opportunities for development.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has long left its mark on the European countryside, setting development in a support role to the implementation of structural changes in the agricultural world. Routinely attacked in the framework of intra-European and international negotiations, it has seen its structuring capacity lessened in favour of an increasingly independent policy with extended functions. 2008, with a possible mid-term review of the Community budget, and 2013, which ushers in a new six-year budget and programming cycle, are the next stages in this fundamental change in the issues at stake. As a structural tool of the CAP, rural development is gradually becoming a vector of geographical cohesion, driving the competitiveness of rural areas and supporting the sustainability of human activities and rational management of natural resources.

Nevertheless, the weakening of the CAP alone has not automatically led to this rise in rural power. The trend reflects a more profound reappraisal of rural areas in terms of their economic, social and environmental potential to satisfy the new demands of post-industrial societies. The change in the paradigm is real and has to do with the major

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currents which are rocking today's societies and which the Mediterranean sphere cannot escape: the globalisation of the economy which increases competition but at the same time opens up new opportunities; the advent of new technologies with the growing dematerialisation of services and social relations; the assertion of civil society and the emergence of participatory local governance; the rise in environmental perils which is raising international awareness that urgent action is needed.

The rural population in the Mediterranean in 2020

Different definitions of rural

Traditionally, three theoretical approaches are used to define "rurality". (1) *by a negative*: everything which is not urban is rural. Urban is defined in terms of the inhabited space, population density and concentration and diversification of activities. Rurality, therefore, means low density, with little artificialisation, dispersion of activities and communities. (2) *sociological*: rurality is defined in terms of socio-cultural criteria relating to social relationships, the value system, lifestyle and consumption patterns. (3) *economic*: the pattern of economic activity is taken into account in the definition of "rural". It is about areas where economic activities are little diversified and where agricultural activity is dominant in terms of its share of jobs and incomes.

The endogenous and exogenous transformations of rural areas have, to varying degrees, made these approaches inappropriate. The first uses criteria, in particular density, which can only have conventional definitions based on space (from one country to another), time (for the same country) and the desired approach to problems. The sociological approach is no longer valid. Differences in lifestyle and consumption between rural and urban societies tend to become blurred as a result of a process of "homogenisation" in the countries of the North and "coming together" in the countries of the South. The economic approach is also becoming worthless in the light of the internal changes in rural areas. Even if it still provides work for a very large part of the countryside, agriculture is no longer the dominant activity (in terms of employment and incomes) in the majority of rural areas in the countries of the northern shore.

In the face of these trends and the enormous diversity of rural areas, any attempt to define the concept of rurality becomes illusory (Perrier-Cornet and Hervieu, 2002). Conversely, two practical approaches seem to sum up well the situation of rural areas in the North and, to some extent, in the South of the Mediterranean:

- The first puts nature at the core of the definition. Rural areas are characterised by the abundance of nature (open space and largely not built up) and water resources, vegetation, etc.
- The second combines low population density, activities and infrastructure in a given area with low purchasing power compared with urban centres (Wiggins and Proctor, 2001).

The most commonly used approach in drawing up national statistics is the one which takes account of the criteria of density and size of the population (the Maghreb coun-

tries), combined or otherwise with other criteria, employment in particular (France). In certain countries, such as Egypt, a purely administrative decision classifies areas as rural or urban. This shows clearly how carefully “rural” and, conversely, “urban” statistics must be treated. The EU, for its part, adopted the OECD definition (Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2006), based on a two-stage approach:

- Firstly, basic local units (such as municipalities) are identified as rural if their population density is less than 150 hectares per km².
- Secondly, by aggregation, NUTS 3 or NUTS 2 local communities are classified in one of the following three categories¹: predominantly rural region if over 50% of the population live in local rural units; intermediate region if between 15% and 50% of the population live in local rural units; predominantly urban region if less than 15% of the population live in local rural units.

This last classification, which does not contrast the terms “rural” and “urban”, but replaces them, suitably weighted, in a shared common territory, the region, is particularly interesting.

Revisiting rural demographic projections

Rural areas in the Mediterranean could still be home to some 32% of the total Mediterranean population in 2020, some 166 million people.² Unlike the towns which will concentrate over 98% of the overall population growth in the Maghreb, they will experience a generally modest increase since average projections suggest only two million more rural dwellers. These projections conceal major disparities between regions and countries and show that the rural component of the population will essentially continue to weigh on the future of the Mediterranean countries. Egypt and Turkey, with 50 and 22 million rural dwellers respectively, will concentrate 43% of the Mediterranean rural population in 2020. Three of the countries of the South and East Mediterranean (SEMC), Egypt, Syria and the Palestinian Territories, will see their population increase by over 14% from 2005 to 2020. The rural population of the Maghreb will probably decline by 2.5% from 30,510,000 inhabitants in 2005 to 29,760,000 in 2020. The rural population of Mediterranean Europe is expected to fall by 11%.

This overall fall in the rural population forecast in the United Nations trend scenarios, however, needs to be questioned. The assumption adopted is that urbanisation will continue due to countries’ economic and social development, with a reduction in the absolute value for rural populations in the developed countries and a similar but relative reduction, allowing for population growth, in the developing countries (United Nations, 2006, p.15). A number of indicators suggest that this scenario should be treated with a degree of caution and possible alternative scenarios should be imagined.

1 - Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics. NUTS 2 have 800,000 to 3,000,000 inhabitants, NUTS 3 have 150,000 to 800,000.

2 - See Chapter 1 “The socio-demographic context”.

The end of the urban mirage in the South?

In the context of liberalisation of the South Mediterranean economies, the number of agricultural producers could decline in the face of international competition in both domestic and global markets. The question then is whether it must be assumed that these populations, as in the past, will come to swell the towns and more particularly, those on the coast. Nothing could be less certain as the towns will already have to absorb the bulk of their own demographic growth and employment opportunities for an under-skilled rural population will still be poor in a sluggish industrial sector and in services, should the latter come to be developed.

Towns, which have long been a magnet, nowadays already have high unemployment rates, a housing crisis with rising rents, growing insecurity and lowering of the quality of urban life. According to UN-Habitat,³ the proportion of town-dwellers in 2005 living in difficult conditions is far from negligible. If one applies the precarious settlement ratio for 2003 to the urban population data forecast for 2020 (which on the face of it is a low hypothesis), 26 million Turkish town-dwellers will be living in precarious conditions. There will then be more urban poor than rural. In Egypt, 16 million town-dwellers will be affected, equivalent to over 30% of the rural population.

The press release for the last UN-Habitat report, *State of The World's Cities 2006-2007*, is even more explicit: "It is generally assumed that urban populations are healthier, more literate and more prosperous than rural populations. However, UN-Habitat's *State of the World's Cities Report 2006/7* has broken new ground by showing that the urban poor suffer from an urban penalty: Slum dwellers in developing countries are as badly off if not worse off than their rural relatives" (UN-Habitat, 2006-2007). In cities like Cairo, where according to national estimates,⁴ 40% of the population live in shanty towns, people disappointed by the mirage of urban life are going back to the countryside. It is probable, therefore, that the rural exodus will not happen and that economically excluded and very poor rural populations will prefer to stay in the countryside or emigrate, especially to Europe, which itself will not be without its problems. The need for a "rural" approach to these changes must then be considered as a strong hypothesis.

In the North, the longing for the country

In the last decades, all the North Mediterranean countries have undergone a decline in their rural agricultural population. Its continued decline is now being called into question by a process of resettlement of the rural environment. The fall in the number of farms seems to be largely offset by the arrival of newcomers from the towns bringing significant change to the nature of the rural population. A recent study by the Interministerial Delegation of Land Planning and Regional Competitiveness (DIACT) underlines the new demographic dynamism of rural areas. While with the phenomena of "metropolisation" of towns, periurban areas are the chief focus, the arrival of new residents also affects more peripheral rural communes and "even rural communes most remote from urban centres are now seeing considerable inflows of new residents: for the first time, the migratory

3 - The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) defines precarious conditions as a deficit of at least one of the following: secure tenure, adequate access to drinking water, satisfactory sanitation and other facilities, quality of construction and adequate living space.

4 - See the Egyptian Daily *Al-ahram*, March 2007.

Table 1 - Precariousness of urban settlements

Country	2003					2020 (with precariousness ratio for 2003)				
	Total population	Rural population	Urban population living in precarious conditions			Total population	Rural population	Urban population living in precarious conditions		
	Millions	Millions	%	Millions	% rural pop.	Millions	Millions	%	Millions	% rural pop.
Albania	3.1	1.7	7	0.1	5	3.3	1v6	7	0.1	8
Tunisia	10.1	3.7	4	0.3	7	11.1	3.5	4	0.3	9
Greece	11.1	4.4	6	0.4	9	10.8	3.6	6	0.4	12
Italy	58.1	18.9	6	2.3	12	55.3	16.8	6	2.3	14
Portugal	10.5	4.8	14	0.8	17	42.8	9.3	6	2.0	22
Algeria	32.9	13.6	12	2.3	17	10.5	4.0	14	0.9	23
France	60.5	14.3	6	2.8	19	60.8	12.4	6	2.9	23
Spain	43.1	10.1	6	2.0	20	38.8	13.1	12	3.1	24
Egypt	74	42.8	40	12.5	29	90.9	49.9	40	16.4	33
Morocco	31.5	13.4	33	6.0	45	36.8	12.5	33	8.0	64
Turkey	73.2	24.7	43	20.9	85	83.1	22.6	43	26.0	115
Lebanon	3.6	0.5	50	1.6	350	4.0	0.4	50	1.8	471

Source: UN-Habitat 2001 figures in Med 2006.

balance of so-called “isolated” rural areas has turned positive (+0.29% per year over the last decade)” (DIACT, 2003).

It is well known that France is much more rural in character than other European countries, and perhaps this new rural dynamism could be merely an exception in an “urban” Europe. Nothing of the sort. A forecast study commissioned by the EU comes to the same conclusion that Europe’s rural regions are demographically dynamic, albeit difficult to analyse. If one considers, as this study does, that a crucial factor in the future of the rural world is its population, many regions are in a healthy state, both keeping and receiving population (European Commission, 2006, p.15). Some whose natural growth rate is negative see their population increase as a result of migration from the towns and urban agglomerations (Ibid, p. 40). This vitality, which can also be found in the economic field, is forging a new image of the European countryside.

The economic and urban shift coastward: is it an illusion?

Both for geo-strategic (ports) and physical reasons (deserts in the South), the Mediterranean coasts are today major centres of activities for all the countries that fringe the Mediterranean in terms of road systems, airports, industry, trade and especially tourism. In the South, the fear that coastal areas will dominate and attract entire national

economies, to the detriment of the hinterland, is justified to the extent that these areas currently benefit from investment and, against a background of liberalisation of markets, are called on to act as a direct interface between global markets and the consumer centres formed by the major coastal towns. In circumstances where the economies of the South are subject to the great international economic currents, this external pressure could lead to a total split between the hinterland and a coastal region where most of the wealth is concentrated and which face outwards beyond the sea. The former, too poor, too unproductive, too uncompetitive and consuming too little to be really interesting would then be condemned merely to subsist.

If this scenario is not to become reality, it must to be taken into consideration and its relevance for countries needs to be evaluated, in order to encourage movement towards more balanced regional development. Let us start by putting the image of coastal monopolisation of economic development in perspective. In terms of the demographic dynamic, the coastal zone is not the irrepressibly attractive region that is often imagined. Towns in the interior have their own dynamic, as shown by the development of the network of towns with over ten thousand inhabitants between 1950 and 1995 (Moriconi-Ebrard and Dinard, 2000, p. 33). With the notable exception of the Maghreb, this network is proportionally denser in the hinterland than on the coast (see table 2).

The projections, in terms of demographic weight, relative changes in that weight and changes in population density (see Charts 1, 2 and 3) show two strong trends: firstly, the general stability of the coastal population in relation to the total population (see Chart 2), which means that coastal population trend is directly related to demographic growth and that the “coastal effect” is weak; and, secondly, the relative stability of the coastal population density in the North and its very strong growth in the South (see Chart 3). There are two reasons for the latter: demographic growth and the narrowness of the coastal strip in the countries concerned.

Furthermore, these data show the diversity of situations of the Mediterranean coastal communities with:

- *northern coastal populations which will change little.* Although in very different ways, their population will tend to decline as a percentage of the total population of the European Union and with an increase in population density for the country as a whole (with the exception of Italy). This pattern will reach as far as Turkey, without exceeding 200 inhabitants per km²;
- *a highly heterogeneous Maghreb,* where the percentage of Mediterranean coastal populations is 70% in Tunisia, 40% in Algeria and 10% in Morocco, and Algeria’s population density is double that of Tunisia and Morocco;
- *a very strong increase in coastal population densities in Syria and Lebanon* but in two very different settings: a Lebanese population the vast majority of which is coastal whose size is related to the overall population increase, and a Syrian population of which only a small minority is coastal and declining in proportion to the overall population;

Table 2 - Trends in the average spacing of agglomerations in Mediterranean “departments” (km)

Zone		1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1995
Maghreb	Coast	65.7	43.4	36.2	33.1	19.6	21
	Interior	66.0	55.3	47.6	44.4	36.5	31.8
	Difference Interior-Coast	0.3	11.9	11.4	11.3	13.7	10.8
Egypt	Coast	20.1	14.5	12.6	10.7	8.2	7.5
	Interior	9.3	8.0	8.7	8.2	7.9	6.2
	Difference Interior-Coast	10.8	-6.5	-3.9	2.5	-0.3	-1.3
Machrek	Coast	25.1	23.2	22.9	18.8	14.5	12.9
	Interior	35.4	30.6	25.7	19.6	16.3	15.5
	Difference Interior-Coast	10.3	7.4	2.8	0.8	1.8	2.6
Turkey	Coast	47.5	33.9	31.7	25.9	21.8	22.2
	Interior	59.2	51.0	39.0	33.8	29.5	28.9
	Difference Interior-Coast	11.7	17.1	7.3	7.9	7.7	6.7

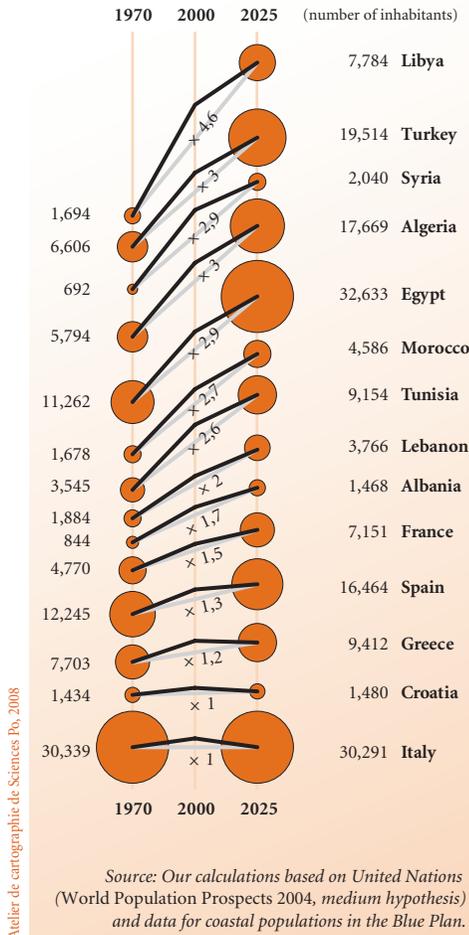
Source: Moriconi-Ebrard and Dinard (2000); breakdown used: NUTS 3 and equivalent outside Europe.

- Turkey which could absorb the increase in its population better than Algeria and Egypt and which will continue to have a relatively low population density;
- four countries, Libya, Tunisia, Lebanon and Greece, where the majority of the population is coastal but for very different reasons: omnipresence of the sea in Greece, desert in Tunisia and Libya, and Lebanon’s small size.

The interior of countries has not been abandoned. It is time to stop exaggerating the importance of the international economy and trying to outdo one another in parroting the idea that “it is the large coastal cities which have benefited and still benefit from this magnet effect” (Mella Marquez, 2006), when it is rather a social construct which well illustrates the role of political and economic forces in the current distribution of populations. Thus, for example, Algeria’s coastal development is part of its colonial history, further entrenched after independence by the choice of development based on the establishment of “industrialising” industries located in the coastal reasons (Kateb and Ouadah-Bedidi, 2002).

Rather than succumb to this temptation, it is now time to recognise the existence and value of this interior economy in order to develop its potential. Algeria, with its 40% of coastal population exposed to a major seismic risk, has taken on board the need to strike a balance in its development by launching a grand national regional development scheme (Ministry of Regional Development and the Environment) aimed at purging the coastal strip to control urbanisation more effectively, develop the highland regions and the South, protect communities and economic potential. Combating the rural exodus, revitalising marginal zones, and preserving the agricultural and natural resources of

Chart 1 - Evolution of the coastal population, 1970-2025



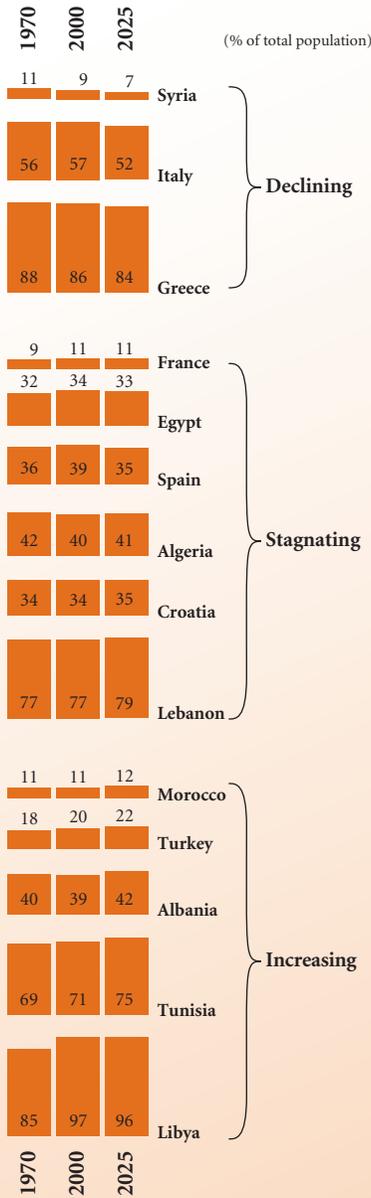
Atelier de cartographie de Sciences Po, 2008

these areas are the objectives of this ambitious policy. It involves developing local resources, making these areas more attractive economically and socially and creating a network of towns and new towns.

The pattern of change in the North Mediterranean countries now shows that this coastal region may reach its limits in terms of population and environmental pressures, which means that the levels forecast for 2025 may never be reached. "In the North, while some coastal areas continue to experience positive migrant flows, other are showing clear signs of exhaustion, even depopulation of the coast. Tuscany, for example, between 1950 and 1980, was very much marked by increasing coastal settlement while, from 1981 to 1991, only 32% of coastal municipalities saw a rise in their population, compared with 40% inland. The causes appear to be the crisis of coastal industrialisation, the halt in tourist development, and planning policies which favoured the centre of the region" (Moriconi-Ebrard and Dinard, 2000, p. 3). In that case, the hinterland become balancing areas. Recognising this reality now would allow the implementation of proactive policies which would have the dual advantage of avoiding pointless destruction of the environment and voluntarily delivering the necessary balanced development.

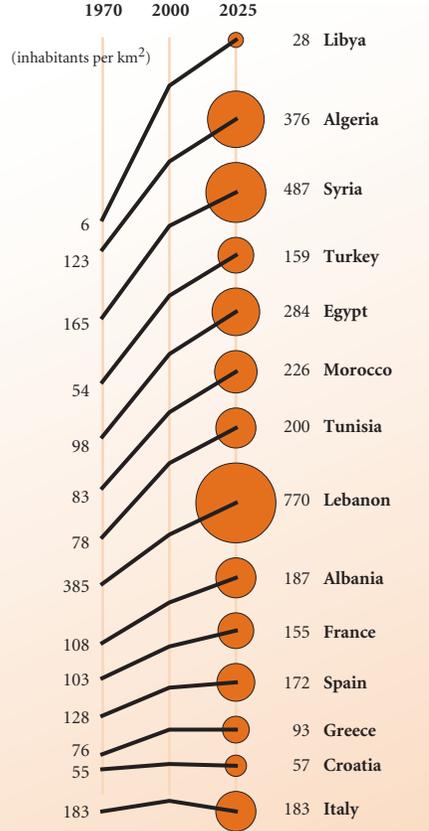
These various perspectives put the Mediterranean rural areas at the heart of future development policies. Bearing in mind the population burden, it is no longer tenable to think that development will be driven by towns alone, coastal or otherwise. The countryside is no longer just agricultural and neither are its communities still condemned to be a social burden. Genuine rural development policies, with an integrated and autonomous structure, need to be able, in the North, to meet the expectations of populations who voluntarily resettle these areas and, in the South, those who will be forced to build a future there other than in agriculture.

Chart 2 - Evolution of the coastal population, 1970-2025



Source: Our calculations based on United Nations (World Population Prospects 2004, medium hypothesis) and data for coastal populations in the Blue Plan.

Chart 3 - Evolution of the coastal population, 1970-2025



Source: Our calculations based on United Nations (World Population Prospects 2004, medium hypothesis) and data for coastal populations in the Blue Plan.

Four key factors in the evolution of today's societies

The “territorial moment”

Globalisation, accompanied by liberalisation of markets, is perceived in economic terms as a major constraint and source of increased risk of marginalisation for rural areas which could find themselves excluded from the major international trade routes. Yet it opens the way to a new production dynamic. For B. Pecqueur, “there would be a ‘territorial moment’ in the global regulation of the economic system (production and consumption) which would allow the end of an industrialised world indifferent to the geographical and cultural context to be managed” (Pecqueur, 2004). It would see the emergence of a postfordian regional economy with a transition to a vertically organised (product-based) production system, and a shift from standard mass production to a flexible horizontal system (based on customer micro-segments) with enormous capacity to adapt to the segmentation of the market and rapid changes in demand.

This development is evident in all consumer goods sectors. In agriculture, demand for “local” products and other “typical” products has seen supply multiply in numerous niche markets. The territorial argument refers here to the idea of product quality and authenticity. Alongside mass production of standardised food products, more modest branches of production, which can be expected to achieve greater redistribution of added value in the region of origin, are being developed. While this trend is still the prerogative of the countries of the North, consumers in the South have always recognised the distinctive quality of certain local products,⁵ and these products, certificated and recognised, are distributed through national outlets. Although they are more readily found in export markets, this is more for economic reasons than lack of interest among local populations. By relying on ethical trade and recognition of the act of production, fair trade products, specifically aimed at promoting products from the countries of the South, enshrine a similar idea of a return to regionalised production.

In fact, the renewed appreciation of local products is merely the expression of a profound reorganisation which is giving regions a role in the building of a dynamic economic fabric which is a match for international competition. While it was predicted that there would be a convergence of behaviour and regional economic emancipation with its cohorts of unbridled delocalisation, it is found that “neighbourhood relations between local actors can play a key role in the competitiveness of economic activities” (Pecqueur, 2007). The reality of this phenomenon now seems to be widely accepted, even beyond the rural economy. Almost paradoxically, globalisation thus creates conditions favourable to the emergence of regions and local economic dynamics. It remains to be seen how far Mediterranean rural areas and the producers located there will be able to take advantage of this.

Alongside this “globalisation effect”, while not exaggerating their importance, particular mechanisms of economic independence unite the Mediterranean countries of the

5 - Hasbaya olive oils or almonds from Hermel in Lebanon, Beni Mauouche figs or Deglet Nour dates in Tunisia, Taliouine saffron in Morocco, for food products; argan oil from the foothills of the Moroccan High Atlas, Aleppo soap in Syria, essential oils in Morocco for cosmetics.

North and South. They find their political expression in the Euro-Mediterranean process initiated in 1995 and, more recently and more practically, in the Mediterranean component of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Intensifying this partnership could contribute to the rediscovery of the region, if, for example, it led to a policy of Mediterranean labelling to foster greater international visibility of local products.

The time for connectivity

While Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have contributed enormously to the globalisation of the economy and information by allowing companies to communicate in real time and work on a just-in-time basis with ever more numerous suppliers increasingly scattered around the world, they have also opened the way to the dematerialisation of activities and services. Direct relations between individuals and organisations is much easier nowadays. More formalities can be processed via the Internet. The consumer, yesterday “at the end of the chain”, can be reached by the producer of goods. The employee, yesterday tied to his desk, now finds freedom and quality of life in teleworking. Groups and individuals scattered around the world can share and discuss common concerns.

The town, as a place to meet, to conduct business and deal with administrative formalities, has long been a place you have to go. With the new technologies, many activities can now be carried on independent of the place where they originate. The town loses some of its functions in favour of virtual nodes accessible to everyone provided that they have suitable equipment. What can rural regions expect from these new technologies which open them to the world and break their isolation? How should they prepare for this revolution? What policies need to be followed, differentiated in the North and the South, to take full advantage of this new way of relating to the world?

A civil society asserting itself

Against a background of growing recognition of civil society in development processes, the composition of rural areas today is changing and is faced with the evolution of political structures for representation and decision making. Civil society is organising and a new governance is on the march. In the North, its opinion is now explicitly sought by governments as shown by the constitution of a citizens’ panel from the ten European regions asked to express their views on the future of rural areas.⁶ Civil society can even set itself up as an opposition and join in national or international debate. As a partner of international organisations in development activities, it is now, more than in the past, recognised as having the right of observer status, consultation and even involvement in the management of those organisations.

In the South Mediterranean, the progressive organisation of civil society and its emergence as a development actor are also realities, even if it can be assumed that “in the South and East Mediterranean Countries, the legacy of centralisation and authoritarian political systems will continue to influence the forms of intervention and organisation of local actors. [...] The public-private-associative dynamic will still be hampered for a long time by the lack of devolution or decentralisation, by the closed nature of administrations and

6 - See www.citizenspanel.eu

the rigidity of administrative rules” (Bessaoud, 2006). Often occupying ground abandoned by the State, it contributes to the evolution of societies (protection of human rights, advances in the status of women, etc.) and development. The building of partnerships with counterparts in the North, in the Euro-Mediterranean framework, for example, confers on it the legitimacy that at times it still finds difficult to achieve at national level and strengthens it, at the same time creating bridges between the two shores of the Mediterranean. “The importance of decentralised cooperation should be underlined, in particular its growing impact on local development, thanks to the intervention of a variety of actors – regional and autonomous governments, municipalities, associations, universities, entrepreneurs, citizens’ platforms – which reinforce its dynamism and its capacity to share projects on both shores of the Mediterranean” (Roque, 2004).

Despite the handicaps of recent or earlier history,⁷ national leaders seem genuinely to realise the importance of intervening with or for the benefit of rural populations, as shown by the current implementation of the rural renewal policy in Algeria or the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) in Morocco. These overtures must be translated into success, otherwise there is a risk of returning to more conservative positions.

Awareness of the environmental challenge

As reflected in the latest work of the IPCC, environment, its protection, sustainable management and conservation will have an ever more important place in development policies. All the more so in the Mediterranean which is particularly affected by human activities and exposed to the consequences of climatic warming (see chapter 3 “Natural resources”). Due to the variety of climates and soils and its agricultural history, the rural Mediterranean is characterised by the wealth of its agriculture and landscapes. Largely man-made, it nevertheless accommodates enormous biodiversity and unique and extremely fragile natural regions. As areas of production and thus exploitation of natural resources, they are seeing their productive capacity dwindle day by day under the excessive pressure of population, urban development and unsustainable and intensive production methods. Land is lost to the development of towns, erosion, over-exploitation of water resources, salinisation of soils, over-grazing and desertification, etc. Paradoxically, the abandonment of the poorest rural areas, combined with land left fallow and the disappearance of improvement works, which in some cases had been going on for centuries, constitutes a new kind of impoverishment.

Natural spaces face the same threats (Benoit and Comeau, 2005). Many animal and plant species are endangered, the last highly bio-diverse wetlands are gradually disappearing and the coastline is in a critical situation: “the growing pressure of coastal development and economic exploitation of the coast is making any attempt at sustainable management extremely difficult. Of the 47,720 kilometres of coast, 25,000 are urbanised or have already passed the critical limit” (López Ornat and Correas, 2003). What will happen in 2025 when 80% of the population of Mediterranean countries will be concentrated in a coastal belt 30 kilometres deep? Setting aside the most pessimistic

7 - The Arab Human Development Report 2003 of UNDP emphasised the role of historical, psychological and cultural factors in citizens’ participation in social life. In Egypt, the subordination of society to the State goes back to the time of the Pharaohs and reflects the characteristics of societies dependent on irrigation which demanded powerful, centralised States.

scenarios, if forecasts prove to be true, the effects of global climate change will accentuate an already critical situation: rising sea levels, more natural disasters, changes in ecosystems, reduction in river flows. In what way and how energetically will this environmental problem be tackled? It is still hard to say, other than mentioning the initiatives taken in Europe over the last decade. Certainly, rural areas will have to mobilise and play their part in the sustainable development policies which will be adopted over the next two decades.

A major challenge: the regional approach to rural development

Faced with the key factors affecting societies at their core, the demographic weight of rural populations and the diversity of social, economic and environmental situations, how can Mediterranean rural areas be engaged in a new development dynamic? In an increasingly open world, development can no longer be left exclusively to States which, for various reasons, no longer have the means. It must draw on the resources of civil society and be the fruit of collective dialogue and shared learning. It must be able, in an organised and responsible way, to promote this “local” approach which is asserting itself with globalisation, and truly take account of the question of its sustainability, not in an abstract way or by delegation, but through citizenship, incorporating it fully in projects adopted by the stakeholders themselves.

Successfully reconciling economic growth, sustainable management of resources and representation of the various components of society requires a common goal in which everyone feels that they have a stake and which is effective in implementing development strategies. The local territory can mobilise the human and material potential that it possesses in its own way. Living space is something its people know, they take ownership of it, they have a vision of it. It is the confrontation of these visions, in which they convey particular interests, desires, innovations, which fuels the participatory debate and acts a catalyst in mobilising existing tangible and intangible resources for the benefit of local sustainable development. If there are any imperatives in terms of equipment and rules, (regions generally have an administration), there are no prescribed recipes and each region can and must find its own path to development.

The Community Leader programme, launched in 1991 by the European Union, lasting until 2006 and then incorporated in the second pillar of the CAP 2007-2013, showed that a measure of this kind can help to revitalise rural areas. The aim of the initiative was to respond to the challenges facing the European rural world: changes in the agricultural sector following the reform of the CAP, increasingly demanding consumers, environmental pressure, accelerated spread of new technologies, ageing of the population and rural exodus. The Leader programme involved defining and implementing innovative regional approaches incorporating new ways of promoting the heritage, strengthening the local economic environment and organisation of local actors centred on a common development strategy. It demonstrated the actors’ capacity to mobilise and take charge of the future of their region, the value of a decentralised, integrated and bottom-up approach and the enriching character of sharing and transferring experiences between rural areas by setting up networks. Following up on this experience, in

France, to mention but one case, the number of local territories engaging in development has multiplied – local “*pays*”, communities of communes, centres of competitiveness or rural centres of excellence.

Centres of competitiveness and rural centres of excellence

Centres of competitiveness are defined by the Inter-ministerial Committee for Planning and Local Development (CIADT) as “the combination in a given area of enterprises, training centres and research units involved in common projects of an innovative character and having the necessary critical mass to achieve international visibility”.

The ambitions associated with “rural centres of excellence” perfectly illustrate the new economic role that rural areas are intended to play: “Rural areas are reservoirs of growth and excellence at national level. They contribute to the attractiveness and development of France. Their role is essential in the battle for employment and the national commitment to sustainable development. Over and above the measures taken, notably the organisation of rural areas and development of local infrastructure, projects emanating from rural areas now need to be given a new impetus. That is the ambition of the policy of centres of rural excellence”.

The text on the promotion of centres of rural excellence can be consulted on DIACT’s official Website: <http://poles-excellence-rurale.diact.gouv.fr>

Mediterranean rural areas could take this type of approach by extending the initiatives in the North and fundamentally renewing policies in support of rural development in the South. Given the change in production systems, liberalisation of trade, conservation or development of resources, they are more the victims of change than its cause. This situation needs to be reversed, making these regions the masters of their future. In Algeria, the turning point has already been reached, in particular with the Algerian rural renewal policy launched in early 2007. In Morocco, Strategy 2020 also hints at a voluntarist policy towards the rural world.

The challenge for the years ahead is to put flesh on the new rural policies, organise their implementation and explore all their potential. There is an urgency: a social urgency to take regions out of their isolation, and an economic and environmental urgency to change mankind’s relationship with his environment. To succeed, this regional approach must be supported in order to create the conditions for participation of all the actors, public and private, economic and social, to open development opportunities to the maximum, to place all the actors in a position to construct development projects and participate fully in the process. It must also ensure the overall development balance, as the regional approach can lead to competition between regions and unequal development. In this context, certain secondary issues closely linked to the major challenge of regionalisation of rural development are particularly important.

The transition from an agricultural economy to a “rural” economy

In terms of jobs and incomes, agriculture everywhere is declining in importance while aid is being reduced in favour of often more complex support mechanisms less directly linked to production. This trend is particularly pronounced in the North. Farms there

account on average for only 10% of the rural population and a new economy, based on tourism and services to the new residents, is developing. Farmers are no longer the only users or managers of the land. The new rural population is composed of neo-rural dwellers, retired people, residents working in urban areas or in commerce and/or services. In the South Mediterranean, agriculture is still an important activity, but no longer provides the necessary jobs or sufficient income due to the change in agricultural structures and population growth. Multiple activities are developing in farming families, often in the informal sector. In addition, the return of a population driven out of the towns, chiefly by unemployment, is irrigating rural areas with often young and skilled labour.

For the most agricultural and most productive rural areas, the race to be competitive by optimising the factors of production continues in the North and is accelerating in the South with the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area. Rural areas will continue to exist but they are likely to shrink in their extent while incomes will improve even further. Rural employment directly generated by this activity will also probably decline, and crops could be developed in favour of species or varieties better adapted to the environmental constraints or the effect of the opening of new markets (such as biofuels). They will benefit primarily from technical progress which will allow optimisation of the use of the resource, both for economic and environmental reasons⁸: intensive “precision” agriculture, introduction of automation, new farming practices (leaving land fallow, association of crops...), use of new varieties, whether or not the result of biotechnology, etc. Very closely linked to the food distribution and marketing sector, they will no doubt adjust to consumer demand. However, these areas will not be immune from problems. While the industrial concentrations feed the surrounding economic and social fabric, intensive agricultural production is emptying the countryside of its populations, often leading to the disappearance of services and a degradation in their habitability.

Outside these areas, agricultural activity is now no more than one element of the rural economy, and its share is steadily declining. In the North Mediterranean where this diversification process is most advanced, the rural economy is today largely determined by the towns. The countryside is “consumed” in a variety of ways by neighbouring or distant urban actors:

- *Consumption of the land.* The phenomenon of “out-of-town” residential development initially affected the immediate environs of the towns. With rising living standards, settlements subsequently extended further and further, eating away the neighbouring countryside and swallowing up villages and market towns. For these new populations which prefer a residence in a rural environment for its quality of life and cheaper property, the town is the dominant centre of economic and social activity.
- *Consumption of space for leisure activities and tourism.* Originally, it involved mass tourism which took over the most picturesque areas with the well-known consequences: urbanisation of the coasts, pollution, competition for water, etc. In contrast to this tourism, green tourism, which reflects the new aspirations of town-dwellers

8 - “Environmental pressure from agriculture will continue to lessen because of new technology (precision farming), driven by two incentives for a more exact use of inputs: compliance with environmental regulations and cost savings.” (European Commission, November 2006, p. 18).

with a thirst for nature, seems better integrated and more respectful of the countryside and its inhabitants. Not without its environmental effects, this type of tourism has little direct economic fallout in terms of visitor numbers. At the same time, it makes a considerable contribution to the new social image in which the rural world offers the visitor a world of nature and space.

- *Consumption of nature.* The protection of natural spaces and species is the last element of this external takeover of the countryside. It can take several forms. Even when they are not held responsible for the degradation, resident populations are judged incapable of ensuring the conservation of the natural heritage, which then becomes the subject of specialised management with the development of protected reserves or the proliferation of seed and gene banks to conserve biodiversity. Local populations are still all too often excluded from economic strategies to develop this heritage.

In a few years, we have moved from an “agricultural” image of the rural world, based on food security and later the conquest of export markets (“countryside as resource”) to a countryside which crystallises the new aspirations of urban populations which long for the environment, the natural heritage and quality of life (the “lifestyle countryside” and the “nature countryside”). This longing for the countryside is well described by Jean Viard and Bertrand Hervieu (Hervieu and Viard, 1996). The rising power of local communities, the growing regionalisation of public policies and the settlement of neo-rural populations who mean really to live in a rural environment opens new channels of development for European rural areas.

In the South Mediterranean, the dependency on agriculture and the uncertainty surrounding the consequences of the liberalisation of agricultural markets are strong. The theoretical model of total liberalisation and a general requirement to compete envisages a considerable reduction in the number of farms and a massive rural exodus. The “traditional” response which consisted of employing the labour from the rural world in the industrial or service sectors has little chance of working in the SEMC. The fear is that the towns will be unable to cope with this influx of new populations. The question then is to embark on diversification of economic activities in rural areas which both leaves room for agriculture and encourages economic integration of populations excluded from agriculture. With this in mind, alongside more sectoral rural development policies (equipment and infrastructure, hydro-agricultural development policies...), people are beginning to explore new opportunities and experimental policies. In Algeria, for example, a micro-credit policy is designed to help young people to create their own businesses in rural areas (artisanal businesses, services, etc.). A rural renewal policy launched in early 2007 also seeks rural development for and with the resident rural communities. Generally speaking, this is still a long way from the processes seen in the rural areas of the North, where diversification is part of a pattern of multi-functionality and satisfaction of social demand, based on clearly identified sectors such as tourism and services, and enjoys aid and support policies such as the successive Leader programmes.

The implementation of regional rural economic development strategies first involves evaluating local potential. In the agricultural sector, it must concern production (what products? Old or new? What production methods? What processing? etc.), marketing methods (short circuit and reconquest/reorganisation of local markets, urban outlets,

access to foreign consumers, etc.) and marketing strategies. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that the agro-food industry, especially in the North, is increasingly concerned with the regional origin of its products. In the South, the concentration of debate on export markets has made people forget the importance of the domestic agricultural economy. With the notable exception of Morocco, volumes of agricultural products consumed account for 98% of domestic production, and domestic demand for agricultural products in the SEMC has risen by 20 to 50% over ten years depending on the product (Rastoin and Szedlak, 2006, p. 2). This trend is likely to continue in the years ahead. In these circumstances, a reassessment of domestic agriculture should be one of the major pillars of regional rural development policies, with emphasis on strengthening trade chains, aids to investment, land security and development of services.

The liberalisation scenarios leave the SEMC little to hope for beyond meagre growth of their traditional exports of fruit and vegetables (of the order of 1 to 2%), chiefly because of existing and future constraints on production (water, land, cost of transport, etc.) This should calm the fears of European producers concerning South Mediterranean products. To conclude, the real competition is not between the Mediterranean countries but rather the competition that products from both the North and South Mediterranean will face from like products from other countries (Chile, United States, China...). The countries of the region have good reason, therefore, to unite and consolidate the positive image and identity of the "Mediterranean product". Bearing in mind the pattern of consumer demand and the constraints faced by Mediterranean farmers, this image could be developed on the basis of local, sustainable and quality agriculture which can make the variety of Mediterranean products profitable (extension of varieties grown, specification of commercial products, diversification of transformed products, quality labels...)

The introduction of the regional and the place of rural development policies into thinking about the future export capacity of the Mediterranean can have other advantages, such as:

- bridging the current gulf between domestic and export markets;
- allowing a larger number of producers to access the international market by expanding the range of exportable products;
- stimulating domestic consumption of these products due to their positive image and the inclusion of their production in the local economy.

This revolution in product identity must be a companion to the changes in the Mediterranean agricultural world. As with the other sectors of the economy, Mediterranean production must have intelligence, innovation, technology and marketing at its core. Quantity must no longer be the sole criterion of sustainability. Indeed, it cannot be.

Alongside agriculture, economic diversification must promote structured activities for the region so that it ceases to be a consumer commodity and becomes a place to live. Between the extremes of a rural dormitory linked to the town by fast transport and the

constitution of suburbs with a set of commodities, services, supported by their own development dynamic and connected both to the nearest town and the hinterland, there is a range of possible improvements for which it is not so much the number of residents that is important but rather the nature of their relationship with their surroundings. The same goes for tourism. Everything suggests that this major social phenomenon of the last fifty years is likely to grow in the next decades. Exploiting it to the maximum for the benefit of local economies could be a cornerstone of the future development of rural areas, provided that a “regionalised” supply is developed around these expectations: better mobilisation of the heritage, personalised treatment, small reception units, farm accommodation. However, tourist activities and quality products are not a panacea. Innovation must explore other paths which, for more remote regions, could involve development of the social economy or the community economy in order to combat poverty. Contrasting with this, attracting “high tech” companies which wish to offer their employees a pleasant place to live can be a legitimate objective for regions which have a recognised rural and natural heritage. As each has its own potential, it is up to the local stakeholders to develop their particular approach.

The State and advisory bodies have a key role to play in establishing a climate propitious to the success of these initiatives, by adopting regulatory texts which secure economic activity (in the field of property rights, usage rights, recognition of intellectual property...) or by promoting these initiatives (in the form of credit, aid to business start-ups, various tax reliefs...) and capitalisation of experience (through training and sharing of experience or dissemination of good practice). Given that one economic activity draws in others, it also means creating economic virtuous circles. Local economic potential is real, provided that one does not focus on a given economic model (productivist agriculture, export markets, wholesale distribution...). The diversity of agriculture and production, the wealth of “humanised” and natural landscapes, the climate, the existence of a varied cultural and historical heritage, an often highly developed crafts sector, knowledge and know-how are all trump cards which are only rarely played, and even more rarely for the benefit of the resident population. This new approach to regional economies, therefore, means that values and perceptions must be overturned.

A countryside that is attractive and integrated with the town

Rural areas, especially in the SEMC, are still in the main disadvantaged, not to say impoverished, and as such are “backward” areas. Existing efforts, in particular the Millennium Goals, must be pursued so that all rural populations have the necessary facilities in terms of water, electricity and services. These places, like towns, must also be the target of modern investment, especially in new technologies. It would be self-deluding to imagine that attractive rural regions could be developed without such resources. Cut off from the world in the past because of the poor road network, they cannot remain disqualified in the future because of deficient virtual economies and information networks. Initiatives by governments, donors and non-governmental organisations to reduce the “digital divide” must be integrated in national rural development policies. At present, the statistics show that the SEMC are still lagging behind in this.

Apart from strengthening rural amenities, the underlying challenge of articulating the rural and the urban cannot be escaped. The process of occupation of space in the

Mediterranean countries is characterised by accelerated urban growth and an enormous increase in the population density of the coastal regions. At the same time, we are witnessing a growing metropolisation of towns and expansion of periurban rural areas which are becoming prime areas of articulation where the dynamics stem both from complementarity and competition. In the countries of the South, the spread of homes destroys already limited agricultural land resources. On the other hand, agricultural activity persists, and even increases, to supply the towns. Other activities of transformation, artisanal businesses or services are established there, enjoying more favourable conditions in terms of rents, price of land, while remaining very close to the town. In the countries of the North, the residential function is crucial, with a dual approach: development of related services and commercial activities and the concern to maintain as “natural” an environment as possible. These areas become magnets for certain activities which do not require immediate proximity with consumers or which use the new communication technologies.

With the enormous development of these intermediate areas, the rural-urban articulation, which for a long time operated as a kind of frontier between the two worlds, is now changing radically to the point where urban geographers themselves tend to consider that the town does not exist and that it is being replaced by “metropolised” areas which are neither rural nor urban but relate to the territory and its habitation through all the populations present. “Metropolisation (in the territorial sense) thus completes the urban project by putting an end to the longstanding distinction between town and country. [...] We will now deliberately use inverted commas with the word town to mean that the territories are now understood as constituting vast archipelagic assemblies linking “town” and “country”. [...] If they have the means, the inhabitants move frequently and have access to the same goods and services everywhere. At any point in the territory, wherever they live, they share the “same” metropolitan culture which is neither country nor rural” (Ferrier, 2005). This shift to the metropolisation of large towns highlights the urban-rural relationship to the point where the existence of both is called into question. At the same time, it leads to a rediscovery of the relationships between areas in the depths of the country and urbanised areas, the importance of small and medium-sized towns in the economic dynamic of rural areas and the relations, or lack of them, between a town and its hinterland.

Research carried out in some Mediterranean countries, for example in Greece, shows that the development and functioning of small urban centres can help to sustain, or even develop, the rural area surrounding them or, conversely, cause its disappearance. Through a system of “polycentrism”, it creates a mesh of rural areas, maintains the links between the rural and the urban and moderates the process of concentration and agglomeration. The example of the small Greek town of Mouzaki shows the articulation that can exist between a town and its hinterland and the gains to be made from this mutual recognition of the two spaces. It also sheds light on the complexity of the regional development process which, in this case, is built on a synergy of formal and informal dynamics where townspeople who originate from the villages play a prime role.

“[...] In Mouzaki, the development process was not started through a project but was essentially the consequence of a development movement of the diaspora itself, transforming a depopulated highland to a space to be used (secondary residence). For this reasons, the initial development, which corresponds to the period when the highland hinterland benefited from the movement, can be characterised as informal. Local society itself seeks to exploit its own human potential and the intangible resources which characterise the way its socio-cultural and productive system works (relationships, networks, know-how). The diaspora was the chief consumer and ambassador of the development and economic revival of the micro-region. It is interesting to note that during this period, financing under structural policies and the CAP was limited to infrastructure (roads, etc.), modernisation of agricultural businesses and financing of training seminars by the European Social Fund. No financing was specifically envisaged for integrated local development projects.

The strengthening of the links between the “mother-territory” and the diaspora by developing secondary residences encouraged the transformation of socio-cultural relations into a network with an economic dimension. It was in fact these networks which allowed local businesses not only to control the emerging market but also to create competitive advantages compared with neighbouring urban centres.

The general interest in the highland region has developed a positive climate for micro investment. This contributed to the take-off of a market essentially involving the construction sector (landscaping, building, hydraulic works, electricity, furniture, window and door frames...). Later, the movement had implications for other sectors of activity (week-end tourism, demand for local products), thus providing new outlets for local producers and traders of food products and drinks. Finally, through informal networks, local businesses control activities grafted on to the development of secondary residences, thereby injecting considerable capital into their region. This trend has strengthened the diaspora's relations with the small town which, little by little, has become the centre of the entire movement [...].”

Source: Goussios, 2006

The question of regional cohesion

Since the creation of the European Union, the question of regional cohesion has become central. Initially based on the political concept of the union of European nations, it has progressively taken on an economic dimension. The market economy, even in its neo-liberal version, demands a re-balancing in favour of the least competitive regions, whether to allow them to enter the competitive race or to prevent them becoming marginalised. Two main types of measures are implemented to achieve regional equity: direct aid and subsidies to maintain levels of income and public services in disadvantaged areas, and measures to offset the effects of heterogeneous mechanisms for regionalising economic activities. This policy will be of great benefit to rural areas, especially in the countries of southern Europe, faced with the need to modernise their agriculture and considered to be structural laggards.

The assertion of the regions, and more generally local communities, marks a dual change in the perception of regional cohesion. On the one hand, cohesion policies are called into question because of their cost and their results which are judged to be rather meagre. What we are seeing, therefore, is a progressive localisation of regional policies: “Regional policy has thus begun a paradigm shift from a top-down, subsidy-based strategy to

reduce regional disparities into a much broader family of policies designed to improve regional competitiveness. [...] [with] less of a focus on exogenous investments and transfers.” (OECD, 2006, p. 14-15). On the other hand, a “separatist temptation” is appearing, where regions demand the right to manage more and more of their own affairs, at the risk of undermining national unity (as in the case of Catalonia in Spain or the northern regions of Italy).

In the countries of the South, little or no account has been taken of the inequality of regional development, in some cases structural, but often considered to be inevitable, except in the case of crises which imperilled the central government or national unity. Under the constraint of a general lack of resources and means, and in the pursuit of efficiency and optimisation, resources are concentrated on regions where the “returns” are highest. The poorest regions only receive just enough aid to keep social tensions in check. The question is whether the policies being drawn up today, with a local approach and regionalisation of development, decentralisation and devolution or more or less extensive powers to the local level, will be able to restore a balance between the regions, or at least allow each of them to embark its own development spiral. This approach is based on two powerful assumptions:

- 1) Every region has within it the seeds of its development. This is the wager of regionalisation which is to assert the capacity for regional self-determination. “Thus, in social terms, the gaping inequalities (within and between States) and the ensuing security dysfunctions must no longer be dissociated from endogenous solutions of societal production which invent goods and services based on the subsistence of poor inhabitants and allow the continuity of societies [...]. It is all as if the “regional” stakeholders knew or, wherever they could, initiated the numerous spatial actions which are satisfying and optimum in pragmatic terms and at any time,” (Ferrier, 2005).
- 2) The region is capable of mobilising these resources to its own advantage and enter the market economy. In this regard, nothing is a given. For the regions, it means staying in the race, maintaining a dynamic of building and renewing their economies, which allows everyone, successively or simultaneously, to position themselves.

Regional development strategies are underpinned by support strategies to increase the likelihood that they will be put into effect. In order to play fully their role of development promoter and guarantor of equity, States and partners are asked to pay constant attention to local initiatives, to be flexible in the solutions to be provided and to provide “complicitous” support. The principle of subsidiarity must be continually invoked, upwards and downwards, and the arrangement adopted must be closely dependent on the national and local situation. It must be able to evolve over time in parallel to the capacity of old or new institutions and forms of local government.

Consolidation of institutions and local governance

Divergences in the representation of the region, difficulties of expression of certain social groups, internal conflicts in competing for resources, inter-regional competition to produce goods and services or to attract businesses, relations with States and supra-national bodies, cohesion between regions..., these are all areas which demand strong

institutions and good governance able to integrate the various levels of government, dialogue and decision-making.

Regulation of social relations is essential for living together, and the importance of institutions, including in the field of economics, is beginning to be recognised. Research on this subject is growing. One study analyses the respective contributions of institutions, geography (climate and natural resources) and economic integration in the make-up of average incomes by country. It shows conclusively that institutions are paramount in increasing incomes, while the effect of the other two is weak if not negative (Rodrik, Subramanian and Trebbi, 2002). What institutions do we mean? While there are no rules on the subject, well-known principles can be applied: representation of populations, expression of minority groups (ethnic, social...), recognition by populations of the legitimacy of institutions, etc. The articulation of institutions from international to local level in relations of mutual respect, subsidiarity and complementarity is particularly important. Not all institutions fulfil the same function and not all have the same scope. It is on the interplay between them that the newly emerging social organisation is built.

Throughout the whole Mediterranean sphere there is a proliferation of local institutions. In the North, there is a burgeoning of institutions which can often barely manage to work together and in the South, a civil society which is seeking ways of positioning itself in relation to a central authority which still dithers over which way to go. The Mediterranean rural sphere clearly lacks institutions and rules, whether in the economic field of property and real estate, user rights and management of natural resources or the expression of social diversity. The challenge, therefore, is to establish institutions for coordination and negotiation where they do not exist, strengthen all regional institutions by giving them real powers and responsibilities, create an institutional fabric to foster complementarities and synergies between production, research and training. Strong institutions presuppose people able to make them work. Training local populations to assume their responsibilities in local bodies and in their relations with supralocal institutions is of great importance. The education deficit in rural areas is a major obstacle here, as is the persistence of social or gender inequalities. Access to information and networking of the actors are also essential in this process of building local governance.

“Good governance” must be able to transcend certain social representation which is self-evident, such as representation of the rural world. Nowadays there is a primacy of the town. Rural areas are at best seen as spaces “to consume”, at worst places where it is not good to live. Metropolisation would simply be a new form of conquest or annexation by the towns of an “inert” rural space. One of the challenges for future regional rural development policies will certainly be to restore the balance between the two spaces, to go beyond the urban conception of these regions. Recognition of their own dynamics and developing their new potential (new markets, new social expectations, rebuilding the town-country articulation, tackling growing environmental threats, etc.) are necessary to the emergence of endogenous development strategies which are truly regional and rural. “The specific dynamic of rural spaces is not susceptible of interpretation solely in terms of the impact of urban evolution on the rural world [...]. The transformation of minds and functions in the rural space, the establishment of new social forms and professions without necessarily abolishing agricultural activity, the development of local

activities, and a new spatial organisation of rural growth starting with small localities integrating rural activities in the global economy, all these are evidence of the development of local mechanisms, both institutionalised and individual, as the initiators of endogenous dynamics not contemplated by initiatives of an urban origin” (Thomsin, 2001).

The challenge is real since the trend today, deliberately or by default, is to exclude rural populations from the process of drawing up regional development strategies. The North, despite a genuine culture of representation and participation, is not immune. Surveys conducted by IAMM in the framework of diagnostic analyses of regions shows that farmers are poorly represented in bodies responsible for development such as regions, multi-functional inter-municipal unions and other centres of competitiveness or excellence. In the “Haut-Languedoc and Vignobles” region of the Department of Hérault, while 77% of farmers surveyed are members of a professional body (trade union, professional group, chamber of agriculture, cooperative, etc.), only 30% participate in an institution responsible for local development (region, regional natural park, municipal council, community of communes, etc.). Over 50% of them consider that their interests are not well represented in these institutions, 33% do not feel concerned and only 10% say that they are satisfied (Ciheam-IAMM, 2006).

Some scenarios for the future of rural spaces

Based on the various factors in the development of rural areas and the challenges facing them presented in the preceding chapters, it is possible, by way of conclusion, to imagine various paths for the future.

A first underlying scenario suggests a residual rural space which continues to suffer from the effects of processes and policies which do not directly concern it. Changes in the rural world depend largely on exogenous mechanisms and rural policies are “follow-my-leader” support policies or corrections. In this scenario, two main elements which will be crucial in the evolution of rural regions can be envisaged:

- the economic capacity of urban areas to receive rural migrants;
- the weight and force of environmental policies.

In the South, with the much trumpeted liberalisation and its effects on agricultural production, one can predict:

- a reduction in the number of farms;
- little development of economic alternatives in rural areas;
- worsening unemployment and poverty with or without a rural exodus to the towns and growing social and economic exclusion of rural populations;
- centralised management of protection of the environment and natural resources with a strong risk of failure.

In the North, civil society will continue to play a role in the evolution of rural areas but with an “urban bias”, the possible effects of which could be:

- management of the rural space for the benefit of towns with a rural space subject to the demands of urbanisation and urban leisure;
- strong pressure on agricultural activities which are under-estimated and under-valued as a factor in the construction of rural regions;
- continued reduction in the number of farms and agricultural development based on the “entrepreneurial” model of agriculture and concentrated in the most productive areas.

Two alternative scenarios can be derived from the underlying scenario. The first, which could be described as a “blocking” scenario, reflects the impossibility for rural areas to bear the pressure of a development which is exogenous to them. For the countries of the South, this scenario envisages:

- rising social instability and insecurity and increasing migration to the towns and abroad;
- proliferation of conflicts linked to regulation of human pressure on the environment. As this poverty scenario associates degradation of natural resources with the process of survival of resident populations, it will be difficult to counter these practices through negotiation.

The crisis in the rural space could be reflected in the North by the “disappearance”, at least in perception, of agriculture and farmers from the rural development process. While some rural regions will be able to profit from their “urbanisation”, they will still not form “whole” regions, rather living second-hand off a development model which only regards them as a back-up for urban spaces. It may be supposed that in this context, competition in the use of the resources will grow, with trade-offs more and more often unfavourable to the farmers.

The last scenario presents a rural world which builds its own legitimacy and manages to offer diverse and balanced development options which allow for the complexity of its social and economic fabric. This scenario can be developed if proactive policies are put in place which, based on a vision of these rural spaces, helps to implement them. It also supposes a legal framework with sound institutions and processes of governance. This scenario is not a utopian one, since it builds on the trends already seen in outline today, both in the North and the South. It carries within it the major changes which give it all its “modernity” and give hope that more account will be taken of sustainability in the processes of production. At the same time, it is these very changes which will make achieving it a sensitive process, both in the North and the South.

Nothing is predestined and these considerations as a whole show that the future of the Mediterranean rural regions is not yet written. There is therefore a need, not to say an urgent need, to deepen our understanding of the changes at work, avoiding the trap of preconceptions and the obvious. In this spirit, a Mediterranean regional approach to rural development is certainly one of the factors which could contribute to the building of a renewed vision of its rural spaces.

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