

Decentralization policies of natural resources management in Albania.

What impacts on the local farming systems?

Eriketa CENOLLI¹, Melanie REQUIER DEJARDINS²

Abstract -Albania is a Mediterranean country still characterized by difficult economic development, weak social capital and environmental fragility. As a former communist country, historical dynamics of the management of the natural resources were characterized by important reforms (like collectivisation and de-collectivisation), which constitute discontinuities in their management. Demographic and land-use challenges are rooted both in the growth of population, and its distribution in the territory, and the chaotic urban concentrations induce new needs both in terms of food and consumption of services, including recreational services. This paper tends to explore the decentralization policies have brought to the sectors of development and environmental protection at a very local level in Central Albania. The methodological approach aims to identify development and environmental issues due to the decentralization policies after the fall of communism in 1991. The preliminary results show that the perspective of natural resource management has changed over time and in line with EU legislation the focus has been on the adaptation of directives and decentralization of natural resources. Some aspects in collaborating on the creation of a common strategy for the sustainable use of natural resources are discussed as a tool for future sustainable development strategies.

Keywords-Natural resource management; Environment; Agricultural production

INTRODUCTION

Albanian diversity of landscapes and biodiversity has a high heritage and identity value. This richness of natural and environmental heritage is an asset for its economic development (Cenolli, 2019). However, landscapes and biodiversity are closely linked across habitats and ecosystems, and the role of agriculture in their dynamics is of major importance (Angeon et al., 2007). Demographic and land-use challenges are rooted both in the growth of population, and its distribution in the territory, and the chaotic urban concentrations induce new needs both in terms of food and consumption of services. Albania is one of the European countries with limited referred to farming land. Land pressures have increased to the

last decades due to urbanization and spontaneous territorial developments policies. The Territorial Reform, initiated in 2013, merged the communal and state pastures into public pastures modifying the pasture governance mechanisms. More precisely, communal pastures are now managed at the district level as a result of the merging of municipalities into larger administrative entities, like the case of state pastures (Bombaj et al., 2018). Land market and other issues such as lack of development of products with comparative advantages in the European markets, structural improvement of agriculture linked to land ownership and inappropriate agricultural practices are identified by recent research (Gontard, 2016). Currently, environmental challenges in Albania are the conservation of natural resources and sustainable economic development. *The main hypothesis of this paper is that frequent institutional changes of the natural resources management create instabilities for the local actors leading to a non-efficient management of the resource.* One of the well-known territories for its ecosystems is the Municipality of Divjake, in central Albania.

METHODS

The organization of our study was located in the five administrative units that are part of the municipality of Divjake. We choose a number of villages on every administrative unit having the largest farms with the most intensive agricultural activity, and therefore the greatest use of natural resources. At the national level we used several documents, including reports, papers, databases, ongoing projects and other official scientific data available. Interviews with the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment, Universities professors and nongovernmental organizations working on the same issues were done. Combining statistics and preparatory discussions with local actors and regional specialists, the selection of villages was done according to the farming intensity of each farm, proximity and ties with the one protected area (Natural Park) nearby. Our method was conducted in three stages by starting with a general analysis of the chosen area, continuing with in-depth of 74 interviews and ending with the results analysis.

RESULTS

Land use and market

The agricultural land is fragmented into small plots ranging from 0.1 ha to 9 ha. In terms of ownership status only 23% of the surface is owned and 77% is rented. The distance of the land from the centre of the village is not very large. 56% of farmers have land up to 0.5 km from the village centre, 33% up to 4.5 km and 11% up to 9 km. The distance from the market of the products is related to the location of the administrative unit. There are two places where agricultural products Lushnje and Divjaka are traded. 30% of the farmers have the market of 7 to 14 km, 29% of them of 20 to 20 km, 22% or 16 farmers have a market of 22 to 28 km. Agriculture is the main activity and most of the population is involved in this

¹ Freelancer researcher (eriketacenolli@yahoo.com)

² CIHEAM-IAMM, Montpellier, France (requier@iamm.fr)

activity. 66% of the surveyed farmers have no other source of income other than agriculture, 21% are retired, 9% have income from migration and there are a small number of farmers employed in public institutions. The territory of the municipality is expanded with 4 administrative units, increasing the planted area of agricultural land. Agriculture is one of the main economic activities and the bases of agricultural production are field and greenhouse vegetables, fruit crops, livestock and field crops. In cultivated areas cereals occupy 51%. Then comes the fodder with 16% being planted in almost all administrative units, potatoes 4 %, industrial plant 5%, and other products. Most of the production goes to the domestic market

Biodiversity and farming

In the study area the surveyed farmers stated that they use more organic and chemical fertilization, 60% of the farmers use it, 19% use organic fertilization and only 6% use chemical fertilization. The rest of them use integrated practices such as chemical / organic and crop rotation. It is noted that there are some farmers who do not use fertilization because they have invested in improving irrigation, drainage and investments to maintain soil quality. There are some crops such as watermelon and melon for which crystalline fertilizers are used that do not affect the deterioration of product quality. There are contradiction between the sector of agriculture and conservation of the environment. About the irrigation the principal source is the underground water making these practices inappropriate for the sustainable development. This situation leads to environmental issues like pollution of water and salinization. The park as one of the principal actor has difficulties preserving the values of biodiversity because the economic activity inside the park, agriculture, urban development and tourism has caused the loss of one part of biodiversity. All the farmers agree that product with reduced pesticides are more healthy and better quality. However, only 62 % of them are willing to cooperate to create a new brand for bio product. Farmers are informed about the environmental issues but they did not seek for any further information, only 52 % of them have searched.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

There is a potential labour force but only 44 % of them are employed in agriculture. Even if this region is one of the most productive areas, the farmers do not participate in association or cooperatives, since only 2 % of them are engaged. As observed the Grabjan unit has the biggest surface irrigated (66 %). The productivity of this area is composed in two pillars: agriculture and livestock. The principal productions are vegetables and greenhouses, fodder, cereals and fruit corps. The incomes from agriculture and livestock are measured only with the amount of product traded in market. Divjaka and Grabjan are the units who gain more by selling their productions. In the other units the gains are too much lower comparing these units. According to the results, the

willing to cooperate of the local framers for common strategy in the future is strong. The Natural Park is an actor who is more interested in creating a new brand that will make possible the conservation of environment. Recent research shows that the regulation of public land becomes untenable when economic, political and social contexts change (Huband et al., 2010). By analysing the local strategies we observe that the natural resources are taken in consider and it is one the objectives in order to have a sustainable development. The results show that the perspective of natural resource management has changed over time and has been in line with EU legislation while the focus has been on the adaptation of directives and decentralization of natural resources. By analysing the legal framework changes at the national and local level we can conclude that frequent institutional changes of the natural resources management may create instabilities leading to a non-efficient management of the resource (Bombaj et al., 2018).

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