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New stakes for CIHEAM

in the areas of agriculture manager training, food and environment in Mediterranean countries

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The seminar that was held for three days outlined the image of a “moving” CIHEAM. The tone of the event, the quality of a challenging attitude, the very nature of the questions were the expression of dynamics that arouse the interest of both those who are familiar with CIHEAM and of the economic players who answered the organisers’ invitation. It seems important to underline this introduction before getting to the contents of the Seminar.

The tone of the event was set, first by the high level of the individuals that CIHEAM was able to involve: namely, two Ministries of Agriculture, the UNO deputy Secretary General, the World Bank Agricultural Research Manager, the Chairman of the European Federation of Zootechnics, the General Manager of ICARDA, one General Manager of the European Union, and many others. In the same way, the interactive discussion method that was used was instrumental in maintaining a permanent dialogue between all participants, which is infrequent in such an event, where the attention slackens after the first day.

Through this seminar, CIHEAM is questioning itself and is asking to be challenged. It is in no doubt about itself, but wants to identify the ways to perfecting dynamics so as to better meet its tasks. As a result, it is led to review its assignments and check their relevance in a Mediterranean world that has significantly changed since the Centre was established, 36 years ago.

This questioning attitude for a better preparation of the future deserves a “tip of the hat”. Indeed, in a globalisation, internationalisation and quick-changing context, an institution that is content with duplicating what works and what has been successful risks to be disqualified. Not beaten, just forgotten !

I will first mention the interrogations facing CIHEAM, and will then indicate the main possible directions as expressed during this seminar, and last, I will assess CIHEAM’s assets.

I – CIHEAM interrogations

1. CIHEAM’s scope of activity

During the seminar, several speakers felt the need to comment the transformations which are affecting both areas in which CIHEAM is active: The Mediterranean region and agriculture. Indeed, it is useful to take a preliminary look at the context of CIHEAM’s activity.

The first question is about the very relevance of identifying a “Mediterranean region”. The Mediterranean is first a sea, and what is referred to as “Mediterranean region” actually covers countries that belong to three continental sub-groups: Southern Europe, North Africa and Western Asia. Each of these sub-groups is currently involved in highly different geo-political matters and in social and economic dynamics that move them away from one another.

These aspects were mentioned during the last CIHEAM seminar on “the regionalisation of agronomic research, Florence, May 1997). For instance, compared to a “European region” being built, ICARDA, a partner of CIHEAM, is active in the “WANA region” (West Asia North Africa). In addition, the “Mediterranean region” in which CIHEAM is involved, is showing serious political consistency and stability difficulties between the various non European Union countries.

This region is also the centre of exacerbated situations which are always affecting the durability of systems: weather risks, fragility of natural resources, ongoing deficit of food production compared to growing needs, low plant productivity, industrial delays, social distortions.

One might be strongly concerned by an underlying scenario which could be that of growing imbalances, and in the end, the end of the existence of the “Mediterranean region”. Or will there be internal regulation abilities in the future: will the future Euro-Mediterranean free-trade zone help? or can one consider that the opening of economies to international markets in Mediterranean countries will be controlled with a view to satisfying the food needs of inhabitants for a lesser cost, or will it be the cause of further growing imbalances?

The second question covers the interest that has to be shown to agricultural matters, while economic concerns mainly cover industrial development and while the efforts now seem to focus on the arrival of the “society of information”. Besides, regarding populations, the long term, world-wide trend is that of urban concentration, attested in the “Mediterranean region” by an influx to large coastal cities, to the detriment of country rural space. Doesn't CIHEAM appear to have a field of action out of touch with such changes that some regard as inescapable?

I will later answer the question about the existence of a “Mediterranean region”, by stressing the fact that a region is not only a homogenous territory, it is also determined by the existence of an active network of relations. As to agriculture and food, even though their role seems reduced compared to the weight of other economic sectors, they do carry major stakes for populations, in developed countries as in less wealthy countries. The issue of fulfilling food needs is still high on the priority list of southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. Long term trends in favour of opened agricultural product world markets show by contrast that agricultural activities fulfil a major function in terms of territorial balance, from an environmental and social point of view. Besides, one has to assume that controlled agricultural matters can be a factor of cohesion in public policies in the main parts of the world. I will come back to these points.

2. The contents of CIHEAM's actions

A second set of questions covers the contents of CIHEAM's actions, taking into consideration that its legitimate calling is agriculture and food in the “Mediterranean region”.

The Mediterranean region of agriculture and food should be looked at within a world transformation process, which is affecting public policies as well as agricultural product markets and applicable health standards, and is involved in the homogenising trend of consumers' habits and in the growing share of mass distribution in some countries... This first view calls for a strategy of adjustment: it might be one of CIHEAM's and its Institutes' tasks to conceive and accompany this.

The Mediterranean region can also be looked at as special region of the world. This second approach calls for an innovative look onto activities regarded as traditional, and not only for the need of modernisation of such activities. “*Working CIHEAM's Mediterranean specificity*” is one of the messages sent to the Board of Directors of CIHEAM by the Advisory Scientific Committee. It is not only about adding “Mediterranean” to all items, it is about identifying issues relating to specific regions. For instance, taking into consideration the specific quality of typical Mediterranean agriculture products, reason the part taken by tourism for which the Mediterranean region is the first destination in the world, take into consideration the increasing significance of environmental issues and the emergence of a durable development concept in a country where natural resources are rare and fragile ...

3. CIHEAM's clients

CIHEAM has to answer the question that was asked during the Seminar: who are your clients? what are the targets of your training programs?

CIHEAM's immediate answer is that for several years, it has identified as a preferred target the managers of institutions and of industrial groups, specially administration heads, University teachers and research group managers, managers of professional and economic organisations, political decision makers... The advantage of this approach was confirmed during the Seminar. However, having the "managers" as a target is not the basis of CIHEAM's activity. The answer needs to be explained : are they future managers, receiving initial post-university training? or existing managers receiving vocational training? or are both ends to be pursued? the answer to these questions has implications that may be important to CIHEAM's system and future.

4. CIHEAM's ability to respond

One last thought is about the reaction time of the Centre for the identification of new stakes: the implementation time for a reform is always very long in higher education, and care must be taken that the offer isn't outdated by the demand. Concerning diploma-awarding training, one should be aware of the long interval between the moment when a reform is decided and its implementation (five to ten years). If we look at the training time of a student, to which should be added the time it takes for him to access professional responsibilities as a manager, another ten or fifteen years can go by. Which means that education systems whose effect is potentially very strong, are actually rather inert. Therefore it is not a surprise that when the student gets to the targeted position, the needs that were the basis of the training contents may have substantially changed.

Hence another question for CIHEAM. What type of action can CIHEAM design and carry-out with a close operational horizon, lets say of two years only? What are CIHEAM's specific responsiveness abilities to requests originating from its clients? These are legitimate questions, because for instance, the quick globalisation and internationalisation processes of economy and the negotiations led within the World Trade Organisation (WTO), require prompt answers in terms of analysis and training, in the area of agricultural public policies and food-processing markets.

II – CIHEAM projects

Analysing the activities enables to identify three types of projects which CIHEAM is involved in, in view of its adjustment to current changes and of the improved efficiency of its system:

1. improvement of its work resources ;
2. adjustment of the offer of educational products to the demand ;
3. conduct of management actions in the Mediterranean region.

1. Improvement of its work resources

The numerous advantages of the "New Technologies of Information and Communication" were described during the Seminar. In a way, these are "saving" technologies, in the same way as bio-technologies. "Saving" technologies because it is assumed their implementation will solve all problems ...

Thus, there was discussion about designing and opening a "Virtual University", offering rapid and universal access to knowledge anywhere in the Mediterranean region. The implementation of this approach gives a priority to one of the functions of education, the information conveyance function. Simultaneously, it makes one aware of the significance of the personal encounter function, another func-

tion of education. A balance has to be maintained between both these elements of education: information conveyance (ensured through an electronic network) and encounter (which can be achieved only by a teacher).

However, setting-up a virtual Mediterranean university opened to the help of southern and eastern Mediterranean institutions, can also be an opportunity to establish a place for exchanges between university managers with a view to achieving a project in common. The numerous discussions around the Seminar Tables showed the need for us to clarify the functions and means of higher education, as well as the way the different type its users see it. This calls for more attention. Indeed, working on tools doesn't have for only purpose to bring a new product to the market. It is also an opportunity for players to communicate during the course of the various phases of the project.

One also has to clear-mindedly wonder whether a Mediterranean Web network is justified. Why have a Mediterranean Web when information can be accessed in the rest of the world, regardless of proximity? CIHEAM's and Seminar participants' answer is that to such extent there is an existing relation network between institutions and individuals, which is intended to be improved, the setting-up of a Wen Network becomes interesting and is likely to provide significant added value. Several propositions were made to that end to CIHEAM during the Seminar: developing and broadening the network to the main agronomic higher education and research institutions in Mediterranean countries, conducting pilot experiments of remote tuition, setting up material for short vocational training courses (specially CD-ROMs), trying thesis management and remote research work experiments ...

2. Adjusting the offer of educational products to the demand

Obviously, two types of training products have been mentioned for future agricultural and food industry managers in Mediterranean countries. Basically, they are distinguished by the type of target: long-term university and post-university training (Masters, Thesis) for initial training students ; specialised short term training for high level professional managers. CIHEAM has to justify its choices regarding both types of training ; the stake is high for both types, as I have already said. In the first case, CIHEAM has the opportunity to develop a university system in the same areas as national universities, but with much less staff and less resources. In the second case, CIHEAM should make an effort towards further and permanent need identification work.

Whatever the options, it seems to me two conditions have to be fulfilled if CIHEAM is to maintain its quality and interest: (i) a joint offer of the four Institutes broadened to other partners ; (ii) a frequent reevaluation of relevance and contents.

A joint offer of the four Institutes broadened to other partners:

The concern is expressed by the Scientific Committee when it expresses the need to ***“Prepare and Have a joint training offer of the four Institutes”***. Indeed, we have to go further than just regrouping the training offered by the four Institutes under three general titles: 1. Plant and animal techniques and productions ; 2. Environment – Management of resources ; 3. Economy – Development. In addition, the implementation of the European Union's DGI agreement as a partnership between the four Institutes and southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, around four identified topics (water resource management, rainwater agriculture, food and agricultural policies, conservation and management of renewable natural resources) can be an opportunity to broaden the reflection to the whole Mediterranean region.

Frequent reevaluation of relevance and contents:

Frequent tuition updating and evaluation is facilitated, in the case of CIHEAM, by international research network activities. Such activities enable the IAMs to call upon the best specialists in Mediterranean and other countries to ensure that appropriate topics are identified and to facilitate necessary knowledge updating. CIHEAM has shown a rare ability to mobilise individuals and organise programs involving all Mediterranean countries.

3. CIHEAM as a driving force behind the Mediterranean region

During the seminar, CIHEAM was questioned about further involvement in a function that is close at hand, that of the driving force behind the Mediterranean region in the area of agriculture and food. The Advisory Scientific Committee put forward the concept that CIHEAM and the IAMS have to be the “**driving force of a partnership with institutions involved in the Mediterranean region**”. In some way, the request consists in encouraging CIHEAM to be a drive-catalyst: have made, stimulate, assist rather than making, than itself fulfilling functions that belong to other operators. However, it was reminded by several speakers during the Seminar that it is almost the only international organisation able to conduct management activities in the Mediterranean region such as follows:

- designing a higher training strategy in the Mediterranean region with university operations in several countries ;
- creating an employment research institute and identifying demands for higher education: agriculture, food-processing, rural land;
- organising a Seminar for top-level political and government officers on the topic of OMC and Agenda 2000 related negotiations ;
- setting-up a research centre and a high level education system on agricultural and food public policies in Mediterranean countries ...

III – CIHEAM’s resources

Based on questions and expectations, it is now important to assess what the favourable characteristics of CIHEAM are and justify moving towards them. A list can be made based on the words used during the Seminar :

- the length and durability of CIHEAM’s service in the Mediterranean region, since 36 years ;
- the essential mass of the 8.000 former CIHEAM trainees whom CIHEAM Institutes frequently call upon to support specific actions or to answer requests from other international organisations (FAO, UNESCO, Banque Mondiale, etc) ;
- research networks covering all Mediterranean countries, enabling to have competent correspondents and specialists for most of the sensitive issues in the Mediterranean region ;
- the widely-shared feeling that there is a “CIHEAM family”, a family whose quality is also to be opened to the rest of the world ;
- the small size of the leading bodies at CIHEAM and its Institutes ensures responsiveness and flexibility ;
- the organisation’s intergovernmental feature, providing an efficient link with political and administrative decision-makers.

Last, the organisation’s stand on agricultural issues, which I mentioned in my introduction, far from being outdated, is an asset for the construction of cohesion in the Mediterranean region. In some way, it could be assumed that the strengthening of the CIHEAM network, the only international organisation involved in all Mediterranean countries, is instrumental in the construction and the existence of the Mediterranean region.

In conclusion: the outline of an action platform

Such facts and thoughts help to sketch the elements of a renovated action platform at CIHEAM, by comparing the expectations expressed during the seminar and CIHEAM’s specific assets and that of its Institutes.

1. A first area of action involves the training function of CIHEAM towards agricultural and food processing managers in the Mediterranean region. The highest expectation, together with the acknowledgment that the need is inappropriately fulfilled, concerns **vocational training** for existing managers. Obviously, in that regard, CIHEAM has rare and specific assets : its ability to mobilise the best international specialists, its involvement in the research network management enabling it to face the various challenges which agriculture and the food processing industry are facing, its know-how and training organisation. A thorough thinking process should enable to identify: the nature of the needs (for instance customised training of managers to identified development actions), priority themes, forms to be chosen in order to satisfy this specific client base (duration, education, material, etc.) and the conditions required to meet these needs.

2. However, this central priority doesn't mean that CIHEAM Institutes have to relinquish their involvement in the area of **initial training**. On the contrary, this is also one of CIHEAM's assets. But the Institutes have to carry out this activity in an innovative and unquestionable manner, so as to be more than one University in the Mediterranean region countries. First, they have to display that their training offers students an access to the international dimension. As a result, this dimension should be "cultivated" in the substance and in the form of the tuition: international hiring, diversified education groups, Master and/or Thesis work offered to students on sensitive topics, with a significant share of north/south co-operation.

The Institutes themselves could be designed as educational laboratories for national universities. This probably means that the Institutes have to have perfect knowledge of the status of higher education in the Mediterranean region.

3. The third request concerns the high-level discussion **management function** targeted at decision-makers in the countries in the "Mediterranean region". This Seminar is a meaningful example of CIHEAM's ability to act, with a broad interest from political and administrative, scientific and university, and economy managers. Several topics have been outlined, which I mentioned earlier. It would be interesting to assume that the management action of CIHEAM will be all the more credible if the Institutes can emphasise an innovative personal experience, in the area of university education for instance.

In terms of prospective, four types of attitudes are identified, in connection with the future:

- withdrawal from changes ;
- passive adjustment ;
- anticipatory adjustment ;
- "pro-active" attitude, which consists in being active on one's environment, in acting the changes of one's economic and human environment rather than being subjected to it.

In a world where the future is uncertain, and whose dynamics are towards globalisation, it is known that it is through **specific resources** in their territory that players can construct their future by being "pro-active".

In this pro-activity aspect, CIHEAM has unquestioned specific qualities, as mentioned during the Seminar. CIHEAM can be an active partner of players in the Mediterranean region, a **specific resource** in this part of the world.

The contribution of the Seminar is first the positioning of CIHEAM in a strategic perspective of consideration of changes. But the main challenge of CIHEAM isn't only about adjusting. CIHEAM has a true ability to organise the "Mediterranean region" regarding agricultural, food and rural land issues.

