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Synthesis of the round tables debates

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This seminar was attended by some 60 participants, consisting of officials and teachers working in higher education, for research organisations, companies and government and financial institutions from various countries bordering the Mediterranean.

The diversity of participants made it possible to go beyond the strict framework of official points of view. Forecasts of the main trends in the field covered were outlined.

The talks by speakers invited to stimulate debates showed the importance of the underlying issues of the theme of the seminar. Indeed, advanced education in agriculture and agrifood in Mediterranean countries faces a double challenge:

1. that of the internationalisation/globalisation trend that affects all the countries in the world and their educational systems to varying degrees;
2. that of the problems specific to the Mediterranean zone and the agricultural/agrifood sector (consumption model, soil resources and especially water resources).

The method used to run the seminar was based on active participation by the persons present and consisted of centring the debates on four themes previously selected by the organising committee:

- the demand for training: *new profiles and new trades*,
- training supply: *tomorrow's training operators and new programmes*,
- tools and methods: *new pedagogical approaches*,
- new methods of co-operation: *networks*.

The 60 seminar participants were invited to group in five "round tables" or, better still, "reflection/proposal workshops" constituted by mixing the origins and responsibilities of the participants:

- technology and production,
- stakes for the management of natural resources,
- management of enterprises and market dynamics,
- regional development and national policies,
- study and development of training systems.

Each workshop developed its own answers to the questions raised (two questions per theme) for each of the four themes above.

Finally, two rapporteurs gave syntheses in plenary sessions of the work of the four workshops. The CIHEAM document containing the results of the round table discussions and the present report form the synthetic presentation of the conclusions of the seminar.

This presentation is, of course, succinct. It shows the agreement between the opinions of the seminar participants, sometimes on the basis of the lowest common denominator, and cannot therefore claim to be a faithful reflection of the great diversity of all the views expressed. However, it does identify a number of major trends that we hope will be useful for decision makers.

TOPIC I – The demand for training: new profiles and new trades

In concrete terms, this consisted of identifying the “jobs of the future”—the profiles of managers in the agricultural and agrifood sectors.

The five workshops considered that the most promising occupations for the coming ten years concern the management of projects of all kinds (farm enterprises, new products, agri-industrial investments and natural resources within the framework of public bodies, local chamber or private undertakings), work at the interface between potential resources (knowledge and services) and the demand for services: product marketing (including the commercial aspects and sales; and the production and management of innovations in companies (R & D, expert appraisals, team management).

Rapporteurs' comments

It should be noted that it is still difficult to perform analysis in terms of 'food system' and not only in terms of agriculture. However, even if occupations in crop and animal farming will change considerably (especially in private and public agricultural research), the job market for holders of diplomas from advanced agricultural training institutions will shift steadily but rapidly towards downstream occupations (logistics, agri-food industry, distribution/catering, services for businesses).

These jobs of the future will require special skills. Here, the workshops came up with substantially convergent proposals, stressing the importance of relational capability (communication, team management, leadership), the ability to appraise complex situations, responsiveness (understanding change, forward-looking attitude), international open-mindedness (mastery of foreign languages and also a perception of cultural features and national characteristics of markets) and, of course, indispensable technical skills, the foundation of an engineer's training.

Rapporteurs' comments

There would seem that there is good perception of the requirements of future employers in both the public and private sectors with regard to future senior managers, with relatively high salaries.

TOPIC II – Training supply: tomorrow's training operator and new programmes

Although this theme raises delicate problems of institutional responsibilities, a substantial consensus of opinion was noted among participants on the following points:

- the need for training content to be “steered from downstream”, that is to say that curriculae should match users' requirements and be flexible in order to respond to an acceleration in economic changes;
- the advantage of a pluridisciplinary approach while conserving a good balance in curriculae between theoretical and practical training;
- the important role of partnerships (public/private, academic/professional, regional/international) in the emergence of new training operators capable of setting up programmes matching next century's job markets.

Rapporteurs' comments

In the framework of a general opening to the market economy, and hence an increased demand for competitiveness, employers' requirements in terms of skills and operational capability can only increase. Training institutions will also find themselves increasingly in competition with each other at an international level in the 'recruitment' of students. As a result, the search for synergy through partnerships will become an important feature for national training players. Finally, there will no doubt be a very strong increase in short, strongly-targeted courses aimed at specific skills.

TOPIC III – New pedagogical approaches: tools and methods

The discussions covered new information and communication technologies (NICT), whose importance is increasing rapidly in the training sphere.

The workshop participants validated some of the advantages of NICT in the context of advanced teaching in farming and food: ease of access to information and personalisation of curriculae, networking of the various actors (students, training staff, researchers and professionals) and a reduction in the potential cost through economies of scale.

However, the discussion also led to stressing the need for other pedagogic approaches to achieve high-quality teaching: group dynamics (contacts between students), classroom work (in the presence of a teacher), tutoring, field placements (learning by doing) and the still irreplaceable "conventional" teaching material (paper documents such as books, classes and case studies).

Rapporteurs' comments

As was observed by the various workshops, pedagogic effectiveness requires a combination of different methods, including those using NICT. In addition, investment in NICT will require a large student population, whence the importance of the inter-institution networks mentioned above.

TOPIC IV – New methods of co-operation: networks

The workshop participants felt that the setting up of co-operation networks in the field of advanced training in agriculture and agrifood first of all required clear identification of needs and present supply (centres of skills, occupation watches). With this as a basis, the development of training modules can be envisaged (calling upon public/private partnership as mentioned above).

The "products" to be developed include factual and bibliographical databases, the holding of meetings (meetings, joint tutoring, mobility of teachers and students) and training sessions for training staff.

Such co-operation would be based on the specific features of Mediterranean farming and food (e.g. water management or the consumption model) insofar as specific features generate distinctive skills and markets on an international basis.

The pressures of the economic and social environment, together with institutional complementarity, the existence of funding (MEDA) and the sharing of costs are all favourable forces for inter-institutional co-operation.



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