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Organization of the Extension Service in Greece

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SUMMARY - Since its establishment, in the early 1950s, the Greek Extension service has undergone considerable changes. Especially after 1981, an administrative role has been undertaken as related to the implementation of the CAP, the provision of subsidies and the execution of the relevant controls. The development of a progressive farmer strategy as well as the, more or less, homogeneous productivist ideology, manifested in the discourse of the extensionists and enhanced by the application of modernization schemes largely based on the EU Regulations, have favoured RRFs (resource rich farmers) in the plains. In view of the problems in both the plains and the LFAs, due to environmental questions as well as declining quotas and subsidies for the former, and the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions in the latter, which may in turn have environmental implications, a radical restructuring of the Service is required. The development needs of different farmers' categories call for the differentiation of the roles of extensionists as related to rural development towards non-productivist and more socially and environmentally sensitive actions.

Key words: Extension, bureaucratization, target groups, rural development.

RESUME - "Organisation des services de vulgarisation agricole en Grèce". Le Service de Vulgarisation en Grèce a subi des changements considérables depuis sa fondation, au début des années 50. Après 81, elle a pris en charge un rôle administratif qui se trouve en connexion avec l'application de la PAC, la distribution des subventions et les contrôles afférents. Le développement d'une stratégie des agriculteurs "dynamiques" et aussi de l'idéologie productiviste, plus ou moins homogène, a privilégié les agriculteurs disposant déjà de ressources suffisantes et actifs dans les zones de la vallée. Ce phénomène est apparu, après le discours des ingénieurs agronomes et il est renforcé par l'application des projets de modernisation qui se sont basés sur les réglementations de l'UE. Le Service de Vulgarisation en Grèce a besoin de réorganisations radicales à cause des problèmes apparus dans les zones de la plaine et défavorisées. Les problèmes apparus dans les zones de la plaine se sont connectés avec les questions d'environnement, et aussi avec les questions de la diminution des quotas et des subventions. Dans les zones défavorisées, également les problèmes apparus ont un rapport avec la dégradation des conditions socio-économiques qui peuvent avoir des influences négatives pour l'environnement. Les rôles des ingénieurs agronomes doivent être en équivalence avec les nécessités de développement des différentes catégories d'agriculteurs dans le cadre d'un développement rural non productiviste et plus sensible socialement et environnementalement.

Mots-clés : Vulgarisation, bureaucratization, population cible, développement rural.

Historical background

The Greek Extension Service was formally established in 1950. This was the first systematic attempt of the State in implementing an integrated system of occupational training for peasants. The basic aim of such an attempt was the re-organization of the agricultural sector (in both productive and social terms) which was ruined after World War II and the following Civil War.

During the 50's and the first half of the 60's, the Service was very effective in achieving its targets and this period is thought of as being the "golden age" of Extension in Greece. There was a massive and well co-ordinated mobilization of the staff (agronomists) on the basis of well designed extension programmes. During this period, extensionists seem to meet the ideotype of the "change agent". They performed an educational role explicitly aiming at changing farmers' attitudes towards modernization with 'progressive farmers' constituting their primary target-group. The main characteristic of their work was a missionary attitude and popular image. The problems that extensionists had to tackle, despite being severe, were relatively easily solved by means of existing technical knowledge and the introduction of new/improved inputs.

As a result, the Greek agriculture attained self-sufficiency in strategic food crops by the end of the 1950s. In addition, with the establishment of the first Agricultural Training Centres all over the country

in the early 1960s, agronomists were able to carry out their educational duties much more efficiently and effectively.

After the mid 60's the problems of the agricultural sector change. The Extension Service does not seem able to tackle more complicated issues which are not solved by an increase of production *per se*; such issues have to do with the restructuring of the sector in relation to marketing considerations. In addition, the attitude of the Service towards its clients is transformed from having to work with peasants to having to deal with farmers. Hence, its perceived role also changes: the change agent gives way to the advisor. Farmers are expected to be able to deal with most of their problems without the assistance of the Service which provides advice, mainly of a technical nature, usually upon request. At the same time the Service, fulfilling the increasing administrative needs of the State becomes largely engaged in bureaucratic tasks; extensionists are gradually transformed into almost typical civil servants working in office. The vacuum created is steadily filled by agronomists either working for private companies or establishing local commercial enterprises promoting, in both cases, all kinds of commercial inputs. As time passes by, such agronomists become antagonistic to extensionists. Meanwhile, the Service, which has not established either organizational links with other major agricultural development institutes (i.e., Universities, Co-operatives) or organic links with the Research division of the Ministry, does not attempt to co-operate with the private sector in creating an agricultural development network.

The contemporary setting

After the access of Greece in the EC (1981), the administrative burden of the implementation of the CAP implementation was automatically designated to the Extension Service. The new approach towards agricultural development requires that Greek farmers have to become competitive entrepreneurs, both within the CAP framework and in view of the GATT negotiations. Such developments imply the need for change of the Extension role from the advisory model towards the change agent function, yet in a different way than in the first period (50's and 60's). Instead of adopting an extensive social and educational role as in the "golden era", extensionists have to differentiate farmers into groups, according to criteria established by the CAP, and detect their deficiencies in terms of behaviour and/or their wider environment; such deficiencies are perceived as obstacles to modernization. But, as no major functional re-structuring of the Service has taken place, extensionists did not escape from their bureaucratic-administrative role. Furthermore, due to the lack of an adequate institutional framework (i.e., land and farmers' register) the duties of controlling the implementation of the CAP. Regulations were imposed on them; agronomists were assigned with the task to verify samples of farmers' statements regarding the acreage of subsidized cultivation through controls at local level. Therefore, extensionists are severely restricted to providing advice to information seeking individuals in a rather fragmented, inadequate and inefficient manner. As a result of the huge working time devoted to the bureaucratic functions of the Service very few extension programmes are designed and implemented on the local level.

Nevertheless, the Service maintains its educational function, although in a limited extent. Main training activities are carried out through the local Agricultural Training Centres offering short term training (i.e., 150 hours for farmers and 300 hours for new entrants to agriculture) which are in essence related to their ability to attain eligibility for participation in the EU modernization schemes (R. 2328/91/EC). Yet, a number of factors related to the unsatisfactory functioning within the current system of agricultural training has been identified. Such factors relate to: (i) the lack of central programming along with the availability of local options related to the specific character of the localities; (ii) the lack of training materials; (iii) the lack of a valid evaluation procedure; (iv) the inadequate duration and timing of the offered courses; and (v) the lack of appropriately qualified personnel with specific educational tasks (Koutsouris, 1994).

The problem

It seems that Extension under its present mode of function cannot provide adequate service to farmers in terms of rural development. So, a number of studies have attempted to detect what the present situation is both in terms of farmers' perceptions about the Service's interventions as well as,

in terms of the intervention policy and practice of the Service (Panagiotou *et al.*, 1994; Papadopoulos, 1995; Panagiotou *et al.*, 1996; Koutsouris and Papadopoulos, 1998; Koutsouris *et al.*, 1998).

Distinct profiles of households have been identified differing in a number of parameters such as acreage, irrigated land, European Size Units (ESU), household demography and educational status, etc. Further differentiations have been detected within the same aggregate types of households when examined according to their background characteristics related to the altitude zone (i.e., lands and agro-climatic conditions) they belong to. Such distinct types of households have differential needs as far as their socio-economic reproduction and development are concerned.

Meanwhile, the Greek Extension Service operates within a more or less homogeneous development ideology focused on the topic of agricultural competitiveness in the framework of the "productivist" agriculture. Therefore, the target-group is confined in the category of the "dynamic" farmers located in the plain areas; the information and training needs of other categories of farmers are largely ignored. The application of the R. 797/85 (now R. 2328/91), is the main modernization scheme employed, and has had a major influence on such a way of thinking within the service. In addition, despite sporadic incidents, no major environmental problems have been identified so as to attract the attention of the general public. Nevertheless, there is a need to limit intensification in order to avoid irreversible damage.

For the LFAs the provision of compensatory allowances, along with other subsidies, has been the main policy instrument aiming at helping farmers to survive under difficult circumstances. The fact that there is considerable differentiation between plains and LFAs, along with the lack of research on alternative crops and enterprises, has resulted in the exclusion of farmers in the LFAs from the modernization schemes. Here, special measures in order to protect the extensive systems are required with special emphasis on the socio-economic survival of the communities.

Therefore, "dynamic" farmers in the plains who besides favourable agroclimatic conditions and resources also have, on social terms, access to the service tend to be satisfied with the extension service. The situation is different for "dynamic" farmers located in semi-mountainous and mountainous areas who struggle to keep in pace with modernization in agriculture, usually under unfavourable circumstances. They consider the Service to be bureaucrats, not easily accessible for advice, without any significant contribution to development. Distance from the local offices, lack of the proper social networks, difficulty to meet the Regulations' requirements, the administrative burden of extensionists as well as their pre-occupation with "dynamic" farmers in the plains are factors explaining such reactions on the part of this category of farmers.

As far as the "intermediate" and "less dynamic" farmers mainly located in non-prosperous areas are concerned, they seem to be satisfied from the mode of operation of the extension service. This can be attributed to their age and state of farming; with no modernization prospects they feel satisfied since they have the opportunity to gain money through the mechanism of compensatory allowances without which they would face difficulties in survival. Consequently, they do not feel any attraction to agricultural training.

Discussion

In Greece, during the last few decades the Extension Service is in a painful process of bureaucratization leading to its absence from the rural development field. In addition, the Service's homogeneous development policy and ideology has actually been operating a limited 'progressive farmer strategy' relating to the plain areas of the country. To date, the inertia of the bureaucratic mechanism leading to the provision of inadequate services to farmers especially in the LFAs has had serious consequences leading to the desertification of such areas.

Alternatives to this situation require first of all the abandonment of the normative scientific stereotypes towards a more flexible and co-operative spirit. Farming Systems Research/Extension approaches should be employed thus taking into account multifaceted criteria and examining alternative development paths in accordance to agro-climatic zones and existing resources (both human and non-human). Working with specific target-groups as well as being able to assess needs, to exploit indigenous knowledge and to animate participation, agronomists will be able to develop

appropriate extension programmes and contribute to local development. Moreover, the issue of sustainability requires the development of new conceptual frameworks and modes of operation along with innovative policy measures and research agendas.

The development needs of the various farmers' categories in Greece also call for a differentiation of roles on the part of extensionists. The ideotypes of the "change agent" and the "advisor" cannot be found as such in every day reality nor can someone maintain which one is the most appropriate in an *a priori* manner. Social, political and development aspects are heavily involved in determining the nature of any service. Nevertheless, it seems that most farmers in the LFAs are more in need of change agents whilst the rest of the farmers are in need of some type of an advisory service.

Further requirements refer to the transfer of controlling and bureaucratic tasks to administration thus leaving agronomists with the extension and training work. An additional step would be the establishment of an organic interactive relationship with research. In such a way research would be aware of the specific problems of target-groups while the transfer and adaptation of technology would be more efficient. A final need refers to the re-organization of the training division of the service.

It has to be noticed, that on the policy level, new operational frameworks are currently promoted by the Ministry in order to amalgamate various divisions, establish a semi-autonomous training service and create a new division with the single task of administrating all kinds of the CAP subsidies, thus discharging the extension service from such a burden. It is, as yet, very early to comment on the impact (i.e., besides the rhetoric) on such developments.

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