

The process of change in the livestock systems on small family farms in response to new development programmes at a local level: the example of mountainous region of Evritania, Greece

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Evritania, situated in Central Greece is an autonomous administrative region and the only prefecture comprising 100% mountainous land. The area suffers many of the problems associated with such areas in Greece and in Mediterranean Europe in general. Such problems are:

1. old age of the population, with few possibilities for regeneration from local births,
2. rural exodus, and
3. abandonment of activities related to primary production.

The population density of Evritania is extremely low. Officially there are 11 inhabitants per square kilometre though in reality this figure is much lower (about 9 inhabitants per square kilometre). Pasture land, which is one of the main productive resources, makes up 40% of the total land area of Evritania. This land is, however, of poor quality. Animal husbandry is still the main activity for many villages in Evritania, making it a priority that development efforts be intensified towards “new” and more productive herds, with the same traditional structures, but with up-to-date methods and ideas that will lead to the production of pure and natural, high-value animal products.

Seasonal problems of supplying herds with adequate nutrition occur. Pasture plays an important role in feeding the herds for about 7-8 months, but utilisation of this resource is poor. According to data from the Animal Production Service, the land is able to supply sufficient grazing to feed the herds for just 4-5 months of the 7-8 months that the herds stay in the area. The shortfall of resources has to be made up with bought-in feeds, with an adverse effect on farm net income.

The primary sector plays an important role in Evritania with three main activities:: utilisation of the forest land, livestock production and crop production. These three activities contribute an average of about 60% of total regional income, 25% from the utilisation of the forest land, 30% from livestock production and 5% from other farming activities

Crop farming is limited by the morphology of the land to just 5% of the land area. Annual land use statistics show a decline in cropping, and also in agricultural activity in general. The abandonment of farm land continues to increase and there is little hope for the survival of farming activities.

Livestock systems and local development policy

In the mountainous regions of Greece in general, and in Evritania in particular, livestock farmers form relationships with their land that grow to become more than a simple

productive procedure. This gives farming important social significance. It also contributes to the protection and improvement of the environment and improves accessibility to the area for other activities such as leisure and tourism.

In this context, the extensive management of small ruminants in particular plays an important role. Requiring large areas of land and using local pasture resources, they manage the landscape and natural wealth.

It is generally agreed that the mountainous Mediterranean areas, including most of Greece, have the necessary comparative advantages for the survival of extensive small ruminant production. However, construction of infrastructure has been limited, while laws forbidding mainly goat herds to enter state-owned forest land are enforced in mountainous areas. This restriction was established at a time when animal production was the main economic activity of the majority of the population. Though the decisions to forbid livestock from state forest land had to be made at the time, there was no concern for the producer’s livelihoods. The measures eliminated the herds and the farmers moved out of agriculture.

Today it is necessary to understand animal production at a local level and to take a more realistic approach. The local potential must be identified and encouraged to develop within the existing perspectives of small family farm holdings in the mountains. Mountainous areas now undergo social and economic changes on the basis of experimental or pilot programmes that are conceived and enforced by the planners of developmental programmes both at national and European level. In addition, the aim at a European and national level is wholly to develop a given area, activating the human labour and the natural resources and capabilities. Thus, an analysis of more general development planning is needed.

Whatever reservation one may have for the programmes, it is the case that the local market has to be won by mountain livestock producers, given that there are problems to sell to distant city markets. The opportunity to secure a quality premium has to be taken in some way and, while the livestock product market is highly competitive, sales through local markets offer producers, in particular smaller producers, some advantages. Money paid to feed livestock, especially during winter, can be found from higher selling prices as quality-assured products. For this to become reality, consistent and continued education of producers is needed.

The increased levels of tourism development, alternative tourism, and especially rural tourism, provide an opportunity for the entrance of animal production into new marketing channels. It should be noted here that rural tourism (or agritourism)

in Greece is conceived differently than in other countries where it has flourished. Agritourism in Greece has nothing to do with offering the experience of farm life to tourists, as in other countries (France, UK, Canada etc.). It is simply the diversification of farm incomes by offering accommodation in rented rooms. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to investigate how animal production can benefit from such an activity which will change so dramatically the social, economic and cultural behaviour of the traditional societies of mountainous areas.

Mountain livestock production in Evritania (as in all Greece) has to enter this new and very promising market probably without external support, using the initiative of farmers. This is primarily because there has been little involvement by the state to understand and use the development possibilities offered by the local animal production, education of farmers and their successors, nor how to include traditional production systems in general local development planning.

Tourism and livestock

The regional development agency, Evritania S.A., has been faced by these problems of social and economical abandonment of the area since it was created in 1980. Its role is to promote rural development by mobilising the indigenous human and natural resources. Since then, the development agency has started to enact development plans and little by little a local development policy has been established.

Within the framework of EC programmes, such as the Integrated Development Programmes, LEADER and others, the development policy has been oriented towards the secondary and tertiary sector, while the primary sector has been largely left behind. The philosophy behind such programmes encourages internal development or self-development. These programmes are based on the activation of human labour and offer radical solutions for the regeneration of the local economy. They refer mainly to the support of tertiary sector activities, and in particular rural tourism, but also to the secondary sector with emphasis on the start-up and running of small handicraft workshops and other businesses.

The passage from the traditional production systems to the new economic activities used in traditional societies is now a milestone in the developmental history of the mountains. For years neglected, the mountain economy is now contributing to the general economic system of the country. However, the implementation of development programmes has caused certain problems for the traditional societies and economies that are affected. The dynamics of these effects are so important that they require consideration before any radical changes offered by European and national schemes, such as the Integrated Mediterranean Programs (IMP) and LEADER programme, should be implemented.

The local development policy adopted by the Agency relates mainly to the promotion of tourism, tourist activities and alternative tourism (including agritourism). Approximately 85% of the money invested aims to improve facilities for tourism, such as in the provision of quality hotel and apartment accommodation. Seventy per cent of the investment under LEADER I was directed towards agritourism, representing 50 rooms and 150 beds, while in Leader II 60% of the investment will create another 100 rooms with 250 beds.

This development policy helped at this stage to create an

important tourist demand. Also, a ski centre has been developed, and municipal guesthouses and large hotels have appeared. Local young people were more interested in investing in the idea of agritourism in the form of rented rooms (and not in the primary sector), as there were more advantageous rates of subsidies. Incomes were increased, and families began to stay in the area with their children.

Such alternative productive activities are preferred to the primary sector, as it is easier and quicker to obtain as well as a return on capital invested and the proportion of subsidy is more advantageous for the beneficiaries of the development programmes.

It is worthwhile to point out that this developmental policy created a serious antagonism between the different sectors of the economy at a local level and discouraged the investment of young population in the primary sector. However, whatever reservations one has about the policy, it is true that the expansion of tourism activity increased the demand in the local market for milk and meat products, while the points of selling, i.e. the meat and milk shops, increased considerably between 1990 and 1997. In Evritania, between 1990 and 1997, the number of butcher shops grew from 25 to 34. It is worth noting that, excluding Karpenissi, the prefecture's capital, with 10,000 inhabitants and a total of 8 butcher shops, 26 others are scattered throughout villages, where the average population is 150 inhabitants per village. Such a number of inhabitants is much too low to justify their existence simply to supply the needs of the local population. The traditional rural hospitality, *philoxenia*, of Greece has at its core the consumption of lamb and goat.

Figure 1 shows the evolution of tourism capacity, according to records of overnight stays in hotels, municipal guesthouses and agritourism facilities in Evritania during the last 7 years, and demonstrates the importance of this activity to this region.

Of the goats and sheep in Evritania, some are located on farms, others are migrant and move around the area. This paper concentrates on the farm situation, as it is considered that their existence and development contributes in a positive manner to the development of the area, in a determining manner to the level of farmers' income and in relation to the newly offered economical activities.

The data indicate the situation of the small family farmers (20 to 50 small ruminants) of some villages of the region that were surveyed. The survey covered 12 villages (out of 81) and examined the situation of these farm units over a ten-year interval (1987 and 1997), using a specific questionnaire sent to the secretaries of the villages (see Figure 2).

The proportion of meat sold locally by small producers over the same period of time and in the same villages was also evaluated (Figure 3). Finally, an assessment was made of the annual number of tourists and visitors for the same villages and period of time.

The results of this research demonstrate the strong link between the development of the small herds, the increase in local sales and the expansion of tourist visits to these villages. In fact, the recent promotional efforts for rural tourism has helped considerably, not only to maintain small producers but also to encourage an increase in the number of animals, and the development of local retail outlets.

Ten years ago, most researchers, but also the local producers, were certain that there was no hope for the small farmers to

survive in this area. With the above results, it can be confirmed that a new livestock system has now developed – we can call it maybe “tourism extensive livestock system”-that survives and develops alongside tourist development, encouraged by schemes to promote integrated rural development. It is clear that this is still a fragile system in which production depends heavily on the local demand for local products.

The sudden expansion of tourism in Evritania over the last eight years has continued to a point where this one-sided development, and the move to this new economic activity (that is aided by the improved road infrastructure) can be said to have made a positive contribution to mountain livestock farming,

rather than follow the course of the Greek island areas. The islands have suffered almost complete abandonment of the primary sector because of the antagonism between the sectors of the economy.

Some suggestions

Actions aimed at the support of mountain livestock production should be introduced as soon as possible, before the tourist accommodation activity reaches the catastrophic levels found in the island areas. Mountain herding should be helped to establish and maintain local marketing channels.

Whoever though, cries “help!” and “make it easy for us!”

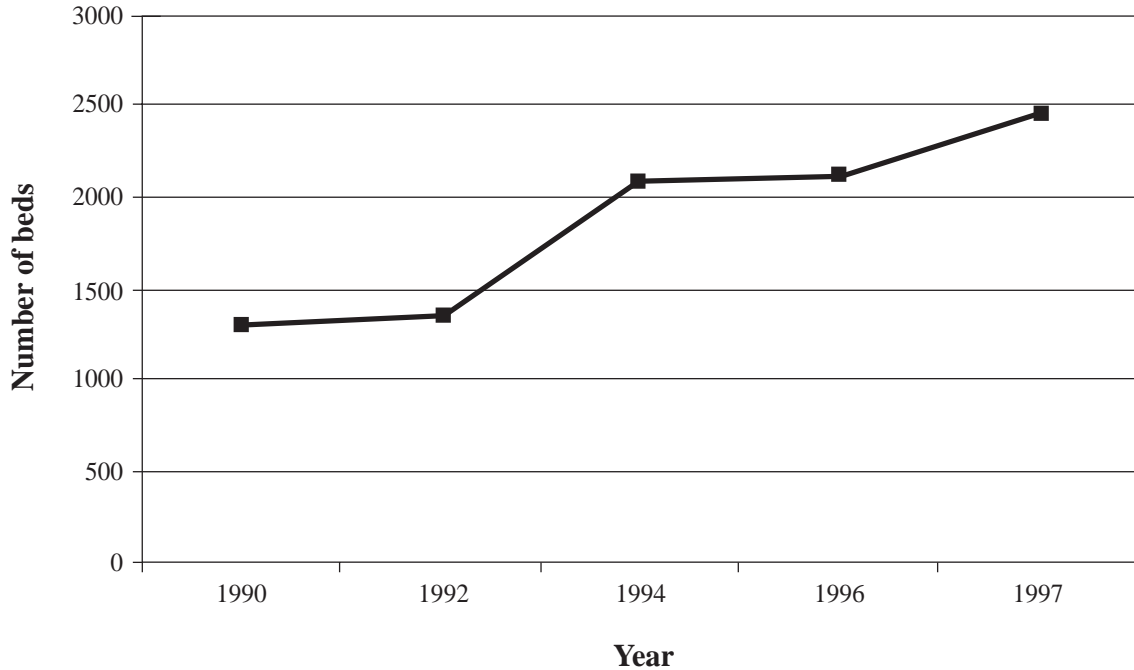


Figure 1. The evolution of tourism capabilities according to hotels, municipal guest houses and agritourism lodgings in Evritania from 1990 to 1997.

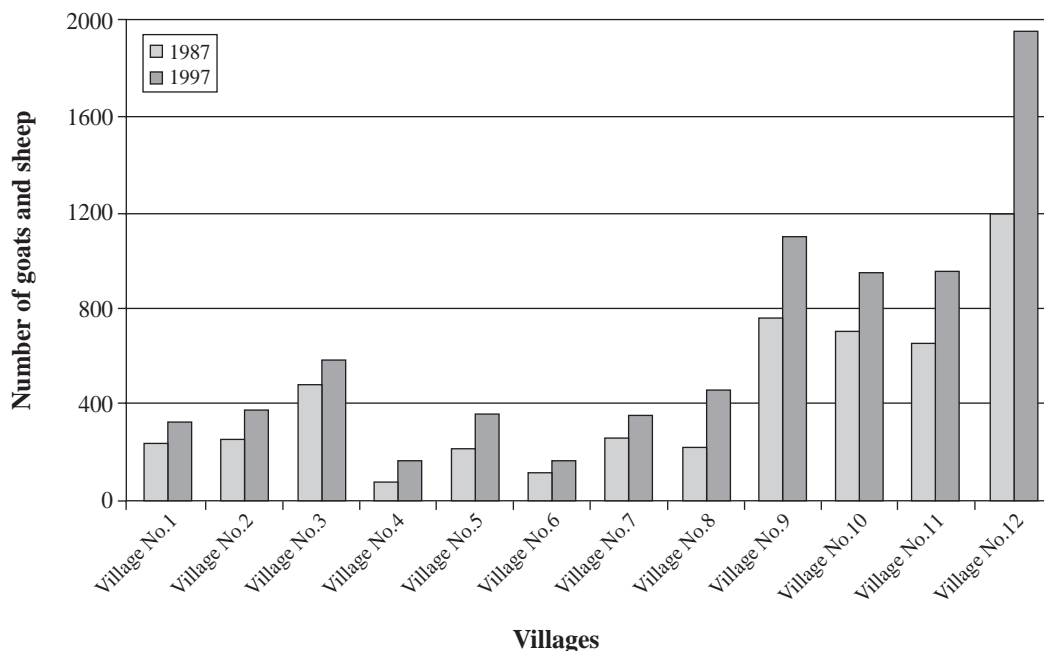


Figure 2. The changes in small ruminant populations on small farms (20 to 50 goats and sheep) in 12 villages of Evritania from 1987 to 1997.

should also “think sensitively”, as major changes will influence the rural economy and society in the direct future. The following suggestions are not aimed to give the entire picture for the conclusive development of the livestock sector. However, they do aim to awaken the “sensitivity” of the responsible services to the need for immediate and low cost acts towards supporting this activity.

The state and the local development agencies should awake to the need to educate producers, many of whom ignore the existing opportunities and as such cannot find a way to enter a bigger market.

The scientific services should also awake to the need for national level research on products that can be classed as “natural” or “pure” and these should receive the much-needed “Denomination of origin”.

The local community leaders should co-operate in order to start programmes to encourage farmers, increase the level of co-operation between them, and improve the flow of information to a more direct level.

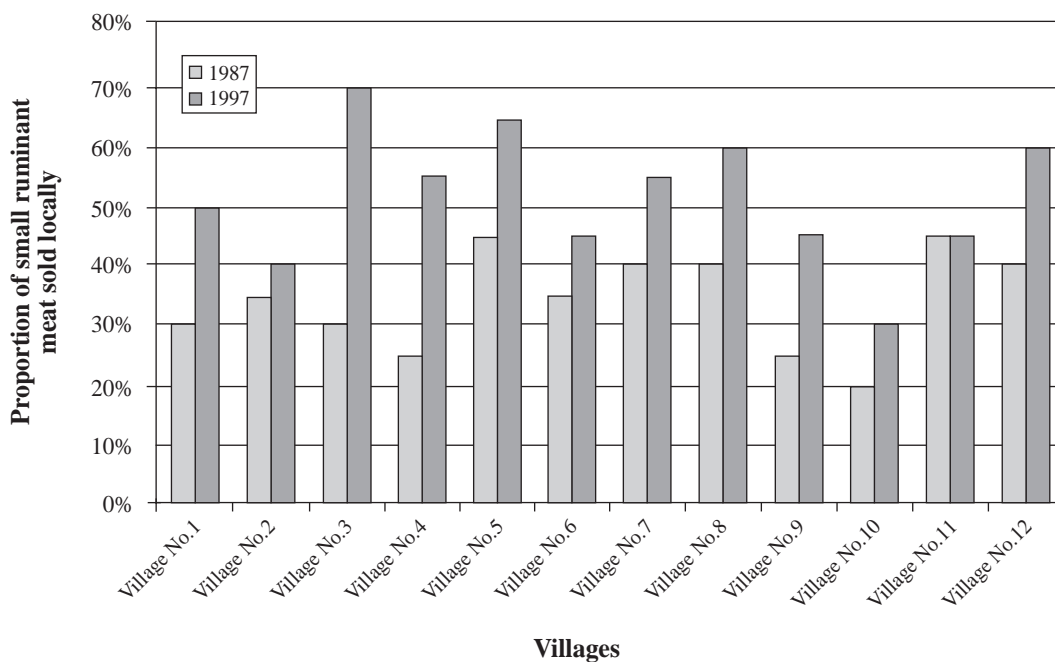


Figure 3. Local sales (%) in 1987 and 1997 of small ruminant products (20 to 50 goats and sheep) in 12 villages of Evritania.

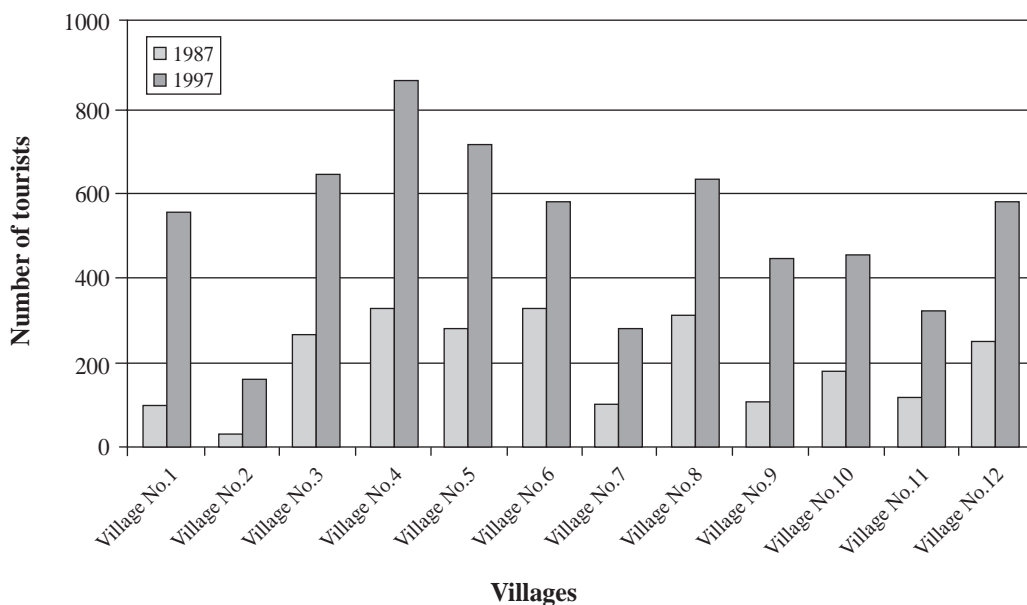


Figure 4. Annual number of tourists in 12 villages of Evritania from 1987 to 1997.

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