

Review of the book:

Kasimis, C., Stathakis, G. (eds.), **The Reform of the CAP and Rural Development in Southern Europe**, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003

This volume was inspired by the results of a Conference on “New Policies for the Development of Countryside in Southern Europe” held in Athens in November 1998 under the support of the “Nikos Poulantzas” Foundation and the Institute of Urban and Rural Sociology of the National Centre for Social Research of Greece.

After the introduction of the two Editors aimed at presenting an overview of the volume, a first part (four papers by: T. Mardsen, N. Beopoulos, K. Bruckmeier and T. Patricio, and K. Vergopoulos) focus on the European countryside evolutionary experience, the CAP reform and the rural development policies, providing an horizontal analysis and a research agenda from a Southern European perspective. The following part (five papers by: J. Portela and C. Gerry, E. Moyano-Estrada and F. Garrido-Fernandez, J.-P. Billaud, F. Di Iacovo, and M. Demoussis) explore, from a vertical perspective, the cases of Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Greece, giving a different kind of emphasis on the issues of the research agenda mentioned above.

The principal aim of the book concerns the analysis of Mediterranean agriculture and rural systems, facing the present change in agricultural markets orientation and CAP reform, while consistent influence is expected on a more global scale: due to EU enlargement, WTO agreements, technological change, and economic and political conjunctures etc.

The analysis concentrates first on the Mediterranean specificity. For a mixture of economic, social, institutional, natural, environmental, cultural and political reasons, Southern European Countries, compared to the Northern ones, generally present weaker production systems and a lower capacity to compete on open markets. This general condition of the economy presents specific distinguishing marks in agriculture: small farm size, generalised part-time employment and pluriactivity, weak connections with the market, low technical efficiency and entrepreneurial capacity, weak institutions and network linkages.

But once we focus down, from the recalled general and abstract dichotomy between Northern and Southern agriculture, to the specificities of the national, regional and even local levels, another major character of Mediterranean agriculture appears: that of its complexity and diversity. The wider range of crops and animal products, the seasonality and sensitivity to weather conditions and water availability of many of them, the wider range of elements to be considered when defining their quality, the regional characters,

cultural identity, and historical heritage associated to each specific product (e.g.: wine), determine a huge variety of local and sectorial problems.

On the other hand, diversity constitutes a fundamental asset for Mediterranean agriculture, especially considering the new attitude of the European consumer towards variety and quality of food, healthy diets (the “Mediterranean” diet), and its new demand for new and old farm services. Agro-tourism and related activities are presently experiencing a real boom in a large part of Mediterranean regions.

An optimistic perspective should be derived as well considering the keywords of the current debate on the role of agriculture in Europe: multifunctionality, sustainability, inter-sectoriality, diversification, biodiversity, food safety and quality of nutrition. Southern agriculture suits, better than the Northern one, the expectations of the European citizen (and the willingness of the taxpayer to pay).

Diversity characterises also the rural territories, economies and societies in Mediterranean Countries: in terms of local identities, traditions, cultures, biological systems, landscapes, etc. Local institutions play a crucial role, which is reflected in local governance. It results in differences both in market opportunities and in the capacity and degree of development. Thus in several cases the Southern regions, especially in the more remote locations, conditioned by physical and climatic constraints are still currently in a deep and unresolved crisis. But, on the opposite side, some other regions, driven prominently by market opportunities, but also supported by good policies (especially designed and implemented at local levels, as in the case of the Leader initiative), have recently witnessed original development experiences with the rise of new entrepreneurial industrial initiatives, as well as in services and especially in tourism, which have produced a counter-urbanisation and the emergency of new social groups in rural areas.

Here the crucial point concerns the relationship between agriculture and the rest of the economy. For its higher quota on local employment and GDP and its still unexploited market opportunities, agriculture plays a fundamental role in determining the general development of rural regions. But a general lesson coming from the Southern experience is that the role of agriculture (and its development possibility) is strictly linked to that of the non-farming activities and to the provision of services in rural areas. Its own capacity to compete on the market is dependent on the general economic development and social change and the capacity of the territory to dynamically adapt and qualify its new identity.

Starting from the analysis which has been briefly synthesized here, the judgement on the CAP expressed by the authors is sharp. The criticisms concentrate first on the

uneven distribution of funds between the two sections of the EAGGF, the preference widely recognised towards continental products, such as cereals, sugar, and milk, to the detriment of the typical Southern crops, such as fruit and vegetables, resulting in a wide discrimination in terms of support per farm or working unit.

Southern European agriculture generally expresses a common demand for specific agricultural policies: structural policies are in fact mainly needed favouring the change both at a farm level (in terms of support towards restructuring and services) and at the agro-food system level, in order to reach the market and adjust to its requirements and dynamics. Market policies such as those principally provided by the CAP (in the past as well as at present) can just about soften the effects of the scarce competitiveness. And an agricultural policy, isolated by a territorial policy, has no sense for resolving the problems of Southern agriculture as well as those of rural territories. A strong support then comes from the book for a consistent redistribution of funds from the first to the second pillar and for the integration of agricultural policy with all the other structural and cohesion policies directed to rural regions.

The appropriate policies should then be flexible enough to adapt to sectorial and local specificities, and their design should be the result of a new compromise between top-down and bottom-up procedures, tending to involve both the centre and the periphery, as well as both public and private actors, in search of negotiated solutions inspired towards long term strategies.

From a Southern European perspective, “What is required is not a *reform of the reform* but a more explicit and fundamental *redesign of the policy*”. This could be the final message of the book. After this assertion the reader is keen to guess the judgement of the authors on the current stage of the MTR reform.

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