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AN INTRODUCTION TO DIFFERENT CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF ENDOGENOUS RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims at introducing a broader conceptualisation of endogenous rural development. It will be argued that paradigms of endogenous rural development could also be explored through a different framework. In that connection, emphasis is placed on the identification of already-existing or potential local comparative advantages which may lie anywhere within the spectrum of the economic activities that take place in rural areas.

The development prospects of rural areas are structured by the prevailing socio-economic conditions. Regional specificity is increasingly acknowledged as central to a self-sustained process of growth. Flexible theoretical and methodological tools are required for the comprehensive knowledge of such specificity.

KEYWORDS:

Rural Development, Regional Development, Development practices, Greece

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, development through modernisation of agriculture was perceived as the only means for promoting social and economic advancement in rural regions. That conceptualisation of rural development prevailed, not only in Greece, but also in all the other developed and developing countries of the world.

Agriculture nurtured the development of the overall economy in most countries for several decades. According to neo-classical economic theory, agriculture contributes to the process of development (Stevens & Jabava, 1988) by:

- Supplying cheap agricultural products
- Increasing the exports of primary products (foreign exchange)
- Supplying the other sectors of the economy with a labour force
- Transferring the surplus generated in agriculture to other sectors of the economy
- Strengthening the domestic market through consumption and investment.

Today, increased awareness of the complexity of rural development issues leads to the questioning of the adequacy of

the perception of agriculture as the sole income-generating activity in rural areas, and the reformulation of the concept of rural development.

Rural areas have faced persistent problems of depopulation, desertification, low-income levels, inflexible production processes, and conflicts of land-use. As a consequence, the relation between rural and urban areas and the role of the expanding agro-food complex has been redefined, while environmental protection issues and inquiries about sustainable rural development have emerged.

1. THE CONCEPT OF ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT

In recent years a great deal of attention was paid to endogenous development as the potential solution to the impasses that brought about a reconsideration of rural development. Two realisations became the centrepiece of the new concept. Firstly, any deviations from modern farming did not necessarily constitute marginal or inefficient structures, and therefore did not present structures to be eliminated in the course of the modernisation of agriculture. Secondly, it was necessary for new conceptualisations of rural areas be developed, in order to encourage the undertaking of new economic activities and the adoption of new lifestyles. Both realisations strengthened the need for a more comprehensive approach to development.

Until recently, the attention given to agriculture was justified by the assumption that agriculture enjoyed the unique role of nurturing the process of development. Capital investments in the industrial sector were expected to draw the surplus labour out of agriculture and incorporate it into the complex technological and institutional

design of 'modern' society (Long, 1984; Slee, 1993).

If agriculture were to be 'modernised', existing farming practices had to be replaced by science-based technology (Roep & Bruin, 1994). Agricultural technology was generated in national research institutes, far from and "above" the rural communities where farming is actually carried on. Moreover, the development and diffusion of science-based technology necessitated the establishment of an institutional framework for market operations, organisation of the structure of the farm enterprises, determination of the role of research institutes, and last but not least, the design of agricultural and rural development policies (Saccomandi, 1993; Benvenuti, 1993).

According to the neo-classical economic model, farmers were seen as entrepreneurs who aimed at profit maximisation. This goal would be achieved through intensification of production, scale-enlargement, and higher competition which led to the adoption of the latest technology by farmers and to the elimination of small holdings which could not operate efficiently in such a competitive environment. Consequently, substantial variation in agricultural practices was related to low levels of development.

A different approach perceived heterogeneity not as an obstacle that needs to be eliminated but as an advantage in the rural development process. In this alternative model, diversity was seen as a consequence of the acknowledgement of agriculture as a social structure. More specifically, the selection of agricultural practices was heavily dependent on the decisions of the agents involved and on their strategies. Heterogeneity reflected different development patterns, each emerging from

a corresponding farming style. Farming styles were the outcome of the strategic behaviour of the agents involved in agricultural production and denoted specific market relations, specific selection of technologies and specific structuring of the process of production.

According to the definition provided by A. Long and van der Ploeg (1994, p. 1-2), *“Endogenous development patterns are founded mainly, though not exclusively, on locally available resources, such as the potentialities of the local ecology, labour force, knowledge and local patterns for the linking of production to consumption, etc.”*

In that sense, present-day heterogeneity exhibits a wide range of farming practices, some of which are mainly dependent upon ‘external’ forces, while others are mostly founded on ‘local’ interests and resources. Each development pattern can be locally appropriate in that it contains a specific balance of ‘external’ and ‘internal’ elements.

The endogenous development approach aims at providing the theoretical and empirical framework of an alternative rural development pathway, by viewing heterogeneously the potential for endogenous growth. Nevertheless, the present study argues that the dominant definition and context assigned to the concept of endogenous rural development could be considered as narrow, and thus inadequate. The current definition of endogenous rural development is drawn out of paradigms for which applicability to all rural areas cannot be assumed, while it restricts the developmental potentialities of rural areas to the development of the primary sector alone.

In order to identify endogenous development patterns, van der Ploeg uses

the concept of ‘styles of farming’. Based on Hofstee’s definition, he identifies a style of farming as a specific cultural repertoire or as a set of strategies related to the socio-economic goals of each farm (van der Ploeg, 1994). Then, he proposes a ‘self-identity’ scheme to classify farmers. Whatmore (1994, p.35), acknowledges the contribution of the local recognition and knowledge of farming styles to the development debate, in a ‘hermeneutic’ epistemological framework. Nevertheless, she does not undervalue the importance of external factors that affect the farming styles. Moreover, Giddens (1984) states that a self-classification scheme, whether applied to farmers or to any other social group, has limitations stemming from the differences between the perception of individuals and the actual events. Lowe *et al.* (1995, p.4) attribute all these gaps in the endogenous development approach to the fact that “social science *theory* has not been particularly successful in providing useful models to inform endogenous approaches. Indeed, the switch from a concern with exogenous to endogenous development strategies has been driven by practical realities and not by theory”. Their main point of criticism refers to the definition of endogenous development offered by van der Ploeg. That is, they object to the lack of acknowledgement of the importance of power in relation to the development process.

2. A BROADER CONCEPTUALISATION OF ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT

Although advocates of the endogenous development approach strongly emphasise the non-polar nature of this model, other theorists, such as Portela (1991) and Drinkwater (1992), warn against the risk of constructing conceptual and methodological tools that would, once again,

capture reality in an inadequate way. As Portela (1991, pp.47-48) stresses, researchers should try to avoid being led to the *“predominant conservative perception that the crisis and difficulties faced by rural areas are the result of personal failures or endogenous social causes”*, which will drive them to look for ‘internal’ problems and needs as well as ‘internal’ solutions, possibilities and constraints, while neglecting the embedded external dimensions. That is, it is possible to arrive at a wrong identification of the problem because of the starting point.” Furthermore, Drinkwater (1992, p.371), claims that an actor-orientated approach aimed at accounting for a variety of responses to the same or similar influences must acknowledge the importance both of the nature of these influences, and of the role the acting individuals play.

Consequently, one major area of criticism of the dominant definition of endogenous development is that it lacks a solid theoretical basis. Indeed, studies undertaken in various countries using the methodology suggested by Long and van der Ploeg have accommodated a number of different patterns of farming under the term “endogenous” (Ventura & Meulen, 1991; ISEC, 1991; Cano, 1991; Kasimis *et al.*, 1991; Cristovao *et al.*, 1994; Portela, 1994). Furthermore, critics of Long and van der Ploeg argue that focus on agriculture can be misleading. They maintain that the restructuring process in the wider rural space should not be neglected. As Robinson (1990) claims, it is important to realise that rural space becomes increasingly diversified in order to accommodate various economic activities and new lifestyles.

Nowadays, traditional assumptions about the character of rural areas do not

seem to enjoy unanimous acceptance. A broader conceptualisation and definition of endogenous rural development is required, acknowledging the potential role of local human and natural resources in economic activities other than farming. These activities, indirectly related or non-related to farming, may include agro-tourism, development of the agro-food sector, on-farm processing and manufacturing, and so on. Such a conceptualisation is based on the argument that every region or locality should develop by taking advantage of an existing or potential local comparative advantage that may lie anywhere within the spectrum of economic activities. Activities such as organic farming, maintenance of landscape and natural cycles, habitats, resources, tourism, energy harvesting and employment creation through labour-intensive services should be promoted (Pausewang, 1995). Thus, it would not be necessary to force labour out of the rural areas.

3. IDENTIFICATION OF ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

The policy measures necessary for encouraging endogenous development should be based on the experiences that have affected and determined the development potentials of a specific setting. Thus there is a need for a typology of regions aimed at identifying areas with similar structural problems and potentials.

Nevertheless, attention should be drawn to the dangers hidden in the use of the so-called orthodox scientific method of constructing typologies. Misconceptions about reality, the potential and the needs of rural areas are often results of improper construction methods. Policy-makers describe and explain social phenomena, using the same classifications over time and

space and standardised, often "official", data (Whatmore, 1994, p.32). Nevertheless, in order to understand present-day heterogeneity we need a different scheme of classification. This was the objective of the Farming Systems Research approach (FSR is a scheme to classify farmers according to their crop and livestock activities), which acknowledged the role of social scientists in development projects (Gibbon, 1994). The FSR approach aims, among other things, at developing a holistic perspective for rural communities, at identifying differentiated groups of farmers, and at responding in a dynamic and flexible way to different circumstances. Nonetheless, this approach exhibits various problems relating to: a) the focus and the boundaries of the analysis and b) to the research methodology. Despite current developments and innovations in Systems Research, Van der Ploeg (1994a) argues that due to the time and space competition between and among crop and livestock activities, the FSR approach often leads to false results.

A number of different methodological approaches for identifying alternative development patterns have been proposed by researchers in five European countries (Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal and the Netherlands). Different types of classification were used in an attempt to identify farming styles that might possibly embody endogenous development patterns. These involved:

- Production of high quality products (high added value per unit of end product)
- Low use of external inputs in agriculture
- Specific production patterns allowing for alternatives to modernisation schemes
- Combination of non- agricultural activities
- Recognition of the contribution of local factors and knowledge of local styles of farming.

In Italy, food-chains have been the point of departure in examining meat, wine and tobacco production. The corresponding studies showed that specific interlinkages between production, transformation and consumption can be viewed as "resources" able to enforce an endogenous development process (Broekhuizen & van der Ploeg). This potentiality, however, can be revealed only if these chains are seen as socio-economic circuits.

In the case of Spain an agro-ecological approach was adopted in an attempt to identify the principal social carriers (actors, movements, institutions, etc.) of endogenous development. Four case studies were undertaken in areas reflecting the most important branches of agricultural production in Andalusia, and covering two important classes in rural society: agricultural day-labourers struggling for land, and small farmers. A common element characterising all four cases is local participation in the development process. Apart from the production process, human resources are also actively engaged in the decision-making processes determining the form of the production process (e.g. on a co-operative basis), the type of the products (ecological or with an emphasis on the former), the marketing strategies (price policy) etc. (ISEC, 1991).

The most striking characteristic of the Greek agricultural sector is the persistence of "traditional" relations in production, as family farming may be characterised. This is firstly the outcome of the failure of co-operative movements to operate in an

efficient way (in plain areas), and secondly of the lack of integrated policy measures as far as problems in the mountainous regions are concerned. Both stem from the clientilistic relations between the agricultural population and the central political authority which resulted in narrowly self-orientated behaviour among Greek farmers (Kasimis *et al.*, 1991).

Local practices as embedded in farming were the focus of analysis in Portugal. Local practices, such as manuring, irrigation etc., were examined within the general framework of heterogeneity of farming practices. In some farming styles, with reference to both village and farm level, these practices were found to be crucial (e.g. Barosso, N. Portugal) while in others they become marginal (Cristovao *et al.*, 1994; Portela, 1994).

Finally, in the Netherlands, focus was made on the social organisation of the process of production. Extensive researches carried out in the field of Dutch dairy farming revealed that farmers have a wide cultural repertoire from which, each time, they select the specific production practices that coincide with their own strategic insights.

These 'entrances' (local practices, specific products, social carriers, specific food-chains and the social organisation of the agricultural production process), were used in order to identify areas where a comparative advantage may lie. It has been argued that a synthesis of these entrances could be used in the construction of a typology of regions according to their potentialities. Such a typology could be used for the identification of endogenous development processes, while it can also be

the basis for constructing measures to strengthen relevant processes.

In general, the use of five different methods of identifying endogenous rural development practices and processes showed that identification methods should be case-specific. In that sense, heterogeneity is conceptualised and incorporated differently into each specific methodological approach.

Within this framework, the 'NEDMED' (*Endogenous Rural Development in the Mediterranean Region* research project, DG VI CAMAR program) research teams focused on identifying different stages of growth experienced among regions of Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, Albania and Greece. The main goal of this co-operation was the identification of practices that embody endogenous development potentialities and also the identification of common areas of concern.

The identification of local comparative advantages presupposes comprehensive knowledge of the heterogeneity in regional and local development patterns. In that sense, heterogeneity may be the outcome of:

1. The growth gaps observed between rural and urban regions
2. The implementation of top-down development policies
3. The inadequate attention paid to regional economic, social and environmental specificity.

Combined with a lack of appropriate infrastructure and of institutional development, these factors resulted in regional disparities that were induced over a period of time.

CONCLUSION

In endogenous development theorisation, heterogeneity of farming practices expresses different developmental trends, while it entails more possibilities for renewal. A development process based on

the exploration of local comparative advantages could be characterised as endogenous in the sense that it promotes a self-sustained process of growth.

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