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Why do geography and history matter?: Insights for a strategic-analytical framework in agroecological development

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Mediterranean “terroirs” have been left apart from the last modernization process in agriculture (intensification-specialization), mostly because of natural constraints and very fragmented territorial facies. However, these territories were fully included in the previous phases of modernity, with demographic growth, market specialization and socio-political transformation. In some cases, like in the Dalmatian islands, they were affected by both long-term Mediterranean trends and specific national conjunctures. The result is that agriculture almost disappeared in a lot of islands – as it was abandoned in a lot of similar/different situations in the Mediterranean mountains and remote territories.

Today, in a new European institutional embeddedness and also concerning the environmental challenges, there may be an opportunity for a special kind of development, which tackles both local and international issues- especially in terms of biodiversity, ecological landscapes, socio-environmental heritage, and, hopefully, climate change. Examples coming from the southern Dalmatian island shall be used to exemplify this general statement.

“Reading” social and economic relations in these territories through the geo-historical lens can bring us strategic elements to better conceive and participate in territorial projects and dynamics. The aim is to integrate the legacy of these systems within the contemporary challenges of eco-systemic (biodiversity) and ecological landscapes. Instead of counterbalancing the negative effects of contemporary economic trends, there is the possibility of using the historical and geographical legacy, patrimony and remains of agrobiodiversity and semi-natural biodiversity, in order to create a more sustainable situation. Balkan Mountains (and the islands) are, in that sense, an important source of environmental and cultural values for the European Union territory and society.

PREDAVAČ

FRANÇOIS LERIN was, until recently, scientific administrator at CIHEAM, an international organization dedicated to agro-food issues in the Mediterranean. He was also the funding member of the NGO “Solagra” (Solidarités Agro-Alimentaires) (1981-2007) and editor-in-chief of its magazine *Courrier de la Planète* until its closure in 2014. He was also the coordinator of the project BiodivBalkans (Biodiversity, Conservation and Valorization. Sustainable rural development in Balkan mountains; 2013-2017) and of Horizon 2020 project dedicated to High Nature Value agriculture (HNV-Link, 2016-2017). He is a specialist in multiscale analysis in agro-environmental enquiries, on which he published books and articles. He is currently the member of the recently created International Institute for Island Development – MIRO and also of the International Association for the Development of Agro-Ecology (AIDA). He is also member of the Scientific Board of the UNESCO site “Causses & Cévennes” – Mediterranean cultural landscape of agropastoralism (France).