

## THE NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN ALBANIAN COASTAL WETLANDS AFTER THE DECLINE OF COMMUNIST REGIME IN 1990 (STUDY CASE: KARAVASTA WETLANDS)

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### ABSTRACT

The organization of agriculture in coastal wetlands of Albania has experienced huge changes after the decline of communist regime in 1990. During the communist time the land was state property and every decision on it was made by the state. The people owned only little land around the house, but they were not allowed to raise animals or crops in it. The villages were organized in socialist cooperatives and every villager was obligated to work in it. The men and women worked together in the planting process, livestock care, harvesting etc. There was not a studied division of work between men and women, but it was strange in that time to see a woman work with a tractor or combine harvester.

This paper focuses on the main changes that the agriculture organization has experienced after the decline of communist regime, especially after the destruction of agriculture cooperatives. It also analyzes the first problems of the new organization and division of land and the changing patterns in land use and selection of crops.

Albania as a developing country has suffered also the huge migration of people, especially men. The changing role of women work in agriculture and decision-making for the production is also a central focus of the paper. The paper will also focus on the different challenges the villagers have to face for a better future development of coastal wetlands and especially the Karavasta wetlands. Will the villagers be open to collaborate in the future? For how long will, the bad experience of socialist cooperatives, impact their future decisions on better organization of the land and agriculture? For how long will survive the actual form of organization of agriculture based on family members work?

**KEYWORDS:** Organization of the Agriculture, Structure of the Crops, Mechanization, Division of Work

### INTRODUCTION

The actual development of the agriculture in Albania's wetlands can be better understood and predicted, if we analyze deeply the main stages of its development in the past. These stages have been detected based on the structural organization of the agriculture, types of practices in the farms and the different levels of their specialization, the intensity and forms of using the available resources and the division of labor in the family. The main changes in Albania's agriculture have had their impact in many aspects: *First, in the different ways of the organization of Agriculture*; it refers to the changes occurring to the production units, which have been created to manage and orientate the production means (labor force, capital and the natural resources) and also to determine the final destination of the agriculture outputs. Organization of the agriculture it is highly depended by the political decisions. The communist period had a bad impact on the social division of the work as well as on the use of natural resources. Also, the division of the land in 1991 didn't result as successful as it was expected. *Secondly, in mechanization level*; the farms located in the Karavasta wetlands have

experienced major changes in the level and type of mechanization. After the decline of communism many agriculture machineries for harvesting, for the treatment of the soil, for the livestock etc. are being used by the farmers. They are also being careful to use more the new technologies and the biological and chemical inputs for the increasing of the quality and quantity of the agriculture productions. *Thirdly, in the farms sizes and specialization*; the main and most evident changes have happened to the fragmentation of the land and creation of small family farms and also in the specialization in some specific crops. The production units are now more orientated from the market and are investing to specialize on those production that are sold in higher prizes in a shorter time. This specialization has its positive and negative impact on these small farms, because often the lack of diversity is a potential ecological, economical and social risk.

### **THE ORGANIZATION OF AGRICULTURE IN THE KARAVASTA WETLANDS DURING THE COMMUNIST REGIME (PERIOD 1945-1990)**

The economic development of Albania after 1945 was centrally planned-the communist leadership in Tirana would make all decisions regarding economic planning and development. The collectivization of agriculture was considered and proclaimed as the best way for the maximization of productivity.

The Agrarian Reform in 1946 took the land from the large landowners and divided it to the poor villagers (in Divjaka the families profited in average 5hectares/family). Although the villagers were the new owners of the land, they could not decide by themselves how to use the land or the structure of the crops cultivated. The state was the only leader of the agriculture production and the only one to decide what and how much would produce every family. The farmers were obligated to sell this amount to the market, with the price that the state had decided no matter the quality of the production. Only the overproduction could be sold in the so-called “black market”, where the price and the quality were higher.

The happiness of the villagers (small farmers) who finally had a piece of land in their property didn't last for much. The scholars think that the Agrarian Reform of the 1946 was only a tactic in the strategy of Communist Party which main objective was the collectivization of the agriculture. The collectivization in Albania was organized and fulfilled in three main phases and lasted 20 years. *The first phase* was from 1946-1954 (the same year that was finished the division of the land) began in the coastal and plain villages (150 cooperatives were created in this period), *the second phase* until 1965 was concentrated in the hilly villages (in 1959 were created 1800 cooperatives) and *the third phase* lasted only two years in the mountainous villages of Albania.

*The level of mechanization* in this period had little change and the farmers began to use the fertilizers (mostly manure) for the first time, after the creation of the first cooperatives in 1946. The first big changes and investments to the improvement of mechanization level in agriculture happened after year 1951. The state invested in buying tractors, harvester machines etc., but still most of the agriculture work was made by hand. The division of work in this period was not very clear. The women and men were obligated to work where the leaders of the village or cooperative had decided for them. There was not a clear division of work between men and women, but the men were mostly involved in the hard works and especially as drivers of the agriculture machines. The women worked mostly in the planting and collection process in the field and they also were more involved in the caring of livestock, poultry etc. The children were less involved in the agriculture works during the communist regime. They had to study and go to primary and secondary school by obligation.

After the year 1951, happened also the first changes in *the structure of the crops*. The agriculture cooperatives except the cereals began to cultivate other industrial plants (sunflower and cotton), potatoes and vegetables. The hills were

adapted to plant olive trees, vignettes and fruit trees.

The first years after the collectivization of the agriculture the system of socialist cooperatives resulted successful and recorded raise of production, of mechanization level, raise of investments for the development of agro industry etc. Also in the period 1960-1963 were constructed many watering and drainage channels, some reservoirs and the whole land of the Cooperative of Divjaka (high type cooperative), especially the ones near the hills were covered by the watering system.

The success of collectivization and cooperatives lasted until 1970, after this year many factors influenced the decline in quantity and quality of the agriculture production and the villagers were getting poorer. After some years of free agriculture market the farmers were not allowed anymore to sell their products and the government decided to decrease the garden area they had in property, so they would not spend much of the time working for themselves but for their cooperatives. The increase of the population number, absence of the free market, lack of competitiveness, increase of the number of unsatisfied farmers and many other reasons made unsuccessful the collectivization of the agriculture and livestock.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN DIVJAKA-KARAVASTA AREA AFTER YEAR 1990 AND ACTUALLY**

The decline of communist regime in 1990 had its great impact also on the organization, mechanization and specialization of the agriculture. The first years after 1990 were very difficult for the Albanian economy and especially for the agriculture. The system of the socialist cooperatives was destroyed and the people attacked and robbed everything that was state property after the division of land in summer 1991.

In Divjaka in few hours was destroyed completely the watering system and were damaged 22 hectares of greenhouses. The destroying of the watering system had negative impact for the future use of the land in Divjaka, especially of the agriculture land between the road and the hills, where the water is found very deep and is very difficult to be extracted<sup>1</sup>.

In 1991, the land was re diffused to the farmers according to the number of members per family and the quality of the land. In Divjaka municipality were divided 4256 hectares of land (average 4.5 dynym per capita). After the division of the land according to the Law of the Land no.7501 the farmers faced many difficulties and problems:

- *The conflicts between the old and new owners of the land* were present in every village and also the conflicts between the owners of the buildings with the old owners of the land where they were constructed. There are not rare the cases when these conflicts ended up in armed fights causing the death of many young and old members of the same family.
- *The organization of the agriculture* in the first years after the division of the land was mostly chaotic and individual. The farmers failed to collaborate with the agriculture specialists about the decisions to be taken for the better development and maximization of the profits from the agriculture and livestock. The changes happened also in the division of the work. The families were responsible for their land and divided the work among the members from the oldest to the small children. *The men* were more involved in the hard works of the field, transporting of the products to the nearest agriculture markets, taking the decisions etc. *The women* would work more on the housework, raising the children and taking care of the animals and poultry they had at home. They would be very

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<sup>1</sup> "Agricultural and Environmental Issues for the Sustainable Development in Albania", pg. 96

little involved in the decision making. *The children* helped taking the cows or other animals to graze in the nearby meadows or near the forest of Divjaka. During these years (1990-1995) many children left the school or didn't study too much, because they spent all the time taking care of the animals.

- *The specialization of the agriculture crops* changed according to the market demand. The free market economy has directed the decisions of the farmers toward the crops that are easily produced and sold. In Divjaka the farmers are cultivating more vegetables (potatoes, carrots, cabbages, melon, beans) in 23% of the total arable land. The farmers are also taking care to increase the number of fruit trees, olives and vignettes, as important source of fast and secure economical profit (the olive trees cover 58% of the total surface with trees and the vignettes 27%). Most of its products are sold to the nearest city (Lushnje) or to the capital city (Tirana).

The specialization and production of only some types of the crops had both negative and positive effects. Some of the industrial plants such as: cotton, sunflower and tobacco are disappearing or are being plant only for personal use. Positive is that some crops that were not cultivated before are now covering a large surface, according to the demands from the national and foreigner market. The cauliflower, broccoli, artichokes and kiwi are mostly cultivated in Divjaka and exported to some Balkan states (Macedonia, Kosova, Rumania and Bulgaria).

- *The level of mechanization in agriculture* has experienced also big changes after the decline of communist regime. The improvement of the mechanization level has come over the years with the efforts of the regional strategies and collaborations. The farmers are encouraged to raise the quality and quantity of their crops and for this they are investing and buying of the small tractors and mini tractors. An important help in this mechanization has played the application of the Japanese Grant, which has offered small mechanical tools in low prices. The farmers invest a part of their incomes to rent some specific tools or for the service of the harvesters, seeding machines etc. The low relief of the Karavasta wetlands is favorable for the use of the agriculture machines and other tools. Although the farmers are trying to increase the level of mechanization in the agriculture and livestock they are very far from the level in the European farms. In Karavasta wetlands still many works in the agriculture are made by not specialized people and there is a lack of some machines such as: selective machines, thrasher, gin etc. which would help the farmers to maximize their profits from the agriculture and livestock.
- *The sizes of the farms* are very important for the better development of agriculture and livestock. Their dimensions and the quality of the land influence the diversity and specialization of the agriculture crops etc. The great fragmentation of the agriculture land and properties in the villages is one of the greatest obstacles for the fast and sustainable development of the agriculture in Albania. The new system of the micro-farms had to face many difficulties related to: the organization of the work and production, furnishing with the seeds and chemical needed for the soil, agriculture machines, water, places for the storage and reservation of the production etc. The farmers also were not well orientated and trained to produce in a free trade economy and market. In the early years they were not able to compete the foreigner crops and the possibilities for financial support were very little or inexistent. Another problem that are facing the farmers in Divjaka and other Albanian villages is the continuing of fragmentation of the land for some reasons: *a.* The creation of the new families after the marriage of the children; *b.* Emigration of the population and the selling of the land they had in property etc.; *c.* The division of land between two or more inheritors after the death of the householder etc.

## THE EMIGRATION PROCESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN WORK IN AGRICULTURE AND DECISION-MAKING

Albania has suffered for 45 years the most severe communist regime in Eastern Europe and was the only country which had a total isolation from the world. The free movement of the people was prohibited not only outside the country, but also inside it. The people could not choose by themselves the place to live and work. After the decline of communist regime in 1990, many Albanian young boys emigrated mostly in Greece (walking the confine for many days and nights) or Italy (using illegal boats or small boats). The patriarchal tradition of the families in Albania changed in this period, when almost all the men had emigrated. In Divjaka as in other municipalities of the country almost 20% of the population has emigrated. The women who until 1990 were used to work mostly in the house and in the cooperative works, became suddenly householders to take care not only for the children, but also for the land and livestock they had profited after the implementation of the Law of Land. Through the valuation of the situation and interviews with the local community it is easily to identify two models of the role of women, whose husbands had emigrated. *First*, it is the model of the women who are able to manage by themselves all they have in property. They are very active in the field work, take decisions about the cultivation process, hire field workers and agriculture machines, negotiate to sell their products and also take care for the livestock, children and house. *Second*, it is the model of the women who don't work in the field and don't take any decision about it. They take care only for the house works, the poultry or other animals they raise and for the children. This women live with the money they husbands send to them. Karavasta wetlands area (in Divjaka municipality) is mostly populated by a work loving community, so the most diffused is the first model of women, which is very positive for the wise use of the agriculture land and economical development.

## THE NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN KARAVASTA WETLANDS

The production, stability and the sustainable development are three important elements connected in a fragile relation. In Albania, the application of the strategies for the sustainable development of agriculture should include these three elements and also estimate the impact of each intervention in one of them. For example, in the case of the drainage of the wetlands of Karavasta, was estimated only the opportunity to profit agriculture land, which resulted very positive in the beginning, but after some years was evident that this intervention had damaged heavily the wetlands ecosystem and the sustainable development.

The level of education and training of the farmers in the Karavasta wetlands is not very high and in some practices they are very far from the main objectives of the sustainable agriculture. From the main principles of sustainability the farmers in this area know and practice very few: *a) the method of circulation and alternation of agricultural crops* is practiced in the sector of the land that produces for market. In Divjaka the farmers usually *in spring* plant the potatoes and melon, and in fall they use the same land to plant carrots, cauliflower and cabbages. Also after the harvesting of wheat they use the same surface to plant corn or other crops; *b) Agro forestry* is another sustainable method used in Divjaka-Karavasta area. They use the land between trees to plant broad beans to provide food for the animals. These two methods are very important, but there are many other methods (combination of the crops, green fertilizer, biologic control of the bad insects and grasses, diversity of crops etc.) which are not practiced in this area and would have a great impact in the development of agriculture and economical profits.

A big obstacle for the development of the farms in Karavasta wetlands is the organization of the work separately. The delusion from the socialist cooperatives is still present in the mind of people and they are against any type of collaboration and union of the farms. The farmers should forget that experience and look forward for the better organization of agriculture in the future. They should be aware of the great benefits that will bring to them the creation of small cooperatives for the organization and division of work, for the investments in mechanization level etc. The local and central government as well as other agriculture organization are responsible to encourage and support the farmers who decide to unite their land and capital.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

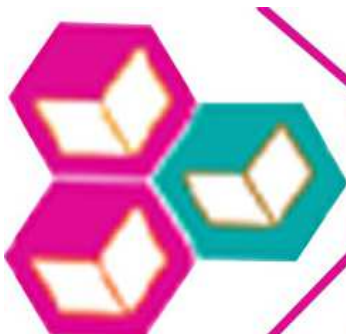
- The development of agriculture in the Karavasta wetlands has gone through some stages with changes in the organization, level of mechanization and specialization of crops.
- The agriculture production raised until 1970, but after this year began to be evident the first negative effects of the forced collectivization, isolation from the world, lack of competitiveness etc.
- The disintegration of the socialist cooperatives after the decline of communist regime resulted in the distribution of the land per capita and influenced the great fragmentation of land, appearance of the conflict for the property, restructuration of the agriculture etc.
- Actually, the agriculture is organized and functions according the principles of the free trade economy which has influenced the changes in the land use and specialization of crops.
- The biggest challenge for the development of agriculture in Karavasta wetlands is the raise of collaboration between farmers and organization of small cooperatives.

The farmers in the Karavasta wetlands will increase their agriculture production if they work together and invest to the creation of the needed infrastructure for the practice of the principles of sustainable agriculture. It is very important for the farmers to work for the minimization of the great fragmentation of land through collaboration in small cooperatives, associations of farmers etc. The local and central government should raise their investments for the improvement of the watering and drainage channels, information about the new technologies, providing of the market inside and outside the country etc. It is also strongly suggested the orientation of the investments for the building of the needed infrastructure for the agro industry, which is almost absent in the area. The agriculture is an important economical source for the farmers in Karavasta wetlands and can support the tourism and other activities, so they should invest and profit mostly from it. They should overcome the problems of the past and continue forward to a better future.

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