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The Natural Environment and Landscape As a Tool of Development for and Less Developed Areas: the Attitudes of the Municipality of Vegoritis About the Effects of the Rural Development Policy in the Area

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The natural environment and landscape as a tool of development for and less developed areas: The attitudes of the Municipality of Vegoritis about the effects of the rural development policy in the area.

SUMMARY

A large number of areas, especially in our country are characterized as mountainous and less developed due to some special characteristics of their natural environment and landscape. These characteristics restrict local people's occupation with some activities such as agriculture. However, at the same time there are some other natural characteristics, such as hills and mountains, which can function as factors of development for the local communities. More specifically if the mountains, rivers, lakes, etc, in these areas are properly developed they can positively contribute to the local development, by attracting visitors in the area and by giving them the opportunity to be engaged in activities like trekking, climbing, fishing, animal and bird watching and sports. Such actions could benefit both sides, the visitors who would be able to relax in a peaceful environment and the residents of the area as well who also benefit financially by new income generating activities.

Greek government has recently realized the importance of this perspective and is constantly trying to take action in order to take full advantage of programs and policies of the European Community which are designed and targeted to areas with special characteristics in their natural environment and landscape especially in the mountainous areas and therefore contribute to the regional development.

In our research we examined the ways by which the natural environment and landscape of a mountainous area could be developed through the development and environmental policies and the policies of E.U. and through programs of the local government. We examine the local peoples' attitudes and perceptions towards the advantages of such an action as far as the the increase in the number of enterprises in and income of the residents, the prevention of the the population reduction the

protection of the environment and the improvement of infrastructure are concerned. Attitudes are also examined towards the perceived as disadvantages like the environmental degradation due to the large number of visitors, the new developments which could possibly be in contrast with the natural environment and landscape and finally the financial loss which could be caused due to income outflow from businesses attracted in the region from other places out of the are concerned.

1. Introduction

There is an increasing concern recently about the protection of the environment and landscape, and a discussion about their development on the basis of the principles of sustainable development. New Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), has already been differentiated and orientated towards the development of the rural areas and their natural environment so as, on the one hand to preserve its sufficient condition, and on the other to enable local communities to gain as many benefits as possible through its multifunctional role in the society.

As far as the agricultural development is concerned , the issue of the protection of the natural environment and landscape is regarded as extremely important, as with the proper actions, it could act as development tool for a large number of regions of the European Union and for those areas which are characterised as mountainous and less favoured.

Nowadays, these areas face serious natural disadvantages which cause problems like the soil degradation due to the agricultural activities, productivity reduction, low population density, decline in their social infrastructure and lag in their economic growth. The element that could lead these areas to the economic growth is the protection and exploitation of their endogenous resources, among which the natural environment and landscape play an important role. Through the endogenous resources development these areas can be changed to popular tourist destinations for people from the big city centers who visit these areas in order to relax in a peaceful and pleasant environment or to be engaged in outdoors activities like trekking, climbing, fishing, animal and bird watching and sports. The local government has recently taken action and implemented a number of EU initiatives and programs in order to develop these areas. These programs are targeted towards the protection of the natural environment and landscape and the development of

alternative forms of tourism, like rural tourism, ecotourism, which offer the opportunity to the visitors to escape from the hectic pace of life of the big cities and enjoy the peaceful atmosphere and environment of the countryside. Moreover, they support new constructions development in the area, like the new road networks, accommodation, etc, which are necessary in order to support the development of the area. Between these programs and actions are Leader Initiative the Integrated Rural Development Programs. Such programs and actions are expected, among others, to support the development and economic growth of these areas by promoting the the natural environment and landscape as a popular tourist destinations | attracting visitors from both near and remote urban areas. Also, the new constructions development, which will be supported by the actions of the local government, will contribute to this aim as the visitors of the area will be served better during their stay there. All the above are expected to lead to the increase of local peoples' income, improvement of the infrastructure of the area, the protection of the rural landscape, etc. Nevertheless, it is also believed, **(ανέφερε σχετικές βιβλιογραφικές αναφορές)** that the development procedure is expected to cause some problems to rural areas among which are environmental and infrastructure degradation, disturbance of the peaceful environment and income outflow.

In this paper, we examine the role that played the natural environment and landscape of a mountainous and semi-mountainous area in the north-west part of the prefecture of Pella and more specifically the municipality of Vegoritis, in adopting and implementing the present European development policy. The municipality of Vegoritis is a pure agricultural area and is found in the list with the areas, which are characterized as “mountainous and less favored” according to the 75/268/EU Directive. More specifically, we examine local peoples' attitudes towards the local government development plans, so as to draw conclusions about their effectiveness. Among the aims of this research are also to examine the ways by which the natural environment and landscape of a remote and mountainous area could be developed through the adoption and application of environmental regional and rural EU policy framework. We also examine peoples' attitudes towards the advantages of such an action such as the increase in the number of enterprises in the area, the increase in the income of the residents, the prevention of the population reduction, the protection of the environment and the improvement of rural infrastructure. Finally we examined the possible disadvantages like the environmental and infrastructure degradation due to

the large number of visitors, the new construction development which could possibly be in contrast with the environment and landscape and finally the financial outflow which could be caused due to foreign businessmen which take advantage of these programs and gain financial benefits.

2. CAP and the European policy for the environment

Among the articles of Treaty of Rome we find nothing to relate CAP and the environment. The concerns about the environment in rural areas first appear in mid seventies by adopting the Directive 75/268 about the mountainous and less favored areas of the European Union as a result of the 1972 Summit Meeting of Stockholm, signaling the beginning of a new period of EU development considering the protection and preservation of the natural environment.. The of environment protection is later introduced in the 1992 CAP Review to be eventually an integral part in the New CAP, under the Agenda 2000 adopting cross-compliance as an integral part of income support . The reorientation of the CAP aims' started in

In our days, it has been accepted, both in a European and global level, that the concern about the environmental preservation should constitute a crucial element of the development policy No development action would be undertaken, unless the environmental parameter be seriously considered. As far as the EU agricultural policy is concerned among the problems of the rural regions, such as the infrastructure, markets equilibrium, the food safety, etc, there has been added the parameter of the environmental protection. For the rural world and the rural regions, where we mostly find beautiful landscapes, the environmental planning is called to support and to differentiate the policies for the rural areas to integrated development plans. According to such matters and taking in mind the upgrading of the role of the environmental policy in the E.U., we could say that the last years there has been an attempt for an incorporation of the environmental demands to the rural development policy of the E.U. (Beriatos and Psaltopoulos, 2003).

3. EU policy for the protection of the natural environment and rural development. .

The environment protection and landscape development policy of the countryside in the EU less favored areas, consists of a series of plans which focus on the the soil and subsoil protection, the atmospheric and aquatic environment enhancement, the of the forests preservation, the protection of EU genetic and natural and cultural recourses and through actions which will give a boost to the countryside –Second Pillar . All these take place through the adoption of Community Support Framework which support financially the relevant ministries and the regions of the country so as to carry out their local development programs and actions. The financial and social cohesion among the European countries can not exist without a specific policy which will aim at the development of the less favored areas, through the transmission of financial resources from the areas of high degree of development. As a result the European Union adopted and is implementing a regional development policy, which aims at the reduction of the regional inequalities and the prevention of the creation of new ones. Regional Operational Plans are also specially designed for rural development and applied at a regional level Their aims are the strengthening of the international competitiveness of the regional economies, the production support system , local development, the development of human resources , the quality of life improvement, and the protection of the environment.

Moreover, under the Community Framework Program, the Strategic Targets of the Rural Development And Restructuring of the Countryside plan of the Hellenic Ministry of Rural Development and Food, are the improvement of the competitiveness of the agriculture and the restructuring of the countryside which will minimize the inherent shortcomings and structural weaknesses of Greek agriculture and will lead to an increase of agricultural income taking under consideration the preservation and improvement of the natural environment (Hellenic Ministry of Rural Development and Food, www.minagric...).

In addition, under the Strategic Development Plan of the Hellenic Ministry of Environment, development policies and actions taken are clearly connected with the protection of the environment applying an holistic management of the environmental problems, aiming basically to the development, protection and sustainable management of the natural and anthropogenic environment. All these are extremely

important if we opt for the improvement of peoples' quality of life, and the harmonization of the environmental policy with other international policy directions and commitments (**βιβλιογραφική πηγή**).

Leader plus Initiative also aims at the improvement of peoples' quality of life, through sustainable development. These actions aim at the promotion of alternative forms of tourism, like rural tourism, the establishment of small enterprises, the improvement of the quality of the production, the use of new technologies and the protection of the natural and cultural heritage.

4. The development policy plans in the area of research.

In the municipality of Vegoritis lhave been taken place and still are in progress programs and actions which have financially supported and positively contributed to its development. During the last five years these actions have been part of two wide program units specially designed and applied in the region:

- The Integrated Rural Development Plan of Vegoritis, designed by the Central Macedonia Regional Authority aiming at the creation of new forms of employment outside the agricultural industry with the protection and promotion of ecologically sensitive areas and the natural environment of the region. Also to promote and support actions for the development of tourism, manufacturing, animal welfare and the protection of the rural environment and landscape in forest lands of areas with ecological importance protected by Natura 2000 program. So, there have been many development actions that have taken place, mostly in the settlements of Arnissa, Palaio Agio Athanasio, Neo Agio Athanasio, Panagitsa and Anw Grammatiko, having to do with the protection of Lake Vegoritis and mountain Voras, the development of new businesses and enterprises, the creation of places for tourist accommodation and the promotion of rural tourism.

- Leader Plus action applies in the region is aiming at the exploitation of local resources (natural, cultural, human, financial) through financial support, in order to improve the quality of life of people so that they remain at the area. It is also focused at the improvement and promotion of natural and residential areas as well as the cultural heritage in order to strengthen the social infrastructure. at increasing the attractiveness of the area through sustainable development promoting important historical and cultural elements especially attractive for alternative forms of tourism

such as rural tourism. Actions like these mentioned above have taken place in the settlements of Arnissa, Palaio Agio Athanasio, Neo Agio Athanasio, Ano Grammatiko and Panagitsa. More specifically they had to do with the protection of Lake Vegoritis and Mountain Voras, the creation of new businesses, visitors' accommodation, like small hotels, traditional restaurants and taverns (Development Agency of Pella S.A., 1999).

● The Community Framework for the Environment took place in the region during the period of 2000-2005 under the Natura 2000 program. Among its aims were the management, protection and promotion of the natural environment, the promotion of the knowledge of different forms of flora and fauna of the area and the management of the negative consequences of the development actions, the local people and visitors' awareness about environmental issues as well the improvement of the conditions of residence in the area and the development of alternative forms of tourism like ecotourism, the support of environmental education and finally the sustainable management of the natural resources of the area. ● A series of studies and managerial plans have been produced under the Natura 2000 program for the Environment, designed for the protection of ecologically sensitive areas under the existing institutional framework. The recognition of ecologically important areas as Natura 2000 areas is aiming at the preservation of natural habitats and important species of flora and fauna of the area. In the municipality of Vegoritis as ecologically sensitive areas are considered the Lake Vegoritis and Mountain Voras which have been recognized and protected as Natura 2000 areas

3. Area of study and methodology

The municipality of Vegoritis of the prefecture of Pella –North Greece recognized as a less favored and mountainous area (75/268/EU Directive), and consists of the following communities: Arnissa, Agios Dimitrios, Drosia, Nea Xanthogeia, Palaia Xanthogeia, Palaios Agios Athanasios, Neos Agios Athanasios, Kato Grammatiko, Ano Grammatiko), Panagitsa, Zervi and Peraia with total population of 4.180 residents (2001)

Table 1 :
Population of the Mountainous and Less Favored areas in the municipality of
Vegoritis according to the 75/268/EU Directive and development actions

| Settlement | Population | Development actions | Charecterization of the area |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Arnissa | 1.550 | Leader, IRDP , Natura | Sub-mountainous |
| Agios Dimitrios | 63 | - | Mountainous |
| Drosia Δροσιά | 68 | - | Mountainous |
| Nea Xanthogeia | 114 | - | Mountainous |
| Palaia Xanthogeia | 2 | - | Mountainous |
| Palaios Agios Athanasios | 184 | Leader, IRDP, Natura, ΕΠΠΕΡ | Mountainous |
| Neos Agios Athanasios | 460 | Leader, IRDP, Natura, ΕΠΠΕΡ | Mountainous |
| Kato Grammatiko | 230 | Leader, IRDP | Mountainous |
| Ano Grammatiko | 78 | Leader, IRDP | Mountainous |
| Panagitsa | 730 | Leader, IRDP, Natura, ΕΠΠΕΡ | Sub-mountainous |
| Zervi | 349 | - | Sub-mountainous |
| Peraia | 352 | Leader, IRDP | Sub-mountainous |
| Total | 4180 | | |

Source: National Statistic Service of Greece, 2001.

The area is characterised by a diversity of natural environments and alternative forms of activities that can be developed in the region all year round.. The Ski resort of Mountain Voras offers the visitors the opportunity to be engaged in sports like ski and climbing. There is also located the Aerosporting Center of Macedonia and Thrace near Panagitsa with the airfield which offers the opportunity in sports like paragliders, gliders, hang-gliders). The Moto-cross Club, near the lake of Vegoritis attracts tourists who arrive here to be engaged in fishing and also trekking and watching different rare species of flora and fauna of the area.

The study took place in the municipality of Vegoritis. A number of (αριθμός...)local residents, representing 4 % of the local population (Siardos, 1997) answered to a specially designed questionnaire. The aim of the research was to study the peoples' attitudes towards the protection and preservation of the natural environment and landscape of the area in relation to regional development initiatives. The settlements of Arnissa, Palaios and Neos Agios Athanasios and Panagitsa were the most developed, due to the implication of development programs and due to the fact that they are close to the basic attraction points of the area, like the mountain

Voras and the lake Vegoritis. A pilot study was conducted among the members of the sample. The questionnaire consisted of four parts, each one of which containing questions dealing with the:

1. offered activities of the area
2. development plans
3. natural environment of the area
4. personal data of the residents

Based on the total population of the municipality we chose the 4% to be the size of the sample. This procedure was based at the proportion between men and women in the population of the research area. The total population from which we estimated the size of the sample was 3.144 people regarding men and women, between the age of 20 and 79 years old. Registered men were 1657 and women were 1487. The proportion of men on the total population was 53% and that of women was 47%. Based on this proportion we chose the number of men and women from each one settlement. We chose 4% of the total population, meaning 126 people and 4% of the population of each one settlement, between the age of 20 and 79 years old, and then estimated the proportion of men and women. The questionnaire contained both close and open type questions.

The personal interviews took place between December 2005 and January 2006 followed by the statistical analysis with the SPSS statistical program.

4. Results – Discussion

The results from the analysis of the data helped us draw conclusions about the development in the area, and the local people's attitudes towards the development) of the natural environment and landscape as well as the consequences of the development process in the region.

All sample members were permanent residents of the municipality of Vegoritis. As concerns their age, the majority (49,2%) was over 51 years old while 19% was between the age of 41 and 50 years old. Another 19% was between 31 and 40 years old and 12,7% between 20 and 30 years old.

As regards the level of educational 41,3% of them were graduates of a primary school and 25,4% were graduates of High School. A number of 15 people (11,9) were Graduates of a Technological Institution or a College

Regarding their occupation, most of them, 31% of them were in retirement, 25,4%, were farmers, 17,5% of them were occupied in the private sector and the rest of them were civil servants (4,8%), self-employed (8,7%) while unemployed were 4%.

Their monthly income range was up to 500 Euro for 50% of them, while 38% of them gain between 500 and 1000 Euro monthly and the rest 12% of them gain between 1000 and 1500 Euro.

Regarding the activities offered in the area, they have to do mostly with physical exercise and sports like trekking, fishing, skiing and climbing. Moreover, the visitors in the area can be involved in activities like glider and paraglide flights. A Moto-cross speedway is also available for funs by the Motorcycle Club. The most popular activities seem to be skiing, climbing, trekking and glider flights. So, visitors seem to be very often involved with skiing and climbing, and sometimes with paragliders and gliders while rarely are involved + with trekking and fishing.

The people who participated in the research were asked about their view of the importance of certain parameters for the development of the area and specifically they were asked if they consider them to play an important role in attracting visitors in the area. According to their opinions they consider natural environment, the ability to be engaged in a variety of activities and a well organized transportation system to play an extremely important role in attracting tourists in the area. The same is for the existence of a well-developed road network and the sufficient number of tourist accommodation. Finally, they regard less important the existence of security in the region as well as and the supply of medical services to the visitors.

The participants in the research also believe that the development actions plan can benefit both the area and its people. They believe that these actions will both increase and generate new income, there will develop job opportunities for the local people and young people in particular will not migrate in other areas. They also believe that the quality of their lives will be improved, the natural environment will be protected, and the infrastructure will be finally improved. The main infrastructure development in the region during the last five last years is a new road construction. In the area there haven't been any improvements made in relation to the medical and security services provided, , the transportation system, as well as the water supply, irrigation and drainage systems. The development process in the rural areas can also have disadvantages. When members of the sample were asked about these

disadvantages and most of them (69% of them) said that they have not noticed any serious disadvantages. However 22% of them believe that there may be income outflow due to the fact that foreign businessmen establish new enterprises in the area.. Natural resources and environment degradation is believed by 16,7% while a small number believe that the development actions can lead to the disturbance of the peaceful environment of the area.

Table 2 :
Disadvantages from the development of rural areas/

- ➔ **No disadvantages from the development of the rural areas (69%)**
- ➔ **Income outflow (22,2)**
- ➔ **Pollution due to waste (19,8%)**
- ➔ **Contamination of water resources (16,7%)**
- ➔ **Disturbance of the peaceful environment due to the great number of visitors (3,2%)**
- ➔ **Disturbance of the aesthetic of the area due to the construction development of new buildings and street network (2,4%)**

Source: Data processed from questionnaire

The majority of local people (51%) seem not to be satisfied by the works/ that have been constructed lately in the area. A percentage of 43 of the people questioned (43%) seem to be indiscrete and only 6% of them said that they are fully satisfied.

Table 3:
Local people's valuation of the constructed works/tasks in the area as sufficient/

| Valuation of the constructed works as sufficient/Αξιολόγηση έργων ως ικανοποιητικά | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|
| Extremely little | 28 | 22,2 |
| Little | 37 | 29,4 |
| Indiscrete | 54 | 42,9 |
| Very much | 7 | 5,6 |
| Total | 126 | 100 |

Source: Data processed from questionnaire

The degree of satisfaction by the infrastructure works that have been constructed in the area differs among the different settlements of the Municipality. It was clear that it was greatest in those settlements where the local government took some development actions, for example Leader plus Initiative. Arnissa, Palaios Agios Athanasios, Neos Agios Athanasios and Panagitsa were the settlements where local people were more satisfied by the development process. On the contrary people in the settlements of Zervi, Nea Xanthogeia, Agios Dimitrios and Drosia were less satisfied.

Local people also said that there has not been any interest by businessmen to come to the area and establish there their business, so it appears to be further room for improvement in this respect

Table 4 :
Local people's attitudes towards businessmen' interest in the area/

| Enterprise establishment | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Not at all/Πολύ μικρό | 18 | 14,3 |
| A little/Μικρό | 28 | 22,2 |
| Ούτε μικρό/Ούτε μεγάλο Indiscrete | 54 | 42,9 |
| Great/Μεγάλο | 25 | 19,8 |
| Extremely great Πολύ μεγάλο | 1 | 0,8 |
| Total | 126 | 100 |

Source: Data processed from questionnaire

Local people also said that among the things that they consider to be extremely important for the development of the area are the coordination and communication between the people and agencies responsible for the planning and application of regional development plans.

Table 5 :
Elements necessary for the successful development process

| |
|---|
| Cooperation in the decision making (92,1%) |
| Communication between agents responsible for development planning (92,1%) |
| Education on sustainable management issues of the natural resources/ (71,4%) |

Coordination (61,9%)

Source: Data processed from questionnaire

Local people also seem not to be satisfied by the promotion of their area. So, 36,5% of them were indiscrete, while 23% were a little satisfied and 14% were not satisfied at all. Only 1,6% seem to be very happy with the promotional initiatives of the region.

Table 6 :

Local people's valuation about the promotion of their area/

| Evaluation as sufficient/ | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Not at all/ | 18 | 14,3 |
| A little/ | 29 | 23,0 |
| Ούτε λίγο/Ούτε πολύ Indescrete | 46 | 36,5 |
| Enough | 31 | 24,6 |
| Very much | 2 | 1,6 |
| Total | 126 | 100 |

Source: Data processed from questionnaire

Among the actions and the programs for the regional development and the protection and preservation of the natural environment, the one which is most known by the locals is the Leader action. Local people seem not to be informed about the programs for the protection of the environment (Natura, Life) actions of which have been implemented in the area. People who said that have heard about Leader action and Natura were mostly young and well educated. Also, more informed were the residents in Arnissa, Nea Xanthogeia, Palaio Agio Athanasio and Neo Agio Athanasio whereas in the other settlements people were less informed.

Πίνακας 10.4 :

People awareness of the implementation of development programs

→ **Leader**

(57,9%)

→ **Natura**

(11,9%)

→ **Life**

(1,6%)

Source: Data processed from questionnaire
Results of the processing of the questionnaire data/Αποτελέσματα
επεξεργασίας στοιχείων ερωτηματολογίου

To the participants of the research were presented a list of legislative regulations about the protection of the environment and they were asked if they were informed about any of them. This list contained the Presidential Decree about the protection of the species of flora and fauna, the Directive about the preservation of biodiversity, the Law about the preservation of wild life and the Decision/ for the determination of Residential Control Area. Extremely few people knew these environmental laws. However, among the few who knew about some of them the most known was the Presidential Decree which is mostly known by young people, those who are well educated and who are residents of Arnissa, Nea Xanthogeia, Palaio Agio Athanasio and Neo Agio Athanasio. The same is for the Directive for the preservation of biodiversity which is mostly known by young people and better educated.

Those who were informed and knew about the laws for the protection of the environment (22 persons), believe that they contribute to the protection of the environment and they said that they find it quite satisfactory. They were also asked if they had ever taken part in an environmental education program, a seminar for the protection of the environment or if they were members of an environmental organization. As concerns these questions, one person said that is a member of an environmental organization and ten people had taken part in a seminar for the protection of the environment. In this case, once again, the younger and the better educated were those who have participated in a an environmental seminar and most of them were residents of Arnissa, Nea Xanthogeia, Palaio Agio Athanasio and Neo Agio Athanasio.

5. CONCLUSIONS

From the data collected we can conclude that the area of Vegoritida can be described as an interesting mountainous and semi-mountainous rural area, that despite the existing difficulties (difficulties that all mountainous areas confront) has the

opportunity to develop using alternative ways. These ways are closely related to the physical environment and the landscape of the area that can attract visitors who would strengthen financially the area. Moreover, while the physical environment is developed a lot of other actions take place that are also considered as necessary for the development of the area.

In the area lately there have been many actions that have been taken place, which have been part of the development plan of the prefecture for the period 2000-2006. There have been many improvements on the street network and more specifically improvements on basic parts of it in order to make it easier and safer for the visitors to visit the area. There have been also made structural improvements in order to support the development of alternative forms of tourism there have been improvements as concerns the health services through the provision of new health equipment and the construction of new buildings. There has also been a promotion for the protection of the environment through the protection and preservation of the most important and ecologically sensitive ecosystems of the area and actions for the restoration of any damages in the natural environment and landscape. Finally, the local government promoted actions for the protection of the forests and the rational/use of the water resources.

Regarding the recreational activities offered, it seems that each one settlement offers different kinds of activities, related to their geographical location (for example how far or close they are at the attractions of the area like mountain Voras or lake Vegoritis). So, Arnissa, Panagitsa, Palaios Agios Athanasios and Neos Agios Athanasios offer the opportunity to visitors to be engaged in a wider variety of recreational activities, compared to the other settlements.

However, apart from the attractions and the beautiful landscapes and the natural environment, the development process requires other elements too in order to be successful and to bring the wanted results. Among these elements, according to the locals, are a well organized system of public transportation, a good road network which offers the opportunity to visitors to reach the area safely. Also, a sufficient number of accommodation and restaurants which will be able to serve a great number of visitors who will arrive in the high peak period, for example in winter where most people arrive to be engaged in winter sports like skiing. Finally, health services and police security and α are considered important in order to attract visitors in the area, who will feel more secure in the presence of these services. It is obvious that the

absence of these elements will probably make people chose another touristic destination instead of this one.

Most of the people who knew about the Leader action and the Natura program were young and well educated. This is because young people mostly are involved in development actions and programs or are interested in being informed about such actions in their area in comparison with older people which don't seem interested enough in such actions. Also, people who are well educated seem to be more informed either because they were informed about such actions at school or because their concerns are stronger now. Residents of Arnissa, Palaios Agios Athanasios and Neos Agios Athanasios were more informed. This is because in these settlements there have been taken place most development actions.

When people were asked if they believe that the development actions benefits the area, they all agreed and said that such actions help the area to become more developed. This happens because local people will be able to increase their incomes thanks to the arrival and stay of tourists in the area. Moreover, there will be more occupational chances for the locals, as new business, mostly related with tourism, will be established. This fact will help so that people, and mostly young people, will stay in their area, as they don't need any more to abandon their hometown in order to search for an occupation/job in another place. One more advantage will be the improvement of the quality of life of local people, because infrastructure development will also benefit the local communities (for example, improvements on the road network, of the transportation system, of the medical services etc).

According to the results of the research the constructed works in the area, the past five years, seem not to be enough. Most of them have to do with the construction of recreational areas. The answers that people gave us and the discussion with them made us draw the conclusion that the main construction works in the region had to do with some improvements on the road network or the construction of a new road, the development of tourists accommodation, restaurants and recreation areas. We need to mention finally that the sector of the medical services has not been improved.

People also said that they did not think that the public investment were satisfying at all and they also said that the local government needs to take more action in the area.

The participants in the research told us that only a small number of businessmen arrive at the area in order to establish their business there and this fact

disappoints them. They relate this fact with the not sufficient promotion tactics of their area, which is not widely known to probable visitors and businessmen. A lot of people claimed that the promotion of the area through the Internet and through some advertising leaflets is not sufficient enough and they believe that the area must be promoted through all the mass media.

As far as the negative consequences of the development actions are concerned, the majority of residents claimed that the development actions will not have any special negative consequences, such as the degradation of natural environment and the soil and water pollution. All the above seem reasonable because the area is visited by a limited number of visitors who can not cause problems like that and the investing activity existing in the area is not capable of causing degradation of the natural environment. It is also believed that the disturbance of the landscape by the construction of modern buildings is not an eminent consequence because the majority of the constructions such as restaurants and hotels are very much alike the already existing buildings. Although, they are a few that believe that negative consequences may take place. Among these are soil and water pollution. Another problem is the fact that foreign investors may come in the area and take advantage of the possible investing actions that may take place in the area. All these were claimed by the residents of Arnissa, the biggest settlement of the municipality of Vegoritis, where a lot of investing actions have taken place and the number of visitors can be described as sufficient. So, it is sensible for the residents of the area to concern about the above negative consequences.

The residents of the area are not aware of the environmental laws and the existing legal frames that concern the protection of the natural environment of the area. This is due to the fact that most of the residents are old and they have low educational level. Although, there were some young, educated people living in the most crowded parts of the area that claimed that they were aware of the environmental laws concerning the protection of flora and fauna as well as the directive concerning biodiversity. So, it can be concluded that young and educated people want to be well-informed as well as the residents of the most crowded parts of the area who can see a lot of actions taking place in their area. The trend is similar when we came to investigate the participation of the residents to some action, which is related to the protection of the environment such as some kind of environmental organizations, courses about the protection of the environment e.t.c. However, the number of the

participants was limited. Some young and educated residents of the area claimed that they attended a course concerning environmental protection. This is maybe due to the fact that the environmental problems have become a subject that the educational system and mass media deals with. It can be concluded that the people attended seminars like that were young, educated, and live in parts of the area where a lot of development actions have taken place.

The residents are quite satisfied concerning the environmental laws that have to do with the protection of the environment. In fact, whoever is aware of the legal frame believes that it functions properly as far as no environmental degradation exists.

Finally, we should mention that all of the residents, no matter the educational level, the sex or their incomes, recognized the importance of cooperation, communication and coordination when it comes to decision-making and the importance of the educational training of people that will be responsible for the environmental management and protection of the area. They all mentioned that without these elements the developments process would not be successful enough.

All in all, the development process seems to be a multidimensional issue which should be given the needed attention. In the area of our research the development process starts with the protection of the natural environment and landscape as a development tool which, when combined with new constructions will lead to the economic growth of the area. It is obvious that in the municipality of Vegoritis the legislative framework for the protection of the environment functions sufficiently and contributes to its preservation. The problem seems to be the new constructions which are not enough to support the development procedure. So, although there have been made investments on business like hotels, restaurants, business having to do with sports, improvements on the street network and a small progress and improvement on health services, the situation has not been significantly improved. It seems that more motives should be offered to local people in order to develop their business there and that local government should promote more the area and act so that the scheduled program actions take place.

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