

CASE STUDY SUMMARY FROM GJIROKASTER:
Analyses of the Local Aspects of Land Markets.

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1. The Dropulli Plain

The land is cultivated at about 60% in the district of Gjirokastra. At first glance, the land of the Greek minority, along the wide plain of Dropulli, seems to be completely "abandoned", if I use the same word as the villagers themselves did. The Greek minority is generally considered as the most favored in getting visa to immigrate to Greece. The Greek consulate always prefers people who belong to the Greek minority and orthodox religion. In the dark of the night, driving across the national road through the field, the villages of the Greek minority get mixed up in the dark, with the side of the stony hills where they're situated: only a few houses light up, the rest are empty. In the morning, the fields down the villages seem desolated- how is it possible- even though it's a land of high fertility, it's still abandoned. In some of the villages, there's none, except for some old people whose families and sons live in Greece.

Moreover, the strategic location across the main road that leads to Greece, where hundreds of Albanians come and go continuously; the short distance from the town of Gjirokastra, the centre of the whole district, the sufficient superficial and underground water, make the villages of the Dropulli plain, privileged of high quality agricultural production. When the cooperatives still existed, the wheat production was approximately 60-70 kv/ha, the maize production was 80-90 kv/ha, vineyards and fruits, vegetables too; they also cultivated and planted the forages 5-6 times a year. The dominant model of the land usage, even when it's not abandoned, presents the cultivation of some wheat for domestic necessities; also some maize and forage (lucerne) for the only cow they have, except for a number of 10-15 sheep, too. I had the sensation that all the families used the land at the minimum of the possibilities that it offers, they just think of the domestic consumption: meat, milk and their products.

The immigration of their families, mainly to Greece is easier than the rest of the population; their conditions of living and the life style is improved, but still no one thinks of selling the land and only some of them agree to lease their own land. However, the Greek minority families of the

Dropulli plain found their strategic way out: the model of maximum investment in immigrating to Greece and the minimum investment in the use of their land in Gjirokaster, not even thinking of their properties transactions, either buying or selling anything.

2. Mountain Villages

We found the same model but less extreme, not very far from Dropulli, in the Albanian villages on the other side of the plain, situated on the eastern mountains. Two of these villages, respectively Suha and Stegopuli are isolated by a river, where only a few bridges are constructed and because of the bad conditions of the roads not used any more of transport. The land quality here is variable: there's only a small field, in a higher level than Dropulli's plain; all the rest of the arable land is stony, inclined and separated into different patches of land throughout the mountain side, but never irrigated any more. When the cooperative still existed, an effective irrigation system was constructed in these field, providing a very high land fertility. This land belongs now to the village of Suha, ex-centre of the cooperative. Stegopuli, another village which belonged to the ex-cooperative, is situated in a distance of 2 km from Suha. No bus goes to Stegopuli or Suha so transportation is limited to the vehicles of the local villagers; consequently the people who need to go to Gjirokastra, have to walk at least 3 km from Suha and 5 km from Stegopuli; then they wait for a bus. There are two buses a day. Stegopuli is about 1.5 hours bus ride from Gjirokastra, further than Suha; between Suha and Stegopuli there's a small field, once irrigated.

An important difference between the two villages is their different ethnic composition, divided between the Vllah and ethnic Albanian. In Stegopuli 80% of the population is Vllah, all the rest are native Albanians; while in Suha it is vice versa: 80% Albanians and 20% Vllah. Before WWII, the Vllah people were nomadic shepherds, who wandered from the high fields of south-eastern Albania to the hilly coast of Saranda. These groups are Greek and Romanian by origin; the ones who live here are Greek. They stopped their nomadic ways and they were situated here since 1957-1958, forced by the regime to become members of the local cooperative. The cooperative of Suha was created precisely in 1958. The herds Vllah livestock were confiscated in both villages. This population was forced to stay there, and later on they intermingled with the native people. They were given some of the existent houses of the native villagers who owned more than one house; they also were given some ground (truall) inside the yellow line of the

village. This ground (truall) was a property of the cooperative or belonged to the villagers before 1958.

3. Land Distribution in the Suha and Stegopuli Villages.

The distribution of land in Suha after 1991 was pacific and according to the law: they calculated the land quantity per person and they drew lots. The Vllah minority was not discriminated against. Each family was given the legal allotment: 3.5 dynym to each member of the family. In Suha, the arable lower lands of the village were distributed to resident families, while the hilly and stony land in the highlands was used as communal pastures or to cultivate forage (lucerne). The land distribution satisfied the majority of the families, and there were few serious conflicts between the recipients of the land in 1991 and the ex-owners. The ex-owners did complain of their loss of arable land, while many others complained of their ex-properties, inside the yellow line (there is a law of 1995 to compensate the ex-owners). In Suha there is no visible conflict about the land people owned before 1946- when the first Albanian agrarian reform was applied. The majority of the native villagers didn't even own a patch of land, but they rented the land of a rich family from Gjirokastra, who owned big estates in that area. The system of renting the land was fixed by giving 1/3 of the production to the owners. Moreover, only a few native families in Suha owned a few dynym of land, which were generally returned to the by the reform of 1991.

In Stegopuli, there's quite the reverse situation, although in a short distance from Suha. Before 1946, the land of Stegopuli was a property of the same rich Albanian owners, who complain of their ex-land now. But Vllah population does not allow anyone to violate the law, distributing the land per person by drawing lots, and the plots they got depended on the number of the families' members. The representatives of Vllah population constituted the large majority in the Commission of the Village. As consequence, a conflict between the native minority and Vllah majority newcomers, rose up. Today this conflict is becoming worse. The villagers have not reached an agreement, even when the native villagers proposed to apply the law of distributing the land per person, but in their ex-land. Vllah population do not believe that native's demands would stop at this point. They were afraid of them, because once getting back a part of their ex-property, the ex-owners would go for the rest of it. When their demands were refused, the native villagers did not participate in distributing the land. They only accepted the parcels in use; it was about 1/5 of the whole land of the village, but they didn't sign the

land-patent (tapi). Because of this conflict, people do not feel secure in their ownership of the land. The native villagers expect the law to change; because they think their demands are right. They also hope that the elections will solve or improve this problem. The Vllah population do not feel safe, although they own some land now. But they are sure that the plots inside the yellow line will be given to the ex-owners, at least the ones not occupied yet. Vllah families who have their houses and got land by the reform of 1991 have decided to protect the land at any cost, also by force if necessary. They feel that it is their right to stay in the village with all the rights of the native villagers: after a balance of 40 years of cooperative and socialism history in the village, Vllah people feel as equal as the native people, with whom they worked at the cooperative. When the cooperative was created, the land was taken from the native population, while Vllah population "contributed" the livestock (each family had not less than 500-600 heads of livestock).

Other than this ethnic conflict, there are no great differences in production between the two villages. The animal production is the only activity that seems to be partly successful, while the agriculture is restricted just in their domestic necessities. Both hope for the state to provide better infrastructure. The model of production is the same: wheat for domestic consumption, maize and forage for the cattle; a maximum investment in the immigration and minimal land use strategy.

4. Land Markets in the Villages Studied

The immigration to Greece is a very important economical strategy of the families of Suha and Stegopoli, but a bit lower than in the villages of the Greek minority. It is not the strategy of the people from Suha and Stegopoli to live their villages. People go to Greece for part time job and then they come back. The Vllah population is actually advantaged in this temporary migration, compared to the native people, because of their Greek historical origins, but since their language is not Greek, they have less possibilities of getting visa than the Greek minority of Dropulli does.

No one sells the land here and there is no signal of a prospective market. Moreover, they do not agree to cultivate either for the market or for growing animals; these families just continue their domestic economical strategy, doing the same as the villages of the Dropulli plain do, although for the Albanian villages of the mountainside, the market economy seems familiar.

In the case of the Greek minority's families of the Dropulli plain, land is of a high quality and people still remember the good results and output of the cooperative. Today, people do not think of cultivating; it isn't economical because of the high cost of production. After all, the market prices are very low, compared to the cost of production and the disorganization of the market system, too. A considerable segment of the population consider emigration as relatively acceptable, and the families invest in seeing that the young people go to Greece, where they make money to keep their families here (women and old people). But the immigration is not definitive even though extensively practiced; it is something temporary that can help to have more possibilities in the future. For now, the land is just held in case the future will demand its use; for now people do not cultivate other than for subsistence, and they do not sell. The families hope their situation will improve; if opportunities for using the land improve, then they would decide what to do. Of course, not everyone thinks alike, but the predominant view is "wait and see".

5. Land Markets in the Mountains

While the result is the same, i.e., low intensive land use, the logic is quite different in the villages on the other side of the river, on the mountain side. People of these villages do not agree to cultivate for the market (wheat and forage in Suha), or to keep cattle and then to sell the milk (in Stegopuli). The cost of production, the prices of the market are also some of the factors that stop the production here. It is getting worse because of the geographical distance from the market, the transport costs high: the families that go to the market, many times sell the things cheaper, in order to make some money after paying for the transport, too; or they are not sure that someone will come with a van to buy all their production.

The incomes from emigration are not the same here for the native population, because the native villagers have more difficulties to emigrate than Vllah population does and many more difficulties than the Greek minority. The Albanians who emigrate to Greece, return after short stays, because of visa difficulties, so they cannot support their families continuously. In the meantime, the land is not an alternative, but a basic physical component of the domestic economical strategy. The native families cannot live without the land, it is the only base they have; they do not have other possibilities. This is why they do not sell or rent the land;

it is the base of their survival. People also believe that the land will help them in the future, when the cost of production and the prices of the market will get better.

The land quality and the geographical position combine to influence emigration. The combination of these two factors creates different economical strategies, but results in the same final effects: the land market is paralyzed, people produce some wheat and vegetables for domestic consumption, maize and forage for the cows and sheep. In the case of Stegopuli, their subjective insecurity comes from the actual conflict between the Vllah population and the native people.

In the case of Suha, there's a formal insecurity of land (they still don't have the land-patent, tapi), but it is not a conflict. The lack of proper documentation would become a barrier for selling the land, if and when all members of a family want to leave the village and move to the town; or the emigration of the whole family to Greece.

Although emigration raises the possibility of selling the land, there is a counteracting factor that paralyses the land market in the Dropulli plain: the insecurity for the social-economical future (to come back in Albania or no?); will they find a job in Albania or no? etc...), and because of the political situation that is a strong factor presently.