12.2 New institutions in southern Europe

Chair: Socrates Petmezas

12.21 Raluca Musat – The ‘model village’ of Diosti: sociologists and the future of the Romanian countryside

This paper is a case study of the ‘model village’ Diosti, planned and built in Southern Romania between 1938 and 1939. Through this, I will examine the role of sociology in modernising the Romanian countryside through housing and rural planning. Founded in 1925 by Dimitrie Gusti, the Bucharest School of Sociology engaged in field-based research of rural life and other cultural activities aimed at reforming the countryside. In charge of Romania’s participation at the 1937 Paris World Fair, Gusti and his team exhibited a maquette of a model village, made up of planned purpose-built rural housing. This ‘village of the future’, combining traditional architectural features with the comfort of modern living, was partly realised in the reconstruction of Diosti. During the royal dictatorship (1938-40), King Carol II embarked on a mission to reform the countryside by reconstructing entire villages affected by natural disasters, especially fires. Almost entirely burnt down, Diosti became the pilot for a future large-scale project of rural modernisation. Part of the village was rebuilt according to a rational plan, including new ‘model’ houses and a village centre. This paper will examine the sociological vision behind the reconstruction of Diosti. Firstly, I argue that the planning of the village reflected the ideas of the Bucharest School of Sociology, who sought to re-centre the rural community around culture. Secondly, I hold that the new model housing was an attempt to rationalise the peasant body. Planning the indoors and outdoors spaces reflected ideas about how people ought to live and behave in the countryside, at the same time showing the limits of comfort the urban scholars thought necessary for village life.

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12.22 Paolo Tedeschi – New institutions for agrarian development: the Cattedre Ambulanti di Agricoltura in Lombardy during the early decennia of the twentieth century

The aim of this paper is to show how the Cattedre Ambulanti di Agricoltura helped the growth of the Lombard agriculture from the last years of the nineteenth century (when they were progressively created in all Lombard provinces, the first in 1895, the last in 1904) to 1935 (when Mussolini decided to replace them with the Ispettorati Provinciali di Agricoltura, new institutions more strictly linked to the fascist regime).

The Cattedre were public institutions financed by the provinces and some agrarian institutions and country banks: their aims were to coordinate the activity of farmers and breeders and to promote the diffusion of new more productive cultivations and new more efficient productive systems. They had to help Lombard farmers and peasants to know the new agronomical techniques and so to improve the crops and the agrarian yields. Using the example of the Cattedre is so possible to analyse advantages and limits of the public intervention for the development of the agrarian sector.

The agronomists working in the Cattedre had a very good knowledge of agronomics and veterinary sciences: they organised lectures, courses, evening classes, trainings and also some special itinerant
offices where they gave advice to farmers and breeders. In fact all agronomists were itinerant, that is they visited all farms and cattle-breeding of the province and informed the owners about all innovations in agronomics and zootechny. They particularly gave suggestions concerning:

a) the best rotation of the crops, the best way to sow and, for every different type of land, the hybrid seeds and chemical fertilisers having the best yields;

b) the best cures for vine disease (particularly phylloxera) and silkworm disease (particularly diaspis pentagona), and the least expensive and most efficient methods of replacing the incurable ones.

c) the best breed of cattle and the best fodder crops, to improve the production and the quality of the milk.

d) the best modern equipment to buy and the best agrarian machines to rent.

e) the best methods to cultivate vines and olive trees and produce better-quality wine and olive oil.

f) the best methods to cultivate the most important fruits for the market such as apples, pears, cherries, peaches and lemons.

g) the Alpicoltura – studies and innovations in the Alpine pastures – and the best techniques for obtaining the highest yields and improving cattle-breeding in the Lombard valleys without overgrazing and exhausting soil fertility.

h) the best ways to defend crops from damage by bad weather (particularly hail).

So the Cattedre gave to the Lombard rural people up-to-date know-how to improve agrarian production. The Cattedre were obviously more important in the backward areas: they reduced the existing gap with the more advanced agricultural ones. On this subject it is important to note that the positive effects of the Cattedre also depended on their links to other institutions supporting the agrarian sector: together to the other agrarian institutions (such as the rural co-operatives and friendly societies and the casse rurali that is the co-operative country banks) and the veterinary and agronomical schools which were born in the last decennia of the nineteenth century, the Cattedre helped the development of the Lombard agriculture. If the Cattedre had represented the only institution charged with the improvement of production and the productivity of farms and cattle-breeding the results could not have been so positive.

At the same time the Cattedre also allowed their young agronomists to perform important experiments and undergo training in a region where there existed a great variety of pedologic areas and agricultural environments, such as Alpine valleys, morainic hills, the plain (dry and irrigated) and the Riviera of the lakes (which have specific microclimates). This obviously improved the quality of agronomical studies in Lombardy and consequently the level of know-how available to Lombard farmers in the early decennia of the twentieth century. Please note that this target was not foreseen by the people who suggested the creation of the Cattedre.

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12.23 Elisabeth Kontogiorgi and Dimitris Panagiotopoulos – Land reform and the rural settlement of refugees in Greece during the inter-war period: the role of the agriculturalists

Greek society and economy underwent fundamental changes during the inter-war period. The débâcle of the Greek Army in Asia Minor (1922) and the subsequent massive influx of hundreds of thousands refugees was a crucial event that triggered important developments. The compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey had momentous consequences for Greek society. The establishment of over a million of refugees in the country, seven hundred thousands of whom were resettled in rural areas, land reform and redistribution of resources (loans, land, human capital), the quest for modernisation and increased agricultural production, urbanisation and the acceleration of growth transformed Modern Greek society and economy.

This paper seeks to highlight the various aspects, social, economic and demographic, of the establishment of refugee settlements in rural areas. It will focus on the contribution of the agriculturalists (agronomists, engineers, cadastral surveyors, agricultural economists) in the complex project of refugee resettlement. These specialists on the field of agriculture, who had been emerged in the second decade of the twentieth century, were employed by the Refugee Settlement Commission, an international organisation supervised by the League of Nations who carried out the refugee resettlement project in Greece. This work suggests that the involvement of agriculturalists both in the land reform and refugee resettlement was pioneering. In addition, it also examines the impact the project for the resettlement of refugees had on the model for the development of the agrarian sector which was followed by the Liberal party in the context of its modernisation programme. The paper’s final portion attempts a comparative discussion and tries to seek parallels and differences between the agrarian problems and the way they were tackled in Greece and the countries of southeastern Europe.


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