

Chapter 23

Participation and in the Aegean Polynesia: Coop Community Challenges at a Time of Acute Social Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The EU recognises that islands suffer from disadvantaging external natural and economic circumstances. As the need for public participation in decision-making increases, in order to address economic and social cohesion issues, both national and supranational authorities should take action to reinforce community involvement in policy. This research, using information from case studies from Greek islands, investigates the obstacles in promoting public participation in insular areas from a European perspective. The study was based on qualitative research methods and an extensive literature review. In areas with low cohesion, attempts for participation failed. In other areas, where social cohesion was maintained, there was mistrust towards local authorities but the members of the community were eager to collaborate with the researcher to promote participation. It was evident that there is urgency for adoption of national and European policies focused on the needs of the insular communities, with respect to their unique circumstances.

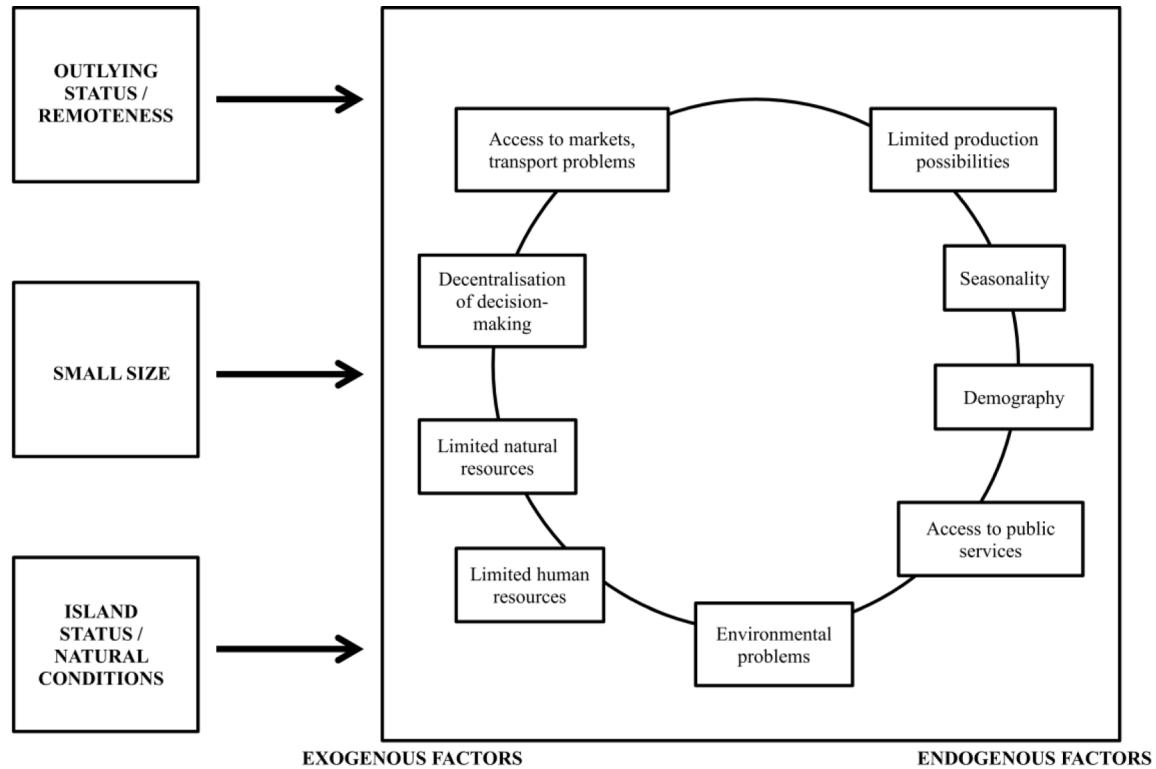
INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) is characterised by a unique, yet uneven settlement pattern (European Commission, 2008; ESPON and the University of the Aegean, 2009). The development of an area within the European borders depends on its attractiveness in the current development model framework. The dominating model relies on economies of scale, accumulation and high accessibility (ESPON and the

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Figure 1. Natural factors affecting human activities

Source: Planistat Europe and Bradley Dunbar Associates Ltd, 2003



University of the Aegean, 2009). Many peripheral regions suffer from severe and permanent territorial isolation, while the European Union recognises the islands as the most vulnerable regions (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007). The average living standards for the residents of the islands is 72% of the EU average (Planistat Europe and Bradley Dunbar Associates Ltd, 2003), and human activities are directly related to the natural environment of the area they take place (Figure 1) (Planistat Europe and Bradley Dunbar Associates Ltd, 2003).

As a result, the island communities - due to their small size and population, their remoteness and their difficulty in accessing markets - suffer from limited economic activities (CPMR, 2012; Planistat Europe and Bradley Dunbar Associates Ltd, 2003). Furthermore, islands suffer from seasonality, as, especially in the Mediterranean, their major income source is tourism during the summer months (Planistat Europe and Bradley Dunbar Associates Ltd, 2003). Tourism has a considerable impact on the fragile natural environment of the islands, indirectly affecting the livelihoods of local traditional fishing and agricultural communities (HCMR, 2005; UNEP, 2006).

Recognising the importance of the islands for the even development of the European area, the EU uses the Regional Policy in order to help the island territories overcome their inherent disadvantages and reach their growth potential. However, the effort is hardly enough for the islands to fully access the European market (CPMR, 2010). There is an immediate need for an assessment of the effects of insularity and new indicators, which take into account the notion of cohesion, rather than simply calculating productivity, as the GDP indicator does (CPMR, 2010). During this time of financial crisis, when central support is

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