

The Role and Involvement of Local Communities in Their Development Today in Cyprus The Example of Inia Village

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1. Summary

It is commonly well-known how important is for rural areas to be developing in order to keep them alive and not left to desert. Nowadays with the phenomenon of rural depopulation it is essential to strengthen country side and give motives to people to return. Local communities themselves and their local administration play an important role in their development. However, for a small community to develop and how it will be developed does not depend only on itself but to the support that gets from the central government as well.

This paper discusses the involvement of local communities in Cyprus in their development, focusing in Akamas area. In the second part of the paper the example of Inia village is introduced.

2. General comments on small communities' involvement in decision taking

Rural depopulation constitutes the worst enemy of small communities. The last years permanent residents in rural areas are getting fewer and fewer. The absence of employment and jobs leads young people to the cities where it is easier to find not only jobs but all everyday needed amenities as well. As a consequence small villages are led to decline or even obliteration.

In the case of Akamas, rural depopulation is not the only problem the communities have to face. The five small communities of Akamas are in a

very difficult position the last years especially due to the deadlock of the theme regarding the correct management of the Akamas peninsula.

Nevertheless, these communities managed to hold up to the problems, resisted in time and remained alive.

However, a mild development plays a determinative role for these communities to continue to exist. This mild development should come through a correct management plan which it would protect the environment and attract visitors to the area.

An alternative form of tourism that can be developed in the area of Akamas is agrotourism. Agrotourism is a form of viable tourist development as well as multi-activity in the rural area. It aims to the financial and social improvement of rural areas by supporting mild and of small scale offer of tourist services, local rural production, making and trading of traditional products and the designation of cultural and natural richness of each area.

The vision for mild development of local communities exists but communities' local administrations on their own do not have the financial resources or the scientific background for its correct implementation. Furthermore, governments have frozen 'Akamas' region in a 'dead' already more than 20-year period with adverse socioeconomic effects due to not preparing and implementing a correct management plan for this region. This Plan is currently under preparation by the government as a policy plan to be formally introduced. The unfortunate issue is that there is no an active and full involvement of all the affected communities in the elaboration of Akamas management plan. According to international acknowledged scientists (Cooke, 1982; Murphy, 1985; Haywood, 1988; Murphy, 1988; Cited in Simpson, 1990) the involvement of local communities is necessary since the early stages of an area's development and this development should have as principles the particularities of human and natural factors of this area. But this is not fully happening with the communities of Akamas at present.

Economic and social continuity with Europe today is achieved by reduction of economic inequalities between Europe's regions, development of countryside, maintenance and upgrade the environment and reinforcement of socioeconomic web of rural area as well as extension and upgrade of basic infrastructure. This is what is the aim for the Akamas management plan under preparation.

3. Inia: an example of an Akamas forgotten community

Inia is a pure Greek village in the district of Paphos, at the plateau of Laona, around 28 km north of the city of Paphos. The administrative boundaries of the village to the west reach the Akamas Sea.

Inia is built at the ridge of Laona's plateau, at an average height of 620m. The landscape is dismembered from many small rivulets that come down from the ridge and they end at the sea area of Akamas.

From a Geological aspect, the village is situated on a huge variety of geological depositions which together with some tectonic movements have influenced the topography "shape". The main bed of rocks of the area are calcareous sandstones, reefal lime stones, marls, marly chinks, sand, gravel, the deposits of 'Mamonia' formation, lavas and serpentinites. The geomorphology of Inia was affected by Akamas's anticline (saddleback), which coincides with the area's ridge. In the carved area of the village one can run into smooth and sharp slopes, green valleys, bare sloping areas and underground caves. On the north-west of the village and next to Ayios Georgios church, is Lara peak, at 668m height, which is the highest spot in the whole Akamas area.

Inia gets an average annual rainfall around 610 mm. The variety of the shape, bed of rocks and soils contributed in the development of various crops like vineyard, wheat, plants, almonds, olives and others. Part of the Akamas Forest at the west of Inia, and small part of Peyia Forest at the southwest fall in the administrative area of the village. The relatively high level of rainfall that these forests are getting contributed in the development of luxuriant vegetation / germination of aoratus, pine-trees, oleasters, wild carobs, lentisk, thyme, ladano, myrtles and terebinths.

Animal husbandry is also developed at the village. Inia is currently the first village in the plateau of Laona regarding the number of goats and sheep, and the second in the district of Paphos after Peyia village.

At the west of Inia and within its administrative territory, there is the small peninsula of Lara with its picturesque 'Annoudi' and Lara's sandy beach.

Inia is being serviced with a good road network. At the northeast it is connected with Drousia village and through it with Polis. At the southeast it is connected with Kato Arodes village and at the northwest with Fasli village.

From 1881 until 1946 Inia's population recorded a nearly continuous, growth. In 1881 is noted in the report that it had only 15 habitants that increased to 543 in 1891, 580 in 1901, 620 in 1911, 637 in 1921, decreased to 603 in 1931, but then increased to 682 in 1946. From 1946 and afterwards a continuous fall in the population was recorded. In 1960 residents were 648 who decreased to 623 in 1973, 589 in 1976 and 482 in 1982. Migration was intensified after 1946, whereas the village was smitten by rural depopulation as well. The number of 15 habitants that was recorded in the first population report that was done in Cyprus by British in 1881 should be considered to be wrong because then the habitants of the village should have been much more. Although the same report mentions that in 1881 Inia had only 4 houses which were all inhabited, still there is no serious outward cause towards the increase of the habitants from 15 to 543 in 10 years.

According to testimonies the village existed during the French Occupation period and it belonged initially to the Templar Knight Order. After the break-up of this order, the village and with it another 46 Cyprian villages consisted property of the Knights of Ayios Ioannis Order.

The main problem that the community has to face is considered today by Inia's inhabitants, the Management Plan of Akamas. The few nowadays residents of Inia community cannot take advantage of their properties since 1989 and as a result they are facing a lot socioeconomic problems. Even though management and development of property consists a human right for every European citizen, unfortunately people in Inia are deprived of this right for the last twenty five years.

Furthermore, a serious problem that preoccupies the community is the settlement of many telecommunication and military antennas and radars that affect the health of the habitants and that's why they have been asking for their removal from the area. One more problem is the inexistence of development and beautification works in the community. Nothing was really been done and it stayed as it was 100 years ago. The community, though, is developing and it is necessity for infrastructure works to be done is high for the interest of the habitants, the visitors and the community as well.

The community of Inia, looking for serving the best interests for the communities of Akamas, has made during the last years several suggestions regarding Akamas management plan, Akamas preservation and Akamas

sustainable development together with the community's development. These suggestions are be listed and briefly discussed below.

The first suggestions the community's vital belief is that Akamas Park should be restrained within the 55 km² of national forest. The Park should not get into the private properties of local habitants. Private properties should stay in the hands of their owners who should be able to use them as they wish considering that certain development regulations are to be followed.

Moreover sustainable development is essential for this area. However, attention should be paid so as to not overdevelop and destroy the today's unspoiled landscape. "Mild" development is what is needed. A sustainable development beginning from Lara Beach and reaching up to the existing thorp will be ideal for all interested parties. Not forget to mention that this specific beach in 1989 had a building coefficient of 57% whereas the last twenty years with Akamas Management Plan on hook it has been reduced to only 0,5% without any compensation given to the legal owners of the land.

Lara's beach is quite famous for its turtles. Both kinds of Green Turtles and caretta –caretta are breeding at this beach. More than 10.000 turtles were led to the sea in the area of Lara and more than 30.000 eggs were hatched almost year. It is very important that these beaches where turtles come to lay their eggs are protected. The eggs and little turtles should be protected from humans and foxes. Furthermore turtles coming out to give birth or in the sea must be protected as well. The unique turtle hatchery that is operating in Lara contributes a lot in protecting as well as studying turtles and their breeding activities. Additionally turtles' nests in touristy beaches are being transferred to Lara's hatchery. This unique area should be well protected and if possible well presented to visitors and tourists by distance and by skilled guides to create even a special eco-tourism together with similar activities in the Akamas peninsula.

One more suggestion coming from Inia Communal Board is the regeneratong of the center area of the village to make it friendly to visit at and not giving the impression of a deserted community. Old traditional buildings and stone walls should be restored. The streets in the center of the community could be traditionally paved with stone materials. This will significantly upgrade the impression to people visit and walk in beautiful surroundings. These visits will further create the need local traditional restaurants and shops for local people to work and sell their goods. One more project urgently needed is the regeneration of the central square of the

village. The square of a village constitutes the place where local people can go and spend their free time, meeting other residents of the community, chat and socialize.

Other projects that can be promoted are restoration and maintenance of the cleric monuments of the community. These monuments can be a major attraction for the whole area.

Furthermore, a local medical center providing services form a main necessity for the area. It is very important for not only elderly people knowing that when and if they need to visit a doctor they would be able to do it without many expenses and travelling.

An additional suggestion for the community's development is the development of environmental studies' centers with special interests in the local environment. The area is ideal for such centers since it is uniquely rich in flora and fauna. A lot of unique opportunities will be given to environmentalists and scientists to come and visit the area and they will be given the chance to help maintain nature, growth of species and study them. A local environment study center will also give extra value to the region and will help to its general development.

Continuing with the suggestions the community has made the last years to the central government, another proposal is to create nature observation posts. Akamas Area is unbelievably beautiful and famous for its wild nature. Spots that dominate Akamas make excellent positions for observing nature. "Vouni" and "Alykoy" for example are two such spots. Interested persons and groups will then perform organized visits to the area which inevitably great another form of sustainable tourism for the interest of both the community and the whole island tourism industry.

Of the same importance is the development of well organized excursion areas for park and forest services. Buildings to house these services will contribute to the better and safest provision of services to visitors of the nature park. A proposal from the community authorities is to give to local residents the priority for employment to these services' areas when is needed. This will help a lot to give local people the opportunity to work in their area.

Finally, last but not last is a proposal for the creation of agrotourism corporations. These corporations can work for the promotion of local traditional establishments and foods. Tourists are very interested in traditional handcrafts and often they are more than delighted to try

traditional food and sweets. This will also create additional work for people without a permanent job and will keep the local population at its own village to live and grow their children. .

People of Inia as people of all villages love their community. This is the reason why they are not indifferent but on the contrary are working very hard for the best interest of the area. Work towards implementing some of the suggestions listed above has already begun in cooperation with the local government and hopefully with good will of both parties the results will soon be presented for the benefit of all. The entire above is an effort by the community of Inia itself for a fruitful cooperation by all involved parties for the sustainable development of the community, productively involving from the first stages, the people and the authorities of the community.

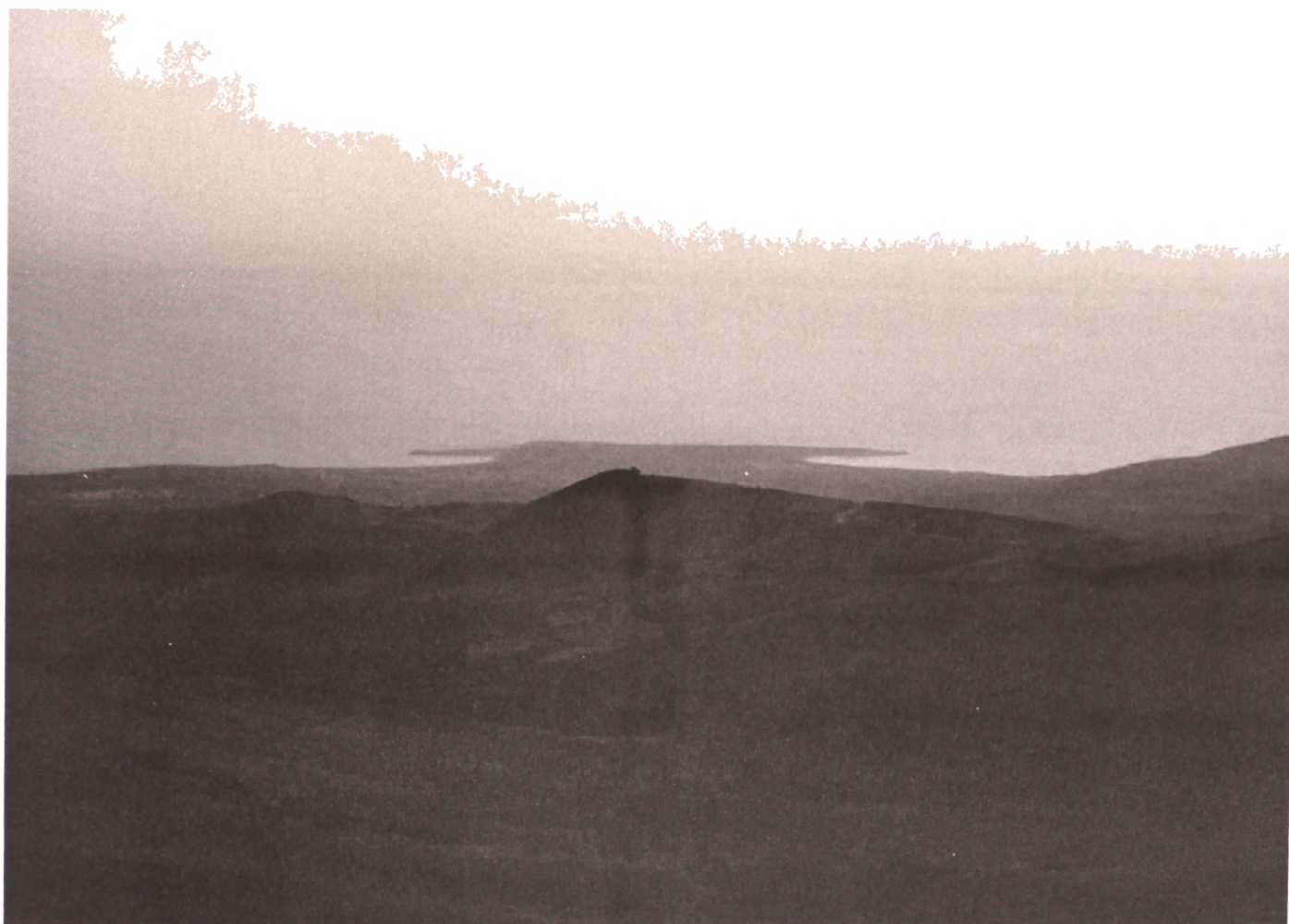


Figure 1 A view of Akamas peninsula



Figure 2 A deserted house in Inia.



Figure 3 Lara's Beach.



Figure 4 Turtles' hatchery



Figure 5 An old Church in Inia



Figure 6 A stone wall in Inia before...



Figure 7 ... and after restoration