Programme for the sustainable development of the region of Moria

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Background

Lesbos is an island located in the Aegean Sea, Greece, very close to Turkey. Since more than three years ago, it has been overwhelmed by the large amount of refugees arriving there: more than a million people have passed through Greece on their way to Europe. From the beginning of the crisis 80% of refugees travelled through the small island of Lesbos. After the EU-Turkey deal in March 2016, the arrivals decreased as well as the departures to the mainland, leaving most of them stuck on the island. Since the beginning of 2018 7.275[1] out of 13.717 refugees in whole Greece have made their way to the island by boat. Nowadays, the number of refugees in Lesbos is close to 8700, most of them coming from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The welcome of almost 8700[2] refugees means a big impact to the demography of Lesbos, an island of 1600km2 and a population of only 85.000 people. Most of the refugees are currently stuck in the Moria refugee camp with a current population of around 7300 people[3].

The arrival of several foreign inhabitants added to the difficulties of the island to absorb the increasing numbers of population. It generated differences and tensions between the local community and the refugees, them being accused for the decline of one of the main economic sources of the island: tourism. In 2016, at the beginning of the migratory crisis, the overnights in the island were a 90% less than the year before[4] and the arrivals of tourists were reduced by more than a 60%[5] in summer. The current amounts show a recovery of the airport activity however not a recovery of the touristic sector, as it includes the thousands of volunteers that come periodically to the island.

This situation is similar to events in nature. An ecosystem requires a balance between its elements which makes it work as a whole. But, what happens when a new element is introduced to an established ecosystem? Often a shortage of resources is generated and the balances breaks, developing tensions between the participants.

As described by the United Nations Organization, at the time of dealing with any kind of emergency regardless of its category it must be tackled through four phases of actions: immediate emergency response, recovery, mitigation and preparation for future emergencies. Each of these stages involves differents processes and actions.

Until now, Greece's response to the extensive arrival of refugees has been of reaction and emergency in order to solve the most immediate problems. A lot of NGO have worked on the field for more than three years to guarantee basic life conditions to refugees. Even though the situation is far from being solved, the number of arrivals on the island are less than previous years. This has established a period where the temporary lead to a more permanent situation that allowed a reflection of the past, present and future of the island.

1   Greece sea arrivals Dashboard, UNHCR. June 2018 (https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64636)

2   New York times. Aprill 2018 (https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/24/world/europe/greece-lesbos-refugees.html)

3   Moria Camp (Manager office)

4   Greek travel pages, Lesvos Hoteliers Association. February 2016 (https://news.gtp.gr/2016/02/29/greece-hoteliers-cancellations-refugee-crisis/)

5   Greek travel pages, Mytilini Airport, Lesvos Hoteliers Association. August 2016 (https://news.gtp.gr/2016/08/05/greece-north-aegean-tourism/)

The project

The project is born from the multiple experiences on the island over the past year while cooperating with both private and public entities from regional and local governments as well as with the NGOs working on the camps. The idea of having a global understanding of what the humanitarian response means to both the refugee and local population and the development of a common collaboration between all entities involved was established after the last trip to Lesbos.

The aim of the project is to encourage proposals and interventions addressed both to the refugee and local communities. It focuses on finding a balance of the ecosystem in order to reduce the consequences on the local economy while not forgetting to give a response to the present and future needs of the refugees. The project wants to become the tool used by the different parts of this new ecosystem to offer benefit for both sides.

To achieve this a detailed understanding of the elements that are part of the equation and the different scenarios that can happen is needed to provide

appropriate proposals and solutions. For such purposes, the quantitative analysis of the physical territory and the social casuistry of the island are essential factors to make decisions. For this study, it is indispensable to work with real database that helps to quantify the processes happening on the island.

The database required belongs to these three categories:

- **Territory:** it is necessary to establish a quantification of all the resources available on the island, including natural resources, communication, transport, economy, construction and heritage.

- **City system:** this section includes not the available elements listed above, but the chains and relationships created by the more general systems produced in towns and cities in all their complexity.

- **Social structure:** this is the fundamental study, the population, made up of local inhabitants, visitors and refugees who live together in the same physical space, the traditional structure that has been altered.

Working method

One of the main tools for data analysis and representation will be mapping. The maps allow to understand and communicate the data of all the categories in the same territorial base making it possible to compare and cross several variables. It is intended to work through the use of static and dynamic cartographies. Traditional analysis using propositive cartography and GIS systems will be fundamental parts of the project.

The potential of the GIS tool lies in its ability to provide an overview of the situation at territorial level by bringing together different sources of information. This system allows a deep and detailed knowledge of the area and aims to identify opportunities for improvement in a given geographical area.

Many developed cities integrate this technology as an indispensable part of the control and management of

urban data. In contrast, rural areas and developing areas rarely have such systems of analysis.

This will require a compilation of available official data generated by local Greek and public state entities, as well as European bodies working in the area. Secondly, it is intended to access extensive databases (Big Data) of entities and companies that allow a reading with a lower level of aggregation of the study area. Finally, fieldwork will be carried out on data collection with the aim of quantifying the day-to-day aspects that are not covered by official statistics.

Another working tool of the project will be the implementation of participatory processes with the inhabitants of the area. These processes are based on the desire to learn from the experiences of local people as a source of essential information for the development of the project. In addition, they directly

involve the inhabitants in the identification of the problems and the search for solutions, giving them a voice in a situation that marks their daily lives.

Interpretation and implementation

The phase after the data collection will consist of two stages: interpretation and application of the results.

Based on the work previously carried out using the tools proposed, whether they be traditional tools such as the maps generated through the identification of the site and the participatory workshops or those of innovative application such as the GIS, the aim is to achieve a holistic interpretation of the site and all its participating agents. This holistic or general interpretation makes it possible to organize the social, economic and territorial chains of the region, thus making it possible to objectively find key points (points with development potential) and/or points of conflict (points with shortcomings) in order to ensure that any proposal or public policy resulting from it is efficient in terms of resources and of direct application.

The subsequent application will consist of diagnosing guidelines to be followed in terms of political actions, both public and private, that can be applied to seek the sustainable development of the region. These guidelines will not only be applied upon the finish of the project, also a series of actions will be established according to the scale and type of problem:

– Punctual or with direct impact such as measures to improve the situation of the countryside and its surroundings, improvements that favour regional economic cooperatives, adaptation of the urban park and its heritage or even a better regional transport system.

– General or guidelines to follow for future public policies or interventions in a more general scope that seek results in the medium to long term.

While general actions will set the guidelines and public policies to be followed in the medium in long term, specific actions can be implemented and applied at the same time they are identified. This will enable to propose solutions already at the initial stages of the project, that will also form part of the general long-term policies.

In conclusion, the project starts from a desire to offer a view of the territory and its population years after the onset of the migration crisis as a fundamental part of the reflection and evaluation of the actions carried out and the changes that have taken place in the physical and social environment of the area. Only by understanding the past and present conditions proposing new measures and implementing them will be possible.