4
Institutional Capacity and Policy Environment in the Southern Aegean Islands

Introduction

Although the centralized state structure, as outlined in chapter three, acts as an important constraint for local institutional capacity in Greece, given the dynamic character of the system of intergovernmental relations, the characteristics of the system of intra-regional interactions play a decisive role in the dynamism of local systems of governance and their capacity for adaptation. This chapter maps the institutional infrastructure in the Southern Aegean Islands region, highlighting its political, economic, institutional and cultural (social capital) features.

Local characteristics and political climate

The Southern Aegean Islands region (NUT II) comprises 78 islands, of which only 43 are inhabited, with a population of 257,481, or 2.51 per cent of the entire country’s population (1991). It consists simultaneously of two island-complexes and prefectures: the Cyclades with a population of 94,005 inhabitants, and the Dodecanese with a population of 163,476 (1991). The demographic picture of the region is one of the best in the country since the early 1970s. After a substantial decrease during the decade 1961–71 (7.01 per cent or 0.7 per annum) because of both internal and external emigration flows, the population of the region increased significantly (12.6 per cent or 1.26 per annum) in the decade 1971–81. Finally, during the decade 1981–91 its population increased by 10.25 per cent, or 1.0 per cent per annum, while all the other regions had lower rates of increase in the same period. At the prefectural level, the Dodecanese, after a small decrease in population
in the decade 1961–71 (1.63 per cent) – by far the smallest among the five prefectures of the Aegean islands in the same period – since the early 1970s has demonstrated the best demographic picture in comparison with all the other Aegean island prefectures, with an increase of 19.88 per cent during the decade 1971–81 and 13 per cent in the decade 1981–91. The Cyclades prefecture, on the other hand, shows a better performance when compared with the Northern Aegean islands, but lags behind the Dodecanese. In particular, after a substantial decrease during the decade 1961–71 (–13.63 per cent), its population increased significantly during the decades 1971–81 (2.46 per cent) and 1981–91 (6.27 per cent).

In education, the region lags behind country averages. In particular, according to the 1991 population census, it demonstrates a lower percentage (7.1 per cent) in university graduates when compared with the national mean (11.5 per cent) in 1991. The picture is the same in secondary education (27.95 per cent : 31.5 per cent respectively), while the region has a higher level of illiteracy than the national mean (7.75 per cent : 6.8 per cent).

The administrative and economic centre of the region is shared among the most prosperous islands. The capital city of Syros island (Ermoupolis) is the capital of both the region (seat of the regional secretariat) and the Cyclades prefecture, while Rhodes is the capital of the Dodecanese. In terms of economic development, because of the significant intra-regional disparities (among the islands), the economic centre of the region is shared among a leading group of developed islands consisting of Rhodes and Kos in the Dodecanese, and Mykonos and Santorini in the Cyclades. Additionally, the island character and subsequent fragmentation of space has important consequences for the administrative structure of the region at the sub-prefectural level. It comprises ten provinces (provincial councils): seven in the Cyclades complex (Andros, Santorini, Milos, Naxos, Kea, Tinos and Paros) and three in the Dodecanese (Kos, Karpathos and Kalymnos). However, the subordinate character of the province vis-à-vis the prefecture and the first tier of local government (municipalities), and the short life of the directly elected sub-prefects (the first election took place in 1994) have resulted in a limited role within the regional system of governance.

A significant aspect of spatial fragmentation within the region is illustrated by difficulties in communication between the two island-complexes and the subsequent lack of communication and transport linkages between the capitals of the prefectures (Syros and Rhodes). Under these circumstances, although the old dispute between the