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Institutional Capacity and Policy Environment in the Northern Aegean Islands

Introduction

As has been shown in chapter four, in the case of the Southern Aegean islands, despite the centralized structure of the state, local factors in institutional networks and the strength of civil society can play an important role in enhancing the learning and adaptation processes of the local system of governance. This chapter maps the institutional infrastructure in the Northern Aegean Islands region, drawing its political, economic, institutional and cultural features.

Local factors and political climate

The Northern Aegean Islands region (NUT II), with a population of 199,231 inhabitants, or 1.94 per cent of the entire country in 1991, consists of three big islands (Lesbos, Chios and Samos), each of which, along with some smaller islands, constitutes a prefecture. The Lesbos prefecture with a population of 105,082 inhabitants (1991) comprises mainly Lesbos and Limnos islands. The Samos prefecture consists mainly of Samos and Ikaria islands with a population of 41,965 inhabitants (1991). Finally, the Chios prefecture with a population of 52,184 (1991) comprises Chios island and the small islands of Innouses and Psara. The demographic picture of the region is one of the worst in the country,1 characterized by significant population losses since the 1950s and 1960s. In particular, its population decreased significantly during the decades 1961–71 (17.30 per cent) and 1971–81 (7.34 per cent), while only in the 1981–91 decade did the region demonstrate a small increase (2.17 per cent).

At the prefectural level, the Lesbos prefecture has demonstrated the worst demographic picture since the 1960s, with population decreases
of 18.14 per cent and 8.87 per cent for the decades 1961–71 and 1971–81 respectively, while only during the last decade 1981–91 did it experience a small increase in population (0.4 per cent). The Samos prefecture demonstrates a similar picture with population losses of 19.82 per cent and 2.85 per cent during the decades 1961–71 and 1971–81 respectively, and a small increase (0.6 per cent) during the 1981–91 decade. Finally, the best demographic picture in relative terms is that of Chios prefecture with population decreases of 13.30 per cent and 7.57 per cent during the decades 1961–71 and 1971–81 respectively and a substantial increase (4.7 per cent) in the last decade 1981–91.

With regard to educational features, the region lags behind the country averages with the exception of the illiteracy rate. In particular, according to the 1991 census, it demonstrates a lower percentage (7.46 per cent) in university and technical college graduates in comparison with the national average (11.5 per cent). Additionally, the situation is similar in secondary education (28.1 per cent – 31.5 per cent respectively), while the level of illiteracy is lower (5.30 per cent) than the national average (6.8 per cent).

The complete fragmentation of the administrative and economic structures between the three prefectures, illustrated by problematic transport and communication linkages, is the main characteristic of the region. Although Mytilene – the capital of the Lesbos prefecture – is the seat of the Regional Secretariat and hence the administrative centre, it does not constitute the economic centre of the region, since the development patterns among the island-prefectures are fragmented. Thus, the only similarity in levels of economic development among the islands is that they are low. Additionally, the administrative structure is affected by the degree of fragmentation of space. In that sense it involves only two provinces (provincial councils): one in the Lesbos (Limnos) and one in the Samos prefectures (Ikaria), though for reasons similar to those in the Southern Aegean the role of provincial councils remains marginal within the regional system of governance. Therefore, the existing dispute between the three prefectures about the distribution of public investment funds should be viewed as a consequence of the radial structure of Greek administrative and transport/communication systems and the structure of the intra-regional interactions. Within this framework ‘the only cohesive institution of the region is the Regional Secretariat, whose relatively good administrative structure is mainly due to the stability and continuity of the personnel’. However, given the limitations of the role of the Regional