

Could COVID-19 Boost Greece's Village Revival?

Natali DOLOGLOU¹

*Metsovion Interdisciplinary Research Centre (MIRC), National Technical University of Athens,
Patission 42, 10682 Athens, Greece.*

Abstract: In the last decades, Greek villages, especially in mountainous and remote areas, are gradually depopulated and suffer from youth out-migration, school closures and unemployment. During this COVID-19 outbreak, there is an increasing trend of villages as destinations for domestic tourism for short holidays or longer stays. At the same time, this pandemic leads to a significant increase of remote working practices. This article explores the prospect for the revival of traditional villages via an *Albergo Diffuso* (AD) model with adjustments for both visitors and temporary distance-working residents. We analyze the AD concept as it has been employed in Italy, make minor adjustments to it, and investigate the applicability of such a model in order to overturn the current depopulation of rural and mountain villages in Greece and improve the wellbeing of the local communities. To this end, we present a comprehensive SWOT analysis and discuss the findings. Our approach lays the groundwork for further research that is required to successfully implement AD in mountainous villages.

Key words: *sustainability; remote working; mountain areas; Albergo Diffuso, workation*

Introduction

COVID-19 has completely disrupted everyday life. Everything has changed and there is great uncertainty in several dimensions. Governmental targets, the business plans of entrepreneurs and even ordinary family plans are largely out of synch with reality. The impact on the economy, at both the local and global scale, will be substantial.

For village communities around the world, the COVID-19 outbreak is one more unsolved issue added to their long list of problems. Nevertheless, and somewhat ironically, this crisis could also work in their favor. It has long been argued that information and communication technologies (ICTs), in particular the Internet, would provide disadvantaged groups and remote rural areas with access to information, services and markets that would otherwise be inaccessible, and that even unemployed people and other vulnerable groups would be assisted in accessing services and developing social contacts through ICT (McQuaid et al., 2004). But progress has been slow so far, especially in remote mountainous villages. Now, due to the pandemic safety measures, there is a rapid adoption of remote working practices as well as the swift digitalization of processes, e-education and e-services.

This creates significant potential for the improvement of the working and living conditions of remote mountain communities. Moreover, and perhaps even more important, this teleworking boom allows regular employees to “escape” into an attractive working environment, away from the mundane workplace. It is not such a big surprise that some mountain villages have now become very popular compared to cities, as they provide a non-crowded, safe and calm environment both for working and leisure.

¹ Corresponding author: Natali DOLOGLOU, E-mail: ndolog@mail.ntua.gr. Received on 15 May, 2021.
Revised on 25 August, 2021, Published on 10 September, 2021