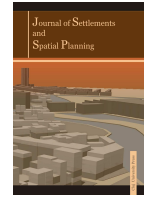




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The Regeneration of Rural Space in Difficulty by the Family Multi-Activity. The Case of Mediterranean Mountainous Spaces of Toukabeur, Chaouech and Hidous (the Down-Valley of Mejerda-Tunisia)

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ABSTRACT

The mountainous spaces in the Mediterranean zone constitute, ever since ancient times, very populated locales. Human pressure and surrounding natural constraints are the main cause of the rupture of the fragile equilibrium of ecological systems and the movement of rural exodus towards the plains and local towns. The case of mountainous “déchras” in the north of the Down-valley in the north of Tunisia (Toukabeur, Chaouach and Hidous) offers a manifest example of the grave structural crisis which the Mediterranean mountains suffer at present. The disequilibrium of the relationship population- resources push the dwellers of the mountains to develop short and long term strategies of adaptation, carried out through a traditional management of the rural space. The poor outputs of the latter led to the emergence of a new tendency towards a restructuring of familial activities by giving a greater importance to multi-activity and extra-agricultural employment. This new tendency lies behind the socio-professional and special redeployment of the mountainous population. The case study of this space leads us to raise queries as to the future of the Mediterranean mountainous space, in the context of the state’s disengagement as well as giving an ampler chance to market mechanisms in the rural and local development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since ancient times, the mountainous spaces in the Mediterranean zone constitute very populated locations despite the hostile and restrictive natural environment. Anthropogenic pressure on a fragile environment, driven by local conflicts (civil wars, atrocities by the central government, land settlement of the plains during colonization) has increased the disruption of the balance of ecosystems and the capacity of retention of a more and more growing mountain population. Such a finding, reported by some specialists of the mountain, is visible in several mountainous areas in Tunisia especially in septentrional Tunisia. The case analysis of the mountainous space in the north of Mejerda Down-valley (Toukabeur, Chaouech and

Hidou) shows the acuteness of the problem of morpho-climatic factors and the scarcity of farmlands against a mountain people seeking to revitalize its space and develop a harmonious relationship between the reproduction of agricultural and non-agricultural needs, on one part, and the potentialities of the milieu on the other part.

However the marked imbalance of the population-resources relationship pushes the inhabitants of the mountain to implement strategies of adaptations characterized by a variable geometry which is aligned around two main axes: one short-term strategy relating to the allocation of the employed means of production (land, financial and technical) and the modalities of space management (agriculture, habitat, erosion combating).

The second is a long term strategy which consists of alternative choices to rural household by restructuring activities and even considering socio-professional and spatial redeployment of the population.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Mono-sectoral and classic approach to rural development, especially in countries with dominant agricultural character, has long insisted on the primacy of the agricultural dimension of rural areas. This very simplistic view had led to the strengthening of the theoretical division between rural and urban, making agriculture and family farms the only field of activity of rural people. The invalidity of this approach was demonstrated by the poor results of the development of rural areas and the marked delay in relation to urban spaces. Despite such a finding, some mountainous areas which are in difficulty managed to stand in the face of current socio-economic environment characterized by the expansion of market mechanisms and the disengagement of the state. Despite natural and land calamities, as well as overpopulation, these spaces have not experienced demographic inversion or depopulation as in the mountainous regions of industrialized countries. The development of various strategies of adaptation, the strengthening of the family - farm system and the development of the multi-active family phenomenon by taking into account external income and non-agricultural activities constitute a key to understand the socio-spatial and socio-economic current dynamics. The emergence of new features in rural space breaks with the mono-dimensional conception of a countryside which is inert, rigid and mono-functional. The model of urban growth currently presents a major asset of rural development and contributes effectively to the strengthening of horizontal linkages and dynamic interactions between the city and rural areas. These linkages manifest themselves in the interdependence between activities (farm and non-farm), the economic sectors (primary, secondary and tertiary) and geographic spaces (city-country). To validate this assumption, the direct and personal survey conducted on a 1/10 sample is a privileged field of investigation and data collection on the basis of the structural representation of farms. Out of the total number of farms in Toukabour (180), Chaouech (160) and Hidous (170), we selected a sample of ten percent which brings the number of family farms surveyed to 51.

3. BINDING NATURAL AND HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

3.1. A fragile natural environment and scarce resources

The mountains of Toukabour (507 m), Chaouech (542 m) and Hidous (503 m) are located in the northern sector of the Down Valley of the Oued Mejerda, which

constitutes a geographical barrier between the plains of the Mid-Valley and lowlands which extend to the capital Tunis. Overlooking the vast alluvial plain of Mjez-el-Bab in the north, these mountains are formed by faulted anticlines corresponding to the Triassic period, and contain tormented synclines formed by limestone rocks of the inferior Eocene. The contact with the plain has done many glaze accumulations extending from Jebel Jedidi to the east until Jbel Chaouech, having a silty, discordant and crusted cover giving rendzina or brown calcareous soils. In the lower glaze of Chaouech, limes fossilized by unevolved colluvium because of upstream cretaceous erosion promoted the formation of thick red rendzinas (Hamri) dedicated to grain and olive growing. Due to the rugged topography of these spaces the potential physical space is gained by increasing the hilly land accounting for 80% of all agricultural land with slopes exceeding 15%, which facilitates the action of water erosion by the sinking of ravines and landslides. This is exacerbated by the exposure of mountain slopes to the prevailing wind from the northwest giving erosive rainfall averages ranging from 500 to 600 mm/year. These winds are very frequent in November, December and January and are responsible for the remarkable cooling temperatures, morning frosts (20 days/year) and occasional snowfall (1 every 5 years) leading to discontinuation of agricultural work, havoc among livestock and destruction of plantings. Despite the weather conditions marked by cold, rain and wind, these mountainous areas are devoid of water mobilization techniques. We note the absence of clear-cut wadis, the scarcity of wells (12 wells out of 46 contained in the T C E of Mjez-el-Bab)¹ and only four springs and a hilly lake in Toukabour and Chaouech.

3.2. A much humanized mountainous space

In ancient times, the mountainous Dechra of the old "Tucabor", "Sua" and Hidous kept a privileged function of shelter areas to local people against the invaders from all sides. Thus, the Berbers have settled on the rugged and heavily eroded hills whose mortared rooms which are carved into the rock (Haouanet) in Chaouech stand as testimony. The passage of Romans has shown a noticeable presence justified by the abundance of relics such as housing, mausoleum, triumphal arch, water mains... and for the benefit of the Roman colonists who settled on the foothills and glazes. It is in medieval and modern ages that demographic pressure made itself felt on the environment because of the extension of land property of the aristocracy of Tunis in the plain and abuses of power by its central administrative mechanisms of the Bey and fiscal control pushing back thereby a large part of the occupants of foothills to the strapped heights and sparse clearings which are hedged with a mass of thick bush².

¹ TCE (Territorial Cell of Extension).

² Archives of the Tunisian government: Dossier of "mejba" No. 627 and 584 (1856).

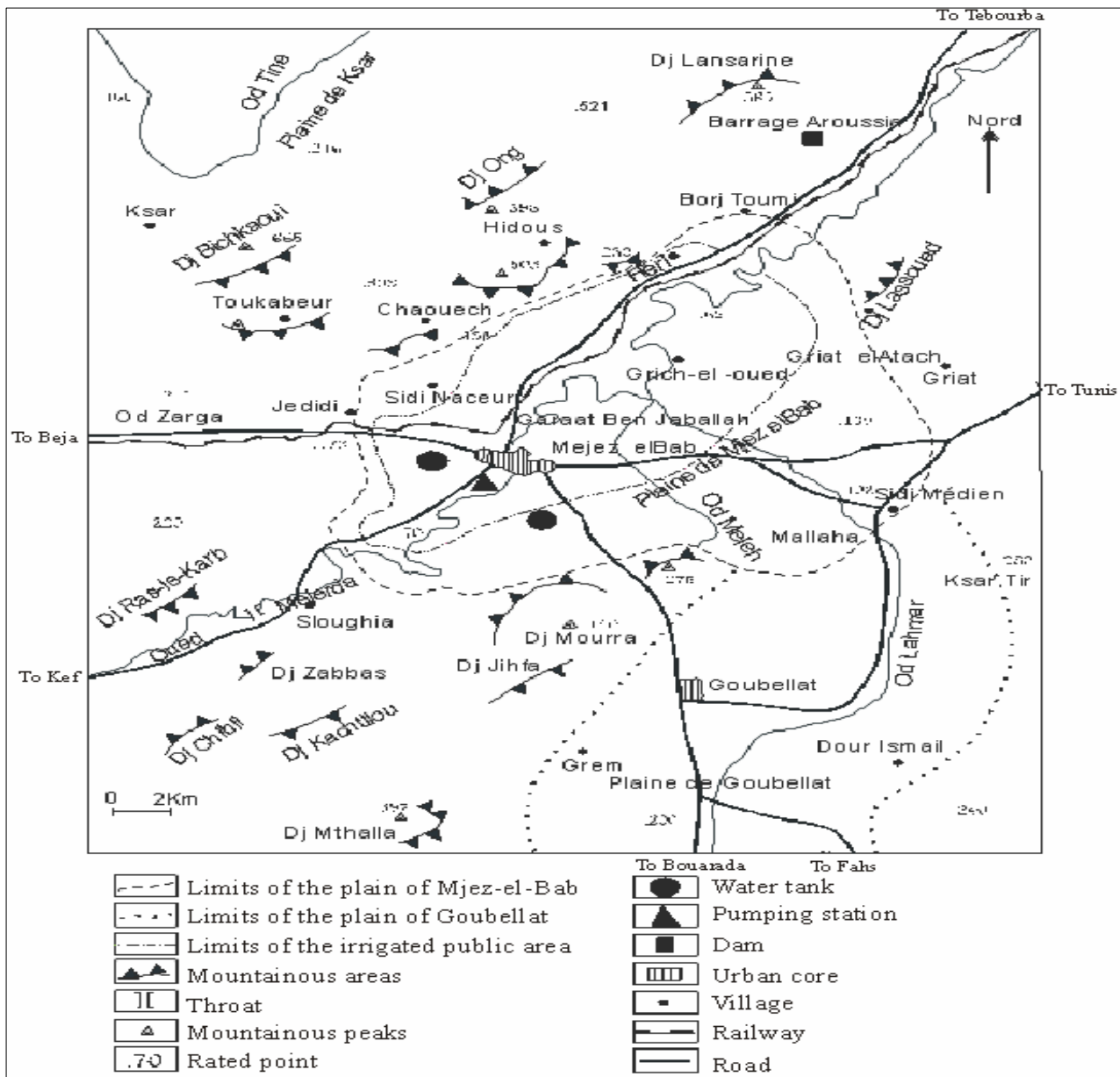


Fig. 1. Map of the plain of Mjez-el-Bab.

Thus there is a strong demographic thrust that helped populate these mountainous *déchra*, housing 231 families in 1,856 which represent a quarter of the families living in the town of Mejez-el-Bab and its rural hinterland. The colonial settlement of the plain after 1881 reinforced high population densities reaching high averages between 60 and 100 inhabitants per km², according to the census of 1911 and thereby increasing human pressure on the environment and the aggravation of the erosion phenomenon.

At present the mountainous spaces of Toukabeur, Chaouech and Hidous are considered overcrowded homes housing 10% of the population of the delegation of Mjez-el-Bab.

Like other Mediterranean mountains which formerly operated as shelter places, these *Dechras* still keep very high population density including Toukabeur (60.08 hab./km²) and Chaouach (58.6 inhabitants per square km) which far exceeds the low density in *Imadats* of the Mejez-el-Bab's plain as Sidi Medien (15.7 inhabitants/km²) Jedidi (22.9 hab.), Ksar (23.8 inhabitants) and Heri (pop. 48.6).

The *Dechra*³ is the main core of rural settlement comprising, 86.5% of peasant households and family homes.

³ The main *Dechra* is a rural group of fewer than 400 inhabitants whose distance from domestic places rarely exceeds 200 m-, secondary *Dechra* have a size of less than 50 inhabitants – (Definition of INS).

Given the fragility of the natural environment and strong demographic pressure are there socio-economic and environmental impacts? What are the

strategies of human adaptation and measures implemented by the mountain population to regenerate and revitalize rural areas?

Table 1. Demographic data of 3 Imadats (2004).

Data Imadats	Area (ha)	Population (nb)	Density (hab/km ²)	Exploitation (mn)	Household (nb)	Habitations	Percent age of habitat grouped	Size avg/family
Toukabour	2,450	1,491	60.8	150	333	270	81.6	4.4
Chaouech	2,200	1,290	58.6	170	304	291	86.5	4.2
Hidouss	5,930	827	13.9	145	162	183	85	5.10
Total	10,580	3,608	34.1	465	799	744	86.5	4.5

Source: I.N.S Census 2004.

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE IMBALANCE POPULATION RESOURCES

4.1. Persistence of traditional agriculture and reinforcement of family social structures

4.1.1. An overused agricultural space

Inheriting a mountainous area characterized by binding and fragile terrain, farmland shortage and the small size of farmlands, the village communities (Toukabri, Chaouechi and Hidoussi) indulged in excessive land use reaching an exorbitant average of 83,1% of the total area and even exceeding 90% in Chaouech. These lands are mostly located on slopes, foothills and the glaze constituting eroded soils and strap shaped terraces overlooking the alluvial plain of Mejez-el-Bab. The small soil strips contrast indeed with the expansion of large estates in the plains.

Table 3. Structure of agricultural speculations (2008).

Speculation Imadats	Cereal		Forage		Vegetables		Legume		Arboriculture		Total
	(ha)	(%)	(ha)	(%)	(ha)	(%)	(ha)	(%)	(ha)	(%)	
Toukabour	2280	59.1	475	12.3	50	1.2	615	15.9	435	11.5	3855
Chaouech											
Hidouss	2900	66.4	680	15.5	-	-	600	13.7	187	4.4	4367
Total	5180	63	1155	14	50	0.6	1215	14.7	622	7.7	8222

Source: C.T.V.of Mejez el bab

4.1.2. Prevalence of dry farming and extensive production systems

Having a rough natural environment and very low water mobilization, old ways of development of rural areas continue to exist in the mountainous areas in question, where dry farming predominates. The extensive cereal agriculture is the most agricultural activity and covers 63% of sown areas. Used as a means of barter and payment of taxes in the modern era, cereal

Table 2. Structure of agricultural land of 3 Imadats (2008).

Areas Imadats	Total area (ha)	Cultivated space (ha)	Rates of use (%)
Toukabour	2,450	2,050	83.6
Chaouech	2,200	2,000	90.9
Hidouss	5,930	4,830	81.4
Total	10,580	8,800	83.1

Source: C. T. V. Mjez el bab

Anthropogenic pressure on the environment through over-exploitation of land potential marked the passage of the rural economy of agricultural clearings associated with ranching and forest vocation during the colonial era to the extensive farming of cereals after independence.

specialization now provides nearly half of farm income. It is associated with legumes (bean, chickpea, and green beans) rich in nitrogen and whose impact on soil fertility reduces the erosive effect of flowing water on the dissected slopes and leached foothills. However, the forage area remains very low (14% of cultivated area) because of poor integration of cattle in farming systems and whose orientation is dedicated to provide family cash and financial support of agricultural activities particularly during random situations.

Dry arboriculture (olive trees) occupies a prominent place on the mountain slopes of Toukabour and Chaouech (11.5%); and also besides the significant amount of revenue it brings, it plays an important role in soil fixation and the protection of cereal agriculture.

At Hidous, the arboricultural space remains marginal (4.4%) due to the presence of a less rugged topography and the extension of large-scale mechanized cereal exploitation. Vegetable speculation is almost absent (0.6%) and located near springs in Toukabour and Chaouech, and almost all the production of which is designed for self-consumption.

The weakness of irrigation is due to the absence of traditions of water controlling like other Mediterranean mountains as in the Druze mountains of Lebanon and the Riftains of Morocco ... [2].

Despite the predominance of extensive dry agriculture, we can detect three types of cropping system varying according to the topo-climatic levels:

- the peaks are the domain of a system of sheep breeding associated with cereal subsistence farming in very small crumbled holdings. The rangelands in the highlands, intra-mountain hollows and the forest were used as natural pastures for the livestock.

- on the slopes and foothills and rugged badlands a system of mixed cultivation (cereals – olive trees) is developed.

The high level is the field of olive cultivation to fight against erosion and retain the soil while cereal

agriculture extends to the protected foothills which are ploughed in the opposite direction to the contours.

Cattle breeding is carried out away from the land in cramped and poorly equipped stables within the domestic home. At the edge of the plains and on colluvial glaze of accumulated red salty soil, we find an agricultural system that specializes in mechanized grain farming on large farms fertilized with chemical fertilizers and manure purchase from livestock farmers settled on the tops and slopes. This system is the work of absentee and multi-active farmers who live in the town of Mjez-el-Bab.

4.1.3. A strictly family farm employment

Following the predominance of traditional extensive agriculture, family employment constitutes the basic of work structure in the farms of the mountainous area of Toukabour, Chaouech and Hidous. It provides 93.7% of working days while the casual and even less permanent employees remain very marginal and almost absent.

This work is strictly familial due to the persistence of family farming characterized by the structural importance of the domestic group whose organization and reproduction depend on the degree of use of productive resources at hand (land, financial and technical) and level of acquisition of family consumer goods.

Table 4. Structure of agricultural employment (2008).

Employment	Family employment				Total	Casual	Permanent	Total
	head	wife	boys	girls				
Working days	8,680	1,060	3,360	610	13,710	647	260	14,617
Percentage (%)	63.3	7.7	24.5	4.5	93.7	4.4	1.9	100

Source: Direct Survey.

In this context, family work is conceived as a safety valve and means of regulation for maintaining the balance of the family farm which is weakened by deficiencies of the natural and economic risks as caused by increased exploitation charges, including agricultural inputs and services whose prices are currently soaring in the increasing disengagement of the state and the privatization of supply agencies.

4.2. The severity of environmental impacts

4.2.1. Land Fragmentation and land erosion

Given the small size of rural space and farmland shortage the agricultural landscape of the mountainous areas of Toukabour, Chaouech and Hidous is characterized by a highly fragmented structure, especially in small private farms under 10

hectares which represent 43,3% of the number of farms and only 4% of the total area.

The fragmentation of plots is very pronounced in holdings less than 5 hectares that extends only to about 2.2% of the total area and the average per farm hardly exceeds 3.2 ha.

This fragmentation of land is the result of high population pressure characteristic of small and medium-sized farms, and the sequence of inter-familial divisions caused by the loosening of traditional family ties and sometimes the abandonment of farming and the migration to cities especially the local urban core of Mejez-el-Bab.

Sometimes these divisions give rise to micro properties of a few acres surrounded by stone, which are difficult to use and whose access can cause tension between the owners.

Paradoxically the large private enterprise with more than 50 ha is gaining ground and concentrates 73.1% of cultivated land in spite of weak numerical representativeness (13.9%). These farms are parcelled,

scattered and divided into 17 plots sometimes separated by several kilometres. Therefore, the very fragmented and crumbled holdings are elements conducive to the accentuation of erosion phenomenon.

Table 5. Structure of agricultural holdings (2008).

Strata (ha)	0-5	5-10	10-20	20-50	50-100	+ 100	Total
Number of farms	17	5	11	11	4	3	51
(%)	33.3	9.8	21.5	21.5	7.8	6.1	100
Farmed area	55	46	167	402	305	1,500	2,475
(%)	2.2	1.8	6.7	16.2	12.3	60.8	100

The work of running water and the damaging of topography favour the formation of gullies, landslides and land degradation.

Another phenomenon which has an overwhelming effect on the degradation of vegetation dates back to the successive steps and systematic deforestation since European agrarian colonization which has engaged in massive land clearing at the expense of forest and by operations of collectivist as well as private agricultural development in the aftermath of independence. Thus the forest area of mountainous heights shrank so much that it currently represents only 10% of the total area (1,100 ha out of 9,980 ha). This aspect reflects indeed the advanced state of degradation of the mountain environment in Toukabour, Chaouech and Hidous.

4.2.2. A social environment marked by rural decline

The rural decline in the mountainous space of Toukabour, Chaouech and Hidous is a result of the fragility of the natural environment, high population pressure, low stock of extensive cereal agriculture and farmland shortage. The survey results show a noticeable reduction of family employment in that 36.6% of working days is provided by the family (5,030 days on a total of 13,710 days).

Consequently the paid work outside the farm ensures by itself 53% of the total family labour. Another manifestation of rural decline is the reduction of the number of the population of mountain inhabitants from 4,239 to 3,905 people according to the last two censuses (1984 and 1994) and fell to 3,608 in 2004. The fragmentation of land and rural unemployment are often caused by the abandonment of farming, the option of tenancy and, if necessary, by outright sale and finding stable employment in the local economic environment.

Table 6. Breakdown of working days of families by sector of activity in T-C-H space (2008).

Work	Farm work		Farm work paid off farm		Non-farm work		Free activities		Total
	N bre journs	(%)	N bre journs	(%)	N bre journs	(%)	N bre journs	(%)	
Chief	8,680	73.3	1,378	11.6	1,270	10.7	510	4.4	11,838
Mother	1,060	55.7	190	1.0	-	-	650	43.3	1,900
Boys	3,360	30.2	650	5.8	5,940	53.4	1,160	22.2	11,110
Girls	610	14.1	-	-	3,530	81.7	180	4.2	4,320
Total	13,710	47.0	2,218	7.6	10,740	36.8	2,500	8.6	29,168

Source: Direct survey

5. MULTI-ACTIVITY AND FAMILY STRATEGIES FOR REVITALIZATION OF MOUNTAINOUS SPACES

Challenging a very hostile and fragile environment is the main stake for the local population to ensure the survival of rural families. This task so heavy, as it is, was cleverly done in previous historical periods which were marked by the partitioning of the mountain economy and weak monetary relations and market mechanisms.

This also explains the continued presence of grouped human habitat and farming in this environment. This finding contrasts with the repulsive mountainous zone south of the plain of Mjez el Bab (J. B. Boumous, Murrah, Bou Touila) where the forest area is owned by the state. Currently the rural economy in the mountain area of Toukabour, Chaouech and Hidous must respond to the issue concerning the allocation of natural resources weakened by human pressure and adaptation to new data imposed by the market economy.

5.1. A strategy of simple reproduction of the family farm system

Given the failures of agricultural development and the deployed means of production (land fragmentation,

technical weakness, advanced state of environmental degradation, extensive agriculture) a major part of agricultural income of rural families of the three mountainous areas in question is assigned to the reproduction of family farm system [1].

Table 7. Balance sheet of farms spending (2008).

Spending Imadats	Value of marked production	Agricultural inputs		Family depenses		Gros margin (DT)	Margin per farm
		Value (DT)	(%)	Value (DT)	(%)		
Toukabour	68,500	18,515	27.0	12,480	18.2	37,505	2,344
Chaouech	61,890	24,029	38.8	15,380	24.8	22,481	1,405
Hidouss	47,100	13,005	27.6	18,350	38.9	15,745	1,049
Total	177,490	55,549	31.2	46,210	26.0	75,731	1,611

Source: Direct survey

Overall, more than half (57.2%) of farm income turned to exploitation in the form of supply of agricultural inputs (fertilizers, labour costs, labour and transportation of agricultural products) and the acquisition of various family possessions. Despite a general remarkable decline, the value of family spending shows a marked reduction in the rural areas of Toukabour and Chaouech. This behavior aims to equip the farm with necessary means to ensure its productive capacities weakened by the multiplication of production charges and aggravation of erosion problem.

Despite a trend of reproducing family farm system, the results of extensive farming of mountainous spaces of Toukabour, Chaouech and Hidous are virtually negative due to weak gross margin per farm (1611DT). This margin is important in Toukabour (2344 DT) whose income from livestock farming (cattle, sheep, goats, beekeeping, and aviculture) compensates the loss of earnings of land farming. Despite the fact that the gross margin may be different the farm is

unable to follow the dynamics of the family and meet the growing need for income, employment and various consumer goods. Because of the endogenous deficiencies, the maintaining of the family-farm system will depend on exogenous factors to the farm; that is to say, forms of family adaptation to natural and economic constraints whose multi-activity is a necessity of survival for rural families.

5.2. A strategy of expanded production through diversification of activities:

The low rate of family activity is the highlight of the socio-professional structure of families living in the mountainous sectors of Toukabour, Chaouech and Hidous. Reaching just over half of the population (53.3%) this low rate is due to the severity of rural unemployment typical of the female population that represents 71.4% of the unemployed and the structural importance of schoolchildren (20.4%).

Table 8. Socio-professional structure of families (2008).

Professions Families	Agriculture		Daily		Industry		Commerce		Public function		Educated		Unemployed		Total
	Nber	(%)	Nber	(%)	Nber	(%)	Nber	(%)	Nber	(%)	Nber	(%)	Nber	(%)	
Chief	14	29.7	13	27.6	6	12.7	7	14.8	2	4.2	-	-	5	11.0	47
Mother	16	39	-	-	2	5.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	23	56.0	41
Boys	6	5.4	29	26.3	10	9.0	7	6.3	7	6.3	36	32.7	15	14.0	110
Girls	5	7.0	2	2.8	10	14	6	8.4	2	2.8	19	26.7	27	38.3	71
Total	41	15.2	44	16.3	28	10.4	20	7.4	11	4.0	55	20.4	70	26.3	269

Source: Direct survey

Paradoxically, the agricultural sector employs only 15.2% of household assets whose majority are housewives. This is largely attributed to endogenous deficiencies of the mountainous area which is characterized by the predominance of traditional extensive agriculture, under-equipped technology, low

yields, property imbalances and the advanced state of environmental degradation. Therefore family multi-activity has become an essential and strategic mode of conduct and operation of the family farm system. Despite the inactive population, off-farm employment has to do currently with 71.5% of household assets in

the mountainous area of Toukabour, Chaouech and Hidous. Family pluriactivity is largely dominated by males. Among the 103 multi-active of the sample studied, 82 members of rural families are men. The latter, besides practicing a secondary agricultural activity, are engaged in basic activities in the main city of Mjez-el-Bab whose public effort ,granted by administrative promotion and strengthening of infrastructures and equipment ,allowed to offer employment opportunities in civil service, agri-food industry, clothing industry, building and plastic sectors ,in addition to daily work and services. The multi-

activity of women is marginal and limited to the practice of some unstable jobs offered by export industries managed by the 1972 law which is set up in the local urban core of Mjez-el-Bab as factories of shoes, socks, and jeans. Some housewives indulged in free low-paid activities such as traditional woollen blankets and “kachabia” (traditional male coat), which is a dress specificity of the inhabitants of the mountainous areas and sold on the local weekly market [9].

Given the numerical importance of multi-active family number, off-farm employment currently provides 44.5% of total revenues.

Table 9. Structure of family income (2008).

Income Imadats	Farm income		Non-farm income					Total
	Amount (DT)	(%)	Salaries DT	Withdrawals DT	Free activities DT	Total DT	(%)	
Toukabour	68,500	54.8	38,150	1,200	17,000	56,350	45.2	124,850
Chaouech	61,890	53.5	33,600	2,000	18,100	53,700	46.5	115,590
Hidous	47,100	60.0	23,300	1,000	7,100	31,400	40.0	78,500
Total	177,490	55.5	95,050	4,200	42,200	141,450	44.5	318,940

Source: Direct survey

The hypertrophy of the amount of salaries (95050DT) shows the unbalanced structure of local employment which is largely dominated by the public service and industrial employment. The free activities (trade, crafts, and other services) are poorly represented in the composition of non-farm income because of low payment and lack of financial accumulation and training in extensive farming investable outside the family farm.

They are limited to simple activities of the low tertiary sector (retail trade, unstructured rural crafts, rural transport ...). However it is important to note that a major portion of off-farm income is provided by the Imadats of Chaouech and Toukabour (77.8%) that are undergoing a structural crisis manifested by severe topography damaging, land fragmentation, overpopulation and the phenomenon of abandonment of agricultural activity. That of Hidous seems better and more appropriate to retain its inhabitants due to the expansion of foundation property, more or less smooth topography and less restrictive effects of erosion phenomenon.

Off-farm income is usually allowed to continue operating the family farm by strengthening the productive (purchasing equipment, land and livestock) and ensuring the survival of the family, some of whose members may choose a spatial redeployment outside family residence [7].

5.3. An alternative strategy for socio-spatial redeployment of the population:

The low record of extensive agriculture, the environment constraints and population pressures justify

alternative choices of the members of rural families of Toukabour, Chaouech and Hidous to search for jobs more or less stable in the local economic environment.

This option usually results in the abandonment of the family home and permanent settling in the urban core of Mjez-el-Bab or in homes outside the region, which explains the rate of regressive evolution of the population (-0.81%) and rural families (-0.13%) between the censuses of 1984 and 1994.

These rates continue to decline during the last census in 2004 and reached (- 7.6%). The main beneficiary of this movement of population is the local core of Mjez-el-Bab who won in the same period 3930 migrants who came from the peripheral Imadats of the plains and the North-west (Nefsa, Amdoun, Tébousouk).

According to the direct survey, the city currently provides 69.6% of employment including the civil service, industry and services. In addition to employment opportunities, the city houses several socio-collective facilities (hospitals, primary schools, secondary schools, culture centres ...) urging the definitive restoration of migrants out of family residence.

The second source of attraction is the city of Tunis, which provides 22.7% of salaried labour of migrants coming from the mountainous areas in question. The industry, services, and with a lesser degree, the public and construction sectors are the preferred activity sectors of migrants.

The proximity of the city and the concentration of activities are elements incentive to extra regional migration flows. A third secondary and marginal stream

absorbs no more than 7,5% of salaried employment in inland and coastal cities such as Beja and Jerba, and

abroad, primarily in Libya and France.

Table 10. Geographical distribution of salaried employment by sector (2008).

Centres	Sectors	Agriculture	Industry	Public service	Services and trade	Building	Total
Tunis		-	8	2	6	2	18
Mjez el Bab		10	20	8	13	4	55
Béja		-	-	1	1	-	2
Jerba		-	-	-	-	1	1
Abroad		-	-	-	-	3	3
Total		10	28	11	20	10	79

Source: Direct survey.

6. CONCLUSION

The case of the mountainous area of Toukabour, Chaouech and Hidous is a typical example of the serious structural crisis currently besetting the mountains especially the southern part of the Mediterranean.

These are characterized by very restrictive and repulsive natural and human conditions which do not allow for inducing a sustainable development and retain a great population on the spot.

The achievement of balance between population and resources is a real challenge far from being lifted by local actors, given the lack of adaptation strategies which shows in the predominance of dry extensive agriculture and the persistence of old modes of rural space development.

The low record of agriculture had led to the emergence of a new trend of spatial development towards a restructuring of family activities by the importance given to employment outside agriculture.

Thus family multi-activity has become a strategic as well as structuring component of the operating system of family farming and an alternative choice responsible for the maintenance and fate of farms especially the smaller ones, and sometimes, space redeployment of some members of rural families in the surrounding urban centres.

The absence of the state contribution for local development in a context of disengagement and reduced public spending, and whose involvement is limited to simple technical work of soil conservation only aggravates the crisis of mountainous space and continues to trigger the exodus from rural areas to inland cities which are unable to absorb the increasing flow of migrants.

Thus the regeneration of rural mountainous areas should be centred on the reorganization of the production by the reshaping of land ownership patterns and the fight against land fragmentation and erosion, the integration of cattle in production systems and incentives to local development through diversification

and intensification of urban employment especially in local cities.

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