

SOME FACTORS INVOLVED IN SMALLHOLDERS' DIFFERENTIAL  
STRATEGIES IN RESPONSE TO CAP<sup>i</sup>

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## SOME FACTORS INVOLVED IN SMALLHOLDERS' DIFFERENTIAL STRATEGIES IN RESPONSE TO CAP<sup>1</sup>

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### **The Concept of Strategy**

Smallholders' survival is a major issue to be resolved both theoretically and empirically. In our analysis, 'strategy' is a central concept that can be considered as a blanket term characterising a number of practices aiming to the continuation of the farm enterprise. The use of this term meets significant problems when it is used to predict human behaviour and the trajectory of farm enterprises. As a concept it is meant to signify the way farmers think about the survival of their enterprise. This 'way of thinking' is named 'strategy' when it includes an 'orientation' of the farm enterprise. This orientation may consist of a goal targeting the farm enterprise survival. This seemingly rational goal setting underlies the whole thinking about strategic actions (see Crow, 1989). However, we should not consider strategy as a purely rational action (Morgan, 1989), but rather as an orientation which involves practices, all of which cannot be regarded as objectively rational actions. However, the strategy itself as well as the practices may be rational within the context of the farmer, who has to deal not only with economic issues but with social and psychological issues as well and who has to often make economic compromises, in order to enjoy social and psychological well being.

On the one hand, farmers make economic calculations on the basis of the local and national market and the EU context. The market context includes agricultural produce prices, the value of land, and the conditions of the agricultural product market. On the other hand, local social conditions such as the strength of the gender stratification system and prevailing gender role stereotypes create different expectations for male and female behaviour with direct and indirect consequences for men's and women's roles in agriculture. The local social context, therefore, may tip the balance toward a non-rational decision from an economic point of view because the farmer cannot tolerate to deviate socially.

The concept of strategy meets the constraints posed both by the market and the CAP in relation to the underlying globalisation process as well as by the local social context. What is important to stress is the construction of new strategic responses of farm enterprises in view of the above constraints. The survival strategies refer to farm enterprises although individuals devise them. In fact, the farm operator/head has been traditionally male and his strategy can be better explored on the basis of his farmer identity. As will be shown later, farmer identity is central to the farm enterprise strategies for survival. However, farmer identity is not only related to farm ownership. It is also related to farm management, which appears to be part and parcel of farmers' strategic response for survival. As a result, the distinction between farm ownership

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and farm management may be considered as a new development linked to the changes of the strategies of the farm enterprise.

The strategic response of farm enterprises to globalisation and CAP consists of a significant set of practices that are articulated with a calculation of internal and local costs of the farm enterprise and the changing organisation of the farm management. The calculation of the means towards the ends (which implies rational action) is locally contextualised and constrained while the actions are taken by individuals who devise the survival strategies. In this respect, gender should be inserted as a factor for manoeuvre in the strategic calculation of the farm enterprise, because it is related to the separation between farm ownership and farm management.

An important issue is what criteria to use for the recognition of farmers among rural dwellers. An operational definition most often used is who is the beneficiary of CAP subsidies. The criteria for defining who is a beneficiary are set by CAP and by national agricultural institutions. These criteria, however, are questionable since they do not necessarily correspond to farmers' self-perceptions or to rural reality.

### **The CAP Experience in Greece**

While the concept of globalisation tends to be nebulous for most Greek smallholders, CAP is a concrete reality with many direct and indirect economic consequences for all smallholders. The focus of this paper is Greek smallholders' adaptive or non-adaptive responses to CAP in order for the farm enterprise to survive. It should be noted that the adaptation of Greek smallholders to CAP is linked to their ability to respond to globalisation which appears to be an all-encompassing reality. Even the European integration process is part and parcel of a 'globalisation project' which is envisaged by the European Commission (EC). In the introduction of Agenda 2000 text the EC recognises that European integration is linked to the globalisation process and that the latter refers to development of a 'tripartite' global system (USA, Japan and EU) (EC, 1997).

In that respect, globalisation does not only constitute an economic process (which is real and important) but also it includes a whole set of socio-spatial phenomena linked to the reconstitution of local economies and societies. Globalisation occurs at a time when regionalisation is the most important tendency in the global arena. In fact, regionalisation and localisation are both fed by and reinforce the globalisation process. As a result, smallholder strategies, constructed at the local/regional level, constitute a significant expression of local identity and rural heterogeneity. Moreover, the local reconstruction of smallholder strategies for survival provides the basis for response against globalisation (Papadopoulos, 1999).

In Greece, still today as much as 45 per cent of average farmer incomes originates from EU subsidies, showing the high dependence of Greek farmers upon the reforms of CAP directions. Of course, there is large regional differentiation of farmers' dependence upon CAP subsidies. For example, farmers' incomes in the region of Thessaly (where Karditsa is located) are more dependent, i.e. twice as much as the country average, while in the Region of North Aegean (where Lesbos is located) is significantly less dependent, i.e. half the country average (Demoussis, 1998).

The alignment of Greek national agricultural policy with the commands of CAP remains an issue of intense social and political debate. The issue of farmers' social and economic integration into the Greek society includes strong ideological and political dimensions that overshadow the true economic and social aspects of CAP consequences (Louloudis and Maraveyas, 1997).

Subsidies for different crops offered by CAP have largely dictated cultivation patterns in Greece. In fact, these subsidies have played a significant role in maintaining smallholders' involvement in agriculture. In addition, CAP regulations have contributed to a large extent to the growing discussion over the *professionalisation of Greek farmers* that led for the first time to the formulation of a Greek Farmers' Register in 1997. The creation of this Farmers' Register has been considered as a movement toward the "purification" of the agricultural sector from "non-real" farmers. The establishment, therefore, of the Farmers' Register has intensified existing undercurrents of conflict or created new antagonisms between full-time farmers, who consider themselves as "real" farmers entitled to special privileges, and pluriactive farmers. These antagonisms and the anger from perceived misclassifications in the Farmers' Register became translated into a number of legal complaints and appeals filed.

Smallholders became the farmers the most alerted from the "purification" criteria of the farmers' register since many of them are pluriactive and have had to prove the professional character of their farmer status. For smallholders, recognition of their "real" farmer status is extremely important, since it can affect not only the operation but also the very survival of the farm enterprise. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to maintain the "real" farmer status that entitles them to full subsidies and other advantages. Furthermore, because CAP subsidies have increased both the economic and social value of farming, most Greek farmers consider it a matter of social status to be called "real" farmers and the loss of this title quite demeaning.

In order, therefore, to be able to maintain the "real" farmer status for the farm household, the only available solution is to transfer the farmer status to the wife by legally transferring the land title (or a long-term lease) or the farm management of the farm enterprise to her. When this action is taken, according to operating regulations, wives, who in most cases do not hold a full-time non-farm occupation, become the "real" farmers, entitled to receive the appropriate agricultural subsidies and other benefits. They are declared as full-time farmers in the Farmers' Register and become officially recognised as the farmers by agricultural institutions and farmers' organisations.

The national and regional implementation of CAP varies considerably and there are unintended as well as intended consequences to which smallholders must respond. This is due to the following reasons: a) CAP measures have assumed homogeneity and have not been differentiated for intensive and extensive agricultural production; b) the changes and the reforms upon the CAP measures during the last decade or so; c) the distribution of information differs significantly from region to region; and d) there are differences in the implementation of the same CAP measures in each area due to differentials in the extent of exercised political clientelism and in the management skills and value system of officials.

#### **The Contrasting Case of Karditsa and Lesvos**

On the basis of quantitative and qualitative data collected during the fieldwork, we selected two contrasting regions that help illustrate different types of farm survival strategies. The region of Karditsa maintains a highly mechanised and agriculturally developed agricultural structure which, at the same time, leads to harsh social polarisation and social exclusion of the less competent in the agricultural market. The intensive character of agricultural production in Karditsa, its socio-economic characteristics (patriarchal structure, low social mobility, low education etc.) and its high dependence upon agricultural productivity as well as on subsidies, allow only for a low adaptation to the fluctuation of agricultural and European and global markets. One may say that in Karditsa, there is only limited room for manoeuvre and diversification towards less intensive and more extensive agricultural production solutions. On the other hand, in the region of Lesvos agricultural production is less mechanised and extensive and is favoured by physical conditions (land, geography, climate etc.) and the limited availability of productive assets in the area. Moreover, the local agricultural and social structure favours a more cohesive society. There is more equitable distribution of wealth, limited social polarisation and higher diversification in employment and economic activities. In that respect, Lesvos appears to be more adjustable to economic crises and agricultural market fluctuations, linked to higher responsiveness to external market stimuli and globalisation. Another aspect of the diversity between the two prefectures is their differences in terms of labour organisation and sectors of economic activity. Karditsa seems to be linked to a rigid agricultural employment structure, connected to a conflictual socio-political negotiation process, as evidence by their high participation and mobilisation in the agricultural movement during the last five years. On the other hand, Lesvos appears to be characterised by a more flexible agricultural and social structure with high pluriactivity and less rigid ownership and inheritance patterns. In this respect, Karditsa is vulnerable while Lesvos is more resistant to the globalisation process. Moreover, the first reflects the shortcomings of productivist-like economic organisation which undergoes a crisis, while the second represents patterns of petty-bourgeois and small-proprietor status, which adapts to circumstances and combines traits of old and new employment organisation patterns.

Moreover, the farmers' professional identity in Karditsa seems to be constructed as part and parcel of an agricultural structure hierarchy, where the large farmers are higher up and the small farmers belong to the poorer and less powerful strata. In that respect, Karditsa's smallholders seek desperately for a farmers' identity since this is a valuable identity in the area, while non-farm activity, when it is not white collar, is considered of lower status than being a farmer. This occurs, also, because farmers' income has increased during the last decade, especially in those areas which have intensified their agricultural production and where large farms predominate. Thus, in plains, where intensive crop cultivation predominates, farmers have a high status that is appreciated by smallholders. On the other hand, the farmers' identity in Lesvos does not have a pronounced professional connotation, since the great majority of farmers are either part-timers or exercise traditional/extensive farming. Thus, in Lesvos although the farmer identity is appreciated, men smallholders do not have a high psychological investment in this identity.

In this way, smallholders are identified with diverse professional statuses in the two prefectures reflecting the differential impact of the type of agricultural production and of the farming system upon them. The responses of smallholders in each of the two prefectures cannot be, necessarily, considered as conscious actions in response to

globalisation. However, smallholders actively respond to external stimuli (CAP regulations, national economic policies, investment projects etc.) according to different farming systems (i.e. intensive and extensive). Moreover, in view of the reformed CAP, which favours the extensive farming systems, smallholders in Lesvos seem to be more privileged, while smallholders in Karditsa, who are mono-crop cultivators and emulate larger farmers in their area, do not appear to have a foreseeable future. While the specialisation in Karditsa may be considered a ‘rational’ response to agricultural policies, this adaptation, as we shall see below, occurs at the expense of farm survival, since it is based on debts. Exactly the reverse is the attitude of smallholders in Lesvos. Although their lack of specialisation may be seen as a disadvantage, with respect to increased agricultural production, it provides some security at times of low agricultural prices, decreased agricultural support and economic restructuring. They more or less pursue an anticipated future survival by purchasing agricultural land and by making investments in their farm enterprise. Thus, two different ‘rationales’ seem to be put forward: the ‘persistence by intensification’ in Karditsa and the ‘endurance by restructuring’ in Lesvos. Both rationales cannot be considered as adaptive, since the first one has reached its limits towards intensification, while the second, due to CAP regulations, provides the opportunity to expand activities instead of restraining them.

## **Methodology**

The authors of the paper and additional researchers spent four months (one month in each region) of field work, during which two hundred and ninety-six interviews were conducted, 206 with women and 90 with men farmers. In addition, secondary data about agricultural services and resources were also collected from regional and local administrations. The data were collected from March to October, 1998 as a part of a research on: “The Causes and Mechanisms of the Social Exclusion of Women Smallholders” conducted in four Greek prefectures: Karditsa, Evia, Chania (a prefecture of Crete) and Lesvos. In Karditsa, 50 women and 21 men were interviewed and in Lesvos, 55 women and 24 men. All married women below 50 years old who were listed in the Farmers’ Register as smallholders with less than 4.5 ha, all wives of men listed as farm owners of holdings less than 4.5 ha. and as having a non-farm occupation and all married men below 55 years old listed as smallholders with less than 4.5 ha. were contacted for interviews. The same research has been conducted in another four European countries: Sweden, Finland, France, and the Netherlands.

## **Research Results**

In Karditsa smallholders try to emulate the behavior of larger farmers by buying agricultural machinery. In our sample, 62 per cent of the smallholders (with less than 4.5 ha.) have tractors and/or other agricultural machinery. In order to buy agricultural equipment, two-thirds of them have taken large agricultural loans and 44 per cent of them have not been able to repay them. (It must be noted that the frequency of mechanization in Karditsa compares with only 16 per cent in Evia, 26 percent in Chania and only one farmer in Lesvos). Also it is important that farmers in Karditsa have to rely on agricultural loans for mechanization because the EU subsidized agricultural restructuring/modernization programmes have not benefited them. No one has been able to participate in such a programme.

In Lesvos, the cultivation of olive trees does not require mechanization but cultivation can be modernized by means of special nets that facilitate the collection of olives. Despite the lack of unnecessary mechanization, our sample shows that during the last five years, one in four smallholders in Lesvos have made investments and have modernized their production without loans, while only one in ten smallholders have done the same in Karditsa. This is partly due to the fact that one in ten smallholders in Lesvos participate in an EU subsidized agricultural restructuring/modernization programme. Their participation in EU programmes is made somewhat easier by the lower percentage of required agricultural income per total income (25% instead of 50% for the whole nation) for participation in EU agricultural programmes. This special allowance is made because of the borderland status of Lesvos. In addition, however, this is due to the more dynamic agricultural outlook of farmers in this region, evidenced by the purchasing of land and their willingness to modernize.

The data show that the farmer identity seems to be much more important to smallholder men in Karditsa than in Lesvos since men's pluri-activity rate is much lower in Karditsa than in Lesvos. Thus in Karditsa, 47 men (70%) and in Lesvos 66 men (86%) are pluri-active. Furthermore, in Karditsa only 19 men (40%) of those who are pluri-active work nearly full-time and in Lesvos 31 men (52%) do the same, while the others are only occasionally or seasonally employed. It must also be noted that men's pluri-activity is lower among farmers with more than 45 stremmata (4.5 ha.).

The centrality of the farmer identity for men's self-concept is also evidenced by the fact that despite the high rate of pluri-active smallholder men in both Karditsa and Lesvos, the rate of transfer of the farmer status to the wife is significantly higher in Lesvos than in Karditsa. In Karditsa, 7 (28%) pluri-active men with land title transferred the farmer status to their wife and 32 (58%) of pluri-active men in Lesvos. This signifies that in 72% of farm households in Karditsa and in 42% of farm households in Lesvos, in which the husband is pluri-active, the farmer status has not been transferred to the wife. In Karditsa, men's psychological investment in the formal farmer status seems to be so high that they are willing to be registered only as farm owners with lesser rights and privileges in the Farmers' Register but to keep the appearance of a "real" farmer. In Lesvos, on the other hand, fewer men seem to be troubled by the transfer of the farmer status to their wife.

However, even the legal transfer of the farmer status to the wife does not necessarily signify that the man ceases acting as the principal farmer as well as being recognized as the farmer by the local community. It all depends on how willing is the husband and the local community to follow the legal steps with substantive steps that allow the woman to act as a farmer and to become recognized as a farmer. If this willingness is missing, the woman may become a member of the agricultural cooperative but it is the husband who attends the meetings and is the real cooperative member; she is not selected for agricultural training; and she is not able to actively participate in agricultural decision-making. Thus, husbands who want to hold on to the farmer identity can do so by relegating their wife to a nominal farmer status. As it could be expected, the data show that even when the farmer status is legally transferred to the wife, the probability that this transfer will allow her to become a full-time farmer is smaller in Karditsa than in Lesvos. Thus, in Karditsa, only 57% of the women to whom the farmer status is transferred are recognized as farmers, are cooperative members and actively participate in agricultural labour and decision-making. The remaining 43% are described (by the women themselves) as excluded, primarily as

“excluded-invisible”, in that they make important agricultural labour contributions but are not recognized as farmers (Table 1). In Lesvos, on the other hand, 85% of the wives, to whom the farmer status is transferred, become recognized as farmers by their husband and the community, become members of the agricultural cooperative (most often instead of the husband) and actively participate in agricultural labour and agricultural decision-making. The remaining 15% are described as nominally integrated, in that they do not actively participate in agricultural decision-making and either are not members of the cooperative or it is their husband who usually attends cooperative meetings. In Karditsa, however, women enjoy a traditional power base through land ownership by means of their dowry. Thus, almost half (45%) of women who are integrated in agriculture in Karditsa owe this to land ownership while in Lesvos it is a less important criterion in integration.

If we accept that in the case of pluri-active smallholders, the most adaptive survival strategy is the transfer of the farmer status to the wife, it is important to examine the reasons for which pluri-active smallholders in Karditsa are less able to adopt such strategies than those in Lesvos as well as the non-adaptability cost to the men and women involved.

There is a number of factors responsible for the fact that Karditsa smallholders are less able to adapt to the reformed CAP than Lesvos smallholders, prominent ones being: (a) the type of cultivation (mainly intensive cotton mono-cultivation) and their reliance on agricultural loans; (b) the need to rely on expensive agricultural machinery for the performance of necessary agricultural tasks, the use of which is stereotyped as “male”<sup>2</sup>; (c) their traditional, patriarchal mentality that does not allow them flexibility, notions of gender equality and any social change; (d) their inability to change their farming system so as to adapt to changed socio-economic, agronomic, and market conditions. Lesvos smallholders, on the other hand, have multi-crop cultivation; they are modernizing their farming system without becoming indebted; although they have traditional, patriarchal values, they are flexible enough to be able to utilize gender in the calculation of farm enterprise survival strategies and to separate farm ownership from farm management; and are open to changes in their farming system.

The non adaptability cost to the women is frustration and often bitterness, especially when their husband has transferred the farmer status to them but they are not given a chance to act like farmers and to be recognized as farmers. Some of these women in Karditsa feel used by their husbands, especially since in some cases they were not even informed that they were declared as farmers in the Farmers’ Register. They were quite surprised when they found this out from us during the interview and were annoyed that not only they had not been asked, if they agreed with this action, but they were not even informed about it. It is quite possible that the husbands did not let their wives know that they had transferred the farmer status to them, in order for their wives not to have new expectations concerning their role as farmers and any claims on agricultural income.

The non adaptability cost to smallholder men is both physical in terms of becoming overburdened with work and psychological. In Karditsa, for the majority of pluri-

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<sup>2</sup> All farmers with more than 4.5 ha. have expensive agricultural machinery and smallholders become heavily indebted in order to obtain them. Such machinery constitutes a status symbol of male, successful farmers and the proud owners keep parading several times a day in the middle of the village with their tractors and cotton picking machines.

active men who do not transfer the farmer status to their wife as well for those who transfer it but they do not allow their wife to act as a farmer, it seems that the threat of transferring the farmer status (legally and much worse substantially) is felt to be greater than the threat from the lesser farmer status of “farm owner”. Their entire self seems to be so much anchored on the farmer identity that changes that decrease its significance cannot be tolerated. Their lack of tolerance of such negative changes is aggravated by the vulnerability of their smallholder status in an agricultural region in which there is a considerable number of wealthy and powerful farmers. Within this context, the lesser status of “farmer owner” appears to be psychologically and socially a less costly option.

Furthermore, smallholder men in Karditsa who transfer the farmer status to their wife, tend to experience considerable stress, because of cognitive dissonance, since they can never accept that their wife is the farmer instead of themselves and continue to believe that women cannot be competent farmers. In their view, the substantive transfer of the farmer status to their wife would be multiply demeaning, since it would also signify that their occupation as a farmer up to that time was not an important one, since “a woman could also perform it.” One way, therefore, to diminish their cognitive dissonance is to at least substantially maintain the farmer status by making it impossible for their wife to have a voice in agricultural decision making and to play in reality the farmer role. This allows them to maintain the social image of the farmer vis-à-vis friends and fellow villagers, the official transfer of the farmer status to the wife constituting a way of “fooling” the state and the European Community. The non-adaptability cost to both categories of pluri-active men, is additional labour and responsibility they have to shoulder, especially when they are engaged in two more or less full-time occupations.

In order for smallholders’ strategies to be judged as adaptive they must also be sustainable, indications of such sustainability being the extent of farming continuity and farming succession. In terms of these indicators, in our sample one in five smallholders in Karditsa report that they will abandon agriculture, as soon as they can, while no smallholder in Lesvos reports that he will abandon agriculture. In Lesvos, however, one in four smallholders reports that he will continue farming as long as they are subsidies but there is no clear indication that they will abandon farming when the subsidies will stop.

With regard to farming succession, the collected data show that significantly more smallholders in Karditsa than in Lesvos report that their children will not succeed them in agriculture ( $\chi^2=4.5615$ ,  $p<.05$ ). It must be noted, however, that in Lesvos one-third of those who believe that their children will succeed them in agriculture, see their children’ involvement with farming as a secondary, supplementary occupation, while the corresponding percentage for Karditsa smallholders is 5 per cent (Table 2). Smallholders in Lesvos seem to have more pragmatic outlook for agriculture rather than the “all or nothing” attitude of Karditsa smallholders, partly explained by the differential labour requirements of their respective farming systems. Also it is noteworthy that three times more often Lesvos smallholders report that they will preferentially give (or have already given) the land to their daughters (some of them having already joined the EU programme for young farmers) rather than equally to sons and daughters (Table 3). This indicates that in Lesvos farming has become de-differentiated in terms of gender, thus maximizing flexibility and adaptability to change, be it CAP or globalisation. In Karditsa, on the other hand, only 10% of

smallholders plan to give the land to their daughter. In view of the very low fertility in rural areas, the exclusion of daughters can often signify the lack of a successor.

## Conclusion

The data presented in this paper suggest that an important impact of CAP and globalisation on small farm enterprises is the fact that their survival is no longer necessarily or solely represented by the husband. Also it is no longer possible to conceptualize farm survival merely as a family strategy. It is necessary to individualize strategies into husbands' and wives' strategies (or and children's strategies), while always keeping family cohesion and farm enterprise continuity as common denominators. In Greece, as in other European countries, both the husband and the wife need to flexibly combine their farm and non-farm labor and income contributions in order to ensure the survival of the farm enterprise. It is necessary, therefore, for farming systems research to take into consideration the occupational activities of husbands and wives in the farm and off the farm as well as their labor and income contributions. In different European countries, depending on the conditions of the rural labor market for men and women and the profitability of non-agricultural uses of the farm, men and women are more or less active participants in agriculture and on-farm and off-farm gainful employment. The type of farming system and the ability of small farm enterprises to survive depend on both husbands' and wives' flexible and adaptive occupational and labor strategies to changing local and global socio-economic and agronomic conditions.

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**Table 1. Whether or not the farmer status has been transferred by a pluriactive husband to his wife by typology of women's exclusion/integration in agriculture in Karditsa and Lesvos.**

Transfer or not of farmer status	Integrated		Nominally integrated		Excluded	
	Karditsa	Lesvos	Karditsa	Lesvos	Karditsa	Lesvos
Farmer status transferred to wife	4 (57%)	28 (85%)	-	5 (15%)	3 (43%)	
Farmer status not	3	6	1	1	17	

transferred to wife	(14%)	(55%)	(5%)	(9%)	(81%)	(36%)
The wife is the land owner (from dowry)	9 (64%)	7 (88%)	-	1 (13%)	5 (36%)	
The farm enterprises rent the land they cultivate	4 (57%)	1 (50%)	-	-	3 (43%)	(20%)
Total	20 (41%)	42 (78%)	1 (2%)	7 (13%)	28 (57%)	(9%)

**Table 2. Smallholders' beliefs concerning farm succession in Karditsa and Lesvos**

Beliefs about farm succession	Karditsa	Lesvos
There will be farm succession	13 (22%)	18 (32%)
There will be no farm succession	42 (72%)	30 (53%)
Farming only as a supplementary occupation	3 (5%)	9 (16%)
Total	58 (100%)	57 (100%)
The children are very young	6	7

**Table 3. Smallholders' plans concerning land inheritance by sons and daughters in Karditsa and Lesvos**

Plans about land inheritance	Karditsa	Lesvos
Land to be inherited by both sons and daughters	29 (55%)	18 (31%)
Land to be inherited only by sons	18 (34%)	20 (35%)
Land to be inherited only by daughters	6 (11%)	20 (35%)
Total	53 (100%)	58 (100%)