

Introduction to section 2 – Agriculture, land use and sustainable development

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This section focuses on the keywords agriculture, land use and sustainable development.

Agriculture

Agriculture should be considered according to its widest meaning, as a complex productive activity with a multi-functional purpose. The representation of the countryside only as the site of a productive sector appears limited; nowadays the countryside is assuming, or re-assuming, an increasingly multi-functional role, especially in the more developed economies. This development reconfirms the countryside's crucial role in the general socio-economic system.

New functions have emerged in addition to the traditional one of a direct producer of foodstuff. These are: a) a supplier of many raw materials for an increasingly complex agro-food industry, b) an important market outlet for products of the manufacturers of some means of production, c) an occupational buffer to the employment-unemployment cycle of industrial origin (e.g., multi-activity families), d) an autonomous, diffuse, directly productive activity aimed at subsistence, e) an essential contribution to the protection and conservation of the existing land use, f) an opportunity for old people to continue to feel active and useful for the family, g) a therapeutic function for social categories undergoing urban *stress* (e.g., urban population), or finding themselves vulnerable or at risk (disabled, drug-addicted).

In addition, people in many European regions consider agriculture to be a fundamental element of the territorial specificity and identity, particularly in the regions that have a high environmental, cultural (e.g., historical remains and literary associations), and landscape (e.g., location, climate, etc.) value and that are suitable for high quality niche products. In these areas, the consumer is offered a full basket of agricultural products, local crafts, sightseeing and cultural services. These situations are deeply rooted in the public's imagination and lead to the identification with the products not only within their natural, but also within their social and cultural contexts. Their development is linked to the capacity of *creating a system* among agricultural and non-agricultural enterprises, institutions and the local population, united by a specific local or *contextual knowledge*, which is not only technical-sectorial, but also cultural and related to territorial resources. The demand for these products comes from outside (mainly from city dwellers) and often takes the form of agri-tourism.

In this kind of "*rural local system*", the social and economic environment is characterised by a set of productive activities, strongly linked to the valorisation, conservation and reproduction of renewable natural and historical resources, which offer a basket of goods and services able to satisfy a very wide cluster of needs. In this case, the demand by external consumers results mainly in a complex competition among various territories each one of which offers a peculiar basket of goods and services. Every rural local system shows an association between agricultural producers and the whole community, which allows for sharing the costs and benefits

of production. In this case we can no longer speak of agriculture only, but must include environment and rural society, whose production of typical food products, specific to that land use, occurs through synergy among craft, agri-tourism, nature tourism, catering, traditional and cultural events, and land use management, both in the open and in inhabited centres.

The first group of papers deals with the integration between agricultural and non-farming activities at the territorial (Theodoropoulou and Kyriakopoulou) and farm level (Contini *et al.*) as well as the conservation of traditional practices and culture (Dneboská *et al.*). The multifunctionality of agriculture is also examined. Methodology and case studies are presented.

Land use

The demand for these “*complex goods*” creates a network of relationships between urban and rural areas. In fact, it is networking with urban people, who had become alienated from the countryside that represents the second of the novelties of our times.

Until a few years ago, the disadvantages and hardships of living in the country were such that the basic needs of the rural population could not be satisfied. With the improvement of the means of communication, both within the rural areas and between these and the nearby urban areas, with the spread of manufacturing activities in the countryside or in small communities, and with the consequent increase in the average income of rural families, the hardships of country life gradually decreased. Furthermore, if we consider the growing burden, not only in strictly economic terms, of the life in the city (lack of green space, traffic congestion, air pollution, *etc.*), we can better understand the change of attitude towards living in the countryside. This change is highlighted by the well-known and wide-spread phenomenon of urban families who move to the countryside.

The growth of a new rural pride, developed among old and new inhabitants of the countryside, is not unrelated to this phenomenon and radically alters the earlier sense of shame for rural origins. Some factors contributing to marginalisation yesterday paradoxically have become competitive advantages today.

Living in the countryside, particularly in small centres, whether permanently, periodically or occasionally, corresponds, in fact, to a fuller satisfaction of a cluster of needs linked to the search for greater welfare. This “contamination” between urban and rural people, that once represented a lever for migration to the town, has become a complementary relationship, in which urban dwellers rediscover their subdued or corrupted, but never lost cultural roots, and rural dwellers break their isolation and valorise their style of living. The tourist, or at least the person who does not work in the fields, is all the same physically and psychologically immersed in the local production atmosphere, somehow sharing, even if only observing, the “cultural climate”. Most agricultural practices, in fact, take place in the open air in everybody’s full view (and smell), for better or worse, so the perception of the agricultural typical product by the consumer or tourist includes, at least in part, that specific “cultural climate” that determines the properties of the product.

On the other hand, the lifestyle of the rural population is not immune from contamination by the urban one: it is sufficient to think of the intense social and institutional relations that even rural dwellers entertain with the near urban centres, or to think at the recent development of telejobs that can be carried out at home, creating a dense network among different places and social groups, beyond physical and cultural boundaries.

In conclusion, the relationship between the city and the countryside is no longer conceived as a relationship marked by mutual estrangement, cultural contraposition, or worse, as a relationship marked by economic and cultural dominance of the former upon the latter, but as a dialectic relationship in which both environments interact.

An analysis of the relationship between rural and urban environment (Stobbelaar *et al.*) and the role of the institution (Röling and Jiggins) and "social capital" (Cristóvão, Baptista and Miranda; Schermer) in the development of the territory are presented in the second group of papers. The promotion and enhancement of typical, quality food products and their supply chain in the form of complex goods which are able to satisfy a cluster of needs is also identified as a way to preserve small-scale farms and their livelihood within the territory (Cristóvão *et al.*).

Sustainable development

The process of sustainable development can ensure our and future generations continuity of the use of resources to satisfy their complex needs. It is centred on:

- an economic aspect in terms of income for a rural population;
- a social aspect dealing with the style of living and welfare;
- an ecological aspect concerning the preservation of the dynamics of natural resources and ecological services.

The fact that a local system can survive and develop in a capitalistic world only if it appropriately preserves its place in the general cultural and economic panorama means that no place can be considered separately from what happens to the rest of the world.

For their survival and development, local systems need to keep the pace of the incessant evolution of needs and technological innovations that occur in the global market, at the same time safeguarding their natural and cultural identity. The future of local systems depends to a large extent on their capacity to use their productive know-how to respond to the challenges of global cultural, economic and ecologic dynamics.

What is to be preserved is not only a cluster of goods, but a cluster of goods based in a whole life style, i.e. an interrelated complex of resources, goods, activities, values and institutions. This is strongly related to an overall, say national, culture, and normally, but not necessarily, is dependent on distance and communication facilities. The general significance of the proliferation of this kind of local systems is an intensification of the network of relationships between cities and countryside, in other words, a restoration, through new forms, of an intimate relationship between city and country, destroyed by the earlier capitalistic invasion of the land use.

Several papers deal with these themes and focus especially on water management (Buijze and Van Lamoen), biodiversity (Wiersema and Van Alebeek), non-timber forest certification (Wilsey), environmental benefits as silvoarable agroforestry (Palma *et al.*), sustainable milk producing techniques (Chataway *et al.*), biomass production, transformation and allocation (Rapidel *et al.*) and availability of manure, food security and poverty in Mali (Keita *et al.*).

Whether and how different farming systems can mobilise capacity to adapt to this situation and become 'local rural systems' in the sense discussed above, and whether and how they can succeed in combining the three key words in the title of this workshop, is investigated and discussed in the papers of this section.