

***Forum Aree interne: nuove strategie per la programmazione
2014-2020 della politica di coesione territoriale***

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**DYNAMICS OF AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS IN INTERNAL AREAS
(EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES)**

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First it will be argued that social capital is an important ingredient of territorial capital. Social capital is especially relevant for the quality of life. As a recent study of Ventura, Milone and van der Ploeg shows, this does not only apply in the cities, but also in the rural areas and especially in the 'internal areas' of the country.

On its turn the magnitude of social capital (in the rural areas) can be explained with the presence and development of multifunctional agriculture. This type of agriculture directly produces (and indirectly helps to create) meeting places, services, new employment opportunities, beautiful and accessible landscape and, more generally: attractiveness. Thus it sustains high levels of social capital which in turn translate into a high level of quality of life, being the *sense of belonging* one of its core elements.

At the level of municipalities different types can be distinguished: 'classical' agricultural areas (with a specialized agriculture), suburban areas (where agriculture is in decline) and 'new agricultural areas', where new types of multifunctionality are developing. The analysis shows that those people having the possibility to choose where to live (who are not constrained by occupation or tradition) largely prefer to settle in these newly emerging 'new agricultural areas' (many of which are, indeed, located in the 'internal areas'). The interesting aspect of all this is that in this way new local markets emerge. These are promising outlets for the multifunctional farmers and they simultaneously increase the attractiveness of the area.

Secondly, this contribution brings forward a more general question: What is making some areas in Europe prosperous, whilst others are stagnating? This question was, as a matter of fact, the starting point of a European wide research program (ETUDE) that was funded by the European Commission and which probed into the differentiated development processes and patterns in rural regions in Europe. The main finding was that the *rural web* is decisive here (see also figure 1). A rural web is a complex whole of many different and interacting

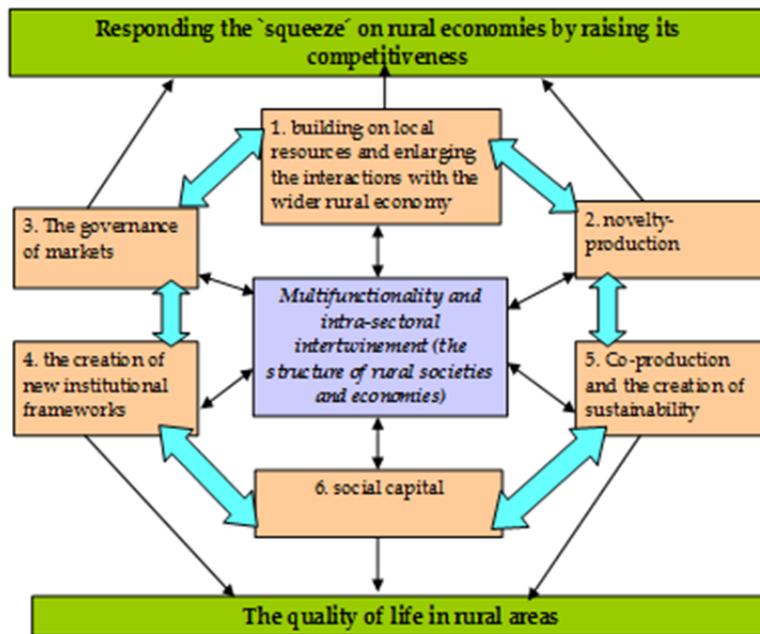
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networks, that together allow for many interlinkages between people, activities, sectors, resources, enterprises, etc. The more such a rural web is present, the more comprehensive and self-propelling the process of rural development will be. At the same time it applies that successful trajectories and episodes of rural development result in a strengthening of the rural web.

The rural web is multi-dimensional and it will be no surprise that social capital is one of these dimensions. The more the rural web articulates along all six dimensions (see again figure 1), the more successful rural development will be.

This raises of course the question how a rural web can be strengthened (this echoes former discussions on how social capital could be strengthened – these followed the publication of the well-known work of Robert Putnam). Some key elements will be unravelled by shortly presenting some features of *territorial cooperatives* that have been constructed, over the last 25 years, in the Netherlands. These embrace increasingly all 6 dimensions and thus became carriers and drivers of local development. Their role has now been recognized and the new Rural Development Regulation of the European Union will offer possibilities to start to construct similar (albeit adapted) forms elsewhere as well.

Figure 1 - The Rural Web



In the third place, a few remarks will be made on the creation of employment for young people (and especially from different ethnic groups). On the whole it applies that local and regional economies strengthened through a well-functioning web, will create more employment. Or even more important: 'seduce' people, especially young people, to create and invest into self-employment. Studies in the North West

of Europe that immigrant population scores very high on this type of entrepreneurship. There is one exception: that is agriculture. It is a 'closed' sector.

New institutional frameworks that create access to indispensable assets (as land) are decisive here (as *Terre des Liens* in France, *rural estates* in the Netherlands). The revalorization of the role of *peasants/paysans/contadini* within society as a whole is equally important.