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Strengthening the sustainability of rural areas: the role of rural tourism and agritourism

The European territory is characterized by a strong presence of rural areas. While the primary sector still plays a major role in some regions, the importance of agriculture in the economic system of the EU-28 is declining. The inability in generating sufficient revenue has led the farmers, in many cases, at diversifying from the agricultural base, by engaging in a pluriactivity. In this context, Rural Tourism is one of the key opportunities in terms of potential growth for rural areas, in the wider context of the Sustainable Management and Promotion of Territory activities. This paper aims at studying the Rural Tourism, with the purpose to overcome the difficulties in defining analytically the Rural Tourism and Agritourism, by setting up a comprehensive body of knowledge and a theoretical framework for future analysis and studies.

1. Introduction

In 2010, the European Commission adopted a new method to classify its territory, thus highlighting how the European Territory is characterized by a strong presence of rural areas. Approximately 52% of the European territory is classified as predominantly rural, 38% intermediate and only 10% predominantly urban (European Commission, 2013). Nevertheless, for over a century, the traditional assumption that urban areas provide a different way of life and usually a higher standard of living than rural areas, has supported the powerful trends of industrialisation and urbanisation that have steadily altered the economic, social and political condition of rural areas. While the primary sector still plays a major role in some regions, the importance of agriculture in the economic system of the EU-28 is declining (European Commission, 2011).

In this context, Rural Tourism is one of the key opportunities in terms of potential growth for rural areas. In fact, the overall importance, in terms of standard output, of the agricultural holdings that undertake a Tourism services, in the EU-28 Countries, amounts to 12.5%, after contractual work (39.1%) and after both the processing of farm's products and the production of renewable energy which amount to 18.7% (Eurostat, 2013). With nearly three quar-

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ters of bed places located in the rural areas, in the EU-27, this sector already plays a major role in the rural economy (European Commission, 2011), and it plays a fundamental role in the wider context of the EU Rural Development Policy (RDP) 2014-2020, which aims at coping with the new challenges faced by rural areas, by improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, the environment and the countryside and the quality of life in rural areas, and by fostering the diversification of economic activities.

The present work aims at providing a contribute to the theoretical debate, in order to overcome the difficulties in defining analytically the Rural Tourism and Agritourism, and to build a comprehensive body of knowledge and a theoretical framework for future analysis and studies.

The authors have accomplished two phases. The first phase has required a conceptualization of what is now the territory and a theoretical and bibliographical documentation concerning the different types of tourism considered. An analysis of the differences between the two types of tourism examined, in terms of quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the phenomena, has been carried out, in order to understand how these forms can contribute to the rural environment, by strengthening multifunctionality and sustainability of the rural areas. Research, in this phase, was mainly focused on the study of the different activities (primary activity, social ,economic and rural functions) of Rural Tourism and Agritourism. The aim was to define the issues related to a correct definition of multifunctionality and pluriactivity, so as to constitute an explanatory theoretical background for future analysis. The second phase has been drawn up and completed with the analysis of the relationship between Rural Tourism and Agritourism, and with the objective that EU policy aims at achieving for the development of rural areas in the EU countries. The focus was on the analysis of how the different forms of Tourism in the farms can cope with the rural development challenges.

2. Diversification in the rural economies

Eurostat data on the Entrepreneurial Income of Agriculture, for the 2005-2013 period, confirm that revenues for the agricultural system have fluctuated considerably. In 2013, the levels of the EU-15 income were slightly below the levels registered in 2005[1]. As from the reference year 2005, the EU 28 index has increased for two years in a row, before decreasing again in 2008-2010 (at

[1] Net entrepreneurial income of agriculture (Indicator C): This income aggregate is presented as an absolute value or in the form of an index in real terms. It consider activities like Growing of crops (perennial and non-perennial); Plant propagation; Animal production;

the height of the financial and economic crisis) strongly below the levels of 2005. Thereafter, the index of the Entrepreneurial Income of Agriculture has rebounded, with a relatively rapid growth in 2011 and 2012 (Eurostat, 2013).

The inability in generating sufficient revenue has led the farmers, in many cases, at diversifying from the agricultural base, by engaging in a pluriactivity (Fleischer & Pizam, 1997). In this context, diversification, from and within the primary activities, has become a necessity, and the agricultural secondary activities and services, related to the rural environment, have represented the major driver of growth within the EU during the latest decade.

Whilst the incidence of agriculture in rural economies has declined, the importance of diversification in rural economies has grown. This need has met the trend of "urbanisation counter" that has gradually asserted in the "well developed" parts of the world. Together with a parallel process of "de-agriculturalisation" of rural households, and an increasing development of non-agricultural activities in rural areas, these processes have contributed largely to the formation of a "new rurality" characterising more and more the rural regions of Europe (Kasimis, 2010). In the EU-28, as a whole, about 5.2% of farms had at least one other source of income, referred to as other gainful activities (Eurostat, 2013). If considered in terms of their economic incidence, the agricultural holdings that undertake secondary activities were more important, since they have generated 18.9% of the agricultural standard output[2] in the EU-28, in 2010.

This process of adaptation to the new scenarios, has required a re-positioning of the farm, thanks to which, it has the opportunity to go beyond its traditional functions, by following three defined paths: deepening, broadening and re-grounding (Van der Ploeg et al. 2002). These new strategies allow, therefore, the diversification of the business areas of agriculture, pointing to new ways of creating value, by leveraging an integrated use of local specificity, with positive impacts in terms of rural development (Nazzaro, 2008).

The evolution of the economic dynamics, related to the assertion of new values and cultural trends and behaviour, have led to new needs, new expectations and lifestyles resulting in the creation of new consumer behaviours (Marotta & Nazzaro, 2011). The latter has showed, more and more, a strong sensitivity to environmental issues and quality of life. These intangible needs, have characterized a new "demand of rurality" (Iacoponi, 1996) at the base of the recovery of the activities and the socio-productive functions of the rural environment.

Mixed farming; Support activities to agriculture and post-harvest crop activities; Hunting, trapping and related service activities (Eurostat).

[2] This statistic is based on the average monetary value of the agricultural output at farm-gate price, in euro per hectare or per head of livestock.

3. Territory: Why, What, Who?

3.1 Why the territory

The situation in the world, and specifically in many European Countries, shows a trend of continuous degradation and a use of land for purposes other than agriculture (Coldiretti, 2014). This result is ascribable to the inability of both local and national governments to cope with the hydrogeological instability, which occurs more and more frequently even in view of the looming effects of a global change in the climate. According to the estimates, the global damage calculated for 2011 amounted to over 311 billion dollar (IFRC, 2011).

The territory is a physical substrate (soil, arable land, water, forest, biodiversity, renewable energy, non-renewable resources, landscape, buildings and infrastructures, etc.), where economic, social, historical and cultural aspects are stratified (Romstad, 2010). Being innovative activities, the actions of territorial programming and planning must be carried out and strongly supported by an appropriate and widespread use of advanced instrumentation of Information and Communication Technology. The GIS, GPS, DSS and broadband Internet should be the key elements of a "user-friendly" storage of knowledge in the modern management of the process for the sustainable development strategy. Taking the territory into consideration is an indispensable way to guarantee the sustainable future of any activity in the rural areas, and particularly in the rural tourism and agritourism.

3.2 What is the territory

The territory is an open book, written with ink that we cannot normally read. But it is our duty to make it readable to everyone with an innovative, smart and skilled approach. This because the territory has different roles and functions, as in the following open list:

- showing and representing
- telling stories
- speaking
- singing
- smelling
- tasting
- stimulating feelings
- catalysing creativity
- stimulating inventiveness
- attracting

- inspiring
- intriguing.

The territory, in its widest and most holistic form, together with man with his capacity to analyse, choose and operate together with humanity, which distinguishes him from all other living creatures, should be brought back to the centre of strategies used by any development model by using a concrete, operational parameter in order to create the basic conditions for an indefeasible "new renaissance".

3.3 Who in the territory

This will focus on the strategies of protection, conservation and enhancement of different areas around the world, the relationship between urban and rural areas, the challenge of renewable energy, green economy and the eradication of poverty. Therefore, these objectives and issues need to be put into practice both in a local, national and international context by professionals who, from the perspective of "global thinking and local acting", have noticeable, modern know-how and the "ability to act" that matches the ongoing revolution, known as the third industrial revolution.

4. Multifuncionality and pluriactivity

The scientific idea of Environmental Economics and the need/opportunity to think of a development model more respectful of environmental resources was established by the World Economic Conference for Development (WECD) in 1987, with the publication of the report "Our Common Future" which has become the foundational document for the sustainable development strategy. This document emphasizes the importance, still valid, of the following essential pillars (Ciani, 2012):

1. Moving towards the multicriteria measurement of the level of development;
2. Intra-and inter-generational approach in the development process;
3. Breakage of the traditional paradigm of development, based on the indirect relationship between development and resources, with the passage proposed, in the strategy of sustainable development, to a direct relationship.

The multicriteria approach to sustainable development has imposed, more and more at the micro level, the option of multi-functionality, especially related to the production of ecosystem services (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). In this context, pluriactivity and multifunctionality are terms often assimilated.

Agricultural activity, in the rural areas, is the centre around which farmer carries out endogenous development based on local resources, by enhancing his entrepreneurial capacities. Nowadays, the value of his work no longer resides, as before, in the agricultural products, but in the quality of his products allowed by technical progress, accompanied by marketing actions in response to changing consumer preferences. For every traditional agricultural product, it corresponds a wide range of by-products, typological and qualitative variants with related services (Sotte, 2006). The interplay between multiple activities into a space where traditional goods are produced in a dynamic way, supporting the development of a multiplicity of relationships and the ability to allocate efficiently human and material resources, represent the new rurality. In this sense, Agritourism activities should be considered one of the best way through which expand and diversify farm activities. This diversification, as well as implementing new business areas, bringing new clients / tourists to the company, allows to enhance intangible assets, environmental assets and landscape values.

While Agritourism is the expression of the pluriactivity of the agricultural firm, multifunctionality refers to the fact that an economic activity may have multiple outputs and, thus may contribute to several societal objectives at once OECD (2001). Key features of multifunctionality relate to the existence of multiple commodity and non-commodity output that are jointly produced by agriculture and the fact that some of the non-commodity output exhibit the characteristics of externalities or public goods, with the result that markets for these goods do not exist or function poorly (Vejre et al., 2007). The multifunctionality should therefore not be confused with the term, related to it but substantially different, such as "pluriactivity". We can understand the multifunctionality as the possibility that the same activity has two or more outputs (products), while pluriactivity means that different economic activities, such as food production and tourism, are combined within the same management unit (farm).

There is a general agreement to consider the production function of agriculture the key function, referring to other function as coupled, secondary, externalities or services (Paalberg et al., 2002; Petersonet al., 2002). In this sense, Rural Tourism should be considered as expression of Multifunctionality of agriculture. The importance of multifunctionality of the agriculture, in terms of sustainability, is emphasized by the EU that states as agriculture apart from its production function, encompasses other functions such as the preservation, management and enhancement of the rural landscape, protection of the environment (including against natural hazards), and a contribution to the viability of rural areas. Agriculture must also be able to respond to consumer concerns for example those regarding food quality and safety (European Commission, 1999). The EU defines three main functions of Agriculture:

1. Food Production Function

2. Environmental Safety Function
3. Rural Development Function

According to Van der Ploeg et al. (2000), Rural development is a multi-level, multi-actor and multi-facetted process. Rural development can be operationalized at the level of the individual farm household. At this level, rural development emerges as a redefinition of identities, strategies, practices, interrelations and networks. Agritourism should be considered as a main activity which can guide the development of rural areas. Sometimes this redefinition rests on an historically rooted but marginalized cultural repertoire. In other situations it is based on highly 'market-oriented' responses that embody a general or partial reconceptualization of what farming should be in the context of the new ties emerging between town and countryside (Broekhuizen, 1997). The co-ordination and allocation of family labour between different (agricultural and non-agricultural) activities in the pluri-active farm household is an important source of synergy which needs for a rural development (Van der Ploeg et al., 2000).

While farm and rural tourism are expressions of multi-activity and multifunctionality, they both represent an important source of development for rural areas.

5. Differences between Rural Tourism and Agritourism

It is generally acknowledged that tourism plays an important role in many countries' economies. This is certainly true in the European Union, which is the world's number one tourist destination (Eurostat, 2013b). The analysis of data on nights spent in accommodation establishments on a regional basis (2012), demonstrates the strong interest, of both EU residents and non-residents, on the rural areas of the European Union. On the basis of densely populated areas (100), the nights spent in Thinly-populated areas account for 98.2%, followed by the intermediate urbanized areas to 89%[3]. In this context tourism has the potential to pull the growth of rural areas. Furthermore, the new EU policy moves towards an encourage of projects that bring together agriculture and rural tourism through the promotion of sustainable and responsible tourism in rural areas.

Rural tourism is a growing sector and offers attractive growth opportunities that arise from the ability to respond to some of the emerging trends in tourism demand, which tent to use less massified forms, and pay more attention to the values of nature, culture, food, and to the countryside (Belletti,

[3] These statistics refers to the nights spent in accommodation establishments in the year 2012 on the basis of a classification of the land areas in densely populated, thiny populated and intermediate urbanized.

2010). In addition to the primary function of food production, the new "tourism" dimension, required farms to operate in new and different contexts as social, leisure, education, environmental protection, landscape management and control of water resources.

The EU definition of rural tourism is a holiday that is primarily motivated by the desire to closely experience the countryside, its people, heritage and way of life. The holiday should be primarily based on a rural setting, as opposed to being general touring/sightseeing holiday (Gorman, 2005).

The OECD's Rural Development Programme (OECD, 1994) tackled the definitional issue in the early 1990s. They concluded that rural tourism, in its "purest form", should be:

1. Located in rural areas
2. Functionally rural - built upon the rural world's special features of small-scale enterprise, open space, contact with nature and the natural world, heritage, 'traditional' societies and 'traditional' practices.
3. Rural in scale - both in terms of buildings and settlements - and, therefore, usually – but not always - small-scale.
4. Traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, and connected with local families. It will often be controlled locally and developed for the long-term good of the area.
5. Of many different kinds, representing the complex pattern of rural environment, economy, history and location.

This definition, underlying how Rural Tourism is strictly related to multifunctionality of rural areas and how it should be connected to the multicriteria approach to the measurement of the development of rural areas. In this context, businesses need to consider very carefully how they pitch their enterprises, to take maximum advantage of the marketing opportunities afforded by rural images. They also need to understand how is the "perceived rurality" so that their activities do not damage the reality or image of the countryside. Rurality represents an essential requirement for many visitors: tourism is ultimately a form of escapism from everyday urban and suburban life. For this reason understanding how the market defines rural is, therefore, vital. There is also a broad environmental and ethical goal in seeking a definition. The search for a definition of Rural Tourism brings with it a search for the value judgements which should underlie the rural tourism development and management process (Lane et al., 2013). Rural Tourism, in contrast to other types of tourism, such as the heritage tourism[4], is normally considered a

[4] The concept of Heritage Tourism has emerged as the further development of "cultural tourism". It focuses its attention on the cultural aspects related to the most complex cultural identity of the territories, trying to go beyond the traditional content as museums, mo-

"complete", albeit unplanned, package of tourism facilities, comprising a range of accommodation facilities, a range of hospitality facilities, attractions both natural and man-made, retailing, and often co-ordinated information facilities provided by a local partnership, a local council or community. Almost all accommodation facilities will be privately owned, along with many of the attractions. Because of this, rural tourism can be, and often must be, more attentive to market demands. At the same time, it includes additional forms of tourism that exist in a rural setting, including eco-tourism and other nature-based forms of tourism, cultural tourism that does not relate directly to agriculture (McGehee & Kim, 2004).

Within the background presented above, Rural Tourism assumes itself a strong and complex multidimensional character. It may have had its roots in farm based or Agritourism, but is now much more diverse, and continue to diversify (Bernard, 2012).

There are many definitions of Agritourism in existence, and many types and terms of agriculture-related tourism that are similar to Agritourism. For example, Agritourism is seen as virtually identical to its European equivalent "farm tourism" (Busby & Rendle, 2000; Getz & Carlsen, 2000). Other authors report an evolution of more than 13 definition of Agritourism (Busby & Rendle, 2000). Previous Research on Farm Tourism have tended to focus on particular declinations of this phenomenon, such as bed and breakfast activities (Warnick & Klar, 1991) (Moscardo, 2009), while Maude & Res (1985) and Blaine et al. (1993), examined the wider context of farm tourism.

Agritourism and Rural tourism are not the same but Agritourism may be seen as a segment within Rural Tourism (Wilson et al., 2001).

Traditionally, agriculture was central to rural life. It was the main employer of labour, the main source of income within most rural economies, and indirectly the farming process and community had a powerful influence on traditions, power structures and life styles. Decisions taken by farmers determined land use and landscapes. Early forms of rural tourism were, not surprisingly, strongly linked to accommodation on farms. Farm tourism is not a new phenomenon. It exists as a recognizable activity for over a hundred years (Frater, 1983). The use of the term Agritourism became common during the '80s, but gradually, the term rural tourism has taken over, with Agritourism becoming just one sub-sector of a more holistic rural tourism.

The vitality of the Agriturism, as a growth factor, can be quantified by Eurostat data: from the beginning of this activity, in the '80s, the number of

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numents, historical "official" territory of cultural tourism (Bessiere, 1998) (Chhabra et al., 2003; Moscardo, 1996).

farms offering tourist services has doubled in Italy, the UK and France. Currently, in the EU (12) there are over six hundred thousand Agritouristic accommodations. The percentage of farms that offer tourist services is 8% in Germany and the Netherlands, 4% in France and 2% in Italy, while in Spain, undoubtedly one of the main tourist countries of the world, only 0.5% of farms practice it. In some countries, however, the percentage exceeds 10% (Austria) or even more like in Sweden and Switzerland (20%).

Agritourism can include various types of overnight accommodations but also encompasses day visits to on-farm attractions like festivals and educational events (McGehee & Kim, 2004) and for these reasons, it can be defined as rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component (Weaver & Fennel, 1997). Many studies have focused on motivation or rationale for development of Agritourism enterprises. The inability to generate sufficient revenue has, in many cases, led farmers to diversify from the agricultural base and undertake pluriactivity (Fleischer & Pizam, 1997). Farm tourism has been primarily developed for its economic benefits and represents a symbiotic relationship for areas where neither farming or tourism could be independently justified (Inskeep, 1991). The obvious, and most prevalent, reasons for Agritourism development are economically based. Each business has the fundamental goal (traditional) to reach the highest level of net income. The traditional production processes anchored to the strong specialization and to the monoculture, in the modern context of dynamic market price, increase the risk of business. In the presence of technical risk or low market prices, business could fail, because of an inappropriate level of operating income. The traditional position of weakness of farm financial activity is characterized by long periods of anticipation and returns only in short periods. The option of product diversification is a first real opportunity to limit these risks and improve the cash flow business. Integrating the revenue from traditional agricultural activities with non-traditional, but connected to it and complementary capturing business opportunities that offer non-agricultural functions, such as environmental protection and conservation, are other factors that increase the possibility for the entrepreneur, to raise its total net operating income.

The creation and the development of new economic activity, in the form of new farms, the diversification into non-agricultural activities, including tourist activities, are essential. Agritourism acts as a driving force for the development of tourism in rural areas and promotes the rural development, allowing the family of the farmer to supplement farm income with income related to touristic activities.

6. Tourism key role in the new paradigm of development

Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification, becoming one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. Despite occasional shocks, the international tourism of European arrivals has shown virtually uninterrupted growth – from 25 million in 1950 to 278 million in 1980, 528 million in 1995, and 1087 million in 2013. The Tourism activity represents all around the world 9% of the total World GDP, 1300 Billion of the export, 6% of the total export and 6% of total export of the least developed countries (UNWTO, 2014).

This trend is strictly connected to the development of ICT, which is characterizing our days, and propose new paradoxes (Najsbitt J., 1994). The most important, is related to the fact that the diffusion of ICT is leading for a wide spread of places images, landscapes and traditions. All this, could suggest that the need of making tourism with the traditional approach should gradually fade with the replacement of the communication of images. Economic data on rural tourism prove the opposite, showing an increasing trend towards thematic tourism and niche tourism. In fact, more pictures each person sees more is encouraged to visit directly those places.

According to a market research (Ohe; 2000,2003) consumers choose Rural Tourism for the following reasons: be in contact with nature, feel free, sunbathing, being outdoors, do unusual things, make an holiday to rest and be quiet.

The characteristics of visitors, which can easily be extended to matters concerning rural tourism are: love for nature, pleasure of genuine things, desire for peace, taste for the new, ability to adapt.

In this context, it becomes crucial to understand who creates and manages this entire ecosystem of services that match the visitor needs. The farm and in particular, the Agritourism, as part of Rural Tourism has a key role in the production of these services, guaranteeing the productions of commodities and non-commodity output.

These issues could be considered as the engine of the new model of sustainable development that is taking shape from the Green Economy, defining new paradigms of development processes. From an inverse relationship between the environment and natural resources, to a direct relationship between natural resources and environment; from a monocriterial approach (only quantitative or monetary) to a multi-criteria approach (economic, environmental, social, cultural, managerial); from the mere consideration of the problems of the present generations towards an intra-and inter-generational vision.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the development model in place in this century, demonstrates as world tourism has a future of great interest to every area of the world. The phenomenon is paradoxically helped by ICT which, in the progressive image transmission, stimulates the curiosity in people to visit the sites for which they receive the same images. In this context, dealing with rural development, multifunctionality of rural areas has gained increasing attention. The distinction between the multifunctionality of agriculture and pluriactivity has allowed a qualitative distinction between the two forms of tourism considered. Both, on different levels, represent a great opportunity for EU policy makers to guide future policies for the development of rural areas. Sustainable development is the model that is emerging with new paradigms, the demand for an innovative approach to fruition and for new opportunities that the land itself provides for the sustainable vitality of farm and rural tourism. While rural tourism can be a guide for the development, satisfying the growing demand of "rurality", on the other hand, the Agritourism is set up as a major investigation unit, due to the strong link with the primary activity of agricultural production. In view of its specific character Agritourism is complementary and related to an agricultural activity. It is the form that must be privileged because the movement of niche tourism in rural areas is mainly based on the supply of ecosystem services. Farmers guarantee a continuous supply of these services. According to Perotto (1993), rural tourism and Agritourism could lead a new relationship between Environment, work and free time, in terms of sustainability of rural areas. The analysis of the specific characteristics of the two forms of tourism analyzed, has allowed to provide a background that will be a reference for future analysis in the field of rural development.

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