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## THE EVOLUTION OF RURAL TOURISM IN TUSCANY

*Abstract* - Rural Tourism (RT) has moved into a more complex phase and today it is possible to point out different stages of development within European regions. In order to encompass the evolutionary processes of tourism development within rural areas, an evolutionary approach is proposed. If the attention moves from a static analysis of RT within a region, to the transition from a basic rural economy to a new economic specialisation, then the evolutionary economic geography (EEG) may be a useful framework. The EEG explains economical transitions as a shift from a historically predominant configuration to a new one, by the interplay of processes at three different levels: micro (local), meso (regional) and macro (european). The aim of this paper is to adapt the EEG approach to the study of RT. In this paper, the framework is applied to the case study of RT in Tuscany. We argue that in Tuscany the rural transition towards a tourism development was fostered by the weakness of the established rural configuration and its heritage of a large availability of empty buildings, which has been a primary input for tourism development. New trends at the macro-level fostered the transition towards RT, in particular the European funding for multifunctionality within agriculture and urban people seeking for natural life-style.

Keywords: rural tourism, evolutionary economic geography, accommodation on farm, Tuscany

*Introduction.* - The 2003 midterm Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform has led to a significant change in how to interpret and implement rural development. The fundamental idea is a multifunctional agricultural sector encouraging the development of alternative sources of income in rural areas whilst safeguarding the environment. For instance, multifunctionality concerns themes such as the joint production of commodity and non-commodity outputs<sup>1</sup>, public goods and externalities resulting from agricultural activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Commodities are goods and services produced to be exchanged through markets, non-commodities are goods and services that for their characteristic of often being public goods cannot be exchanged automatically through markets and are therefore more likely to result in externalities (Simoncini, 2011).

Due to the capability to integrate farmers income, rural tourism (RT) has a leading role in moving agriculture towards multifunctionality. So to link the provision of a commodity such as an holiday in agri-tourism farms to the maintenance of a public good such as landscape (Simoncini, 2011). As a consequence, the costs of maintaining the aesthetic qualities of the landscape are internalised in the price of staying in the holiday farms (agri-tourism). The rural landscape has become a tangible expression of the culture and identity of territorial (Zerbi, 2007) as well as the environmental quality but also an extraordinary driving force for sustainable spatial development. In this paper RT is conceived as a driver of change within rural areas, as a novelty in comparison with the previous traditional rural configuration based on a sole activity: the production of agri-products.

After a period of development in the Nineties, with growth in demand and offer, RT has moved into a more complex phase (Long and Lane, 2000). In this second phase RT is no longer a minor agent of rural economy, landscape and social change and it has become a prior element, able to attract attention of local, regional, national and supranational policy makers, although it cannot be considered the main path to enhance local economies (Hall et al., 2005). However, RT can contribute to diversify farm incomes (especially in small family farms), carry out additional benefits into the rural economy, counteract emigration from rural areas, encourage an increase in cultural exchange between urban and rural areas, and enhance the values inherent to rural life, as well as contribute to the general diversification of the economy (Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997; Roberts and Hall, 2001; Canoves et al., 2004). Broadly speaking, RT is a driver, not the only one, of rural development transition towards a multifunctional model.

RT studies have developed a rich palette of theoretical frameworks and they interest a growing number of scholars worldwide (Béteille 1996; Garrod *et al.* 2005; Sanagustin Fons *et al.* 2011; Su 2011). For instance, RT is conceived as integrated with the economic, social, cultural, natural, and human local structures in which it takes place (Saxena *et al.* 2007; Ilbery and Saxena 2011). Other researchers have brought light on the mutual inter-relationship between agriculture and tourism (Pearce 1990; Walford 2001; Fleischer and Tchetchik 2005). In the literature it is taken for granted that RT is rooted on rural amenities and that it has a strong relationship with agriculture. On the other hand, it is not clear how it evolves over time and why it is unevenly distributed within European regions. For instance, why should two wine regions (e.g. Tuscany in Italy and Aquitaine in France), both embedded in a beautiful landscape, both well-known worldwide for their top quality wines, with good air and road links, have reached different stages in the RT development?

The shift from a basic rural economy to a new economic specialisation is not a linear process, as it involves experimentation, learning processes, new policies, adjustment and reconfigurations. In

addition, the geographical dimension of the transition changes the background of every process. In order to reveal the dynamics and mechanisms that move towards specialization in tourism, we suggest to draw the analysis upon recent evolutionary economic geography (EEG) literature (Boschma and Martin 2010).

*An evolutionary framework for rural tourism studies.* - In recent years EEG has attracted increasing attention (Frenken 2007; Boschma and Martin 2010) with two special issues in the main journals of economic geography (Journal of Economic Geography, 2007; Economic Geography, 2009) and in April 2009, the Times Higher Education presented an analysis of data from Thomson Reuters' Essential Science Indicators showing "relational and evolutionary economic geography" to be the third hottest area in the social sciences (2232 citations across 41 papers).

As Boschma and Martin (2007) put it, EEG is concerned with the spatialities of economic novelty (innovations, new firms, new economic sectors, new networks). Employing the core principles of the EEG (variety, selection and retention), we argue that the diffusion of RT within rural areas is not a linear process. It needs a more systemic approach which actively addresses the multidimensional and co-evolutionary character of the formation of new territorial configurations and barriers to transformation from established ones. While certainly not being units of selection, rural regions can be conceptualised as selection environments within which, and across which, evolutionary processes operate (Boschma and Martin 2010).

Furthermore, EEG is concerned with how the processes of path creation and path dependence interact to shape geographies of economic development and transformation. The notion of path dependence, based especially on the writings of Paul David (1985) and Brian Arthur (1994), is concerned with giving economics a prominent historical dimension. The economic landscape does not tend towards some (predefined) unique equilibrium state or configuration, but is an open system that evolves in ways shaped by its past development paths (Martin and Sunley 2006). In order to reveal the transition process towards the development of tourism we will stress the analysis of past development paths within rural regions. We assume as a key concept the rural configuration within a region, in terms of production process techniques, farm organization, land use pattern, infrastructures and rural settlements. A rural configuration deals with the semi-coherent set of rules that orient and coordinate the activities of the rural actors. On the one hand, actors enact, instantiate and draw upon rules in concrete actions in local practices; on the other hand, rules configure actors (Giddens, 1984). Examples of regime rules are cognitive routines and shared beliefs, capabilities and competences, lifestyles and user practices, favourable institutional arrangements and regulations, and legally binding contracts (Geels, 2012). It follows that two different regions could have the same specialisation (e.g. wine

regions) or morphology (e.g mountainous or hilly regions) but totally different rural configurations. Hence, a rural configuration deals with organization processes and routines, with “how” not with “what” has been produced in a region.

We argue that the established rural configuration within a region may enable or hinder the transition of rural economies towards a specialisation in tourism. By providing orientation and coordination to the activities of rural actor groups, a rural configuration accounts for its stability over time. This stability is of a dynamic kind, meaning that innovation still occurs but only incrementally. In evolutionary terms, the deep structure of a rural configuration evolves through selection and retention mechanisms (Essletzbichler and Rigby 2007). Therefore, RT may induce a change that occurs firstly as a novelty at the micro level, and only in a second phase might it apply for a change in the rural configuration, creating a new path. On the other hand, due to aligned and locked in use patterns, the transition processes may stunt and the change will not occur. In that case, the rural configuration is not open to change and the transition towards a development of tourism has a hard time getting into gear. In this paper we argue that while under a strong and stable rural configuration changes have a hard time to diffuse beyond the micro-level because the elements are linked and aligned to each other. New paths have a hard time to break through, because regulations, infrastructure, user practices, maintenance networks are aligned to the existing rural configuration. On the other hand, they may eventually break through when the configuration is weak. For instance, a rural configuration is weak in the case that the local production doesn't adhere to market standards, old routines are inappropriate and need to be discarded, production costs are high and thus companies are not competitive on the global markets.

In an evolutionary scenario who drives the change? According to Boschma and Frenken (2006), EEG examines how the spatial structure of the economy emerges from the micro-behaviour of individuals and firms. The economic landscape is the result of an evolutionary sequence in which innovations were selected because, for some reason, they were a better fit than others to the existing rural configuration. As choices are made by companies at the micro-level, this paper addresses to farmers and their strategies over time. We argue that a new path in a rural region can not start up if local farmers are not interested in moving forward.

Selection occurs also at the macro-level of markets. Market competition acts on variety as a selection device, opening and closing “windows of opportunities”. In a dynamic economy, fitter novelties become more dominant over time through selection, enabling more innovative firms to expand their production capacity and market shares at the expense of less innovative firms. Many researchers have pinpointed new demands for a natural life-style, a current of *Naturophilia*, which has emerged with considerable strength in highly industrialized countries (Shaw and Williams 1994; Hall *et al.* 2005). Furthermore, the re-launching and recovery of RT demand in recent years may be attributed

to changing patterns of leisure time, the segmentation of holidays and the development of long weekends (Cánoves *et al.* 2004).

The selection environment also includes institutions, whose effects become especially visible when a major institutional change occurs and the “playing field” on which firms compete changes dramatically (Boschma and Martin 2010). Thus, understanding the transition of rural economies towards specialisation in tourism requires an analysis of institutions, as relevant enabling and constraining contexts. In this paper we will distinguish between institutions at the regional and national level from those at the macro-level (European Union). All of them may influence the emergence of new paths at the micro level of the firm, although today the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) affects rural development widely and more deeply than national and regional policies do. On the other hand, regions and countries can change policies, and in consequence European funding, in many different ways.

In conclusion we will explain rural transitions as a shift from a predominant historical rural configuration to a new one through the interplay of processes at three different levels: micro (local), meso (regional) and macro (European). The important point of a such evolutionary approach is that the further success of tourism within rural area is not only governed by processes within the micro-level, but also by developments at the meso and macro level. It is the alignment of developments (successful processes within the micro level reinforced by changes at meso and at the macro level) which determine if a rural shift towards tourism will occur.

This paper framework is not in antithesis with traditional analyses of RT evolution, but is intended to offer some new insights. Many of them have already assume an evolutionary perspective (Lewis 1998; MacDonald and Jolliffe 2003; Cánoves *et al.* 2004) with relevant results in terms of analysis and comprehension of this topic. However our framework may be able to explain the uneven distribution of RT in regions with similar contingences in terms of amenities, institution and market. This issue requires further analysis of path dependence, path creation and lock-in mechanisms within rural European regions. In addition, assessing evolutionary mechanisms in the diffusion of RT requires more empirical analysis. Here we present a case-study to illustrate the general points of an EEG perspective in the study of RT.

*Empirical case-study: genesis and evolution of RT in Tuscany, 1950-2010.* - Due to the quantity of *agriturismo* (accommodation on farms), Tuscany is considered in Italy the leading region for RT: in 2011 the percentage of *agriturismo* located in Tuscany was 22.5% share of the total at the national level (4,200 of 18,674 in Italy) (Source: Agriturist, 2012). Many farms have undertaken the transition towards tourism accommodation and today *agriturismo* covers over 60% of beds in many

rural municipalities. RT is a stable driver of rural development in Tuscany and the performance in some tourism indicators (nights and beds per capita ) are higher than in the region as a whole.

Table 1. Accomodation supply and demand in Tuscany.

	Population	Density (Pop/kmq)	Total nights	Nights per capita	Total beds	Beds per capita	Beds in hotel	Beds not in hotel
Rural areas	2.326.477	101,1	28.550.550	20.84	402.074	0.20	136.043	266.031
Tuscany Total	3.692.828	160,6	43.024.087	11.65	923.544	0.13	377.898	545.646

Source. Regione Toscana, 2011.

Traditional analysis of the success of RT in Tuscany describes it in terms of richness in local resources such as a beautiful landscape, high quality food products and many historical centres spread out in the countryside (i.e. San Gimignano, Volterra, Cortona) or nearby (Florence, Pisa, Lucca). To prevent a mechanistic storyline we propose a dynamical approach divided in three different phases showing the transition from the established rural configuration towards the specialisation in tourism.

*The path creation period: involving the farmer and experimentations (1951-1985).* - The re-organization of rural Tuscany has moved hand in hand with a process of change in landownership due to the fact that only a few landowners successfully became agri-entrepreneurial families (such as Antinori, Frescobaldi, Ricasoli, etc.). Many landowners sold their properties, either to new entrepreneurs or to sharecroppers, who in turn became entrepreneurs. Due to the widespread availability of empty buildings on farms, a large number of remote houses, a heritage of the previous agricultural system, were occupied by new residents. From the Sixties some pioneers began to acquire these empty farmhouses, at the beginning for very low prices and later on for a fortune. They were predominantly foreigners from England, France, Germany, Switzerland and U.S.A., or Italians from the main Italian cities (Milan, Rome, Naples, etc.) and Tuscany (Florence, Prato, Siena). The stimulants in this process of acquisition were the beauty of landscape, the pleasant climate and a natural life style. Like the merchants in the fifteen century, they bought rural properties to invest their money coming from other businesses, either as a primary or secondary home or to become a wine produces (Randelli and Perrin 2007). Due to a strong business capacity (in terms of finance and knowledge) and an international web of contacts, this new set of

farmers and residents would prove to have a leading role in the transition towards the development of tourism.

We will now look at the role of institutions at the national level in making farmers aware of the opportunities for developing tourism. In 1965, after several study tours conducted by farmers and trade unionists in some European countries with advanced RT development (United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, France), the National Association of Agriculture and Tourism (Agriturist since 1978) was founded. From the beginning they had a leading role in organizing events and conferences to draw the attention of political, media and public opinion. In 1973, due to the initiative of the National Confederation of Farmers, “Terranostra” was also founded, with a greater attention to the problems of small farms compare to Agriturist. Then, in 1976, on the initiative of an alliance of a group of farmers, “Alturist” was born, which later became “Green Tourism”, defined as the Institute for the farm and the environment, for the defense of the countryside and for the promotion of cultural and recreational activities in it.

While the Italian tourists preferred at that time to spend their holidays at beach resorts, those three pioneer institutions were firm in the belief that RT could work in tandem with agricultural production. These ideas were discussed in various conferences and events dedicated to the farm with the aim of spreading awareness among farmers and highlighting the important role of tourism in supporting agricultural income. Finally in 1973, as a result of these initiatives, the autonomous province of Trento, with the law “Actions to farm”, established that farmers were allowed to start a business providing accommodation. A few months later the autonomous province of Bolzano passed the law “Outline for rural tourism” that limited to eight the number of beds each farm could provide.

Simultaneously, at the micro-level some pioneers started to experiment hosting tourists on their farms. Right from the start, Tuscany led the process of path creation<sup>2</sup>. In 1975 Agriturist published the “Guide for Rural Hospitality”, which can be considered the first RT data base in Italy. The guide identified throughout Italy 80 farms with accommodation (about 500 beds), of which 18 were in Tuscany.

The number of pioneers in Tuscany increased dramatically and by 1984 there were 171 farms experimenting tourism. Due to the earlier demise of sharecropping, both new and old farmers saw the opportunity to increase their income and find a profitable use for many empty buildings. In this preliminary stage, regional law on tourism accommodation was lacking and hospitality they offered was basically of a low standard. RT is based nearly exclusively on lodgings: rooms rented in the owner’s private home or independent lodgings, both on the farm and in private houses.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the first pioneers in Tuscany was a Swiss lady that in 1947 began to welcome guests in her farm near Castellina in Chianti.

*The period of growth (1985-2007).* - Agritourist, Terranostra and Alturist had a leading role in making both farmers and governing bodies in Italy aware of the creation of new paths for tourism. Due to the national law n. 730/1985 on the “Farm Accommodation Regulations”, the period of experimenting ended in Italy in 1985. The law provided a general framework that strictly defined the context and its general discipline and transferred the responsibility for tourism on the farm from the central government to the regional legislative bodies.

After the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano, the Tuscany region was the first to legislate on *agriturismo*. The regional law (n. 36/1987) stipulated that tourism should be only a secondary activity alongside that of agricultural production. Above all, the relevance of the Tuscan law was that of officially including tourism in the farm activities, whilst preserving its *status* of agri-firm. This is very important in the European context because it allowed farmers to invest in tourism having access to a large set of policies and funds designed for the development of agriculture.

The new Tuscan law also increased the awareness of farmers of the new path on RT. The success of pioneers attracted other farmers and residents to follow them on this new path. In this second stage, that of growth, the micro-behaviours of local firms are reinforced by new trends on the macro-level. Here we point out two: European funding for multifunctionality within agriculture, and urban people looking for a natural life style (Bétteille 1996; Champion *et al.* 1998; Romei 2008). Since 1987 the Tuscany regional government has invested a lot of European funds for agriculture and rural areas in setting up and then improving *agriturismo*. Due to the availability of financial support, farmers had the opportunity both to restore the old sharecropper farmhouses and later to provide them with facilities such as swimming pools, restaurants and sport facilities.



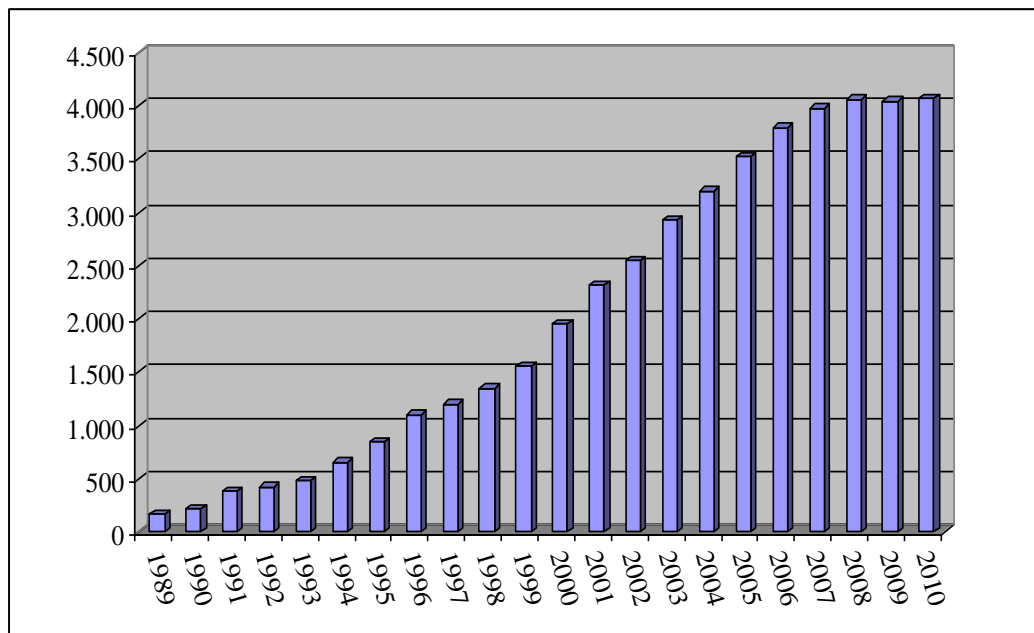


Fig. 1 Number of farms with accommodation in Tuscany in the period 1989-2010.

Source: Regione Toscana, our own elaboration

During the period of growth, RT in Tuscany evolved from its original beginning. RT was no longer experimental and big businesses were starting to invest in rural accommodation. Entrepreneurs invested in farmhouse restoration and in doing so they were supporting small firms and craftsmen working as masons, carpenters, joiners, plumbers, electricians and so on. As the number of tourists increased, so the price of houses and farm started to grow. Related services began to be offered by local municipalities (tourist information, public transportation) and local entrepreneurs (restaurants, car rental, taxi services). In this second stage, the integration of RT improves through the construction of networks that enable actors to jointly develop resources such as local traditions, art forms, celebrations, experiences, entrepreneurship, and knowledge (Saxena and Ilbery 2008). In order to encourage repeat visits and longer stays, many farms provide a number of activities related to nature, rural pastimes and specialized agricultural products (wine tasting, cooking classes, horse-riding, trekking). Beside *agriturismo*, which provides over 60% of beds in many rural municipalities, there are also bed and breakfasts, private lodging and rural resorts all of which have experienced continual growth in recent years.

*The period of maturity (since 2007).* The third stage is that of maturity. RT is now a stable driver of rural configuration in Tuscany. Today, existing entrepreneurs need to diversify their offer

investing in the quality of their accommodations, in the professionalism of their employees, in marketing – especially on the web – and on the range of services and facilities they offer (restaurant, guided tours, internet facilities, etc..). At this stage of maturity it may happen that tourism produces more income than agricultural activities, because it is more profitable, and because entrepreneurs prefer to focus on a business.

At this stage, institutional planning is crucial, ensuring short and long-term community benefits while also preserving its resources. The principles for good planning include authenticity and quality, education, conservation and protection and partnerships between local agents. Integration (Saxena *et al.* 2007) and sustainability are the key words in regional policies in Tuscany.

The growth of RT has to be totally divergent from seaside tourism development that tends to create holiday resorts and artificial villages with no identity. Many coastal regions in Portugal, Italy, Greece, and particularly in Spain, have suffered this problem, where the coast line has been completely destroyed by blocks of apartments and huge hotels, lacking in green or natural areas (Sanagustín Fons *et al.* 2011). This could be a threat for RT in Tuscany: overdoing the urbanization of rural spaces. RT has offered a great chance to take advantage of the empty spaces (i.e. farmhouses) made available by the decline of rural areas, but it should not contribute to the growth of new buildings.

*Methodology and results of quantitative analysis.* - In order to highlight the different stages of tourism development in rural areas of Tuscany was examined in a number of indicators. The preparatory phase of the analysis was the identification of municipalities and rural areas within the region. To this end, we selected three different indicators as to understand the social, economic and ecological effects of rurality. As a result we have classified as rural those areas that meet at least one of these three indicators:

- social dimension = population density <150 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (threshold OECD);
- economic size = percentage of workers in agriculture > 4.09% (regional average);
- ecological dimension = percent rural or non-urbanized (forests, farmland, semi-natural areas, beaches, rivers, lakes, etc.) > 95.92% (regional average).

In the second phase of the work of qualitative analysis we have collected a number of statistics on the phenomenon of tourism at the regional level, already proposed previously in Table 1. In the third step we have selected some indicators which, in our opinion, are able to represent the different stages development of tourism in rural municipalities. It is considered the consistency of tourism dynamics in the last decade (2000-2012) and the quality of the tourism offer. Specifically, the indicators selected were:

- the total number of tourists per inhabitant;
- total beds per capita;
- trend of admissions and beds in the decade 2000-2012;
- number of farms in capital-intensive (with at least one service provided between pool, restaurant, golf and tennis).

The results showed three main areas that are not contiguous with different developmental levels in tourism development: the first with a development of TR mature and consolidated (in black in Fig. 2), the second still in transition with a significant growth in the last decade (dark gray) and the third in which the TR is still underdeveloped and therefore marginal (light gray).

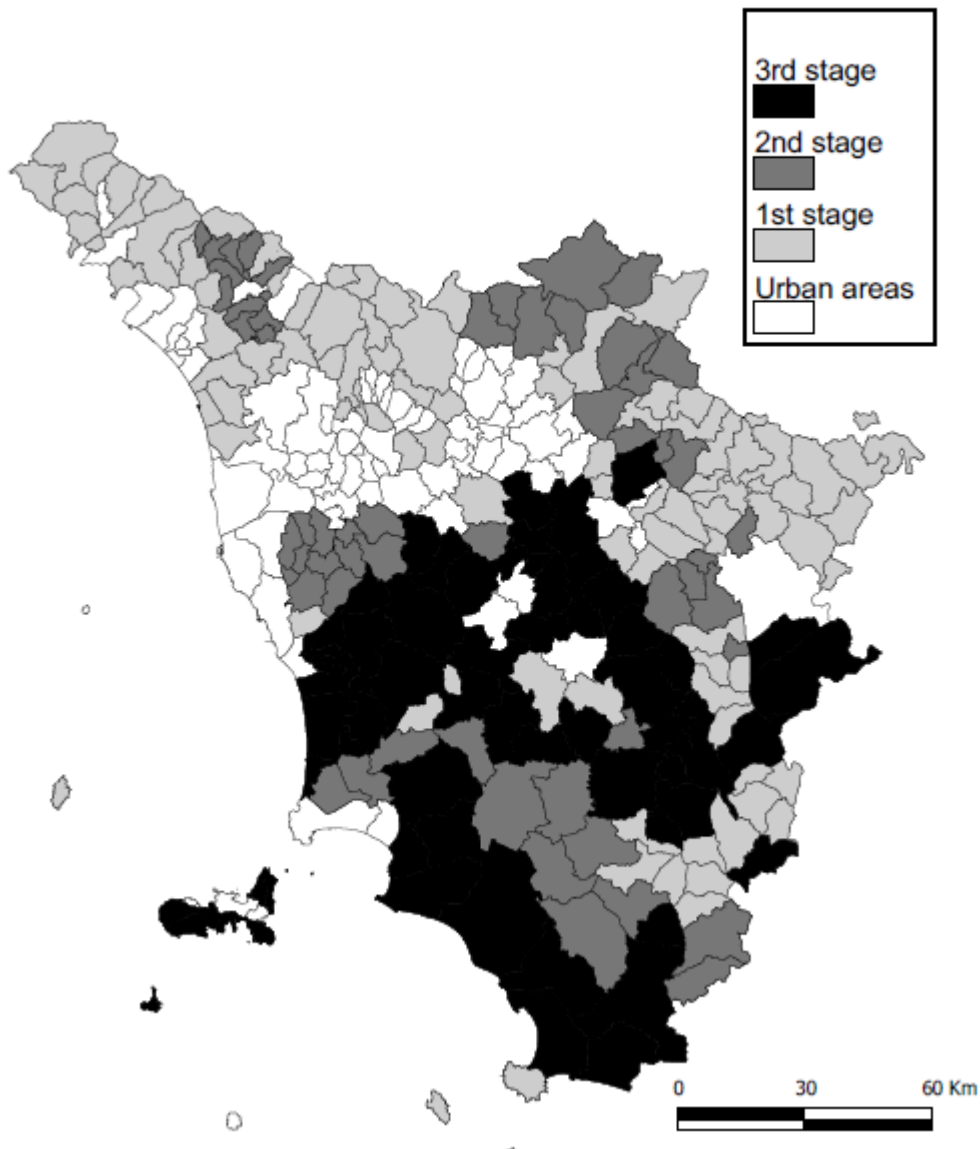


Fig. 2 - Different stages of tourism specialisation among Tuscan municipalities (our own elaboration)

RT in Tuscany is much developed in rural areas such as Chianti, Val d'Orcia, Maremma and the surrounding countryside of Siena (Randelli et al., 2011). In some leading municipalities such as San Gimignano, Pienza, San Quirico d'Orcia or Radda in Chianti the number of nights spent per capita is over 50 units and the local governments are discussing about constraints on visitor numbers. In those mature areas the main issue is no longer the growth but rather the consolidation and sustainability of RT. Due to the high quality of rural tourists (high cultured and spending tourists), those mature areas are faced with the dilemma of mass tourism: do they need to attract more tourists? The future sustainability of RT in those mature areas is strictly connected with the institutional planning, which should be balanced between enduring for short and long-term community benefits and preserving the local resources. The rural environment is particularly fragile and susceptible to damage from tourism development. The presence of large numbers of tourists and the provision of attractions and facilities to satisfy their needs, may diminish or even destroy the characteristics that originally attracted them to the countryside (Canoves et al., 2004).

On the other hand, in the majority of northern mountainous rural areas, isolated from large urban areas, RT can be considered sporadic and only few areas (Mugello, Garfagnana) are moving forward from the first stage. In those areas the main issue is still the growth of RT and alternatively, the networking with the nearest mature areas. Thus, the funds support should be addressed in those areas, yet at the preliminary stages in the framework.

*Conclusions.* In order to address on the gradual diffusion of RT and reveal the mechanisms that can enable or hinder the transition of rural economies towards specialisation in tourism, we have provided a framework that draws on the insights provided by the EEG. The framework explains rural transition towards a multifunctional model as a shift from a historically predominant rural configuration to a new one by the interplay of processes at three different levels: micro (local), meso (regional) and macro (European).

Every incremental change in the rural configuration is due to the ongoing interaction of processes at the three different levels of the framework. Changes in the rural reconfigurations thus occur when developments at multiple levels link up and reinforce each other. Due to lock in mechanisms, in some regions rich in rural amenities, the transition might fail and RT will not move on from a preliminary stage. On the other hand, rural transition toward tourism development might be fostered by a weak

rural configuration. Hence, in order to throw light upon path dependence within a region the analysis of the established rural configuration becomes crucial.

The rural configuration is the background of the scene but the action is due to selection mechanisms at the micro level of the farm. Due to the fact that agriculture is highly profitable, rural actors may not select tourism as an innovation then RT will have a hard time to emerge and growth beyond a preliminary stage. For instance, it is common to see policy makers pushing for RT development and rural entrepreneurs failing to follow them. This has happened in some wine regions in France (Aquitaine, Champagne), in which the rural configuration based on wine production is too strong and successful to enable a novelty like tourism to take root (Frochot 2000; Lignon-Darmaillac 2009).

In this scenario institutions may reinforce the transition towards tourism development and co-evolve with farmers and residents. In any case, the transition won't happen if farmers and residents do not move forward and change their routines through a process of experimentation and small incremental change. At the micro level the market drives the changes, with new needs and new customers applying for new rural functions.

In this paper the framework has been applied to the case study of Tuscany in Italy. Tuscany is a region where *agriturismo* establishments have taken a firm hold, which are basically a hotel structure where you can enjoy the rural experience and accounts for a 32% share of Tuscan accommodation facilities, compared with 8.4% for the whole of Italy (Lazzeretti 2010). It is possible to explain the success of Tuscany as a simultaneous interplay of several different factors at the micro, meso and macro level. Tourism first occurred as a novelty at the micro level, with just a few tourists hosted in simple accommodation with basic facilities. In this period of experimentation, institutions had a leading role in making farmers aware of the new potential path created by tourism. At the regional level, the weakness of the established rural configuration and its heritage of a large pool of empty buildings was a primary input for development of tourism. A new group of farmers and residents, in many cases foreigners and urban residents, with strong business sense and an international web of contacts drove the renaissance of the rural areas.

The development of RT in Tuscany during the first stage took off when ongoing processes at the macro level opened a "window of opportunity". Further trends at the macro-level reinforced the transition towards RT, in particular the European funding for multifunctionality within agriculture and urban residents seeking a natural life-style. Following new regional laws regulating tourism on farm, since 1987 farmers have been investing in setting up and than constantly improving the quality of *agriturismo*.

During the period of growth many farms started the transition towards supplying tourism accommodation and today *agriturismo* is a stable driver of rural configuration in Tuscany. RT has offered a great chance to fill in the empty spaces (i.e. farmhouses) made available by the decline of rural areas, but it should not contribute to the change in the land use (i.e. new buildings). Due to many speculative interests, in the developed tourist rural areas of Tuscany the threat of urbanization is a very real.

In conclusion, empirical analyses with an EEG approach can improve our understanding of the complexity of rural developments. An evolutionary analysis depict on process and mechanisms can point out the transition within a rural region towards tourism development. The transition is not a linear process and it should not explain only with the offer of local amenities. It follow that the study of rural configurations, as it refers to the semi-coherent set of rules that orient and coordinate the activities of the rural actors, it is a benchmark in the study of the evolution of rural tourism within a region. For future research, additional case studies and improvements in the framework are needed, in order to address the dynamics enabling or hindering changes in rural areas.

The findings in this study have important policy implications. The evolutionary framework shows how RT can sometimes be inappropriate, which is often ignored by the policy makers, regardless of the region or country. This is the case of Aquitaine and Champagne, two strong productive wine regions where the rural actors are too successful in the wine market to shift in a different economic sector. Broadly speaking, in some regions, a strong and stable rural configuration might inhibit the development of RT. Thus, it can happen that sustained institutional planning and public investments will not be followed and matched with investments by local entrepreneurs. In this case, reducing support for agriculture while increasing support for non-agricultural activities, such as tourism, might not have the desired impact in that region.

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