

AN EVOLUTIONARY MODEL FOR THE RURAL TOURISM STUDY: THE TUSCANY CASE

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Riassunto

Un modello evolutivo per lo studio del turismo rurale.- Il Turismo Rurale (TR) è entrato in una fase matura rispetto al passato ed oggi è possibile individuare diversi livelli di sviluppo tra le regioni europee. L'obiettivo del presente lavoro è quello di comprendere i processi evolutivi del turismo nelle aree rurali. Se l'attenzione passa dalla configurazione statica di un territorio rurale alla transizione da un modello di sviluppo rurale (unifunzionale) ad un altro (monofunzionale) allora la multi-level perspective (MPL) può essere un utile strumento metodologico. La MLP spiega le transizioni economiche come il passaggio da una configurazione storicamente dominante ad un'altra, attraverso l'interazione di processi a tre livelli: nicchia (livello micro), regime (meso) e ambiente globale (macro). L'integrazione della MLP con altri approcci evuzionisti ne consente l'adattamento allo studio del TR. Il risultato è un modello evuzionista con tre distinte fasi: inizio, crescita, maturità e declino.

Il modello è applicato al caso di studio della regione Toscana dove la transizione verso un modello turistico rurale è stata aiutata dalla debolezza del regime rurale precedente, fondato sulla mezzadria.

L'evoluzione del TR in Toscana non è stata omogenea e alcune aree sub-regionali sono nella prima fase del modello, mentre altre nella seconda e terza. L'utilizzo di strumenti statistici e di indicatori ad hoc ci ha consentito di mappare la distribuzione disomogenea del TR in Toscana.

1. Introduction

Due to changes in the European countryside and new demands from society, rural development has undergone an important transformation process during the last decades. The 2003 midterm Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform has led to a significant change in how to interpret and implement rural development. The

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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 outputs², public goods and externalities resulting from agricultural activities. 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). 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. This paper addresses the following questions: How can RT drive the transition towards a multifunctional model? Why hasn't the transition happened everywhere yet?

In the literature a plethora of research make it very complex to define clearly RT. This versatility and diversity has led to a big confusion and/or substitution of terms such as

² 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).

farm tourism, green tourism, outdoors, ecotourism or nature/wildlife tourism on one side, and RT on the other (Frochot, 2005). According to Lane (1994) and Sharpley (1996), all these terms are specific forms of tourism activities taking place in rural areas, built upon the specificities of the rural world (open space, rural heritage, etc.), rural in scale (usually implying small scale) and representing the complex pattern of the rural world (environment, economy, history and location). As a matter of fact, RT cannot be limited simply to farm tourism but should include all the aspects of tourism that its physical, social and historical dimensions allow it to develop. For this reason, in this paper, RT is conceived as the “tourism in rural areas”. All kind of tourists will be accounted, those renting a house or hosted in a farm, bed and breakfast, hotel, camping and any other kind of accommodation.

In our 21st century society, large hotel chains or leisure centres are rather similar and lacking of identity, without the added value of the landscape or environment. On the other hand the rural environment reveals itself as exceptional, showing the value of reality, far from the standard or international large-scale hotel chains (Romei, 2008b; Randelli et al., 2010). From this perspective, RT needs to remain a support for rural development without trespassing a certain limit, an invisible threshold, over which it is possible to compromise the true spirit of the countryside. Today, only a few regions are approaching that threshold. In those regions the main issue is not anymore the development of RT, but its sustainability. Sustainable tourism is the only type of tourism that can generate the maintenance of an authentic countryside lifestyle area, where it is possible to relax and enjoy nature and the countryside atmosphere.

In order to address the uneven distribution of RT in the European Union, we will be focus on dynamics and processes that enable over time the transition of rural economies towards a tourism specialisation. The present paper is structured as follows: section 2 provides an evolutionary framework for RT studies, and in section 3 and 4 the framework is applied to the case-study of RT in Tuscany.

2. An evolutionary framework for rural tourism studies

RT studies have not yet developed a univocal theoretical framework and usually they carry out a static and descriptive analysis (Béteille, 1996; Garrod et al., 2005; Sanagustin Fons et al, 2011; Su, 2011). At best, RT is conceived as integrated with the economic, social, cultural, natural, and human local structures in which it takes place (Saxena et al., 2007; Saxena and Ilbery, 2008; Ilbery and Saxena, 2011). Some

scholars studied the mutual inter-relationship between agriculture and tourism (Pearce, 1990; Fleischer and Pizam, 1997; Walford, 2001; Nilsson, 2002) and their observations lead to the conclusion that there is a range of links between them (Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005). In the literature it is clear that RT is based 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.

The core problems of any static approach concerns its tendency to neglect the genesis of change so as to be able to answer to the question: Why does it happen there and not there? Which processes did allow it? More systemic approaches actively address the multidimensional and co-evolutionary character of the formation of new territorial configurations and barriers to transformation from established ones (Coenen and Truffer, 2012). In order to encompass the evolutionary processes of tourism development within rural areas, a framework is proposed. If the attention moves from a static analysis of RT within a region to the transition from a rural development model (unifunctional) to another (multifunctional) than the multi-level perspective (MLP) might be a fertile framework. The aim of this paper is to adapt the MLP to the study of RT. This has been possible to be achieved due to the integration with other evolutionary approaches as the model developed by Lewis (1998), the tourism product lifecycle of Butler (1980) and the findings by MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003) for the study of a cultural rural tourism and those by Cánoves et al. (2004) on the development of RT in Spain.

The multi-level framework (Geels, 2002; 2004) explains economic transitions as a shift from a historically predominant configuration to a new one by the interplay of processes at three different levels: niches (micro-level), regimes (meso) and landscape (macro), hence the term “multilevel perspective”. The key concept of the MLP is the socio-technical regime, a highly interrelated and stable structure at the meso-level characterized by established products, specializations and technologies, stocks of knowledge, users practices and routines, expectations, norms, regulations, etc. In our adapted MLP the key concept is the rural regime, that is the rural configuration within a region, in terms of production process techniques, farm organization, land use pattern, infrastructures and rural settlements. Two different regions could have the same specialisation (e.g. wine regions) or morphology (e.g mountainous or hilly regions) but totally different rural regimes. A rural regime deals with organization

processes and routines, with “how” not with “what” has been produced in a region. Doing so we will focus on the territorial embeddedness of a rural regime. MLP approach suffer from a missing conceptualization of space (Cooke, 2010; Coenen and Truffer, 2012) while the development of a better theoretical understanding of factors enabling or impeding tourism development in rural areas requires a closer investigation into the contingencies and particularities of the spatial contexts in which transition evolves and take place. Furthermore, a greater emphasis on the territorial embeddedness will help to address our aim: to disclose the unevenness of rural tourism development.

By providing orientation and co-ordination to the activities of rural actor groups, a rural regime 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 regime evolves through selection and retention mechanisms. In every region RT induces a change that occurs firstly as a novelty at the micro level (niche), and only in a second phase it may apply for a radical change in the rural regime. The success of tourism in changing the rural regime is therefore due to diverse incremental changes that tourism will be able to generate over time in a rural region.

The macro-level, the so-called landscape, includes a set of factors that influence innovation or transition processes, such as economic growth/crisis, cultural and normative values, environmental problems, urban crisis, food price and food quality and so on. While a regime refers to rules that enable and constrain activities within a rural community, the landscape refers to wider external factors. The context of landscape is even harder to change than that of regimes, it changes but more slowly than regimes.

While under a strong and stable rural regime, changes have a hard time to diffuse beyond the niche-level, they may eventually breakthrough when the regime is weak. In this paper we argue that rural transition towards tourism development was fostered in those areas with a weak rural regime. On this perspective it is possible to understand the reasons that prevented RT development in many wine regions in France, except in Alsace, Champagne and Cognac (Frochot, 2000; Lignon-Darmaillac, 2009; Schirmer and Randelli, 2009): the rural regime based on wine production was too strong and successful to enable a novelty like tourism. In this paper the transition from a rural development model (unifunctional) to another (multifunctional) is conceptualized as shifts from one stable rural configuration to a new one by

interacting processes at the different levels of landscape, rural regimes and niches. The transition is incremental and the configuration may differ regionally. The result is a framework structured on four different stages, as shown in the following table.

<p>Stage 1 START</p>	<p>Few tourists arrive and some local individuals and farmers see an opportunity. RT is a niche. Other empty rural houses and farm are acquired by external individuals (urban and foreign individuals). Regional law on accommodations is lacking. Accommodation are rudimentary and not lawfully regulated. Local services supporting tourism doesn't exist yet. (e.g. distant rural areas, isolated from large urban area such as UK periphery, the centre of France, the central south of Spain and Portugal, the south of Italy)</p>
<p>Stage 2 GROWTH</p>	<p>The number of tourists grows. Related services are offered by local municipalities and other entrepreneurs. A new law on tourism is passed (accommodations and standards). RT is considered an opportunity by a growing number of farmers and residents. Accommodations in the farms are provided and tourism income support agricultural income. External corporations may invest in RT accommodations. Tourists support local demand for agri-products and art crafts. Investments on farm houses support other related small firms activities. Rural regime is under transition towards multifunctionality (e.g. Alsace, Champagne, Cognac and Aveyron in France, Umbria, Marche and Abruzzo in Italy, Aragón and Asturias in Spain).</p>
<p>Stage 3 MATURITY</p>	<p>Competition among tourist entrepreneurs is based on quality accommodation and services. Tourism income supports additional investments in quality accommodations and services provided in the farm. Institutional planning is crucial, enduring for short and long-term community benefits. Transition towards multifunctionality is ended. The empty spaces are filled in. RT is a driver of the local rural configuration. The threat is not exceeding in the urbanization of rural spaces. (e.g. South Tyrol and Tuscany in Italy, Castilla y León and Catalonia in Spain, the Cotswolds and Chilterns in UK, the Douro valley in Portugal, Tyrol in Austria)</p>
<p>Stage 4 DECLINE</p>	<p>If sustainability is not achieved, a decline of the rural areas may start (Any rural area in Europe reached this stage yet).</p>

Tab. 1 Stages in the evolution of Rural Tourism

The framework, as shown in Table 2, provides four different stages in the evolution of RT in a region. The transition process towards tourism development begins when a few tourists arrive in the community and some residents see an opportunity. In this

preliminary stage RT is a novelty and it is not able yet, either to influence the rural regime or to support local employment. Its future development depends on different factors at the macro level (the landscape on the MLP) such as changes in tourism practices, policy makers strategies, transports development, funding mechanisms, etc.,. At the meso level the weakness or strength of the rural regime is important: if local rural regime is strong and stable then local entrepreneurs and farmers will not be interested in developing new trajectories of business within their firms. Furthermore to develop RT means to change routines, to approach different markets and suppliers, which is a radical change for entrepreneurs and employees.

It is crucial the availability of buildings for new accommodations. In the farm, the weakness of the previous rural regime could made available empty buildings which can be restored and arranged as accommodations. At this first stage few of those pioneer tourists, attracted by low prices of properties (houses and farms) may decide to buy one and, eventually to become a permanent resident³. In this preliminary stage regional law on tourism accommodation is lacking and the offer is basically on a low standards profile and quite rudimentary. RT is based nearly exclusively on lodgings: rooms rented in the owner's private home (included farm house), independent lodgings, or rural campsites, although under different labels in Europe (Cánoves et al., 2004). Local government (municipality) doesn't yet organize any tourist service such as public transport, tourist information or local events.

The future development of RT over the first stage in a region will break out when ongoing processes at the macro and meso level open a "window of opportunity". If the macro level has an influence on every region, than the local transition towards a RT development depends basically on the meso level: if the regional rural regime is strong and growing than there will not be any openness for a novelty such as tourism in the first stage. A strong path dependency (Arthur, 1994), due to aligned and locked in use patterns (David, 1985) may stunt the transition processes and the change will not occur in the rural configuration, although the region has a strong potential in RT development and a new law on accommodation in the farm (e.g. in France policy makers push for RT development although rural entrepreneurs do not ever follow them).

³ In many rural areas tourism development go together with rural gentrification (Phillips, 2005; Hines, 2010).

The second stage (growth) evolves from the simple start. RT is not a niche anymore and it starts to change the regional rural regime towards multifunctionality. It is the stage to plan and to implement strategies that start to benefit the whole region (MacDonalds and Joliffe, 2003). This will develop into more formal regulation of accommodations and standards (regional or national law on tourism). After the first stage of novelty, tourist entrepreneurs start to grow in number and also farmers and corporations, together with individuals, start to invest in rural accommodations. The main actors of the existing rural regime are involved in the transition. This is due to their great advantage over new entrant entrepreneurs: they already own rural buildings. Tourist entrepreneurs invest in house restoration and they support small firm and individuals working as mason, carpenter, joiner, plumber, electrician, etc. Tourists grow and the price of houses and farm increase. Related services are offered by local municipalities (tourist information, public transportation) and other entrepreneurs (restaurant, car rental, taxi service). At 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 and longer visits, in many accommodations are provided a number of activities related to nature, rural activities and specialized agricultural products (wine tasting, cooking class, horse-riding, fishing, hunting, trekking excursions, rafting, therapy treatment, fruit-picking, etc). A plethora of various formulae are offered in Europe and each country or region emphasis on one or more specialities (Cánoves et al., 2004).

The third stage is that of maturity. RT is now a stable driver of rural regime. The existing entrepreneurs need to diversify their offer investing in the quality of their accommodations, in the professional degree of employees, in marketing – especially on the web – and on the range of services they offer (restaurant, guided tours, internet facilities, etc..). At this stage of maturity it is quite common that the entrepreneur abandon agricultural activities, because they are less profitable, and also because it is difficult to manage both businesses. In France 36% of the farms and 45% in UK (Ardillier-Carras, 1999; Dehoorne, 1999) are substituting tourism for agricultural activities in rural accommodations. This is therefore a growing phenomenon, especially in areas where agriculture is not economically competitive.

At this stage, the institutional planning is crucial, enduring for short and long-term community benefits while also preserving its resources. The principles for a smart planning include authenticity and quality, education, preservation and protection and partnerships among local agents. Integration (Saxena et al., 2007) and sustainability are the key words.

The growth of RT has to be totally divergent from that one of 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, and 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 too: exceeding in the urbanization of rural spaces. According to us, RT offers 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 using (i.e. new buildings). On this third stage RT might continue to grow although without following any tourist mass strategies. The start of the fourth stage (decline) is intimately related with the planning strategies developed in this third stage.

3. Genesis of RT in Tuscany

As the rural configuration along the transition process may spatially differ, the framework can be applied to the study of RT evolution in different regions. In the present paper the framework is applied to Tuscany region within Italy. Starting from the Eighties, RT is driving the renaissance of Tuscan countryside. Traditional analysis of tourism development describe it in terms of richness in local resources such as a beautiful landscape, high quality products (wine and olive oil) and many historical centres widespread in the countryside (i.e. San Gimignano, Volterra, Cortona) or nearby (Florence, Pisa, Lucca). We argue that to understand RT evolution in Tuscany is crucial to shine a light on the Tuscan rural regime.

Since the fifteen century, the traditional agricultural system in Tuscany, as in other Central Italy regions, was based on the “*mezzadria*” system (sharecropping). At that time the Florentine merchants owned the majority of rural properties around the urban area and started to use the sharecropping in order to manage their rural properties. Sharecropping offered certain advantages to both landowners and landless farmers, in

that the first could keep their properties flourishing and sell the share products in the city, and the second could have a small farm⁴ with a house and the food for their families. The same happened in the rural areas around Siena, Lucca, and Arezzo, the other principal Tuscan cities. It is in that period that the Tuscan landscape takes its typical shape: the merchants built their *ville*⁵ and the sharecroppers their *case coloniche* (farm houses). That architecture, with only some marginal changes, is today still alive on the Tuscan hills, together with olive trees, vines and cypresses, the latter used around the houses, to limit properties and on the boulevard reaching villas and castles. The rural settlement on the Tuscan hills is still composed by villas with gardens and parks around (Azzari and Rombai, 1991) and many farm houses – sometimes small villages - surrounded by olive trees and vineyards. The small cities are sometimes located down the hill, more frequently at the top of the hills, generally on the main roads, as they developed as market places. To this day in many rural municipalities of Tuscany the number of *case sparse* (scattered houses) is over 30%. Since the Fifties, the sharecropping underwent a deep economic and social crisis and the sharecroppers abandoned their houses. The reasons for such a profound crisis are different but one in particular explains it clearly: the gap between the farm income and the industry income was 1 to 3.7 in the 1955, and 1 to 5.5 in the 1963 (Cianferoni and Mancini, 1993). In the 1971 the Italian Census of Population shows clearly the “escape” from Tuscan countryside and the growth of industrialised cities⁶. Many Tuscan rural areas were classified as “depressed area” and many rural municipalities lost over 50% of their population in the period 1955-1971 (Milani, 1991). Since the Eighties, after a deep re-organization, the Tuscan countryside started to improve by all social and economic indicators. A modern and technological agricultural system, based on the production of wine and olive oil export oriented, has been developed. The empty spaces in rural areas, the villas and the farm houses take a new set of functions. A large number of scattered houses, heritage of the ancient agricultural system, starts to be occupied by new arrivals: tourists and residents. Due to the previous crisis of sharecropping and a large availability of empty buildings in

⁴ The sharecropping farm in Tuscany had an average size of 10-15 hectares (25-37 acres) and to this day it is almost the same.

⁵ In a certain point of view, the merchants and their guests, moving seasonally from the cities to their villas in the countryside, they could be considered the first rural tourists in Tuscany.

⁶ The rural crisis has been overdrawn by the take off of industrial districts in Tuscany and in the rest of the “*Terza Italia*” (Third Italy) (Bagnasco, 1977; Goodman et al., 1989; Pyke et al., 1990).

the farms, the rural regime in Tuscany was able to accept a radical change in terms of a new specialization in tourism.

Since the Sixties some pioneers had been acquiring those empty farm houses, in the beginning for very low prices and later on for a fortune. They were especially foreign people from England, France, Germany, Swiss and US, or Italians from the main cities of Italy (Milan, Rome, Naples, etc.) and Tuscany (Florence, Prato, Siena). As the merchants in the fifteen century, they bought rural properties to invest their money coming from other businesses, so to have a primary or secondary house or to become a wine maker⁷ (Randelli et al., 2007).

The large availability of an unemployed architectural heritage embedded in a unique rural landscape masterpieces of an ancient rural society, has been the primary input of RT development in Tuscany. The first stage - that of the start in the framework - developed in Tuscany through 1970' and early 1990'. The only accommodation available in that early stage were the old inns located in the centre of the main villages. In that period only a few individual and family farmers offered low standards apartments and rooms. Due to the lack of regional law on tourism, many of those preliminary accommodations were not legal.

The second stage started in Tuscany in 1985 with a new law on *agriturismo* (farmer's house). On the macro-level (landscape in the MLP) new trends supported the transition towards RT and here we point out two: European funding for multifunctionality within agriculture and urban people asking for natural life style (Bétteille, 1996; Champion et al., 1998; Phillips, 2005; Romei, 2008a). Since 1985 Tuscany regional government has invested many European funds for agriculture and rural areas in setting up and then improving accommodation in farm (*agriturismo*). Many farms started the transition towards tourism accommodation and today *agriturismo* cover over 60% of beds in various Tuscan municipalities. Due to the number of *agriturismo*, Tuscany⁸ is considered in Italy a leading region on RT: in 2010 the percentage of *agriturismo* located in Tuscany was 22.5% on the total at the national level (4,200 of 18,674 in Italy) (Source: Agritourist, 2011). The evolution of

⁷ The rural gentrification of Tuscan countryside is not homogeneous and it can be displayed by the value of rural houses. The value of a rural house can vary from 800/1.000 € per square meter (sm) in the north mountainous areas to 2500/3000 €/sm in the countryside southern Siena and 4000/5000 €/sm in the Chianti, the rural area between Florence and Sienna.

⁸ Tuscany is also member of NECSTouR, the Network of European Region for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism, gathering 28 Tourism Regional Authorities associated to 30 representatives of the academic and business sectors (www.necstour.eu/necstour/necstour.page).

RT within Tuscany has not been homogeneous and today some rural areas are on the third stage (mature) while others are still at the preliminary stage, although the transition has become widespread. To point out to the different stages within the region, a quantitative analysis has been carried out.

4. Results of the quantitative analysis

To carry out an analysis of those differences, the first step has been to detect the rural areas within the region. In this way we have selected three different indicators so to include social, economic and ecological dimensions of rurality. Then we have classified as rural those municipalities respecting at least one of those three following indicators:

- Social dimension: density of population < 150 inhabitants per km² (OCSE);
- Economic dimension: number of employees in agriculture > 4.09% (regional average);
- Ecological dimension: rural land use (forests, agricultural fields, semi-natural areas, beaches, rivers, lakes, etc.)⁹ > 95.92% (regional average).

As second step we considered a data set including all available tourist statistics. In Table 1 we report some of them for the rural areas of Tuscany, in comparison with the whole region. The nights per capita (14,51) and the total number of beds per capita (0,2) in rural areas are higher than in the whole region. This is due to both the high level of development of RT in some rural areas and to the lower density of population.

	Population	Density (Pop/kmq)	Total nights	Nights per capita	Total beds	Beds per capita	Beds in hotel	Beds not in hotel
Rural areas	1,369,579	72.93	19,869,475	14.51	269,443	0.20	84,106	185,337
Tuscany Total	3,677,678	159.92	41,995,655	11.42	461,104	0.13	178,915	282,189

Table 2. Statistics for rural areas in Tuscany. Source. Regione Toscana, 2010.

⁹ The result of the first step was a selection of 213 municipalities on 287. We have included also those coastal municipalities respecting at least one of the three indicators. This choice is due to the fact that those coastal municipalities have an internal countryside rich of agricultural productions and agriturismo. This large number may lead someone to argue that this number is excessive because it includes urban and rural coastal areas more oriented to beach tourism.

In the third step we have selected some indicators that, according to us, are able to represent the different stage in the development of RT within the rural municipalities. According to us the level of development on RT can be measured by some indicators such as:

- Total nights and nights per capita;
- Total beds and beds per capita;
- Trend of both nights and beds (2000-2010);
- Number of intensive capital *agriturismi* (with at least one service such as swimming pool, restaurant, golf, tennis)

Indicators	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Nights per capita	<2	2 < value < 12	>12
Beds per capita	<0.03	0.03 < value < 0.15	> 0.15
Trends of nights and beds	<+10% per year	+10% > value < +20% p.y.	stable
Number of intensive capital <i>agriturismo</i>	Not existing	< 15%	>15%

Table 3 The indicators in the different stages.

The results have been an output of three different kind of municipalities as a consequence of their stage in the RT development: those to the third stage with a “mature” development of RT, those to the second still moving forward through a growth process and those not moving yet from the first preliminary stage (see fig.1). 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.

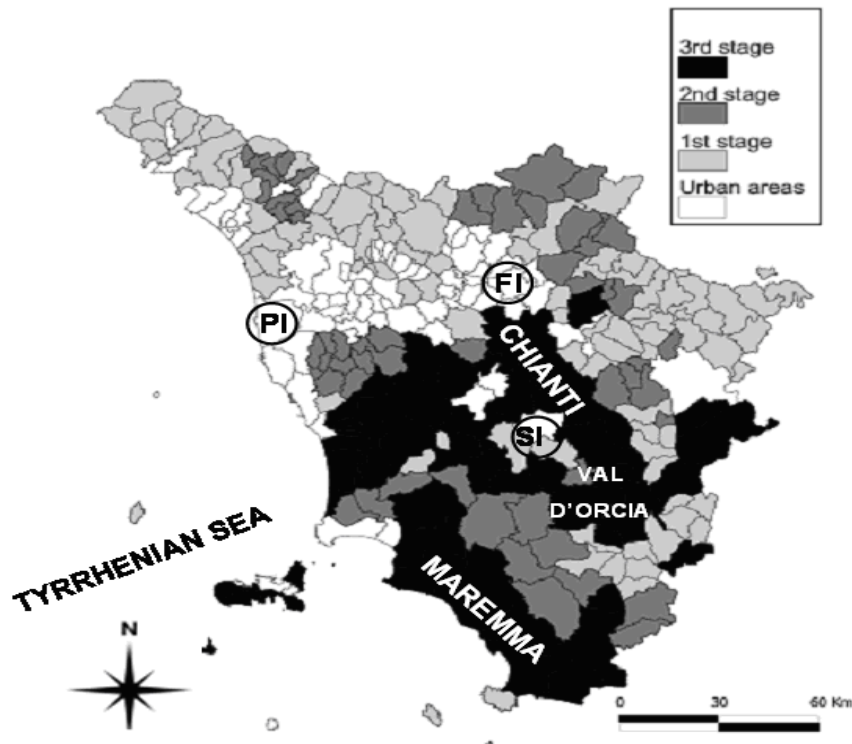


Fig. 1 Different stages within Tuscany (PI=Pisa, FI=Florence, SI=Sienna)

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.

5. Conclusions

In many regions RT is driving the restructuring of countryside with many positive effects in the social and economic field. In order to address the uneven distribution of RT within European regions, we focused on dynamics and processes that enable the transition of rural economy towards a tourism specialization. The present paper provides an evolutionary framework based on the adaptation of the MLP (Geels, 2002; 2004). The framework explains rural transition towards a multifunctional model as a shift from a historically predominant configuration to a new one by the interplay of processes at three different levels: niches (micro-level), rural regimes (meso) and landscape (macro). Taking into account the dynamics as well as the spatial contingencies, it allows us to point out the mechanisms that might enable or inhibit the transition within a region. Due to lock in mechanism, also in some regions rich in rural amenities, the transition might fail and RT will not move from a preliminary stage. On the other hand, rural transition toward tourism development might be fostered by a weak rural regime.

Moving forward on the evolution of RT we pointed out a model with four different stages, from the start, through the growth and maturation and in case to the decline of a rural tourism region. Every incremental change in the rural configuration is due to the ongoing interaction of processes at the three different level of the framework. Rural reconfigurations thus occur when developments at multiple levels link up and reinforce each other.

In the present paper the framework has been applied to the case study of Tuscany in Italy. In line with the framework it is possible to explain the success of Tuscany as a simultaneous interplay of several different factors at the micro, macro and meso level. Tourism first occur as a niche at the micro level, with a few tourist hosted in rudimentary accommodations. Then, at the meso level, the weakness of the rural configuration and a large availability of empty buildings, heritage of the previous rural regime, has open a “window of opportunity” for tourism development. At macro-level new trends fostered the transition towards RT, in particular the European funding for multifunctionality within agriculture and urban people seeking for natural life-style. Due to a new regional law on tourism in the farm, since 1985 farmers have invested in setting up and than up-grading accommodation in the farm (agriturismo). This massive wave of investments in restoration has been supported by European funding

for agriculture and rural areas. Many farms started the transition towards a tourism accommodation facility and today accommodations in the farm (*agriturismo*) cover over 60% of beds in various Tuscan municipalities. To pinpoint the different stages within the Tuscany region we set up a quantitative analysis.

In conclusion, empirical analyses with the MLP can improve our understanding of the complexity of rural developments, although MLP might not be handle as “an ontological description of reality, but an analytical and heuristic framework to understand transitions” (Geels, 2002, p. 1273). For future research, additional case studies and improving in the framework are needed, in order to address the dynamics enabling or inhibiting changes in rural areas.

The findings in this study have important policy implications. The evolutionary framework depicts the possible unfitness, which is usually ignored in different policy measures, regardless of the region or country. We show that, in some regions, a strong and stable rural regime might inhibit the development of RT. Thus, it can be that every institutional and public effort will be not follow ed and supported by local entrepreneurs investments. 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 and funds support should be address to other areas. Furthermore, pointing out the different stages of RT it can support regional planning to modulate different policies within the same region. In some rural areas the main issue of policies might be supporting tourism entrepreneurship and the related services, while in some other should be preserving rural atmosphere and limiting new housing and facilities.

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