



Challenges for the New Rurality

In a changing world

Proceedings from the
7th International Conference on
Localized Agri-Food Systems

Editors
Paulina Rytönen & Ursula Hård

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Challenges for the New Rurality in a Changing World

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ICT Platform and Gaming to Social Change in Rural Areas

Francesco Contò¹, Anna DiPace², Anita Norlund³, Sara Djelveh⁴, Nicola Faccilongo⁵, Alessia Scarinci⁶ & Lucia Borrelli⁷

Abstract – This work aims at the dissemination of learning processes in rural areas through the use of ICT in relation to programs of national and regional rural development.

In particular we want to:

- Spread the basic knowledge;
- Provide tools and informations for a better management of learning processes through ICT;
- Significantly reduce the digital divide present in the region;
- Combine social development to the growth of competitiveness in the market.

Keywords: rural areas, ICT, education, digital divide, social innovation, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Rural world is marked by well-defined work times and cultural resistance that are reflected in closed attitudes towards training. One answer to these problems is given by the ICT. Unfortunately, in rural areas the access to online resources is often difficult because of a very slow broadband connection.

The growing presence of ICT in every productive sector clashes with the delay of the entire agri-food sector about the use of information and communication technologies. The adoption and diffusion of ICT is essential for local development to promote e-inclusion.

It is proposed, therefore, the use of ICT tools to promote a collaborative learning environment, especially in rural areas.

The European Policy for Rural Development 2014-2020, (within the strategy "Europe 2020"), aims at the dissemination of knowledge-based economy in the agricultural sector, particularly in rural areas.

The development of rural areas has been profoundly influenced by social, economic and

normative factors which can be enclosed in the following subjects:

- Environment (environmental policies, environmental sustainability, urban and landscape plans, environmental protection plans, mountain plans);
- Competitiveness (research and innovation, policies for the enterprise);
- Quality of life (social and health policies, education, gender policy, health plan).

Citizens in rural areas, compared to residents in urban areas, suffer from specific disadvantages for geographical isolation which implies, among other difficulties, especially that of transport.

Therefore living in a rural area could mean the impossibility of access to professional training and retraining.

The European Commission has said that lifelong learning (LLL) and the continuous updating of knowledge and skills are the essential conditions for a business competitiveness, economic development and social cohesion.

The education and training occupy a prominent place to achieve the goals of the Lisbon Strategy of 2000, in which the Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) are recognized with a crucial role to enhance lifelong learning and facilitate access to continuous training also to those people who are often excluded from permanent education.

METHODS AND SOURCES

It develops a distance learning that utilizes a network infrastructure. It is an on-line courses model: the main feature is the lack of stiffness fixed by time and physical spaces.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ORGANISING CONCEPTS

Reference is made to the constructivist theory, which fully develops the principles of open education. Teaching model is centered on the environment, on scaffolding, on collaboration and cooperation dynamics.

The focus is on rural areas: Rural or semi-rural areas represent about 88% of EU territory and account for 46% of the Gross Value Added and 55% of jobs (EC, 2013⁸). Innovation patterns in rural areas are often claimed to be slower and less frequent than in cities, due to their low-density and relatively poor level of human and physical resources, as well as for their weaker linkages with research and development centres. Improving the capacities of local actors to contribute to economic growth and sustainable development within their areas or regions is one of the key-factor for the economic development strategies of rural areas (Terluin, 2003).

Innovation is a largely concept that can be defined as the successful exploitation of new ideas into new products, processes, markets and ways of

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⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/statistics/rural-development/2013/index_en.htm (consulted 01/03/2016).

organizing (Pittaway et al., 2004) that is determined not only by internal factors but also by external ones (Lasagni, 2012). However, the literature suggests that innovation has often been interpreted by the policy level as essentially technological development (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008), thus somehow "excluding" rural areas from the process of innovation itself (idem).

Recently, Social Innovation (SI) as emerged as a possible solution for addressing the needs and features of innovation in rural areas and promoting interconnected issues of growth and social inclusion, particularly in rural areas, thus incorporating the rural innovation into a new approach to defining and measuring innovation (idem) and going beyond the traditional models focusing on productive and especially technical innovations (Howaldt & Kopp, 2012). Even without a unique and undisputed definition of social innovation, the concept refers to new ideas that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations (Bureau of European Policy Advisors, 2011). Social innovation has been also conceptualised as a mean to achieve societal transformation (Avelino et al., 2014) and as a mean to promote the innovation, reorganization and improving of societies (eg. social empowerment and inclusion, social capital, cohesion, etc.). The crucial element of SI is again the need of improving and enhancing rural communities' capacity to mobilise new knowledge and technologies for the development of their activities.

SI can take advantage from the use of ICT solutions and their ability to reduce distance and improve the exchange of knowledge among different areas and communities. This concept has been strongly supported by several initiatives launched by the European Union, in particular in the framework of the Digital Agenda for Europe⁹. Digital Social Innovation has been promoted as a concept to use digital technologies for achieving social good and can be defined as "a type of collaborative innovation in which innovators, users and communities collaborate using digital technologies to co-create knowledge and solutions for a wide range of social needs and at a scale that was unimaginable before the rise of the Internet¹⁰". In principle, (ICT) thereby offer great potentials for rural areas to reconnect and revitalise, and grow through social innovation dynamics, but rural areas still lag behind in Internet and particularly high-speed internet access (Bock, 2016).

Based on such assumptions, this work aims at identifying possible models for improving human skills, capacity-building and innovation capabilities in rural areas through the use of digital social innovation solutions.

RESULTS

The main expected results will predominately concern the increase of rural systems people skills.

This increase has skills as a further result, the maintenance of the population within these rural areas.

The latter result reflects one of the principal objectives set by the European Union in the new agricultural policy.

CONCLUSIONS

Improvement of human capital in rural areas will bring better living conditions in rural areas and an increase in average gross income per capita.

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⁹ See for instance the CAPS call in Horizons 2020.

¹⁰ <http://digitalsocial.eu/> (consulted 14/03/16).

Challenges for the New Rurality in a Changing World was the title of the 7th International Conference on Localized Agri-Food Systems.

The contributions in this volume are written by conference participants. The themes highlighted relate to four topics. The *first* topic refers to various aspects of the articulation of the New Rurality and its challenges and opportunities, with a specific focus on the Nordic countries, the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea, and the Eastern European Countries. Also in focus is the role of knowledge in the promotion of rural development and ‘glocal’ links as enablers of opportunities and sources of challenges in relation to entrepreneurship and rural development – in theory and practice in particular Europe and the Americas. The *second* topic highlights various aspects of territorial governance and localized agri-food systems in particular Europe, North and South America. The *third* topic relates to the impact of the market on localized agri-food systems, with a special focus on short food chains, public procurement and tourism. The *fourth* and final topic highlights questions related to the connection between localized agri-food systems and the environment. Special interest was devoted to possible synergies, (organizational) innovations and challenges between localized agri-food systems and environmental benefits, proposing agroecology as a framework for action in the transition from conventional production to more sustainable agro-food production systems.



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