



How can different stakeholders contribute to rural landscape planning policy? The case study of Pralormo municipality (Italy)



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ABSTRACT

In rural landscapes, historical values and traditional crops are in conflict with recent commercial demand and social needs. For sustainable development, it is essential to find a methodology able to conjugate cultural and historical values with socio-economic trends. In order to identify shared actions, strategies and policies for the management of rural historical site, an integrated empirical work was developed. The main goal was to understand how to promote a bottom-up planning approach, including stakeholder perceptions in policy actions and planning strategies for historical rural landscapes. Pralormo municipality (Piedmont, north-west Italy) was chosen as case study. We developed a methodological framework to understand if the participatory approach can contribute to landscape planning from the local to the regional level. Field observations, landscape and historical analysis, farmers' interviews and two focus group meetings were performed. This study shows that complex socio-cultural and economic drivers affect the future of the studied rural area. The assessment of land use scenarios can play an important role in promoting the understanding of such uncertain systems. Shared actions, strategies and policies were identified for the planning of rural historical site. In the case of Pralormo, which is transferrable to other European historical rural areas, we promoted the adoption of a new local landscape planning strategy with positive fall-out on the regional scale. Linking food and landscape quality, preserving ancient settlement, maintaining traditional land uses and promoting educational activities in farm are considered the most important issues for sustainable development.

1. Introduction

Rural landscapes are characterised by dynamic and continuous changes (Antrop, 2005). They are the result of a continuous land re-organisation to adapt their use and spatial structure to the changing of economic and social demands. According to Sandker et al. (2010), rural landscapes are considered as mosaics of land cover types providing ecosystem services and developing opportunities for the multiple needs of diverse stakeholders. In Europe since the 1950s the different rural systems have been evolving in two opposite directions: intensification and monoculture *versus* marginalization and abandon (Skaloš et al., 2011; Larcher et al., 2013). Moreover, in the European Union (EU) since 1990, several rural landscapes were in transition, losing their primary agricultural functions, traditional crops, and historical land uses (Meeus et al., 1990; Cullotta and Barbera, 2011). The European Commission's Agri-Environmental Measures (2005) refer to maintain the sustainable farming systems, to sustain traditional landscape and to promote and rural development. In Europe, many historical rural landscapes have been subjected to transformations following land

abandonment or crop conversion caused by processes of polarisation towards more urbanised areas (Pedroli et al., 2016). Recently in Italy, the Italian Statistical National Institute (ISTAT) measured in 50% the loss of cultivated lands between the 1930 and 2010. Urban sprawl and land consumption played a fundamental role in this process (Romano and Zullo, 2014).

Protecting, sustaining and valorizing historical agricultural landscapes are considered priorities by the international community. In 2003, the FAO GIAHS project (Globally Important Ingenious Agricultural Heritage System) addressed the relationship between agricultural heritage systems and their landscape and outlined the need to safeguard them over time. Furthermore, up to 2016, 17 historical agricultural sites had been included in the World Heritage List as 'cultural heritage' by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2016). These sites are mainly recognised for their distinctive agricultural systems and historical features such as cultivation practices, land uses, productions or traditional cultivations techniques (Gullino and Larcher, 2013). In this context, multi-disciplinary studies should be applied and specific actions, policies,

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measures and management plans should be developed. Choi and Sirakaya (2005) and Dearborn and Stallmeyer (2009) recognised a conflict between heritage protection and tourism development and identified the need to develop policies and effective management strategies. These authors outlined that what remains unclear is how the sustainable concept can concretely assume a dynamic character and, moreover, how people's awareness changes through generations. The identification of landscape planning policies, strategies and actions for historical rural areas is a priority (Agnoletti, 2014).

1.1. Participatory process for rural landscape planning

The participatory approach allows to understand local actors' perspectives and problems and to identify strategies for supporting the agriculture (Pinto-Correia et al., 2014; Cleary and Hogan, 2016; Prasad Pant and Hambly Odame, 2017). The public participation can be used as instrument for landscape planning too (Stenseke, 2009). Moreover, following the European Landscape Convention's (ELC, 2000) recommendations concerning the need to take into account people perception in landscape planning, public consultation has recently become an increasingly important tool in the decision-making process. Jones and Stenseke (2011) illustrated and compared different experiences of public participation across Europe. Local participation evolved as a strategy in the conservation and maintenance of biological and environmental resources and historical values in cultural landscapes. In the ELC the concept of landscape was defined and 'means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'. In general, landscape is differently understood and perceived by each stakeholder (Larcher et al., 2013). Rural landscapes are non-static features and places that define people's livelihoods, identities, and belief systems. According to Tress et al. (2007) and Antrop (2006) landscape is considered an integrating concept that refers both to a physical reality that originates from the continuous and dynamic interaction of natural processes and human activity and to immaterial existential values and symbols that the landscape embodies.

For evaluating the sustainability of rural landscape over time according to cultural and historical values, the "active" management is considered a primary goal. Gullino et al. (2015) affirmed that a dynamic sustainability can be ensured through the evaluation of several parameters and by the definition of an integrated planning approach. In this context, the involvement of different stakeholders in the participatory process and the creation and exploration of future landscape scenarios contribute to the development of sustainable future landscapes (Bohnet and Smith, 2007; Tress and Tress, 2003). Moreover, to maintain farming activity, historical crops and traditional elements, the recognition of qualifying elements and the participation of local people are essential activities. With this approach the population becomes more aware and responsible in the management process.

1.2. Research aim

New tools and techniques, based on multi-disciplinarity, increased the ability to monitor and to explore changes in land cover over time (Pedroli et al., 2007; Barbera and Cullotta, 2012; Almeida et al., 2015). According to these authors, we developed an integrated conceptual framework. Frequently, historical values and permanences and traditional cultivations are in conflict with commercial demand and social needs. To apply a methodology able to conjugate the cultural and historical values with the socio-economic trends and create pathways for planning historical rural landscapes, a multidisciplinary study was developed. The method was applied in Pralormo municipality (Piedmont, North-West Italy) as a case study.

The key goals of the research were:

- to develop an integrated empirical work promoting a bottom-up

planning approach;

- to employ participatory approach (interviews) identifying problems and qualifying elements perceived by local farmers;
- to identify shared actions, strategies and policies for rural historical landscape planning.

The development of integrated empirical work proposed in this paper, should be related to the context used and to the focus' research. The methodological framework combines landscape theoretical study with different participatory approaches. This pilot application demonstrates how stakeholders participation would influence landscape planning process in rural areas.

2. Material and methods

2.1. The study area

The case study was the Pralormo municipality (44° 51' 39" North, 7° 54' 9" East) (Piedmont Region, north-west Italy) and it is characterised by several agricultural patterns and land uses. The municipality covers about 2980 ha with flat areas and hills ranging in altitude from 260 to 1300 m above sea level. The rural mosaic is a non-specialised and fragmented farm pattern of cereals (70%), grassland pasture (25%), woods (3%) and vineyards (2%). In 2013 there were 102 farms with 2042 ha of cultivated lands (Agricultural Statistical Census). Pralormo municipality represents the diversity of the characteristic mosaic of the Pianura Padana irrigated flat area. In fact, the landscape is dominated by different agricultural systems combined with small-scale mosaics of other land uses resulting in a specific landscape character.

A methodological approach to explore landscape scenarios was applied to Mértola municipality in southern Portugal by Loupa Ramos (2010). In that case, the author decided to study this site because it was considered fragile in terms of rural landscape and classified as critical in terms of population density. By contrast, also considering the European trend (Temme and Verburg, 2011), we decided to study Pralormo municipality because in this site the agricultural activity is already an important socioeconomic resource and, during the last decades it has progressively increased in terms of cultivated surface (+30%). The evolution of agriculture over time was analysed by checking the ISTAT data of the Census of Agriculture between 1980 and 2010. This unusual dynamic shows how the agricultural sector continues to represent the most important socio-economic resource for this municipality. Moreover, the area is characterised by clay soils that in the past were exploited by inhabitants for building fishponds. Since XIX century, these structures provided water for irrigation and were used for tench fishing. Today in Pralormo municipality, a total of 102 fishponds characterize the landscape. In this context, identifying actions, strategies and policies for conserving land uses and landscape features were also our research aims.

2.2. Methodological framework

We developed a methodological framework to understand how the participatory approach can contribute to landscape planning from the local to the regional level. In Italy (Fig. 1), the landscape policy is based on regional regulatory constraints and requirements applied at landscape unit scale without effects on the municipality level (Fig. 1A). Decisions taken at the local level, on the other hand, can influence other municipalities in the same landscape unit without effects on the regional level (Fig. 1B). We considered that the empirical work proposed, starting from the municipality level, can promote the exchange in each direction by involving stakeholders from all the political levels (from municipality to regional level) (Fig. 1C). Moreover, the main political target of Pralormo was to adopt new landscape planning policy to promote and enhance the rural landscape, and its cultural and historical features, integrating all the qualifying elements in a project of

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