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# PEASANT AGRICULTURE AND PART-TIME FARMING: USE OF RESOURCES AND LANDSCAPE EFFECTS IN A RURAL AREA OF SOUTHERN ITALY

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the factors influencing the decisions of the economic operators that use the territory as a fundamental resource, seems a good point to start for any study finalized to understand the dynamics of the landscape.

In the rural areas, where the agriculture still has a prevalent role in economic terms, big responsibility in maintaining the landscape is attributed to the "farmers." It becomes fundamental, therefore, to know the main variables able to condition the choices operated by these figures in terms of land use and utilization of the territory in general.

The name "farmers", in reality, defines a series of relationships between management and ownership of the resources, which could have great importance in the studies on the preservation of the environment.

In the U.E., during the last decades, these relationships have changed, carrying out the consolidation of two main types of farm organization: the capitalistic farms and the family-farms.

As it is known, the first is a farm managed very much as a typical industrial firm, where the entrepreneur

## ABSTRACT

In many regions peasant farm households are disappearing under socio-economic forces, their destiny is either to become landless or holdings, but in southern Europe more often they are relatively stable or became part-time farms. Great importance in the intensity of use of resources is attributed to the relation between the ownership of the land and its management. The paper objective is to inquire which are the effects of land property and management on the attitude toward the rural landscape. The study is an empirical work conducted in a rural area of Southern Italy. In this context two main typologies are delineated: the traditional peasant household and the part-time farms. The figure of the traditional peasant is typically associated, in this context, to a poor marginal agriculture. Therefore, agricultural activity, in that it is the only source of income for the family, is substantially like a kind of continuous "robbery" that determines the accentuation of the environmental degradation already broadly diffused in these areas. Unexpectedly the part-time farming better guarantees the control of the territory in terms of resource preservation. The results seem to confirm that the most discriminating variable, able to influence the attitude toward a preserved rural landscape, is not the relationship that intervenes between the ownership and the management of the land. On the contrary, the level of wealth of whoever manage the land, assumes greater importance in this context. In order to guarantee the social and economic vitality and to promote the development of this type of rural areas, is necessary to activate a network of complementary agricultural activity.

## RÉSUMÉ

*En nombreuses régions, les familles rurales vont au fur et à mesure disparaître sous l'action des forces socio-économiques; leur destin est celui de devenir des sans-terre ou sans-proprété mais en Europe du Sud, elles sont le plus souvent relativement stables ou pratiquent l'agriculture à temps partiel. Une grande importance dans l'intensité d'utilisation des ressources est attribuée aux relations entre la propriété et la gestion de la terre. Ce travail vise à rechercher quels sont les effets de la propriété et de la gestion des terres sur le paysage rural. Cette étude est un travail empirique mené dans une zone rurale du Sud d'Italie. Dans ce contexte, deux typologies principales ont été identifiées: la famille paysanne traditionnelle et le paysan à temps partiel. La figure du paysan traditionnel est typiquement associée à une agriculture marginale pauvre. Donc, l'activité agricole, en tant que seule source de revenus pour la famille est, pour ainsi dire, un "vol" qui accentue la dégradation environnementale déjà grandement diffusée dans ces zones. L'agriculture à temps partiel semble mieux garantir le contrôle du territoire en termes de conservation de la ressource. Les résultats semblent confirmer que la variable la plus discriminante, capable d'influencer l'attitude vis-à-vis d'un paysage rural préservé, n'est pas la relation qui intervient entre la propriété et la gestion de la terre. Au contraire, le niveau de richesse de quiconque gère la terre revêt une plus grande importance dans ce contexte.*

buy on the market all the necessary inputs (included the land or the use of it) and sell all the economic outputs.

These farms, that represent a very small part of the total European farms, usually manage large amount of land and their behaviour is guided by the maximization of farm profit.

The prevailing form of farm organization in Europe and in many countries all around the world is, instead, a typical family-farm, which, very often, owns the land and where the family components mainly work into the farm or, non rarely, outside.

Among the family-farms we can distinguish (cfr. Ellis, 1992) a peasant farm and a more modern family-farm, also called part-time family-farm or pluri-active family-farm. The latest is completely integrated in the inputs and outputs markets, especially in the labour market, where it participate as supplier and as demander.

Many family-farms belonging to this typology, in fact, have components working in other sectors, while the agricultural activity represents just income integration. On the contrary, the traditional peasant farm is a family-farm only partially integrated in the markets. In

this case the decision to work only into the farm depends both by the characteristics of the family components (age, sex, education level, etc) and by labour market condition (demand side). The small dimension

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and the low quantity of capital per work-units typically associated to the peasant farm, strongly influence its productive choices, pushing them to intensive cropping system and labour intensive activities. The family-farms completely integrated in the market usually adopt cropping system characterized by intensive use of capital and more extensive use of labour. These two prevailing forms are in a kind of dynamic equilibrium, influenced by the economic and demographic characteristics of the family and, above all, by the characteristics of the context, i.e. by the possibilities, for the members of the family, to find occupation in the local labour market. Considering only the family-farms, that represent by far the most important form of farm organization in Italy, the objective of the study is to verify which form of management is more sensitive to the rural landscape and to the environmental problems in general. In particular the study attempts to clarify if the new forms of farm organization, that take place of the traditional peasant farms, are more or less sensitive to the rural landscape respect to the former.

## 2. THE STUDY AREA

The study has been conducted in Basilicata, a small region of Southern Italy, in an area about 1,700 km<sup>2</sup>, representing the 20% of the regional territory. This area has been interested by many research activities financed by the Environment Division of the U.E. (DGXII)<sup>(1)</sup>. This area can easily be divided in three homogenous sub-areas, both from a physical-environmental and agronomic point of view, and from a socio-economic and demographic characteristics one, as well as the production activity performed: coming from the mountain to the sea the upper, the middle and lower valley. According to the last Population Census (1991) the number of resident units in the area was about 100,000. In the last forty years the population of the area as a whole was almost constant, but the dynamics of the three areas has been very different. In fact, residents have decreased in the middle valley bringing the population to 32 per km<sup>2</sup>, while they have increased in the lower valley up to 72 per km<sup>2</sup>, even though these values remain much less than the Italian value (190). The most important factor determining this pattern is the migration phenomenon which has interested the total area. Both intra-Basin, from

middle and upper valley to lower, and extra-regional movements have contributed to create the present situation. Many municipalities, in fact, have reduced their population by half it was forty years ago, and some others doubled their residents. An other consequence of these population movements, is the demographic fragility and impoverishment that is very serious for a large part of the study area. Taking as an example the elderly index, calculated as the ratio between the resident population over 65 years old and the population under 6 years old, we can find many villages made up only by old pensioned people (see **figure 1**). In fact, this index goes from an extreme of more than 1.000 to less than 100 in the lower valley. The economic fragility of the area is also confirmed by the fact that the primary sector absorbs around one third of the total working population, value decidedly remarkable and four times higher than the correspondent national value. The most substantial fraction of the active population (43%) works in the services, that for the area mean public servants. The last General Agricultural Census (1990) identifies 15,520 farms, which were almost as much as ten years before. These farms conduct 173,300 hectares of cropping area, with an average size of 11 hectares. The distribution of land by size illustrates a typical poor agriculture structure: in fact the two third of the farmers manage farms having an average size around 2.5 hectares. It emerges, in this way, a reality marked by a depth structural dualism that has not showed any change in the course of the last fifty years and no intervention of Agricultural Policy has succeeded to modify. The farms less than two hectares represent, however, an important element of the area as well as for many other places in Italy. They represent the demonstration of both an inverted exodus that for many years has induced the people to prefer the rural areas to the urban areas and cultural heritage on the losses of land<sup>(2)</sup>. The

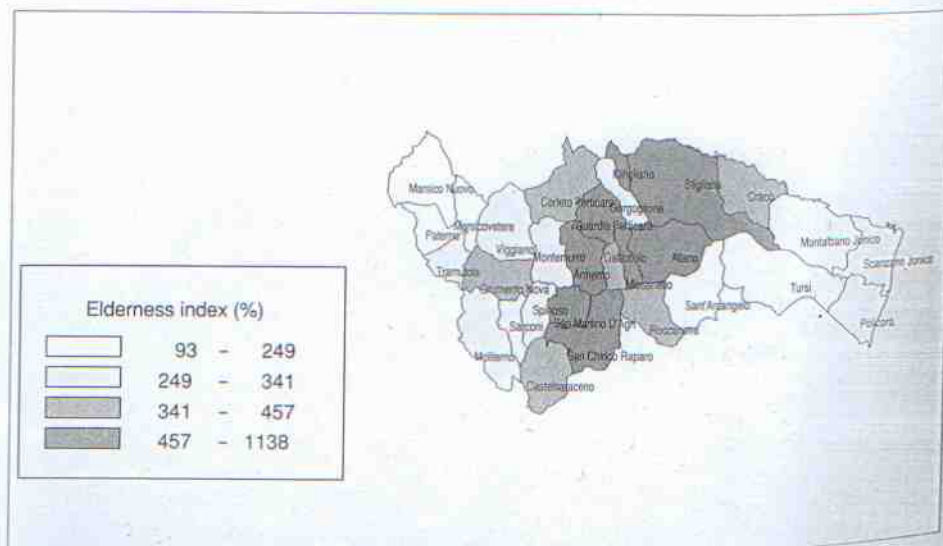


Figure 1 - The elderly index for the study area in 1991.

(<sup>1</sup>) Among the others: Medalus and Medimont projects.

(<sup>2</sup>) The phenomenon, for its evident implication on economic, social and environmental conditions, needs much more attention and would require a specific study.



quality of the resources, both environmental and human, available in this area allows, almost exclusively, a marginal traditional agriculture. Agri-environmental conditions are such that the safeguard of the landscape strictly coincides with the maintenance of the agricultural activity. In fact, the zone has a delicate environmental equilibrium, almost deprived of natural vegetation, where the presence of the man causes positive effects on the landscape when the use of the resources is rather extensive. On the contrary, a too much intensive use of the resources that in this area coincides with grain cultivation translates in negative effects on the environment and on the landscape.

### 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Since the available data from the official statistic are not sufficient to answer the objective of the study, it has been essential to collect information directly by the family-farms. A representative sample of family-farms has been selected. From the total, for the reasons above mentioned, the farms that have total agricultural land less than 2 hectares have not been considered. Since the limited variability of the population regards to the structural parameters of the farms and regards to the demographic characteristics of the families, from the statistical point of view can be considered sufficient a sample dimension of 1.5-2% of the whole population.

The sample, randomly selected, is constituted by 154 family-farms.

The agricultural land, managed by the farm directly inquired, usually dry, destined for the 70% to cereal production, while pasture and arboreal crops utilize the rest of land. The arboreal crops more representative are olive-trees, vineyard and citrus. Therefore crops that can be considered fundamental to safeguard the landscape of that area and the environment interest less than 50% of the whole sampled agricultural land. More than half of the inquired family-farms practices goats, sheep and cattle breeding. As for the total farm population the farmers of the sample are prevalently male, of middle age to around 50 years, with a level of formal school of 7 years and their families have usually 4 components. The family-farms of the sample have been then grouped in homogeneous groups, using the technique of the cluster analysis. In order to classify the family-farms the variables that define the relationships between labour, management and ownership of the land, have been chosen as discriminating variables.

The procedure identifies rather clearly two typologies of prevailing family-farms in the study area: the typical peasant family farm and the family farm that we can define not peasant. The first family typology, in fact, is little integrated in the labour market and lives prevalently in the farm. The second, instead, is tightly connected to the labour market from both sides: as supplier and as hired. The farm, in fact, hire labour for agricultural ac-

tivity and sell part of the own labour force in other sectors.

### 4. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The first analysis on the two groups of farms shows results according to which the family-farms not peasant have made a better adhesion, in terms of total land involved, to the agri-environmental measures (Regg. CEE 2078/92<sup>(\*)</sup> and 2080/92<sup>(\*)</sup>). The apparent anomaly of this result resides on the fact that does not confirm the role, for a long time accredited only to the peasant family-farm as unique type of farm organization that takes care and safeguard the rural landscape. The coincidence between farm center and house of the family as well as the presence of labour surplus respect to the farm needs that can be used in "maintenance" of the territory, have always considered the peasant farm as having an effect on the rural landscape. It seems reasonable, interpreting this result as a better information available to the family that is integrated and works in other sectors. At the same time this result came also from the mostly extensive character of the agriculture operated by this type of farms that better fit their needs. It is resulted, therefore, obvious to investigate on the possibility that other elements should influence the farm decisions regards to the management of the territory. A retrospective analysis, of historical farm behaviour (averages of the last years) on land use by the two farm typologies has been performed. This also to assess the attitude towards the landscape not only as regards the new tendencies emerged in the last years, but as usually behaviour characterizing the agricultural activity of these farms. To such purpose, for each farm, a specific index has been elaborated: LCI (Landscape crop index). This index is constructed as ratio between the land destined to crops whose cultivation causes positive effects on the environment and on the rural landscape and the total farm land:

$$LCI = \frac{\text{Woodland} + \text{meadows and pasture land} + \text{vineyards} + \text{olive trees}}{\text{total agricultural land}}$$

(\*) The Reg. 2078 constitutes a form of voluntary and conditioned support in base to which the producers sell some rights on the custom of the natural resources in change of a compensation for a lack of income. Measures of Reg. CE 2078/92:

A Sensitive reduction of chemicals and fertilizers, maintenance of the reductions already effected, introduction of the methods of organic agriculture;  
 B Promoting or maintenance of the extensive production already on its way;  
 C Reduction of the density of the bovine and ovine per hectare;  
 D Employs of other echo-compatible methods, care of the rural space and of the landscape, breeding of animal kind in by of extinction;  
 E Care of the agricultural and forests land abandoned;  
 F Long stay (20 years) Set-aside;  
 G Correct management of the land for public and recreational use.

(\*) The Reg. CEE 2080/92 promotes: A Re-forestation of agricultural lands; B improvement of the forest existing patrimony.



This index includes values from zero (maximum negative effect) to one (maximum positive effect).

The unequivocal landscape value, beyond the advantages caused on the stability of the soil has brought to include the wood, the pastures and the permanent meadows between the land use having a positive effect. The vineyards and the olives trees have considered, instead, because they are the most typical expression of the Mediterranean landscape and because their cultivation causes a low impact on the land.

It is possible to compare, then looking the LCI index farm behaviours respectful of the landscape and of the environment in both the homogeneous groups of family-farms.

The index shown a mean value equal to 0.3 for both groups. This result, therefore, has brought clearly in evidence that the type of management of the firm could not be considered as the key variable, able to explain the attitude towards the landscape problems but there will be other factors able to drive the farm decisions.

This consideration has pushed to find new variable that could better explain the correct interpretation of the farm behaviour.

Among these the economic variables have been considered as, in particular, incomes of the family-farms have been chosen. To such purpose budgets of the single family-farms have been elaborated considering the incomes coming from the farm activity and those coming from out-farm labour activity.

The farm incomes are strictly related to the cropping system, which depends by the nature and by the quality of the available resources and by the level of market integration.

The family incomes coming from out-farm activity have been elaborated on the base of gathered information and by the level of *sectoral* retribution.

They tightly depend by the age, by the education level, by the labour market characteristics. It has been also considered the distance and the time occurring from the farm to the work place for the notable reflexes that this may have on the farm activity. It is, in fact, evident that a

meaningful distance conditions notably the residual availability time to destine in farm labour and pushing toward cropping system more extensive. The family incomes have been then assessed jointly to the LCI, for each family-farms.

The **figures 2** and **3** shown a graphic representation for the two family-farms groups.

It is evident that for both the typology exists a direct correlation of these two indicators: as the family income increase so do the portion of the farm land destined to cultivations that better fit the desirable landscape.

In other words the richer family-farms are more sensi-

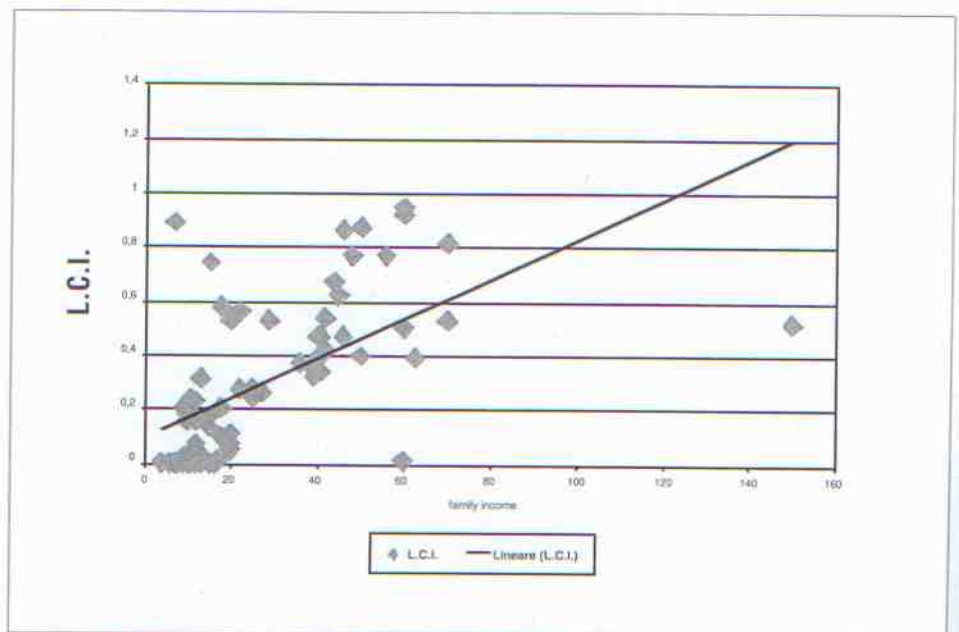


Figure 2 - LCI and family income in peasant family farms.

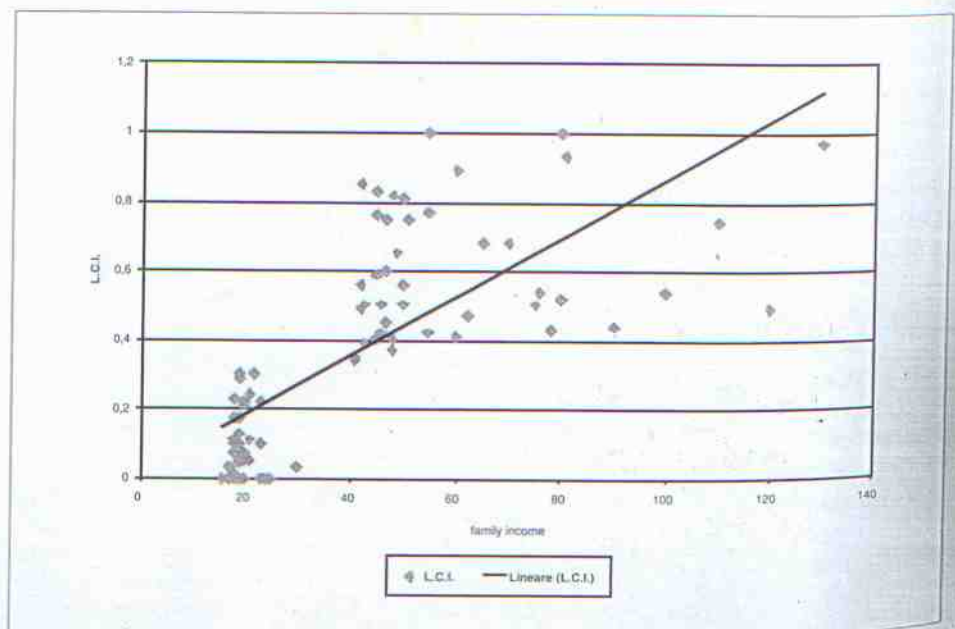


Figure 3 - LCI and family income in pluri-active family farms.





tive to the environmental problem and more active in the preservation of the rural landscape.

#### CONCLUSIONS

To consider the family-income as explanatory variable, it allows both to take in account the farm profitability and the demographic characteristics of the family. It is evident, therefore, that the farms that manifest better attitude towards rural landscape are those either equip with greater natural resources and those in which the family has the possibility to integrate its farm income. The family-farm better integrated in the context and with greater economic availability can appraise the landscape as an economic resource and that can be offered to the collectivity. They are mostly involved in the process of revaluation the territory to produce services like agri-tourism, rural tourism and, therefore, to create occasions of additional income to the agricultural activities, starting a virtuous circle. This in turn means also that it became crucial to improve the conditions of life in the rural areas and create labour opportunities in the same rural areas (policies for the rural development). On the contrary, the family-farms less integrated in the context, with poorer economic availability not guaranteeing a sufficient income to all the family components, carry to escape of the most qualified members of the family toward other sectors and toward other geographic areas, where greater are the possibilities to find

relation to the local labour market and social characteristics of the family. ●

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