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The mixed results of the participatory approach in the context of European rural development policy: a review of competing explanations

DRAFT VERSION

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Introduction

In the context of European policy for rural development, partnership working based on a bottom-up approach is regarded as a promising instrument for achieving both efficient policy delivery and stronger local democracy. Empirical research shows that both vertical and horizontal partnerships are flourishing, and that achievements are mixed and highly differentiated across EU regions. This opens the question about under which conditions partnerships are able to deliver effective and responsive policy outputs and to improve access to policy processes and their transparency.

The paper aims at discussing possible competing explanations for mixed results in partnership working in rural areas, in order to shed light on factors that might have an impact on its performance. In the literature competing explanations can be found: according to the literature on social capital, differences in the levels of associationism and social trust are the most important factors shaping the relations between citizens and public authorities, while in a rational choice perspective it is the existence of strong positive incentives to participation that makes it rational for self-interested actors to overcome free-riding strategies and get involved. An institutionalist account will stress that the institutional characteristics of participatory devices for getting citizens and organised citizens involved are of crucial importance.

The paper discusses critically these approaches on the basis of empirical research in eight rural areas of Italy and England. The focus is on participatory devices that have been set up in the context of the LEADER+ Initiative funded by the European Commission, that is explicitly based on a participatory and bottom-up approach. Case studies consist of eight public-private partnerships in four regions: Emilia Romagna and Sicilia in Italy, South West and East Anglia in England.

The paper is structured as follows: the first paragraph puts the LEADER+ Initiative in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy and more specifically of European Rural Development Policy. The rationale for supporting partnership working and expectations of European and national institutions are delineated in the second paragraph. The third paragraph discusses how to assess partnership performance and offers an example of a possible index based on empirical studies of eight rural areas in England and Italy. In the subsequent paragraphs different theoretical approaches and their related hypotheses are presented. More specifically the discussion focuses on the contribution of social capital, rational choice and institutionalist

perspectives to theoretical understanding of public-private partnerships. In the final paragraph some provisional conclusions are presented.

Putting the LEADER+ Initiative in context

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) represents the oldest and more expensive European policy: its origins date back to the '50s and in 2004 absorbed 42% of European Union budget[1]. The CAP is also one of the most controversial EU policies. Generally speaking a large consensus can be found among observers on the idea that the CAP is costly, inefficient, counterproductive, unfair, environmentally damaging, corporatist, in need for reform and obscure (Grant, 1997).

In a few lines, the CAP consisted of a system of price support: the EU was intervening buying agricultural production in case the market price falls below a negotiated target price. In short, the more farmers produced the more the market price dropped, the more subsidies they received. Besides, the EU subsidised exports, compensating EU farmers for lower prices on the international markets. The overall effect was overproduction, higher prices for EU consumers and recurrent budgetary crises[2].

The system proved unsustainable and in recent years the need for reforming the CAP has represented an imperative. From 1992 onwards four main reforms have been implemented, with the aim of reducing the overall level of expenditure and cutting down direct subsidies to farmers. In basic terms, on one hand the reforms aim at breaking the link between subsidies and production (decoupling) introducing a single farm payment linked to the respect of environmental sustainability, food safety and animal welfare (cross-compliance) and on the other hand reforms aim at improving rural development policy. For many, the reform is far from sufficient and controversies still occur. One might note that serious problem with the negotiation on the EU budget in 2005 arose in relation to the reform of the agricultural sector. Typically France and the UK push for opposite solutions to the problem of reforming the CAP, the former being interested in maintaining guarantees for EU farmers (the "gardeners of the nation"), the latter advocating for a liberalisation of a sector whose importance in terms of GDP and level of employment is constantly decreasing (at present agriculture accounts for 1.6% of EU GDP, the number of people working in the sector is 3%).

Explanations for policy outputs in the context of the CAP are generally based on such inter-governmental dynamics, but it is of note that the agricultural lobby played a crucial role in shaping the CAP (Rieger, 2005). Research based on the policy network approach highlights that the sector is characterised by a very closed and cohesive policy community (Daugbjerg, 1999), that for decades proved effective in keeping consumers and environmentalists off the sector (Daugbjerg, 1998;, 2003). At present, 113 organisations are listed in the Connecs database in the agriculture and rural development sector. The large majority are expression of the agri-industrial sector, like AIJN "Association of the industry of juices and nectars from fruits and vegetables

[1] Decreasing from 72% in 1985 and 55% in 1995.

[2] The Economist defined the CAP "the single most idiotic system of economic mismanagement that the rich western countries have ever envisaged". It should be noted, however, that the CAP was originally ideated on the basis of reasonable intentions, in primis the need for avoiding food shortages, a very essential need in the aftermath of the Second World War.

of the European Union" and are highly specialized (see for example "European Meat Association" and "European Minced Meat Association"). Among farmers organisations the most important are COPA, COGECA and CPE (European Farmers Coordination), the former being the most powerful and influential (Grant, 1997). Among interest groups that declare an interest in agriculture and rural development, a single organisation, Birdlife International, has a strong environmental vocation.

Further, it is of interest that farmers are one of the few categories that mobilized at the EU level, organising mass demonstrations in Brussels and targeting EU institutions directly[3].

In sum, benefits are highly concentrated and cost very diffused and the process of reform was very slow and never radical. The dominant theoretical explanation for the process of reform stresses the role of external factors, like international pressures (see the Doha round) and policy crises, particularly the increased public concern about food safety and the environment.

For what of interest in this context, it should be noted that it was after the Agenda 2000 reform (1997) that rural development policy has come to constitute the second pillar of the CAP. In the word of the European Commission, "the 1st pillar concentrates on providing a basic income support to farmers, who are free to produce in response to market demand, while the 2nd pillar supports agriculture as a provider of public goods in its environmental and rural functions, and rural areas in their development". (DG Agri, Basic Guidelines) [4]

Rural development policy is clearly distinct insofar as it is supposed to benefit the rural population at large, recognizing the increasingly differentiated features of rural areas. It is now common to say that "rural is no longer equated with agricultural", meaning that people living in the countryside are employed in a variety of activities other than agriculture and that farmers themselves do not deal exclusively with food production. At the EU level this trend is largely recognised and multifunctionality has come to be the main original character of the so-called "European Agricultural Model".

Rural development policy is also to be characterised by a different model of governance, open to public scrutiny and participation, transparent and sustainable. The "manifesto" for the sector states that Rural Development:

"It must be as decentralised as possible and based on a partnership and co-operation between all levels concerned (local, regional, national and European). The emphasis must be on participation and a bottom-up approach which harnesses the creativity and solidarity of rural communities. Rural development must be local and community-driven within a coherent European framework" (Cork Conference, 1996:3).

This is the context in which the LEADER+ Initiative has been proposed in 1991. LEADER represents an experiment in policy-making and in policy-delivery or as Lowe and colleagues put it "a venture by the EU into rural participatory development at local level" (Lowe, Ray et al., 1998).

In the context of the LEADER+ Initiative a range of policy goals for rural development policy are defined by EU Commission, while options on concrete actions to be undertaken at the local level are left open. In order

3 The activities of various social movements in Brussels (pro-environment, anti-racist, etc.) are highly institutionalised (Ruzza 2004). If, following Imig (2004), we define a mobilization "European" when it involves citizens from different EU countries bound together as European citizens, targets EU institutions and is based on transnational processes of engagement, then farmers mobilization is likely to be the only genuine form of European mobilisation we can observe.

4 In terms of resources, the two pillars are clearly unbalanced: rural development policy absorbs 15% of CAP resources.

to decide and implement them, it is necessary that the public, the private and the civic and voluntary sectors come together to form a partnership called Local Action Group (LAG henceforth) and decide over the specific policy goals for the LEADER+ Initiative in their area. Their decisions have to be made explicit, formulated in the language of policy planning and submitted in the form of a Local Action Plan to regional and national authorities for formal approval. A number of requirements have to be met in drafting the plan and in carrying out subsequent activities: partnerships have the obligation to work in connection with regional and national authorities, highlighting how their plans fit the national and the European frameworks, they have to give their own contribution to policy coordination participating in the development and in the dissemination of best practices; they are also encouraged (although no longer obliged) to invest in transnational projects, and more importantly for the purposes of the present paper, they are required to adopt a bottom-up approach, that "means that local actors participate in decision-making about the strategy and in the selection of the priorities to be pursued in their local area" (DG Agri, Basic Guidelines: 8). In addition "participation should not be limited to the initial phase but should extend throughout the implementation process, contributing to the strategy, the accomplishment of the selected projects and in stock-taking and learning for the future" (DG Agri, Basic Guidelines: 9).

In brief, local partnerships are invited to enter the EU multilevel system of governance, interacting with a wide range of heterogeneous actors at local, national and supranational level and at the same time they are expected to engage with citizens in their rural areas offering opportunities for participation and involving them in decision-making and implementation.

All considered, it is not without reason that the LEADER+ Initiative has been described an "experiment in participative democracy" and, with some exaggeration, "an incipient radical new social movement" in agriculture (Ray, 2000). Expectations were very high and it might be of interest to note that the European Commission holds a positive view of the LEADER experience; for instance it is a good result that over time the number of active LAGs increased from nearly 200 to nearly 900. According to the EU Commission, Leader "can play an important role in encouraging innovative responses to old and new rural problems, and becomes a sort of laboratory for building local capabilities and for testing out new ways of meeting the needs of rural communities" (DG Agri, Basic Guidelines:).

Why are local partnerships – LAGs - the preferred tools for delivering European rural development policy? And more specifically, why do partnerships have to adopt a participatory approach to deliver rural development policy? What are the results achieved so far?

The rationale for partnerships and for a participatory approach in rural development policy

In the famous typology proposed by Sherry Arnstein (1969) partnerships represent a participatory forms of governance that could imply some redistribution of power between decision-makers and citizens. They effectively make decisions over collective resources and manage public funds. The interest in debating Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and their implications for EU governance is growing but by no means partnership working can be regarded a European innovation. For what of interest here, it might be noted that

in the UK partnership working has been strongly supported by the Conservative governments in the '80s in the context of the so-called New Public Management approach to policy-making. At that time, partnership working was a way for widening consumer choice and introducing market-like logics in the delivery of public services. The more recent formula of the "joined-up government" promoted by New Labour governments maintained and encouraged partnerships, adding an emphasis on their potential for democratic renewal and stressing the concept of "active communities" to be involved as partners (Stewart, 2003; Stoker, 2004; Bogdanor, 2005).

In Italy the development of new forms of governance has been fostered by the diffusion of "patti territoriali", "accordi di settore", PRUSST (Bobbio, 2003), but on the whole the introduction of partnership is more recent and the development of local partnerships among public authorities, private interests and public interest groups is mainly linked to EU programmes.

At the European level partnership working has been introduced in the context of European Structural Funds in 1988. At that time, the partnership principle applied to institutional actors at local, regional, national and supranational levels, who where supposed to adopt it for programming cohesion policy (Brunazzo, 2005). In 1993 the partnership approach has been extended to private actors and the voluntary sector, and it has been strengthen in the regulation for 2007-2013. The EU is not an exception in recognising merits to PPP as a promising form of governance. In the view of the OECD partnerships denotes a specific form of active participation, that "recognises the autonomous capacity of citizens to discuss and generate policy options; it requires governments to share in agenda-setting and requires commitment from government that policy proposals generated jointly will be taken into account in reaching a final decision. Last but not least, it requires citizens to accept a higher degree of responsibility for their role in policy-making that accompanies greater rights of participation" (OECD, 2001).

According to EU institutions, participation in partnerships is a promising way for enhancing both efficiency and consensus; in particular the Leader LAG is expected to "strengthen the dialogue and co-operation between different rural actors, who often have little experience in working together, by reducing potential conflict and facilitating negotiated solutions through consultation and discussion" (DG Agri, Basic guidelines).

The British and the Italian governments also emphasises the potential of the LEADER+ Initiative, stressing for example that "The objectives of LEADER+ are: to build capacity in local rural communities to encourage them to think about the longer term potential of their area and to work together to address in sustainable ways the needs and issues identified; to support local communities in developing and implementing integrated, high quality, innovative strategies for sustainable development." (Defra, Mainstreaming Leader 2005).

In short, a cursory analysis of policy documents highlights a strong consensus on the idea that the setting up of LAGs is what is needed in order to broad the range of actors who have a say in rural areas and bring innovation in the agricultural sector.

Mixed results in the performances: responsiveness and effectiveness of partnerships

So far I argued that improving policy delivery and building community-capacity are both explicit policy goals of the LEADER+ Initiative, as proposed by the EU Commission and reinforced by national and regional governments, and that local partnerships (LAGs) are regarded as the ideal institutional device for the task. So: how did LAG perform and what are the results achieved so far by LAGs in different EU countries, and more specifically in England and in Italy? Are there differences among countries and within countries among LAGs[5]?

A necessary preliminary step is to specify a definition of partnership performance. In the literature it is possible to find various definitions of what should be relevant in assessing the performance of institutional devices. Specifically, partnerships have been evaluated on the basis of their capacity for involving marginal groups in policy processes, of empowering local communities, of re-framing controversial policy issues, of delivering consensus-based decisions (Leach and Sabatier, 2003).

I will take the broader view that, as a key tool of EU governance, partnership working affects both decision-making and implementation and therefore has implications for the democratic policy process. This is even more evident if we take into account that LAGs make decisions over public resources and in this sense they are required to be open, accountable and responsive, i.e. democratic (Beetham, 1994; Cain, Dalton et al., 2003). From this point of view I argue that it makes sense to assess the performance of LAGs in terms of their democratic performance, and ask whether this specific policy instrument like the community-based partnership provides citizens with an opportunity for exercising democratic control over policy decisions and under which conditions it works according to democratic criteria.

According to Putnam, responsiveness and efficacy in policy delivery are crucial dimensions of the democratic performance: "a good democratic government not only considers the demands of its citizenry (that is, is responsive), but also acts efficaciously upon these demands (that is, is effective) (Putnam, 1993). In what follows a measure of different performances of LAGs based on notions of responsiveness and efficiency is provided. The task is made relatively easier by the fact that the EU has adopted a common set of indicators for the evaluation of the LEADER+ Initiative (Linee guida per la valutazione dei programmi Leader +, Commissione Europea 2002 – Doc. STAR VI/43503/02-Rev.1). National and local indicators have been added by Defra and by Regional authorities in Italy. The evaluation has been carried out simultaneously across Europe in December 2003 (mid term evaluation) and again in December 2005.

[5] The empirical research consists of eight LAGs, located in the Italian regions of Emilia Romagna and Sicily and in the South West and in East Anglia in England. Regions have been selected taking into account basic characteristics of the agricultural sector. According to Charvet (1994) it is possible to distinguish among three different types of European agricultural regions: competitive regions, intermediate regions, and marginal regions. We utilized the first and the third category for locating case studies. This typology has been proposed according to productionist principles, so that intensive production and industrial farming characterize competitive regions, and low intensity farming systems and small-scale producers characterize marginal regions.

In this first version of the study a limited set of indicators is presented, and refers to factual information about the inclusiveness of the partnership, the characteristic of consultation processes carried out for deciding over policy goals, the number of initiatives supported and funded by the LAG[6].

	East Anglia		South West		Emilia Romagna		Sicilia	
	EA1	***EA2***	***SW1***	***SW2***	***EM1***	***EM2***	***SI1***	***SI2***
Number of partners	27	15	46	31	89	27	42	91
Number of consultations	3	3	3	2	109	15	0	-
Total number of participants in consultation events	120	-	200	100	800	mixed	0	40
Weeks	36		12		52		0	
Number of funded projects	15	26	39	48	142	179	120	76
Financial - (dec 2005)%	41	30	50	37	91.5	61.4	63.1	26.5
Total financial resources (EU+National+Other Public+Private) Thousand of Euro	6,412	5,160	4,786	3,106	6,217	5,466	4.636	5.104

In addition, official statements about results achieved by different LAGs (and based on a larger number of indicators) have been taken into account for assessing effectiveness.
For simplicity, different indicators have been combined along the two dimensions of effective and responsive governance (see appendix B), and reported in the table below.

		Effectiveness	
		High	Low
Responsiveness	High	EM1	SW1
	Low	EA1 / EM2 / SI1	SI2 / SW2 /EA2

This index should allow us to classify partnerships according to how effective and how responsive they have been, at least in relation to each other. What is of interest is to understand under which conditions can LAG perform better, that is what are the most important factors in determining differences in such results.

Competing explanations for mixed results in enhancing public participation

In the previous paragraph I argued that LAGs in the context of the LEADER+ Initiative achieved different results over time in terms of effectiveness and responsiveness.
In this paragraph I will review three competing explanations for such mixed results: an explanation based on the notion of social capital, an explanation based on rational choice paradigm and a (neo-) institutionalist account. These three perspectives emphasise different aspects and rest on different logics. They prove

[6] A great part of EU indicators are based on opinions and self-evaluations. Although they are interesting, the qualitative work undertaken for the present paper suggests that: - they reflect in a consistent way the opinions of the managers of the LAG (who filled the EU questionnaire in) but do not necessarily reflect the opinions of members of LAGs; - there are great linguistic differences between Italians and English in expressing evaluations that make direct comparison misleading.

helpful in highlighting the role of different factors in determining the overall performance of partnership working.

Social Capital

The effectiveness of democratic governance is affected by the existing level of social capital, that is by "connections among individuals- social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000: 19). The basic idea is that the more individuals get involved in associations and the higher the level of trust among them, the better their capacity to overcome collective action problems, like setting up and running a LEADER LAG.

The concept of social capital is controversial, both from an empirical and a theoretical point of view. From and empirical point of view, a growing literature is devoted to discuss how to measure the concept properly[7]. The first definition of the concept proposed by Putnam and its operationalisation have been widely criticised, on the basis that its focus on formal membership in associations is inadequate to grasp the social reality. Italian academics pointed out that informal networks should be included in the definition of social capital because of their prominence in the Italian context and in particular in the South[8]. It would also be important to investigate what associations actually do, if they are inclusive – and help building bridging social capital – or exclusive- and produce bonding social capital. In the British context, Putnam has been widely discussed in relation to his recent thesis on the decline of social capital in America, which seems not to apply to the UK: according to Peter Hall, "Britain has long had some of the densest networks of civic engagement in the world" (Hall, 1999) and still has (Hall, 2002).

From a theoretical point of view, it has been noted that the mechanism that is supposed to link associational life, social trust and democratic governance is left unclear. At the aggregate level we have a strong correlation between indicators of social capital and indicators of democratic governance. Tough we don't know why. As Inglehart puts it "it seems likely that democratic institutions are conducive to interpersonal social trust, as well as trust being conducive to democracy" (Inglehart, 1999:104). Putnam supports the latter interpretations, but several scholars provide us with evidences of the opposite relation between trust and democracy. For instance Rothstein and Stolle (2003) argue that it is responsibility of political institutions to foster social capital by promoting universalistic and impartial social policy, and Uslaner (2003) showed that the higher the level of income inequality, the lower the level of generalised trust.

Related to this, opportunities for creating social capital and the role of historical legacy in determining the present levels of social capital have been widely debated. In his study on Italy Putnam leaves no room for agency, arguing that low levels of social capital have been inherited from the medieval era and that it is not possible to change them intentionally in the short term. Scholars who emphasise the role of institutions in

[7] It is interesting to note that in the recent debate on social capital, its positive effects are taken for granted. Indeed, the debate is currently focussing on how to measure the level of social capital properly and in this context the need for taking into account informal relationships has been stressed. Though, it is not entirely clear whether formal and informal networks have the same effect on democratic governance.

[8] It is of note, however, that in a comparative perspective Italy scores particularly low in surveys on informal sociability. According to EB and WVS, Italians and Spaniards go out less often, have less friends, less conversations with neighbours etc etc than any other European (see C. Wallace, unpublished report).

determining political processes show that positive (although contingent) trustworthy relations can be enacted and developed. According to them, we should not blame the Normans for present problems in Sicily. Or we should not be allowed to thank the Romans for the present good performances in Britain.
Whatever the problems with the concept of social capital, it might be argued that the basic idea that the cultural traits of a nation determine the quality of its democratic political life has a long tradition. Almond and Verba identified the most important cultural characteristic in the civicness and found that Italians lack it. It is also of note that a constant characteristic of Italian political culture is the dissatisfaction with democracy and its practices. The difference between Italy and Great Britain is striking: over time, the percentage of Britons who declare to be very or fairly satisfied with the working of democracy is at least 35% higher than the Italian percentage. As a consequence of the lack of trust, "Italians tend to look upon government and politics as unpredictable and threatening forces, and not as social institutions amenable to their influence" and refuse politics and public engagement.
This seems to be particularly relevant for the success of consensus-based devices like partnerships.
In this light it might be argued that the higher the level of social capital in a region, the better the cultural and social environment for collaborative forms of governance in general and for the Leader Local Action Group in particular. Social capital has positive externalities that cut down transaction costs and make collective action easier, it's a basic requirement for collaborative governance. If the levels of social capital and trust are particularly low, the cooperation required by the implementation of the LEADER+ Initiative could prove impossible. As a consequence, rather than being the solution to problems of rural marginality, the development of collaborative participatory devices could represent an intractable problem in itself. In other words, following the logic proposed in the context of social capital there are regions where, instead of asking "how to enhance public participation", it might be better to take a step back and question whether to at all.

For the purposes of the present paper, it is important to assess levels of social capital at the local level; at present the available data refers to the regional level in Italy and in England[9]. In this first version of the analysis, I was planning to rely on existing research. The original study performed by Putnam has been replicated several times, but at present it proved impossible to find the exact replication for England and Italy at the regional level. Study at the national level (based on Eurobarometer and World Value Survey) shows a great difference in the English and Italian levels of social capital. More specific analyses of England (Casey, 2004) and Italy (Cartocci and Vanelli, 2006) show that in both countries a north-south divide exists, although it is less relevant in the English case. The problem is that authors introduce variations in the construction of the index (from instance some include sport organisations, while some exclude them; some include turnout in European elections, someone not, etc), so that it is impossible to say whether the East Anglia has a higher, lower or equivalent level of social capital than Emilia Romagna.
Table below lists basic indicators, which are relevant for the construction of a social capital index. Indicators mainly refer to a "pure Putnam" index of social capital, the "Civic Community Index" proposed in his first study on Italy. It is famously based on four main indicators: electoral turnout, newspaper readership, levels

[9] It is difficult to disaggregate Eurobarometer and World Value Survey data to local level, because of the resultant reduction in sample size that makes statistical processing unreliable. At the time of writing (Dec. 2006) I am waiting for data at the territorial level of Provincia (Italy) and county (England).

of trust and associational membership. As you can see available data does not allow a straight comparison of regions and a new elaboration of ISTAT and ONS data will be required (*I am working on this, suggestions welcome*).

	East Anglia	South West	Emilia Romagna	Sicilia
Membership of community organisation	29.1	39.1	45.9	37.7
Participation in voluntary activities (check formal/informal)	48	47	10.6	3.8
Level of institutional trust (local institutions)	59	56	------	------
Level of social trust (% of people saying "most people can be trusted)	42.9	47	35.8	25.2
Electoral turnout (last national election)	64	66.5	89.5	75
Newspaper readership (GB: three or more times at week; IT: at least once a week)	64	62	67.8	43.5
Level of civic engagement %	22	20		

A cursory analysis of available data however, suggests that the structural component of social capital, that is the presence of associative networks is almost at the same level in English and Italian regions[10]. The difference in the involvement in voluntary work seems substantial and perhaps more importantly in the level of social trust.

It has been noted that in his definition Putnam conflates two components of social capital, namely a structural dimension and an attitudinal one, and that it would be important to distinguish their effects on democratic governance (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003). For instance, Pippa Norris summarizes her discussion on social capital highlighting that "if we disentangle the twin components of Putman's definition of social capital what is driving this process is primarily the social trust dimension, not the associational network dimension" (Norris, 2001:?).

Several interviewees, particularly in Italy, stressed the negative consequences of the lack of trust among stakeholders, but more importantly the negative consequences of the lack of trust in political institutions[11]. According to the most critical representatives of civil society organisations, in some cases the LEADER+ Initiative in Sicily did not adopt the leader method (participatory, bottom-up, integrate, etc); rather Leader funds have been instrumentally used by local administrators to gain consensus: "Policy instruments for participation have been transformed in re-distributive instruments, with the aim of supporting private initiatives. The only task is fund raising" [TG:*i9*]. From this point of view, the involvement of civil society organisations was merely formal and their opportunities for influencing rural development policy very limited. This negative view is not unanimously shared: actors recognise the importance of the existence of a "forum" for discussing issues. Our results suggest that in Sicily the adoption of the Leader method proved at least effective in limiting distrust.

[10] Networks in Sicily are usually less diffused, but in the specific area under consideration civil society organisations are traditionally very active, particularly in the fight against the local mafia (add info on mobilization in Capo d'Orlando).
[11] It is of note that in Italy (and according to Sciolla only in Italy among EU countries) interpersonal trust and institutional trust are not correlated.

Critical voices and indications of distrust in political institutions can be found in England too, both in the South West and in East Anglia. Interestingly, in both regions Regional Development Agencies are highly distrusted, because of their top-down approach to policy-making and their focus on economic performances. As RDAs are expected to be increasingly influential in determining the direction for rural development policy, actual participants in the LEADER+ Initiative are extremely worried about the future of participatory local partnerships and their autonomy in making local decisions.

Rational-Choice

It would not be apathy, parochialism (Almond and Verba) and familism (Banfield) the factors that prevent Italians from engaging in community affairs but rather an acute sense of rationality (See for example the discussion of Banfield proposed by Pizzorno). It is of note that the perception of effectiveness is the most important factor in determining the willingness to take part in public life; if participation turns out a waste of time, people will decide not to contribute. In other words, it is important to make participation rational for individuals, because the temptation to free ride can be substantial.

One might observe that in the literature on participatory democracy, the willingness of people to get involved is assumed and almost taken for granted. Pateman in her study on industrial participatory democracy affirms that "whether the vast majority of workers would participate in a democratised industrial system must at this stage remain a question largely of conjecture" (Pateman, 1970). Rational choice theorists address the question and give their answer observing that positive incentives are needed if people have to get involved. The very existence of the LEADER+ Initiative, that is the availability of EU funds for rural development policy, constitute a powerful incentive to take action, particularly in deprived areas (like Sicily) or in areas where public funds are scarce (Dorset in South West of England). Though this would explain better the commitment of beneficiaries of EU funds rather than the commitment of local communities in participatory decision-making processes. In other words it can make sense to apply for getting the money and run my own project, but why bother with LAG meetings in disparate villages? It is possible to summarize definition of advantages and of disadvantages of participation in the LEADER+ Initiative according to the type of actor. In the empirical work undertaken for this project, we made contact with 10 partners for each LAG and interviewed them. They are expression of the different interests that the partnership brings together: the public sector (local councillors, civil servants), the private interests (business, professional organisations), public interest groups (community organisations and pro-environment organisations) and the managers of the LAG.

According to our results, LAG meetings are quite demanding for individuals: on a regular basis all LAGs members and interested citizens meet in a different place in the LEADER area, mainly in the late afternoon or in the evening. That means that all individuals involved have to volunteer their time, including civil servants who are not in their office hours.

Meetings last between 2 and 3 hours, and some interviewees admit that such meetings can be quite boring. Details on practical matters (information on how to get to the meeting, what is the agenda, etc) seem to be of

great importance for the success of the initiative. In marginal rural areas facilities for holding a public meeting are not always available, and public transport is not at its top. In such cases a rotation of localities had to be established in order to make the travelling less demanding, occasionally a transport service was provided and sometimes the managers had to organise (with some disappointment) meetings in the main urban centre where people found it easier to converge.

Members of the LAGs also have to devote some time to the LEADER+ Initiative before the meeting: proposals and ideas for projects have to be discussed and informed decisions made. Members of the LAG receive a folder with proposals in advance, so that they can make their mind up.

In general terms, the majority of interviewees see enhanced public participation as a value per se. Interestingly, for an analysis of shared understanding of democracy and its practices, more participation is generally equated with more democracy, and from this point of view is highly appreciated. A number of instrumental advantages of enhanced participation are also identified, specifically in terms of innovative decisions more grounded in citizen preferences.

There are a number of benefits that are directly related to the peculiarities of the Leader Initiative.

The opportunity for funding small projects has been welcomed by local authorities, that have the opportunity to distribute resources widely in the community. In most English cases, LAG managers promoted a simplified procedure for getting funds, which turned out to be one of the most successful initiatives. In Emilia Romagna funds are made available for promoting specific risky projects that could not be otherwise easily funded.

The LEADER+ Initiative brings the advantage that it provides local communities with resources for sustaining the costs of public participation, and provides with resources for capacity building a characteristic that is often neglected in other streams. As Taylor (2000) points out, this is a crucial point, as communities are generally poor in financial resources and find it difficult to contribute to partnerships.

From the point of view of civil servants and project responsible the involvement in EU funded initiatives is perceived an important opportunity for developing a career as project manager. It is of note that staff involved in the LEADER+ Initiative in England and Italy operate on the basis of different time horizons, being clearly limited in the first case, more likely to be a long term in the second. Further, a high level of turnover has characterized English LAGs, a condition that has been regarded as a serious problem for the continuity of the programme and for the development of participatory practices. Almost all interviewed actors stress the importance of time for achieving substantial results in the delivering of the participatory approach of the LEADER+ Initiative. Italian LAGs appear to be more stable over time and to involve in a continuative way a core group of interested actors. In most cases the same organisation has been active – as management organisation – since the early ‘90s. A long-term perspective facilitates learning processes, though there are evidences that it might be a disadvantage for innovation.

In terms of costs, large part of interviewed people share the view that participation is extremely time consuming (in the sense of “too much”) and it is not necessarily efficient.

The Leader Initiative is hardly the core activity of private actors. Individuals who represent business and professional organisations might agree on the holistic approach and on the specific purposes of the

LEADER+ Initiative but this is not to say that the preferences and core policy beliefs of their organisations are affected.

A minority of political actors argue that their administrations could be more efficient if they could act with a more limited involvement of social actors. According to them, citizens lack a general perspective on "what is going on" in rural development policy at regional, national and European levels and in different localities. Citizens do not have the knowledge to make informed decisions about the policy priorities for their area, have unrealistic expectations, "naïve" or voluble preferences, and are sometimes unreliable. From this point of view, the creation of participative devices was seen a necessary step for meeting European requirements and the added value of citizen participation is not recognised.

The European requirements, in terms of bureaucracy and administration are perceived to be complicated, particularly for small organisations and particularly in England. The monitoring process is demanding and in England is made more complicated by national requirements (though only a minority of interviewees are aware that it is because of Defra requirements). The 2005 evaluation compiled by an independent agency on behalf of Defra highlights the lack of skills in rational planning: "There is limited recognition of the difference / relationship between the outputs and results indicators. For many LAGs no distinction is made between the two and they are treated essentially as a long list of outputs (or milestones). The relationship between outputs and results should be logical – results follow the outputs. We have found evidence that some LAGs have recorded progress against results but not outputs, and vice versa, indicating a lack of appreciation of the relationship" (MTE, 2005:83).

Similarly in Sicily the evaluation report highlights an existing gap between the perceived impact of the LAG and the verifiable impact. People involved in implementing the LEADER+ Initiative show high levels of commitment and even enthusiasm, that is not always possible to appreciate applying criteria based on rational planning: "Le autorità intervistate ritengono che l'attenzione a nuove fonti di reddito disponibile e a nuovi o migliori servizi per le esigenze della popolazione hanno avuto una crescita del reddito pro-capite e dell'occupazione a tempo determinato nelle aree dei PSL. Affermazioni quest'ultime che andrebbero però supportate da specifiche analisi economiche".

From this point of view, additional efforts and costs should be required to acquire the necessary skills on how to run a European project.

Public interest groups, and in particular environmentalists among them, stress the dangers of close collaboration with political authorities. According to them, politicians get in touch with citizens for legitimating purposes only and it is unlikely that politicians will change their agenda to align it with true public preferences. From this point of view, the cost of losing independence is regarded as very high and very real.

A sense of crisis seems necessary to motivate people to take part. As Bobbio notes commenting on decision-making processes on infrastructures, "people will not show up until the bulldozers are there" (Bobbio, 2003). This might be true for some case study in Sicily and South West: a very slow process of decision-making has been suddenly speeded up by regional and national authorities, who put pressures on LAGs for meeting EU requirements on timely allocation of funds. According to EU rules (the so-called n+2 rule),

LAGs have to demonstrate capacity spending, making decisions over projects and allocating funds. If not, their resources will be reduced.

Neo- Institutionalism

The LEADER+ Initiative is locally managed by LAGs. A closer look to what a LAG consists of reveals a high level of variations in terms of institutional structure.

It is of interest that partnerships in the context of the LEADER+ Initiative can be regarded as a case of intentional institutional design (Goodin, 1996). LAG had to be set up from the start; even in cases where a partnership already existed, EU regulation required to adopt the Leader method explicitly and to activate participatory devices for giving evidences of the adoption of the bottom-up approach. At this stage, the story goes in a very similar way in almost all cases under consideration: public authorities had the initial information about the existence and the contents of the programme, and took the lead in putting together the partnership, its arrangements and in drafting the development plan. Yet the style they adopted in taking the lead has been different and the way in which institutional and social actors interpreted the participatory and bottom-up approach has been embedded in different institutional models. According to an institutionalist perspective it might be argued that such institutional arrangements have an independent role in affecting the performance of LAGs (Rothstein, 1998).

In all LAGs a general assembly of LAG partners and an executive board are present. Case studies differ however in relation to the openness of the general assembly and the division of competences between the assembly and the executive board. Further each case study presents different rules for aggregating preferences of participants and making decisions over projects to be supported. Three basic mechanism can be found: unanimity, majority rule, a rule based on weighted preferences.

If we take into consideration these institutional characteristics of LAGs, three basic models can be identified.

Model 1: The LAG meeting is open to all members of the community, and the LAG assembly has decisional powers. There are no requirements or formalities to be met for attending the meeting. In practice you can decide to pop up at the meeting and you are entitled to take part in the discussion and decide over projects to be supported. The attendance varied across time, ranging from a few people to more than 100. On average 30 committed individuals attend meetings.

Applicants are invited to give a 10-minutes presentation of their ideas explaining the project, its rationale and the expected results. They have to be ready to answer questions from the floor, making the argument for their project and for their ability to carry it out. Respondents tend to admit that most people find the procedure challenging, as applicants are unlikely to be used to give speeches in public and don't know how to organise their presentation in an effective and convincing way. Managers of the LAG tend to appreciate this procedure as truly participatory and respondent to the Leader ethos.

In this case, the LAG assembly has decisional powers: projects that receive the approval of the LAG assembly are then discussed by an executive committee that has to sort out technical details and help applicants to refine the proposal and make it consistent with regional/national/European requirements. What is interesting is that participants are not required to vote for or against a proposal, but they have to score it on the basis of a number of criteria. Scores are collected and processed by the LAG managers, so that the final results are not immediately available.

Model 2: LAG meetings are open to LAG members only, and to be entitled to take part in LAG assemblies, a citizen should demonstrate:
"Ability to attend a LAG meeting at least four times a year; A knowledge of your local area, in particular an understanding of your community's development needs and an awareness of any other existing development initiatives that are operating in your community; To be an ambassador for the LEADER+ programme, promoting and encouraging local community groups to apply for funding from LEADER+.
If you are selected as a LAG member further training will be provided to assist you in your role if required."
In these cases citizens have to become experts on rural development and to commit themselves to the LEADER+ Initiative. Interviewed people affirm that training is a necessary step: it proved impossible to manage the initiative with no specific knowledge on the management of public funds, the content of projects etc. In such cases LAG members are representatives of an organisation. The trained, skilled assembly make decisions over projects to be supported and the executive board has the task of assuring timely and effective implementation.

Model 3: decisions over projects to be implemented are made by the executive board or by a dedicated management committee. In some cases sector-specific advisory committees (for tourism, environmentalism, etc) have been established in order to select proposals to be supported. Experts have to evaluate proposals on the basis of a number of criteria (made explicit in advance) and score each proposal. In practice they perform the same function as interested citizens in model 1. In other cases they have to agree unanimously on projects to be funded. The executive board is accountable for decisions and refers on the implementation process to the wider partnerships on a regular basis (from 3 to 6 times a year). This model is the most diffused. In this model citizen and civil society participation has been generally encouraged in the initial phases. For instance the DE LAG organised dozens of public meetings and the entire process of public consultation took a year. In the view of members of the LAG the initial consultation has been essential in providing the LAG with the necessary legitimacy and authority for carrying out the implementation of the plan. It is of note that, having identified shared policy priorities and specific policy goals, the activities of the LAG have been organised in a managerial way and the LAG relies on well-defined procedural rules for implementing and monitoring the activities. However the initial consultation has not always been so extended and the procedures for advertising about available funds are not always transparent. A basic difference can be observed between Italian and English cases, insofar as in Italy LAG tend to advertise for bids and collect applications while in England the procedure tend to be more informal.

In the context of the model 1, the role of civil society and citizen participation is developmental: the advantages of community involvement and the need for developing civic skills among rural residents are both stressed. In the context of model 2, specific skills have to be acquired. Local knowledge is not enough: participants have to be socialised to the LEADER+ Initiative and their contribution has to be appropriate. In the context of model 3, civil society organisations and partners are expected to provide innovative ideas: their role is not to build or restore the civic community but to contribute to its well-being thanks to original projects that can benefit the area.

Our results suggest that differences in decision-making processes had an impact on the choices made by LAGs. In general terms, model 1 LAGs proved to be more responsive, while model 3 enhanced effectiveness. Model 1 LAGs show a large number of funded projects of very different orientations; at first glance they seem quite fragmented and sometimes they "deviate" in terms of content from what was originally planned or from the identified policy priorities for the area. Model 3 LAGs are certainly more focussed and overall have a higher degree of coherence. It might be that efficiency was obtained at the expense of originality and that the innovative potential of citizen participation was lessen. But this is not always the case.

The institutional design for getting citizens and communities involved is a crucial aspect to be taken into account. More specifically a number of institutional features make a difference: the openness of LAG assemblies and real decisional competences motivate people to engage in discussion about ideas for their rural area. However the entire process results very demanding in the long term, and there are evidences of difficulties in expanding the number of involved citizens (so that attendances tended to stabilize). LAGs in models 2 and 3 have a strategic direction that is more clearly defined; people involved are welcome to provide their contribution in the context of specific measures that reflect coherent policy priorities. Participation is formally limited to the initial phases of the activities of the LAG, although the LAG assemblies have the opportunity for giving their input to members of the executive committees.

Conclusions

The EU Commission proposed the adoption of partnership and of a participatory approach in order to enhance democratic governance in rural areas.

The potential obstacles implied in the adoption of a participatory approach have not been properly taken into consideration, starting from the assumption that enhanced participation represents both an efficient mechanism for delivering policy and a value *per se*. This seems in line with the observations that "the political landscape is now more favourable to participatory ideals than in the recent past" (Warren, 2002).

It is important to say that partnership working is not necessarily democratic, but opportunities for democracy can go along with the development of partnerships. In the present paper a (provisional and tentative) measure of democratic performance based on notions of effectiveness and responsiveness of LAGs has been presented. LAGs performances are clearly differentiated and reasons for such mixed results have been discussed in relation to social capital, rational choice and institutionalist perspectives. It is not possible, nor desirable, to affirm which perspective offers the best explanation for mixed results in partnership

performances. Each perspective highlights the importance of different factors and there are overlaps among them. This has not been considered, but it is of note that for instance trust plays a role in all three approaches. This is the first version of a paper based on empirical research that came to an end last month. In subsequent versions of the paper a more careful indicator of performance and a more systematic analysis of relevant variables will be performed. I thank you in advance for your suggestions and for your attention, emanuela

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