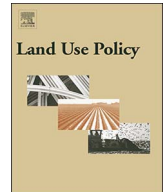




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Governance changes in *peri*-urban farmland protection following decentralisation: A comparison between Montpellier (France) and Rome (Italy)

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ABSTRACT

Many countries have implemented laws and planning instruments to preserve farmland on the urban fringe. This paper aims at a better understanding of the governance changes in *peri*-urban farmland protection following decentralisation processes in France and Italy. We compare the implementation of farmland protection instruments in the two city regions of Montpellier and Rome. From a governance perspective, we highlight the practical issues of effectiveness and social acceptability arising from power devolution, different forms of governance, and the potential conflicts when planning control shifts to lower-than-regional bodies.

Our analysis is based on qualitative methods. Primary data were collected through document analysis, participant observation and in-depth interviews aimed at understanding local stakeholders' practices and points of view on access to farmland, housing and building rights.

We find that around Rome and Montpellier, decentralisation has produced multiple decision-making authorities and increased the complexity of procedures. Despite more regulatory constraints in agricultural areas, farmland conversion has persisted. However, decentralisation processes have also changed ways of governing and favoured local alternative initiatives for farmland protection and farming development on the urban fringe. New modes of governance involve public local authorities, farmers' representative bodies (Montpellier) and civil society organisations (Rome). In both cities, they have a positive but limited impact on the effectiveness of farmland protection instruments. Their social acceptability varies, depending on who is really included in the participation process.

1. Introduction

Urbanisation is a global phenomenon with major implications for croplands worldwide (Bren d'Amour et al., 2016). Since the 1990s, a growing body of scientific literature has examined the urban conversion of farmland (Bryant and Johnston, 1992; Nelson, 1992) and its impacts on landscape, environment, and food security (Johnson, 2001; Plieninger et al., 2016). Many countries have accordingly implemented laws and planning instruments to preserve farmland on the urban fringe (Alterman, 1997; Bengston et al., 2004; Daniels and Lapping 2005). These studies identify various obstacles to effective farmland protection. Tan et al. (2009) in particular compare how national governance structures impact farmland conversion in the Netherlands, Germany, and China. They highlight major differences related to land ownership, land use planning, the role of the market and the role of government. However, they conclude that it is very difficult to assess and compare the performance of individual governance structures, each embedded in

its local context. They therefore promote the “comparative study of institutional change stories” (p.973).

Our objective is, thus, to contribute to a better understanding of governance changes in *peri*-urban farmland protection following decentralisation by comparing the situation in France and Italy. These two nations have private property regimes with some use constraints (Jacobs, 2008). Since the 1970s, they have undergone a process of decentralisation that has affected the governance of land use planning decisions. In both countries, the land use planning system is based on binding zoning plans drawn up at municipal level. Their models of decentralisation, however, differ: France has a centralised tradition and Italy a tradition of local autonomy.

To shed light on the influence of such decentralised governance structure on agricultural land use planning, we compare the implementation of farmland protection instruments in the two city regions of Montpellier (France) and Rome (Italy). From a governance perspective, we aim to highlight the practical issues arising from power

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devolution, different forms of governance, and the potential conflicts when planning control shifts to lower-than-regional bodies.

Does the devolution of powers lead to different forms of governance of farmland protection? Do these governance forms affect the effectiveness and social acceptability of farmland protection instruments?

In what follows, we first explain our conceptual and analytical frameworks. Then, we provide an overview of our case studies and methods, and we compare land use planning systems in France and in Italy. In the results section, we focus on local practices to explain how peri-urban farmland protection has been implemented around Rome and Montpellier. Then, we present alternative local initiatives which illustrate new modes of governance involving not only public local authorities, but also farmers' bodies and civil society organisations. The last section discusses the impacts of decentralisation and of different modes of governance on the effectiveness and social acceptability of farmland protection instruments.

2. Conceptual and analytical frameworks

2.1. Farmland conversion: forms and stakeholders

Urban sprawl caused by the conversion of farmland to urban uses may follow various spatial patterns: from spill-over or leapfrog in dense urban developments (Yaping, 2009; Altes, 2009) to the low-density scattering of buildings within agricultural areas (Millward, 2006; Gosnell et al., 2011). Many driving factors explain these various patterns. Around the Mediterranean for example, Salvati (2013) shows that urban growth follows a path-dependency process: Rome and Lisbon, which had a dispersed urban form at the beginning of the 20th Century have experienced more sprawl than Athens and Barcelona, which had and still have a more compact form.

In this paper, we refer to various processes of farmland conversion:

- Farmland conversion driven by planning choices. This urbanisation is legal and produces new residential or commercial districts, following spill-over or leapfrog spatial patterns. New transportation infrastructures also cause fragmentation of farmland.
- Farmland conversion driven by individuals, for private projects, leads mainly to the scattering of residential and farm buildings within agricultural areas.

Since the 1960s, French and Italian governments have tried to control such long-term trends in farmland conversion, while, at the same time, the pattern of governance has shifted from predominantly centralised to more decentralised modes.

2.2. A governance perspective revealing the impacts of decentralisation

We propose to use a conceptual framework based on a governance perspective to focus not only on formalities (and government institutions) but also on governing behaviours and practices. With Stoker (1998), we believe that “the value of the governance perspective rests in its capacity to provide a framework for understanding changing processes of governing” (p.18). Kjær (2004) pointed out that ‘governance’ has different meanings for the people using it. Most scholars agree with Stoker that “governance refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond government” (1998, p.18). Since the 1980s, in a context of public budget reductions, governance has evoked the stepping back of the state, the limits of government, and the growing commitment by individuals and civil society to tackling social and economic issues. This governance perspective “sees the government as able to use new tools and techniques to steer and guide” Kjær (2004), not only command in a *top-down* approach.

For this paper, we refer to Kooiman's ‘interactive governance’ framework (Kooiman, 2003) to analyse the interactions of social and political actors from state, market and civil society. Based on three types

of interactions (‘interferences’ in primary societal processes, horizontal ‘interplays’, and vertical, formalized ‘interventions’), he distinguishes three modes of governance: ‘self-governance’, ‘co-governance’ and ‘hierarchical governance’. Moreover, Kooiman's interactive governance has three components: images, instruments, and action. ‘Images’ are visions, knowledge, convictions, ends and goals which guide action, may or may not be shared among stakeholders, and may or may not be explicit in public action. ‘Instruments’ link these images to action, to influence societal interactions (legal tools, incentives, etc.). A wide range of instruments is available, and they are not considered a neutral medium. ‘Action’ is how instruments are put into effect, for instance the implementation of policies according to set guidelines. These notions will be useful in our analysis to show the role played by instrumentation in farmland protection policies.

Decentralisation processes partly explain the shift from government to governance in France and Italy. According to the World Bank, “decentralisation is the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to intermediate and local governments or quasi-independent government organisations and/or the private sector¹.” Schneider (2003) distinguishes three core dimensions: ‘political’, ‘administrative’ and ‘fiscal’ decentralisation.

Decentralisation is generally promoted by international organisations to provide better opportunities for local stakeholder participation in decision-making, aiming for more creative, innovative and responsive programs. However, frequent challenges in implementing decentralised governance include the potentially reduced efficiency of public action in regions with weaker administrative and technical capacities, a lack of strategic vision and an increased risk of corruption at local levels. The literature on land use planning highlights issues of timescale coordination (Holtslag-Broekhof et al., 2014), vertical coordination between multiple public decision-making levels (Koomen et al., 2008; Kline et al., 2014; Artmann, 2014), spatial coordination and balance between rural and urban authorities (Lichtenberg and Ding, 2008). Stakeholder-based approaches are complex to implement due to the high number and diversity of stakeholders involved, as well as their often antagonistic interests (Cormerais-Thomin and Bertrand 2013, Rey-Valette et al., 2014). They even raise issues of procedural and distributive justice (Kerselaers et al., 2013). That is why we decided to focus not only on effectiveness but also on social acceptability of farmland protection instruments and their modes of governance.

2.3. Analytical framework: assessing effectiveness and social acceptability of modes of governance

Farmland protection policies encompass public acquisition of land, regulatory approaches (urban growth boundaries, green belts, comprehensive zoning), and incentive-based approaches (based on taxation or on purchase or transfer of development rights) (Bengston et al., 2004). French and Italian farmland protection policies are characterised by the pivotal role of land use planning. We will see how decentralisation modifies the way land use planning is implemented, introducing new modes of governance of farmland protection. Our assessment of these various modes of governance will consider two dimensions: effectiveness and social acceptability.

The notion of effectiveness relates to the outcomes of public policy relative to its goal. We will thus consider farmland protection instruments as effective (i) if they reduce the rate of farmland conversion – some urban sprawl is considered unavoidable during economic development and population growth periods –, (ii) if agricultural land is still actively farmed and (iii) if they help meet societal demands for a multifunctional peri-urban agriculture (Zasada, 2011) providing goods and services (landscapes, natural risk management, short food supply chains (SFSC), etc.).

¹ <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralisation/what.htm>.

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