



European farmers and participatory rural appraisal: A systematic literature review on experiences to optimize rural development



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ABSTRACT

Farmers are those who daily supervise and manage rural areas, but still their collaborations with those institutions entitled to decide the transformation of these territories are not managed properly. The experiences of participatory processes with the involvement of farmers are analyzed in many agricultural studies. A systematic review has allowed us to analyse experiences related to 35 participation paths aimed at rural regions' development. The analysis has been made on the basis of 14 variables describing the path followed and its purpose, the agricultural holding involved and the areas surveyed.

The work has the objectives to identify some strengths and weaknesses in the involvement of farmers in decision-making and the strengths and weaknesses of the processes themselves. The review has shown that too often in participatory processes farmers are considered only as a source of information to be used by researchers rather than as active participants in the choices for the protection, management and transformation of the rural territory. An effective participatory rural appraisal requires greater empowerment of farmers. In general, compared to the methods and tools used, farmers are wary of paths that are too complex and prefer the use of low-tech tools. This result can be attributed to the farmers' demand of direct contact with the researchers to build trust and also to the average age of European farmers, which is pretty high.

In participation contexts, it is not possible to establish standardized methods and tools, because each process should be tailored for the community that expresses it. Nevertheless, the work has highlighted the need to establish some minimum principles to avoid considering unsuccessful some participation paths which, in reality, have been only scarcely participated. In the work, these principles have been presented through the development of key questions, to which those who design the path for an effective engagement of agricultural stakeholder must respond: representativeness, empowerment, empirical knowledge, relationships, group type, numerosity and involvement stage.

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1. Introduction

1.1. European policies, rural areas and participation

Statistics say that 57% of European regions are predominantly rural and the main activity in these areas is agriculture (Eurostat, 2015). For this reason, particular attention must be paid to the farm-

ers' involvement in decisions regarding the government of the rural territory as a whole.

In the recent history of European politics, there has been a growing attribution of importance to the involvement of local communities in decision making. The Aarhus Convention (UNECE, 1998), The European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe, 2000), the Directive 2003/35/EC (European Parliament, 2003) are the milestones at the regard.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reforms from 2007 to 2013 and from 2014 to 2020 ask to the farmer to change the scale at which he operates. The farmer cannot finalize his work on the opti-

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Table 1
Review Procedure (index publication from 1950 to mid-may 2014).

Step	Process Phase	Review Procedure	Result
1.	Data Gathering	Definition of Scopus search query: (participation OR participatory) AND (planning OR evaluation OR management) AND (landscape OR rural OR agri*) AND NOT (urban*) AND NOT (cit*) Selection of English papers Selection of European experiences	Bibliographical information of 4523 potentially relevant papers Bibliographical information of 3684 potentially relevant papers Bibliographical information of 1294 potentially relevant papers
2.	Data Screening	reviewing of titles and abstracts to select participatory processes that involved farmers	Potentially relevant papers are identified and classified as relevant or unsure (126 papers)
3.	Data Scoping	downloading of all papers that are likely relevant or unsure.	Total number of downloaded papers: n = 126.
4.	Data Cleaning	Reviewing of the papers that describe participatory processes with more than one moment of participation	98 papers are included into the comprehensive review (we didn't analyse papers concerning climate change, water management, forest conservation or landscape perception: 24 papers are included in this review)
5.	Experiences Review	Identification of the experiences to be reviewed (some paper discuss about more than one study case) Study cases reviewing with regard to the variables selected to investigate the characteristics of each experience	Identification of 132 study cases (35 study cases are included in this review) The experiences were reviewed by 14 variables (2 binary normalized numbers and 12 nominal values).
6.	Statistical Analysis	Analysis of all relevant data points using R.	We tried to assess whether there is a link between the variables used in the multivariate analysis

mal management of a single agricultural holding, but must address the rural area in its entirety.

This new perspective involves a change of objectives from the maximization and optimization of production (the subject of the first pillar of the CAP) to rural development policy (the subject of the second pillar). An organic rural development policy needs to coordinate the decisions of individual farmers but the objective of a sustainable rural development requires that decisions must be taken together with the farmers living in the territory.

The CAP 2014–2020 aims to incentivize a community-led local development strategy, identifying the Local Action Groups as the principal actors (European Parliament, 2013). Such groups are born under the Leader + Community initiative to implement local development strategies and are composed of representatives of the local community such as trade unions, business associations, municipalities (European Commission, 2016). With the previous programming direct and inclusive involvement of the entire local community occurred only sporadically. With the CAP 2014–2020, the European Commission is trying to make it a structural element of the paths to local rural development.

Since the term participation is used to describe very different paths and purposes, different authors have proposed scales to classify the experiences, ranging from a simple one-way information to place the final decision-making in the hand of the communities (Arnstein, 1969; Bishop et al., 1992; Burns et al., 1994; Ashby, 1996; Neubert, 2000; International Association for Public Participation, 2007).

In this work, participatory rural planning process (PRPP) shall mean an inclusive path that aims to compare and integrate the expert knowledge with the local knowledge for the taking over of responsibility and shared commitments.

1.2. Objectives of the work

There is a growing literature on the experiences of PRPPs focused on different themes. In this paper, we did a systematic review of 35 experiences to optimize rural regions' development, focusing on the characteristics and methods of farmers' involvement.

The focus of this paper is to identify important key questions, which require answers for the efficient farmers' involvement, and to identify strength and weakness in the studied experiences. The results can be useful to people who organize PRPP, as well as to land managers and policy makers.

2. Methods

The review protocol was constructed according to Luederitz et al. (2013), Brandt et al. (2013), and Newig and Fritsch (2009) and can be viewed in Table 1. As can be seen from Table 1, the selection process was made through a range of European PRPPs that envisaged involvement of farmers and 126 papers were identified out of 4523. Subsequently, these 126 papers were the subject of the Data Gathering phase (Table 1). A comprehensive multivariate statistical analysis was performed on the selected papers, leading to the identification of five macro-thematic clusters. The first brings together the works aimed at the optimization of agricultural production, the reduction of the impacts of agricultural and livestock activities, the recovery of traditional farming practices and the enhancement of inner areas, while the other four are single-issue and concern the adaptation to climate change, the water management, the forest conservation and the landscape perception. The overall analysis did not identify any other significant correlation, so it was decided to perform a differentiated review for each single cluster, in order to further investigate the individual topics. Since the five macro-themes are very complex, this first paper reports the results of the analysis made regarding only the first cluster, which brings together 24 papers. Some papers present more than one case study. A total of 35 experiences were studied.

This work is structured in two parts: a quantitative multivariate analysis and a qualitative analysis of the reviewed documents. The quantitative analysis aims to identify any correlation between the purpose of the project, the method and tools used, the type of farm, the type of contribution required to the farmers and the weaknesses and strengths of the PRPP. The methods used in these experiences are described in the corresponding papers under review, hereinafter are mentioned briefly other interesting works for the understanding of the various methods: Godschalk et al. (1992) and Brown and Raymond (2014) use participatory mapping, Strager and Rosenberger (2006) and Zhang et al. (2013) use participatory multicriteria analysis, Tress and Tress (2003) and Hossard et al. (2013) use participatory scenario, Becu et al. (2008) and Poplin (2012) use multi agent systems, Worrappimpong et al. (2010) and Simon and Etienne (2010) use Companion Modelling, German et al. (2007) and Mapfumo et al. (2013) use Participatory Action Research. The qualitative analysis aims to provide a set of minimum criteria for an efficient farmers' involvement, which must be respected in every PRPP.

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