

Promises and Problems in the Governance of Mediterranean Agro-Pastoral Systems: The Case Study of *Alta Murgia*

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Abstract

Governance, as a wider concept that includes not only government actors but also private sector and civil society, came into use in the 1980s. This paper discusses some major definitions of governance in order to delineate its main indicators. These indicators are then used to discuss premises and problems in the governance of rural areas with special reference to Alta Murgia, in central Apulia. The paper shows that the governance of rural areas holds both promises and problems.

Keywords

Good governance, Rural areas, Alta Murgia, Apulia, National park

1. Introduction

Governance, in its current broader meaning, acquired general currency in the 1980s. In this broader sense governance refers to a decision-making process that includes government actors, civil society (NGOs, neighbourhoods, etc.) and individual economic actors (businesses, consumers). Governance as a participatory form of decision-making has come in use at all levels – from global to local, for all types of organizations – private, non-profit, project and cooperate, and for all types of activities – goods and services, environment, land, internet, information technology.

Cities have provided institutional settings that are considered favourable for governance. It has been found useful in structuring problems, developing guidelines and plans and solutions to be implemented in the face of an increasing fragmentation of the social sphere and complexification of government. Its use in processes for developing or renewing built environments in urban regions has been considered appropriate, since cities provide the foremost example of collective enterprise in human history.

The concept of rural governance was introduced much later. The initial contributions on this issue underlined the lack of attention to governance processes in rural contexts, unlike what literature showed about urban contexts and the nation level (e.g. Marsden, Murdoch, 1998; Goodwin, 1998). The emergence of governance processes in rural areas, as in urban contexts, was associated with globalisation and post-Fordism, the decline of the post-World War II welfare state, and consequent changes in rural societies, economies

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and landscapes. The emergence of governance in rural contexts is due to the change of agriculture areas into multifunctional entities, paralleled by the decline of the hegemony of agrarian interests and the emergence of a wide variety of local and regional organizations promoted by the EU (*e.g.* LEADER) and other sources. The specific features that distinguish it from urban governance can be summarized as follows.

The structural process of employment decline in agriculture, at the heart of the shift in the economic base of rural regions from the primary sector, implied going beyond traditional agricultural policies and searching for different trajectories of development for these regions (OECD, 2003). In rural areas governance has been used to facilitate the redefinition of the rural itself. Globalisation and post-Fordism have profoundly changed the economic, social, cultural and symbolic role assigned to rural areas (Berti, Rossi, 2007). From being simply considered as agrarian lands or a sub-product of urbanisation processes, rural areas have been reconceptualised as multifunctional and economically diversified territories. In particular, multi-functionality is based on ‘the idea that rural landscapes typically produce a range of commodity and non-commodity use values simultaneously and that policy ought to recognize and protect that entire range of values’ (McCarthy, 2005, p. 773-774); therefore, it alludes to ‘the heterogeneous and synergistic aspects of landscapes’ (McCarthy, 2005, p. 778). It also implies the ‘disavowal of protectionism *per se*, devolution of governance, increased use of public-private partnerships, voluntary participation in conservation programs, a shift from prohibiting pollution to paying property owners for providing ecosystem services, the growing use of audits to ensure that farmers are delivering those services’ (McCarthy, 2005, p. 779).

Rural governance should help a plurality of actors to be involved at the local and supra-local level to redefine the ‘nature’ of a rural context, in order to exploit its multiple socio-economic and environmental functions and accordingly to mobilise political, institutional, economic, cultural and social resources necessary to cope efficiently with this change. In the European context, these processes are also regarded as a means to dismantle rigid top-down and state-led agrarian rural policies and enlarge planning and management of these areas to local and non-local actors, in order to make rural areas more attractive and competitive.

On the contrary, rural areas share with the urban ones the widespread use of the concept of governance, and its consequent misuse and abuse. The concept has been diluted to cover almost every form of decision making, without paying attention to its essential requirements. Besides democratising decision-making processes by opening them to new forms of participation, governance arrangements have shown a Janus face (Swyngedouw, 2005). They ‘redefine and reposition the meaning of (political) citizenship and, consequently, the nature of democracy itself’ (Swyngedouw, 2005). It could be said that governance always produces something similar to a ‘double movement’ (Polanyi, 1944). Such a ‘double movement’, that temporarily enables democratic interactions and erodes the democratic character of the political sphere, is particularly worrying especially when the ‘rules of the game’ are defined by powerful actors and, in particular, by market forces. In order to overcome such problems, the concept of ‘good governance’ has been proposed and widely used in rural areas as a remedy to potential governance distortions. Good governance is seen as offering normative orientations to put people at the centre of the decision-making process.

This paper aims to discuss governance promises and problems in rural areas by adopting a good governance perspective and with reference to *Alta Murgia* in Italy, a distinctive type of Mediterranean open agro-pastoral system. Our analysis will follow specific

characteristics of the good governance as a process, that are outlined in section two of this paper. This section will also discuss specific issues of governance in rural areas. The following section will deal with the case study of *Alta Murgia*, focusing on changes in the governance system following the establishment of the national park. Besides presenting our major conclusions, we shall reflect on governance of rural areas in general and future research in this field of study.

2. Governance, good governance: concept and characteristics

In its broadened meaning, ‘governance’ includes government actors as well as civil society and private sector actors in state interventions. The purpose is that citizens and market representatives should play a more direct role in public decision-making. Thus governance aims to enable participation over and above the prevailing practices in representative democracies. Governance is conceived as a process leading to decisions made in a collaborative fashion (Kjaer, 2004).

As such, it is a generic concept, and, with reference to several distortions highlighted in practice, it raises several questions (Bevir, 2013). What does citizen participation in practice imply? Does participation imply some form of power sharing between government and non-government representatives? Are NGOs and other civil society associations (CSAs) really representatives of citizens? If citizens directly or through NGOs and CSAs are to participate, how can they follow the decision-making process? How can equal opportunities be ensured for all citizens or their representatives? How can we ensure that decision-making is responsive to the needs of the society? Participatory processes are often considered by public officials as time-consuming and ineffective. How can effectiveness and efficiency be ensured?

Several concepts of governance have been introduced in order to answer these questions and try to give some guidelines. Community, participatory and networked governance are some of them. These modes of governance respectively refer to the need of engaging the communities in decision making in public matters, as well as deepening the democratic process through citizens’ engagement in different phases of decision making, and emphasising new ways of collaboration among emerging networks of actors, stakeholders and groups, in order to provide more integrated responses to problems. However, these ways of governance do not seem satisfactorily efficient in coping with both the ‘top-down versus bottom-up’ dilemmas in different contexts and, above all, the double movement implied by any governance process.

Good governance offers a possible normative way out of such impasse. In particular, the literature on good governance provides some principles and guidelines in order to ensure a good decision-making process.

These characteristics are as follows (see *Governance for Sustainable Human Development. A UNDP Policy Document*, 1997):

1. Participatory-ness
2. Transparency
3. Accountability
4. Responsiveness
5. Equitability and inclusiveness
6. Effectiveness and efficiency
7. Rule of law

There are other attributes, *e.g.* consensus-orientation, degree of commitment. In any case, these seven characteristics are often cited as criteria for good governance. They are broad enough to be interpreted in various ways and need further clarification. Since we shall use these characteristics in our case study, we shall discuss them in relation to specific premises and problems in the governance of rural areas.

Participatory-ness

Participation implies active involvement of all affected parties in the decision-making process. This requires an enabling environment, dissemination of information among all concerned, collecting opinion of people, offering opportunities to make recommendations and ensuring that these are attended to.

Transparency

Transparency is generally considered to be one of the major pillars of good governance. In governance it means honesty and openness. It involves bringing intended actions' aims and consequences into the public awareness. The same applies to the consequences of implemented actions.

Accountability

Accountability is a central aspect of governance. Accountability involves assumption of responsibility for policies, decisions and actions. In governance decision-makers are obliged to report, explain and are answerable for resulting consequences.

Responsiveness

Good governance requires that decision-makers are sensitive to the various stakeholders' needs as well as to their reactions to intended and/or implemented decisions. In representative democracy elected representatives show responsiveness in times of election, but, according to good governance, responsiveness should prevail during the entire governance process.

Equitability and inclusiveness

These two concepts, in governance literature, go hand in hand and imply fairness and justness in treatment and involvement of all the participants in a governance process. This implies that all participants feel that their interests are given consideration and that all groups in the society, particularly the most vulnerable, have equal opportunities to take part.

Effectiveness and efficiency

These two concepts in governance process ensure proper utilization of resources, best possible quality of public service delivery and simplified public management procedures with low transaction costs. Decision-making and implementation follow generally accepted procedures.

Rule of Law

Rule of law implies that every person is subject to law including lawmakers and law enforcement officials. Laws are publicly declared, are consistent and comprehensible, applied equally throughout the society and protect individual rights. Public officials should have little space for arbitrary decisions, in order to ensure a high degree of rule of law.

3. The governance of rural areas in the face of changing paradigms and policies

The governance of rural areas is influenced by different European, national, regional and local policies: from infrastructure and land-use to agriculture and environmental

policies. A relevant perspective concerns the competing paradigms faced by agriculture in the last decades, and the related shifts in Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), i.e. the EU's most important policy for over 50 years, with a budget that amounts to around 38% of the total for 2014-2020. Since the 1990s, the productivistic paradigm, widely defined as a 'commitment to intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture with state support based primarily on output and increased productivity' (Lowe *et al.*, 1993), has progressively given way to the more blurry and problematic notions of post-productivism (Wilson, 2001; Evans, Morris, Winter, 2002), non-productivism (Wilson, 2007), bio-economic productivism (Marsden, 2013), and more recently neo-productivism (Wilson, Burton, 2015). All these can be interpreted as symptoms of the crisis of Fordism and imply shifts in the pattern of agricultural governance (Potter, Tilzey, 2005).

This is not the place to discuss the implications of such debate. As far as the European context is concerned, it focused mostly on northern countries dominated by intensive agriculture, and failed to consider Mediterranean areas, which include extensive farming systems maintaining a distinctive landscape character (Barroso, Pinto-Correia, 2014). Non-productivism is considered a more appropriate term for these areas. It refers to the 'growth of farm pluri-activity, re-orientation towards amenities and multifunctional outcome, the loss of the central position of agriculture in the rural areas, environmental regulation and a more diverse livelihood strategy' (Barroso, Pinto-Correia, 2014, p. 46). These trends do not imply the replacement of one system to another, and their underlying processes are far from linear (Wilson, 2001). Non-productivism and the predominant productivistic agri-business model and increasing globalisation of agro-commodity chains can co-exist spatially and temporally (Wilson, 2007; Barroso, Pinto-Correia, 2014).

The concept of multifunctional agricultural regime better encapsulates the diversity, non-linearity and spatial heterogeneity of modern agriculture and rural society (Wilson, 2001). According to this concept, farms not only produce food and other goods, but provide also other (non-market) functions such as nature and landscape protection, and contribute to the conservation of material and immaterial cultural heritage in rural areas. For Mediterranean agriculture, the point of view of multi-functionality offers a reversal of perspective: processes conceived as 'backward' from a productive viewpoint, become ways of supporting long-term farmers' livelihood, generating environmental and social benefits (Moragues-Faus, 2016).

However, once incorporated into CAP programmes and instruments, the above-mentioned concepts lose their impetus as reaction to the productive era, and open the way to flexible uses of the notion of multifunctional agriculture, which include economic interpretations of multi-functionality simply as an 'externality' issue (Wilson, 2007, p. 309). In the face of pressures to increase production and liberalize agricultural policies, the main environmental and social objectives of multi-functionality are constantly challenged (Rønningen, Renwick, Burton, 2012). In most Mediterranean landscapes, the complex historical relations between production, consumption and protection are being altered and re-arranged in multifarious and contradictory ways. Land management options are still focusing mostly on production and productivistic ideals, even when included in a multifunctional system (Pinto-Correia, Godinho, 2013).

The concept of multifunctional agriculture moves the focus of attention from the agricultural sector to the territory (Cairol *et al.*, 2009). It highlights the several and various relations between farming and rural areas (Wilson, 2001). It implies a policy shift following the Agenda 2000 reform: the re-orientation of funds from the production

subsidies provided through Pillar 1 (direct payments to farmers and measures to manage agricultural markets) towards wider rural development measures in Pillar 2, based on Rural Development Programmes (RDP).

4. Issues in governance of agro-pastoral systems: the case of Alta Murgia

Alta Murgia (AM) is the vast plateau with an average altitude of 400-500 m. that extends for about 200,000 hectares in the inner central part of Apulia. Its scarcely populated rural space is characterized by the prevalence of extensive pastureland and arable land and, at the same time, abundant signs of human interaction with nature over its long history. It represents a very rare environment in Italy and Europe, which includes large portions of dry rocky grasslands and other habitats and species of great scientific interest. These are an important part of the Network Natura 2000, which offers vital protection for Europe's most valuable and endangered species and habitats.

In the following sub-sections we shall analyse some major transformations and related governance aspects (table 1), which ask for greater efforts aiming to preserve such valuable agro-pastoral system. We will apply the set of criteria for good governance in order to single out any improvements or worsening in achieving such aims, caused by a crucial innovation in the governance system: the establishment of the national park of AM in 2004 (table 2). Our study is based on the analysis of relevant documents and literature, participatory observations and interviews.

4.1 Alta Murgia: an atypical rural area

The terms 'rurality' and 'rural area', both in international literature and in public policies, usually designate territories characterised by low population density, small-sized towns and villages, where agricultural production provides the major economic base. As a consequence, the rural way of life is considered peculiar and different from the urban one¹. These conceptions of rurality and rural area contrast with the peculiar characters of AM. Its settlement structure is made up of large compact towns² overlooking a poorly inhabited vast territory, 'an enigmatic world' in which the peasants live in towns and the countryside is an empty but productive space (Salvemini, 2011). Historically, the towns were cores of the organisation of local economy: a network of roadways (mule tracks, sheep tracks etc.) extending from each town organized the distribution system for the farmhouses (the so-called *masserie*) and connected services (baits, sheep pens etc.). These were related to the agro-pastoral landscape and the rocky grasslands characterising AM, which were used as extensive pastures for sheep and goats, and are now considered of high value for their biodiversity. Therefore, they play an important role within the EU Natura 2000 ecological network, according to the Habitat Directive (European

¹ This does not mean that the definition and operational interpretation of such terms have been uncontroversial, as demonstrated by the long and intense scientific debate on this topic. According to the European Commission (1997), 'the popularity of terms such as rurality and rural areas resides in their apparent clearness. They are immediately understood because they suggest a physical, social and cultural concept opposed to the concept of 'urban'. However, to give an objective and unambiguous definition of rurality seems quite impossible'.

² Currently, the largest ones are Andria (100.331), Altamura (70.595), Corato (48.313), Gravina (43.770); the smallest ones are Poggiorsini (1.486), Spinazzola (6.536), Toritto (8.461), Minervino (8.943).

Commission, 1992), that is the main tool for European nature conservation policy (Fracchiolla *et al.*, 2017).

Currently agricultural lands account for about 72% of the entire Murgia area, about 23% consists of wooded areas and natural environments, while 5% are built-up areas (Torre *et al.*, 2017).

The highly concentrated form of settlement contrasting with the uninhabited countryside and the long distance flows of goods and people, still characterising this area, are difficult to reconcile with the model of rural district that emerged in the 1990s as an analytical concept (Iacoponi, 2001) based the notion of 'industrial district' conceived by Becattini and, in the early 2000s, adopted as a governance tool for the implementation of rural development strategies (Brunori, Rossi, 2007). Such a model focuses on the internal organization of local economies and tends to consider the relationships between organizational proximity and geographical proximity as strongly linked (Blanc, 1997).

4.2 Unfitting transformations into an (apparently) empty countryside

Patchy and scattered developments

In the 1980s the AM territory began to undergo great transformations. In these years, four centres (Altamura, Santeramo in Colle, Gravina in Apulia and Cassano Murge) show very high rates of population growth, while the expansion of urban areas characterises all towns. Its low density and scattered nature led to high land take in peri-urban countryside and consequent loss of the historical urban compactness. In the same period pressures for non-agricultural uses of open agro-pastoral spaces started. The spread of holiday homes was intensive especially in some parts of AM, such as Santeramo, Cassano, Andria, Gravina, Corato, and took more concentrated forms near Cassano, Quasano and Castel del Monte. They privileged some axes that deny the longitudinal character of historical main roads, and penetrated into the very heart of the AM territory, impairing the original structure of open rural landscapes.

The birth (and crisis) of the 'furniture industrial district'

The 1980s were marked by the exceptional performance of the so-called 'furniture industrial district', i.e. an atypical Mezzogiorno version of the well-known Italian model of industrial district (Baculo, 1999). This gave rise to a huge demand for space around Altamura, Santeramo and Matera, which are the vertices of the so-called 'sofa triangle', and induced the regional and local authorities responsible for land-use decisions to approve special procedures that make land-use planning more flexible and simplify development control (Khakee, Barbanente, 2003). As a result, industrial prefabricated sheds disseminated in agricultural and peri-urban areas along the main roads of the triangle, causing a sharp deterioration of the unique environment of AM.

Many sheds are now empty and abandoned, and partly were never used and even never completed, also due to the crisis of the industrial district that started in the early 2000s and is still in course.

Agricultural intensification

All over Europe agricultural intensification have reduced grasslands and transformed them in arable lands. In AM, especially between the 1980s and 1990s, 25,000 ha of semi-natural grasslands present before 1980s (i.e. 56 % of the total area), traditionally used for sheep grazing, were transformed in arable lands through practices of stone crushing (Fracchiolla *et al.*, 2017). This deep transformation of the calcareous basement caused

problems of soil degradation, hydrogeological breakdown, sediment deposition and contamination in aquifer, together with loss of biodiversity and damage to rocky pasture habitat of high naturalistic value.

This process was driven by the financial support initially of the regional government and later of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This had a huge impact: it initiated the so-called ‘crushing of the Murgia’, i.e. the transformation of pastures in arable land, in order to fraudulently access more European contributions, as part of the integration of income from cereals. Many of these practices were carried out illegally on protected areas under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, and thus obtained illicit EEC subsidies. They were performed also on rocky or steep terrain, resulting in huge hydrogeological damage.

Dissemination of high impact activities

The poorly inhabited vast territory of AM made it a privileged site for uses irreconcilable with densely populated areas. In 1983 the regional government approved a decree that designed 14,000 hectares to four permanent military polygons. Other areas were distressed by legal and illegal quarries, illegal waste and toxic mud discarding that caused heavy metal contamination of soils and aquifer, while the threat of nuclear waste storage loomed from time to time. Moreover, in the early 1990s four reinforced concrete artificial reservoirs were built, together with numerous hydraulic works, never used and now abandoned, connected to the never built Capodacqua dam.

More trivial and odd land-use transformations, such as technological facilities, service areas etc., fragmented the natural continuity of territorial morphology and increased the hydraulic risk, disregarding the primary role that the AM geomorphologic structure plays in the hydrological regime of a wide bio-region extending to the coast.

4.3 Changing landscapes of governance between conflict and proposal

The rise in awareness of the outstanding environmental and landscape values of the AM is commonly traced back to the regional decree that in 1983 established the military polygons. Such decision triggered a broad oppositional movement that involved a variety of institutions and actors: from local authorities to environmental associations, from political forces, trade unions and economic categories to religious authorities. Important episodes of collective mobilization were the peace marches from Gravina to Altamura in December 1985 and 1987.

Since then, the *Alta Murgia* Committees (AMCs), that in the meantime were formed as a network of local associations, have been constantly engaged in actions that combined antagonism and conflict with vision and proposal: the denunciation of illegal and legal practices that were responsible for degrading a unique natural and cultural environment alternated with projects and initiatives aiming not only at protecting the AM but also at implementing an alternative development perspective based on its unique natural and cultural values.

‘Rurality’ as a conceptual device

‘Rurality’, in the local associations’ narrative, was conceived as the agro-pastoral culture that developed over the centuries in AM, merging in a unique way physical environment and human agency (Castoro *et al.*, 2005). In this sense, the term ‘rurality’ does not refer either to the rural way of life or to the rural character of the population, or to some objective properties of space, as in the spatial approach that uses indicators of distance from agglomeration or population density to identify a rural context (Blanc,

1997). Rurality underlies an interpretation of this territory gradually turned into a socio-political vision. This is centred on the potential that the establishment of a rural park could develop for the future of AM, in terms of protecting its natural and cultural heritage, diversifying the local monoculture farming, establishing a new low-impact 'ecotourism', and creating new professional opportunities in fields linked to the agricultural sector, including research and education (Castoro *et al.*, 2005). Thus 'rurality' has to be understood as a strategic construct (Crosta, 2010), that is a purposeful and interactive conceptual device. This helped, on the one hand, to appreciate the transformations underway in AM as degrading and threatening for the 'rural environment', on the other hand, to construct a vision for the future of this territory founded on a different, experimental form of 'development', not intended as 'a mere expansion of the productive capacity of the territory', but as the protection and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage in order to create 'job opportunity in biological agriculture, new techniques of livestock breeding, agri-tourism, cultural production' (Torre di Nebbia, 2002, p. 136). Without making explicit reference to the concept of multifunctionality, the local associations' narrative envisioned the need of fostering different functions and values in order to defend this territory from degradation. The 'rural park' is a metaphor for the collective construction of such a different form of development (Torre di Nebbia, 2002, p. 138).

The idea of instituting a park catalysed a large consensus and support by movements, groups, associations, and individual citizens, far beyond the AM territory, but raised also a harsh opposition by the economic actors operating in the area: above all, large farms and mining companies.

Shifts in governance following the establishment of the National Park

The establishment of the AM National Park, which started in 1998 and was officially decreed in 2004, changed significantly the governance arrangements and practices in the area. The park covers a total area of 68,656 hectares, largely coinciding with the Natura 2000 Site, and involves thirteen municipalities³. It is considered the only national rural park in Italy due to the prevalence of agricultural areas (Capotorti *et al.*, 2012). The Park Authority (PA) is an autonomous public body with legal personality and political-administrative offices, ruled by a President, a Director, a Managing Board, and the Park Community⁴.

The PA is added to the multilevel governance that from the local scale, through the regional and national levels, reaches the European Union. Each authority uses its own decision-making resources (e.g. regulatory and financial instruments), which include government, civil society and private economic actors, in specific ways in order to achieve different goals. This accentuated the fragmentation of the previous governance system in AM. Its consequences affect not only the management effectiveness of AM territory, but also the possibility to build, on the values of such rural area, a new collective identity, here interpreted not as a datum but as a dynamic process that depends on how a

³ Altamura, Andria, Ruvo di Puglia, Gravina in Puglia, Minervino Murge, Corato, Spinazzola, Cassano Murge, Bitonto, Toritto, Santeramo in Colle, Grumo Appula and Poggiorsini. Protected land extensions range from 12.660 ha within the administrative boundaries of Altamura to 127.5 within Poggiorsini.

⁴ The President is appointed by the Ministry of Environment and the President of the Regional government, the Director by the Ministry of Environment; the Managing Board is composed of representatives of the park Community and other members appointed by environmental associations, research organisations and the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment. The park Community is composed of all the mayors and the provincial and regional presidents and has advisory and propositional duties.

set of relations develop in concrete actions (Melucci, 1996). In this vein, the institutionalization of environmental protection, based on a framework law that outlines the fundamental principles for the management of the area and entrusts this task to specific bodies, interrupted the process of bottom-up promotion of visions and actions on which the very idea of rural park was founded. It strengthened land-use control devices in the area included in the park, and thus accentuated the contrast between areas to be protected because of their exceptional value, and ‘ordinary’ places where most people live and work. The appointment of non-local presidents and directors contributed to perceiving the park as a ‘foreign body’, which responded to a bureaucratic logic based on rules ignoring AM specific problems.

The need to avoid, reduce and prevent the dissent of farmers against the protection measures to be enforced by law induced the PA to open a direct dialogue with farmers. Financial incentives and benefits were the key to getting and keeping private economic actors involved. In 2010, the PA started a system of agreements, providing economic support to farmers carrying on actions beneficial for the environment⁵. Funds allocated for these actions increased from 350.000 euro in 2009 to 1.800.000 euro in 2014. They aimed at strengthening the relationship between the PA and farmers in order to uphold both social and conservation needs. They raise doubts about the respect of principles of equitability and inclusiveness.

On the other hand, doubts were raised whether they met effectiveness criteria, that is to which extent they were able to increase farmers’ awareness of environmental values, obtain their consent to protection rules, and contribute to achieve conservation objectives (Capotorti *et al.*, 2012; Fracchiolla *et al.*, 2017). From this point of view, the PA is a weak actor, since the financial resources available for state intervention to conserve physical and biological systems are much lesser than those coming from the CAP. The PA encounters difficulties in directing the regional RDP towards the conservation objectives it pursues. In the multi-level governance process for the RDP implementation, the voices representing the most productive farmers are much more powerful than those of the least productive ones and, even more so, the most vulnerable parts of society (*e.g.* agricultural workers, seasonal migrant workers), and the nature. These power asymmetries generate conflict. In 2013 the AMCs, as part of more general dissatisfaction with the management of the park, accused the PA of not being able to direct the RDP towards the implementation of projects supporting the improvement of the AM peculiar ecosystems and pastoral activities⁶.

Moreover, the establishment of the park increased the diversification of activities in favour of recreational, leisure and eco, naturalistic or sustainable tourism. This trend is in line with the national law no. 394/1991, which includes ‘compatible recreation’ among the aims to be pursued in the management of natural parks. Holiday farms, teaching farms, farms offering social services etc. create new activities that integrate agricultural income. These activities help build the consensus of local farmers. The European

⁵ These actions include: burying of crop residues (instead of burning them); growing at least three different arable crops (at the same time); grazing or growing cover crops in the orchards; cleaning the edges of country roads; maintenance of driveways and trekking paths; purchase and installation of passive safety systems. Moreover, grants were awarded to refund damages made by wild boars or wolf to cultivations or flocks, and projects were promoted aiming at converting arable lands into grasslands to safeguard biodiversity and enhance pastoralism, and at helping farmers to reduce the business cost for shearing sheep and increasing the selling price of wool.

⁶ See <https://www.altamuralive.it/news/attualita/465941/dieci-anni-di-parco-dellalta-murgia-i-cam-giudizio-compressivamente-negativo>

Agricultural Fund for Rural Development boosts such diversification. It complements traditional CAP measures in support of farms with area-based local development strategies promoted by the LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs)⁷. The LEADER approach is based on the idea that development strategies are more effective and efficient if decided and implemented by local actors. Cooperation, public-private partnership and local governance are keywords of such an approach. The municipalities that fall in the AM park are spread among different LAGs: 5 in the 2007-2013 cycle and 4 in the 2014-2020 cycle. This made it difficult for AM to establish close and stable relationships with each LAG and direct their programs towards environmental protection objectives. LAGs programs emphasised the promotion of complementary activities to agricultural ones, in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the agricultural system and the increase of eco-sustainable activities, farm- and non-farm-based, especially in tourism and leisure, gastronomy, and crafts. However, they yielded modest results as far as the preservation of AM's agro-pastoral system is concerned, due to the accentuated fragmentation of initiatives and consensus-building mechanisms that guided the selection of actions and related beneficiaries.

Tab. 1. Major issues, consequences and governance aspects.

Issues	Consequences	Governance aspects
<i>Scattered suburbanization and holiday homes</i>	Introduction of urban functions in the rural area; habitat fragmentation; loss of landscape natural and cultural values and symbolic interest	Lack of awareness of natural and cultural values → lack of organized civic actions Developers easily getting across the red tape in procedures for land-use control → insufficiency in transparency → lack of political accountability, equitability and inclusiveness. No assessment of effectiveness and efficiency in land-use control Rule of law used to support the building sector
<i>The birth (and crisis) of the 'furniture industrial district'</i>	Evidence of success in terms of newly established firms and jobs creation → Lack of awareness of short-term effect on employment Subsequent rising unemployment Incomplete, vacant and abandoned sheds Waste of resources → criminal complaints and long investigations and trials → highlighting illegal buildings: permits obtained on protected areas or with special procedures in the absence of the requirements prescribed by law	Facilitated procedures and permits that bypass urban planning rules and waive the principles of participation, transparency and fair treatment of citizens in land-use decisions Lack of effectiveness and efficiency in land-use control Responsiveness oriented only to short-term demands and acquisition of consensus, disregarding equitability and inclusiveness Decrease of public confidence in the public authorities Rule of law thwarted by forced changes in regional laws and dishonest implementation of the rule in force

⁷ These 'must consist of a balanced and representative selection of partners drawn from the different socioeconomic sectors in the territory concerned. At the decision-making level the economic and social partners and associations must make up at least 50 % of the local partnership' (European Commission, 2000).

<i>Agricultural intensification</i>	Dependency of land owners from CAP payments, measures and schemes, and a deviation from long-term reasoning on the land use system Loss of grassland and biodiversity, soil erosion, hydrogeological breakdown, contamination in aquifer Fraudulent use of CAP resources	Poor collaboration in reporting illegalities by civil society at large. Local activists initially isolated in the complaint Lack of transparency: difficulty in singling out fund beneficiaries and information on the purpose of the support granted Lack of effectiveness and efficiency in the supply of CAP funds Rule of law undermined: infringements of European legislation on special conservation areas
<i>Dissemination of high impact activities</i>	Spread of land uses not compatible with environmental protection measures → EU infringement procedures for biodiversity conservation → military polygons and legal and illegal quarries A number of these are managed in contravention of the provisions on environmental incidence/impact assessment Short term economic gains contrasting with long-term preservation concerns	Issues of higher symbolic value and more relevant environmental threats foster broad participation of the local community Lack of transparency and accountability: specifically, military institutions for the polygons and regional government for the cultivation and recovery of quarries. Decrease of public confidence in the public authorities Rule of law undermined

Tab. 2. Change in governance assessed against the criteria for good governance.

Criteria for good governance	Change in governance arrangements and practices after the establishment of the park
Participatory-ness	Interruption of the bottom-up processes nurturing visions and promoting actions. Formal involvement of municipalities in the Park Community, together with scientific bodies and environmental associations' representatives in park management. Power sharing between governmental and non-governmental representatives limited to formal decision-making settings.
Transparency	Lack of reporting and explaining decisions and consequences. Bureaucratic observance of the State and European rules on transparency in force. Lack of commitment for improving transparency in communicating decisions and their consequences.
Accountability	Further fragmentation of powers among different policy sectors at national, supranational (EU) and regional scales makes it difficult to identify the actors who are responsible for decisions.
Responsiveness	Scarce participation of mayors in the Park Community meetings reinforces the power of the appointed decision-makers (president and director), makes 'red tape' logic prevail and widens the distance between the PA and local community. Improved the ability to act quickly in times of emergency that endanger fauna and flora (e.g. forest fires).
Equitability and inclusiveness	Privileged relations with powerful actors based on funding in order to obtain their consensus, largely neglecting the most vulnerable segments of local society. Recent attempt to broaden social involvement in the activities of the park, made difficult by the statutory park management provided for by law.

Effectiveness and efficiency	Mainly interpreted in relation to biodiversity conservation through the lens of the authorization granted by the PA: request for limitation and streamlining of the authorizations sanctioned for conservation by virtue of the National Law, above all for the agricultural, pastoral and building activity. Improved sustainable use of resources and protection of natural heritage.
Rule of law	Increased compliance with law and procedures for biodiversity conservation.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the evolution of governance in the *Alta Murgia* through the good governance parameters offers a complex portrait of this area and the related opportunities to preserve it through the restructuring processes of the rural.

The set-up of the park represented a turning point in the constitution of the 'identity' of that territory as a rural landscape to be preserved. The park limited the expansion of the urban structure (physical and socio-economic) of the compact cities surrounding the 'urban void' of *Alta Murgia* through the enactment of the rules of law on biodiversity preservation. However, in governance processes, since the park is a weak insular territory in the economic development, it has been an actor looking for consensus of powerful forces shaping local development. Consequently, although aimed at protecting the rural environment, the governance process has imperilled the idea of a park as an alternative way of managing a territory in which paradigms of development based on the co-existence between nature and culture could be experimented.

The marginalisation of local NGOs and civil society that has followed the setting-up of the park reveals how the structure of the governance has been unable to cope with top-down/bottom-up dilemmas. As occurred in other countries of the South of the Mediterranean, in the *Alta Murgia* too local governance has been characterised by a concentration of powers and/or an asymmetry of powers in favour of the public administration or organisations institutionalised or dependent on state structures. The NGOs marginalisation is also a consequence of the fact that 'the new modes of governance coincide with environmental, national and regional development policies' which, although 'directed towards greater openness to opportunities of initiatives and actions of rural areas (regional parks, national development act, environment)' (Bessaoud *et al.*, 2009, pp. 287), tend to overwrite local processes of change. Other difficulties depend on an increasing global pressure to liberalise the rural economy and turn existing agro-pastoral landscapes into part of the contemporary forms of urbanisation-led management of territory. In this regard, in the *Alta Murgia* the role of municipalities is problematically ambiguous, as they focus their attention on the urban and look forward to be integrated into the metropolitan area of Bari. This could accentuate an interpretation of multi-functionality, which actually has been encouraged by the setting-up of the park, limited to the development of 'compatible recreation' activities, and induce to neglect other (non-market) functions such as the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

The *Alta Murgia* case seems to suggest that, when alternatives to the urban-led development model are available (such as the park), governance processes should not be disentangled from the contemporary production of contextual and appropriate forms of organisation and management of the territory. In order to preserve fragile agro-pastoral landscapes, it could be crucial to emphasise self-organisation and the adoption of critical

perspectives within governance processes, in order to satisfy good governance criteria such as accountability, responsiveness, inclusivity, balance of power asymmetries and equality.

As a result, nowadays the park is still trying to find an identity, which requires to rethink the premises and promises of rural governance in the context of a problematic redefinition of the rural and beyond mainstream approaches to rural restructuring, such as the urban-rural divide, the rural-urban perspective and multi-functionality. Assuming this last perspective as a sort of paradigm inside governance processes could distract actors from the contextual specificities of a rural area, thus favouring globalisation and liberalization (McCarthy, 2005) as well as a transformation of local civic society in something else, i.e. an aggregate of consumers.

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