

**ERSA 54<sup>th</sup> Congress, Saint Petersburg, 26-29 August 2014**

**Special Session**

**Towards a Smart Rural Europe**

**What future for European Areas given the smart specialization paradigm?**

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The EU growth strategy for 2020 builds on the ambition to become “a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy”. This objective relies on the identification, in a context of global competition, of comparative advantages of the regions and their consistent inclusion in global value chains and innovation processes, but also to prior sectors, allowing peculiar local development spirits. Smart development strategies are based on the exploitation of the related variety of EU areas and their ability to initiate new activities and/or technological fields.

The notion of rural development and the related policies are components of EU policies and one of the pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). A substantial part of the rural policy for development of nations and regions can be found in the CAP, which does not only include measures for agriculture, but also targets at a wider institutional and economic setting. But, in recent years emerged an agreement on the idea that the rural sector approaches have not achieved the expected results, and a growing demand for policies involving territorial dimensions (place-based policies) to better reflect the new challenges and differentiated growth potential of EU rural spaces. The recognition of the multi-facet character of rural areas puts the stress on the necessity to assess not only the agricultural development and its impact in terms of externalities or agroecology, but also the other dimensions of rural areas, be there business, services, tourism or nature, considering the emerging forms of organization, practices or technical innovation. All this also fits in a context of increased territorial competition, pressure on public funding for agriculture, and claims for administrative and fiscal decentralization, putting a greater emphasis on the ability of local actors to renew their proximity relations and connect to external networks.

At the same time the increasing urban sprawl and the growth of cities justifies the need for more research on the relation between rural and urban areas, in terms of peri-urbanisation processes as well as regarding the soil occupations and competition between different land uses. Europe is considered as being one of the most desirable and healthiest parts of the world according to various index measures. It belongs to the most urbanized world area, with an expected growth of the urban population. This anticipated development can in several ways be a challenge for the European economy as well as the remaining rural areas, their contribution to the overall growth and their development paths.

Several authors consider now that a new paradigm of rural development is emerging; gaining autonomy from the dominant agro-industrial production and including strong links between rural areas and the increasing proves of urbanization. Accompanied by the rise of agroecology, it is thought to be emerging both in the practices and interventions of actors on the field and in public policies: rural development is seen as a multi-level, multi actors and multi dimension process. The new paradigm pleads for a renewed approach of scientific research towards these areas. It involves the question of territorial modes of governance, in order to understand the ways decisions and rural development projects are undertaken involving different stakeholders participating in the decision making process.

The aim of this special session is to identify the main conditions for an enlarged definition of a Smart Rural Europe, given the regional dynamics, facts and figures, the profound changes in rural areas and the new regional and rural policies. The participants can choose to discuss around the two major following questions:

- a) Is there a possible smart development for European rural and periurban areas?
- b) Which type of smart development (agriculture, business/industry, peri-urbanisation, tourism/leisure ...) of these zones can be privileged with regards to regional peculiarities?

This session is organized under the umbrella of the TASTE project of the Ruragri Era-Net. Papers are welcomed from the members of the project (M. Steiner, H. Westlund, S. Corsi...) and from other scholars in the field.

