

CFP

International Conference

Working in the Countryside:

Subsistence, Pluriactivity, Mobility

Milan, September 2017



The introduction of the pluriactivity concept marked an important turning point in rural studies. As a wider outlook of research on the countryside led the agricultural world to be more open, the care in the ways of integrating and structuring the different activities allowed to get a new point of view on the ways of socially organizing farming world and its material and symbolical spaces. Furthermore, the subject of pluriactivity has undoubtedly the merit of being in the crossroads of the most recent tracks related to renewal of rural history: it played indeed a central role in the enhanced prestige of the marginal farmers, who are no longer a powerless victims pushed in the background of the market, but actors able to disrupt the traditional picture of the still countryside, both from the geographical and the socioeconomic point of view (Bevilacqua 1990; Béaur 2015).

Especially during the 80s, Italian and French researchers focused their attention on this phenomenon, both as a tool for investigating the most recent changes and as the subject of long-lasting analyses (ARF 1984; Garrier, Hubscher 1988; Annali 1989; De Benedictis 1990; Fanfani 1990; Sabbatucci Severini 1990; INEA 1992). In France, home of marginal farming *par excellence*, pluriactivity does not seem to emerge as a simple trick to survive, but as the tool for reasserting the value of the farming world, forced to be a motionless universe by modernization and being close to an end, according to Henri Mendras. In a somehow similar framework, Italian studies on pluriactivity seem to refer to practices already detected in the stories which had given voice to the farming world (Dolci 1956; Montaldi 1961; Revelli 1977; Contini 2005).

The idea of the farmer-craftsmen and, in more general terms, the presence of 'mixed' figures and of the interconnection between city and countryside are constant in research about the proto-industrialization and 'modernization' processes. (INSOR 1970; Poni 1983; Cafagna 1983; Dewerpe 1985; Corner 1990; Mayaud 1999). However, the pluriactivity pattern seems to go further and beyond the traditional distinction between city and countryside, agricultural and extra-agricultural, and by detecting socioeconomic interconnections and geographical dimensions which allow to redefine the consolidated dichotomous interpretations of the territory as a product of the human action.

Whereas Maurice Aymard (1983) highlighted how self-sufficiency is a privilege for a limited group of medium-sized farms, pluriactivity turns out to be the tool to investigate the fortunes of a wide farming universe, which often handles precariousness, but is extremely prompt to adapt itself to changing conditions. Both in Italy and France, the debate on pluriactivity corresponds, nevertheless, to the last act of a study season with rural history playing a key role. This is not the same for all contexts; for example, one should think of the recent work about the

“integrated rural economy” put forward by Aleksander Panjek starting from the Slovenian situation or the CORN network project (Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area). In fact, some of the topics dealt with in the volumes published in the homonymous series by Brepols Publishers seem to leave room for new ideas (e.g. food issue, environmental impact) for future research which could shift research perspectives on the role of the countryside. Therefore, the focus on pluriactivity allow us to investigate social actor practices in a long-term perspective, by transcending borders of strictly agricultural work and rural social space.

In this context, **we invite proposals for panels or papers**; any historical period will be accepted, from antiquity to the present, and any geographical area as well, European and extra-European. In line with SISLAV practice, interdisciplinary proposals are welcomed.

Proposals should apply to one or more of the following subjects:

1) *Pluriactivity, between autonomy and dependence*

Who practises pluriactivity? And why? When is pluriactivity a survival strategy for the poorest and when, on the contrary, is it a tool for diversification used by dynamic entities?

2) *Individual or group pluriactivity?*

Is pluriactivity part of a personal story, of workers taking up more than one job, profession or activity in their lifetime and/or at the same time? Or is it an analysis criterion of the family budget, with a breakdown of roles according to gender/age? Or is it part of more complex balances between families or communities?

3) *Pluriactivity and development dynamics*

Which factors can explain pluriactivity emerging or disappearing in a certain context? Which is the evolution of the balance between the different agricultural and non-agricultural (handicraft, small businesses, services, etc.) activities practised? How can pluriactivity preserve the environmental balance of a territory or change it radically? How can pluriactivity help agriculture to innovate or condemn it to a marginal role?

4) *Pluriactivity and its discipline*

Which are the reactions of public authorities in case of a pluriactive business? To what extent can certain dispositions be a deterrent or an incentive (like in the case of military work) to jobs considered “external” to the main activity or the activity one is employed in? To what extent do the attempts to regulate pluriactivity respond to the variety of practices? Or do they represent, instead, an effort to get a reaction in times of difficulty?

5) *Pluriactivity as a school of expertise*

How can pluriactivity usefully enable techniques and knowledge to be transmitted and circulate? How can it help traditional practices to adapt to innovations? Could the evolution of pluriactivity become an indicator of social advancement or decline in an intergenerational perspective?

6) *Pluriactivity between assistance and resistance*

To what extent do the existence and the levels of public and private assistance affect the rise of pluriactivity practices? To what extent are the forms of opposition and resistance, including the everyday resistance (Scott 1985), alternative to the existence of work pluriactivities? Or to what extent and how do they modify pluriactivities, considering that pluriactivity system often embraces heterogeneous, if not opposite, identities, logics and interests? How is the pluriactivity

outlook transformed by “deviant practices” (e.g. rural theft) or by the economy of “expedients”, which represents a sort of “degree zero” or “informal”?

7) *Pluriactivity and mobility*

Additional and complementary activities – in the primary, secondary or service sector, - often imply periodical, seasonal or temporary displacements: to other farmlands or villages (reaping, skilled agricultural work, handicraft), to the reference city (e.g. construction) or to far (industrial cities or large infrastructure building sites) or even far-distant (just think of the *golondrinas*) contexts. How do types of mobility change depending on the various shapes of plural activity? And, contrariwise, in what do “sedentary” pluriactivities (e.g. proto-industrial or manufacturing) differ from individual or group migrations?

Proposals should be submitted in one of the official languages of the conference, which are Italian, English, French and Spanish.

The organizing committee reserves the right to group together or separate any single papers and/or sessions.

No registration fee is required; facilitation for accommodations and reimbursements for students or Ph.D students will be notified in due course, depending on available funding.

Each paper proposal should not exceed 500 words, whereas a panel proposal (again, with a word limit of 500) should be sent together with the single paper abstracts (up to 500 words for each); panel and paper proposals should be sent via mail to storialavoro@gmail.com no later than 30th September 2016.

Organizing committee: *RU-LAV Labour and rural workers*, (research group of the SISLav - <http://www.storialavoro.it/gruppi/lavoro-e-lavoratori-rurali/>), Andrea Caracausi (University of Padua), Pietro Causarano (University of Florence), Michele Colucci (ISSM – CNR)