



Rural development in Italy and its evolution

Cionco F., Monteleone A.

in

Chassany J.P. (ed.), Pellissier J.-P. (ed.).

Politiques de développement rural durable en Méditerranée dans le cadre de la politique de voisinage de l'Union Européenne

Montpellier : CIHEAM

Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 71

2006

pages 121-128

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=6400063>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

Cionco F., Monteleone A. **Rural development in Italy and its evolution**. In : Chassany J.P. (ed.),
Pellissier J.-P. (ed.). *Politiques de développement rural durable en Méditerranée dans le cadre de la
politique de voisinage de l'Union Européenne*. Montpellier : CIHEAM, 2006. p. 121-128 (Options
Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 71)



<http://www.ciheam.org/>
<http://om.ciheam.org/>



Rural development in Italy and its evolution

Francesca CIONCO, Alessandro MONTELEONE
Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria

Résumé. La complexité des financements de l'agriculture et du développement rural en Italie, selon qu'il s'agit de régions relevant de l'objectif 1 ou non, est d'autant plus grande que les actions autres que les mesures compensatoires ou d'ajustement structurel de l'agriculture concernent les Programmes Régionaux Opérationnels liés aussi à la Politique Régionale, sans oublier les Programmes d'Initiatives Communautaires (LEADER). De fait 49 programmes différents sont mis en œuvre avec des risques de programmation double ou triple nuisibles à l'efficacité de ces actions. En effet, il en résulte des difficultés d'organisation et de coordination entre les niveaux national et régional et des coûts d'administration élevés. D'un autre point de vue la concentration des dépenses sur un nombre réduit de mesures répond mal à la complexité des situations locales. Enfin les interventions via le FEOGA Garantie demeurent très orientées sur la compétitivité sectorielle des entreprises. Quoi qu'il en soit, tout ceci nécessite de la part des autorités une bonne connaissance des voies et moyens mobilisables. Sur la période 2000-2005 la contribution financière publique au PDR (Plan de Développement Rural) s'élève à 7,8 milliards d'euro et concerne majoritairement le secteur agricole, cependant que 10,2 % des dépenses sont affectées plus spécifiquement au développement rural proprement dit. En tout état de cause les Programmes Opérationnels Régionaux et Nationaux ont permis de rassembler 23,9 milliards avec un apport de 13% du FEOGA. L'ensemble des actions projetées et réalisées a permis de consommer la plus grande partie des financements communautaires prévus (l'installation des jeunes agriculteurs constituant en la matière une des actions modèles) et d'éviter le « de-commitment » entraînant le remboursement par l'Italie des sommes non utilisées.

En Italie les programmes LEADER ont été menés dans le cadre des Régions pour lesquelles un Programme Régional Leader a été défini, 80% des ressources étant réservés à la mise en œuvre de stratégies territoriales de développement rural, 11% des ressources ayant facilité la coopération entre les zones rurales et la création d'un réseau national de communautés locales. La coopération transnationale en a également beaucoup bénéficié. Elle s'est traduite par 21 opérations inter territoriales basées sur la valorisation de l'histoire et de la culture ainsi que sur l'échange de savoir faire et de nouvelles technologies susceptibles de renforcer la qualité des produits et des services (37 projets).

Abstract. *The complexity of the financing of agriculture and rural development in Italy according to whether the areas qualify as Objective 1 or not increases as actions other than compensatory measures or structural adjustment of agriculture concerning regional operation programmes also related to regional policy, without forgetting community initiative programmes (LEADER). In fact, 49 different programmes are implemented with risks of double or triple programming that reduce the effectiveness of the actions. Indeed, the situation results in difficulties in organisation and coordination between national and regional levels and high administrative costs. From another angle, the concentration of expenditure on a small number of measures forms a poor response to complex local situations. Finally, interventions via FEOGA clearly target the sectoral competitiveness of businesses. However that may be, all this requires that the authorities possess good knowledge of the pathways and resources that can be used. From 2000 to 2005, the public contribution to the Rural Development Plan totalled €7.8 bn and mainly concerned the farming sector, while 10.2 % of expenditure was devoted more specifically to actual rural development. In any case, regional and national operation programmes assembled €23.9 bn with a FEOGA contribution of 13%. All the actions planned and accomplished made it possible to use most of the community financing planned (with the installation of young farmers being a model action) and to avoid 'de-commitment' leading to the return of unused sums by Italy.*

In Italy, the LEADER programmes have been run within the framework of the regions for which a regional LEADER programme was drawn up, with 80% of the resources reserved for the implementation of regional strategies for rural development; 11% of the resources were used to enhance cooperation between rural zones and the creation of a national local communities network. Transnational cooperation has also benefited greatly in the form of 21 interregional operations based on the use of history and culture and on the exchange of know-how and new technologies likely to enhance the quality of products and services (37 projects).

From 2000 to 2007, EU enlargement and the decrease in community credits (from €89 bn to €70 bn at 2004 prices) is an inescapable fact. In order to benefit from the new fund (FEADER) specifically earmarked for the rural development policy, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is drafting a national strategic plan to take the form of 21 rural development plans for regions and the two autonomous provinces (Bolzano and Trento) and a national plan for setting up a national rural development network. Representatives of the regions and the autonomous provinces and private partners (professional organisations, cooperatives, environmental associations, young farmers, women's organisations, etc.) are involved in developing this strategy. Taking into account the lack of competitiveness of production, new consumer requirements (food safety, quality, typical features, etc.) and the necessary conservation of natural resources and the environment should also lead to improving the conditions of economic development and the quality of life, especially in rural zones in which intensive farming is dominant, intermediate zones and rural zones whose development lags behind. The identification of regional priorities and the integration or coordination of interventions form a key requirement. It is necessary to achieve a critical mass for the mobilisation of resources for the strategic axes chosen while responding to regional expectations in such a way as to create synergy. The LEADER approach is recognised as the main regional integration tool benefiting both the agri-food system and rural dynamics. However, the setting up of the national rural network will be based on a national operational programme going beyond the LEADER networks. This reflection and its implementation will depend on the decisions taken and the resource allocation accepted by the Commission together with the extent to which the regions support the approach.

Pour la période 2000-2007, l'élargissement de l'UE et la réduction des crédits communautaires (de 89 milliards à 70 milliards aux prix de 2004) constitue une donnée incontournable. Pour bénéficier du nouveau fond (FEADER) affecté spécifiquement à la politique de développement rural, le Ministère de l'Agriculture et des Forêts est en train de définir un Plan Stratégique National qui se traduit par 21 Plans Ruraux de Développement pour les Régions et les 2 Provinces autonomes (Bolzano et Trento), et un Plan National pour créer un Réseau National pour le Développement Rural.

Les représentants des Régions et des Provinces autonomes ainsi que des partenaires privés (organisations professionnelles, coopératives, associations environnementales, jeunes agriculteurs, organisations de femmes...) sont impliquées dans l'élaboration de cette stratégie. La prise en compte du manque de compétitivité des productions, des nouvelles demandes des consommateurs (sécurité alimentaire, qualité, typicité...) et de la préservation nécessaire des ressources naturelles et de l'environnement, devrait conduire à améliorer également les conditions du développement économique et la qualité de la vie notamment pour les zones rurales à agriculture intensive dominante, les zones rurales intermédiaires ou les zones rurales en retard de développement. L'identification de priorités territoriales et l'intégration ou la coordination des interventions constitue la priorité. Il s'agira d'atteindre une masse critique pour la mobilisation des ressources autour des axes stratégiques retenus tout en répondant aux attentes territoriales de manière à développer les synergies.

La démarche LEADER est reconnue comme le principal outil d'intégration territoriale à la fois en faveur du système agro alimentaire et des dynamiques rurales. Cependant la mise en place du Réseau National Rural s'appuiera sur un Programme Opérationnel National allant au delà des réseaux LEADER. Toute cette réflexion et sa mise en œuvre dépendra des décisions qui seront prises et de l'allocation des ressources qui sera acceptée par la Commission ainsi que eu degré d'adhésion des Régions à cette approche.

I - The structural policies for agriculture and rural development in the 2000-2006 period

In the programming period 2000-2006, resources earmarked by the European Union for the accomplishment of structural interventions in support of agriculture and rural development are fed by two different sources of finance. On the one hand, the establishment of programmes regarding the actions financed within the Rural Development Plans (RDPs), that are co-financed by the Guarantee Section of the EAGGF (European Agriculture Guidance and Guarantee Fund), while - on the other hand – the structural interventions in Objective 1 regions, where the EAFFG-Guidance Section intervenes in combination with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG).

In Italy, rural development programming thus follows different courses of action for Objective 1 areas and for the regions not covered by Objective 1. As regards the regions in the first group, all interventions concerning agricultural structures and rural development are covered by the Rural Development Plans, co-financed by the EAGGF-Guarantee Section only. In Objective 1 regions, the articulation of programming is more complex as it includes the Rural Development Plan, co-financed by the EAGGF-Guarantee Section, as far as accompanying measures and compensatory allowances are concerned, while all the other interventions are co-financed by the EAGGF-Guarantee Section and covered by specific Regional Operational Programmes (ROP). Moreover, all the Regions benefit from the Community initiative called Leader+ (Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale) that provides for the realization of an ad hoc Regional Programme financed through the contribution from the EAGGF-Guarantee Section only.

1. Characteristics of Rural Development Programmes in Italy: some remarks

As the end of the current programming period is approaching, and facing a substantial increase in the expenditure, a few general remarks have been made about the outcomes achieved and the problems met in the application of the rural development policy in Italy.

The initial observation regards the entire “system” of rural development, the complexity of which is highlighted by the fact that 49 different programmes are being implemented in Italy, with evident repercussions on both the organizing capacities at regional authority level, and on the national coordination activities. The existence of a double or triple rural development programming affected, on the one hand, efficiency – as it brought about an increase in the administrative costs – while, on the other hand, it made the effective management of its implementation more complicated.

Considering the efficacy of programmes, it is to point out how the excessive concentration of expenditure on a reduced number of measures can have an impact on the actual ability to achieve the complex targets that the programmes had set for themselves by making use of just a “few” intervention instruments. Having this in mind, it is possible to note how the EAGGF action on the rural development still has a largely sectoral nature. As a matter of fact, a significant part of the aid is concentrated on those interventions involving businesses, accomplished either by pursuing targets of sectoral competitiveness, such as those regarding modernization, or environmental objectives, such as agri-environmental measures.

During its implementation, the management authorities have run into several difficulties connected with the realization of forms of integration among the different programmes and among the different measures included in the programmes. The lack of integration does not favour the coordination between actions performed by different persons and the achievement of the critical mass of required resources, thus negatively influencing the achievement of targets.

Lastly, it is important to remember the difficulties faced by measures with more innovative content, in particular those addressing the quality of agri-food products and the development of rural areas in their territorial dimension. Such difficulties may often be referred to the effective capacity to achieve the potential recipients, due also to the fact that the knowledge of certain subjects and of the opportunities offered by policies is not evenly and properly disseminated yet.

2. Rural Development Plans

In Italy, the Community resources earmarked for the implementation of RDPs amount to approximately EUR 4,500 million, to which the EAGGF-Guarantee Section should participate with a nominal annual contribution of approximately EUR 644 million⁴². The annual contribution reserved for the Northern and Central Italian Regions is equal to approximately EUR 415 million, while the amount for Objective 1 regions, devoted to accompanying measures and compensatory allowances only, is equal to approximately EUR 229 million.

In 2005, State resources accounting for more than EUR 1,460 million were paid out within the framework of the Rural Development Plans for all the Italian regions, with a EAGGF contribution higher than EUR 679 million. As a whole, in the 2000 - 2005 period, over EUR 7,800 million of public resources have been spent, with an obvious different apportionment among the various Italian regions. Broadly speaking, it is possible, however, to report an excellent level of financial development. All regions are indeed about to accomplish their programming activity, which is inferred from the average expenditure capacity equal to 89.2 percent (Table 12.4).

If we leave out the accompanying measures being derived from previous programming, it is possible to observe how most of aid granted refers to interventions directly performed for the benefit of the

⁴². Figures include automatic index living (Decision 2000/426/EC).

agricultural sector. As a matter of fact, the measures that obtained the most significant expenditure levels are those regarding investments in agricultural holdings (12.6%), the setting-up of young farmers (5.8%), the new agri-environmental measures (18.5%) and compensatory allowances (6.7%). A significant part of resources is also allocated to support the measure aiming at the improvement of processing and marketing of farm products (6.5%). Compared with the early years of its implementation, we may note, however, that the most typical form of "rural development" interventions (diversification of economic activities, infrastructures and services) are gradually being included in the regions' expenditure activities (10.2%). Among the above measures, a noteworthy part of the expenditure has focused on the relatively more "traditional" measures (diversification of the activities carried out by the agricultural holdings and rural infrastructures), while the most innovative measures (such as the renovation of villages and the marketing of quality agricultural products) have difficulty in taking off.

In general, the existence of the entire package of rural development measures that can be financed within a single programme has positively influenced the general trend in the expenditure, thus making it possible in the initial years to concentrate expenditure on the measures that can be completed immediately and to dedicate more time to the actual execution of measures requiring a longer implementation time depending on the characteristics of financed projects (public and private investments).

3. The Regional Operational Programmes – Objective 1

Total Community resources at the service of Objective-1 Italian regions, in the period 2000-2006, earmarked for the implementation of the Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) and of the National Operational Programmes (NOPs), amount to approximately EUR 23,900 million. This figure also includes the additional resources deriving from the Community and the domestic performance reserves. In particular, as regards the EAGGF, available resources currently account for approximately EUR 3,200 million (i.e. 13 percent of the total available resources, a practically unchanged quota with respect to the original allocation, not including performance reserves).

After an initial difficulty connected to the rather time-consuming procedures regarding the implementation of interventions, expenditure began to run more quickly. In December 2005, the expenditure levels regarding EAGGF co-financed measures within the different ROPs stood at approximately 48% of programmed resources (Table 12.6), showing a significant acceleration with respect to 2004 (+17%). From this angle, the delay in the Rural Development Plans is clear although it depends on the fact that most ROP-financed interventions have a structural nature and therefore require the making of investments instead of the payment of performance awards (with the sole exception of the setting-up of young farmers). On the other hand, with regard to the interventions financed by the other structural Funds, the situation is not currently different, with the exception of the NOPs that show a good expenditure capacity (63.8%). Also in 2005, total aids granted were large enough to reach the threshold of expenditure required to avoid automatic de-commitment⁴³. Furthermore, it is worth noticing that, unlike programmes financed by the EAGGF-Guarantee Section, that are to accomplish the expenditure activity within the end of 2006, the use of resources earmarked within the ROPs may last until the end of 2008.

Among the measures reserved for agricultural holdings, the highest expenditure capacity has been obtained by the measure concerning the setting-up of young farmers that is characterised by quite simple and consolidated procedures for access to financing and loan disbursement. A few more difficulties have been reported in the case of investments by both agricultural holdings and agri-food businesses, as they logically require more time for the implementation of projects.

43. This rule provides for a mechanism of automatic de-commitment regarding the parts of Community budget commitments that are not settled by the end of the second year following the year of commitment (Article 31 of the EC Council Regulation no. 1260/99/EC).

4. The Leader Programmes

Total Community resources available to Italian Regions for the implementation of the Leader + programme are approximately EUR 284 million. Leader is an Initiative financed by the Community in order to sustain, promote and strengthen the implementation of an integrated and sustainable approach to rural development. In line with previous programming periods, Leader + intends to promote, in all rural areas, "integrated actions developed and implemented within active partnerships operating at local level", that are characterized by an integrated strategy of sustainable development and high quality, and have an experimental nature.

In Italy, Leader + programming has been carried out at regional level with the definition of a Regional Leader Programme (RLP). Most of the programmed resources, namely more than 80%, have been reserved for the accomplishment of the "Rural Development Territorial Strategies". A significant part of the resources – about 11% - has then been devoted to "Cooperation among rural regions" that at this stage can take place between rural areas in several Member States (trans-national cooperation) as well as between regions located in a single Member State (inter-territorial cooperation). The Leader+ Initiative also includes a national programme for the Creation of a National Network unit, aiming at promoting the exchange of experiences at national and Community level among the Initiative stakeholders.

On the basis of the Regional Leader Programmes, Italian Regions selected 132 Local Action Groups (LAGs) that are supposed to implement their development strategy through the Local Development Plans (LDPs) that they previously developed. The local strategies of the different LAGs have been fixed on the basis of inspiring topics, partly fixed by the Commission and partly suggested by the Regions. In Italy, the selection made by the LAGs has focused mainly on the theme of "valorisation of natural and cultural resources" (27%), thus emphasizing the LAGs' strong sensitivity towards the environmental theme and the cultural heritage, with interventions that cover both the best use of art and architectural resources and of the local cultural heritage.

As regards cooperation, 58 projects have been started and are still in progress; 21 are inter-territorial and 37 trans-national projects. Among them, interventions aiming at the "Valorisation of the local natural and cultural resources" are at the top of the strategic selections made by the LAGs of the Italian regions. Many projects are indeed oriented towards the recovery and strengthening of the elements of territorial identity (such as itineraries linked to historical events, characters, and so on) for performance through the protection of natural areas and the implementation of new cultural and economic activities (such as integrated tourist packages, guided paths, and so on).

Interventions aiming at the "Use of new know-how and new technologies" are instead mainly concentrated within the ambit of trans-national cooperation projects, being largely directed to develop and sustain the ability of entrepreneurs as well as to improve the quality of products and services in the rural areas.

LEADER Programmes show a certain delay with respect to the other programmes because most RLPs were approved between the end of 2001 and the first months of 2002 and, on average, at least one year elapsed before regions started the selection of LAGs and their respective LDPs.

II - Rural development programming for the period 2007 - 2013

On 20 June 2005, the Council of Agriculture Ministers reached a compromise on the formulation of the new rural development regulation, definitely approved and published however only in September (Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005), but reported no indications as to the resources earmarked for rural development. The agreement on the Community budget for the period 2007-2013 was reached in fact at the December meeting of the Council⁴⁴ that provided for a drastic cut in the resources allocated on the whole to rural development with respect to the former proposal made by the Commission regarding the financial perspectives relative to this programming period (February 2004), going from EUR 88.75 billion to the current 69.75 billion (2004 prices). Of the latter amount, EUR 33.01 billion will be earmarked for the new Member States and for Rumania and Bulgaria, the two countries that are going to join the European Union in the near future, while EUR 18.91 billion will be reserved for the European Union. The remaining financial resources will be granted instead to the different Member States in accordance with precise criteria (Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005, Article 69, par. 4): i) the amounts reserved for regions eligible under the convergence objective; ii) past performance iii) particular situations and needs based on objective criteria.

The new Reform provides for the separation of the rural development policy – to be financed through a specific Fund (the European Agricultural Fund for the Rural Development, EAFRD) – from the cohesion policy, and the Italian Ministry of Agricultural and Forestry Policies is developing the National Strategy Plan (NSP) as provided for by Community legislation, which will be followed by the arrangement of 21 Rural Development Plans - by the Regions and the two autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano - and of a National Programme regarding the National Network Unit for rural development.

In order to work out the NSP, the Italian Ministry of Agricultural and Forestry Policies has set up a negotiation table aiming above all at granting the contribution of the institutional, economic, social and environmental partnership to the development of the NSP before its submission for the consideration of the European Commission. In particular, among the institutional actors that participate in the table of negotiations, there shall be representatives from the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, from the Ministries directly or indirectly involved in rural development programming (such as the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Ministry of the Environment and Territorial Protection), as well as the professional organizations and the cooperatives operating in the agricultural and forestry sector, the major environmental movements and associations, the Italian Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurship National Observatory (Osservatorio nazionale per l'imprenditoria giovanile in agricoltura, OIGA) and the Female Agricultural Entrepreneurship National Observatory (Osservatorio nazionale imprenditoria femminile in agricoltura, ONILFA).

The NSP development procedure has been performed in various steps that - because of the delay in the approval of the regulation - have been postponed, thus involving a deferment in the submission of the NSP to the Commission that cannot take place before the end of summer 2006.

The contents of the NSP – The NSP proposed to the partnership is the outcome of a painstaking work of analysis of the requirements and potential for development of the Italian rural areas and of a work of synthesis of the strategic guidelines emerged from the debate occurred at the negotiating table.

The NSP will consist of the following 7 chapters :

- Evaluation of the economic, social and environmental situation,
- The general strategy of the Plan,
- The strategy per single axis,
- Rural development Programmes of and the financial allocation,
- Consistency and complementarity,
- The creation of the Italian National Rural Network Unit,
- A method for the arrangement of the NSP and the role of partnership.

The evaluation of the intervention context provided an opportunity to point out some more or less well-known characteristics of the Italian agri-food sector and of the Italian rural areas. In particular, we

⁴⁴. Council of the European Union, Brussels, 19 December 2005 (20.12) (OR. EN), 15915/05, CADREFIN 268.

reported a loss in competitiveness affecting the agricultural and forestry sector taken as a whole, which is going to face with new challenges due, on the one hand, to new consumer demands in terms of agri-food product quality, as well as of health and safety, and, on the other hand, to competition from production systems that may rely on reduced labour costs. These challenges shall be faced by appealing to the remarkable potential linked to a more professional and quality agriculture, to the typical features of products and, more generally, to the many cultural, social and productive links existing between agriculture, environment and territory.

In this perspective, environmental resources appear to play an increasingly important role as – firstly – the protection and conservation of the environmental components (in particular, water, soil and biodiversity) dictate the adoption of specific environment-friendly production behaviours, and – secondly – as their use may represent an important development factor for both agriculture and naturalistic forestry.

Finally, the growth and strengthening of existing links between agriculture, forestry and the other economic activities in rural areas also came to light. However, if several rural areas display some brilliance in terms of the diversification of economic activities, others in contrast report structure and infrastructure (material and immaterial) delays that partly condition the economic development and the quality of life.

Undoubtedly, in the analysis of the intervention context, the most interesting and innovative aspect is just represented by the identification of four distinct types of rural areas, where it is possible to highlight problems and intervention priorities of different types. These areas, described – on a local municipal basis – by applying the OECD technique (adapted so as to take into account the Italian specific situation), are the following:

- urban regions,
- rural areas with specialized intensive agriculture,
- intermediate rural areas,
- rural areas with general development problems.

The strategy of intervention proposed by the NSP is discussed in the second, third and fifth chapters and is arranged in the five following axes in line with the Community Regulations:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Axis I | - "Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector", |
| Axis II | - "Improving the environment and the countryside", |
| Axis III | - "The quality of life in rural areas and the diversification of the rural economy", |
| Axis IV | - "Leader", |
| Axis V | - "The National Rural Network". |

However, the most interesting and innovative elements in the proposed strategy are not to be identified in the articulation of the objectives but rather in the establishment of territorial priorities and the strong attention paid to implementation of methodologies aimed at the integration of interventions. As regards the first element, the target to reach is – on the one hand – to concentrate and create a critical mass of resources around a certain number of strategic priorities and – on the other hand – to adapt the different types of intervention to the different territorial requirements. As for the decision to rely on a greater integration of interventions, this aims instead at assuring greater internal consistency within each axis and, above all, at creating the background to promote the development of synergistic effects.

A number of interest subjects have thus been identified – such as quality, environment and bio-energies, youth and female entrepreneurship in the agriculture – which thanks to their transversal nature with respect to the RDP objectives are suitable for the adoption of approaches that may enable greater integration of the different measures contained in the Regulation in terms of businesses, chain of production and/or territory. These approaches can rely for instance on the identification of single packages that – depending on the objectives pursued – can be joined by the individual business or by the different actors in the chain of production and/or operating in a specific area, provided that they can be considered as eligible in accordance with the Regulation provisions.

The NSP recognize in LEADER the main tool for providing territorial integration and in the LAGs the actors who can implement it, and reaffirms how, according to the Regulation provisions, through the same LAGs it is possible to finance all the measures envisaged.

Again with reference to the strategic aspects, the NSP – though not having the nature of a national policy programming document for the agri-food sector and the rural areas – deals with some significant issues with a view to allowing the different instruments of the community, national and regional economic policy to work in the same direction and in a reciprocal complementary manner. Again with a view to integration of the different interventions to carry out in favour of the agri-food system and of the rural areas, particular attention has been paid to coordination and integration with the national strategic lines of the cohesion policy, as the development of the agri-food sector and of rural areas cannot be promoted solely by the incentives provided within the ambit of the rural development policy.

The sixth chapter of the NSP lays the foundations for the creation of the future National Rural Network that shall be implemented through a national operational Program. Involving the whole rural development policy, this is going to accomplish quite larger tasks than the Network for the animation of the project provided for by the LEADER Initiative.

The Network objectives shall be pursued by means of:

- actions of coordination and connection with the activities performed in parallel by the European Network,
- actions of information and training for the benefit of rural development actors,
- system actions directed to support the local authorities, to implement through the exchange of experiences and competences, training activities, methodological support, dissemination of information regarding national and Community policies and tools, support for the activities of the National Monitoring System and of the National Evaluation System,
- supporting actions in favour of the LAGs,
- identification actions, active involvement, promotion of synergies with the unofficial networks already existing on the territory,
- actions for the dissemination and transfer of good practices and innovations in the field of rural development,
- evaluation and survey actions to guide the rural development programming in a more efficient manner,
- actions of technical assistance for inter-territorial and trans-national cooperation.

The version of NSP outlined thus far is however subject to further changes that might be required as a result of the evolution of certain issues, such as the allocation of financial resources to the Member States, which is currently an element of uncertainty. It might also affect certain strategic decisions, depending on whether the actual availability of resources is lower or higher than expectations, as well as the official approval of the NSP by all Regions, which shall be possible only after being informed of the actual amount of financial resources available at national level and their apportionment at regional level.

References

- *Rivista dello sviluppo rurale n. 1 e 2*
- *Bollettino dell'Osservatorio Politiche Strutturali n.19, 22 e 23*
- *Repertorio dei Programmi LEADER+ regionali - asse 2 cooperazione*
- *Rapporto sullo stato di attuazione dell'iniziativa LEADER+ in Italia 2005*