Rural tourism driving regional development in Tuscany. The renaissance of the countryside[1].

Filippo Randelli, Patrizia Romei, Marco Tortora and Maria Tinacci[2].
Department of Economic Sciences.
University of Florence.

Abstract: After the crisis of the traditional agricultural system in the 50's, starting from the 80's rural tourism is driving the renaissance of Tuscan countryside. The empty spaces of rural areas, which characterise the agricultural landscape, show a new set of functions developed by and for the tourist field.

The Tuscany Region was the first Italian region to recognize the new trend of the integrated rural development so that in 1985 it stated the first regional law on agritourism. In this context Tuscany is the one of the first Italian and European regions committed to the development of rural areas.

This paper recognizes the leading role of Tuscany in the development of rural areas and tourism and shows the relationships between tourism and local sustainable development in rural areas through a case study.

In the first part there is a historical analysis of the evolution of the tourism in rural areas, of the strengths of the Tuscan model in this field, and of the relationship between identity and local resources for the sustainable development of tourism (the topic of rural tourism may be analyzed from a local development point of view).

In the second part there is the introduction of a case study developed in a rural area characterized by the "typical" Tuscan landscape, the presence of art cities, and a high-quality supply of services and products such as food and wine. The analysis is based on quantitative and qualitative methodologies that helped us outline the network of tourist centres and study tourism in rural Tuscany. Then there is an analysis of competition capacities and potentialities of the local area to understand if and how these depend more or less on the network structure or on local resources.

At the end the paper underlines the strengths and weaknesses of rural tourism in Tuscany, one of the leading region of the European project NECSTOUR, and outlines possible future regional policies in support of the sector.

1. **Introduction**

After a first stage of development in the 1990s, with growth in demand and offer, Rural Tourism (RT) has moved into a second phase (Long and Lane, 2000), more complex, which is trying to give some topic questions about its role in local development and policy and, consequently, its role within the restructuring countryside, and within wider tourism development processes (Hall et Al., 2005).

In this second phase RT is not anymore a minor agent of rural economy, landscape and social change and it has become a prior element, able to attract attention by local, regional, national and

---

supranational policy makers. Even if many parts of Europe have experienced a century, and North America a eighty years of rural decline (Long and Lane, 2000), tourism can not be viewed as it is often by many rural regions, as one of the few opportunities to enhance local economies (Hall et Al., 2005). However, many studies in various European countries has shown that RT is not the solution for the problems facing the agricultural areas, although it certainly can contribute to diversify farm incomes especially in small family farms, carry out additional benefits into the rural economy, counteract emigration from rural areas, encourage an increase in cultural exchange between urban and rural areas, and enhance the values inherent to rural life, as well as contribute to the general diversification of the economy (Sharpley et al., 1997; Roberts and Hall, 2001; Canoves et al., 2004).

In the literature a plethora of researches make it very complex to define RT. This versatility and diversity has led to its confusion or substitution to several other concepts such as farm tourism, green tourism, outdoors, ecotourism or nature/wildlife tourism (Frochot, 2005). According to Lane (1994) and Sharpley (1996), all these terms are specific forms of tourism activities taking place in rural areas, built upon the specificities of the rural world (open space, rural heritage, etc.), rural in scale (usually implying small scale) and representing the complex pattern of the rural world (environment, economy, history and location). In conclusion, RT cannot be limited simply to farm tourism but should include all the aspects of tourism that its physical, social and historical dimensions allow it to develop. For this reason, in this paper, RT is considered as the "tourism in rural areas". All kind of tourists will be accounted, those renting a house or hosted in a farm, bed and breakfast, hotel, camping and any other kind of hospitality.

Even if the trend towards specialization in RT are already consolidated in the UK and the Netherlands, a bit less in France, Spain and Italy, not all areas within any country are at the same stage of development and some of them can be considered particularly matured in the development of RT. In this paper, in the section 3, we analyse the case of Tuscany which can be considered, at least within Italy, the most important area for RT. In section 4 we report the results of a quantitative and qualitative survey on the rural area of Vinci, the hometown of Leonardo da Vinci.

2. Rural tourism

Today, many different interests are converging in the rural areas and in some cases with differing targets and purposes: the countryside becomes a refuge from urban life (Daugstad, 2008), but at the same time the countryside is sometimes geographically involved in the urban sprawl; countryside is faced to globalisation (Woods, 2007) but at the same time it is possible to assist to the re-regionalisation of food system (see i.e. special issue of Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy

and Society, 2010). The relation between urban areas and the countryside has been changing in the last three decades and today new flows toward rural areas are generated by the city. Financial capitals but even people are moving from the richest cities toward some rural areas. "People" means primary or secondary home owners but also tourists. All of them should be considered part of the same process which is generated by the wish of living something considered "true", genuine, not artificial.

In our 21st century society, large hotel chains or leisure centres are rather similar and lacking of identity, without the special added value of the landscape or environment. That is the reason why rural environment reveals itself as exceptional, showing the value of reality, far from the standard or international large-scale hotel chains. On the other hand, RT needs to remain a support for rural development without trespassing a certain limit, an invisible threshold, over which it is possible to loose the genuine spirit of the countryside. Otherwise the risk is to loose the attractiveness of the place, that rural atmosphere which is the main resource of RT itself.

Not all rural areas within any country are at the same stage of development and today only few regions are approaching that threshold. In those regions today the main issue is not anymore the development of RT, it is sustainability. A Sustainable tourism is the only type of tourism that can offer an authentic countryside lifestyle area, where it is possible to relax and enjoy nature and countryside atmosphere, without compromising the other local specialisation, first of all agriculture. The growth of RT have to be totally diverging with that of seaside tourism development that, without control could create huge holiday resorts and artificial villages with no identity. Many coastal regions in Portugal, Italy, Greece and particularly in Spain, have suffered this problem, and coast line has been completely destroyed by blocks of apartments and huge hotels, without green or natural areas (Sanagustín Fons et al., 2011). This could also be a threat for RT: exceeding in the urbanization of rural spaces. According to us, RT can be a great chance to fill in the empty spaces (i.e. houses) "disposed" by the decline of rural areas but it should not contribute to the change in the land using (i.e. new buildings).

In those "intensive" RT destinations (i.e. Provence, Tuscany, or the rural areas close to London, Lisbon and Barcelona), where occupancy is spread throughout the year, and clients come regularly for weekends or short vacations, thanks to the proximity of large urban agglomerations and rapid access (Canoves et al., 2004), rural tourists are mixed with second home ownership. The great beauty of the landscape and the existence of housing stock that is being abandoned but remains desirable have led to a population influx from closed large urban areas, purchasing these homes as a primary or secondary residence (Randelli et al., 2007; Solana, 2010). This topic has been widely studied in Great Britain (Champion et al., 1998; Cloke and Thrift, 1990; Phillips, 1993, 2005) and

in other countries as well (Curry et al., 2001; Ghose, 2004; Hines, 2010), even if those studies focused primarily on the displacement of social classes and persons. Some rural gentrification studies have focused on the possible social and economic impact of the rising cost of housing as a result of a persistent process of immigration (Dirksmeier, 2008; Solana, 2010). More recently, rural gentrification of relatively young, ex-urban members of the postindustrial middle class, has been considered as a form of "permanent tourism" (Hines, 2010). In this case the term "permanent tourists" is "a conceptual hybrid that demands that we appreciate not only the analogy between the activities of rural gentrifiers and those of traditional tourists but also the fact that rural gentrifiers are pursuing these activities in a regular and constant fashion" (Hines, 2010, p. 509).

This paper consider rural gentrification together with rural tourism, because it is a primary driver in the process of re-exploitation of the existing building stock. This process is undoubtedly responsible of the "renaissance" of many rural areas but it can not be a never ending process. When the stock of empty homes is totally recovered it might be very difficult for manager of local community to resist to property speculations. For sure new buildings, especially if not integrated with local architectonical style, might attempt to preserve the landscape, charming old structures and those other bucolic characteristics which are essential for RT development.

RT studies approaching sustainability should implement in their data set the value of rural properties, whether used for housing or other purposes, as an alert indicator for sustainability. In other words, rural gentrification is a driver of rural development, as agriculture and tourism, and it needs to be consider in order to account sustainability.

In conclusion, RT has become a major source of income for rural actors (Ilbery et al., 1998) and it has taken over from agriculture as the principal business in many rural communities in Europe (Sharpley et al., 1997; Butler et al., 1998; Roberts et al., 2001; Garrod et al., 2005). Nevertheless it would be very dangerous if policies would be focused in developing tourism in rural areas without any evaluation on social effects, on land use and landscape change, on natural systems, on local identity and many other aspect of the particular and precarious balance of every countryside. In order to achieve this integration, management by the local community and constraints on visitor numbers might needed, because for tourism development must be guarantee not to detract from landscape quality so to reduce the attractiveness of the resource upon which it depends (Canoves et Al., 2004). This is a crucial point making RT totally different from "tourism industry", which is invested, as any other industry, in reaching a high quantity of customers (tourists).

3. Genesis and evolution of RT in Tuscany

In this paper we approach RT studies in an evolutionary perspective (Boschma and Martin, 2010), taking seriously into account the history. Over the past decade, evolutionary economics has found its way into the field of Economic Geography (see, e.g., the special issue on Evolutionary Economic Geography (EEG) in the "*Journal of Economic Geography*", 2007 and in "*Economic Geography*", 2009). In this article we will not argue on the theoretical framework of EEG (see i.e. Boschma and Lambooy, 1999; Boschma and Frenken, 2006;. Boschma e Martin, 2010) and we will only introduce the main concepts with the aim of applying them into the study of RT.

First, employing the core evolutionary principles of variety, selection and retention (continuity), EEG argues that competition between agents located in different geographical spaces may produce distinct economic regions and, most of all, different paths in the organization of economy. This is particularly true in the case of RT which assumes "innumerable formulae in Europe and each country or region places emphasis on one or more specialities" (Canoves et al., 2004, p. 758).

Second, the EEG approach is essential for studies on RT because its conceptualization of time. According to the EEG the explanation to why something - even a local specialisation as RT - exists intimately rests on how it became what it is. Taking into account historical processes, the current state of affairs cannot be derived from current conditions only, since the current state of affairs has emerged from and has been constrained by previous states of affairs (Boschma and Frenken, 2006).

To better understand how, starting from 80's, RT is driving the renaissance of Tuscan countryside, it is necessary to argue on the traditional agricultural system in Tuscany and its deep crisis in 50's.

Since the 15th century, the traditional agricultural system in Tuscany, as in the other Central Italy regions, was based on "sharecropping". In the 15th century, the Florentine merchants owned the majority of rural properties around the urban area. With 100.000 inhabitants, Florence was one of the largest city in Europe and it was depending on the food produced in the surrounding countryside. Those merchants started to use the sharecropping in order to manage their rural properties. Sharecropping offered certain advantages to both landowners and landless farmers: the first could keep their properties flourishing and sell the share products in the city, the second could have a small farm[3] with a house and the food for their families. The same happened in the rural areas around Siena, Lucca, Arezzo, the other principle Tuscan cities. The city overcomes the economy of the countryside and a constant flow of agri-products moved from the rural areas to the nearest cities (Cianferoni and Mancini, 1993). At the same time those rich merchants moved

---

[3] The sharecropping farm in Tuscany had an average size of 10-15 hectares (25-37 acres) and to this day it is almost the same.

towards the rural areas financial capitals invested in new buildings, new roads and new agricultural fields so to increase both production and productivity.

It is in that period that the Tuscan landscape take its typical shape: the merchants built their villas[4] and sharecropper their farm houses. That architecture, with only some marginal changes, is today still alive on the Tuscan hills, together with olive trees, vines and cypresses, the latters used around houses, to limit properties and on the boulevard reaching villas and castles. The rural settlement on the Tuscan hills is still composed by villas with gardens and parks around (Azzari and Rombai, 1991) and many farm houses – sometimes small villages - surrounded by olive trees and vineyards. The small cities are usually located down the hill, on the main roads, and they developed as market places. To this day in many rural municipalities of Tuscany the number of straggling houses is over 30% .

Fig.1 – Rural areas and straggling houses in Tuscany (light green - less than 20%; green – between 20 and 30%; blue – more than 30%) .
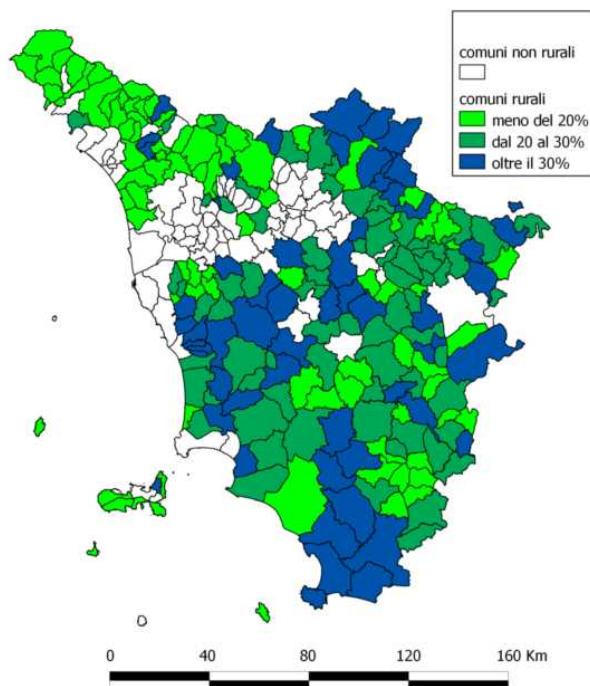

In the '50 the sharecropping underwent a deep crisis and many sharecroppers abandoned their houses. The reasons of a such profound crisis are different but one in particular explain it better: the gap between the farm income and the industry income was 1 to 3.7 in the 1955, and 1 to 5.5 in the 1963 (Cianferoni and Mancini, 1993). In the 1971 the Italian Census of Population shows clearly the "escape" from Tuscan countryside (see fig. 2 in blue) and the growth of industrialised cities (in

---

[4] In a certain point of view, the merchants and their guests, moving seasonally from the cities to their villas in the countryside, they could be considered the first rural tourists in Tuscany.

red). The rural crisis has been overdrawn by the take off of industrial districts in Tuscany and in the rest of the "Third Italy" (Goodman et al. 1989; Pyke et al. 1990). The Tuscan countryside was classified as "depressed area" and many municipalities lost in the period 1955-1971 over the 50% of their population (Milani, 1991).

Fig.2 – Rural (red) and industrial (blue) areas in Tuscany.
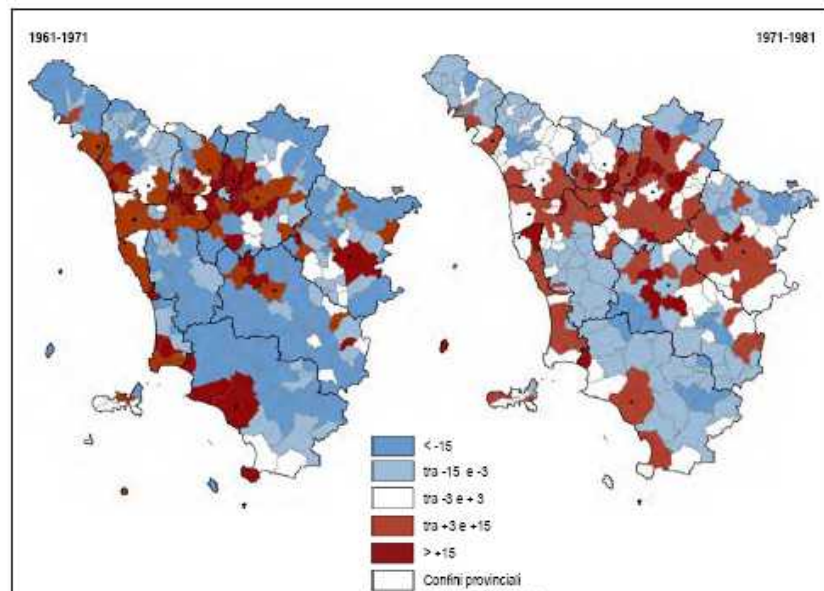
Since the '80s, after a deep reorganization, the Tuscan countryside started to improve all social and economic indicators. A modern and technological agricultural system, based on the production of wine and olive oil export oriented, it has been developed. The empty spaces in rural areas, those villas and farm houses, take a new set of functions. The large number of straggling house, heritage of the previous agricultural system (sharecropping) start to be occupied by new arrivals: tourists and residents.

Since the '60's some pioneers acquired those empty farm houses, in the beginning for very low prices and later on for a fortune. They were especially foreign people from England, France, Germany, Swiss and US, or Italians from the main cities of Italy (Milan, Rome, Naples, etc.) and Tuscany (Florence, Prato, Siena). As the merchants in the 15th century, they bought rural properties to invest their money coming from other businesses, so to have a primary or secondary house or to become a wine maker (Randelli et al., 2007). The rural gentrification of Tuscan countryside is not homogeneous and it can be display by the value of rural houses. The value of a rural house can vary from 800/1.000 € per square meter (sm) in the north mountainous areas to 2500/3000 € sm in the countryside southern Siena and 4000/5000 € sm in the Chianti, the rural area between Florence and Siena.

In conclusion, the large availability of an unemployed architectonical heritage, embedded in a unique rural landscape, masterpieces of an ancient rural society, it has been the primary input of RT development in Tuscany. And yet, the landscape is the output of a particular agricultural system (sharecropping) and it has been positively influenced by the proximity of rich city arts as Florence and Siena. In this sense, only an evolutionary perspective can explain the success of RT in Tuscany, that of course, it cannot be replicated with the same modality. It could be possible, and it is really happening, that other regions with the same agricultural system and a similar landscape are undergoing through the same path of RT development (i.e. Umbria and Marche). On this way the role of institutions could be important. In fact, in the 1985 Tuscany Region has been the first to have a law on tourism in the farmer's house (agriturismo). But it is better to state that in Tuscany the region co-evolved with the territory instead of declare that it determine the success of RT. The co-evolution of local institution can support RT development but it is very difficult for institutions to promote RT without a spontaneous spread of entrepreneur and tourist attracted by the place.

To have a measures of this success we report here some results of a study on RT in Tuscany. The study is part of a three-years research program promoted by the Tuscany Region. Tuscany is considered in Italy the leading region on RT because the number of agritourisms (accommodation in a farmer's house): in the 2008 on 18.674 agritourisms in Italy, 4.200 (22.5%) were in Tuscany (Source: Agriturist). The percentage of population able to reach at least 20 agritourisms in less than 30 minutes is in Italy 46.1 while in Tuscany it is 99.1.

But within Tuscany there are different stage of development on RT. To proceed on the analysis of those differences, the first step has been to detect the rural areas within the region. On this way we have selected three different indicators so to include the social, the economic and the ecological dimension of rural. Than we have classified as rural those municipalities in respecting at least one of those three following indicators:

- Density of population (inhabitants per km^2) for the social dimension. The threshold used to identify rural areas is that applied by OCSE (< 150 ab. per km^2);

- Employees in agriculture (economic dimension). The threshold is the regional average on total employees (4.09 percent);

- Land use (ecological dimension). Here they are considered not only forests and agriculture fields but even semi-natural areas (beaches, rivers, lakes, etc.). The threshold for every municipality is the regional average (95.92 per cent).

The result of the first step was a selection of 213 municipalities on 287. We decided to include even those coastal municipalities respecting at least one of the three indicatory. This choice is due to the

fact that those coastal municipalities have an internal countryside rich of agricultural productions and agritourisms.

The second step has been to shape a data set with all available tourist statistics. In the table 1 we report some of them for the rural areas of Tuscany, so to compare with the whole region, which of course it include tourist urban areas such as Florence, Pisa, Siena, Lucca and Arezzo. The nights per capita (14.51) and the total number of beds per capita (0.2) are higher than in the rest of the region. This is due to the high stage of development of some internal rural areas rather than the lower level of population living in the rural areas.

Table 1 - Tourist statistics for rural areas and the Tuscany region (Source: Regione Toscana, 2007).

	Population	Kmq	Total nights	Nights per capita	Total beds	Beds per capita	Beds in hotel	Beds not in hotel
Rural areas	1.369.579	18.781	19.86.9475	14,51	269.443	0,20	84.106	185.337
Tuscany	3.677.678	22.997	41.995.655	11,42	461.104	0,13	178.915	282.189

In the third step of our analysis we needed a tool to manage the large data set. Our choice was on an open source GIS (Quantum GIS), able to manage such a rich data set and to report on a map the results. The aim of this step was to distinguish Tuscan municipalities according with their stage of development on RT. In the figure 3 we report the heterogeneous distribution among rural municipalities of the indicator "nights per capita".

Fig. 3 - Municipalities values of the indicator "nights per capita".
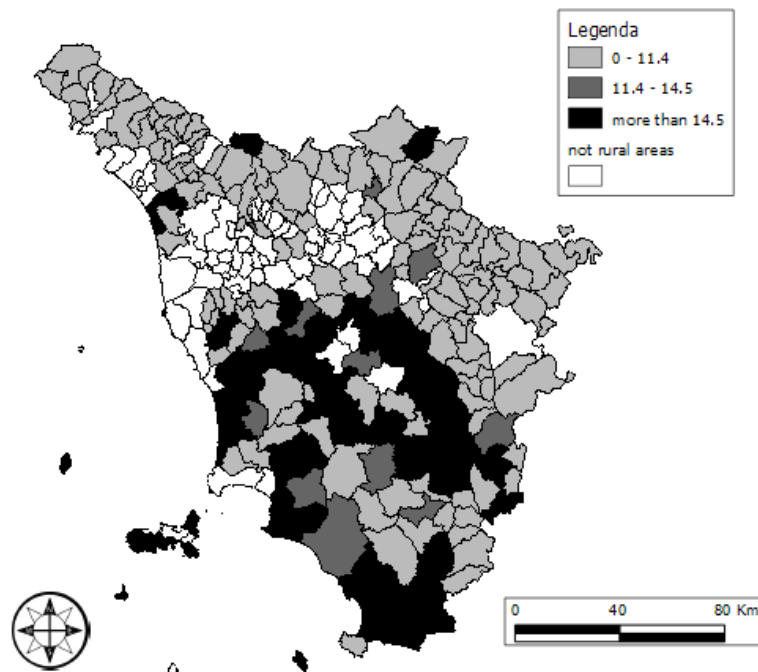
According to us the stage of development on RT can be measured by some indicators such as:

- Total nights;
- Total beds;
- Both trend of nights and beds (2000-2007);
- Number of intensive capital agritourisms (with at least one between swimming pool, restaurant, golf, tennis);
- Percentage of foreign tourists.

Depending on the performance in all those indicators we have been able to point out Tuscan municipalities according with their stage of development on RT. The results has been an output of three different kind of municipalities: those with a "mature" development of RT, those "in transition" moving forward on the development of RT and those "not tourist" (see fig.4).

Fig. 4 - The different stage of development on RT in Tuscany
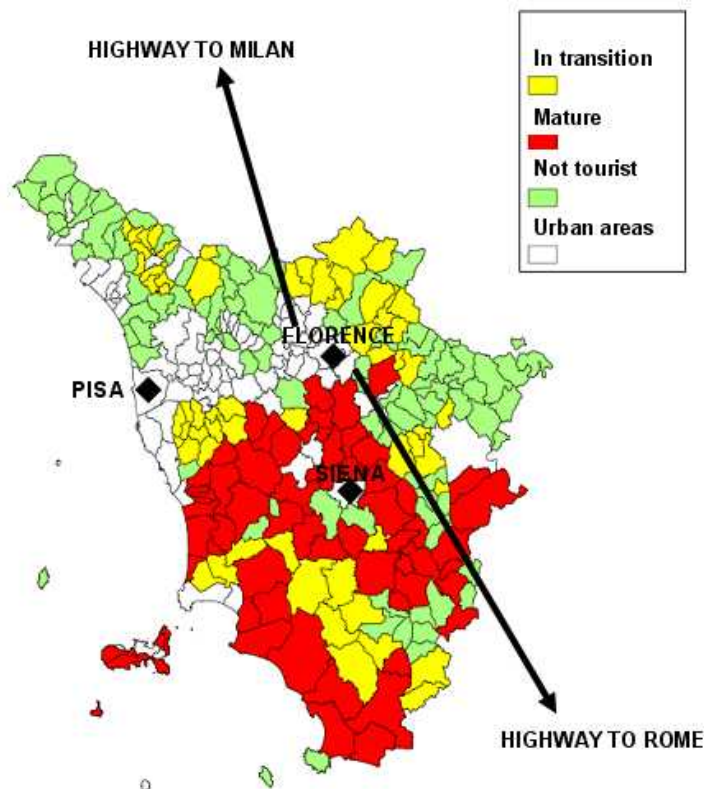
In conclusion, RT in Tuscany is very developed in some internal rural areas such as the Chianti, Val d'Orcia, Maremma and the surrounding countryside of Siena. In some leading municipalities such as San Gimignano, Pienza, San Quirico d'Orcia or Radda in Chianti the number of nights spent per capita is over 50 and the local governments are discussing about constraints on visitor numbers. This is the main reason why in Tuscany has a sense to argue on sustainability of RT. On the other hand in the majority of northern rural areas, much more mountainous than the rest of the region, RT is not yet developed and only few particular areas (Mugello, Garfagnana) are under transition.

4. The case study: Vinci, the hometown of Leonardo.

The aim of this paragraph is to present the case study of a municipality embedded in a rural area, moving forward on the development of RT, in order to study and analyze opportunities and threats from a sustainable point of view. The municipality is Vinci, the hometown of Leonardo da Vinci, located close to Florence in Tuscany. The main question is whether it is possible to observe a local sustainable development strategy in the tourism sector of a local community embedded in a rural landscape but with arts specialization or as competitive advantage.

We argue that under the umbrella of sustainability it is possible to observe different tourisms in rural areas and that these different ways offer different opportunities and threats to local development strategies. It follows that there are many ways to analyze tourism in rural areas. That is possible because of the different specialization of rural areas firstly driven by the multifunctional process of rural firms, and because of the different natural and cultural environments, of the supply side and the local community's sense of belongings and identity. These differences lead to more paths of development. If follows that the values, the mission and the identity of a place become the main pillars which a sustainable competitive strategy should be based on. The aim here is to underline the sense of identity and belongings of a local community embedded in a rural area but specialized in tourism.

The methodology has been developed on three steps: first, the collection and organization of quantitative data from institutional sources; second, direct interviews to citizens (200) and tourists (200) and stakeholders (10 individual interviews); third, a focus group to stimulate a discussion with the involved stakeholders on three main topics. In the following parts there is the presentation of the qualitative analysis.

4.1 Results.

Results from the questionnaire for the citizens of Vinci.

The main aim of the questionnaire was to understand the basic characteristics of Vinci as a main tourism destination. It is analyzed how much the local community values its town, the impact of tourism on its hometown and the ability of the local system to manage this sector. The questionnaire has been used to interview 200 citizens in person or by phone. The results show that citizens think of tourism as a resource for the local development, but that their town does not have many strengths or potentialities and that local entrepreneurs are not capable of new investments and operations. In fact, they have given higher values (more than eight points in a range from zero to ten) to landscape (70%) than to the historical town centre. They reckon localization as a strategic tool in relation to the regional context (54%), but the capacity and ability to welcome tourists and the levels of the local tourist entrepreneurship and of services are rated very low (from 15% of services to 29% of entrepreneurship). The same negative value is given to the efficiency of public services. Because of the overall negative impression of Vinci and its resources, there is the idea that there should be more investments in tourism development and more actions to preserve the rural territory.

Results from the interviews to tourists.

The main aim of the direct interviews methodology is to catch the feelings, critics, suggestions and ideas of people visiting Vinci. The 200 tourists, classified in italians and foreigners, were interviewed in the center of Vinci near one of the main tourism attractions (Il Museo Leonardiano – The Museum of Leonardo) during the summer of 2010. In the questionnaire there were five questions: the kind of transport used to come to Vinci, the origin (country, city) of tourists, the place chosen to stay in Tuscany and to visit Vinci from, the kind of resort and the time of stay. The answers were collected by trained students and organized in a matrix to underline the main keywords and show the main results. Since the results are composite, they are worth of a detailed description.

The results show that there is no difference between italians and foreigners in terms of the chosen transport to go to Vinci and to move around: 80% of them prefer to use a car and only 6-7% bus or trains. Italians prefer to use motorbikes (15%) more than foreigners (only 2%).

In terms of place of origin the focus is on foreigners which represent 60% of our sample. The majority (76%) of tourists come from the north of the European Union (Germany 23%, the Netherlands 16%, Belgium 12%, France 10%, the United Kingdom 8%, Denmark 7%), while only 3% from the United States and 3% from Asia (China and India).

In terms of the chosen destination to stay, foreigners and Italians show similar tastes (Vinci and Florence are first), even if with some differences: Vinci was chosen by 25% of foreigners and 70% of Italians, while Florence by 15% of foreigners and 7% of Italians.

In terms of the kind of resort, foreigners prefer to stay in agritourisms (39%), camping (23%), B&B (21%) and Hotel (2%), while Italians in Hotel (66%), agritourisms (16%), camping (7%), and B&B (2%).

The time dedicated to visit Vinci and to stay in town is different but without a wide gap. The chosen timeline used to categorize the answers (less than 1 day, 2-3 days, 4-6 days, more than 7 days) shows the following results: more than 50 percent of tourists, both Italians and foreigners, prefer to stay only for one day (64% foreigners, 57% Italians). The second best choice is to stay for more than a week for foreigners (19%) and for 2-3 days for Italians.

The same answers were analyzed in aggregated terms and absolute numbers. The data show first that tourists chose to visit Vinci before or after (in conjunction with) visiting other places. These places are Florence (74 tourists on 200), Pisa (54), Siena (45), Lucca (33). It results a reminder to the "classical" tour of Tuscany based on the network of city of arts. Second, the main reasons to visit Vinci are: arts (52), rurality (20) and food (13). Third, the main sources used to get information are the Internet (26), word-of-mouth (25), travel guide (19) and personal experiences (12). Finally,

it was asked them to give a general evaluation (from zero to five) of the "system" of Vinci. The evaluations resulted very high with some strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are rural landscape (4.9), hospitality (4.3), accommodation (4.2), and general opinion (4.2). The weaknesses are shopping (3.0), transports (3.1), and entertainment (3.6).

Results from the Focus Group.

The focus group was organized at the end of the qualitative analysis to show to stakeholders both the results of the quantitative and qualitative studies and to monitor and register their opinions, critics, suggestions and expectations. The stakeholders involved in the focus group are the Mayor and the vice-Mayor of the town of Vinci, the director of the museum, the director of the URP office (the Public Relations Office) of the Municipality of Vinci and one of the front desk assistants. The focus group was organized and lead by three researchers from the Department of Economics of the University of Florence. The main topics presented to the stakeholders were: 1) the identity of Vinci (the main resources that strength the identity of places – the *genius loci*) and the strengths, weaknesses and critical points of the tourist supply; 2) whether or not Vinci be part of an integrated tourist system (does it exist a national, regional, local reference network? Is it part of tourist routes comprehending other places? If yes, which one?); 3) to give suggestions for regional and local policies (priority actions).

Point 1: The identity of Vinci.

On the basis of the answers, it is possible to state that the identity of Vinci is composed of two main elements: the landscape and the image of Leonardo da Vinci. This relationship has many important consequences but it is not intended by the stakeholders in the same ways. Because of the different backgrounds, professional profiles and level and quality of the relationships with visitors, they see different opportunities and threats and propose different solutions (see point 3.)

For the Mayor, it is important to maximize the relationship between these two elements to increase the capacity of the territory to be more competitive. Since the competitive advantage is based on a mix of arts, landscape and architecture, it is strategic to collect data and to develop a SWOT analysis as a main tool of strategic development. For the URP Director Vinci has a multiple identity. The first is Vinci as the city of Leonardo: the consequence is that this town attracts visitors with a complex profile, but with the same motivation - to visit Vinci for its arts and for the image of Leonardo's awesomeness. It follows another kind of expectations definable as cultural and scientific: since Vinci is the hometown of Leonardo, then this is the city of innovation and culture. The second identity is connected to landscape and architecture. Vinci is embedded in a rural

landscape and it has a medieval village urban structure. This two characteristics give a total perception of the rural and middle-age profile of the city. These two identities also show how late the local community is in developing an adequate strategy. Since many visitors are ramblers/hikers more than tourists (they do not pass the night in Vinci's structures) there is a lack of services to tourism. There is not a structured and organized supply of primary and secondary services as there is not an organized promotion of these services. For instance, during the month of August (one of the peak month) many commercial services are closed. This example shows that local people do not understand and recognize that the landscape is at the same time the leverage, the driver and the accelerator of and for the local growth. It is, combined with the Leonardo awesomeness, the added value of Vinci. The Director of the Museum Leonardiano presents the same concepts from a different perspective. It is truth that the identity is based on the link between the territory-landscape and the image of the Genius, but there are two essential constraints:Vinci cannot be defined as a city of arts and the image of Leonardo is mediated by foreign media. For instance, in arts history Leonardo is very famous as a naturalist painter. In many artworks he reproduced the landscape of Vinci. This side of Leonardo is not present in foreign media contents. If the naturalist one is one of the main character of the identity of Leonardo, then it has to be developed in order to move from a folk vision of Leonardo and its hometown to a higher image based on "quality". This folk image was constructed not only by foreign media but also by local and regional players such as the Tuscany Region. By quality the Director means a different and higher image based either on historical facts (e.g. the Museum has invested in the last years to build all the Leonardo's mechanical machines) and the natural heritage, the local landscape. For this reason the municipality is investing in promoting new communication activities oriented to give a new image of Vinci based on a new name of the Genius (from Leonardo "da" (from) Vinci to Leonardo "a" (in) Vinci), on a new identity of Vinci itself as the birthplace of Leonardo, and on developing a didactics that could present the globality of the event Leonardo and the importance of the place in which it happens.

Point 2: The network system.

The sense of belonging to a place and the vision of the own identity is necessarily based on the sense of belonging to different and multi-scale networks. A place is a nod in one or multiple networks. So the point is whether the local community feels to be part of one or more networks and which one. These answers help understand what kind of multiple identity they think to have and the possible strategy chosen to develop Vinci. The Mayor considers Vinci located and embedded in an area connected and open to the flows coming from the coast and the west of Tuscany. New strategies and investments are needed to increase these incoming flows and relationships with those

areas rich of arts and history, such as the area of Bassa Val d'Elsa and the town of Volterra. The same idea is confirmed by the Director of the URP Office. The city of Vinci turns itself to the area and the towns of Volterra and San Gimignano because of the affinities with these two historical and arts cities. The Museum Director thinks there are two levels in the network connections of Vinci: the first is the local - building a local network with other regional and external players is strategic for the development and growth of Vinci; the second is the regional one (*meso*): there is the need for collaboration with European, Italian, and other regional places and actors to create an international network that reflects the life and effects of Leonardo's activities.

Point 3: Suggestions for policies.

The final point is the need to understand if the local community has a strategic vision to develop in order to increase the quality of tourist services, the number of tourists and the kind of policies to develop. The Mayor states that there are different strategies, the firs being based on the assumption that the town of Vinci is located inside a metropolitan area, as indicated by the Regional Planning Act (Documenti di Piano), composed of the three closest provinces of Florence, Pistoia and Prato. The local administration has been lobbying the Tuscany Region to consider Vinci and its surrounding hills (e.g. Montalbano) as the "green lung" of the metropolitan area composed of the administrative boundaries of the three provinces. Another strategy is based on the recognition that there is not a systems organization at the base of the tourist supply side. This lack of systems structure leads to a lack of organized training tools. For these reasons the municipality of Vinci asks for 1) the recognition of the territorial/local uniqueness; 2) the introduction of tools that discourage the use and the development of fragmented promotional activities. Today Vinci is promoted by the Tuscan Region or by the echo of Leonardo da Vinci. This situation is not sustainable any more and not effective for a sustainable planning process. New investments in communication, culture and infrastructures are the key idea for the vice-Mayor too. He bases its opinion on statistical data. There is a strong relationship between Vinci and its Museum. From 1987 to 2000 there has been an accelerated increase in the number of visits (from 40.000 to 120.000), while from 2000 to 2010 there has been a low increase (from 120.000 to 140.000). It follows that this area needs continuous cultural investments. That happens because there is a strong competitiveness on the use of the brand "Leonardo" from other actors located in Tuscany, in Italy and abroad. The investments adopted from 2000 has sustained and lead the tourist demand to the same levels of the pre-crisis era.

The URP Office Director states it is fundamental and strategic to invest in the development of the tourist information network. This network is strategic because giving information to tourists influences their choices while at the same time generate precious feedbacks and data that are useful

(but only if there is the capacity to aggregate and analyze them accordingly). The main disadvantages are: there is not a network at various level. This is a problem because tourists are disoriented by the use of different communication practices (languages, information, data). This disadvantage also shows that there are not investments in the education and training sector, not only at the local but also at the regional level. At the moment there is not any kind of coordination with other tourist information offices or centers located in other cities, villages or areas of the region. The idea of the need for an information system is confirmed by the URP Front desk girl who stresses the fact that there should be more investments in the area of education and training of the personnel of regional tourist information offices. Information is seen as the leverage to disseminate properly the knowledge of the regional and local territory. There is also a problem of communication in terms of transparency and accessibility to information and data not only for tourists and visitors but also for professionals.

The Museum Director gives a more global outlook from a cultural point of view. Because of the richness and quality of cultural infrastructures presented in Vinci, the development strategy should be based on the fact that Vinci could be the place of innovation and culture. The Museum and the Library of Leonardo (Biblioteca Leonardiana) should be thought and developed as study centres. The reading of the works of Leonardo is a scientific event (Lettura Vinciana) that began in the Sixties. Over the years this meeting has grown up till the point today it is a major event open to the mass of experts and amateurs. In 2006 there was the launch of a summer school in partnership with the University of Florence while a doctoral program with the University of Pisa was developed. Other activities included the realization of a digital archive with 40,000 documents online. One of the key point is the creation of synergies with other actors (institutes, institutions, multinational firms, etc.) that could locate in Sovigliana, the modern area of Vinci developed in the plan and place for many different industrial and service activities. Because of its nature and historical tradition, Vinci is devoted to communicate with many players, located in different parts of the world. It follows that Vinci needs more coherent and flexible national and regional policies.

4.2 The case study conclusions

Vinci is considered an interesting tourist place located in an area rich of arts, culture, architecture and embedded in a rural area. Its main advantages are the name, the landscape, the image of the Genius and its proximity to Florence and other international tourist destinations. Although these characteristics should give Vinci a competitive advantage in the international market, Vinci is not considered by citizens as a tourist center or as a place in which a specialized form of tourism is

developed. The interviews and the focus group with the stakeholders strength the idea that there is a gap between the image of Vinci as it is reflected in the eyes of tourists, citizens, policymakers and local players. It seems that this gap is nurtured by a lack of a strategic and systemic planning process in three main areas: education and training, infrastructures, communication. Moreover, the small size of Vinci (in qualitative and quantitative terms) does not help the local system to be a active nod in a multiple network and so there is the need for an help from above, from regional and national actors, and from below, other small arts centers located in the same region or abroad. It follows that the small size is a threat because there is not the possibility to develop new investments and strategies on one side (local government and stakeholders) and on the other (citizens, local firms and entrepreneurs) there is not the capacity to understand the competitive advantage of the place and to put in action all those activities needed for the local development. Finally, there is something missing. As introduced at the top of the paragraph, the aim of the research was to understand the development of a local place located in rural areas on the basis of the tourist sector from a sustainable point of view. As read in the results, sustainability and rurality are two key concepts that did not enter into the discussion or the interview, or they did it only indirectly. Rurality is considered as the landscape, like in a painting of Leonardo, and as the main box in which foreign tourists like to stay because of an inner contact with the natural environment, that should be preserved for the future (sustainability?).

5. Conclusions.

In this paper, to better understand how, starting from the '80s, Rural Tourism is driving the renaissance of Tuscan countryside, we approach rural tourism studies in an evolutionary perspective (Boschma and Martin, 2010), taking seriously into account the history. We argue that the large availability of an unemployed architectonical heritage embedded in a unique rural landscape can be considered the primary input of rural tourism development in Tuscany. And yet, the landscape is the output of a particular agricultural system (sharecropping) and it has been positively influenced by the proximity of rich city arts as Florence and Siena.

To have a measures of the leading role of Tuscany in the development of rural tourism within Italy, some statistics have been displayed. But within Tuscany there are different stages of development of rural tourism so to need a deep analysis at the municipality level. Depending on the performance on a selected set of indicators we have been able to point three different kinds of municipalities: those with a "mature" development of rural tourism, those "in transition" moving forward on the development of rural tourism and those "not tourist". Rural tourism in Tuscany is very developed in

some internal rural areas such as Chianti, Val d'Orcia, Maremma and the surrounding countryside of Siena. In some leading municipalities such as San Gimignano, Pienza, San Quirico d'Orcia or Radda in Chianti the number of nights spent per capita is over 50 and the local governments are discussing about constraints on visitor numbers. This is the main reason why in Tuscany has a sense to argue on sustainability of rural tourism. On the other hand in the majority of northern rural areas, much more mountainous than the rest of the region, rural tourism is not yet developed and only few particular areas (Mugello, Garfagnana) are under transition.

The case study of Vinci offers us some important remarks. Central and south rural areas of Tuscany, if compared with other rural areas of Italy and Europe, have a particularity: next to quality agricultural products in a typical rural landscape, they are able to offer a rich set of arts, culture, and architecture. In addition, Vinci has the image of the Genius and its proximity to Florence and other international tourist destinations. Nevertheless, the interviews and the focus group with stakeholders strength the idea that there is a gap between the image of Vinci as it is reflected in the eyes of tourists, citizens, policymakers and local players. This gap seems to be due to the lack of a strategic and systemic planning process in three main areas: education and training, infrastructures and communication. Moreover, the small size of Vinci (in qualitative and quantitative terms), as any other rural place, does not help the local system to have an active role and so there is the need for an help from above, from regional and national actors, and from below, from other small arts centers located in the same region or abroad. At this stage of development, the next step on evolution of rural tourism in Tuscany seems to be depending on the capacity of connectivity and cooperation among rural municipalities so to develop new investments and strategies on topic issues such as education and training, infrastructures and communication. It is not yet clear if cooperation will rise spontaneously or if it will be driven by regional and national actors.

Finally, there is something missing in our results and it is the sustainability of rural tourism. In the results, sustainability and rurality are two key concepts that did not emerge during the focus group or the interviews, or they did it only indirectly. Rurality is considered as the landscape and tourists – especially foreign ones - like to feel, like in a painting of Leonardo, part of the Tuscan landscape. To be included in that "painting" means also an inner contact with the natural environment, that is sustainability. Any regards on the sustainability of rural tourism emerged during the focus group and interviews. According to us this is very dangerous because over a certain threshold even RT might become unsustainable for a fragile environment as it is the rural one.

References.

Azzari M. and Rombai L., 1991, La Toscana della mezzadria, in Paesaggi delle colline toscane, Marsilio, Venezia

Boschma, R. A., Lambooy, J. G. (1999) Evolutionary economics and economic geography. Journal of Evolutionary Economics, 9: 411–429.

Boschma R. and Frenken K., 2006, Why is economic geography not an evolutionary science? Towards an evolutionary economic Geography, Journal of Economic Geography, 6 (2006) pp. 273–302

Boschma e Martin, 2010, The Handbook on Evolutionary Economic Geography, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Butler R. and Clark G., 1992, Tourism in Rural Area: Canada and United Kingdom, in Bowler I., Brayant C. and Nellis M. (eds), Contemporary Rural System in Transition. Economy and Society, CAB International, Wallingford, vol. 2, pp. 166-186

Canoves G., Villarino M., Priestley G.K. and Blanco A., 2004, Rural tourism in Spain: an analysis of recent evolution, in Geoforum, 35, pp. 755–769

Champion, T., Coombes, M., Fotheringham (eds.), S., 1998. Urban Exodus. CPRE, London.

Cloke, P., Thrift, N., 1990. Class and change in rural Britain. In: Marsden, T., Lowe, P., Whatmore, S. (Eds.), Rural Restructuring. Global Processes and Their Responses. David Fulton, London, pp. 165–181.

Cianferoni R. and Mancini F., (eds by) 1993, La collina nell'economia e nel paesaggio della Toscana, Firenze, Accademia dei Georgofili

Curry, G.N., Koczberski, G., Selwood, J., 2001. Cashing out, cashing in: rural change on the south coast of Western Australia. Australian Geographer 32 (1), 109–124.

Daugstad K., Negotiating landscape in Rural Tourism, Annals of Tourism Research, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 402–426, 2008

Dirksmeier, P., 2008. Strife in the rural idyll? The relationship between autochthons and in-migrants in scenic regions of South Bavaria. Erdkunde 62 (2), pp. 159–171.

Frochot I., 2005, A benefit segmentation of tourists in rural areas: a Scottish perspective, Tourism Management 26, pp. 335–346

Garrod, B., R. Wornell, and R. Younell, 2005, Re-conceptualising Rural Resources as Countryside Capital: The Case of Rural Tourism. Journal of Rural Studies 22, pp. 117–128.

Ghose, R., 2004. Big sky or big sprawl? Rural gentrification and the changing cultural landscape of Missoula, Montana. Urban Geography 25 (1), pp. 528–549.

Goodman. E.. Bamford, J. and Saynor P. (eds), 1989, Small Firms and Industrial Districts in Italy, Routledge, London and New York.

Hall D.R., Roberts L. and Mitchell M., 2005, New directions in rural tourism, Hants, Ashgate

Hines J.D., 2010, Rural gentrification as permanent tourism: the creation of the "New West" Archipelago as postindustrial cultural space, Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, volume 28, pp. 509- 525

Ilbery, B., I. Bowler, G. Clark, A. Crockett, and A. Shaw, 1998, Farm-based Tourism as an Alternative Farm Enterprise: A Case Study from the Northern Pennines, England. Regional Studies 32, pp. 355–364.

Lane B., 1994, Sustainable Rural Tourism Strategies: A Tool for Development and Conservation Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Vol 2, Nos. 1 & 2

Long P. and Lane B., 2000, Rural tourism development, in Gartner W.C. and Lime D.W. (eds), Trends in Outdoor Recreation, Leisure and Tourism, CAB International, Wallingford, pp. 299-308

Milani R., 1991, Radda in Chianti. Storia, economia, società, Editori del Grifo, Montepulciano

Phillips, M., 1993. Rural gentrification and the processes of class colonisation. Journal of Rural Studies 2, pp. 123–140.

Phillips, M., 2005. Differential productions of rural gentrification: illustrations from North and South Norfolk. Geoforum 36, pp.477–494.

Pyke, F., Becattini G. and Sengenberger, W. (eds), 1990, Industrial Districts and Inter-firm Co-operation in Italv, International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva.

Randelli F. and Perrin C., 2007, Aree rurali e residenti stranieri. Un confronto fra Chianti e campagna francese, in *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, Fasc. 1, marzo 2007, pp. 67-92.

Roberts, L., Hall, D., 2001. Rural Tourism and Recreation: Principles to Practice. CABI Publishing, Wallingford.

Sanagustín Fons M.V., Moseñe Fierro J.A., Gómez Patiño M., 2011, Rural tourism: A sustainable alternative, Applied Energy 88 (2011) 551–557

Sharpley, R., 1996, Tourism and leisure in the countryside (2nd ed.). Huntington: ELM Publications.

Sharpley, J., Sharpley, R., 1997. Rural Tourism. An Introduction. International Thomson Business Press, London.

Solana M. S., 2010, Rural gentrification in Catalonia, Spain: A case study of migration, social change and conflicts in the Empordanet area, Geoforum 41, pp. 508–517

Woods M., 2007, Engaging the global countryside: globalization, hybridity and the reconstitution of rural place, Progress in Human Geography, 31 (4), pp. 485-507