

People, Politics, Participation

Populism of rural fragile areas in Italy and Europe

XIII Fragile Areas Conference, Rovigo Italy, 22nd - 23rd March 2019

The Italian community of practices 'fragile areas' is wondering about a (new) phenomenon called populism, which appears more prominent in rural communities and challenges established local governance. In particular, the places left behind are showing strong signs of malaise, which seem to be oriented towards a search for closed communities, a rejection of diversity, scepticism and repulsion towards scientific knowledge, intolerance, a demand for strong leaders capable of re-establishing order, and a narrative contrast between a pure populace and a corrupt elite. The new emerging electoral geographies in all Western countries seem to confirm this orientation. If this is true, there are new questions for those who are committed to destiny of fragile rural areas. In Italy, and likely throughout rural Europe, the main issues are three:

- a) multilevel governance: the complex architecture of agreements among levels of government – from municipalities to the European Union - does not work any more
- b) integrated development projects: the unbundling of old development agencies in favour of competition (call for bids) among a variable range of private and no-profit bodies has increased job precariousness in rural areas
- c) confidence in institutions: the traditional prestigious intermediators in rural areas (church, popular parties, Provinces, national NGOs, intellectuals....) are weakened or delegitimized.

The double nature of the conference – scientific and educational – will allow to ask for two questions: which forms and meanings does the rural populism of Western countries adopt? Which are the antidotes to the negative aspects of such a drift? The first question implies the evaluation of scholarly literature or ad hoc surveys, the second one examines experiences of social participation in rural areas. Some examples are civilian protection corps, sport, heritage and cultural associations (the so called Pro Loco), commons (Regole, Usi civici), even hunters and fishers organisations. Of course, new forms of civic intermediation of every scale will be welcomed.

Thus, the conference welcomes analyses of rural populist manifestations and illustrations of cases of inclusive participation in the fragile countryside. A useful way to deepen the motives of the conference and to identify emblematic cases is to look at the position paper (at the moment only in Italian). The [past editions](#) of the conference can provide additional insights to set the case study. A discussion and case selection tool is also the Facebook group "[aree fragili](#)".

The abstract (up to 2000 characters), in English or Italian describing the electoral trends, political manifestations and civic engagement must be sent by December 31, 2018 to Giorgio Osti (giorgio.osti@dispes.units.it) and Sara Morelli (areefragili.rovigo@gmail.com). The call is open to scholars, artists, administrators, public officials, grassroots operators, peasants, ecologists, social and for-profit entrepreneurs. To the authors of the accepted abstract by the 'reference group' we will offer on March 22nd dinner and the buffet on March 23rd. Travel and accommodation expenses can not be covered, even if special cases are carefully evaluated. Acceptance of the abstract will be communicated by January 31, 2019.

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