Back to earth: issues related to the access to land

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Introduction

In Tuscany the problem of access to land, for those who want to practice peasant agriculture, appears amplified in all the contexts marked by proximity to major centres and special landscape attractiveness, where the tendency to disintegration of historic rural structures on one side, de-ruralisation on the other, is stronger. Such phenomena are extensively active on access to land, taken both as real availability of agricultural lots on the sales and rents market, and as buying and managing capacity for actors with scarce financial resources that intend to establish or manage a farm. Hereafter the issue is examined in reference to the Province of Florence and the Florentine Chianti region, where de-ruralisation of residences and buildings is actually preventing their agricultural reuse and creating an obstacle to the return to earth and the ‘re-conquest’ of countryside by the actors in the manifold universe of ‘neo-rurality’, usually composed by people approaching agriculture ex novo.

There are differences in the analysis of this neo-rural world, articulated in France by Pierre Donadieu starting from peri-urban agriculture and investigated in Italy from several points of view: in a research, NOMISMA has led the ‘hobby farmer’ profile to a better definition, assuming that this figure manages at least 1.8 ha. of the national UAA (Utilised Agricultural Area), Alberto Magnaghi has insisted on multi-functionality defining the ‘new farmer’ figure as specific to a farm based on complex (agro-tertiary) arrangements referred to extended territorial networks (Magnaghi 2005) whilst, in opposition to this territorialist view, Michele Corti has proposed a kind of distinc-

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1 Translation from Italian by Angelo M. Cirasino.
2 An area I frequent in the dual role of conductor of a small farm and activist in environmental associations and movements; in this capacity I also took part in the discussion about planning instruments for several municipalities of the Florentine Chianti.
3 Donadieu distinguishes the hobby farmer, who never minds the CAP [Common Agricultural Policy, Translator’s note] and spends in the countryside only some time freed from work, the “no-farm farmer”, who does not reside in the countryside but cultivates it, and the “no-farm urban”, city dweller who lives in the countryside for leisure or necessity (Donadieu 2005).
4 The group of hobby farmers is highly diversified: clerks, professionals, self-employed, civil servants, workers, retired. All are united by the passion to cultivate and practice agriculture in order to consume more healthy and wholesome products (62.5%), practice outdoor activities (61.7%), enhance land inherited (39.3%) or expressly bought (35.7%), but also to save money in purchasing food (25.1%). The average size of cultivated land is not marginal and is between 0.6 (mainly held by retired and workers) and 1.2 hectares on average (NOMISMA 2010).
tion between hedonistic urban neo-ruralism and rural neo-ruralism, highlighting
the characters of continuity of the latter with the rural world. Corti has also
identified a ‘neo-ruralism’ that does not even include new settlements or ‘returns
to rural roots,’ but is an interesting phenomenon of internal ‘metamorphosis’ in
business continuity, in this following Ploeg’s analysis of the ‘new peasants’ seen
as the result of a process of re-peasantification of the enterprise system in itself
(Ploeg 2009). However, the different studies agree on the existence of a demand
for land by new actors, a demand conditioned both by market and territorial
regulations, which orient the real estate market and affect the feasibility of an
agricultural recovery of abandoned land by disciplining transformations; this is
what we will try to describe, first briefly analyzing the market for ‘rural’ land and
buildings in the Province of Florence, then investigating the regulations of three
municipalities of Chianti to verify whether and how they address the encoun-
tered problems.

1. Real estate market: agriculture disappears, ‘rural’ for sale

The difficulty of access to agricultural land is made evident by the trends and offers
in the real estate market. As an example, the chart below shows the results of a web
research about the Province of Florence realised consulting four major sites of real
estate offers on January 22, 2013.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RF. Agency</th>
<th>Agricultural lots for sale</th>
<th>Farmhouses/ carcerases for sale</th>
<th>Farms for sale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total ≥ 3 ha.</td>
<td>total ≤ 200,000 €</td>
<td>total ≤ 300,000 €</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TROVACASA.IT</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOME.IT</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMMOBILIARE.IT</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA.IT</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7912</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the lots category, the table highlights sale offers with a surface greater than or
equal to three hectares. Three hectares represent a surface of agricultural land ade-
quate for the construction of a small farm pointed to familiar self-consumption and
economically manageable; in addition, that area, if carried out through specialised
tree crops typical of the Florentine hills (vines, olives), is the minimum necessary for
legal recognition of the figure of ‘farmer’ by the public administration.8 As evident
from the graph, most of the few agricultural lots for sale are in fact small plots. We
highlight several types: lots from de-ruralisation and dismemberment, land parcels
and rural outbuildings sold with achievable plans for a building or residential transfor-

5 ‘First of all many ‘neo-rurals’, labelled as ‘urban people on the run’, are connected to the rural world by
family experiences that bring them back to their home territories or similar areas. Moreover, there are
young people who, after some time of study and work in different industries, come back with a new moti-
vation to the family firm or, if this has gone out of business in the meanwhile, start a new one’ (Corti 2007).
6 That’s an aware adoption, by small and medium-sized farms, of new production styles based on limit-
ing or reducing the production scale, adopting less expensive techniques, making crops extensive,
reducing external inputs (like chemical fertilisers, pesticides, fodders, supplements, but also ideologies)
(Corti 2007).
7 The reported data were substantially stable, with fluctuations of a few units or tens of units, during a
monthly observation.
8 As provided for in the Regional Law 64/1995, that defines the minimum cultivation units a conductor
must possess in order to apply for a plan with construction of facilities and equipment.
mation, or even pseudo-outbuildings with appurtenance land built after the Regional Law (RL) 5/1995 but equipped as small habitable cottages. The market for separate lots is so narrow obviously due to the fact that the average size of discontinued peasant farms (1-3 ha.) lends itself to a disintegration of the limited agricultural areas in parks, common courtyards, leisure orchards. Besides, this last speculation flourishes in periurban areas, with splits about 500-1000 square meters in size, provided with water and a small outbuilding, offered at astronomical prices to citizens who wish to carry self-consumption orchards.

As for the farmhouses/carcasses category (the largest), there are not potentially productive farms here: almost all the ads relate to portions of buildings dismembered and restored in style (more or less), de-ruralised barns or outbuildings with small gardens and buildings which, at best, have a manor park with swimming pool and, at worst, maintain only the appurtenant parking. The character of agricultural functionality is totally absent from this market segment, so that the agencies conventionally place ruins or farmhouses with adjoining farm in the ‘agricultural lots’ category examined above. As the table shows, only about 10% of the ads are in a less than € 200,000 price range, a market segment basically identifying spaces which are accessible to families without large financial resources.

Finally, for the few farms for sale, this market is actually separate from the residential real estate one, with prices per surface unit following their own parameters; as shown in the table most of the sale offers exceed one million euro and relate to large farms with tens or hundreds of hectares in land, thousands of square meters in houses, outbuildings or annexed works (B&B, swimming pools, cellars, etc.). Prices, when not postponed to private negotiations, are definitely not affordable for young people or families with scarce capital.

Florentine real estate market, therefore, gives us the image of a rapacious conquest of rural assets by the widespread residence which is no longer active. The sale of medium to large farms is explained, on the contrary, with a sector crisis which affected businesses pointed at large markets, and also with physiological dynamics of sale and succession; to resize this datum, which may appear remarkable, it is worth the finding that the total amount of properties seen in the web offers is not actually equivalent to the amount of the various agencies offers, since very often a property is managed by multiple parties (and this obviously also applies to farmhouses and ‘agricultural lots’). This sort of snapshot of the rural real estate market is both the fruit and the contributory cause of the dynamics illustrated by the data of 2010 6th general census of agriculture: many small peasant farms disappear, the farms or rural dwellings associated are offered for sale, the land is subdivided and turned into appurtenance or, separated

9 The RL 5/1995 prevented the residential use of outbuildings after its entry into force, binding their designation for at least 20 years.
10 The RL 5/1995 and then 1/2005 oblige, in case of de-ruralisation, to maintain a relationship between the farm buildings and their ‘appurtenance’, which for small farms correspond almost entirely to the whole surface of the lot.
11 The amount corresponds to a surface area less than or equal to 70-80 m² in buildings to be restored but next to the city, and to 100 m² and over (depending on the state of property) as we move towards the Apeninnes.
12 In 10 years, the Italian farms collapse by 32.4%, decreasing from 2.4 to 1.8 million, while the average farm size of the UAA (utilized agricultural area), gets close to 8 hectares increasing by 44%, largely due to a growth of 50% of land rent, which make up 30% of the whole Italian UAA; lastly, the companies and the share of land controlled by them increase, as they are just 3.6% of the total of farms but own 17% of the whole UAA (ISTAT 2011).
from homes, feed a parallel agricultural market being acquired by medium and large companies (more capital holdings) through purchase or rent. This systematic demolition of peasant agriculture, combining rural depopulation, hard mechanisation and breaking of short supply chains, finds exegetes and supporters among major farmers,13 but unfortunately is also supported in large sectors of public administration, resulting at all levels in an orientation that leads us to consider competitive and modern just the corporate agriculture, specialised, based on large surfaces, better with a production pointed at international markets. The decrease in agricultural workers, and thus the social desertification of the hill territories, is considered a necessary accessory cost of the bright progress of ‘agro-industry’ that is the enemy of sustainable peasant agriculture (Kroese 2002). The Tuscan RL 64/1995 on agriculture, which informs and inspires the planning instruments of municipalities, is symptomatic for this approach since it denies the possibility of functional infrastructures for lots placed under surface thresholds actually rewarding medium-large companies, thus preventing a production recovery for many split or broken lots, especially in periurban areas. In addition, the law intervenes in various ways to penalise or prevent to build up on small lots, viewed as a problem and not as an access opportunity for new farmers. As a conclusion, we can identify a problematic node for access to land in the fact that, on the real estate market, small discontinued businesses (differently from large and medium-sized ones) do not appear intact in the relationship with the surrounding land and bound as for their functional destination. Therefore, the establishment of a single residential market, in which farmhouses are mixed with suburban cottages, leads to rise in prices and to a tendency to subdivide rural housing into apartments more attractive for the market, as well to the ‘disappearance’ from production of large amounts of agricultural land turned into ‘appurtenance green’ and to sales of lots separated from buildings that swell up large properties.14 We can now ask whether and how this phenomenon, actually preventing a rural re-population, was analyzed, addressed or solved in the planning instruments.

2. Planning between de-ruralisation and de-peasantization

Under the RL 1/2005, Urban Regulations (URs) actually represent the binding and time-limited part of the municipal planning activities (whereas Structural Plans represent their longer-lasting and statutory part), so it is just in this ambit that we should get answers to the described issues, primarily related to territorial government. Below we proceed to an assessment of the rules related to URs having some specific reference to provisions for the existing assets, standardisation of the new buildings, regulation of subdivisions and de-ruralisations. For clarity we will consider separately different municipal regulations, highlighting the consequences of the related standards.

13 An unsigned editorial published in Lineaverde (“Greenline”, a journal in the flower-horticultural industry), significantly titled “2010 Census of Agriculture: micro-businesses fall, but not enough”, reads: “Unfortunately, these numbers do not affect the substance of the planet agriculture in Italy, where the galaxy of micro-businesses is so populous that even the disappearance of 800,000 small plots, which often keep calling businesses just for statistical needs, is able to align us to the more realistic numbers of other large European agriculture: the threshold of 8 hectares recently conquered is still very far by more than 50 hectares of France and 24 of Spain. Measures are then needed apt to drive the system towards a further increase in the average size” (AA.VV. 2012).

14 It’s not by chance if the disappearance of 32.4% of farms in 10 years corresponds only to a 2.5% decrease in the total national UAA (Istit 2012).
2.1 Scandicci: when the constraint destroys agricultural landscape

The municipality of Scandicci approved in 2007 its UR, then revised in 2012. It left unchanged the general regulations of the Implementing Technical Standards (ITS), which makes these choices about open territories: article 141, paragraph 1, divides open territories into “rural areas” and “territories of urban influence” (the ones next to urban centres), then dividing rural areas, in the following paragraph 3, into “areas with predominant agricultural function” and “areas with predominant function of agricultural production”. In this way there are no areas in which (as according RL 1/2005) agricultural functions are exclusively allowed. This choice, common to other administrations also, is based on the belief that urban influence or territorial peculiarities make it necessary to allow multiple functions in open territories, such as non-rural residence, non-hotel hospitality etc.. In par. 4, then, we find the following rule: “In rural areas the construction of new residences, although agricultural, is not allowed except through the reuse of existing buildings”. The prohibition of new rural residences (which might seem a logical means to protect rural assets), is however accompanied by regulations on de-ruralisations which are very ‘broad’, allowing at art. 150 the creation of small 60 m² apartments in existing buildings for residential use, limit which is not valid, then, for housing units with different intended use (tourist accommodation, agro-tourism, commercial, public establishments) that may reach smaller surfaces. Very rigid the regulations on agricultural outbuildings, developed on the basis of a distinction, among agricultural operators, in “businesses with high production capacity”, “businesses with average production capacity”, “minimal businesses” and “amateur agriculture operators”; this distinction is based on the surface but not only: for example, a high capacity company must have more than 2 cultivation units (for specialised olive grove that would correspond to more than 8 ha.), must permanently employ at least two working units, must sell on the market at least half of the gross marketable production. Needless to say, the rules obviously permit higher volumes to large companies, whilst preventing small businesses even to build certain types of permanent outbuildings. In par. 8 of art. 145, then, the law details the absolute prohibition of carrying out such (permanent) annexes in large swathes of land. “Average capacity businesses” are allowed to build permanent outbuildings, with the prohibitions noted above, only for types “... where it is not allowed a continuous stay of people (areas for storage and/or intermittent processing of agricultural products, depots for vehicles and machinery, sheds, cellars, etc.)”. Minimum businesses and amateur operators, finally, must limit to “reversible agricultural artefacts: these are wooden structures, without foundation works, to use exclusively as depots for products, tools and agricultural machinery” (art. 146), obviously with all the prohibitions for the location of permanent outbuildings mentioned before. No chance to use reversible

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15 City Council resolution n. 10, February 2, 2007: first Urban Regulations, then subjected to the five-year review provided for by the law with the second Regulations, adopted by the C.C. resolution n. 31, February 23, 2012.

16 That is to say ‘outbuildings in which a continuous stay of people is allowed, such as ‘business centres’ (corporate headquarters, offices, spaces for exhibition and sale, staff canteens, changing rooms, etc.), ‘service centres for agriculture’, ... or ‘hunting lodges’, art. 145 par. 3.

17 Perifluvial areas, landscape appurtenances, historic parks and formal gardens, lines of retreat and buffer zones for roads, highways or cemeteries, agricultural areas surrounding historical contexts, fringe and/or landlocked areas for predominant agricultural use, riparian zones of Arno falling within the perimeter of the Arno River Park, riparian zones of Pesa, areas adjacent or close to historical agricultural adjustments and decorative arboreal formations: all limitations that greatly reduce the possibility of re-cultivate small abandoned plots.
outbuildings as animals shelters, but on the other hand (art. 155) all enclosures in open areas are forbidden unless they concern the “building appurtenances” of homes and a few other exceptions.\textsuperscript{18} This might apparently disadvantage enclosures, but who just needs to protect a part of the agricultural land, to defend crops or livestock, is in fact compelled to apply for a ‘closed lot’, thereby enclosing the whole property.\textsuperscript{19} 

The conjunction of these standards produces a de-ruralisation of existing buildings facilitated by the small size of the apartments obtainable and by the allowance of functions other than farming throughout the whole rural area. Agricultural areas ‘liberated’ from productive uses are compulsorily constrained as appurtenances of buildings,\textsuperscript{20} but such a constraint is likely to be merely formal since it allows those buildings to host no longer farmers and, even if the new residents decide to dispose of the land separately from the buildings (after 20 years), no one could come to settle in the area since new rural residences are banned. Moreover, the rules that allow only businesses with medium or high production capacity to implement rural buildings seem to be made just in order to prevent any small producers to resettle in the mesh of the widespread residences; equally inconsistent with the stated aim is the harmful result of regulations on temporary outbuildings and fences that, strongly limiting their use, actually makes widespread their abuse: in areas subjected to landscape constraint, to build a wooden annex of a few square meters would require a building permit, with its landscape report attached after an ABIP whose timing is at least one to two years: it is therefore forbidden to all small farmers or amateur private operators, who do not have the legal requirements to submit an ABIP with an appliance for new volumes. The restrictive rules even for the inclusion of simple reversible outbuildings, as well as all the craziness of such regulations considering the same, in terms of authorisation, 

\textsuperscript{18} The only exceptions are ‘enclosures for the use of faunistic farms (only for conducting particular activities properly planned by Agricultural Environmental Improvement Plan), and the processes for the establishment of ‘closed lots’’. In addition to the permission “… to nurseries of fencing the business area as strictly necessary”. Art. 155.

\textsuperscript{19} So that many roads leading up the hills above Scandicci have become a succession of (more or less approximate) fences that prevent any social and ecological permeability of territories for many animal species.

\textsuperscript{20} Art. 143 par. 5 prescribes the Agrarian Business Improvement Plans (ABIP) to provide for “… the continuation of the appurtenance relationship between buildings and plots identified as their exclusive appurtenances (‘housing’ and/or ‘agricultural’, as defined in art. 151) for not less than 20 years”.

In the pictures, two landscape views typical for the context of study.
a simple wooden shack and a six-storey building, a 50 cm. dry stone wall and a cyclo-
pean concrete masonry, produce further difficulties for a productive recovery of the
hill territories, and also generate widespread degradation caused by illegal buildings,
crumbling and precarious, just partly hidden by hedges and trees.

2.2 Tavarnelle: hiding farmers to save landscape
The town of Tavarnelle Val di Pesa has got an UR approved in 2008 (C.C. resolution n.
34, July 1, 2008), later subjected to upgrades and variants concerning some imple-
mentation activities but not the ITS. As for the rural areas, regulated in chapter IV, art.
50 identifies “Areas of exclusive and predominant agricultural function”, but in fact
these areas “… include all parts of the township outside the city limit”, without any
distinction or definition for those “of exclusive agricultural function”. The list of the al-
lowed functions seems to exclude everywhere the transformation of rural assets, as it
is stated that “for the new buildings the only allowed intended use is agricultural, with
the related functions in accordance with law”. But the discussion of “existing assets”
is postponed to Chapter V, where articles 72-78 specify the types of rural building
allowing for almost all of these (including historical production buildings) a mix of
destinations including residential, agricultural with related functions in accordance with
law, tourist hospitality limited to room rent, holidays houses and apartments, historic resi-
dences, management offices, craft activities compatible with residence, service.
In the standards, particular importance is given to the ridges, whose protection areas are
mapped and which are described and regulated in arts. 45, 46, 47, 48, reflecting the strong
predominance of the landscape and perceptive aspects: in effect, in these areas rural out-
buildings are in principle forbidden, allowed only in the absence of business alternative
and still subject to requirements (landfill, alignment to existing buildings, etc.) intended to
conceal rather than to ensure construction quality. Similarily, for the new rural residenc-
es, clearly taken as necessary given the opportunity offered to transform all existing rural
buildings, art. 51 provide a wide series of location prohibitions and prescribes that “the
new rural buildings will be preferably located in areas of low visibility, such as valley floors
and low-lying areas, where the slope is less”, despite the fact that art. 53 correctly gives a lot
of prescriptions (orientation, colours, materials, etc.) on the types of construction of rural
housing, to ensure its architectural quality. For a curious historical nemesis, the ridge set-
tlements in open areas, sprung up to take advantage of the best conditions of safety
and health for farmers in the past, are transformed and host a widespread residence,
while the new farmers are foreclosed access to historical heritage, now de-ruralised,
by the high cost and, where applicable, asked to ‘hide’ the signs of their presence. In
general, the standards appear here more rational and attentive to the needs of agri-
cultural production (on the side of the enclosures, structures for breeding or amateur
agriculture, etc.), and above all exempt from that explicit choice in favour of ‘business’
agriculture of Scandicci. One can not escape the impression, however, that a mistak-
en realism has taken for achieved the process of widespread de-ruralisation, limiting
the public programming policy to a control on landscape insertion.

21 Art. 58, in the ABPI requirements for new rural outbuildings, reads: “the outbuilding will be screened
on the two longer sides, arranged along the level lines with native species, preferably evergreen; the
position of the outbuilding should preferably be placed adjacent to slopes or embankments (the latter
must be behind the building in order to reduce their visual impact)”.

22 Art. 51, requirements for ABPI: “the creation of new rural buildings for residential use is not allowed:
in areas classified as E2 and E3, in protection areas of the settled ridges identified as ‘areas of maximum
visibility’;, in protection areas of waterways and lakes…, in areas classified by the PTC the Province of
Florence as: «landscape protection», «sensitive area», «biotopes» and in wooded areas.”
2.3 San Casciano: de-ruralising but with style

The City Council of San Casciano Val di Pesa approved the municipal UR in 2012 (C.C. resolution n. 43, June 18, 2012), then amended it in order to allow a number of residential buildings as expansions of smaller centres, with subsequent consumption of agricultural land; there have been no changes in general regulations, and in part IV, which governs open areas (correctly differentiated from rural areas, which are only a part of them), equal to other municipalities, the choice is made not to identify “areas for exclusive agricultural use” and therefore to allow, in reusing existing buildings, a mix of functions defined, in art. 61, as “compatible with the objectives of agricultural landscape protection”: it is reasonable of course to expect an increase in de-ruralisations, given that in all the open areas (art. 61 par. 4) “residential use is always allowed” and that, through a reuse of existing assets, it is possible to establish representation activities, shops detached from farms, private riding schools, clinics or nursing homes for disadvantaged people, business accommodation, leisure and sporting activities also related to accommodation, boarding schools, research centres even private connected with residences, all of which can obviously produce a real estate increase in value that has no parallel, in profitability, with the sale of agricultural areas. In par. 6 of the same article, open areas are divided in three ambits: one where landscape and environment values prevail (wooden areas; agricultural areas with beautiful landscapes identified by the Structure Plan; productive agricultural areas, in the olive grove and vineyard, with specific landscape value; agricultural fluvial areas), areas where a consolidated agricultural use prevails, and portions of open land suffering from the effects and pressures of urbanisation, for which the UR imposes appropriate standards of revitalisation and “rules of use for the compatibility of eligible functions, which also enable its increase in functional as in aesthetic-perceptive quality”. The choice made, very questionable, is to attribute an outright landscape value to the extensive and specialised cultivation of grapes and olives (typical for medium to large companies), while the whole short chain agriculture, amateur or professional, next to the different centres (orchards, stables, organic farms, fruit farming, vineyards and olive groves in polyculture, all the fragmented and not extensive areas) is perceived as a phenomenon of degradation. Needless to say that just from the fragmented areas, from the accessibility to lots of little economic value but next to consumer markets, it is possible to restart the proximity farming which offers economic chances to new rural subjects and represents a viable alternative to peripheralisation of countryside. Significantly, four articles (71, 72, 73, 74) regulate de-ruralisation of buildings and outbuildings, while the other Regulations here considered address this issue in less detail and not with special articles: a sign of the strong attention given to a procedure, as stated by the administration in presenting the Regulations, explicitly supported as required by the same farms and functional to help them, in a time of crisis, by allowing a recapitalisation through the sale of parts no longer useful for their activities. The problem is that, for small businesses, de-ruralisation coincides with the disappearance of the entire production unit, while for medium to large companies it implies a reduction in acreage and working units.23

23 This is not the main topic here, but the dissolution of small peasant property does not automatically increment permanent agricultural workers, as shown by the fact that with a general increase in the national agriculture workers (+10% in 2012), more than 28% of which are seasonal with working periods shorter than 50 days/year, the increase in Tuscany employees is based on seasonal workers for 45% (Istituto 2012): the direct experience on field witnesses a widespread use of subcontracting and rural underclass made up by immigrants (sometimes irregular) for vintage, harvest, pruning, and shows how short-sighted this model is, even from the point of view of the socio-economic impact.
For the rest of the Regulations, we find that apart from some locations excluded (within reason) for new rural residences and outbuildings, there is in fact a very open legislation, as well as for everything related to equipment, enclosures, animals shelters, for which even minimal - albeit inadequate - responses have been looked for, more ‘flexible’ and outside of ABIPs. It is concerning that for new rural buildings (art. 80) it states that “if the slope of the terrain permits, underground or basement solutions are preferable, so as not to substantially alter the landscape features of the surrounding context”, thus declaring that new agricultural buildings are only perceived as disruptive of the context values; similar concerns are aroused by the fact that volumes exceeding the capacity of the agricultural lot are allowed (art. 104) where “… the construction of new larger outbuildings is required for the introduction of contemporary architecture in open areas”, which shows that the goal is not to meet the needs of a widespread demand but to foster ‘monumentality’ (obviously reserved for companies with large availability): in short, the mark of an archi-star signing the huge design wine cellar\(^24\) is well liked, less are common architectures and small sizes which, instead, shape the new rural landscape.

**Final remarks**

Goals like hillside repopulation, maintenance of the agricultural character of the open areas, containment of land consumption, as well as addresses toward a short chain modern agriculture, sustainable and apt to produce quality landscapes, are at present totally absent from the considered regulations.

To assist the return to earth of new actors, we should foster the emergence of small to medium sized polyculture and organic oriented farms, innovative and sustainable (IRPET, 2012), in consonance with the guidelines outlined for the future Common Agricultural Policy (2014-2020). It must be said that the previous CAP is partly responsible for the current problems, as both the Guarantee Fund and the Rural Development Fund fostered big business in the name of the priority attached “to European agriculture’s increase in competitiveness without market distortions”, which in 1999 led several States to reject the European Commission’s proposal of a ceiling for aid.\(^25\) Many problems will probably remain in the next CAP programme, especially with regards to the accessibility of land for young entrepreneurs, the link between producers and consumers in the food chain, the protection and development of small and medium-scale agriculture, local economies and rural areas, the environmental issue and the preservation of biodiversity: that is witnessed by the desire to measure aid in relation to the amounts involved, thereby favouring enterprises applying for more contributions (obviously corresponding to those owning more land).\(^26\)

\(^{24}\) Exactly as happened in San Casciano with the creation of an underground cellar with heavy visual impact signed by a famous architect, task done by the owners, rather than for patronage, to implement a massive residential and commercial real estate transaction about the area of the former overground cellar….

\(^{25}\) The result has been the allocation of 80% of CAP funds to 20% of the companies owning 80% of the land (source Ecvc, Hoti, 2013).

\(^{26}\) 3% of the owners of agricultural land accounts for half of all agricultural land in Europe: a concentration of land ownership comparable to what is currently happening in Brazil, Colombia and the Philippines (source Ecvc, Hoti, 2013); if not corrected by the CAP, this phenomenon of land grabbing will have terrible effects on all the critical points highlighted.
Even more so, given the context, at the local level we should rely with greater consistency on small production, ensuring more flexibility and simplicity for the lots infrastructures, looking for low-impact, light, reversible solutions, allowing to practice agriculture even to those who access to land through rents and gratuitous loans (both growing) or acquiring fragments of the former large companies. This aspect is lacking in the examined regulations, since the reference model is that of a company with full possession of large surfaces, able to invest over long periods and with large economic resources. There is no peasant agriculture without repopulation, and the free market of farmhouses remains unattainable to the most. The planning and sector legislation, regional and municipal, should then programme/exceptions to the standards or project targeted for small businesses with surfaces that do not allow to locate residence in open areas, eventually by stimulating co-housing in rural farmhouses and existing buildings, or constraining de-ruralisations to maintain a minimum of ‘rural lodgings’ in the very act of obligation. We should then stop the spread of residence in open territory and the proliferation of functions that subtract from agricultural market much of the existing assets, unlike what happens in the examined planning instruments which, fostering de-ruralisation and residential widespread, help municipal budgets with urbanisation tax but actually prevent many vulnerable people to access agricultural land: the only way to rebuild an agricultural market with affordable prices. Forcing new farmers to flee in valley floors, to hide outbuildings with bushes, to pack houses and barns in the hills, even when non-functional, is definitely not the solution to get a new quality rural landscape. It is right, instead, to deepen and detail the construction requirements already present in the municipalities URs, thinking of abacus and taxonomies for a neo-rural architecture, negotiated and discussed with the farmers starting from their real needs. Finally, the instruments here examined transform attention to landscape in a kind of hypostasis of the beautiful sharecropping landscape, producing constraints that, when not completely preventing to repopulate the hill and to create and manage a small, innovating and sustainable business, for sure penalise neo-rurality far more than multifunctional farms betting on luxury tourism.27 Local governments should have acted in a logic of participatory planning, aggregating around shared goals of landscape quality both the existing residents of open territories and the actors of a peasant repopulation of the countryside, key players in the management of landscape.28

References

27 This contrary to the European Landscape Convention (on which even the Region of Tuscany has based its legislation) which identifies in Landscape “a certain part of the territory, as perceived by people, whose character derives from the natural and/or human factors and their interrelations” and that therefore invites the Member States “to recognise landscapes in law as an essential element of the life context of people, expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and foundation of their identity”: a landscape without people or a countryside without farmers, then, is impossible.28 “Neither museum janitors nor rural landscape gardeners, farmers, from the most rural to the most urban, are simply the natural managers of non-urban areas. For this reason, public administration must call them as privileged partners for their extra-urban projects” (Dondadieu 2008).
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Abstract

The actual viability of a peasant agriculture implies an accessibility of land that is now far from obvious, especially in contexts marked by proximity to centres or by remarkable landscape beauty, where the stronger is the tendency to a collapse of historic rural structures or to final de-ruralisation. In such contexts access to land - both as actual availability of agricultural lots on the sale or rental market, and as purchase and management chances for people without high liquid assets wishing to set up or manage a farm - is a crucial point about the ‘re-conquest’ of countryside by the manifold universe of ‘neo-rurality’: through a comparison among local circumstances and regulations, the paper considers the issue with reference to the province of Florence and Florentine Chianti, territories which are emblematic for the conflict between two opposite concepts - and two opposite practices - of a ‘return to earth’.

Keywords

Access to land; neo-rurality; deruralisation; local planning; Chianti.

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