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1. Introduction

The EU, many Member States as well as Regional Authorities are increasingly transforming their rural development policies from an initial focus on farm structures to a broader framework that includes food chain aspects, forestry, environmental issues, diversification of the rural economy and the quality of life in rural areas. Simultaneously, patterns of governance have started to change: integrated actions, new public-private partnerships and area-based and bottom-up approaches constitute important ingredients of new local development strategies (although not everywhere with the same consistency). Together with a myriad of grass root initiatives new policies and governance structures are reshaping the social and economic fabric of many rural economies. At the same time it is becoming clear that rural development processes are moving beyond the institutionalized blocks of knowledge that are fragmented and were once designed to represent and understand the rural economy as it was shaped during the epoch of the big modernisation project of European agriculture. Sectoral approaches are no longer adequate to understand the manifold and multilevel interactions between farming activities and the wider rural context and integrative and multi-disciplinary theories are critically lacking. The ETUDE project developed and empirically loaded and tested an integrated conceptual framework that goes beyond mono-disciplinary and sectoral approaches and integrates several currently emerging theoretical strands.

2. Contractors involved

The ETUDE consortium consisted of the following research institutes and universities:

- Wageningen University (WU), Rural Sociology Group, the Netherlands
- Institut fuer Laendliche Strukturforchung an der Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universitaet Frankfurt (IfLS), Germany
- University of Perugia (UNIPG), Department of Economics and Food, Italy
- Cardiff University (CU), School of City and Regional Planning, United Kingdom
- MIT Economic Research (MIT), Finland
- Baltic Studies Centre (BSC), Latvia

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3. Project objectives

The aim of ETUDE was to develop an integrated conceptual framework for rural development, which will enable a better understanding of the manifold and multilevel interactions between farming and the rural context.

Figure 1 reflects the basic structure of the ETUDE project. At the heart of it is the re-conceptualisation of regional rural constellations in terms of multifunctionality, interactions and synergy. The figure also demonstrates how the six domains or dimensions might contribute to counterbalance the `squeeze on agriculture` and to raise the quality of life in rural areas. ETUDE

aims to enlarge the theoretical understanding of the interrelations and interactions between these dimensions and to examine how these theoretical dimensions can be used in rural studies as well as in the design and implementation of rural policies.

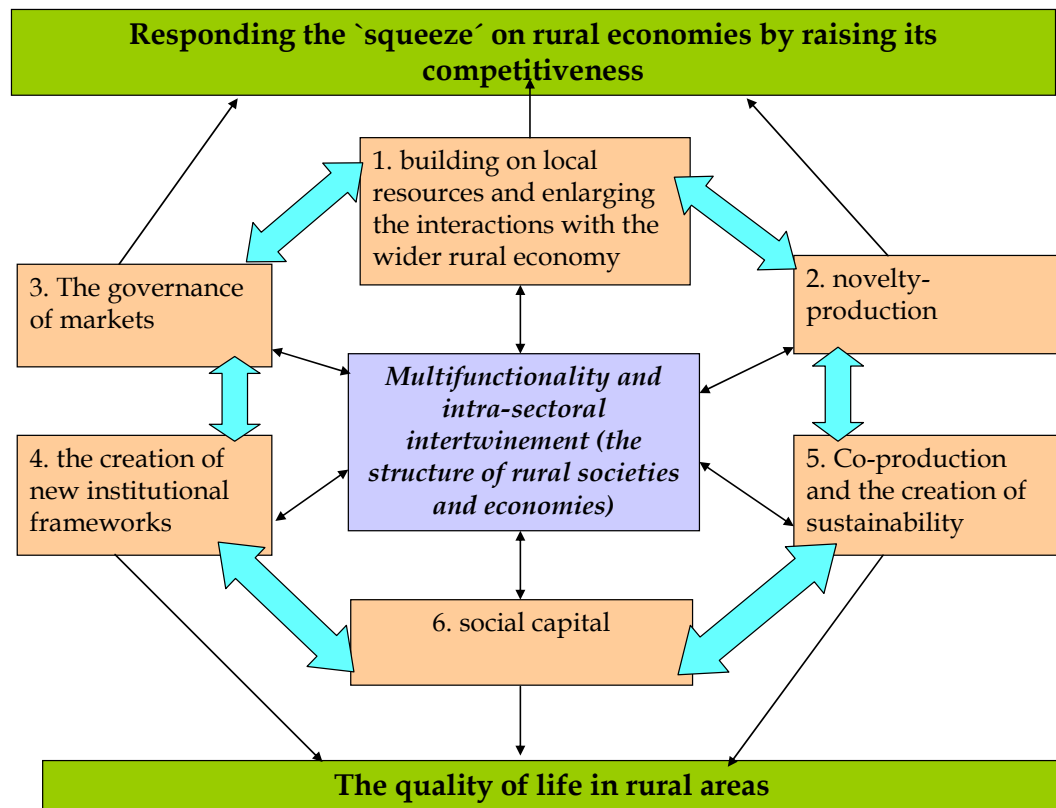


Figure 1: Provisional outline of the conceptual model to be developed

ETUDE has the following main objectives:

- 1) To acquire a better understanding of the dynamics, scope and regional economic impact of rural development processes, through the construction of a theoretical model that takes into account its main conceptual aspects, whilst reflecting simultaneously the large heterogeneity of rural areas and activities.
- 2) To assess the differential impact of newly emerging rural constellations in terms of land management, the competitiveness of rural economies and the quality of life in rural areas.
- 3) To explore the complex interfaces between different rural development trajectories on the one hand and governance structures and rural policies on the other.

To reach these main objectives the specific objectives of the project are defined as follows:

- a. To gain insight into the interactions and interrelations between six theoretical domains and to examine the relevance and applicability of domain specific concepts for the field of rural development studies
- b. To further develop the provisional conceptual framework
- c. To identify key rural development experiences in a range of European countries
- d. To build a typology of rural development approaches, characterised by different configurations of the web of interrelations, interactions, exchanges and positive mutual externalities within rural societies
- e. To further develop the conceptual framework
- f. To test the conceptual framework in 12 regional settings across Europe

- g. To carry out a detailed diagnosis of the current rural development situation in each region
- h. To identify strengths and weaknesses of different rural development practices and approaches by carrying out a mid-term comparison of rural development practices and processes in the 12 regions
- i. To identify approaches to enhance the integrated rural development potential of a specific region making use of experiences of other regions
- j. To understand the factors affecting the structure of rural societies and economies as well as the approaches and conditions strengthening or weakening the competitiveness of rural economies and the quality of life in rural areas
- k. To evaluate the relevance and added value of the conceptual framework for enlarging the understanding of the manifold and multi-dimensional interactions and relationships affecting rural development
- l. To develop policy recommendations for rural policy-making at different administrative levels by clarifying the conditions in which specific rural policies are most effective and by proposing approaches for effective self-regulation at local level

4. Project activities, achievements and main outcomes

In order to realise the outlined project objectives the following research activities were effectuated in 5 consecutive Work Packages:

- Development of a conceptual framework (WP2).
- Quick scan of cases: loading the conceptual framework with 63 cases from all over Europe (WP3).
- Testing the conceptual framework by 12 in-depth regional case studies (WP4).
- Comparative regional analysis and evaluation of the conceptual framework on the basis of the twelve regional case study analysis' (WP5).
- Policy recommendations for rural policy-making at different administrative levels (WP6).

In addition to the research activities two other work packages were effectuated in order to ensure an effective project coordination and administration (WP1) and coordinate dissemination and consultation activities with stakeholders and experts (WP7, see section 6)

In the following the project activities and main achievements for different steps of the research process (WP2 to WP6) are described.

➤ *Development of the conceptual model (WP2)*

The first step in the further development of the initial conceptual framework consisted of seven literature reviews regarding seven domains (or conceptual areas) and their interrelations: endogenous development, novelty production, governance of markets, sustainable development, institutional frameworks, social capital and 'the rural web'. Central is the 'web' of interrelations, interactions, exchanges and positive mutual externalities within rural societies. In the provisional conceptual model it is assumed that these 'webs' interrelate with the six dimensions. The literature reviews for each domain are mainly focused on the interrelation with other domains and with 'the web'.

In a second step the initial conceptual framework has been elaborated further by making use of the literature reviews (and comments of the European Expert Forum: see consultation). In this synthesis document the conceptual model is added with a typology of rural areas, a reconceptualisation of 'the rural', an extended discussion of the concept of 'rural web' and an exploration of the interrelations between diversity and webs.

Central to the approach are the closely interconnected notions of the ‘web’ and the diversity of rural regions. Rural regions differ in terms of the ‘web’ that they entail. In turn, the specificity of this web helps to explain the particularity of a rural region and its development trajectory. This web interlinks activities, processes, people, and resources and simultaneously shapes the ways in which they unfold. A *central hypothesis* underlying this text is that the more developed such a web is, the better the performance of regional rural economies. We hypothesise that a smoothly functioning and complex web that contains many positive externalities and allows for many encounters, etc., explains a good performance of a regional economy, its comparative advantages, its competitiveness, innovativeness and sustainability, as well as the quality of life it offers to its people.

Achievements:

- Seven literature reviews; six on the domains of the conceptual model and one on ‘the web’.
 - A synthesis document: the elaborated conceptual model.
- Both the synthesis document and the seven literature reviews are also published in the first ETUDE-book ‘Unfolding webs, the dynamics of regional rural development’ (eds. Van der Ploeg and Marsden).

➤ *Loading the conceptual model by means of a Quick Scan of 62 cases (WP3)*

The Quick Scan intends to enable an improved understanding of the large variety of rural ‘webs’ emerging from empirical cases in the light of the domains and the conceptual model (WP2). In total, reviews of 62 case studies from 16 countries were carried out. The focus of the case studies was mainly on: interactions between the domains; the influence of policy arrangements on the interrelation between domains; to what extent domains (as well as the interactions between domains) strengthen the ‘web’ of interrelations and positive mutual externalities within rural societies; how different domains influence the competitiveness of rural economies and the quality of life in rural areas.

Subsequently a synthetic/comparative analysis of the 62 case studies was undertaken to: a) develop a characterisation of patterns of both consistencies and diversity that characterise rural ‘webs’ and the underlying domain interrelations and thus of rural development approaches and b) as a way of ‘loading’ the conceptual model – i.e., feeding empirical data into the model to examine and improve its validity as an analytical tool. Some examples of significant tendencies regarding domain interrelations are:

- Social capital tends to initiate or consolidate positive domain interrelations in rural development initiatives;
- Market governance, sustainability and endogeneity often constitute the key outcomes of positive domain interrelations;
- In successful rural development initiatives, the domains that trigger positive interrelations (most evidently social capital) are often reproduced and further strengthened by the same process; and
- The denser the web of domain interrelations, the greater the sustainability outcomes/potential.

The analysis of policy arrangements found that territorially-based rural development policy interventions tend to enhance these domain interactions, especially those that involve endogeneity, social capital, and sustainability as the core, while policy contributions to the interactions that revolve around novelty and market governance may be relatively weaker. An additional comparative analysis described the empirical multidimensionality (i.e., heterogeneity) of the analysed rural webs (the distribution of the case studies in terms of the density of the web(s), the scale of the web(s), and the type of rural area).

Achievements:

- Quick Scan of cases: 63 case studies.
- Quick Scan of cases: a comparative analysis of the 63 case studies (description of rural development approaches and patterns of rural webs and the impact of policy arrangements). The comparative analysis of the 63 cases studies results is also published in the first ETUDE-book 'Unfolding webs, the dynamics of regional rural development' (eds. Van der Ploeg and Marsden).

➤ *WP4: Testing the conceptual framework; in-depth regional studies*

The conceptual framework was tested by means of 12 in-depth regional studies (2 per country). The regions studied together reflected different types of rural development approaches and different kinds of rural areas. The conceptual model was used to examine if and how different domains are interlinked, which interlinkages are missing, if and how the different domains affect the structure of rural societies and economies, and which (sets of integrated) activities are undertaken or lacking to improve the competitiveness of rural economies and the quality of life of rural areas. This resulted in the identification of strengths and weaknesses of different rural development practices, and of approaches to enhance the integrated rural development potential of a specific region.

The outcomes of the 12 case studies were presented and discussed in regional workshops with stakeholders and policy makers.

The regional studies provided the baseline for identification and comparison of rural areas, and rural development path and for the WP5 and WP6 analysis.

All the twelve regional studies focused on the dynamics of the areas and underlined the role of Rural Web in countervailing or converting threats in new opportunities. The regional case studies confirmed the potential of the Rural Web approach as an analytical tool able to capture the multidimensional nature of rural development and to underline the linkages with the specific territorial context.

Achievements:

- In-depth analysis of twelve rural regions.
- Regional workshop reports.
- A report on the identification and selection of the involved rural regions.
- A comparison of the twelve rural areas and their development dynamics and territorial capital.
- A comparison of the rural-urban relationships in the twelve regions.

➤ *WP5: Comparative regional analysis and evaluation of the conceptual framework*

On the basis of the results of the in-depth regional studies a comparative analysis was carried out. The intention of the comparison was to identify: a) The factors that affect the structure and development dynamics of rural societies and economies. Reference is made to the different domains that the web concept is based upon; b) The approaches that strengthen or weaken the competitiveness of rural economies and the quality of life; and c) The relevance and added value of the conceptual framework for enlarging the understanding of the manifold interactions affecting rural development.

Emphasis in the analysis has been on the main differences in the regional 'webs of positive mutual externalities', the interrelations between the six domains, the interrelations with land management, and rural and environmental amenities, urban pressures and, more generally, urban-rural relationships, relations with (rural) policy frameworks, 'countertendencies' reflecting processes that aim at enlarging social capital, the role of novelties, the ways different areas confront the different pressures on rural economies, and finally, the interrelations between web

structures and dynamics and competitiveness on the one hand, and perceived quality of life in rural societies on the other.

In the WP5 report the analysis of the unfolding web is linked with a description of the main characteristics of each domain, the story and dynamic of the web and the interrelations between the six domains. Some of the conclusions regarding the rural web are:

- A clear strength of the rural web concept is its usefulness in capturing the complexity of rural development processes and in identifying disconnections and deficits in rural development strategies.
- Strong webs with a high level of social capital reinforced by a good use of endogenous resources and the establishment and/or active use of new institutional frameworks tend to be more competitive.
- A correlation between a web's strength, the related initiatives and networks and the level of competitiveness and quality of life in an area is only verifiable to a limited extent.
- The process of web elaboration helps empowering a participatory analysis with rural stakeholder involvement. Regional actors appreciated the discussion of rural web impacts. The web model as a tool clearly helped to structure the analysis related to 'regional competitiveness' and 'quality of life'.
- The systematic collection of information on the territorial capital base and its activation in rural development processes is significantly improved with the use of the web concept.

Achievements:

- A comparative regional analysis including evaluation of the conceptual framework.

➤ *WP6: Policy recommendations*

The main intention of WP6 was to develop recommendations for rural policy-making at different administrative levels (region, nation state, European Union). The bases for this were a) the twelve case study reports (WP4) and b) answers of all the teams on a set of additional questions aiming at further elaborating national policy frames. The draft policy recommendations were presented and discussed in six national workshops and in the European Expert Forum (see paragraph 6).

Some of the policy recommendations are summarised below:

General Findings

- a) The capacity of the regional level should be developed further in order to enhance its role in different stages of the policy-making cycle to foster direct interaction between the EU level and the regions.
- b) Pillar 1 funds should be reoriented to foster the creation of SMEs for high quality food production, regional distribution and decentralised energy-production.
- c) Possibilities should be introduced for regions to propose and negotiate derogation possibilities for national and EU regulatory systems.
- d) Spaces for self-regulation should be enlarged.

Main findings: Regional level

- a) Access to (EU) rural policy budgets is currently uneven and a block in unfolding the rural web. Co-financing capacities should be improved, especially with regard to NMSs, and bureaucracy diminished.
- b) Participatory approaches should be strengthened.
- c) New approaches to rural-urban interaction are needed to stimulate the web as part of rural-urban exchanges and flows of new goods and services.

Main findings: National level

- a) Main emphasis should be shifted from Narrow to Broad Policy perspectives.

- b) Both individual and network oriented support systems are needed. The unfolding of the web needs actors and the main actor in this context is civil society.
- c) Market governance is important in the construction and revalorisation of agriculture and rural areas but also a problem especially in agriculture.
- d) Tools for novelty product facilitation should be made available and further utilised.
- e) Extra room for manoeuvre should be created for new institutional arrangements.

EU level suggestions

- a) The 1st pillar of the CAP should be reformed to enable self-organising mechanisms for market governance to unfold, for instance, by supporting sustainable food chains.
- The 2nd pillar's general policy design has two main components: a *sectoral* function (the platform to reform agricultural policy), and a *territorial* function (rural economy and population).

Sectoral function

- b) Instead of a strict menu of measures, flexibility should be increased, for instance in the form of regional tailoring.
- c) In response to the market squeeze and vis-à-vis the web domains of market governance and novelty production stimulation, investment should be provided to support restructuring of food-chains. In doing this, attention should be paid to oligopolist market situations unfavourable to farmers.
- d) Rural development aid for farmers should be provided on the condition that farming is integrated with other local activities and services. Farms are often nodes of multiple rural actions.

Territorial function: mixed economy responding to the wider society needs; pro-active policy, not compensation oriented

- e) LEADER should be mainstreamed into Structural Funds programmes to support the institutionalisation and self-regulation of the civil society and the 3rd sector.
- f) Policy-makers should rely on the contextual knowledge existing in the rural web.
- g) A further diversification of activities would increase rural competitiveness.
- h) More attention should be paid to the service infrastructure and to innovative decentralised solutions to provide services (health, education, transport, other communication infrastructure, energy production).
- i) Non-monetary contributions should be accepted as co-financing.

Recommendations to solve some current problems in EU policy design

- j) More synergy between the RDP (2nd pillar) and Cohesion policy should be created. Growth of the 2nd pillar implies increased co-financing, and so far, more bureaucracy. We have to learn more equal, more simple, and more transparent and efficient policy practices.
- k) More synergy should be created between the RDP (2nd pillar) and the European spatial planning 'policy' (ESDP) in order to cope with the embeddedness of rural areas in the fabric of modern regional planning. Accurate evaluations are needed to show which kind of policy measures are most effective in obtaining the objectives of each function. The web is a useful tool for monitoring and evaluation in this respect. Programming and evaluation procedures should be improved in such a way that initiatives strengthening the web already emerging in the area are supported. More attention should be paid to potentials than to the weaknesses identified by applying the web approach. Applying the ETUDE model helps also to encounter counter structures and countertendencies in RD.

Achievements:

- Reports of the six National Policy Seminars.
- A report on 'Policy recommendations'.

5. Dissemination, consultation and publishable results

In the approach of the project, a key role is given to the consultation of stakeholders and experts in different stages of the research process. Stakeholder and expert consultation are considered crucial to ensure that research results and proposed support measures are sufficiently grounded in field experiences and policy debates. The dissemination and consultation activities run parallel to the research activities. It envisages a two-way interaction process between project researchers, external experts and stakeholders that, on the one hand, integrates and synthesises (provisional) research results from the research activities (work packages 2 – 6) for their discussion with stakeholders and experts while, on the other hand, mobilising the knowledge of stakeholders and external experts as input for further research activities. Through this structured form of participation and consultation, possibilities are created to get advice on the research process itself, validate and match the results with the everyday experiences of stakeholders, and to reflect on the results from a combined practical and scientific perspective.

The main consultation and dissemination activities were:

- Two ‘science and policy’ seminars (European Expert Forum)
The European Expert Forum was composed of approximately 10-12 outstanding scientific and policy experts from different countries. Two ‘Science and Policy’ seminars were organized. In the first seminar (30th of November 2007 in Frankfurt) the conceptual framework (WP 2 and WP 3), was at the centre. In the second seminar (19th of December 2007 in Rome) the overall results, the recommendations and their practical applicability (WP4, WP5 and WP6) were presented and discussed.
- Regional workshops
To test and develop the conceptual framework and to improve the development potential of the regions 2 in-depth regional studies per country were carried out (WP4). In all 12 case study areas regional workshops were organized (one or two). Policy-makers, civil servants of local authorities, representatives of interest groups, ngo’s, rural entrepreneurs (incl. farmers), et cetera at local/regional level were invited to participate in these workshops. These workshops played a crucial role in the dissemination and consultation process, specifically regarding the practical and local political relevance of the conceptual model and its underlying ideas.
- Six national workshops
In all six countries one national workshop was organised with regional and national policymakers and stakeholder at the national level to present the provisional results and recommendations of the project and to get feed-back on the practical applicability of the policy recommendations.
- The first ETUDE book: ‘Unfolding webs, the dynamics of regional rural development’ (eds. Van der Ploeg and Marsden) with the results of WP2 and WP3.
- The ETUDE-website: a project website for the dissemination of research results to a wider audience (www.etuderd.eu). On the website the main lines of the project are explained in an accessible way, while also the main publications of the project are made available for downloading on the website.
- Leaflet: in addition to the website a leaflet was produced at the beginning of the project to disseminate the aims and approach of the project to a wider audience.
- A publication ‘eStrategies Projects Europe’ (editor: British Publishers) that reaches over 39,000 readers key researchers, policy makers, government and decision makers across both the private & public sectors throughout Europe and internationally.
- Many lectures for authorities and stakeholders at different administrative levels; results of the ETUDE project were presented to and discussed authorities and stakeholders at different administrative levels in several lectures all over Europe and in Brazil.
- Lectures for scientific audiences, a.o. PhD-courses.

A full overview of the dissemination activities is included in the Final Plan for Using and Disseminating Knowledge.

All public project reports and documents are published and made available for download at the project website www.etuderd.eu.

Additional publishable results include the following articles and papers:

1. Ploeg, J.D. van der (2007), Diversification in Rural Areas, in: *Conference Proceedings: Regions for Economic Change – Fostering competitiveness through innovative technologies, products and healthy communities*, EU/Regional Policy, 7-8 March 2007.
2. Ploeg, J.D. van der and T. Marsden (eds.) (2008), *Unfolding Webs, the dynamics of regional rural development*, Assen, Royal Van Gorcum.
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12. Kanemasu, Y., R. Sonnino, T. Marsden and S. Schneider (2008), Testing the web: a comparative analysis, in: Ploeg, J.D. van der and T. Marsden (eds.), *Unfolding Webs, the dynamics of regional rural development*, Assen, Royal Van Gorcum, pp. 175-210.
13. Kanemasu, Y. (2008), The impact of policy arrangements, in: Ploeg, J.D. van der and T. Marsden (eds.), *Unfolding Webs, the dynamics of regional rural development*, Assen, Royal Van Gorcum, pp. 211-224.
14. Marsden, T. and J.D. van der Ploeg, Some final reflections, in: Ploeg, J.D. van der and T. Marsden (eds.), *Unfolding Webs, the dynamics of regional rural development*, Assen, Royal Van Gorcum, pp. 225-233.
15. Kanemasu, Y. (2008) “*Dynamics of Collective Action in Rural Development Processes: The case of farm tourism in Devon County, UK*”. Conference paper presented on 11 July at the XII World Congress of Sociology, Goyang, Korea.
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