

Rural development, resilience and sustainability in socio-ecological systems

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Summary

The concept of resilience has evolved over time. Resilience, in fact, has various different meanings, it can refer to the amount of shock, and ensuing changes, a natural system is capable of absorbing without changing its structure or functions, a system's ability to re-organize its structure following a stimulus or a system's adaptive capacity, that is its capacity to accumulate and re-process knowledge thereby innovating and reconfiguring its original structure and functions. This last definition of resilience is the base of the present paper. Notwithstanding the wealth of scientific work on the definition and application of the concept resilience, few attempts have been made to quantify and/or reach an operational definition of resilience (Carpenter et al., 2004), nor its use in explaining the dynamics of rural areas (Hejiman et al., 2007, Shouten et al., 2009), despite the fact that rural areas undergo many changes which range from profound transformation of ecological components (climatic changes, processes of desertification) to changes in socio-economic landscape (globalization, changes in land use, food crises).

The objective of the work is, on one hand, to identify key indicators capable of qualifying the components that make up resilience in rural socio-ecological systems and, on the other hand, to evaluate how rural development measures in place impact on a system's components and, therefore, with their ability to effect development processes. The work, therefore, proposes a matrix "Resilience – Development" with which to ascertain whether the current policies and measures in place promote processes of sustainability.