

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

Forest ownership fragmentation connected to inheritance rules induces land abandonment and may constitute an obstacle to the sustainable and active forest management, which would ensure the optimal provision of forest ecosystem services. In rural mountain areas, this is one of the issues that impact on the socio-economic dimension, provoking land value loss and fostering a vicious cycle that definitively deplete mountain rural communities. From many countries' experiences, one of the tools to reduce this problem is the establishment of forest owners' associative models, but also other solutions resulting from social innovation can contribute.

To increase societal capacity to manage forest landscapes as social-ecological systems, a suite of institutional mechanisms - namely policies, formal organizations, and governance networks - will likely be necessary (Folke et al., 2016). Innovation can be a process specifically developed within and towards institutions, that is the case of institutional innovation, however within an innovation system there are relationships between different types of innovation, and these evolve over time (Buttoud et al., 2011). Social innovation involves institutions: they can be promoters and endorse it, or they can be involved as actors, internal or external to organizational models that are first developed by innovation process driven by other sources.

This study aims to examine the different organizational models experienced in Italian mountain regions, to provide an updated state of the art and to assess their main challenges and the innovative solutions they're adopting to overcome the issues of forest fragmentation.

We present an analysis of national and regional legislation and some case studies of innovative organizational solutions from the Italian mountain regions. The results reveal that several laws and regulations for addressing this topic were approved so far in Italy, but the Regions legislate on the issue without any form of coordination, and this led to the emergence of a range of different associative models. While some of them, supported by laws and incentives, are mere organizational solutions, others, like community cooperatives, appear as the result of social innovation processes. These different models are described and categorized displaying their features and we'll present an inventory of the officially registered organizations operating in the Italian mountains within these models' categories. Our analysis concludes that regional regulations need to be coordinated, mutually sharing the lessons learned. Moreover, cooperative models resulting from social innovation, involving many actors from the local communities, can be recognized and supported by policy-makers and local administrations.