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Addressing the social landscape dimensions: the need for reconciling cross scale assessments

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Abstract:

The rural development policy community is calling for new transdisciplinary approaches to convey public preferences into meaningful measures for assessing landscape capacity to provide public goods. Some of the public goods which rural landscapes provide relate to landscape appreciation which reflects people's preferences for particular features in a given landscape or certain geographic unit. Assessing landscape appreciation can be dealt with at different spatial scales, e.g from the European to the local, however these assessments often rely on different data and methodological approaches (Paracchini et al 2012). At broader spatial scales, a common procedure is to use proxy indicators (mostly environmental indicators), derived from European datasets such as Eurostat or Corine, being those indicators often integrated into composite indexes driving appreciation indirectly, while at the local and regional scales landscape preference surveys are operational thus a straightforward common method used to directly gather data on landscape appreciation (mostly landscape indicators) (Pinto Correia and Carvalho Ribeiro 2012). The problem is not only to gauge whether or not those assessments deliver comparable results but as well to critically analyse how these top down and bottom up approaches can be reconciled in order to comprehensively tackle landscape appreciation in such a way this can inform policy making at different scales of governance. Another issue is that while there is an array of environmental indicators derived at multiple scales of analysis, on the contrary landscape indicators – including the social dimension - are scarce. Differences between environmental indicators and landscape indicators therefore lie in the fact that the latter cannot necessarily be generalized and applied to any context. In fact, the characteristics of different landscapes and

the values related to appreciation by people are likely to be different. The work developed throughout this paper addresses this issue as it builds on both conceptual and empirical basis of landscape research in order to comprehensively derive a cross scale set of social landscape indicators for conveying the appreciation people derives from rural agrarian landscapes across the diverse European settings. The work comprises a literature review and subsequent meta-analysis of studies on landscape related subjects that were further assessed and validated. The ways in which to integrate land cover datasets on the data analysis was also explored. Although in different ways, land cover was considered as one promising avenue for devising indicators that bridge agri-environmental and social spheres. An attempt at framing and mapping the results was made by addressing scale issues in order to meaningfully incorporate these results at different levels of governance.

References:

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Pinto Correia T, Carvalho Ribeiro SM. The Index of Function Suitability (IFS): A new tool for assessing the capacity of landscapes to provide amenity functions. Land Use Policy (2012) 29:23–34.

Date and time:

Wednesday, 11th September 2013 - 15:21 to 15:33



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