

# *les dossiers* d'**AGROPOLIS** INTERNATIONAL

*Expertise of the scientific community*



## Societies and sustainable development

*Contribution of the social sciences*

Number 7





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*An apple orchard in the Haut-Atlas region (Morocco)*

# Territorial dynamics *and changes in* production systems

**R**ural societies are now undergoing rapid change in their environment, thus affecting their communities, resource allocation, economic activities and land use patterns. Trade globalization is also impacting these societies by fostering competition between all regions and forms of agriculture. With the withdrawal of government support, local operators are striving to coordinate their efforts for rural land management. Tensions between globalization and emerging local governance is a new focus for research on territorial dynamics and changes in production systems. Globalization has boosted interactions between regions and agriculture in developed and developing countries, without altering the specificities. On a regional scale, rural functions are being diversified in different ways depending on the local features of rural areas, while giving rise to specific territorial functionalities and new sources of wealth (tourism, etc.), but the agricultural footprint is still quite marked. Production systems are also changing in a specific way.

In the South, export commodity channels and increased urban demand for food products has revitalized local production systems. Family farmers are nevertheless still hampered by a lack of effective extension services and farmers' organization weaknesses. In emerging countries, capitalist mechanized agriculture prevails and benefits from relatively low labour costs. Population growth and competition between family farmers and commercial farmers have increased land tensions. This often forces small-scale farmers to give up their land because of their lack of economic viability and could push others to intensify their farming systems. In this setting, which is worsened by the decline in natural resources required for agriculture, the sustainability of production systems, territories and thus rural societies is becoming a crucial issue.

In the North, the situations differ depending on the extent of public support for agriculture and land availability—there are vast areas in Argentina, USA and Australia where extensive agriculture is possible and agrofuels can be produced. Western Europe has begun changing its agricultural systems with the aim of preserving a high level of production, enhancing food quality, broadening the range of products, and especially reducing the negative externalities of agriculture. This new policy is also focused on resource and land use

management, employment and rural services in order to give rise to local development dynamics that will force farmers to collaborate with other rural stakeholders. In less productive areas, farmers diversify their activities (processing and direct farm sales) or strive to increase the size of their farms so as to remain competitive in a setting marked by a reduction in European subsidies.

Teams conducting research on these topics focus on the development of family agriculture which they feel represents a more sustainable model than commercial agriculture because of its innovation and adaptation capacities that, in turn, should be supported. Innovation should enhance the sustainable development of agriculture, farms, processing units and rural areas, while improving the well being of the operators involved. Both technical and organizational changes in farming practices are thus required. The organization and coordination of rural communities with upstream and downstream production operators and with local authorities seems important. This coordination should boost recognition of product quality, improve commodity channel performance, facilitate fair profit sharing and enable dispute arbitration by groups.

New concerns will arise in the next 20 years with changes in rural, agricultural and agrifood economies influenced by climate change and increased fuel prices.

Over the last few decades, researchers focusing on agricultural, rural and territorial dynamics have been implementing multidisciplinary and comparative approaches to gain insight into, measure and explain the changes under way. They have diagnosed the situation and conducted analyses to provide guidelines for decision makers. Research is now also involved in implementing and supervising innovation processes. For this partnership research, nonresearcher stakeholders must be recognised as participants in the innovation research and design process. Methods and tools such as surveys, diagnoses, experiments, modelling and action research are thus used as part of a partnership approach to produce general knowledge, facilitate problem solving and enhance mutual learning amongst participants.

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