

## ***From the “best fit” to the “big fuss”: the lost opportunities of the Italian advisory services***

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**Abstract:** The organization on a regional basis of the public Italian advisory services responds to the extreme differentiation of the local farming systems, institutional arrangements, market opportunities, and many other contextual factors. In Italy, each Region has its own law and its own policy on agriculture advisory services, developing 21 different systems that rarely interact with each other.

The possibility to design an agricultural advisory system on local basis could be an important prerequisite in devising a system that fit the specific needs and situations, according to the theoretical framework that support a shift from a “best practice” or “one-size-fits-all” to a “best fit” approach in the reform of public advisory services (Birner, 2006).

In reality, however, the decentralization of Italian advisory system produces a great variety of regional public systems with different quantity and quality of service delivery, poor coordination, duplication of efforts by key players, limited funding, penalizing the farming systems in some Regions. The recent measures to cut public extension system have further compromised the quality of services offered while new challenging scenarios demand an even more complex knowledge needs.

The main aim of this paper is to analyze the effects of current disinvestment in the Italian public extension services, while the knowledge needs of small and medium-sized farms (by international standards, the farms managed in Italy are very small and thus rarely competitive on the global markets), the emphasis on public goods provided by agriculture and the dominant narrative of rural development require more support from advisory services.

The study is carried out within the EU FP7 Project Prospects for Farmers Support: Advisory Services in European AKIS (PRO AKIS). The overall purpose of PRO AKIS is to contribute to the performance of advisory services within the European AKIS, to make available significant and reliable knowledge for farmers and other rural actors.

**Keywords:** agricultural advisory service, Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System

### **Introduction**

In literature and in political discourse there is a growing consensus on the idea that the possibility to design an agricultural advisory system on local basis could be an important prerequisite in devising a system that fit the specific needs and situations, according to the theoretical framework that support a shift from a “best practice” or “one-size-fits-all” to a “best fit” approach in the reform of public advisory services (Birner 2006).

In practice, the different possibilities to implement decentralization and the effectiveness of decentralization in integrating diversity may be a controversial topics.

The main objective of this paper is to highlight some critical issues in the implementation of this framework analyzing the Italian case study.

Italy is a good example of agricultural advisory services decentralization realized in full. By following the more general decentralization process, agriculture is subject to the jurisdiction of Regions and Autonomous Provinces (Trento and Bolzano). Each Region has its own Department of agriculture and its own peculiar organization also with respect to research and advisory service. As a result, we can reasonably claim that in Italy there are 21 different AKISs.

The advisory services decentralization is both the result of a historical process and an explicit search for maintaining the relevancy of services to different end-users. The organization on a regional basis of the Italian AKIS is the necessary consequence of institutional decentralization envisaged by the Italian Constitution in 1948, but only in 1977 it was launched (D.P.R. no. 616/77 and 617/77). It responds to the extreme differentiation of the local farming systems, institutional arrangements, market opportunities, and many other contextual factors. This variety goes beyond the classic dualism North/ South, “beef”/“bone”<sup>17</sup>, modern/traditional farming.

The Italian farms differ also in their objectives not always consistent with the aims of a business enterprise. Italian agriculture includes a myriad of “non-enterprise” farms (36% produce only for self-consumption) next to a much smaller number of entrepreneurial farms (Arzeni 2013). According to the 2010 census, the total agricultural area (TAA) is 17.1 million hectares and around 12.9 million is utilized (UAA). Between the last two censuses (2000 and 2010), the number of farms has fallen by about a third, resulting 1.620.844 agricultural holdings in 2010.

The product mix adopted by farmers is very complex, including traditional agricultural commodities and non agricultural commodities, such as the provision of care farming, agritourism, education, direct selling, landscape or biodiversity conservation<sup>18</sup>. In addition, farm household resources are progressively devoted to off farm activities (pluriactivity, green energy, etc.). There is also an increasing attention to locally and high quality food production<sup>19</sup>. These trends call for new and more articulated knowledge needs.

Other specific needs are correlated with small size of Italian farms. The farms’ medium size is 7,9 hectares of UAA with geographical differences (14.4 ha of UAA per farm in the North West and 5.1 in the South). The number of farms with more than 30 hectares represents 5.3% of total and cultivates 53.8% of the total UAA. Farms in the Northern districts show the best production performance and profitability, the net income ranges from 41,928 euro in the North West to 15,053 euro in the South (2010 FADN).

This study is carried out within the EU FP7 Project Prospects for Farmers Support: Advisory Services in European AKIS (PRO AKIS). To investigate the Italian advisory service within AKIS, we integrate information from multiple data sources, collecting direct (primary) data as far as possible. We contacted all the most significant players to collect the updated data from the original source. With the value help of The James Hutton Institute (UK), we implemented an online survey to collect different information about the services providers. At October 2013, 205 entities (individuals or organizations) filled out the questionnaire. From July to September 2013 we interviewed 17 stakeholders representatives of research centers (Universities and public re-

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<sup>17</sup> In 1958 Rossi-Doria described the dualism of agriculture in Southern Italy as “la polpa e l’osso” (the “beef” and “bone”). “Beef” represents the modern agricultures insisting on fertile and productive lands, while “bone” includes marginal areas ( Rossi-Doria 1958).

<sup>18</sup> As indicated in a survey on the FADN data, the 57% of total farms in 2007 is involved in at least one of multifunctional activities. The most representative are on-farm processing (39% on total), direct sale (23%) and origin and traditional certification (13%) (Aguglia 2011). In 2010 there were around 20,000 agritourism farms and 2.225 teaching farms.

<sup>19</sup> In 2012, 248 Italian agro-food specialities (excluding the wine sector) obtained the specific Pdo, Pgi and Tsg certifications– the highest number of certifications at the Eu level. Moreover, since 1998, Italy is the European country with the largest area farmed organically (8,6% of total UUA) as well as with the highest number of organic farms (2,59% of holdings).

search institutions), of Farmers Unions (Coldiretti and CIA), private advisors, public advisory services, innovation networks (Slow food, Legambiente Campania). In addition we submitted a brief survey to all Regions in order to have more detailed and update information on the key issues of the Regional public advisory service. At October 2013 14 replied out of 21 Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

### **The Italian agricultural advisory services**

Each Italian Region (including the autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano) has a singular extension services framework, including a huge variety of actors. In several cases the division between public and private actors is really pronounced. The quality and quantity of services provided highly differ from one Region to another, depending to historical political choices and different structural configurations.

The current structure of the Italian advisory system is still strongly influenced by the Council Regulation (EEC) N° 270/79, within the so-called Mediterranean package, that sustained the *Development of agricultural advisory services in Italy* through 66 Million ECUs over 12 years. The funds allocated by this and subsequent ECC Regulations (1760/87 and 2052/88), along with the state funds, were intended to train and employ 3500 extension agents (60% in the South and in the Islands). To access these funding, the Regions had to bring their own Regional law on advisory services, defining their organizations, actors and subjects. However a common framework was defined by the implementation plan of the national committee CIDA (Interregional Committee for Agricultural Advisory). Despite its very slow and problematic implementation, the Regulation (EEC) N° 270/79 has been a cornerstone of the Italian advisory services, giving an impulse never repeated in the future. Subsequently the agriculture advisory services have especially been supported by the Multiregional Operating Programmes (ECC Reg. 2052/88 and followed 1989-1993, 1994-1999).

From 2000 to 2006 the Italian public system experienced a drastic reduction of investment in extension services due to the cut of dedicated European funds. In the first five years of the millennium, Regions invested € 350 million globally in extension system, about half of the amount invested in the previous five years (Vagnozzi, 2008). Despite the difficulties, in 2004-2007 the Regions promoted an important project: the Interregional Programme for agricultural and rural development advisory services. The Project, coordinated by INEA, aimed to promote networking and shared debates about advisory service (especially about contents and methods), to test new tools and approaches, and to disseminate best practices.

The Rural Development Regulation (EC) No1698-2005, supporting the Farm Advisory System, has given new impetus to Italian advisory system. The Regions are the authorities responsible for setting up the FAS, consequently there are 21 Regional FAS with different organizational frameworks. The first difference concerns the source of funding: 17 Regional FAS are funded through the use of EAFRD measures (including measure 114, measure 115 and measure 111), while other Regional FAS are using different resources (Regional/provincial or national funds). *Trento, Valle d'Aosta, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Bolzano*<sup>20</sup> don't use the RDPs funds for different reasons<sup>21</sup>. Anyway the *measure 114* supporting the use of advisory services at farmers' level is the most important tool used to finance the FAS and actually the Regions are still involved in its implementation.

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<sup>20</sup> In Bolzano the measure 111 finance only the 0,12% of FAS.

<sup>21</sup> For instance they have Regional advisory services that already covered the cross-compliance, they focus the RDPs funds on few measures to avoid excessive bureaucracy or even they want to have the possibility to give advice for free.

As it emerges from this brief historical excursus, the Italian service system suffers from a heavy dependence on European funds, resulting in a lack of continuity without a coherent medium and long-term strategy.

### **Overview of all agricultural advisory service suppliers**

In Italy agricultural advisory services are provided by diverse suppliers, presenting different objectives and organizational patterns. Due to the effects of the already mentioned Reg.270/79, the role of public actors in the South and Island is more important than in the rest of Italy. According to the INEA, in the 2000s the Northern and Central Regions involved around 50% of private bodies and public institutions, while the Southern Regions involve more public institutions (64%). In the last years, pluralism and privatization have continued to grow, as well as the participation of farmers in founding and planning the public advisory services. In addition the private players are changing. Thanks to the adoption of public procedures aimed at encouraging competition, the relevance of classical farm trade unions decreased and the importance of other farm based organization and private advisers increased.

However the role of **Public sector** remains crucial in the agricultural extension services. Each Region establishes through a Regional law the organization of Regional agricultural extension, the actors involved, the competence fields, the fund allocation. Usually the Regional authorities provide strategic direction, coordination and planning, while the implementation is delegated to the Provinces, to other local government structures (such as Comunità montane, Consorzi di bonifica, etc.), to farmer based organizations, to private or NGO advisors. Some Regions have dedicated Regional agencies or foundation providing directly specific services or dealing with external providers, organizing calls for tender, managing the funds, etc. The Regional agencies have really specialized staff and may combine research and advisory services (as in Trento province). The number of Regional employees working for extension services ranges from 3 employed in Toscana to the 220 in Calabria, dealing mainly with administrative tasks. In some cases the Regional advisors have really the possibility to work on farms. For instance in the Trento province about 70 experts offer daily technical advisory services reaching more than 8,000 farms (out of 16,428 total). The Regions usually provide also technical support services, such as agro-meteorological service, soil analysis, etc. They realize diverse information activities to disseminate technical and scientific innovations related to very different fields such as market opportunity, production processes, environmental resources (biodiversity, soil protection, cross-compliance). Finally some Regions organize also training activities for the private advisors carrying out the services that they fund (such as in Piemonte).

As evidenced by interviews, many public advisers (including those formed thanks to the Reg. 270/79) are increasingly absorbed by bureaucratic tasks. They are also demotivated by the lack of financial resources and career incentives, penalizing the advisers working on the ground in direct contact with the farmers.

In recent years the economic crisis has led further cuts in public spending with a downsizing of human resources and facilities dedicated to services, creating further disparities between the Regions.

The **upstream industry** such as seed, fertilizer and pesticide industry have an important role in the diffusion of innovation to farmers and it is also increasingly involved in R&D activities with high potential market returns. The upstream industry has a widespread network of retail and wholesale stores and technicians working on the ground in direct contact with farmers.

It is extremely difficult to make an accurate estimate of the advisers working in the upstream industries, an INEA study published in 2008 estimated 5000 advisers working in agricultural up-

stream industry in the sectors of seeds, fine chemicals, veterinary medicines, agricultural machinery, irrigation, greenhouses and animal feed.

The **downstream industries** may provide agriculture advisory service to the farmers under contract farming, with the aim of allowing farmers to meet the quality standards and delivery schedule set by the purchaser. In 2007 the number of farms under contract farming with industrial companies is 39.249 and the farms under contract farming with commercial companies 94.980, totaling 134.229 farms (ISTAT 2007). The contracts may allow a producer to benefit from technical advice, managerial expertise and access to technological advances provided by the contractor. According to an INEA estimate, in 2008, 734 are the advisors working in the downstream industries of poultry, pig, meat, fruits and vegetables destined for canning, sugar beet and wheat for beer (INEA 2008).

The relevance of contract farm depends on the productive sector. It's really important for the dairy cattle, poultry, pig, durum wheat for pasta, fruits and vegetables destined for canning, sugar beet, malting barley.

In Italy, the agronomists or veterinarians working as **private professional advisors** must be registered with a professional order. In 2010, there are 20.993 people enrolled in the Agronomy professional order, 14.712 people in the Agro-technical professional order, 17.671 people in the Agrarian Expert order and 27.891 people in Veterinary professional order (ISFOL 2012). However in practice not all the enrolled in the professional orders work as advisors.

In recent years, the private agriculture advisory experienced a strong expansion, especially concerning the application procedures to obtain European funds. For instance the presence of private advisers prevails in the projects eligible for RDPs innovation funding (measure 124), that in Italy has been very successful. The FAS application has pushed hard to increase the professional associations. In fact all Regions, except the Emilia Romagna, exclude the accreditation to individual for the measure 114 of RDPs. In 2007 the three professional orders created Fondagri (Foundation for agricultural advisory services), a network of freelance advisors working in all Italian Regions, with the main objective of participating to the FAS measures of RDPs. By 2012 Fondagri provided advisory services to livestock farmers mobilizing 159,687 Euros of the 114 measure of RDPs (Fondagri 2013).

The three main **farmers unions** are Coldiretti, CIA (Italian farmers confederation) and Confagricoltura. These three organizations are decentralized with local offices widely geographically disseminated. They include different structures by sector, function, target group (such as gender issues), etc.

The Unions provide several services to their farmers, in some case thanks to specific agreements with Regional administrations and paying agencies. Through CAFs (tax assistance centers) they carry out tax assistance for employees, pensioners and project contractors. Through the CAAs (Agricultural service centers) they take care of activity related to the management of EU subsidies, such as bookkeeping, legal services and administration. Furthermore, they also offer information and technical advisory services through specialized staff, adopting both individual and group methods. Historically they have played a major role in the service provision.

In addition to these, there are other smaller farmers organizations, which play an important role in representing the various sectors.

In Italy there is an important **farmers' cooperative** tradition, especially in the North and Center of the country. The most recent data of Italian agricultural cooperation observatory (Nomisma

2013) indicate in 2011 around 5.901 agricultural cooperatives<sup>22</sup>, including almost 993.400 farmer members<sup>23</sup>, with approximately 94,000 employees and revenues exceeding 35 billion euros. The study provides data on “services cooperatives”, a category that includes 1.827 units, with 246.497 members (25% of total) generating about 17% (5.9 billion) of the cooperative revenue.

Service cooperatives provide various services to their members, mainly they supply farm inputs (e.g., seeds, feedstuffs, agrochemicals, etc.) and the storage and selling of farm products—primarily cereals. To a lesser extent, the services cooperatives work in the sector of scientific/technical research (analysis, experimentation, etc.) or in providing commercial or technical advisory services (insurance services, certifications, etc.).

Historically, a special kind of farmers cooperatives, the *Consorti agrari*, have played a very important role as advisory services. In the late nineteenth century, they were created to operate mainly as buying groups (especially of chemical fertilizers and agricultural machinery), but their activity begins soon to be extremely relevant to improve farms knowledge and innovation. In 1991, after the financial collapse of Federconsorzi (the National Federation of Consorti agrari), many consortia were placed under compulsory administration and winding-up proceedings. Over time different consortia were able to reorganize its business, actually they are federated in ASSOCAP, including 38 Consorti agrari with ordinary administration, 7 Consorti agrari into compulsory liquidation and one managed by government commissioner. The agricultural advisory is provided through a capillary network of agencies, about 1200, spread in the whole Italy (ASSOCAP 2013).

In recent years the **Producer Organisations (OPs)** have experienced a constant growth. The MIPAAF Registry, in August 2013, includes 195 non-fruit and vegetable producers and 297 fruit and vegetable Ops (regulated under (EC) 1234/2007 for Common Market Organisation), often they are farmers cooperatives. The majority of OPs adopts actions to improve the production quality and safety (such as disciplinary, traceability systems, certifications) and offers expert advice for achieving this goal. The POs role in innovation and knowledge transfer processes could be crucial, however it's highly variable depending on the sector and geographic area.

In the last years, in the Italian AKISs are emerging numerous new **innovation networks**. Next to the traditional players these experiences include also several informal actors delivering advisory services. Usually these networks aim to preserve and enhance local resources and quality and sustainable food production, involving a broad range of stakeholders including medium and small farmers, consumers, citizens, local governments, retailers, environmental associations, etc. They work together to promote socio-technical innovations operating along the whole supply chain, in rural and also urban areas. These experiences are spread throughout the territory albeit with a different intensity, among the most significant experiences there are: the Consortia for the protection of typical food specialties, some of the local group promoted by the EU Leader programs, the Community supported agriculture initiatives, the networks to preserve local seeds and agricultural production, the Slow Food Presidia, the care farming associations, etc. (Brunori 2013).

## Results

As evidenced by interviews, one of the strengths of the decentralization of agricultural advisory services in the Italy is the presence of capillary structures and staff (often also well trained and motivated). This extreme regional articulation produces a great variety of local systems with different quantity and quality of service, penalizing some Regions. As is clear from interviews, usually the quality of public advisory services is not really related to the expense, but to the smooth

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<sup>22</sup> The study adopts other sources compared to ISTAT, according to which in Italy in 2010 there are only 3.007 agricultural cooperatives.

<sup>23</sup> Considering “farmer members” means that a farmer can join more than a cooperative.

functioning of the public administration that varies greatly from one Region to another and even within the same Region, presenting too often the traditional weakness such as bureaucratic inertia, low levels of effectiveness and efficiency, not much responsiveness to citizens' demands, etc.

Decentralization, however, does not even seem to be a condition that ensures effectiveness in responding to the needs of different categories of end-users. Some recent studies unlighted different deficits and gaps of the Italian advisory services whether considered individually, or as part of a more general AKIS.

The paradigm of multifunctional agriculture in Italy finds full expression both as farm diversity and as farm diversification, but different researches show that the public extension services do not adequately respond to the farmers need for diversification (Aguglia 2011) and neither covered the needs of different kind of farms, especially the smaller one. "Agricultural extension services are actually supporting the agro-industrial paradigm, more than the alternative territorial integrated (and multifunctional) paradigm...(.) a large part of farms remains left out, due to the types of services supplied, mainly production oriented and less careful to environmental and multifunctional aspects of agricultural activity" (De Rosa 2012).

There are also several examples of excellence of the public AKIS providing advisory service very effective even for the emerging needs (such as agritourism, care farming, etc.). However, as evidenced by interviews, in general an important AKIS bottleneck is to be not sufficiently demand oriented, especially respect to the agricultural research considered too often self-referent and not adequately linked to the real farmers needs. Moreover the research results are not communicated properly and on a large scale to the parties concerned. As demonstrated by several studies, the farmers express demands of innovation already available, but clearly not yet well known (MIPAAF 2013).

In the last period, Italy experienced numerous successful cases of bottom up innovation led by local networks mainly related to the quality production, emerging also new figures covering advisory functions (Slow food, Consorzia, CSA etc.). These innovations networks however remain limited; they fail to cover all the farmers' needs and especially to reach those in the most need, as the vulnerable and marginal farmers. Thus, an important challenge of the Italian AKIS is how to include and support new bottom-up innovation processes and disseminate the benefits of positive experiences to all actors, comprised the small and marginal farmers. By the way, this issue is in line with the ongoing debate about the regeneration of AKIS (Dockès et al. 2011, EU SCAR 2012, Cristovao et al. 2012).

As already noted, the Italian system is highly dependent on EU funding, resulting in a discontinuity of funding without a coherent medium and long-term strategy. Moreover the Regional articulation, especially regarding public services, leads also to a duplication of efforts and limited funding, improving the transaction cost and a weakness of the Regional administrations also in EU negotiations. A clear example it is the FAS implementation, which in some Italian Regions has occurred extremely delayed (and in different cases is not yet complete), due to the difficulties related to the measures 114 of RDPs. Each Regional FAS is individually programmed with a lack of a national framework. For instance, in a first time European commission did not agree with the approach of many Regions that extended both the aims and the contents of measure 114 including advisory on environmental impact and business management. As a consequence the Regions renegotiated their RDPs giving more importance to cross compliance issues. In addition, in many Regions the private professional orders (who felt penalized respect to the farmers based associations) take legal action against the regulation for accreditation. For the Regional administrations it took additional administrative requirements and human resources and the spent funds result much lower than planned.

The problems associated with his extreme regional and provincial articulation in the offer of services are amplified by the lack of coordination and by the institutional complexity in the AKIS frameworks, due to the coexistence of several institutional level responsible for the different AKIS components. State and Regions have concurrent jurisdiction over the R&D policies. Secondary and high educations are under state jurisdiction, while vocational education and extension are under Regional administration. Interestingly, in theoretical and political discourses, and also in many dedicated Regional laws, agricultural extension, research and education have been considered since years as integrant part of a system so called "services for agricultural and rural development" or more recently "agricultural knowledge system". This idea, never archived in practice, proposes a vision of advisory service, not only as an integral part of AKIS, but also as a tool exceeding the problems of singular farm to embrace the broader aims of the rural communities development. This vision has been greatly supported by the National Institute of Agricultural Economy (INEA) that plays an important role in Italian AKIS. Since 1988, the INEA has a study group specialized in agricultural knowledge system, combining research activities with scientific support to public administrations, also in the implementation of EU policies and in the maintaining of the Regional Referents Network of agricultural research. This interregional organization was established by several Regions in 1998 to improve the coordination of agricultural research system. The Network created also a searchable database, with the INEA scientific support, to disseminate and integrated the Regional researches. In 2002 was established also the Regional Referents Network of extension services to deal with common challenges, promote discussion and experiences exchanging. The proposal to merge the two networks is currently under discussion to better coordinate the whole AKIS.

To provide an appropriate, positive and effective response to the farmer's needs, the Italian AKIS clearly required a process of rationalization to move toward a more efficient and effective use of the available resources. However, rather than a rationalization it is currently undergoing a process of drastic reduction of public spending for advisory services, research and education, with indiscriminate cutting of human and technical resources. An exemplary case is the ARSIA (Region agency for agricultural development and innovation) suppression in Tuscany, which took place in 2011 without creating any alternative option. The Tuscan Regional Administration absorbed the ARSIA employees, assigning them to other tasks, predominantly bureaucratic activities, losing experiences, relationships and investments accumulated over the years. In despite of its deficiencies, the Agency in the past played an important role in linking policy, research and extension. Among other things, ARSIA also worked as innovation broker for the construction of local innovation networks, in some respects, anticipating the experience of the EIP.

## **Discussion**

The present trends highlight greater pluralism and also privatization of Italian extension services, emerging new players and different organization/configuration of the traditional actors. If these trends positively impact the services supply, however, the public advisory services remains crucial important to meet the knowledge needs of Italian agriculture. In fact, the structural characteristics of Italian agricultural sector (presenting a large presence of small and medium-sized farms, rarely competitive on the global markets, providing significant public-good emphasized by the political dominant narrative of rural development) is not always able to express a willingness to pay for advisory services.

The recent measures to cut public extension system have further compromised the quality of services offered, not addressing the main problems of Italian AKIS, while the most critical aspect is the absence of effective and inclusive governance.



Actually it exists a multiplicity of public and private actors accountable to different system components, each with different professional cultures and theoretical frameworks, with different systems of accountability, different financial regimes, working to their own agendas. Moreover there are also different combinations of these actors involved in the delivery process at local levels, giving rise to problems of both vertical and horizontal integration. It is even very complicate to rough out the resulting organizational complexity.

The requirement of more system integration is widely stressed, but it doesn't give concrete expression to solve the fragmentation of policies and practices. Co-ordination is clearly hard to achieve, but more formal methods to ensure better governance need to be employed. In the context of joined-up working, the agricultural knowledge system must be thought of as the totality of players, including public, private, NGOs and citizens that operate in research, education and extension. Effective AKIS requires effectiveness within each component of the system and effective links between them, including the development of a more horizontal model which recognizes the importance of local specificities and the emerging of bottom up innovation processes. It might be useful for this purpose to implement an open organization structures that facilitate dialogue, adopting a shared planning with strong task definition and clear accountability for results. It should be supported by effective monitoring and evaluation systems, improving long term continuous learning from experience. At present, it's not available a common monitoring and evaluation system of AKIS policies or of its individual components, but different experiences and situations exist. Generally there are more structured evaluations mechanisms for the education and research than for advisory services (Materia 2012).

The European Innovation Partnership (EIP) for Agriculture Productivity and Sustainability could be useful to improve the linkages in the Italian AKIS, operating also to better sustain the already existing innovation bottom up networks. However, at the moment it is not yet clear the EIP implementation and actually this is a big concern of the Italian Regions (likes the possibility to operate at inter-Regional level, how identifying the actors, the roles, the mechanisms etc.). Moreover the effect of EIP could be limited in terms of time, space, contents and actors involved, enhancing the power of the already strong actors.

Anyway the effectiveness of this and other specific instruments is limited without a comprehensive AKIS reform able to strength the whole governance structures and long term strategic planning processes, breaking also the excessive dependence on the funding provided by the European Union. For instance different Regions use the FAS measures to replace their own funds.

Because of this dependence, the Regions place a lot of expectations on the new PAC to revive the whole Italian AKIS. For instance the expansion of FAS, proposed by the EU for the future CAP is evaluated very positively, as well as the previsions regarding the measures beneficiaries and the possibility of training opportunity for advisers.

Finally, the Italian AKISs suffer for a lack of "systematic knowledge about the agricultural knowledge system", including the absence of common databases about the services delivered and the ongoing research, a systematic collection of information about "who does what", etc. This knowledge is necessary and crucial to improve the system and to support the policy makers.

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