

Abstracts of Presentations

2. Small-Scale Organic Farming and the 'return to rural': global perspectives and case studies on the revitalization of marginal rural territories

Asst. Prof. ZOLLET Simona (Hiroshima University)

Global environmental issues such as climate change, as well as changes in societal expectations to-wards agriculture (such as growing sensitivity towards environmental issues, workers and animal welfare, and food quality), have put sustainability transitions in agri-food systems at the centre of attention. These concerns are also accompanied by the growing recognition of the potential of small-scale, biodiversity-based and territorially integrated farming and food systems to face the current environmental challenges and transition towards more sustainable societies, while at the same time ensuring the resilience of rural communities. A further trend, mainly in developed countries, is that of 'return to the land' or 'return to the rural', the movement of formerly urban-based people to rural are-as in search of agrarian and rural lifestyles. This trend has gained visibility over the past ten years, due to the global economic crisis first, and now to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has both highlighted the desirability of rural life and heightened concerns over local and global agri-food system sustainability. A growing number of newly established organic farmers in countries such as Japan, Italy, Canada, and the US, for example, come from non-farming families or are urban to rural in-migrants. Even though they may play important roles for the sustainability and resilience of agriculture and rural communities, however, this trend has been the focus of limited scholarly research.

Using case studies from Japan and Italy, this contribution first introduces the characteristics and practices of newcomer small scale organic farmers at the individual and farm levels, and then examines them from a territorial perspective, looking at the interplay with other territorial actors, consumers, and the local agroecosystem and culture. The case studies show how newcomer organic farmers represent important agents of change, concerning both transformations of culture and practices within the dominant farming system and the resilience and revitalization of rural communities. Their potential to drive change, however, hinges upon several context-dependent aspects: the characteristics of the prevailing farming mode in the area (such as its historical evolution and its degree of productivist orientation); the existence of supportive policies; and, perhaps most importantly, the capacity of creating networks of social organization that can contribute to the scaling out of new farming, food and socio-economic practices at a territorial level. These aspects are examined through a comparative lens of analysis between the two case

study countries, highlighting the potential and pitfalls for a sustainability-oriented and territorially embedded transition of agri-food systems, rural economies and societies. The discussion and conclusions focus on outlining leverage points for change and directions for future research.