

The Rural Web

Dynamics, diversity and synergies in rural regions

Prof.dr.ir. J.S.C. Wiskerke
*Chair and Professor of Rural Sociology,
Wageningen University, The Netherlands*

The Rural Web

1. Introduction
2. *Unsustainable rural regions: underlying processes*
3. *Development paradigms*
4. *From agricultural broadening to regional development*
5. *Sustainable regional development: underlying processes*
6. *The rural web*

Introduction



- North-Limburg Health Care Group:
 - Merger of 28 care and nursing homes
 - 2200 residents, 44.000 home care clients
 - Annual cost food procurement > €4 million
 - Subject to EU tender legislation

- Effects of upscaling:
 - Drop in income and turnover of local food suppliers
 - Loss of added value and jobs in the region
 - Negative impact on psychosocial and physical wellbeing of residents and home care clients

The Rural Web

1. *Introduction*
2. **Unsustainable rural regions: underlying processes**
3. *Development paradigms*
4. *From agricultural broadening to regional development*
5. *Sustainable regional development: underlying processes*
6. *The rural web*

Unsustainable rural regions: underlying processes

- The example of the North Limburg Care Group is exemplary for the dominant development trend of the past decades
- Characteristics of the dominant development trend:
 - Disconnecting suppliers/producers and customers/consumers
 - Disembedding goods and services
 - Disentwining economic and non-economic activities
- Effect:
 - Exchangeability of goods and services
 - Interchangeability of regions
 - Marginalisation of some regions, enrichment of others

Unsustainable rural regions: underlying processes

- Driven by the principle of cost-effective production and the economies of scale it can generate
 - Principle applied in industry (car, steel, textile), and
 - in public sector (health care, education)
- Post-war development of agriculture and countryside was also based on this principle (agricultural modernization project / original CAP)
- Negative social, economic and ecological side-effects of agricultural modernization well known and widely recognized
- Competing paradigms addressing the unsustainability of agriculture and rurality

The Rural Web

1. *Introduction*
2. *Unsustainable rural regions: underlying processes*
3. **Development paradigms**
4. *From agricultural to regional development*
5. *Sustainable regional development: underlying processes*
6. *The rural web*

Development paradigms

Agro-industrial paradigm

Development paradigms

Post-productionist paradigm

Development paradigms

Integrated rural development paradigm

The Rural Web

1. *Introduction*
2. *Unsustainable rural regions: underlying processes*
3. *Development paradigms*
4. **From agricultural broadening to regional development**
5. *Sustainable regional development: underlying processes*
6. *The rural web*

From agricultural broadening to regional

development

- From 1980s: diversified or multifunctional agriculture
- From 1990s: collaborative relationships / rural partnerships
 - E.g. agrarian nature & landscape management; green care/social farming; collective marketing of regional products; rural tourism
- From beginning of this century: regional approach
 - Agricultural & farm-based rural development practices still important for regional quality and identity
 - Other activities, products and services more important from an economic perspective ...
 - ... however, to what extent does the economic viability of non-agricultural/rural activities, products and services depend on the agricultural/rural identity of the region?

From agricultural broadening to regional development

- Five examples of rural and regional development:
 - Environmental cooperative NFW (Netherlands)
 - Cornwall Food Programme (UK)
 - Wine routes Tuscany (Italy)
 - Fuchsia Brands – regional branding (Ireland)
 - Proeftuin Amsterdam – urban food and RD policy (Netherlands)

Northern Frisian Woodlands (NL)

- Agricultural development within small-scale landscape
- Create synergies between agriculture, environment, nature and landscape
- Initiative of environmental cooperatives
- Focus on self-organization / self-governance
- Improve utilization of endogenous resources; increase value added

Cornwall Food Programme (UK)

- Initiative of NHS-Cornwall management (improve catering logistics and nutritional quality of food) & patients (reduce food miles)
- Localizing food procurement for NHS hospitals in Cornwall
- Strengthening the role of public sector institutes in sustainable regional development
- Create a more robust regional economy, improve health of patients and employees, reduce food miles and CO₂ emission

Wineroutes in Tuscany (Italy)

- Switch from unbranded table wine to high quality wines of origin, and later establishing PDOs and PGIs
- Intertwine on-farm sales of wine with other activities: gastronomy based on locality and tradition, luxury farmhouse accommodation, information about viticulture, hiking routes, cultural history
- Activities are offered along a 'wine route': a tour of vineyards and wine cellars and of varied landscapes and cultural and historical attractions.
- Significant resource in the marketing of Tuscany as a region where the good life can be found.

Fuchsia Brands (Ireland)

- Initiative of West Cork LEADER Co-op Society
- Revive regional economy by creating synergies between agriculture, food SMEs, tourism, crafts, culture and arts
- Utilize and valorize endogenous resources (territorial capital) through regional brand (Fuchsia)
- Generate additional value added (€ 107 million) and employment (> 1100 jobs)

Agenda Proeftuin Amsterdam (NL)

- Covenant of municipalities of Amsterdam and Zaanstad, Provincial Council of North-Holland and Ministry of Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality
- Integrated & territorial food approach
- Encourage healthier eating habits and lifestyles
- Stimulate production & consumption of regional and seasonal produce
- Promote sustainable animal-friendly and environmentally sound production, transport, consumption and lifestyles
- Promote a regional labour market in the fields of food and of exercise.

The Rural Web

1. *Introduction*
2. *Unsustainable rural regions: underlying processes*
3. *Development paradigms*
4. *From agricultural broadening to regional development*
5. Sustainable regional development: underlying processes
6. *The rural web*

Sustainable regional development: underlying processes

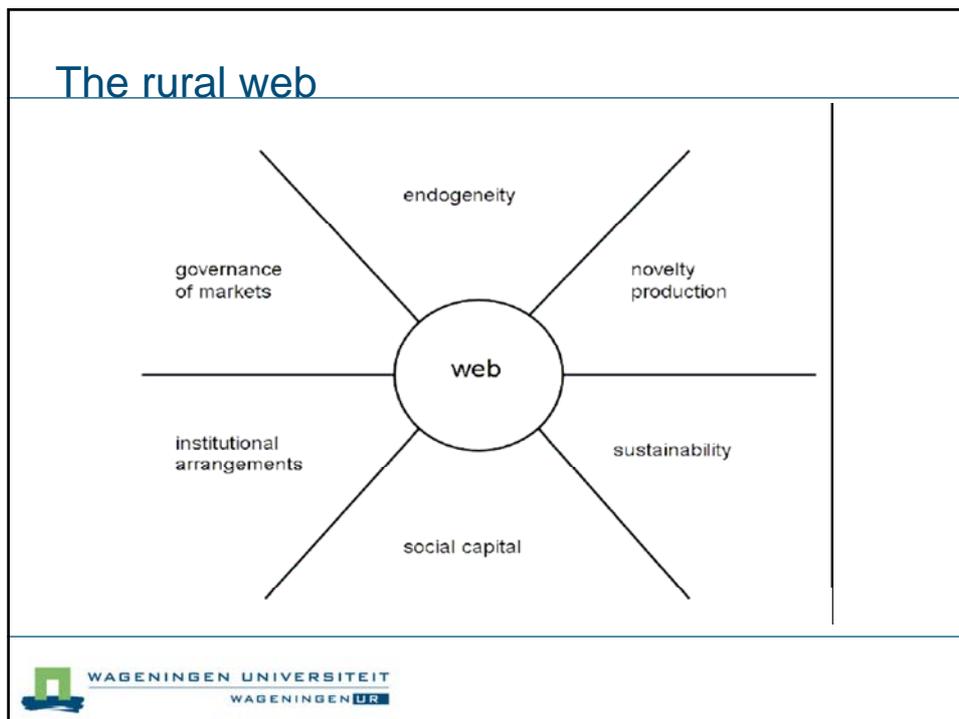
- Five examples are an illustration of the transition towards sustainable regional development
- Processes underlying this transition:
 - Connecting people and stakeholders
 - Embedding goods and services in the uniqueness of the region
 - Diversifying the rural economy
 - Intertwining economic and non-economic activities
- Combinations of connecting, embedding, diversifying and intertwining can contribute to more robust (rural) regions:
 - Different routes / pathways
 - Different forms / configurations, varying with time and place

The Rural Web

1. *Introduction*
2. *Unsustainable rural regions: underlying processes*
3. *Development paradigms*
4. *From agricultural broadening to regional development*
5. *Sustainable regional development: underlying processes*
6. **The rural web**

The rural web

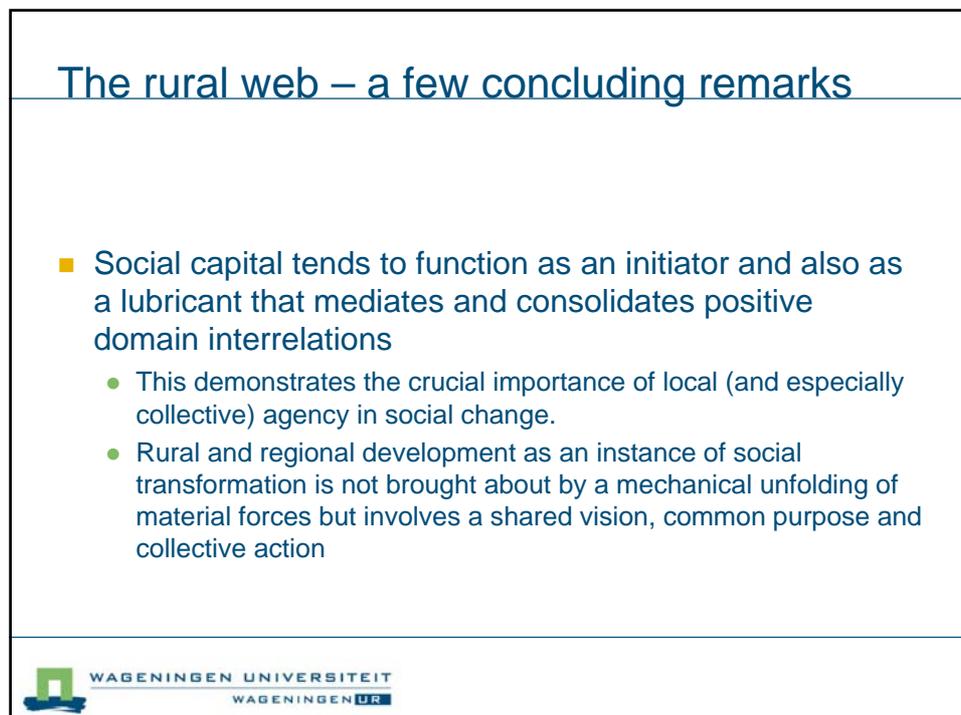
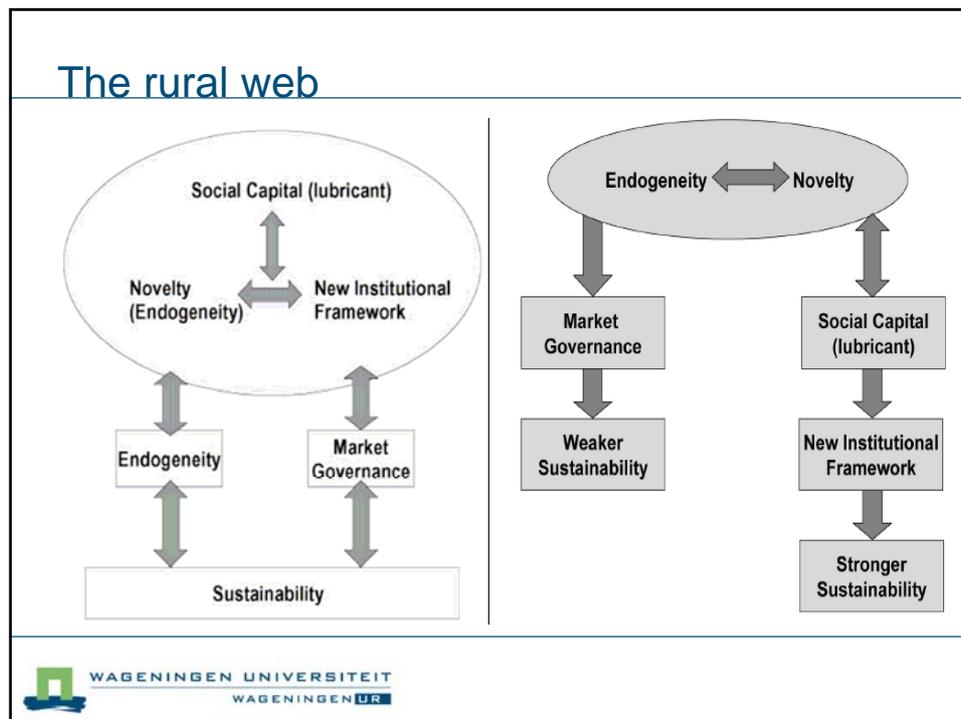
- The rural web is a tool to conceptualize and analyze contemporary dynamics, diversity and synergies in rural regions
- The web refers to the network of interrelations, interactions, exchanges and mutual externalities within rural societies.
- The web interlinks activities, processes, people and resources and shapes the ways in which they unfold
- On the empirical level a rural web is composed by actors, resources, activities, etc. and especially by the interrelations constructed between them.
- From a theoretical point of view, this same web emerges as the intersection of six dimensions



The rural web

- The 'entrance point' for creating more robust or resilient regions is different:
 - Novelty production in the Northern Frisian Woodlands
 - Institutional arrangements for the wine routes in Tuscany
 - Endogeneity for Fuchsia Brands
 - Sustainability for Cornwall Food Programme and Proeftuin Amsterdam
- Different 'entrance points' also imply different routes / pathways for sustainable rural and regional development

WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITEIT
WAGENINGEN UR



The rural web – a few concluding remarks

- A successful RD initiative is an *unfolding web*, whereby a novelty fosters more novelties, sustainability outcomes prompt further sustainability initiatives, endogenous development achievements encourage further endogenous aspirations of the community/region and so on, as well as further interrelations between/across such new domain developments.
- The denser the web of domain interrelations, the greater the sustainability outcomes/potential.

The rural web – a few concluding remarks

- The concept of rural web signals a warning against a mechanistic theorization of RD based on a deterministic and reductionist understanding of social action and a static or linear notion of social change.
- A better theoretical understanding of RD requires dynamic, actor-oriented, context-specific analysis that pays due attention to its ever-expanding, ever-evolving configuration of actions and interactions.

Thank you for your attention

© Wageningen UR