

# Final Report on the Special Section (ERAE 40-4) on “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Agricultural and Rural Policies”

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## 1. Introduction: the 122<sup>nd</sup> EAAE Seminar

On 17-18 February 2011 at the Faculty of Economics of the Università Politecnica delle Marche (UNIVPM), Ancona (Italy), it was held the 122<sup>nd</sup> EAAE Seminar. The Seminar focused on “Evidence-Based Agricultural and Rural Policy Making: Methodological and Empirical Challenges of Policy Evaluation” and was jointly organised by the Department of Economics of the UNIVPM, the Interuniversity Research Consortium on Rural, Environmental and Economic Policies (SPERA), the no-profit Associazione “Alessandro Bartola”, editor of the electronic journal AgriRegioniEuropa (ARE). The organisation of the Seminar was also supported by Rete Rurale Nazionale (the Italian National Rural Network), Regione Marche (the regional institution) and Carifano (an active local bank).

128 people participated at the Seminar. 11 of them were actually members of the local organising institutions and 8 were invited by the Local Organising Committee. If we exclude these latter, the participation by Country was the following: 41 participants from Italy; 14 from Belgium; 11 from Germany; 5 from The Netherlands, Switzerland and UK; 4 from Portugal; 3 from France, Greece and Spain; 2 from Austria, Czech Republic, Ireland, Russia and Sweden; 1 from Canada, Finland, Latvia, Serbia and Slovenia. Of these, 47 were new members of the EAAE.

The selection of Seminar papers was made starting from the 102 submitted abstracts. 90 of them were accepted. Any abstract was evaluated by a pair of reviewers. A group of 15 reviewers worked on this selection process. All components of the International Scientific Committee participated to the selection process. Rejection of some submitted abstracts was mostly due to the fact that they were not suited for the topics of the Seminar. 89 contributions were finally presented at the Seminar. They were organised in 21 sessions, two plenary and 19 parallel sessions.

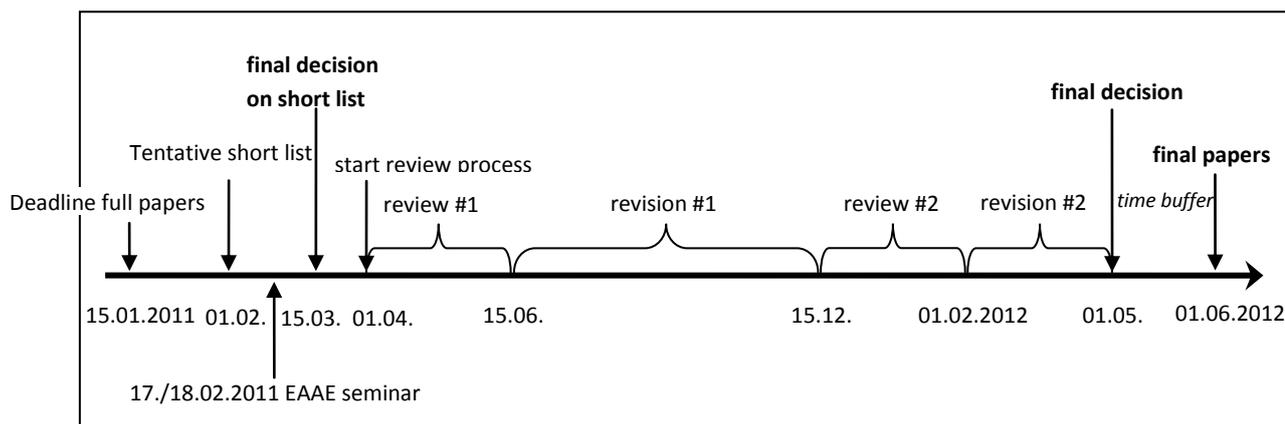
The Seminar topics can be summarized in the following four categories:

1. The methodology of agricultural and rural policy evaluation
2. Experiences of agricultural and rural policy evaluation
3. The economics of agricultural and rural policy evaluation (with the CAP in the foreground)
4. Evaluating the distributional implications of agricultural and rural policy

On the proposal of the Seminar organizers, the ERAE Editors and the ERAE Foundation (now EAAEP Foundation) agreed to publish a selection of the best seminar contributions (included invited papers) in a special issue of the ERAE after following a review process according to the ERAE standards. This special issue of the ERAE was expected to especially focus on items 1 and

2 reported above. In particular, a priority was attributed to high-quality papers with a clear methodological focus.

The Seminar organizers, the ERAE Editors and the Foundation also agreed to designate three editors for the Special Issue to assume the responsibility for the short-listing of papers, the selection of external referees, and the control of the review process. The selected Editors were Roberto Esposti (chair of the Seminar Organizing Committee and member of the ERAE Editorial Board), Franco Sotte (chair of the Seminar Scientific and Program Committee) and Alison Burrell (former long-term Editor of the ERAE). The following timetable was eventually scheduled for the preparation of the SI:



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## 2. Paper's selection and the review process

Just after the Seminar, the three Editors started working at the short-listing of papers presented at the Seminar. This selection of best papers was evidently based on their scientific quality. More specifically, these criteria were taken into account:

- priority has been given to papers explicitly aiming at the evaluation of policy impacts and that have a clear methodological content
- priority has been given to papers that show scientific ambition, that is, aim at making a more durable contribution to the literature beside the current policy issues and debate
- selection was also expected to cover the different policies (Pillar I, RDP, environmental policies...) and methodological approaches (ex-ante evaluation, ex-post evaluation, farm-level impacts, economy-wide impacts...)

Other aspects that have been taken into account were: the clarity of exposition during the Seminar's presentation, the quality of English, the suggestions and comments of Seminar's participants collected with an on-line survey carried out by the Local Organising Committee after the Seminar.

This selection process was finalized in March 2011. Eventually, 13 papers were selected and the respective authors were asked to submit a final version to the ERAE by April 2013 to enter the usual review process. All the review process was managed through the excellent online facilities provided by the OUP (the ERAE manuscript submission site at ScholarOne Manuscripts). Among

the editors, Roberto Esposti was designated to coordinate the review process and to manage the information provided through ScholarOne Manuscripts.

Overall, 66 people were contacted and invited to act as anonymous reviewers (double-blind process) of the selected papers. About 42% of them declined the invitation. Eventually, the review process was carried out by 38 reviewers. Of these, 21 (55%) worked in EU countries. The review process started in June 2011 and was completed in January 2013 (the last paper was finally accepted on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2013). The whole process thus took about 1 year and a half and this generated a delay of about half a year with respect to the scheduled timetable.

### 3. The outcome

Of the 13 papers originally selected, 7 were rejected at the first revision round. For the other 6 papers major revisions were asked. Of these “survived” papers, 1 has been rejected in the second round while for another paper the authors decided to drop the opportunity to resubmit. Eventually, only 4 papers overtook the second round of revisions. Of them, 2 papers have been directly accepted while the other two papers entered the third round of revision and was eventually accepted.

The following table summarizes the whole review process:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Papers presented at the Seminar          | 89 |
| Papers invited to submit for the ERAE SI | 13 |
| Papers submitted                         | 13 |
| <b><i>First review round</i></b>         |    |
| Rejected                                 | 7  |
| Major revision                           | 6  |
| Minor revision                           | 0  |
| Accepted                                 | 0  |
| <b><i>Second review round</i></b>        |    |
| Withdrawn                                | 1  |
| Rejection                                | 1  |
| Major revision                           | 1  |
| Minor revision                           | 1  |
| Accepted                                 | 2  |
| <b><i>Third review round</i></b>         |    |
| Withdrawn                                | 0  |
| Rejection                                | 0  |
| Major revision                           | 0  |
| Minor revision                           | 0  |
| Accepted                                 | 2  |
| Total rejected/withdrawn papers          | 9  |
| Total accepted papers                    | 4  |

Eventually, the outcome of the whole review process has been 4 accepted papers, therefore not enough for a full Special Issue of the ERAE. Still, as agreed with the ERAE Editors, the Editors

decided to gather these papers in a Special Section of the journal preceded by a short introduction. This short introductory paper was written by Roberto Esposti and Franco Sotte that eventually appeared as the editors of the Special Section. Alison Burrell provided a very helpful contribution in the early stages of the process, especially for selecting the candidate papers and the reviewers. After these first steps, however, Roberto Esposti and Franco Sotte actually carried out most of the editor's work. That's why Alison Burrell herself proposed to do not appear as one of the editor of the Special Section. The introduction was written in February 2013 and by April 2013 all the 4 papers of the Special Issue were published online.

The Special Section was eventually included in issue 40 (4) of the ERAE released in August 2013 with the following contents:

**Special Section on *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Agricultural and Rural Policies*:**

Roberto Esposti and Franco Sotte

*Evaluating the effectiveness of agricultural and rural policies: an introduction*, 535 - 539

Barbara Fährmann and Regina Grajewski

*How expensive is the implementation of rural development programmes?*, 541-572

Johannes Sauer and Ada Wossink

*Marketed outputs and non-marketed ecosystem services: the evaluation of marginal costs*, 573-603

4 Stefano Pascucci, Tiziana de-Magistris, Liesbeth Dries, Felice Adinolfi, and Fabian Capitanio  
*Participation of Italian farmers in rural development policy*, 605-631

Jan-Henning Feil, Oliver Musshoff, and Alfons Balmann

*Policy impact analysis in competitive agricultural markets: a real options approach*, 633-658

**4. Some final considerations**

As editors, at the end of the this long process and after the publication of the Special Section, we would like to make some final and general considerations about this opportunity granted by the Foundation to publish a Special Issue of the ERAE with selected papers presented at EAAE Seminars. We think the both pros and cons emerge from this experience.

Among the positive aspects it must be underlined how this opportunity reinforces the reciprocal linkage between the EAAE seminars and the ERAE. Publishing a Special Issue remains the best way to give scientific value, *ex post*, to the results of an EAAE Seminar. Moreover, if properly announced *ex ante*, the chance of publishing in the ERAE makes the EAAE Seminar more attractive and, therefore, more and better papers are presented.

In addition, these Special Issues represent a sort of "gym" especially for young researches to make their first experience of submission to an highly-ranked journal like the ERAE. The editorial work underlying the preparation of such issues may also be helpful to train and test

young scholars that, in the future, could be suitable and reliable candidates to act as ERAE Editors.

It must also be acknowledged the great job made by the current ERAE Editors and Foundation in supporting these Special Issues, as well as the precious assistance provided by the OUP through its facilities and personnel. Last but not least, this experience makes even more clear how critical the free collaboration provided by that vast community of anonymous reviewers is. It really represents the key asset underlying the success of the ERAE and its Special Issues.

At the same time, the experience of being editors of a Special Issue also taught us some other, and less positive, important lessons. First of all, it is a complex and long process and it is very hard to finally achieve a timely publication of the Seminar best papers. It is difficult to find a so high number of good reviewers; a significant amount of them decline the invitation to review. Therefore, the selection of reviewers in the very first round may take months. Moreover, papers presented at EAAE seminar are often very heterogeneous in terms of quality and topics covered. Sometime, papers showing good potential are actually incomplete works or drafts. That's why selecting a bulk of relatively homogenous papers from those presented at the Seminar is not easy. After that, selected papers enter a review process whose outcome is actually unpredictable. The fact that papers are often not fully "mature" makes the review process longer than expected. It may take two or three revision rounds to finally achieve an acceptable papers. At the end, the accepted papers may be quite different from their original versions and it may difficult, for the editors, to find a solid common ground to gather them in a Special Issue or Section.

For these reasons we think that it is very important that the EAAEP Foundation provides clear and detailed guidelines to the Editors indicating the best or good practices to tackle these issues from the very beginning of the process.