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***CO-MANAGEMENT AND RURAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:
THE CASE OF TAMERA (SOUTH – PORTUGAL)***

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The Nobel Prize attributed to Prof. Elinor Ostrom originated an important movement of re-visitation of the concept of cooperation and its effects. This issue is particularly interesting when thinking about sustainable use of natural resources. Our aim is to address this issue with a particular reference to the land case. Starting from the “Commons Tragedy” theoretical framework, we try to underline the factors that, in a situation of *res-communes* property-rights regime, concurs for the exit of sustainable use of resources. In methodologic terms we use the case of Tamera/South of Portugal to address this problematic, through the analysis of the information contained in several publications, related sites and interviews made with the leaders of this project. The fundamental results suggest robust social capital and leadership as the key factors for the success of this experience of “Co-management”.

According to Schlager and Ostrom (1992): “Ambiguous terms blur analytical and prescriptive clarity” and the term “common property” resource “is a glaring example. In fact, in the literature on Natural Resources it would be difficult to find a concept as misunderstood as commons and common property. The term *commons* (and *common property*) is repeatedly used to refer different situations: property owned by a government; property owned by no one; property owned and defended by a community of resource users; any common-pool used by multiple individuals independently of the type of property rights involved. This perpetuates the “unfortunate tradition” of failing to recognise the critical distinction between common property (*res communes*) and nonproperty/open access (*res nullius*).

The problem started five decades ago with the article of Gordon (1954), on fisheries, and the confusion persisted in the papers of recognised authors in the Property Rights Theory (Demsetz, 1967). It was reinforced with Hardin (1968) in its much-cited allegory of the “Tragedy of the Commons”. Some academics use the term common property and open access interchangeably. The current situation derives from the fact that none of the cited authors offer a coherent discussion on the meaning of property, rights and property-rights, before presenting the problems inherent in common property.

First of all, if we want to rectify the confusion, we must recognise that the term property refers not to an object or a natural resource but rather to the benefit stream that arises from the use of that object or resource. When economists think about property they are perhaps inclined to think of an object, and when they think in common property they accept the idea of common use of that object. This leads to the acceptance of the aphorism that “everybody property is nobody’s property”. The truth is that is only correct to say: “everybody’s access is nobody’s property”.

At the same time, we must recognise that, in the essence of the concept of property, there is a social relation. Property rights do not refer to relations between men and things but *rather to the sanctioned behavioural relations among men that arise from the existence of things and pertain to their use* (Furubotn and Pejovich, 1972). The prevailing system of property rights in a community can be described as a set of economic and social relations defining the position of each individual with respect to the utilisation of scarce resources. So, there is nothing inherent in the resource itself that determines absolutely the nature of the property rights. The property nature and the specification of resource use rights are determined by the society members and by the rules and conventions that they choose and establish between them, about the use of the resources. Not by the resource, itself. One solution to the impasse over the use of the term “common property” is to distinguish the resource and the regime. This distinction, between the resource itself and the property-rights regime under which it is held, is critically important. In fact, the same resource can be used under more than one regime.

Political Economists’ understanding of Sustainable Development shapes perceptions of resource degradation problems and prescriptions recommended to solve them. In this context, Elinor Ostrom’s research is fundamental in the substitution of the “Tragedy of the Commons” metaphor to the more interesting “*Drama of the Commons*”. Of course we’ll have tragedies, in the open access regime situation. But, sometimes, we’ll have also reasons to laugh. Ostrom

(1990) stresses that a commons can be well governed and that most people, when presented with a resource problem, can cooperate and act for the common good. “Co-management” and self-regulation are the keys for sustainable resource management.

This conclusion may be fundamental when trying to investigate the relation between social responsibility and environmental sustainability. Relating social responsibility (as a special ethical positioning facing the community, including a set of values and a strategy of social inclusion and development, as well as the promotion of collective and individual citizenship) with the experiences of co-management, is an interesting research field.

According to European Commission (Green Paper (2001)), the concept of social responsibility concerns the situation according to which companies or other organizations decide, on a voluntary basis, to contribute to a fairer society and a cleaner environment. Based on this assumption, the company or, in a more general sense, the organization cannot/should not be guided towards the only fulfilment of interests of the owners of the company, but also of other stakeholders’ interests (employees, local communities, customers, suppliers, public authorities, competitors and society as a whole). In practice, Corporate Social Responsibility refers to the adoption of a model of business management in which the companies, being aware of their social commitment, hear, preserve and respect the interests of different groups, incorporating different needs of the business planning and operating them through their decisions and activities. Although much discussed, the concept of Social Responsibility is not yet finally stabilized. In any case, the effort of researchers to differentiate it from the simple idea of charity has proved essential to its proper scope and understanding by companies and managers. At the same time, environmental preoccupations seem to enter definitively in the core of this *way of being*, including those related with the efficient and sustainable use of natural resources.

A particular example of this kind of preoccupations is the land use case. Taking several cases, many researchers have been arguing that community-based management should prevent the commons tragedies and that cooperative management often results in sustainable use of agricultural land and rural sustainable development. The analysis identifies strong leadership and robust social capital as important factors of success. This paper introduces a particular case in the south of Portugal (TAMERA/Odemira). It is made of three parts. In the first part it introduces a typology of regimes of property rights relevant to common property of natural resources and investigates the presence of *tragedies* in their common-use. In the second point, “co-management” analysis is introduced. As Elinor Ostrom had been demonstrating,

the conventional wisdom that common property is poorly managed and should be either regulated by central authorities or privatized, is far from being correct. In fact, there are a lot of examples of “true” common property regimes that are efficient and promote the conservation of the resources. The conceptual framework associated with the Co-management proposal is presented and discussed. Finally, the paper introduces the particular case of TAMERA, describe this experience of co-management and evaluate its results.

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