

*From strong-ties to weak-ties, building community resilience in disaster prone areas.
The case of rural communities in Central Italy.*

Abstract.

Although the concept of resilience has only recently entered the field of social sciences, it has quickly gained fame and fortune in different field and contexts. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the literature on the topic by looking at the role of social capital on community resilience, with a particular focus on the rural communities in Central Italy recently hit by the earthquakes in August and November 2016.

The earthquakes were a devastating event that brought many communities, already struggling with a less than ideal economic situation, down to their knees. However, often, an exogenous shock, such as a natural disaster, offers also an opportunity to rethink the structure of the communities and their local economies. In the case of the rural communities located in the Centre of Italy, which rely heavily on a social structure made of a tight-knit network of strong-ties centred around a nuclear core of kinship relations, one might question the role that social capital can play in the resilience process, and whether weak-ties might prove more helpful than strong-ties.

It has been argued (Granovetter, Mark. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." American Journal of Sociology (78):1360–80; Murphy, Brenda L. 2007. "Locating social capital in resilient community-level emergency management." Nat Hazards (41):297–315), for instance, that the prevalence of strong-ties over weak-ties may imply a greater ability to *resist* exogenous shocks but, at the same time, weaken the capacity of a community to recover and be, truly, *resilient*. Indeed, the capacity to be resilient is more than the ability of a community to survive and rebuilt after a natural disaster; a resilient community is able not only to "jump back" but also, and firstly, to change and adapt in order to overcome difficulties and shocks, either exogenous and endogenous (Ron Boschma (2015) Towards an Evolutionary Perspective on Regional Resilience, Regional Studies, 49:5, 733-751).

In this paper we will try and deepen our knowledge on the relation between social capital and community resilience by looking at (and measure where possible) patterns of social networks, and their links to community resilience. A community, especially if rural, might have high levels of social capital, but still not be able to be resilient to a shock and this

might depend on the prevalence of tight-knit strong-ties over weak-ties (and a process of cultural lock-in).

An exogenous disruptive event, such as an earthquake, may provide an opportunity for these communities to build a more adaptable and resilient loose-knit social structure (and local economy) because of its great destabilizing force on all the aspects of a community (economic, social, physical, infrastructural...).