

IRSA - CONGRESSO MUNDIAL DE SOCIOLOGIA RURAL (01/10/2025 A
20/01/2026) - IRSA 18 - RURAL FUTURES: EXPLORING THE SOCIO-
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL-URBAN NEXUS

**NEGOTIATING FUTURES IN RURAL SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS: THE
CASE OF SANT'ERASMO IN THE VENICE LAGOON**

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The Venice Lagoon, Italy, is marked by socio-environmental conflicts over the privatisation of common goods. Sant'Erasmus, the historical food production hub of Venice, epitomizes these tensions. Disputes over the island's future have emerged among local committees, farmers, public institutions, and private actors, reflecting broader struggles over how rural and peri-urban territories are imagined, managed, and transformed.

Preliminary findings from our fieldwork highlight the emergence of multiple pathways for Sant'Erasmus. While farmers advocate the preservation of conventional agricultural production as a means of safeguarding cultural identity and food sovereignty, local committees emphasise the role of agroecology to promote sustainable practices and community-based governance. Private

enterprises advance trajectories oriented toward mainstream tourism or new income sources with potential environmental impacts, such as agrivoltaics. These divergent visions illustrate how conflicts over commons are profoundly influenced by competing values and power relations. Also, they are influenced by contrasting and sometimes unconventional narratives. While these discourses appear fragmented, they may serve as entry points for dialogue, opening imaginative spaces for innovative futures and, paradoxically, helping to build consensus by making underlying fears and aspirations explicit.

To analyse these dynamics, we developed a conceptual framework to unfold conflicts over natural commons, focusing on the interplay between ecological components, governance structures, and economic pressures. From these insights, we aim to engage in future action-research with local stakeholders, not only to document conflicts but also to contribute to their mitigation. By co-producing knowledge with communities and institutions, we seek to identify the needs emerging from the conflict and fostering dialogue to explore pathways that balance ecological resilience, cultural heritage, and socio-economic viability.

Sant'Erasmus thus offers a critical case for rural sociology: it demonstrates how contested visions of development in rural socio-ecological systems can be negotiated through participatory approaches respecting both local livelihoods and environmental concerns.

Palavras-chave: disputes; land-use dynamics; public land; privatisation; governance.