

IRSA - CONGRESSO MUNDIAL DE SOCIOLOGIA RURAL (01/10/2025 A 20/01/2026) - IRSA 39 - TERRITORIAL MARKETS AS SPACES OF VALUE

ITALIAN FOOD COOPERATIVES AS TERRITORIAL MARKETS OF VALUE

Giovanna Sacchi (giovanna.sacchi@unito.it)

Tiziana Pagnani (tiziana.pagnani@unicas.it)

Teresina Mancuso (teresina.mancuso@unito.it)

This contribution analyses Italian Food Cooperatives (Food Coops) as territorial markets in which food exchange is embedded in social relations, shared values, and collective forms of governance. Rather than functioning as neutral spaces of exchange, Food Coops actively shape prices, quality definitions, and production and consumption practices through locally grounded norms, participatory decision-making, and direct relationships between producers and consumers. In this way, they contribute to the emergence of alternative market architectures and to a reconfiguration of power relations within agri-food systems.

The research explores how Food Coops operate as socially constructed market spaces where economic and non-economic values are co-produced by a plurality of actors. Particular attention is paid to democratic governance, member participation, and collective practices that structure market exchanges and orient them toward social, environmental, and ethical objectives. By emphasising

proximity, transparency, and shared responsibility, Food Coops foster market arrangements that differ from conventional agri-food circuits and enhance the autonomy of local food systems.

Empirically, the study is based on a two-step research design combining qualitative research with quantitative data collected through a structured survey administered to approximately 2,300 members of seven Italian Food Coops located in different Italian regions. The findings show that Food Coops function as territorial markets where value is generated through collective action, shared knowledge, and ongoing interaction among social actors, contributing to more inclusive and socially embedded pathways of rural development.

Palavras-chave: collective action; co-production; food activism; food cooperative; participatory governance.