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LABOUR IN AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITION: A SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS IN SOUTHERN ITALY

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This paper contributes to the sociology of agroecology by examining the intersections between labor, socio-ecological practices, and agroecological transition. Its objective is to understand how diverse labor categories—including local and migrant workers, family farmers, and collective producers—mediate the reproduction of rural livelihoods and the transformation of agri-food systems. Central to the analysis is the relationship between labor and nature: how work conditions, social hierarchies, and environmental pressures influence the trajectories and scalability of agroecological initiatives.

The research draws on the theoretical frameworks of critical agrarian studies and political agroecology, emphasizing the need to integrate labor relations, gender, class, and migration dynamics into agroecological debates. This approach highlights how labor structures not only support production but also

shape socio-ecological stewardship, knowledge co-production, and environmental sustainability.

Empirically, the study is grounded in fieldwork in Southern Italy, where agroecological practices are combined with biodiversity and land management, alternative and solidarity economic arrangements to respond to climate and market pressures. Methodologically, the research employs a participatory action research approach adapted from FAO's TAPE framework, complemented by semi-structured interviews with farmers, migrant and local workers, technicians, activists and policymakers, participant observation, and policy analysis. This combination allowed mapping of agroecological projects, assessment of labor conditions, and evaluation of enabling and constraining factors for transition.

The findings reveal how labor emerges as a critical factor, mediating sustainability, social justice, and the resilience of rural communities. The paper argues that agroecological transitions must be understood as socio-political processes in which labor, power, and environmental stewardship interact, emphasizing the importance of a sociology of agroecology in order to build more just agrifood systems.

Palavras-chave: sociology of agroecology; political agroecology; labor; agroecological transitions; rural injustice.