

# Journal of Rural and Community Development

## Relaunch of Italy's Inner Areas and Community Cooperatives. The – Failed – Case of Gerfalco

**Authors:** Fabio Berti & Alexandra D'Angelo

**Citation:**

Berti, F., & D'Angelo, A. (2022). Relaunch of Italy's inner areas and community cooperatives. The – failed – case of Gerfalco. *The Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 17(2), 128–150.

**Publisher:**

Rural Development Institute, Brandon University.

**Editor:**

Dr. Doug Ramsey

**Open Access Policy:**

This journal provides open access to all of its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge. Such access is associated with increased readership and increased citation of an author's work.



**BRANDON  
UNIVERSITY**  
Founded 1899



## **Relaunch of Italy's Inner Areas and Community Cooperatives The – failed – Case of Gerfalco**

**Fabio Berti**

University of Siena

Siena, Italy

[fabio.berti@unisi.it](mailto:fabio.berti@unisi.it)

**Alexandra D'Angelo**

University of Turin

Turin, Italy

[alexandra.dangelo93@gmail.com](mailto:alexandra.dangelo93@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

A few years ago, in Italy, there was a return to the debate on how to try to relaunch the country's so-called 'inner areas', after many years of inattention towards rural and mountain areas and towards all those territories considered marginal and unproductive. These territories—which occupy more than 50% of the Italian surface—are geographically complex and socially disadvantaged due to a plurality of dynamics that have made them poor both from a demographic and economic point of view and in terms of available services.

Although, in some phases of the industrialisation process, there have been attempts to bring factories and extend the productivist model to these areas—almost always unsuccessfully, even from an environmental point of view—from a certain point onwards, the area/territories have been left to their own devices despite their wealth of natural, landscape and cultural resources. These dynamics (processes of urbanisation, tertiarisation of the economy, and a crisis in traditional agriculture) have contributed to exacerbating the Italian territorial inequalities, which in the centre-periphery and city-countryside binomials, in the 'inner areas' are expressed through a high degree of social exclusion, absence of essential services and distancing from the governance bodies of the territory and of its resources. However, a combination of factors—such as rising unemployment, the high cost of living in cities, the ecological crisis of urban centres, together with a cultural change and an attempt to re-evaluate natural resources long considered unproductive—have timidly put the spotlight back on inner areas. This academic and political attention towards inner areas nowadays needs to place social justice side by side with the recently conceptualised principle of environmental justice—defined as the idea that the global population should have equal access to and equal ability to control environmental resources necessary for their subsistence and well-being (water, land, energy, and clean air).

From a policy point of view, among the various actions undertaken to make inner areas attractive again and to achieve greater environmental justice in these contexts, one of the most interesting is the establishment, and then the spread, of so-called 'community cooperatives'. This is a particular type of social enterprise that seeks to strengthen the link between the typically cooperative model and the territory and the people who live there. As the name suggests, these enterprises work when they can count on a 'community' reference that believes in the territory in which it lives and seeks to halt the process of depopulation by making

the territory attractive again. In the first chapter, we explore the concept of 'inner area,' and we analyse the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI); successively, the second chapter is dedicated to community cooperatives, with particular attention to the Tuscany Region, where a case study analysis was conducted, which will be discussed in the third chapter. The final part of the article presents the results of research conducted in Gerfalco where, since 2017, old, but above all, new residents have tried to set up a community cooperative. Through a documentary analysis and a series of interviews both with the protagonists of this project and with other residents who remained indifferent to it, the difficulties encountered and the reasons why the cooperative was not established will be described.

**Keywords:** social innovation, neo-rural experience, community cooperatives, inner areas, Italy

## **La relance des zones intérieures en Italie et les coopératives communautaires. Le cas -infructueux- de Gerfalco**

**Fabio Berti**  
University of Siena  
Siena, Italy  
[fabio.berti@unisi.it](mailto:fabio.berti@unisi.it)

**Alexandra D'Angelo**  
University of Turin  
Turin, Italy  
[alexandra.dangelo93@gmail.com](mailto:alexandra.dangelo93@gmail.com)

### **Résumé**

Il y a quelques années, en Italie, le débat sur la manière de relancer les « zones intérieures » du pays a refait surface, après de nombreuses années de laisser-aller envers les zones rurales et de montagne et envers tous les territoires considérés comme marginaux et improductifs. Ces territoires – qui représente plus de 50% de la superficie de l'Italie – sont géographiquement complexes et socialement défavorisés en raison d'une pluralité de dynamiques qui les ont rendus pauvres tant d'un point de vue démographique et économique qu'en termes de services disponibles.

Bien que dans certaines phases du processus d'industrialisation il y ait eu des tentatives d'implantation d'usines et d'extension du modèle productiviste dans ces zones – presque toujours sans succès, même d'un point de vue environnemental – à partir d'un certain moment, ces territoires ont été laissés à eux-mêmes malgré leur richesse en ressources naturelles, paysagères et culturelles. Le processus d'urbanisation, la tertiarisation de l'économie et la crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle ont contribué à exacerber les inégalités territoriales italiennes qui, dans les binômes centre-périphérie et ville-campagne, s'expriment dans les « zones intérieures » par un degré élevé d'exclusion sociale, l'absence de services essentiels et l'éloignement des organes de gouvernance du territoire et de ses ressources. Cependant, une combinaison de facteurs – tels que la hausse du chômage, le coût élevé de la vie dans les villes, la crise écologique des centres urbains, ainsi qu'un changement culturel et une tentative de réévaluation des ressources naturelles longtemps considérées comme improductives – a timidement remis l'accent sur les zones intérieures. L'attention académique et politique portée aux zones intérieures doit aujourd'hui placer la justice sociale à côté du principe de la justice environnementale récemment conceptualisé – défini comme l'idée que la population mondiale devrait avoir un accès égal et une capacité égale à contrôler les ressources environnementales nécessaires à sa subsistance et à son bien-être (eau, terre, énergie et air pur).

D'un point de vue politique, une des plus intéressantes actions entreprises pour rendre les zones intérieures à nouveau attractives et pour parvenir à une plus grande justice environnementale est la création, puis la diffusion, de ce que l'on appelle les « coopératives communautaires ». Il s'agit d'un type particulier d'entreprise sociale qui cherche à renforcer le lien entre le modèle typiquement coopératif et le territoire et les personnes qui y vivent. Comme leur nom l'indique, ces entreprises fonctionnent lorsqu'elles peuvent compter sur une communauté de

référence qui croit au territoire dans lequel elle vit et qui cherche à stopper le processus de dépeuplement en rendant le territoire à nouveau attractif.

Dans une première partie de cet article, nous explorons le concept de « zone intérieure » et nous analysons la Stratégie nationale pour les zones intérieures (SNAI). Une deuxième partie se consacre aux coopératives communautaires, avec une attention particulière à la région de la Toscane, où une analyse de cas a été réalisée, et qui est discutée dans une troisième partie. La dernière partie de l'article présente les résultats d'une recherche menée à Gerfalco où, depuis 2017, d'anciens et de nouveaux résidents ont tenté de créer une coopérative communautaire. À travers une analyse documentaire et une série d'entretiens, tant avec les protagonistes de ce projet qu'avec d'autres résidents qui y sont restés indifférents, les difficultés rencontrées et les raisons pour lesquelles la coopérative n'a pas été créée seront décrites.

**Mots clés:** innovation sociale, expérience néorurale, coopératives communautaires, zones intérieures, Italie

## **1.0 Introduction**

A few years ago, in Italy, after many years of inattention towards rural and mountain areas and towards all those territories considered marginal and unproductive. There was a return to the debate on how to try to relaunch the country's so-called 'inner areas.' These territories—that occupy more than 50% of the Italian surface—are geographically complex and socially disadvantaged, due to a plurality of dynamics that have made them poor from a demographic and economic point of view and inadequate in terms of available services.

Although, in some phases of the industrialisation process there have been attempts to bring factories and extend the productivist model to these areas—almost always unsuccessfully, even from an environmental point of view—from a certain point onwards, these territories have been left to their own devices despite their wealth of natural and cultural resources. These dynamics (processes of urbanisation, tertiarization of the economy, and a crisis in traditional agriculture) have contributed to exacerbating inequalities between the Italian territories, which in the 'inner areas' are expressed through a high degree of social exclusion, absence of essential services and distancing from the governance bodies of the territory and of its resources. However, a combination of factors—such as rising unemployment, the high cost of living in cities, the ecological crisis of urban centres, together with a cultural change and an attempt to re-evaluate natural resources long considered unproductive—have timidly put the spotlight back on inner areas. This academic and political attention towards inner areas nowadays needs to place social justice side by side with the recently conceptualised principle of environmental justice—defined as the idea that the global population should have equal access to and equal control over the environmental resources necessary for their subsistence and well-being (water, land, energy, and clean air).

From a policy point of view, among the various actions undertaken to make inner areas attractive again and to achieve greater environmental justice in these contexts, one of the most interesting is the establishment, and then the growth, of so-called 'community cooperatives'. This is a particular type of social enterprise that seeks to strengthen the link between the typically cooperative model and the territory and the people who live there. As the name suggests, these enterprises work when they can count on a 'community' reference that believes in the territory in which it lives and seeks to halt the process of depopulation by making the territory attractive again. In the first chapter, we explore the concept of 'inner area' and we analyse the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI); successively, the second chapter is dedicated to community cooperatives, with particular attention to the Tuscany Region, where a case study analysis was conducted, which will be discussed in the third chapter. The final part of the article presents the results of research conducted in Gerfalco where, since 2017, old, but above all, new residents have tried to set up a community cooperative. Through a documentary analysis and a series of interviews both with the protagonists of this project and with other residents who remained indifferent to it, the difficulties encountered and the reasons why the cooperative was not established will be described. The purpose of this article is to underline the importance of social and human capital in the national and international debate on rural development. In fact, rural decline is frequently explained in economic terms by unfavourable conditions and by a lack of resources or support. But this link is not entirely clear and does not give enough consideration to the role of social capital, particularly in terms of community bonds and social ties.

This paper aims at placing communitarian bonds and community participation at the core of rural development processes, highlighting their fundamental role both in the implementation of rural development policies and in bottom-up attempts to revitalise so-called marginal areas. This will be done through the description of a failed attempt to constitute a ‘community cooperative’, which—as will be described—is considered a hybrid enterprise model which places itself in between a social enterprise *tout court* (of which it constitutes a sub-group), and a traditional consumer cooperative.

## 2.0 Italian ‘Inner Areas’: Origins and Present Fragilities

### 2.1 A Historically Determined Vulnerability

The concept of ‘inner areas’ is widely used in modern scientific literature in reference to those Italian territories that, over the last few decades, have undergone heavy depopulation, marginalisation and a decline in provided services (Baldi, 2019; Barca, 2015; European Network for Rural Development [ENRD], n.d.). One of the characteristics of these territories is that deep diversities and heterogeneities exist side by side in very circumscribed areas: from natural ones of biodiversity, microclimates, natural resources, agricultural products, etc., to cultural ones like the coexistence of numerous dialects and strong characterizations of identity that are expressed through rich musical, artistic, or gastronomic varieties. At the same time, however, Italy’s inner areas are characterised by significant disadvantages, which have marked the historical trajectory and destiny of these places. These include a demographic fall, a heavy depopulation, the ageing of the resident population and, on an environmental level, an increase in uncontrolled forests and a decrease in land allocated to agriculture and grazing (Barca et al., 2014).

The origins of the processes of marginalisation of inner areas can be traced back to some of the extraordinary political and economic changes that have characterised Italy since the mid-1800s: the Italian Unification, intensive agriculture and industrial growth. These events triggered a general development process that, however, did not spread evenly across the country, giving rise to the current Italian territorial inequalities. Over the last 150 years, economic, social, cultural, and historical factors have combined to produce a chain of complex dynamics that led large mountain or rural areas to suffer from strong processes of depopulation, isolation, and marginalisation. These are places that for hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of years represented central spaces for anthropic distribution, but that within a few years found themselves unable to fulfil the functions that historically characterised them. One of the most significant changes that has affected Italian mountain territories is the development of the hydroelectric industry and the consequent energy revolution (Armiero & Barca, 2004). Another element that profoundly influenced the territorial transformation of the social and economic structure of these areas was the institution of private property: in 1924, all forms of collective land use were definitively abolished.

The period following 1924 was, therefore, an important historical phase characterised by interventions and policies aimed at transforming natural resources from a collective and promiscuous asset implying many rights of use—to a mobile and divisible asset implying a right of ownership. This contributed to loosening the community constraints that, until then, had represented “the defence of Europe’s inner areas” (Corona, 2004, p.383). This is how a real process of ‘deruralization’ began, which saw the transfer of rural labour to the industrial sphere (Toniolo, 2013; Reynaud & Miccoli, 2018). The

processes outlined above contributed to an increase in the exodus of a large section of the population from mountain and rural areas, attracted by industry and by the cities located in the valleys: a repulsion/attraction dynamic that favoured urban centres to the detriment of inner, rural and mountain areas. The socio-territorial changes and the historical dynamics outlined so far contribute to making the current vulnerabilities of these areas more evident, resulting from historically and culturally determined processes which contributed to widening the gap in Italy's territorial inequalities.

The Italian debate around inner areas matches the wider international debate regarding marginalisation processes and rural development. In Europe, rural development is a long-lasting issue that has been supported through different kinds of policies (European Commission [EC], 2014; ESPON, 2018). While addressing rural marginalisation in the European context, Copus and colleagues (2011) identify geographical remoteness, insufficient services, and demographic transition as the main triggers for the definition of marginal areas. Following the modernisation paradigm, such a combination of disadvantageous locations, were expected to cause backwardness in economic and sociocultural terms, for example low education and lack of employment opportunities (Terluin, 2003).

In the more recent international debate on rural development, the lack of access to different kinds of resources and infrastructures is explained as the result of a lack of socioeconomic and political connections, together with a relational remoteness that is not necessarily bound to geographical location (Bock, 2016). In this respect, a core role is played by changes in technology and in the emergent network society (Castells, 2000) in which mobility is ubiquitous and, in principle, transcends spaces (Urry, 2007; Cresswell, 2010). Geographical remoteness on its own does not create direct marginalisation, but it undoubtedly constitutes one of the challenges for interspatial and infra-social 'connectivity' (OECD, 2014). Rural marginalisation is, hence, embedded in a broader process of social change and a consequence of great socioeconomic and political changes, such as globalisation (Woods, 2016). The urbanisation of European countries (Buhaug & Urdal, 2013) is also considered a main trigger for demographic displacement from rural areas, as large cities are attractive for young people with their prospect of a prosperous metropolitan life (Saker, 2015). Finally, the global financial crisis had a key role in rural marginalisation processes, as the overall lowered incomes for residents and municipalities triggered rural outmigration and put services and businesses more at risk, especially in disconnected spaces.

## ***2.2 The Italian Inner Areas Today: Territorial Inequalities and Environmental Justice***

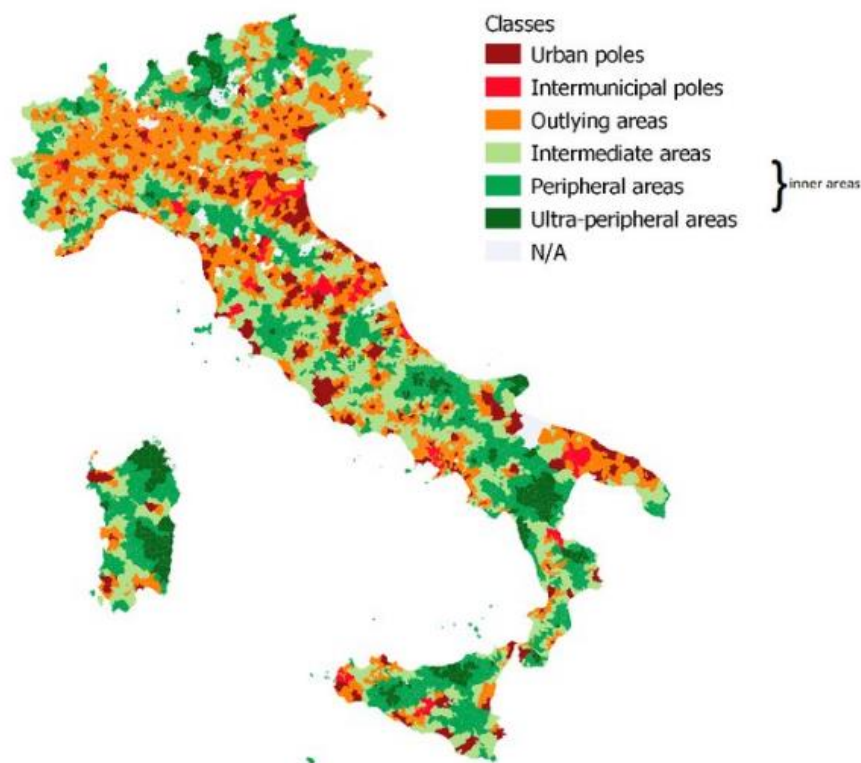
The Italian situation corresponds exactly to the international trend mentioned in the previous section. In 1958 the Italian economist Manlio Rossi-Doria coined the expression 'pulp and bone' to denounce the profound socioeconomic demarcation and divide that was emerging between different areas of our country, i.e., between rural and urban areas, between the hinterland and the coast, between the plains and the mountains. In the metaphor used by Rossi-Doria—which effectively reflects the concept of territorial inequalities—the 'pulp' areas are those territories in which the economy of economic development was polarised, while the 'bone' of the country—the skeleton of the peninsula—consists of the marginal territories. Many agree that this dynamic is "not the result of globalisation processes" but "the result of erroneous development policies" (Barca et al., 2014, p.4). Numerous experts on the subject point out how the inequalities of inner areas are systematic, especially concerning access



to and quality of the basic services available but also in terms of income (Carrosio, 2016; Gallo & Pagliacci, 2020). A further dynamic is what was named 'inequality in recognition' perceived by the inhabitants and described as the inattention and the neglect on the part of the urban ruling classes towards the specific nature of the inhabitants' needs, a disavowal of the cultural values and specificities of these territories.

More recently, both academic and political attention to the issue of inner areas found particular vigour, especially thanks to the foundation in 2013 of the National Strategy of Internal Areas (SNAI) under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Government. For the purposes of a systematic definition of Italy's inner areas, three services considered fundamental (health, education, and transport) were taken into account; it is precisely the absence of the combination of these services that is considered the main trigger for the continuous abandonment of these territories by the local population. In fact, a 'pole' is defined as a place where all three of the above-mentioned services are present—in particular, a complete school system offering up to secondary school level; an essential level of health care including a hospital; the presence of a railway station. As one moves further away from the poles of attraction, the distance and the time taken by individuals to reach the listed services increase, and this differentiation made it possible to identify what have been called the 'belt' places, the 'intermediate areas', the 'peripheral areas', and the 'ultra-peripheral areas' (Iommi & Marinari, 2017). Intermediate, peripheral, and ultra-peripheral areas altogether compose the 'Italian inner areas': a territory that exceeds 60% of the national soil and that involves 53% of Italian municipalities (4,261), to which 23% of the Italian population belongs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Italian inner areas according to National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) classification.



Source: Barca, 2015.

It is in these contexts that, in recent times, in academic work and in political debates on inner areas, the principle of environmental justice has been joined by that of social justice. The concept of environmental justice—which has been gaining ground in the United States since the 1980s, when civil rights movements began to place ecology at the heart of their demands—is based on the idea that the global population should have equal access to and control over environmental resources that are useful for their subsistence and well-being (Temper et al., 2015; Escobar, 2008). Starting from the US, the principle of environmental justice spread globally, inspiring and characterising the struggles of global movements for environmental justice. The aim of environmental justice movements was to claim the right of all people to have equal access to the use of resources and essential services, equal health protection for all communities and territories, and equal control over the environmental resources necessary for their own well-being and in respect of the environmental balance of the planet. Subsequently, this principle came to characterise the debates around the binomials of centre-periphery and city-countryside, in which the debate on Italy's inner areas finds its place. The equitable distribution of services aimed at creating greater equality in terms of territorial governance today represents the objectives of some of the political instruments committed to building a new rural welfare, from which community cooperatives stand out.

### **3.0 Community Cooperatives: A Possible Tool for Greater Socio-environmental Justice**

#### **3.1 A New Type of Social Enterprise in Italy**

The national development policies and the institutional reforms that in recent times addressed inner areas have often been considered as inefficient and marked by a 'place-blind' approach (Cotella & Vitale Brovarone, 2020). The simple transfer of public policies designed for urban areas to inner areas has proved ineffective and has often further aggravated their conditions, as shown by the continuous demographic decline of these territories, marked by an ageing population, the absence of young people, and continuous emigration processes only partly compensated by the arrival of foreign immigrants. On the other hand, new and heterogeneous experiences are developing, of which community cooperatives are one of the most interesting examples (Bianchi, 2021), whose aim is precisely to 'reverse the course' of territorial inequalities and seek greater socio-environmental justice in the country's rural and mountain territories.

In Italy, community enterprises have taken the cooperative form and are an even more recent phenomenon (Bandini et al., 2015). Among the various social enterprise experiences in Italy, community cooperatives are defined as multi-sectoral and multifunctional realities of social innovation that conceive a "different relationship between state, market and society" (LegaCoop, 2011, p.3). They are social enterprises<sup>1</sup> created to respond to the needs of the community, making the inhabitants the protagonists of these territories through the planning and managing of the cooperative itself in a typically participatory style. Community cooperatives, like other experiences of cooperative

---

<sup>1</sup> In the Italian legal system, community cooperatives respond to the national regulation dedicated to 'social enterprises' (Decreto Legislativo, 2017). In fact, specific regulations referring to community cooperatives have been made only on a regional level (e.g., Abruzzo region: L.R. n.25 8 ottobre 2015; Basilicata: L.R. n.12, 20 marzo 2015; Emilia Romagna: L.R. n.12, 7 luglio 2014; Liguria: L.R. n.14 7 aprile 2015; Lombardia: L.R. n.36, 6 novembre 2015; Puglia: L.R. n.23, 20 maggio 2014; Toscana: L.R. n.24, 8 maggio 2014). In the text, we often refer to community cooperatives as social enterprises by assuming the judicial terminology assumed on a national scale.

enterprises, perform an important social function not only in terms of particularly critical situations, but also in relation to generating development and well-being at the local level (Depedri & Turri, 2015). From this point of view, community cooperatives are a social innovation model in which the citizens organise themselves to be both producers and users of goods and services, fostering synergy, opportunities for growth, and cohesion within a community; by bringing together the activities of individual citizens, enterprises, associations, and institutions, community cooperatives should be able to respond to multiple mutuality needs for greater socio-environmental justice.

The increasing number of community cooperatives is characterising those contexts where the absence of services, or their poor quality, is more marked, proposing themselves as 'subjects' capable of responding to the various needs of the community. Here, the local community is the protagonist in the phases of conception, promotion, and management of heterogeneous activities linked to the subsistence of the population and the protection of the territory. The self-organising, participatory and mutualistic structure with which community cooperatives present themselves contributes to the creation of an infrastructure that strengthens the cohesion and social capital of a community, while at the same time enriching its economy. Indeed, this kind of cooperative has been established in continuity with the more classic cooperative experiences that developed throughout the 20th century, although over time, it has taken on specific conformations. Community cooperatives are, in fact, 'at the service' of a community with a heterogeneous composition and tend towards the inclusion of all individuals without distinction, whereas the past cooperative system was aimed at benefiting certain categories and groups within society<sup>2</sup>. The specificity of community cooperatives is that members aim to benefit the whole territory rather than specific individuals (Mori, 2014) and consequently share the needs and requirements linked to it.

A further innovation of modern cooperatives is represented by their affinity to what, in literature, has been defined as hybrid enterprises (Bandini et al., 2015; Venturi & Zandonai, 2014) that is, enterprises that have as their objective the creation of economic and social value, that reinvest profit to strengthen and expand activities and are only partially guided by market logic (Dees & Elias, 1998). They also have a very broad mission: they tend to maximise collective benefit and are oriented to respond to the needs of a plurality of subjects (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). In brief, in a hybrid enterprise, the mission is extremely broad, encompassing different aims; the company is made up of different subjects, and "co-production plays a central role in the development of the enterprise" (Bandini et al., 2015, p.21). These features also characterise community cooperatives. Indeed, in addition to having objectives linked to the regeneration of the socioeconomic fabric and the creation of both economic and social value (IreCoop, 2016), community cooperatives are distinguished by encompassing multi-sectoral activities, ranging from agriculture to tourism, from local production to environmental protection, from trade to renewable energy production (Bandini et al., 2015). This multifunctional logic makes it possible, on the one hand, to respond to the diversified reality of the community's needs and, on the other, allows cooperative realities to increasingly broaden the panorama of employment offerings (Carrosio, 2004). The occupational offer and job placement of participants is, in fact, an inherent prerogative of the main missions of community cooperatives. Thus, cooperative

---

<sup>2</sup> Since its inception, the cooperative world has involved particular categories of individuals who have voluntarily decided to 'associate' in order to benefit from each other and face the risks generated by the more overbearing capitalist market (Mazzoli & Zamagni, 2005).

members are not simply beneficiaries of the provided services, but also producers of the same, following the logic of co-production (Borzaga & Zandonai, 2015; Pestoff, 2012). According to some, the entrepreneurial experiments of community cooperatives represent the subversion of the very idea of the inner areas: no longer territories “capacitated with a narrative of their own”, but places placed at the centre of a reconstructed world thanks to new social and market relations that build a network capable of “going beyond the physical marginality of the territories themselves” (De Rossi, 2018, pp. 303–305).

### ***3.2 Inner Areas, Community Cooperative and Neo-rural Experiences***

Seeing that they represent a novelty in the cooperative landscape, community cooperatives are not yet particularly widespread, although they are rapidly increasing in number. In recent years, this particular type of cooperative has also spread to Tuscany, thanks to the Region’s commitment to supporting forms of collaborative economy through various forms of public funding. In 2019, 24 community cooperatives were established throughout the region, carrying on projects concerning the recovery and enhancement of disused common assets, tourism promotion, cultural or commercial activities, environmental protection, rediscovery of local products, etc. Also, in November 2019, the region approved a new regional law on community cooperatives, which amended regional law n.73/2005 by systematising policies to support this means of territorial cohesion and development by providing new forms of funding.

Given the growing political commitment to supporting inner areas, the question now is whether and to what extent these new forms of funding are sufficient to support the creation of community cooperatives or whether, in addition to the typical economic aspects, other resources are also needed to strengthen fragile territories. In short, it is once again a question of understanding the relationship between economic capital, social capital, and human capital. Even when the role of the institutions is active in promoting projects aimed at revitalising local micro-economies, the proposed interventions often fail due to rarefied or even absent human resources. There is no social and production network strong enough to take up the project efforts; there are few young people who are scattered over vast areas with a very low population density and few opportunities to aggregate.

At the same time, there are opposite experiences of people who are following a reverse migration project, moving from the cities or highly anthropized territories to these marginal areas, in search of a higher quality of life. This ‘back to the countryside’ migration process has undergone an increased trend in the last few decades in the European context, so much so that the concept of ‘neo-ruralism’ (or ‘neo-rural’ phenomena) has been coined. Nogué (2012), for example, describes this tendency as “the back-to-land phenomenon that took place in Europe and North America in the 1960s and 1970s, led by young urban people seeking an alternative way of life in rural areas” (p. 28). While these neo-rural movements have the capacity to repopulate and revitalize a territory, they also redefine the identity of these areas and, for this reason, they may represent a source of misunderstanding and real conflict (Chevalier, 1993; Massey & Jess, 1995).

The attempt to revitalise inland areas, even though new forms of social enterprise, in some cases—as we see in the case study—brings out new forms of ‘social conflict’ between stakeholders or different cultures. On the one hand, there are the old residents who resisted the temptation to abandon the territory and have made of the decline a self-fulfilling narrative and realized prophecy; on the other hand, there are a few new inhabitants who have come from urban areas and who relate to the territory in a different way, with heterogeneous

projects and prospects for the future. So-called neo-ruralists can find in the new forms of social enterprise an economic opportunity for their choice of life, while for the old inhabitants it is not always easy to come to terms with social innovation, technologies, and new ways of understanding agriculture. Old and new farmers, for example, do not always agree on how to work and how to take advantage of the surrounding environment and available natural resources.

## **4.0 Building a Community Cooperative Without a Community. The Case of Gerfalco.**

### **4.1 The Socio-environmental Context of Gerfalco**

Gerfalco is a characteristic village located in one of the inner areas of Tuscany. In the heart of the Colline Metallifere, it stands at the foot of the Cornate di Gerfalco, which is the highest peak (1060m) of the Antiappennino Toscano hills. In the middle of the nature reserve, Gerfalco is located at an altitude of 776m and, together with nearby Boccheggiano and Travale, makes up the three hamlets of the municipality of Montieri, in the province of Grosseto. Until the last century, the pyrite and silver mines were one of the main job sources for the inhabitants of Gerfalco and the neighbouring villages. In fact, the cessation of mining and the consequent gradual closure of the mines from the 1950s onwards drastically reduced the employment opportunities for the inhabitants of the area, contributing to a sharp increase in the depopulation of the entire area.

Bearing in mind that the confluence of educational, health, and rail transport services is the element that characterises Italian 'poles of attraction'<sup>3</sup>, it can be deduced that the city of Follonica represents the pole for the inhabitants living in Gerfalco. The distance between Gerfalco and Follonica is 38.9 km, and the calculated time for this car journey is 40 minutes. For this reason, Gerfalco falls into the category of 'peripheral inner area' (Iommi & Marinari, 2017). The data contained in the Report for the Selection of Inner Areas for the Region of Tuscany (2015), show that the village of Gerfalco belongs to the specific area of the region that has suffered the greatest percentage decrease in population (Regione Toscana, 2015).

In just over 50 years, the population of Gerfalco has decreased by about 90 per cent, from 1,000 residents in the 1960s to 100 today. Moreover, from the data that emerged from the conversations, it appears that about 40% of the official residents do not live in the village all the time, having maintained their residence despite moving elsewhere. This means that little more than 60 people live in Gerfalco today, making use of the services provided in the village. In this process of abandonment, only two commercial activities have survived: the *Circolo*, which, with its large terrace, is the only meeting and refreshment point, and *la Bottega*, which serves as a small shop, while numerous other commercial activities, along with many other types of services, no longer exist. The case of Gerfalco is not unique, but it remains emblematic of a set of processes that have been affecting an important part of the Italian territory for several decades. Today, these territories require specific interventions, both by public subjects, as in the case of the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI), and by private

---

<sup>3</sup> According to the Italian Strategy for Inner Areas (Barca, 2015), depending on the distance of Italian municipalities or small villages from the centre of confluence of three services (comprehensive educational offer, railway station, and hospital hub), Italian inner areas have been classified as follows: intermediate areas (where the travel time by car to reach the pole of attraction is between 20 and 40 minutes); peripheral areas (travel time between 40 and 75 minutes); and ultra peripheral area (travel time over 75 minutes by car).

subjects, in particular, those traceable to the so-called private-social sector, as in the case of community cooperatives.

After analysing all available documentation on the project to start a community cooperative in Gerfalco—in particular, the news published in the media, even on a national level<sup>4</sup>—eight interviews were carried out in spring 2018 with those who were the promoters of the cooperative. Then, six residents not involved in the cooperative project were interviewed in order to understand the reactions and points of view of those who, although living in Gerfalco, did not feel the need to revive the territory, even though the cooperative. Finally, during the month of May 2021, two of the old promoters were interviewed again in order to understand, after three years, what had happened to the project of setting up the cooperative and how relations with the ‘historical’ residents of Gerfalco have evolved. The main objective of the fieldwork carried out was to analyse the social dynamics present in this particular context, highlighting the role of social networks and understanding the role of interpersonal relationships in the implementation of a community project.

#### ***4.2 The Birth of the Cooperative Project***

The idea of setting up a community cooperative in Gerfalco dates back to early 2017, thanks to a young man who had been living for a few months on a farm between Montieri and Gerfalco with his partner and son. C.B. (43 years old, personal communication, 27/04/18) is well acquainted with the reality of community cooperatives in Emilia Romagna, and Gerfalco seemed to represent the ideal context to start a community project similar to the realities from which he draws inspiration. The initial project envisaged a series of activities typically linked to the territory, ranging from the development of the agricultural sector—i.e. restructuring the chestnut dryer, which had been out of use for years—to tourism activities, as in the case of the management of the park’s visitor centre and the running of a hostel. The aim was twofold: on the one hand, to create jobs or supplement the incomes of people in the area and, on the other, to develop activities that could bring well-being to the entire community.

In order to concretise and further develop the project, which in fact at this stage was not particularly well-structured, C.B. organised a first meeting among acquaintances living between Montieri and Gerfalco to verify the community’s willingness to work together in this direction. Several people from different backgrounds and experiences took part in the meeting, motivated by curiosity about this idea. Among them, there were also some of people living in a commune not far away, a farm that is part of the Italian network of Ecological Villages (RIVE). The experience of this commune is about fifteen years old, and during this time, it has hosted several personalities involved in activities related to permaculture, natural medicine, and renewable energy. Promoting the balance of the environment in a context of community and self-organised life is the objective that guides the activities and lifestyle sustained by the people who live there. Objectives and aspirations that well-matched the community cooperative project proposed by C.B.: this is how ‘La Bandita di Gerfalco: community cooperative project’ (C.B., personal communication, 27/04/18) took shape. Thus, the promotion of activities carried out by the community for the community came to be outlined, within a framework of principles linked to a respect for human and environmental resources, a circular economy based on decentralisation, and the enhancement of local traditions. In the months

---

<sup>4</sup> Our initial interest in Gerfalco arose thanks to articles published in national and local newspapers (Nembri, 2017) and some television reports (TgR Toscana, 2017).

following the first meeting, the actors involved continued to establish contacts with experts from Confcooperative—both at a national and regional level and were engaged in discussions on the progress of the initiative.

Thanks to a growing sensitivity towards attempts to revitalise rural and mountainous areas, and also in relation to the interest of the Tuscany Region in community cooperatives<sup>5</sup>, numerous media began to take an interest in the project, which aimed at the “rebirth of the village [...] to stop its inevitable decline” (Nembri, 2017, n.p.). An article in the *Corriere della Sera*'s *BuoneNotizie* magazine, followed by a publication in the monthly *Vita* and the local newspaper *Grosseto Notizie*, contributed to the media boom in which the Gerfalco project was featured. In addition, the mediatisation of the process quickly extended to television: on 6 November 2017, the Tuscan regional news programme of the Rai (the Italian public television) dedicated an episode to the drying of chestnuts, an activity in which the creators of the cooperative were involved; and on 20 February 2018, the programme *Uno Mattina*, this time on a national Rai programme, also dedicated an episode starring the ‘new young people’ of Gerfalco (during the period that the researchers spent in Gerfalco, another Rai crew made an inspection to verify the possibility of making a report for the *Linea verde* programme). However, linked to the fashion of *I'm going to live in the countryside*, if on the one hand, this rapid media coverage contributed to drawing more attention to the whole world of community cooperatives, on the other hand, it seems to have raised concerns and misunderstandings in Gerfalco, especially in relation to the project's still decidedly ideational phase.

What could have represented an opportunity for momentum for the fledgling cooperative actually turned out to be too much of an early mediation, taking place at a still embryonic stage of the project. “It was still all based on an idea” say the promoters of the cooperative, emphasising the precociousness of the dissemination of which they were protagonists. In some ways, the Gerfalco community felt publicly involved in an initiative they were still unaware of, since the real participatory activity aimed at including all the actors in the project had not yet begun. Thus, instead of arousing interest among the few residents, the distance between these young outsiders full of ideas and the old residents was deepened, the exact opposite of the ‘inclusive’ principles that inspire community cooperatives.

Moreover, this early mediatisation fuelled a rather bitter debate even among the promoters themselves: on the one hand, those who were willing to cooperate openly with the various bodies involved and, on the other hand, those who feared that this openness might call into question the ideals that inspired their own life model (this was particularly true for the members of the RIVE network). Already in the first few months, it became clear that despite certain cultural affinities “finding a common path was difficult and laborious” (C.B., personal communication, 27/04/18). For example, the initiative was initially attended by people hoping for a short-term return to employment, so “those who needed to work right away stayed away” (C.B., personal communication, 27/04/18), preferring, according to a tried and tested logic, to look for a job in an urban context rather than to engage and invest in a medium-term project. Or, as perspectives on the concepts of self-sufficiency and sustainability can take on very different nuances, some views among participants turned out to be discordant and led to the detachment of some initial participants.

---

<sup>5</sup> Here we can only recall that in 2017, except for the case of the Monticchiello experience (Berti, 2017), no real community cooperatives have yet been created in Tuscany, despite the fact that the Region has been encouraging processes of this kind for some time.

### 4.3 The Gerfalco Community: A Difficult Involvement

From the data collected through interviews with some of Gerfalco's inhabitants, some useful dynamics emerged to help understand the relationship between the community and the cooperative project and, consequently, the possibility of collaboration between the two parties. First, the inhabitants' lack of knowledge about the community cooperative project emerged rather clearly. In particular, none of the interviewees affirmed that they were fully aware, on the one hand, of the meaning of the community cooperative and of previous experiences of community projects in the Italian context. On the other hand, in the majority of cases, the interlocutors stated that they knew about the idea of the community cooperative in Gerfalco only by word of mouth or hearsay. When discussing the hypothetical project and its possible potential for the local community, respondents showed an attitude somewhere between hope and disillusionment. In fact, all those who expressed their views on the prospect of community management of activities and services proved to be very open to accepting new ideas and project proposals: "If something is done it is better. If they do something positive it is good, for the area too [...] if someone comes and wants to do something, no one tells them anything, on the contrary, we are happy" (F., 60 years old, personal communication, 28/04/18).

The interviewees remember the *glorious* years of the village: not only the older people who experienced this past directly, but also those who experienced it indirectly through the narratives of their grandparents or parents. The hope of seeing the village reborn and repopulated is certainly present but, furthermore, attitudes of disillusionment and mistrust are particularly evident among the interviewees.

As a young Gerfalcoian states:

We are quite happy when new things are created, but we are also a bit disillusioned from a certain point of view. After many years that, like me, you see that it's hard to get any kind of activity off the ground, obviously before you get too enthusiastic [...] I think the interest is there, we're all a bit disillusioned. I can assure you of that because I know how it works here, I know that people are disillusioned, because when you live in a place like this it's easy to become so. You can think that [the project] is a positive thing but you don't really know what it can lead to (S., 26 years old, personal communication, 27/04/18).

The advanced age of the majority of the population, the lack of young residents and the scarce—or sporadic—presence of middle-aged people (between 30 and 55 years old) make the prospect of active and lasting involvement of the population in any community project difficult. For example, the sporadic nature of the inhabitants who only live in the village at weekends or during the summer is part of what Carrosio (2004) called "intermittent residency" (p. 78), practised by individuals who only sporadically live in the village and participate in its social and cultural life: this is one of the elements that make the revitalization of local micro-economies problematic. Residents themselves imagine a new type of inhabitant in the Gerfalco of the future, in a community that will inevitably be different from that of the past:



These villages will no longer be inhabited by permanent residents, there will be people who love the place and who will bring it back to life through various activities; a different community of tourists and people who are retiring and looking for tranquillity (T., 56 years old, personal communication, 29/04/18).

Of the few young people from Gerfalco, none of them is a permanent resident in the village and their prospects seem far from a possible return:

It is a village that you can love because you grew up there, but it also caused you problems because it was always hard to move around, it was hard [...] There is no work here, there is nothing. I am a student, and I am thinking about creating something for myself [...] clearly, I have my own needs (S., 26 years old, personal communication, 29/04/18).

The offer of services, the heterogeneity of possibilities and socio-cultural stimuli of urban environments necessarily attract young people from Gerfalco, who do not seem to have lasting prospects in the village. The difficulty of having to cope with a permanent residence in Gerfalco is also perceived among the new residents, especially for families who would like to move permanently to the territory but who—to allow their children to complete their studies—spend the spring and summer seasons in Gerfalco, and the autumn and winter seasons in their places of origin. This is the case, for example, of A.'s family, who, in May 2021, tells us that the lack of an efficient transport system, together with the particularly adverse climatic conditions of the rural winters, forces them to live in the territory only seasonally, in the hope that this will become permanent when their daughter completes her studies.

In addition to these systematic problems, endogenous dynamics should also be examined. These can be traced back to a system of social relations built up over time, which do not facilitate the emergence of a real 'cooperative spirit': "the village is very divided and always has been", says a historical inhabitant of Gerfalco. This element is particularly highlighted by those who, in past years, had the experience of active participation in the activities of the cultural associations present in the village, which gradually decreased due to personal hardships. As happened—and is happening—in similar realities, these frictions, whether personal or related to family issues, also compromise(d) some of the activities traditionally organised in the village that used to bring cultural ferment, contributing to the reproduction of social and community ties in the area. A further element considers the foreign origin of the promoters of the community cooperative project. In a context such as that of Gerfalco, the feeling that reflects the binomials internal-external or autochthonous-foreigner is marked. This is reflected in the existence of the already mentioned new inhabitants of Italian villages, often defined in the existing literature as 'the new mountain dwellers' (Corrado et al., 2014; Membretti, 2016), that is, the new residents of rural and mountainous areas, who may be "young people in search of non-consumerist lifestyles, pensioners returning to their places of origin, families with micro-entrepreneurship projects, promoters of rural tourism" or "foreigners, and in particular so-called 'economic migrants', who arrive in Italy in search of work and better living conditions" (Membretti, 2016, pp. 52–53). In the examined case, it was clear from some conversations that the presence of people who are not natives of the place creates discrepancies

between natives and foreigners in the ways of thinking about the territory, imagining it, and relating to it. Such discrepancies, as observed by several interlocutors, quickly turn into mistrust towards the new and the unknown: regarding the creators of the cooperative project, for example, it was affirmed that, “These people are not from here anyway, I’m not saying that people are afraid, but there is this feeling that they are not from here. There is distrust” (T., 56 years old). Being outsiders is a condition which is strongly perceived by the new inhabitants who continue to repopulate the area. In May 2021, in fact, we are told of the presence of new young people in the area who had moved to Gerfalco in the previous two years—coming from nearby Florence or even from Milan—and who have taken up the management of agritourism for the production and sale of agricultural products. In spite of the initiative shown, relations with the Gerfalcians “Are good to the point of common sense and cordiality [...] we try to find a quiet life, but relationships are not very good” (A., 40 years old). Coexistence between old and new residents is not always fully accepted, and the widespread perception remains, on the part of the residents, that of ‘being invaded’ by new energies, lifestyles, and habits, and on the part of the new inhabitants, that of ‘feeling intruded upon’ and limited in their freedom of expression, action and contribution of novelties, ideas, and innovations.

During the planning phase of the cooperative project, the municipal administration had also tried to support the creation of the cooperative, but despite apparently favourable political will, several bureaucratic constraints did not allow this. For instance, the idea of entrusting the nascent cooperative with the management of the park’s visitor centre, considered strategic both to guarantee an economic return in the first phases of the activity and to legitimise itself in the eyes of the residents, floundered in the face of the obligation to hold a public tender. However, the lack of requirements on the part of the nascent cooperative prevented it from participating in the tender itself, so the management of the visitor centre was entrusted to another institution, not linked to the territory. The social dynamics described above certainly did not facilitate the position of the municipal administration, which probably found itself mediating, with little result, within those processes that determined the difficult progress of the cooperative project.

The confluence of exogenous dynamics (a premature mediatisation, the bureaucratic limits of the public tender), endogenous elements (the discrepancies of vision among the promoters, the frictions between old and new residents) and the structural problems of this internal area (the ageing of the original population, the attraction of young Gerfalcians towards urban centres) led, in the end, to the abandonment of the project for the creation of the community cooperative. As an alternative, the *Bandita di Gerfalco* took the form of a social promotion association, whose members carry out the activities that were conceived for the community cooperative, but in a mostly informal and sometimes individual way. These include traditional chestnut drying (thanks to the presence of a drying room in Gerfalco and a new one created in the neighbouring hamlet of Travale), honey and olive oil production, the management of a barn used for tourist accommodation, and beekeeping.

The difficulty of integrating the local population into the activities proposed in the area has undermined the collective and community character of the project in question, which is inevitably established as a *sine qua non* of community cooperatives. These activities do, however, find space in the territory and are undertaken with dedication and care. However, the pursuit of such initiatives on an individual level or on behalf of small groups of

outsiders transplanted in Gerfalco, may run the risk of increasing the gap between old and new residents and, consequently, of sharpening the distances between the traditional and the original ways both of managing the resources and of caring for the territory. In other words, there is a risk that the virtuous mechanisms that can arise from sharing and comparing old and new ways of relating between man and the environment and between the community and the territory—virtuosities that are now more necessary than ever in the context of inner areas—will be lost.

## 5.0 Conclusions

The case study clearly shows to what extent the combination of good laws (those allowing the creation of community cooperatives, for example), the availability of public funding and the natural resources typical of these inner areas are not enough in order to set up a community cooperative if what is missing is precisely what is needed, namely the ‘community’ bond. The Gerfalco case showed that the problems of inner areas do not only lie in the processes of depopulation, lack of services, and distance from urban centres, but also in the crisis of social capital, which has produced and continues to produce a fraying of the fabric of relations, mistrust, and disenchantment. As has already emerged from other research (Berti et al., 2017), inner areas do not always represent true ‘local communities’, and for this reason, it would seem appropriate to work not only on the provision of ‘tools’ (such as, for example, community cooperatives) but also on the re-weaving of social ties. This perspective is particularly important because inner areas have been shown to be more resilient: the low presence of manufacturing industries enabled these areas to better withstand the great recession that began in 2008 (Urso et al., 2019).

In Italy, there are many different cooperative experiences that have had a more than positive impact on depopulated villages and their territories. However, the analysis here proposed and the dynamics outlined have shown that the experiences of community cooperatives are not always easily replicable. This makes it possible to reconsider the concept of community and the meaning attributed to it within the specificity of each territorial context, both in Italian and in European marginal areas. Rural areas, in Italy as elsewhere, are heterogeneous realities with complex specificities: the Gerfalco case study underlines the risks of assuming an ‘orientalist’ gaze (Said, 1978) towards rural territories by considering inner areas as a unique territorial entity capable—or desirable—of communitarian projects. The failed case of Gerfalco reveals that this attention should be assumed not only by policy makers motivated by top-down approaches, but also by the growing number of so-called ‘neo-rurals’ that, in recent years, are increasingly being included in these contexts. The transformation that Italy’s inner areas have undergone is a phenomenon of vast proportions, which has given rise to economic and demographic dynamics with an evident impact, but which has also been accompanied by social and relational transformations that cannot be ignored for the purpose of greater socio-territorial and environmental justice. An economic vision of development has led the territory to be equated too simplistically with the terms of territorial resource or capital: indeed, territories need to be worked on in order to capitalize on the complexity of the present assets, both those that are strictly territorial and those that are human and social, which are certainly more difficult to identify and solve through standardised, top-down solutions.

## References

- Armiero, M., & Barca, S. (2004). *Storia dell'ambiente: una introduzione* [History of the environment: An introduction]. Rome: Carocci.
- Baldi, B. (2019). The national strategy for inner areas: Innovation, policy transfer and post-earthquake reconstruction. *World Political Science*, 15(2), 149–176. <https://doi.org/10.1515/wps-2019-0007>
- Bandini, F., Medei, R., & Travaglini C. (2015). Territorio e persone come risorse: le cooperative di comunità. [Territory and people as resources: Community cooperatives]. *Impresa Sociale*, 5, 19–35.
- Barca, F., Casavola, P., & Lucatelli, S. (2014). Strategia nazionale per le aree interne: definizione, obiettivi, strumenti e governance [National strategy for Internal Areas: Definition, objectives, tools and governance]. *Materiali UVAL*, 31, 1–68.
- Barca, F. (2015). *Disuguaglianze territoriali e bisogno sociale. La sfida delle "Aree Interne"* [Territorial inequalities and social need]. Modena: Fondazione Ermanno Gorrieri per Gli Studi Sociali.
- Berti, F. (2017). Da un Teatro povero ad una "comunità ricca". Forme di "resistenza" in un borgo del sud della Toscana. [From a poor theater to a "rich community". Forms of "resistance" in a village in southern Tuscany]. *Culture della sostenibilità*, 19, 64–75. <https://doi.org/10.7402/CDS.19.006>
- Berti, F., Bilotti A., & Nasi L. (2017). *Volontariato e welfare rurale. Uno studio per progettare nuovi servizi*. [Volunteering and rural welfare. A study to design new services]. Firenze: Centro Servizi Volontariato Toscana.
- Bianchi, M. (2021). Community engagement or community service? Case study of Italian community co-operatives and networks. In N. Walzer (Ed.), *Community owned businesses international entrepreneurship, finance, and economic development* (pp. 123–145). London: Routledge.
- Bock, B. (2016). Rural marginalisation and the role of social innovation: A turn towards nexogenous development and rural reconnection. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 53(4), 552–573. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12119>
- Borzaga, C., & Zandonai, F. (2015). Oltre la narrazione, fuori dagli schemi: i processi generativi delle imprese di comunità [Beyond the narrative, outside the box: the generative processes of community businesses]. *Rivista Impresa Sociale*, 5, 1–7.
- Buhaug H., & Urdal, H. (2013). An urbanization bomb? Population growth and social disorder in cities. *Global Environmental Change*, 23(1) 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2012.10.016>
- Carrosio, G. (2004). Un caso emblematico di economia leggera in aree fragili: la cooperativa Valli Unite [An emblematic case of a light economy in fragile areas: the Valli Unite Cooperative]. *Sviluppo Locale*, 11(27), 78–93.
- Carrosio, G. (2016). A place-based perspective for welfare recalibration in the Italian inner peripheries: The case of the Italian strategy for inner areas. *Sociologia e politiche sociali*, 19(3), 50–64.
- Castells, M. (2000). Materials for an exploratory theory of the network society. *British Journal of Sociology*, 51(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2000.00005.x>

- Chevalier, M. (1993). Neo-rural phenomena. *Espace géographique* (Special issue in English), 175–191. [https://www.persee.fr/doc/spgeo\\_0046-2497\\_1993\\_hos\\_1\\_1\\_3201](https://www.persee.fr/doc/spgeo_0046-2497_1993_hos_1_1_3201)
- Copus, A. K., Courtney, P., Dax, T., Meredith, D., Noguera, J., Shucksmith, M., & Talbot, H. (2011, August). *EDORA: European Development Opportunities for Rural Areas - Applied Research 2013/1/2: Final Report* (Report). Luxembourg: EPSON & UHI Millennium Institute.
- Cresswell, T. (2010). Towards a politics of mobility. *Environment and Planning*, 28(1), 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1068%2Fd11407>
- Corona, G. (2004). Declino dei commons ed equilibri ambientali. Il caso Italiano fra Otto e Novecento [Decline of the commons and environmental balances. The Italian case between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries]. *Società e Storia*, 104, 1–27.
- Corrado, F., Dematteis, G., & Di Gioia, A. (Eds.) (2014). *Nuovi montanari. Abitare le Alpi nel XXI secolo* [New highlanders - Living in the Alps in the 21st century]. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Cotella, G., & Vitale Brovarone, E. (2020). The Italian National Strategy for Inner Areas: A place-based approach to regional development. In J. Banski, (Ed.), *Dilemmas of regional and local development* (pp. 50–71). New York: Routledge.
- De Rossi, A. (2018). *Riabitare l'Italia. Le aree interne tra abbandoni e riconquiste* [Rehab Italy - The internal areas between abandonment and reconquest]. Rome: Donzelli.
- Dees, J. G., & Elias, J. (1998). The challenge of combining social and commercial enterprise. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 8(1), 165–178.
- Decreto Legislativo. (2017, July 3). *Revisions of the rules on social enterprise no. 112*. Normattiva.
- Depedri, S., & Turri, S. (2015). Dalla funzione sociale alla cooperativa di comunità: un caso studio per discutere su un flebile confine [From the social function to the community cooperative: A case study to discuss the thin border]. *Rivista Impresa Sociale*, 5, 65–82.
- European Commission (EC). (2014). *Investimenti per l'occupazione e la crescita. Promuovere lo sviluppo e la buona governance nelle città e regioni dell'UE – Sesta relazione sulla coesione economica, sociale e territoriale*. (Report). [Investment for jobs and growth. Promoting development and good governance in EU cities and regions - Sixth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion]. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion6/6cr\\_it.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion6/6cr_it.pdf)
- European Network for Rural Development (ENRD). (n.d.). *Strategy for Inner Areas Italy*. (Working document). Brussels: Author. [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg\\_smart-villages\\_case-study\\_it.pdf](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg_smart-villages_case-study_it.pdf)
- Escobar, A. (2008). *Territorios de diferencia. Lugar, movimientos, vida, redes* [Territories of difference: Place, movements, life, Redes]. Popayán: Universidad del Cauca.

- ESPON. (2018). *Inner peripheries in Europe. Possible development strategies to overcome their marginalising effects.* (Final Report). Retrieved from <https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/ESPON-Policy-Brief-Inner-Peripheries.pdf>
- Gallo, G., & Pagliacci, F. (2020). Widening the gap: The influence of 'inner areas' on income inequality in Italy. *Economia Politica*, 37, 197–221.
- Cooperativa di comunità. (2017, October 10). *Cooperativa di comunità: la rinascita di Gerfalco passa attraverso "La Bandita"*. Grosseto Notizie. Retrieved March 30, 2018, from <https://www.grossetonotizie.com/cooperativa-di-comunita-la-bandita-a-gerfalco/>
- Iommi, S., & Marinari, D. (2017). *Aree montane, aree interne, aree fragili: Partizioni non coincidenti* (Report) [Mountain areas, internal areas, fragile areas: Non-coincident partitions]. Firenze: Irpet.
- Istituto Regionale per l'Educazione Cooperativa (IRECOOP). (2016). *Studio di fattibilità sulle cooperative di comunità* (Report) [Feasibility study on community cooperatives]. [https://www.mise.gov.it/images/stories/documenti/allegati/coop/SCHEDA\\_SF\\_STUDIO\\_DI\\_FATTIBILITA\\_PER\\_LO\\_SVILUPPO DELLE COOPERATIVE DI COMUNITA.pdf](https://www.mise.gov.it/images/stories/documenti/allegati/coop/SCHEDA_SF_STUDIO_DI_FATTIBILITA_PER_LO_SVILUPPO DELLE COOPERATIVE DI COMUNITA.pdf)
- LegaCoop. (2011). *Guida alle cooperative di comunità.* (Report). [Guide to the Cooperative di Comunità]. Retrieved April 4, 2021, from [http://www.coopstartup.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/GuidaCoopComunita2011\\_LEGACOOOP.pdf](http://www.coopstartup.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/GuidaCoopComunita2011_LEGACOOOP.pdf)
- Massey, D., & Jess, P. (1995). *A place in the world? Places, cultures and globalization.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mazzoli, E., & Zamagni, S. (2005). *Verso una nuova teoria economica della cooperazione.* [Towards a new economic theory of cooperation]. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Membretti, A. (2016). Provinciali, montanari, forestieri. Appaesamento degli stranieri e riproduzione della socio-diversità nella provincia alpina. [Provincials, mountaineers, foreigners. Appeasement of foreigners and reproduction of socio-diversity in the Alpine province]. *Lo Squaderno: Explorations in Space and Societies*, 41, 51–54.
- Mori, P.A. (2014). Community and cooperation: The evolution of cooperatives towards new models of citizens' democratic participation in public services provision. *Euricse*, 63(14), 1–25. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2390748>
- Nembri, A. (2017). *100 abitanti, una comunità e la rinascita del borgo.* [100 inhabitants, a community cooperative and the rebirth of the village]. Vita Bookazine. Retrieved April 25, 2021, from <http://www.vita.it/it/article/2017/10/10/100-abitanti-una-cooperativa-di-comunita-e-la-rinascita-del-borgo/144769/>
- Nogué, J. (2012). Neo ruralism in the European context. Origins and Evolution, In J. R. Resina, & W. Viestenz (Eds.), *New ruralism: An epistemology of transformed space* (pp. 27-40). Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert.
- OECD. (2014). *Innovation and modernising the rural economy.* Paris: OECD publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264205390-en>

- Peredo, A. M., & Chrisman, J. J. (2006). Towards a theory of community-based enterprise. *The Academy of Management Review*, 31(2), 309–328. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20159204>
- Pestoff, V. (2012). Co-production and third sector social services in Europe: Some concepts and evidence. *Voluntas*, 23, 1102–1118. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-012-9308-7>
- Regione Toscana. (2015). *Rapporto di Istruttoria per la Selezione delle Aree Interne per la Regione Toscana* (Report). [Investigation Report for the Selection of Inner Areas for the Region of Tuscany]. Retrieved April 25, 2021, from <https://www.ars.toscana.it/rapporti-relazioni-e-sintesi/2015/3315-le-aree-interne-e-fragili-della-toscana-situazione-demografica-stato-di-salute-e-mobilita-sanitaria-dicembre-2015.html#>
- Reynaud, C., & Miccoli, S. (2018). Depopulation and the ageing population: The relationship in Italian municipalities. *Sustainability*, 10, 1004. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10041004>
- Rossi-Doria, M. (1958). *Dieci anni di politica agraria* [Ten years of agrarian policy]. Bari-Roma: Laterza.
- Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Saker, R. R. (2015). The well-being of nations: An empirical assessment of sustainable urbanization for Europe. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 22(5), 375–387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2015.1055524>
- Temper, L., Del Bene, D., & Martinez-Alier, J. (2015). Mapping the frontiers and front lines of global environmental justice: The EJAtlas. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 22, 255–278. <https://doi.org/10.2458/v22i1.21108>
- Terluin, I. J. (2003). Differences in economic development in rural regions of advanced countries: An overview and critical analysis of theories. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 13, 327–344. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167\(02\)00071-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167(02)00071-2)
- TgR Regione Toscana. (2017, November 6). Montieri: i giovani e le antiche tradizioni [Montieri: Young people and ancient traditions] [Video file]. Retrieved May 8, 2021, from <https://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/TGR/media/tos-montieri-tradizioni-castagne-giovani-antichi-mestieri-914d19b4-ba91-4ca8-a81d-79c3dae0c6df.html>
- Toniolo, G. (Ed.). (2013). *The Oxford handbook of the Italian economy since unification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Urry, J. (2007). *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Urso, G., Modica, M., & Faggian A. (2019). Resilience and sectoral composition change of Italian Inner Areas in response to the Great Recession. *Sustainability*, 11(9), 2679. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11092679>
- Venturi, P., & Zandonai, F. (2014). *Imprese ibride. Modelli di innovazione sociale per rigenerare valore* [Hybrid businesses. Models of social innovation to regenerate values]. Milano: Egea.
- Woods, M. (2016). Territorialisation and the assemblage of rural place, examples from Canada and New Zealand. In J. Dessein, E. Battaglini, & L. Horlings (Eds), *Cultural sustainability and regional development* (pp. 29–42). London/New York: Routledge.