



RENAISSANCE IN ECONOMICS - Proposal for an Organized Session

Food economy: Building Resilience and Social Justice in Agricultural Systems through Solidarity Economies, Self-managed Labour and Agroecology

The session presents the results of our action-research journey exploring the role of solidarity economies and self-managed labour in fostering resilient and sustainable agricultural systems. By examining the intersection of economic democracy, cooperative work models, and agroecology, we aim to highlight how these alternative frameworks challenge dominant agro-industrial paradigms and contribute to broader social and environmental transformations. Additionally, we will focus on regulatory proposals and advocacy actions capable of supporting these experiences in their everyday challenges and thus pursue, at the same time, objectives of sustainable development and social justice.

Solidarity economies emphasize collective ownership, democratic decision-making, and the prioritization of social and ecological well-being over profit maximization. These principles are particularly relevant in agriculture, where industrial models often result in exploitative labor conditions, environmental degradation, and economic precarity for small-scale producers. By contrast, solidarity-based initiatives seek to create alternative systems that empower workers, promote ecological sustainability, and strengthen local economies. Additionally, these practices are part of a renewed attention to the agrarian question which promotes less intensive (or restorative) agriculture, the enhancement of collective land ownership and its management, cooperative and self-managed work, as well as mutual organizations among producers, other workers, and consumers. Finally, the creation of an ecological and self-managed supply chain, aiming for sector agreements that prevent the creation of unfair profits throughout the distribution chain.

Our discussion will draw from experiences of agroecological initiatives in Italy, understood as a laboratory where the economic and social context has been affected by the 2008 crisis, austerity measures, and finally the new socio-economic challenges brought by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Against this backdrop, we will focus on how solidarity economy experiments and self-managed productions create equitable labor conditions, foster economic self-determination, and promote environmental stewardship.

A key focus will be the policy implications of solidarity economies in the context of agroecological transitions. As governments and institutions increasingly recognize the need for sustainable food systems, we will examine how legal frameworks, funding mechanisms, and land use policies can facilitate or obstruct the growth of solidarity-based agricultural models. Another central theme will be the challenges faced by self-managed labor initiatives in scaling their impact while maintaining their core principles of autonomy and collective governance, with insights from practitioners who have successfully navigated these complexities.

This session is promoted by RIES (Rete Italiana di Economia Solidale) together with the project "Contemporary Italian Foodways: Commons, mutual aid, and agroecology", funded by Maison des Sciences de l'Homme de Paris Nord (Co-directed by Maria Francesca De Tullio and Wadid Minh Rahhou). Hence, we consider the study of the Italian context as a way to connect different theoretical and methodological standpoints and foster a dialogue between scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

Jason Nardi (RIES and RIPESS Europe) will provide an overview of the current state of solidarity economies, rural areas, and ongoing advocacy projects. Drawing on a broad range of case studies from Italy and beyond, he will illustrate the ways in which solidarity economies contribute to reshaping agricultural landscapes, creating new models of governance, and advocating for policy changes that support sustainable and inclusive food systems.

Mondeggi Bene Comune - Fattoria senza Padroni, will be presented by Martina Martignoni (Univ. Pisa) as a political practice and a case study exemplifying dynamics of ecological agriculture through its commitment to land stewardship and collective governance.

The above speakers will be involved in a dialogue with economists Ana Sofia Acosta Alvarado and Wadid Minh Rahhou (Univ. Paris 13). Inspired by the foodways and food pathways literature, the project aims to study the production of tomato sauce (Solidaria in Bari), olive oil (Mondeggi in Florence), and pasta (RUcasa1130 in Sant'Agata dei Goti, Benevento). This approach, borrowed from historical studies of culinary cultures, links local culinary practices with the underlying historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political dynamics. The purpose is to study the agroecological transition through a "local systemic" lens. The production sites are local, but belong to systems that connect actors and spaces; therefore, the project aims to observe how the organization of these local agri-food systems promotes the emergence of social and spatial relations different from those of the contemporary agri-food production regime.

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