

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN ITALY¹ İTALYA'DA KOOPERATİFÇİLİK HAREKETİNİN GELİŞİMİ

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, kooperatif hareketinin teorik temellerini ve tarihsel gelişimini araştırarak, temel prensiplerini, tarihsel kökenlerini ve çağdaş önemini açıklamaktadır. Ortak mülkiyet ve demokratik yönetim ideallerine dayanan kooperatifler, kâr maksimizasyonu yerine üyelerinin ve toplumlarının refahını öncelemektedir. Robert Owen gibi öncüler, Sanayi Devrimi'nin sosyo-ekonomik zorlukları arasında sosyal uyumu teşvik etmek amacıyla kooperatif prensiplerini savunmada önemli roller oynamıştır. Zengin kooperatif mirasıyla İtalya, kooperatif işletmelerin evrimini incelemek için önemli bir vaka çalışması sunmaktadır. 15. yüzyıldaki başlangıç aşamalarından günümüzde çeşitli sektörlerdeki belirgin konumuna kadar, İtalya'nın kooperatif hareketi tarihsel, kültürel ve sosyo-ekonomik faktörlerin karmaşık etkileşimini yansıtmaktadır. Siyasi çalkantılar ve ekonomik istikrarsızlık gibi engellerle karşılaşmalarına rağmen, İtalyan kooperatifleri dayanıklılık ve azim göstermiştir. Son yıllarda İtalya kooperatif faaliyetlerinde bir canlanma yaşamış olup, bölgeler ve endüstriler arasında dikkate değer bir varlık göstermiştir. Kooperatifler, geleneksel iş modellerine alternatif bir paradigma sunarak ekonomik kalkınma ve toplumsal katılım için katalizör olmaya devam etmektedir. Dayanışma, kapsayıcılık ve sürdürülebilirlik prensiplerini benimseyerek, kooperatifler, daha adil ve refah dolu bir toplumun gerçekleşmesine katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, kooperatif hareketinin kapsamlı bir analizini sunmayı amaçlayarak, onun sürekli önemini ve olumlu toplumsal etki potansiyelini vurgulamayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekonomi, Ekonomi Politikası, Kooperatifler, Kooperatif Hareketi

ABSTRACT

This paper inquires the theoretical underpinnings and historical trajectory of the cooperative movement, elucidating its fundamental principles, historical origins, and contemporary significance. Rooted in ideals of collective ownership and democratic governance, cooperatives prioritize the welfare of their members and communities over profit maximization. Pioneers such as Robert Owen played instrumental roles in advocating for cooperative principles as a means to foster social harmony amidst the socio-economic challenges of the Industrial Revolution. Italy, with its rich cooperative heritage, provides a compelling case study in the evolution of cooperative enterprise. From its nascent stages in the 15th century to its contemporary prominence across diverse sectors, Italy's cooperative movement reflects a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Despite encountering obstacles such as political upheaval and economic instability, Italian cooperatives have demonstrated resilience and perseverance. In recent years, Italy has

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witnessed a resurgence of cooperative activity, with a notable presence across regions and industries. Cooperatives continue to serve as catalysts for economic development and social inclusion, offering an alternative paradigm to traditional business models. By embodying principles of solidarity, inclusivity, and sustainability, cooperatives contribute to the realization of a more equitable and prosperous society. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the cooperative movement, shedding light on its enduring relevance and potential for positive societal impact.

Keywords: Economics, Economic Policy, Cooperatives, Cooperative Movement

1. INTRODUCTION

The cooperative movement, a cornerstone of economic and social development, has a rich and multifaceted history spanning centuries. Rooted in principles of collective ownership, democratic governance, and mutual support, cooperatives have emerged as powerful agents of change, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. This article delves into the theoretical underpinnings and historical trajectory of the cooperative movement, examining its fundamental principles, historical origins, and contemporary relevance. Cooperatives, as distinct from conventional corporations, prioritize the welfare of their members and communities over profit maximization. From their inception as a response to the socio-economic challenges of the Industrial Revolution to their proliferation in diverse sectors such as agriculture, retail, and finance, cooperatives have embodied resilience and adaptability. Italy, with its vibrant cooperative heritage, serves as a compelling case study in the evolution of cooperative enterprise. From the emergence of early cooperative endeavors in the 15th century to the modern-day expansion of cooperative activity across regions and sectors, Italy's cooperative movement reflects a rich tapestry of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Despite facing challenges such as political upheaval and economic uncertainty, Italian cooperatives have persevered, demonstrating remarkable growth and resilience. As the global community grapples with pressing challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and social injustice, the cooperative model offers a compelling alternative to traditional modes of business. By fostering principles of solidarity, inclusivity, and sustainable development, cooperatives continue to play a pivotal role in shaping a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, a cooperative is defined as a democratically managed enterprise created on the basis of common ownership by both men and women. For cooperatives, partners—that is, people—are of greater importance than just making a profit. In this regard, cooperatives not only provide economic support to their members but also contribute to their social and cultural well-being. Due to these characteristics, cooperatives are recognized as social initiatives that emphasize peace and democracy (FAO, 2012).

The concept of corporation, used in the sense of an institution or company, is not limited to the narrow framework referring to limited liability shareholder companies, with legal regulations based on Roman Law and Napoleonic laws in European countries such as Spain, Italy, France, and much of South America. Instead, it is more broadly associated with the origin of the concept, *corpus*, invoking connotations of body, structure, and form. Since the

early 20th century, the concept of corporation in anthropological literature has often referred to kinship or communal structures with shared rights and properties, functioning as a single body, reminiscent of tribal formations (Vargas-Cetina, 2011). Similarly, the concept of cooperation, rooted in Latin, can be traced in literature from the 14th century onwards. It signifies acting together for the attainment of a common goal or the joint execution of a task (Draperi, 2006). According to Draheim, when a cooperative is considered as a social group, it represents a collective intelligence that gathers around the cooperative spirit or solidarity spirit (*genossenschaftgeist* or *esprit de corps*). Harmonious social cohesion can only be achieved through this spirit. A genuine cooperative should possess not only rational thinking but also this shared sentiment. The shared cooperative spirit significantly influences factors such as the stability, development, and competitive strength of the cooperative (Draheim, 1952).

The formation of cooperatives in a contemporary context is a result of the search for a solution by workers and farmers against the worsening conditions brought about by the Industrial Revolution. From the mid-18th century onwards, parallel to industrial progress, modern cooperatives were primarily established in Europe and later in North America, gaining prevalence. Intellectual figures such as Philippe Buchez, Etienne Cabet, Charles Fourier, William Thompson, and Robert Owen, who played a significant role in creating the ideological foundation of cooperativism, also made important contributions through their initiatives in the formation of some cooperatives based on their opinions (Shaffer, 1999). The Rochdale Cooperative Movement, initiated by 28 textile workers following an unsuccessful strike in 1844, was shaped by the ideas of Robert Owen. In line with this approach, it advocates that through cooperation instead of competition, unemployment and poverty can be alleviated, leading to the creation of a harmonious, prosperous, and ideal society (Balnave & Patmore, 2006).

The prominent social economists of the time put forth ideas on measures that would reduce class conflicts and achieve social peace and harmony. The widely advocated view has been that these goals can be achieved by sharing profits. Charles Gide, on the other hand, staunchly defended cooperativism as a definitive element of the social economy, presenting it as an alternative to both market economy and state socialism (Westlund, 2003). John Stuart Mill, in his evaluations on the principles of political economy, addressed the relationship between capital owners and workers. He argued that as humanity continues its progress and development, a form of enterprise where capital is collectively owned by workers, and its management is determined through the election of workers among themselves, based on equality, would prevail over a model where the working class has no say in the administration (Taylor, 2016). The cooperative law prepared by Edward Vansittart, Charles Kingsley, and Frederick Maurice served as a precursor to contemporary cooperative laws (Koraltan et al., 1971)

It is possible to speak of a cooperative experience in Europe dating back to the 19th century, where legal regulations for cooperatives began to be implemented, particularly among the countries forming the European Union. Although cooperative legislation has undergone some changes in line with the spirit of the time, the fundamental principles remain the same. Cooperatives continue to exist as organizations based on voluntarism, maintaining their democratic character and strong ties, especially with local communities (Bijman & Iliopoulos, 2014). The importance of cooperatives, democratically governed by their members, stems from their distinct characteristics compared to traditional shareholder companies. They are noted for being more responsible and transparent towards their members, providing responses

not only to economic problems but also to social issues, and contributing to the alleviation of poverty. Within industrial activities, cooperatives have been significant stakeholders for over 150 years. Consumer cooperatives, particularly in Scandinavia and many parts of Europe, have emerged as pioneers in the modern retail chain structure and continue to be important actors today. Examining the agricultural sector reveals that cooperatives engaged in agricultural processing and marketing hold market shares close to 100% in many countries. Additionally, cooperatives play a significant role in sectors such as banking, insurance, healthcare, and housing (Kalmi, 2007).

The growing interest in cooperatives is not limited to Europe alone. In 2009, the number of cooperatives in the United States increased to 29,285, with approximately 351 million cooperative members and 856,310 employees. The total value of assets owned by cooperatives surpassed 3 trillion dollars, and the annual income generated by cooperatives exceeded 500 billion dollars (Deller et al., 2009). The formation of consumer cooperatives in the United States, more closely aligned with the Rochdale example, was primarily initiated by Europeans who migrated to America, bringing along the ideals and traditions of cooperativism. This trend was particularly led by immigrants from Scandinavian countries such as Sweden, Finland, and Norway. The mass inclination towards the cooperative movement in America occurred notably during the Great Depression. The devastating effects of the economic downturn led many individuals to question the economic system they were in and seek solutions to counter the impacts of the crisis (Childs, 1937). Cooperatives operating in the United States today are present in various sectors, including agriculture, food retail, public services, childcare, healthcare, and financial services. While some of these cooperatives are small local businesses, there are also larger ones that rank on the scale to be included in the Fortune 500 list (Majee & Hoyt, 2011).

3. THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN ITALY

Italian cooperative movement, which traces its origins back to the 15th century with the establishment of primitive cooperative enterprises in the northern regions of the country, boasts a rich and varied history deeply rooted in rural areas. However, the pivotal period of cooperative development emerged in the 19th century, during which the movement flourished, resulting in the establishment of thousands of cooperatives, approximately 8,000 of which remained operational prior to the outbreak of the First World War. (Tereshtenko, 1944). The origins of contemporary Italian cooperative enterprises, which span a wide array of sectors including agriculture, construction, social services, retail, and credit, and have attained considerable scale, can be traced back to the 19th century (Menzani & Zamagni, 2010).

The founders and trailblazers of Italian cooperatives drew inspiration from a range of cooperative models prevalent in 19th-century Europe. These included the consumer cooperatives pioneered by the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in England, worker cooperatives in France, and credit cooperatives established in Germany and Austria, following the frameworks proposed by Raiffeisen and Schulze-Delitzsch. The proliferation and adoption of such cooperative paradigms in Italy were influenced by the country's varied regional economic structures and developmental stages, as well as the distinct requirements of local markets across different regions (Borzaga et al., 2010). The earliest documented instances of modern cooperatives trace back to the 1850s. A notable example is the consumer cooperative movement spearheaded by the Turin Workers' Association, which emerged concurrently with the Rochdale model but developed autonomously, devoid of its influence.

Additionally, the glass production cooperative founded in Altare stands out as one of the pioneering Italian cooperatives, with both cooperative endeavors commencing in 1854 (Oakeshott, 1990).

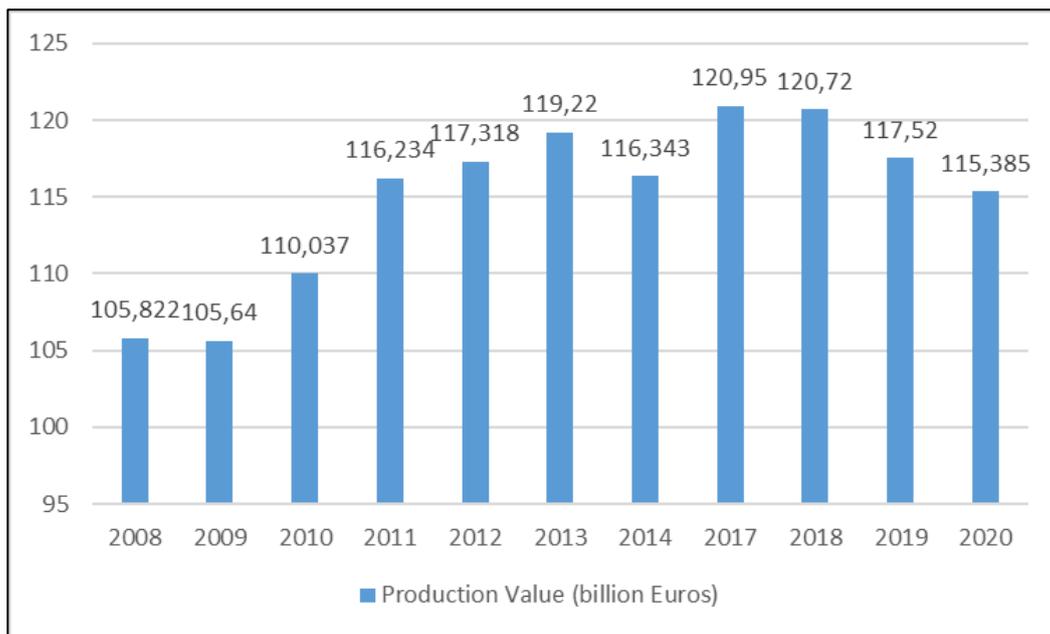
The onset of the Italian cooperative movement's expansion is often dubbed the "golden age of cooperatives," marking its inception in the early 20th century. Throughout this era, the enduring characteristics that would come to define the cooperative movement were solidified. Ideological schisms emerged within overarching organizations, leading to overlaps and competition among them. The three predominant umbrella organizations during this period were Legacoop, rooted in socialism, Confcooperative, with ties to the Catholic Church, and the republican-liberal umbrella organization (Menzani & Zamagni, 2010). In Italy, the count of registered cooperatives stood at 4,896 in 1885. With the advancement of the cooperative movement, this figure surged to 7,400 by 1910, with cooperative membership surpassing one million. However, in the early 1920s, following the rise of the Fascist regime to power, socialist, Catholic, and republican democratic cooperatives all endured severe setbacks, severely impeding the rapid progress of the cooperative movement. While the policies of the Fascist regime did not eradicate the cooperative movement entirely, they significantly decelerated its growth, leading to divergent trajectories in the development of various cooperative sectors, notably fostering the expansion of farmer cooperatives. Following the conclusion of World War II, the number of cooperatives managed to surpass the levels of the early 1930s (Costa et al., 2012).

Following the restoration of democracy, the umbrella organizations Legacoop and Confcooperative were reestablished. In 1948, Article 45 of the constitution recognized and supported cooperativism as a means to reconcile economic activity with the spirit of solidarity, aligning with national interests. The liberal cooperative umbrella organization, Agci, was founded in 1952, followed by the establishment of smaller umbrella organizations such as Uinci in 1975 and Unicoop in 2004 (Menzani & Zamagni, 2010). Italian cooperatives achieved extraordinary growth particularly in the post-World War II period, notably between 1945 and 1947, and again from the 1970s onwards. By 1981, the number of registered producer cooperatives in Italy approached 20,000. While the influence of cooperatives in the service sector increased, they were most impactful in the construction and manufacturing sectors. Construction cooperatives accounted for 8% of national sales, while cooperatives held approximately a 10% market share in pottery, carpentry, glass production, and certain engineering activities. More than 40% of cooperatives operating across Italy are concentrated in the regions of Emilia-Romagna, Campania, and Sicily (Jones & Svejnar, 1985).

Between 1973 and 1982, both the number of cooperatives and the number of employees working in cooperatives in Italy witnessed an increase of over 66%. Cooperatives not only exhibit a presence across various sectors of the economy but also demonstrate a widespread geographical distribution. According to official records from this period, 35% of cooperatives are located in the north, 25% in the central region, 25% in the south, and 15% on the islands. Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, prominent regions in the cooperative movement, are indicated to account for 7.5% and 6.2% of cooperatives, respectively. As of the 1981 official census, the 16,000 producer cooperatives operating in Italy employed over 300,000 individuals. While small-scale producer cooperatives increasingly evolved into larger industrial enterprises since 1945, private firms predominantly remained small-scale enterprises. Italy boasts the highest number of producer cooperatives among Western countries, surpassing the combined total of cooperatives in all other OECD countries during this period (Bartlett et al., 1992). In the aftermath of the Great Recession, employment generated by cooperatives

witnessed an upsurge in sixteen out of the twenty-one regions of Italy between 2012 and 2017. Notably, nine regions reported employment increases exceeding 10%. By 2017, the workforce engaged by 57,000 cooperatives in Italy amounted to 1.13 million individuals, comprising 6.6% of the nation's total employment. When considering the broader social economy, which encompasses associations, foundations, and similar entities, the proportion of employment within the European Union averages around 6%. Italy's contribution to employment within the social economy surpasses the European Union average (OECD, 2021).

Graphic 1: Production Values of Cooperatives in Italy



(Alleanza delle Cooperative Italiane, 2015; MISE, 2021; MISE, 2022)

The total production values of Italian cooperatives for the period between 2008 and 2020 are depicted in Graphic 1. It can be observed that the performance of cooperatives during the period remained relatively stable compared to 2008, when they had a production value of approximately 106 billion Euros. From 2008 to 2017, there was an increase of around 14.3% in the total production value. Although there was a decrease of approximately 4.6% in the total production value from 2017 to 2020, there was still an overall increase of about 9% from 2008 to 2020.

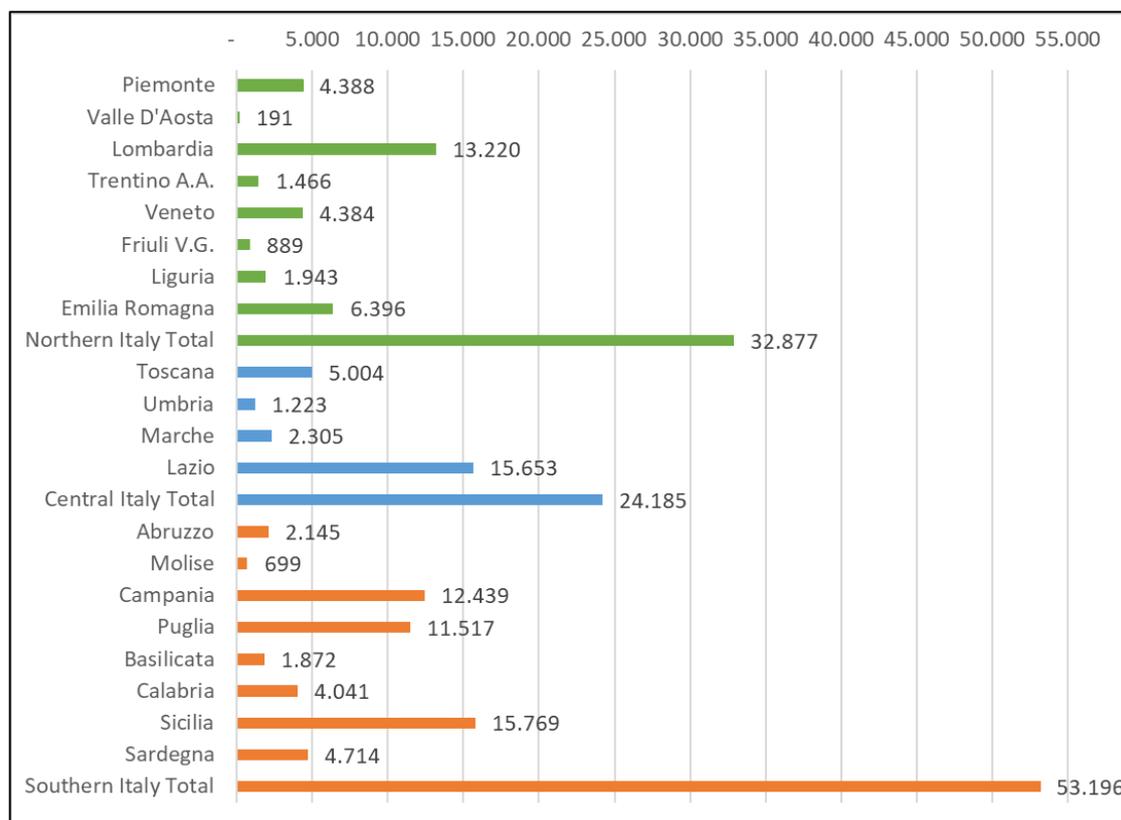
Table 1: Cooperative Revenues by Major Sectors

Cooperative Type	Revenue (billion Euros)		
	2017	2018	2019
Producer-Worker Cooperatives	24,73	23,87	22,09
Social Cooperatives	15,41	15,80	15,41
Agricultural Cooperatives	35,67	36,09	35,36
Trade Cooperatives	26,31	26,20	26,25
Total	120,95	120,72	117,52

(MISE, 2021)

As shown in Table 1, the highest revenue level exceeding 35 billion Euros in Italy between 2017 and 2019 was generated by agricultural cooperatives. In terms of ranking, social cooperatives follow after trade and production cooperatives. The revenue levels depict a stable trend with no significant deviations observed within each sector.

Graphic 2: Regional Distribution of Cooperatives in Italy (2021)

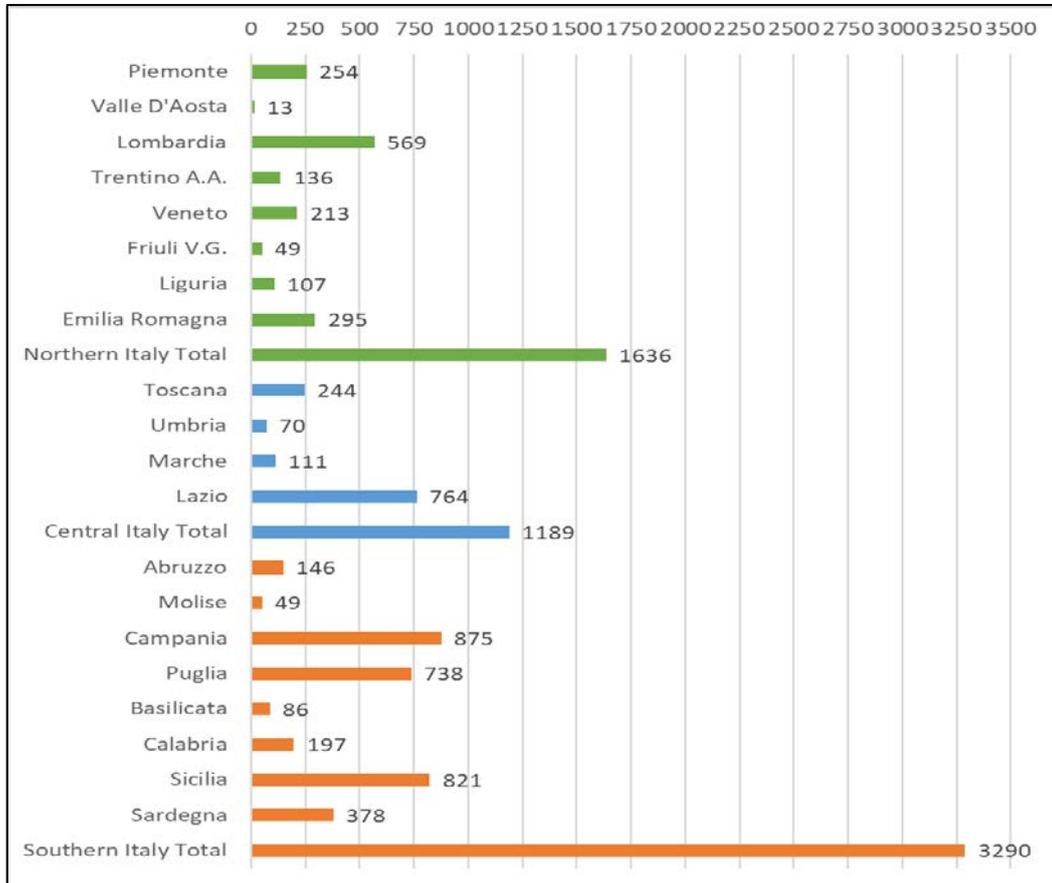


(MISE, 2021)

As seen in Graphic 2, as of 2021, out of a total of 110,708 cooperatives operating in Italy, more than 53,000, or proportionally 48%, are located in Southern Italy. In Southern Italy, the regions of Sicily, Campania, and Puglia stand out as areas where cooperatives are densely clustered. In Central Italy, where 21.8% of all cooperatives are located, approximately 65% of these cooperatives are situated in the Lazio region. The cooperatives in Northern Italy account for 30.2% of the total countrywide, with Lombardy being the most densely populated region with cooperatives, followed by Emilia-Romagna, which also emerges as a significant

cooperative hub. Graphic 3 displays the distribution of newly established cooperatives in Italy by region from 2020 to September 2022.

Graphic 3: The Regional Distribution of New Cooperatives in Italy (2020- Sep 2022)



(Area Studi Confcooperative, 2022:2)

As shown in Graphic 3, during the period from 2020 to September 2022, which also includes the COVID-19 pandemic, new cooperatives in the Emilia-Romagna and Lombardy regions constitute approximately 53% of new cooperatives in Northern Italy. In Central Italy, around 64.2% of new cooperatives are located in the Lazio region, while approximately 74% of new cooperatives in Southern Italy are found in the Campania, Puglia, and Sicily regions.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the cooperative movement represents a compelling manifestation of collective action and shared principles that have shaped economic and social terrains over time. Throughout its historical trajectory, cooperatives have emerged as bastions of solidarity, providing an alternative paradigm to conventional profit-driven business models. Grounded in principles of democratic governance and equitable resource allocation, cooperatives prioritize the welfare of their members and communities, thereby fostering resilience and inclusivity amidst various challenges. The historical development of the cooperative movement, spanning epochs and continents, mirrors a profound aspiration for societal equity and economic empowerment. Originating as a response to the socio-economic disparities of the Industrial Revolution, cooperatives have evolved into influential entities, gaining prominence

across diverse sectors and geographical regions. Their enduring ethos continues to inspire optimism and facilitate constructive societal transformations. Italy, with its illustrious cooperative legacy, serves as a notable exemplar of the transformative potential inherent in cooperative endeavors. Enduring through periods of political turmoil and economic instability, Italian cooperatives have remained steadfast in upholding the values of solidarity and mutual assistance. Presently, Italy's cooperative sector functions as a dynamic catalyst for economic progress and communal cohesion, fostering prosperity across its communities. Looking forward, the cooperative movement holds promise as a model for fostering sustainable development and promoting inclusive growth in an increasingly interconnected global landscape. As societies confront multifaceted challenges such as climate change, inequality, and social marginalization, cooperatives offer a viable pathway towards a more equitable and resilient future. By facilitating collaboration, empowerment, and collective prosperity, cooperatives embody essential values of solidarity and cooperation vital for constructing thriving and inclusive societies.

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