

# At the Origins of a Multi-Stakeholder Non-Profit Organisational Model: Comizi Agrari in Post-Unification Romagna

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## Abstract

In the field of business administration, the management practices adopted by Third sector organisations have made economic associations a topic of growing interest for several years now. The origins of this heterogeneous group of entities can actually be traced far back in time. The main associative form of post-unification Italy's farming class was *comizi agrari*, which were private organizations with public functions. By redefining their nature as multistakeholder non-profit organizations, this research takes on the task of re-examining historiography's negative evaluation of *comizi*'s effectiveness. Out of the analysis regarding the *comizi* operating in Romagna, it is evident the nature of some successful *comizi* is characterised by certain key factors such as the value of organisational, institutional, and technical leadership, the ability to develop strategic services for stakeholders that were not effectively provided by enterprises or the public sector, an attention to financial sustainability, a careful orientation towards building institutional networks.

**Keywords:** Farmers' associations, Comizi agrari, Non-profit organizations, Post-unification Italy, Multistakeholder organisational model

## 1. Introduction

The European Commission recently defined "social and solidarity economy" (SSE) as a group of economic organisations of various types "with the main objective of having a social impact rather than generating profit for owners or shareholders". These are entities that produce "goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and innovative fashion and use their profits primarily to attain social objectives" (Note 1). These organisations can be described as "social enterprises" (Bronzetti & Mazzotta, 2012; Bandini, 2016) – belonging to the vast world of the so-called third sector (Note 2), a relatively vague category composed of foundations, NGOs, co-operatives, associations, mutual aid societies and other more minor typologies (Note 3). This sector has attracted attention on an international level from scholars, policy-makers and experts (Del Gesso, 2020) (Note 4).

The origins of this heterogeneous group of entities can actually be traced far back in time (Zamagni, 2020). Over the centuries some of these organisations have undergone a process of "corporatisation" which made it possible to group them together with for-profit businesses from an organisational viewpoint. Indeed, the distinctive trait they assumed for purposes of their own reproduction was that they were managed as a business. In some cases this process of "corporatisation" dates back to the late Middle Ages and the early modern period: this was the case of the *Monti di Pietà* (Del Sordo, Fornasari & Orelli, 2019), among others, which in Italy assumed the characteristics of an enterprise even though its aim was not to generate profit. In other cases such as those of the varied category of associations, and specifically economic associations, the process of "corporatisation" took place in the contemporary era.

The management practices and various forms of governance adopted by these organisations in the third sector also make economic associations a topic of interest for a study in the field of business administration. The refinement of management practices (Hodgkinson, Young & Hollister, 1992) starting with a focus on managing an organisation's assets and fundraising techniques, is a process that has transversally characterised the world of associations beginning in the 1800s (Mazzotti, 2008). Recently there has been particular interest in those bodies that operate with multistakeholder governance (Vidal, 2014; Borzaga & Sacchetti, 2015): these organisations

consist not only of individuals who contribute to the association by paying a membership fee, but also of various types of organisations and individuals with specific interests. We can thus state that from an historical perspective the topic of business associations borders on different disciplines: economic history, business history and business administration.

Economic historiography has broken down the topic on the basis of the typologies of different forms of association. The transition in the 1800s of the system of fraternities and corporations into the dual function of *popular sociability* in the form of mutual aid societies – linked on the one hand mainly to the logic of self-help and on the other hand to the élite sociability of the noble and bourgeois circles, and oriented fundamentally towards recreational and cultural goals (Note 5) - contributed to redefining the character of contemporary society from that of the *ancien régime*. In economic historiography the emergence of specific fields of research, such as those of mutualism and the co-operative movement, has been important for all economic sectors including the primary sector, where the study of agricultural associations, the subject of this paper, has been of great interest.

In regard to *business history*, about ten years ago the participants of the Business Historians Association Conference posed the question of the scientific collocation of these bodies and where they belong in academia: “are the histories of co-operatives, mutuals and those other important aspects of economic activity that provide goods and services in (or beyond) marketplaces, but not according to preferred or privileged models of business organisation, not to be seen as ‘business history’?” (Walton, 2010). The question arose from the prevailing directions taken by the Anglo-Saxon matrix of *business history* that was always focussed on other key themes: entrepreneurship; innovation; globalisation; the relationship between enterprises and the environment; the state’s role in promoting and supporting entrepreneurial activity; and the relationship between enterprises and democracy (Friedman & Jones, 2011). Even in the field of French *business history* there was a partial convergence with those themes: relationships with the state, innovation, protoindustry, industrial heritage, the formation of cartels, distribution, de-industrialisation, and the environment (Daumas, 2012), without developing a reflection on social enterprises and social and solidarity economic organisations. One partial exception was represented by studies on non-profit financial institutions (Bátiz-Lazo & Billings, 2012) and, in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, by research on the relationship between business and philanthropy (Harvey, Maclean & Suddaby, 2019).

In the field of business science, interest in non-profit organisations in Europe matured at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s, contextually with the decline of welfare. This process indirectly influenced topics contained in the agenda of scholars of business administration. In Italy studies of non-profit organisations were essentially absent until the mid-1990s (Borgonovi, 1994; Airolti, 1996); in the last two decades’ greater attention to this topic has enabled the definition of the characteristics of this broad economic sector (Anheier, 2005) (Note 6).

## 2. Economic Associations and Farmers’ Associations in Italy

Within the scope of economic associations an important field where the possible convergence between economic history, business history and business administration can be verified, is that of agricultural associations. While the thematic fields involved in studies of the third sector are traditionally those of social assistance and social welfare (Rossi & Zamagni, 2011), we can observe how farmers’ associations share a series of characteristic traits with non-profit organisations. They are institutions of private law; they lack the profit motive; they pursue goals and promote interests that do not have an individual or partial character but can be traced back to aspects of the “common good” or collective interests; and they make decisions autonomously (decisions do not emanate from another institution) (Salamon & Anheier, 1997).

On a European level, studies dealing with farmers’ associations in the 1800s and 1900’s were focused on those aspects considered important for identifying their nature and function: the role of agrarian élites within these associations, their precocious politicisation, the function of patronage carried out by local notables, the role of farmers’ groups in exerting pressure and mediating between state authorities and local farmers, the function of farmers’ associations in relation to processes of nation building, and the start of the co-operative movement (Brelot, 2006; Sanz Lafuente, 2006; Aldenhoff-Hübinger, 2006; Raphael, 2006). Important studies, from a general point of view, were devoted to the relevance assumed by these associative forms which evolved into political pressure groups during the long transition process that took place between the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Malatesta, 1997; Subacchi, 1997; Banti, 1989, 2004). Studies on this topic have also been carried out on individual European countries: Spain (Pan-Montojo, 1997), Portugal (Rodrigues Bernardo, 1997), Germany (Ullmann, 1997), and Italy (Fontana, 1997).

In Italy a primary role in the agricultural associative movement of the 1800s was played by the *comizi agrari*, sometimes categorised as élite associations (Ridolfi, 2018), along with farmers’ unions and agricultural academies. Based on the French model imitated in Savoy Piedmont in 1843 and subsequently transferred to the newly founded

kingdom of Italy, *comizi agrari* were private entities with public functions recognised by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1866: they represented the interests of the agricultural sector in the government, gathered statistical information, offered advice on farming issues, and promoted the development of the agricultural economy and local technical training (Corti, 1973, 1977).

In spite of the important public functions attributed to them, the role of *comizi agrari* has been considered marginal by a large part of economic historiography, whereas in certain contexts they promoted the processes of agricultural modernisation. This negative judgment actually derives from inadequate research that has not been able to bring to light the unique relevance of these entities in different parts of the peninsula (Note 7). Which factors contributed the success of some associations and the failure of others, and what were the characteristic traits of their evolutionary path in the various regions? Were *comizi agrari* inspired by a “bureaucratic” organisational model – as in an appendix of the state – or did they adopt hybrid models in terms of operating effectiveness? Was the process of “corporatisation” that involved the largest associations decisive for their subsequent consolidation? What induces us to classify these entities as non-profit organisations and what benefits can be derived from this interpretation in terms of historical knowledge? An investigation that focuses on the organisational dimension of *comizi agrari* as non-profit entities can better clarify their different evolutionary paths, starting with those undertaken in the areas of Romagna where sharecropping prevailed at the end of the 1800s.

In the first years following the unification of Italy the resistance of local élites to attempts to standardise the existing farming associations along the lines of the Savoy model led to Ministry of Agriculture’s decision to officially establish *comizi agrari* across the entire national territory with royal decree-law of Cordova on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1866. The decree established the scope and organisational form of *comizi agrari* as well as their relationship to other organisations, requiring the merger of old and new institutions, indirectly encouraging the incorporation of pre-existing farmers’ unions or academies into the newly established network of associations, and entrusting the latter with the role of leading innovation and disseminating agricultural know-how (Note 8).

The evolutionary parabola of *comizi agrari* covers a rather limited chronological period, since from the first phase of their existence in the early years following the emanation of the decree, they progressively declined with the emergence of new institutions (agricultural consortiums and itinerant agricultural teaching) which were able to gradually take over most of the traditional functions and add new ones, as an effect of the socio-economic changes taking place between the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s. In 1870 there were 247 *comizi agrari* in Italy, in 1888 there were 256, and by 1905 there were only 180. This trend also reflects in part the transition from a model of sociability typical of the pre-unification farmers’ unions and a social *milieu* strongly influenced by the noble class, to an associative model oriented towards the protection of corporate interests of a more composite class, represented also by other social components of a more purely bourgeois character. This was a process of transition analogous to the dynamics occurring in other major European countries. (Malatesta, 1997).

The task implicitly assigned to the *comizi* to represent the interests of the entire farming world – parallel to the merely technical function inherited from the pre-unification farmers’ unions – was however inhibited by the rigid mechanism of forming and joining the associations, which depended on co-optation. The organisational model was inspired by that of the academies (there was no elective selection of members, who were mainly from the land-owning aristocracy and to a lesser degree the land-owning bourgeoisie and tradesmen). Like the academies, the associations initially maintained their mission of facilitating the transmission of a broad range of agricultural information and promoting technical and financial initiatives aimed at supporting agriculture.

The ministry’s objective was to set up associations across the entire country, with one for each district, but without obliging farmers to join or contribute. For some contemporary commentators the main factor of weakness consisted of greater deregulation than the chambers of commerce, and in the connected obligation to pay membership fees depending on one’s category (Barberi, 1880). For others the real weak point was the ministerial imprinting and the strategy of standardisation, which was pursued from the beginning, when instead the existence of multiple areas specialising in different crops would have required the associations to be organised along *ad hoc* lines.

One cause of their limited success, apart from land-owners’ generic indifference, was the strenuous resistance of the leaders of many pre-existing organisations to their being incorporated into the new associations (Zaninelli, 1990). Episodes of scarce collaboration frequently took the form of refusal to implement statutory or organisational changes and often derived from reasons of local pride, of refusing the process of standardisation, and of claims of the virtues of financial self-organisation, in contrast to the ministry’s pervasive control of the region, carried out by the prefect (the government’s local representative). The prefect’s function was not actually limited to merely monitoring but extended to a vast activity of mediation and consensus building with the local ruling classes, in addition to settling disputes for the various provincial *comizi agrari*. Although they were founded in compliance

with government regulations and were under the strict control of the prefect, they were not fully financially supported by the government. Their problematic dependence for economic survival on membership fees and subsidies from local institutions was often indicated as the main cause of their weakness (Note 9).

### 3. Comizi agrari in Romagna: A Flexible Associative Model

A great deal of information about Italian agriculture in the late 1800s can be gleaned from the results of the Jacini Inquest, conducted during the 1860s and 1870s (Jacini, 1976). The technical backwardness of agriculture in Romagna, outlined in the results of this inquest (Barberi, 1880; Biffi, 1880; Preti, 1987; Magalotti, 2004) reflected the conditions of poverty of most of the rural population, and especially people living in mountainous areas. The publication of the results of the Jacini inquest coincided with the end of the first fifteen years of the *comizi*' existence, a phase in which most of them were not yet operational. This circumstance could have contributed to the negative judgment of these organisations, regarding for example their self-referential character and their tendency to consolidate a framework of institutional fragmentation (Malatesta, 1997). It was observed how the transformation of numerous *comizi agrari* into consortiums, which in some cases occurred as early as the 1880s, was the only real exception to the general fragility of their experience (Rogari, 2002). Indirectly supporting these observations, Ridolfi wrote "in response to the agricultural crisis of the 1880s [...] the rejection of the bureaucratic model of the *comizi agrari* was accompanied by a decisive transformation, mainly of a scientific and technical nature, of farmers' unions" (Ridolfi, 2018, 135).

At the same time the static image of the rural world portrayed by the agricultural inquests did not acknowledge ongoing changes in certain areas, which were then accelerated by the agricultural crisis (Ferrari, 2013). As our analysis will show, even the evolutionary process of the associations became more intense during the agricultural crisis when interaction between local private companies, regional public institutions and the Ministry of Agriculture contributed to promoting the modernisation of the local economy (Cafagna, 1988) (Note 10). For this reason, we will focus our attention on a few case studies of the areas of Romagna where sharecropping prevailed, an area that encompassed the high plains with the urban centres along the *via Emilia* between Imola and Rimini, and was dominated by wheat farming. In this case we can exclude the rural areas around Ravenna (Note 11).

The genesis of *comizi agrari* in Romagna was analogous to that of other Italian organisations, just as their initial period was analogously static. The *comizio agrario* of Forlì, for example, was essentially non-operational from its founding in 1866 up until the early 1880s, when it experienced a sort of rebirth, as shown by an increase in membership. It went from 20 paying members in 1880 to 150 in 1881, to nearly 200 at the beginning of 1886. The *comizio* in Imola also experienced a significant renewal at the beginning of the same decade: the scarce interest of its members along with a weak board of directors had impaired the association's functioning up until then (Note 12). In contrast, the *comizio* in Cesena, founded in 1868 (CAF, 1881) (Note 13), boasted greater consensus as early as the mid-1870s when it had 290 members, but its operations fluctuated during the 1880s. Rimini's *comizio* was particularly well-structured: after it was founded in 1869 a *Circolo agricolo* at the initiative of a small group of promoters who were dissatisfied with what they viewed as the excessively bureaucratic association formula. Both partnerships survived in conditions of essential inertia until the end of the 1880s when they merged, forming the *Comizio e circolo agricolo* of the district of Rimini. In Faenza the local *comizio* was established in 1868, but achieved only modest results up until the end of the following decade (Note 14), apart from promoting an important farming exposition in 1875 (Note 15). The *comizio* of Ravenna, another large urban centre in Romagna – which we will not deal with here – was barely operational at the beginning of the 1880s with only 50-60 members, who hardly participated in the organisation (Barberi, 1880).

The resumption of activities by the *comizi* in Romagna during the 1880s was similar to that of other *comizi agrari* in Italy, as shown by the numerous reactivated or newly activated publications put out by farmers' associations (Corti, 1973, 278-279). However, this was only partly due to renewed interest in the primary sector generated by the crisis (Paris, 2008). Actually, analysis of the cases in Romagna revealed the existence of certain institutional factors that played a primary role in the propulsive push to rejuvenate the associations. For this reason we will focus on some key characteristics that distinguish these non-profit organisations: a definite attention to the financial sustainability and the activation of fundraising strategies; the ability to build institutional networks; the quality of organisational-institutional and technical-scientific leadership; and the development of strategic services for stakeholders.

#### 3.1 Financial Sustainability and Fundraising Strategies

While long-term financial sustainability is an essential goal not only for private companies but also for those in the third sector, there are important differences between the two spheres from the point of view of the logic of management. The ability of non-profit organisations to obtain donations and subsidies, i.e. the efficient use of

techniques for locating financial resources through effective and potential networks of stakeholders, is fundamental (Edles, 1993; Melandri & Masacci, 2000). This aspect should be considered in order to frame the dynamics of the third sector in a perspective of path dependence: one must consider the context in which Italian associations were operating in the 1800s and eventual national specificities – the “Italian way to raise funds”, as it has been defined (Melandri & Zamagni, 2001) – which made these organisations’ future development dependent on this factor.

As pointed out above, the limited financial autonomy of the *comizi* was considered one, if not the main factor behind their fragility, such that they were sometimes defined as “institutions that artificially appeared in very different geographical locations, with no autonomous financial means, but were forced to depend on membership fees, and thus had no concrete power to act” (Catolfi, 1992, 266-267). External observers and managers often assigned the associations’ lack of efficiency to inadequate financial resources, with responsibility for this falling mainly on the public authorities (Biffi, 1880, 116).

Scarce participation in the assemblies of the *comizi* and irregular payment of annual membership fees were symptoms of landowners’ limited willingness to be involved in the association process, initially perceived as a tax and therefore not accepted (Corti, 1977). The problem of members’ inability or unwillingness to pay membership fees and the consequences for the associations’ financial footing can be seen in the case of Cesena’s *comizio*, which due to the local public institutions’ paltry financing, encountered significant operational difficulties with negative effects in terms of stakeholder consensus and public opinion surrounding the association (Note 16).

This type of farmer’s association can reasonably be categorised as a so-called “intermediary body” (Bouneau, 2019), which to be able to operate effectively had to satisfy criteria of efficiency and proper management of resources. The aspect of financial equilibrium (Speckbacher, 2003; Bandini, 2013) is thus one of the keys to evaluating the real operational dimension of these non-profit organisations. In reality, the ability to combine the survival of the association with attaining the organisation’s social goals was not a result of merely passively collecting membership fees and public subsidies, but depended on the ability to promote and raise funds among private businesses and institutions and activate an effective network of relationships that could sustain this sort of pro-active strategy.

The improved operability of the associations starting in the 1880s also benefited from a change in the overall institutional context; starting in December 1878 the prefect’s mediating function was eliminated and the *comizi* were able to interact directly with the ministry. Recovering their autonomy in relation to the central authority suggests the start of an orientation towards a policy of active fundraising with stakeholders, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce (MAIC), which allocated funds for specific activities promoted by the associations.

Starting in the 1880s the *comizi* began to receive funding from the provincial government and local banks, which began to take on the role of catalysts of economic development by supporting the agricultural sector in particular. Credit unions, savings banks and co-operative banks financed numerous local initiatives, some of which were aimed at improving human capital, starting with the agricultural schools and training courses for sharecroppers. Rimini’s *comizio* which in the mid-1870s still had only about a hundred members, received subsidies not only from some of the surrounding municipalities but also from the local savings bank and the province of Forlì (which included the districts of Forlì, Cesena and Rimini) (Note 17); these funds allowed the *comizio* to financially support Rimini’s agricultural school. A fundamental condition for revitalising the organisation after a long period of stagnation was consolidating its capital stock. In the medium term this condition facilitated the start-up of a significant number of initiatives with a reduced risk of financial imbalance: by virtue of long-term rental contracts for farmland administered jointly with the local *Congregazione di carità* (a public charitable organisation) from 1874 on, Rimini’s *comizio* succeeded in accumulating assets of approximately 20,000 lire. At the end of the 1880s, this enabled it to operate more effectively and incisively in the local economic context (Facchinetti, 1898).

The merger of the two existing farming associations into the *Comizio e circolo agricolo del circondario di Rimini* led to an extraordinary increase in membership, which tripled: by raising awareness and garnering funds, 25 more local land owners joined, while the membership fee was raised from 33 cents a month to 0.75 lire. The budget was weighed down mainly by short-term liabilities stemming from debts that could not be paid off due to the lack of necessary liquidity. After writing off many uncollectible items, the *comizio* began to pay off short-term liabilities using both cash brought to bear by the *Circolo agricolo*, and by taking out a loan from the local savings bank, where the down payment on the sale of a piece of land was also deposited. The remaining debt was paid off after the land was fully paid up by the purchasers. A similar conservative choice was made in the mid-1870s by the leaders of the Faenza *comizio*. They preferred to consolidate the *comizio*’s finances rather than investing in local livestock farming, thus temporarily closing the cattle breeding station (Note 18).

The trade-off between using and accumulating resources became decisive for the survival of many non-profit associations or organisations during the second half of the 1800s. In many cases financial difficulties were caused by spending that exceeded the actual means of the association and the benefits to be gained from the subsidised initiatives (Mazzotti, 2008). One particular instance was the regional exposition “*Agraria, Industriale, Artistica*” (Agriculture, Industry and Art) held in Forlì in 1871: the financing granted by the Forlì *comizio*, which exceeded the association’s financial means, negatively affected operations in the following years, such that for budgetary reasons the *comizio* was forced to abandon the 1881 general exposition in Milan, as opposed to nearly all the kingdom’s *comizi* (CAF, 1886).

In those years the leaders of Cesena’s *comizio* also ran into not only financial but also managerial problems (Note 19). In 1874 the association was financing itself exclusively with the ordinary income from membership fees: operations were reduced to a minimum, limited to publishing the farmers’ bulletin, due to members’ unpaid fees (112 members out of approximately 300) (Note 20). A similar situation prevailed in 1878 (Note 21). The analysis of budgets revealed a turn-around in the 1880s: extraordinary revenues were allocated to funding important initiatives, in particular agricultural teaching and the promotion of livestock farming (Note 22).

Another factor in the turnaround for many *comizi* was a change in the institutional framework, that is, the new regulations introduced in 1878 and 1879 by the MAIC which led to an improved institutional setting (Note 23). In addition to eliminating the role of the prefect, and therefore enabling a direct relationship between the associations and the government, the new rules set out certain corporate criteria for managing the *comizi*: the requirement of a forecast and final balance sheet and an annual report of activities, and more streamlined methods for requesting subsidies from the various public administrations. The *comizi* thus acquired those traits of greater transparency and accountability that today are recognised as fundamental requirements for non-profit organisations (Basri & Khalid, 2011).

The final balance sheet of the Forlì *comizio* for the five year period 1881-1885 (CAF, 1889) was drawn up according to accounting criteria that for the most part reflected the standards used today by non-profit organisations in drawing up their financial statements (Propersi, 2012), at least in terms of classifying income and revenue: the first was broken down into ordinary income from typical activities and extraordinary income from fundraising (Table 1). The distinction enables us to better understand the connection between improved operability and the above mentioned changes in the context. Moreover, the financial equilibrium of the Forlì *comizio* depended on the ups and downs of extraordinary expenses and income, influenced by events or initiatives it was promoting, with membership fees in progressive decline.

Table 1. Profit and loss accounts of the Forlì farmers’ association: ordinary income and expenses in 1881-85 (Italian lire)

	1881	1882	1883	1884	1885		1881	1882	1883	1884	1885
<b>Ordinary expenses</b>						<b>Ordinary income (from regular activities)</b>					
Vice secretary’s fee	350	87,5	0	200	300	Membership fees	910	851,5	812	773	748
Office maintenance and cleaning	100	153,32	180	180	180	Late membership fees	24	0	0	34	28
Collection of taxes and distribution of invitations	76,9	191,43	159,73	160,35	168,8	Annual check from the Province of Forlì	0	500	500	500	500
Heating and lighting	45,3	11,25	22,25	33,7	36,26	Subsidies from district municipalities	193	218	81	231	100
Office supplies and printing	391,05	280,03	207,4	153,36	188,75						
Association newspaper subscriptions	102,4	38,2	27,4	22	17						
Subsidy, agricultural station	100	100	100	100	100						
Subsidy, farm machinery depot	50	50	50	50	50						
Miscellaneous expenses	56	99,85	63,7	101,35	153,45						
Total ordinary expenses	1.271,7	1.011,6	810,5	1.000,8	1.194,3	Total ordinary income	1.127	1.569,5	1.393	1.538	1.376
<b>Extraordinary expenses</b>						<b>Extraordinary income (income from fundraising)</b>					
Improvement of local livestock breeds	400	524,37	100	834,3	218	MAIC subsidies	550	400	0	400	1.000
Instruction of agricultural classes	100	18	358,05	97,5	266,4	Province of Forlì subsidies	0	0	0	500	100
Expenses, agricultural and forestry improvements	260	0	457,9	0	400	Municipality of Forlì subsidies	198,8	0	0	300	0
<i>Comizio</i> ’s itinerant library	93	185,5	0	0	20	Forlì Chamber of Commerce subsidies	0	0	0	200	0
Expenses, agricultural machinery improvements	0	0	0	0	47	Miscellaneous	5,5	180	0	0	0
Miscellaneous	88,1	0	0	765,7	397,12						
Total extraordinary expenses	941,1	727,9	916	1.697,5	1.348,5	Total extraordinary income	754,3	580	0	1.400	1.100
Total ordinary and extraordinary expenses	2.212,8	1.739,5	1.726,4	2.698,3	2.542,8		1.881,3	2.149,5	1.393,0	2.938,0	2.476,0

Source. Authors' elaboration from CAF, 1889: Final balance sheet from 1881-1885.

Since there was no obligation on the part of the state or the local public administration to regularly finance the *comizi*, the above mentioned change in the institutional setting pushed farmers' associations to "win" public funding by promoting the associations' activities on the basis of individual projects. The randomness of public funding was the defining factor in the *comizi*'s existence: the start in 1882 of a fixed annual contribution of 500 lire from the Forlì province partly reduced this uncertain situation and reflected recognition of the results of the *comizio*'s activities across the entire province, along with its increasingly visible role of effective public service. Decisive was the extraordinary raising of funds from the province, municipality and the chamber of commerce, in addition to ministerial funds, to finance the Forlì *comizio*'s participation in the livestock fair held in Turin in 1884 (CAF, 1889). With the increasingly high profile of livestock farming, not only in Romagna, the Forlì *comizio*'s extraordinary success at the fair was the litmus test for a broader longer-term strategy of investing local resources (Note 24): Forlì's cattle won first prize at the fair, garnering a certificate of merit from the jury, the maximum honour for non-profit organisations.

The associative model of the *comizio* also entailed shares held by private institutional shareholders, including banks, able to orient their investment strategies depending on the bulk of financing allocated, as indicated by the choice of focussing on livestock as the key sector of the local economy. Cesena's *Banca popolare* (co-operative bank) became a shareholder in the local *comizio agrario* in 1881 and one of its first gestures was to allocate a significant amount of money to Cesena's *Scuola pratica di agricoltura "Filippo Re"*, an agricultural education institute founded in 1882 to train farm managers. The financing was allocated to start rural development activities in the buildings of the school's farm, to be managed in partnership with the *comizio agrario*, the guarantor, supervisor and co-financier of the initiative (Note 25). The importance attributed by the bank's leadership to raising the Romagnola breed of cattle (as draught beasts and for meat) as an engine of local economic development, was such that it overcame the resistance of the school principle, who had insisted on building a dairy and using the financing exclusively for the bull breeding centre. This circumstance, common among other *comizi*, evokes a trait which characterises some social enterprises even today: multistakeholder governance, "a specific feature that characterizes some social enterprises is the combination of different types of stakeholders in their membership, whereas traditional cooperatives and associations have generally been set up as single-stakeholder organizations" (Galera & Borzaga, 2009). The multistakeholder governance model was thus a tool of primary importance in catalysing financial resources from the private sector to boost local economic development.

Knowing how important it was for the MAIC to improve livestock farming for the country's agricultural sector, the heads of Forlì's *comizio* managed to obtain a subsidy from the ministry to activate a system of prizes for bull breeders, with a specific commission appointed to select the best Romagnola bulls to export to other Italian regions. The operation was successful, in that sending selected bulls to governmental stations in southern Italy generated positive results for those areas' breeding systems and decent income for the breeders in Romagna (Note 26). The provincial livestock fair in Forlì in September 1892 was an occasion to celebrate the great skill of the local breeders, whose specialised cattle raising techniques enabled them to produce high quality, competitive bulls compared to those of other regions. Due to the progress achieved in raising livestock during the 1890s, the area around Forlì and Cesena became an important centre for the export of Romagnola bulls of the *podolica* breed, especially to markets in Russia and Austria (Note 27).

### 3.2 Ability to Build Institutional Networks

Another typical trait of successful associations was the creation of institutional networks that could connect centres developing complementary technical farming competences. In a similar co-operative type context (Austin, 2000), one association could emerge with superior competences, a sort of *primus inter pares*, with the skills and motivation to help the other *comizi*. This was the case of the *comizio* in Forlì, whose operational effectiveness was guaranteed by close collaboration with other public bodies, oriented towards developing the agricultural sector and in particular the *stazione agraria sperimentale* (agricultural research centre). Founded by the Ministry of Agriculture concurrently with other *stazioni sperimentali* and directed for over twenty years by Alessandro Pasqualini, president of the *comizio agrario*, the *stazione agraria* dealt with scientific research in the agricultural field and technical quality control of agricultural products. A second component of the network was the governmental depot for farm machinery. Operating since 1870 and attached to the *stazione agraria*, the depot made new machines and tools available to farmers. These items had been purchased after testing by the *stazione agraria* and were often improved with micro-innovations thanks to the empirical knowledge of Gaetano Pasqui, an extraordinarily skilled technician who managed the depot. The publication of results of the tests carried out by

the *comizi*, private businesses and the *stazione agraria* on the rural machinery and tools from the government's depot promoted the circulation of technical know-how among landowners, technicians and farmers.

Thus in the Forlì area an integrated supply chain was gradually built up, consisting of the *comizio agrario*, the *stazione agraria sperimentale*, the government depot and in the early phase, the agricultural school, which trained surveyors and provided an experimentation site for farm machinery on the experimental farmland it had been given. Thus in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a concentration of factors supporting farming progressively integrated research, the spread of information, training, the organisation of promotional initiatives, and business services.

The other *comizi* in Romagna (in Lugo, Faenza, Ravenna, Cesena, Rimini, and Imola) all used the services of the Forlì structures: from the farm machinery depot, which allowed them to use the machinery for free, to the *stazione agraria*, for studies or building models of the many farm machines which were necessary to build prototypes. The Forlì *comizio*'s support of these two organisations can be seen in the flow of resources in the association's annual budget for this purpose (CAF, 1889). One of the most important public stakeholders in the last twenty years of the century was the provincial government, the council of which had become an important arena of consultation and mediation between institutional actors in the agricultural sector (Note 28).

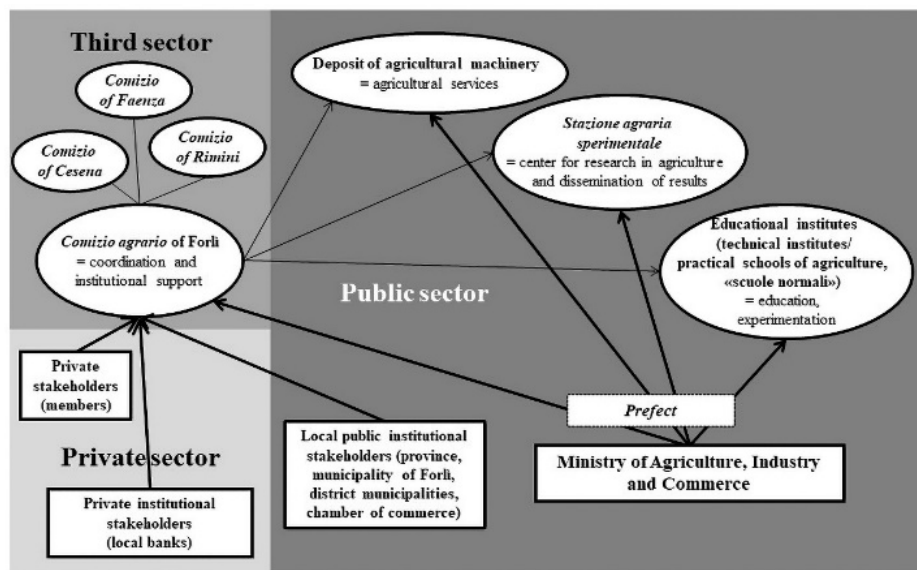


Figure 1. Institutional network of the agricultural sector in the province of Forlì

The economic returns of this intense and efficient interaction between the public sector, farms and the farmers' associations demonstrated the importance of the third sector in propelling the dynamics of development through subsidiarity, compared to the other two sectors of the economy, a sort of unique "substituting factor" *sui generis* on a local level, which worked in these specific circumstances.

It was no coincidence that the Forlì model was held up as an example for other associations outside Romagna. The president of the Modena *comizio agrario* Carlo Sacerdoti, pointed out several times the need to configure an integrated centre for farming competences in the Emilian city similar to the one in Forlì, a centre that could act as a driving force for other smaller centres in the surrounding area, through collaboration and reciprocity (Note 29). In reality the efficacy of the relationship between associations and local institutions (municipalities and provinces) was due not only to their reciprocal economic ties, but also to the interweaving of institutional duties carried out by men who belonged to them, as shown by the experience in Rimini at the end of the 1800s, which will be dealt with in the following paragraphs.

### 3.3 Organisational, Institutional and Technical-Scientific Leadership

The authority of the people leading the farmers' associations and their ability to navigate through the institutions, often supported by an indisputable level of technical-scientific knowledge, was a further success factor, as demonstrated by the cases of Forlì, Cesena and Rimini. Likewise, lack of leadership could become a formidable obstacle to the functioning of the associations, and could even cause their implosion, which is what occurred in Imola during the same period that the Forlì *comizio* radically improved, an example the Imola *comizio* would have



wanted to take inspiration from to restart its activities (Note 30).

The case of Cesena effectively proves the importance of leadership through the dynamism of its president Giovanni Urtoller in promoting farm loans (Preti, 1987), the main service provided by Cesena's *comizio*. But it was mainly in two other towns, Forlì and Rimini, where leadership proved to be a fundamental factor: in the first case the leadership was more technical-scientific and was more widely distributed across the territory, whereas in the second case it was more concentrated and of an organisational-institutional nature.

The Forlì model would not have been nearly as efficient if it had not been led by a nucleus of extremely capable men including Gaetano Pasqui, Tito Pasqui, Alessandro Pasqualini, Giuseppe Ricca-Rosellini, Bartolomeo Moreschi, and Fausto Sestini (Note 31). These people contributed to enabling significant technical-scientific progress as well as building an institutional network of relationships that extended beyond Romagna's borders and ensured the effectiveness of this centre of development of agricultural services. A clear example of this can be seen in the program of renewing the local farming system, developed in the mid-1870s by two of the top farming experts and central figures in the Forlì *comizio*, Tito Pasqui and Alessandro Pasqualini. The mission statement of "new agriculture" in Romagna (Pasqui & Pasqualini, 1874), based on developing the livestock sector and fodder crops, entailed the intensification of labour-saving processes by introducing farm machinery, building larger and more sanitary barns, improving and extending man-made pastures, establishing irrigation consortiums and a system of incentives for livestock breeders based on prizes, improving breeds by selecting bulls and implementing proper feeding techniques (Mazzotti, 2017).

The political context also influenced the associations' situation in Romagna and the composition of their leadership. In Forlì the *comizio*'s return to a new life between 1880 and 1890 coincided with a political turnaround: in 1880 the democratic parliamentary deputy Alessandro Fortis electoral defeat of his liberal opponent Giovanni Guarini marked the collapse of the moderate hegemony, to be replaced by the republican one, a trend which was then reinforced in the city council. The ascent of the urban bourgeoisie – which had already begun in the 1870s also because of the passive political attitude of the exponents of liberalism – corresponded with a reduction in large landowners' power, weakened not only by the agricultural crisis but also by increasing fiscal pressure, above all negatively affecting rents.

A similar rise in the influence of the bourgeois class typified the *comizio* in Rimini. The strategic value of people at the head of local institutions can be illustrated in this case by Leopoldo Tosi and Dino Sbrozzi, who took on key roles in the administration and in the organisations tasked with developing agriculture at the end of the 1880s. To this end they coordinated a group of dynamic landowners, of both bourgeois and noble extraction (Catolfi, 1992). A principal architect of the transformation of Rimini's agricultural institutions in a broad sense was Leopoldo Tosi, who held numerous positions of leadership over the years, at times for long periods. He was president of Rimini's *Comizio e circolo agrario* (until 1917), of the *Società Anonima Edificatrice Riminese* (a local Rimini building company), the agricultural co-operative and the agricultural trade union, the *Cattedra ambulante di agricoltura* (mobile agricultural training service), member of the Commission of Viticulture and Oenology for the Province of Forlì, and three-time mayor of San Mauro di Romagna (1890-1896, 1897-1903, 1914-1916). In addition, he contributed to the merger – in 1889 – of two existing agricultural associations in the Rimini district, the *comizio agrario* and the *Circolo agricolo*, taking over the leadership and implementing a series of far-sighted changes to develop not only the activities of the newly founded association – the financial situation of which he managed to straighten out, as explained previously – but also the entire local farming sector (Note 32). It is therefore useful to point out how the *Comizio e circolo agricolo riminese*, overcoming the twenty years of inertia that plagued both organisations that combined to form it, improved its operations not so much due to the conversion to a more private-based model than that of the *comizio*, but thanks to the combined strategy of shoring up its finances and effectively leading the new organisation, facilitated by the new regulations on associations of 1878-79.

### 3.4 Developing Strategic Services for Stakeholders

The role of institutions in promoting economic development, recently the subject of new studies (Ogilvie & Carus, 2014; Burroni & Scalise, 2017), was analysed decades ago also from the perspective of primary sector organisations (Caracciolo & Socrate, 1977). These topics have recently been taken up again in specific studies (for Belgium Vanhaute & Van Molle, 2006; Segers & Roeland, 2009; for the Netherlands Molema, 2017; for France Marache, 2019; for a comparison of Italy and France Andreoni & Mignemi, 2019). The spillover effects generated by the actions undertaken by the *comizi agrari* for the benefit of the economy are a relevant aspect of the process of local economic development in crucial phases of the history of liberal Italy, as it was in the last twenty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The prerequisites for the process of agricultural transformation in Romagna emerged during the 1800s, when the

agricultural crisis triggered and accelerated the process of replacing cereal crops (maize in particular) with forage crops across most of northern Italy. In the transition towards growing protectionism through higher customs duties, common also in other countries, the *comizi* acted as sounding boards for the frequent complaints of the farming community (Note 33) due mainly to strong market competition from international producers and fiscal pressure, which was considered excessive. This was happening in the context of strong and growing migratory phenomena as well as protest movements by farm workers (Cerrito, 2003; Frascani, 2012).

Frequently these associations acted to address specific local needs, beyond what was prescribed by the ministry. In Romagna, in addition to the above cited service of developing and improving livestock - cattle breeding station (Note 34) -, they revised and renewed contractual models for sharecropping that were used locally, as well as modernising the system of farm accounting, in close co-operation with other local entities such as the chamber of commerce (Note 35). Some associations also set up fertiliser depots for forage, cereal, hemp and wine grape crops so as to allow local farmers to experiment with its use, stipulating agreements with the producers.

Agricultural credit was a further service which, although extraneous to the original task of the associations, became strategically important in the fight against the scourge of usury. In Cesena, where a lack of banking services in support of indebted sharecroppers and small landowners had pushed the latter towards userers, small loans were offered thanks to a special fund made available by the local savings bank but managed by the *comizio* (Note 36). Once started, the loan program was so successful that it quickly ran out of funds when faced with farmers' growing needs and had to request another allocation made available by public subscription. The scourge of usury and the concentration of land ownership caused by the dynamics of expropriation of small, indebted farmers were common to other areas of the countryside of Romagna, so that Cesena's initiative was imitated in nearby areas such as Faenza (Note 37). The service of granting small loans, identified by some historians as one of the qualifying functions of co-operative-type organisations – agricultural consortiums – quickly became widespread in the agricultural sector, and was introduced in Romagna by some *comizi*. They thus showed a significant ability to anticipate future banking dynamics.

In addition to farm loans the *comizi* developed another type of service: enhancing and promoting human capital in agriculture, one of their original missions, pursued with varying intensity depending on the geographical context and the orientation of each association. A survey conducted in 1870 among representatives of the country's *comizi* revealed that agricultural education was an area which urgently needed to be improved. Eight years later another survey showed that the resources devoted to education were just as important as land tax equalization (in the north) and farm subsidies (in the south) (Corti, 1973, 300; D'Altemps, 1877).

In spite of the relative declining interest of the *comizis'* directors, starting in the 1880s education was sustained by both farmers' associations and public institutions, which supported education in various ways according to the different levels of instruction, not least elementary school (Fornasari & Mazzotti, 2021). This was not only because the agricultural crisis made clear the centrality of education as the driving force of development, but also due to greater availability of funding for education on an institutional level and better management and fundraising skills on the part of some associations.

In Cesena this commitment by the *comizio* took the form of a series of teaching activities, of spreading agricultural knowledge to rural communities mainly with teachers from the agricultural school *Scuola pratica di agricoltura "Filippo Re"*: lectures, courses, brochures, and newsletters were sent to alumni or published on the pages of local periodicals, in addition to agricultural experiments conducted on the school's experimental plots, with dynamics similar to those in other Italian regions (Vaquero Piñeiro, 2011). In Forlì those agricultural sectors that were considered strategic were targeted for investment with specific educational initiatives: courses in silkworm cultivation were started with the support of MAIC (manual pruning of mulberry trees); for fruit trees, specialised training of youth at the *Scuola speciale di Pomologia e Orticoltura di Firenze* (Specialised School of Pomology and Horticulture in Florence), initially also financed by local public institutions and then only by MAIC; in the field of viticulture, consulting, information and training not only to improve the technical aspects of local production but most of all to combat the fatal effects of frequent attacks of disease and insects (*oidium*, *anthracnose*, *peronospora*, and *phylloxera*) (CAF, 1894). The technical instructions circulating in Romagna from the lectures and brochures distributed by the Forlì association and the provincial commission for viticulture and enology – which benefitted from consultation provided to the association by the Centre for agricultural entomology in Florence and the laboratory for cryptogamic botany in Pavia – enabled local viticulturists to contain the damage caused to vines by phytopathogenic agents (Mazzotti, forthcoming).

Italian historiography has identified the beginning of the descending parabola of some of the *comizi* at the end of the 1880s, when they began to be progressively drained of their main functions with the rise of new organisations

that they had often helped to create. This was a controversial palingenetic process that led to their dissolution. Some of their activities, those linked to agricultural education, were progressively absorbed by the mobile agricultural training service (as occurred in the case of the Rimini course, founded in 1896, the first one in Romagna), whereas another part was managed later by the agricultural consortiums (Note 38), supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, and which grew by means of monetary prizes bestowed on the associations that promoted them. The Forlì *comizio* paved the way for the founding of the *Sindacato agrario forlivese*, a co-operative organisation tasked with directly purchasing raw materials and reselling them to members at cost and with quality guaranteed. This organisation later transformed into the *Consorzio Agrario Romagnolo* (Romagna Agricultural Consortium), with a more extensive role “of providing machinery, seeds, artificial fertiliser, fungicides, and to guarantee, control, analyse and spread the use of them, and provide instructions and advice”. In addition to the Forlì *comizio*, other *comizi* in Romagna were involved in this organisation. In the other cities in Romagna the processes of transformation or incorporation of these bodies occurred at the turn of the century (Note 39), in a sort of third phase of the life of the *comizi*, often the conclusive one (Note 40). This evolution enabled these associations to avoid being absorbed into the chambers of commerce, a proposal that was studied in 1893 by MAIC aiming to reorder the regulatory status of the *comizi* (Note 41).

#### 4. Some Concluding Remarks

This research took on the task of re-examining economic historiography’s previously negative evaluation of *comizi agrari* as a main associative form of Italy’s farming class in the early post-reunification period. This attempt at revision began by redefining the nature of the *comizi* as multistakeholder “social enterprises”, characterised by certain key factors: a careful attention to financial sustainability, along with effective fundraising; a specific orientation towards building institutional networks; the value of organisational, institutional and technical-scientific leadership; and the ability to develop strategic services for stakeholders that were not being effectively provided by enterprises or the public sector. By virtue of these distinctive factors, the *comizi agrari* in Romagna effectively contributed to the transition of the regional farming system from its static state in the post-unification period to the dynamism of the co-operative phase and the more intense development of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Their story contradicts the general perception of inconsistency traditionally held by historiographers. Also the hypothesis of the private business model being superior to the semi-public one of the associations is not supported by the evidence produced here. This paper has also shown how in contrast to the supposed self-referential character of the associations, their efficient regional coordination, based on connecting multiple municipalities, encouraged the emergence in Romagna of a system of diversified competences and a sort of “division of labour” between the various centres in the region. This was a system able to activate the dynamics of institutional co-operation as well as healthy competition between cities, not dictated by parochial views or municipal pressures. The *comizi agrari* were first and foremost a sort of urban network able to integrate the various civic institutions engaged in promoting and developing the agricultural sector; secondarily, it was a geographical network able to connect different *comizi* of the region, albeit within a partially hierarchical system, influenced by different levels of competence present in the various urban centres.

Finally, the paper brings to light the positive effects of the *comizi agraris’* activities on the local economic fabric in various fields of agriculture: cattle raising, farm loans, agricultural machinery, viticulture, farms’ system of contracts, and agricultural education: an extremely significant spillover effect which at the same time should be cause for reflecting on the role of third sector enterprises. Here an interdisciplinary study could highlight the importance of promoting local economic development. Specifically, the function carried out by *comizi agrari* in terms of triggering innovative processes and spreading know how on an extra-regional scale highlights the need to integrate this line of investigation into the research agenda of the fields of business administration and business history.

In this way, historical analyses can be of increasing interest to economists and business experts in order to understand the economic dynamics of the contemporary age. In particular, we believe that our study can offer significant food for thought to management scholars in the nonprofit sector; in fact, the proposed case study does not only shed light on nonprofit organisations and their possible institutional articulations, but also offers suggestions on the strategies adopted by local decision makers that have proved successful, albeit in different historical contexts.

As recently stated, “multi-stakeholder governance can be effective when it is able to achieve an entrepreneurial synthesis or virtuous compromise between the different values, motivations, objectives, or when it is able to convert (again through virtuous compromises or synthesis) stakeholder objectives into societal goals” (Tortia,

2020). A similar virtuous process, in the ways and within the limits described above, is what emerged from the analysis of the dynamics of the *comizi agrari* operating in Romagna at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The recent tendency of social enterprises to adopt a model of multistakeholder governance seems to run alongside (Borzaga & Sacchetti, 2015).

In conclusion, the formulation of interdisciplinary research projects on the theme of multistakeholder non-profit organisations taking into account historical analyses may be of great benefit to the operators of those organisations. The topic of the public-private relationship in the process of setting up local development projects, an aspect developed in the paper, would also merit further study, and it is legitimate to expect a significant spin-off for follow-up studies.

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## Notes

Note 1. The European Commission document was drawn up in the framework of programmes that launched in 2011 the Social Business Initiative, which established a set of concrete measures to create a favourable environment for the development of social enterprises. In European Commission (2011).

Note 2. On the debate about “non-profits” and the definition of “social enterprise” see Defourny & Nyssens (2017). Scholars of business administration have extended this reflection to the space occupied by non-profit actors in the economic system, going so far as to redefine their rank: the expression “civil economy” was not as fortunate as the expression “social economy” of French origin or the expression “third sector”; both of these merged into the expression “social and solidarity economy” (Zamagni, 2020).

Note 3. This complex topic has been dealt with in various ways: one of these, the legal-institutional approach, has efficiently outlined the difference between the three main operational mechanisms of the social economy, i.e. associative, mutual and co-operative type mechanisms (Defourny, Develtere & Fonteneau, 1999).

Note 4. On the concept of social enterprise see Galera & Borzaga (2009); Dacin, M.T., Dacin, P.A., & Tracey, P. (2011).

Note 5. On sociability in the 1800s in Italy see for example the contributions of M. Agulhon, Z. Ciuffolotti, M.T. Maiullari, M. Malatesta, M. Formica, G. Pécout and M. Ridolfi on the topic “Sociabilità/Sociabilità nella storiografia dell'Italia dell'Ottocento”, in *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, 1 (1992), 39-136.

Note 6. Parallel to studies of economic sociology in Italy, interest emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985; Gui, 1991; La Valle, 1992) and then resurfaced in recent years (Garascio, 2017; Testi, Bellucci, Franchi & Biggeri, 2017) to analyse the functions of non-profit organisations within the economic system, their interaction with the public sphere and the corporate world, and their economic and financial sustainability.

Note 7. For a different interpretation see Landi, (1990).

Note 8. *Regio decreto 23 dicembre 1866 concernente la istituzione dei Comizi agrari, con le modificazioni introdotte dai successivi regii decreti del 22 giugno 1879, e 3 aprile 1884*. In appendix to *Statuto del Comizio e circolo agricolo del Circondario di Rimini e R. Decreti e Regolamenti Ministeriali sull'ordinamento dei Comizi Agrari*. Rimini: Tipography by Emilio Renzetti, 1892.

Note 9. “Municipalities, and in particular rural ones, were often penniless and after the implementation of the Coppino law in 1877, concentrated their efforts on elementary school education. Private businesses, on the other hand, were anxious to join up so as not to have to be saddled with having to financially support an entity which did not provide them with an immediate return” (Rogari, 2002, 372-374). For more on this, see Carboni, Fornasari & Mazzotti (2018, 56-60).

Note 10. On the role of urban élites in the process of modernisation see Hertner (1998).

Note 11. The Ravenna area underwent a profound transformation that differentiated it clearly from the rest of Romagna: the extension of rice fields and the growth of the new entrepreneurial bourgeoisie that managed them, the expansion of day labourers due to the crisis of sharecropping, the spread of co-operatives, and the activity of land reclamation (Ridolfi, 2018).

Note 12. *L'Alberghetti, Giornale del Comizio agrario e degli interessi locali*, 1 October 1881.

Note 13. The board was composed mainly of engineers, professors of agricultural science, or land surveyors.

Note 14. *Comizio Agrario di Faenza, Relazione illustrativa dell'opera finora svolta da codesto comizio e programma d'azione per l'avvenire del nuovo ente*, 3 January 1929.

Note 15. *Bollettino dell'Esposizione Romagnola in Faenza*, 7 August – 13 October 1875.

Note 16. *Bollettino del Comizio Agrario del Circondario di Cesena (BCACC)*, fascicoli I-II, Jan.-Jun. 1884.



Note 17. Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce (from here on MAIC), *Notizie e studi sull'agricoltura. Relazione al Consiglio di Agricoltura*, 1877-78, 1093-1094.

Note 18. [Comizio Agrario di Faenza], *Relazione letta all'assemblea dei soci tenuta il 7 maggio 1875*, s.l., s.a. In 1878 a bull breeding centre was reopened. Comizio Agrario di Faenza, *Relazione annua della direzione*. Faenza: Typography by P. Conti, 1879.

Note 19. BCACC, fascicolo II, Apr.-Jun. 1882, 18-20.

Note 20. BCACC, fascicolo II, Mar.-Apr. 1875, 52-53.

Note 21. BCACC, fascicolo I-III, Jan.-Mar. 1879, 20-21.

Note 22. BCACC, fascicolo I-II, Jan.-Jun. 1885; BCACC, fascicolo II, Apr.-Jun. 1886.

Note 23. *Regolamento dei Comizi agrari con decreto del Ministero di agricoltura in data 8 dicembre 1878, 2 febbraio 1879 e 23 giugno 1879*. In appendix to *Statuto del Comizio e circolo agricolo del Circondario di Rimini*, cit.

Note 24. While national events were an occasion to present outstanding local products on a vast stage, provincial fairs served mainly as a way to gain better visibility with local stakeholders.

Note 25. BCACC, fascicolo II, Apr.- Jun. 1883, 27-30; BCACC, fascicolo IV, Oct.- Dec. 1884, 50-52.

Note 26. Comizio Agrario di Faenza, *Relazione della direzione del Comizio Agrario del Circondario di Faenza per l'anno 1891*. Faenza: Typography by P. Conti, 1892.

Note 27. Comizio agrario circondariale di Cesena, *Sulle condizioni agricole del circondario di Cesena. Parole del prof. Filippo Barbato*, Cesena, 1892, 4-5. For a general framework on livestock breeding systems innovation in Italy see Fumi (2013).

Note 28. *Atti del Consiglio Provinciale di Forlì*, 1881-1887.

Note 29. Forlì Municipal Library, *Fondo Pasqui*, envelope 30/22m, article by Carlo Sacerdoti, which appeared in "Lunedì – Giornale agrario di Modena", February 1892, cited in "Il Polesine agricolo", newspaper clipping, no date [1892].

Note 30. *L'Alberghetti, Giornale del Comizio agrario e degli interessi locali*, 15 June 1881.

Note 31. For a biographical profile of this figure see Mazzotti (2017). In particular, Tito Pasqui and Giuseppe Ricca-Rosellini became the first agricultural inspectors for the MAIC. Pasqui continued his career in the Ministry until he became director general for agriculture, as was also the case of Bartolomeo Moreschi.

Note 32. Forlì State Archive (ASFo), *Provincia, Atti amministrativi*, b. 725, 31 August 1889.

Note 33. ASFo, *Prefettura generale*, b. 1080, 20 July 1889.

Note 34. In Forlì a horse breeding centre was added, unique in the entire district.

Note 35. CAF, *Quattro anni di operosità*, cit., 80-81.

Note 36. BCACC, fascicoli I-II, Gen.- Jun. 1885, 27-28.

Note 37. See Comizio agrario circondariale di Cesena, *L'esercizio del credito agrario presso il Comizio agrario di Cesena*, Cesena, 1893.

Note 38. The *Sindacati agrari* or *Consorzi agrari* were co-operative organisations founded in France (*Syndicats*) which operated as distributors of capital goods to members and providers of facilitated loans.

Note 39. In Rimini, for example, the *Comizio e circolo agricolo* evolved by first incorporating the mobile agricultural training service, then the *Sindacato agrario* and finally the *Consorzio agrario cooperativo* (1902).

Note 40. In some cases such as that of Faenza the *comizi* lasted longer, also due to the synergies they had developed with other entities. It can actually be stated that they lasted longer because they were influenced by the dynamics within the network of entities that made up the local agricultural system and the ability of the *comizi* to adapt to new situations. [Comizio Agrario di Faenza], *Relazione illustrativa dell'opera finora svolta da codesto comizio e programma d'azione per l'avvenire del nuovo ente*, 3 gennaio 1929.

Note 41. Comizio Agrario di Faenza, *Relazione della Direzione del Comizio agrario del Circondario di Faenza per l'anno 1892*. Faenza: Typo-lithographic company of P. Conti, 1893, 22.

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