

Article

Food for Thoughts: The District Approach to Rural Areas Development—A Case Study in Campania

Giorgia Iovino ^{1,*}, Eleonora Guadagno ²  and Daniele Bagnoli ³ ¹ Department of Political and Communication Sciences (PoliCom), University of Salerno, 84084 Fisciano, Italy² Department of Human and Social Science, University “L’Orientale”, 80134 Naples, Italy; eguadagno@unior.it³ Department of Humanities, University of Salerno, 84084 Fisciano, Italy; dbagnoli@unisa.it

* Correspondence: giovino@unisa.it

Abstract: The district approach has become increasingly important for the analysis and planning of local agro-food systems. In this paper, we analyse the role and potential of Italian food districts, spaces of governance where a plurality of actors share practices and knowledge and jointly elaborate local development strategies. After a first section aimed at illustrating the theoretical background and the regulatory framework, we examine the food districts of Benevento, an inland Province of the Campania Region, in order to: (i) reconstruct the characteristics, actors and strategies of these local food systems and critically discuss the criteria used for their creation and spatialisation; (ii) investigate the contribution that districts can make to the goals of social cohesion and sustainability. As for the methods, we use a mixed approach that integrates documentary analysis and geostatistical information with a qualitative survey (based on semi-structured interviews and questionnaires) to explore the governance model adopted and the degree of participation and interest generated among stakeholders. We conclude that the district approach can, under certain conditions, be a key tool for territorial enhancement, especially for those internal areas marked by depopulation and economic decline.



check for updates

Citation: Iovino, G.; Guadagno, E.; Bagnoli, D. Food for Thoughts: The District Approach to Rural Areas Development—A Case Study in Campania. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 16263. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su152316263>

Academic Editors: Michael S. Carolan, Alessandro Bonadonna, Luigi Bollani, Egidio Dansero and Maria Giuseppina Lucia

Received: 13 September 2023

Revised: 6 November 2023

Accepted: 22 November 2023

Published: 24 November 2023

Keywords: food districts; multilevel governance; community-led local development; Italy; Campania Region

1. Introduction

The district approach has become increasingly important for the analysis and planning of local agro-food systems in relation to the widely shared need to implement place-based development policies [1,2]. This type of approach, inspired by the programme “Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale” (LEADER) Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), has found widespread application in Italy, also thanks to the experience gained in the 1990s with negotiated planning. Starting in 2001, different types of agricultural districts (DAs) were enshrined into the national legal system, later merged into food districts, the macro-category established in 2017 (L. 205).

Beyond the various regulations, these districts are conceived as areas of geographical proximity where, either spontaneously or more often as a result of policy initiatives, strong cooperative relationships are established between several actors (supply chain actors, public and private actors, institutions, etc.) with the aim of sharing and retaining locally the added value generated [3].

However, from a policy design perspective, many questions remain, starting with the size and configuration of these governance spaces. In some cases, these systems are too small and localised to implement scaling up or scaling out strategies. This is particularly the case in realities characterised by a fragmented agro-food system with small or very small enterprises. For the pursuit of endogenous development strategies, what matters most, even more than size, is the ability of the actors involved to work together, to share



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

common objectives, to express active planning based on the recognition of local resources as identity factors and tools for territorial development.

In this paper, we examine the potential and role of agricultural districts, introduced in Italy in 2001 and regulated several times until the Law 205/2017 on the establishment of food districts. Unlike industrial districts, which are spontaneously created from below, agricultural districts are in most cases “districts by election” [4] (p. 13), created in accordance with the law (see Sections 2 and 3).

The present research is structured as follows: in the first section, we reconstruct the theoretical conceptual framework, referring to the main studies that have animated the debate on agricultural and rural districts. This is followed by a brief review of the national and regional legislation, focusing on the Campania Region.

The investigation is then limited to the Province of Benevento, a case study of particular interest in the regional context. It is the Province with the strongest agricultural vocation and one of the most disadvantaged. More than half of its territory is classified as “rural area with development problems” in the Rural Development Plan (PSR Campania 2014–2020). The analysis focuses on two districts, selected for the characteristics of the places (internal areas with a rural vocation) and the diversity of the district typology: the Rural District (DIR) “Terra Sannita” and the District of Agricultural and Food Quality (DAQ) “Sannio Vino Olio e Ortofrutta”. The aim is twofold: (a) to show the spatial distribution of both areas, also in relation to other territorial aggregations (such as the LAGs of the LEADER programme or the certified food production zones); (b) to investigate the features, actors and strategies of these local food systems, to highlight the elements of distinctiveness and to critically discuss the logics and criteria underlying their formation and demarcation.

By adapting the framework proposed by the Italian territorialist school [5–9] and specifically the interpretative key of Food Local Territorial Systems (FoodLoTS) more recently introduced by Tecco et al. [3], we focus on the governance model adopted and the possible transformation of these districts into FoodLoTS.

To this end, using local planning capacity and the presence of active networks as “clues”, we examine the dynamics of these local food systems to verify whether and to what extent they reflect the active role of territorial actors. In this perspective, we operationalise a methodology that integrates documentary analysis (district plan and meeting reports, regional programmes and plans, etc.) and geostatistical information (ISTAT and regional data) with a qualitative survey (based on 15 semi-structured interviews with privileged witnesses and questionnaires addressed to local entrepreneurs), in order to investigate the governance model and the different levels of participation and interest of stakeholders operating in the districts.

2. The Theoretical Background

In recent years, several studies have been published on the spatial and organisational settings of agriculture that challenge the dominant agro-industrial paradigm and propose a different way to the understanding of food production, distribution and consumption patterns [10–12]. In the global food system, the modernisation and reorganisation of the agricultural sector in a productivist direction has led to the separation of production and consumption locations, alongside the adoption of standardised and de-territorialising [13] or de-naturalising agricultural practices, as suggested by studies in the political ecology of food [13–15]. The establishment of increasingly long supply chains, both geographically and functionally, has generated significant environmental impacts [16], has disconnected food production from natural processes [17] and severed the close and osmotic link between food and territory [18], with evident effects at the material level (due to foodscape banalisation and standardisation) and at the symbolic level (for the loss of the traditional cultural and identity value associated with food).

The risks associated with climate change, the food crises of 2007–2008 and, more recently, the supply insecurity caused by the pandemic emergency and the Ukraine war have laid bare the fragility and inequity of the capitalist agro-industrial system and the need

for more sustainable food governance and place-based food policies [19–22], designed to enhance local resources and specificities [10,11,22]. In contrast to the conventional approach centred on the agro-industrial paradigm, there has been a rise in studies, movements and policies [22–25] aimed at reconnecting food and territory. These initiatives emphasise productive relocalisation and the activation of re-territorialisation processes, to create “alternative geographies of food, where multidimensional proximity (both in the spatial sense and in the cultural and identity sense) becomes an actual medium and value in itself” [3] (p. 25). Such a territorial approach assigns a strategic role to the local scale in implementing community-driven development processes, and from this perspective: (i) adopts broadly participatory decision-making mechanisms; (ii) seeks solutions that enhance the specificities of places; (iii) fosters the implementation of short and sustainable supply chains for producers, consumers and for the environment.

The territorial paradigm embraces a holistic and integrated vision: “holistic”, since it recognises the interconnections between food systems and the environment [9,26] and assigns to agriculture the role of producer of environmental and cultural values and guardian of the landscape and biodiversity; “integrated”, since it aims to combine agricultural practices with tourism, handicrafts, educational and protection activities to curb the exodus from rural areas and enhance the quality of life in these areas. Multifunctionality and diversification thus appear as the cornerstones for building a CLLD, a development which acknowledges the diversity of territories as a potential strength for implementing local territorial capital [27]. Long employed in LEADER programs, the territorial approach has been adopted by the *From Farm to Fork Strategy*, which is part of the *European Green Deal*, aimed at ecological transition [28–30].

In Italy, a central role in the pursuit of local development strategies in the agricultural sphere is assigned to the food districts, which, beyond the different types and legal denominations, can be defined as spaces of geographical proximity where, either spontaneously or driven by food policies, strong multi-stakeholder cooperative relationships are established to share and retain the added value produced locally [3].

The theoretical reflection on these localised food systems has its roots in the notion of the industrial district developed in Italy in the 1970s by economists and other social scientists [31–41] to investigate the characteristics and potential of that particular model of industrialisation emerging in some areas of North-East and Central Italy. Becattini is particularly credited with the rediscovery and reinterpretation of Marshall’s notion of the industrial district based on the key concept of agglomeration external economies [35,41,42]. These economies, “external to the firm but internal to the district” [32], are understood as the economic advantages that small-scale enterprises derive from spatial concentration, thanks to the division of labour among production units, the presence of a more specialised labour market, increased production flexibility, faster circulation of knowhow, improved infrastructure, the creation of a specific industrial atmosphere that gives the district and its production an identity and the establishment of dense inter-industrial interactions based on a unique mix of cooperation and competition.

In Becattini’s Marshallian reinterpretation, districts are “social and territorial entities characterised by the active coexistence, in a circumscribed, naturalistically and historically determined geographical area, of a community of people and a population of enterprises” [35] (p. 112). In his view, it is not merely a new industrial organisational form, alternative to Fordist–Taylorist large industry, but rather a territorialised production system, based on a close collaboration between the local community and enterprises, where the territory plays a role as an aggregating force in social and inter-industrial relations, allowing for increased productivity. This perspective, as Dematteis and Magnaghi [43] suggest, reverses the relationship between production and places, as it is the places, with their identity and heritage values, that determine the characteristics and quality of production.

The translation of the district concept into the agricultural domain dates back to the 1990s, although Becattini refers to an “agricultural proto district” older than the industrial one [41], since agricultural enterprises, by their nature, are deeply immersed in local society

and closely tied to the territory [44]. The most important contributions to the theoretical definition of districts in agriculture come from the agricultural economists Iacoponi and Cecchi. Iacoponi [45,46] acknowledges that most farms are not organisationally autonomous, but rather integrated into the local economic system or the agro-industrial system. In the former case one would refer to a “rural district”, in the latter case to an “agricultural district”, an “agricultural supply chain” or an “agro-industrial district”, depending on whether the integration into the agro-economic system occurs at the level of the local economic system, at the level of the product market (where the supply chain does not have a local dimension) or at both levels. The agro-industrial district integrates the three phases of the agribusiness system: the supply phase, the agricultural production phase and the processing and distribution phase, while the agricultural district does not follow the marketing aspects of production (the distribution phase). Both types of districts display clear commonalities with classic industrial districts. On the other hand, the notion of the rural district is more distant from the Marshallian and Becattian conceptual apparatus, since rurality expresses a “despecialisation” of the local production system and multiple uses of the territory: agriculture remains central in the district, both in terms of land occupation and for its role in safeguarding the environment and landscape, but it is integrated with artisanal, touristic and commercial activities.

Starting from Iacoponi’s work, Cecchi [47,48] proposes a different definition of agro-food and agricultural districts, identifying the quantity of local agricultural production as the discriminating factor. In an agro-food district, the supply comes mostly from outside the district, whereas, in an agricultural district, the raw material transformed is predominantly sourced locally, as farming retains a leading role. In relation to the rural district, Cecchi points out how geographical proximity is a less prominent element compared to other district types.

A pivotal reference experience in conceptualising rural districts was that of Maremma district, promoted by Pacciani in 1996 as an integrated development project of Grosseto Province [49,50]. It is not possible to delve deeply here into the events and organisational methods of this pilot project, which, as Toccaceli [4] (p. 30) notes, “closely resembles the French Pays experience and extensively embodies the Leader spirit”. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that this experience was a crucial reference point for Italian regulations on agricultural districts [40], a topic to be analysed in the following section.

3. The Regulatory Framework at National and Regional Levels

The season of “districting” *ex lege* dates to the nineties, a thirty-year process during which the legislator’s attitude towards the district as a tool has changed several times [51]. By reading the legislation, it emerges how polysemic the very term “agricultural districts” (DAs) is, since it encompasses an inhomogeneous family of typologies with multiple adjectives. Table 1 and Appendix A recall the regulations on the subject and district definitions given by the legislator over the course of time. Reformulating the classification proposed by Toccaceli [4], four differently characterised evolutionary phases are identified.

The first phase began in 1991 when Law 317 recognised “industrial districts” as local areas characterised by a high concentration of small and specialised businesses. Each Region is tasked with identifying the districts to be funded through the “programme contract” instrument.

As proof of the interdependence between the district regulations and negotiated programming, it is worth recalling CIPE Resolution 127/1998, which also allowed agricultural, agro-food and fishery districts to use the instruments of negotiated programming, thus introducing the concept of agricultural districts [52]. The desire to extend the use of the “district tool” to areas other than industry is confirmed by Law 140/99, which establishes “local production systems” (SPL): “homogeneous contexts characterised by a high concentration of industrial enterprises and highly specialised production systems” (art. 6 c. c). Less rigid parameters are set for their identification [53,54].

Table 1. Regulatory acts related to agricultural districts (DAs).

| Phase | Laws | Type of Districts Introduced | Tools |
|-------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | L. 317/91 | Industrial Districts (DIND) | Negotiated Programming Tools (L. 104/1995) |
| | L. 140/99 | Local Production Systems (SPL) | |
| 2 | D. Lgs. 228/2001 | Rural Districts (DIR) Agro-food Quality Districts (DAQ) | Negotiated Programming Tools (L. 104/1995) Supply Chain and District Contracts (Art. 66 L. 289/2002; DM 1192/2016) |
| | L. 266/2005 | Production Districts (DISP) | Facilities for all Types (L. 266/2005) |
| 3 | L. 133/2008 | Enterprise Networks | Network Contracts (L. 33/2009) |
| 4 | L. 205/2017 | Food Districts which Include 7 Different Types of Districts | District Contracts (DM 7775/2019) |
| | Law 23/2022 | Organic Districts | District Contracts (DM 7775/2019) Facilities (CRS 2023–2027) |

Legislative Decree 228/2001 inaugurates the second regulatory phase, which explicitly introduces the district tool in the agricultural sphere: two district types are envisaged: quality agrifood districts (DAQ) and rural districts (DIR). The first are defined as “local production systems characterised by a homogeneous historical and territorial identity” which result “from the integration of agricultural and other local activities and the production of goods or services of particular specificity, in accordance with natural and territorial traditions and vocations” (art. 13 c.1). The second category (DIR) refers to “local production systems, including interregional ones, characterised by a significant economic presence and the productive interdependence of agro-food businesses, as well as one or more certified and protected products according to current EU or national regulations, or traditional or typical products” (art. 13 c.1). For both typologies the legislator proposes a territorial, integrated and participative approach, however, while for DAQs the emphasis is set on the integration of the agro-food chain and production quality, for DIRs the aim is to enhance local socio-cultural traditions and the typical products’ character, aiming at the rural space’s multifunctionality and diversification. In 2005, with Law 266, all the different district types previously regulated were unified under the “productive districts” (DISP) category, identified as free groupings of businesses articulated at a territorial and functional level. To support their development, “district contracts” are introduced, aimed at implementing integrated investment programmes. At the same time, the range of facilities and incentives for district businesses is extended.

The Budget Law (L. 133/2008), introduced in 2009, launches the third legislative phase, which stands in clear discontinuity with the previous ones. Enterprise networks are introduced, supported by “network contracts”. This new typology moves considerably away from the district model, in the sense that businesses’ location and their geographical proximity no longer counts. The very fact that such networks can cross regional borders underlines the change of course. With a view to acquiring the flexibility required by the growing competition in international markets, these enterprise constellations adopt a relational model, capable of fostering services and technology exchange and dissemination between productive realities deprived of spatial contiguity, aiming at improving economic centrality on a supranational scale [55]. Thus the “territorial” connotation is completely lost and the network relates directly to the state’s administrative levels, regardless of the local governance system.

On the other hand, the fourth and final phase sees a “return to the territory” and a renewed focus on qualitative objectives: food production healthiness, landscape and environmental resources protection and local socio-cultural traditions enhancement. In other words, the 2018 Budget law consolidates the “qualitative turn” enunciated beforehand by the legislator *in nuce* during the second phase. It introduces food districts, local governance spaces regulated at a regional level. The tool identified to financially support

these new localised agricultural systems is the “district contract”, aimed at implementing integrated investment programmes of one or more supply chains in the district area (with both public and private initiatives). It is an intervention that aligns with the sustainability objectives already set out in the Declaration of Cork [56] and, in this perspective, food districts are interpreted as real territorial presidia able to contain rural areas depopulation and protect the landscape and environment. Besides enhancing multilevel governance and being a virtuous model for the principle of subsidiarity application, this new type of district introduces an important public element: the National Register of Food Districts, which aims to fill an information and monitoring gap. Lastly, the 2022 Organic Agriculture Act adopts the same territorial approach in relation to organic districts [57].

Within this complex and changing regulatory framework, Regions have moved with a certain degree of autonomy, intervening in the matter in a differentiated way also from a diachronic point of view: Piemonte had already regulated wine districts since the mid-late 1990s in an innovative way, Veneto and Basilicata started in 2003, Sardinia and Campania in 2014, while Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Molise, Valle d’Aosta and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano have not deliberated on the matter yet [4,58]. Some Regions were then more dynamic than others in terms of activated districts: Tuscany, Calabria and Campania entered an extremely high number of districts in the Register (39, 29 and 23 respectively), Liguria only one, Marche three, Umbria, Piemonte and Basilicata four. Not all districts have opted for inclusion in the Register: an example is the Cilento biodistrict, promoted *ante legem* by the Italian Association for Organic Agriculture (AIAB) in the territory of Cilento, Vallo di Diano and Alburni National Park [58].

The 176 Italian food districts are also very different from each other in terms of production specialisation: some are dedicated to a single product such as the “annurca apple district” in Campania or the “pear district” in Emilia-Romagna, others focus on a broader range of products such as the “quality agro-food district of Fruit and Vegetables of Abruzzo” or the “DAQ Piacenza” based on charcuterie. Others comprise a production chain such as the “cereal district” or the “poultry district” in Lombardia. Organic districts represent a minority: they are present in nine Regions with a particular concentration in Lazio (10 districts). Even in terms of size, the differences are considerable: they range from very small areas such as the “Giffoni hazelnut” district in Campania, to provincial dimensions (“Distretto agricolo Milanese” and “Distretto del cibo dell’area metropolitana di Bari”), up to districts on a regional scale, such as “Distretto delle Filiere e dei Territori di Sicilia in Rete” which covers the entire regional territory.

Campania has entered 23 food districts in the registry, belonging to the two different typologies recognised by regional regulations: rural districts (DIR) and quality agro-food districts (DAQ). The first category includes seven districts, with a clear polarisation in “rural areas with overall development problems” (Campania PDR 2014–2020); the second category includes very heterogeneous district types in terms of production characterisation and size: from the small “Amalfi lemon quality agrifood” district to the “Chestnuts of Campania” DAQ, among the largest in Italy.

The procedural process leading to this recognition started in 2019, with its approval (Council Resolution 8 of 1/10/2019) of the Regulation implementing Regional Law 20/2014 “Recognition and constitution of rural districts and quality agrifood districts and supply chain districts”. The Regulation entrusts the proposal for the identification of districts to a Promoting Committee representative of the territorial socio-economic fabric and the reference supply chain and prescribes the requirements for district recognition. For DIRs, these requirements concern the presence of: territory features; a relationship system between agriculture and local businesses active in other sectors; a homogeneous historical and landscape identity; differentiated economic activities; tourist attractors; multifunctional farms; agricultural production which respects the territories’ environmental and landscape peculiarities; valorisation of local resources heritage services; collaborative relations with local institutions (Art. 4). The recognition of quality agro-food district requirements include the presence of certified products and traditional products, with at least one production

chain referring to certified products (in relation to integration and interdependence between agricultural businesses and businesses in the processing and distribution sector), as well as the existence of collaborative relations between local institutions, researchers and operators in the agro-food chain and the integration between agro-food production and cultural and tourist activities (Art. 5).

Subsequently, with DRD 183/2019, the Region set parameters to recognise the two district types envisaged (Table 2). As per the districts' perimeter, the use of the Territorial Development Systems (STS) has been established, recognised by the 2008 Regional Territorial Plan (PTR) [59].

Table 2. The indicators set by Campania Region for district recognition (Executive Decree 183 of 23/10/2019).

| District Type | Indicators |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DIR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rurality index (% rural agricultural area in the district > regional average). • Environmental protection index (% protected area in district > national average). • Population density (<150 inh./sq km (or <180 inh./sq km in the presence of an urban STS). • Member businesses numbers (at least 50, 60% of which are agricultural). • Participating municipalities numbers (at least 10). |
| DAQ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one quality label presence (pivot product). • Pivot product specialisation index (% of farms or UAA) at or above 150% of the regional average). • Businesses' number or business employees' number (agricultural, processing and marketing) in the district (at least 50 businesses or 300 employees). |

Lastly, the 2020 executive decree (DRD 31, Annex 4), which recognises the districts, redefined the procedures for district establishment and operation (bodies and tasks) as well as the minimum criteria required for its legal establishment: for DIRs, the adhesion of 50% of municipalities included in the district area, 100 enterprises operating within the district perimeter and subjects belonging to the world of knowledge (research bodies, professional training bodies, etc.); for DAQs, the adhesion of at least 100 enterprises with activities consistent with the district's aims, 50% farms included in the district's product certification systems, farms producing traditional agricultural products (PAT), enterprises linked to the processing and distribution phases (in a balanced relationship with farms) and subjects belonging to the world of knowledge (research bodies, vocational training bodies, etc.).

4. Context and Methodology

4.1. The Investigation Area: Benevento Province in the Regional Context

With its 2080 square kilometres, Benevento Province is the smallest in Campania after Naples (15% of the regional territory) and also the one with the smallest number of inhabitants (262,413). Located in the southern Apennines, straddling Molise, Apulia and the Campania Provinces of Caserta, Naples and Avellino, Benevento basin has historically acted as a geographic and cultural link between the Peninsula's Adriatic and Tyrrhenian sides.

The average altitude of around 900 metres above sea level justifies the often-used term "high lands". Equally appropriate for Benevento area is the expression "bone territories", coined in the 1950s by Rossi Doria [60] to state those remote and mountainous territories marked by depopulation and economic marginality, devoted to extensive small-scale agriculture.

ISTAT data confirm this interpretation. Provincial population density is the lowest in Campania (140 inhabitants/sq. km), with more than half of the municipalities having less than 30 inhabitants per square kilometre (Figure 1a). In spite of its millennial history, Sannio territory (taken from the name of the Italic population, the Samnites, who settled there in pre-Roman times) has a wide-ranging settlement pattern, with small villages, mainly located around the hills. Out of the 78 municipalities that make up the Province, only 7 exceed 5000 inhabitants and only 3 exceed 10,000 (Benevento, Montesarchio, Sant'Agata dei Goti). The number of elderly people is the highest in the Region, and in 55 municipalities, the over-65s exceed 30% of the population. This figure should be seen in relation to the intense phenomena of depopulation and abandonment that have been affecting the area for some time (Figure 1b). Almost 80% of municipalities have recorded negative demographic dynamics over the last twenty years and, in several cases, this decrease has been systematic since the post-war period. Prominent among the decreasing municipalities are those so-called "marginal" municipalities that the Ministerial Decree of 30 September 2021 identifies as beneficiaries of a post-Covid support fund. These are 26 municipalities that simultaneously present three disadvantage conditions: a negative population growth rate in both the long and short term, a high social and material vulnerability index [61] and a low-income level (below the first quartile of the Italian municipality distribution).

Looking at the economic activity sectors, the Province's agricultural-rural vocation clearly emerges, with an employment rate in the primary sector that is more than double the regional and national average (9% against 4%). The utilised agricultural area (UAA), although decreasing, occupies an area of almost 110 thousand hectares (Figure 1c for data from the 6th Agricultural Census, 2010), exceeding 50% of the administered territory in as many as 40 municipalities, with peaks in Vitulano (77%), Castelfranco in Miscano (82%) and Dugenta (92%). The agricultural production base consists of around 11 thousand farms (data from the Study Centre of Confindustria Benevento relating to 2017), which contribute 6% to the production of the Province's GDP [62].

The contraction of farms in recent decades has led to an increase in the average farm surface area (Figure 1d), but only in rare cases has this meant a modernisation of the agricultural system, which remains overall characterised by small family businesses. Extensive cultivation of "hill and mountain and trans-Apennine crops" prevails [63] (p. 1091), both on the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic sides, with arable land (especially cereals), pastures and uncultivated land, a few woods and limited "medium-activity areas", with mixed cultivation, arboreal crops and specialised horticulture. Intensive tobacco cultivation is being drastically reduced, with the consequent productive reconversion of vast areas. The most widespread arboreal crops are vines and olives, which are characteristic elements of Benevento rural landscape. The highest quality wine production is concentrated in the Telesina Valley, especially in the foothills of Taburno-Camposauro and Titerno [64,65].

In the Rural Development Plan (PSR Campania 2014–2020) [66] classification of rural area adoption and more recently by the Supplement for Regional Development (CSR Campania 2023–2027) [67], on the basis of the parameters used (altitude zones, total agricultural area/territorial surface ratio, population density, etc.), the Beneventano municipalities are ascribed to two types of areas (Figure 1e): "intermediate rural areas" (49.5% of the provincial territory), which include partially urbanised hill or mountain areas with intermediate development, and "rural areas with overall development problems" (50.5%), which include rural areas with low population density and scarce dynamic.

The fragility of the local economy is also linked to the poor territory infrastructure and the lack of essential services. This is clear from the municipalities' classification adopted by the National Strategy for Internal Areas (SNAI), based on distance (measured in travel time) from the main centres offering primary services (health, higher education and railways) [20,65,68,69].

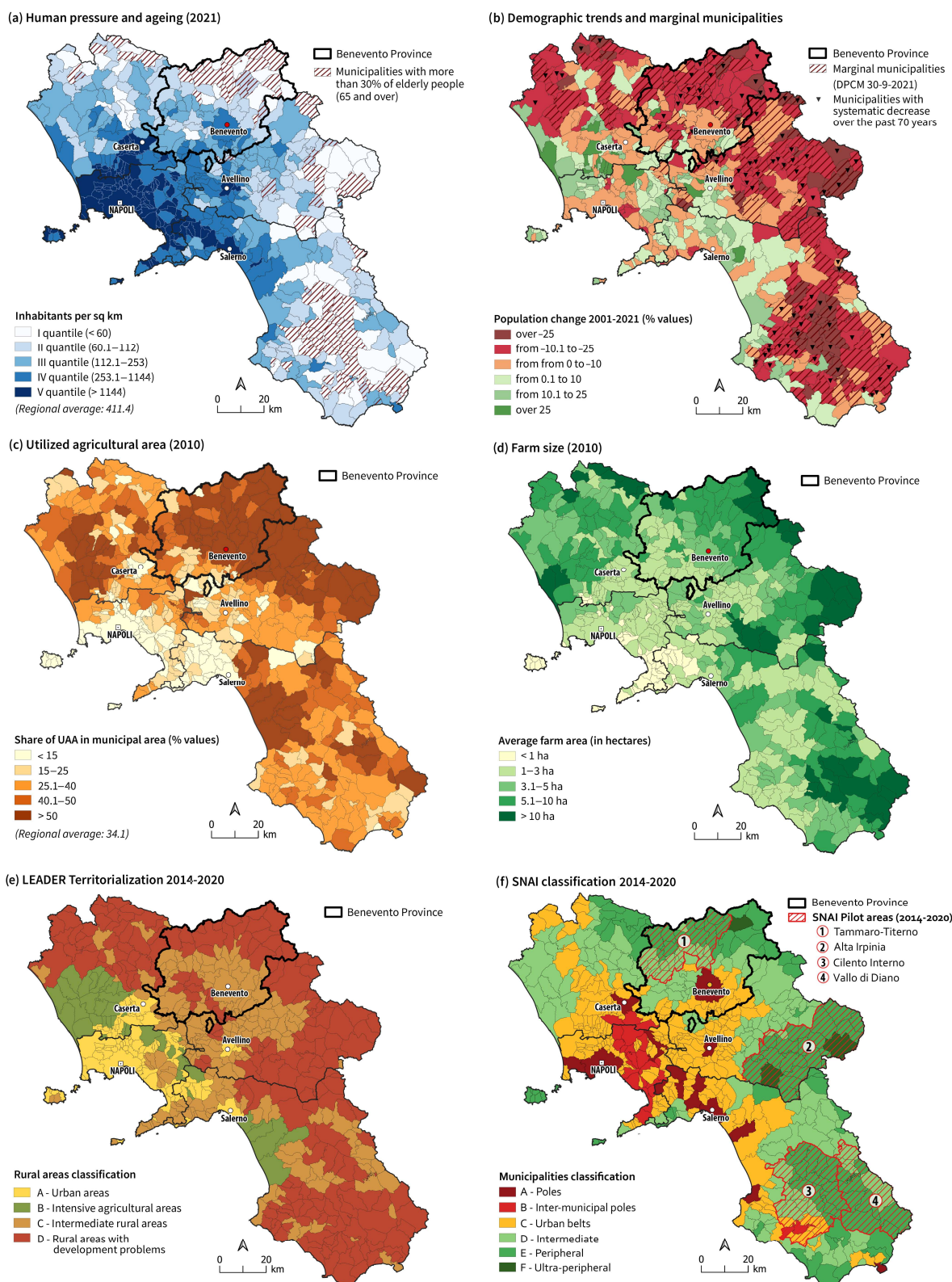


Figure 1. Benevento Province in the regional context: some indicators (our elaboration).

Within this classification (related to the period 2014–2020), Benevento Province (Figure 1f) is characterised by the widespread presence of intermediate areas (36 municipalities equal to 46.2% of the total) and peripheral areas (18 municipalities equal to 23% of the total) [65].

The North-Western quadrant also includes one of the 72 national pilot areas identified by SNAI in which place-based development strategies are to be tested: the Tammaro-Titerno area, made up of 24 municipalities. This has been joined in the new 2023–2027 programming cycle by “Fortore beneventano”, an internal area made up of 12 municipalities within the Fortore Mountain Community.

However, SNAI themselves state that the strong and stratified identity of internal regions, as well as their diverse cultures, traditions, lifestyles, food, nature and human relations, are precisely ensured by their peripherality or remoteness. These factors represent “latent development factors”, as Barca [19] (p. 41) puts it, and should be adequately valued through the development of a shared planning process.

From this point of view, Benevento, with its rich environmental and cultural heritage, constitutes an area with great attractive potential. Evidence of this are the ancient villages perched on the hills, the beauty of its centuries-old olive groves and wine-growing landscapes, the quality and typicality of its wine and food production and artistic craftsmanship, the natural parks and the tourist–cultural itineraries that criss cross it (just think of the Appian Way or the Southern Francigena route).

4.2. Methodology and Data Collection

For the analysis of the two Benevento food districts, we employ the analytical framework of the Food Local Territorial Systems (FoodLoTS), a notion introduced by Tecco et al. [3] in the wake of studies on Local Territorial Systems (LoTS) developed by the Italian territorialist school [5–9,70,71]. As observed by Dematteis and Governa, what the LoTS model aims to identify and describe empirically “is not an existing territorial system functioning as a collective territorial actor, but a series of clues (attitudes, previous experiences, etc.) and subjective and objective preconditions that, when supported by appropriate stimuli, governance and accompanying actions, enable and make highly probable the construction, in a certain geographical area, of a territorial system capable of autonomously contributing to development objectives” [6] (p. 29).

In essence, it is an approach aimed at studying the interaction among stakeholders, local resources and development dynamics to identify the most suitable architecture for building local territorial systems, FoodLoTS in our case. The methodological approach proposed by the authors comprises two analytical moments. The first is aimed at analysing those territorial aggregations that, by leveraging local resources, have produced actions or projects attributable to the general category of local development (not only in an economic sense but also social, cultural, etc.). Mapping these local networks and their overlaps makes it possible to draw an initial geography of local territorial action, i.e., to identify areas marked by clusters of collective projects and actions (those with the greatest local self-organising capacity). The analysis of these areas demands an in-depth examination, encompassing the composition and stability of networks, the role of stakeholders, the expected objectives, the activated or yet-to-be-activated resources, the ability to engage networks and markets on a supra-local scale, etc.

In this paper, we partially reverse the previously outlined methodological approach, as we start from pre-established and delineated food districts, trying to discern if these spaces—set by law—can be recognised as FoodLoTS. To this end, we investigate the governance dynamics and the role of active stakeholders in Benevento area, striving to draw an initial map of past local initiatives and active networks (LAGs, protection consortia, mountain communities, parks and protected areas, pilot internal areas, etc.). Our aim is to understand how the two investigated food districts are related to these local governance areas, since the sustainability and success of the district’s action are expected to be notably more effective when grounded in an already established system of relationships or past collaborative experiences. To delve deeper into the analysis of the two Benevento districts, we employ as information source the project schedules and district plans submitted to Campania Region for recognition. The dimensions investigated from this documentation include district spatialisation and characteristics (size, population, demographic density,

membership, rurality and specialisation index, certified and traditional production, etc.), involved actors and expected objectives.

Furthermore, the study presents the findings from a field analysis conducted between March and June 2023, aiming to better define the characteristics and governance system adopted, as well as the different degrees of interest and influence among the district's stakeholders. Two tools were employed for this purpose: semi-structured interviews with key district actors and questionnaires (administered online through Google form) addressed to a wider audience of private subjects, mainly farmers. Overall, 156 out of 246 DIR members (63%) and 80 out of 121 DAQ members (66%) were contacted (initially by phone and then via email).

The six analytical dimensions tackled in the interviews and questionnaires concerned: 1. reasons for joining the district; 2. district activities; 3. governance; 4. participation levels; 5. district identity; 6. critical issues and expectations.

Fifteen key witnesses were interviewed (refer to Table 3), while 24 members responded to the questionnaire (11 for DAQ and 13 for DIR), a statistically insignificant number, yet capable of complementing the insights provided by the interviewed key actors.

Table 3. Interviews conducted with privileged witnesses.

| Privileged Witnesses | Role in the District |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Confindustria Benevento | participation in DIR and DAQ establishment phases |
| Irpinia Sannio Chamber of Commerce | participation in DIR and DAQ establishment phases |
| Confcooperative Campania | participation in DIR establishment phases |
| University of Sannio (BN) | DIR member |
| President "Gal Taburno" (and Taburno Park) | lead DIR in the initial phase and then partner |
| President Italian Confederation of Agriculture | DIR President |
| Project manager | DAQ Managing Director |
| Coldiretti Benevento | DIR Member |
| Univ. Federico II, Rural Economics and Estimates | assignment for LEADER territorialisation 2023–2027 |
| Municipality of Pietrelcina | DIR Member |
| Municipality of Apollosa | DIR Member |
| Municipality of Morcone | DIR and DAQ member |
| Managing Director "La Guardiense" | DAQ President |
| Sanniti Olive Growers Association representative | DIR Member |
| Campania Region Agriculture Department | Head of district constitution procedures |

The questionnaires were designed to optimise response times, considering the difficult agricultural season affecting the Campania Region (due to extreme weather events). This led to a limited number of open-ended questions, covering a few topics (expectations and criticalities, past aggregative experiences, most influential and/or interested actors). For each dimension, options were provided to be scored on a Likert scale from 1 to 4 based on their perceived importance. For instance, under "reasons for joining the district" the questionnaire included the following motivations to be scored: (a) networking; (b) gaining greater market visibility; (c) enhancing local resources and identity; (d) accessing funding; (e) creating new job opportunities. In the "district activities" section, the evaluation considered the following aspects (rated by frequency): (a) institutional and assembly-related initiatives; (b) marketing activities; (c) learning/innovation initiatives; (d) efforts in building/strengthening alternative food networks; (e) undertakings directed towards non-agricultural sectors (such as tourism, handicrafts, etc.). The same approach was applied to the other analytical dimensions.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. An Explorative Analysis of Benevento Food Districts

The food districts affecting the Benevento Province are six in total, the "Terra Sannita" DIR and five quality agro-food districts: the "Sannio" DAQ, focused on the Central Apennines White Veal (43 municipalities), the inter-provincial district "Annurca Apple" with

38 municipalities, “Campania in Shell” DAQ (18 municipalities) and two districts covering the entire Province: the “Campania Dairy Livestock Chain” and the “Sannio Wine, Oil, Fruit and Vegetables”. There are also two other districts that marginally affect Benevento area: the “Liburia Felix” DAQ, which includes the municipalities of Durazzano and Vitulano, and the “Wines of Irpinia” DAQ, pertaining only to the municipality of Pannarano (an enclave within the territory of Avellino Province). While no territorial overlap exists for rural districts, the territorialisation of the DAQs allows intersections between DAQs and DIRs or among several DAQs.

Figure 2a displays the “multiple” affiliations of Benevento municipalities to the quality agro-food districts, as well as the spatialisation of the two districts examined in this study: the “Terra sannita” DIR, encompassing 65 municipalities, and the “Sannio Vino, Olio e Ortofrutta” DAQ, covering the entire Province (Figure 2b).

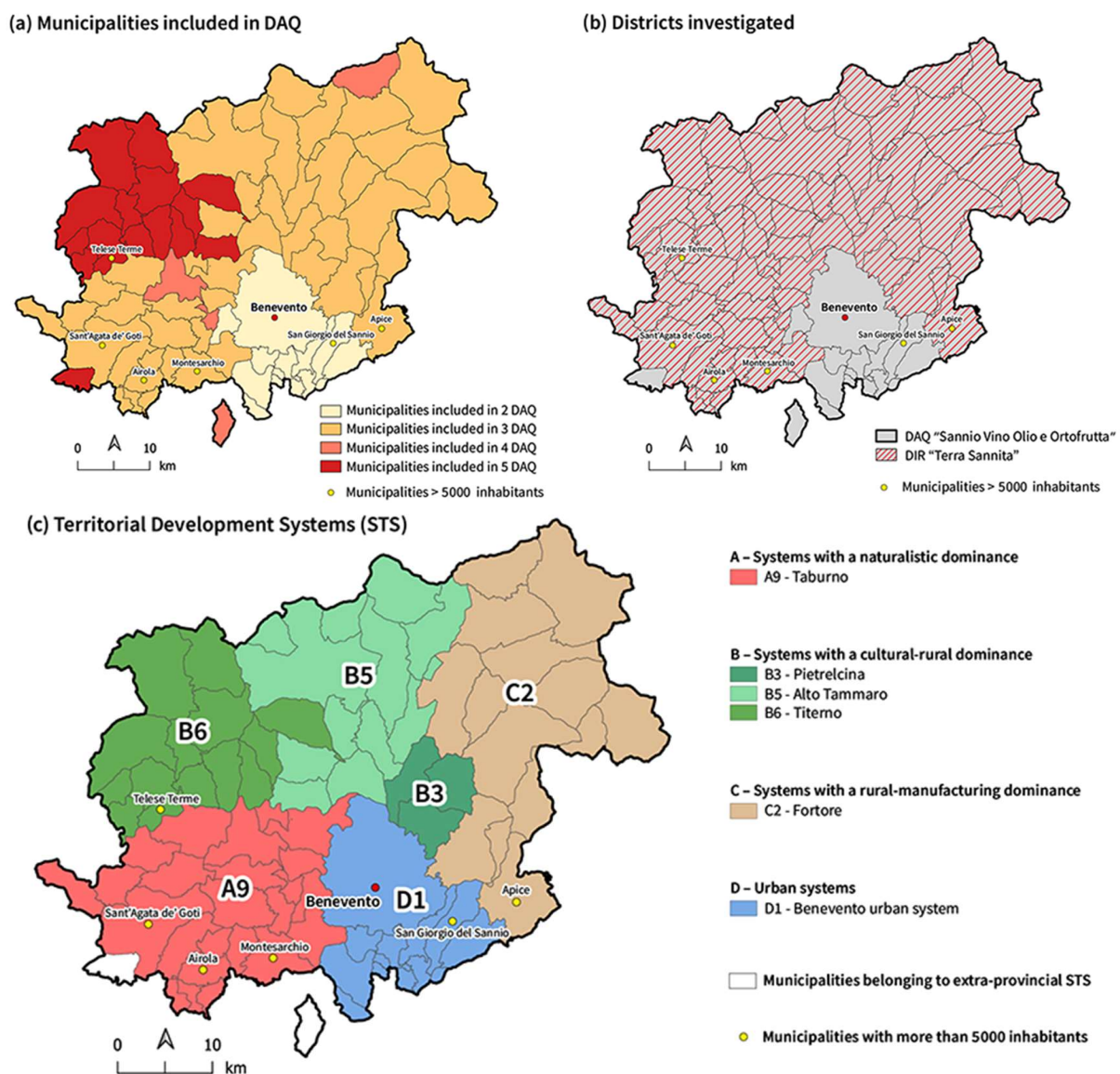


Figure 2. Districts and territorial development systems in Benevento Province (our elaboration on Campania Region data).

In compliance with the regional regulatory provision (DRD 183/2019), the Territorial Development Systems (STS), designated by the 2008 Regional Territorial Plan (PTR), were used to perimeter the districts. This choice, although not without its criticalities (mainly related to the failure in updating the STS), presents some interesting points. The

45 regional STS are classified into six territorial dominants, defining six categories of systems: (a) naturalistic; (b) rural–cultural; (c) rural–industrial; (d) urban; (e) urban–industrial; (f) landscape–cultural. As stated in the Regional Territorial Plan [59] (p. 206–207), the STS represent not only areas of environmental and socio-economic homogeneity/affinity, but also local planning areas based on the geography of self-recognition processes of local identities and networks of active stakeholders (territorial pacts, territorial contracts, industrial districts, natural parks, etc.).

Referring to Benevento (Figure 2c), the six STS making up the provincial territory fall into four categories: one predominantly naturalistic, three with a rural–cultural dominance, one with a rural–manufacturing dominance and, finally, the urban system of Benevento. The wine DAQ, spanning across the entire provincial territory, encompasses the six STS, along with the two municipalities of Pannarano and Durazzano belonging to extra-provincial STS (A8 and D4 respectively), while the “Terra Sannita” DIR covers 5 STS, excluding Benevento’s urban system.

Table 4 summarises some basic information regarding the two districts (our elaboration on data extracted from documents submitted to the Region by the districts). The “Terra Sannita” DIR, featuring an extremely low population density (about 98 inhabitants per square kilometre) and a very high rurality index (87.1), exhibits broad but fragmented participation.

Table 4. The investigated districts: an overview.

| Analytical Dimensions | | Terra Sannita DIR | Sannio Wine, Oil, Fruit and Vegetables DAQ |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Context data | Surface area (sq. km) | 1789.5 | 2080.30 |
| | Population | 175,035 | 266,716 |
| | Population density | 97.8 | 128.2 |
| | Rurality and environmental protection index (DIR) specialisation index (DAQ) | 87.1% (rurality index) 21.6% (environmental protection index) | >150% (specialisation index) |
| | Presence of PAT (traditional agricultural products) | Yes | Yes |
| | DAQ pivot product | - | Aglianico del Taburno DOCG |
| | District area | 65 municipalities and 5 STS | 78 Municipalities and 6 STS |
| | Lead partner phase | LAG Taburno | LAG Titerno |
| Legal form | Consortium | S.C.A.R.L. (a type of consortium) | |
| Board of Directors Chairman | President of the Sannio Olive Growers Association (AOS) | President of the “La Guardiense” social winery | |
| Formally adhering parties | 245 | 121 | |
| (a) Total businesses | 190 | 114 | |
| Stakeholders | 1. <i>agricultural businesses</i> | 127 | 107 |
| | 2. <i>tourism businesses</i> | 40 | 0 |
| | 3. <i>craft businesses</i> | 4 | 0 |
| | 4. <i>processors</i> | 0 | 6 |
| | 5. <i>other businesses</i> | 19 | 3 |
| | (b) Member municipalities | 39 | 3 |
| | (c) Research organisations | 4 | 1 |
| | (d) Other subjects | 12 | 1 |

Table 4. Cont.

| Analytical Dimensions | | Terra Sannita DIR | Sannio Wine, Oil, Fruit and Vegetables DAQ |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Objectives and previous experience | Main stated purpose | Create an “organisational” bond between all economic activities in the area and generate a socio-institutional link between all local players for territory enhancement. | Design, develop and manage, in a district logic, innovative and sustainable agrifood development paths aimed at more evolved business models in district production |
| | Main project experiences and activated networks in the district area | Area pacts/area contracts, integrated programmes, LAGs, mountain communities, parks, SNAI pilot area | Area pacts and contracts, integrated programmes, protection consortia, social wineries, producer organisations |

There are 245 stakeholders affiliated with DIR, with a clear predominance of farmers. A total of 144 of the 190 member enterprises are sole proprietorships, confirming the atomisation of the local production system. As a result of the planning capacity developed within the LEADER programme, the Taburno LAG (local action group) played a key role in the territorial animation phase, leading to the formation of the DIR as a consortium legally represented by the President of the Olivicoltori Sanniti Association. Institutional entities (municipalities, LAGs, mountain communities, Taburno Camposauro Park, training institutes) and research entities make up about 17% of members, with a significant municipality representation (39 municipalities). The District Plan’s objective is to “implement a fertile ‘ecosystem’ for the development of local agricultural, agro-food, craft and e-gastronomic tourism businesses” (DIR Terra Sannita, Annex 2). The approach outlined and explicitly referenced in the district plan aligns with the strategy formulated within the LEADER program, known as CLLD (EU Regulation 1303/2013).

By forging closer ties among all economic activities in the area, the DIR aims to overcome the excessive fragmentation of products and services offered. It seeks to amplify the diverse natural features (Figure 3a) and the historical–cultural heritage, highlighting the many local specialties, particularly emphasising wine production (Figure 3b–d).

Previous experiences encompass the “Terre dei Sanniti Wine Route” project, which was formulated by Titerno LAG and officially endorsed at the regional level (L. 268/1999, DM 12 July 2000, DGR 3504/2001). This project sought to develop wine tourism routes while fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing and trust between public and private stakeholders. This is an initiative aimed at enhancing the territorial identity and, more specifically, what Becattini and Omodei Zorini [55] (p. 18) define as “integrated specialties”, i.e., distinctive local products, created through a symbiotic connection with artisan crafts, agritourism, rural tourism, dining, traditional cultural events and land management.

Figure 3b shows the two suggested routes traversing the right and left sides of the Telesina Valley, originating from the provincial capital [72–76]. These itineraries include several wine cities affiliated with the Recevin community network, comprising over 800 municipalities.

The “Sannio Vini, Olio e Ortofrutta” DAQ focuses on the production of certified wines: Aglianico del Taburno DOCG (the highest wine classification in Italy), as the pivot product, Sannio DOC/DOP, Falanghina del Sannio DOC/DOP and Beneventano IGP. Aside from Aglianico del Taburno, the wine production areas cover the entire provincial territory (Figure 3c), coinciding with the DAQ’s spatialisation. With 45% of the regional area under vineyards (12,000 hectares) and a production of more than 1 million hectolitres, the Province of Benevento boasts a very high concentration of winegrowers and producers, with over 10,000 companies showing considerable untapped potential.

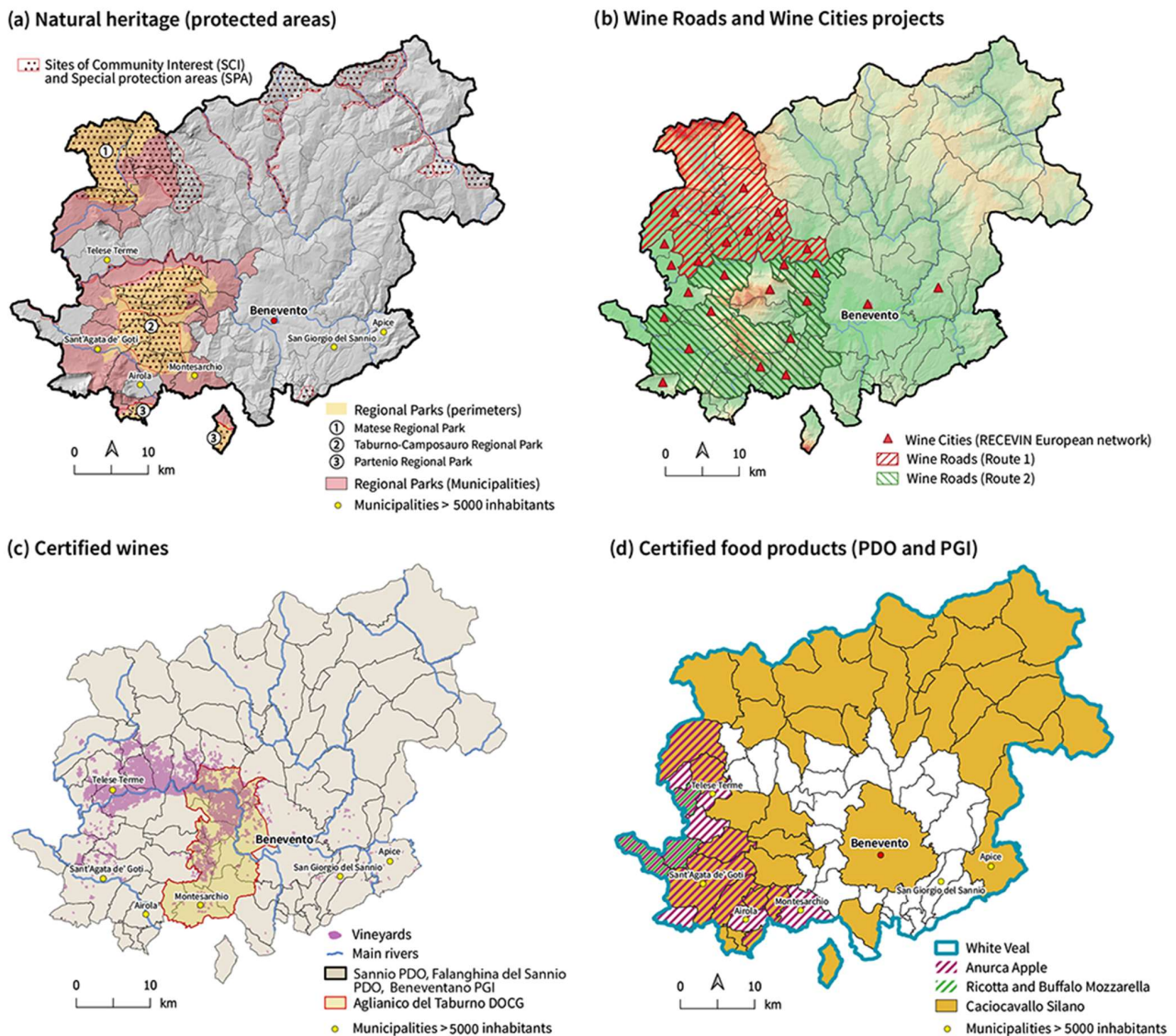


Figure 3. Natural and gastronomic resources and related spatialisation (our elaboration on Campania Region data).

Protected Designation of Origin and Protected Geographical Indication wines (EU Reg. 1151/2012) account for a tenth of the provincial production (roughly half of the certified wine in Campania) and occupy an area of about 3800 hectares (data extracted from the “Sannio Consorzio Tutela Vini”) [77], with a significant concentration in the Titero and Telesina Valleys and Taburno. The local wine-growing system is characterised by its longstanding cooperative tradition, allowing viticulture to thrive despite industrialisation and rural exodus [58]. The social winery “La Guardiense”, founded in 1960, is the oldest and largest wine cooperative in Campania (over 1000 members). It hosts the only sparkling wine plant in Southern Italy and has garnered numerous awards. Well-rooted locally are also the Solopaca social winery (over 600 members and 1300 hectares of vineyard area), Taburno winery (a branch of “Consorzio Agrario” in Benevento) with 300 members and 600 hectares and “Cantina Vigne Sannite”, affiliated with the “Centro Cooperativo Agricolo Sannita” (CECAS).

This mutual system, which internalises the entire supply chain within the cooperative relationship (except for specialised distributors to foreign countries), links up with the non-cooperative players in the sector through “Sannio Consorzio Tutela Vini”. This consortium encompasses 1300 entrepreneurs, comprising winemakers, winemakers and bottlers. Its

primary responsibility is safeguarding, promoting and advocating business interests for all designated origin appellations and typical geographical denominations in the Benevento Province [77].

The district's other distinctive territorial productions include olive oil (PAT extra virgin olive oil "Sannio Caudino Telesino" and "Sannio Colline Beneventane") and numerous fruit and vegetable productions, officially recognised by the Region as traditional agricultural products (Pietrelcina artichoke, Jonna chestnut from Civitella Licinio, Sannio white roundel, Matese black potato, to name a few).

The olive-growing sector utilises a land area of 10,558 hectares managed by around 17,000 farms, confirming the fragmented nature of these businesses and the necessity for synergies among operators. The Sannio Olive Growers Association, with about 2200 members across 2000 hectares, fosters these essential connections. Although yet to receive formal recognition, olive cultivation remains a fundamental aspect of the Sannio landscape, which boasts 2.5 million olive trees, including a notable proportion of centuries-old trees, serving as a significant economic driver [69,76]. Most of the olive groves occupy hilly areas, fulfilling a critical role in preserving the land. Much like the vine, the olive tree symbolises cultural and historical heritage with profound identity value.

The DAQ, with a production specialisation index in pivot products above 150%, comprises 121 entities, predominantly agricultural businesses (114). In comparison to the DIR, institutional involvement is notably smaller, a common scenario when the district revolves around "strong" production chains. During the district's establishment, the leading entity was the Titerno Local Action Group (LAG). This LAG was pivotal in forming the board of directors, consisting of 10 entrepreneurs who formed the consortium company in 2020.

The district's primary objective, as stated, is to create "an intelligent, sustainable economic and social welfare model within the framework of the green economy and circularity", generating initiatives that are environmentally and culturally oriented. The core strategic actions outlined in the district's plan focus on enhancing the quality of production and innovation. These actions involve efforts to improve brand recognition, engage in research and development projects, foster innovation. There is an emphasis on establishing tangible and intangible technological platforms and networks for 4.0 process management, as well as on promoting and marketing district products.

As detailed in Table 4, the Sannio area has a history of previous joint efforts aimed at fostering local development initiatives [64]. These include integrated supply chain projects funded by the Rural Development Plan in the wine sector and in the zootechnical sector, rural integrated projects for protected areas linked to the three regional parks set in the Province, initiatives under programs "Interreg III B, such as "I-Trace" or "Hadriamed" dedicated to rural area development. The Benevento District Agreement and the two Integrated Territorial Plans, "Regio Tratturo" and "Protofiliera", are also notable examples.

Figures 3 and 4 map some active project areas in the territory, such as regional natural parks, consortia for certified products (Figure 3c,d), Mountain Communities and SNAI pilot areas (Figure 4a), tourist districts (Figure 4b) and LAGs (Figure 4c–e).

In this regard, it is interesting to note how, in the latest 2023–2027 programming cycle (CAP Strategic Plan, Campania Rural Development Complement), the Territorial Development Systems outlined in the 2008 PTR were also utilised for LAG territorialisation [78]. As illustrated in the maps (Figure 4c–e), there has been a gradual reduction in the number of LAGs over time, coupled with an expansion in terms of coverage: there were four LAGs during the 2007–2013 period, encompassing 59 municipalities.

In the following programming cycles, this number has reduced to three, covering the entire provincial territory (77 municipalities in one period and 78 in the other).

These collaborative experiences, although varying in terms of institutionalisation, governance methods and achieved outcomes, have contributed to propagating a culture of cooperation among territorial stakeholders, which could potentially serve as an advantageous factor for the newly formed districts.

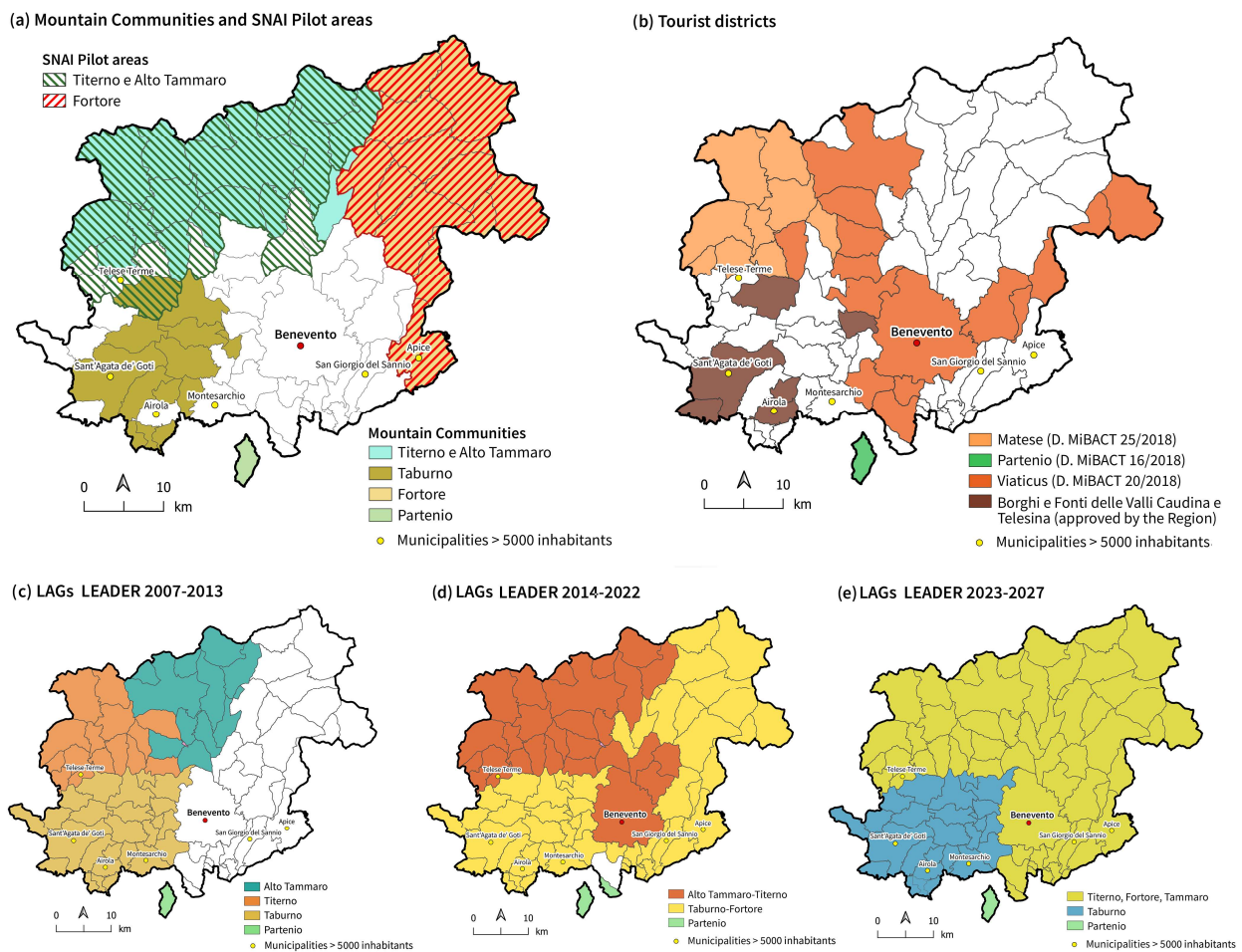


Figure 4. Project areas in the Province of Benevento (our elaboration on Campania Region data).

In fact, it is reasonable to assume that the sustainability and success of actions undertaken at the district level could be more effective when rooted in an established or evolving network of relationships.

5.2. The Qualitative Survey

The survey was based on interviews and questionnaires aimed at investigating some specific district dimensions: (1) motivations for setting up/joining the district; (2) district activities; (3) governance system; (4) participation levels; (5) district identity and cohesion; (6) critical issues and expectations.

Obviously, the more flexible and discursive interview structure allowed a more in-depth analysis of district realities than those from the questionnaires (see Section 4.2). This, together with the low statistical relevance of answers received (24 filled questionnaires out of the 236 administered), led us to assign priority weight in discussing the results of the interviews with privileged witnesses. Nevertheless, the low response rate of questionnaires can also be read, in our opinion, as an indicator of the low level of involvement and/or satisfaction with the district tool. The collected questionnaires seem to confirm this interpretation and, at the same time, they allow us to supplement the narratives of key actors interviewed with a “bottom-up view”.

We now present the picture that emerged from the survey for each of the examined dimensions.

(a) Reasons for setting up/joining the district.

Privileged witnesses interview accounts helped us reconstruct the investigated districts’ genesis and allowed us to identify some evolutionary phases that have characterised the young district experience. The first phase began in 2019, following the regulation

(8/2019) implementing the District Regional Law (R.L. 20/2014). It is a phase of planning effervescence and high expectations: steering committees have been set up in which the LAGs assume a central role, thanks to the experience gained in the LEADER programmes. In 2020, there has been a slackening of activities, closely linked to the pandemic shock and restrictions associated with it. Territorial animation activities came to a halt (except for the summertime, which corresponds to a moment of pandemic appeasement), while, at regional scale, activities related to district recognition continued at a slow pace. A new phase that we might call “disillusionment” opened in 2022, following the post-pandemic recovery. Gone is the idea cultivated in the preparatory phase of the new 2021–2027 programming cycle of making the districts intermediate bodies, on a par with LAGs or local partnerships participating in and financed by public bodies, with the task of programming and managing a share of European funds. The only funding channel activated, specifically dedicated to food districts, is that of the Competitive Tenders issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry (MaSAF), using the resources provided by the Fund for Complementary Investments to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), which allocates 1.2 billion euros to supply chain and district contracts to be granted as a capital contribution of up to 40% of the investment (L. 101/2021). There seems to be a fear among respondents (particularly among those from the DIR), that only solid DAQs which are centred on strong supply chains will succeed. A fear confirmed by the first call for tenders in which three Campania DAQs participated, obtaining a total of 17 million euros: the regional Chestnut district, the “Irpinia” wine district and the “Sele Plain” district linked to the fourth range, all districts consolidated and well established in the national market and/or abroad. The picture of disillusionment outlined by most of the interviewed actors should also be kept in mind to evaluate the questionnaires in the right light. It could in fact explain, on the one hand, the limited level of feedback obtained (also linked to the bad weather and ensuing commitment), and, on the other hand, the bias detected in some of the interviewees’ answers (with the attribution of low average values). Nevertheless, in connection with the motivations for creating/joining the district, both DIR and DAQ actors recognise the importance of “networking”, a key factor in the district method. As several interviewees pointed out, the business fragmentation that characterises the territory pushes them to seek synergies between c farmers and between s farmers and other territorial subjects. The need to “enhance local resources” and the need to “increase the reputational value and distinctiveness of the territorial brand” are also among the reasons considered as most important (according to 70% of respondents). On the other hand, the possibility of creating employment, except for institutional subjects, is not among the drivers considered as strategic by the interviewees (of both the DAQ and the DIR). While it is difficult to infer hypotheses in this regard, it could be assumed that the response is conditioned by the large presence of family-run farms, where the need for labour has already been met endogenously. Access to finance is considered important, yet it surprisingly seems to matter less for DAQ members than DIR members. This is probably influenced both by the greater habit of DAQ members to collaborate and identify funding channels on their own, and by the more heterogeneous and fragmented DIR composition.

(b) District activities.

The answers received show a significant variability in relation to the period considered, since, as mentioned above, a large part of the animation and listening activities in the area concerned the district’s constitutive phase (2019 and summer 2020).

From the interviews conducted and the questionnaires, there is evidence of greater activism of the DIR than the DAQ. This is surprising in appearance, but probably motivated by the different needs of the two districts. The presence of a strong supply chain with consolidated cooperative traditions in the DAQ may paradoxically have pushed the members to invest less in marketing activities, as they can already count on previous projects, independently of the district. This is testified to by the rich calendar of events implemented in 2019 for the “Sannio Falanghina European City of Wine 2019” award, assigned to the Benevento area (23 municipalities) by Recevin. As for the DIR, marked by a more variegated

and less “tested” team, it has engaged in various promotional activities, such as farmer markets, local products and visits to farms, with the aim of creating a common territorial narrative to strengthen and promote the Terra Sannita district’s image and identity. The territorial animation meetings were intense for both districts, but differently shaped. Those of the DAQ focused mainly on the wine and olive-growing sectors, and placed the quality of production, technological innovation and the sustainability of agriculture in the face of climate change at the centre of the district challenge. As far as assemblies and institutional activities are concerned (including concertation tables for project participation), a greater activism of the DAQ seems to emerge from respondents’ answers, probably due to a more “robust” organisational structure, which mirrors that of its consortia and employers’ associations. The different structuring of the two districts is reflected in the communication channels activated. While the DAQ has set up its own website containing the initiatives undertaken, regulations and reference documentation, public meeting minutes and press releases, the DIR has more simply created a Facebook page, containing mainly iconographic material (photos, some video clips and local scout meeting playbills).

(c) *Governance system* and (d) *Levels of stakeholder participation/influence/involvement*.

The responses from members of both districts reflect the peculiarities of their stakeholders. According to the interviewees, both districts have a regulated and hierarchical structure, as prescribed by the law and the consortium’s legal form. It seems, however, that the DIR is distinguished by a more marked hierarchisation with some strong local actors of an institutional or associative nature at the top (LAGs, Benevento Coldiretti, Taburno Park). More specifically, the answers to the questionnaires reveal a low level of member participation in the decision-making processes. This implies that the possibility of influencing decisions and mobilising resources is on the whole more limited in the DIR than in the DAQ. The greater number and heterogeneity of the actors adhering to the DIR makes the sharing of strategies and collective elaboration of projects more challenging. On the other hand, the presence of a large number of small businesses in very different sectors of activity means that the interest and involvement of DIR members is greater than that of the DAQ, as is their integration in the tourism and cultural sectors and with institutions. The DIR’s membership is inevitably influenced by the presence of many businesses in the craft, tourism and other non-agricultural sectors (as many as 63 businesses, 1/3 of the total number of members), as well as many public bodies, far more than the number required by the regulations (more than twice as many). The relations of DAQ actors outside the reference chains are less intense. As noted by several interviewees, the only institutional interactions are with municipalities that are part of the “Wine Cities” network and with the Campania Regional Ministry of Agriculture, which manages agricultural policies and funds. The link with the Universities of Sannio and Federico II of Naples, which were only involved in the initial phase, is also weak. For the DAQ, the participative element considered most significant appears to be the “sharing of production, services and/or technical or economic information means”, to which the questionnaires also attribute greater value than the other aspects taken into consideration (interaction with institutions and research bodies, integration with players and activities in the tourism and cultural sector, etc.). Probably the fact that farmers, especially wine growers, belong to consortia means that there is a habit of “delegating through representation”. In other words, sharing already takes place upstream, with participation in consortia or social wine cellars.

(e) *District identity and cohesion*.

Sharing the same vision of identity, based on the peculiarities of the Samnite territory, history and culture, unites the two districts, although among the DAQ actors the identity recognition is reinforced by the presence of supply chains with illustrious and ancient traditions. The historical presence of consortia certainly also has an influence, making the entrepreneurial system more cohesive and aware of its role as guardian of a cultural, historical and landscape heritage of great value. In both districts, a growing attention to the territory emerges, both in terms of sustainability (maintaining biodiversity, landscape protection, water management, healthiness) and in terms of safeguarding knowledge, local

traditions and cultivation methods. The district form is read by some privileged witnesses as a challenge and an innovation compared to the parochialism that characterises small towns, and in particular local government bodies. Moreover, some interviewees noted a practice of obstruction on the part of local institutions (especially from a bureaucratic point of view) in respect to the establishment of the district instrument itself. It is also interesting to note that, in questionnaire responses related to competitiveness/cohesion levels among the district actors, the competitiveness appears to be higher among the DAQ members, while levels of solidarity and trust score high on average in both districts, with greater variability in DIR.

(f) Expectations and critical issues.

Confidence in and satisfaction with the district instrument appear to be very low in both districts, with a higher share of dissatisfied applicants in the DAQ. As mentioned, this circumstance appears to be closely linked to the lack of district acknowledgement as an intermediate entity and to the scarcity of funding channels identified: competitive calls of the MaSAF and, within the CRS Campania, the SRG07 intervention—Cooperation for rural, local and smart villages development for implementing integrated projects. The district's high expectations during the establishment phase were, in fact, followed by a phase of disillusionment and stand-by activities. According to some expert's opinion, one of the problem's crucial nodes would lie in the hybrid form of these districts (meso-spaces created according to a top-down logic) in an attempt to distribute community resources in a widespread manner throughout the territory. Their fate would thus inevitably be linked to the possibility of identifying possible funding channels. Otherwise, it is highly likely that only the strongest and most specialised clusters, centred on strong supply chains, would survive. Another aspect criticised in particular by respondents from academia concerns the duplication of governance tools which, by overlapping with each other (LAGs, tourist districts, SNAI areas, etc.), frustrate a univocal response to the territory's issues. One of the critical problems noted by some of the DAQ witnesses concerns the lack of synergy with other strong players in the non-provincial territory. There is a call for a wine (and oil) mega-district in Campania, which could promote greater foreign and national market penetration. This is a hypothesis that seems to be about to materialise, according to the Regional Department of Agriculture. Among the DIR members interviewed, some point to the lack of truly bottom-up practices as a critical issue, which would lead to uniform development strategies without really considering the different territorial vocations. Others complain about the use of a utilitarian logic on the part of institutions, i.e., involvement of as many actors and territories as possible with the aim of capturing consensus. To overcome the current impasse, the respondents would like to see various solutions, both exogenous and endogenous in nature.

The former include: recognising the district as an intermediate body, identifying further funding channels, speeding up bureaucratic procedures. Endogenous actions include: greater collaboration between districts (rural, agrifood, tourism), a more widespread information within the territories, promotion initiatives, an increase in activities and meetings between members, a local institutions' greater involvement to keep cultural and tourist sites open (DIR interviewees).

It is interesting to note that it is the DAQ interviewees who often mention external factors of a political-bureaucratic nature, while the DIR interviewees tend to point more frequently to endogenous remedies.

6. Conclusions

The district approach to agriculture and rural areas has gained new centrality from recently introduced legislation at a national and regional level. However, its implementation has been hindered by the disruption caused by the pandemic, leaving Campania's districts (like several others in different regions), in their early stages. This suggests caution in concluding considerations.

A first general observation concerns the hybrid nature of these meso-spaces, which cannot be strictly traced back to bottom-up or top-down practices, since their constitution envisages multi-level and multi-actor governance. While institutionalisation reduces the original innovative scope of these spaces originally born from below, it does offer potential for a wider stakeholder engagement, theoretically empowering the weakest local subjects. Yet, our analysis shows that decision makers are primarily the most influential actors in the area investigated.

A second consideration involves the spatial extension of the DIR. The decision to extend the district tools to the entire provincial territory (e.g., Wine DAQ) or to a very large portion of it (e.g., Terra Sannita DIR) is influenced by various factors, including the adoption of Territorial Development Systems as territorial units of reference for district identification. However, it also seems to be motivated by a desire to distribute European resources for electoral consensus purposes, as suggested by some respondents.

Another critical issue, highlighted by a few privileged witnesses, concerns the multiplication of governance tools that, by overlapping with one another (as mapped in Figures 3 and 4), risk hindering a unified response to the area's problems.

For district success, however, the central issue remains the chosen governance system. This significantly impacts the ability to build sustainable paths of local development, i.e., paths aiming to enhance social cohesion, safeguard the environment and the quality of community life, implement the territorial capital.

In this respect, the two case studies investigated in this study show some substantial differences. Both districts have a large membership, but in the DAQ the presence of a strong supply chain in the wine sector, together with the well-established associative tradition among wine growers, is undoubtedly a condition of advantage. The high level of specialisation and the maturation of a shared design capability indeed make the district a more cohesive subject, aware of the aims to be achieved, as the recent project of a mega wine district in Campania testifies.

On the other hand, the DIR, albeit not lacking in past aggregative experiences linked to the LEADER programme and the National Strategy for Internal Areas, is characterised by a lower capacity to develop a truly shared planning process. The presence of a plurality of actors belonging to heterogeneous fields of activity and the adoption of a hierarchical governance model mean that there are few decision makers. In past years, the LAGs have accumulated a certain amount of management experience, which has favoured aggregative logics aimed at exploiting locally rooted "latent development factors" [20] (p. 41). However, these factors are present unevenly across the territory and the "influential" actors are in most cases few and always the same. In other words, it is difficult to give voice to the small local entrepreneurs that so profoundly characterise the local production system.

In summary, employing the Food Local Territorial Systems framework in our analysis, we can assert that, under the present circumstances, solely the DAQ displays the potential to evolve into a FoodLoTS.

Author Contributions: G.I.: research design and coordination, conceptualisation, methodology, literature analysis, investigation supervision; D.B.: territorial context analysis, use of GIS, geostatistical analysis and map visualisation; E.G.: regulatory analysis, survey investigation, qualitative data collection and curation, writing review and editing. For the Italian Evaluation Purposes: D.B., Section 4.1; E.G., Sections 3 and 5.2; G.I., Sections 1, 2, 4.2, 5.1 and 6. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding authors. The district documents and plans are not publicly available due to the confidentiality requirements of the Campania Region.

Acknowledgments: We are very grateful to all respondents of the questionnaires and interviews for their time and contribution to our research.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acronyms

The following are Italian acronyms used in this manuscript:

| | |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| CIPE | Department of Economic Policy Programming and Coordination |
| CSR | Rural Development Complement |
| DAQ | Agro-food Quality District |
| DIND | Industrial District |
| DIR | Rural District |
| DISP | Production Districts |
| DOC | Controlled Designation of Origin (CDO) |
| DOCG | Controlled and Guaranteed Denomination of Origin |
| DOP | Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) |
| IGP | Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) |
| ISTAT | National Statistical Institute |
| MaSAF | Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry |
| PAT | Traditional Agricultural Products |
| PNRR | National Recovery and Resilience Plan |
| PSR | Rural Development Plan |
| PTR | Regional Territorial Plan |
| SNAI | National Strategy for Internal Areas |
| SPL | Local Production System |
| STS | Territorial Development Systems |

Appendix A

Table A1. Evolution of Italian Legislation on Agricultural Districts (DAs) with Legal Discipline and Regulatory Cases.

| Laws | District Definition | Tools |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Industrial Districts (DIND)</i> L. 317/91 art.36 c.1. | Local areas characterised by a high concentration of small businesses, paying particular attention to the ratio of enterprise presence to resident population and the production specialisation of all businesses. | Negotiated Programming Tools (L. 104/1995) |
| <i>Local Production Systems (SPL)</i> L. 140/99 art.6 c.8. | Homogeneous production contexts, characterised by highly concentrated industrial businesses and highly specialised production systems. | |
| <i>Rural Districts (DIR) Agro-food Quality Districts (DAQ)</i> D. Lgs. 228/2001 art.13 c.1, c.2 | Rural districts: local production systems characterised by a homogeneous historical and territorial identity resulting from the integration of agricultural and other local activities and from the production of goods or services of particular specificity in accordance with natural and territorial traditions and vocations, as referred to in article 36(1) of Law no 317 of 5 October 1991, as amended. Quality agro-food districts: local production systems, including inter-regional ones, characterised by a significant economic presence and productive interdependence of agro-food businesses, as well as one or more certified and protected products according to current EU or national regulations, or traditional or typical products. | Negotiated Programming Tools (L. 104/1995) Supply chain and district contracts (art. 66 L. 289/2002; DM 1192/2016) |
| <i>Production Districts (DISP)</i> L. 266/2005 art.1 c.366 | Free groupings of businesses articulated at a territorial and functional level. Their aim is to promote the development of reference areas and sectors, to improve the efficiency of organisation and production, in accordance with the principles of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity, and also to find ways of collaborating with business associations. Membership is free for industrial, service, tourism, agricultural and fishing businesses. | Facilities for all types (L. 266/2005) |
| <i>Enterprise networks</i> L. 133/2008 art.6bis | The free association of individual production centres is linked to the unified development of industrial policy, also with a view to improving presence on international markets. | Network Contracts (L. 33/2009) |

Table A1. Cont.

| Laws | District Definition | Tools |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Food districts</i> L. 205/2017 art. 1 c.499</p> | <p>They call themselves food districts: (a) rural districts as local production systems referred to in article 36(1) of Law no 317 of 5 October 1991, characterised by a homogeneous historical and territorial identity resulting from the integration of agricultural and other local activities, as well as the production of goods or services of particular specificity, consistent with natural and territorial traditions and vocations, already recognised at the date of entry into force of this provision; (b) quality agro-food districts as local production systems, also of an interregional nature, characterised by a significant economic presence and productive interrelationship and interdependence of agricultural and agro-food businesses, as well as one or more certified and protected productions pursuant to current European or national regulations, or traditional or typical productions, already recognised at the date of entry into force of this provision; (c) local production systems characterised by a high concentration of small and medium-sized agricultural and agro-food businesses, as referred to in article 36(1) of Law 317 of 5 October 1991; (d) local production systems, including those of an interregional nature, characterised by the interrelationship and interdependence in production of agricultural and agro-food businesses, as well as one or more certified and protected productions under current European, national and regional regulations; (e) local production systems located in urban or peri-urban areas characterised by the significant presence of agricultural activities aimed at the environmental and social regeneration of the areas; (f) local production systems characterised by the interrelationship and integration between agricultural activities, in particular the direct sale of agricultural products, and local marketing and catering activities carried out in the same area, solidarity economy networks and solidarity purchasing groups; (g) local production systems characterised by the presence of cultivation, breeding, processing, food preparation and agro-industrial activities carried out organically or in compliance with the criteria of environmental sustainability, in accordance with current European, national and regional regulations; (h) organic districts and biodistricts, understood as territories for which organic farmers, processors, consumer associations or local authorities have stipulated and signed protocols for the dissemination of the organic method of cultivation, for its dissemination and for the support and enhancement of sustainable management also of activities other than agriculture.</p> | <p>District Contracts (DM 7775/2019)</p> |
| <p><i>Organic Districts Law 23/2022 art. 13</i></p> | <p>Without prejudice to the provisions of article 13 of Legislative Decree No. 228 of 8 May 2001, which includes organic districts and biodistricts among the food districts, local production systems, including those of an interprovincial or interregional nature, with a strong agricultural vocation in which they are significant, also constitute organic districts: (a) the cultivation, breeding, processing and food preparation, within the territory identified by the biodistrict, of organic products in accordance with the relevant legislation in force; (b) organic primary production located in a supra-municipal territory, i.e., including areas belonging to several municipalities.</p> | <p>District Contracts (DM 7775/2019)</p> <p>Facilities (CRS 2023–2027)</p> |

References

- Barca, F. *Towards a Place-Based Social Agenda for the EU*; EU Report Working Paper: Brussels, Belgium, 2009.
- Marsden, T. Third Natures? Reconstituting Space through Place-making Strategies for Sustainability. *Int. J. Soc. Agric. Food* **2012**, *19*, 257–274.
- Tecco, N.; Bagliani, M.; Dansero, E.; Peano, C. Verso il sistema locale territoriale del cibo: Spazi di analisi e di azione. *Boll. Della Soc. Geogr. Ital.* **2017**, *13*, 23–42.
- Tocaceli, D. *Dai Distretti Alle Reti? I Distretti in Agricoltura Nell'interpretazione delle Regioni e le Prospettive Verso Il 2020*; Rete Rurale Nazionale: Rome, Italy, 2012.

5. Dematteis, G. Per una geografia della territorialità attiva e dei valori territoriali. In *SLoT Quaderno 1*; Bonora, P., Ed.; Baskerville: Bologna, Italy, 2001; pp. 11–30.
6. Dematteis, G.; Governa, F. *Territorialità, Sviluppo Locale, Sostenibilità: Il Modello Slot*; FrancoAngeli: Milan, Italy, 2005.
7. Magnaghi, A. *Il Progetto Locale*; Bollati Boringhieri: Turin, Italy, 2010.
8. Bagliani, M.; Dansero, E. Verso una territorialità sostenibile: Un approccio per sistemi locali territoriali. In *Territorialità, Sviluppo Locale, Sostenibilità: Il Modello Slot*; Dematteis, G., Governa, F., Eds.; FrancoAngeli: Milan, Italy, 2005; pp. 118–145.
9. Governa, F. *Tra Geografia e Politiche*; Donzelli Editore: Rome, Italy, 2014.
10. Van der Ploeg, J.D. *I Nuovi Contadini—Le Campagne e le Risposte alla Globalizzazione*; Donzelli: Rome, Italy, 2008.
11. Renting, H.; Marsden, T.; Banks, J. Understanding alternative food networks: Exploring the role of short food supply chains in rural development. *Environ. Plan. A* **2003**, *35*, 393–411. [[CrossRef](#)]
12. Pe'er, G.; Bonn, A.; Bruelheide, H.H.; Dieker, P.; Eisenhauer, N.; Feindt, P.H.; Hagedorn, G.; Hansjürgens, B.; Herzon, I.; Lomba, Å.; et al. Action needed for the EU Common Agricultural Policy to address sustainability challenges. *People Nat.* **2020**, *2*, 305–316. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
13. Morgan, K.; Marsden, T.; Murdoch, J. *Worlds of Food*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2006.
14. Murdoch, J.; Marsden, T. Quality, Nature, and Embeddedness: Some Theoretical Considerations in the Context of the Food Sector. *Econ. Geogr.* **2020**, *76*, 107–125.
15. Moragues-Faus, A.; Marsden, T. The political ecology of food: Carving “spaces of possibility” in a new research agenda. *J. Rural Stud.* **2017**, *55*, 257–288. [[CrossRef](#)]
16. Iovino, G. Italian agriculture in the shade of a pandemic. New and old dilemmas. In *Global Threats in the Anthropocene: From COVID-19 to the Future*; Mercatanti, L., Montes, S., Eds.; Il Sileno: Lago, Italy, 2021; pp. 230–254.
17. Pettenati, G. La rinaturalizzazione del cibo in Valposchiavo: Ecologia politica di una “valle bio”. *Riv. Geogr. Ital.* **2021**, *128*, 137–153. [[CrossRef](#)]
18. Dansero, E.; Giorda, M.; Pettenati, G. *Per una Geografia Culturale del Cibo*; Scienza Attiva: Turin, Italy, 2014.
19. Barca, F. *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy: A Place-Based Approach to Meeting European Union Challenges and Expectations*; Independent Report Prepared at the Request of Danuta Hübner; Commissioner for Regional Policy: Brussels, Belgium, 2009.
20. Barca, F.; Casavola, P.; Lucatelli, S. *Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne: Definizioni, Obiettivi, Strumenti e Governance*; Materiali Uval: Rome, Italy, 2014.
21. Sonnino, R.; Marsden, T.; Morgaues-Faus, A. Relationalities and Convergences in Food Security Narratives: Towards a Place-Based Approach. *Trans. Inst. Br. Geogr.* **2016**, *41*, 477–489. [[CrossRef](#)]
22. Kristensen, D.K.; Kjeldsen, C.; Hvarregaard Thorsøe, M. Enabling sustainable agro-food futures: Exploring fault lines and synergies between the integrated territorial paradigm, rural eco-economy and circular economy. *J. Agric. Environ. Ethics* **2016**, *29*, 749–765. [[CrossRef](#)]
23. IPES-Food. *From Uniformity to Diversity: A paradigm Shift from Industrial Agriculture to Diversified Agroecological Systems*; International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems: Brussels, Belgium, 2016.
24. Petrini, C. *Terra Madre: Come Non Farci Mangiare dal Cibo*; Giunti: Firenze-Bra, Italy, 2009.
25. Pettenati, G.; Toldo, A.; Ferrando, T. The food system as a commons. In *Routledge Handbook of Food as a Commons*; Vivero-Pol, J.L., Ferrando, T., De Schutter, O., Mattei, U., Eds.; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2018; pp. 42–56.
26. Pothukuchi, K.; Kaufman, J. Placing the Food System on the Urban Agenda: The Role of Municipal Institutions in Food Systems Planning. *Agric. Hum. Values* **1999**, *16*, 213–224. [[CrossRef](#)]
27. Farrell, L.; Thirion, S.; Soto, P. *Territorial Competitiveness Creating a Territorial Development Strategy in Light of the LEADER Experience, Dossier n°6 –Part1*; Leader European Observatory: Brussels, Belgium, 1999.
28. EC. *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Bringing Nature Back into our Lives COM(2020) 380 Final*; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2020.
29. EC. *Farm to Fork Strategy for a Fair, Healthy and Environmentally-Friendly Food System*; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2020.
30. EC. *The European Green Deal*; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2019.
31. Bagnasco, A. *Tre Italie: La Problematica Territoriale dello Sviluppo Italiano*; Il Mulino: Bologna, Italy, 1977.
32. Bellandi, M. The Industrial District in Marshall. In *Small Firms and Industrial Districts in Italy*; Dietrich, M., Krafft, J., Eds.; Routledge: London, UK, 1989; pp. 375–387.
33. Fuà, G. *L’industrializzazione nel Nord Est e nel Centro*; Il Mulino: Bologna, Italy, 1983.
34. Brusco, S. *Piccole Imprese e Distretti Industriali*; Rosenberg & Sellier: Turin, Italy, 1989.
35. Becattini, G. Sectors and/or Districts: Some Remarks on the Conceptual Foundations of Industrial Economics. In *Small Firms and Industrial Districts in Italy*; Goodman, E., Bambford, J., Eds.; Routledge: London, UK, 1989.
36. Becattini, G. Beyond geo-sectoriality: The productive chorality of places. *Investig. Reg.—J. Reg. Res.* **2015**, *32*, 31–41.
37. Becattini, G.; Bellandi, M.; Dei Ottati, G.; Sforzi, F. (Eds.) *From Industrial Districts to Local Development: An Itinerary of Research*; Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK, 2021.
38. Bellandi, M. Innovation and Change in the Marshallian Industrial District, *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **1996**, *4*, 357–368. [[CrossRef](#)]
39. Conklin, H.E.; Bryant, W.R. Agricultural Districts: A Compromise Approach to Agricultural Preservation *Am. J. Agric. Econ.* **1974**, *56*, 607–613. [[CrossRef](#)]

40. Toccaceli, D. Agricultural districts in the Italian regions: Looking toward 2020. *Agric Econ.* **2015**, *1*, 111. [[CrossRef](#)]
41. Becattini, G. Distrettualità fra industria e agricoltura. *Quest. Agrar.* **2000**, *2*, 11–24.
42. Marshall, A. Introductory Lecture in Political Economy Given 19 October 1877. *Western Daily Press*, 23 October 1977.
43. Dematteis, G.; Magnaghi, A. Patrimonio territoriale e corralità produttiva: Nuove frontiere per i sistemi economici locali. *Sci. Territ.* **2018**, *6*, 12–25.
44. Becattini, G.; Sforzi, F. *Lezioni Sullo Sviluppo Locale*; Rosenberg & Sellier: Turin, Italy, 2002.
45. Iacoponi, L. Distretto industriale marshalliano e forme di organizzazione delle imprese in agricoltura. *Riv. Econ. Agrar.* **1990**, *4*, 711–744.
46. Iacoponi, L. Dal distretto agricolo al distretto rurale. In *Lo Sviluppo del Sistema Agricolo Nell'economia Post-Industriale*; Valorosi, F., Ed.; Franco Angeli: Milan, Italy, 2002.
47. Cecchi, C. Per una definizione di distretto agricolo e distretto agroindustriale. *Quest. Agrar.* **1992**, *46*, 81–107.
48. Cecchi, C. Sistemi locali rurali e aree di specializzazione agricola. In *Sviluppo Rurale: Società, Territorio, Impresa*; Rook Basile, E., Romano, D., Eds.; FrancoAngeli: Milan, Italy, 2002; pp. 90–115.
49. Pacciani, A. Distretto rurale della Maremma: Dalla proposta alla realizzazione. In Proceedings of the Società Italiana di Economia Agraria “Nuovi Strumenti per lo Sviluppo Locale”, Grosseto, Italy, 1–2 March 2003.
50. Pacciani, A. Governance dello sviluppo rurale a livello locale: Quali prospettive dall’esperienza distrettuale. *Agriregionieuropa* **2010**, *6*, 19–21.
51. Toccaceli, D. *I Distretti del cibo: Novità e Aspettative*; Georgofili INFO: Florence, Italy, 2018.
52. Albisinni, F. Distretti e sviluppo rurale: Elementi per una lettura delle regole di diritto. *Agriregionieuropa* **2010**, *6*, 21–25.
53. Sforzi, F.; Lorenzini, F. Distretti Industriali. In *L’esperienza Italiana dei Distretti Industriali*; Ministero delle Attività Produttive, IPI, Eds.; IPI: Rome, Italy, 2002; pp. 20–33.
54. Coppola, G.; Mazzotta, F. I sistemi locali del Lavoro in Italia: Aspetti teorici ed empirici. *MPRA Paper* **2005**, *13173*, 4–82.
55. Becattini, G.; Omodei Zorini, L. Identità locali rurali e globalizzazione. *Quest. Agrar.* **2003**, *1*, 7–30.
56. EC. *Cork Declaration on Rural Development and Agriculture: A Better Life in Rural Areas*; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2016.
57. Talamo, G.; Sabatino, M. Il PNRR e le trasformazioni dei distretti agroalimentari italiani tra innovazione e competitività. *Agriregionieuropa* **2021**, *4*, 29–31.
58. Pugliese, P.; Antonelli, A.; Basile, S. *HealthyGrowth. From Niche to Volume with Integrity and Trust. BioDistretto Cilento—Italy*; Ciheam: Bari, Italy, 2015.
59. Regione Campania. *Piano Territoriale Regionale*; Regione Campania: Naples, Italy, 2008.
60. Rossi-Doria, M. *Dieci Anni di Politica Agraria nel Mezzogiorno*; Laterza: Rome-Bari, Italy, 1958.
61. ISTAT. *L’indice di Vulnerabilità Sociale e Materiale*; ISTAT: Rome, Italy, 2015; Available online: <http://ottomilacensus.istat.it/documentazione/> (accessed on 22 August 2023).
62. Confindustria—Centro studi di Benevento. *Dove va L’economia Sannita*; Confindustria Benevento: Benevento, Italy, 2018.
63. Fabiani, G.; Favia, F. Vitalismo produttivo e precarietà strutturale nell’agricoltura campana contemporanea. In *Storia delle Regioni. Le Regioni IX: La Campania*; Einaudi: Turin, Italy, 1990.
64. Bencardino, F.; Marotta, G. (Eds.) *Modelli Organizzativo-Territoriali e Produzioni Tipiche nel Sannio*; FrancoAngeli: Milan, Italy, 2002.
65. Regione Campania, Strategia Aree Interne Regione Campania 2014–2020 and 2023–2027. Available online: <http://www.regione.campania.it/regione/it/tematiche/strategia-aree-interne-pd4f> (accessed on 22 August 2023).
66. Regione Campania, PSR Campania 2014–2020. Available online: http://www.agricoltura.regione.campania.it/psr_2014_2020/psr.html (accessed on 22 August 2023).
67. Regione Campania, CRS Campania 2023–2027. Available online: http://www.agricoltura.regione.campania.it/CSR_2023-2027/CSR-23-27.html (accessed on 22 August 2023).
68. Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale, Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne. Available online: <https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne/> (accessed on 22 August 2023).
69. Storti, D. *Rapporto sul Caso di Studio di Benevento*; INEA and OECD: Paris, France, 2015.
70. Lucatelli, S.; Luisi, D.; Tantillo, F. (Eds.) *L’Italia Lontana: Una Politica per le Aree Interne*; Donzelli: Rome, Italy, 2022.
71. Dematteis, G. Applicazione analitica del modello SLoT a un territorio. In *SLoT Quaderno 3. Una Geografia dei Luoghi per lo Sviluppo Locale*; Rossignolo, C., Simonetta Imarisio, C., Eds.; Baskerville: Bologna, Italy, 2003; pp. 13–27.
72. Amodio, T. Rappresentazioni cartografiche e patrimonio viticolo in Campania. In *Conoscere per Rappresentare. Temi di Cartografia e Approcci Metodologici*; Scanu, G., Ed.; Edizioni Università di Trieste: Trieste, Italy, 2018; pp. 127–142.
73. Amodio, T.; Bencardino, M.; Iovino, G.; Siniscalchi, S. Emerging topics in Italy: The Territorial Capital value. *Boll. Soc. Geogr. Ital.* **2019**, *14*, 75–89. [[CrossRef](#)]
74. Guadagno, E. “Il senso della vite”: Paesaggi, pratiche, attori e tutela ambientale. In *Elementi, Animali, Piante Mobilità dei Costituenti, delle Forze e degli Organismi, Nodo 1: Atti del XXXIII Congresso Geografico Italiano*; Pase, A., Bondesan, A., Luchetta, S., Eds.; CLEUP: Padua, Italy, 2023; pp. 63–71.
75. Gabellieri, A.; Gallia, A.; Guadagno, E. *Enogeografie. Itinerari Geostorici e Geografici dei Paesaggi Vitati, tra Pianificazione e Tutela Ambientale*; Società Geografica Italiana: Rome, Italy, 2023.

76. Regione Campania Assessorato all'Agricoltura. *Strade del Vino della Campania Terre dei Sanniti*; Regione Campania: Naples, Italy, 2011.
77. Matarazzo, N.; Sarrapochiello, N. *Nel Sannio Coltiviamo Emozioni*; Sannio Consorzio Tutela Vini: Benevento, Italy, 2016.
78. Del Giudice, T.; Olivieri, G. *Analisi di Contesto per la Territorializzazione Dell'intervento SRG 06—LEADER*; Dipartimento di Agraria, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II: Naples, Italy, 2023.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.