

Article

Activating Solidarity-Economy Territories: Towards a 'Differently-New' Economic Approach: The Case of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region (Italy)

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Abstract: Since 2012, the University of Udine has been directly involved in research to study the Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) solidarity-economy sector, even collaborating to develop the first regional law on the solidarity economy (ESol). Recently, the university has implemented a project to profoundly investigate the practices that can be part of the Regional ESol tissue, based on the indications provided by the Regional Law 4/2017, to delimit and characterise them, know their distribution over the regional territory, and divide them by territorial areas (thinking about the activation of future economic-solidarity communities) and sectors (thinking about the activation of future economic-solidarity chains). After an initial qualitative analysis at the conceptual and values levels, and after building a database of regional ESol realities—useful for further qualitative–quantitative in-depth analysis in the future, too—we mapped and georeferenced the FVG ESol framework, obtaining indications on where to intervene to enhance ESol local supply chains as active laboratories for future bioregional territorial development, and to understand where the activation of local solidarity-based community assemblies is possible, to support local solidarity initiatives as the Regional Law states. The results show a regional picture rich in economic-solidarity realities spread throughout the territory with a wide variety of proposals but still struggling to concretely apply the tools provided by the Regional Law even though they are acting in the microsphere as cells of sustainable and solidarity-based “re-appropriation” and “re-inhabiting” of the territory. In this paper, we want to present the project results by discussing the size and characteristics of the regional solidarity-economic sector and the opportunity inherent in developing a different logic of “doing enterprise”, combining the need to produce wealth with maintaining, preserving, and enhancing our environment, cultivating an economical and productive culture distinct from the one still prevailing today, and making our territories “places of life”.

Keywords: FVG Regional Law 4/2017; alternative economies; solidarity economy; sustainable supply chains; solidarity firms; bioregional territorial models; University of Udine (Uniud)



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1. Introduction

Some researchers at the University of Udine have long been studying the solidarity-economy realities in the Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) region. This process began in 2012 with the creation of the Common Goods and Solidarity Economy Forum, a local network involving citizens, local authorities, associations, and universities interested in proposing a debate on the economic model considering the various crises that are affecting the world at diverse levels: economic, social, and environmental. Although these phenomena are increasingly common, we often treat them as if they were isolated and unrelated. According to many scholars, there is reason to believe that all these crises have a structural

root in capitalism's tendency to expand globally by modifying all dimensions of human life [1] (p. 2). Faced with this possibility, it becomes urgent to think about alternatives that would allow the construction of "other economies", in which preserving the life of living beings is the purpose of economic activity instead of being commodities in the endless pursuit of profit [1]. The current global economic culture emerges from the interweaving of three semantic dimensions: an anthropological one, referable to the figure of *homo oeconomicus*, "hedonistic, individualistic, egocentric, and utilitarian, indifferent to the other and ruthlessly competitive" [2] (p. 285); a socio-political one, linked to the concept of "contract"; a physical-technical one, i.e., how economic activity is understood based on structurally scarce resources [3] (p. 194), proposing the market as the best universal system to optimise its use.

Economists who refer to bioeconomics and ecological economics consider "nature" and "society" as two inseparable realities: the inhabitant cannot separate himself from the place of inhabiting and the place of inhabiting from the inhabitant. This logic leads to various local re-designs related to territorial identities, reconnecting human productions with the ecosystemic possibilities of the territories within a bioregional local project, which means seeking to maximise ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being [4] without necessarily depending on the global market. Citizens can understand and control the decisions that affect their lives [5] and their productive and consumption choices, living in harmony with the world of nature [6] (p. 308) within the constraints and possibilities imposed by the [physical and cultural] character of the territory [7] (pp. 97–98).

Various parts of the world have been experimenting with economically productive practices that, although differing in origin and action, are oriented towards a common goal: to redirect economics in a dimension that allows citizens to decide what goods to buy and what productive choices to make [8] (p. 122). Some local communities took the initiative, mobilising forms of support and organising themselves in response to contingent needs that neither the public nor the private sector would be able or willing to assume individually, generating a productive mosaic of "from-below experiences" as a tangible alternative in the framework of a cultural transformation in line with a bioregional vision. The solidarity economy (hereafter ESol) compiles and describes these different activities and practices, codifying the shared values and principles that inform them [9] (p. 9). The ESol, its territorial networks, and its forms of organisation are generating important dynamics of territorial growth and development in many territories worldwide. The flexibility of ESol organisational forms and their ability to interact horizontally with various institutional and private actors and social movements pushed this expansion. But, as [10] (p. 163) affirms, although the variegated world of the ESol offers today a broad framework of good practices at the national and international level, "opinions on the potential and role of these economic forms—starting with the classic and still unresolved question of whether they should be understood as complementary or rather as alternatives to the dominant system—are very different and often opposing".

From our perspective, and according to our hypothesis, the solidarity-based enterprise can concretely be the economically productive *modus* for territorial reactivation that most closely reflects the bioregionalism vision and idea of development. It pursues a logic of "not only for profit" and extended mutuality that requires directly relating to its territory, environment, and communities. It should then be considered "a broad working hypothesis [...] articulated to help organise local action in a transition logic towards sustainability" [11] (pp. 2–3) and as a practice of sustainable living in the era of contemporary crisis [12] postulating a particular *modus operandi* by the productive territory as an active and proactive subject acting in cooperation with local administrations and civil society actors. On the other hand, the economic-solidarity approach can concretise and put into practice the ideological-theoretical basis offered by bioregionalism, rebuilding a "bridge of reciprocity" between the human sphere and the environmental context. This evidence has led to the identification of ESol as a tool for territorial inclusion, as a support to face situations of economic, employment, and environmental crisis, and as a connection

of several territorial identities and visions to generate widespread well-being (in the firm in the territory and the community), and to produce a “productive culture” in harmony with the territory and a regenerative way of “doing enterprise”.

All these considerations led to the Friuli Venezia Giulia Regional Law 4/2017, “Norme per la valorizzazione e la promozione dell’economia solidale”, which addresses the issue of rebuilding community–territory relations by directing economic actions towards the creation of a citizens’ responsibility to promote local solidarity supply chains. One year later, in 2018, the University of Udine began research to detect and identify ESol experiences at a regional level with an initial survey, which stated some criteria characterising ESol regional experiences and some good practices. To deepen the research and build a clearer picture of the solidarity economy tissue at a regional level, the research project “The Bioregion: Proposal for the Definition of Criteria for the Selection and Mapping of Solidarity-Economy Practices and the Study of Network Models for the Support of the solidarity economy” starts in February 2022 with three purposes: (a) reasoning about the theoretical–conceptual connection between Territorialist–Bioregional and Solidarity Economy approaches, the first one representing the “logic”, and the second one the “mean/operating arm” into the territory; (b) to better characterise the sector and size it; (c) to build a cognitive mapping of the spatial and territorial dimension of economic solidarity “good practices” in FVG, central to the activation of local economic paths.

Based on what we have said so far, in this paper, we want to present the project results by discussing the size and characteristics of the regional solidarity-economic sector and the opportunity inherent in developing a different logic of “doing enterprise”, which combines the need to produce wealth while maintaining, preserving, and enhancing our environment.

The first part of the paper focuses on bioregionalism and the solidarity economy as the two primary theoretical containers that provide the guidelines for delimiting the realities we studied at a regional level, emphasising the coincidence, in principle and terms of “forma mentis”, between the two approaches. The second part presents the Regional Law 4/2017 and its main features and objectives. The last part reports the project results, which provide an initial, albeit constantly evolving, reasonably straightforward image of the regional economic-solidarity “fabric” and its main characteristics and spatiality. We conclude the article by discussing the opportunity inherent in these alternative and transformative forms of enterprise, capable of producing wealth reciprocally concerning the territory by a logic of “not only for profit” and attention to the environment that characterises the solidarity-economy practices and activities by their very nature.

2. Materials

2.1. *Intertwining Bioregionalism and Solidarity Economy: Towards a “Differently-New” Economic Approach for the Territory*

The concept of bioregion emerged from the work of ecologists in California and the West Coast during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It emphasises a closer, more identity-based relationship with the environment. It provides a framework for studying the complex relationships between human communities, government institutions, and the natural environment [13] and implementing environmental policies. The bioregional vision theorises a complete and complex organisation at a bioregional community level that can satisfy local needs by improving the quality of life and adapting human behaviour to respect each territory’s ecological limits and constraints [14]. The term “bioregion”, therefore, underlines an alternative approach that considers localism as a way to protect social and environmental biodiversity from the degenerative processes of artificialisation and a holistic attitude that refers to the capacity to integrate the systemic complexity in a territorial vision in close relation to local communities. The father of the concept, Peter Berg, and the ecologist Raymond Dasmann define the bioregion as “geo-graphic space” and a “place of consciousness” [15], a “territory of life” [16,17] characterised by a recognisable identity and delimited by natural (geographic) and socio-cultural boundaries not imposed at an

administrative level [18] but dependent on natural features that are fundamental to the local way of life [19] (p. 179).

From a purely economic perspective, a bioregional economy holds the promise of being sustained by “self-sufficient communities in a self-sufficient bioregion” [20,21], which guarantees essential resources—water, food, products, and services—with a greater awareness of their provenance and the destination of their waste [22] (p. 1). According to a consumer/producer ethic based on social and ecological responsibility, this logic prioritises locality, territory, cooperation, collaboration, and cohesion rather than efficiency, expansion, and profit. Therefore, there is a need to reconceptualise the global economy as a system of local economies [22,23] that act by generating reticular forms of cooperation as the sum of local, territorial identities, and “face-to-face” communities [24,25], focusing on the recovery of regional resources, and that are not alien to local culture [26] (p. 249). This concept promotes the sustainable management of the productive apparatus, which acts as price and competition regulators through developing a solid non-commercial sector promoting communitarian projects based on a production technology with a continuous tension towards the ecological innovation of products and processes. The standard principle linking the concepts of “place of consciousness”, “environmental sustainability” and “self-sufficiency” thus trends towards a conscious and cooperative territorial management system [27].

Dezio identifies three fundamental aspects of bioregionalism: (a) its ability to bring together material and immaterial aspects within the same meaning framework; (b) its strong present and holistic character, which contains close concepts: sustainability, 0 km-products, green economy, green cities, anti-globalisation, awareness, participation, activism, innovation, democracy, community, subsidiarity, mutual-aid, localism, common heritage, local traditions, territorial and cultural identity, self-sub-sistence, and cooperation; (c) an alternative policy, territorial planning, which sees localism as a possibility for safeguarding biodiversity and social and cultural diversity [18]. To move global society towards a “sustainable ecotopia” [28], it is then necessary to put ourselves in a logic of re-inhabiting territory [29] (pp. 3–4), re-covering damaged environments, re-activating dead or dormant territories, re-reading territorial practices, and re-imagining ourselves and the places we live in terms of ecology. This approach implies thinking of growth and development through different perspectives [30], harmonising human activities and life-sustaining natural systems [31]. The process should culminate in a holistic transformation of our societies by reinventing political boundaries and governance structures [...] [29] (pp. 6–7), creating cultures informed on local ecological dynamics and adopting their language to organise the processes that will bring people together to implement such a model [28] (p. 10).

The multidimensional paradigm of the bioregion thus conceals a platform of opportunities for the territory, conceived based on the theoretical concept of a “return to the land” [32] or a rapprochement with it, which can be fostered by interpreting and promoting the growth of local societies with a view to a process of enhancing territorial capital and reconstructing local identity aimed at the preservation and reproduction of lasting, resilient, and sustainable wealth [18] (p. 58). Thus, we speak of small-scale local industries, low-growth economies, self-determination, self-sufficiency, non-hierarchical cooperation, and participatory democracy, which are the cornerstones of decentralized development, a paradigm that postulates: the abandonment of consumerist growth, the integration of traditional ecological knowledge, the preservation of biological and cultural diversity, and the adoption of a bottom-up approach [33] (pp. 211–212) inspired by problem-solving and oriented towards the search for concrete solutions to be applied in the study of place-based socio-ecological phenomena and the interaction of local dynamics, and an integrative (transdisciplinary) approach inspired by problem-solving and oriented towards finding concrete solutions to be applied in the study of place-based socio-ecological phenomena and the interaction of local and global dynamics (glocalization), through the creation of “knowledge-action collaborations” and networks of learning and mutual support within a normative and ethical dimension that enhances the democratization [11] (pp. 1–2) of the territory by promoting economically and ecologically positive action at the local scale.

A bioregional policy postulates a small-scale economy largely self-sufficient from the prevailing market system, where human communities can provide for almost all their material and energy needs and do so within their natural carrying capacities without being “vassals of distant governments and corporations” [20] (p. 138). However, this self-sufficiency is not isolationism; instead, it supports new ideas and techniques, providing that all production and trade meet ecological safety standards and respect for other life forms [7] (p. 54). Moreover, the bioregional level of social organisation postulated by K. Sale allows people to cooperate, promoting “the communal values of cooperation, participation, sodality, and reciprocity, which enhance individual development”, and practising that principle of “biological reciprocity” that requires us, on the one hand, to think in terms of duties rather than just rights as an intrinsic part of a larger community of life, but also, like other forms of life, to “use nature for reasonable ends” [7] (p. 47).

Local control is thus based on a co-management and equitable sharing of political power between the members of a specific community and the people/entities concerned with public policy issues and the management of common goods, i.e., land resources. It follows that a bioregion can be sustained if a society promotes the institutional capacity of communities to take part and cooperate on a small scale to preserve the commons [14] (p. 2) through the development of a more local economy [23]. More concretely, this means reconceptualising the global economy as a system of local economies [22] that generate reticular forms of cooperation at the territory level as a sum of local territorial identities. The new economy postulates a move towards small business (small business, self-employment), which is more innovative, profit-making, and flexible, and which has a greater capacity to exploit the opportunities of physical and virtual connectivity in a rapidly changing market and, in particular, to tie itself to the territory with sustainable production, “adopting models that are not alien to local culture” [26]. These forms of entrepreneurship, ethically close to the principles of bioregionalism, promote ecosystem management policies in an integrated manner with an economic development model that bases the possibility of growth on the recovery of local material and cultural resources with a shift of scale that combines the criteria of compatible use of resources with the “sustainable management of production apparatuses” [26] (p. 249).

On the other hand, the ESol “sees the possibility of developing a socio-economy in which economic agents are not separated from their social identities, let alone their history and culture” [2] (p. 43), and which act through firms characterised by a double nature, economic and social. This orients them towards the reproduction of a growing quality of life for their members and belonging communities, with a “non-profit vision that does not make them anti-capitalist but non-capitalist” [2] (p. 47). This large container is a mosaic of expressions and alternatives with various articulations. Still, they are all inspired by the same principles and logic relating to their internal and external dimensions. All refer to concepts, practices, and criteria “that represent a wealth of opportunities [in terms of] efficiency, sustainability, decent and self-managed work, territoriality, endogenous and equitable development, economy democratisation, responsible consumption, fair trade, social justice, solidarity, reciprocity, extensive reproduction of life, good living” [2] (pp. 33, 396–398).

The ESol, recognising associative and community networked self-managed work and business practices, “and the reproductive work of families and communities” [2] (p. 34), has become “the most significant ideological current for the promotion of the social economy in Latin America” [2] (p. 56). These “alternative firms” rely on the relations of reciprocity and cooperation and a certain hybridism between formal and informal agreements that go beyond the narrow market relation [34,35] and operate according to the principles of labour preservation, democratic participation, inclusion of disadvantaged people, workers’ personal development, environmental conservation, promotion of social and cultural actions, and involvement in collective movements [36]. They include different forms of economic organisation carrying out productive activities, service provision, trade, and credit in the form of production groups, associations, cooperatives, and self-managed firms,

combining economic activity with educational and cultural activities [37] (p. 229), as a reciprocal effort for common interests [38].

Coraggio speaks of a double meaning of the “social and solidarity economy” concept: an economic system whose functioning guarantees the integrated material basis of a fair and balanced society, a collective action based on a socio-political project focused on daily strategic transformation and reproduction practices [2] (pp. 381–382). J. L. Laville, on its part, argues that the ESol integrates activities that contribute to democratising the economy through the direct engagement of citizens, aiming to “reposition solidarity at the heart of the economy rather than correcting the economy’s effects” [39]. The economic strength of these organisations lies in Razeto’s “C-factor” [40]: a communitarian element of joint, associative, cooperative, and solidarity-based action and management that provides each economic unit’s member with more benefits, better performance, and the economic unit efficiency as a whole. However, as Gaiger points out, “the hypothesis of a new rationality in action implies not only that these characteristics are frequent and shared, but also that they are logically articulated, reinforced, and combined to act most logically” [37] (p. 235) concerning a specific context. The construction of the “other economy” with other rationality thus “implies converging in a project [...] based on new proposals and concepts: territory, community, sustainability, food sovereignty, rights of nature, social currency, popular, domestic, mixed, labour (as opposed to capital), and plural economy” [2] (p. 37). In the economic sphere, this would entail “liberating the workers’ power and creativity as associated producers, the valuing of popular cultures and identities, the recognition of practical “knowledge”, and its social relocation “[...] to ensure the dignified reproduction of life to all” [2] (p. 39). A sort of “shared capitalism” [41] (p. 148) that prefigures the new frontier of the current economic system, moving from a model based on exploitation to one centred on the principle of solidarity-based reciprocity, and progressively reducing the excess of inequality between and within our societies [3] (p. 213). This approach requires cultivating a multi-democracy (in societies, territories, and markets) with an opposite and complementary nature to the logic of “usage value” (things) and “exchange value” (money) typical of the capitalist approach, and that manifests itself in multidimensional reciprocity practices capable of transforming the current market demand criteria [42], leading to the reasoning that goes beyond the mere calculation of prices and generating a different economic culture and anthropology that sees the *homo donator* and *reciprocus* accompanying the *oeconomicus* one in the construction *iter* of an economy that cares for the commons.

Referring to the Italian system, which is a mosaic of small- and medium-sized enterprises firmly rooted in the territory, and also to the cultural-productive context of reference, the possibility of relaunching cooperative and solidarity-based forms of entrepreneurship that function and reason as a network (such as districts) therefore appears concrete within homogeneous production spheres (aggregation in homogeneous but also polygamic clusters) and local supply chain relations that allow for local entrepreneurs to gain margins of productivity, efficiency, and innovation, obtaining advantages of scale and avoiding overuse and waste of resources. Declining sustainability in a bioregionalism version using integrated production activities, therefore, means “extending the principle of industrial symbiosis to strategies of production symbiosis, which is feasible when, in addition to industrial systems, it is possible to activate transversal processes between different sectors [replacing] the concept of industrial chain with the broader and more flexible concept of networked production systems” [26] (p. 250). In other words, a bioregional productive fabric should (re)organise itself into a network for the sustainable management of clusters of local entrepreneurial cells or industries, of productions by sector of activity, and by territorial proximity, according to a collaborative approach based on the sharing of resources, collective services, and common infrastructures, which promote the revival of local productions in sectors outside the market, but always with a view to environmental compatibility. Furthermore, we should act in the logic of generating interconnections between apparently distant sectors, such as agriculture and industry, generating solidarity networks to support sustainable forms of production and consumption.

2.2. *The Solidarity Economy Regional Law 4/2017*

The implementation of the theory of the solidarity economy in practice translates into numerous good solidarity practices that have often suffered from the lack of an institutional framework that would guarantee and recognise them as active players in an economic process that opens a new relationship between community and territory, redesigning their dynamics from the point of view of production and consumption. This case, therefore, represents a particular example of “bottom-up” action, which has seen local institutions and groups of citizens initiate the process of legislative recognition that was missing from the many realities that already existed in the region or that were emerging in response to the shared and hitherto unsatisfied need to invert the hierarchy of consumption and production, bringing territories and communities “above capital” based on values and principles inspired by a greater and better quality of living, inhabiting, producing, and consuming our “places of life”.

Friulian citizens started this process as early as 2005 with the Association for Degrowth of the Solidarity Economy Network FVG, a path of legitimisation and promotion that resulted in 2008 in the establishment of the Regional Solidarity Economy Network, to continue in 2012 with the Forum of Common Goods and Solidarity Economy (FBC), “a non-partisan association that has long been committed to building solidarity-based economic and development management at the regional level” [43], which now acts as a “link” between local authorities and territories’ representatives.

In 2013, the FVG Forum launched a participatory process that led to the drafting of a proposal for the first regional law (R. L.) aimed at promoting and developing the solidarity economy in Friuli Venezia Giulia, approved on 14 March 2017, with a large majority by the Regional Council of Friuli Venezia Giulia. In elaborating on the draft proposal of the regional law, the forum involved the main stakeholders operating in different supply chains in the regional territory. Then, the draft was presented to regional councillors and in four public meetings, one in each province of FVG. It was finally modified thanks to the contribution of some experts in regional legislation and administrative procedures. With this law, the region “recognises and supports the solidarity economy as a socio-economic and cultural model centred on local communities and marked by principles of solidarity, reciprocity, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, and care for the common good, and as a fundamental tool for tackling situations of economic, employment, and environmental crisis”. Also, local institutions play a crucial role, offering an organic meeting ground with citizens beyond simply listening and adopting a permanent dialogue with communities.

This process is a result of the conviction that the current economic crisis is a symptom of a broader crisis of the current model based on the principles of development at any cost and infinite growth and that “we have to find possible answers to this crisis in different social and economic models based on the principles of sustainability, cooperation, solidarity, and the participation of people and local communities” [44]. For this reason, they decided to act on two fronts: with municipalities, to have resolutions in favour of the development of good solidarity-economy practices; and with the region (territorial administrative authority) to have a confrontation with regional councillors who could support a law on these issues. In the meantime, solidarity-based production chains have sprung up in the area, boosted by the law, which has been approved without dissenting votes and followed within a year by the implementing regulation. Now, the sector is working on the involvement of citizens in the “solidarity-based economy communities” assemblies, whose territories coincide with the 19 territorial ambits for the associated management of the Social Service of Municipalities (SSC) (Figure 1).

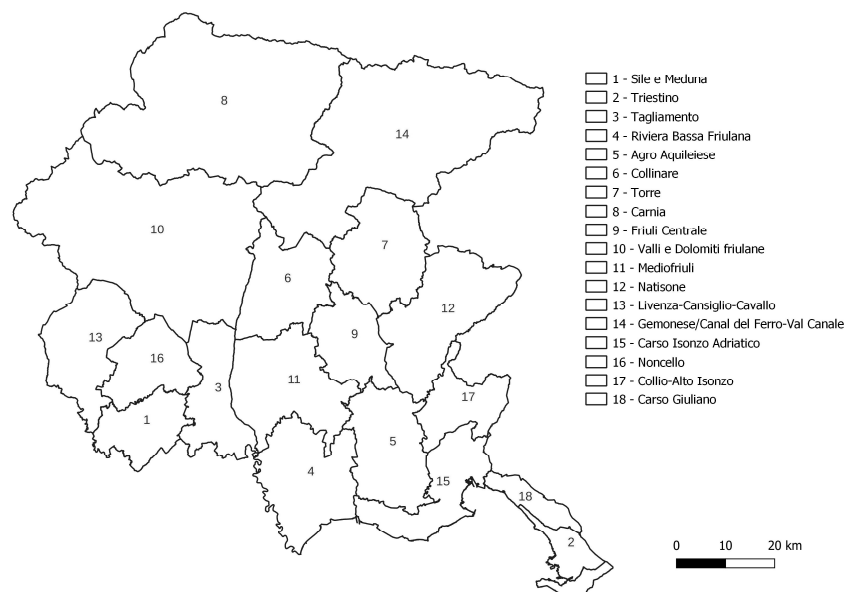


Figure 1. The Municipal Social Service Areas (SSC) in FVG. Source: Authors' elaboration.

In the design of FVG Regional Law 4/2017, in which researchers from the University of Udine also participated, the territory is structured into solidarity economy communities based on a bioregional approach and according to the characterisation elements mentioned above. As the law indicates, good solidarity-economy practices aim to structure solidarity-economy supply chains to enhance general territorial well-being, both local and supra-local. In other words, the R. L. states the legal framework for the support of solidarity-based economic processes, promoting the self-sufficiency and resilience of local communities, recognising the latter as protagonists of the ESol through the institution of community assemblies organised on a territorial basis [45] (Art. 4). The community assembly is conceived as a new democratic institution within which the inhabitants of a particular territory can decide, according to the ESol principles set by the law, on proposals and programs that “favour the development and dissemination of enterprises, supply chains, and good practices of solidarity economy” (Art. 4, letter a), triggering collaborations and synergies between citizens (and civil society organisations)—thus redefining the producer-consumer relationship—as well as between different territories, in a bioregional logic. The Regional Law also recognises economic practices such as self-production and neighbourhood exchange, based on the principles of providing and volunteering rather than market exchange [45] (Art. 3).

The R. L. goals are to promote ESol principles and practices [45] (Art. 7) and to recognise the forms of coordination and representation of actors involved in ESol paths. Article 1 focused on the idea of a close (and univocal) relation between the existence of a solid and cohesive local society and the creation of production paths linked to the solidarity-based economy, developing a socio-economic and cultural model focused on local communities and based on principles of solidarity, reciprocity, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, and care for standard goods.

Article 3 defines the main concepts related to this proposal:

- (a) **Solidarity Economy Community:** A group of people living in a particular territory who, in a network of reciprocal social ties and activities aimed at satisfying their members' well-being, actively implement the principles of solidarity, reciprocity, gift, and respect for the environment.
- (b) **Solidarity Economy Forum of Friuli Venezia Giulia:** An assembly of representatives of the Regional Solidarity Economy Communities.
- (c) **Common Goods:** A set of tangible and intangible goods for which the community must guarantee, protect, and manage the right of access and usability through a

- system of social relations based on cooperation and participation and the promotion of a culture that recognises the mutual dependence between goods and community.
- (d) Solidarity Economy Firms: An enterprise producing goods and services using methods that respect the natural and social environment, with a prevalence of the use of labour, raw materials, and services from the solidarity economy district and the supply chain in which it operates. To this end, it plans and reports its activities through methods that assess the impacts on the natural and community environment in which it is established, with particular regard to human dignity, solidarity, eco-sustainability, social equity, and democracy.
 - (e) Solidarity Economy Supply Chain (Annex A in [45]): An integrated activities system capable of satisfying a particular category of needs, and which prioritises local resources, material, and energy savings, respect for the environment and landscape, protection of workers' and consumers' rights and health, and the active participation of citizens.
 - (f) Supply Chain Pact: An agreement aimed at achieving integration between all the stages of production, processing, and consumption of goods and services that make up each supply chain or segment, making maximum use of local input and human resources. It also includes goods and services that are functional to its realisation, such as energy, research, promotion activities, maintenance, financial, and insurance services.
 - (g) Solidarity Economy Good Practices: Activities implemented to participate in the establishment of solidarity economy supply chains to improve the general well-being, both local and supra-local, through (1) the production of ecologically and socially sustainable goods and services; (2) the reduction of excessive consumption induced by the conditioning of advertisements, and not compatible with limited resources; (3) the safeguarding of the healthiness of the environment and biodiversity, the rights of future generations, and all peoples to an autonomous and dignified life; (4) the promotion of the spirit of cooperation, solidarity, dialogue and participation, peace, and support for the weakest; (5) the protection and enhancement of common goods such as air, water, land, and knowledge.

According to R. L., three leading practices contribute to the constitution of local supply chains: (1) self-production and consumption practices; (2) neighbourhood production and exchange practices, based on the principles of voluntary work, solidarity, and gift, and without the intermediation of money or other forms of accounting for the value of the goods and services offered or exchanged; (3) activities of production, processing, sale, and consumption of goods and services, where all the chain actors agree among themselves through specific pacts.

Specifically, the solidarity economy supply chains are distinguished by food, housing, clothing, and community-based services. Therefore, good practices should be developed as a priority in the following areas, relevant for the development of forms of solidarity economy and district supply chains, and to valorise the territorial resources sustainably: proximity farming; organic and biodynamic agricultural and agri-food products; short supply chain and food-quality assurance; landscape, natural heritage, and biodiversity protection; fair trade; solidarity purchasing groups; community and neighbourhood services; sustainable building and green building; energy saving and renewable and sustainable energy; ethical, mutual, and solidarity finance; collective transport and sustainable mobility; reuse and recycling of materials and goods; local exchange systems; free software; responsible and sustainable tourism; critical and responsible consumption; transmission of knowledge; time banks; other initiatives based on the principles of solidarity economy.

Finally, the R.L. foresees the establishment of a "Permanent Regional Table for the Solidarity Economy", the institutional instrument delegated to formulate opinions and proposals to the regional government to support the solidarity economy and to:

- Activate shared paths for the promotion of programs and actions and support the development of the solidarity economy provided for by this law;

- Promote the development of supply chains and related pacts also through administrative simplification measures;
- Verify that the management modalities ensure the respect and implementation of the principles and organisational modalities of the solidarity economy along all the production chains.

After the law approval, the forum proposed public presentation meetings to promote its concrete implementation, including launching the planned community assemblies to drive economic-solidarity initiatives in the territory. However, only one community assembly has been formally established and still functions in the Province of Udine.

Preceding the FVG initiative, only two other laws formally recognised at a national level are delimiting the sector in some way (Table 1): Trentino Alto Adige Provincial Law 13/2010 and Emilia Romagna Regional Law 19/2014.

Table 1. Laws recognising the solidarity economy sector in Italy.

Year	Region	Ley	Title	Principles
2010	Trentino Alto Adige	Provincial Law No. 13 of 17 June 2010	“Promotion and development of the solidarity economy and corporate social responsibility” (“Promozione e sviluppo dell’economia solidale e della responsabilità sociale delle imprese”.)	Eco-compatibility, transparency, fairness, solidarity, fair employment, participation, and awareness of human and natural limits [46]
2014	Emilia–Romagna	Regional Law No. 19 of 23 July 2014	“Norms for the promotion and support of the solidarity economy” (“Norme per la promozione e il sostegno dell’economia solidale”.)	Ethicality, justice, equity, social cohesion, solidarity, centrality of the person, protection of the natural heritage, and connection with the territory [47]
2017	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Regional Law No. 4 of 23 March 2017	“Norms for the valorisation and promotion of the solidarity economy” (“Norme per la valorizzazione e la promozione dell’economia solidale”.)	Solidarity, reciprocity, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, and care for the common goods [45]

Source: elaborated by Authors from P. L. No. 13 of 17 June 2010, R. L. No. 19 of 23 July 2014, and R. L. No. 4 of 23 March 2017.

Lombardia, another region that began collecting signatures in 2019 for a popular initiative proposal aimed at recognising these realities on regional soil, is inspired by the FVG economic-solidarity model, which we describe below. That, in turn, proposes the same conception of the sector as the Emilia–Romagna model: ESol is a “fundamental tool for dealing with situations of economic, employment, and environmental crisis”.

3. Methods, Results, and Discussion

Based on this background, in 2021, the University of Udine sees the need to identify the realities potentially belonging to the ESol sector as established by R. L. 4/2017 to delimit and characterise them, to know their distribution over the regional territory and to divide them by territorial areas (thinking about the activation of future economic-solidarity communities) and sectors (thinking about the activation of future economic-solidarity chains). The project “The Bioregion: proposal for the Definition of Criteria for Selecting and Mapping Solidarity Economy Practices and the Study of Network Models for the Support of the Solidarity Economy” thus starts in February 2022 with the specific aim of (a) reasoning about an effective theoretical–conceptual connection between territorialist–bioregional and economic-solidarity approaches, the first one representing the “logic” and the second one the “medium/operative arm” into the territory (to prove our hypothesis); (b) characterising the sector and sizing it with a database construction (answering the question: what activities can be considered as part of solidarity economy according to the L.R. 4/2017 criteria identifying these practices); (c) building a cognitive mapping of the spatial and territorial dimension of economic-solidarity good practices in the FVG

region, central to activating local solidarity-economy paths and productive and territorial communities' assemblies.

Below, we describe the main phases of the project and discuss the results for each.

3.1. Conceptual–Theoretical Analysis

We started with the general question of whether a theoretical connection exists between bioregionalism and the solidarity economy. We considered the following questions: Can bioregionalism be read and applied in terms of a solidarity economy? Can the solidarity economy concretely interpret the principles underlying the bioregionalism vision? What contribution can it make to a different form of territorial socio-economic development?

We carefully reviewed the reference literature (in its main Latin American and European interpretative variants). We identified the recurring concepts associated with ESol, occasionally grouping them into higher-order interpretative conceptual categories. From this list, assembled according to an abductive approach, we divided the critical concept and words into two levels, finding main and subordinate thematic nodes by the idea expressed.

We initially found a significant quantity of nodes, then reviewed, grouped, and coded with a second-order analysis, obtaining 14 main concept words (higher order) and 39 relative concept words (lower order) as the ESol's most explanatory theoretical categories [48]. We combined a narrative review and a specific systematic review [49,50] with a continuous exercise of selection, comparison, and synthesis of evidence to answer precise review questions, thus minimising possible duplication and bias concerning our research goals. We finally obtain an identification and characterisation of the solidarity economy framework and the logical approach underlying this economic model (Table 2).

Table 2. ESol keywords and key concepts.

Higher-Order Concept Word	Lower-Order Concept Word
Solidarity	Social and solidarity economy
	Solidarity economy
Community	Communitarianism
	Urban and rural communities
Cooperation	Cooperative
	Cooperative system
Democracy	Participation
	Participatory democracy
	Popular participation
Reciprocity	Mutual-aid
Self-management and autonomy	Freedom of association and enterprise
	Independence from the market
Sustainability	Sustainable development
	Ecosystem integrity
	Ecological integrity and restoration
	Ecosystem equilibria
	Environmental sustainability
	Resilience

Table 2. *Cont.*

Higher-Order Concept Word	Lower-Order Concept Word
Territory	Life territory
	Life-place
	Local
	Local communities
	Local territorial systems
	Localisation
	Localism
	Space and place
Territorial identity	Geo-cultural identity
	Cultural identity
	Local traditions
Conscious and responsible consumption	Food security
	Food sovereignty
	Km0 resources
Network/System	Cluster
	District
	Chain
	Network
Common goods	Common heritage
	Landscape
	Territorial capital
Social responsibility and justice	
Profitability	

Source: Authors elaboration.

In parallel, we searched Scopus articles on bioregionalism (peer-reviewed essays and book chapters), finding 131 (Table 3). After dropping those irrelevant to our research by the initial inclusion/exclusion criteria “Social Sciences—YES/Hard Sciences—NO”, we isolated 65 papers between 1985 and 2022, referring to various social sciences branches, and constructed a database.

Table 3. Scopus articles by search keywords.

Search Keyword	Scopus Articles
<i>Bioregion</i>	4
<i>Bioregional Territorial Development</i>	9
<i>Bioregionalism</i>	111
<i>Bioregional territory</i>	7
Total	131

Source: Authors elaboration.

The article’s review first characterised the bioregional approach by identifying 131 key concepts and words. As before, they were aggregated and progressively renamed with different tags based on the same linguistic and conceptual meaning to reflect the immediately higher abstract conceptual level, thus making a grouping into corresponding macro-categories by type of concept expressed, identifying 19 aggregated dimensions

(Table 4) as main descriptive categories [49,50] of the bioregional perspective, highlighting the predominant features of this approach and its vision, previously described in Section 2.

Table 4. Bioregionalism thematic nodes.

Bioregionalism Thematic Nodes
“Life place”
Physic and cultural boundaries
Common heritage
Community
Consciousness
Co-operation
Democracy
Network and system
Food sovereignty and security
Identity
Autonomy
Mutual aid
Plurality
Local resources
Self-subsistence
Environmental, social, and economic sustainability
Environmental and social justice
Subsidiarity
Responsibility

Source: Authors' elaboration.

To validate the results, we performed a word-frequency query using the software NVivo 13, respectively, by exact match, synonyms (with Boolean operators), and derivate words, requesting reading on the 30 most-frequent concept words.

By eliminating non-determinant words and considering only nouns, adjectives, and verbs, according to the exact match search, the most frequent concepts and words (with a percentage $\geq 20\%$) were found to be environmental (environmental, environmentally), urban (urbanised), nature (natural, green), local, social (socially), place (placing), ecological (ecology), development, human (humans), community, political (politics), food, land, sustainable, life (living), and area (areas). Furthermore, although with a specific percentage deviation, in all three cases, the same fundamental concepts are repeated, whose categorisation corresponds to the bioregionalism thematic nodes previously identified (Table 4). Additionally, as we did not find any literal reference to ESol or related concepts, we repeated the analysis explicitly limiting it to this concept, again without seeing any correspondence and thus confirming the absence of direct and explicit references to ESol by the bioregionalism vision.

We then searched for descriptive trends by treating each paper as an individual case and coding the Scopus by year of publication and disciplinary field (Figure 2). Compared to the first coding, and concerning the considered period of analysis (1985–2022), we can observe a progressive increase in papers with a bioregional approach, especially from 2007 onwards, with a peak of publications concentrated between 2015 and 2021, i.e., in concomitance with the increased international attention and concerns regarding the problem of seeking more sustainable forms of development in response to the productive, economic, social, environmental, and even health and energy crises of recent years. It is no coincidence

that in 2020, the year of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we see the highest number of publications on the subject in 37 years.

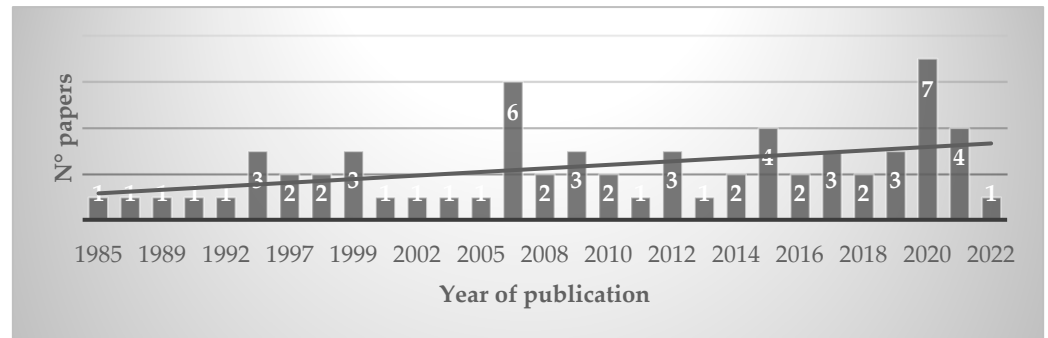


Figure 2. Scopus articles by year of publication (1985–2022). Source: Authors' elaboration.

Regarding the second coding, most papers refer to journals or books of a multi- and inter-disciplinary nature, followed by geographical–urban, philosophical–ethical, and sociological ones (Figure 3).

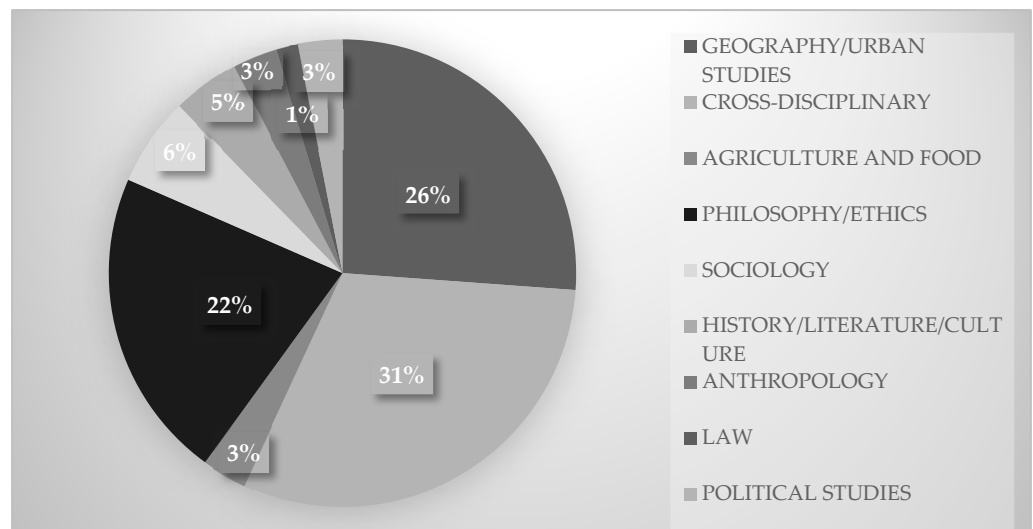


Figure 3. Scopus articles by disciplinary field. Source: Authors' elaboration.

There is a notable absence of contributions of a strictly economic nature that can be explained, on the one hand, by the scarce presence of this kind of study showing solid empirical, quantitative, and qualitatively measurable evidence, but also by an issue, we dare say, of a purely cultural nature and linked to the predominant economic approach in the reading and interpretation of reality, which leaves no room for the inclusion of variables that, on the contrary, are fundamental in a territorialist and bioregional reasoning.

To find correspondences between the ESol keywords and concepts list we structured and the content of Scopus articles, we finally performed a “Query by keyword-concept EcoSol_exact match” and a “Query by keyword-concept EcoSol_synonym”. Based on the frequency of occurrence of a particular word concept, we divide the results of each query into three sub-groups: “No Match”, “Medium Match”, and “Strong Match”. In both queries, for all the words and concepts, we always found a percentage of coincidence, albeit minimal:

- Strong matches—In both queries, the words “System”, “Sustainability”, and “Local” are related (localism). In addition, “Community” appears in the first query, and “Participation” and “Network” appear in the second.
- Average matches—In both queries, “Cooperation”, “Local Communities”, “Territory”, “Network”, and related words (“Cluster”, “District”) appear. In addition, “Democ-

racy”, “Participation”, and “Landscape” appear in the first query, and “Cooperative System” and “Resilience” appear in the second.

Again, the only case with no matches in both queries is with “solidarity economy” or “social and solidarity economy”: no article explicitly uses or refers to these concepts, not even the most recent ones.

By reconstructing a general picture of the results obtained from the analysis of the Scopus papers and the previous characterisation of the solidarity economy, we found the following conceptual correspondences this way summarized (Table 5):

Table 5. Macro-conceptual correspondences “Bioregionalism—Solidarity Economy”.

Bioregionalism	Solidarity Economy
Cooperation, Cooperative system	Cooperation
Participation, Democracy, Participatory democracy, Popular participation	Participation and democratic management
Sustainability, Environmental sustainability, Ecosystem and ecological integrity, Ecosystem equilibria, Ecological restoration, Settlement resilience	Environmental sustainability
Community, Communitarianism, Urban and Rural communities	Community
“Life place”, “Life territory”—“Life-place”, Localisation, Localism, Local traditions, Local communities, Territorial project	Territory as living dimension and local living environment
Shared heritage, Countryside capital, Landscape	Caring for the commons
Identity, Geo-cultural identity, Cultural identity, Physical terrain and a terrain of consciousness, Flexible boundaries, Natural and cultural boundaries	Territorial identity
Chains, Network, Cluster, District	Networking and “system building”
Food sovereignty and security	Conscious and responsible consumption, Local resources, km0 resources
Autonomy	Freedom of association and enterprise, Independence from the market
Reciprocity	Reciprocity

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

In most cases, these are clear correspondences; in others, very few, the same language is spoken but with different words. Bioregionalism speaks an economic-solidarity language; the solidarity-economic world has adopted the development “guidelines” theorised by bioregionalism. However, as we have seen and observed in our analysis, in the bioregionalism publications, we did not find explicit references to a connection between bioregionalism and economic-solidarity theoretical approaches; we instead found explicit references to the need for cooperative processes between territorial agents as an appropriate form of action for sustainable and integral socio-economic development in harmony with communities, environment, and the territory in its systemic complexity—at the environmental, cultural, social, economic-productive, and institutional levels. Moreover, we did not find any work in the specific economic field that dealt with these issues, either marginally or critically, or that linked some way the two approaches to explore the validity of our thesis, according to which it is not only possible but theoretically feasible to postulate the existence of a direct and natural thread between them according to a cause/need—idea/logic—goal/means relation.

This approach would redefine the economic, political, and social spheres regarding ecological sustainability, social justice, and human well-being through small-scale communities and cooperative actions that “cultivate” common goods through intentional and voluntary forms of association with an affinity for vision, born to address common problems through solidarity practices. However, the missing link at the theoretical level between

the two approaches as a spontaneous translation of the bioregionalism theory and “utopian idea” into concrete practices within the territory—what has weakened the Bioregionalism approach from the outset—shows evidence that can be found in various parts of the world with more than appreciable results, especially in certain South American and European countries. This has not yet been adequately explored by the economic science as examples of bioregional and solidarity-economic-based territorial development. From our point of view, therefore, the hypothesis is confirmed: the nexus exists; it is concrete, empirically detectable, and measurable. Thus, the social economy, especially in its solidarity-based extension, could be confirmed as the way and means for a possible territorial project with bioregional characteristics.

3.2. Database Construction of FVG ESol Realities

Based on the indications and conceptual delimitations provided by the FVG Regional Law and the references mentioned above in the literature, we circumscribed the survey of ESol realities on the regional territory by constructing a related database.

The following table lists the realities considered part of the ESol Regional system because they embody the solidarity economy values and principles in their actions in the market and towards their communities and territories.

We identified 4717 ESol realities, divided into 23 typologies, 102 operating simultaneously in two economic sectors: 99 in the primary and tertiary industries and three in the primary and tertiary sectors.

Their distribution by economic sector (Figure 4) shows a significant presence in the tertiary sector (66.3%) and in the primary one, while a deficient presence in the secondary sector (1.2%) and in the advanced tertiary sector (2.1%).

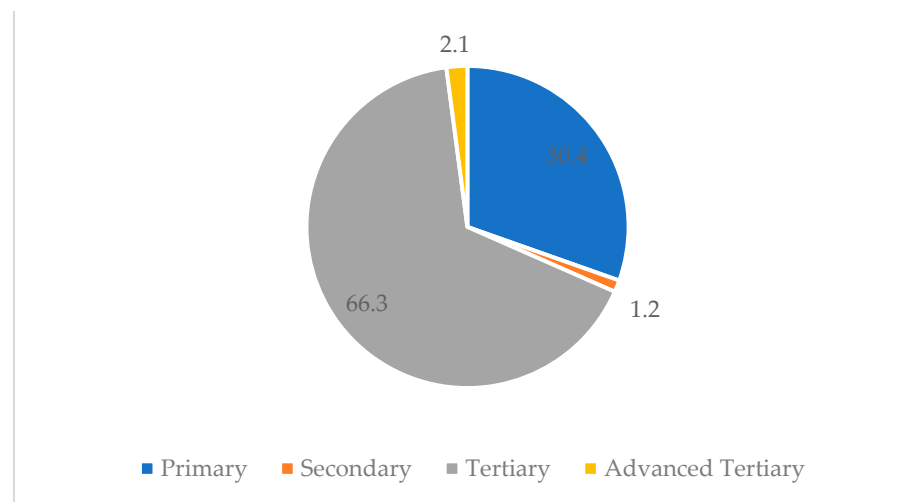


Figure 4. ESol realities percentage by economic sector. Source: Authors' elaboration.

By aggregating the data by type of reality, we obtain that voluntary organizations (26.2%), associations of social promotion (25.3%), and organic operators (21.6%) represent the most realities in FVG. Furthermore, the aggregate figure of cooperatives/consortia and social cooperatives reaches 18%.

To validate the list of Friuli Venezia Giulia ESol realities, we submitted the selection criteria we used to circumscribe them (based on Law 4/2017 and the reference literature) to a panel of 20 professionals and experts representative of the types of activities we identified to better characterise the experiences activated in the territory and define a degree of belonging to the solidarity economy system concerning the principles set out by the regional law and the reference literature. The questionnaire sent out for completion contained, in its initial part, an accurate description of the list of the realities by us identified at the regional level as representative (in whole or in part) of the ESol values (Table 6) and a list of each solidarity economy value (Table 7). It was also accompanied by a detailed

explanation of what these realities were while reporting, where possible, the legal references relating to each of them. The professionals and experts contacted were then asked to assess whether and to what extent, in their opinion, these realities were “solidary” according to the values established by the regional law.

Table 6. Solidarity-economy realities and practices in Friuli Venezia Giulia region.

ESol Realities and Practices	Definition
Solidarity Purchasing Groups (GAS)	They are born to save money and make sustainable purchases. Ethicality, sustainability, and solidarity mark them. They create a close relationship with the surrounding area through socialisation among members and in an attempt to revive a link with the food, wine, and cultural traditions of the places to which they belong (see L. 244, 24/12/2007, art. 1 paragraph 266).
Solidarity-based Firms Networks/Solidarity-based Production Chains	<p>Solidarity firm (see R. L. 4/2017): A firm producing goods and services using methods that respect the natural and social environment, with a prevalence of use of labour, raw materials, and services from the solidarity economy district and the supply chain in which it operates. It plans and reports its activities through methods for assessing the impacts on the natural and the community environment in which it works, particularly regarding human dignity, solidarity, eco-sustainability, social equity, and democracy.</p> <p>Network contract: Two or more firms jointly carry out one or more economic activities to increase their mutual innovative capacity and market competitiveness (see L. 33, 09/04/2009).</p> <p>Solidarity-based production chain (see R. L. 4/2017): An integrated system of activities (from the production of raw materials to the processing, realisation, and distribution of the finished product in the market) capable of satisfying a particular category of needs that prioritises local resources, the saving of materials and energy, respect for the environment and the landscape, the protection of workers and consumers rights, health, and the active participation of citizens.</p> <p>Supply chain pact (see R. L. 4/2017): The agreement aimed at achieving integration between all the production, processing, and consumption of goods and services stages that make up each supply chain or segments of it, using local material and human resources to the maximum extent possible; the supply chain pact may also include goods and services that are functional to it, such as energy, research, promotion activities, maintenance, financial, and insurance services.</p>
Solidarity Economy Districts (DES)	A network in which the participating entities help each other satisfy their needs to buy, sell, exchange, and donate goods, services, and information according to principles inspired by a local, fair, solidarity-based, and sustainable economy (see R. L. 4/2017, “Norms for the valorisation and promotion of the solidarity economy”).
Recycling—Reuse	Recycling or reusing practices of various products and materials.
Community-based co-operatives	A social-innovation model is one in which citizens are producers and users of goods and services within the same community, responding to multiple needs for mutuality. The model must explicitly, objectively produce benefits for a community to which the promoting members belong or elect as their own by producing goods and services that have a stable and lasting impact on the quality of the community’s social and economic life.
Local Action Groups (GAL)	A local partnership between representatives of local socio-economic interests, both public and private, whose existence, tasks, and aims are laid down by European norms (see Arts 32–35, E.U. Regulation 1303/2013) are to foster the economic, cultural, and social development of the local territory of a rural area through a participative strategy supported by one or more European funds.
Organic Markets	Market selling organic products.
Associations of Social Promotion (APS)	Recognised and unrecognised associations, movements, groups, and their articulations or federations to carry out socially beneficial activities for the benefit of associates or third parties, without a profit motive and with full respect for the freedom and dignity of associates (see L. 383/2000).

Table 6. Cont.

ESol Realities and Practices	Definition
Territorial Initiative Groups (GIT)	Banca Etica Territorial Initiative Groups (GIT) are the “home” of locally elected members. Their goal is to bring ethical finance closer to the territory, strengthen relations with organisations and enterprises working for a “new economy”, promote the culture of responsible money use, and feed the debate within the bank to make it an ever-better enterprise.
Organic operators	Organic producers (see R. L. 32/1995): agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and food products.
Collective properties	A series of alternative forms of land management in which the community directly administers common lands of promiscuous use (see L. 1766/1927, Legislative Decree no. 42/2004, art. 142, paragraph 1, letter h).
Time Banks (BdT)	Associations operating with the free exchange of “time” are organised like credit institutions, where transactions depend on the circulation of time rather than money. The only obligation one has is to balance the account (see Art. 27, L. 53/2000 under the heading “Time Banks”).
Social/collective/urban gardens	Social gardens are small- to medium-sized plots of urban land usually assigned to people in distress, elders, people with disabilities, or the community. Urban and collective gardens are also located in the city and assigned to ordinary citizens individually or collectively, but they do not fulfil an educational, social, civic, or ethical function.
Energy communities	Associations of citizens, organisations, or small- and medium-sized enterprises that decide to equip themselves with one or more shared facilities for the production and self-consumption of renewable and clean energy, with an exchange between equals, addressing the problem of energy self-sufficiency to make citizens and firms “prosumers”, i.e., producers and, at the same time, consumers of the energy produced (from strictly renewable sources). They base their values on combating energy waste and sharing a fundamental good at a competitive price.
Co-operatives/Consortia	Cooperative (see Art. 45, Italian Constitution; Title VI of Book Five, Articles 2511 to 2548 of the Civil Code): An enterprise, in the form of a company, in which the purpose and basis of economic action is the satisfaction of the needs of the person, i.e., the member. Underlying the cooperative is the common will of its members to protect their interests as consumers, workers, farmers, cultural operators, etc. While capitalised enterprises aim to make a profit, realised in the distribution of patrimonial profits, cooperatives have a mutualistic purpose that, depending on the cooperative, consists of providing members with work, goods, or services at better conditions than they would obtain in the free market. Consortium (see Arts. 2609, 2614, and 1615 of the Civil Code): An association of several enterprises carrying out the same activity or related activities of an economic and voluntary nature, characterised by a typical organisation (common objectives, purposes, and rules) for carrying out certain production phases. It also aims to generate the best profit conditions for its members and market positioning for its products/services by incorporating entire typical production phases with a reduction/containment of the related costs.
Social Cooperatives	They pursue the general interest of the community in the human promotion and social integration of citizens through (a) the management of socio-medical and educational services and (b) the performance of various activities—agricultural, industrial, commercial, or service activities—aimed at the employment of disadvantaged persons (see L. 381, 8 November, 1991).
Social and educational farms	Farms run individually or in associations, which combine their main activity—agriculture and farming—with one or more cultural, educational, or training social projects. They often collaborate with schools, institutions, communities, associations, people in tricky situations (such as prisoners and drug addicts during their path to social reintegration), elders, and people with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental difficulties (see R. L. 18/2004, art. 23, c. 4; Decr. 6 March, 2015, n. 047/Pres.).
International Cooperation and Solidarity	Non-governmental organisations and other international solidarity organisations.

Table 6. Cont.

ESol Realities and Practices	Definition
Voluntary organisations	Associations carrying out non-profit activities with social, civil, or cultural aims and exclusively for social solidarity purposes (see Law 266/91 and subsequent amendments).
Biodistricts	The geographic area naturally suited to organic production in which the various actors in the area (farmers, private citizens, associations, tourism operators, and public administrations) sign an agreement for the sustainable management of resources, focusing on organic production that involves all the links in the supply chain up to consumption. The biodistrict/bio-district is a pact for the green development of the territory, signed by organic producers, local administrations, and civil society (see Art. 13, Decr. leg. 18/05/2001, n. 228).
Fair Trade Shops	Run by volunteers, they sell high-quality handicrafts and food products from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. They also denounce the imbalances and injustices of the world market, raise awareness of fair-trade issues, and invite consumers to commit to responsible consumption and an economy based on the values of justice and fairness for all.
Sustainable mobility (car sharing, Internet transport, etc.)	It aims to ensure that transport systems meet society's economic, social, and environmental needs while minimising their negative impact on the economy, society, and the environment (European Sustainable Development Strategy, approved in 2006 by the European Council).
Ecovillages	A community based explicitly on environmental sustainability, characterised by principles such as the voluntary adherence of participants and sharing founding principles, design of housing units with minimal environmental impact, use of renewable energy, and food self-sufficiency with permaculture or alternative forms of organic farming.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 7. ESol values.

ESol Values	Definition
Co-operation	In the economic and legal sense, the action carried out in common, with mutual and non-speculative purposes, by several persons voluntarily united in a cooperative enterprise or organisation to achieve a common purpose of production, consumption, or credit, without recourse to intermediaries.
Solidarity	In a broader sense, and on an ethical and social level, it describes the relationship of brotherhood (in the sense of recognising "the other" and recognising oneself in the other) and of moral or material support, not necessarily reciprocal, that links the individual members of a community according to a feeling of belonging to the same society or community whose needs, identity of interests, ideas, and feelings are shared, and which expressed in individual or collective voluntary initiatives. Solidarity is realised by prioritising ethical aspects for members, suppliers, and stakeholders.
Reciprocity	Reciprocal acts as a voluntary and equal relationship of cooperation and mutual support linking two or more subjects. In general terms, a close association or relationship between different actions or persons results in mutual benefit for all parties involved. In economic terms: (a) it expresses the "giving to" or "doing something for" someone so that they may return "the favour" to me or others; (b) those who reciprocate, being concerned with their interest, are also concerned with the welfare of other participants in the joint action; (c) when the practice of reciprocity is repeated and formalised over time, as happens in a cooperative firm between members and the company, it adopts the form of mutualism.
Social equity	Social equity guarantees everyone the same opportunities, considering everyone's particularities and differences. It is not to be confused with the concept of equality, which postulates the existence of equal fundamental rights—to live, be respected, feel free, express one's thoughts, and seek one's way of feeling fulfilled—and duties. Social equity refers to a potential endpoint, considering the opportunities offered by valuing differences between human beings.
Human Dignity	The term dignity (from the Latin <i>dignitas</i> , <i>dignus</i>) means excellence, nobility, and value: what is "worthy" is who has value and, therefore, deserves respect, a value that every human being possesses for existing as a unique and unrepeatably person (it comes close to the concept of self-esteem, i.e., consideration of oneself, one's capabilities, and identity). Human dignity is thus a value, an ethical principle, a right, and a legal duty: it takes the form of a civil right of the human subject that implies self-respect and the individual's freedom to be able to express themselves freely in their spheres of life and society, but also as a legal duty whereby each individual must treat each other and other individuals in such a way that each can preserve his dignity.

Table 7. Cont.

ESol Values	Definition
Environmental Sustainability	It refers to the Earth's biophysical conditions and the use of its resources based on the idea that the planet's resources are not perennial and cannot be indefinitely used, exploited, and damaged. It proposes a model of growth and development that allows for the respect and wise use of environmental resources. It prefigures an organisational culture based on an ecological approach, reducing waste and harmful or environmentally unsustainable practices.
Participatory democracy	In the economy and the enterprise, it takes three distinct forms: (a) participation in the governance of the enterprise (decision-making moment) with the possibility of influencing its strategic choices (see Art. 46 of the Italian Constitution); (b) organisational participation by enhancing workers ideas and skills in work organisation; (c) economic-financial participation in the distribution of profits produced by the enterprise and direct or indirect shareholding in large enterprises (see Art. 47 of Italian Constitution). At the macro and micro level, participation is the trigger factor for economic democracy.
Social responsibility of the producer/consumer	The producer/consumer social responsibility refers to responsible production, processing, sale, and consumption. It means satisfying the needs of the customer/consumer and, at the same time, managing the expectations of other stakeholders, such as one's workers, suppliers, and the local community. It translates into the application of several principles. <i>Sustainability</i> : Conscious and efficient use of environmental resources as common goods, ability to enhance human resources and contribute to the development of the local community in which the company operates, and ability to maintain the company's economic development over time. <i>Voluntariness</i> : Actions carried out over and above legal obligations. <i>Transparency</i> : Listening and dialogue with the company's various direct and indirect stakeholders. <i>Quality</i> : In terms of products and production processes. <i>Integration</i> : Vision and coordinated action of the various activities of each directorate and department, horizontally and vertically, on shared objectives and values.
Gift	Any provision of goods or services, with no guarantee of return, to create, nurture, or recreate social ties between persons, enterprises, and territories, i.e., to create and reproduce social relations. The gift is neither a purely gratuitous provision nor a production or exchange for profit, but a hybrid. The giver can expect a counter-gift (in similar or different quantity, quality, and modalities). The difference between giving and reciprocation, and a regular mercantile exchange, lies, then, in the fact that the giver, without materially receiving anything in return, nevertheless derives a personal gratification that is one of the motives of the act of giving itself.
Social cohesion	A set of behaviours and bonds of affinity and solidarity between individuals or communities aimed at mitigating disparities linked to social, economic, cultural, and ethnic situations.
Caring for the common goods	It refers to the existence of resources and tangible or intangible goods shared by all, non-exclusive (one cannot exclude someone from using them) and non-rivalrous (a good is "rival" when use by one subject prevents use by another), i.e., which can be enjoyed simultaneously by several persons or communities of users and which constitute a common heritage of humanity. There are three distinct categories of common goods: 1. Natural resources and subsistence goods on which life depends (water, land, forests, and fisheries), local knowledge, seeds selected over centuries by local people, the genetic heritage of humans and all plant and animal species, and biodiversity, 2. Global commons (atmosphere, climate, oceans, food security, peace, knowledge, patents, and internet) and all goods resulting from collective creation; 3. Public services are needed to respond to citizens' essential needs (e.g., water supply, transport system, health, food and social security, and administration of justice).
Neighbourly relations (territorial proximity of relations)	Practices of "proximity" production and consumption lie on ties of knowledge and neighbourly relations and the principles of volunteering, solidarity, and giving, without the intermediation of money or other forms of accounting for the value of goods and services offered or exchanged.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In relative terms, concerning the other solidarity practices and activities identified in the territory, solidarity-economy districts, solidarity-based firms, networks/solidarity-based production chains, and community-based cooperatives are those considered to be solidarity-based by 100% of respondents, followed by the fair-trade shop, GAS, and social cooperatives. On the other hand, more than 50% of respondents do not consider organic markets and organic operators to be solidarity-based realities.

Another significant point is the prevailing age of the respondents, with 78.9% belonging to the 51–70 age group. The ESol Regional sector is then generally characterised, especially in the “top positions”, by the presence of professionals with a maturity of action, what prospectively can be read as a robust criticality that requires a significant path adjustment and a powerful intergenerational investment by the same institutions involved providing continuity to a more solidarity-based territorial development.

Although this is the first analysis of the sector at a regional level and is still in process, it is worth pointing out some weak aspects of our analysis, which we need to work on in the future. First, we need to devise a method for weighing (with “solidarity degrees”) the criteria we set to indicate the vocation to the solidarity economy. In addition, we must better circumscribe the data of realities that belong to more than one category to delimit and rationalise the same categories, especially for some of them. However, it is still crucial to maintain a certain degree of distinction that allows us to disaggregate the general data and circumscribe the realities based on their primary vocation. Otherwise, the variety of experiences existing independently of their legal form cannot emerge.

3.3. Georeferenced Mapping and Analysis

The third and last step of the project was to conduct a georeferenced regional mapping of the FVG ESol phenomenon to know its distribution within the territory (Figure 5).

By processing the database data to see the concentration per province of ESol realities, we obtained the following map:

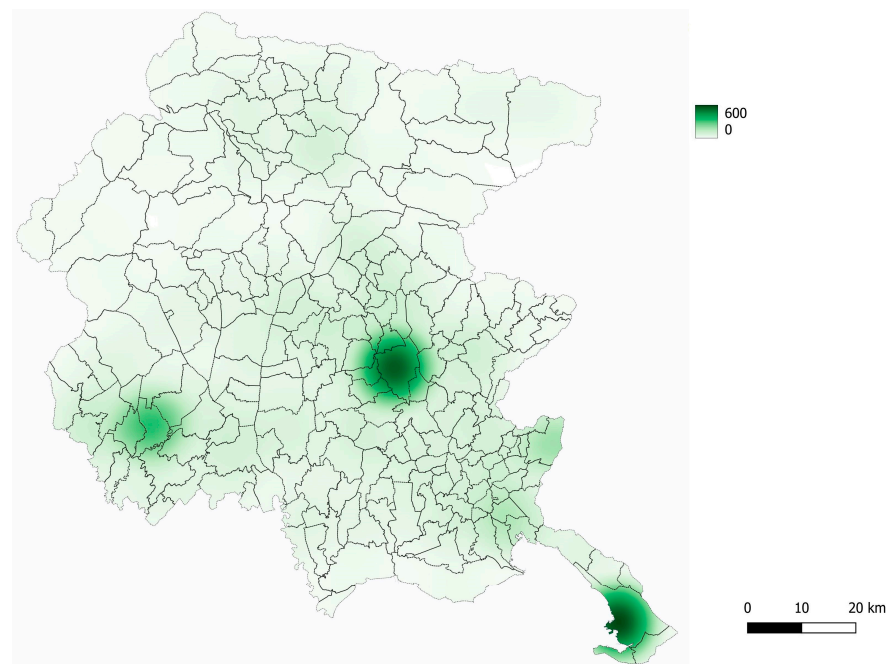


Figure 5. Regional mapping of solidarity economy systems: ESol realities’ concentration (by province). Source: Authors’ elaboration.

As highlighted by the dark-green parts, the main provincial capitals in the FVG region—Trieste, Pordenone, and Udine—show the highest number of ESol realities and the highest concentration of activities.

Focusing on the density of ESol activities among the resident population at a municipal level, we obtain a different result from the previous map (Figure 6): the ESol realities’ density results are higher in mountain areas.

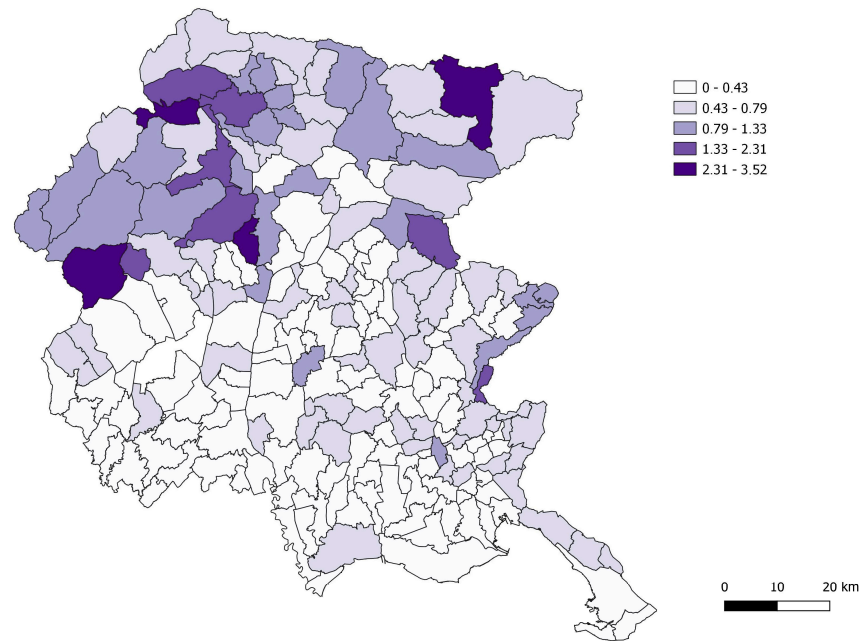


Figure 6. Regional mapping of solidarity economy systems: ESol reality density per resident population (% at Municipal level). Source: Authors' elaboration.

This result explains that there are fewer inhabitants in peripheral areas, which also counts a confident presence of historical ESol practices on the territory, primarily related to agricultural–sylva–pastoral production and land management.

To find evidence of which supply chains prevail in the FVG region, we divided the ESol realities according to the supply chains stated by R. L. 4/2017 and to the municipal social service area, obtaining the following result (Figure 7):

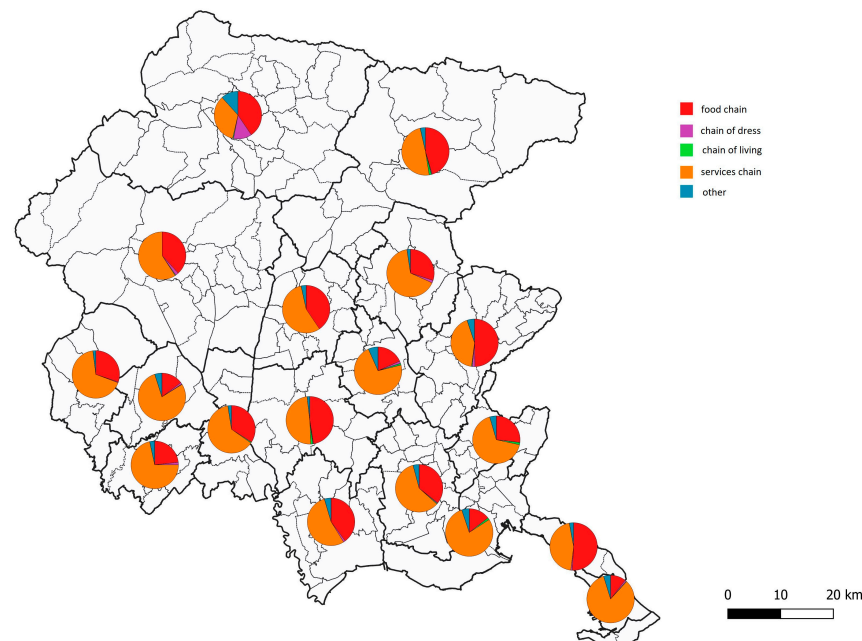


Figure 7. Regional mapping of solidarity economy systems: ESol realities by supply chain and municipal social service (SSC). Source: Authors' elaboration.

The most represented supply chains in the region are “Food” and “Services”. Only in the mountain area (Carnia) can a more balanced presence of four supply chains be found, with evidence of activities related to the “Housing” supply chain and “Other” activities,

such as collective property and other forms of local organisation and activities connected with territory management, enhancement, and protection. However, the food and service supply chains are predominant in this case.

Finally, we centered on the number of ESol realities per municipal social service area (SSC) (Figure 8).

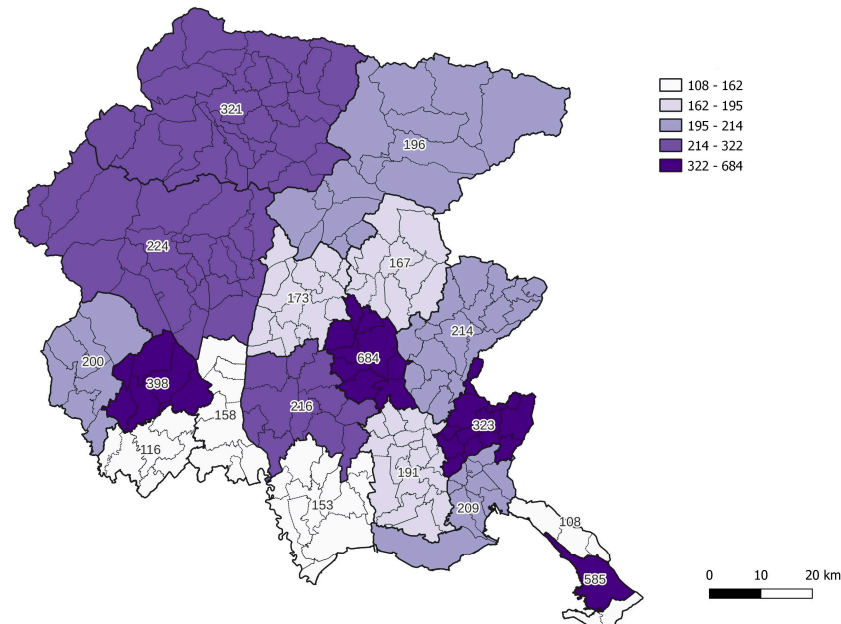


Figure 8. Regional mapping of solidarity economy systems: No. of ESol realities per municipal social service area (SSC). Source: Authors' elaboration.

The map confirms the presence of potential areas that can be activated or strengthened. In particular, the mountain territory (Carnia, Gemonese/Canal del Ferro–Valcanale) at the top of the map, which is considered a marginal and depressed area, could become an activation laboratory, as could the Middle Friuli area (in the centre of the map), where the first community assembly in the region took place.

4. Conclusions

This paper presents the results of an in-progress project investigating the size and characteristics of the Friuli Venezia Giulia's growing solidarity-economic tissue and the opportunity inherent in developing a different logic of "doing enterprise" enshrined in the regional law. This one combines the need to produce wealth with that of maintaining, preserving, and enhancing the environmental wealth (in the broadest sense of the term) that characterises our territories and makes them "places of life" as bioregionalism postulates, where an economic and productive culture that is different from the one prevailing today can be cultivated.

We initially focused on a bioregional–territorialist development theoretical perspective, reflecting on the solidarity economy role as a "tool" to support bioregional dynamics of territorial "re-inhabitation and re-activation" where specific economic and meta-economic needs are unmet. After conceptually characterising these approaches, contained in the FVG regional law for the valorisation and promotion of ESol, we confirmed both the theoretical and conceptual connection between them and the potential inherent in the economic-solidarity practices that, by their very nature, appear to be the productive alternatives closest to ioregionalism in terms of territorial development with these characteristics. Secondly, by constructing a database based on the initial theoretical framework, we explored the ESol regional realities tissue, obtaining essential indications about the regional panorama regarding the variety of expressions and characteristics. Finally, starting from the

database, we made a detailed mapping of solidarity economy experiences at the regional level to see their distribution over the territory and georeferencing them.

As final considerations about the “solidarity-based transition” of the FVG territory, reading the results according to the regional context allows us to state that we found premises on how to move forward. The research shows a variety of economic-solidarity realities that are part of the ESol panorama and can become active territorial cells for developing territorial and local economic-solidarity circuits.

Reading the results concerning the Regional Law 4/2017, we can affirm that economic-solidarity-based realities are already present in all territories in a reasonably balanced way, including the most marginal and border areas, which let us think about the potential activation of several localised economic-solidarity networks and supply chain systems, as the ones created during the law-approval path, and the activation of those communities’ assemblies that are still struggling to form. On the other hand, the law application will depend on a bottom-up activation process that still needs to be implemented with the support of local institutions and communities.

These results tell us that, although the premises for launching the solidarity-based supply chains advocated by the regional law exist, there is still a lack at the territorial level in terms of a complete acknowledgement of the opportunities it offers to strengthen precisely that “bridge of reciprocity” between economy, community, and territories that can act locally as a flywheel for the development and/or consolidation of different production and consumption dynamics decided and chosen by citizens in the search for an ever greater and better quality of life within their living spaces. This is a crucial point for decision-makers and academics to understand why communities are so reticent to adopt the tools offered by the regional law. At the same time, this makes us think about the lack of territorial leaders who can enhance and promote solidarity processes moving from the territories’ needs and identities. This probably reflects the recurrent problem of “continuity-in-the-action” due to the generational change also revealed by data processing and analysis. Likewise, it confronts us with another compulsory line of reasoning: “what are, and of what nature, the barriers to implementing the tools provided by the Regional Law, and how to curb or ‘lower’ them”.

Today, territories suffer a double “shockwave”: on the one hand, the fact of having to survive and be self-sufficient, maintaining their own identity within a world system guided by globalising logic also from a cultural point of view; on the other hand, the responsibility of becoming actors in a different competition within the market, which today is no longer merely a question of/among companies, but it is also (sometimes, above all) played and measured at a territorial level. Thus, supposing that the multidimensional paradigm of the bioregion represents a theoretical approach applicable in specific territorial contexts more than in others, we wonder what forms of economy and what means are then more appropriate to better interpret the bioregional vision as the “alternative-option-approach” closest to the coherence imposed by the facts, and oriented towards more sustainable development perspectives of producing wealth. In this sense, different from conventional utilitarian approaches, multiple visions shed light on how to rethink economic activity based on a logic of greater solidarity and cooperation in the human economic and productive sphere [1] (p. 77). These have legitimised ESol practices from civil society and the affirmation of certain ethical principles that should guide them as praxis to construct a new economic culture that generates wealth from the territory and for the territory, according to that fundamental principle of a “bi(and bio)directional reciprocity” between society and the natural and environmental dimensions already mentioned. This platform of opportunities includes small-scale local industries, low-growth economies, self-determination, self-reliance, cooperation, and participatory democracy, which are the cornerstones of decentralised community-based development, a paradigm that postulates abandoning consumerist growth integrating traditional ecological knowledge, conserving biological and cultural diversity, and adopting an integrative (transdisciplinary) approach [33] (pp. 211–212) to solve concrete problems through “knowledge–action collaborations” and mutual learning and support networks within an ethical-normative dimension that values

the democratisation [14] and enhancement of economically and ecologically positive action at the local level. From such a perspective, the fundamental economic values for recovering the society in the economy are solidarity and reciprocity, which are practically mortgaged because of the capitalist dogma.

There is a long process of experimental action, historical recovery, theoretical production, and learning [2] (pp. 166–167) behind the concrete and practical consolidation of this perspective, and some crucial open questions remain, such as how to “move from the normative promotion of localism as an ‘ideal’ to the demonstration of how it can translate into concrete practices detectable in the territory” [51] (p. 1). Hence, the legitimisation in proceeding to concretise bioregionalism dictates through the form of a solidarity-based firm that is born from the territory and “cares for” the territory as an economic organisation means “from below” in line with this approach. It is definitely “an alternative to the development paradigm as we know it” [51] (p. 17).

Indeed, as Mikulak argues, while a bioregional society based on largely self-sufficient communities may be unrealisable in this historical moment, the utopian vision offered by this theoretical current provides a “politic of hope” for translating different symbolic and literal discourses into concrete actions in support and protection of this diversity [52]. All over the world, we can already see communities that are informally and formally engaging in bioregional policies through the implementation of community-based forms of agricultural production, cooperative firms, bioregional councils, neighbourhood alliances, and other autonomous community-based action means within specified territorial contexts, which act according to logics that support a more harmonious vision of growth and development. They respond to capitalist system inefficiencies by experimenting with alternatives, sharing common values and practices, and, finally, laying the foundations for local development models of proximity through the creation of networks and relationships between civil society actors, firms, and institutions, as well as the promotion of cooperative praxis, also considering the ethical dimension of the economy [53]. FVG Regional Law 4/2017 rightly goes in this direction: (a) building another economy, other markets, other redistribution systems, other reproduction and consumption styles, and (b) enhancing regional solidarity subsystems and networks capable of strengthening or reconstructing this virtuous link between production and reproduction, operating at every stage of the economic process. The goal is to carve out a consolidated niche within the economic theory for the solidarity economy, overcoming ‘the absence in a discipline where the concept of solidarity does not seem to fit spontaneously’ [39].

The FVG regional law sanctioned a first and fundamental step in the recognition and regulation of the solidarity-economic sector as a tool for the creation of territorial supply chains inspired by a bioregional vision of “re-inhabitation” and re-appropriation of production and consumption dynamics in the territory, which recalls the importance of satisfying unmet needs with instruments, such as the solidarity-economic realities, that privilege values that are wholly or partly alien to conventional market logics.

The contribution of this research, therefore, goes in three directions: (1) to have thoroughly investigated the ESol Regional sector starting from the indications and characterizations provided by Regional Law 4/2017 and the main bibliographic contributions relating to the theoretical–conceptual approaches of bioregionalism and solidarity economy, proving the link between them as a natural transposition of theory (bioregionalism) into practice through solidarity-economic realities (in the form of individual activities, networks, and/or districts) acting locally as sustainable productive and consumption cells; (2) to have built the first database to report the complete and detailed picture of the regional solidarity-economy sector, a source of future and necessary in-depth studies, and investigations aimed at supporting and consolidating the law’s desiderata at a territorial level by acting on the present levers; (3) to have mapped and georeferenced for the first time the sector at a regional level, providing critical information regarding where and how to intervene for the local activation of the multiple solidarity paths and processes desired by the law, creating the conditions for a greater diffusion of the culture of solidarity in the territories’

economies and of good solidarity practices inspired by values, logics, *modus operandi*, and actions alien to those today prevailing in the market, and more environmental and territorial-friendly.

In a more general sense, this work provides a particular example of “bottom-up” action that saw institutions and groups of citizens initiating the legislative recognition process that was missing from the many solidarity realities that already existed in the regional territory or were being born in response to the shared and hitherto unfulfilled need to invert the hierarchy of consuming and producing by re-bringing territories and communities “above capital”, based on values and principles inspired by a greater and better quality of living, inhabiting, producing, and consuming our “places of life”.

This case, therefore, makes clear the potential inherent in coordinated action between economic and social actors in the territory, but also the complexity inherent in consolidating actions aimed at a greater and better re-appropriation of our production and consumption spaces within a market system where survival is played based on principles and values that are most often diametrically opposed to an economic-solidarity and bioregional vision of the common goods.

In conclusion, both the pandemic and the recent war events, and the problems they, directly and indirectly, bring about, are restoring to millions of people this “awareness of place” that is necessary to support local development by recognising the structural variants of each territory, guaranteeing its regeneration through a new way of “living” and “inhabiting”, identifying niches of proposal and innovation in the micro dimension, and finding the meta-rules capable of preventing change, hindering it or affecting it negatively, supporting solidarity-economic organisations from below.

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