



Generational renewal in agriculture: What's the problem represented to be? Deconstructing Policy Representations in Rural Development Programmes across Italian regions

F. Consentino¹ · R. McAreavey² · I. Peri¹

Received: 4 September 2025 / Accepted: 16 December 2025 / Published online: 19 January 2026
© The Author(s) 2025

Abstract

Generational renewal in agriculture has long been declared a priority of European policies, yet little critical attention has been paid to how the problem is represented and to the implicit assumptions that orient instruments and strategies. This study focuses on the first-settlement aid for young farmers (Measure 6.1) of the Rural Development Programme 2014–2022, one of the most prominent policy tools introduced by the European Union to attract new generations into farming. The analysis comparatively examines how Italian regions have implemented the measure through eligibility requirements, selection criteria, and the exercise of regional discretion, highlighting the diversity of policy implementation. Adopting Bacchi's *What's the Problem Represented to Be?* (WPR) framework, the research focuses on how generational renewal is represented and which subjective, discursive, and lived effects – including unintended ones – emerge from such representation. Methodologically, the study combines qualitative content analysis of regional calls with cluster analysis, enabling the identification of five distinct regional approaches (clusters) to generational renewal, while also capturing commonalities and divergences. Results reveal that the dominant representation constructs the “desirable” young farmer primarily as the successor who has already inherited the family farm, while marginalising other categories such as new entrants (young individuals with no family farming background) and potential successors (those who may inherit but have not yet done so). Finally, the study deconstructs dominant CAP paradigms on the topic and argues for more inclusive and differentiated strategies capable of recognising multiple entry pathways and sustaining identity-building processes.

Keywords Young farmer problem · New entrants · Farm succession · WPR approach · Common Agricultural Policy · Rural Development Programme

Introduction

Since the 1990s, supporting young people in agriculture has become a central objective within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and a growing concern among European policymakers. Over the past two decades, demographic trends have shown a persistent decline in the number of young people entering farming and living in rural areas, while the average age of farm holders continues to rise and farm abandonment remains widespread (Eurostat 2022). Future projections are equally concerning: an estimated 9.1 million farm holders aged 55 and over are expected to retire within the next 10 years (Šajn 2025), further reinforcing the urgency of ensuring generational renewal in agriculture. Also, the European Commission's (2021) Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas describes generational renewal as a

✉ F. Consentino
federica.consentino@phd.unict.it

R. McAreavey
Ruth.McAreavey@newcastle.ac.uk

I. Peri
peri@unict.it

¹ Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment,
University of Catania, Via Santa Sofia 100, Catania
95123, Italy

² School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle
University, Newcastle, Upon Tyne NE1 7RU, UK

“precondition for future-oriented change.” Indeed, the lack of a new generation of farmers raises urgent questions not only about the resilience of the agricultural sector and food supply but also about cross-cutting issues such as farm modernization and innovation (Bertolozzi-Caredio 2024), the vitality of rural territories (Consentino et al. 2024; Mattas et al. 2024), and landscape preservation, as well as environmental sustainability (Zagata and Sutherland 2015; Farrell et al. 2021; Sarkar et al. 2022).

Although generational renewal has long been highlighted as a CAP objective, it was formally established as one of the nine specific objectives only under the most recent CAP 2023–2027. Nonetheless, since the early 2000s, previous CAP reforms have already introduced specific measures and support schemes for young farmers under both Pillars I and II, which are still to be implemented.

Under the first Pillar, a supplementary direct payment has been available for active farmers under the age of 40, granted for up to five years following farm establishment. Under the second Pillar, aid for supporting young farmers has been implemented through the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) and co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This latest measure consists of a one-off payment, often referred to as a “premium”, aimed at facilitating young individuals’ establishment in agriculture and granted to those who meet specific eligibility criteria and rank highly on a list of applicants.

Over time, this financial aid has been revised. Licciardo et al. (2024) provide a detailed overview of its evolution across CAP programming periods. A major change to the measure was introduced during the 2007–2013 CAP, when applicants were required to submit a business development plan as part of their application. This requirement was subsequently formalized in the 2014–2022 CAP, linked to the so-called “youth package,” making access to the financial premium conditional on a clearly defined strategy for farm establishment and development. Funding allocated has steadily increased. The maximum premium rose from €30,000 in the 2000–2006 CAP to €100,000 in the current CAP 2023–2027. In Italy, the share of resources allocated to the First-settlement Aid within the RDP shows a moderate upward trend, increasing from 4.0% in 2007–2013 to 5.4% in 2023–2027 (Licciardo et al. 2024). Apart from these adjustments, ranging from Measure 112 (CAP 2007–2013) to Measure 6.1 (CAP 2014–2022) and more recently SRE01 (CAP 2023–2027), the core eligibility conditions have remained largely consistent: beneficiaries must be under 40 years old, setting up an agricultural holding for the first time, possess adequate occupational skills and competences.

Even though generational renewal cannot rely solely on European financial aid – and for this reason, integrated strategies involving complementary national policies have

been repeatedly called for (European Commission 2024) – it remains one of the most widely known and requested support measures (Balezentis et al. 2020). However, the literature has shown that the effects of this measure remain modest, especially considering that financial incentives alone are mostly insufficient to address the deeper structural barriers faced by young people, such as access to land, capital and knowledge (Dwyer et al. 2019; Eistrup et al. 2019; Licciardo et al. 2024; Mattas et al. 2024). In the same vein, the European Commission (2024) stresses the need for in-depth evaluations and targeted analysis, emphasising that the effects of the policy depend not only on the choice of interventions but also on their design and implementation. These advanced phases are carried out at the national level. Indeed, while the EU sets objectives and guidelines, it is ultimately up to Member States to tailor interventions to their specific contexts.

Against this background, the core question driving this research is: What representations and assumptions about the generational renewal problem in agriculture are embedded in the implementation of the EU’s ‘aid for the setting up of young farmers’ under Italy’s Rural RDPs?

While previous research has extensively discussed the limited effectiveness and structural shortcomings of this measure, few studies have critically deconstructed the underlying policy representations and the multi-level governance dynamics shaping its regional implementation. In order to address this gap, the present study focuses specifically on Measure 6.1 of the CAP 2014–2022, the most recently completed version of the first-settlement aid. From this point onward, all references to “the measure” in this article will explicitly refer to Measure 6.1.

By adopting Bacchi’s “What’s the Problem Represented to Be?” (WPR) framework, this study provides an analytical perspective, highlighting how the conceptual framing and regional discretion in policy design produce specific discursive, subjectification, and lived effects. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to rethinking dominant policy paradigms and opens pathways toward more inclusive and differentiated approaches to generational renewal in agriculture. While existing research on young farmer policies has largely adopted a national perspective, providing an aggregated and uniform view of the phenomenon, this overlooks the significant regional differences that characterise policy implementation in highly decentralised contexts such as Italy (Michalek et al. 2020). This lack of attention to sub-national dynamics and the need to evaluate policy interventions at their multi-level design and implementation stages has been identified as a key gap in the literature on policy instrument analysis (Capano and Howlett 2020).

From EU policy objectives to targeted interventions: multi-level governance in the context of RDP measures

Conceptualised by Hooghe and Marks (2001), multi-level governance represents a key analytical and practical lens in EU policymaking. It entails the coordination of actions across different levels of governance, from the EU to national authorities, reflecting the institutional and administrative structures of each Member State. While the EU defines overarching policy goals and establishes general rules, it is then up to national authorities to design and implement the specific instruments through which these goals are realised. This structure is intended to foster locally meaningful responses by adapting broad policy objectives to diverse and heterogeneous contexts (Thomann 2015; Thomann and Sager 2017). This dynamic is particularly evident in the case of RDPs, whose interventions must align with the economic, social, and structural specificities of the contexts in which they are implemented.

Italy has a regionalised administrative structure characterised by significant territorial disparities and socio-economic differences. As a result, it implements a separate RDP for each of its 20 regions. An exception is the Trentino-Alto Adige, which is itself divided into the two autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano, each managing its RDP programme independently. Consequently, a total of 21 RDPs is in place in Italy. Figure 1 shows how responsibilities are distributed across the multi-level governance of RDPs.

In the framework of Measure 6.1, the EU defines the overarching policy objectives, establishes the regulatory framework, and sets the maximum financial allocations alongside the general eligibility criteria, as follows: (1) beneficiaries must be under 40 years old; (2) they must be installed for

the first time as head of a farm; and (3) they must submit a business plan (European Commission 2023).

Italy develops the National Strategic Framework, which guides to ensure that regional RDPs align with EU priorities and national development strategies. It also establishes common guidelines, such as the requirement for each region to define minimum and maximum farm economic size thresholds, the five-year commitment period for beneficiaries, and additional eligibility criteria such as the obligation to become an “active farmer” (a farmer whom agricultural activity constitutes the main occupation or corporate purpose) within 18 or 24 months of first settlement.

In line with EU provisions, Italy grants its regions the discretion to introduce the so-called “youth package,” which entails linking Measure 6.1 with other complementary measures focused on planning, investment, collaboration, and advice (Dwyer et al. 2019). The adoption of the “youth package” is thus not mandatory, and each region decides whether to implement it within its RDP. This, however, is only one of several aspects over which regions exercise discretion.

Indeed, regional authorities are responsible for designing and publishing the calls for applications for Measure 6.1 and for defining the selection criteria as well as the amount of aid. While eligibility criteria are mandatory requirements that determine whether applicants can access the Measure at all (e.g., age limit, first installation, business plan), selection criteria allocate scores that rank applicants in a competitive list. The financial resources allocated to Measure 6.1 are often insufficient to meet all demands (Licciardo et al. 2022), then young applicants must rank high enough to secure funding, making selection criteria a decisive element in benefiting of the measure. In this sense, as Thomann (2015) argues, selection criteria enable flexibility while simultaneously embedding normative assumptions. Dörrenbächer

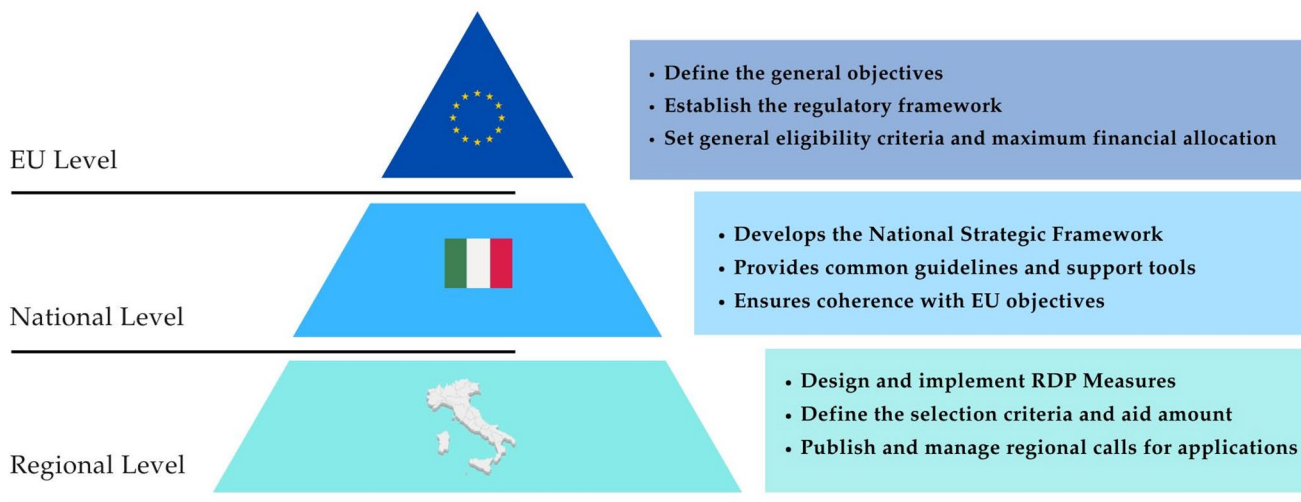


Fig. 1 EU, national, and regional responsibilities in the design and implementation of RDP measures – our elaboration

and Mastenbroek (2019), while conceptualising this space of discretion as the outcome of bargaining between legislative principals and implementing agents rather than as a challenge to compliance, emphasise that interpretative flexibility can nonetheless generate both opportunities and tensions, leading to unintended consequences.

To capture generational renewal policy dynamics and address territorial gap – namely, the need to evaluate interventions at their multi-level design and implementation stages – this study examines the 21 regional calls for Measure 6.1. The aim is to understand how these calls differ from one another and how regional discretion shapes their content and application. First, a content analysis of the calls was conducted to identify variations in eligibility conditions, financial allocations, and procedural requirements. This was followed by a cluster analysis of the selection grids to explore whether regions share common patterns or diverge in their priorities and criteria. Finally, observational fieldwork provided complementary insights into how Measure 6.1 is interpreted and operationalised in practice.

What's the problem represented to be: a model by Carol Bacchi

Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR) model represents an analytical tool for critically investigating policy interventions (Bacchi 2009). Recent studies have employed the WPR approach as a framework for investigating rural development and agricultural policy. Particularly, it has been widely applied to gender inequalities in the agricultural sector (Ville et al. 2023; Cheong et al. 2024; Pettersson et al. 2025) and has been framed to critically analyse the EU LEADER programme (Johansson and Holmquist 2024). Particularly, Calo and Corbett (2024) draw on key insights from Bacchi to examine new entrant policies in Scotland, integrating elements of the WPR approach within a broader critical discourse analysis. WPR is grounded in the idea that policies are active practices that shape social reality, challenging the notion that public policies simply respond to objective and pre-existing problems. Instead, it posits that policies are themselves interventions that construct certain situations as "problems," define legitimate subjects of intervention, and shape the field of acceptable and imaginable solutions (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). Thus, it challenges conventional definitions of "problems" and their proposed "solutions," allowing for examination of the implicit knowledge and assumed categories that underpin and legitimize dominant policy discourses (Bacchi 2012, 2017). Within the broader field of discourse-oriented and critical policy analysis, the WPR approach can then be situated alongside traditions that interpret policies

as meaning-making practices rather than neutral or technical solutions. These perspectives share the premise that problem definitions are constitutive: they shape the identities, behaviours, and futures that policies seek to organise. Indeed, in Bacchi's model, problem representations produce three interconnected types of effects: discursive, subjectification, and lived effects (Bacchi 2012). Discursive effects concern the boundaries of what can be thought, articulated, or deemed legitimate within a particular policy domain. They work by privileging specific interpretative logics, while marginalising alternative perspectives. Subjectification effects relate to how policies contribute to shaping individuals as particular kinds of subjects, prescribing roles, qualities, and behavioural norms. Finally, lived effects refer to the tangible, material consequences that these discursive and subject-making processes have on individuals' everyday lives, including their access to financial opportunities and institutional recognition.

The WPR approach operationalises this critique through a set of six guiding questions that serve as a flexible framework for interrogating the conceptual and discursive architecture of policies: (Q1) What is the problem represented to be in a given policy? (Q2) What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation? (Q3) How has this representation come about - what is its historical and political genealogy? (Q4) What is left unproblematic in this representation? (Q5) What effects are produced by this representation? (Q6) How might this representation be disrupted?

Why apply the WPR approach to generational renewal

Generational renewal has long been presented as a demographic and economic challenge, typically framed as a policy effort to increase the number of young people entering farming. Yet the core of the debate is not simply how many young people take over farms, but who can do so, under what conditions, and according to which vision of agricultural futures. These dimensions tie to the broader field of agrarian change, where struggles over land access, labour relations, technological models, and environmental commitments shape divergent understandings of what farming should be (Borras and Franco 2012; van der Ploeg 2018; Calo 2020). Competing interpretations of the "young farmers problem" coexist, reflecting distinct normative commitments and different understandings of generational renewal in agriculture that could affect the sector more generally. A first stream of scholarship conceptualises generational renewal through the prism of family succession, focusing on the declining attractiveness of farming among heirs (Mishra et al. 2010; Cassidy and McGrath 2014; Chiswell

and Lobley 2018; Conway et al. 2021; Villàn et al. 2025). A second and increasingly stream highlights the presence of highly motivated new entrants without family background who nonetheless face structural barriers that hinder their effective entrance in agriculture (Carolan 2018; Sutherland 2023; Creaney et al. 2023). Eistrup et al. (2019) show that support frameworks tend to benefit successors already embedded in family farms, leaving aspiring entrants structurally disadvantaged. Administrative hurdles further limit access, as shown by Licciardo et al. (2024). Calo (2018) also points out a process of canalisation, whereby only a narrow, relatively homogeneous group can access the means of production, reinforcing existing farming structures. Mattas et al. (2024) underlines young people's attitudes, perceptions and needs, reinforcing the idea that financial incentives are not enough to attract new farmers. In this sense, Shortall et al. (2020) describe European agriculture as a *de facto* closed profession structured around inheritance rather than open opportunity, also shaped by gender and familial dynamics. However, several studies point out that new entrants from non-farming backgrounds often bring distinct skills, experiences and imaginaries that may foster innovation (Carolan 2018; Calo 2018; Žabko and Tisenkopfs 2022; Fanelli et al. 2023). From this perspective, recent contributions explicitly interrogate who is imagined as the "future farmer" in Europe (Sutherland 2023), challenge the normative centrality of the family farm in shifting agrarian contexts (Hof-felmeyer et al. 2024), and emphasise the heterogeneity of young farmer trajectories beyond the successor model (Creaney et al. 2023).

Taken together, these analyses show that generational renewal is a fundamentally political and discursive issue. It is not merely a question of facilitating farm succession, rather it involves determining which agrarian subjects deserve support, which farming models are (re)produced, and which futures become conceivable. This demands a discourse-oriented and critical policy analysis, and in this respect, Carol Bacchi's WPR approach is particularly well-suited. When combined with insights from multi-level governance, WPR acquires additional explanatory power: examining Measure 6.1 through these lenses allows us to understand the intervention as a discursive and institutional tool in which problem definitions, farmer identities and agrarian futures are not shaped by a single policy design or action but emerge through the interplay of regional, national and European actors. Attending to these dynamics opens up space to question dominant representations and to imagine alternative forms of public intervention.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method design that combines qualitative content analysis of policy documents with quantitative clustering techniques, in line with established approaches in policy implementation research (Bowen 2009; Schreier 2012), to examine 21 calls for applications for Measure 6.1 issued under the Italian RDPs between 2014 and 2022. Content and cluster analyses have been carried out alongside observational fieldwork. These have been applied to examine how policy language, access mechanisms, eligibility, and selection criteria contribute to discursive, subjectification, and lived effects according to the WPR framework.

Content and cluster analyses

As a first step, calls for applications of Measure 6.1 were collected for all 21 Italian RDPs from the Polaris platform, a centralized database managed by the Italian Council for Agricultural Research and Economics (CREA). This platform provides official implementation data for all RDP measures, ensuring completeness of the dataset. Following a content analysis (Weber 1990; Hsieh and Shannon 2005), the textual content of each call was examined, focusing on language choices, categorization of eligibility, and selection criteria (Le Gouais and Wach 2013). From each Measure 6.1 call, selection grids were extracted and transcribed into a dataset in which each single criterion represented a raw variable. Because regions employed heterogeneous formulations (e.g., "organic farming commitment", "environmental sustainability practices", "climate change mitigation"), an iterative coding procedure was applied to reduce overlap and redundancy and to make criteria comparable across regions.

This procedure involved three main steps: (1) Initial open coding, during which all criteria were listed exactly as formulated in the regional calls; (2) Axial coding, to group similar or equivalent items under broader analytical categories (e.g., "organic farming commitment", "climate change mitigation", and "resource efficiency" were merged into the category Environmental performance); (3) Validation through consultations (both in person but especially via phone) with agronomists and agricultural consultants working across different Italian regions and all of whom had direct experience as project designers for Measure 6.1, to ensure that the aggregated categories captured the substantive meaning of the selection criteria. The outcome of this process was the set of aggregated categories of selection criteria reported in Table 1, in order to reflect policy-relevant dimensions that structure access to Measure 6.1.

Table 1 Aggregated categories of selection criteria – our elaboration

Aggregated category	Synthesized definition of selection criteria
Farm Location	Involves farm location in disadvantaged or marginal areas, inner areas, and Natura 2000 sites, as declared in the application
Economic Size	Based on initial farm economic size and/or standard output indicated in the business plan
Sector-related factors	Linked to specific agricultural production sectors and sector-based investments (e.g., livestock farming), as outlined in the project proposal
Education and Training	Considers educational qualifications, planned training participation, and agricultural experience declared in the application
Gender	Addresses gender aspects, giving preference to female applicants and women-led farms
Age upon farm entry	Considers beneficiary age, distinguishing between applicants below or above 30 years old at application
Economic Performance	Assesses projected increase in farm income as declared in the business plan
Environmental Performance	Evaluates projected improvements in environmental sustainability, organic farming, climate change mitigation, and resource efficiency stated in the business plan
Social performance	Focuses on planned farm employment generation, demonstrated through the business plan (e.g., projected number of workers to be hired)
Innovation and Digitalization	Encourages adoption of innovation, precision agriculture, and digital tools, as planned in the project proposal
Certified quality schemes	Recognizes adherence to certified quality schemes and producer organizations (e.g., PDO, PGI) declared in the application
Diversification and Multifunctionality	Promotes planned diversification of activities, extra-agricultural income sources, and supply chain completion as per the business plan
Newly restructured farms	Refers to farms that include the new acquisition of additional land (also non-family), declared in the application
Succession due to retirement	Supports farm succession from elderly or retiring farmers, as demonstrated in the ownership transfer documentation

While techniques such as Principal Component Analysis (PCA) are valuable for reducing dimensionality and uncovering latent factors (Jolliffe and Cadima 2016), our aim was not to extract hidden statistical components. Instead, the objective was to construct policy-driven typologies grounded in expertise. As highlighted by Lowe et al. (2019), consultants are not merely transmitters of scientific knowledge but mediators and translators who adapt science to the specific context of farming. In this regard, the validation carried out with agronomists and agricultural consultants provided an essential interpretative layer, offering insights that a purely statistical reduction such as PCA would not capture. Their expert assessment ensured that the aggregated categories reflected not only formal criteria but also the practical and policy relevance of how Measure 6.1 operates across regions.

Then, we employed hierarchical clustering, which is particularly well-suited to grouping observations on the basis of validated, policy-relevant categories (Ketchen and Shook 1996; Everitt et al. 2011). As regions apply heterogeneous scoring systems under the public call (e.g., total scores of 100, 60, or other thresholds), a normalization procedure was applied, converting each criterion's weight to a 0–1 scale by dividing it by the total maximum score of the respective call. This yielded a standardized matrix of weighted selection criteria across all regions, enabling systematic cross-regional comparison. Based on the resulting standardized matrix, a hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted

to identify typologies of regions with similar configurations of selection criteria. Ward's minimum variance method was chosen for its ability to generate compact and interpretable clusters (Ward 1963). The optimal number of clusters was determined by evaluating the silhouette score across different k -values (Rousseeuw 1987). A resulting dendrogram visualized proximity among regional profiles, allowing for the development of a typology of regional approaches to generational renewal within the RDP measure. By combining content analysis with clustering, this methodological design thus serves to reveal both the discursive effects (how generational renewal is framed) and the subjectification effects (how intended beneficiaries are constructed), thereby operationalizing Bacchi's WPR approach within the concrete instruments of CAP implementation.

Observational fieldwork

To complement the document analysis and capture the situated and experiential dimensions emphasized by Bacchi's WPR approach, observational fieldwork was carried out during two meetings organized by the youth sections of Italian agricultural unions between 2022 and 2024. This period was particularly relevant as it coincided with the post-programming phase of the 2014–2022 RDP, during which stakeholders critically reflected on the effectiveness of the Measure and discussed priorities for the upcoming programming period. Fieldwork was conducted in Sicily which, although

representing a single regional context, serves as an illustrative case and provides a context-rich example (Yin 2018). The meetings, attended in person, brought together young farmers already benefiting from the measure, their parents and relatives involved in farming, aspiring applicants, policymakers, union representatives, and other stakeholders, such as consultant agronomists. These encounters provided access to discursive spaces where the Measure was debated and negotiated in everyday language. Particular attention was paid to how participants narrated their experiences with the Measure 6.1 and reinterpreted institutional narratives in light of their lived realities. Participation took place in a non-intrusive observational role with permission to ask occasional questions during or after the sessions to explore emerging issues in greater depth. Detailed field notes were taken during the meetings, focusing on recurring themes, metaphors, and moments of resistance or ambivalence. While geographically limited, this component serves at this study to enrich the WPR analysis by illustrating how the discursive and subjectification effects of Measure 6.1.

Results and discussion

The hierarchical cluster analysis identified five regional groups, as confirmed by the silhouette coefficient (Annex 1). The dendrogram in Fig. 2 shows the relative proximity between Italian regions based on the selection criteria as in the regional calls for application. Clusters are intended to reflect a specific priority in generational renewal, according

to the weight (and then priority) that is attributed to the aggregated category of criteria. Importantly, such priority does not exclude the attribution of scores to other criteria; rather, it reflects a greater weighting of one criterion over the others. As a result, clustering reveals the type of beneficiary or farm model that is more likely to be prioritized and ranked higher in the selection process, as well as how generational renewal is represented.

The hierarchical cluster analysis was performed exclusively on the weighted selection criteria, as these variables directly reflect the policy priorities embedded in regional calls. Binary variables, such as the presence or absence of the youth package, and context-dependent elements, such as the amount of the financial premium and year of publication, were excluded from the clustering procedure because they do not have a comparable weight. Instead, these elements are presented separately (Table 2) as additional information to contextualize and better interpret regional approaches. It is important to note that access to the youth package is contingent upon meeting the selection criteria of Measure 6.1, which therefore remains the primary determinant of selection and the focus of the clustering.

These results allow us to interrogate how these clusters encode different visions of who counts as a “desirable” young farmer, what types of farms are prioritized, and which models of agriculture are implicitly valorised or marginalized. By applying Bacchi’s (2009) approach, we move beyond a purely descriptive comparison of regional criteria to critically examine the underlying representations of generational renewal.

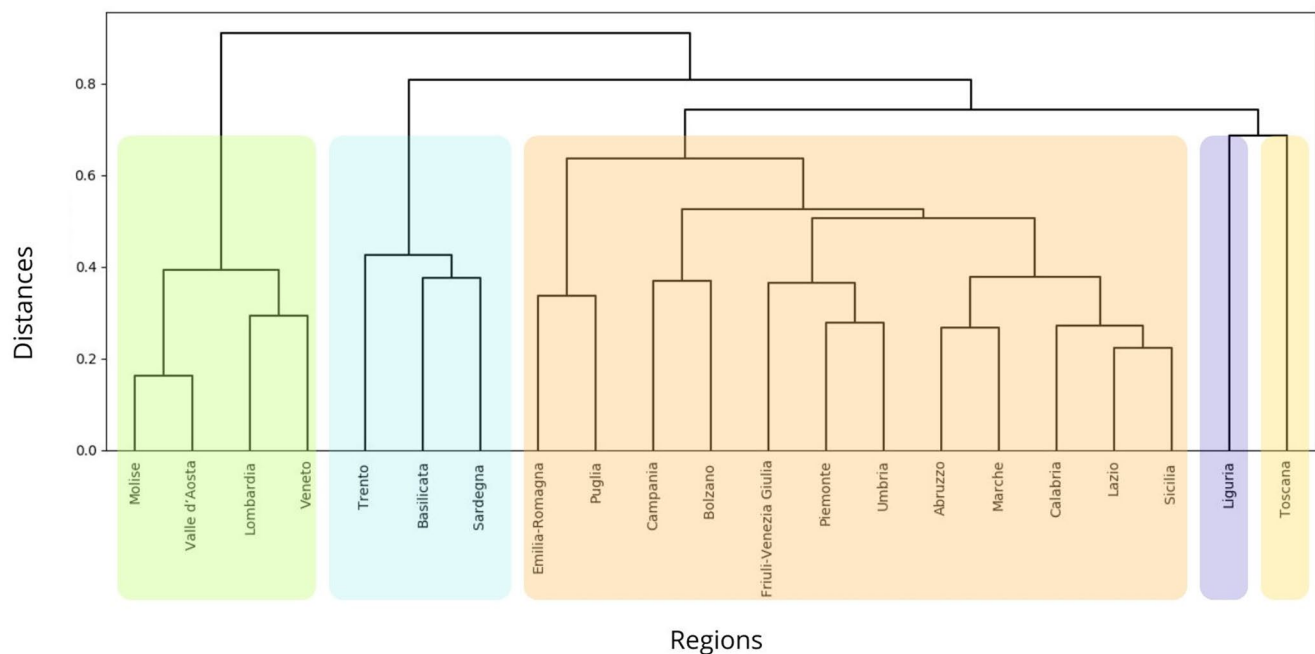


Fig. 2 Dendrogram of Italian regions based on selection criteria clustering

Table 2 Additional information

Cluster <i>n.</i>	Regions	Year of call	Youth package	Financial aid
1	Molise	2016	Yes	€ 30.000 ^a
1	Valle d'Aosta	2016	Yes	€ 30.000 ^{bc}
1	Lombardia	2018	No	€ 20.000 ^a
1	Veneto	2022	Yes	€ 40.000
2	Trento	2019	Yes	€ 40.000
2	Basilicata	2017	No	€ 60.000 ^a
2	Sardegna	2022	No	€ 35.000
3	Emilia-Romagna	2022	Yes	€ 30.000 ^a
3	Puglia	2022	Yes	€ 50.000 ^c
3	Campania	2022	No	€ 50.000
3	Bolzano	2017	No	€ 20.000 ^d
3	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	2018	Yes	€ 40.000
3	Piemonte	2017	Yes	€ 35.000 ^a
3	Umbria	2016	Yes	€ 50.000
3	Abruzzo	2022	No	€ 60.000 ^a
3	Marche	2022	Yes	€ 35.000 ^a
3	Calabria	2018	Yes	€ 40.000 ^a
3	Lazio	2018	No	€ 70.000
3	Sicilia	2022	Yes	€ 40.000
4	Liguria	2017	Yes	€ 18.000 ^a
5	Toscana	2022	No	€ 65.000 ^a

Amount increased if: ^a lands are located in disadvantaged area; ^b young beneficiary produces certified quality product; ^c establishes a newly farm; ^d holds an agricultural degree or diploma

What is the problem represented to be?

Aligning with the clustering, five distinct representations emerged. In Cluster 1 (Molise, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardia, Veneto), generational renewal is primarily framed through the lens of economic and productive performance. The weighting of the selection criteria reflects a policy emphasis on farm viability and structural consolidation achieved through the involvement of a young individual. Within this perspective, young farmers are constructed as entrepreneurs expected to sustain the competitiveness of their farms. While economic strengthening is central, it is closely tied to environmental compliance, as indicated by the inclusion of criteria linked to environmental performance. Certain sectors are explicitly prioritized, particularly livestock farming, given its recognized vulnerability to generational turnover (Góngora et al. 2019; Pérez et al. 2020). Similarly, priority is accorded to those producing certified, territorially linked products, reinforcing a vision of renewal that combines market-oriented entrepreneurship with quality production anchored in local contexts (Consentino et al. 2024).

Particular emphasis is placed on education and training in Cluster 2 (Basilicata, Sardegna, and Trento). Rather than focusing on economic profitability, the policy framing places human capital and knowledge at the center of rural and farm

development strategies. Agricultural qualifications ranging from secondary school diplomas to university degrees are prioritized, while practical farming experience is also recognized, allowing young individuals without formal education to qualify if they can demonstrate previous involvement as a farm worker. Indeed, as noted by Taylor and Bhasme (2018), direct on-farm experience constitutes a form of embedded learning, where skills and knowledge are acquired through on-farm practice and peer-to-peer exchange in real farming contexts. Alongside education and training, succession due to retirement emerges as a significant criterion, reinforcing a representation of generational renewal grounded in the intergenerational transfer of land. Complementary to this, policies also reward newly restructured farms, favouring processes of farm consolidation aimed at countering land fragmentation and creating larger, more competitive holdings. In Sardegna, the simultaneous presence of both criteria (succession due to retirement and newly restructured farms) conveys an ideal scenario in which older farmers withdraw, land is transferred, and holdings are reorganized under the leadership of well-trained young successors.

Cluster 3, the largest cluster encompassing a diverse set of regions (Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lazio, Marche, Piemonte, Puglia, Sicilia, Umbria and Bolzano), is framed through a multidimensional policy approach that differs from other clusters more narrowly focused on one or two dimensions (such as economic performance or education). Here, selection criteria are distributed across a broad spectrum of priorities, signaling an effort to address economic, environmental, social, and quality-related goals within a single framework. This multidimensionality translates into a demand for complex and integrated projects (Sivini and Vitale 2023). Although regional variations exist, all regions in this cluster converge on a common vision of the “desirable” young farmer as a versatile and innovative medium-scale entrepreneur capable of combining production, sustainability, value-chain integration, and extra-agricultural diversification within a single project. In this view, generational renewal is positioned as a strategic lever for a qualitative agricultural transformation, aimed at embedding farms more deeply within territorial and market dynamics. Notably, social performance criteria (in Abruzzo, Calabria, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lazio, Piemonte, Sicilia, and Umbria) require applicants to demonstrate an increase in on-farm employment, reinforcing the role of young farmers as drivers of rural socio-economic revitalization. Almost all regions also provide additional points for medium-sized farms, but even where this explicit scoring is absent, the complexity and cross-cutting nature of the required business plans indicate that only farms with adequate resources and capacity are positioned to meet these demands, especially if the youth package is present (e.g.

Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and Marche). Education remains central but is redirected toward the policy-driven vision of fostering integrated, multifunctional, and innovation-oriented agricultural models. It is noted by Marzban and colleagues (2016) that higher education increases their propensity to engage in diversified and multifunctional farming activities, thereby aligning individual skills with broader rural development objectives.

In contrast to the more demanding requirements observed in the regions belonging to Cluster 3, other regions, such as Liguria (Cluster 4) and Toscana (Cluster 5) adopt a lighter approach in terms of selection criteria and requirements. However, it is worth noting that although Liguria does not impose stringent conditions and instead awards points primarily based on farm location and the applicant's age upon entry, it has activated the youth package, directing it toward farm modernization achieved through material investments. Therefore, even with less stringent criteria, young farmers are still encouraged to prepare a well-structured business plan.

In Toscana (Cluster 5), the call is closely linked to the sector and production orientation (e.g., cereals, cattle, sheep and goats, olives), as well as to participation in certified quality schemes. Gender also plays a prominent role, explicitly promoting young female farmers. Toscana is one of only six out of 21 regions that have introduced a specific score for women, alongside Abruzzo, Campania, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and Bolzano. The weighting given to gender in most of these regions is relatively low, except for Bolzano, which represents the only case where it approaches that of Toscana, making these two regions stand out as the most gender-focused within the overall framework. The absence of the youth package in Cluster 5 further underscores its less restrictive nature, indicating an even lighter policy framework compared to Cluster 4.

A common element across nearly all regions, except for Abruzzo and Bolzano, is the inclusion of additional points (with varying weights) for farms located in disadvantaged rural areas. In many cases, this scoring advantage is complemented by an increased financial premium for young farmers who establish their holdings in these areas, including Abruzzo, which applies the latter despite lacking the associated scoring component. This highlights how Measure 6.1 goes beyond its primary focus on generational renewal, aligning itself with objectives aimed at territorial revitalization and demographic rebalancing. This overlap suggests a hybrid representation of the "problem" of generational renewal: one that not only addresses agricultural competitiveness and farm viability but also embeds young farmers within a wider strategy of rural socio-economic regeneration, thereby merging agricultural policy logics with those of local development.

What assumptions underlie this representation?

All clusters operate on the assumption that their respective strategies are effective in fostering a long-term commitment to farming. While the strategies differ in focus, they share the underlying belief that entry into farming can be successfully stimulated through financial incentives. Under Italy's general and widely applied rule, young beneficiaries are required to maintain their farm business for at least five years; however, it is implicitly assumed - and expected - that they will continue to do so well beyond this minimum period. The financial aid is thus conceived as a strategic mechanism to launch a long-term entrepreneurial trajectory. In this sense, becoming a farm holder is framed as an irreversible step into an adult professional identity, rather than as a potentially tentative or exploratory process.

We applied for Measure 6.1, and receiving financial support was beneficial [...] I don't know and think my son will continue farming beyond the mandatory five-year commitment [...] he is already considering alternative career paths. (Young beneficiary's father and farmer, 56 years old).

In this narrative, the father appears to be the driving force behind the application, with the son playing a more passive or instrumental role in accessing the funding. While the measure envisions young farmers as committed entrepreneurs ready to take on long-term responsibility for the farm, in practice, the decision to apply may become pragmatic or family-driven, rather than rooted in a personal and durable vocational project. Consequently, the five-year requirement functions less as a springboard for sustained agricultural engagement and more as a bureaucratic threshold, after which exiting farming remains a likely option. This finding builds upon the arguments put forward by May et al. (2019) and Chatzitheodoridis and Kontogeorgos (2020), adding further evidence that early exits remain a significant risk beyond the mandatory commitment period.

Another implicit assumption is that the premium should not only incentivize young people to enter farming but also encourage older farmers to withdraw and transfer managerial responsibility. This is particularly evident in Cluster 2, where most regions introduced a specific selection criterion linked to succession due to formal retirement. However, even in the other calls and regions, there is an implicit expectation that the senior farmer will lose authority once he is no longer formally registered as the farm holder. Within this framework, although all calls require that beneficiaries be registered as "active farmers," there is no certainty that they hold genuine decision-making power within the farm (Leonard et al. 2017). This raises questions as to whether

Measure 6.1 truly facilitates a substantive transfer of authority or merely formalizes the status of young farmers without transforming intra-family power dynamics. Although the regional calls do not explicitly require that the transfer occur within the family, this remains the most common practice, not only observed in this study but also widely emphasized in previous literature (Zagata and Sutherland 2015; Cavicchioli et al. 2019; Bertolozzi-Caredio 2024; Mattas et al. 2024; Calo and Corbett 2024).

How has this representation come about?

With the introduction of the CAP, what was already deeply rooted became formalised: the overlap between family and farm, perceived as the natural foundation of rural society, social cohesion, and agricultural viability (Calus and Huylenbroeck 2010; Cavicchioli et al. 2019). Over time, significant socio-cultural changes have reshaped intra-family structures and dynamics. As one young farmer put it:

We should reflect on what we mean today by family farms... Back in my grandfather's and even my father's time, families were large, with many siblings, and everyone lived and worked in the countryside to produce food. The family and the farm were the same... Looking back now, those times no longer belong to us and could never return. (Young farmer, 35 years old).

Alongside these socio-cultural shifts, structural changes have also taken place: farms are no longer seen solely as productive units but as key actors in safeguarding landscapes, driving rural economies, and providing multifunctional benefits. In this context, new imperatives, such as entrepreneurship, innovation, sustainability, and formal education, have emerged (Nazzaro and Marotta 2016), in contrast to a past when the farmer was simply a traditional peasant. As these imperatives have become layered onto the family-farm model, regions have interpreted them differently. Historically, substantial structural and institutional differences have shaped Italian agriculture: in the northern regions (e.g. Emilia-Romagna, Lombardia, Veneto), farms are generally larger, capital-intensive, and integrated into agro-industrial value chains; central regions such as Toscana, Marche, and Umbria display more diversified and multifunctional farm structures; while in the southern regions (e.g., Sicilia, Calabria, and Puglia), the agrarian structure is typically fragmented, with a coexistence of large export-oriented enterprises and a multitude of small farms. However, the policy orientations identified in the analysis do not follow a clear North-South divide. Instead, they reflect distinct regional understandings of what regions

intend to achieve through generational renewal over times. Across the clusters, regional approaches have appeared then less determined by structural conditions and more by policy and governance priorities. In this sense, regions differ not only in how they support young farmers, but in why. This points to the need for further investigation into how regional characteristics and institutional contexts are translated into selection criteria.

What is left unproblematic in this representation?

In Bacchi's WPR approach, representation of the problem carries implicit assumptions and leaves certain aspects unexamined or silent, shaping what is treated as self-evident. Although Measure 6.1 is not explicitly labelled as targeting family farm successors, in practice it largely operates in this way. New entrants without a family farming background rarely participate, aware that their chances of ranking competitively are minimal. As one young farmer explained:

I have a small farm to which I dedicate all my time and the savings I put aside from other jobs. Through hard work, marketing, and study, I managed to make it grow. I could expand and reach more customers, but there are no grants for someone like me: no farming family background, a degree unrelated to agriculture, just a strong desire to build a farm business from scratch. (Young farmer, 30 years old).

All regional calls establish minimum and maximum thresholds for farm and economic size, as promoted at the national level, ostensibly to exclude both very small farms and very large ones deemed not in need of support. While these thresholds are formally broad enough to encompass the predominant farm types in each region, in practice, only farms with a minimum level of structural and financial capacity can realistically access aid (Borda et al. 2023). This dynamic is particularly evident in Clusters 1 and 3, as well as in regions where the youth package is mandatory. Indeed, the requirement for a complex business plan entails substantial investment, only partially covered by the grant and otherwise reliant on private resources, thereby excluding the possibility for young new entrants without family resources to access it, even if they are the ones who genuinely need it.

Moreover, there is no evidence that even the farm holders' children (potential successors) are motivated by the premium to take over the farm. Previous studies have highlighted that engagement in farming is rarely driven solely by financial considerations but rather by a broad range of socio-cultural and personal factors (Conway et al. 2016; Coopmans et al. 2021; Consentino et al. 2023). In this vein, as also noted by Stork (2025), the Measure 6.1 tends to refer

to those who are already motivated to settle in farming or are guided by family involvement, calling into question the actual role and agency of the young beneficiary, who formally becomes an “active young farmer” but may be largely shaped by family decision-making.

Taken together, these elements prompt critical reflection: what remains for potential successors who are not yet sufficiently motivated to pursue an agricultural career, and what opportunities exist for new entrants who are eager to enter farming but lack family resources?

What effects are produced by this representation?

The representations emerging across all clusters define an almost uniform understanding of who is recognized (and then legitimized) as a desirable young farmer. Eligibility and selection criteria emphasize an active farmer (almost full-time) who has inherited land and takes care of a pre-existing farm structure. More in depth, regional approaches vary in defining the desirable young farmer as follows: an entrepreneur capable of generating economic profit for their farm (Cluster 1); an individual educated in agricultural subjects (ranking particularly high if possessing a university degree) or with prior on-farm experience gained before settlement (Cluster 2); an entrepreneur steering their farm towards multifunctionality and innovation (Cluster 3); a young person who settles at a very early age, ideally well before reaching 40, and invests materially in their farm (Cluster 4); and a young woman who establishes herself in sectors that are significant to the local area yet have long been abandoned (Cluster 5).

Alternative farming subjects or approaches risk being marginalised. For instance, those lacking the required backgrounds or resources are implicitly positioned as outsiders in the agricultural sector, reinforcing a discourse that farming remains largely a family inheritance rather than an accessible career choice for all. On a broader scale, such representation could affect not only new entrants, so treated as outsiders, but also an entire category of young potential successors who may feel pressured into inheriting their family's farm even if not fully desirable (Chiswell and Lobley 2018; Consentino et al. 2023). Consequently, if farming risks becoming more of an imposed destiny rather than a conscious choice, the possibility of abandoning the activity at the earliest opportunity is left open.

Adding to this, the fact that selection criteria strongly favor a specific model may discourage alternative or more gradual paths. From the meetings, a strong emphasis emerged on the growing complexity of business models, which leads some beneficiaries to perceive the premium more as a constraint than an opportunity:

I like the idea of being multifunctional, and that's what I'd like to achieve on my farm, but being multifunctional often requires an already strong structure [...] I wasn't ready for it, but I had to commit just to secure some liquidity. (Young beneficiary, 30 years old).

Other observations gathered other interconnected and lived effects: young people intervened less frequently than elder farmers or consultants, showing hesitation and a sense of incomplete legitimacy in their new role as farm holders. Several expressed feelings of inadequacy, while others adopted overtly strategic narratives, describing the measure as something to be “taken advantage of” rather than a step within a vocational trajectory. Intergenerational tensions were recurrent, and not only on a symbolic level. Indeed, many parents effectively retained strong decision-making power because they financially contributed to the investments required by the business plan, covering amounts exceeding the premium or providing liquidity in anticipation of reimbursements. This financial leverage translated into relational leverage, enabling parents to maintain a central role in strategic and operational decisions. Thus, although formally registered as farm holders under Measure 6.1, many young beneficiaries remained in a hybrid position between declared autonomy and material dependence. Adding to this, consultants appeared as key actors, along the lines of elder farmers. What became evident is that they often steer decisions toward what maximises the application's ranking rather than what the farm actually needs:

I often find myself drafting projects solely to ensure that my young clients rank high on the list [...] sometimes they end up having to include investments that do not match the actual needs of their farms. (Agronomist, 50 years old).

Overall, these findings indicate that lived effects extend far beyond access to financial support, encompassing processes of personal legitimisation, family negotiation and influencing the strategic trajectory of the farm itself.

Conclusions: How might this representation be disrupted?

By analysing how each Italian region has interpreted and operationalised the European framework, this study has uncovered the dominant frames through which the problem of generational renewal is constructed. The value of applying Bacchi's WPR approach lies precisely in its ability to unpack both the explicit and implicit dimensions of Measure 6.1, and to reveal the discursive, subjectification, and lived

effects emerging from its regional implementation. Shifting the analytical focus to selection criteria made it possible to observe the measure at the point where it most directly intersects with young people's lived experiences, rather than limiting the analysis to the EU-level policy design. It is indeed regional implementation that shapes access, non-access, and the concrete ways in which young farmers are positioned and supported. The findings show that, as implemented during the previous CAP programming period, the measure tends to reproduce long-standing family-based configurations of production while simultaneously promoting shifts linked to economic competitiveness, multifunctionality and environmental commitments among others. Consistent with van der Ploeg's (2018) argument, these dynamics reflect overlapping tendencies towards both de-peasantisation and re-peasantisation. At the same time, they echo Brent's (2022) notion of regimes of agrarian social reproduction, whereby young farmers formally assume new roles while remaining embedded in entrenched power relations and labour arrangements that shape their pathways into farming. In this sense, this study contributes to the debate by showing how current policies address the questions "generational renewal for whom and for what," while also highlighting how dominant representations may be questioned to open up space for alternative policy solutions.

While it is understandable that current policies pursue multiple objectives, attracting new generations may require standalone strategies: gradual, long-term, gender-sensitive, and supportive of inclusive identity-building processes. The argument here is not for abolishing the first-settlement measure, but for integrating it with additional policy tools. The current strategy could remain directed towards successors already engaged in the family farm, but there is an urgent need to make some adjustments in order to avoid the unintended and silences consequences in real context and lived experiences. For instance, first-settlement aid should avoid overly restrictive selection criteria that may push young people towards projects and investments misaligned with their actual capacities or farm structures. Moving away from a "one size fits all" approach would help better capture the diversity that exists not only across regions but also among farm businesses within the same region. This could also reduce the persistence of hidden or behind-the-scenes parental control and allow business plans to be more effectively managed by young successors themselves.

Potential successors, in turn, could benefit from a transversal set of policy tools sensitive both to their life stage and to broader, non-economic motivations shaping their decision to take over the farm. This calls for non-financial incentives such as access to professional networks, mentoring schemes, and opportunities for temporary experimentation (e.g., co-management with parents for a defined

period). Through such mechanisms, succession would no longer be framed as either an obligatory destiny or an immediate burden, but rather as a process supported by public policies attentive to the complexity of young people's life trajectories.

With regard to new entrants, a broader and more integrated political debate is required. For a long time, the European approach has implicitly treated generational renewal as synonymous with attracting a new generation of farmers' children willing to take over the family holding. Yet previous research (Consentino et al. 2023) has shown that the familial nature of agricultural work can, in some cases, have the opposite effect: some young people may reject the idea of working within the family, while the persistent expectation that "if you are born a farmer's child, you will become a farmer" can undermine perceptions of the sector itself. The presence of young people interested in farming despite not having an agricultural background offers grounds for optimism about the future of the sector (Sutherland 2023; Stork et al. 2025). Nevertheless, much remains to be done to ensure that policy frameworks genuinely support new entrants rather than constraining their opportunities. In this regard, Borrás and Franco (2012) are drawn upon, according to which agricultural policies must be understood in relation to social movements, agrarian struggles, and power relations within the broader system. Beyond measures aimed at overcoming key structural barriers such as access to land and credit, it may therefore be necessary to envisage new institutional contexts and alternative futures.

Our analysis also reveals limited attention to cooperative approaches. Policy frameworks seldom encourage cooperation, despite its growing relevance among younger generations and its potential attractiveness in fragmented and small-scale agricultural contexts (Consentino et al. 2024). Sharing complementary competences, such as managerial, economic, and marketing skills, may prove more effective than relying on a single farm holder. In this sense, cooperative approaches could also encompass civic-led forms of agriculture, involving non-farming actors or local communities. Collaborations between successors and new entrants, for instance, may facilitate valuable exchanges of knowledge and resources, helping to overcome the material constraints typically faced by new entrants. Moreover, other social groups, including migrants and refugees, increasingly express aspirations to engage in farming not merely as casual labourers but as tenant farmers and rural entrepreneurs (McAreavey 2017; McAreavey and Argent 2018; Minkoff-Zern 2025). Opening entry pathways to these groups would not only diversify the profile of new entrants but also expand the portfolio of policy strategies for generational renewal, recognising their potential to contribute to the revitalisation of rural areas. Encouraging cooperative

entry pathways or shared management models also resonate with broader calls within agrarian political economy for forms of farming less dependent on individualised entrepreneurial trajectories and more capable of collectively confronting structural constraints (Borras 2009; van der Ploeg 2018). Such approaches could diversify both who enters farming and which agricultural models become viable for the next generation.

In conclusion, this study underscores the need for a broader debate on generational renewal across all governance levels, from European strategies to regional implementation. While a shared EU framework that explicitly recognises multiple entry pathways appears necessary to enhance coherence and legitimacy, the regional differences identified in this analysis also reveal meaningful spaces of flexibility. The diversity observed across clusters suggests that regions still possess the capacity to orient generational renewal along distinct trajectories. This indicates that, although operating within the border of the overarching CAP architecture, regional policymakers could enhance a potentially transformative approach to generational renewal. This points to a shift from asking whether room for manoeuvre exists to examining how it is enacted and whether there is the willingness to reorient it toward more plural and context-sensitive visions of agricultural futures.

Limitation and future research

This study has some limitations, which also point to directions for future research. Although the primary aim of this study was to conduct a content analysis of Measure 6.1 and to cluster Italian regions into typologies, the observational fieldwork was carried out in only one region. This inevitably limited the ability to fully capture the diversity of implementation contexts and to assess how the identified policy frames translate into lived experiences across different regional clusters. Future research should address this limitation by extending fieldwork to multiple regions, ideally ensuring representation from each identified cluster. Moreover, gaining a more detailed understanding of regional implementation processes would enable future studies to examine how policy representations take shape within specific territorial, institutional, and agricultural contexts. Each region operates within distinct structural constraints, administrative traditions, and farming realities, and analysing these dimensions in greater depth would provide a more nuanced and grounded account of how Measure 6.1 is interpreted and enacted in practice. Finally, this study does not capture the full range of policy instruments that regions may implement alongside Measure 6.1. While the selection grids analysed here reveal a strong and often implicit normative

model of generational renewal, they do not encompass other regional tools that may significantly shape young people's entry pathways into agriculture. This limitation points to the need for future research to investigate regional policy mixes more comprehensively, in order to better understand how different instruments interact in shaping generational renewal trajectories.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-025-10841-x>.

Acknowledgements The authors would like to thank the farmers, agronomists, and agricultural consultants who generously engaged in discussions and shared valuable insights. We are also grateful to the organizers of the meetings and events that made the observational fieldwork possible.

Author contributions All authors contributed to the conception and design of the study. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were performed by Federica Consentino. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Federica Consentino. Iuri Peri provided the conceptual framework, contributed to the analysis of agri-food policies, and supervised the overall research process, offering critical revisions throughout. Ruth McAreavey contributed to the development of the theoretical framework and to the critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content. All authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript, read, and approved the final version.

Funding This research received no external funding.

Data availability The data analysed in this study consist of publicly available calls and policy documents, which can be accessed through the official websites of the relevant regional and national authorities. Further details are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License, which permits any non-commercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this licence to share adapted material derived from this article or parts of it. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

References

- Bacchi, C. 2009. *Analysing policy*. Melbourne: Pearson Higher Education AU.
- Bacchi, C. 2012. Introducing the What's the problem represented to be? Approach. In *Engaging with Carol Bacchi: Strategic Interventions and Exchanges*, 21–24.
- Bacchi, C. 2017. Policies as gendering practices: Re-viewing categorical distinctions. *Journal of Women Politics & Policy* 38(1):20–41.
- Bacchi, C., and S. Goodwin. 2016. *Poststructural policy analysis: A guide to practice*. London: Springer.
- Balezantis, T., E. Ribasauskiene, M. Morkunas, A. Volkov, D. Stremikiene, and P. Toma. 2020. Young farmers' support under the common agricultural policy and sustainability of rural regions: Evidence from Lithuania. *Land Use Policy* 94:104542. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2020.104542>
- Bertolozzi-Caredio, D. 2024. The farm succession effect on farmers' management choices. *Land Use Policy* 137:107014. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2023.107014>
- Borda, Á. J., B. Sárvári, and J. M. Balogh. 2023. Generation change in agriculture: A systematic review of the literature. *Economies* 11(5):129. <https://doi.org/10.3390/economies11050129>
- Borras Jr, S. M. 2009. Agrarian change and peasant studies: changes, continuities and challenges—an introduction. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 36(1):5–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150902820297>
- Borras Jr, S. M., and J. C. Franco. 2012. Global land grabbing and trajectories of agrarian change: A preliminary analysis. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 12(1):34–59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0366.2011.00339.x>
- Bowen, G. A. 2009. Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal* 9(2):27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Brent, Z. W. 2022. *The challenge of generational renewal in post-industrial farming contexts: regimes of agrarian social reproduction in the Basque Country*. PhD thesis, Universidad de Córdoba (UCOPress), Córdoba, Spain.
- Calo, A. 2018. How knowledge deficit interventions fail to resolve beginning farmer challenges. *Agriculture and Human Values* 35(2):367–381. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-017-9832-6>
- Calo, A. 2020. The yeoman myth: A troubling foundation of the beginning farmer movement. *Gastronomica*, 20(2):12–29. <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2020.20.2.12>
- Calo, A., and R. Corbett. 2024. New entrant farming policy as predatory inclusion: (Re)Production of the farm through generational renewal policy programs in Scotland. *Agriculture and Human Values* 41(4):1335–1351. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-024-10557-4>
- Calus, M., and G. Van Huylbroeck. 2010. The persistence of family farming: A review of explanatory Socio-Economic and historical factors. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 41(5):639–660. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.41.5.639>
- Capano, G., and M. Howlett. 2020. The knowns and unknowns of policy instrument analysis: policy tools and the current research agenda on policy mixes. *Sage Open* 10(1):2158244019900568. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019900568>
- Carolan, M. 2018. Lands changing hands: Experiences of succession and farm (knowledge) acquisition among first-generation, multi-generational, and aspiring farmers. *Land Use Policy* 79:179–189. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2018.08.011>
- Cassidy, A., and B. McGrath. 2014. The relationship between 'Non-successor' Farm offspring and the continuity of the Irish family farm. *Sociologia Ruralis* 54(4):399–416. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12054>
- Cavicchioli, D., D. Bertoni, D. G. Frisio, and R. Pretolani. 2019. Does the future of a farm depend on its neighbourhood? Evidence on Intra-Family succession among fruit and vegetable farms in Italy. *Agricultural and Food Economics* 7(1):10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40100-019-0129-5>
- Chatzitheodoridis, F., and A. Kontogeorgos. 2020. New entrants policy into agriculture: Researching new farmers' satisfaction. *Revista De Economia E Sociologia Rural* 58(1):e193664. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1806-9479.2020.193664>
- Cheong, D. D., B. Bock, and D. Roep. 2024. Unpacking gender mainstreaming: A critical discourse analysis of agricultural and rural development policy in Myanmar and Nepal. *Agriculture and Human Values* 41(2):599–613. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-023-10502-x>
- Chiswell, H. M., and M. Loble. 2018. It's definitely a good time to be a farmer: Understanding the changing dynamics of successor creation in late modern society. *Rural Sociology* 83(3):630–653. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12205>
- Consentino, F., G. Vindigni, D. Spina, C. Monaco, and I. Peri. 2023. An agricultural career through the lens of young people. *Sustainability* 15(14):11148. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151411148>
- Consentino, F., I. Peri, M. Litrico, D. Spina, and G. Vindigni. 2024. Mapping young farmers' choice to pursue geographical indication in a rural context: Application of fuzzy cognitive map. *Agricultural and Food Economics* 12(1):44. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40100-024-00340-8>
- Conway, S. F., J. McDonagh, M. Farrell, and A. Kinsella. 2016. Cease agricultural activity forever? Underestimating the importance of symbolic capital. *Journal of Rural Studies* 44:164–176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.01.016>
- Conway, S. F., J. McDonagh, M. Farrell, and A. Kinsella. 2021. Going against the grain: Unravelling the habitus of older farmers to help facilitate generational renewal in agriculture. *Sociologia Ruralis* 61(3):602–622. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12355>
- Coopmans, I., J. Dessein, F. Accatino, F. Antonioli, D. Bertolozzi-Caredio, C. Gavrilescu, and E. Wauters. 2021. Understanding farm generational renewal and its influencing factors in Europe. *Journal of Rural Studies* 86:398–409. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.06.023>
- Creaney, R., H. Hasler, and L. A. Sutherland. 2023. What's in a name? Defining new entrants to farming. *Eurochoices* 22(1):58–65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1746-692X.12382>
- Dörrenbächer, N., and E. Mastenbroek. 2019. Passing the buck? Analyzing the delegation of discretion after transposition of European union law. *Regulation and Governance* 13(1):70–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12153>
- Dwyer, J. C., E. Micha, K. Kubinakova, P. Van Bunnem, B. Schuh, A. Maucorps, and F. Mantino. 2019. *Evaluation of the impact of the CAP on generational Renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas*. Brussels: European Commission.
- Eistrup, M., A. R. Sanches, J. Muñoz-Rojas, and T. Pinto Correia. 2019. A young farmer problem? Opportunities and constraints for generational renewal in farm management: An example from Southern Europe. *Land* 8(4):70. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land8040070>
- European Commission. 2021. *A Long-Term vision for the eu's rural areas – Towards Stronger, Connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040 (COM(2021) 345 Final)*. Brussels: European Commission.
- European Commission. 2023. *Eligibility for direct payments of the common agricultural policy 2023–2027*. Brussels: European Commission. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/index_it
- European Commission. 2024. Assessing generational renewal. In *CAP strategic Plans. Report of the good practice workshop 14–15 March 2024, Croatia*: Zagreb. <https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa>

- [.eu/publications/assessing-generational-renewal-cap-strategic-plans](#)
- Farmers and the Agricultural Labour Force – Statistics Explained. Luxembourg: Eurostat, and Eurostat. 2022. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=685839>
- Everitt, B. S., S. Landau, M. Leese, and D. Stahl. 2011. *Cluster analysis*. 5th ed. West Sussex: Wiley.
- Fanelli, R. M. 2023. Barriers and drivers underpinning newcomers in agriculture: Evidence from Italian census data. *Sustainability* 15(14):10755. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151410755>
- Farrell, M., A. Murtagh, L. Weir, S. F. Conway, J. McDonagh, and M. Mahon. 2021. Irish Organics, innovation and farm collaboration: A pathway to farm viability and generational renewal. *Sustainability* 14(1):93. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14010093>
- Góngora, R., M. J. Milán, and F. López-i-Gelats. 2019. Pathways of incorporation of young farmers into livestock farming. *Land Use Policy* 85:183–194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2019.03.052>
- Hoffelmeyer, M., K. Sexsmith, and L. Glenna. 2024. Divergent approaches to the ‘family farm’: celebrate, reform, or abolish? *Agriculture and Human Values* 41(4):1309–1316. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-024-10628-6>
- Hooghe, L., and G. Marks. 2001. *Multi-Level governance and European integration*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Hsieh, H. F., and S. E. Shannon. 2005. Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research* 15(9):1277–1288.
- Johansson, J., and M. Holmquist. 2024. LEADER and rural development Policy - What's the problem represented to be? *Journal of Rural Studies* 108:103287. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103287>
- Jolliffe, I. T., and J. Cadima. 2016. Principal component analysis: A review and recent developments. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 374(2065):20150202. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2015.0202>
- Ketchen, D. J., and C. L. Shook. 1996. The application of cluster analysis in strategic management research: An analysis and critique. *Strategic Management Journal* 17(6):441–458. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(199606\)17:6<253C441::AID-SMJ819>3.0.CO;2-G](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199606)17:6<253C441::AID-SMJ819>3.0.CO;2-G)
- Le Gouais, A., and E. Wach. 2013. A qualitative analysis of rural water sector policy documents. *Water Alternatives* 6(3):439–461.
- Leonard, B., A. Kinsella, C. O'Donoghue, M. Farrell, and M. Mahon. 2017. Policy drivers of farm succession and inheritance. *Land Use Policy* 61:147–159. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2016.09.006>
- Licciardo, F., B. Zanetti, G. Gargano, S. Tarangioli, and M. Verrascina. 2022. Rural development policies supporting generational renewal: Some evidence from the Italian experience. *Social Policies* 9(1):89–112. <https://doi.org/10.7389/104074>
- Licciardo, F., R. Henke, F. Piras, and B. Zanetti. 2024. The Setting-Up measure to support generational renewal in agriculture: The Italian experience. *World* 5(4):1130–1147. <https://doi.org/10.3390/world5040057>
- Lowe, P., J. Phillipson, A. Proctor, and M. Gkartziou. 2019. Expertise in rural development: A conceptual and empirical analysis. *World Development* 116:28–37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.12.005>
- Marzban, S., M. S. Allahyari, and C. A. Damalas. 2016. Exploring farmers' orientation towards multifunctional agriculture: Insights from Northern Iran. *Land Use Policy* 59:121–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2016.08.020>
- Mattas, K., C. Staboulis, E. Tsakiridou, D. Natos, A. Polymeros, P. Baranowski, and F. Arfini. 2024. Facilitating generational renewal in rural areas by responding to young farmers' voices: Echoes from the Greek territory. *Journal of Rural Studies* 112:103480. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103480>
- May, D., S. Arancibia, K. Behrendt, and J. Adams. 2019. Preventing young farmers from leaving the farm: Investigating the effectiveness of the young farmer payment using a behavioural approach. *Land Use Policy* 82:317–327. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2018.12.019>
- McAreavey, R. 2017. *New immigration destinations: Migrating to rural and peripheral areas*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9780415540056>
- McAreavey, R., and N. Argent. 2018. Migrant integration in rural new immigration destinations: An institutional and triangular perspective. *Journal of Rural Studies* 64:267–275. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2018.08.001>
- Michalek, J., P. Ciaian, and F. Di Marcontonio. 2020. Regional impacts of the EU rural development programme: Poland's food processing sector. *Regional Studies* 54(10):1389–1401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1708306>
- Minkoff-Zern, L. A. 2025. Land access among immigrant Latinx workers and farmers in the united states: racialization, invisibility, and possibilities for reform. *Agriculture and Human Values* 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-025-10744-x>
- Mishra, A. K., H. S. El-Osta, and S. Shaik. 2010. Succession decisions in US family farm businesses. *Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, 133–152. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23243041>
- Nazzaro, C., and G. Marotta. 2016. The common agricultural policy 2014–2020: Scenarios for the European agricultural and rural systems. *Agricultural and Food Economics* 4(1):16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40100-016-0060-y>
- Pérez, R. D. G., M. J. M. Sendra, and F. López-i-Gelats. 2020. Strategies and drivers determining the incorporation of young farmers into the livestock sector. *Journal of Rural Studies* 78:131–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.06.028>
- Pettersson, K., H. Ahl, K. Berglund, and M. Tillmar. 2025. Paying lip service to gender inequality: EU rural development policy in Sweden. *Gender Place & Culture* 32(5):641–663. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2024.2312358>
- Rousseeuw, P. J. 1987. Silhouettes: A graphical aid to the interpretation and validation of cluster analysis. *Journal of Computational and Applied Mathematics* 20:53–65. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0377-0427\(87\)90125-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0377-0427(87)90125-7)
- Šajin, N. 2025. *Generational renewal in EU agriculture (EPRS briefing PE 772.876)*. Brussels: European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)772876](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2025)772876)
- Sarkar, A., H. Wang, A. Rahman, J. A. Azim, W. H. Memon, and L. Qian. 2022. Structural equation model of young farmers' intention to adopt sustainable agriculture: A case study in Bangladesh. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* 37(2):142–154. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742170521000429>
- Schreier, M. 2012. *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. London: Sage.
- Shortall, S., A. McKee, and L. A. Sutherland. 2020. The performance of occupational closure: The case of agriculture and gender. *Sociologia Ruralis* 60(1):40–57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12279>
- Sivini, S., and A. Vitale. 2023. Multifunctional and agroecological agriculture as pathways of generational renewal in Italian rural areas. *Sustainability* 15(7):5990. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15075990>
- Stork, S., W. Lorleberg, B. Pölling, X. Yu, and J. H. Feil. 2025. Towards better tailored new entrant support in European agriculture: Analysing the differences between family successors and newcomers. *Journal of Rural Studies* 119:103787. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2025.103787>

- Sutherland, L. A. 2023. Who do we want our 'new generation' of farmers to be? The need for demographic reform in European agriculture. *Agricultural and Food Economics* 11(1):3. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40100-023-00244-z>
- Taylor, M., and S. Bhasme. 2018. Model Farmers, extension networks and the politics of agricultural knowledge transfer. *Journal of Rural Studies* 64:1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2018.09.015>
- Thomann, E. 2015. Customizing europe: Transposition as Bottom-Up implementation. *Journal of European Public Policy* 22(10):1368–1387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2015.1008554>
- Thomann, E., and F. Sager. 2017. Toward a better Understanding of implementation performance in the EU multilevel system. *Journal of European Public Policy* 24(9):1385–1407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2017.1314542>
- Van der Ploeg, J. D. 2018. From de-to repeasantization: The modernization of agriculture revisited. *Journal of Rural Studies* 61:236–243. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.12.016>
- Villán, A., S. Villamayor-Tomás, and E. Corbera. 2025. Family farm succession and agroecology? A life-history approach to young farmers' sustainability strategies. *Journal of Rural Studies* 120:103815. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2025.103815>
- Ville, A., G. Wong, A. J. Aceituno, A. Downing, M. Karambiri, and M. Brockhaus. 2023. What is the 'Problem' of gender inequality represented to be in the Swedish forest sector? *Environmental Science & Policy* 140:46–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2022.11.013>
- Ward, J. H. 1963. Hierarchical grouping to optimize an objective function. *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 58(301):236–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01621459.1963.10500845>
- Weber, R. P. 1990. *Basic content analysis*. vol. 49 Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Yin, R. K. 2018. *Case study research and applications*. 6th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Žabko, O., and T. Tisenkopfs. 2022. New entrants need tailored farm advice. *Eurochoices* 21(1):63–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1746-692X.12349>
- Zagata, L., and L. A. Sutherland. 2015. Deconstructing the young farmer problem in europe: Towards a research agenda. *Journal of Rural Studies* 38:39–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.01.003>

Publisher's note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Federica Consentino is a PhD candidate in Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Catania, where she is in the final stage of her doctoral studies. Her research combines economic and policy analysis with sociological perspectives, focusing on young farmers, generational renewal, agricultural policy, and the valorization of biodiversity in agri-food systems. She has undertaken visiting research at Newcastle University and has already published scientific works both within the framework of her doctoral project and beyond. Through accredited courses and advanced training, she has acquired expertise in both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Her doctoral thesis, entitled *Generational Renewal in Agriculture: A Multi-Level and Multi-Dimensional Analysis*, aims to assess the interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors shaping generational renewal at European, national, and regional levels.

Ruth McAreavey is Professor of Sociology in Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University. Her research focuses on migration, governance, and ethics, with particular attention to the inequalities faced by migrants in the labour market and in everyday life. She has published extensively on rural governance, regeneration, international migration, and research ethics and methodologies. She has a strong practitioner background, having previously worked in the voluntary and community sector and in local government, and continues to collaborate with external partners, including third sector organisations and local authorities. She has obtained funding from research foundations, government, and industry, with projects generating significant social and policy impact. She is co-editor-in-chief of *Sociologia Ruralis*, an elected Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, and an active member of international research networks including the European Society for Rural Sociology and the European Sociological Association.

Iuri Peri is Associate Professor at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Catania, where he also serves as Director of the Master's Programme in Viticulture, Enology and Wine Marketing. His expertise covers both qualitative and quantitative analyses of EU agri-food policies, multi-level governance at regional and local levels, and rural development strategies. His research interests include food quality schemes, food safety, sustainability, bioeconomy, and the use of geospatial analysis to study local agri-food systems. He has collaborated with various international institutions such as the European Commission (DG SANCO), OECD, and CIHEAM, and has been involved in several international study and research programmes, including AgriMundus-Agrinatura, AgTrain, UNESCO Chairs, Tempus-QESAMed, ENPI CBC LactiMed, and UNITWIN UNESCO. He has also coordinated Interreg projects, including SEA MARVEL, aimed at promoting sustainable development and the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems.