

Laura Costantino, *Profili giuridici dei sistemi produttivi agroalimentari locali nell'era della sostenibilità*, Torino (Italia), Giappichelli Editore, 2024, 192 páginas.



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The research carried out in the book *Legal profiles of local agri-food production systems in the era of sustainability* analyses the agrifood system taking into consideration the relationship between the local dimension of the market and the valorisation of the territory, highlighting the public and private legal instruments for governing this segment of the food system.

The book points out the relationship between globalization and territoriality, by reconstructing the phenomenon looking at its evolution, with reference to agricultural businesses and market regulation, in the national and European Union context. Special attention is given to legal instruments that enable the development of local production systems in the perspective of sustainability.

In the panorama of recent studies on agricultural and food law, Laura Costantino's monographic work stands out for two reasons. The first reason is the choice of the topic addressed, concerning the analysis of "local agri-food production systems", thus identifying a precise aspect: the local markets. This topic – little explored so far by Italian scholars of agricultural and food law – is developed by the author from a system perspective.

The second reason is given by the innovative conclusions reached by the author, through the careful analysis of the legislative policy choices and legal instruments available within the framework of market rules. Local productions are analysed by highlighting their dynamic approach, as well as the aspects that project these experiences towards a productive and social liveliness.

The result paints a picture that places local agri-food production in a very different perspective from the idea of "resilient agriculture" in which production activity risks being relegated to local dimensions, in the face of the "competitiveness" of global markets.

As for the first consideration, it should be noted that the book places the development of agri-food production of local relevance in the context of the study of "sustainable food systems", which starts from a comparison between

the European approach to global markets, highlighting the reasons for the decline, and the "rediscovery" of local productions.

In this sense, the book analyses the legislative and contextual changes that lead to a reinterpretation by the legislator of the way of considering territorial realities (local, but still productive) that – until the crises of recent years – seemed destined to be the subject of a substantial transformation towards an almost standardized model of competitiveness, that is, relegated to merely conservative situations to avoid the abandonment of rural areas, mainly through support mechanisms.

The analysis goes further. The author highlights the trend to revise the entire structural model of the agri-food market, thanks to the need to promote the conservation of agricultural production within the territory of the Union, characterized by the emergence of "food security" goals – in the sense of guaranteeing food supply, net of extra-EU imports. In this regard, it is stated that "we are witnessing a significant reversal of the approach followed so far in the construction of the rules governing the agricultural sector: the role of the territories acquires a renewed centrality in consideration of the objectives that the current agricultural policy intends to achieve and which respond to a decisive overcoming of the critical issues that have arisen in the face of an economic system focused on the absence of territoriality".

In this way it is possible to discuss local agri-food production "systems". The use of the plural – systems – highlights the peculiarity of the different forms of agriculture, linked to the territories and their diversity, which due to their intrinsic characteristics are able to achieve and enhance the transition towards sustainability objectives, in the three dimensions: environmental, economic and social one.

Face to the unavoidable variety of types of "local agriculture", deriving from the diversity of the territories, the book explores the presence of an alternative model of productive development of the agri-food market. The territorial production, through the enhancement of the local dimension of agricultural production, acquires its own identity that contrasts with the massification of agricultural production in the agro-industrial chain.

In this perspective, the author analyses the different legal instruments that lead to a new dimension of development of local production realities.

The legal instruments developed concretely at national level to enhance the local experiences of agri-food production are deeply discussed in the book. The author focuses attention on the figures of food districts, an Italian legal scheme for the "public" enhancement of local food policies, characterized by the creation of sectoral production districts. The

effectiveness of this legal instrument is compared with the legal scheme of the network contract, by pointing out the critical issues and the substantial incompleteness with respect to the developments expected from the use of the contractual scheme in the agricultural sector.

Beyond the specificities of national regulation, the analysis of the "tools" continues by identifying three regulatory mechanisms that make it possible to enhance local production experiences, using legal rules, rather than merely promotional mechanisms intended to support rural development.

Following this interpretation, the Author first recalls the legal discipline that allows "the revival of biodiversity", referring not only to the place that these aspects assume in the context of the Green Deal and the consequent choices in the field of agricultural policy, but also to the detail of the legislation on the protection of seed biodiversity, pointing out the regulatory aspects that are reflected in the enhancement of the activities local agricultural production systems, aimed at protecting varieties at risk of extinction.

A second regulatory strand identified as a tool for the development of local production systems is the territorial enhancement of agricultural products. The relevance of these tools at European and national level is highlighted. This is about the geographical indications established at European level – PDO and PGI system, the "quality systems" of agri-food products structured at European level; as well as the series of legal instruments to promote local agriculture laid down at national level.

In the book emerges the relevance of the tools for the local enhancement of agricultural production with respect to local food policies. The breadth of these is emphasized, as it aims to include the entire management of territories and food production, with a view to connecting rural and urban areas.

Finally, a further aspect highlighted in the book, among the legal instruments aimed at promoting the development of local agriculture, are the welfare activities entrusted to agricultural enterprises, through the regulatory models for the promotion of social agriculture, which is thoroughly regulated in Italian legislation.

The analysis carried out in this book results in a very well-argued framework of the legal instruments that contribute to the construction of "local production systems", based on biodiversity, the valorisation of local food production and the socially relevant services provided by agricultural enterprises. The analysis shows not only the functionality with respect to the construction of the "local production system" model, but also the impact on the sustainability and growth of the territories, by outlining the potential development of the agricultural sector, especially in relation to the

consequences of the crises that have led to a revision of the regulation of agri-food markets.

In fact, to conclude the framework of the legal instruments, the Author dwells on the changes that have affected the figure of agricultural producers' organizations, now essential in the European design of structuring the agri-food market. In this regard, the need to recognize an adequate space for small producers and their needs is important, also in the context of a system aimed at consolidating and increasing the associative functions through the figure of groups. Increasingly relevant market functions are assigned to producers' organizations, which are projected towards dimensional characteristics such as to stand up to comparison with the operators downstream of the agri-food market. In this, the attention to small producers and to the maintenance of the possibility of developing local markets is highlighted, in the discussion, as symptomatic of the legislative policy choices that move in the direction indicated in the research.

The book therefore clearly outlines the development of locally relevant agricultural production. Laura Costantino examines political choices and regulatory instruments through a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon and highlights their full integration in the mechanisms of the agri-food market, articulating a model that allows for the combination of agricultural competitiveness with the sustainability of rural areas.

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