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## MAPPING COOPERATIVES IN ITALY\*

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this contribution is to photograph and describe, with reasonable accuracy and beginning from the territorial, time and sectoral distribution, the Italian cooperative universe in all its main economic, size and qualitative variables. In the light of the economic crisis triggered by the present epidemic, the mapping work also takes on a further importance in outlining a perspective of analyses on the future impacts of the recession, on the resilience of the cooperative movement and on the role it will be able to play in counteracting the decline in industry and employment.

**Keywords:** Cooperatives; Mapping; Italy

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**JEL Classifications:** J54, P13, Q13

### 1. Introduction

Since the post-second world war, the academic debate has gradually confined the discussions and research on the cooperative movement to a residual space in the economic literature and in books on enterprise management (Kalmi, 2016). Moreover, up to now, the difficulty in gathering data and the fragmentary nature of the local sources (Bernardi, Treu, Tridico, 2011), as well as the lack of a clear and universally shared definition of a cooperative, have hindered the creation of a comprehensive global database that would allow for a full-scale

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reading of the cooperative movement under its manifold aspects. An internationally recognised definition of a cooperative enterprise was only reached in 1995 (ICA, 1995), during the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) Centenary, after a lengthy consultation involving thousands of co-operatives from around the world.

From then on, over the last decade, some important steps have been made in recognising and taking into consideration the value of the cooperative world, both at international and national level. The valuable work carried out in recent years by ICA-Euricse (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019) has to be seen in this context. According to ICA data (2019a, 2019b), cooperatives now play a key role in the world's economic system. The approximate 2,000 billion dollars in turnover generated by the top 300 cooperative enterprises in the world out of the 3 million cooperatives registered in 156 countries, in addition to the more than one billion members and 280 million employees, are important indicators of the scale of this phenomenon.

In Italy, especially starting from the first decade of the century, there is no lack of important contributions in the work of mapping and measuring the Italian cooperative movement (Borzaga, 2017; Borzaga, C. Carini, C. Carpita, M., Lori, M., 2016; Borzaga, C. Calzaroni, M., Lori M., 2016; Costa, E., Carini, C., Borzaga, C., 2013; Euricse 2011, 2013, 2015; ISTAT, 2017; ISTAT-Euricse, 2019; Mazzoli, E., Zamagni, S. 2005; Zamagni S., Zamagni V. 2011, 2019; Zamagni, V. 2006). In this scenario, the purpose of this contribution is to photograph and describe, with reasonable accuracy and beginning from the territorial, time and sectoral distribution, the Italian cooperative universe in all its main economic, size and qualitative variables. In the light of the economic crisis triggered by the present epidemic, the mapping work also takes on a further importance in outlining a perspective of analyses on the future impacts of the recession, on the resilience of the cooperative movement (Berranger, C. Monni S, Realini, A., 2020; Bernardi and Monni, 2016; Bernardi and Monni, 2019; Demartini, P., Monni, S. eds., 2017; Zamagni and Zamagni, 2019; Zamagni, V., 2020; Mazzanti, M., Mazzarano, M., Pronti, A., Quatrosi, M. 2020) and on the role it will be able to play in counteracting the decline in industry and employment. The rate of survival and average lifespan of the worker buyouts carried out in Italy under a cooperative model (Demartini, P., Monni, S., 2017; Monni et al., 2017a; Monni et al., 2017b; Monni et al., 2017c; Area Studi Legacoop, 2020a; Vieta, 2015, 2016), are the proof of this, showing the economic and social success of this type of management opportunity as a response to company crises.

In the opening section, the numbers and general aspects of the Italian cooperative system as a whole will be presented. Subsequently, the territorial distribution of Italian cooperatives will be analysed under the three main aspects: numbers, production and employment. In the third sub-section, the descriptive analysis will focus on the size classes of cooperative enterprises. The Italian peculiarity, the distinction between prevailing and non-prevailing mutuality (better specified in the reference sub-section), will be dealt with in the fourth sub-section. In the fifth, the new start-up and 100 year old cooperatives, the Italian cooperative enterprises will be classified on the basis of the years of activity. Finally, the numerical, productive and employment aspects of the Italian cooperatives will be redistributed on the basis of the sectors of their economic activity.

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## **2. The aspects of the Italian cooperative world**

The analysis is the result of tapping into a combination of different data banks. Specifically, the economic and employment data, taken from the Aida-Bureau Van Dijk databank (2020), was integrated with the information taken from the Cooperative Register of the Ministry of Economic Development (2020) and Legacoop's Area Studi data bank. The level of coverage for the cooperative universe does not coincide in the different sources used, both as regards the number and typology of the data. As far as the sample selection and the main classifications adopted are concerned, information can be found in the methodological note.

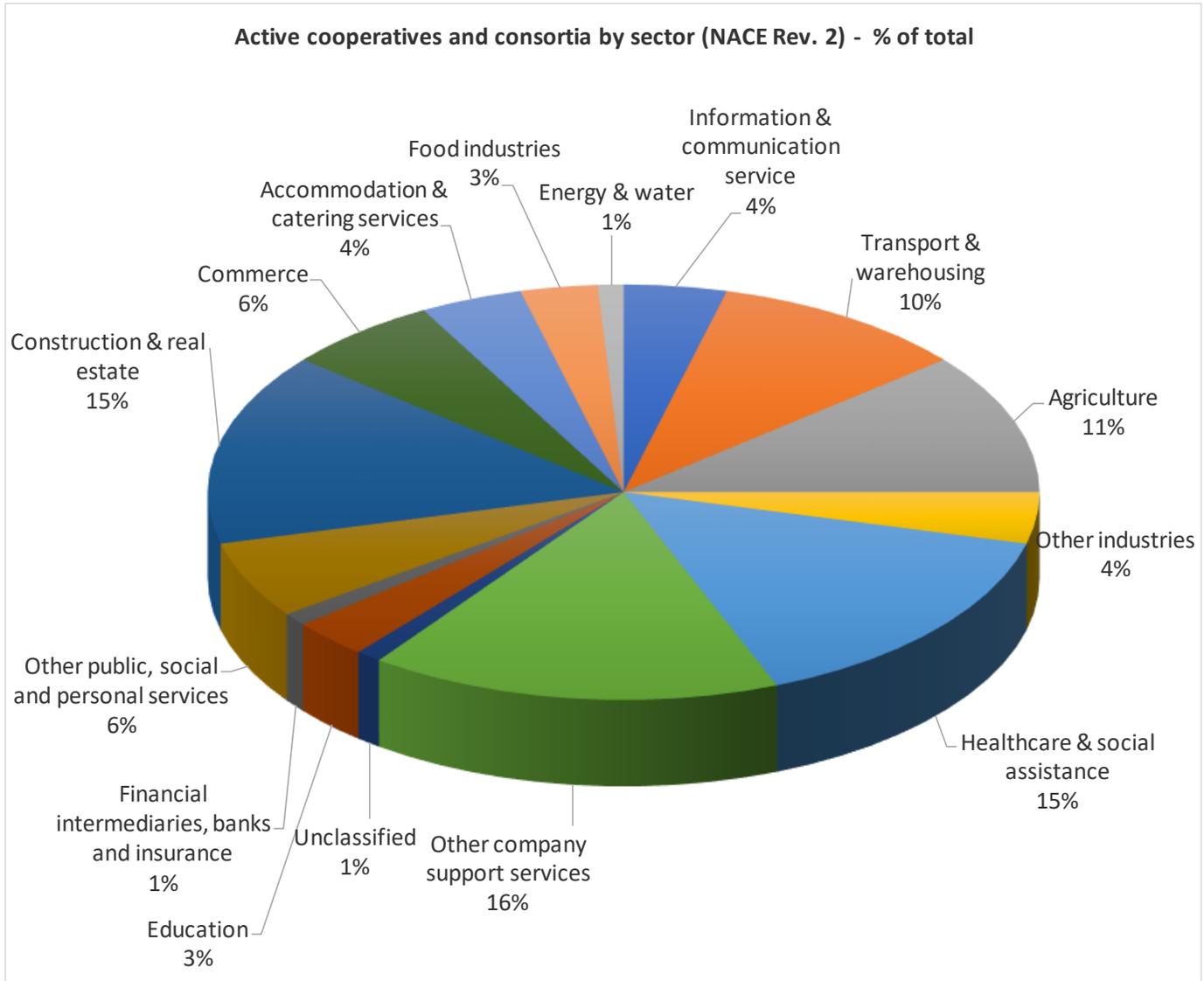
It should be mentioned that what emerges from the analysis of the balance and employee data (Aida-Bureau Van Dijk databank, 2020) does not take into account the actual magnitude of the cooperative sector. This is due to the fact that the universe considered is limited only to enterprises that, at the time of data extraction, had presented their balances to the Chamber of Commerce. Therefore, as far as the economic and financial data is concerned, it is impossible to include, because of discrepancies in the adopted balance framework, the credit unions, the cooperative banks, the financial intermediaries, the smaller credit consortia, the credit guarantee consortia and cooperatives and the insurance companies.

The total of the cooperative enterprises and consortia that we can consider active<sup>†</sup> numbers 61,274 which are quite evenly distributed across the main business sectors (Fig. 1). However, a higher representativeness can be seen in the sectors of company support services, construction and real estate, healthcare and social assistance, logistics and agriculture.

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<sup>†</sup> Cooperatives considered active are all those enrolled on the Company Register which, at the time of reference, did not have any insolvency procedures underway and which, except for companies set up after 1/1/2016, had lodged at least one financial balance with the Chamber of Commerce between 1/1/2017 and 31/12/2019.

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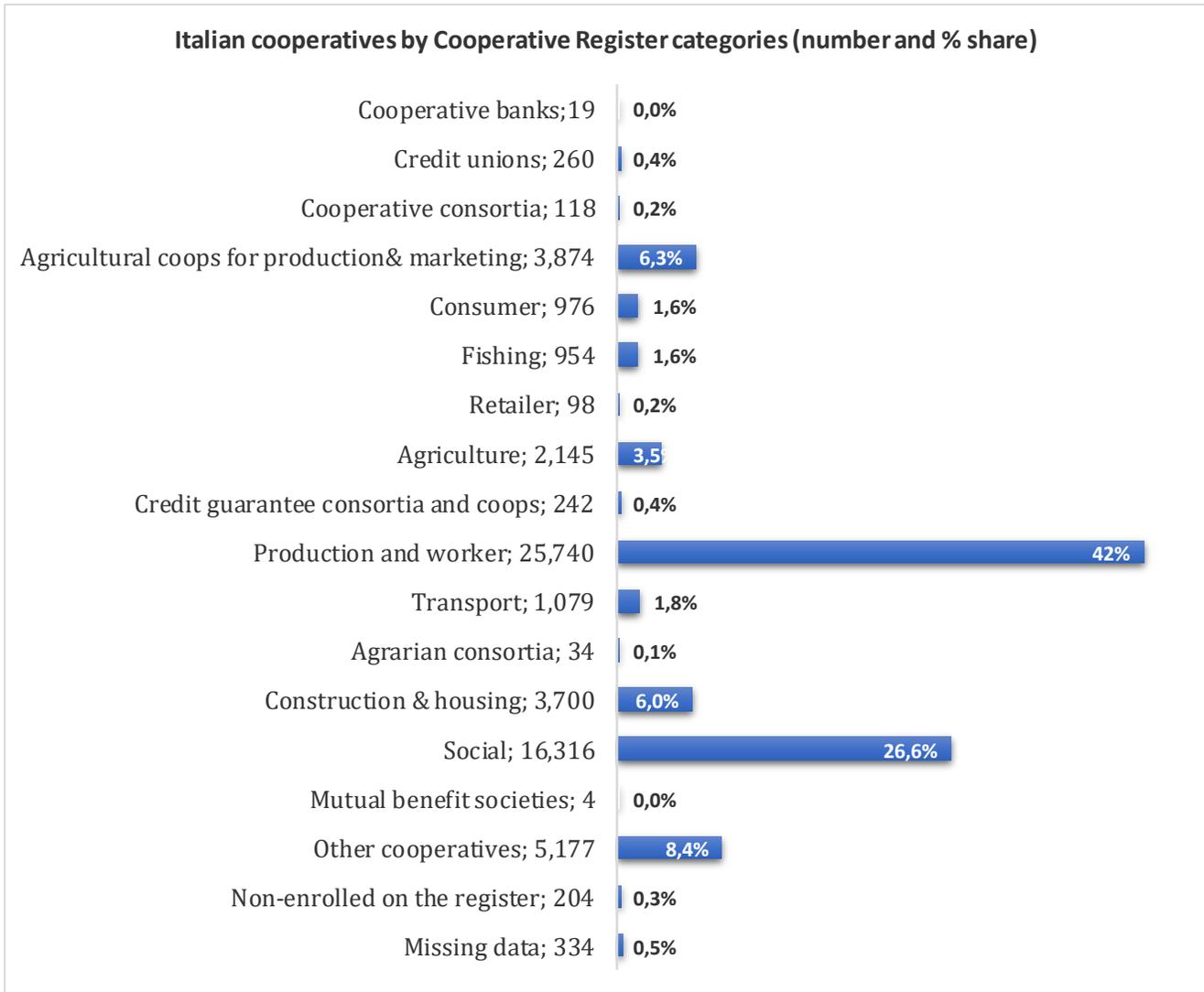


**Fig. 1.** Active cooperatives and consortia by sector

Source: Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

Out of the total of cooperatives considered active at the date of data elaboration, 0.3 % was not enrolled on the Cooperative Register (Fig. 2). The Italian Cooperative Register shows that more than 42 % of that enrolled fall into the Production and Worker Cooperatives group, while 26.6 % accounts for the Social Cooperatives, followed by “Other Cooperatives”, Agricultural cooperatives for production and marketing and Construction and Housing Cooperatives.

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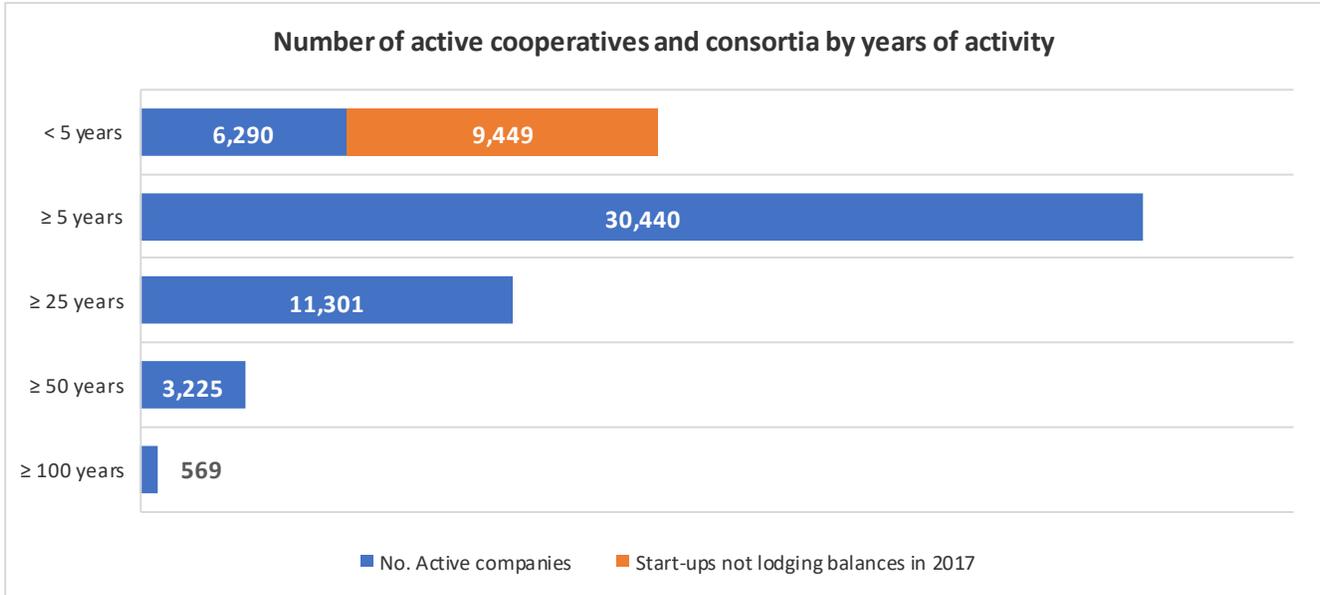


**Fig. 2** Italian cooperatives by sector (Cooperative Register categories)

Source: Ministry of Economic Development (MISE) – Italian Cooperative Register (2020)

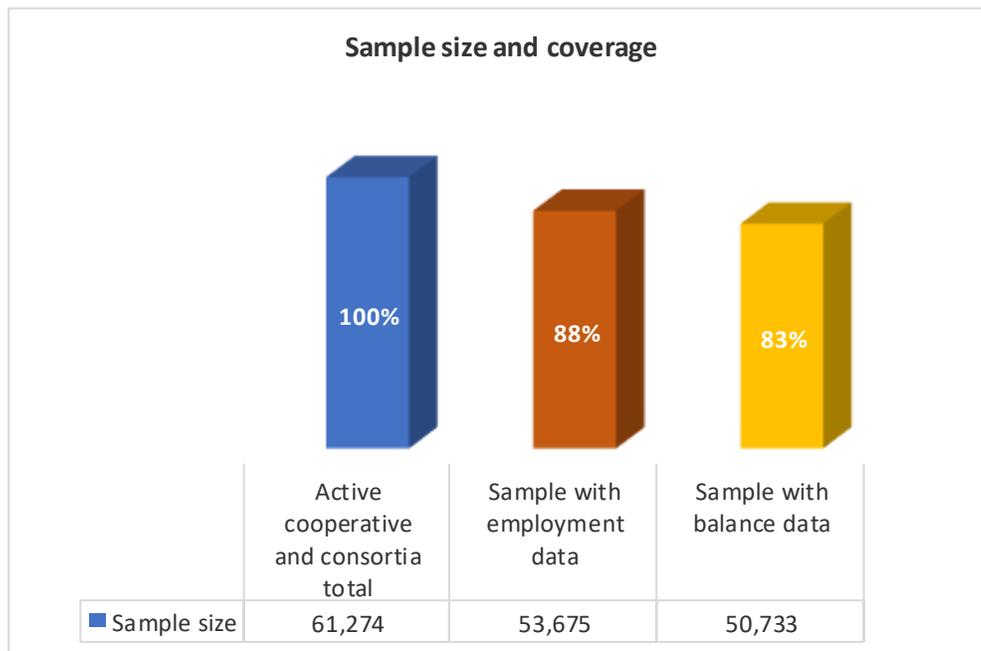
Instead, out of the total enterprises considered active, it was possible to find employment data on 53,675 cooperatives and consortia and financial balance data on 50,733 cooperatives for 2017. The lack of balance data for 2017 for a significant part of the active cooperatives can be mainly explained by the presence of 9,449 cooperatives and consortia set up from 2016 (Fig. 3) and which did not present a financial report in 2017 and, as previously mentioned, by the choice to exclude the finance, banking and insurance sectors. Nevertheless, the data available accounts for more than 83% of the active enterprises in the Italian cooperative sector (Fig. 4) and, therefore, allows for drawing the quite accurate perimeters.

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**Fig. 3.** Number of active cooperatives and consortia by years of activity

Source: Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)



**Fig. 4.** Sample size and coverage

Source: Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

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Finally, to establish how many cooperative enterprises operate within the Italian productive and social fabric, two precise indicators were chosen on a provincial basis<sup>‡</sup> - the economic density index (ED) and the number of workers per 1,000 residents. The ED index expresses, in numerical terms, the percentage of cooperatives in each territorial unit (province) compared to the national total of active cooperatives, while the latter renders the 1/1,000 share of workers out of the total number of residents per territorial unit.

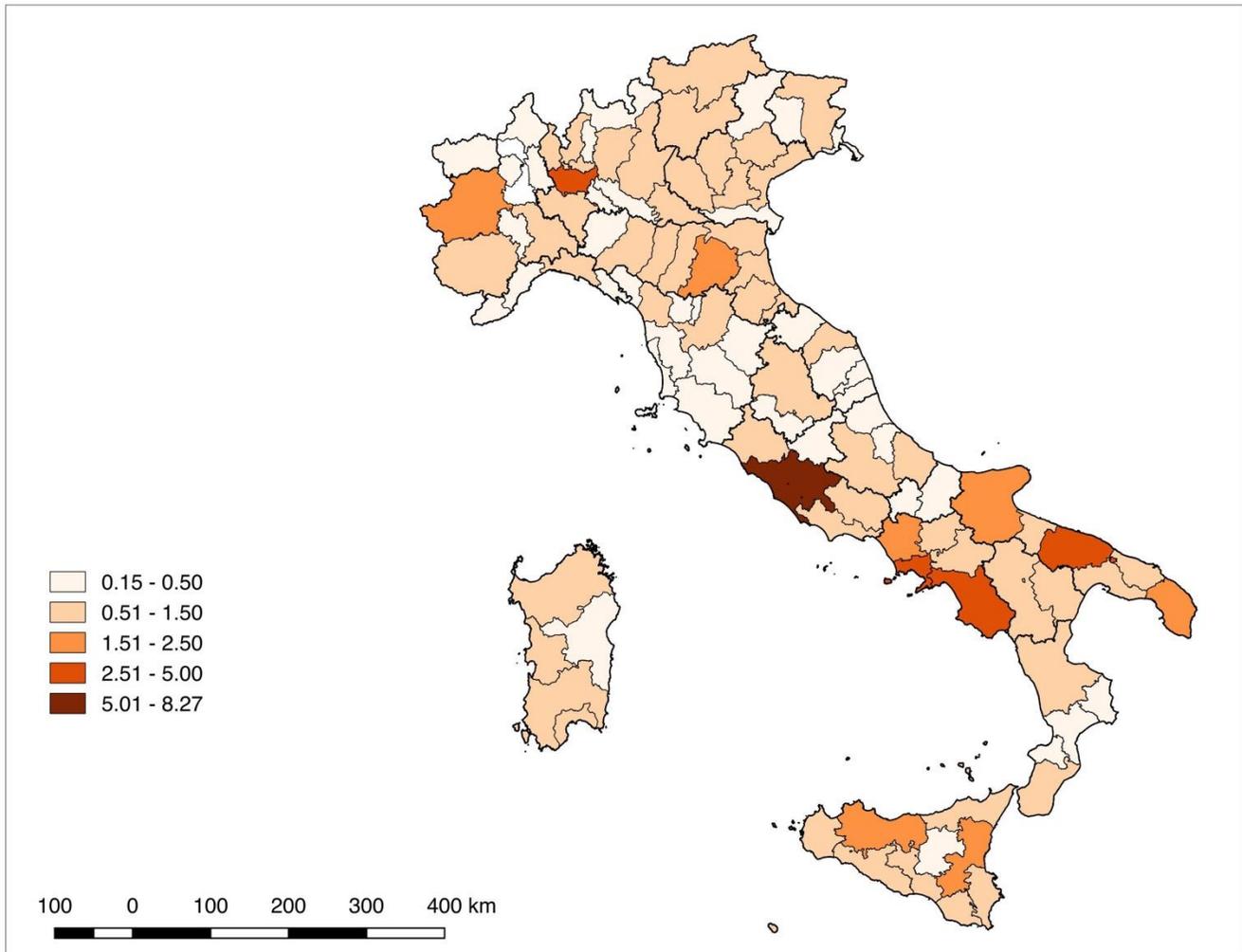
The average ED value per province, Italy-wide, is 0.93, while the median value is 0.63. From a macro-territorial viewpoint, the value revealed in the provinces of Southern Italy and the Islands, is on an average higher than those observed for the Centre-North provinces. In the southern provinces, the share of enterprises set up as cooperatives is on average 1.2 % compared to the national total, while in the centre-northern provinces, the average ED value is 0.70. The data for the more densely populated provinces – Rome, Milan and Naples – is quite comprehensible, where the cooperative ED values are well above the average. For example, the Rome province headquarters 8.6% of Italian cooperative enterprises.

Where employment is concerned, on average, for every 1,000 residents, 18.6 are employed in cooperatives. 30 provinces, involving 107 second level government bodies have been considered, all situated in the Centre-North of the country and with a population of 21,974,275 inhabitants, with more than 20 employees for every 1,000 residents. From a macro-territorial point of view, the values revealed highlight a picture diametrically opposite to what emerged from the observation of the median ED values. The median value of the provinces in the Centre-North is 22.3 (24.7 in the northern provinces) cooperative employees per 1,000 inhabitants, while in the southern and island provinces the same median coefficient drops to 11.9. It can also be noted that in the Bologna and Reggio Emilia provinces, approximately 9% of inhabitants are employed in cooperatives.

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<sup>‡</sup> 100 second level government bodies (80 provinces, 14 metropolitan cities, and 6 autonomous municipal consortia in Sicily); 2 autonomous provinces in Trentino-Alto-Adige; 5 cancelled provinces in Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Valle d'Aosta, are considered here for statistical and information organisation purposes.

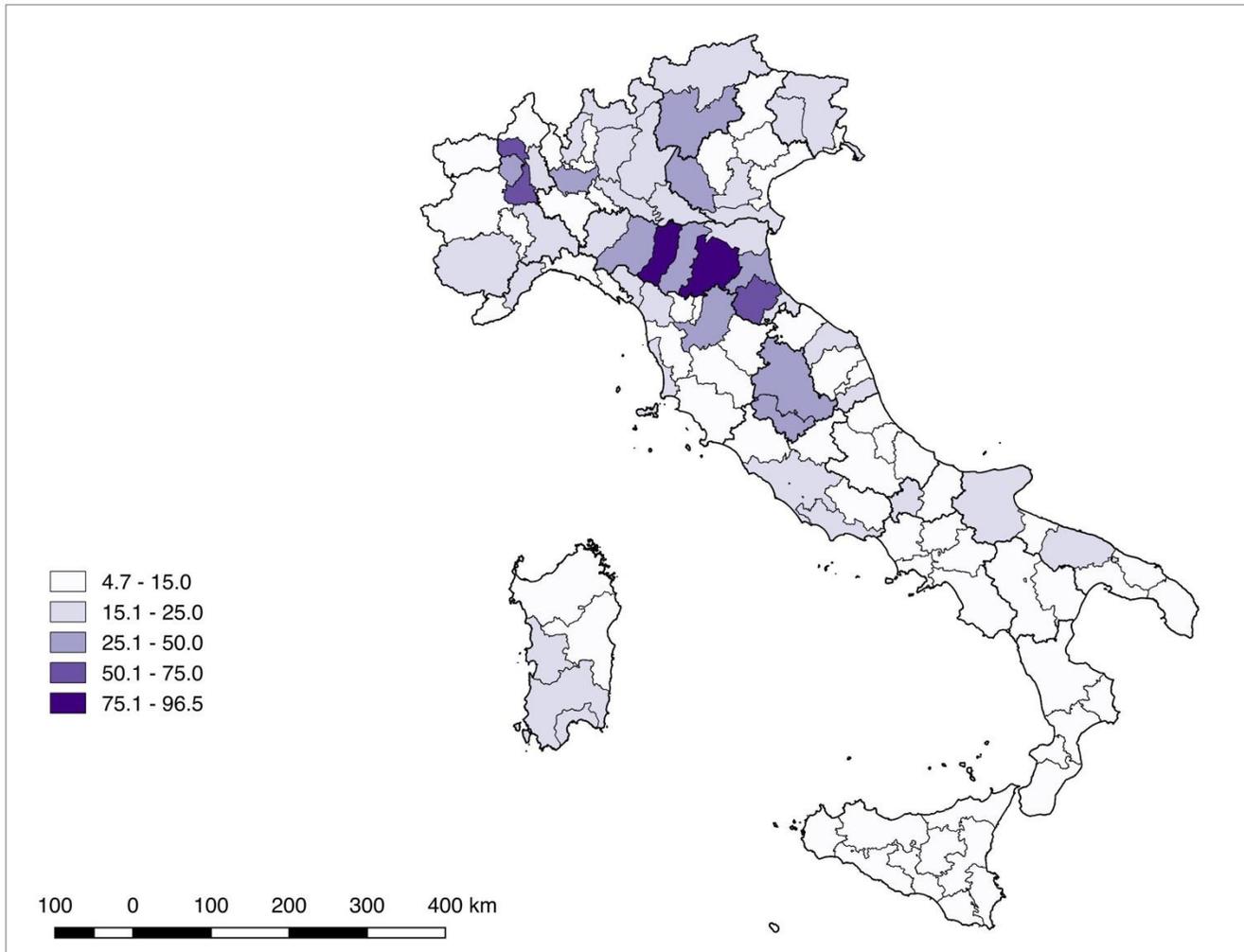
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**Fig. 5.** Economic density of cooperative enterprises at the provincial level, 2017 (%)

*Source:* Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

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**Fig. 6.** No. employees per 1,000 inhabitants at the provincial level, 2019

*Source:* Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

## 2.1. Italian territorial distribution

Based on the financial balances and the employment data available for 2017, the Italian cooperative sector generated a total turnover<sup>§</sup> of more than 122 billion euros, equal to 4 % of the turnover of private Italian

<sup>§</sup> There is a discrepancy in the cooperative universe coverage between the sample analysed for the economic and financial analysis and the sample used for employment data gathering. The main economic and financial variables take into account 50,733 companies with data available for 2017, and do not include the credit unions and cooperative banks (279 in total), the financial intermediaries and smaller credit consortia (29 in total), the credit guarantee consortia and cooperatives (282) and the insurance companies. Employment takes into account a wider sample of 53,675 enterprises, which includes, besides the companies analysed for the economic and financial aspects, the credit

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companies (ISTAT, 2017), and employs 1.18 million workers accounting for more than 7% of total employment for Italian private companies (ISTAT, 2017).

Approximately 60 % of employees can be found in the cooperatives and consortia with headquarters in the northern regions, despite 66 % of the companies being, instead, distributed in the central southern and island areas (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Regional distribution of Italian cooperatives – no. of employees (members and non-members)

AREA/REGION	No.	%	EMPLOYEES	%
<b>North West</b>	<b>9,953</b>	<b>18.5%</b>	<b>308,739</b>	<b>26.1%</b>
Valle d'Aosta	159	0.3%	1,964	0.2%
Piedmont	2,396	4.5%	80,086	6.8%
Lombardy	6,381	11.9%	203,673	17.2%
Liguria	1,017	1.9%	23,016	1.9%
<b>North East</b>	<b>8,346</b>	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>395,207</b>	<b>33.4%</b>
Veneto	2,644	4.9%	90,827	7.7%
Trentino-Alto Adige	1,257	2.3%	30,636	2.6%
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	737	1.4%	24,916	2.1%
Emilia-Romagna	3,708	6.9%	248,828	21.0%
<b>Centre</b>	<b>11,228</b>	<b>20.9%</b>	<b>240,077</b>	<b>20.3%</b>
Umbria	663	1.2%	25,253	2.1%
Tuscany	2,692	5.0%	78,645	6.6%
Marche	1,310	2.4%	23,758	2.0%
Lazio	6,563	12.2%	112,421	9.5%
<b>South</b>	<b>15,503</b>	<b>28.9%</b>	<b>158,445</b>	<b>13.4%</b>
Apulia	5,394	10.0%	63,621	5.4%
Molise	349	0.7%	3,688	0.3%
Campania	5,958	11.1%	52,792	4.5%
Calabria	1,737	3.2%	14,539	1.2%
Basilicata	951	1.8%	7,376	0.6%
Abruzzo	1,114	2.1%	16,429	1.4%
<b>The Islands</b>	<b>8,645</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	<b>80,476</b>	<b>6.8%</b>
Sicily	6,206	11.6%	53,502	4.5%
Sardinia	2,439	4.5%	26,974	2.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53,675</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,182,944</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

Therefore, where the employment data is concerned, it is not surprising that 70% of the total turnover is generated by companies in the North of Italy (Table 2), clearly led by the North-East, and followed by Emilia-Romagna, that produced 50% of the total turnover with an average capitalisation ten times greater than that recorded for the companies in the South and the Islands.

unions, the cooperative banks, the financial intermediaries, the smaller credit consortia, the credit guarantee consortia and cooperatives, the insurance companies, and 2,641 enterprises where it was possible to integrate the data missing for 2017 (see methodology note).

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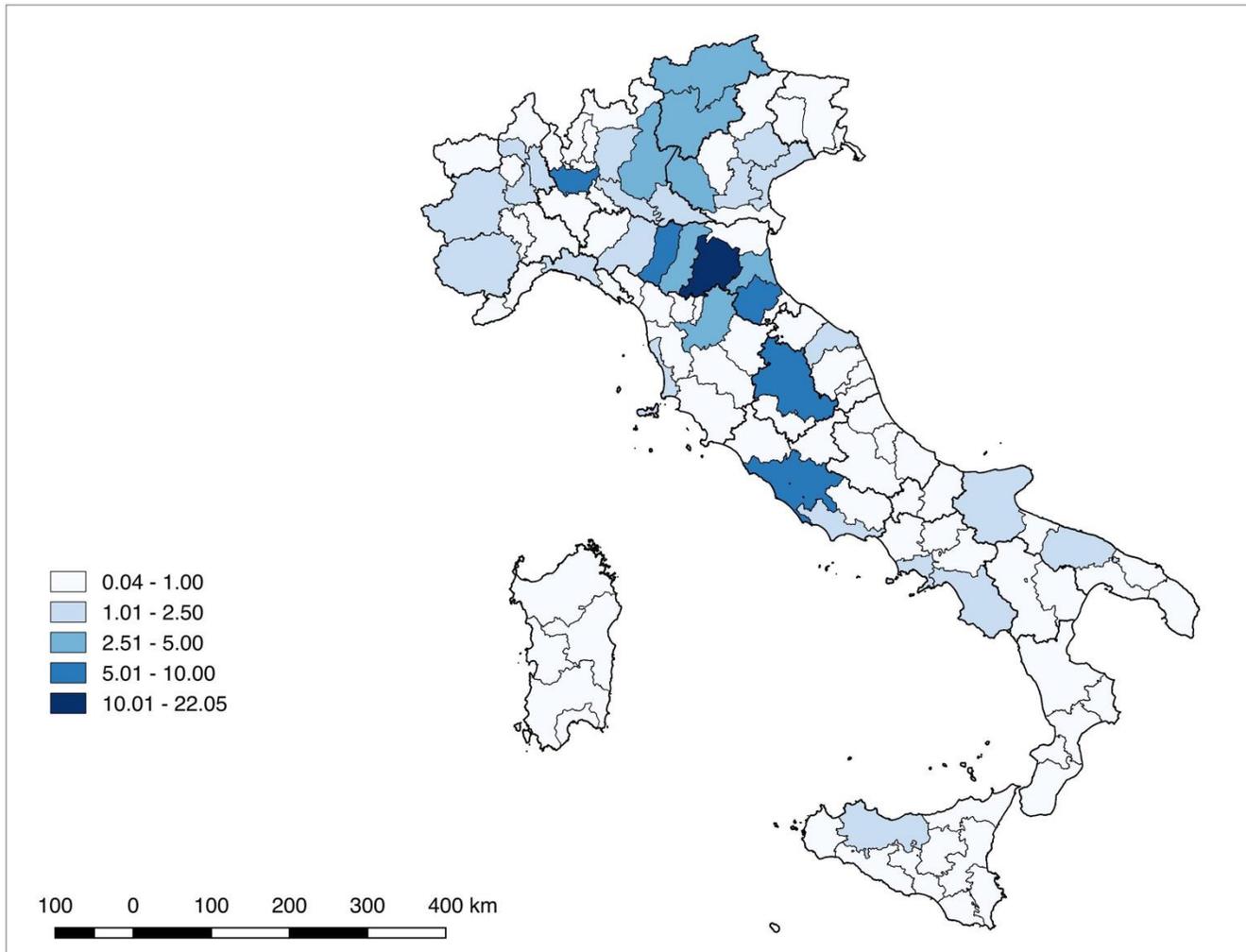
**Table 2.** Regional distribution of Italian cooperatives – main economic/financial balance items

AREA/REGION	No.	PRODUCTION VALUE 2017	AVG. PRODUCTION VALUE	OPERATING INCOME 2017	COMPANY CAPITAL 2017	AVG. CAPITAL	NET WORTH 2017
<b>North West</b>	<b>9,419</b>	<b>26,634,820,836</b>	<b>2,827,776</b>	<b>83,867,763</b>	<b>778,389,382</b>	<b>82,640</b>	<b>6,857,202,118</b>
Valle d'Aosta	155	121,529,583	784,062	1,003,585	7,023,293	45,312	53,420,905
Piedmont	2,289	7,334,205,759	3,204,109	66,519,255	206,912,324	90,394	2,248,136,306
Lombardia	5,990	17,362,427,166	2,898,569	58,686,913	517,173,275	86,339	3,746,960,162
Liguria	985	1,816,658,328	1,844,323	-42,341,990	47,280,490	48,000	808,684,745
<b>North East</b>	<b>7,876</b>	<b>59,053,044,347</b>	<b>7,497,847</b>	<b>366,059,967</b>	<b>2,012,728,404</b>	<b>255,552</b>	<b>16,119,580,544</b>
Veneto	2,473	9,688,874,636	3,917,863	53,657,145	279,700,818	113,102	1,586,764,450
Trentino-Alto Adige	1,158	6,186,829,029	5,342,685	63,155,202	240,765,631	207,915	2,115,456,926
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	710	1,619,740,810	2,281,325	19,780,139	62,107,830	87,476	347,727,532
Emilia-Romagna	3,535	41,557,599,872	11,756,040	229,467,481	1,430,154,125	404,570	12,069,631,636
<b>Centre</b>	<b>10,580</b>	<b>22,014,041,480</b>	<b>2,080,722</b>	<b>141,057,707</b>	<b>762,052,209</b>	<b>72,028</b>	<b>4,355,045,531</b>
Umbria	621	5,537,375,448	8,916,869	87,543,208	123,777,612	199,320	1,262,018,108
Tuscany	2,579	7,910,320,459	3,067,205	1,792,894	299,623,831	116,178	2,901,168,356
Marche	1,225	2,985,242,737	2,436,933	31,622,620	120,022,331	97,977	611,165,321
Lazio	6,155	5,581,102,836	906,759	20,098,985	218,628,435	35,520	-419,306,254
<b>South</b>	<b>14,694</b>	<b>9,337,448,461</b>	<b>635,460</b>	<b>47,052,131</b>	<b>309,836,078</b>	<b>21,086</b>	<b>1,592,814,864</b>
Apulia	5,128	3,162,229,266	616,659	12,599,751	92,182,634	17,976	523,431,780
Molise	338	202,522,709	599,180	627,517	7,806,748	23,097	30,194,285
Campania	5,658	3,312,265,007	585,413	29,526,795	72,540,055	12,821	520,827,396
Calabria	1,639	799,134,600	487,574	3,703,974	20,804,007	12,693	134,959,388
Basilicata	901	596,629,663	662,186	1,596,265	20,488,663	22,740	118,267,665
Abruzzo	1,030	1,264,667,216	1,227,832	-1,002,171	96,013,971	93,217	265,134,350
<b>The Islands</b>	<b>8,164</b>	<b>5,217,468,048</b>	<b>639,082</b>	<b>-1,494,489</b>	<b>217,036,005</b>	<b>26,585</b>	<b>944,180,692</b>
Sicily	5,901	3,629,449,396	615,057	11,061,314	140,532,640	23,815	589,399,929
Sardinia	2,263	1,588,018,652	701,732	-12,555,803	76,503,365	33,806	354,780,763
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50,733</b>	<b>122,256,823,172</b>	<b>2,409,809</b>	<b>636,543,079</b>	<b>4,080,042,078</b>	<b>80,422</b>	<b>29,868,823,749</b>

Source: Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

On a provincial level, the companies with headquarters in the Bologna province generated approximately 17% (€ 22 bn.) of Italian cooperative turnover and more than 50% of that generated by companies with headquarters in the Emilia-Romagna region. Other than Bologna, the other provinces registering a total turnover of more than 5 billion euros can be found in the Centre-North and, in order of turnover generated, Milan, Forlì-Cesena, Perugia and Reggio Emilia.

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**Fig. 7.** Production value at the provincial level, 2017 (bn. Euro)

*Source:* Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

### 2.3. The size classes

As previously mentioned in the EURICSE updated third report on the cooperative economy (Euricse. 2015), 57 % of the more than 122 bn. in total production value of Italian cooperatives can be attributed to 242 companies with a turnover of more than 50 million euros (Table 3), while almost 90 % has a production value of less than 2 million resulting in a yearly loss of 20 million euros and 11 % of total turnover.

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**Table 1.** Numbers, production value and operating income of Italian cooperatives by turnover class

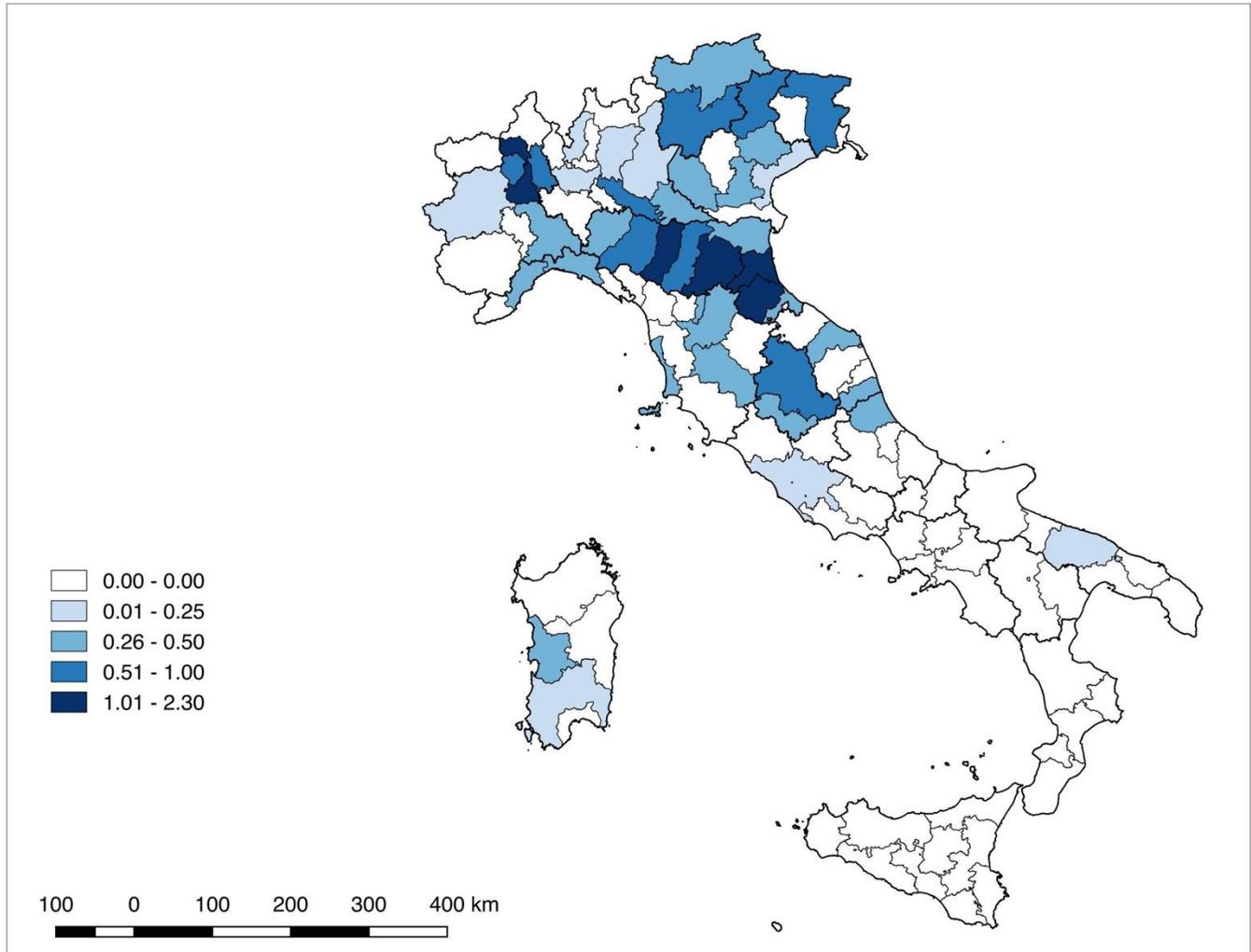
<b>TURNOVER CLASS</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>PRODUCTION VALUE 2017</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>OPERATING INCOME 2017</b>	<b>%</b>
≤ 2 mln	44,921	89%	13,792,433,162	11%	- 19,776,433	-3%
≤ 10 mln	4,567	9%	19,431,996,384	16%	105,840,151	17%
≤ 50 mln	1,004	2%	19,401,042,377	16%	118,376,707	19%
> 50 mln	241	0%	69,631,351,249	57%	432,102,654	68%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50,733</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>122,256,823,172</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>636,543,079</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

According to the parameters currently used by the institutions and found in the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/Ce of 6 May 2003, almost all cooperatives are classified as SMEs, while large cooperatives number only 116. The latter are all situated in 43 (40%) of the 107 second level government units considered. Only 5 large companies have registered their head offices in the South. Specifically, 46 % of the total of large cooperatives is to be found in Emilia Romagna and 16 % in the Bologna province. As can clearly be seen in the map below, the provinces where there are the highest number of large companies out of the total number of cooperatives per province\*\* are almost all exclusively located in the North – specifically, in Emilia Romagna, Lombardy and Piedmont. The Vercelli province registers the highest density of large-sized companies (2.2 %) which account for 93 % of total turnover of the province and employ 83 % of the workforce.

\*\* There is a discrepancy in the cooperative universe coverage between the sample analysed for the economic and financial analysis and the sample used for employment data gathering. The main economic and financial variables take into account 50,733 companies with data available for 2017, and do not include the credit unions and cooperative banks (279 in total), the financial intermediaries and smaller credit consortia (29 in total), the credit guarantee consortia and cooperatives (282) and the insurance companies. Employment takes into account a wider sample of 53,675 enterprises, which includes, besides the companies analysed for the economic and financial aspects, the credit unions, the cooperative banks, the financial intermediaries, the smaller credit consortia, the credit guarantee consortia and cooperatives, the insurance companies, and 2,641 enterprises where it was possible to integrate the data missing for 2017 (see methodology note).

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**Fig. 8.** Share of large companies out of cooperative companies total at the provincial level, 2017 (%)

*Source:* Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

The large cooperatives account for, on an average in the relative provinces, 39 % of total turnover and 29 % of employment registered with the different local government bodies.

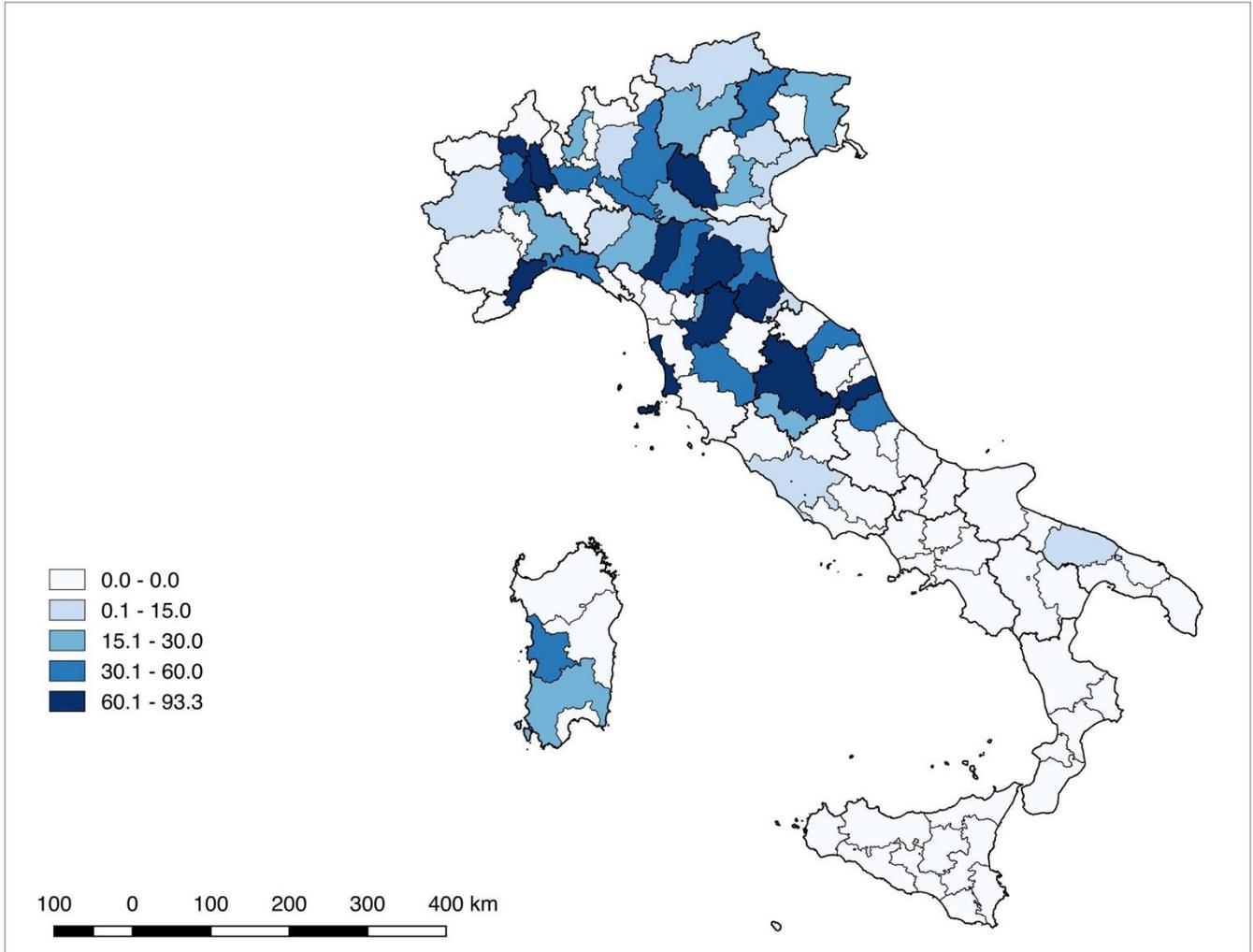
The incidence rates for turnover<sup>††</sup> and number of employees<sup>‡‡</sup> broadly reflect what was previously observed in terms of quantitative importance. The large cooperatives accounting for more than 60 % of total local turnover are found in 11 provinces out of the 43 where these cooperatives have their registered head offices. While in only 4 of

<sup>††</sup> The share of turnover generated by large cooperatives by province was calculated on the total turnover produced by the sample made up of 50,733 active companies with balance data.

<sup>‡‡</sup> The share of large cooperative employees by province was calculated on the total of employees from the sample made up of 50,733 active companies with balance data.

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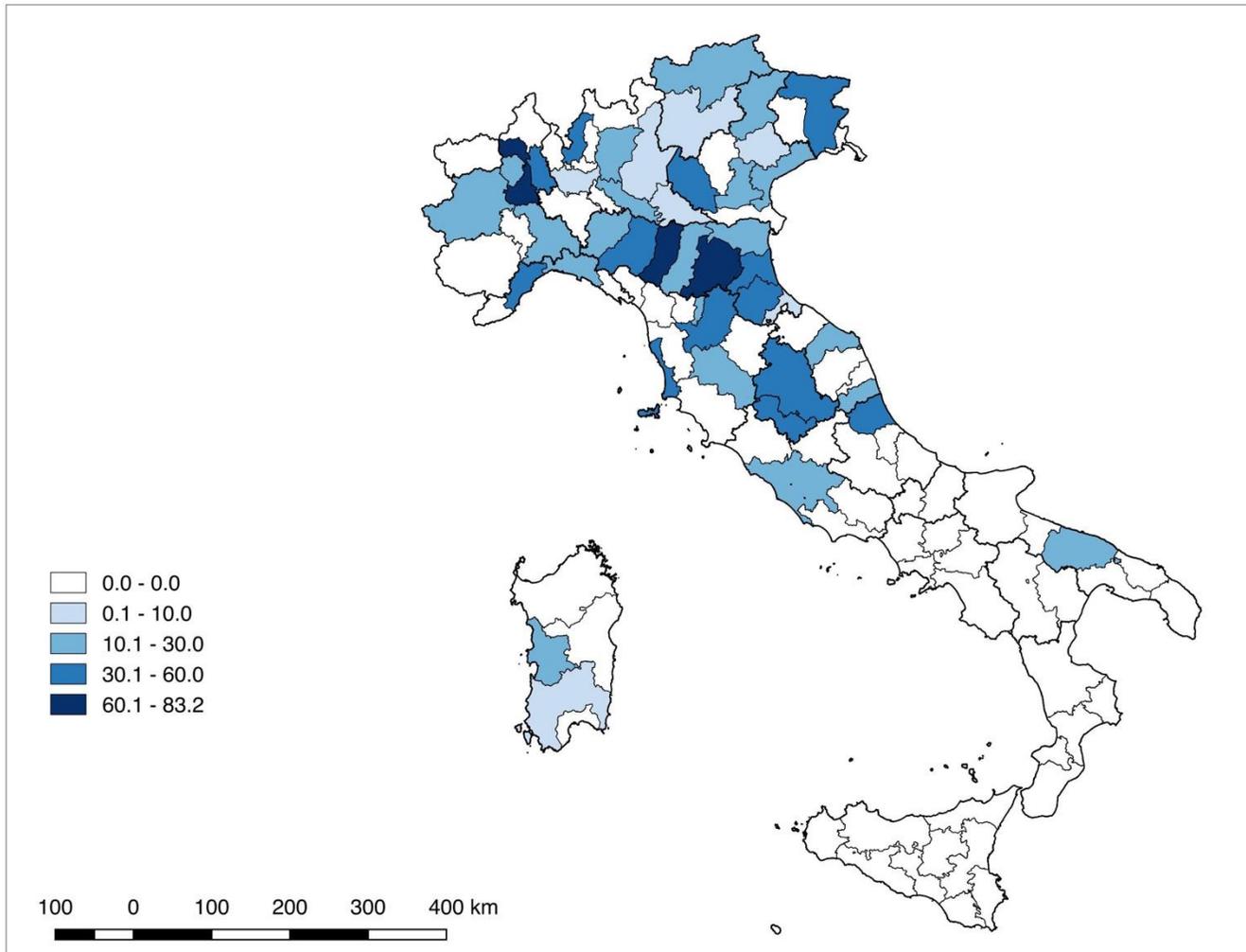
these - Vercelli, Novara, Bologna and Reggio Emilia – the large cooperatives account for more than 60 % of the number of local cooperative employees.



**Fig. 9.** Turnover share of large companies out of total cooperative turnover at the provincial level, 2017 (%)

*Source:* Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

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**Fig. 10.** Employee share of large companies out of total cooperative employees at the provincial level, 2017 (%)

*Source:* Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

#### 2.4. Mutually prevalent cooperatives<sup>§§</sup>

Out of all the active cooperatives and consortia whose financial balance data is available, 93 % are enrolled on the Cooperative Register of the Ministry of Economic Development under the section of mutually prevalent

<sup>§§</sup> Italian Law nr. 366, 2001, introduced the so-called mutually prevalent cooperatives, which have the key features of a limited profit distribution and indivisible capital reserves. Regarding their mutual exchange, mutually prevalent cooperatives (art. 2512 Italian civil code) primarily conduct their activity in favour of members and/or consumers or users of goods or services primarily relying on the work of their members to carry out their activities. The criteria for determining whether a cooperative is mutually prevalent or not are contained within the Civil Code, which also fixes statutory limitations they must adopt (art. 2513, 2514 Italian civil code). Instead, social cooperatives are considered mutually prevalent by law (Bruni and Zamagni, 2009).

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cooperatives (Table 4). Approximately 5 % of the cooperative total do not meet the prerequisites to be mutually prevalent, while 0.3 % of the sample are not on the register.

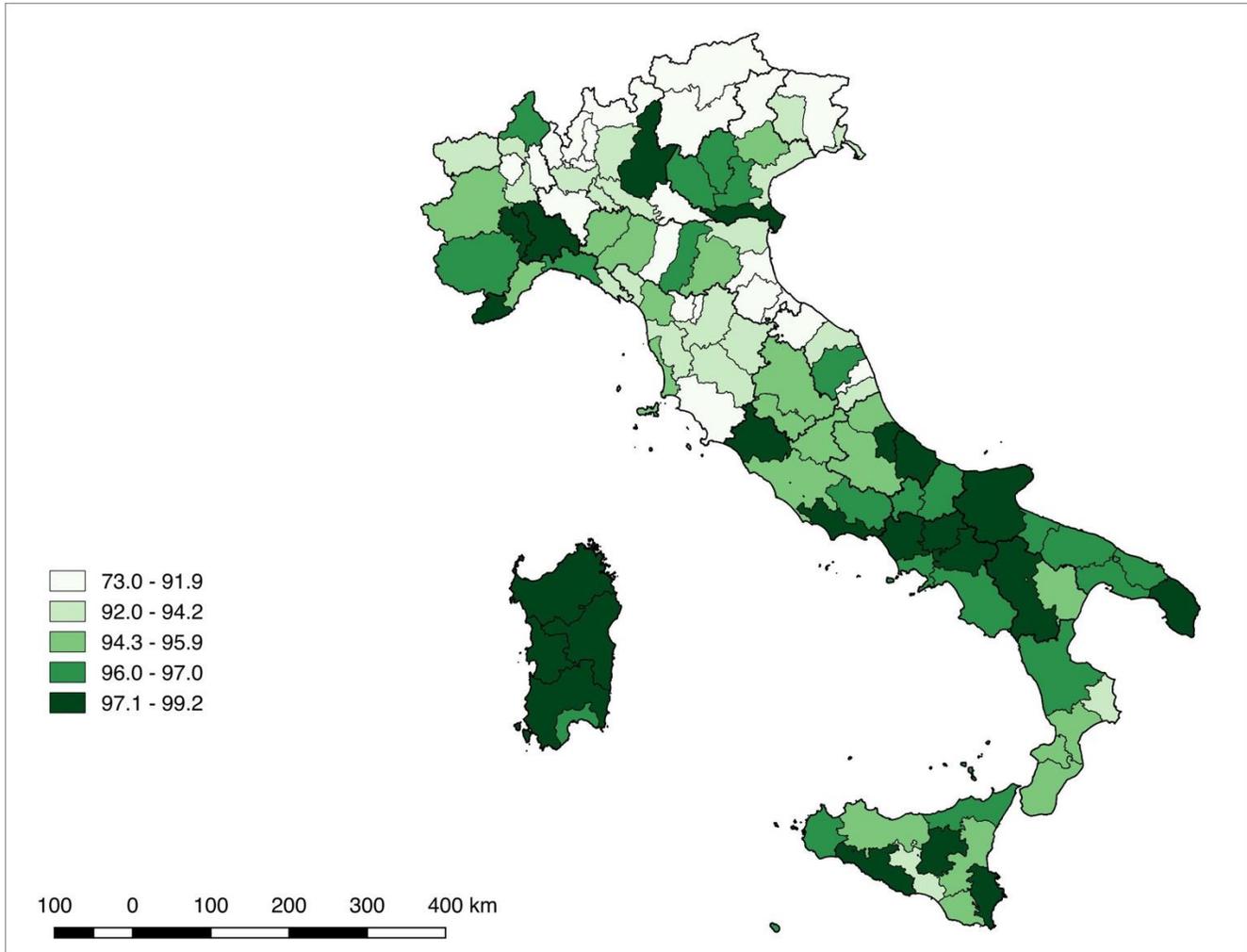
**Table 4.** Level of mutualistic exchange

COOPERATIVE REGISTER SECTION	No.	%	EMPLOYEES	PRODUCTION VALUE 2017	OPERATING INCOME 2017	COMPANY CAPITAL 2017	NET WORTH 2017
MUTUALLY PREVALENT	47,259	93.2%	1,058,086	113,681,356,723	3,802,873,456	567,594,288	29,141,850,887
NON-MUTUALLY PREVALENT	2,602	5.1%	36,827	5,810,361,342	223,248,073	70,087,384	1,798,024,230
MUTUAL BENEFIT SOCIETIES	1	0.0%	0	214,337	6,770	1,042	8,051
MISSING DATA	2	0.0%	36	1,694,244	26,100	19,743	78,248
OTHER TYPOLOGIES	697	1.4%	4,420	503,526,303	45,631,223	-1,157,576	-1,084,436,216
NOT PRESENT	172	0.3%	1,181	2,259,670,223	8,256,456	-1,802	13,298,549
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50,733</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,100,550</b>	<b>122,256,823,172</b>	<b>4,080,042,078</b>	<b>636,543,079</b>	<b>29,868,823,749</b>

Source: Our elaboration on data from Aida and the Ministry of Economic Development – Italian Cooperative Register (2020)

With the exclusion of the cooperatives not enrolled on the register, regarding the other typologies and the mutual benefit societies, on a provincial basis we can see the percentage of enterprises that display the prevalence requisites. On an average, in the southern and island provinces we find higher values, with 96.6 % of mutually prevalent cooperatives, while in the Centre-North the average percentage of those mutually prevalent is 92.5 %. In general, in 21 % of the Italian provinces, the share of mutually prevalent cooperatives is more than 97 %. The highest percentage of non-mutually prevalent cooperatives can be found among the Lombardy provinces, at 10.5 %. At the same time, in the provinces of Belluno and Sondrio, there is the highest percentage of non-mutually prevalent cooperatives, at 26.9 % and 20.1 %, respectively.

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**Fig. 11.** Share of mutually prevalent companies at the provincial level, 2017 (%)

*Source:* Our elaboration on Ministry of Economic Development data – Italian Cooperative Register (2020)

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## 2.5. The new start-up and 100 year old cooperatives

In Table 5, one of the principles underpinning the cooperative movement is revealed - that is, the principle of inter-generationality (Area Studi Legacoop, 2020b). The table shows that 7 % of enterprises have been active for more than 50 years, generating about 32 % of the production value. Instead, the highest number of companies are found in the groups with life spans of between 5 and 25 years. Cooperatives in the sample lasting more than 100 years, number 568 and, of these, 448 register a balance with a turnover of more than 7 billion euros.

**Table 5.** Numbers, employment and production value for years of activity

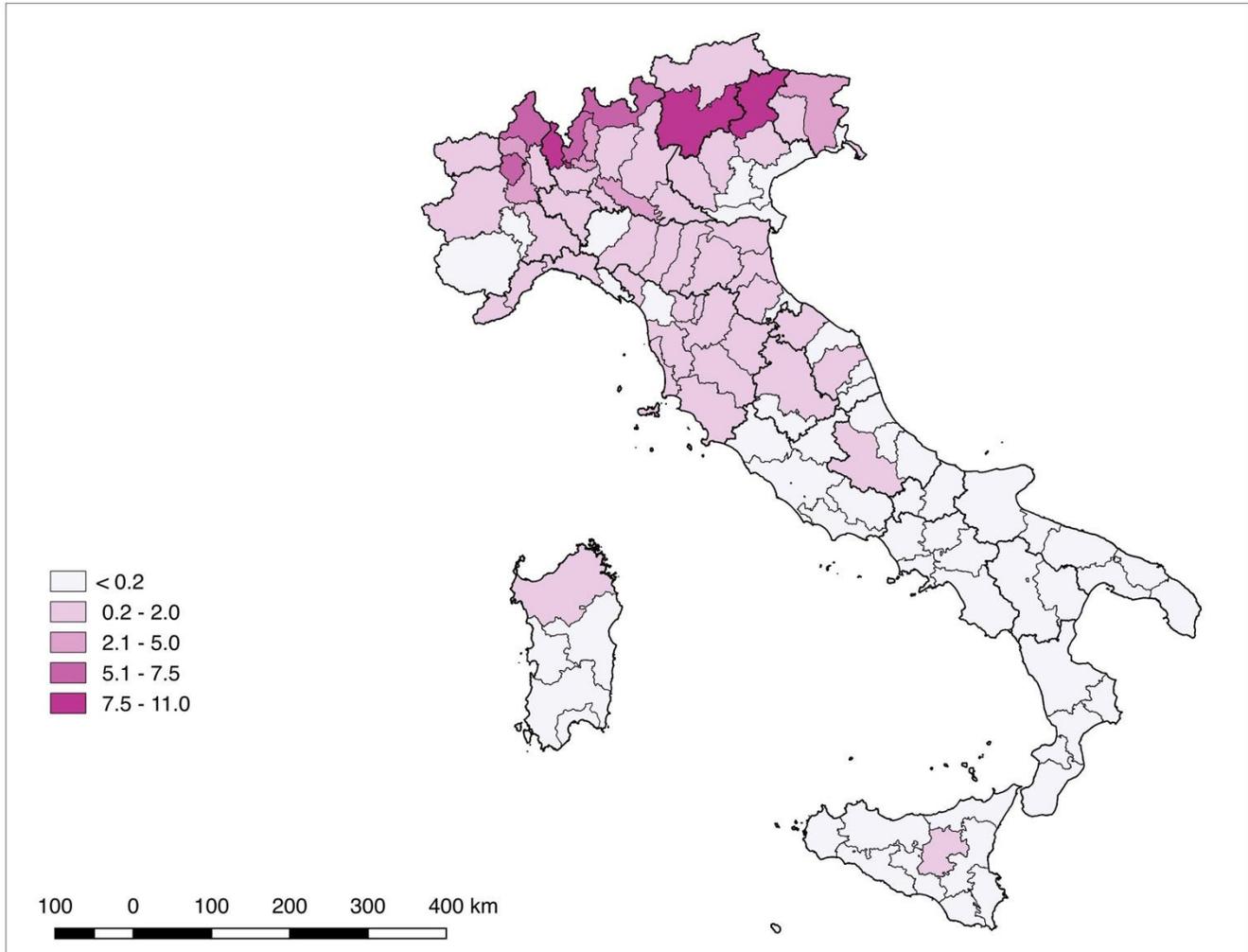
YEARS IN ACTIVITY	No.	%	EMPLOYEES	%	PRODUCTION VALUE 2017	%
≥ 100	448	1%	21,474	2%	7,375,826,335	6%
≥ 50	3,079	6%	112,794	10%	31,671,188,835	26%
≥ 25	10,922	22%	427,975	39%	38,679,214,299	32%
≥ 5	29,994	59%	483,036	44%	41,489,889,962	34%
< 5	6,290	12%	55,271	5%	3,040,703,741	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50,733</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,100,550</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>122,256,823,172</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

Most of the cooperatives with a lifespan of more than 100 years are situated in the north of the country, especially in Lombardy and Trentino. The map below shows the share of 100+ year-old enterprises out of the total of companies in the relevant province. There is a higher density of 100+ year-old companies in the provinces of Trento, Belluno, Varese, Sondrio and Como. In Trento, the 100+ year-old companies number 81 out of the total of 568, while in the South there are 31, 19 being found in the Islands<sup>\*\*\*</sup>.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> The share of 100+ year-old companies is calculated on the total of the sample, also including the cooperatives whose 2017-2018 balances are unavailable.

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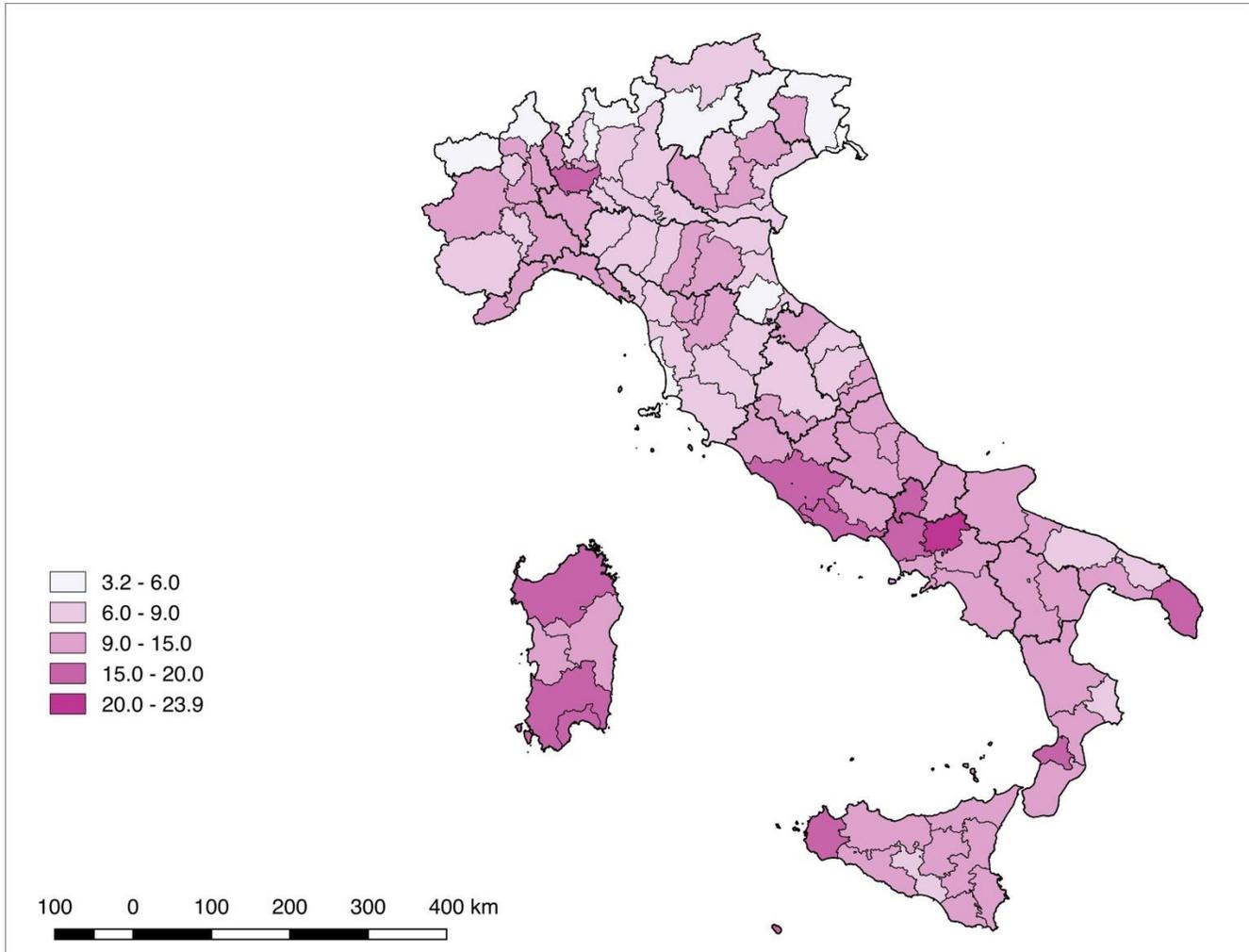


**Fig. 12.** Company share of 100+ year-olds out of the cooperative companies total at the provincial level, 2017 (%)  
*Source:* Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

Instead, the distribution of the cooperatives set up from 2016 is relatively balanced between the Centre-North (53%) and the South (47%), albeit, in this case, the southern and island provinces register a higher density of new cooperatives (Area Studi Legacoop, 2020c). New cooperatives number 15,739 (Fig. 3<sup>†††</sup>), 6,290 with balance data. The provinces with the highest number of cooperatives set up beginning from 2016 are Rome, followed by Milan, Naples and Salerno. Instead, the provinces of Benevento, Trapani, Sassari and Milan record the highest share of new cooperatives out of the cooperative total per province. For example, in Benevento province the percentage of new cooperatives amounts to 39 % of the total, while in the provinces of Lecco, Trento, Sondrio, Gorizia and Belluno, the share is less than 10%. Instead, in the Rome province, where the highest number of cooperatives is registered, the total of new cooperatives is 34 %.

<sup>†††</sup> The share of new cooperatives is calculated on the sample total, also including those where the 2017-2018 balance data is unavailable.

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**Fig. 13.** Share of cooperatives set up in 2016 at the provincial level (%)

*Source:* Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

## 2.6. The Italian cooperative sectors

The sectoral analysis (Table 6) is based on the NACE Rev. 2 code groupings communicated to the Chamber of Commerce by the companies and available on the Aida databank. Consistent with the last report on the cooperative economy drawn up by EURISCE (2017), a distinction was made between the manufacturing industry and the food industry, in order to bring to light a key characteristic of Italian cooperative production.

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**Table 6.** Sector distribution of Italian cooperatives

SECTOR	NO.	EMPLOYEES	PRODUCTION VALUE 2017 (K. EUR)	OPERATING INCOME 2017 (K. EUR)	COMPANY CAPITAL 2017 (K. EUR)	NET WORTH 2017 (K. EUR)
<b>Agriculture</b>	5,902	61,328	14,929,643	52,202	627,365	3,114,506
<b>Food industry</b>	1,344	46,570	15,734,731	77,566	629,522	2,974,116
<b>Other industries</b>	1,962	29,747	3,893,969	87,702	177,604	1,809,535
<b>Energy &amp; water</b>	448	11,285	1,000,936	25,758	73,399	503,924
<b>Construction &amp; real estate</b>	8,000	29,725	6,321,775	-112,756	362,234	4,446,305
<b>Commerce</b>	3,352	86,836	44,272,676	231,853	783,646	10,016,513
<b>Transport &amp; warehousing</b>	4,816	162,609	9,016,582	-24,179	247,752	729,469
<b>Accommodation &amp; catering</b>	2,005	51,747	2,360,795	12,636	125,234	567,551
<b>Communications/information services</b>	1,900	15,581	864,837	5,411	65,359	241,042
<b>Other company support services</b>	7,969	226,260	10,750,600	96,333	463,837	2,623,998
<b>Education</b>	1,858	22,295	810,755	8,926	32,973	150,130
<b>Healthcare &amp; social assistance</b>	8,118	313,978	11,000,630	171,902	413,192	2,385,913
<b>Other public, social, personal services</b>	3,055	42,587	1,298,889	3,192	77,919	305,791
<b>Unclassified</b>	4	2	6	-3	6	31
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50,733</b>	<b>1,100,550</b>	<b>122,256,823</b>	<b>636,543</b>	<b>4,080,042</b>	<b>29,868,824</b>

Source: Our elaboration on Aida-Bureau Van Dijk data (2020)

Among the leading sectors we find commerce, with a sample representation of 9%, and generating 36 % of total turnover and profits, capitalising 34 % of resources. The healthcare and social assistance sector, the most representative in terms of numbers, employs 29 % of total workers. However, company capital is mainly concentrated in the commerce, agriculture and food industry sectors. The ratio between employees and company capital in the different sectors, shows that the most labour intensive sectors are healthcare and social assistance, education, and transport and warehousing. In general, it can be confirmed that approximately 60% of the active

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cooperatives, with balance data available, is concentrated in the sectors of construction and real estate, company support services, healthcare and social assistance and agriculture.

### **3. Conclusions**

This paper which, as mentioned in the introduction, emerged from the objective to outline and analyse the major aspects of the Italian cooperative movement referring to the most authoritative databanks available, has also taken on a further meaning in light of the current situation arising from the Covid-19 emergency. The original intent was to photograph the final situation of what has occurred over the last decade beginning from 2007-2008, however, with the emergence of this new and still dramatic crisis, it will become the springboard for an analysis on the future impacts of which, today, we can only vaguely divine the consequences.

In the weeks of the lockdown, the cooperative associations confronted the emergency prioritising job security, guaranteeing the survival of the cooperatives (liquidity, financial reorganisation support, maintaining services and product orders, cost-cutting, and so on) and defending jobs. At the same time, it began a constant monitoring of the immediate repercussions of the legislative measures that froze entire sectors with still unquantifiable consequences and, as well, of the rapid evolution, at the moment full of uncertainties, of the relevant sector and market conditions which, in all likelihood, will require a thorough restructuring.

From the very start, an important compass was the certainty, quite widely shared, that the imminent crisis – that will soon unfold the economic, as well as social and political consequences – must push the economic actors, among others, to question themselves about the underlying choices and meaning of their actions where the market is concerned. The cooperative associations along with all the institutional bodies have pointed out the need to restart, but with the aim to build a different economy, where individuals, the common good, wellbeing, the health of citizens and the safety of our planet, must always come before individual interests. Otherwise, after this crisis, we will end up with a fragile and vulnerable world.

Undoubtedly, the different aspects of the Italian cooperative experience outlined here are a force on which future actions can be hinged. However, it requires a full awareness of the features of the cooperative entrepreneurial base, as well as appropriate key preparations that take into account the changing context of today.

Italian cooperation emerged from the decade of the crisis seeing some historical strong points consolidated, such as widespread sector presence, inter-generational solidarity, an instinct for resilience and especially safeguarding employment, and a capability to adapt and regenerate before social and market changes. On the other hand, the decade of the great crisis also exacerbated some shadowy areas. These include, for example, a tendency towards territorial, sectoral and size concentrations in traditional comfort zones; a decrease in numbers that, although being compensated for by the setting up of new companies, also confirmed some weaknesses in the model, overall among the micro and small cooperatives; and a difficulty to adapt to the democratic workings of companies in a context of rapid evolution.

Nevertheless, even throughout the contentious situation of the past decade, while entire sectors were undergoing restructuring, at times being drastically reduced, the Italian cooperatives also revealed themselves to be resourceful and energetic in renewing themselves, coming up with new needs, trends, experiences, new market responses and solutions in an associative, democratic and cooperative form.

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This is certainly the case for the WBOs where the Italian experience has provided an original contribution to existing practices at an international level, as well as for the community cooperatives. They provide a new response for the many different needs that challenge the idea itself of mutualistic exchange and how it has been shaped and dealt with over decades of cooperative theory and practice, innovatively interpreting the need to manage public goods, also through a widespread reallocation of ownership rights. The crisis resulted in being a catalyst for change and, moreover, in recent years has generated productive cross-sectoral collaborations where the objective of inclusion, often through turning to new technologies to come up with new products or services, has led to practices in economic, social and cultural innovation whose transformative force we will increasingly see the results of in the coming years.

Of course, many of these innovations, because they are so widespread, spontaneous and experimental, also display characteristics of entrepreneurial fragility, albeit in the light of a large-scale added value. One of the essential aspects of the future cooperative development strategies will be in knowing how to find, recognise, shape and sustain the sprouting seeds of these innovative practices. After all, accumulating and reproducing knowledge and entrepreneurial capability, especially if inspired by cooperative values, and linked to local communities and areas, are per se a “common good” (Berranger, Monni, Realini, 2020; Giovannetti, E: (2001)) to be cultivated and preserved with care.

#### **4. Methodological Note**

As of 20/01/2020, 146,396 cooperative, cooperative consortia and cooperative consortium company enterprises were present in the Aida databank. 85,597 of these were active, numbering 84,944 cooperatives and 653 consortia and cooperative consortium companies.

From the 85,597 active enterprises, all those set up before 11/1/2016 and not lodging a balance with the Chamber of Commerce from 31/12/2016 were then eliminated. An analysis then followed of the consolidated balances that brought the total of eliminated companies from the sample to 195. Resulting from the provisions taken in selecting the sample, the total of cooperative companies and consortia that can be considered active is made up of 61,274 enterprises. Therefore, out of the total of those enterprises considered active, according to what was previously presented, there are 53,675 cooperatives and consortia for which it was possible to obtain data on employment. For 3,048 enterprises, the missing data for the number of employees at 31/12/2017 was integrated with the manual entry of the data from the balance, with the data from cooperative audit minutes in the Area Studi Legacoop databank or, alternatively, with the corresponding data at 31/12/2018. Instead, as far as the main economic aspects are concerned, due to the impossibility to compare the balance data, the credit unions and cooperative banks (279), the financial intermediaries and the smaller credit consortia (29), the credit guarantee cooperatives and consortia (282) and the insurance companies<sup>\*\*\*</sup> (4) were excluded from the sample.

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> The credit unions and cooperative banks (279), the financial intermediaries, the smaller credit companies, the credit guarantee cooperatives and consortia (287) and the insurance companies, were identified based on the information provided by the cooperative register, the financial intermediary register of the Bank of Italy, and on the balance classification data from the Aida-Bureau Van Dijk databank (those identified were companies which draw up a balance according to that foreseen in the civil code for banks, financial intermediaries and insurance companies).

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