

FER-MENTI Leontine: a community cooperative for the socio-economic regeneration of mountainous areas

Founded in 2019, [FER-MENTI Leontine](#) community cooperative is a social innovation in the Romagna Apennines (Italy) that seeks to foster a socio-economic regeneration in the municipality of San Leo. Activities for the revitalisation of the territory are defined and developed by citizens, and they pursue the long-term interest of the local mountain community.

The establishment of the community cooperative

The Valmarecchia territory in the Romagna's Apennines (Italy), where the Municipality of San Leo is located, is affected both by a strong depopulation and seasonal mass tourism (approximately 75,000 visits and about 2,800 inhabitants in 2016). Touristic incomes strongly vary according to the season and do not benefit all local businesses. These factors have led to the progressive impoverishment of the territory and the closing of several traditional businesses, including its central bakery: "Il forno di San Leo".

Sourced from a series of local participatory meetings – to reflect on territorial hurdles – organised by the "Confcooperative Ravenna-Rimini", the association "Figli del Mondo" and the start-up accelerator "Primo Miglio", the FER-MENTI Leontine community cooperative was born in 2019 with the objective to regenerate the social and economic life in the mountainous village of San Leo.

Credits Comune di San Leo



MORE INFO



Benefits of the cooperative model for mountain communities

Since then, the FER-MENTI Leontine cooperative reopened the historic bakery of the village, created 5 new jobs, and received 200,000 Euros via: share capital (from the financing members), ordinary financial instruments, and financial instruments reserved to the cooperation domain. The cooperative now consists of 60 members, including several companies and associations from Valmarecchia.



Credits FER-MENTI Leontine community cooperative



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FER-MENTI Leontine has already won several prizes, including the [ReStartApp](#), a business accelerator programme tailored to support entrepreneurial activities in the Italian mountains.

FER-MENTI Leontine promotes and manages personal services as well as productive and commercial activities which are beneficial to the long-term well-being of the entire mountain community. In the Municipality of San Leo, FER-MENTI Leontine oversees different activities from the reopening and management of the local bakery, the promotion of sustainable local tourism, but also the care of the common goods of the village, and the enhancement of zero-mileage products along with the home delivery of basic necessities, promoted during the COVID-19 times.



An example of social innovation

FER-MENTI Leontine relies on a model of social innovation called the community cooperative (“cooperative di comunità”) governance model where citizens are both producers and users of the products and services they support. Local citizens can actively decide to take part to the FER-MENTI Leontine’s activities or suggest new ones based on the needs and obstacles faced by the community. Moreover, the community cooperative’s model encourages adhesions, collaborations and partnerships from local actors ranging across citizens, enterprises, associations and institutions.

As reported by a [feasibility study](#) conducted by the Italian Ministry of Economic Development (2016), cooperative communities are not new in the Italian mountains and comparable forms also exist in other European countries, such as: the “Société Coopérative d’Intérêt Collectif” in France, the “Gesellschaft bürgerlichen Rechts” or “Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung” in Germany and the “community enterprises” in the United Kingdom. However, according to the same study, this type of social innovation is quite new or inexistent in other European mountain areas.



Innovative aspect

Community cooperatives, a bottom-up and multi-stakeholder network, are particularly present in vulnerable and fragile areas. Their innovative aspect stands in the capacity to empower citizens in identifying their long-term needs and actively work for the amelioration of their own mountain community, developing a sense of social cohesion and innovative entrepreneurship.

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