

5th International Forest Policy Meeting April 10-12, 2024, Helsinki  
*session I - (Forest) land use, forest owners and land conflicts*

## Italian forest policies for associating forest sector's actors: an urgent response to (forest) land abandonment processes

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## Outline

- Introduction and background (3-5)
- The problem statement (6)
- Methodology and Conceptual framework (7-8)
- Results (9-18)
- Wrap-up (19-21)
- Conclusions (22)



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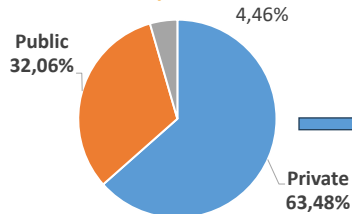
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## Background - Italian Forests

- Italian forests > 36% of the territory (11,9 M ha)
- 65 % above 500 m asl (→ 900k inhabitants lost in the last 60 years)
  - +15% of forest area in the last 35 years, +70% from 1936
  - 87% of high forests under restrictions for Hydro-geological safety
  - 100% subject to Landscape conservation law
  - only about 30% of the annual growth is harvested
  - 80% of industrial timber is imported, as 70% of italian harvested wood is used for energy.



### Forest ownership



Only 15,5% with a management Plan

90% small owners (less than 2 ha)

→ many small/micro parcels = **low profitability** = very difficult to actively manage

→ **abandonment of private forests**

(Sources: INFC, 2021; Secco et al., 2017; Falcone et al., 2020)



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## Background - Land abandonment

### CENSUS of AGRICULTURE (1982 - 2020)

UAA (Utilized Agricultural Area) → 3,2 Mha missing  
TAA (Total Agricultural Area) → 5,9 Mha missing  
WA (Wooded Areas) → decreased 2,75 Mha  
**2,86 Mha of «Wooded Areas» (within active farms)**  
in 2020

(ISTAT, 2022. Census of Agriculture)

### REPORT on SOIL CONSUMPTION (2006 - 2020)

0,11 Mha of natural and semi-natural soil lost

(ISPRA, 2022. Report on Soil consumption)

### NATIONAL FOREST INVENTORY (1985 - 2015)

**8,95 Mha** of highforests in 2015  
+46% from 1985

NO silvicultural intervention on 37,4% of the forest area

15,5% with a forest management plan

(National Forest Inventory, 2020)



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## Not only forests

### ...overview of some demographic and social dynamics

Forest regions are characterized by **social changes and challenges**:

→ (richer) areas intensively exploited for tourism Vs. (poorer) rural areas with socio-economical depletion and demographic issues

→ The **new mountaineers**, often not landowners

(Corrado et al. 2014, Membretti e Viazzo 2017)

→ Changes in the **demands for forest ecosystem services**, both from local communities and from urban population (EEA, 2015)

→ Recent **interest for collective bottom-up action** within people interested in **managing local resources** (Bassi and Carestiato 2016)

Who the new protagonists? How do they co-operate with traditional actors?

Risk of new **CONFLICTS** vs. **INNOVATION** opportunities



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## The problem and the research questions

Forest management can improve the **overall provision of Forest Ecosystem Services** and reduces **risks from natural hazards** (Romano, 2017; Chirici et al., 2019)

Forest land fragmentation and poor organization of the value chain are recognized within the major causes for land abandonment (Dir. Gen. Foreste MIPAAFT, 2017)

*Associating forest owners could be a strategy to contrast land abandonment and to encourage active forest management?*

Need to better understand land abandonment and (private) forest owners

Which solutions for associated forest management?

How to support the establishment of different associative models and instruments?



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## Methodology

2 (+1) parts, design based on mixed methods:

1. Analysis of proxy statistical data from national databases

2. Policy Analysis + literature review (through 3 steps)

Analysis of 31 cases of different forest-based associations in Italy (questionnaires)



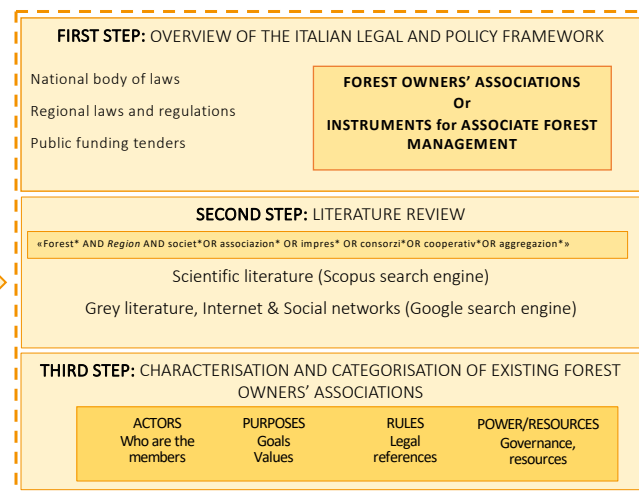
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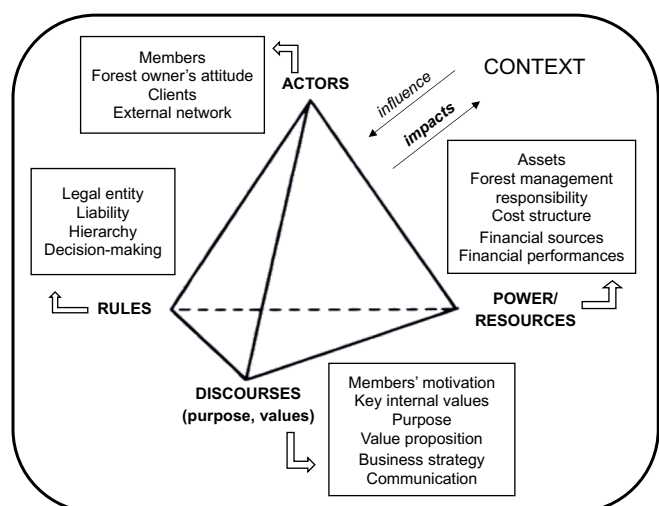
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## Conceptual framework

**ASSOCIATIVE FOREST ORGANIZATIONS (AFOs)** can be implemented with different organizational models

**ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS** → a representation of the way one or more *actors* establish internal and external relationships, set order (*rules*), manage responsibilities (*power*) and resources, to achieve their purposes.

20 variables nested within the 4 key dimensions to describe and characterize organizational models.



(Source: Loreggian et al. 2023, modified from Arts et al. 2003; Wiering & Arts, 2006)



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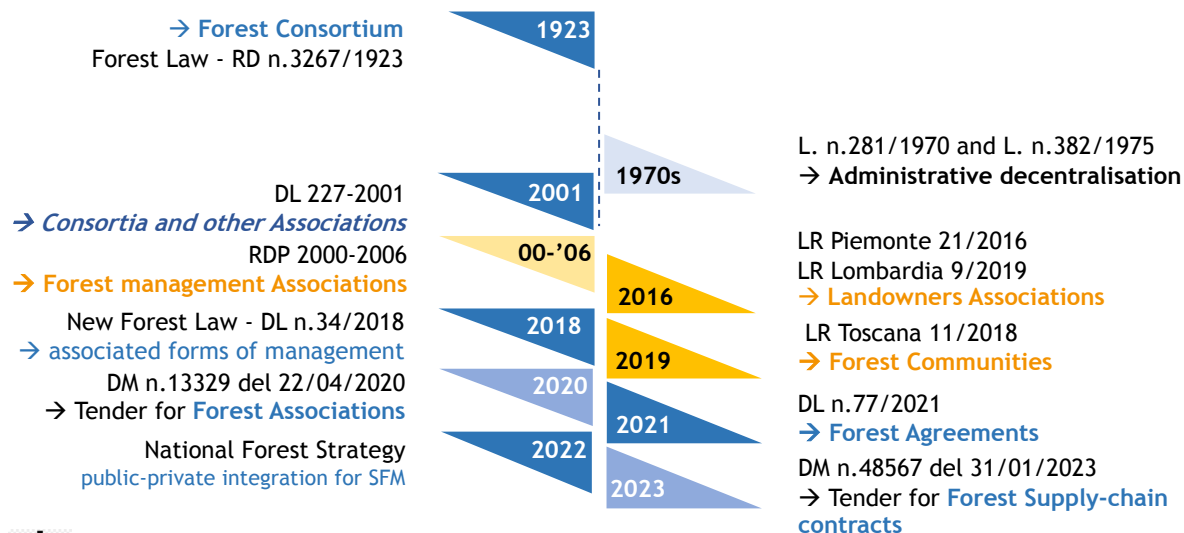


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## Results

### National policies and norms for associated forest management



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## Results

### Identification and categorisation

#### Structural solutions

- **Consortia** (public, private and mixed)
- **Associations** (Forest-, Land-, Woodland communities, Model Forests)
- **Cooperatives** (Community cooperatives)
- *Foundations*
- *Forest Condominium*

Organizations for management of **commons** (ASUC, ASBUC, Regole, Vicinie, Comunelle, Comunalie, Comunanze, Partecipanze, ecc..)

#### Contractual solutions

- **Business networks**
- **Forest Agreements**
- *Forest contracts*
- *Value-chain contracts* (← *Forest agreements*)
- *Multi-year timber sales*
- *Concessions*
- *Sales of growing forests*
- **Certification groups**








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## Results

### Characterization of Associative solutions

	FOREST CONSORTIUM 	COMMONS 	ASSOCIATIONS 	FOREST COMMUNITY 	COMMUNITY COOPERATIVES 
<b>ACTORS#1 (Members)</b>	Forest entrepreneurs (private) or Public forest owners	Families holding rights to participate (delegates)	Forest owners (private and public)	Citizens of a forest region + Stakeholders	Members of a local community with strong identity
<b>ACTORS#2 (Forest ownership)</b>	Shareholders, contracts	Local community's ownership	Shareholders, contracts	Contractor	Contractor
<b>RULES#1 (Legal form)</b>	Contract. Can become enterprise C.c. artt. 2602-2616	Special legal form (L. n.168 del 20/11/2017)	Association LR Piemonte n.21 - 2/11/16 LR Lombardia n.31 - 5/12/08	Association Rif. LR Toscana n° 11/2018	Cooperative (labouristic model) LR E.-Romagna n.12 - 27/07/22 LR Toscana n.67 - 14/11/19
<b>RULES#2 (Int. Govern. structure)</b>	Democratic	Democratic (closed)	Democratic (open)	Democratic (open)	Democratic (open)
<b>DISCOURSES#1 (Purpose)</b>	Transaction costs reduction = enhancement of forest management profitability	To produce resources and richness for the local community	Transaction costs reduction = enhancement of forest management profitability	Sustainable Forest Management oriented to local socio-economic development and landscape conservation	Socio-economic development of the local community
<b>DISCOURSES#2 (Value proposition)</b>	Forest products and services	Products and services from forests, breeding and agriculture	Forest management plans, Support for administration, marketing and logistics	Forest products and services, Projects for raising financial opportunities	Forest products and services, for the benefit of the community
<b>POWER/RESOURCES#1 (Forest management)</b>	Internal responsibility, eventually supported by ext. professionals	Internal responsibility, eventually supported by ext. professionals	Management responsibility contracted to professionals	Management responsibility contracted to professionals	Internal Management responsibility or contracted to professionals
<b>POWER/RESOURCES#2 (Financial sources)</b>	Financing from shareholders + commercial revenues	commercial revenues	General and dedicated Grants + (rarely) Financing from shareholders	Fund Raising + commercial revenues + Grants (PSR, ecc.)	Fund Raising + commercial revenues



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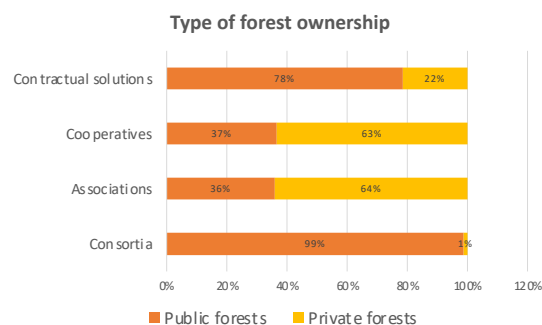
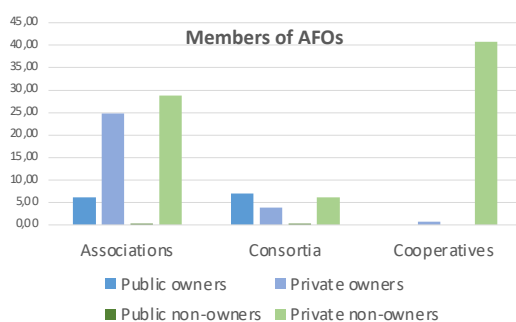
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## Actors and managed areas

### Different models for different actors

- ✓ **Consortia** are preferred by public owners (municipalities), but can involve also enterprises
- ✓ **Cooperatives** are composed by private individuals, managing both private and public forests
- ✓ **Associations** can involve any kind of actors, to manage both private and public forests



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## Actors - Key roles

Some key roles are taken by different actors in different AFOs

	CONSORTIA	ASSOCIATIONS	COOPERATIVES	CONTRACTUAL SOLUTIONS
<b>FOUNDERS/LEADERS</b>	Often far back in time, often coinciding with a mayor or a group of mayors.	Soul, heart and legs of the association. They keep the members together.	The dream and vision of the founders remains the main compass	Important figures, because the idea comes from them, who strongly rely on consultant's support.
<b>TECHNICAL ASSISTANT</b>	No. In most cases the technical director is the first employee.	Key contribution: - Skills to detail the project - Identification of funds - Drafting of management plans	Technical figures to support the leaders, internalized.	Fundamental in the 'weaving' work, they contribute to technical and contractual setting (skills eventually covered by several people, in support of 1 reference consultant)
<b>PUBLIC ENTITIES</b>	Fundamental. They are the owners and manage the consortia just like shareholders in a company.	The presence of the Municipality among the members can greatly increase trust (and the number of members).	An important but 'light' relationship, it can last a short time.	Useful for building confidence. It can bring a lot of resources, but also stiffening.

## Rules & Legal forms

A broad range of solutions, belonging to some main categories

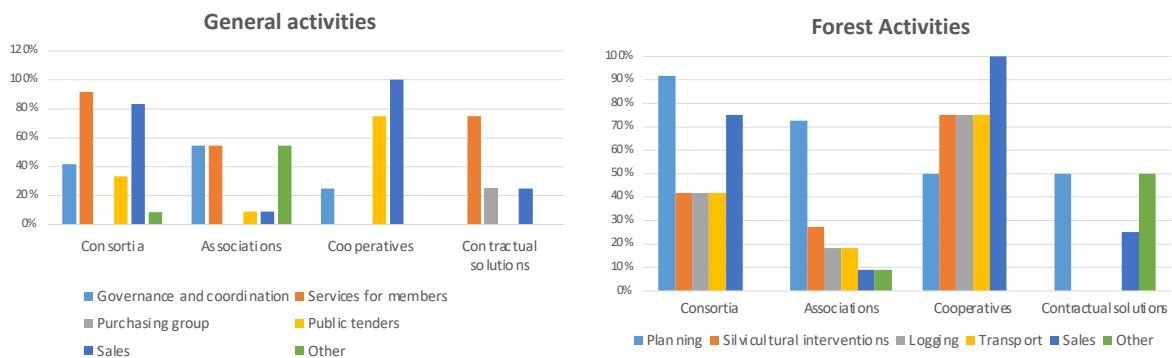
- ✓ **Forest Consortia** can get different legal entities, normally with limited liability
- ✓ **Cooperatives** are set for mutualism, workers are shareholders and share responsibilities
- ✓ Many different **Associations** exist, with different focus, but the same legal form

	CONSORTIA	ASSOCIATIONS	COOPERATIVES	CONTRACTUAL SOLUTIONS
<b>LEGAL FORM</b>	Contract. Can become enterprise, several legal forms C.C. artt. 2602-2616	C.C. artt. 14-42 Many different names (some defined by Regional norms), but just one legal form	Labouristic model Some Regional specificities	Forest Agreements DL n.77/2021 Business Networks L. n.33/2009
<b>INTERNAL GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS</b>	Democratic, but centralized and vertical	Democratic and participative, horizontal organization	Democratic and participative, vertical organization	Power of attorney given to a representative signatory



## Purposes and activities (value proposition)

- ✓ **Forest Consortia** are essentially efficient enterprises, with the aim of managing public assets to maximise public utility
- ✓ **Associations** are established with strong social engagement and commitment, they focus on planning for landscape conservation, safety for local communities, cultural or spiritual reasons
- ✓ **Cooperatives** are mutualistic enterprises, forest management is a way to generate job opportunities



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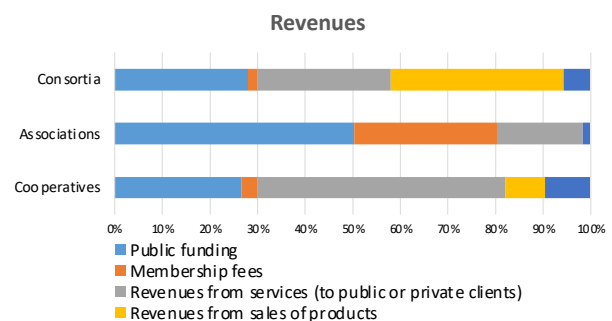
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## Power and resources

- ✓ **Forest Consortia** have employees, assets, and more robust business models
- ✓ **Associations** rely on public funding, involving volunteers and external professionals
- ✓ **Cooperatives** are similar to consortia, with smaller size (on average)

	Employees	Season workers	External professional collaborators	TURNOVER	Revenues from forestry
<b>Consortia</b>	9,6	6,3	2,5	> 1 million €	0,5
<b>Associations</b>	0,3	0,0	6,1	10-100 k €	0,2
<b>Cooperatives</b>	4,2	6,2	2,2	100-500k €	0,2
<b>Contractual agreements</b>	0,3	0,0	2,0	10-100 k €	0,4



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## Business models

	CONSORTIA	ASSOCIATIONS	COOPERATIVES	FOREST AGREEMENTS	BUSINESS NETWORKS
SALES	Sale of timber (standing or round) + land services (especially winter and/or mixed woods)	Possible but limited	Purchase of lots & sale of timber (roundwood) + public services (in winter) + Forestry operations	The agent sells and the benefit is divided according to the provisions of the agreement	Development of a special product line, which is sold directly. Signatories carry out the various stages of production
ACTIVITIES DEVELOPED UNDER PUBLIC FUNDING	RDP, EU Funds, Regional Funds (Lombardy)	Regional Funds, RDPs, Ministerial Calls	RDP funds, participation in partnerships on other EU funds	Targeted calls (Ministerial supply chain call) but it can NOT be a beneficiary	Participation in calls for tenders (Ministerial Supply Chain Call, EU Funds)
OTHER ACTIVITIES	Services and jobs for members (in-house assignments)	Activities of "maintenance and care of the territory" carried out with volunteer staff	Tourist infrastructures and services (Adventure park, tree houses, etc.)	Forestry Office for the Mountain Union (funded by the FA's signatories)	R&D



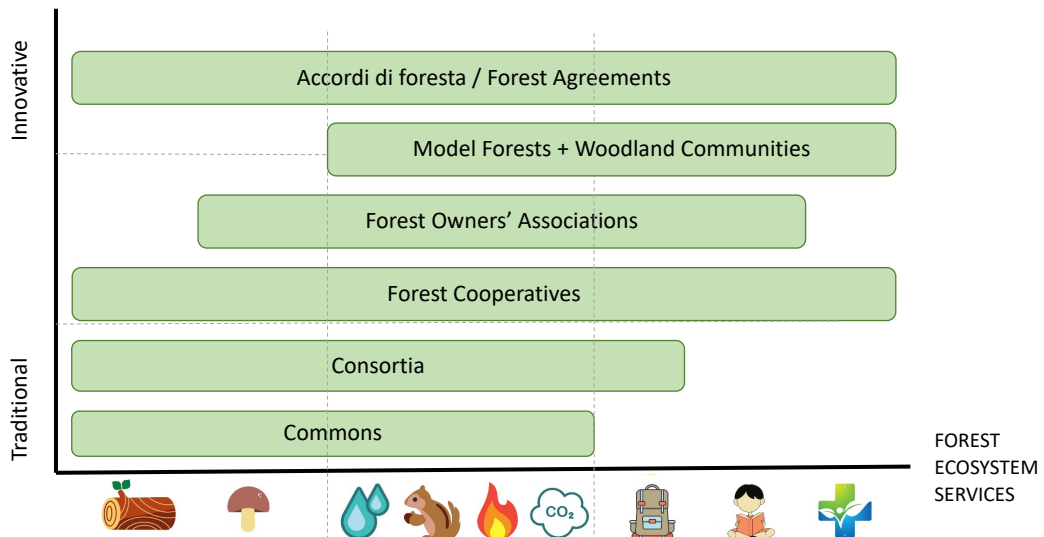
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## Forest Ecosystem services



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## Wrapping up 1/3

**LAND OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE** is a central topic for Italian forest policy:

- ✓ **Land abandonment** is a **wicked problem**: management issues, weak value chains, soil consumption, demographic crisis, climate change → many related problems and... **very poor data!**
- ✓ **Silent lands** represent a crucial issue
- ✓ Urgent need to shorten the gap with **private forest owners** → *knowledge gap (who they are and what are their goals)* + very hard and costly bureaucracy



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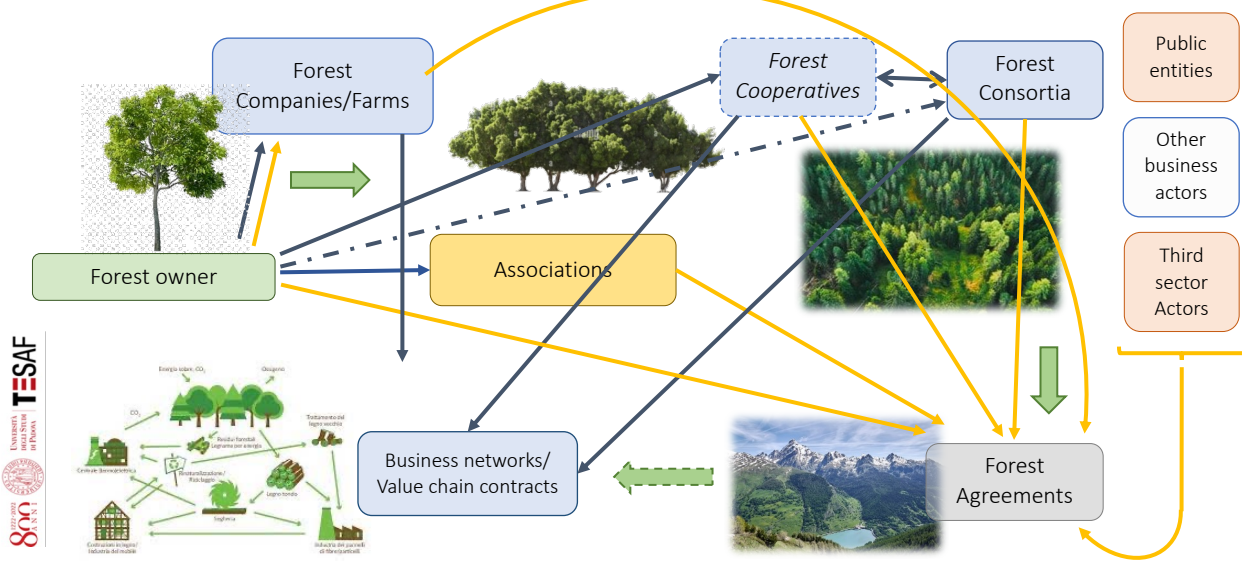
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## Wrapping up 2/3

Many different actors, tools and purposes... with many integration opportunities

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## Wrapping up 3/3

- ✓ The **context** (socio-ecological system) is much relevant, mostly in its social features = **no easy recipes**
- ✓ **Social innovation** as a key process, **social capital** is a crucial variable and **activators** are key actors (professionals foresters, mountaineers, administrators)... → need for specific training to merge technical and social skills
- ✓ **Public entities** → often involved, they contribute to build trust, but they bring bureaucracy and political issues. Need to refine their role.



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## Conclusions

Associating (forest actors) cannot be considered as an easy solution to solve fragmentation and land abandonment issues, but a good strategy that needs some more actions:

- ✓ Consideration and evaluation of **forest ecosystem services (FES) + the overall social impact**
- ✓ Regions should urgently implement provisions from the national forest law (art. 12 d.lgs. 34/2018) about procedures to re-activate **management of silent lands**;
- ✓ Clear and financially adequate **policies** to support not only the establishment but also the provision of FES and social benefits by forest associations;
- ✓ **Second-level associations** should be promoted and encouraged, to bridge the gap between landowners and policymakers

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**Thanks for your attention!**

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