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Household food waste and social capital. An analysis across Italy

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Abstract

Household food waste is not visible. Hence, consumers tend to reduce it when they are committed and intrinsically altruist, pointing to the role of social capital. We model food waste decisions as an impure public good game where one's payoff is a function of non-wasted food, and increases with social capital. Given Italy's well-known divide (North-South) in terms of social capital, this country represents a relevant setting where to test our hypothesis. Using a national-level dataset of household food-related behaviours and opinions from 2016, we find that the variables measuring household food waste are negatively correlated with relevant proxies of social capital. This negative correlation is mediated by family income, as it becomes weaker and non-significant among better-off families. Thus, other measures of social capital could be used as proxies of hard-to-assess food waste, to target specific territories, consumer groups, and behaviours therein.

Keywords : household food waste, social capital, Italy, territorial divide, public good game