

# Culture, food and wine as heritage of rural areas

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## *1. Introduction*

Identity elements (physical elements of landscape, the subjective perception and the timeline of events) establish the mark of a rural region and they represent the distinctive features of its cultural landscape (Adamo, 1999). It is assumed that they are essential for a sustainable local development project achieved by way of the territory's distinctive features, considered primarily as cultural heritage made up of both material elements and identity values (geophysical characteristics, cultivation and manufacturing techniques, the territory's historical context), these can be defined, according to a French-speaking terminology, as ethnological heritage (Rautenberg, 1998). In order to ensure the soundness of this development, it is therefore considered necessary to begin from an appreciation of that heritage by residents of the area itself.

In this context, it seems particularly fruitful – as is shown by the many experiences already in place, not only in Italy (Defosse, 1997; Bailly, 2000; Bianchi de Aguiar, 2001; Maby, 2002; Biancotti, 2003) – to use local products to accompany the economic, social and cultural development of the area, thus establishing a link between the economic and the historical-cultural sides of the development.

In fact working suitably on traditional products such as these may form the symbol of a community. The product (especially an agricultural one) then assumes the character of a symbol (moreover potentially a bearer of all the ambiguities which a symbol of local identity represents). In this way, the inhabitants can come to feel more easily part of a cultural heritage and contribute to its preservation, accompanied by an environmentally friendly use of local resources.

Food has a high symbolic and cultural value and the five senses have a great significance (Montanari, 2004). Food delights the eye, engages the taste and makes it back to the top of the hierarchy of the senses.

Interest in food is often strictly tied to, and associated with, its history, which bestows on it a unique value that contributes to creating an excellent quality product. Producers are more and more frequently voted for the

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quality of their products, as consumers require, preferring slow processes to a fast meal.

Globalization should not be seen, as Jacques Lévy said (Levy, 2003, p. 60), as a destruction of places but as a *topogenesi*, a creator of places. Globalization stimulates local or regional communities to make an area more competitive in terms of allure or productivity by inserting it in the process of globalization. But if globalizing means competitiveness and specialization of the same places, it also means specialization of local economies. Globalization allows all cultures to become “contemporary” as claimed by Marc Augé (Augé, 1993, p. 16). Cultures, or rather culture, was best defined by a Sicilian anthropologist as the moment in which the relationship between man and nature is expressed and realized in a system of signs (Buttitta, 1979).

It is therefore important at a time of globalization to propose an alternative based on what has been called the “globalization of niches” as specific areas of production (Aimone, 2001, p. 21). An acceptable analysis, a new approach to food considered not only as a social act but also as a cultural experience which stimulates demand for local products and traditions. The Langhe is a prime example of how wine activates a chain of values that extends from the agricultural to the tertiary sector, involving tourism, cultural activities and real estate, creating a “cultural district”. A strong connection between territory, product and culture as parts of an area with a specific vocation.

The enhancement of local agricultural products is one of the factors of the possible development of the mountains. Certain agricultural products peculiar to the Alpine area such as environmentally friendly farming can be an important component of local development and territorial identity. Cultural products can be considered as a world heritage site, a sign of man’s work and its historical and cultural contribution to the creation of a landscape.

The promotion of niche products requires a cultural policy aimed at promoting local products that can also affect dairy products, wines, meat, berries, medicinal herbs, honey, apples and chestnuts which may become synonyms of territorial identity.

The project aims to investigate the effectiveness of the model “wine roads” and identify possible alternatives to organization of supply-focused models of “geo-itineraries”. The project also aims to analyze the involvement of local communities. The methodology used measuring the effectiveness and attractiveness of the routes, is based both on an analysis of the levels of satisfaction of demand and on an analysis of tourist mobility of gastronomes.

## 2. *A new rural model*

Town and country are two disjointed aspects of the civilizing process. In recent years this relationship has Changed and led to the emergence of a post-industrial or post-modern rurality in which the city calls to rural areas to take on a new role in providing a healthy and sustainable way of life

centered on biodiversity and based on a historical landscape that is the heritage of a community in opposition to consumption patterns (SGI, 2012). The new model of rurality is part of the broader concept of local development based on exploitation of local resources and territorial peculiarity that aims to protect the complexity of environmental, economic and social characteristics. Moreover, agriculture is subject to dynamics that are not local but global, a farmer must be able to adapt to a new environment by focusing on investment and business skills.

“Agenda 2000: For a stronger and wider Union” (COM 97/2000) has opened a new course of European agricultural models focused on the development of rural areas where attention is paid to the cultural model which constitutes a natural capital based on the unique key to development through territorial marketing initiatives. The “Manifesto for the development of the Mountain” promoted by The National Union of Mountain Towns and Communities (UNCHEM) and others subjects in 2009 (Manifesto per lo Sviluppo della Montagna, 2009) emphasized the need to make the mountains and the countryside features of a new development plan based on Italy’s most innovative and promising production chains also from an economic point of view. The mountains and the countryside from marginal areas could thus become central locations for a new development model. These areas are no longer seen as places of abandon, but new areas for economic and social opportunities related to new production functions. Agriculture should continue to be a form of defense of the territory as in the case of terraces that make up the soul of the landscape of heroic viticulture.

The rural space is proposed as a reference for a new economy based on the use of the green economy, centered in protected areas where the diffusion of renewable energy and sources of local interest (hydroelectric, solar, biomass, wind, etc.) may promote community living in the territory such as in the province of Bolzano and the Basilicata region, which rank high in Italy (Caire, 2010). A new geography of rural life is spreading. Areas are budding where agriculture has become the protagonist of an alternative way of interpreting development which is more attentive to the specificity and originality of places and careful to integrate the new economy (tourism and services) around traditional rural productions. This new concept of rural development recognizes an element of progression in the cultural identity of a territory such as the Italian one.

The National Strategic Plan for Rural Development of 2010 (Piano Strategico Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Rurale, 2010) emphasizes the role played by the landscape and the activities related to planning, planting, maintenance, and management that can be the basis for activities such as rural tourism (Axis I – Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector). In other words, the quality of products is closely related to the quality of the landscape. Strategic measures are in fact aimed at promoting knowledge and improving human potential, such as restructuring and developing physical potential and

promoting innovation and ultimately implementing measures to improve the quality of agricultural production and products.

The recovery of traditional landscapes can represent an added value for certain geographic areas such as Italy where mixed farming and fragmentation are an integral part of the landscape. The restoration and maintenance of the traditional system of irrigation and land development could help reduce flood risk and ensure the stability of the hydro-geological system through the use of typical materials.

### 3. *The project*

The liberalization of markets and the emergence of supranational stakeholders have fostered territorial rivalry as well as allowing areas to get their own back. As maintained by Fabio Pollice, typical productions acquire growing importance not only because of their economic contribution and share of employment, but because they are the first example of how value can be created by drawing on local productive traditions and reinterpreting them in an innovative perspective, attentive to trends in demand, but firmly focused on quality and excellence (Società Geografica Italiana, 2012).

The importance and the role of this new agricultural food sector is tied to two considerations. On the one hand, rural development whose typical production increasingly represents one of its strategic axes. On the other, because of intensifying competition in the agricultural food market, the creation of “imitations” and the subsequent search for more easily defensible competitive positions.

In recent years the importance of gastronomic tourism has been steadily increasing, both in terms of demand and supply, resulting in the development of large tourist areas that have managed to endorse territorial value relying on the quality of typical productions, culinary traditions, the rural landscape, the quality of the environment and, more generally, on a wide range of other intangible natural attractions (Bellencin Meneghel 1991; Antonioli Corigliano, 2004; Montanari, 2008; Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 2013).

In this tourism context, whose territorial allure is widespread and mainly intangible and whose demand is mainly motivated by experience, the route does not perform the function of a mere logical or spatial connection between different territorial attractions, but becomes the central element of the offer that allows tourists to experience the place and to create an interactive bond with the local community which is the ultimate custodian of those intangible values that drive the demand for tourism.

Wine roads, roads of taste, roads of flavors. Beyond the names used, these routes are often little more than a listing of geo-referenced places chosen for their proximity to tourist attractions, directly or indirectly related to the food and wine offer. They are often routes designed arbitrarily, without any real involvement of local people and without assessing the real tourist attractions in advance and then subjecting them to the scrutiny of the demand (Galvani, 2004; Croce, Perri, 2008).

The success of food and wine derives from its experiential value, i.e. its ability to provide tourists with an active and conscious experience of the territory and its otherness. These are the reasons that give meaning and value to the attractiveness of geo-itineraries. The tour itinerary can be defined as a “geo-itinerary” if it is proposed as a journey into the territory, that is, if it offers an experience of the space that constitutes the ultimate essence of the territory itself. But for this to happen, it is necessary that the route proposed as a tourist product is characterized by a degree of flexibility and adaptability with regard to the different, changing needs of tourists and that it has the active involvement of the local community. The latter is not only a carrier of the intangible cultural heritage that feeds the tourist appeal of the area, but it is also the cultural medium that makes the place, with all its connotations and intangible assets, intelligible and helps to create an empathetic relationship between tourism and territory. This situation also leads to an inescapable situation for achieving a conscious use of the territory as a whole and involving local attractions. If an itinerary is nothing but a mode of narration of the territory, a *community involved* itinerary is to be seen as a narrative given to the local community that shuns outside mediation and uses mostly the same facilities and infrastructure as their collective shared space. The tourist goes back to being a guest of the local community, rather than a consumer of local attractions, and the community itself reassumes its role at the heart of the tourist experience. Of course, due to the fact that there has to be an effective involvement of local communities in the initial planning stage and in the subsequent management of these routes, it is necessary that the route itself is the result of a process of collective learning in which the local community takes ownership of their territorial identity and continues to repeat this shared narrative to tourists. Tourism becomes a means of symbolically re-possessing and planning one's space in an endogenous way.

On the basis of these considerations, the project aims at investigating the effectiveness of the allure of “wine roads” and identifying possible alternatives to the organization of supply on the basis of territorially-focused models of geo-itineraries. That is, on a greater involvement of local communities and on tourism proposals with a higher experience-oriented content. From a methodological point of view, measuring the effectiveness of a route, as well as its possible modification, must be based on an analysis of levels of satisfaction of demand focused on offering food and wine (three sample areas, Piedmont, Toscana, Puglia representing the three main Italian constituencies) and on an analysis of the mobility of “gastronomes” obtained with the same method of detection and aimed at detecting deviations between itineraries that were suggested and those actually carried out (Paolini, 2002; Anelli, 2007).

The research project will be divided into six phases:

1. The research project will be based on a survey administered to users of the food and wine tours. For this purpose, the first step will be to establish a choice of methods and to plan the stages of research followed by the identification of the wine roads.

2. A second phase will involve the definition of references points, well thought out samples of data collection as well as the processing of the of the survey.
3. The following stage will involve the processing of the results of the interview on the basis of a common itinerary.
4. Following that, there will be a reasoned analysis of communication tools, itineraries available online and on site, and the administration of interviews.
5. Analysis of the results with an elaboration of an interpretive synthesis.
6. The last objective relates to the realization of a model and mapping of wine roads.

#### 4. Conclusion

The landscape and the products of a territory represent not only its cultural but also its economic worth in the promotion and enhancement of an area from the point of view of tourism.

Food and wine itineraries, together with the culture and landscape of the area, are the apex of a tourist proposal in which local communities can, and must, play a key role. The market is trying to meet the needs of the gastronome who, if led appropriately, will be able to approach a relatively unknown and badly promoted or esteemed cultural package.

The research project aims to shed light on the potential supply and the critical issues of the supply system that involves public and private actors. The success of food and wine derives from its experiential value, i.e. its ability to provide tourists with an active and conscious experience of the territory and its otherness. These are the reasons that give meaning and value to the attractiveness of geo-itineraries. The project aims to create a synergy between a quantitative and a qualitative interpretation of a landscape and its signs and symbols (Pitte, 2001).

The research method highlights the potential of routes as well as the marketability of the landscape, seen as a product, as an essential added value related to food and wine productions analyzed according to the different geographical areas and according to the Italian territorial and economic transformations currently underway.

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### *Cultura, cibo e vino come patrimonio dei territori rurali*

Negli ultimi anni l'importanza del turismo enogastronomico è andata costantemente aumentando e questo sia in termini di domanda sia in termini di offerta. Il successo di un itinerario enogastronomico discende dal suo valore esperienziale, ossia dalla sua capacità di mettere il turista nelle condizioni di fare esperienza. Fondamentale è il coinvolgimento della comunità locale che assume il ruolo di interlocutore privilegiato. Il progetto, mediante l'indagine diretta ottenuta attraverso interviste rivolte ai turisti enogastronomici, si pone come obiettivo di analizzare gli itinerari enogastronomici disponibili e di produrre una cartografia sul tema delle strade del vino.

### *Culture, nourriture et vin comme patrimoine des territoires rurales*

Au cours des dernières années, l'importance du tourisme du vin n'a pas cessé d'augmenter, et ce tant en termes de demande, tant en termes d'approvisionnement. Le succès d'une route du vin dépend de sa capacité à offrir des expériences, c'est à dire, de sa capacité à permettre aux touristes d'entrer en contact avec la communauté locale et la production d'un territoire. La question clé est la participation de la communauté locale qui assume le rôle d'interlocuteur clé. Le projet, grâce à l'enquête directe obtenue au moyen des entretiens avec les touristes, vise à analyser les visites disponibles et la construction d'une cartographie sur le thème des routes des vins.