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Typical local products and their zone of origin: the importance of their re-evaluation emphasising the links which connect them

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ABSTRACT

This work deals with the importance of giving value to the links between typical products and territory. It analyses the causes of these links and the importance of the production of typical products for endogenous local development. It examines the usefulness of the production of typical products from the perspective of differentiating the product to avoid the saturation of demand, highlighting the links between typical products, market niches and consumption linked to culture. It emphasises the role of planning to promote the production of typical products thus creating synergetic effects as well as other integrated activities to give value to the territory.

INTRODUCTION

The globalisation of the market in the last decades and ever greater standardisation in productive methods has led to a great standardisation of products in general, and of agricultural products, which we deal with in this paper, in particular. One sees indeed the widespread diffusion of products of standard quality, and the under valuation and partial disappearance, even in local markets, of products typical of that particular place, made using traditional production methods. This uniformity is the result of a "banalisation" and under valuation of the product itself by the consumer.

There is at present a cultural tendency contrary to standardisation, and product differentiation is being used, above all in the so-called "sated society", as a marketing strategy. It is in this market situation that local products find their "economic place" which enables them to survive in the market and to be re-evaluated. They draw their unique identity from the closest possible links with the place of origin which give them their particular characteristics.

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1. Differentiation of the product as a marketing strategy

The difficulty connected to the search for new market outlets, to avoid in some way or other the saturation of demand, makes the search for innovation essential for all types of goods and leads to an ever greater differentiation of typology in the product itself. This is done both to create an imperfect market with the aim of reducing the effects of competition, and to overcome the mature stage of the life cycle of a product which is moving into a decadent stage. As a result a phase of new growth and renovation is triggered off. In recent years it has been observed that in the field of food, as with other products, the typical and characteristic situation of perfect competition has tended to disappear, at least in the marketing of the product by large agri-businesses. There is still a competitive environment in the production phase due to the great fragmentation of the suppliers and this creates the well-known imbalance between the primary producer and those responsible for the processing and marketing of the packaged product. During the marketing phase the greatest part of added value is attributed (as for mass consumption domestic products such as detergents) to the presentation of the product and its differentiation from competitors. This creates a type of imperfect market, where the competition between agri-businesses is based on a partly artificial differentiation of the marketing characteristics of similar products sold by different companies.

In the field of foodstuffs it is above all the farmers who must take control of the differentiation of products. This is a process to which they are at present extraneous, and as a result at a disadvantage in contractual negotiations and penalised in the share of added value which is assigned to them. Apart from anything else, these farmers, supplying a varied base food-product to be processed and packaged, would be more capable of differentiating the product on a real basis which would not be linked exclusively to the packaging or marketing of the final product.

2. The crisis in the agricultural market and the new orientation of production

If there are difficulties connected to finding market outlets for non-agricultural products, these are even more accentuated for agri-food products, due to the great rigidity of demand. This is well known to be intrinsically connected to the nature and function of the product itself, and has always been one of the weak points of the agricultural sector. In addition the current world market situation in agrifood products tends to provoke an excess of supply with respect to a demand which is already saturated (at least in the developed countries) in most cases.

This overproduction is also the result, in the EEC, of an indiscriminate increase in production, artificially stimulated by the protectionism of the Common Market, in which the internal prices are higher than the international ones. These internal prices are, however, tending gradually to align themselves with the international ones, as was agreed in the latest WTO meeting, and this is creating a situation where the less efficient farms, incapable of producing at lower cost, will go out of business.

Consequently the farmers are currently disoriented. What they should produce and for which market are often becoming questions to which it is increasingly difficult to find answers.

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In recent years the new guidelines given to farmers by community policy, by contrast with the old tendency to encourage an indiscriminate increase in production, are aimed at improving the quality of the product even at the expense of yield per hectare. This new orientation takes into consideration other problems which are emerging, namely those of the environment, which is now widely reported in the mass media and is widespread in the popular consciousness. This directs all productive sectors, including agriculture, towards the search for alternative production techniques which will have less environmental impact, even at the expense of total production. These are suitable to improve the chances of achieving environmentally sustainable development, with solutions which are the best compromise between conflicting objectives (greater productivity versus less environmental impact).

Moreover the demand for food products is evolving in the direction of demand for more genuine products, with more "natural" characteristics, in other words treated with less chemicals or even free of chemicals, such as the "biological" ones. There is also a demand for products produced by traditional methods, which are believed to be capable of producing more genuine products and the hunt for and discovery of old recipes, with the aim of recovering those good things which have been lost. This is inspired by a type of rejection of mass production.

Given the present consumer demand for more ecologically friendly policies, both with specific reference to food products and in relation to the demand for the environment (seen as green spaces designed for recreational activities). EEC policy thus directs the farmers to produce not only quality goods in an environmentally friendly manner, but also services, and in particular environmental and/or hospitality-recreational services. These latter services could be expressed by the farmers through the supply of agritourism, which it would be convenient to integrate with the supply of typical local products.

This results therefore in a productive and organisational dichotomy in the agricultural concerns: those of the most efficient size and/or organisation to achieve a reduction of those costs which permit them to compete in the international market, aimed at producing a greater quantity of mass produced goods to sell at a lower price, destined for agro-industry and/or the large food retailing chains, and those which cannot compete in price cutting and which, if they wish to survive, must, by force of circumstance, aim at a lower quantity of goods to sell at a higher price, by improving the quality and/or finding alternative outlets in the market (market niches).

This is the situation, for example, in which all of those farms located on marginal lands find themselves in, and for whom the optimal survival solution in the market, and at the same time in their own region, could be that of selling their own agricultural products directly, as well as integrating the income from production of goods with that coming from the provision of tourist services. The direct selling of the production in this way could be achieved both, through primarily the use of the products in the guests' meals and through selling to the same guests the farm products which they have already tasted. An agritourist farm could therefore profit from, through direct selling¹, both the added value connected to the preparation of the meal and the promotion of the products themselves, making it easier to sell the product directly at higher prices than those

¹ The direct selling of farm products is not confined to those farms involved in agrotourism but is also done by other farms and is regulated by law which predates that appertaining to agrotourism.

possible when selling to wholesalers or to agri-industry, destined for the large market outlets.

Obviously all of the above could also be achieved in concerns which are not situated in marginal zones but are themselves marginal, as well as, by choice, in concerns which are not marginal and although capable of competing in the reduction of production costs, prefer other production typologies (opting for improving the quality of the product) to those of mass production and the development of service activities parallel to the agricultural production.

Adding services to the product is also a type of service linked to the modern inclusion of the tertiary sector in the agricultural world, which is paradoxically linked to the search for the venerable, to rediscover the traditions, with the aim of offering consumers also psychological pleasure when they consume food. Indeed offering additional added services to product is not only linked to packaging or the selling methods, but also to the supply of more authentic services, connected to the peculiar characteristics of the product and the identification of the sometimes non-articulated wishes of the consumers but identifiable in certain cultural tendencies, which lead to the search for not only biological products, without chemical additives (untreated by chemicals) but also in the venerable traditions, in the search for old products typical of different localities, in what becomes almost a type of historical research, of food archaeology which takes the more refined consumer on a true "pilgrimage" in a lost countryside.

3. The cultural aspects of consumption and product innovation

In the field of the present supply of added services to food products one includes the use of studies on "consumer culture"², which implies, in practice, moving from food goods seen as simple "agricultural products" or "agrofood products" to food as a true and proper cultural artefact (at the moment in which the product is linked to a specific use, be it a culinary tradition, a particular rite, a festival, or any other specific context, and when the purchase is in a particular locality and/or a farm which offers agritourism). Furthermore it has been observed that in the so-called "surfeited society" [13] other parameters such as for example income, have lost their former importance in characterising food consumption.

The analysis of "culturalisation" is indeed particularly important to understand the elements which promote the birth and success of the so-called "market niches", in a food products market which has become progressively globalised [7].

In an area in which the ease of transport and above all communication has resulted in a standardisation of the way of life and consumption in areas different from and also far away from each other there are strong pressures towards the standardisation of products.

²These studies which have fed the debate on the so-called "post-modern culture" of north-western society are of interest primarily for social theory, but, as has been noted, have also been an important source of interpretative schemes for specific market research, and more recently also for analyses of a particularly economic character. The term "culture of consumption" proposed and used by various authors including P. Bourdieu [6], M. Featherstone [11], D. Miller [15], directed towards developing, despite the variety of themes discussed, an approach which takes into consideration the mode of consumption and considers the satisfaction and the status deriving from the consumption itself. With this approach one tends in addition to highlight the aspects which in various ways generate a "sense of belonging" gratification and aesthetic pleasure.

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These pressures are functional in a market which is tending ever more towards globalisation, but in which, and precisely because of this effect, an increasing number of products are suffering from a process of "banalisation", both in terms of price and availability [5]. There is at present a rejection of this banalisation on the part of the more sophisticated consumers, and a tendency towards diversity of supply, to evade in some way the saturation of demand, through the supply of "new" products, which may consist of also of re-presenting old products which have with time become unknown to modern consumers. If the new frontier of demand, oriented towards a kind of cultural inversion towards standardisation also, is moving towards diversification, this is a response which the market must be ready to supply.

This can be done through the supply of quality products.

Quality products are far removed from the image of "essential foodstuffs", but the nutritive function is of relative importance in addition to other significant ones, namely: "fun food", "health food", "ecological-food", "culturally traditional-food", or "innovation-food" and finally "status-symbol food", when one considers that in food products as well those of high quality are "signed" like works of art and sold at high prices, which provokes in the consumer a kind of "Veblen effect" typical of luxury products. One can see how in this way one can partly overcome the rigidity of demand for food products, which is connected mainly to the function of food for nutrition.

Thus the difficulties connected to finding market outlets for agricultural products leads to the search for ever increasing product differentiation, in which the quality of the product itself plays a strategic role, inasmuch as it is seen as almost a new product.

"New" products can, in a certain sense, be defined as either as products of a particular quality mark which have specific qualitative characteristics which differentiate them from mass products. There are quality marks which, both at the national and European level, verify the geographical origin of particular products (D.O.C. in Italy) or other characteristics peculiar to them, with specific characteristics, or the fact (in biological products) that they have been produced without using artificial chemical substances. At the UE level suitable policy instruments have been established in recent years to evaluate these agrofood products.

The C.M.O. has indeed projected, in response to the needs of the new attitude towards quality, different types of quality marks, among them a quality mark which guarantees the biological production methods used to produce agricultural products (Reg. 2092/91 and successive modifications). With respect to typical agrofood products in particular, the C.M.O. has projected quality marks (P.O.D. e P.G.I.) of origin and locality of production (Reg. 2081/92), through which there will be laid down two different types of geographical protection, and other of quality marks which attest to the specific characteristics (AS) of particular products, enrolled in a community register (Reg. 2082/92).

4. The recovery of biodiversity to give value to local products

As has already been demonstrated the market conditions and the lower productive efficiency of disadvantaged areas with respect to those of the plain keep those farms situated there always marginal.

. As they are at a disadvantage, due to their lower productive efficiency, it is therefore necessary "to think of the non-agrarian use of this area, of re-conversion processes, based of productive criteria, aimed at the substitution of the conventional culture" [14] . That is it could be put into effect through the recovery of local varieties, abandoned in presently disused fields, and the new valuation through improvement of wild species also.

In this century, and in particular in the latter half of it, the rate at which animal and vegetable species are becoming extinct has accelerated alarmingly. Thus it has been observed in many studies and respected scientists (e.g. P.R. Ehrlich and E.W. Wilson) have observed that "If the present rate of extinction of the species continues to increase, one quarter of the earth's organisms, or more, could disappear in the next fifty years and this also is only a rough estimate. In addition for the first time in geological history a large number of vegetable organisms are becoming extinct." In particular the extinction of vegetable species could cause, apart from an irreversible loss of nature's capital stock and dispossession of future generations, to the danger of difficulties in maintaining the safety of foodstuffs at a world level. Vegetables form the first link in the food chain and thus it may be considered risky to reduce the genetic vegetable patrimony, because it reduces the ability of the species to adapt to different situations or climatic variations or possible massive attacks by pests.

Effectively productive standardisation in agriculture, through the commercialisation of selected standard seeds, leads to a dangerous genetic uniformity in reproductive material. Evidence of this fear is shown by the search for local germoplasms of many plant species, both herbaceous and arboreal, and the conservation of this genetic material to avoid problems of eventual future adaptation and unforeseen pests. Nevertheless it is also the new market stimuli directed towards the recovery of variety which, appropriately valued, could play a role in the innovation of the product.

The loss of biodiversity which can be considered as both environmental and economic assets (given that their disappearance can manifest itself as loss of economic goods and wealth) is seen as a typical case of "market failure". These assets, however, suffer from an underestimation of their worth which is inherent in the structure of the traditional paradigm of the market economy.

In particular the loss of genetic plant material usable in agriculture is largely due to the market mechanisms dedicated above all to a concept of quality linked exclusively to productive efficiency and to the diversity of the product itself, with the massive diffusion, for example, of selected seeds and the abandonment of local cultivars of many species.

The abandonment of the land and the disappearance of plant species of agricultural use can be seen in this way and it has mainly economic causes: "the reasons for the present contraction of the biological resource base which can potentially be used in agriculture must be searched for in the certain failures to intervene and in the market itself" [14] . "Failure to intervene" means certain public failures of economic policy such as for example the support price payment mechanism for the production of certain crops and the production and use of certificated seeds, which has made new selected varieties artificially competitive, and contributed to the abandonment of the cultivation of local traditional species and varieties.

However today one can talk of a type of "revenge" by the market itself against this. Indeed the revaluation of the local genetic plant resources is not solely linked to safety and ethical problems, or of an economic evaluation based on new paradigms, capable of

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giving weight to effects which are external to the market, but also to a concrete market necessity. It arises precisely from the need to differentiate products to stimulate demand to overcome in some way the above mentioned market saturation. Another problem linked to the market is that of the survival of farms on marginal lands. This survival is linked to the supply of services, apart from goods, but also to the supply of a quality product, which embodies new "cultural" services. This type of offer is also linked to the rediscovery of local varieties and /or the conservation of productive specificities.

The rediscovery of ancient local cultivars which are to be sold as niche products, and which can be also publicised through agritourism for example, can also be included in the argument. In addition one must add that some of the most appreciated local foodstuffs, appropriately presented through a variety of marketing techniques, can be re-launched on the market as "rediscovered -innovations of the product".

There are already initiatives of this type, promoted at institutional level such as, for example, in Italy the register of "mountain products", envisaged in the latest legislation on mountain areas, Act No. 97/94.

The European Community Agricultural Policy, correcting its own previous aims, apart from the establishment of quality marks, also includes among its agricultural policy objectives the safeguarding of biological resources. Among the objectives to be achieved with the accompanying measures of the McSharry plan are put forward, indeed, apart from extensive farming practices and the promotion of ecologically friendly farming, the recovery of the biodiversity of species. With the agro-environmental measures of Reg. 2078, and in particular measure D3, the community encourages the conservation and valuation of both animal and plant species on their way to extinction.

One must add however that these measures have not been adequately exploited, in particular with regard to biological plant resources, especially in the south of Italy, an area particularly rich in biodiversity, as has been shown in many recent studies, above all in relation to fruit growing germoplasms. In these regions the measures have not been put into effect or, as for example in the case of Sardinia, has not been put into effect with regard to plant biological resources, in which these are particularly rich (see[1],[8],[9]).

It has been shown that many Southern regions of Italy have prepared initial data on the species in preliminary studies to prepare to introduce these measures, but then these were not introduced in the phase of the final program for the application of Reg. 2078. This has been correctly identified as being due to the high risks it offers to businesses involved in the production and marketing of species which are in practice unknown (higher costs, uncertain yields), risks which are not adequately compensated for in the planned incentives. These risks indeed, cannot be easily sustained by single enterprises which are not sufficiently well organised, and these conditions are not sufficiently considered in the calculation of compensation planned under measure D3.

Consequently it has been proposed that the use of autoctone species should be included in measure A3 on the use of autoctone species in the cultivation of biological products, combining the incentives for the measures. In addition farmers who farm biologically normally have better technical and farm management training, and are already keen on the search for and collection of local species which are more capable of adaptation.

With regard to agrofood policy instruments to use to give value to the products obtained with the use of these local cultivars, it has to be said that for typical products the C.M.O. has already established various quality marks of origin and provenance, guaranteed by the

UE. There is not a quality mark which refers directly to the use of a particular to obtain these typical products but the existing quality marks seem capable of guaranteeing, through their production disciplines, the products resulting from this cultivation, and in particular the marks AS, although also POD and PGI, or also the biological production marks in cases of combining local cultivars and biological production. These hypotheses however still need to be verified [14].

5. Different productive organisations and their relationship to the territory

The previously mentioned situation of the international market and that inside the C.M.O. leads, as has been seen, to an organisational and productive dichotomy in farms. Those with a better organised productive organisation are capable of competing in the market and are suited for mass production while those, generally found in marginal zones and less productively efficient may be able to survive in the market by producing niche products.

The former may be connected in networks and chains in an abstract space where the zone of production is unimportant, the latter to survive need to produce in a specific limited area and not only an area of production, but a real region, a material and spiritual place at the same time, identified by the traces left by time and the specific pattern of social relationships, production activities, culture and traditions, interrelated with the peculiar characteristics of the physical environment by which they are in part conditioned. The production of typical quality products may of course also take place on farms which are not located in marginal areas, but rather in zones where there is a well established tradition of the production of particular products, in competitive agricultural systems, identifiable with, or in some way comparable with so-called "districts"³.

The driving force of districts are well known to consist in not only a strong local identity but also in the connections with the global economic environment which express themselves through various cultural and economic exchanges. The marginalised agricultural systems, by contrast, although often possessing their own precise identities, can be defined as systems almost closed to the external environment, with which there is only limited exchange. Effectively they seem to maintain their identity precisely because of their isolation and marginalisation, which is not capable of enriching that identity by means of new inputs, as by contrast happens in the case of "districts" which manage to do this without modifying their essential identity. Other areas although developed, in their turn, have a type of exchange with the global system which has destroyed their essential identity, merging their culture almost completely in the conventional global one. In these areas amorphous development, which are better adapted to mass production, development is and can only be exogenic, developing on fortuitous situations or

³Marshallian industrial districts or also agricultural districts or agro-industry.

The definition of agro-industrial districts, which derives from that of industrial districts, appropriately adapted, is based, according to Iacoponi, on five conditions: a) achievement of a product characteristic of the local productive system; b) disassembly (in phases) and divisibility (into basic units) of the basic productive process, c) concentration of the area of business into different sectors also, among these being integrative ones; d) non-competitive relationship between businesses so as to reduce the transitional costs and establish a "common Market"; e) the "thickening" of the social relationships to minimise the information costs and favour an "industrial atmosphere" [12].

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opportunities which come from outside the area ⁴, and in future absence of these opportunities the development will also disappear because it is not indigenous and self-sustaining.

The area of interest for local products is therefore : the local- district system, where these goods are already produced and exported, which can be seen as models, and the local marginalised systems, for their economic potential development linked to their capability to produce the same goods.

Nonetheless these typical local products are of most interest to disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas where one could, if appropriate in conjunction with other activities, initiate the process of local development, precisely because of their close links to the region.

The territory of single local areas can be defined as dynamic microsystems made up of multiple interrelated elements and at the same time as single elements which interact with each other in the global system in which they exist⁵. It is these relationships at both a local and global level which provide the primary definition of these areas as territories, through reference to the relationships between the individual elements found in them, and not simply as inert geographical spaces (with elements inside them which have no significant relationships). It is also this which creates internally, and also externally, true integration. When there also exist relationships inside the microsystem and also with the external environment that can create integration - in both a horizontal and vertical sense - and which produce synergy in the cultural and economic activities of the local community, with the creation of "economies external to the business but inside the locality"⁶, then these systems can be defined as districts. What creates the capacity to develop is the spontaneous presence of a strong socio-economic system, on which base is established a specific and deeply rooted internal common culture, in dialectic relationship with the exterior world. This system is capable of producing economies which derive from the effects of synergy of various types (economies of agglomeration, economies of scope, etc.).

In weaker areas this system, or something similar, may be tried in an attempt to give value to all those activities which are linked to local traditions and which can be correlated and integrated. Primarily it is necessary to find a way of integrating them not only in an economic framework but also according to the socio-cultural pattern, in a locality-specific matrix which will give the system the strength to be self-sustaining and

⁴The valuation of these areas derives from the present or planned territorial conditions, which the influence of external conditions transforms directly into positive external characteristics. This valuation is thus connected to simple external economies or eventually those of scale. By contrast in local development of the area-district the key conditions are those constructed by a specific milieu, capable of generating inside itself specific external characteristics, connected to synergetic effects [10].

⁵One is speaking of an extreme simplification, which unites on a single level (local) all the other possible intermediate expressions of territory, which may interact among themselves in a hierarchical way to arrive indirectly at a global system and/or which can interact directly with the global system itself.

The global-local relationship may be represented as a node-network. "Two levels of this network can be distinguished: one global in which the network connect nodes which are the local systems, the other local in which these nodes themselves are networks in which the nodes are the individual subjects"[10].

⁶[2]. The economy which is established inside the area are connected to the three different dimensions of the district [4] : districts as areas of containment of the transition costs, as areas of concentration of strategic productive resources, as areas of compatibility between the industrial configuration of small businesses and declining income.

capable of reproducing itself. In order to develop the "sparks" of development in these areas it is essential to give value to the local culture and also to sustain the local-global dialectical relationship. In this relationship the continuing interchange between local-"contextual" and global "codified" awareness⁷ assumes a preponderant role. The contextual awareness may become, after the appropriate adaptation, "codified", thus enriching the global cultural heritage, and the "codified" awareness, due to the greater facility and speed with which it can be passed from one node to another in the global network, may in its turn enrich the local culture which uses it after adapting it to its convenience. From this adaptation may arise still more contextual awareness, which can be "codified" and which will be capable of yet further enriching the culture of the global system. In this way an inexhaustible virtuous circle may be initiated.

In the same way, on a larger scale, the "global village" created by the present speed of communication, instead of producing cultural and productive standardisation, should lead to a new humanism resulting from the ever closer exchanges and interactions between radically diverse cultures, which while integrating, remain intrinsically different.

Above all it is always necessary to safeguard all types of diversity, be they cultural, genetic or productive.

At the applicative level of the economy the interrelationship between contextual awareness and codification could lead to innovation, both in the processing system and the product, which can be transferred from niche products to mass ones. This raises the quality and the variety of the latter, on one hand, and on the other the quality of the product made by traditional methods, which can be modified as necessary in the interests of guaranteeing greater hygienic food safety. Even without arriving at the mass production of niche products, which is not achievable for many reasons including, above all, their higher production costs, contextual-codification integration could lead, by means of quality-mark instruments, to an increase in the awareness and consumption of niche products. The quality-mark is indeed an instrument through which the heritage of contextual productive awareness becomes codified, through the establishment of production disciplines universally accepted on the global market. These disciplines guarantee both the specific quality of the certain products and food hygiene safety to consumers who live in areas different to, and far away from, the zone of production .

The marginal areas are different from the more efficient local areas of endogenous development not only because of their isolation but also because, precisely because of this isolation, they do not create internally that atmosphere and culture of collaboration which is typical of "districts". This collaborative facility is indeed connected to the fact that internal competition is minimal when productive and commercial competition is primarily directed towards outside competitors. In this way an adequate equilibrium is created between the minimum of competition, which is a guarantee of efficiency, and a great integrative capacity, with reciprocal exchange of information, among the businesses inside the area. This positive atmosphere, profitable due to the synergy which it is capable of producing, is difficult to create artificially, but one may artificially establish the base to induce its gradual spontaneous formation.

⁷This definition refers to the study on districts of which one definition, among others, is "cognitive organisations capable of integrating contextual and codified awareness" [3].

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Culture, although specific to an area, is not capable of itself of activating the development processes if it is not able to become operative, that is to say culture of "know-how" and of "know how to work together", on the part of the members of a local community, to produce a benefit which is individualised by its close relationship with the local territory and could not be produced so well elsewhere (at least not at the same quality or at comparable cost).

6. Typical products and integrated activities

The activation of a collaborative culture, which generates trust and a sense of belonging, in place of a "non-culture" which is closed in on itself and reserved, is sometimes the key to activate successfully economic activities which are themselves capable of creating synergy. On the other hand, collaborative culture originates in its turn from the "convenience" of working together, in activities which can be profitably integrated. These may be created by the segmentation of the production process of a single product characteristic of the productive activity of the area, where more businesses may converge (if this process lends itself to being compartmentalised into phases and divisible into basic units). Alternatively the same activities capable of integration may be developed also for productive processes which create different goods or to the activities of different productive sectors, in which process, however, the input of each business forms part of the output of others.

Agriculture, tourism, and handicrafts, for example, are activities which it is easy to integrate in tourist areas. In many marginal zones there is natural beauty and environmental riches capable of stimulating the tourist demand, if the supply requirements are adequately met, which must be put into operation. The consumption of the tourists may in its turn encourage the consumption of local food products and handicrafts.

From this point of view, agritourism, in particular, and rural tourism in general, seem to be activities well suited to revitalise the territorial fabric of marginal agricultural zones. In this way a multiplicity of activities with a single income could be achieved in the same farm which is adapted to agritourism and, in general, activities integrated in the whole area.

The integrating of tourism, handicrafts and agricultural activities are in addition already promoted at a European level in the LEADER project for the development of rural areas. This type of project, widespread throughout all the countries of the European Community, is based precisely on the activation of the economic and cultural resources of the local culture which we have discussed here, valorising the activities connected to typical products which incorporate this culture.

The activation of the self-organising capacity of local cultures came about through the institution of Groups of Local Action (GLA) for the establishment of Local Action Plans (LAP) in which the first tranche of the LEADER project (LEADER I) set up 217 GLA in the whole of the European Community. The second tranche (LEADER II), at present in operation, will take advantage of the experience already obtained.

It may be argued that there are no lack of instruments suitable to sustain the production of local products through integration with other activities, and the valuation of this

production through the establishment of the appropriate quality marks, and also the instruments for the conservation of the biological resource base for specific local products, in the legislative panorama of the community agricultural policy. Nor are there a lack of instruments at a national and local level. We are dealing with activating and when possible integrating the various levels of planning to make them interact with one another and with the activities present and suitable for the area. Apart from this, integration, working through plans on all their levels, not only of economic activities but also the financial resources available through different channels (private and public a various scales of size in the territory) and of the bureaucratic structures which tend to impose themselves, presently forms part of the existing planning culture.

This culture newly established at an institutional level, at least in certain countries such as Italy, must grow and become operative, adapting itself appropriately to the different contingent requirements. In planning, which tends to devolve ever increasingly to the territories to become a dynamic system, perfectly adapted to the territorial system itself, the capacity to sustain synergy at all levels becomes the principal objective.

For typical local products one may essentially find two types of outlet. Either, through agritourism, bringing the consumer to the product, or bringing the product to the consumer through commercial valuation through quality marks. The first way is easier when the production area has not achieved the productive and commercial force to export its products, which remain "niche" products in the strictest meaning of the word. The second when the area is capable of achieving a productive and commercial expansion to supply what is still a niche product but on a larger scale, and linked to the global market. The development of integrated activities to create and spread synergy is projected in the territorial plan both for weaker areas and for more developed ones. they are projected, through integrated programs for the area at all levels of the territorial plan in the regional environment, levels which, must, also through connecting, take into consideration the market outlets pre-envisaged for the various products of the various areas.

It would be more realistic if these two options, described antithetically to describe them more clearly, could be integrated in the ambit of the same area with a mix of their proportions varying according to the strength or weakness of the areas. And thus the valorisation of the product can be combined with that of the area (above all for products consumed locally), and at the same time take advantage (in the case of consumption in distant markets) of memories of the image (which may eventually be emphasised by the quality mark which attests to its geographical origin) of the area of tourist attraction or park.

CONCLUSION

The drive towards standardisation of products in an epoch in which the ease of transportation, and even more communication, has brought about a standardisation of the way of life and of consumption in different areas far distant from one another and also of the means of production and is linked to a generic concept of efficiency. Goods are produced in quantity and quality at low cost, instead of a production system which emphasises the peculiar characteristics which give quality to the product. This has resulted in the spread of products of uniform quality, and of a devaluation and partial disappearance, even in local markets, of local products typical of the locality, produced

Typical local products and their zone of origin

using traditional production processes. We refer to products which have an intrinsic quality linked, apart from the soil-climate characteristics, to a specific geographical environment, and the local culture incorporated in it, through a quality which is the fruit of the productive processes dating from antiquity and repetition and experience. Thus they are products closely linked to the place of origin and their peculiar qualitative characteristics incorporate the physical and spiritual characteristics which identify the area.

There is at present a current running against standardisation and this emphasises diversification, and not only the diversification of commercial products for marketing reasons, but also due to the widespread fear of cultural standardisation and the "flattening out" of culture. This fear, resulting from the greater ecological sensibility, is that standardisation will destroy the vital forces in biological diversity.

If this new frontier of demand, which is a kind of cultural inversion of standardisation, is aimed at diversification, this is a demand which the market must be ready to supply. The present difficulty connected to the delivery to the market of agricultural production is encouraging research into ever increasing diversification of production. This aims to avoid in some way the rigidity of demand and here the qualitative aspect of the product plays a strategic role and can almost be identified as a new product. This causes an organisational and productive dichotomy in the farm. On one hand there is the size and/or organisation most efficient to achieve the objective of a reduction of costs which will allow them to compete in markets, aimed at producing a greater quantity of mass production goods, to sell at the lowest possible price, aimed at agro-industry and the large food retailing chains. On the other those marginalised areas which operate on the fringes of the market and cannot compete by reducing costs and prices and which must, if they wish to survive, focus on the production of a lower quantity of goods to sell at a higher price, either by improving the quality and/or finding a market niche. The former may be connected in networks and chains in an abstract space where the zone of production is unimportant, the latter to survive need to produce in a specific limited area and not only an area of production, but a real region, material and spiritual place in the same time, identified by the traces left by time and the specific pattern of social relationships, production activities, culture and traditions, interrelated with the peculiar characteristics of the physical environment by which they are in part conditioned. The production of typical quality products may of course also take place on farms which are not located in marginal areas, but rather in zones where there is a well established tradition of the production of particular products, in competitive agricultural systems, identifiable with, or in some way comparable with so-called "districts".

Nonetheless these typical local products are of most interest to disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas where one could, if appropriate in conjunction with other activities, initiate the process of local development, precisely because of their close links to the region. Tourism, for example, in such areas is capable of pulling in other investment which can be dedicated to the productive network of agriculture and handicrafts capable of supplying typical products. If not, tourists buy standard products which are known not to be of local origin, or at least not necessarily. This does not increase the wealth of the region where there is consequently only a distribution network. Agritourism, in particular, could allow farms located in marginal areas, and liable to be abandoned, to find a way to survive in the market and at the same time remain in their

region. Moreover the encouragement in all of Europe of such integrated activities in rural disadvantaged areas form the framework of the project LEADER. The search for projects capable of involving various productive sectors, and private and public input, to trigger off development of local synergetic and self-starting processes is connected to the present growing interest in economic programmes based ever-increasingly on the region, through integrated regional development plans, which give due value to the land itself and its products, and individualises and reinforces the relationship which exists between them.

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