

From the alps to the table alternative market, innovative models of commercialization and self-management for the relaunch of production in the mountains

A critical analysis and presentation of five best practices in Europe,
starting with the experience of the network of Slow Food Presidia





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INTRODUCTION

What mountains for which agriculture?

The mountain areas are an extraordinary environmental and cultural driving force. Their physical structure has provided the conditions for the development of incredible diversity, both biological (plant, animal breeds and ecosystems) and cultural (language, folk dances, ethnic minorities, celebrations, etc.). This diversity has given rise to knowledge and anthropized or semi-anthropized landscapes (vineyards, terraces, pastures, etc.), which now risk being compromised by the abandonment of productive activities. More and more, the mountains are considered marginal, even backward, areas.

Yet this heritage is perhaps the most important element of the identity of extreme terrain, making them a potentially strategic asset for Europe, also economically speaking. Consider that (according to data of the Alpine Convention) the tourist influx to the Alps alone is 100 million per year.

Despite the enormous potential, there is a critical situation for those who live and work every day in the mountains. Post-war industrial development depleted a large part of the population. Many traditional activities stopped, and with them, links with local communities and environments were severed (an example is the abandonment of many pastures). This compromised (or risked compromising) the transmission of traditional knowledge (an important resource of intangible heritage) and the availability of services (such as schools, post offices, hospitals).

The economic and social development of the mountains has not been homogenous. From one side to another on the same mountain, the situation can change dramatically. Altitude for agriculture, slope for pasture, exposure and hydrogeological structures for villages are all factors that play a decisive role and critically influence the life of a valley. Just compare a valley with giant facilities for winter sports or close to highways with another more isolated, devoid of large urban centres. The diversity of mountain environments and their character, often cross-border, have significantly slowed down the complex and delicate process of regional development.

Despite depopulation, the Alps alone today count 14 million inhabitants (an significant number considering this is equivalent to the combined population of Denmark and Sweden), and of these, 2 million are aged between 15 and 30 years. After decades of neglect of the mountain areas, however, we are seeing signs of a countertrend. Or rather, a new trend: A new generation of young people are re-inventing their lives in regions that seemed to have been forgotten.

It is a generation ready to rethink the *high lands* as an opportunity rather than a problem to be solved. Technological innovations, virtual and non-virtual networks, a world that is often imagined to be far away from these regions, is in fact ascending upon the valleys and has entered virtuously in various contexts, without morphing them, but rather innovating and providing new opportunities. Those who are launching initiatives in the mountains are doing so with new sensitivities to innovation (regarding sustainability of the production, quality or energy) and new requirements (such as broadband, or telecommunication services).

How to bring food to the centre?

Agricultural and pastoral activities, when placed at the centre of the development of the valleys, may be the most effective way to relaunch the small virtuous economies of these territories. These are economies that do not distort the mountain environment (such

as big downhill ski resorts which benefit only a few towns, investments in overbuilding, and take advantage of the lower valleys as empty corridors), but instead promote activities that care for the land and promote the heritage of mountain cheeses, cured meats, wines, breads, juices, fruits and vegetables.

To make this possible, it is necessary to highlight the critical situation that now affects and limits small-scale food production, distribution and commercialization, starting by instigating a dialogue with farmers, breeders, cheesemakers and artisans who work in the mountains and are custodians of its biodiversity.

This vision, however, presents a new challenge, that of accessibility; that is: how can we make these products more available on the market?

The need arises to build connections linking mountains with consumers; to invent and experiment with new formulas that make mountain products more available, connecting producers to buyers, and creating opportunities for meeting and exchange. The short distribution chain can also be an opportunity for education: it can promote knowledge, which is a prerequisite for informed choices.

To innovate, and make direct distribution more efficient means creating channels that generate not only economic flow, but also cultural. Along with the products, knowledge and understanding of the complex dynamics that regulate the equilibrium of the mountains are also exchanged, generating respect for these territories and for those who live there, and overcoming the stereotypes of these areas as remote and marginal compared to the urban world.

The dossier

The dossier examines the issue of commercialization of local and traditional products, to provide ideas and tools that can enhance and promote mountain areas through the sale of small-scale quality products.

To do so the dossier consists of two parts. The first part investigates the recurring critical issues and needs in the mountain production chains, starting from the experiences of the network of Slow Food Presidia in Europe. It also indicates the main themes (facilities and infrastructure, artisanality and regulations, presence of young people, etc.) and how these affect the marketing of products. The second part reports on five case studies from several different European countries that have created innovative methods of distribution and offers them as successful examples because they are able to foresee new and interesting development opportunities.

The study is further developed through dialogue with producers, artisans, distributors, activists and all participants in the supply chain.

FROM THE ALPS TO THE TABLE

Critical issues and opportunities in the marketing of mountain products, starting from the experiences of the network of Slow Food Presidia

From interviews with Slow Food Presidia producers, it is clear that in some cases the main problems depend on the specifics of the product (such as the need for adequate space for aging or changing tastes and habits of consumers) while in other cases they are linked to factors such as marginalization, distance from urban centres, difficult conditions of the region, and to issues common to all types of producers.

Facilities and infrastructure

One aspect traditionally associated with the mountains is restricted mobility. Often the mountains lack the appropriate infrastructure for mobility and access, not only for tourists but also for the inhabitants and therefore also producers. Farmers, cheesemakers and beekeepers are forced to move in extremely strenuous ways. Often the roads and mule tracks that connect the pastures to the valleys are not well maintained and may be inadequate for the passage of flocks and herds; for example, following heavy rainfall, the roads and tracks could be rough and inaccessible.

Mobility problems also directly affect product sales. Roads that are difficult to travel discourage visitors - and therefore possible buyers - to go directly to the points of production, thus reducing opportunities for direct sales and forcing producers to sell elsewhere.

For breeders and cheesemakers, the problem is more serious: the qualitative characteristics of a cheese are dependent on various factors, including the possibility of processing freshly milked raw milk, and the environment where the first part of aging takes place. Working in pasture for at least three months a year requires a suitable storage place, often at high altitudes, where the cheese can be kept before transferring it to the premises for the final part of the maturing process. Suitability of roads leading to mountain pastures - drivable also by small vans or cars, and not only by herds - thus become indispensable.



In addition to infrastructure, production facilities also represent an important critical issue for those working in the mountains. Mountain dairies and pastures don't always guarantee optimal conditions both regarding production (e.g. reduced spaces for processing and storage, hygienic conditions) and regarding daily life (e.g. electricity).

It is often the producers themselves who look after transit routes or the upkeep of mountain dairies and pastures, taking care of the land for the entire community. It is important to recognize their role in the management of the common goods with appropriate supportive public policies.

The problem of the management of Alpine dairies is perhaps the main problem of the producers who work in these places. A positive example is that of the Orobicche Valleys Traditional Stracchino Presidium (Lombardy, Italy) which, thanks to the local mountain community, has benefited from the restructuring of some dairies, now equipped with electricity, running water and sanitation. The cheesemakers on their part perform maintenance tasks, such as repairing dry stone walls, while their animals, grazing the grass, prevent it becoming dry (in winter, dry grass facilitates sliding snow, thus increasing the risk of avalanches).

But there are also those who have integrated dairy production in Alpine pastures with new ventures in hospitality and training. This is the case of the Formadi Frant Presidium from Carnia (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy) where the producer has recovered the Pozof Alpine dairy (in the municipality of Ovaro, 1,500 meters above sea level). In addition to producing the traditional cheese "Formadi Frant," the producer welcomes tourists and students; organizing educational activities (such as participation in migratory herding and milking, some designed especially for children) and walks to discover the wild herbs.

External relations

A recurring critical issue for producers in mountainous areas is isolation, i.e. the difficulty in managing individual activities that would be carried out more effectively as a collective, such as promotion, marketing and training. Often this work is carried out without the support of local or educational institutions, regional research or even local media.

Aware of this problem, different producers have created networks to promote together local products and their work, demonstrating the potential of cooperation. The integration of non-farming activities with other initiatives such as food and beverage, accommodation, tourism, education, social activities, and others, is an important source of innovation and development for producers in these contexts.

An example of this is the producers in the Primiero Mountain Botiro Presidium (Trentino, Italy). Thanks to the collaboration with specialized technicians, a stage of the production of this traditional butter has been returned to the Alpine dairies, as in the past. Various local institutions participated in this venture, in particular the province of Trento (with important economic support) and the Istituto Agrario di San Michele all'Adige (for technical support). Furthermore, the Presidium participated in exchanges with

producers of other Presidia (both regional and international), and media attention of this production increased with numerous articles and television services, in both local and national press.

Artisanality, regulations and technical training

Industrial and mass-production require codified processes and the use of technology in many stages of production. On the other hand, traditional products are the result of know-how and traditions handed down for generations, which are an expression of local cultures and identities. The quality of the productions in marginal areas is inextricably linked to learning and preservation of knowledge, which cannot be codified. One must work side-by-side with an artisan for years, learning from their actions, acquiring indefinable sensitivity and accumulating experiences. Skipping two generations in the transmission of artisanal knowledge can mean losing products of enormous value forever.

Uniqueness is the strength of artisanal products, the element that in the marketing stage distinguishes them from those produced on a large scale. It allows the community of producers economic sustainability of their activities and appropriate recognition for their work.

These techniques and processes cannot always be reconciled with hygiene regulations. Strict hygiene laws render illegal facilities for production and aging, tools and important materials for the characterization of a product. They can very quickly eliminate old traditions and valuable productions, as has happened in recent years, in many areas of the Balkans.

When they are incompatible, it is important for producers to be able to rely on expert support (maybe to claim the need for exemptions that protect at-risk productions) and also with careful sensitivity to the value of their productions.

The collaboration of experts can overcome even legal obstacles. This was the case with farmers and cheesemakers of the Bucegi Mountains Branza de Burduf Presidium (Romania). Thanks to the technical assistance of some veterinarians (Italian and Romanian), sanitary authorizations necessary for the production and sale of this cheese were obtained.

Discussion with technicians also allows improvement in the quality of the artisanal process. This is demonstrated by the training work done by Slow Food to encourage the production of native enzymes among Presidium cheesemakers, allowing the avoidance of industrial enzymes which, while solving many production problems, make the quality of the cheese generic.

One example is that of the producers of the Béarn High Pasture Cheese Presidium on the French side of the Western Pyrenees. In this historical area of dairy farming, animals were being fed from silo fodder and industrial enzymes were used. The producers have embarked on a path to eliminate both, organizing training on these issues, and activating a trial currently underway for the self-production of enzymes.

Market and consumption

The homogenisation of food consumption that followed the wave of industrialization of the last century has standardized tastes and sensitivities, influencing purchasing decisions. This phenomenon has directly affected the culinary heritage of mountain areas, the result of centuries-old cultures, where the energy from food represented a pillar for survival, but also pleasure.

Many traditional products are no longer frequently consumed because they are considered unsuitable for daily diet, being too "calorific", "fatty" or "strong tasting." This is the case with historical products such as aged cheeses, butter, cured meats of goat or sheep, black pudding, meat conserves, and polenta, found in the mountains of Europe.

Slow Food has countered this trend by building market awareness with several Presidia projects to promote forgotten or undervalued products whose production is often linked to the need to use all parts of the animal, or to draw nourishment from products suitable for steep and poor terrain.

For example, the Valdesi Valleys Mustardela Presidium (Piedmont, Italy), a pasty and mildly spiced, sweet-sour black pudding which was found on the market mainly in the area of production or amongst enthusiasts (as well as some Eastern European migrants, more accustomed to these flavours). Or that of Pitina, a traditional cured meat of the foothills in the province of Pordenone (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy), made from mutton and old goat's meat or game. The meat was smoked for long periods on home fireplaces. Pitina produced in this way was tough, with a strong meaty and smoky taste. In order to find a "modern" market for them, now they are softened with the addition of pork lard, and the period of smoking has been decreased, making the product more sweet, balanced and less intense.

Promoting “poor” products and plant biodiversity

The most famed products from mountain areas are undoubtedly processed ones (cheeses, meats, breads, wines, fruit juices, jams, herbal liqueurs, etc.). Created to preserve food, their production is linked to knowledge and skills of artisans, and for this reason are unique and more profitable. But the mountain areas also have a great wealth of varieties and ecotype of fruits, cereals and vegetables that not always adequately valued.

In this regard, the experience of two communities of producers of garlic is symbolic: the Resia Garlic Presidium (Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy) and the Vessalico Garlic Presidium (Liguria, Italy). Although located far apart, both these communities have been able to capitalize on the quality of their products by selling most of their production as part of the dedicated annual festivals. Moreover, in both cases, the producers are organized to transform their starting product to value-added products based on garlic and, in the Ligurian case, creating a collective processing workshop.

Another significant story is the one of the Lungau Tauern Rye Presidium (Austria); Starting from a rye variety that was grown almost only for personal consumption, its producers engaged in many activities for its promotion. These included organic conversion and especially technological innovations in the drying and cleaning phases, as well as commercial innovation in experimenting with new processed products (such as bread or beer).

Also in this case the interventions for valorization affected the product's commercialization.

Integration of young people

One aspect that emerges whenever we talk about critical issues facing mountain productions is the role of young people, the producers of tomorrow. The presence of the younger generation is not a problem that, like others, affects only the commercialization. It is not related only to the mountain areas, but rural areas in general. Not surprisingly, however, the problem manifests even more obviously in marginalized geographical areas. Marginalization itself is in fact the main obstacle for life in these territories.

New trends however seem to indicate a growing interest in farming and subsequent repopulation. The sensitivity of the new mountain inhabitants has in fact changed, and with it, the needs. Young producers bring new blood and new energy and enrich business initiatives, often through communication. They are in contact with each other even when they are in the Alpine fields using new technologies, social media; Facebook accounts and Twitter profiles, following blogs and posting photos of their animals and pastures (when there is coverage!). They know each other even if they live in different Alpine areas, exchange information, do not fear the novel, and are more able to diversify, launching agriturismos or eating spots, and using the internet to sell their products.

Interviews with producers in the Presidia network have highlighted how conservation projects and promotion have been able to actively involve many young people, both during the production and marketing phases.

Speaking of young people, therefore, means to speak of the attractiveness of the Alpine context, both in terms of liveability as well as from a professional point of view. But one of the key points is the economic sustainability of producers' work of and therefore the possibility of selling at a fair price.

There are, in this regard, examples of young people taking up or restarting family activities related to projects of promoting mountain products. An example is the Swiss cheese Presidium of Vacherin Fribourgeois made from raw milk. Children had always continued the activity of their parents, but over time their interest was dropping because the production of Vacherin was not so profitable. The product, however, was enhanced by improving the quality and an experience of collective aging managed by a producers cooperative. Now the number of young people involved is more than ten.

VIRTUOUS EXPERIENCES

Five case studies that illustrate innovative forms of marketing of small-scale agricultural products

The five cases selected are examples of innovative and successful stories, starting from the conditions that made them necessary to clarifying the management system. They mainly refer to mountain scenarios, but not only, with the purpose of having an even wider spectrum of experiences from which to draw ideas and inspiration. The projects on which the research work was carried out are:

- The Mercatale Project – Il mercato coperto dei produttori (Italy)
- Bitto cheese aging shelter, the Valli del Bitto Trading spa (Italy)
- The Case of the Idoki Label (France)
- Pardorf Earth Market (Austria)
- The experience of the *Paniers Marseillais* (France)



The Mercatale Project – Il mercato coperto dei produttori

The Mercatale was formed as an initiative between the local government and a few organizations and associations that wanted to re-launch virtuous agricultural production in the Valdarno area (near Arezzo). Thus in a first moment a farmer's market was organized, and later with the advent of a designated structure, this evolved into the Mercatale. Here during normal business hours every day, area producers (who agree to respect strict production protocols) are able to directly sell their products to the public.

Bitto cheese aging shelter, the Valli del Bitto Trading spa

This case deals with a specific sector, aged cheeses, and concerns an initiative of one of Slow Food's most famous presidia, Heritage Bitto. A few years ago this presidium's association of producers launched a collective refinement and marketing center in Val Gerola (near Sondrio, Italy), to promote the production of Bitto cheese. In order to cover the necessary financial costs, the associates set up a company just for the occasion that has brought together memberships and financiers, some of whom are private citizens not connected in any way to the cheese making business. In recent years the project has re-launched this alpine pasture product, taking on both the role of facilitator in the supply chain and that of marketing center for Bitto cheese; in this way they help the community of producers and their management of the alpine pastures.

The Case of the Idoki Label

The case of the Idoki label (French Basque Country) describes a system of direct sales initiatives brought together by about 100 producers from the French Pyrenees. Through this label, which foresees the subscription to precise and strict supply guidelines (that are particularly sustainable), the producers have been able to create incredibly diverse marketing canals, thus bringing life back to familial agriculture and the local biodiversity.

Pardorf Earth Market

The *Pardorf* Earth Market is a farmer's market of the Slow Food Network that takes place in the rural area not far from Wien. Local agricultural and artisanal products are available here, as the market aims to promote the regional biodiversity and to allow the producers access to the urban market. The market's leaders propose numerous initiatives that involve the consumers in educational and training activities.

The experience of the *Paniers Marseillais*

The *Paniers Marseillais* is a network of buying groups in the French city of Marseille. Through the centralization of some of the processes (as for example the management of contracts with the producers) and cooperation with local farmers, the association's members manage the weekly distribution of goods in nearly 30 different points through the city. Thus the group helps to support the diffusion of ecological agricultural practices in suburban farming.



THE MERCATALE – IL MERCATO COPERTO DEI PRODUTTORI

The Mercatale project was formed in 2005 and consists of a collective distribution platform for direct sales. Found in the center of the Tuscan town Montevarchi (in Piazza XX Settembre) near Arezzo, this store is open to the public daily (from 9 am to 1 pm, then again from 4 to 8:30 pm).

The staff helps with sales and shoppers can freely buy from the various departments in this sales point; consumers are shown a significant variety of products to eat (fruits and vegetables, beans and potatoes, bread and baked goods, pasta, flour, grains, meat and cold cuts, eggs, dairy products and cheeses, honey, wine, oil, and preserves). Each producer has their own shelf with information about the company shown on a card: shoppers can read about the characteristics of the products and the quantities produced each year, the animals raised, the cultivation system, the provenance of the prime materials, and the necessary elements for evaluating the way that the producer has established the cost.

From an organizational point of view the Mercatale project is public, promoted by the Municipal Administration of Montevarchi since 2011 and managed by the Market Producers Association. This association was set up ad hoc as the town gradually withdrew its direct dealings with the market, after having seen to the beginning phases of the initiative.

From a legislative point of view the structure is not responsible for any commercial activities; instead, the single producers united in the association rely on the structure for sales.

In order to guarantee consistency with the public goals of the project, the association has been joined by a Market Committee, instituted by the Public Administration as a tool to monitor and control the market. As such, the Committee is responsible for coordinating monitoring activities, management of communications and the project's public image, admission and exclusion of producers, consumer protection, and any necessary updates to the general regulations.

The other entities that have contributed to the forming of this Market are ARSIA (Regional Agency for Development and Innovation of the Agricultural and Forestry sectors of the Tuscan Region), Slow Food, the principle industry associations (Coldiretti, Confagricoltura, and the Confederation of Italian Agriculturists, or CIA), and the Province of Arezzo.

The earnings are divided and sent directly to the single businesses that provided the products sold (through a computer program that was designed specifically for the Mercatale). Thus, a single payment for fruits and vegetables and cheese is split up between the two different producers. Every evening when the registers are closed, all of the producers can find out how much of their product was sold that day. A percentage of the total sales of all businesses represented in the Mercatale is retained by the Association (about ten percent of the total) for the management of the structure.

The consumers do not need to be associates in order to shop in the market. In 2010, starting with a group of about 20 - 30 regular customers who were active in local buyers groups for the most part, an effort was made to offer incentives, like entertainment, to regular clientele; thus the Association of Mercatale Consumers was founded, though this initiative did not work as well as had been hoped.

The producers involved in the project participate in the association by paying dues, though they are quite contained (a few dozen euro). These dues are not meant to contribute to the project economically, but they represent a way of establishing membership with a formal act. As they join the association, the producers agree to collaborate with the structure through supplying products to sell and respecting the production guidelines for each category of goods that they deal with, as set forth in the Rules of Conduct. This is to ensure that only the most virtuous producers are part of the association.

In addition to paying the dues, each producer agrees to participate in sales and “marketing” of their products within the sales point.

The producers’ participation within the structure itself has proven to be fundamental regarding sales to the public. Their presence represents the clearest distinguishing factor between the Mercatale and more conventional stores, thanks to the direct relationship that the producers are able to create with the clientele. The producers have therefore organized their presence in the market on a rotating basis (for example, if on a Thursday a cheese maker is in the store, then on Friday one of the fishers will be present, etc.). The producers are available to explain their products and advise the clientele, thus recreating the original conditions of traditional markets. Now that the project has been underway for several years, many of the producers (those who grow fruits and vegetables, for example) are now able to plan their agricultural activities in part thanks to the regularity of sales that take place in this structure.

The general criteria for the identification of the products are laid out synthetically in the project’s by-laws:

- provenance and seasonal factors
- uniqueness and quality of sensory characteristics
- transparency in cost and correct labeling
- sustainability and healthiness of production process
- product traceability

One of the cardinal themes of the project has always been that of proximity; nearly 70% of the producers are from Valdarno and a full 90% are from the Arezzo province, while the remaining 10% are from the surrounding area.

However, the producers’ entrance into the association is dependent upon their acceptance of the Rules of Conduct, which provide strict rules on production methods. These rules are not limited to delegating the definition of quality to other environmental certifications (organic, bio-dynamic), nor to certifications of origin (Protected Geographical Indication, Protected Designation of Origin). Rather, they trace various aspects of the production process, comparing the businesses from the point of view of sensory, environmental, and social qualities. These guidelines were drawn up by the experts that were suggested by the Committee and by Slow Food, together with the producers of the Mercatale Producers Association.

As far as sales prices are concerned, the producers are committed to applying the same ones found in their personal stores, and no higher.

CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT

The Mercatale project was formed in Montevarchi in 2005. At the time, another very popular monthly farmers’ market was already active (with 45 producers present for each edition) that took place on the morning of the second Saturday of each month in one of the central piazzas of town. It was thanks to that experience that the local government decided to launch an initiative for the promotion of small-scale, local agriculture.

Thus the project was formed from the desire of the local institutions to invest in the implementation of direct sales. In order to achieve their goals, no specific reference models were followed (and in any case, there were very few at the time), and instead the founders elaborated a pilot project, developed from the concept of a direct market.

The project was begun by the municipal government, which, thanks to a few officials who dedicated themselves with determination and hard work, was the principle investor, directing the work with the support of Slow Food and the Tuscan region, through ARSIA.

The structure in which the Mercatale was formed belongs to the Municipal government and is found directly in the center of town, for which the initial investment saw considerable savings (the market does not pay any rent). Another determining factor in the project’s success was the creation of a computer program - which is now for sale - which can manage all of the various VAT numbers of each single producer at the accounting phase.



From each producer's earnings, a percentage is retained by the market. The percentage fluctuates between eight and twelve percent, depending on the profit margins of the different categories of products (for example, those who sell fresh products must pay a smaller percentage than those who sell processed or ready to eat items, which have higher profit margins).

These "dues" serve to cover the structural management costs.

The initial investment constituted an essential factor in the project's activation, but there have also been various other determining factors.

The first of these was the territorial component of the project: the Valdarno area benefits from a varied panorama of virtuous businesses, an essential starting point for any project with this approach.

The other determining factor was the site chosen as a sales point. The city center already had a very popular farmers' market in piazza Venchi, and the location chosen for the structure (Piazza XX Settembre) most assuredly benefited from this strategic position. The site also has a parking lot available, which has significantly helped sales. Montevarchi is a small town of about 25,000 people that has shown to have a certain sensibility for issues related to consumer choices as well as decent wellbeing, as seen by the local prominence of the fashion industry and of jewelry stores.

The area does not attract many tourists and thus the consumers are fairly regular.

MANAGEMENT AND CURRENT SITUATION

Thanks also to these contextual factors, the Mercatale has always worked well from a commercial point of view (within the limits of the physiological variations of the market), immediately attracting a discreet following. The data obtained from 2008-2011 has shown an inflow of roughly 250 clients each day. Of these, half of the people live in the town itself while the other half live in the area of Valdarno, between Arezzo and Florence.

Annual sales now come to about one million euro.

As far as the producers are concerned, today there 70 businesses involved in the project. Of these, 20 are regularly involved in the project, as they sell staples of daily life (fruits and vegetables, preserves, dairy products, cheeses, meats, oils, and fish), while the others sell more seasonal items, or those which are sold less frequently (like dried fruits and saffron).

The project's growth has been gradual, and the extension of the commercial surface area has come to take up between 200 and 300 square meters.

A particularly positive note is that for some years now the volume of sales has become steady, thus stabilizing the entire process

(to such a point that the businesses who collaborate more frequently are now able to plan a part of their production thanks to sales within the Mercatale).

The costs of the products have only risen due to inflation; indeed, the concept for this project was not so much to lower costs, but rather to raise the quality of consumption, a fact that renders these products accessible.

During the first three years of activity (and the previous projection phase) the Mercatale was coordinated completely by the Municipal government. Later, the Association of Producers gradually got more involved and over the years has taken over complete management of the project.

Today, there are two full-time employees (one of whom deals only with fresh fruits and vegetables) and one part-time employee. These three people are responsible for the entire management of the structure: orders, product availability, and sales. The only help they receive is the presence of the producers who come to the Mercatale on a rotating basis during operating hours to help the clientele.

Monitoring activities and the possible exclusion of producers are still handled by the Committee. With the assistance of a few experts, this body is charged with verifying that the producers respect the Rules of Conduct with respect to the various products that are for sale within the structure.

The inspections can thus take place both within the Mercatale and at each individual business. Following a guided tour of the businesses, some small irregularities that were found have since been resolved. The majority of these irregularities had to do with transparency in labeling, and in a few cases (four) the proposed products were not always made by the business that was attempting to sell them, but instead had been acquired from other producers who are not part of the Mercatale group. In only three cases so far has an inspection led to the exclusion of the producers.

The monitoring tools currently in use are:

- Trips to the businesses, to ascertain the technical aspects of production
- Trips to the Mercatale, to ascertain aspects of labeling, product presentation quality, packaging, clarity in communication, and the true correspondence between that which is for sale and that which was actually cultivated

In total, the Municipality's initial investment was around 500,000 euro.

The main expenses were:

- construction costs for the refurbishing and arrangement of the building
- research and projection activities (as there was no model to follow, everything was planned from scratch)
- personnel costs for management of the first three years of activity
- the aforementioned computer software
- promotional communications, from ads in local media to the website: (<http://www.ilmercatocoperto.com/>)

Once the volume of products sold was settled it increased no further, due to the limits of space and the resulting management costs.

An approximate calculation that takes account of the ten percent of earnings that each business pays in "dues," for one million euro in sales, shows that managing costs (including stable costs such as personnel and maintenance) runs annually to roughly 120,000 euro.

This sum must be used for utilities, regular maintenance, and especially for management costs. Furthermore, the costs relative to services (like cleaning, stocking, opening, sales, the issue of receipts/invoices for the businesses) are borne by the producers.

Any extra expenses related to the building, structures, equipment etc. are paid by the Municipal Administration.



CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the years, diverse initiatives involving the consumers have been put in place, starting with teaching activities; participation in these activities has neither been at a high level nor constant, and as such they are still only sporadic.

In the past, a more efficient way to organize the link with local restaurants has been sought, focusing especially on the possibility for chefs to refurbish their stocks at the Market. Unfortunately no stable relationships have been founded, due to the difficulty of supplying everything that the restaurants require solely through direct sales by the producers.

A positive sign in a delicate economic period like the current one is that the stability of the Mercatale has remained balanced without creating any major failures in the businesses, instead guaranteeing a sense of consistency.

BITTO CHEESE AGING SHELTER, THE VALLI DEL BITTO TRADING SPA

The Bitto Trading Spa project was formed to promote Historic Bitto, a traditional cheese from the Gerola and Albaredo Valleys (near Sondrio, Italy), which is produced traditionally in the Alpine pastures. The cheese is made from the milk of grass-fed, pastured cows, without any animal feed or supplements, but with the addition of between ten and twenty percent of goat milk from the local Orobica breed. According to some of the producers who are part of the Valli del Bitto association, the characteristics, though fundamental in guaranteeing the historic identity to Bitto cheese, are not laid out in the regulations for Bitto cheese's Protected Designation of Origin certification. In order to safeguard the tradition method of cheese making, a Slow Food Presidium was established in 2003.

In order to contribute to promoting this cheese in a concrete way, this center was created. The structure acts as a point of reference for the product both from a cultural/touristic and from a commercial point of view. Indeed, the structure buys an agreed-upon amount of products directly from the producers (who are mainly historic farming families of the Orobica Alps) for a fixed price, thus guaranteeing sales of their product for a fair price.

This operation is possible thanks to the structure's commercial activities and the fact that the cheese is aged on the premises. The product is then sold either in small portions or as refined products, which are promoted by the structure throughout the year. The Bitto Trading Spa, besides offering support to the producers, also has an important cultural role, which is helpful in developing awareness of the importance of Alpine worker's activities in the preservation of the local economy, the safeguarding of the environment, and in the conservation of the cultural identity of the Bitto valleys.

Each year, the structure buys an average of about 50% of the businesses' productions, which can vary anywhere from between 40% and 70%.

For the producer, the fact that the Association buys such a large amount of cheese means having the security of a significant economic cover for the business throughout the year (thanks to this agreement, each producer is certain of selling about half of their production even before the season ends). For the group that manages the structure, on the other hand, this means taking on a part of the businesses' risks. The purchase takes place each year at the end of the season, in October. Of the more than 2,000 wheels of cheese produced every summer, almost half is sold to regular clients and tourists in the , pastures, much of it sold in small portions. Of the roughly 1,000 wheels purchased each year by the Association, about 200 are set aside for aging. Usually 300 of them are consumed immediately, sold in smaller portions, or used to prepare plates of pizzoccheri (a typical regional dish) that is available to taste directly in the structure. These uses of some of the cheese are due to the fact that at times there may be problems with aging it.

Within the structure it is not only possible to buy the cheeses, but also to taste them in different ways: either "vertically," tasting Bitto from different years, or "horizontally," trying the cheese as made in different part of the Alps; this is in addition to the pizzoccheri prepared with Bitto that is also available.

Keeping the cheeses intact during the aging process has significant costs, since over three years they lose about 35% of their weight due to progressive drying. Thus it was necessary to find a good way to earn money from the cheese even as it ages.

And so it was decided to offer the possibility of buying "personalized" Bitto wheels with inscriptions: affixing names, phrases or illustrations to the cheese if the client leaves it to be aged. The cost of managing a cheese wheel in the aging process is ten euro per year (to clean them, turn them, etc.). These personalized cheeses are also an interesting sight for those who come to visit the structure.

Consumers can visit the dairy to taste and buy the products without becoming members of the association. Members of the Bitto Trading Spa receive a ten percent discount on all purchases as well as one percent of the portion of their property in cheese.

Only producers who are members of the "Bitto Valleys Producers" associations supply cheese to the structure; that is, only those who are members of the Slow Food Presidium. The Association has purchased a symbolic share of 2,500 euro in the company, while various other businesses have chosen to buy between 2,000 and 3,000 euro of shares singularly, for a maximum total of about 20,000 for each one. This represents the total participation of the producers in the association, whose total capital comes to about 400,000 euro.

The Bitto that is for sale within the structure is exclusively that produced by the Slow Food Presidium, but it is also possible to purchase other dairy products and cheeses from the producers in the association. There are also available, though in smaller quantities, other local products, like a vast assortment of wines from the Valtellina area, for example. In this way the structure plays the role of a distribution center for products from the area.



CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT

The initiative was inspired by the activities of a cheese refiner from Morbegno who was personally involved in the events surrounding Bitto. It has always been possible to find the highest quality, local Bitto cheese in his store.

The project's formation has had its ups and downs. In the beginning the project was to have been supported by a public institution, but due to the difficulties encountered with the local government it was necessary to redefine the project, and have it financed solely through private contributions. Thus the need arose to find possible financiers who would invest significant resources.

In the first year, ten founding members of the Association provided 20,000 euro each, thus permitting the purchase of 200,000 euro worth of Bitto. Later, as the membership dues dropped, more and more associates came into the project.

Financing for the structure itself was taken care of by the local administration of Gerola Alta, and called for the refurbishing of a building found on the principle street that goes through town.

MANAGEMENT AND CURRENT SITUATION

The dairy's activities have slowly increased over time. Notwithstanding the fact that this is a publically traded company, the goal is not to make money for the associates, but to supply a service to the territory and to the community of producers. There are currently twelve producers involved in the project, but that number could increase. In fact, the system put in place is just now giving its first fruits, and other Alpine producers can finally choose to join the project. Within the businesses currently involved - all of which are family owned and operated - the young people have taken over for the older generation: the average age of producers is between 18 and 40 years old.

The project also aims to bring in new producers who subscribe to the Presidium's production philosophy, but the Association has no intention of forcing the issue, which would exponentially increase sales. The intention is more so to encourage touristic development and familiarity with the territory, thus creating a virtuous cycle for the entire local community of the valley.

The dairy is found in Gerola Alta, a small town of just over 200 people. The structure is managed by three people throughout the year, with the addition of a few employees during periods of more intense work (like the summer season). The employees are in charge of buying the Bitto cheese, taking care of the cheese as it ages, marketing, and promotional activities.

The third person hired by the structure is a young man just over 20 years old. After having trained to be a chef, he became



passionate about this project and chose to collaborate as a volunteer, which he did until he was asked to be a member of the staff.

Other like him, who have closely followed - in some cases for years- the events involving this product, continue to collaborate.

Associates and friends participate regularly by promoting Bitto cheese in different fairs.

The dairy's revenue comes to 300,000 euro per year, about two thirds of which is spent on buying Bitto. Personnel costs and those for managing the structure must be added to the purchase of cheese. In 2014, after nearly ten years, the budget was balanced for the first time ever, but this was thanks in part to the decision to decrease purchases from the producers in the previous two years. The actual purchase covered 40% of production. In these years sales within the structure have increased, as have those in the single businesses that sell Bitto directly. The first year it was decided to purchase the product for a price of 12-13 euro per kg for fresh cheese. Today the purchasing price has risen to 15-16 euro per kg.

On the other hand, before the project was activated the selling price was 7-8 euro/kg, half of what it is today.

In fact, today the project is self-sustaining, though there is a significant burden of old debts.

CONCLUSIONS

The only important investment undertaken (more for the time involved than resources) is in communications: this involves a presence at food fairs, management of the website (<http://www.formaggiobitto.com/>), the sale of Bitto with inscriptions, and share ownership to participate in the association, an initiative that has retained many clients.

The prospective for future work does not have to do so much with a great increase in activities, but rather in the integration of the offering of new services, which will make it more complete and thus reinforce market interest. With that in mind, the Bitto Trading Spa intends to dedicate itself to two projects.

The first is the diffusion of native animal breeds that have traditionally been involved in the making of this product. There are two important animals in particular, the first of which is the Brown Alpine Cow. This historic Alpine breed is particularly well suited to mountainous areas and, in the last few years, has been the object of some improvements that have slightly modified its historic characteristics (though the supporters of Historic Bitto are currently working to reintroduce breeds that are closer to the more historic Brown Alpine). The other is the Orobica or Valgerola goat, a longhaired mountain breed that is native to the area.

The second project involves accessing new Alpine pastures that today are either unused, or currently occupied by producers who are not part of the Presidium. This project thus calls for the integration of other local Bitto producers into the Presidium.

Another project has to do with an educational stable, that is, a structure that could work as an educational farm for children as a tool to teach them about the different breeds of animals and the work that goes into the production of this unique cheese.



THE CASE OF THE IDOKI LABEL

The originality of the Idoki label, and the interest it has garnered of late, is found in the complex system of initiatives that it has been able to generate. This label is not, in fact, a specific distribution model, or the centralized management of a structure, but rather a combination of various projects that deal with direct marketing. These projects have significantly contributed to the implementation of virtuous agricultural practices in local small-scale realities, while developing diversified answers to the problem of creating new channels for direct sales.

The Idoki project, founded in 1989, is a collective label that supports small scale, local producers through promotional activities and by supporting their marketing efforts.

Many of the producers currently involved have been with the project from the very beginning.

In the Basque language Idoki refers to card games: it is the moment that the cards are shown, face up, on the table. This eloquently represents the project's philosophy: transparency for the consumers is the key element for the promotion of the region's small-scale economy.

Idoki is a collective label that belongs to the Association of Agricultural Producers of northern Basque Country (that is, the Basque territories that are part of France).

The label is complementary to both organic certification and to the PDOs (Protected Designation of Origin labels) of Basque Country and is certified by a third party. Roughly 100 businesses adhere to the project and several kinds of products are included.

To qualify for the Idoki label, each producer must respect a Charter that is based on a few fundamental principles:

- the business produces and prepares only food that it has grown
- the business must be family-sized
- all sales must prioritize direct systems

All of the businesses involved are small to mid-sized. The producer sells exclusively that which was produced with the business's own primary materials (for example, cheese that is produced with milk that was bought from another company cannot be certified).

In order to guarantee that all businesses involved are family-sized, the label indicates precise limits regarding the hiring of personnel: the company may hire one employee for each farmer, with a maximum of four employees per business.

Direct sales are prioritized, both within the company's headquarters and in farmer's markets. At least 50% of the production must be marketed directly (and the remainder of the production can use one intermediary at most).

The purpose of these limitations is to guarantee that the company's work is not distorted, doing so by maintaining the small-scale approach and supporting the establishment of new businesses that share the same approach (which, along with revenue, is an element that represents one of the principle aims of the labeling project). The goal is not, in fact, to increase the quantity of products that each business creates, but to favor the development of new businesses.

Adhesion to Idoki's rules gives access to the label to place on products and communication materials.

However, making the singular products of the region more recognizable is not enough: the goal of the label is to promote the products. In order to do so, the Idoki project has inserted itself into the networks of those who adhere to the project. Since the producers act collectively, there is already a real, grassroots system of initiatives: everything from training to direct marketing goes through Idoki stores and markets.

The most peculiar and interesting aspect is that the entire system is held up by the spontaneous actions of the producers. The association does not centrally manage marketing with its own personnel, preferring instead to delegate that work to the producers who market on their own, as they are all associates, while still guaranteeing for the producers through the label.

Thus, the initiatives are put in place by the association's members, who sometimes act on their own, while, for the most part, they act collectively. Here are some examples.

In-House Sales

All of the companies involved in the project are indicated by a special road sign that renders them easily identifiable, while also informing passers-by that there is a direct sales point for the local products. In this way, the companies benefit significantly from the fact that this is a touristic area. Each company, furthermore, also sells the products of the other businesses that have the label.

Paniers

Some of the producers have organized their products in a system that they call paniers (baskets). These initiatives are usually organized by individual companies that prepare the paniers weekly by order only. For the most part the baskets are picked up by the clients directly at the company, though in one case a producer has taken on the responsibility of hiring a person to do home deliveries.

Fairs

The Idoki producers organize, or collectively participate in, fairs and seasonal events. For the most part, though in no way exclusively, these are regional initiatives. Some examples are the Merkatu Berri, a famous Christmas fair that the association's producers take part in where locals sell artisanal items, while there is also a Christmas market organized directly by the producers in which all of the exhibitors sell certified Idoki products.

Farmers' markets

Another classic tool are the local markets. These are organized by the producers themselves who, on a strictly volunteer basis, prepare a lunch with their own products to share with the clients.

In-House farmers' markets

Consumers are ever more interested in visiting the businesses, and so every year since 2006 some of the network's producers invite a local market into their places of business. This experience helps to show the consumers the places of production and to educate them on the day-to-day activities. Sometimes they organize special sessions dedicated to specific products, like a cheese or meat market.

Retail outlets

As far as the production sold indirectly is concerned, there are several different outlets in the region that stock their shelves with Idoki products, which the association then advertises on its website. Furthermore, some local trade associations tied to the Arrapitz collective, and linked to specific sectors, manage processing plants and sales points, both of which are managed collectively by the members. In these stores, however, all products that have the Idoki label are sold.

Collective sales points

The collective sales points are businesses shared among several producers. There are currently five such sales points. In this case as well, there is no centralized management, but rather the stores are managed on a shared basis by a few producers from the same area who have chosen to open a store to sell their products directly. These stores only sell Idoki products as the structure acts as an intermediary for the businesses. As they are managed by individual producers, these sales points are organized based on the specificity of each single case.

Here follow a few brief descriptions of these cases.

- Baserria

The first collective sales point that the Idoki producers organized is called Baserria. In the same area the Saint Jean de Luz

farmer's market, which is considered one of the most beautiful in Basque Country, was already in place. Since 1994 one of this market's stalls has been managed by a group of producers who, in 2007, hired an employee to manage it. The nine Idoki producers who are currently involved work with this employee throughout the year on a rotating basis. This sales point is open from three to five days per week, depending on the season.

- Kaiku Borda

Beginning in 2009, what was once a store run by a few local cheese producers has become a collective sales point managed by eight partners who sell their own products (principally cheeses, but also meat, vegetables, jams, etc.) with the help of an employee who manages the store. In the summer months the store organizes a weekly promotional tasting event.

Depending on the season, the store is open one to six days per week, and in the summer it stays open all day.

<http://www.kaikuborda.com/>

- Gohetxea

Gohetxea is a sales point that was formed from the initiative of a group of six associates. The store was found in the central piazza of town, but in 2008 it was transferred next to one of the associate's stores, which is called Gohetxea. The producers furnish the store with their own products (fruits and vegetables, cheeses and dairy products, cold cuts, jams and various other products) and take turns managing the sales. The store is open Saturday morning throughout the year, in addition to three afternoons per week during the summer.

- Belaun

Belaun is the name of a mountain in the Aldudes Valley, but in Basque it also means "new generation." The Belaun cooperative arose from the need that some producers had to promote the work of their agricultural businesses within the valley. One of the main goals of the cooperative is to motivate the next generation of young people to come to the territory. In order to reach this goal the cooperative decided to open a processing plant for their veal, ManexTête Noire lamb, and Kintoa Basque pig (the last two of which are Slow Food Presidia). The processed foods are then marketed in the sales points that the five producers share and keep open five days a week year-round, and six days a week during the summer.

<http://www.belaun-aldude.com/>

- Les Fermiers Basques

The Les Fermiers Basques collective sales point counts a total of eleven associates. Thanks to such a large number of producers involved, the choice of products is wide-ranging and includes fruits and vegetables, veal, pork, duck, cheeses, and many jams and other products.

The sales point is open daily during the summer, while throughout the year it is open on three afternoons during the week and throughout the weekend.

The role of the consumers is limited to buying, and they are not bound by any kind of adhesion to the association, as this is made up exclusively of producers.

The Idoki label guarantees to the consumers that there is transparent respect for sustainable agricultural practices. When asked, the producers contend that with respect to people who buy their products without knowing anything about the label, there are ever more conscious consumers who expressly search for the project's products in the region.

The producers adhere to the label by allocating a small percentage (three percent of their production) to the Association of Fermier Producers of the Northern Basque Country (which is the trademark holder for the label). There are possible exemptions built in to this scheme, as, for example, if one of the producers is in financial difficulty an exemption from the fees may be available.

The producers have a central role within Idoki: not only do they come together to define the promotional activities or participation in fairs, but they also actively organize them.

During the markets, for example, they take care of logistics, sales, cleaning, and preparing lunch (which closes out the market and involves both the consumers and the producers themselves); all of this is on a strictly volunteer basis.

The products that carry this label guarantee transparency of the quality of the product and the production process. In fact, each producer is required to follow the individual production rules of the various sectors. These production rules define those practices that are obligatory, prohibited, tolerated, and advised for each sector, while always following principles to make the production more virtuous from an ecological point of view.

The general criteria for breeding require that all producers who adhere to Idoki must practice extensive livestock breeding (mostly in a wild or semi-wild setting) with respect for the animals' well-being; they must favor local breeds (even if they are more rustic and grow more slowly); they must feed the animals with only products that are grown by the company, and if supplements are necessary they must be fodder or grains that are GMO-free.

As per fruits and vegetables, the products must be in season, cultivated without the use of chemical additives or fertilizers, and left to mature in the fields. The varieties grown (just as in the case of the animal breeds) must have strong ties to the territory; these local varieties, which are closely tied to the regional ecology and often threatened - sometimes seriously - with the risk of extinction.

Many of the producers who adhere to the project are completely organic. Some sectors (like the Ossau Iraty cheese, Irouleguy wine, and Espelette hot peppers) are recognized as PDOs.

One of the cornerstones of Idoki is respect for the quality of the products (which is why the choice has been made to limit production but to give special attention to the final quality). These businesses, which are quite small, are able to stay in business thanks to the balance that each one attains between the production size and the internal diversification of the products. In fact, Idoki encourages complementary agricultural practices among the businesses, so as to allow even those who have a limited space to live off of their work throughout the whole year.

However, none of this would be possible without an extensive network of diversified marketing.

CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT

Idoki was formed thanks to the desire of small-scale Basque producers to make their work profitable, and to do so while adhering to their attentive production choices. Indeed, it was only through a commercial outlet that they could counteract the erosion of farm soil and the loss of local biodiversity, in order to support the establishment of new farmers. They thus decided to produce a "packet of initiatives" - identified by the label - that was able to promote this approach and to guarantee recognition for the concept of fermiers in the region.

As the context is so peculiar, it is worth taking a moment to explain the founding of the facts on the ground that developed the Idoki project.

In 1989, the association of Basque Country Producers was formed, bringing together the first associations that were already working in this sector (supporting the producers in managing the bureaucracy, providing technical assistance, and developing projects like collective processing plants).

This cooperation allowed the producers to work on three fronts: better defending, representing, and structuring fermière production; communicating, exchanging experiences, and training collectively; and identifying, promoting, and selling the small-scale products of Basque Country.

Afterwards, the producers felt the need for a tool that could hold together all of the diverse initiatives, allowing them to develop a single marketing front that was recognizable while still being diversified. This led to the formation of Idoki in 1992.

The original goal of the project was to encourage the establishment of new farmers (with technical assistance, provide help in accessing land, and to increase appreciation for this occupation), support traditional agriculture in Basque Country (through the defense of biodiversity and respect for the environment), and help in the realization of collective projects.

Basque Country represents an extremely particular context and the type of association that characterizes this group of producers cannot be separated from the strong sense of community that is tied to their regional identity.

Furthermore, Basque Country is an extremely agricultural area: the area boasts large valleys where animals can graze and a diversified heritage of biological and cultural differences in the products and small-scale family businesses. The return of a second generation of farmers to their family businesses has positively contributed to the project's development. Indeed, it is often the case that young people have decided to take up the work of their parents and grandparents with a fresh point of view: these are people who have studied, who have had experiences away from home (outside of France and even in other sectors) and who have brought back a wealth of critical experiences and new concepts that they can apply to their native lands.

The project's success factors are thus to be sought, on the one hand, in the support of the agricultural heritage of the region, and, on the other hand, in the ability of the group of producers (which is closely united and sensitive to the principles of sustainable agriculture) that has understood how to develop their resources in a mutually beneficial way.

MANAGEMENT AND CURRENT SITUATION

There are currently 111 businesses associated with the Idoki label.

Initially the majority of adherents to the Idoki label were shepherds, though this is no longer the case. The project's development has been enormous, considering the fact that when the project first began there were just 35 businesses involved (which is barely a quarter of the current total), of which 20 were in a single sector (dairy).

This increase is due also in part to the association's policies. One of the cornerstones of the project is that the individual businesses are not encouraged to increase their production volumes (which must be managed in line with their own resources). The increase in volume and Idoki's activities is thus due to the increase in the number of businesses involved in the project.

Idoki currently has three full time employees.

Their work serves to fulfill the management of the project, aimed at helping the producers organize the various initiatives, which they often undertake first hand.

These tasks include:

- managing the organization of membership,
- development and management of training,
- assisting the producers,
- communications,
- external relations,
- and helping in the organization of markets.

Idoki is currently working on hiring a new employee to work on marketing and the organization of tasting events.

The Idoki system acts as both the system around which the activities of the associated network are organized, as well as acting as the voice for this group. As its role is to assist the producers, rather than directly manage sales, at the moment it has quite limited revenues.

The revenue comes mainly from the dues paid by the producers.

This money is used to organize fairs, to produce communication materials, and to coordinate the personnel.

CONCLUSIONS

Idoki's panorama of activities is already extensive in the areas of marketing, training, and internal network support. As far as sales

are concerned, there is still potential to introduce new initiatives, some of which are currently being prepared.

One such example is the development of a project that more directly involves local bars and restaurants. The goal is to build a stronger relationship with these kinds of businesses so as to spread the word about the project and to increase marketing.

An incredibly successful pilot project of a few years ago saw the insertion of Idoki products in three or four restaurants.

The difficulties that arose, however, were significant: the restaurants require a quantity of products that direct sales from single businesses cannot satisfy. This situation shows that a sufficiently stable logistical model must be refined in order to retain constant contact with local bars and restaurants.

The Basque Country's current situation is also particularly rich in initiatives involving tourism. In this sense, the label does not have to develop a specific field of work, but rather needs only insert itself into the activities that are already in place in the region. This takes place principally through taking part in fairs and events, but also involves promoting personal trips to the businesses.

Other than the aforementioned cases (of restaurants and tourism), synergy can be found in other areas as well.

One of the fundamental problems to overcome is the ease of distribution; that is, the single producers need a system that allows them to take advantage of shared logistics.

It is possible that a single logistical platform would allow them to extend their market, even online. This could eventually lead to sales outside of the region.

Despite the current limits, there are some significant points of strength that are characteristic of this experience, the most important of which is a strong sense of community. This is founded on a strong tie to the territory. This sense of community is seen most clearly in the willingness to cooperate and collaborate among the various entities involved in the project.

The other strength of the project (and also a source of complexity) is the sheer number of different kinds of individuals and businesses involved, which consequently leads to a plurality of products offered by this system of relationships.



PARNDORF EARTH MARKET

The Parndorf farmers' market was established on August 28, 2010 and was the first in Austria to join the network of Earth Markets. Parndorf is a village in Burgenland, Austria, which has just over 3,000 inhabitants and is less than 50 km from Vienna. Burgenland is the easternmost region of Austria and being flat, is well suited to wine production, with almost 10,000 hectares of vineyards; it is also characterized by a significant flow of tourists owing to the presence of Lake Neusiedl.

The Earth Market is a farmers' market run according to specific guidelines inspired by the Slow Food philosophy (www.earthmarkets.net).

All markets are managed collectively and are meeting places where local producers sell quality products directly to consumers at fair prices and guarantee environmentally sustainable methods. In addition, they preserve the food culture of local communities and contribute to defending and promoting biodiversity.

Every Earth Market is the expression of a community, comprising producers, local authorities and residents, Slow Food and chefs that come together to create a new meeting place between the town and the country. The market is managed by a Committee with representatives from all these groups, responsible for the whole project, from the selection of the producers to the promotion of the market. The committee also handles the functional aspects of the market, ensuring that its environmental impact is minimized by pledging to reduce waste as much as possible, with correct disposal methods, using biodegradable consumables where viable, and adopting energy-saving measures.

The Parndorf Earth Market is based at a private farm made available by the family of Monika Liehl, a producer and Slow Food Burgenland activist who founded the project and has provided a renovated barn to host the market.

Each edition of the market welcomes a number of different producers, including producers of cheeses, cured meats, desserts, breads and local artisanal products (some not linked to food production). In the same space, there is also an area where local wines can be sampled, and a street food area where local chefs take turns to cook for eager market-goers during every edition. In the case of the Parndorf market, the committee consists of three members of Slow Food Burgenland (the local Slow Food group), three producer representatives, and the town mayor, although the municipality's contribution has never translated into a concrete commitment from an operational point of view or in terms of support.

A key figure of the Earth Market – also from an operational view point – is that of the coordinator, who is also a goat farmer and owner of the farm hosting the market.

Taking place in a farmhouse, setting up the market is quite simple, as shelter from the rain is already provided. The stalls are supplied by the organization and are prepared by the organization's staff before the vendors arrive.

The exhibitors fill the stalls with their products, which are sold directly to visitors.

The market takes place on the first Saturday of every month and is open from 9 am until 2 pm. Participation is larger during the summer months (April to September), partly because of increased tourism.

In addition to the classic market stalls, the market benefits from other regular features such as the street food and wine tasting areas. The wine selection process also considers producers' environmental impact.

With regard to the street food stalls, they represent open kitchens, where different chefs take turns to cook at each market. The chefs have very different backgrounds: there are chefs from restaurants known for their innovative cuisine, but all are dedicated to local products and culture. The venue does not allow for the teaching of cooking techniques, but nevertheless there are demonstrations on how to prepare dishes.

Each edition is characterized by a theme, around which various activities are developed. For example, the theme for one of the markets was "biodiversity" and it was attended by producers that defend local varieties or breeds as well as expert artisans who speak about their products.

Consumers visiting the market are not required to become members. They tend to be very selective purchasers, who choose products carefully, read labels and strive to buy high quality products. Two main types of consumers go to the market. The first are residents of Parndorf: customers who initially only attended the market occasionally, but over the years have become loyal and regularly attendees of the markets.

The second category is made up of tourists, who are attracted by the initiative and the educational aspects as well as the festival vibe.

The town of Parndorf is located about half an hour from the city of Vienna and the popularity of the market has been attracting a growing number of visitors and tourists.

What's more some tourist agencies have started to promote the Earth Market in publications relating to the area of Parndorf, further increasing attendances.

The Earth Markets are reserved only for Slow Food-selected producers. Those permitted at Earth Markets have the possibility of remuneration for their work, and at the same time commit to treating their employees fairly.

The underlying principle is that only their products and the fruits of their labors and of their experience are presented to visitors, creating ties with consumers. These ties allow producers to speak about the products, for which they take responsibility, and the work that underlies them, what defines their quality, and what justifies the price charged.

To start the project, the promoter of the group mapped the producers of the area, evaluating them carefully according to guidelines that comprise the criteria – line by line – having regard not only for the sensory, but also for the environmental and social qualities of products.

Each producer is asked to pay a fee – albeit very low - depending on the size of the stall. These fees range from 21 Euros for a one meter stand to 42 Euros for a two meter stand. These costs are easily recuperated by the proceeds from the sales at each edition.

The popularity gained over time by the market has also generated great interest from new producers from the area - and beyond – generating an increasing number of requests for participation. Today the committee strives to perform an assessing role, with the responsibility of accepting or rejecting applications for participation.

Also encouraging are the relationships that have been established over the years among the producers, who collaborate on a regular basis, for example by helping each other with transportation and the distribution of products.

The produce available at the market includes bread, fresh fruit and vegetables, preserves, juices, spirits, cured meats, honey and other bee products (candles, soaps, propolis), body products, salt, freshwater fish, goat's cheeses, meats and wines. These are from some of the most interesting producers in the area, such as Waldherr, a bakery that works, almost exclusively, with self-ground wholemeal flour for their sourdough products, and the Michelits family that supplies biodynamic certified meat, sourced from their herd of 500 free-range beef cattle.

The products are good: fresh, seasonal, and healthy.

Clean: locally produced, with environmentally sustainable methods and production processes that are in opposition to genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In fact more than 50% of the producers operate according to organic farming practices (although not all are certified).

Fair: affordable for consumers and with fair prices and working conditions for producers.

To protect the local environment all producers (with the exception of some guests) come from within a distance of 40 km from Parndorf.

DEVELOPMENT and CONTEXT

The idea of starting a farmers' market came from Monika who, as a producer from the area and a member of Slow Food, saw the market as an opportunity to highlight the exceptional products and producers from the area, creating a bridge between residents and local producers. Selling directly to consumers provides producers, farmers and artisans with the opportunity to get a fair price



for high quality products, removing the stages from the supply chain that inevitably lead to unaffordable prices for consumers. The Earth Market, a project of which there are 47 examples in 12 countries, is a perfect model to achieve this goal.

The idea of a farmers' market like that of Parndorf, established with assistance from Slow Food Burgenland, goes beyond, the idea of the distribution of products. The coming together of producers, artisans, chefs, experts, activists and residents of the area, and tourists provides an educational opportunity and allows for the promotion of the region, its culture and its potential starting with its produce.

The kitchen represents an extra valuable feature. A Viennese cook linked to Slow Food donated old equipment that is now used at the market.

The local wine tasting stall has inspired participation at the events and encourages interaction between visitors. This, in combination with the musical entertainment, has transformed the market into a place where you can spend all morning enjoying yourself.

At every market, guest producers from other countries are welcomed. These showcase and sell their products, which varies the market offerings.

MANAGEMENT and CURRENT SITUATION

The project involves a variable number of visitors but now, after four years, the market attracts around 200-400 people per edition. The newsletter subscribers now exceed 3,000 people and this number continues to grow, aided by joint work done with other similar events, from collaborations with festivals, and other local associations.

The number of producers was initially 10-12: after four years of activity this number has nearly doubled, and now there are 20 producers at each event.

In addition to an increase in supply, the range has also gradually been enriched with new products (whether fresh, like fruits and vegetables, or processed, like cheeses, salamis or juices).

The project's main activities are: communication and promotion (social media and local press), the organization of educational activities and entertainment, contact and involvement with visitors (including producers from other regions, chefs and musicians), the scheduling of initiatives (concerts and shows), and also maintenance of the building that serves as location for the market. All of these are performed on a voluntary basis (where possible using the professional experience of each volunteer as in the case of the communication).

The only activity paid directly by the committee is that related to logistics and equipment, which requires two workers for each edition.

From an economic point of view, the project could not have been realized if the site had not been made available free of charge. The only cost is that of maintenance; expenses related to this have reached an estimated €25-30k euro since the market was made available almost entirely by the founder alone.

Other smaller investments relate to communication, such as purchasing advertising space in local media.

The proceeds from the operation of the market are reinvested in the management of the project. These include the rental costs for exhibitors' stands and private donations. Donations are collected in August – when turnout is at its highest – when the 'Earth Market's birthday' is celebrated. On this occasion, visitors are required to make a small contribution to the market.

Revenues from other paid activities related to the market (such as the kitchen) are given in part to the professionals involved in the running of those activities.

Two gardens in Africa were financed with the remaining profits,.

CONCLUSIONS

Other activities include educational activities such as games to introduce children to the discovery of agriculture or familiarity with animals (the host farm breeds goats) For adults there are wine tastings to discover local wine, taste workshops featuring local produce, tasting and cooking demonstrations of regional dishes, home cooking workshops (such as courses on making homemade jams), video and film screenings on the themes of food and sustainability, musical concerts with the participation of popular music groups, and food tours around the market (such as the spring tour dedicated to the knowledge of wild herbs that, once harvested, are used as a part of small cooking classes in the market kitchen).

These activities (as well as participation in other festivals or events in the region) are possible thanks to a network of contacts that the organization has been able to capitalize on through exchanges and collaborations.

Some of the other organizations include: WWF, with which "nature-camps" were organized for children and teenagers; Fairtrade, which has a reciprocal events exchange on the issues of the product ethics , and an institute from the Burgenland region with whom cooking classes with seasonal products were organized.

The areas of development include strategic investments for further growth concerning communication (to further increase participation) and the refurbishment of the structure that hosts the market.

The outlook for the future points to a growing involvement of volunteers who can contribute by sharing the coordination work, which is today performed by the committee, but especially by implementing the activities related to the market, particularly in terms of education and the promotion of agriculturally biodiverse products.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE *PANIERES MARSEILLAIS*

The Paniers Marseillais (PAMA) is an AMAP association, a French acronym for *Association for the Maintenance of Farming Agriculture* (literally, *Association pour le maintien de l'Agriculture Paysanne*). It is an associative system which creates a direct link between producers and consumers and aims to develop local agriculture thanks to the direct management of the supply chain. Similar systems exist in different countries under various names (CSA - Community Supported Agriculture, in the English-speaking world, GAC or GAS – Collective or Cooperative Buying Groups, in Italy). The first AMAP was created in France in 2001, in the Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur, under the name *Alliance Provence*.

Hitherto, many other organizations have developed throughout the country following the same model. The national network MIRAMAP (www.miramap.org), serves as a common portal for the AMAP and its regional networks (existing for example in Alsace, Aquitaine, Auvergne, Lower-Normandy, Burgundy, Brittany, Centre-Val de Loire, Champagne Ardenne, and Franche-Comté). Not all AMAPs are part of the national network and there is no obligation to join the network in order to exist or to be considered as such. The model makes possible a wide variety of types and versions.

The case study considered here is that of the Paniers Marseillais association, established in Marseille in 2006, following the split of a group of associations that were part of *Alliance Provence*. Hence the use of a different abbreviation, the anagram AMAP: PAMA. The groups associated with *Paniers Marseillais* are found exclusively in the city of Marseille, while groups associated with Alliance Provence are located throughout the region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, including the city of Marseille.

The Paniers Marseillais is defined as "a network of consumer associations in partnership with local producers (that actually produce) that employ organic agriculture or agro-ecological methods" (www.lespaniersmarseillais.org).

The term *panier* means basket: the basket in which your fruit and vegetables are put and by extension the weekly amount of vegetables destined to not only every consumer member of the association, but also the local group, which often takes its name from the district in which the weekly distribution is made.

Each consumer member is a member of a local group (usually chosen according to the area of residence) and the association PAMA.

Each group has one contact farmer, with whom a contract is established on a half-yearly or yearly basis. Producers participating in the project are represented in the governing bodies of the association, but they deal directly with each basket. Each producer may be associated with one or more groups depending on their production capacity and the number of members in each group. Alternatively the producer may sell part of their production to other markets. Each local group has a fixed day and place of weekly distribution (examples include neighborhood social centers, schools and squares) and sets its own internal operational rules (such as hours of distribution, frequency of meetings and composition of the governing bodies).

PAMA coordinates contracts and the distribution of a range of different products in addition to vegetables, including meat, cheese, flour and citrus fruits, which are available (but not required) for members of the baskets, for whom distribution is carried out in other time frames (once a month, once every two months etc.).

The contract, which establishes every family of consumers with the contact farmer, is a “cooperative” contract: consumers buy the products the week before delivery, while producers are committed to environmentally sustainable production methods and delivering a different basket of vegetables once a week. Payment for the baskets is made at the beginning of the contract (half-yearly or yearly) while the producers are paid on a monthly basis.

The producers are also members of the Paniers Marseillais association. They agree to work within the rules defined by the association regarding the methods of cultivation and they are obliged to work transparently. During visits consumer members are able check whether the rules are being complied with, but otherwise there is no formal system of control. The producers organize activities in the farms in order to better let understand the reality of their work.

The producers carefully plan the yearly farming to ensure a varied range of products throughout the year (up to 45-50 products in the year). This benefits the agrobiodiversity of the company. When possible, production is also adapted to the requests of consumers.

CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT

Projects like Paniers Marseillais were developed because of the need to create a bridge between worthwhile agriculture and places to find a stable market (thanks to consumer investment), making products accessible. The establishment of a local group is not only an advantage for consumers but also for producers. The involvement of individual members in managerial decisions makes the system flexible enough. Place, time, contact producers and the integration of other products are all examples of factors that can vary depending on the decisions of the group.

The initial AMAP projects were more focused on local small scale farming than farming methods. Gradually, an increasing number of AMAPs have introduced criteria that ensure the production methods paying closer attention to the local environment, favoring organic farming over other integrated or conventional farming techniques. From this point of view each association makes independent choices according to the needs of its members, thus favoring different priorities. One of the reasons for the creation of Paniers Marseillais was precisely the desire to implement production according to the methods of organic farming. Thanks to the close understanding between consumers and producers, certification by third parties has not been considered binding for companies.

The successful development of the association in Marseille is due to the urban desire for local, organic products of high quality. The PAMA association plays an important role in disseminating information (to raise awareness of the system, find new partners, and raise awareness of the problems of small local agriculture) and awareness of organic farming.

MANAGEMENT AND CURRENT SITUATION

Each member pays an annual fee (about €14): a third of this goes to the local group, and two-thirds to the Marseille association.

Each local group comprises between 30 and 70 families (50 families on average), which equates to about 1,500 families for Paniers Marseillais (about 5,000 people in the city of Marseille).

Today about 28 neighborhood associations are part of PAMA.

The Paniers Marseillais association has the function of facilitating the creation of local groups and/or to establishing the link between a fruit and vegetable producer and a local group.

Today about 11 producers are involved. A member farmer plays the role of “advisor” to the other producers, organizing training sessions and meetings between producers.

The association also maintains relationships with other organizational bodies related to the project (such as municipalities) and with other AMAPs within the same city, Marseille.

As an association, the Marseillais Paniers may be subsidized by local institutions. These funds, together with the fees paid by the members, cover running costs such as rental costs of the central office and the salary of employees; It is the employees that are responsible for the administration of the association. At the individual local group level, the fees paid by members are used to rent the places where deliveries are made. The volunteer members play a central role in the organization of local groups and the Marseille association, managing contracts, distribution, and the delivery of products other than vegetables.

The weekly basket price is fixed (between 22 and 28 euros), regardless of the quantity and variety of products, which vary by season. The average weekly amount of produce is calculated in order to cover the average weekly needs of a family of four. One can choose to pay a fixed fee, regardless of the season and the amount of vegetables in the basket, ensuring stability and regular takings for the producer; this is made possible by the compensation during the year: for example the summer baskets, richer in fruits and vegetables, will compensate for the leaner winter ones. In the case of bad weather or problems with the harvest, the consumer accepts that the amount of vegetables can be significantly lower.

CONCLUSIONS

The limitation of the system is the inability of consumers to choose their weekly products and the constraint represented by the contract and the weekly distribution. Each local group has found ways to deal with issues, for example the problem of absences during holidays (and the risk of consumers losing baskets).

Despite the limited selection in terms of products, the service is relatively simple and inexpensive considering the supply frequency (a weekly delivery).

The basket system allows consumers to invest in small-scale agriculture thus sharing the business risk and putting the producer in a position to manage the production season with greater economic security. Consumers also actively participate in the weekly distribution and can sometimes be encouraged to participate in educational activities or some farm work. This type of activity provides member consumers with the opportunity to create links with the producers from whom they source, and this promotes an understanding of the operations and agricultural issues.

The basket system is also an opportunity for the producers to escape the pressure of market competition. Owing to the fixed price established for the baskets, revenues are stable and guaranteed, even if the harvest is not good or falls victim to the weather. For these reasons the system mitigates the vulnerabilities to which agriculture is exposed.

References about *Paniers Marseillais*:

Numerous studies have been conducted on AMAPs and the basket systems. In French literature a key text is: Claire Lamine, 2008, *Les AMAP: un nouveau pacte entre producteurs et consommateurs?* Editions Yves Michel, Gap. Among the many other major texts is, Dubuisson-Quellier S. & C. Lamine 2004, “*Faire le marché autrement. Le cas des ‘paniers’ de fruits et de légumes bio comme mode d’engagement politique des consommateurs*” *Sciences de la société*, 62: 145-167.

On Paniers Marseillais, an interdisciplinary research group (EQUALIM-TER, dir. V. Siniscalchi) has been investigating the challenges faced by consumers and producers for several years.

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