

Territorial identity and rurality

Abstract

At the beginning of the '70s, especially in the countries of the South of Europe, rural tourism becomes the lever to raise uncompetitive agricultural realities and to diversify their activities (Rocca, 2013). This form of tourism allows, at the same time, to reduce the migration from rural to urban areas by creating occupation. Born to respond to these needs, farm holiday has opened a new way for a different and elaborate form of rural tourism often confused with the farm holiday as synonymous. In fact, when we consider rural tourism we refer to all forms of tourism activities that are made in rural areas and in contact with nature. It is not necessary that these activities are made by a farmer with his farm (Schifani, 1995).

Keywords: *Rural tourism, Territorial identity, Multidimensionality.*

Agricultural dynamism

Starting from the early seventies of the era recently past, particularly in the countries of Southern Europe, rural tourism becomes a lever which uplifts the non-competitive agricultural situation and diversifies the activities (Rocca, 2013). This type of tourism allows for the decrease in migration from rural areas to the urban areas, in that it creates work. Farms and rural homes adapted to the needs of vacationing requisites, become this way able to attract diverse tourist activities, not only those “governed” by the farmer and limited to the country, but even those, more in general, tied to the contact with nature and the cultural, social, architectural and gastronomical characteristics (therefore, identity) of a territory (Fiori, 2012). In this way, the capacity to attract visitors and offer work, even well-qualified, increases.

This new reality can be read as a sign which Simoncelli (2001, p. 35) defines as “unsuspectable dynamism” of the rural world, besides a radical change of an entire system. In fact, as known, the primary activity has changed very much, in particular from World War II and after, as in general the relation between city and countryside, having become rapidly very complex, but at the rural world till now it is often attributed an idyllic and bucolic halo that, although quite far from reality, it is maybe the most specific and persistent character of its image.

As Formica points out (1996, pp. 18-19), clearly «the importance that modern society has attributed to agriculture is beside the simple calculation of

income that it produces within the Gross National Product and the occupation that it assures the active population, presuming parameters of diverse evaluation than those of the pure economic balance. The parameter regarding the quality of life and environmental protection seem fundamental, for which agriculture is capable of contributing in a decisive way in that it constitutes the principal go-between for man and nature. In essence, just in the greatly industrialized countries it could be the key element of a new type of economical-territorial organization which is not based on an excessive research of simple profit and near-sighted efficiency».

The increasing acknowledgment of the value of the local developmental processes (be it in the research field as well as in the various operator categories), has contributed in providing «an agricultural evolution, within the globalization processes, and a dematerialization of the economy, from the production sector historically in decline to the multifunctional, crucial for cohesion and territorial competition» (Alfano and Cersosimo, 2009, p. 5; Shucksmith, 2000).

Just the very globalization processes have contributed bringing to one's attention the rural territory in all its components, from the strictly economic ones to the social and cultural ones (Vallega, 1989), and some of the principal changes that have intervened in the agricultural field have brought a new type of polifunctionality and have allowed to place the focus on personal aspects and on the territorial specificity (Grillotti Di Giacomo, Moretti, 1998).

This is surely a change in one's point of view,



which has still a long way to go, at all levels: at the moment the focus seems to be concentrated on developed countries aboveall; the need to think over the geography of agriculture as a whole, originates from significant and important changes that in advanced economies have surfaced in the sector, in particular with the expansion of industrial agriculture after a long post-war period dominated by mass production and a substantially quantitative regulation, by single States or associations of States.

It's undoubted, however, that the most recent changes, taking place from the mid eighties, are forming a new and profound meaning. For example, consumers in general and organized groups are becoming more aware, not only of the type of food being consumed, but also of the origin and transference, therefore of what happens to the raw material through the whole productive process. In the "satiating" societies the motive for food consumption is no longer found mostly in satisfying the physiological needs, but rather in a series of psychological or socio-relational factors imprinted in the dominant life-style, so much so as to speak of a real and literal "food symbolism" (Padilla, Thiombiano, 1995).

Because of the increasing range of demand the rural areas are requested to produce and deliver services, coming from local areas as well as from extra-local areas. Moreover, external global pressures are accelerating the dismantling of traditional support systems of a farm, without it being clear with what to substitute them with (Marsden, 1998, p. 266). All that can be considered the effect of a real ideological contrast between the rural development objectives already owned by social State logic and those of the market and globalization ideology, regarding even the production and commerce of goods.

All this warrants the need to integrate new levels of priorities of the rural, of economical and territorial type. The present prospective change – besides the system – consists at least in the fact that one can "see" that the agricultural problems should be integrated in a more ample social and territorial context, for the benefit of the whole population, rural as well as urban. This doesn't mean exaggerating the weight of a sector that in developed countries, in terms of occupation and wealth, is by now very low: in Italy, for example, agriculture presently contributes a total of 5.1% of the economy in terms of work and 2.2% at the nominal GDP, while a growing bulk has been taken on by the industrial transformation of the agricultural products and by incorporated services in the goods destined for food supply (ISTAT, 2015).

The "economic culture" approach

All that just described appears as a result – but even as a factor – for establishing, in a complex link of interdependence worthy of a systematic research concerning significant case studies, of what Ray calls «the economic culture approach of rural development» (Grillotti Di Giacomo, Moretti, 1998, p. 3); an approach, moreover, "legible" through the most recent reflections of multifunctional agriculture.

Regarding the changes we mentioned previously, the same Ray asks some basic questions: «The rural and urban areas in Western Europe – as elsewhere – are increasingly adopting the cultural signs as a key-resources for achieving the territorial development objectives. Such strategies make up the answer to the extra-local forces that have demonstrated the power of mining the local vitality at the base»; he proceeds observing that the answer that these territories and places can give consists in pursuing an endogenous pattern of development, wherein the development is reformulated so as to depend more on the local resources, physical as well as anthropic.

And, therefore, «the local specificity research moves its attention on the indicator signs of the local cultural systems so that today it assists at a proliferating of initiatives in which the local cultural resources are seen as the key to improving the economic and social well-being of rural areas», where the word 'economy' indicates that one is referring to the relationship between resources, production and consumption, while the word 'culture' tries to express the reorganization of the economies, at least partly, to a local cultural-territorial geographic scale.

Note that Ray underlines how the concept of a cultural economy regards primarily the production ambit: that is, the territory, its cultural system and the network of actors that build as a whole resources, in order to continue pursuing the interest of that territory (1998, pp. 3-4). That concept of an economy of culture would derive, according to the Author, from three complex processes: the changes in post-industrial capitalism, according to the post-modern prospective; the European Community choices with regard to rural development; the spreading of regionalism as a global phenomenon not only European.

As for Italy in particular, the Common Agricultural Policy reforms (CAP=PAC Politica Agricola Comunitaria) and of "Agenda 2000", as well as the reformulation of art. 2135 of the Civil Code, have brought up for discussion the definition of "farm",



which was accepted by the agricultural economy for a long time: for example, the farm was defined as the elementary combination of production means, one of which is the agricultural farmland, which constitutes the territorial base (Serpieri, 1956, p. 17). Amplifying considerably the notion of agricultural farmer and leaving out the ties with the land, all productions are instead qualified as agricultural, based on the cure and development of a biological cycle or of a phase necessary for the same cycle, arriving therefore, to the “loss of the territorial character of agricultural activity” (Costato, 2001), otherwise absolutely the paradox of an agriculture that doesn’t cultivate (Grillotti Di Giacomo, 1998, p. 15).

Also for this, the differences between the agricultural farms and those of other economic sectors have diminished rapidly for diverse aspects. All this has pushed the involved groups and the development agencies to define a new rurality in the multifunctional sense, so as to claim public support in a period of financial straits, Marsden (1998) notes, but also encouraging scholars to “update” their reading of territory models (Grillotti Di Giacomo, 2012).

New multifunctionality

In Italy the new agriculture is acknowledged by the legislation in 2001; the law supports the multifunctionality with force, and therefore opens new possibilities for agritourism, the selling of farm products, the organization of didactic activities and the introduction of methods for production and management consonant with environmental compatibility.

Broadly speaking the multifunctionality (multi-use availability and destinations), is not new in agriculture, in that it has always produced goods and made services, principally aimed at food goods for human beings and assessable, but even other aspects not acknowledged by the market and not explicitly increased in value, such as security, that is soundness and salubrity that consumers expect from such products. In virtue of the law, the present efforts to allow using the mechanisms and instruments for tracing are aimed precisely at rendering explicit the security aspect, and thus to permit distinguishing reliable and safe foods from the anonymous and less secure ones. Another important function, implicit in agricultural activity is formed by its environmental, territorial and landscape effects: all the agricultural undertakings function (unassessably) on maintenance and

preservation. And moreover one mustn’t overlook the patrimony of traditions, values, culture, that it still keeps and passes on, even through the radical changes aforementioned.

Multifunctionality and cultural economy: wine and food tourism

An example of the key role of multifunctionality in agriculture is the wine and food tourism, truly increased considerably in these last years, even in the South of Italy, and most recently in Apulia. For many tourists, the table pleasures and the curiosity of discovering what the territory offers constitute all the more a factor of attraction deriving from culture, art and history, that goes beyond the “simple” exotic tasting flavors, and stimulate the curiosity to become familiar with production sites, tradition and culture. This is how agritourism, didactic farms, wine tasting roads proliferate, and typical products are the protagonists in all seasons of the year in that they are a vehicle not only of produce but also of culture and emotions exuding from the territory (Pugliapromozione, 2012).

Furthermore, the so-called “gourmet” tourists prefer the low season (autumn and spring), when it is easier to find peace and to relax and get favorable offers at low-cost, assuring this way ulterior advantages deriving from off-season. The rise in preference for goods produced on farms and for agritourisms and, in addition, for vacationing under the banner of food and wine, and the traditional cuisine, generally correspond to an interest to document themselves as much as possible on the history and the traditions of the territory in which they will stay, that can be seen as a peculiarity of a middle-high social class with a high cultural level (ISNART, 2012). These simple data demonstrate how it could be truly advantageous making tourist packages, opportunely promoted and with steady prices that, for example, make their culinary training a bulwark, but not just cooking courses and traditional recipes, but art courses and antique trades tied in with food and handcrafts, which would require qualified personnel. There is an accepted meaning of multi-functionality referred to the fact that, historically speaking, the farm was run by family. Therefore, the farm is the place in which family relations create activities, occupation, products, economy, for itself and for the community, and the strategic role of women becomes extrinsic.

All this makes one understand why, according to Marsden (1998, pp. 267-269), the underlying question in many present debates is: in what way can



one develop new visions on the significance and value of the rural world, now that justifications based solely on agricultural production have lost almost all of their importance? The same author also observes how many of these debates seem to start at the presupposition that the efficiency of a farm is based on markets regulated by the State, and there is the conviction that in order to remain competitive worldwide, the European farm must, for example, cut costs, the support of agricultural prices no longer being discounted like before. So, all the same, maybe consumers will be able to buy food products at lower costs, but the areas characterized by a marginal agriculture will go more in crisis, and other lands will be abandoned, because the farms will concentrate more on cultivating what maximizes unitary profit.

In addition, the action of the regulating State is more difficult today and less fruitful than in the past, in that the growing complexity of the public politics reduces the efficacy of the traditional governmental bureaucratic techniques based above all on board of governors and controlling. Up to not long ago, in fact, many of the States duties were relatively simple to organize according to the traditional lines of transmission of bureaucracy, while the new social-economic regulation forms are such that their success depends above all on the capacity to have an influence on behavior, on consumption habits or on productive charts of millions of individuals and millions of farms and local administrations. Therefore, it depends on something extremely complex and elusive, not only because it's about facing new and complex problems from a technical point of view, but also because the task consists in trying to modify expectations and individual behavior. This means that credibility leans towards taking the place of a coercive force such being the essential resource of politics.

And in fact, the intervention measures of the European Community tend to reward a more modern behavior, such as the reconquering of segments of the production chain, and thus the upstream or downstream integration processes, the horizontal agreements with the competitor, the resorting to new technologies that favor the directly commercializing of products, etc., even with an eye on government expenditure (Borelli, 2002, p. 1; Scoccini, 2001, p. 9). The direct aid is divided from the production, and is subject to obligations as for the environment, food security and for the well-being of the animals.

This should push farmers to produce according to market demand and not relying on receiving the maximum subsidy.

An italian specificity, the agritourism

A particularly interesting data is the fact that Italy has quickly achieved a specificity, that of agritourism, an activity that, according to the national and regional legislation, is included precisely among the agricultural ones. Law 20 February 2006, n. 96, defines in fact agritourism as an activity of "reception and hospitality done by farmers ... even in the form of capital society or of persons or associated among themselves, through the use of their own farm in connection with the activity of cultivating the farm land, silviculture and breeding animals." So, diversely from the European Community, for which "rural tourism is an ample notion comprising whatever touristic activity is done in the rural environment, including tourism on the farm", in Italy the two sectors are clearly distinguished, and agritourism is considered "... a real agricultural activity connected to cultivation and breeding» (ISTAT, 2012, p. 2).

Moreover, it concerns a carefully regulated activity, different from rural tourism, for which there is no specific legislation: «agritourism represents the offer of hospitality by the farm that obtained the appropriate authorization and has adjusted its structure accordingly in order to have such an activity...», that is one or more typologies of agricultural activities, such as lodging, restoration, wine and food tasting and the organization, even the outside structure within the availability of the farmland facilities, «...recreational activities, cultural, didactic, sports, walking holidays or horseback riding, even through conventions with a local board, aiming at increasing the value of the territory and rural patrimony» (ISTAT, 2012, p. 9).

Already in the 5-year term 2005-2010 agritourism «has been confirmed as a typically Italian reality, different from rural tourism diffused in other European Countries. The close ties between agritouristic activities and comprehensive management of the farm qualify the sector as a fundamental resource of the agricultural reality of the Country» (ISTAT, 2012, p. 2). Now, even though the agritouristic activity seems to be up till now concentrated above all in Northern Italy, the South has recorded a notable increase; in particular Apulia between 2009 and 2010 records a +26.6% and, even with a slight decrease in 2013 (survey year of the most recent report available), it seems to be going presently in a highly positive direction in this ambit, in spite of the recent economical crisis. Another significant element that emerges from this sector is the remarkable amount



of female presence at the managerial level, equal to 49.8% in the South (ISTAT, 2014, p. 3).

The current era presents, therefore, new opportunities besides the critical situation, to create alternatives and interpretative renewed models that have even a political effect: new theories can arise from studies on tenability, on specificity and the territorial production systems and food consumption, regarding an eco-compatible agriculture.

For example, the various forms of organization, such as cooperatives, and the expansion of recourse to the denomination of origin of many products, favors the development of local chains of distribution of food products. These in turn encourage consumer fidelity, but even of producers, that become guarantors of the quality requested by the consumer; the regulation is given thus by the quality instead of a strictly economical criteria, but this requires an approach based on economic and social politics.

This implies that, apart from the polyfunctional role, the farms must try to regain at least some of the food production chain, in order to reduce the discrepancy of distance from companies, with more solid structures and with a stronger market pull, upstream or downstream the farm. The agritourism's capacity to attract both consumer and farmer (in particular women), seems to demonstrate it's being in tune with today's reality.

Attention and the search for explanations and intervention measures for these new realities compels one to investigate the differences based on the economic relations, and the challenge for agricultural politics, as for the farmers, is to find the way to reintegrate agriculture in the countryside, in the economy and in the rural environment from which it was thought to have detached itself during the productive modernization phase.

Consequently, politics, evaluation and research must become more sensitive towards the diverse ways with which the rural areas are integrated in the regional and national economies. One must consider the typology and strewn relational market for which rural areas take part. Moreover, aside which, areas connected by market relations can present unequal non-agricultural forms of development, associated with the increase of tourism, activities for spare time, new manufactured products and service activities. This means that coherent rural politics must reflect these differences (Nainggolan *et Al.*, 2012).

But this requires that the studios of the agricultural and rural world must apply themselves in order to know and comprehend more and more rural spaces and factors at the basis of their differ-

ences (Marsden, 1998, p. 270-273), attempting to approach the diverse themes, as much as possible, in a multidisciplinary viewpoint and therefore in collaboration with scholars of diverse sectors, as much current research in the Economical Geographical field attests it's being necessary, given the new and growing complexity of the economical and territorial systems (Aoyama, 2011).

The spreading of such awareness has probably contributed to the diffusion of researches into personal experience and the farmers' motivations, made in various international disciplinary sectors, taking the stance that observing the behavior of the single farmer in space and time, is necessary for comprehending above all cultural and social relations, in that the study of the structural conditions clarifies the economical and political influence on the agricultural system in a given moment. Both approaches are necessary for explaining the behavior of rural families, that is, if one wants to understand the alternative behavior, it is necessary to learn the individuals' attitudes regarding the agricultural activity, notwithstanding the undoubted difficulties of such a method of research (Fiori, 2012; Grillotti Di Giacomo, 2000 b).

Regarding the other farms of the agri-food industry, in fact, the agricultural one is always in a weak position in relation to its own clients, above all with the fresh products sector (even if, following an already advanced evolution in other European Countries, an always larger portion of the fruit and vegetable production is sold directly to supermarkets and big organized distribution, skipping the intermediate links of the commercial chain and recuperating thus a part of the added value). All the same, in order to reach the goal of better using the opportunities offered from the vertical coordination, agriculture must also continue along the lines of horizontal integration, through the cooperation and the associations, so that the associations assume the form of a real organized agency of the product (Malassis, Ghersi, 1995).

In effect, the competition inside Europe is increasingly delineating itself as a competition for contracts with chain supplies and related activities. The regulation is confronted with a competition between the farm and the diverse chain suppliers, and one can clearly see it in the food distribution field and the detail sector. The same concept of internal market is supplanted gradually by the development of unequal networks of supply chains.

This gives the space a new shape, where quality, choice and credibility become nodal points in the regulation of relations of associated market forms.



Final considerations

In the geographical field there is a tendency towards better define the space dimensions of changes made in the agricultural relations and representations, and which identity it corresponds with. It is interesting how, today even in other disciplinary ambits, there emerges an inevitable need to refer to the concreteness of territorial situations and to the multi-upgrading territorial phenomena (as it is obvious in geographical and in geo-economical research since a long time!); one example is made by the considerations of Keane (1997). He observes, in addition, that the principles of the “sustainable rural community” are the most adequate for development, but remembering Schumpeter’s definition of development as “creative destruction”, he predicts at a research level, as far as a political rule, and of the agricultural world in general, a major and fuller awareness of the “alternative cultures”. Like other scholars, he believes that European rural development programs certainly require “control and coordination”, even though “we all know that these are the least effective instruments for influencing decisions and behaviors” with respect to the incentives given to the best results.

Theory and practice demonstrate their difference just concerning this, he affirms, from the moment that a principle very much shared as this, it is difficult to apply, in that there has not been much work at making objective methods for evaluation processes and performance, necessary for delineating clearly the steps for accountability, but extremely difficult to do, as is very difficult to understand and define concretely the local development (Keane, 1997, pp. 175-176). The concept of multi-upgrading emerges implicitly from the affirmation that, because the rural areas and the local economies don’t perpetuate in isolation, but are a part of a whole, if one wants to seriously predispose an integrated territorial approach, one must try to understand the processes that intervene and keep in mind, different from what many development programs do, that a taken action must be traced on at least two dimensions, the local one and the extra-local one.

In particular, in Italy, the agritourism realm demonstrates being in the clear as for growth and consolidation, but case-study is necessary time consuming and onerous, and a continuous agreement and networking between farmers, administrations and scholars, besides a real contact and awareness of the global world, so as to focus on interpretations and procedures, certainly not “precise”, but however necessary.

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