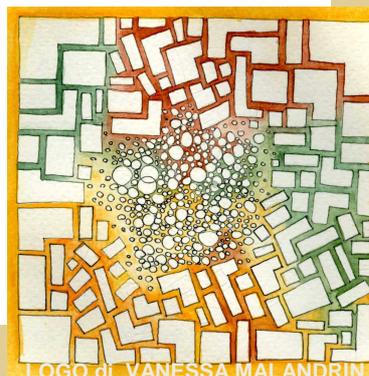


Toward a “radical marketing” approach to food networks

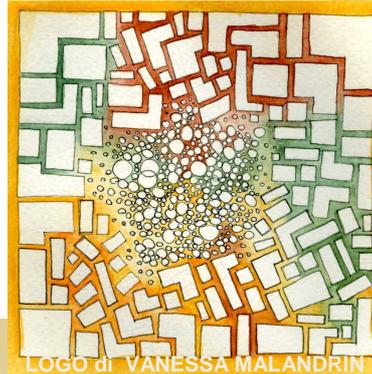
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LOGO di VANESSA MALANDRIN

1 febbraio
2007



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Toward a “radical marketing” approach to food networks¹

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Abstract

The growing movement towards a new paradigm of agricultural and rural development has given origin to a diversity of new farming activities and styles of connecting to the market. Consumers are playing an important and active role in this change. This paper is a contribution to build a theoretical framework for an appropriate marketing approach, here called “radical marketing”, to take in account the changing relationships between production and consumption spheres within Alternatives Agro-Food Networks (AAFNs).

Conventional and post-modern marketing refer to consumers’ inspired actions and strategies set up by the production sphere in order to catch consumers’ need without showing the interest or potentiality to front the mainstream production and consumption model. On the contrary, radical marketing bases its specificity on actors’ will to oppose to the dominant or conventional model, and to enrol other actors into their project. Radical marketing schemes are therefore open to a plurality of diversified actors other than producers, and offer more space to the spreading of non-negotiable values and identities far from the dominant commercial ones on the market.

The paper describes the process of valorization of a product, raw sheep milk cheese in Pistoia mountains (Italy), and analyses its impact on rural development of the area. The peculiarities of the case are related to the fact that the product, whose legality in terms of hygiene and safety had been put into discussion by health authorities which were suspicious on raw milk, has undergone a huge commercial success thanks to the ability of producers to create a strong web of relations both internally and to the outside, and in particular to consumers. In particular, the role of Slow food, an outstanding NGO whose mission is to improve the culture of food and the value of taste against the excesses of industrialisation and technical regulation, is put into evidence.

1) Introduction

The growing movement towards a new agricultural model, flanked by the recent changes of the Common agricultural and rural development policy (CARPE), have given origin to a diversity of new farming activities and styles of connecting to the market. Consumers are playing an important role in this change. As a matter of fact, in developed countries an increasing number of consumers show awareness and concern about conventional and industrialized farming, especially with respect to the production of negative externalities (pollution, loss of biodiversity, economic and social erosion of rural areas, taste homogenization, etc.), which leads them to look for local foods,

¹ This paper acknowledges contribution from the EU, who financed the projects “Transforming rural communication” (TRUC), QLAM-2000-0025, and Marketing Sustainable Agriculture: An analysis of the potential role of new food supply chains in sustainable rural development (SUS-CHAIN) QLK5-CT2002-01349.

This paper was presented at XI World Congress of Rural Sociology Trondheim, Norway; July 25th-30th, 2004.

environmental-friendly products, regional specialties, etc. (Callon, 2004; Weatherell, Tregear and Allinson, 2003).

One of the most evident outcomes is expressed by the spreading of Alternative agrofood networks (AAFNs), which can be defined as new ways to articulating the connections between agriculture and final consumption based on values, principles, meanings somehow opposite to the dominant (therefore “conventional”) ones (Marsden and Renting, 2003). Consumers are seeking to engage in a wholly different type of relationship with farmers and food producers, based on reciprocity, trust and shared values (Hinrichs, 2000, Marsden et al., 2000; Gilg and Battershill, 1998).

The growing interest over AAFNs, and the questions raised over the conditions for their sustainability in a turbulent world (Conner, 2004), have generated the need for a more intense theoretical research aimed at giving food movements and non-conventional producers an effective theoretical basis to their action. Some recent contributions have started to respond to this need. David Goodman, from his peculiar point of observation - being an European and working in an American university - has given a rationale for different approaches on the two sides of the Atlantic ocean. In his view American scholars, being more involved into food movements, are looking at AAFNs as “...symbolic expressions of alternative eco-social imaginaries”. On the other hand the Europeans, being more integrated into policy networks, see AAFNs as “...the dynamic, innovative expression of the “new” rural development’ or as “..sources of resistance to the disruptive effects of global competition” (Goodman, 2003).

In the opinion of the authors of this paper, in the literature on AAFNs there are now enough conceptual resources to build convergence between the two perspectives. The point of departure, as suggested by Goodman, is to recognise that AAFNs “...reconfigure production-consumption relations in the process of extending their spatial and temporal reach. Conceptually, this requires that the active, relational and political role of consumers in the genesis and reproduction of these new economic forms be “acknowledged”” (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002), as well as recognising the role of the new farmers and their changing communicative patterns in the food system arena.

This implies, as Goodman implicitly underlines in its critique, to abandon a conventional marketing approach to consumers as market segments, and look for new approaches. In our view, a research agenda like this should be able to set out an appropriate marketing approach. In fact, if AAFNs are seen as social movements aimed at transforming social relations by active intervention on market mechanisms, an appropriate marketing approach should be able to embody this transformational goal. We call this “radical marketing”. This paper tries to set out some of the basis for this research agenda, using a case study in Tuscany as a seminal test.

2) Background: conventional, post-modern, cognitive and radical marketing

2.1) *Conventional marketing*

The basic principle of (conventional) marketing is that producers can obtain better performances by understanding consumers' attitudes and behaviours and by mobilising their resources to satisfy their needs. As Callon and his colleagues remark (Callon, Meadel and Rabeharisoa, 2002), the key of this activity is a continuous product classification process which implies positioning (defining a set of characteristics that qualifies the product for a specific target of consumers) and communication (which implies signification of the product identity to the chosen group of consumers).

The ways consumers (and their needs and behaviours) are taken into consideration vary a lot between conventional marketing studies. We can identify a range of marketing approaches as distributed between two extremes. The first extreme, that we would call "manipulation" approach, is based on the idea that marketing has the necessary resources to construct consumers' needs through research techniques, symbolic production and persuasion, control at a distance (Lockie and Kitto, 2000; Cova, 1996). The other extreme, that we would call "understanding", is based on the principle that the task of marketing is to satisfy consumers' needs after carefully studying them.



This dichotomy, always present in the marketing literature, has progressively been translated into a different interpretation of consumers' satisfaction. On one side, marketing tends to play on consumers' instincts and creates commodities as surrogates for "real" needs. On the other side, marketing takes consumers' needs seriously, trying to enter into a two-ways communication process to be able to tune with consumers' needs and respond to them appropriately.

2.2) *From Conventional marketing to Post-modern marketing*

An interesting step towards a non-manipulative approach to marketing lies in the recent contributions of the so-called post-modern marketing (Brown 1995, Cova 1997; Firat et al.), which acknowledges that the change happened in the shift to a post-productivist era implies a strong revision of conventional marketing approaches. In particular, the tendency to individualisation no longer allows firms to rely upon steady market segments. Consumers increasingly define their unstable identities through their belonging to networks, picking up from each of them symbolic resources and recombining them together.

But, as Cova states, also the acknowledgement of this tendency can produce different strategic options, distributed over the manipulation-understanding scheme. On the one hand, firms assume individualisation as fully performed, so that marketing becomes a substitute for lost communal

links. Direct marketing based on huge databases, personalised services, customisation, emotional communication are ways to link individualised consumers to producers.

On the opposite side, Cova starts from the hypothesis that individualisation brings to new forms of communities, much less steady than in the past, and not necessarily exclusive (in the sense that each person can belong to a plurality of communities) and this signals an insuppressible need for social bonds. Rather than looking for surrogates to social bonds through commodities, Cova therefore advocates for a “Tribal marketing”, which supports and encourages relationship between customers. Producers inspired by tribal marketing should look to ways by which shifting their attention to “functional value” of the products (those which can be qualified through specific analytical devices, see Callon 1998) to their “link value”, that is the ability of products to strengthen social links between consumers.

With its “link value”, Cova (1997) works out the anthropological concept of “totem” - a symbol which represents social links - and opens a quite new field of research. To take this approach seriously, in fact, implies revising not only the logic of the marketing, and namely of communication, but also the way the production process is designed.

As Goodman and Dupuis highlight, food has in general a strong “link-value”. Whereas modernisation of the agro-food sector tends to individualise food consumption, the “quality” turn shows a strong tendency to re-embed food into social networks. Lee advocates for an “economy of regard”, in the form of a mutual exchange of knowledge and status, which may displace narrow economic relationships (Lee, 2000).

2.3) Towards a radical marketing: cognitive marketing

The first step towards radical marketing is accomplished by recognizing the fact that the information flow that characterizes the relationship between the world of production and the world of consumption is reversed or, better, expanded into a bi-directional information flow. While both in conventional and post-modern marketing products (and communicative contents attached to them) are conceived and adapted after analysing explicit or induced consumers needs (this implying the need of studying consumers characters by means of rather traditional marketing research devices), in cognitive marketing it is the world of production which expresses its values by means of the products or, in a wider definition, it is through the dialectic between the world of production and the world of consumption that products are vehiculated with their attached meanings.

The aim of cognitive marketing is to change the consumers preferences, enrolling them into the producers’ project, included (with special regards to) the values upon which the production process is based. It is no longer a matter of selling to consumers a product which has been conceived in order to satisfy specific consumers’ needs. It is rather a matter of creating new alliances to build and protect diverse product’ meanings through communication practices.

A seminal work in this perspective has been proposed by Lassaut and Sylvander (1997) who, drawing on a comparison between two type of bread in France, find that artisanal bakers explain to consumers why artisanal bread's characteristics are as they are, so taking up a educational function vis a vis consumers. These authors speak of "cognitive marketing" to illustrate this approach. A large set of stories in the business sector (the most famous are Ben and Jerry's and the Body shop), show that producers with a "vision" (and therefore a strong conviction of their ideas) succeed in the market by enrolling consumers into their project.

More in general, the cognitive aspect is strongly taken into consideration in the organisational design of AAFNs. Beyond an economic aspect related to the possibility of better controlling price formation and added value distribution along the chain, communication between producers and consumers allows for considering learning as a component of the product itself.

Cognitive marketing, however, does not necessary bring back to a "production centred" approach. Rather, it may consider producers and consumers as members of —communities of values", where communicative action, rather than strategic action, prevails, and learning becomes a common goal of both producers and consumers. By direct interaction, producers and consumers can learn together how the lifecycle of the product affects social relations and the environment, so that a continuous process of qualification and re-qualification of the product can happen.

2.4) Radical marketing

Conventional and post-modern marketing refer to actions and strategies set up by the production sphere in order to catch consumers' need without showing the interest or potentiality to front the mainstream production and consumption model. Cognitive marketing would aim to affirm values and facts to unaware consumers, without necessarily having the aim of changing the dominant knowledge and value system.

Radical marketing bases its specificity on the producers' will to oppose to (some of the) mainstream or conventional model, and to enrol consumers and other actors into their transformative project. Radical marketing can benefit from many insights of post-modern and cognitive marketing, but alternative commodities vehiculated through AAFNs share specificities which post-modern marketing cannot address.

Opposite to the conventional view of the market, radical marketing is aware that producers can change their environment, and take benefit from this change. Alternative producers have a different hierarchy of motivations, ranging from self-actualisation to commitment to the others to specific norms. When they interact with consumers, they are not neutral on the object of interaction. On the contrary, their product is in symbiosis with their identity, so there are characteristics of their product and production process which is not negotiable. Broadly speaking, it's their specific identities and values to be on the market.

Therefore the aspect which differentiates most radical marketing from post-modern marketing is that, in the world of AAFNs, “also producers have a hearth”, and therefore something to say. For alternative producers, profit is not the ultimate goal, but rather a constraint.

But consumption activities, as well as production ones, are inherently political activities as they go beyond individual utility goals (Lockie and Kitto, 2000). Therefore AAFNs may produce different transformational values, as they can rely on different degrees of reflexivity in production and consumption practices.

As a matter of fact, as Goodman and Dupuis explain, AAFNs are (alternative knowledge-value systems, that is) loci where “modes of ordering” are reconfigured and struggles of contested knowledge are carried out, so that alliance building between producers and consumers and intervention in the public sphere are strictly intertwined.

“The common feature of these initiatives is the role given to involvement in business as a part of a more general strategy aimed at change society: all of them try to change the existing power relationships and to introduce social, ethic, and environmental values into business” (Brunori, 2000).

Having this in mind, the setting-up of AAFNs can be seen as “politics done with other tools”. Producers build AAFNs by activating alliances with a large number of actors, and increasingly success of their initiatives is based on the ability to make links between local and global networks.

This brings to another important aspect to be taken into consideration when looking for a radical marketing theory. A rather diffuse agreement is that producers and consumers look at their participation in AAFNs as a way to transform society and the environment (Barham, 2002). As recent literature is currently showing (Goodman 2000, Barham, 2002), within AAFNs consumers, as well as other actors, are not only passive actors. On the contrary, they too do hold the potentiality to change the world, and they too “have a heart”.

Recognizing the active capacity of other actors than producers to induce a change by activating the network and enrolling other actors (Evans and Yarwood, 2000) means making a great step towards a new concept of marketing, that we might call “network induced radical marketing”, which widens the visual angle.

Firstly, shifting from production to include other sides of the network implies that other basic principles but the profit are at stake, opening more room for marketing strategies based on alternative values. All AAFNs should be able to guarantee to all involved actors a fair distribution of costs and benefits, and in the calculation of costs and benefits also non-monetary costs (social and environment costs) should be considered. This economic constraint is an always present source of contradiction and tensions in the lifecycle of AAFNs, as two different logics face themselves into an economic environment largely dominated by commercial logic.

Secondly, within AAFNs the initiative of changing may originate from different sides, that is other sides than the sole production's. This may lead producers to activate an "induced" or "recursive" radical marketing, which is negotiated with AAFN actors through a reflexive process.

The aspects taken into consideration so far are elements that should be considered when setting up marketing strategies for alternative products.

Summing up the considerations done so far, we could say that a radical marketing approach should base value creation activity on the following formula:

$$\text{Product Value} = \text{functional value} + \text{link value} + \text{"fair" market value} + \text{transformational value}$$

Each of the types of value are outcomes of interaction processes within socio-technical networks (Callon et al. 2002) to which both producers and consumers, together with many other actors, are actively involved. All of them are defined through qualification-requalification processes and consolidated into "criteria", "standards", analytical devices, codified measurements, material and symbolic devices.

The case-study presented here will be focussed on how the encounter of Slow Food with a community of producers from the Pistoia mountains (Tuscany) have generated a wider food network where all actors, from producers to consumers are involved in the construction of a transformative discourse about food and food quality.

3) Case study: a Slow food presidium as a transformative network

3.1) Institutionalising the producers' network: the Consortium

On the Pistoia mountains, in the North of Tuscany, 24 breeders of autochthonous Massese sheep gathered together in a Slow Food Presidium to promote the production of their raw-milk pecorino cheese², a rare product in Tuscany, where nearly all pecorino cheese is made with pasteurised milk.

Before the Slow Food Presidium came into being, the producers of raw milk pecorino cheese had established a Consortium called "Montagne e valli di Pistoia" ("Pistoia mountains and valleys"), with the aim of promoting the local products and the territory. The Consortium was established with the help of the local APA, Associazione Provinciale Allevatori (Provincial Association of Breeders). APA is an association which aims at selecting the breed and improving the breeding techniques, but besides these tasks, its director started supporting the care and promotion of the products (milk and cheese) in order to improve the breeders' economic and social conditions. Now the APA's director is also the director and the promoter of the Consortium.

² The raw-milk pecorino cheese of the Pistoia mountains is included in the national list of traditional products, according to the D.M. 350/99 and is produced in 10 small areas of the Pistoia province.

According to the local tradition, the breeders of the Pistoia mountains use to make the cheese in their small workrooms in the valleys. Their production includes three different kinds of cheese: the fresh/soft one (7-20 days of seasoning), the “abbucciato” (at least 35 days of seasoning) and the “asserbo” (from 2-3 months up to 1 year of seasoning). All the kinds of cheese have a round shape and a white paste; the colour of the rind changes from yellow to dark brown according to the length of the seasoning. The sheep in the area are almost 4,000, and the amount of raw milk pecorino cheese produced every year is about 30 quintals.

In order to establish the Consortium, APA had to work in two different directions:

1. guarantee the healthiness of the products from an hygienic point of view (compliance to EU food safety regulations);
2. draft a code of practices for the production of raw-milk pecorino cheese.

To accomplish the first task, the APA technical staff started a co-operation with the Local Health Unions and helped the breeders to standardise and adapt their workrooms in order to produce the cheeses according to national and EU sanitary rules. They also checked the milk quality and healthiness and verified the opportunity for all the producers to process raw milk without any risks for the health of consumers.

As far as the second task is concerned, after a year since this work had started, the Consortium drafted a Code of Practices, which regulated the “Raw Milk Pecorino Cheese” production and obliged the breeders to use only raw ovine milk.

3.2) Linking networks: the setting-up of the Slow Food Presidium

In 2000 the director of the Consortium casually met the Slow Food representatives.

Slow Food is an international cultural association born in Italy in 1986, mainly within the urban context. It is addressed to the conservation and development of a quality food culture; in particular the aim of Slow Food is to defend the local and traditional food (and way of eating) in front of the industrialised food, and to re-create a new food awareness and culture. The Slow Food movement spread very quickly all over the world and counts in 2003 about 65,000 members in over 45 countries; a half of the members are Italian.

Born essentially as an association of people keen on “good food”, the objectives of the association gradually changed together with a growing awareness of society towards new values. Nowadays Slow Food is concerned with the aim of promoting typical agrofood products and dishes, coupled to the desire of preserving traditional habits linked to food culture and to protect ancient and local plant varieties and breeds from extinction. One of the tools used by Slow Food to protect typical products and mainly their producers and the traditional techniques, skills and know-how is the Presidium. A Presidium is a group of farmers and/or food processors of an agro-food typical product which Slow Food aims at protecting from extinction and promoting to consumers by giving local producers and their associations technical and marketing assistance.

The Slow food representative suggested to the director of the Consortium the idea of creating a Slow Food Presidium, which would have been the Presidium n.1 in Italy. The costs for the participation in the Presidium were supported by the Province of Pistoia, the local Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Craft and Agriculture, and the Mountain Community of the area.

The support offered by Slow Food for the promotion and marketing of the Presidium was remarkable. Many articles appeared on the national press, and the Presidium producers could join in the main national and regional events organised by Slow Food: “*Cheese*” (a national event organised every two years in Italy completely dedicated to the promotion of the cheese), “*Salone del Gusto*” (“The Hall of Taste”), “*Toscana Slow*”, and in the organisation of taste workshops on raw milk pecorino cheese and of typical dinners in the restaurants which adopt the Slow Food philosophy.

On the other hand, Pistoia Mountains sheep milk cheese has meant for Slow food a “turning point”, as it has been the occasion to focus on tradition as key to quality, and to denounce to a wider public the hyper-hygienist tendency of health regulation as a killer of quality, as defined by Slow Food discourse (authenticity, taste, small producers, etc.).

3.3) Changing marketing communication to change markets: the example of Toscana Slow

As an example of the initiatives taken by Slow Food we have chosen Toscana Slow.

Toscana Slow is a gastronomic event organised by Slow Food to present and promote the traditional agro-food products of Tuscany to consumers, with special reference to the products of the *Presidia*. The event is a network of food fairs held contemporarily every two years in all Tuscan provinces, which implies a big organisational effort and the involvement of a big number of actors.

The first edition of Toscana Slow was launched with the aim of promoting traditional local products against the backdrop of the artistic heritage of Tuscan cities. The roots of historical heritage and of gastronomic tradition, as Slow Food put it, are connected and are just different ways to express the Tuscan culture.

During Toscana Slow 2001 the Raw Milk Pecorino Cheese from the Pistoia Mountains *Presidium* participated in some of the events in the programme: the most important day was the 1st December, when the producers of raw milk pecorino cheese joined in a market of Apennines typical products and to a Taste Workshop on their cheeses. During Toscana Slow 2003 the Presidium participated on the 6th June in an event called “The Treasures of the Cheese-maker”, a whole day in a Carthusian monastery near Pisa dedicated to Tuscan cheeses. One of the events of the day was a taste workshop on raw milk cheeses and red wines called “Raw is Better”.

4) Discussion: how relevant is this case to radical marketing?

The following table shows how the value of the product can be broke down into the framework above illustrated.

| Value | Description |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Functional value | Raw milk and traditional production process as key to a better taste |
| Link value | The product purchased by consumers is a "totem", as generally its consumption strengthens a common attitude toward food and food quality. The product has also a link value between consumers and producers, as consumers mature awareness of the need to sustain economically local producers as a way to avoid quality erosion. Slow food provides an ideology for an approach to food consumption as a way to cement dialogue and social interaction and to bridge consumers and producers. |
| Fair market value | Producers keep attention on the level of prices to loyal consumers even in a context of strong tensions to raise them. |
| Transformational value | The product contributes to convey messages of critique to the dominant approach to food and to propose alternatives in the relationship between food production, consumption and nature. |

The case study shows a radical marketing strategy deployed by a network of actors around a common objective: allowing the survival of a traditional product by modifying its regulatory and market environment, and contrasting the outstanding tendency to food and taste standardization and loss of diversity.

This process consisted in two steps: the creation of a core network and the connection to the outside (the Slow Food Presidium). The core network is made by producers, technicians, local health authority, provincial administration, municipalities, local consumers. The other network is made by Slow Food movement and the other stakeholders who joined Slow Food campaign: consumers, regional and national authorities, opinion leaders, chefs, and a diversified set of other stakeholders.

Communication brings to a growing alignment of these actors around the idea that raw milk cheese is a local and valuable asset, and this asset has to be defended against the idea that raw-milk pecorino cheese is unsafe as it does not meet hygienic rules. To this purpose, producers enrol other actors to overturn a moral prejudice against raw milk.

Slow food encounters this process in its development, and gives to the local network the necessary resources to step up the process: symbolic capital (the snail), communication skills (i.e. the Manifesto), access to commercial networks, access to the mass media, a system of values (slow food vs fast food, tradition vs industrialisation). The notoriety gained by the product reinforces notoriety in the local networks (also through the local mass media).

Slow Food Manifesto in Defence of Raw-milk Cheese

Slow Food has recently published on its website this Manifesto, in order to defend the tradition of raw milk cheeses from the sterilization processes imposed by the law. Slow Food asks the supporters of raw milk cheeses to send back a message with their signature, in order to submit the results of the campaign to the government institutions which oblige the producers to the pasteurisation of the cheeses.

Raw-milk cheese is more than a wonderful food, it is a deeply embedded expression of our finest traditions. It is both an art and a way of life. It is a culture, a heritage and a cherished landscape. And it is under threat of extinction! Under threat because the values it expresses are in opposition to the sanitation and homogenization of mass produced foods.

We call on all food-loving citizens of the world to respond now to the defence of the unpasteurized cheese tradition. A defence of a food that has for hundreds of years inspired, given pleasure and provided sustenance but is now being insidiously undermined by the sterile hand of global hygiene controls.

We call for an end to all discriminatory regulations from EU, WTO, Food and Drug Administration and other government Institutions that needlessly restrict citizens' freedom of choice to purchase these foods, and threaten to destroy the livelihood of the artisanal craftsmen who produce them.

We deplore attempts by regulatory authorities to impose unattainable standards of production, in the name of protecting human health.

We believe that such impositions will have the adverse effect of that intended. The bacteriological health of our unpasteurized dairy products is destroyed by overzealous sterilization procedures. So will the health of human beings be destroyed through a diet of sterile food. Without any challenge, our immune system will fail and our medication becomes ineffective.

Moreover the unique flavour and aroma of the cheese are conserved by nonpasteurization.

We therefore call upon those who have it in their power to safeguard the diversity and complexity of our regional foods and the health and stability of our rural communities to act now and ensure a flexible, fair and appropriate regulatory framework; sensible controls and a positive disposition concerning the future.

Be aware – that once the knowledge, skills and commitment of this culture have been lost, they can never be regained.

You can help this cause by sending the following message “I also eat raw-milk cheese” to the e-mail address rawmilk@slowfood.com

Between the two steps there is not a strict sequentiality, but it is rather a recursive process. In fact, external stimuli start a process of reflection upon normal routines: in the contact with outside consumers (already aware of Slow food discourse) producers perceive that what they normally do (and have always done) has a value also for the outsiders, and this strengthens their self-esteem. In the meantime, intensified interaction with the outside brings them to a clearer definition of their identity.

If we have a look at transformation engendered by this AAFN, we can see that it brings change on:

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Codes</i> | → | a changing of the meaning of agricultural activity for producers and consumers. Cheese as a symbol /means for cultural change. A greater awareness of the relation between cheese and the environment which gives rise to it |
| <i>Norms</i> | → | the value of communication, reputation, notoriety |
| <i>Behaviours and attitudes</i> | → | from “hidden” faces to self-esteem and pride. Producers open themselves to the outside and set new relations |
| <i>Technical rules</i> | → | codification of the raw-milk pecorino cheese production process, compliance with hygienic rules |
| <i>Built environment</i> | → | a greater commitment to nature conservation |
| <i>Laws</i> | → | interpretation of the hygienic rules |
| <i>Institutional networks</i> | → | convergence between a large set of local institutions (province, health authority, local municipalities, ..) |

The producers of pecorino cheese had communication practices also before the partnership with Slow Food and the activation of the Presidium. In that period producers used not to show themselves with their own faces, and they underestimated their production because the dominant convention of modernity (rural is old) did not allow them to insert in that logic. If rurality is seen as an old and outmoded thing to get rid of, those persons which still felt totally plunged in this old-fashion vision did not want to show their lives and habits, included the result of their work (pecorino cheese).

But since the Consortium and the Slow Food Presidium appeared, there has been a growth of 12% in the number of sheep, and the prices of the Raw Milk Pecorino Cheese of the Pistoia Mountains have doubled. The producers have started joining in about 50 fairs every year and report an increasing success for their cheeses among the visitors.

This positive feedback from the consumers improved the breeders' perception of their work, as the director of the Consortium refers:

“At the beginning the producers didn't want to join in the fairs and to show their names on their products. Now they have an enthusiastic attitude towards their job and are glad to participate to markets and fairs“.

The initiative has also changed the way consumers are involved into the network. As producers can talk directly with consumers, they have progressively improved their communication skills, as a couple of producers refer:

“Consumers at the fairs make a lot of questions - mainly about the way the cheese is made, about quality features and about raw milk - and this has stimulated us in reflecting about our work and our product“.

The success of this initiative have strengthened a commercial pattern based on a direct relationship between producers and consumers. Producers classify their customers into three groups: steady consumers or retail shops, who buy cheese on a regular basis, occasional consumers, who look for cheese when they pass by in the area, and consumers met at the fairs. They apply different prices to these customers: as there are an excess of demand over supply, they have tried to keep prices steady to loyal consumers, while they have raised the prices to the occasional consumers and at the fairs.

Besides, to reinforce this sensation, producers were also facing problems with the EU food safety regulations. Only when a national /international movement, expression of the urban society, re-evaluated the pre-modernist way of producing and consuming, the producers of the pecorino cheese were able to change the value to give to their work.

This last statement affects the theme of qualification and legitimisation. Pecorino cheese producers had to wait for someone who had acquired the sufficient legitimacy (obtained by means of the success of the communication practices activated) to express an opinion on quality. Slow Food's main role has been to allow a traditional cheese, which in the locality was considered a

“normal” cheese, to circulate in greater networks, thus changing its status from “normal” to “exceptional”, thus acquiring the necessary value and meaning to be fronted to the dominant quality convention. There was no need to change the product with the Presidium, while for example selling to mass distribution would have required to standardize the size and the colors of the cheese, the seasoning, etc. Slow Food action gave a new value to the resources used by inserting them in a new cognitive context, thus solving a problem of “qualification” of the actors who may express against or in favour of a certain vision.

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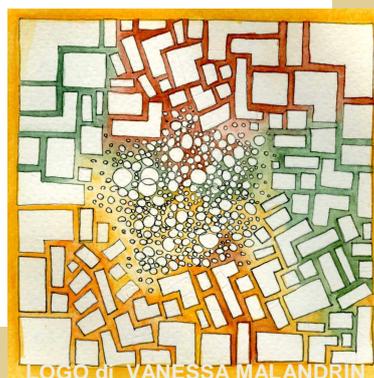
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