

# Food as a development opportunity

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In this work we try to understand how food can have a positive impact on our territory, on health and on the population and, understand if there are methods that make it possible to raise awareness, animate and promote, in the South, the community towards one Sustainable Development. This article consists of several passages that I will explain in a brief and clear way. The logic is to provide a new interpretation of the ways to grow the local economy. In a first part, in fact, we will face the historical-evolutionary path that led to the affirmation of alternative and sustainable food models. The second part deals with sociological approaches and studies related to food, analyzing two good practices. In the third and last part the case studies are analyzed in order to understand if these experiences are positive and, because they should be privileged in a context as problematic as that of Southern Italy.

## Part I

The globalization of the economy and the Green Revolution are the main events that have determined the dependence of the agricultural sector on external factors, which is why a progressive decoupling of the agricultural company from its ecosystem and from its social and local context has been created rural.<sup>1</sup> The unlimited use of resources, territorial expansion and profit maximization, carried out by the dominant economic system, are leading to the occurrence of serious consequences concerning the environment, human health and nutrition. In this system food becomes a commodity, to be produced and marketed, aimed exclusively at gain, as strong competition on prices leads producers to exploit natural resources or work more intensively, being crushed by the so-called cost-price phenomenon squeeze.<sup>2</sup>

Since the late 1990s, a change of perspective has emerged, due both to the profound changes made in the rural areas in the North and the South of the world, and to the resistance movements to the dominant agri-food regime.

New subjects come on stage, building around "food" practices of "other agriculture", "Alternative Food Networks" and, more recently, attempts to give them institutional support through plans and food policies promoted locally.<sup>3</sup> All this represents the alternative to the dominant agro-food system and, it stands out because it favors local identity as an opportunity for economic development and social integration. In the Calabrese case, these efforts are aimed at increasing the sense of belonging to the territory, in order to counteract the dynamic of depopulation that characterizes its internal rural areas.

## Part II

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, *Oltre la modernizzazione. Processi di sviluppo rurale in Europa*, Rubettino Editore, Soveria Mannelli, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228775229\\_Investigation\\_of\\_the\\_Cost-Price\\_Squeeze\\_for\\_Individual\\_Agricultural\\_Commodities](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228775229_Investigation_of_the_Cost-Price_Squeeze_for_Individual_Agricultural_Commodities).

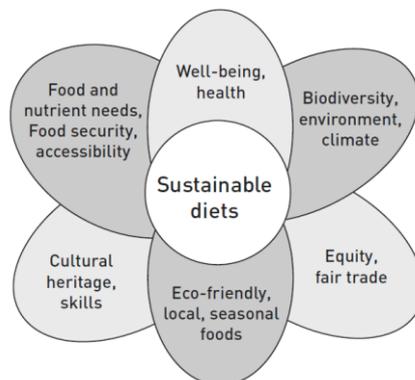
<sup>3</sup> Cfr. A. Cavazzani, *Nuove prospettive per la sociologia rurale in Italia*, Sociologia urbana e rurale, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2009, vol.21,n.90, pp.15-20.

In recent years a complex debate has emerged on the food system. The food system, as we well know, is composed of two divergent models of production and consumption: on the one hand we find large-scale organized distribution, based, essentially, on a type of agricultural production that tends towards the infinite exploitation of resources, generating the loss of biodiversity; on the other hand, there are resistance movements, with respect to the dominant economic system, which seek to identify alternative models in order to support small local productions and resource.<sup>4</sup>The appearance of ecological crises, lack of resources, land grabbing, water grabbing and the financialization of food are just some of the countless shocks that all communities will face.<sup>5</sup>

The "sustainability" and the "re-location of food" are the basis of innovative practices and are a valid alternative to the industrial agri-food system. Food re-localization processes can be interpreted as alternative food regimes. The new types of production and marketing include organic farming, farmers' markets, short supply chains, solidarity buying groups, all linked to alternative food webs. In a world in which there is an important population growth, it is necessary to modify food production and consumption systems; in fact, the various institutions and the international community are oriented to the promotion of "sustainable diets", as a possible solution to the problems inherent in the loss of agri-food biodiversity. FAO states that:

“Sustainable diets are low environmental impact diets that contribute to food and nutrition security, as well as to a healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets contribute to protecting and respecting biodiversity and ecosystems, are culturally acceptable, economically fair and accessible, adequate, safe and healthy from a nutritional point of view and, at the same time, optimize natural and human resources”.<sup>6</sup>

Denis Lairon, in 2010, elaborated a scheme on what are the key components that contribute to the creation of sustainable diets, reported below.<sup>7</sup>



It is possible to note that even in Calabria and Basilicata there are experiences, albeit to be consolidated, oriented towards sustainability. Below we will report good practices.

### **“La Comunità del cibo e della Biodiversità” (The Community of Food and Biodiversity)**

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. S. Sivini, Oltre il consumo e la produzione, Centro Editoriale e Libraio Università della Calabria, Rende, 2014, p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. S.Sivini e A.Corrado, Cibo locale. Percorsi innovativi nelle pratiche di produzione e consumo alimentare, Liguori Editore, Napoli, 2013, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. <http://www.fao.org/ag/humannutrition/25918-0f89629169d179b29a284d08802cf9e89.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. D.Lairon, Biodiversity and sustainable nutrition with a food-based approach. In: B. Burlingame S. Dernini editors. Sustainable Diets And Biodiversity Directions And Solutions For Policy, Research And Action. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization; 2010, p.34.

In the last decade in the southern area of Basilicata, a work of preservation, promotion and enhancement of agri-food products, biodiversity and traditional agriculture is being tested. The Basilicata Region was the first in Italy to sign this agreement with reference to ART. 13 of the law 194 of 2015. The law 194/2015 regulates the protection and enhancement of biodiversity of agricultural and food interest.<sup>8</sup> Since 2008 there have been collaboration agreements and projects that can be summarized in 10 main phases.

Phase 1: first protocol of agreement between the Pollino National Park and the Alsia of Rotonda, mapping of ancient Horticultural, Cereal and Fruttifere varieties.

Phase 2: conservation works through the creation of conservation sites, Botanical gardens, private sites. In 2016 the Bank of Seeds aimed at the conservation and multiplication of indigenous non-native varieties, integrated with the agro-ecosystem and present for at least 50 years, was inaugurated.

Phase 3: bio-agronomic and genetic characterization activities

Phase 4: according to the law n.26 of 2008 the genetic resources will be registered in the regional register

Phase 5: Constitution of the first Food Community, consisting of public and private subjects with the aim of protecting the heritage

Phase 6: establishment of the "Itineraries of Agricultural and Food Biodiversity of the Pollino"

Phase 7: with the aim of extending the activities also in the Calabrese part of the Park by agreement between the Pollino National Park, Alsia and Arsac

Phase 8: Publication of the ISPRA Notebook: Forgotten fruits and recovered biodiversity of the Basilicata and Valle d'Aosta regions.

Step 9: Collaboration agreement between the Park and the ALSIA

Phase 10: collaboration agreement between the park and the ARSAC.<sup>9</sup>

### **Gas "Utopie Sorridenti" (Solidarity buying group Smiling Utopias)**

The "Utopie Sorrenti" network has been operating in Calabria since 2004 and involves around 33 entities, including cultural associations, social cooperatives and farms. Direct sales from the producer to the consumer (short supply chain) is an initiative implemented by the Gas of Cosenza, which every Saturday morning renews the appointment with the Bio-ethical market, between Via Popilia and Viale Mancini. Here, all the agricultural producers who have joined the Utopie Sorridenti Solidarity Network, bring their products. For buyers it is a convenient and simple system: just subscribe to the mailing list on the website [www.utopiesorridenti.com](http://www.utopiesorridenti.com) to receive, every week, a detailed email with the products in the box which, once booked, can be picked up at the market. Therefore, a network that favors local producers and collective well-being is finally active. The collective well-being is protected by Gas, through the quality of organic products, preferring producers who respect workers (no exploitation) and who guarantee respect for the environment, thanks to the short journey that the goods take. Adhering to Gas means activating a

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<sup>8</sup> Cfr. <https://www.diritto.it/normativa/legge-n-1942015-biodiversita-agricolo-alimentare/>

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. <https://parcopollino.gov.it/it/i-progetti-nel-parco/2-non-categorizzato/574-conservazione-e-valorizzazione-della-biodiversita-agraria-nel-parco-nazionale-del-pollino>

social process from the bottom (bottom-up approach), in which the concept of solidarity becomes the guiding criterion.<sup>10</sup>

### **Part III**

The food system has always been ignored by all local administrations, although it has an impact, across all sectors of life. Therefore, the experiences analyzed demonstrate how the construction of alternative food webs in Calabria and Basilicata can positively affect mankind, as they are able to promote sustainable production practices, favoring the change of consumption models; sending clear messages to policies, towards supporting sustainable rural development. The path is not simple, but being able to establish an active, democratic, inclusive method of participation seems a first step to trigger a mechanism of change, which our society needs.

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<sup>10</sup> Cfr. <http://www.utopiesorridenti.com/gas/gas-cosenza/>