

Ecomuseo delle Acque del Gemonese, recovery and appreciation of local agri-food products: an engine to regional social balance

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Abstract

Since 2006, the Ecomuseum delle Acque del Gemonese promotes actions for the rescue and evaluation of traditional regional products, including Pan di Sorc and cheese from rotating dairies. During the last decades, the abandonment of the cultivation of an old local corn variety, the change in the structure of the dairy companies, and the habits and the food market have assigned to these products and its knowledges a possible extinction. The projects initiated by the Ecomuseum in favor of the products and the local producers led to networks of participation, broad benefit chains and participation of the local actors, for a qualified territorial development. The article describes the history of projects, from the outset, examines the benefits and role of the Ecomuseum, based on field research, qualitative data collection, interviews and life stories. The projects are based on multiple objectives: to recover the historic varieties of cereals in the region; organize a network of "conservatives" (farmers dedicated to the conservation of germplasm and local biodiversity); differentiate local agriculture; test environmental, social and economically sustainable agronomic techniques; activate local agri-food chains; to give life memories and knowledge. In addition to monetary valuation, the social benefits includes: enrichment of the archives of the Ecomuseum; reintroduction of multifunctionality in agriculture; favoring the aggregation of small farmers around a common project; territorial promotion (qualified tourist supply and visitation); didactic activity for the local population; social and health benefits due to the inclusion of "fragile" categories (women, elderly, mental health center patients) in productive and educational activities. The multisectoral action of the

Ecomuseum as a catalyst and coordinator contributes significantly to the maintenance of social capital and stimulates the production of shared "immaterial" social goods.

Key words

Offshore heritage, ecomuseum, oral memory, local development and pan di sorc.

Resumen

Desde 2006, el Ecomuseo delle Acque del Gemonese promueve acciones de rescate y valoración de los productos regionales tradicionales, incluyendo el pan di sorc y el queso de las centrales lecheras de rotación. Durante las últimas décadas, el abandono del cultivo de una antigua variedad local de maíz, el cambio en la estructura de las empresas lecheras, en los hábitos y en el mercado alimenticio llevó a estos productos y al conocimiento asociado, a la extinción. Los proyectos iniciados por el Ecomuseo en favor de los productos y de los productores locales llevaron a redes de participación, cadenas de beneficios amplias y participación de los actores locales, para un desarrollo territorial cualificado. El artículo describe la historia de los proyectos, desde su inicio, examina los beneficios y el papel del Ecomuseo, a partir de la investigación de campo, la recogida de datos cualitativos, entrevistas e historias de vida. Los proyectos se basan en múltiples objetivos: recuperar las variedades históricas de los cereales de la región; organizar una red de "conservadores" (agricultores dedicados a la conservación del germoplasma y de la biodiversidad local); diferenciar la agricultura local; probar técnicas agronómicas ambiental, social y económicamente sostenibles; activar cadenas agroalimentarias locales; vivificar memorias e conocimientos. Además de la valoración monetaria, el corolario de beneficios sociales incluye: enriquecimiento del archivo del Ecomuseo; reintroducción de la multifuncionalidad en agricultura; favorecimiento de la agregación de pequeños agricultores en torno a un proyecto común; promoción territorial (oferta y visitación turísticas cualificadas); actividad didáctica para la población local; beneficios sociales y de salud debido a la inclusión de categorías "frágiles" (mujeres, ancianos, pacientes del centro de salud mental) en las actividades productivas y educativas. La acción multisectorial del Ecomuseo como catalizador y coordinador contribuye significativamente al mantenimiento del capital social y estimula la producción de bienes sociales "inmateriales" compartidos.

Palabras clave

Patrimonio deslocalizado, ecomuseo, memoria oral, desarrollo local y pan di sorc.

Introduction

At the outskirts of the little urban center Gemona del Friuli (Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, Italy), at the Ospedaletto locality arises the old Cocconi mill, current headquarter of Ecomuseo delle Acque del Gemonese (Ecomuseum of the Gemonese Waters).

Gemona (Glemone, in the Friulian language) emerges at the Julian Pre-Alps region, 272 meters above sea level, over an alluvial cone located at the feet of mounts Chiampon (1,709 meters) and Glemina (709 meters), inside a subcontinental climate region with cold winters (average minimum temperature of 2°C/35.6°F in January), moderately hot summers (22°C/71.6°F in July) and abundant pluviosity (2,000 ml per year).

With 11135 inhabitants and a total surface of 56.21km², it is the main municipality of the Gemonese territory, of which are also part the municipalities of Artegna, Bordano, Buja, Montenars, Osoppo, Trasaghis and Venzone.

The history of Gemona Ecomuseum is densely interwoven with the recent territory's history, through paths of appreciation of productions, traditions, history and local geomorphological peculiarities - threatened or at extinction risk - of which Ecomuseum has been an untiring supporter.

This article investigates and reconstructs the life history of Gemona Ecomuseum and some of its main territorial actions, based on an exploratory research performed in 2014 through field visits, semi-structured interviews and qualitative data collection. The conclusions point to processes and results constructing a situated development experience that, by generating social benefits, goods and services shared in a way that is lasting, exemplifying and attentive to the territory's inclinations, can be considered virtuous. The ecomuseum, considered as a territorial actor, proves to be a fulcrum and an agent capable of emboldening and expanding such processes.

Ecomuseo delle Acque del Gemonese

In 2000, Gemona's City Hall in a partnership with the local cooperative Utopie Concrete obtained a European Union financing, thanks to the public notice for sustainable tourism projects' support based on the appreciation of local resources. The specific project, named "Centro di Educazione Ambientale Mulino Cocconi" (Cocconi Mill Center for Environmental Education), implied its realization in the old Cocconi family's mill, at the Ospedaletto locality (Gemona), a lab headquarter for didactics and environmental education, an attached expository space denominated Museo dell'arte molitoria (Milling art museum), and the Centro di documentazione (Documentation center). The goal was to add value and promote the Gemonese territory and its peculiarities, thanks to the creation of an ecomuseum, the Ecomuseo delle Acque del Gemonese (from now on indicated as Ecomuseo, with capital letter).

In 2006, the Ecomuseo was recognized as an entity of regional interest, as established by the following law: Legge Regionale n.10 del 20 giugno 2006 - Istituzione degli Ecomusei del Friuli Venezia Giulia.

Since its beginnings, the goal stated by Ecomuseo is: to document, rescue and interpret life, figures and happenings, the material and immaterial culture, the relations between natural and anthropized environment, the traditions, activities, life and work practices and local productions, as well as the way in which human settlement and works characterize the face and evolution of the Gemonese landscape and territory, a geographic unit that is extremely rich in humid areas and hydraulic works.

The activities of survey, documentation and heritage listing stimulated by Ecomuseo have been done through inclusive modalities such as participatory inventory and construction of community maps.

Between 2005 and 2006, within the scope of another public notice Leader type for European Union financing destined to projects of territorial appreciation based in local tradition products, the Ecomuseo operators elaborated the idea, led the process of creating local partnerships - a pre-requisite to apply for the contest - and wrote down the project: the product to be recovered and the one around which

appreciation chains would be activated is the pan di sorc (sorc bread). The approved project was granted the financing.



Fig. 1.

Location of Gemonese territory.

The pan di sorc project

Pan di sorc is a bread coming from local tradition, obtained from the mixture of three different flours: wheat, rye and corn (sorc, in the Friulian language) from the variety with a short vegetative cycle (called cinquantino, due to the 50-day cycle of cultivation). Formerly, the bread dough would be squeezed at home and taken to bake at the village's oven. In the territory of Buja and Artegna, the bread would be made in its sweet version, with dried figs, fennel seeds and sometimes raisins, cinnamon and walnuts. The sweet variant would be traditionally prepared and donated in occasion of Christmas festivities. When dried, the bread would also be used as an ingredient for the crafùt (a meatball made of ground pork liver, bread, raisins and lemon zest, traditionally served with cinquantino corn polenta).

In the 60's, the abandonment of the cinquantino corn cultivation combined with the change in food habits and tastes have restricted the product to a rare, domestic consumption. The bread and its recipe, stored inside the memory of the most ancient community members, were in danger of becoming forever lost.

The project for the recovery and appreciation of pan di sorc – and also of the local heritage through pan di sorc - foresaw a variety of goals: to recover the cereal varieties once cultivated and diffused but today restricted to a few small areas, only to family consumption; to organize a net of "preservers", that is, farmers committed to the preservation of local germplasm and biodiversity; to optimize and differentiate local agriculture, today dominated by the production of common corn varieties for animal feed and silage forage, through the rotation of varied cultures; to experiment sustainable agronomic techniques from the environmental, social and economic point of view; to give life to a local agri-food chain connecting producers, members of the processing industry and consumers; to requalify rural landscape; to pass on knowledge and memories.

The project to rescue the cinquantino corn variety and the pan di sorc was constructed based on a series of collaboration agreements with university institutes, research and development entities, public organs and extra-local partners, which have been supporting the process through studies, experimentations, supply of human resources, knowledge and contacts.

The rescue of bread recipes was done through interviews and recordings, performed with the local population by Ecomuseo operators and collaborators.

To protect producers and actors engaged in the chain (farmers, bakers, millers, traders and restaurant owners) from occasional counterfeiting, the Ecomuseo has set a nominative and collective protection trademark for the pan di sorc: it protects the name "Pan di Sorc", a property of the association CEA Mulino Cocconi-Ecomuseo, and connects it to a specific production protocol; at the same time, the brand is shareable and remains at the disposal of all participants in the productive and commercial chain.

Some years after the achievement of the experience predicted by the pan di sorc project, the operators of Ecomuseo thought about adding even more value to pan di sorc by proposing its recognition as a "Fortress" product within the context of Slow Food movement's international net.¹

Since 2012, pan di sorc is a Slow Food Fortress. The recognition as a Fortress has given a new impetus to the old recipe and the bread's sweet version is again present at the region's tables, thanks to the visibility and commercial openness granted by Slow Food.

Besides, the productive chain of raw materials and processing of the pan di sorc is today entirely certified with the official organic label, by Istituto Mediterraneo di Certificazione (IMC) and thanks to the shared certification system.

Although the project has not been able to include a big number of processing and trading industry members, the pan di sorc continues to be produced and sold locally and in small quantities, in an economically sustainable way to those little companies and people that, thanks to it, are able to supplement some of their income and to share a collective experience.

¹ The Slow Food movement was born in Italy in 1989. It is today active around the world in the protection and promotion of foods and traditional quality varieties. Its pillar is the conservation of cultivation and processing methods that are ecologically concerned, the defense of biodiversity and the tutelage of producer communities and of the ensemble of historic, artistic, cultural and identity values that are present in food heritages. The so called Fortresses are small scale projects that, through technical consulting, formation courses and support in marketing operations, help producers of artisanal foods to preserve its traditional methods and final products (Andrews, 2008; Slow Food, 2013).



Fig. 2.

Jeanett Arteaga Bernal, sociologist and cultural mediator for the educational project about Italy-Mexico trade.

Further actions

Over the years, from the successful experience of the ecomuseum creation and the appreciation route of the pan di sorc, thanks to analogue virtuous processes, further interwoven activities have appeared, all brightened by the Ecomuseo initiative.

This territorial agent is nowadays the catalyst of an intense didactic activity, focused on different actors (both in local and adjoining regions), schools and adults. The didactics consist in countless courses and workshops of environmental education, handicraft, food education, gastronomy and open talks with experts in various fields (geology, anthropology, biology, etc).

Today, thanks to another Leader public notice, the Ecomuseo was able to equip and to open at a place in the historical center of Gemona the Didactic Earthquake Laboratory, which works as a didactic pole to school groups and as a center for reunions and seminars.



Fig. 3.

Fiorindo Mazzolini,
organic farmer and
miller.



Fig. 4.

Maurizio e Stefania,
farmers and operators of
a farm house in Gemona
del Friuli.

The collaboration with the Mental Health Department of the public health system's local core (ASS 3 Alto Friuli) has allowed the insertion of patients with psychophysical and locomotor disorders inside field agricultural works and didactic activities.

The Ecomuseo has also led the recent creation of a new Fortress local project. The Formaggio di Latteria Turnaria (turnover dairy's cheese) is a product based on a traditional collaborative and productive formula, formerly very widespread in all Friuli region, but now almost completely extinct. Institutionalized in 1880, the hundreds of latterie turnarie that were present inside rural settlements located at the feet of paddock areas in the region would work according to a cooperative rationale: members would deliver milk to the dairy; this milk would be processed by other members, which would take shifts at the dairy (therefore turnaria, which comes from the Italian word turno - shift). The final product, that is, the cheese wheels, would be passed on to members based on the quantity of milk that had been delivered by each one of them, so they could finish the aging process and sell the cheese.

Thanks to Ecomuseo's intermediation, two dairies were reactivated at the Gemonese territory and put to service of big and small local farmers (the milk comes from establishments with 70 heads of cattle as well as from those with 3 or 4 cows). One of the dairies receives the milk of 17 farmers (18-20 hundred kg of milk), the other serves 12 farmers (around 10 hundred kg of milk). The first, situated in the Campolessi locality, disposes also of a little public selling spot. The cheese coming from the dairies - raw milk cheese (unpasteurized) - has just been released in the market: it is sold by a minimum price of 7-8 euros/kg (two-month aged).

Pan di sorc's legacy

The appreciation project for the pan di sorc has been generating many positive effects since 2006:



Fig. 4.

Domenico Calligaro, “dean” of the Gemonese bakers, guardian of the Pan di sorc recipe.



Fig. 5.

Pan di sorc, bread of the Gemonese country tradition, in danger of extinction.

- An increase in organically cultivated surface from 3,200m² to 6 hectares²
- An increase in the surface cultivated with traditional and human food varieties (cinquantino corn, rye, seasonal local greens) from 500m² to 10 hectares
- Insertion of 4 local enterprises in the area of touristic animation and didactics
- Endorsement of 7 local micro-enterprises inside pan di sorc's productive chain
- Endorsement of 14 micro-enterprises producing goods for direct consumer sales
- An increase of participants in the annual activities connected with the ecomuseum project (courses, seminars, workshops, tastings) from 26 to 2,180

Beyond measurable results, there is a series of big and small consequences of which the range is, in our opinion, the most relevant aspect of Ecomuseo's history and action. It includes the:

1. Enrichment of Ecomuseo's Memory Files, thanks to the participatory inventory of all material and immaterial heritage related to gastronomy, techniques, knowledge and traditional utensils
2. Reintroduction of multifunctionality and diversity inside involved agricultural enterprises (transition from intensive corn cultivation destined to animal feed to the production of local food varieties)
3. Favoring of the aggregation of amateur and small professional farmers around a common project through shared organic certification
4. Aggregation of small producers united around the tutelage of small quality products and involved in the participatory definition of the protocol for the production of Fortress products

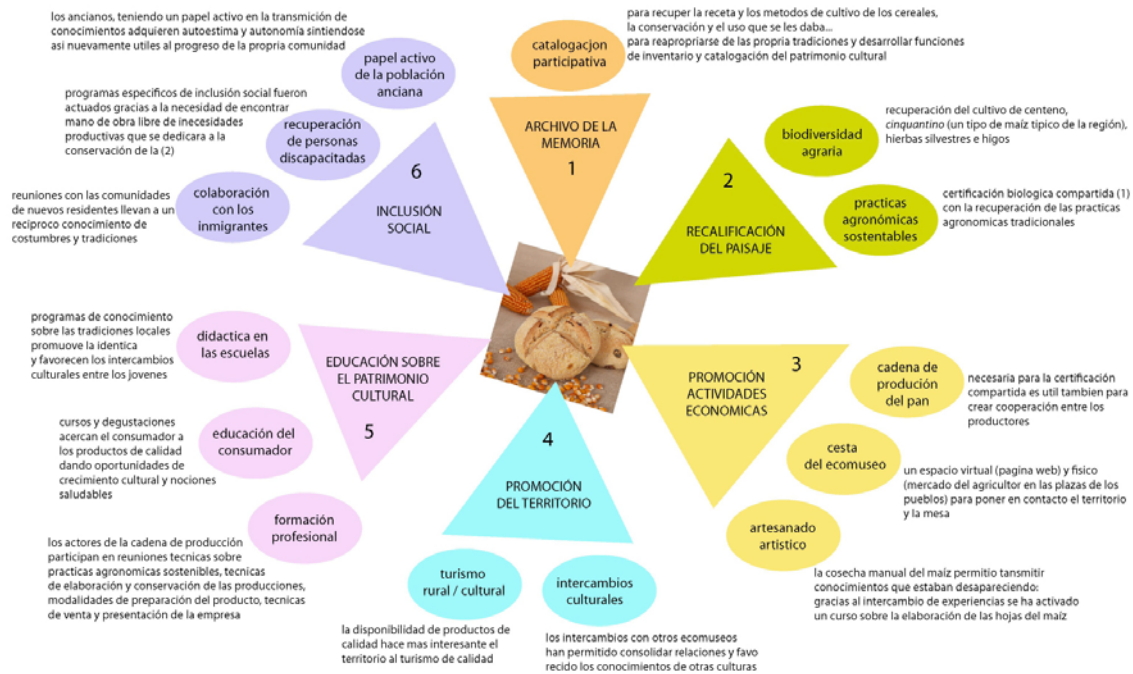
² Data provided by Ecomuseo, as of 2006-2013.

5. Awareness of small producers and consumers regarding the added value of quality artisanal products, its commercial potential and the appreciation of productive chains and local handicraft
6. Favoring of didactic experiences and cultural exchanges at regional and extra-regional level
7. Territorial promotion in favor of qualified touristic visits (nature, geology, agriculture, biodiversity, history, popular traditions, gastronomy, etc)
8. Consolidation of didactic activities for the population (young people and adults) through formation courses and workshops of agriculture, handicraft and gastronomy
9. Consumer education activity, destined to young people and adults, thanks to the collaboration of trainers and technicians provided by Slow Food
10. Collaboration with the Mental Health Department of ASS 3 Alto Friuli and social and sanitary benefits due to the inclusion of patients in productive and didactic activities
11. Creation of time and spaces to voluntary work that is both rewarding and involving to the elderly, who are brought up to hand on knowledge and techniques and to dedicate their time to community and formative activities

Conclusions

For now, the number of producers benefited in economical and monetary terms by the projects of recovery and appreciation of typical local productions is puny and stable. Besides, the income supplement allowed by the productive and commercial activities linked to the project is, in fact, modest.

In contrast, it becomes evident that, although the product and productive chain appreciation is one of the project's goals, the corollary of its effects is way broader and thought to go beyond. The path of appreciation and the products are an "umbrella". Beyond monetary aspects, they shelter and unleash ex-



(1) la certificación compartida es una forma de certificación colectiva de las parcelas. El ecomuseo se convierte en la entidad intermediaria entre los cultivadores y el Instituto que certifica las practicas agronomicas. Se obtiene de esta manera un unico expediente corporativo que facilita a los pequeños agricultores y personas aficionados al cultivo a adherir a las normas de producción biológicas.

(2) con el departamento de salud mental de la Agencia Sanitaria Local se puso en marcha un programa de colaboración que involucra algunas personas en los cuidados de la "parcela modelo" de la biodiversidad agricola: cereales pero tambien frijol, patatas y frutas. Un pequeño guerto para crear vias de reintroducción y actividades complementares a las curas medicas.

Figura 6.

Conceptual map of the Pan di sorc project.



Fig. 7.

The Gemonese territory, field of action of Ecomuseo delle Acque.

tensive and varied processes of value creation. What we could call a "social balance" or a global experience inventory, that is, its effect in stimulating the maintenance of a global synergetic territorial capital (Boisier, 1999) - especially regarding memory, the involvement of actors and of the most fragile and marginalized resources - is way more significant than the economical and commercial benefit to each producer or individual enterprise.

Beyond monetary appreciation, the ensemble of social benefits includes: enrichment of Ecomuseo files; reintroduction of agricultural multifunctionality; encouragement of small farmer aggregation around a common project; territorial promotion (supply and qualified touristic visits); educational activity to the local population; social and health benefits due to the inclusion of "fragile" categories (women, elderly, sick people at the mental health center) inside productive and educational activities.

As a conclusion, Ecomuseo's multisectoral action as a catalyst and coordinator of processes favorable to territorial growth and qualification contributes significantly to the social capital's maintenance (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993; Becchetti, 2005, 2008, 2012) and stimulates the production of shared "immaterial" social goods that, on their turn, generate effective and concrete services and community relations.

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