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GASTRONOMIC CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE IMAGINARY: THE CONSUMER'S OPINION IN REGIONS OF NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN EUROPE

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Abstract. *The aim of this study is to examine and highlight the motivations underlying the consumption of local food. The study has been conducted through an exploratory survey carried out in two European regions, both with a borderland character, namely Jämtland in Northern Sweden and Calabria in Southern Italy. These marginal regions lie far from the heart of Europe. They are rich in uncontaminated landscape beauty and gastronomic deposits, with famous traditional dishes. Indeed, with their local landscape cultural mosaics, they can be seen as lost paradises. Using the Multiple Correspondences Analysis (MCA) method, we identified characteristics and motivational profiles of consumers in Sweden and Calabria, capturing differences and similarities that enable a transnational comparison of the case study contexts. The results highlight the strong link between gastronomy, consumption of local food, and the territory.*

Keywords: *consumer behaviour, local products, gastronomy, Multiple Correspondence Analysis*

Introduction and literature review

The word “local” can mean different things in different contexts and lacks a clear and unified definition (Eriksen, 2013). Only a few studies addressing the aspect of localness in food production and retail exist and, until now, empirical studies have mostly been focused on the consumer (Carroll and Fahy, 2014). The perceived authenticity of a product is strongly related to its provenance, which is expressed by the factors of time (history), place (area), socialisation (local community), and naturalness (raw materials), (Cova & Cova, 2002).

Since the beginning of this century, a stream of (marketing) research has originated in which attitudes towards and consumption of sustainably produced food products are studied (e.g. Annunziata, Ianuario, & Pascale, 2011; Bezencon & Blili, 2011; Kareklas, Carlson, & Muehling, 2014). Specifically, consumer choice of organic products has been widely investigated (e.g. Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence, & Grice, 2004). Many determinants of sustainable product choice can be found in food and gastronomy literature, including positive attitudes towards sustainable food, and social and personal norms (Aertsens, Verbeke,

Mondelaers, & van Huylenbroeck, 2009; Arvola *et al.*, 2008; Bezencon & Blili, 2011; de Boer, Hoogland, & Boersema, 2007; Dowd & Burke, 2013; Nurse, Rainbolt, Onozaka, & McFadden, 2012; Tanner & Kast, 2003; Toma, McVittie, Hubbard, & Stotta, 2011; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006).

Several recent scientific studies have compared consumer preferences for organically and locally produced food by analysing the differences in willingness to pay (WTP) values depending on socio-demographic characteristics, types of product, and place of consumption. To date, no agreement has been reached on whether or not consumers prefer one of the two product attributes over the other (Costanigro, Kroll, Thilmany, & Bunning, 2014; Gracia, Barreiro-Hurle, & Lopez-Galan, 2014).

Food has always been an example of cultural and imaginary objectification. Throughout human history it has always had a central role, and it has occupied and continues to occupy a relevant space in the anthropological imaginary (Natale, 2009).

Traditional food products (TFPs) are an important part of European culture, identity, and heritage, contributing to the development and sustainability of rural areas, protecting them from depopulation, yielding substantial product differentiation potential for producers and processors, and providing ample variety in food choice for consumers. TFPs are often recognised by consumers according to characteristics linked to regional identity and sensory quality (Guerrero *et al.*, 2009). A survey conducted by Ferrandi (2012) involving 724 French people aged 17–84 confirmed the importance of the perceived authenticity of the product in the consumption process (74% of the study subjects considered it important), whilst a survey by Hauser, Jonas, & Riemann (2011) of 100 Swiss consumers revealed that food-related values can be summarised as: authenticity/naturalness, conviviality, health, quality/indulgence, convenience, and price.

The typical consumer of traditional and regional food products often possesses one or more of the following traits: they search for authenticity and tradition; they place an emphasis on their individuality; they have a sense of belonging to the local community (attached to a concrete product, but sensitive to its price); they are tourists and/or gourmets (i.e. occasional buyers); they are expecting a 'guarantee' of the high quality of the product; and they are searching for products associated with the region.

In this context, the food-territory link grows and spreads, presupposing a process that involves the social, economic, and identity sphere of the territory, and bringing us to investigate the subjective sphere of those who regularly or occasionally enjoy food-territory and find fulfilment in consuming TFPs. Food can here be seen as a two-sided cultural object: one side related to consumption and the other linked to the landscape. We therefore try to project the experience of food beyond taste, transcending habit (Longo & Pastori, 2015).

The promotion of food and wine heritage also entails the preservation of the landscape and the sustainable development of the territories, demonstrating the close relationship, even the union, between landscape and gastronomy. The protection of land and sea, combined with the integration and diversity of existing resources, is a strong point of the local system: agriculture, fishing, landscape, gastronomy, artisanal production, eco-tourism, and human resources, can, if adequately protected and valued, represent important added value for the economic and social development of places (Privitera & Nicolosi, 2017; Nicolosi *et al.*, 2016).

The aim of this work is to examine and highlight the motivations underlying the consumption of local food and the way in which the consumer perceives the link between the territory and gastronomy.

In fact, in recent years, gastronomic tourism has proved to be a valuable resource for geographic territories and their communities, representing a winning lever of socio-economic development for many rural localities, even in already touristic areas. It represents a means of communication with local tradition and history. Moreover, it can also attract those travellers who seek elitist experiences of *otherness*, of contact with a culture different from that to which they themselves belong. The cuisine, the wine, and, in general, the typical product: all are considered expressions of a culture, custodians of tradition and group identity, satisfying the more refined and discerning demands of the “gastronaut”, who is often culturally well-prepared, independent, predisposed to learning and acquiring knowledge of what is different from them, and ready to immerse themselves in the history, culture, traditions, customs, and habits of a place.

Case studies

In this section, we focus on the description of two case studies undertaken in different European regions (Fig. 1), from which our data was gathered. The regions examined are similar in that they both express the characteristics described above, despite being far away from each other.



Figure 1- Location of case study regions

Jämtland, Sweden

Jämtland is a centre of Swedish gastronomy, and the landscape of this Nordic territory includes a wide range of typical agricultural and agri-food products, made by small agricultural and agri-food production units. This explains why Östersund, in Jämtland, was designated as a UNESCO “Creative City of Gastronomy” in July 2010.

The local cuisine is based on ingredients grown and reared or gathered and hunted in the region’s forests, in the lakes, in the rivers with icy and crystalline waters, and in the mountain range that stretches from north to south across the western part of the region.

Among the most well-known products are Källarlagrad Getost, a mature goat’s cheese designated as a Jämtland Slow Food Presidium; cold meats; sausages and dried meats such as Reindeer Suovas (salted and smoked lean fillet), another Jämtland Slow Food Presidium product; smoked herring; and fresh water salmon and trout. These, and many others, also feature among the dishes that characterise the cookery of the Sami people. Nowadays they are all re-proposed among the signature dishes of the region. In addition, the products of the forest floor, such as berries, mushrooms, and wild herbs, as well as mosses, lichens, and tree barks, are also used in Swedish cookery in order to enrich, fill, and flavour the food. Salmon and trout, stuffed with forest herbs and wrapped in birch bark, are cooked on stones or under the ground with a fire on top, according to a millennia-old custom. These foods are all strongly flavoured, providing unusual experiences that give rise to great emotions and sensations that linger over time.

Calabria, Italy

In Calabria, food has always marked the landscape: the different food traditions settle, shape, and transform the territory (Baccichet, 2016). Some products that were lost in time have been recovered, leading to new transformations of the landscape. Other transformations have been caused by changes in society, by changes in the relationship between city and countryside, and by changes in lifestyles and the eating habits of the population. Cuisine, wines and typical products in general are considered expressions of a culture, repositories of tradition and group identity. The niche food production and the Calabrian quality food chain are combined with geographic specificities rich in history and culture, with a natural heritage consisting of mountains, forests, coastlines, and seas enviable for their clarity, with a robust human and social capital, and with an abundance of picturesque rural and seaside villages (Iseppi, Gori, Chang, & Clocchiati, 2014). Among the main products of Calabria, one can find renowned cheeses and cold cuts (Caciocavallo, Pecorino, Caprino, Capicollo, Pancetta, Soppresate, etc.), as well as other excellent products such as fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, citrus fruits and in particular bergamot and cedar fruit, and local fish products, both fresh and processed. In Calabria, one is also able to find mushrooms and truffles on the forest floor.

In the relationship between food and landscape, an important factor is how the agri-food supply chains contribute to characterising the environment and modifying the landscape, transforming it and helping to make it more or less attractive both in physical terms and in relation to immaterial variables that comprise cultural, social, and psychological aspects (Tempesta, 2012). Prime examples of this are the different types of cultivation (vineyards, citrus groves, olive groves, arable land, meadows, farms, etc.), or rural buildings and processing facilities, and hence the local built heritage present and disseminated through the rural landscape (dairies, oil mills, stables, warehouses, etc.). The immaterial variables concern the links between the place and the “gastronomic culture” in the broadest sense: product quality, lifestyles, eating habits of the population, and the links with the territory, the history, the culture, the traditions, and the customs and habits of the places.

Methods and Materials

The decision to study and analyse consumers and their taste preferences in relation to local products, otherwise known as *proximity products*, stems from the ever-increasing popularity and consumption of these products. Moreover, the propensity of the modern consumer is to successively increase their exploration of the link between territory and the quality of the foods they purchase, and to recognise the social and cultural value of the “place / economic space” from which the product originates and develops (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Ricci & Ceccarelli, 2000; Feagan, 2007; Nicolosi, Pulina, & Laganà, 2016, Oostindie *et*

al., 2016; Resano *et al.*, 2011; Ittersum, 2007; Hiagan, 2007; Holt & Amilien, 2007).

The attractiveness of food in the landscape of these two far-flung European regions has been studied through a survey that examines the motivations that drive consumer behaviour, and the perceptions that people have of the foods of the territory and of those who produce it.

A questionnaire was designed comprising two sections. The first was dedicated to identifying the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewed subjects. The second investigated the relationship between food and territory in the eyes of the consumer through a number of *ad hoc* questions intended to establish the motives and reasons that pushed them towards the consumption of local foods (Kim & Evens, 2012; Arvola *et al.*, 2008; Bezencon & Blili, 2011; Dowd & Burke, 2013; Samoggia *et al.*, 2016). In addition, it was asked if, in purchasing local products, they are sensitive to issues of environmental sustainability and the need to support and help the farmers, breeders, and fishermen of the territory.

The questionnaire was administered to a total of 342 consumers, of whom 170 were in Östersund and 172 in Reggio Calabria, in the period from March to June 2017. Interviews were conducted in particularly crowded places, such as main roads, bus terminals, areas near retail outlets, areas around universities, etc., in order to intercept a broad sample of respondents with differing characteristics.

Based on the responses given, a database was created using SPSS software (version 20). From this data set, elaborations have been made using the Multiple Correspondences Analysis (MCA) method, thanks to which the primary motivations that guide the purchasing choices of consumers in relation to local products have been identified in both regions, revealing similarities and differences that have enabled transnational comparisons to be made. This type of analysis has been applied with a view to identifying and analysing the main variables, and of highlighting the distinctive attributes that most influence consumers' decisions regarding the purchase of a local, traditional product (Resano *et al.*, 2011).

The collected data were analysed in two distinct phases. Firstly, an analysis was carried out to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, as well as the consumer buying behaviour and attitudes towards local food products. Secondly, a multivariate analysis approach was implemented. The database of collected data was elaborated using MCA.

MCA is a multivariate technique in which a data set is analysed by observing correlations between multiple quantitative independent variables. The objective is to extract the important information from the table in order to manage a heterogeneous set of variables, to represent them as a set of new variables, and to visualise the model of similarity of the observations through their representation as points on maps in a low-dimensional Euclidean space designed on the basis of a few major components (Mäkineniemi *et al.*, 2011).

From a technical point of view, MCA is used to analyse a set of observations described by a set of nominal variables. Each nominal variable comprises different levels, and each of these levels is encoded as a binary variable. For lack of space here, we refer to Greenacre, 1984, 2007; Idda *et al.*, 2008; Graça *et al.*, 2015; and Nicolosi *et al.*, 2016 for a more detailed discussion of the properties and objectives of MCA.

In this study, the MCA is performed by constructing the two matrices $J \times M$ (one for Östersund and one for Reggio Calabria), where $J_k = 2$ (being “yes” or “no”, according to sensitivity to each motivation), and it is the vector relative to the level that we considered for each nominal variable K (in our case $K = 6$), that represents the number of nominal variables that we considered for our analysis. Finally, M represents the number of observations, where $M = 170$ cases in Östersund and $M = 172$ in Reggio Calabria.

Results

From our elaborations (table 1), it emerges that a majority of consumers interviewed in both realities have an age ranging from 18 to 30 years (30.8% in Reggio Calabria and 57.1% in Östersund), with a slight prevalence of women in both cities (table 1). In regards to educational level, the highest percentages are recorded for high school diploma, in Reggio Calabria, and university degree, in Östersund, reflecting the different types of school system in the two countries. Respondents hold a variety of occupations, but we note the highest percentages for Reggio Calabria and Östersund are students and employees, respectively.

The objective of the analysis was to identify the main explanatory variables, and in particular to highlight the distinctive attributes that most influence the decision-making processes of consumers to taste local and proximity products.

The results reveal that the desire to acquire local knowledge and cultures through local food, to enjoy new gastronomic experiences, and to engage in social aspects of eating was the single most important reason given by respondents overall, with 82.4% of people in Östersund and 73.3% in Reggio Calabria answering positively (table 2). Almost as important, consumers affirmed the importance of associating specific sensory emotions such as aromas, taste, touch, and general well-being to the territory, and to experience exciting and alternative eating habits (80.6% in Östersund and 62.2% in Reggio Calabria). Meanwhile, consumption of food as a means to escape the routine is recognised as slightly less of a motivating factor (52.9% in Östersund, 58.7% in Reggio Calabria). Food lived as a conviviality and as an opportunity to share holiday experiences or gain prestige with friends or other people through the posting of photos or descriptions of local dishes and foods (for example, on social media) was also recognised as a relatively important motivation (59.4% in Östersund and 45.9% in Reggio Calabria).

Table 1.

Indications		Descriptive statistics of the sample			
		Östersund		Reggio Calabria	
		no.	%	no.	%
Gender	Male	81	47.6	78	45.3
	Female	89	52.4	94	54.7
Age	18-30	94	57.1	53	30.8
	31-50	46	27.1	71	41.3
	> 50	30	17.6	48	27.9
Education	Middle-High school	90	47.0	100	58.1
	University Degree	80	53.0	72	41.9
Occupation	Employee	48	28.2	47	27.3
	Self-employed	23	13.5	37	21.5
	Retired	11	6.5	24	13.9
	Unemployed	4	2.4	12	7.1
	Student	84	43.5	44	25.6
	Other	10	5.9	8	4.6
Family Income	High	7	4.1	6	3.5
	Upper middle	89	52.4	73	42.4
	Lower middle	57	33.5	76	44.2
	Low	17	10.0	17	9.9
Family Members	1	44	25.9	15	8,7
	2	30	17.6	43	25.0
	3	21	12.4	40	23.3
	4	25	14.7	52	30.2
	5	38	22.4	18	10.5
	> 5	12	7.0	4	2.3
Why at place of survey	Live there	145	85.3	121	70.3
	Work there	10	5.9	14	8.2
	Holiday	3	1.8	15	8.7
	Other	12	7.1	22	12.8

On the other hand, there was a greater disparity in the results in regards to the perceived need to support sustainable development and preserve local varieties and jobs, where the issue was much more felt in Reggio Calabria (77.9% of positive responses) than in Östersund, where this aspect was taken more for granted by the population (37.6% of positive responses). So too, in relation to the need to help farmers, breeders, and fishermen, this factor was seen as far less important in Östersund (25.3%) than in Reggio Calabria (64.5%).

The reasons for this disparity are to be found in the fact that, in recent years, Sweden has pushed towards the promotion of the regional and rural economy through policies to support culture and natural ecosystems that have acted as instruments for the construction and promotion of regional identities (Sjölander-Lindqvist *et al.*, 2016; Ritcheya *et al.*, 2003; Soler & Plazas, 2012; Bergflødt, 2012).

Table 2.

Reasons for tasting local/proximity products				
Questions to respondents: Please indicate your reason for tasting local food	Östersund %		Reggio Calabria %	
	A lot	Not at all/ Slightly	A lot	Not at all/ Slightly
(ER) Escape from routine	52.9	47.1	58.7	41.3
(SE) Exciting experiences and alternative eating habits, sensory emotions (smell, taste, touch, sight, hearing) and wellness	80.6	19.4	62.2	37.8
(NGE) Desire to acquire local knowledge and culture, social aspects of eating, and new gastronomic experiences	82.4	17.6	73.3	26.7
(ST) Desire for social status in the eyes of others (pictures, social media, communication with friends, illustrate exciting life experiences)	59.4	40.6	45.9	54.1
(ES) Environmental sustainability and preservation of local varieties, protection of workers	37.6	62.4	77.9	22.1
(HF) Helping farmers / breeders / fishermen	25.3	74.7	64.5	35.5

Source: author's elaboration from own data

Sweden, and in particular the peripheral and mountainous region of Jämtland in northern Sweden that is far from large urban centres, has seen high emigration over the years, has an aging population, and suffers from a general lack of job opportunities. However, it has a long history of tourism, a strong tradition of locally processed foods, and is actually the region within the European Union with the largest number of organic producers (Sjölander-Lindqvist *et al.*, 2016). Since 2010, Östersund has been listed as a UNESCO city of gastronomy, a recognition that represents a keystone in the strategy to promote innovative and competitive rural development and which has also led to the consequent development of gastronomic tourism in the territory.

Calabria is one of Italy's poorest regions. The regional context highlights numerous social and economic constraints: the economic system is fragile, and socio-economic problems of depopulation, unemployment, and the particular vulnerability of disadvantaged social groups are evident. In many areas, particularly internal ones, problems arise in terms of achieving balanced economic growth, adequate environmental protection, and social equity. However, there are important potentialities connected to the presence of a considerable endowment of resources (environmental and cultural assets, productive excellences, human capital, etc.) that are systematically underutilised. The problem of Calabria's developmental delay, therefore, is due less to the lack of preconditions and endowments for development than to the inability of Calabrian public and private institutions to translate these material

and immaterial resources into opportunities for lasting and sustainable development (Lo Giudice & Nicolosi, 2008).

The motivations to purchase local food products are related to the places where one lives or works, or is on vacation. For the respondents, therefore, there is a strong desire to strengthen or acquire local knowledge and cultures through local food, to have new gastronomic experiences, to associate specific sensory emotions such as touch, aromas and the surrounding landscape to that place, and the sense of well-being felt. These sensations can be provided by the typical foods of a given territory. Food can also be lived as a conviviality and as an opportunity to socialise with others, to acquire prestige, and to share experiences with friends through the description of local dishes and food products.

As figure 2 shows, the MCA analysis conducted on consumer behaviour in Östersund and Reggio Calabria seems to confirm these characteristics.

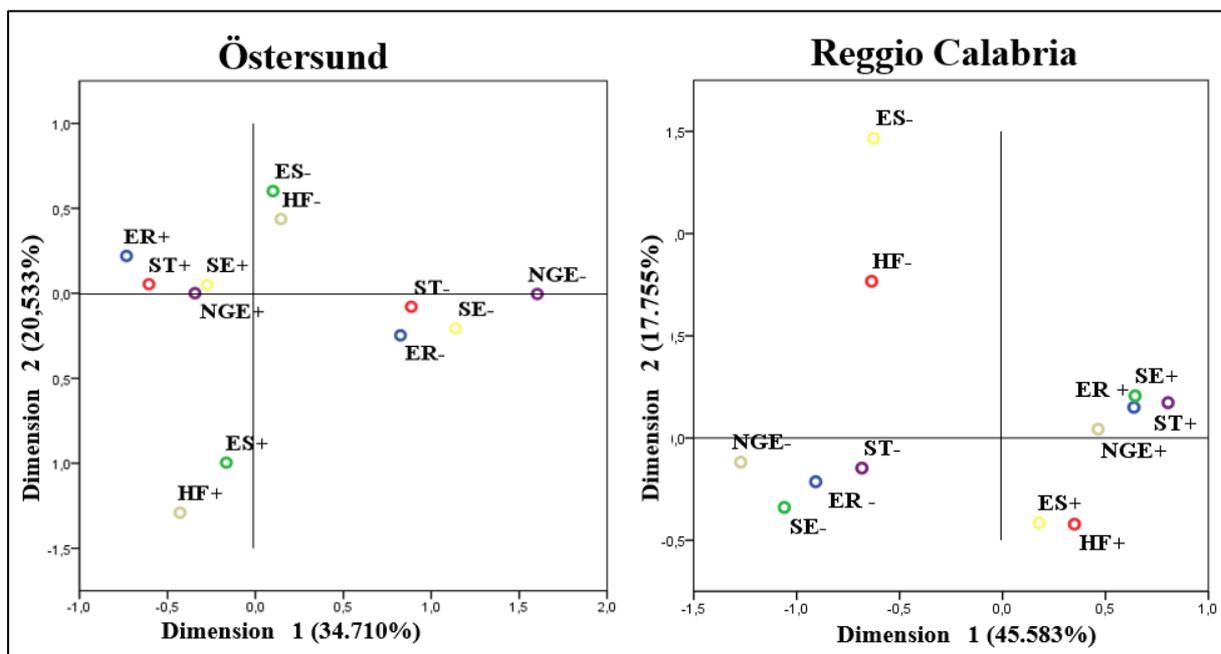


Figure 2 - MCA: reasons of interviewed consumers to taste local food in Östersund and Reggio Calabria (for Legend refer to Table 2.)

In the two elaborations of the MCA, the first dimension, which we defined as “interest in gastronomic experiences, for environmental sustainability, and to help farmers”, clearly divides those who attribute relevance to all the variables considered compared to those that do not consider them important. In fact, it places the two groups of consumers in Östersund and Reggio Calabria in opposition:

- in Östersund, the first dimension, representing 34.7% of the variance accounted for, consumers who claim interest in the six variables are placed in the negative half-axis.

- in Reggio Calabria, where the first dimension represents as much as 45.6% of the variance accounted for, consumers who affirm interest in the six variables are placed in the positive semi-axis.

With reference to both Östersund and Reggio Calabria, the second dimension is more interesting to examine. The vertical axis with an explained variance of 20.5% for Östersund, and 17.7% for Reggio Calabria, unfolds on the contrast between those who attach importance to the four motivations for tasting local foods (ER, SE, NGE, ST), compared to those who consider it important to strengthen the environmental and rural system through sustainable development and support for farmers (ES, HF). We can consider this component as “*local food’s impact on consumers*”. It therefore seems that a distinction develops between those who attach greater importance to personal motivations for tasting local foods, and who respond positively to the ER, ST, SE, and NGE variables, and those who consider environmental sustainability and support to farmers more important, and who thus respond positively to the ES and HF variables.

However, we find that, in Östersund, consumers who favour “*gastronomic and emotional experiences*” are placed in the negative quadrant for dimension one and in the positive quadrant for dimension two (-+), whilst those who favour the reasons of “*environmental sustainability and helping farmers*” are placed in the negative quadrant for both dimensions (--). This suggests that, in Östersund, consumers express greater confidence in the actions for environmental and gastronomic sustainability pursued by their country, are sensitive to external stimuli and innovations, and are informed and aware of the fact that their country promotes innovative and competitive rural development.

Conversely, in Reggio Calabria, consumers are aware of the need to support farmers, the environment, and biodiversity, and are placed in the positive quadrant for the dimension one and negative quadrant for dimension two (+-). They are very involved in the motivations to taste local food, searching for the traditional aspects of “*gastronomic and emotional experiences*”. At the same time, they know that purchasing choices are necessary for strengthening the environmental and rural system of their territory, thus we find them in the positive quadrant for both dimensions (++)).

Conclusion

The demand for knowledge about agri-food products of excellence is ever growing. In particular, the choice to consume local products reflects the need of the modern consumer to search for quality (in all its various meanings). It also reflects a subjective sense of wellbeing and respect for socio-environmental balance. Traditional products thus assume a communicative-economic value, able to transmit the identity of a territory and of the community that lives there. They carry the essence of a place, its customs, its traditions, and its habits. They also add to a territory’s attractiveness as a destination for tourism.

In both Sweden and Calabria, local chefs are increasingly the protagonists of events of international importance inspired by the new trends in gastronomy that are linked to the seasonality of production, to traceability, and to the strictly territorial origin of food products.

Knowing why consumers choose to purchase local food products is useful for developing appropriate policies and for implementing marketing strategies that can stimulate healthier and more sustainable food choices.

Recent studies increasingly associate the importance of interpreting landscape not only through the visual perception of places, but also through the other senses (Kim & Eves, 2012; De Jong & Varley 2017; Montanari, 2006; Alkon 2013, Alkon & Guthman, 2017). Travel destinations are chosen because they arouse an expectation of pleasure that is fed by the various different attractions that are on offer, which drive tourists to visit them. In relation to food-tourism, food is an experience that each of us lives on a daily basis, and as such, it has a central place in our societies. Going further, according to Alkon, food becomes the vehicle through which the human spirit connects to the surrounding environment. For the traveller, therefore, food is one of the most immediate, characteristic, and naturally tasty ways through which to discover a place. In short, to be like a local you have to eat like him (Ricci & Ceccarelli, 2000; Bell & Valentine, 1997; Privitera, 2014). In addition, the products of the food and wine supply chain are considered to be elements capable of characterising the touristic offer of the territory from which they come and of which they are a direct expression, and are able to generate tourist flows.

Sommario

Il legame cibo-territorio cresce e si diffonde, presuppone un processo che coinvolge la sfera sociale, economica ed identitaria di un territorio. Lo studio presenta e discute i risultati di interviste a consumatori intercettati in due regioni europee che si contraddistinguono per essere regioni di frontiera, lontane dal cuore dell'Europa: a nord, "la regione dello Jämtland in Svezia" e a sud "la regione Calabria in Italia". Regioni ricche di bellezze paesaggistiche incontaminate, di giacimenti gastronomici e piatti tradizionali rinomati, veri e propri paradisi perduti del mosaico paesistico-culturale locale. Le interviste sono state condotte in luoghi particolarmente affollati, come strade principali, terminal degli autobus, aree vicine a punti vendita, aree intorno alle Università, ecc. I dati sono stati elaborati e analizzati con il metodo di analisi delle corrispondenze multiple (con l'ausilio del software SPSS ver. 20) per individuare le caratteristiche e i profili motivazionali dei consumatori in Svezia e in Calabria e per cogliere le differenze e le somiglianze ai fini di un confronto transnazionale dei casi studio. I risultati hanno evidenziato il forte legame tra gastronomia, consumo di cibo locale e territorio.

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