Michele Filippo Fontefrancesco

Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy

A Viewpoint from Economic Anthropology

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ISBN 978-3-030-53320-5 ISBN 978-3-030-53321-2 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53321-2

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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Introduction: Food Festivals and Local Development

Reassessing *Sagre*

8000 municipalities, over 32,000 food festivals celebrated in 2019 (most of these events have just a few years of history) and an esteemed turnover of 900 million euros (Pascale, 2019). These figures outline the relevance of this festive phenomenon that characterizes contemporary Italy. This volume looks at the recent proliferation of these events, called *sagre* (s. *sagra*, pronounced [sa:gra:], pl. *sagre*, pronounced [sa:gre]), across the country, exploring the causes of their success. It analyses the reality of these local gastronomic initiatives with a strong touristic focus, mostly organized in rural areas of the country by local non-profit associations (such as the Pro Locos) together with public institutions (such as city councils) and local food producers. In so doing, it interrogates the role *sagre* have in promoting local development in marginal areas of the country, drawing on theories and methodologies developed in economic anthropology.

Sagre are one of the most popular forms of food festivals in the country. They are unlike other kinds of events, such as the main food fairs of the country, like Cibus in Parma (https://www.cibus.it/) and Vinitaly

in Verona (www.vinitaly.com), aimed at professionals and food lovers, or food industry events, such as Tuttofood in Milan (http://www.tuttofood.it/) and Sigep in Rimini (www.sigep.it), attracting entrepreneurs and investors, or gastronomic exhibitions, like Salone del Gusto—Terra Madre in Turin (https://terramadresalonedelgusto.com/) and Identità Golose in Milan (www.identitagolosemilano.it), organized by cultural and professional associations targeting consumers and people interested in new gastronomic trends. All these are urban events, generally organized by public and private institutions in collaboration with national or international associations. *Sagre* are grass-roots food festivals organized in smaller centres, mostly in the rural areas. They attract visitors from urban centres inviting them to taste local and exotic dishes and enjoy the specialties of the local landscape.

The proliferation of *sagre* is shaping contemporary tourism in the country (Garibaldi, 2018c; Guigoni, 2019), triggering a national debate concerning the role of festivals in local communities. Initiatives such as the 2009 *Manifesto della Sagra Autentica* (tr. Manifesto of the Authentic Food Festival. see Paolini et al., 2010), and more recently the establishment in 2018 of the national award *Sagra di Qualità* (Quality Food Festival, http://www.unioneproloco.it/) promoted by the National Union of the Pro Loco Associations (hereafter UNPLI) of Italy, have expressed criticism of festival multiplication, especially condemning the *sagre* that do not promote local gastronomic traditions and products. This volume steps away from such philological zeal and asks why a community should organize a festival drawing on its (true or alleged) traditional gastronomy as well as on culinary traditions from distant places. In so doing, it embraces the diversity of these events that marks the contemporary foodscape of the country and offers its contribution in defining what *sagre* are and what their role is in local communities. It argues that the main aim of the festivals is not to promote tourism, but rather to counter the effects of the socio-economic marginalization that rural communities are experiencing. This objective is, therefore, achieved on three main levels: by supporting new socialization within the community, by fostering a new relationship between the community and their surrounding environment and, finally, by promoting the local economy.

In the following sections, I present the phenomenon of the contemporary Italian *sagra* and the research that underpins this volume considering the recent rise of food tourism that has created fertile ground for the organization of such events.

Food Festivals: A Worldwide Phenomenon

In the West, growing attention to the themes of food and its origins, quality, sustainability and safety marked the beginning of the twenty-first century (Albala, 2013). Coping in an age of risk (Beck, Adam, & Van Loon, 2000) and individual and collective uncertainty (Bauman, 2007), food has turned into a paradoxical object (Corvo & Fontefrancesco, 2019, pp. 210–211) with which people associate a rhetoric of salvation, in regard to individual and group identity, social status, morals, ethics and the environment (Blake, 2019; Petrini, 2005, 2013; Psarikidou & Szerszynski, 2012; Sexton, Garnett, & Lorimer, 2019; Tilzey, 2017). This cultural transformation directly reverberated in consumption practices, moving consumers from mass-production towards innovative and different products that range from health foods to geographically typical foods, and from "free-from" foods to environmentally and socially sustainable foods (Corvo, 2015, pp. 52–87). Also, the traditional methods of purchasing and consumption have entered into the discussion, moving people from markets and shops to alternative food networks (Carolan, 2012; Grasseni, 2013).

Food has become the subject of public debates, TV shows and documentaries. Food stories (Jackson, 2010) have populated new and old mass media outlets. The increasing prominence of food, coupled with its spectacularization (Corvo, 2015, p. 27), has led to a new form of fetishization of food, which is particularly manifest in the private space of social communication, where every day photos and narratives about gastronomic products are shared and commented on social media services, such as Instagram, Flickr, Tumblr, YouTube and Twitter (Ranteallo & Romaputri Andilolo, 2017).

Food is an object of contemporary desire that stirs affects and mobilizes people in this age of consumerism and overabundance (Corvo,

2015; Jameson, 2015; Meneley, 2018; Schulp, 2015). Desire is no longer fuelled by the fear of hunger or the experience of insecurity (Artoni, 1999; Camporesi, 1981; Cocchiara, 1980; Grimaldi, 2012). At the same time, the search for leisure, as well as security, has become central to society and consumption (Belasco, 2008; Blackshaw, 2010).

The rise of culinary or gastronomic tourism is profoundly correlated with this shift. It is a form of tourism based on travelling, exploration, cultural encounter and gastronomic experience (Hall & Gossling, 2013; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Mkono, 2011; Wolf, 2006). In the 1990s, this form of tourism was limited to a niche of enthusiasts, virtual descendants of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (2014) and Alexandre Balthazar Laurent Grimod de La Reynière (1810). Still at the beginning of the 2000s, Lucy Long (2004b) described culinary tourism as an emergent sector that needed a clear conceptual framework. Since then, it has expanded considerably, becoming one of the key areas of contemporary tourism (Dixit, 2019; Garibaldi, 2018c; Getz & Robinson, 2014; Guigoni, 2019; Hall & Sharples, 2008b)—so central to the business that operators consider food and cuisine increasingly crucial for promoting old and new destinations, whereas even in the recent past food was just a marginal element within broader bundles of activities, facilities and places they had to provide to ensure the contentment of the traveller (Lai, Khoo-Lattimore, & Wang, 2017).

In the contemporary tourist market, gastronomy may be integrated into the offer in various forms, such as hotels that offer food- and drink-themed breaks, food producers who develop attractions to promote their brands and manufacturers who offer visits and tours of their premises, as well as food and drink markets (Swarbrooke, 2002). However, it is with food festivals that gastronomic tourism finds its most representative expression (Dixit, 2019, p. 17). Food festivals are public events aimed at celebrating specific food products. They come with straightforward names that identify the event, the products that are promoted, the edition and the place where the festival is celebrated (e.g. Taste of Springfield Festival, 2019; Byblos en Blanc et Rosé, 2019; Sagra del Canestrel di Montanaro, 2019). From the associative clarity of their names, festivals promote a specific place by emphasizing its gastronomic particularity. They are hallmark events, "*of limited duration, developed primarily*

to enhance the awareness, appeal and profitability of a tourism destination in the short and/or long term" (Ritchie, 1984, p. 2).

The touristic competitiveness of a hallmark event derives from its ability to create interest and attract attention through its uniqueness and timely significance (Hall, 1989). Food festivals achieve this by promoting a specific experience that draws from a specific bundle of selected foods and landscapes, both elements ostensibly unique to the event. In so doing, they are able to address both the tourists' desire for a uniqueculinary experience and their search for new exotic and beautiful locations to be explored in the moment of their maximum splendour. In particular, agricultural communities organize the festivals and promote them in the urban areas (Laing, Frost, & Kennedy, 2019), turning food into not just an attraction but also a accessible platform for cultural encounter; a way in which the tourist can access and explore the "authenticity" of the countryside and appreciate local heritage and become part of it through the "genuineness" of their products, providing a memorable experience (Bessière, 2013; Bessiere & Tibere, 2013; Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2016; Timothy & Ron, 2013). From the tourists' perspective, this combination appears to be a fundamental reason for the international success of the food festivals, and from South Africa (Kruger, Rootenberg, & Ellis, 2013) to the Philippines, (Sabanpan-Yu, 2007) and from the USA (Adema, 2009) to Denmark (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014) and New Zealand (Laing et al., 2019), a growing body of literature is revealing the expansion of tourism linked to the celebration of food festivals (Hall & Sharples, 2008).

Considering the ongoing, fast global process of urbanization and abandonment of the countryside (Martine, 2008), food festivals are *"spawned by the desire of communities to put themselves on the map, creating positive images and symbols for themselves [...], and by the need of [people] to belong, to participate in community, to feel a part of social groups (even if they are contrived and last only for a day or two); this sort of invented community has become increasingly common in our culture"* (Lewis, 1997, p. 76). Thus, they appear to be a new and promising bridge between rural communities and people living in urban areas. While rural communities attempt to slow down their ongoing socio-economic marginalization by embracing tourism with growing expectations (Theodossopoulos, 2011),

urban dwellers look at the countryside and find in the festivals easy solutions that satisfy the cultural need for authenticity and tradition (Poirier, 1996) felt in face of the growing cultural insecurity that comes with life in the city (Connerton, 2009, p. 128).

The success of these events is reinforced by the change of attitude towards food. In the context of emerging experiential tourism in which tourists are looking for unique experiences, locations and foods (Richards, 2015), festivals provide prompt solutions particularly suited to satisfying the longing of modern travellers, in particular when the food offer is presented in a way that is directly and indisputably linked with the local community.

This connection passes through the use of the concept of *terroir*, a keyword of the contemporary food and tourist sector that refers to the link between a certain product and a circumscribed territory characterized by specific environmental and human characteristics. The term was originally used in the wine sector in order to link a certain location with a distinctive grape and a specific style of winemaking. However, its use has been extended *"to other forms of rural production, as certain foods are often endemic to particular places, sometimes because of geographical or climatic conditions, but also because of the existence of a creative food economy that supports and promotes the local harvest […]"* (Laing et al., 2019). Thus, the use of the concept of *terroir* in presenting festivals is strictly linked with its strong rhetorical power in establishing a robust, identity link between a place and a product. In fact, the rhetorical use of any word and concept, even the apparently neutral process of pronominalization (Carrithers, 2008), has a clear effect on the way in which a community perceives and understands the world. In particular, the concept of *terroir* suggests the authenticity and indigenousness of a gastronomic product, naturalizing it in the landscape and hiding the historical process that is behind it (Demossier, 2011). Thus, by embracing the idea of terroir and promoting it through the festivals, communities, producers and institutions aim at enhancing the commercial value of their products and creating a stable asset for their economies. However, the very recognition of a special relationship between a product and a territory is far from being innocent or obvious.

Anthropologists (e.g. Demossier, 2011; Grasseni, 2009; Paxson, 2010; Ulin, 1996) highlight the need to reconsider the link between food and territory. In particular, they suggest exploring the dynamics that underlie the very process of constructing a gastronomic identity, a process that encompasses cherry-picking or manufacturing individual elements of local culinary tradition in order to enhance the meaning and commercial value of their products.

Thus, while creating a gastronomic identity is a political and socio-economic process, this insight is key to reconsidering the role played by the organization of a festival in the local communities and how these events are a privileged field of design and actualization of the new gastronomic, invented tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) that fits with the needs of visitors as well as that of local stakeholders (Theodossopoulos, 2013a). Several stakeholders, from political institutions to producers and civil society, participate in this process (Alonso, 2016). The current literature on food festivals suggests some of the main strategies adopted. They go from following promotional strategies that can encompass place branding, as in the case of Gilroy, CA, and its Garlic Festival (Adema, 2009), to the actualization of aspects of local heritage, as in the case of Cebu festivals in the Philippines (Sabanpan-Yu, 2007) or the Chaozhou Hungry Ghost Festival in Hong Kong (Chan, 2018).

Although in the eyes of stakeholders the promotion of local cuisine may simply be motivated by the intention of preserving the community and constructing a solid basis for its economic development by securing high prominence in the tourism marketplace through food (Scala & Galgani, 2005), the process may lead to forms of local commodification (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2009; Hall & Gossling, 2013). The dynamic that is triggered by a form of ethnic tourism, such as the culinary one, sees the local community's expectations of development intertwined with the tourists' expectations of encounters with cultural otherness. As John Comaroff and Jean Comoraff (2009) pointed out concerning other forms of ethnic tourism, the result is a vicious circle of cultural production in which the elements of local heritage turn into ethno-commodities, a version of local heritage shaped in a way to make it understandable, enjoyable and desiderable for tourists.

The ongoing debate in the social sciences about food festivals has examined the socio-economic impact of food festivals (e.g. Ding & Lee, 2017; Hu, 2010; Kruger et al., 2013; Meretse, Mykletun, & Einarsen, 2016; Park, Reisinger, & Kang, 2008; Wu, Wong, & Cheng, 2014), as well as the history of the events and their success (e.g. Alberini, 1988; Einarsen & Mykletun, 2009; Fassio, 2009). This volume draws from this research and expands the analysis. Considering the debate in economic anthropology (Carrier, 2012; Gudeman, 2016; Hann & Hart, 2011), the volume focuses on the process of creation, commodification and embodiment of food traditions, the forms of sociocultural transformation food festivals are able to generate at the local level, and above all the investigation of the expectations, and understandings which motivate a local community to organize a food festival, exploring through the lens of ethnography a country with a strong reputation for its food and a long history of food festivals.

Sagre: An Italian Phenomenon

Italy is one of the largest and most populated European countries as it is a cultural bridge between central and southern Europe. Its territory covers a peninsula that juts into the central part of the Mediterranean Sea, stretching from the Alpine region in the North to Sicily in the South. Since the eighteenth century, cities of art, such as Florence, Rome and Venice, have been at the centre of modern forms of tourism (Berrino, 2011). In the past two centuries, together with culture, natural landscapes have been a key attraction for the development of national and international tourism. Many regions have secured a stable reputation in the international market, among them are the Tuscan hills and the lakes of Lombardy, as well as the larger islands of Sicily and Sardinia. Today Italian destinations compete in a highly competitive market in terms of destinations and services offered. However, the country has established its importance, also through new, emergence destinations as the decision of Lonely Planet (Lonely Planet, 2018) to pick Piedmont, one of the North-Western regions, as its “2019 world’s top region to visit” well testifies.

Also in Italy, since the 1990s, international and national tourists have been increasingly interested in local gastronomy (Croce & Perri, 2015; Garibaldi, 2018b). The complexity of Italian gastronomy, as well as the wide variety of opportunities in terms of restaurants and other culinary attractions, has secured a prominent place for the country in the global tourist market (Garibaldi, 2018c). In fact, internationally, Italy is associated with the imagery of heritage, which can be artistic (Dickie, 1996) or culinary (Naccarato, Nowak, & Eckert, 2017; Scarpellini, 2016). In this regard, the direct experience of Fabio Parasecoli, an Italian historian interested in the intersections among food, media and politics, but also, more relevant in this context, an Italian living in New York, is particularly indicative of this trend:

> "*The assumption that I have a deep and innate connection with good food points to the widespread notion that Italy is, indeed, a special place when it comes to eating and the pleasures of the table. The world seems to be so in love with Italian food that many tend to think of it as exquisitely traditional, almost timeless, untouched by the events that have shaped what many consider a broken food system.*" (Parasecoli, 2014, p. 8)

A substantial body of literature (e.g. Capatti & Montanari, 2003; Cipolla & Di Francesco, 2013; Counihan, 2004; Grasseni, 2013; Montanari, 1994, 2013; Naccarato et al., 2017; Parasecoli, 2004, 2014; Scarpellini, 2016) explores the reality of the Italian foodscape, its history, as well as its perception within and outside the borders. What appears to fascinate the public is the centrality of food within the human landscape of the country—its role in the small and big events that mark the cycle of the day, the year and the life of the people (Grimaldi, 2012; Hooper, 2016). Many elements contribute to the configuration of this particular landscape: products (e.g. Grimaldi, 2017; Root, 1992; Teti, 2007), manners and diets (e.g. Moro, 2014; Teti, 2019), iconic places (e.g. Camporesi, 2009; Capatti, 2000; Mattozzi & Nowak, 2015), and feasts and traditions (e.g. Camporesi, 1995; Ciancimino Howell, 2018; Grimaldi, 2012, 2016). Most of these aspects are often local, bound to specific places, ecosystems and communities. Different from other European countries, such as France, Spain or more recently Denmark, the

fame of Italian cuisine does not derive from the success of specific gastronomic movements, such as *Nouvelle Cuisine*, Molecular Cuisine or the New Nordic Cuisine. Rather, it is linked with the discovery and promotion of regional, popular gastronomy. The most famous example is the Mediterranean diet that has popularized the main features of the peasant cooking tradition of the coastal part of Southern Italy since the 1950s (Moro, 2014; Teti, 2019). Local, environmental and cultural embeddedness is the main distinguishing trait of the culinary Italian tradition. Its richness in foods, preparations and styles derives from its diverse landscape and the fragmented political history of the country (Capatti & Montanari, 2003; Parasecoli, 2004). In particular, the prolonged political control of Italian territory by foreign powers deeply influenced the development of Italian regional cuisines (Helstosky, 2004). This peculiar history made the peninsula a fundamental place of cultural and gastronomic hybridization—a creative milieu whose products are the subject of a growing international demand (Camillo, Kim, Moreoc, & Ryand, 2010; Girardelli, 2004). This diversity makes the Italian foodscape a juxtaposition of specific, local peculiarities (Capatti & Montanari, 2003) with strong differences between the coast and inland, and between Northern and Southern regions. This landscape of culinary differences is bound together by common threads, concerning, for example, the very way in which foods and dishes are categorized and distinguished, the meal is divided into different courses, and people share the meal around the table (e.g. Capatti & Montanari, 2003; Cipolla & Di Francesco, 2013; Sassatelli, 2019; Scarpellini, 2016). All these elements distinguish a common lexicon that underpins and binds together the different Italian gastronomies.

This rich gastronomic tradition has been a key asset in matching the shifting expectations of tourists, more and more interested in discovering the hidden gems of Italian cuisine. This change in attitude is clearly shown by the transformation of tourist guides. In the 1990s, together with established tourist guides, such as the red guides by the Italian Touring Club (Bardelli, 2004), a few new books were published helping readers to choose the best gastronomic destinations to enjoy. Then, the 2000s were marked by the editorial success of gastronomic guides (such as Slow Food's "Guida alle Osterie d'Italia", Gambero Rosso's

"Ristoranti d'Italia" and Italian Touring Club's "Alberghi e ristoranti d'Italia"), as well as the proliferation of new speciality products focused on specific cities (e.g. "I Cento Torino", "Pappa Milano" and "Vuitton City Guide—Roma"), or particular foods (e.g. "The Chocolate Tester", "Pasticceri & Pasticcerie Gambero Rosso" and "Pizzerie d'Italia Gambero Rosso"). Finally, in the past decade, interest in food also permeated social media, which has become a central tool for gathering information about restaurants and wineries to visit (Garibaldi & Pozzi, 2018).

The interest in food festivals is framed in this particular context, in which the "*exportation of the dolce vita*", the Italian lifestyle and foodways, appears to be one of the most promising directions for the national tourism industry (Confindustria & Prometeia, 2016), and the tourist sector is debating how to better promote local culinary heritage, in terms of products and methods of conviviality, as a competitive factor for boosting attractivity (e.g. Adamo, 2020; Corvo & Fontefrancesco, 2019; Garibaldi, 2018a; Moreschi, 2019). The organization of *sagre* meets these new market trends.

While in other Western countries the rise of food festivals is a recent phenomenon linked to the main urban centres (Laing et al., 2019), the organization of food festivals in Italy emerged following the so-called Economic Boom of the 1950s and 1960s (Fontefrancesco, 2018). The festivals can come under different names (e.g. *Sagra, Festa, Festival*, etc.) but they all share a commonality: they are public feasts organized by rural communities in order to promote specific culinary products (ingredients, such as local vegetables or meat, or dishes, such as boiled meat or fried fish) in a clear attempt to attract culinary tourists (Guigoni, 2019; Long, 2004a). Moreover, all these events, to which I will refer generically as *sagre* despite their Italian names, share a common structure. These festivals are one of the main occasions for direct commerce, exchange and consumption of local food products in the rural areas (Fontefrancesco, 2018). Their programmes are centred on the promotion of particular products or dishes, served in temporary restaurants managed by local grass-roots associations (mainly coming under the rubric of Pro Loco associations) and organized for the event, and other activities that range from religious services (e.g. Mass, benedictions, processions), to leisure and cultural activities (e.g. exhibitions, shows, theatrical performances),

to official events (e.g. public speeches by local dignitaries, prize-giving ceremonies, parades) (Photo 1).

In the past decade, *sagre* have reached a surprising prominence in the Italian foodscape. In 2017, Andrea Zannini, Michela Cesarina Mason and Stefano Ciani (2020, p. 2) mention over 18,000 *sagre*, most of them concentrated in the North-Western regions (Lombardy, Piedmont, and Emilia Romagna). Moreover, Coldiretti (2019) pointed out that in summer 2019, 4 out of 5 Italians considered these food festivals as one of the most appreciated attractions during the summer and one of the main drivers to visit rural areas because they enjoy buying and tasting the products they offer. However, a large number of these events do not base their gastronomic offer on local, seasonal production, but rather products and dishes taken from international culinary tradition (Pascale, 2019). In this respect, in the past decade, public debate has questioned the role of *sagre* in contemporary Italy, their significance and future. As mentioned before, a significant contribution was provided by the *Manifesto della Sagra Autentica* (Paolini et al., 2010), which highlights the disconnection between many festivals and local gastronomy and criticizes the cheap food, in terms of quality and selection of ingredients and preparation, served in many festivals. In so doing, it suggests the need for a return to a gastronomic and festive offer closer to the specificities of the local communities. While the Manifesto is distinguished by its critical tone based on a reaction to the perceived degeneration of the festivals, this was not the only contribution to the debate about the overall quality of the gastronomic offer of contemporary festivals. Adopting a more proactive approach, in 2018 the UNPLI established a national award for the *Sagra di Qualità,* the Quality Food Festival, in order to support and motivate local communities to organize festivals aimed at promoting products and preparations embedded in the local foodscape. Food festivals with more than five years of activity that promote local quality products recognized through a geographical indication are eligible for the award.

These two initiatives ideally outline some of the most significant features of a debate that has lasted over ten years, and is still ongoing, conducted by intellectuals, gourmands, producers and local associations. It rests on the assumption that *sagre* should be gastronomic windows through which the tourist can appreciate the authenticity of a place.

Photo 1 Advertisements of *sagre* in summertime (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2018])

However, authenticity can lead to slippery ground (Bendix, 1997; Fillitz & Saris, 2012; Handler & Linnekin, 1984; Lindholm, 2013; Umbach & Humphrey, 2017). Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2013b) pointed out the heuristic dilemmas associated with this concept. They are linked with the very contradictory nature of the concept which nourishes the expectation of the existence of a "true" nature of things different from their social existence; which hides the complexity implicit in the cultural process of the invention of tradition; which conceals the negotiation between the community and their visitors that underpins the definition of what is and what is not authentic in a touristic product. Consequentially, authenticity does not represent an intrinsic value of a food festival, but rather a keyword (Williams, 1983) used to voice questions concerning the festival's connection with the community, its touristic effectiveness, and its social and cultural impact in terms of local development. All these issues are still open questions and their answers do not lie in a search for alleged authenticity. Rather, they point out to a different direction that is epitomized by a simple question: Why should a community toil to organize something ugly or ineffective?

Ugliness, as well as dysfunctionality, as Umberto Eco (2007, p. 20) suggests, is always paradoxical in its phenomenology, because it simultaneously repels and stirs fascination in the beholder. Thus, our question points to a paradoxical situation that raises further questions concerning the relationship between the communities and the festivals; questions about their bond and the affects and expectations that underpin the organization of the events; a thick tangle this book wants to unravel.

Sagre and Local Development

The analysis conducted in this book aims at exploring and understanding the motivations that lead a community to organize the *sagre*. In so doing, the work focuses on contemporary rural communities in a moment in which the socio-economic gap between rural and urban regions is expanding across Europe (Bachtler, Oliverira Martins, Wostner, & Zuber, 2019). While the political debate is asking what policies might halt this marginalization of the rural communities, this book contributes to the

debate by assessing the role that food festivals have in supporting the life of the communities. In so doing, it looks at rural development from a grass-roots perspective.

The volume investigates how communities understand their current condition, their being-in-the-world (Heidegger, Stambaugh, & Schmidt, 2010), how they prefigure their future, and how they mobilize in the face of economic uncertainty. In so doing, it offers a base of knowledge that can be expanded to other contexts exploring the emerging relationship that exists between rural communities and urban centres in the contemporary globalized scenario.

The book, therefore, continues a consolidated thread of research in economic anthropology that, since the 1970s, has analysed rural development. This body of research has explored rural contexts from an emic perspective (Barlett, 1980, p. 8).

In so doing, it overlapped with the debate in the anthropology of development, pointing out the shortcomings in rural development projects in terms of: "*their evident methodological deficiencies, logical and empirical inconsistencies and ahistoricism.*" (Robinson, 2002, p. 1048)

While the research has mostly looked at communities in the Global South, in the "aidland" (Mosse, 2011) in which most of the international development projects are focused, the book moves away from the margins of global economy and moves the anthropological looking glass (Herzfeld, 1987) to the margins of Western growth. Thus, it reconnects with a vast ethnographic literature about rural Italy. Long before Edward Banfield's (1967) study on the socio-economic conditions in Montegrano pointed out the fragilities of rural communities, and triggered a never-ending debate about "amoral familism" (Ferragina, 2009), Italian anthropologists, from Giuseppe Pitrè to Angelo Degubernatis and Lamberto Loria, trod country roads and pointed out the sociocultural discrepancies between urban and rural communities (Alliegro, 2011, pp. 112–140).

At the end of the nineteenth century, in an age in which anthropology in Britain, France and the USA found its main object of study in the

cultural otherness of indigenous populations, often living in other continents (Barth, Parking, Gingrich, & Silverman, 2005), in Italy anthropologists began studying the countryside, its communities and their ways of life (Alliegro, 2011, pp. 145–314). Since the early studies by Lamberto Loria (Puccini, 2005), who worked in the early decades of the twentieth century, ethnographic research analysed rural communities with a conservational approach aimed at studying, recording and preserving their traditional knowledge and customs in face of modernization (Alliegro, 2011, pp. 145–314; Bravo, 2013b; Canobbio & Telmon, 2007; Grimaldi, 2007; Scheuermeier, 1943). After the Fascist regime and its politicization of Italian folklore (Cavazza, 1997), anthropologists continued their studies. The work of Ernesto De Martino (e.g. 1972, 1977, 2005) has notably reconstructed the worldview of rural communities in Southern Italy through the lens of ethnography (Signorelli, 2015). The contribution provided by post-Gramscian studies aimed at documenting the subordinate condition of rural communities in the face of an expanding hegemonic urban society is also well known (Alliegro, 2011; Bernardi, 1990; Cirese, 2001; Pelliccioni, 1980).

Since the early studies in the nineteenth century (Bravo, 2013b; Grimaldi, 2007; Puccini, 2005), local festivals, in particular, those traditional celebrations with a long history and which preserve peculiar forms of rituality, were at the centre of ethnographic research (Alliegro, 2011; Bonato, 2016; Grimaldi, 2007). Although one of the main drivers of these studies was to document and preserve local heritage (Bravo, 2005; Commissione nazionale per i beni demoetnoantropologici, 2002; Porporato, 2007), ethnographic analysis moved beyond the formal aspects of festivals (Bonato, 2005, 2006b). While the celebration itself is read as a moment capable of altering the everyday-life space and time on different experiential levels (Apolito, 2014; Bonato, 2016; Spineto, 2015), festivals appear to be a privileged window through which to explore a vast array of sociocultural dynamics that affect communities: from cultural and economic resilience (Faeta, 2017) to social-economic dependency (Bravo, 1995; Cirese, 2001), from political struggle (Magliocco, 2005; Palumbo, 2006) to cultural resistance (Grimaldi, 1996) and from symbolism (Castelli & Grimaldi, 1997; Cirese, 1990) to religiosity (Buttitta, 2006; Grimaldi, 1993).

The Italian epistemological tradition, thus, can be framed within the broader debate in anthropology about the sociocultural role of festivals (Bell, 2009), an ongoing debate that explored the symbolic meaning of the rituals and the underlying worldviews (e.g. Geertz, 1973; Levi-Strauss, 1978; Turner, 1967) as well as their function in the social and environmental life of the community (e.g. Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Harris, 1985; Rappaport, 1967).

Sagre as Devices

This volume taps into this ethnographic tradition in analysing contemporary *sagre*. Their "external forms and observable characteristics" (Turner, 1967, p. 20) are ethnographic windows (del Mármol & Vaccaro, 2015, p. 23) through which I explore the deep cultural and social transformations rural communities are experiencing. The research, however, does not regard these modern rituals (Segalen, 1998) as symbols to decode but rather as forms of communication made up of gestures and words (Levi-Strauss, 1971; Tambiah, 1985) through which communities represent and relate to their history and environment. In particular, I consider the *sagre* as "devices". The word "device" refers to anything made or adapted for a particular purpose. The use of devices marks the process of human evolution and cultural development (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993). The common narration of this long history is based on the distinction between the person (the subject) and the device (the object), strategically used for specific purposes. In line with a hermeneutic tradition that draws from the classical works of Emile Durkheim (1915) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), we can first consider *sagre* as objects a community uses to sustain its life.

Unlike a hammer, a computer or a car, a *sagra* is not an object detached from its participants. Rather, it is an assemblage (De Landa, 2006) made of men and objects, organic and inorganic matter (De Landa, 2016, pp. 68–87; Latour, 1996; Latour & Woolgar, 1979). Thus, questions arise concerning the very existence of the device, that is, concerning how a person participates and becomes part of the device itself (Biehl & Locke, 2017). This question moves the analysis of a festival away from

a taxonomic analysis of the ritual (Cuisenier, 1993), instead focusing attention on the process of creation, participation and transformation that underpins the event. In particular, this book considers the festivals as assemblages of dynamics enacted, embodied and experienced by individuals and communities at large, or, echoing Giles Deleuzes and Felix Guattari (1987, pp. 279–180), assemblages of lines and force fields.

This approach draws on the works of Michel Foucault (1980, 1986) and Gilles Deleuze (1992) and stems from the conceptualization of "market devices" proposed by Fabian Muniesa, Yuval Millo and Michel Callon (2007b). In this perspective, the concept of device rejects a clear distinction between subject and object (Callon, Millo, & Muniesa, 2007a, p. 2), promotes a distributed understanding of agency suggesting that the subject is not external to the device they are using, and questions the structural complexity of the device itself by challenging its apparent solidity, smoothness and univocity (Callon et al., 2007a, p. 2). In this perspective, scholars have used the concept of device to study a vast array of tangible and intangible objects, from methods of calculation to supermarkets and from derivatives to stock exchanges (Callon et al., 2007b). In this volume, the concept is applied to the study of *sagre*. In this way, it engages an approach capable of recognizing how these food festivals organize the life of the community, generating "*particular kinds of social arrangements, values, economies, and temporalities*" (Nahum-Claudel, 2016, pp. 2–3) that sustain social solidarity among the members of the community and shape their collective time. However, it:

- avoids the rigid distinction between community (subject) and feast (object);
- highlights the two-way nature of a relationship in which the community makes the festival, and, at the same time, the festival makes the community; overcomes a rigid division between actors, play and setting (Bonato, 2006a);
- emphasizes the dynamicity and creativity of an event that can transform, subvert and recreate the logic that underpins the life of a community (Agamben, 2009, p. 14); emphasizes the creative and generative aspects that involve the use of the device;

- challenges the solidity (Bauman, 2000) and seamlessness (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of the very idea of the festival as entity, embracing the complexity of these events (Law & Mol, 2002, p. 1).

The Research

This book, therefore, provides an ethnographic analysis of these contemporary festivals, insufficiently explored in the literature and often considered as mere "lucrative" activities (Proietti, 2009, p. 252). It draws on research conducted in the countryside of Italy between 2005 and 2019.

Between 2005 and 2006 and then between 2009 and 2011, my work focused specifically on Grape harvest festivals. The research started with an ethnography of the Sagra dell'Uva of Lu (Fontefrancesco, 2014). The research in Lu was conducted by combining three different methodologies: archival research, principally the archives of the local newspaper, *Al païs d'Lü*; in-depth interviews with the organizers of the early festivals; and participant observation conducted in the village from 2004 to 2006 and then later on in 2009, and, specifically during the entire organization and celebration of the 37th Grape Harvest Festival in 2005, with active participation in the creation of one of the festival floats.

From 2009 to 2011 and from 2012 to 2017, the research was expanded to encompass the entire area of Piedmont, entailing involvement in two projects promoted by the University of Gastronomic Sciences: the *Atlante delle Feste Popolari del Piemonte* [Atlas of Piedmont Folk Festivals] (Grimaldi & Porporato, 2015), a database that documents more than one thousand one hundred celebrations in the region; and *i Granai della Memoria*, the Granaries of Memory (Grimaldi & Porporato, 2011), a digital collection of memories about Italian and foreign gastronomic knowledge through stories of the lives of farmers, local producers, entrepreneurs and workers, defining a complex and articulated social portrayal of our contemporary reality.

From 2015 to 2017, I focused specifically on the Province of Alessandria, with the aim of mapping, surveying and then exploring the *sagre* in the area. The work was developed on the basis of a preliminary historical review of media and literature sources, mostly newspapers and

ethnographic texts, with the goal of defining the scale of the social phenomenon. Also, on the basis of the data provided by the *Atlante delle Feste Popolari del Piemonte*, I analysed the consistency of gastronomic festivals, across the province. The research continued from an ethnographic perspective, conducting observation in thirty festivals across the province. Observation was carried out on the days when the festivals were held, conducting short, semi-structured interviews with the organizers and participants. The interviews focused on the motivations that drive participation in the events, the relationship that links the interviewees to the festivals and the expectations that underpin the participation and organization of a *sagra*. During observation, material documentation such as flyers and leaflets was collected. The analysis highlighted a proliferation of gastronomic festivals, less and less linked to the times and rites of the local farmers' calendar, and increasingly targeted to create, on the one hand, social cohesion and, on the other, touristic development (Fontefrancesco, 2018).

Since 2016, the research has extended its reach to other regions of Italy, in order to gather better insights into the more general phenomenon ongoing in the country. The research in these new areas was conducted following the same methodology used in the previous research, encompassing historical analysis and observation of the festive events, as well as interviews with the organizers and visitors. The narrations have revealed not only the origins of and motivations for these contemporary lay rites but also the emotions and meanings that define the human, gastronomic and natural landscape of the community.

The analysis presented in the volume focuses on case studies from the North-Western part of the country, an area often studied by anthropologists in order to understand the transformations of the relationship between the urban and the rural centres (e.g. Aime, 2016; Bravo, 1995, 2013a; Ghezzi, 2007; Grimaldi, 1996; Perlik, Galera, Machold, & Membretti, 2019), as well as the area of the country where *sagre* are most frequent and widespread (Zannini et al., 2020). In so doing, it explores new data and develops some of the results I presented in my previous publications. Thus, it expands the discussion in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the role of the food festivals in the rural development of Italy.

In accordance with the European General Data Protection Regulation and the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth's *Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice*, I anonymized all sensitive data collected during fieldwork and used pseudonyms. In particular, I have anonymized the names of my informants as well as those of any communities, associations and registered products, when municipalities, local associations or producers did not explicitly authorized me in using their true name. Data presented in previous bibliographical sources were not anonymized.

The Structure of the Volume

The volume is not directed only to specialists in economic anthropology or to those accustomed to the traditions and foods of Italy. Despite the specificities of its theoretical and methodological approach, the viewpoint (Firth, 1964) from which the analysis was conducted, it was also written to be appreciated by readers that are new to the discipline or field. The book is organized into five main chapters that guide the reader in understanding the multi-layered nature of *sagre*. As such, the narrative is deeply based on tales of the field (Van Maanen, 1988) aimed at giving concreteness to the theoretical analysis.

Chapter 1, "Tourism, Expectations and Local Initiatives", sets the stage for analysis by looking at tourism. In particular, it explores the affective economy of tourism, which is how tourism is perceived and enacted by a rural community by exploring the ethnographic case of San Giovanni in Monferrato, a UNESCO site in Piedmont, Italy. It sheds light on the everyday emotions, feelings, tensions, behaviours and meaning that marks the perception of this emergent sector of the local economy. The chapter sets the stage for the analysis of the food festivals and in particular their use as devices employed by communities.

Chapter 2, "The Anti-marginalization Device", begins the analysis of *sagre*. The chapter investigates the proliferation of these food festivals and the causes of their success, exploring the sociocultural needs that move rural communities to organize the events. Through exploration of the ethnographic case of San Rocco and its Ravioli Festival, the chapter

suggests that the festivals are, first of all, devices used to counter the process of socio-economic marginalization rural communities experience. The case study sheds light on the broader context of present-day Italy and the social transformations that have been occurring in rural areas since the nineteenth century in terms of depopulation and the weakening of local, agricultural communities. Highlighting the material divide that separates urban centres and rural areas, the chapter questions the actual effect of public rural development policies by suggesting that the organization of a food festival is a grass-roots strategy rural communities adopt in order to mitigate and counter the impact of rural marginalization and its consequences, i.e. depopulation, ageing, isolation, and impoverishment.

Chapter 3, "The Socialization Device", moves deeper into the analysis of *sagre*. Far from being just ludic events, these food festivals play a central sociocultural role in rural centres in Italy. Through the case studies of Castellino and Lu (AL), it highlights how modern food festivals are devices for socialization communities use to strengthen and extend their internal social ties in the face of their progressive erosion by reshaping the community's collective time and filling the sociocultural void rural marginalization generates.

Chapter 4, "The Reterritorialization Device", highlights the role that *sagre* play in shaping the very understanding of the space and time of the community. Countering the impact of rural marginalization, the festivals represent a device able to foster a new sense of place (Feld & Basso, 1996). Through ethnographic analysis of the *Fasolà* (pronounced [fasoʊlaa]) Festival of Oltrepasso, observed in 2015, and the Pink Asparagus Festival of Mezzago, observed in 2019, this chapter explores this process by which a community reassesses the value and meaning of the landscape and rewrites its history. In this respect, the festival represents a device for countering the deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) a community experiences, reinforcing ties between the community, its living culture and place.

Chapter 5, "The Development Devices", completes the analysis of *sagre*, exploring the economic contribution provided by festivals to communities. It moves away from an econometric analysis in order to focus on the structure of tangible and intangible exchanges a

festival generates. In particular, it focuses on the ethnographic case of Sant'Ambrogio and its 2016 food festival and highlights the role it plays in creating the social premises of a positive local economy. Then, considering diachronically the role of *sagre*, it points out that contemporary festivals work by increasing the exposure of local producers and enterprises to the market. However, it also suggests a reconsideration of the actual impact a festival can have for the local community, pointing out the importance of short value chains.

The last chapter, "The Community Device", sums up the contribution of the previous chapters. It highlights the multidimensional nature of the device and its overall role in regenerating the community by mobilizing its members and supporting a process of rethinking and revitalizing the local space. While, to make the festival work in this way, a community must feel the *sagra* as actual and matching its expectations, the chapter concludes by arguing the importance of resisting the temptation to crystalize the form of the festivals and keeping the *sagre* open to innovation.

The Post Scriptum, "Sagre After Covid-19", interrogates the possible future for *sagre* in Italy after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, it highlights the socio-economic impact of a prolonged interruption of the festivals and the main challenges the community will have to face.

Concluding this introduction, I want to thank the University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo for the financial support to the publication of the volume. This project has developed in almost two decades; thus, my gratitude to all the friends and colleagues that in the course of the years have contributed to my research, and in particular to Dragana Antonijević, Paolo Corvo, Fulvia D'Aloisio, Gabriele Di Francesco, Roberta Garibaldi, Simone Ghezzi, Radoslav Hlusek, Giuseppe Licari, Claudia Merli, Laura Pacey, Antonio Palmisano, Andrea Pieroni and Dauro Mattia Zocchi for their comments, encouragement and guidance in different stages of the work. A special thanks to Davide Capra and Mario Marchesini for the photos given for the volume. Finally, a very special thanks to Paola Bassino, who lived on my side all the making of the volume, supporting this endeavour with suggestions, advices, lot of patience and love.

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1

Tourism: Expectations and Local Initiatives

The Meaning of Tourism

Sagre are one of the main touristic events in rural Italy; they are attractions able to mobilize about 1 billion euro and 1 million people every year (Pascale, 2019). Here, some initial questions arise: How do rural communities approach the tourism sector, and moreover, what role do *sagre* play in this expanding economic sector? These research questions are at the core of this chapter. In approaching them, the chapter follows the path laid by Clifford and Hildred Geertz, together with Lawrence Rosen (1979), in their analysis of Moroccan bazaars, asking what meanings and expectations communities associate with tourism. In doing so, the ethnographic spyglass looks at the ordinary affects (Stewart, 2007) that permeate the everyday life of a local community and its relationship with the particular form of economy that is tourism. Specifically, embracing tourism is not a linear process for a community (Chambers, 2020; Macleod & Carrier, 2010; Smith, 1989). Ethnographic research conducted in Italy points to the importance of the process of cultural negotiation the community has to undergo in order to develop into a touristic destination (Aime & Papotti, 2012; Grimaldi, 1996; Palumbo,

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M. F. Fontefrancesco, *Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53321-2_1

2006; Simonicca, 2004). This process encompasses a redefinition of the perception of the local space and its relationship with the outside world.

While a broad debate has interrogated the economic role of this industry for rural communities in the country (e.g. Berrino, 2011; Croce & Perri, 2015; Fortis, 2016; Gaggio, 2018), this chapter aims instead to investigate the process of cultural negotiation that surrounds the development of a tourist destination, looking to the community of San Giovanni in Monferrato, a rural village that, like the cities of Catalfaro and Ossina (Palumbo, 2006), has been recently been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The chapter investigates how, in the light of the nomination, the community envisions tourism and its role in its future. Moreover, like most rural communities in Italy (Bravo, 2013), San Giovanni faced a steep demographic and economic decline after World War II, failing to start a process of industrialization or tertiarization of its economy. In this respect, San Giovanni was an arbitrary location (Candea, 2007), and the ethnographic tale (Van Maanen, 1988) of its encounter with tourism explores how the community envisions this economy and tries to benefit from it.

Prospective of Tourism in San Giovanni

Monferrato is a wide hilly region that covers the south-eastern part of Piedmont, stretching from the Po River in the north to the Apennines mountains in the south. The Tanaro River cuts the region in two, dividing Monferrato into Basso Monferrato, on the left side of river, and Alto Monferrato, on the right. Basso Monferrato is also known as "Monferrato Casalese", after the city of Casale Monferrato: it is the largest and richest centre in the region and, once it was the capital of the Marquisate of Monferrato, one of the pre-unitary states of the peninsula. Since the nineteenth century, Casale Monferrato has been an important industrial centre, primarily for the production of concrete. Its industrial history is linked to successful enterprises, such as Buzzi-UNICEM, one of the world's largest firms for the production of cement, ready-mix concrete and construction aggregates, which has its headquarters in

the city (Castronovo, 2007). The economic history of Casale Monferrato is also linked to the production of Eternit fibre cement, which was produced in the city until 1986, and resulted in over 1.800 deaths in the city and Province of Alessandria (Altopiedi, 2011).

Differently from the industrial development of Casale Monferrato, the economic history of Basso Monferrato is primarily based on agriculture, specifically wine and, more recently, hazelnut production (Fontefrancesco & Balduzzi, 2018). Throughout the twentieth century, the rural communities of the area experienced progressive depopulation and limited industrialization, and only marginally benefitted from the fast economic growth between the 1950s and the 1980s (Fontefrancesco, 2015): while many young people left the villages to find jobs in the manufacturing and services industries in nearby cities, those who stayed and invested locally profited from agriculture. Monferrato's "*restanza*" (Teti, 2011), i.e. the sociocultural condition of those who had not abandoned their rural communities, was based on daily commuting and the development of the primary sector. Today, the specificities of the agricultural landscape appears to be the main attraction, along with artistic heritage, around which tourism could develop.

In 2014, a restricted pool of municipalities in Monferrato, among which San Giovanni, was recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO hereafter, as the 50th Italian heritage site (38th World Heritage Committee, 2014) (Photo 1.1). Despite the recognition, the tourism industry has only partially developed, and only recently (Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Alessandria & The European House Ambrosetti, 2010; Fondazione Gianfranco Pittatore & The European House Ambrosetti, 2011; The European House Ambrosetti, Fondazione Gianfranco Pittatore, & Alessandria, 2013). Thus, it appeared as a potential direction for local development for the communities, in particular those included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, situated closer to large urban centres, such as Turin, Milan and Genoa.

San Giovanni is one of the municipalities of Basso Monferrato. It is a community of about 1000 inhabitants, half an hour's drive from Casale Monferrato, Alessandria, the provincial capital, and Valenza, a small city internationally known for its jewellery industry (Fontefrancesco, 2016,

Photo 1.1 The landscape of Monferrato UNESCO core zone (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2019])

2018a). Nowadays, most of its active population commutes daily, and only about one hundred people are directly employed in agriculture. Until the 1950s, agriculture in San Giovanni, like in most of Italy (Bravo, 2013), employed over 60% of the active population. After World War II, young people started to leave San Giovanni, looking for jobs elsewhere, mostly in Genoa, Milan and Turin, which were, at the time, the main industrial cities in Italy. From 1951 to 1971, San Giovanni lost 30% of its population. Beginning in the 1960s, thanks to its proximity to the nearby towns of Alessandria, Casale and Valenza, a few manufacturing firms started opening in San Giovanni, employing over 100 people by the early 1980s. However, during the period of my research, none of those firms were still open. The last one was closed during the 2009 economic crisis that engulfed Italy and Europe for several years (Hewitt, 2013). Thus, today, the economy of San Giovanni rests mostly on agriculture, in particular wine making and hazelnut production.

> "*We tried to be factory workers, but we failed. We tried to open factories but what remains today of that promise of progress its just ruins and abandoned shelters,*" *Mario commented.* "*If we have a future, it is in the land, in its fruits and in the people that will like to visit it*".

Mario is a sixty-year-old viticulturist born and bred in San Giovanni. He left for over twenty years before coming back in the early 1990s to take over the family farm. In the last three decades, he has been committed to his now well-known winery, praised by food and wine associations for the quality of its products. He is a prominent person on the local scene, and for this reason, I interviewed him in 2016 on his farm. During the interview, he was clear about his understanding of tourism:

> "*We cannot remain closed; we must open up … tourism is our future. We must position ourselves well. We must aim for quality, for rich tourism… This is the only future our villages have.*"

Like other local producers, Mario feels the need to transform Monferrato into an area that not only produces good foods and wines, but also, and above all, can be a key tourist destination, such as the Langhe of

Barolo, another area in Piemonte where wine production has become the hallmark of a destination able to attract visitors from all around the world since the 1970s. To this end, Mario was one of the organizers of many initiatives in Monferrato aimed at quality tourism, such as gastronomic tours of the main canteens of the region as well as wine tasting and conference around the country to present the Monferrato wines. In the interview, he described his initiatives, the success and the failure, never giving any hint of doubts about the necessity of tourism.

In the evening, just a couple of hours later, I meet Mario in the village. He is sitting at the bar, playing cards with his friends and comrades. They are discussing the conditions of their area, the continuing depopulation, the overall impoverishment, the lack of industrialization and the possibilities of the future. Mario insists that tourism is the only viable alternative for a community that has recently been fully recognized as a World Heritage Site. His opinion seems to find consensus among his friends, consisting of four other men: two local agricultural entrepreneurs born in the late 1950s, just like him, and two retired men in their seventies, both with a life of work in the tertiary sector. The contents of the chat from the bar echo the theses presented in the conferences and institutional meetings held in the provincial capital of Alessandria in the past years (Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Alessandria & The European House Ambrosetti, 2010; Fondazione Gianfranco Pittatore & The European House Ambrosetti, 2011; The European House Ambrosetti et al., 2013). Those words seem to confirm the idea that the road to the economic development of Monferrato has to pass through tourism and that Monferrato is a potentially successful tourist destination, attractive for the international public, particularly Europeans.

Despite the presence of numerous restaurants, B&Bs and other accommodation facilities in Monferrato, as well as a number of festivals and events organized in every single municipality, tourist development was and still is a path in the making. The European House Ambrosetti (2013) pointed out a clear demand for over one thousand new tourist accommodations in order to allow the growth of the sector. Despite this plea, the number of beds remained stagnant in the past decade across the province and Monferrato (Alexala, 2018) and mostly provided by small

accommodation, unable to host large groups or conventions, and mostly attributable to forms of the gig economy.

Resisting Change

It is the day after my interview with Mario. In front of the same bar, the same guests of the previous evening along with other men of the community are talking animatedly. A group of tourists from Milan had arrived, probably to eat in one of the local restaurants. They were a large group of people who had been visiting the village for about an hour, asking the locals for information. Locals were gossiping about the newcomers. However, when some of them enter the bar, the dozen men and women over fifty among whom was Mario fall silent: some pretend to be reading the newspaper or conducting a quiet conversation with their neighbour and some openly begin to scrutinize the newcomers; for everyone, the tourists have become the centre of attention.

The visitors ask for some news about the town: if there were some places to sleep and which wineries could be visited. The bartender gives them some brief information and they order a coffee. They are served and leave the room while the eerie silence turns into murmurs.

After five minutes, the group of people gather and begin to comment on that visit. To which one says: "*but, who knows what they want, to come here? Can't they just stay at their homes?*" The others nod in agreement, including Mario.

Mario's reaction is not just an example of conformism and raises questions concerning the effective social role of the industry for the local community, and the very meaning as well as the expectations a community associate to this form of an enterprise often described as a viable option to meet socio-economic needs and pave a new way towards a positive future.

Facing this apparent contradiction in reaction, it is clear that for the members of the community to approach tourism is far from being without frictions between the local culture and an exogenous, often global, economic model, as pointed out by Anna Tsing (2005). Rather,

it deeply affects and resonates with the community's global hierarchies of values (Herzfeld, 2004) by transforming the very perception of centrality-marginality that a community live.

> "*In an era of globalization, tourism can represent an effective instrument of knowledge and dialogue between different peoples and cultures.*" (Corvo, 2003, p. 12)

However, as the reactions of the people of San Giovanni show, this socialization with the Other (Aime & Papotti, 2012) challenges the community starting from its deep localism (Stacul, 2003). Tourism calls into question the connection between the locals and the people coming from outside those borders that define the space of their village—a space that for most of the people in the seventies and older has represented the extreme, tangible and intangible limit within which most of the individual's emotional and working life took place.

At stake, thus, it is relationality. Jonathan Skinner and Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2011) suggest tourism is first and foremost a transformative process that shapes the community based on a dialectical relationship between the local people and the new visitors. In this process, the expectations of both hosts and the guests are pivotal because they frame the field of social transformation. However, this process of rearrangement is not smooth, and tensions are palpable in a small village, surfacing in the everyday discussions that involve the locals.

The Affective Economy of Tourism

The frictions and contradictions detected in the field frame tourism within the affective economy (Ahmed, 2004) of tourism. Accordingly, in San Giovanni, the affective economy of tourism has three pillars: hope, rejection and resignation.

Hope is the first pillar of the economy. Hope is not just an individual feeling, but also a collective, cultural strategy of coping. Based on his work with Sovavou people seeking compensation from the government in Fiji for the loss of their ancestral lands, Hirokazu Miyazaki

(2004) suggests thinking about hope as a specific cultural process. This process corresponds to an individual and collective method of radical cognitive reorientation. Hope, here, is a proactive and generative attitude towards tomorrow (Lempert, 2018). On a collective level, driven by hope, a community prefigures its future and plans the actions needed to reach its goals. On an individual level, hope defines life trajectories, maintains self-esteem and, as suggested by Hirokazu Miyazaki and Annelise Riles (2005), supports individuals' capacities to orient their knowledge and autobiography towards the achievement of specific objectives that underpin their imagination of the future. Hope underpins the approach to tourism, making it into a strategy for escaping a situation marked by progressive marginalization, impoverishment and ageing, all of which people in San Giovanni commonly describe. This understanding is expressed through the exaltation of success stories of places where tourism has had a positive impact in terms of slowing down depopulation, driving public and private investments, and strengthening the local reputation. Mario's favourite example is the case of the nearby Langhe area, internationally known for its wine production (Lanzetti & Bottasso, 2014). These locations are taken as examples, which contribute to shaping the community's vision of the future (Bryant & Knight, 2019, pp. 21–48). The future is envisaged as an opportunity to overcome the fragility of the present—fragility that is caused, as in the case of San Giovanni, by the socio-economic transformation that has been occurring since the late nineteenth century (Bravo, 2013; Castronovo, 2007; Lussu, 2013). Looking to the future, locals expect the expansion of local activities, such as wineries, restaurants and shops.

The second pillar is rejection, expressed in regard to the social and cultural changes tourism generates. Despite the fact that the people of San Giovanni regularly refer to tourism as a social and economic opportunity for the community, they also show resistance to investing in the hospitality sector or improving the experience of the place for tourists. In the words of one informant:

> "*There is a proverb here. Guests are like a fish. They start smelling after three days. It works also with tourists.*"

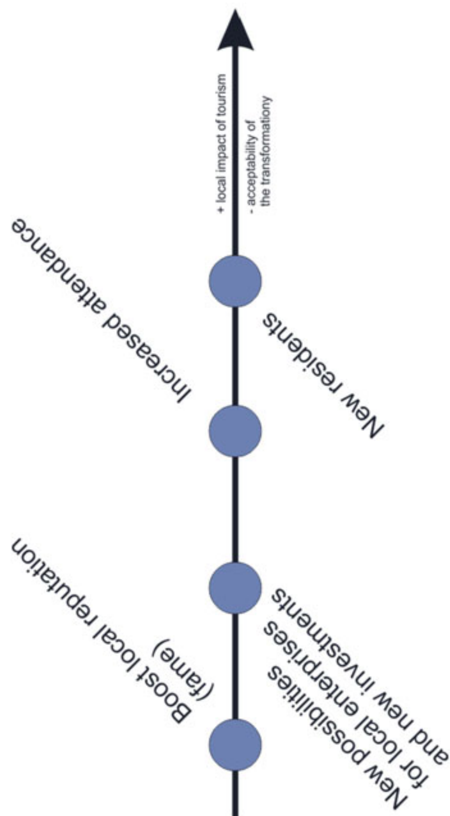

Fig. 1.1 Local reaction to the impact of tourism (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2020])

Overall, the stable presence of tourists in town is met with growing antagonism, insofar as the impact of the tourists' presence threatens to change the community's everyday routine (see Fig. 1.1).

The third pillar is resignation of the economic future of the community. While the economy of San Giovanni has deeply changed over the past fifty years, transforming the village into a rural community of retired people and commuters, the locals point to the industrial failure of San Giovanni. Geremia is a forty-five-year-old clerk born and raised in San Giovanni who commutes to his office in Casale every day, but who has not lost touch with agriculture, continuing as he does in his spare time to help with the activities of his family's small farm. In discussing the economy and future prospects for San Giovanni, he points out:

> "*San Giovanni's economy is declining. Agriculture can sustain only the largest farms, while the small ones like mine continue their activities mostly because the old receive monthly pensions, and the young have another job that covers the bills. Plus, new investments have led nowhere in the past years. Just go into the valley, and in the middle of the woods you can still see the remnants of an attempt to make a sheep farm: ruins* (Photo 1.2). *Moreover, unlike other nearby villages – I'm thinking of San Giorgio or Occimiano – we do not have any industry here. Despite its strategic position near important cities and manufacturing centres, San Giovanni failed to couple its development with industrial development. We had just a handful of workshops in town that lasted just a few years. The good thing, here, is that we have a great landscape, and tourists enjoy the view. Tourism seems the only way forward*."

The words of Geremia reverberate with the experiences of other inhabitants of San Giovanni, who view the manqué industrial development of the post-war period as a major problem for the community. Geremia's analysis is also shared by Mario, who cites it as one of the main reasons for his enthusiasm for tourism. In the face of an impoverishing economy, the people of San Giovanni accept tourism and describe it as "*a light at the end of the tunnel*" (Fontefrancesco, 2018b). The question, still debated in town, is whether it is the light of a new day or of a train coming head on.

Photo 1.2 The ruins of the sheep farm (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2020])

Conclusion

The affective economy of tourism offers insight into the complex cultural negotiation that underpins tourism. It is not just a matter of negotiation between the local community and the visitors (Skinner & Theodossopoulos, 2011), but rather a deep problematization of the past and future of the community. Tourism is perceived as an opportunity and associated with the improvement of the local reputation, the economic opportunities and, potentially, the quality of life of the local population. In this respect, hope moves the community and the farmers to find in local food and wine the main asset for the promotion of this sector. As a result, they show a willingness to change their production practices to better fit the needs of tourists. However, hope is not the only affect the community expresses. There is also rejection for the changes tourism brings to the everyday life of San Giovanni, as well as resignation of tourism as one last opportunity for the community to develop.

Among these different affects, the community negotiates its approach to tourism, moving towards what Marshall Sahlins (1972, pp. 195–196) terms "negative reciprocity"—an approach to exchange that aims at maximizing immediate gain and maintaining the social distance between community and guests. This emerges from the community effort aimed at intensifying primarily the aspect of the sale, which allows for a fast extraction of value and a limited exposition to newcomers. Meanwhile, the articulation of a wide offer of hospitality, a field of enterprise that would create longer-lasting contact with visitors, is largely ignored.

The ethnography of San Giovanni points to the role of attitudes towards development and change in shaping the touristic offer of a community. Thus, it confirms that the offer is not only shaped according to the intentions of tourists, but that it instead corresponds, first of all, to the expectations of the community. Tourism development, hence, is not just about achieving visitor satisfaction. Rather, from a grass-roots perspective, it is an effort to reactivate the community and create an opportunistic bridge to the world outside the community. Using this framework, the next chapter will analyse the organization of *sagre* and how they can answer to the needs of local communities and their affects.

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2

The Anti-marginalization Device

Exploring a Landscape of *Sagre*

Italy may be an intricate tangle of ingredients, tastes and foodways linked together by a common gastronomic lexicon (Capatti & Montanari, 2003). However, there is a further element that unites the communities of the entire peninsula and reaffirms and strengthens their distinct (food) localisms: the celebration of *sagre*.

Everywhere in Italy, the images and colours of the advertisements are a visual rhythm which marks the urbanized space in the summer; the names of the festivals and their foods outline a festive foodscape in which traditional dishes are put side by side with novel foods and new culinary inventions: a gastronomic landscape in which the complex tangle of food and foodways that characterized Italian history (Scarpellini, 2016) collapse into a creative and tasty visual list of gastronomic opportunities. The high density of advertisements makes it almost impossible for a person not to come across communications concerning some festival, and people participate en masse in the events (Fassio, 2009, p. 7) fully enjoying all the gastronomic opportunities our list offers.

The complete list of food festivals that take place during a summer weekend in an Italian province can occupy a long column in the section

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M. F. Fontefrancesco, *Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53321-2_2

of the local newspaper dedicated to upcoming events. Just considering the Province of Alessandria, one of the key areas of my research in the north-western part of Italy (e.g. Fontefrancesco, 2014, 2018, 2019), an ideal list would provide for events such as festivals of ravioli stuffed pasta, beer, celery, deep-fried meat, donkey salami, gnocchi potato pasta, onion, pizza, potato, wine and zucchini. The list of festivals could go on, enumerating events focused on other vegetables and culinary preparations, meats and fishes, some of them deeply rooted in local tradition and others taken from places afar. Even better than newspapers, the streets of the main urban centres of the province, with their poster advertisements and leaflets and postcards in all the main shops, offer a material expression of the pervasiveness of this festive phenomenon.

In summer 2019, around two hundred festivals were organized in the province accordingly RadioGold (www.radiogold.it), the main local radio and online newspaper. Each municipality organized at least one gastronomic event, and most of these towns are rural communities with less than one thousand inhabitants and an economy mostly based on agriculture (Lussu, 2013). A similar concentration of *sagre* can be found across the country (Di Francesco, 2013; Santini, Cavicchi, & Belletti, 2013; Zannini, Cesarini Mason, & Ciani, 2020), making Alessandria Province an ethnographic example for understanding the sociocultural centrality of such events in Italy. In particular, the list of gastronomic opportunities attests to the relevance of food festivals, raising questions concerning the meaning of these celebrations and the motivations that move hundreds of communities, every year, to organize the events, prepare foods and locations, and celebrate the feasts.

Besides an interest in the recipes and products served in the events (Bianchi, 1999; Crescenzi, 2015), anthropologists and social scientists have started investigating the festivals and the nexus between rituality and food. Recently, Francesca Ciancimino Howell (2018) pointed out that food is a fundamental aspect of the materiality of the festivals and a tool through which the celebrating community reinforces the sense of connection with their place and creates a mundane form of sacrality around the event. Food, however, is also a tool through which local communities try to reconnect with their history and cultural roots, as in the case of the Anchovy Festival organized in Val Maira, in the

Western Alps (Grimaldi & Porporato, 2013). The descendants of the street vendors who, coming from the valley, travelled across Northern Italy selling salted anchovies and other preserved fish products until the early decades after World War II organize these feasts. By recovering and celebrating the food of their forefathers, the younger generation makes sense of their past and the valley, nowadays largely unpopulated. *Sagre* similar to the Anchovy Festival in Piedmont can be found across the country, from Emilia Romagna (Bianconi, 2009) to Abruzzo (Di Francesco, 2009), and from Calabria (Teti, 2015) to Lombardy (Agostini, 2015).

As Gabriele Di Francesco (2016, #15150) points out in his analysis of Marino's wine festival near Rome, *sagre*, in particular those hinging on local, traditional products, are key for local place branding. In this process of characterization, marketing and promotion, of a locality within the globalized tourist market (Dinnie, 2011), however, the celebrated foods become ethno-commodities (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009) encapsulated within a precise attempt to generate touristic interest. Thus, the festivals should be considered not just as a rite that lives solely within the bounded space of the celebrating community but framed within the special context of tourism that connects the community with the external world. In fact, as Jonathan Skinner and Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2011) show, tourism is a transformative dynamic that modifies a community and its territory on the basis of a nonlinear negotiation between the expectation of the host community and the visitors. Through this negotiation that shapes the forms of a food festival, a community creates a supplementary link with the external world, and in particular with the urban centres, in order to gain a sociocultural, although transitory, prominence. Following James Ferguson (2002), this attempt to overcome a perceived disconnection can be revelatory of the cultural tension that underpins the festivals, thus offering a response to the yet unanswered question about why there are so many food festivals in Italy today. In particular, an ethnographic answer to this question comes from the case study (Yin, 2018) of San Rocco, a village in the Province of Alessandria, and its *Sagra dei Ravioli* (Ravioli Festival).

San Rocco and Its Ravioli Festival

The mid-2010s. It is a special Saturday afternoon in August in San Rocco. People crowd the main square of the town, a rectangle the size of a football pitch. The square is generally used as a car park for most of the week, and on Wednesday mornings, the weekly market is held there. However, this weekend the local Pro Loco is organizing the annual *Sagra dei Ravioli*.

Twenty people, most of them in their fifties, are working there, setting up the location and preparing the tables. Tables and chairs are located under a commercial marquee located at the centre of the square. There is space for about two hundred people. Four big halogen lights located at the corners of the structure illuminate the ground, while some strings of LED lights like the ones used for Christmas decorations hang over each table. While most of the people are setting up the place, five of them are working in the kitchen, a field kitchen borrowed from the local branch of the Civil Protection Force. They are cooking some meat, frying some vegetables and preparing the ravioli sauce they are going to serve tonight.

The organizers expect at least two hundred people, some from the village, but the majority from nearby towns. *"Everybody knows our Ravioli and how good they are"*, explains Pino, the president of Pro Loco, a farmer in his sixties. *"They come here every year to enjoy the meal and the beautiful landscape of our place".*

San Rocco lies on the bank of an Apennine River, one of the tributaries of the Tanaro River. The village dwells at the bottom of the valley, surrounded by mountains that divide two regions in the north-western part of Italy: Piedmont and Liguria. A provincial road crosses it. Few fields are still cultivated in the valley, while the steep flanks of the mountains, once cultivated with grapes, corn, garden vegetables and potatoes, or used for pasture, have been reclaimed by the forest. In the past fifty years, the village has lost nearly three-fourths of its population. Young people have migrated to the main cities of the north, moving away from the village and leaving empty houses behind.

Vito Teti (2011) described the impact of emigration from Southern Italy that left swathes of land and villages unpopulated. A similar phenomenon also occurred in the Northern part of the country where

San Rocco lays (Porcellana, Fassio, Viazzo, & Zanini, 2016; P. P. Viazzo & Zanini, 2014) due to the harsh living conditions experienced by the population, similar to those Nuto Revelli (1977) recorded in the nearby Province of Cuneo. Pino remembers his youth:

> "*Here in the village we were, I don't know, fifty kids. Today it is a marvellous year when we have a new-born. We are few and the number is even smaller if I consider those people that are working in the village. I would say, maybe there are ten people working here, the others commute every day. However, we have the best Ravioli in the valley and have the festival to make people come here and know our land. And the festival is also great for getting the community together. It makes us strong. That's the reason I love it*."

The Saturday night, over two hundred and fifty people come to the festival. Over 100 kg of homemade ravioli, a kind of stuffed pasta which a group of women of the village prepared during the past two weeks (Fontefrancesco, 2020, p. 3), is sold. Together with the ravioli, people have salami, roast pork, potatoes, salad and cakes, plus some hundred litres of wine and beer. People order *a la carte* choosing from the menu that overall encompassed a dozen of dishes (a couple of starters, such as a selection of local salami and onion and bean salad; different dishes of ravioli dressed with different sauces, such as Bolognese sauce, tomato sauce, and butter and sage; few second courses, such as roasted pork with potatoes and grilled sausage with salad; some siders, such as fried fries and green salad; and a dessert, a selection of homemade cakes) and beverage (such as water, pops, wine and beer). Most of the visitors opt for a dish of ravioli and a second dish. A two-course dinner served with wine costs roughly 15 euros per person, about 30% less than the cost of a similar dinner in a medium restaurant.

Although ravioli is a common kind of pasta in the area, and San Rocco is just one of the towns in the province that organize a Ravioli Festival (e.g. Basaluzzo, Cremolino, Tagliolo), during the years, the festival was able to consolidate its public, mostly local. Visitors come mostly from a maximum of 30 km away. However, there are also a couple of Dutch families: *"They have a small house a few kilometres from the village and every year they attend the festival"*, Pino explains.

The Ravioli Festival is a local event, but can animate the valley and its few communities, filling them with expectations: expectations concerning meetings with friends, having fun, enjoying good food and good wine, but also expectations concerning the future of the community and its role within the broader geography of towns and people.

> "*Here in San Rocco we start working early in the spring for the festival,*" *explains Arturo, one of the volunteers of the Pro Loco. "We start discussing the future menu, where to buy the products and the ingredients, the publicity and the music performers to invite. The work goes on and around June the women of the village gather during the week to make the ravioli. It took a couple of months to make them: the ones we cook and the ones we sell during the festival. Then we have to decorate the square, prepare the kitchen, cook, serve at night, and clean everything after the feast…we [volunteers of the Pro Loco] are few but we manage all the organization*".

The organizers estimate that all the families of the village are involved in the organization of the event:

> *"most of the women work in the kitchen, men do the hard work moving furniture and preparing the place, young people… those few who still live here… are involved in serving, cooking, and managing the music and the dancing," Pino comments. "For many of the local farmers, to participate in the organization is their way of having holidays"*.

The wide participation shows the relevance the festival has for the entire community and the centrality for the community calendar (Grimaldi, 1993). It is, in fact, the fulcrum of the social gathering of the village population during a large part of the year (from late winter to autumn) and the centre of people's attention. The cultural pregnancy of the event can be read, not just in the number of hours of voluntary work spent by the members of the community, but by the festival's capacity of stirring emotion among the people of San Rocco and contributing to building hope for the community's future. *"If the festival ends, it will be the final coup de grâce for the village"*, pointed out Arturo.

A Festive Strategy Against Rural Marginalization

The previous chapter pointed out that a collective method of hope (Miyazaki, 2004) underpins the involvement and investment in tourism of rural communities. The festival in San Rocco appears an actualization of this method, a device the community uses to cherish their vision of an alternative, positive future, helping the local people to face the uncertainty of the present and the effects of the transformation they went through in the past several decades. In fact, as Pino pointed out about the significance of the festival for San Rocco:

> "*To understand it [our festival], you need, first of all, to taste our ravioli. But then, you need to do another thing. You must understand this place and the real meaning of its change.*"

The words of Pino may mirror the "apocalyptic turn" (Lynch, 2012) that afflicts broad segments of Western society. However, they are more than an expression of a growing anxiety about what is to come. They are a formulation of the sense of place, the sensorial and biographical understanding of the local landscape (Basso, 1996), most of the people in the village who witnessed the modification of San Rocco over the past three or more decades shares. People in San Rocco construct their place narrating its change through a meticulous comparison between how the village looks today and how it was forty or fifty years ago. The narration moves on enumerating absences in the landscape. The inhabitants remember dozens of shops and workshops that were open still in the 1970s: bakeries and butcheries, groceries and tailors', barbers' and blacksmiths. There is almost no trace of this economic network, but few faded writings on the walls, or the very shape of the buildings' facades that suggests the presence, once, of shops. People remember the names of the families who lived in San Rocco that left the village, pointing at empty houses with closed and dusty doors. They indicate the side of the mountain, where today one can see the effects of a rapid expansion of the forest, and remember of terraces, vineyards and toiled fields.

Change, indeed, has been affecting San Rocco and its territory. A community of small farmers until World War II, the village, as well as the valley lost a large part of its population in the 1950s and 1960s, due to hundreds of people moving away, leaving behind a life as peasants as well as their houses. Quickly, trees, such as acacias, ash and hornbeams, as well as other plants that are part of the contemporary Apennine flora (Abbà, 1980; Molinari & Cevasco, 2009) cover the higher grazing land. Similar to the ways in which West Virginian former miners feel haunted by the rusty ruins of the mining industry that are an integral part of the landscape of the Appalachian mountains (Stewart, 1996), the empty houses and the new forest are haunting reminders of the past and visible signs of the fragility of the present for people born before the 1970s, which includes the majority of the inhabitants of San Rocco (average age of the population is around 55 years).

Since its origins as an academic discipline, one of the key hallmarks of anthropology has been a strong preoccupation for the transformation of rural communities (Rhoades & Rhoades, 1980). As early as the 1950s, the integration of peasant communities within the modern market economy, in particular in developing countries, sparked a heated debate about the actual impact of this change, questioning issues of dependency, polarization and feminization of the rural world—topics still at the centre of contemporary discourse (Gardner & Lewis, 2015, pp. 81–91). In recent years, the globalization of the food market appears to have further accelerated the processes, in particular for what concerns people's mobility and social polarization (Phillips, 2006). The phenomenon is propelling the abandonment of rural areas and makes the question *"where have all the peasants gone?"* (Narotzky, 2016) extremely timely. Susana Narotzky recently suggested that uneven forms of capitalist surplus extraction and a struggle between corporate firms, states, small entrepreneurs and labourers mark present-day globalized agriculture. In this context, all peasants appear to be negotiating from an awkward position for which the:

> "*quest for subsistence might become a combination of precarious opportunities to access gainful resources at different times.*" (Narotzky, 2016, p. 311)

In a context such as San Rocco, however, the real struggle lived by the community is not a matter of political conflict. The abandonment perceived by the community expressed a growing disconnection (Ferguson, 2002) between the locals and the outside world. When asked about what the key problem for the community is at the present time, rather than issues concerning local impoverishment or exploitation, people in San Rocco point to their marginalization within the wider context of the country. For San Rocco, marginality is not a form of passive exclusion from the global economy and society; rather, it is the effect of the inclusion of the community into the global market that is becoming increasingly detrimental to the preservation of the village and its environment. In San Rocco, the economic integration resulted in demographic decline, triggering the social and economic marginalization of the remaining community. Considering the impact of this process, and the reasons that motivated and continue to motivate the people of San Rocco to leave the village, however, one should not end up falling into the trap of a bucolic or hagiographic representation of the past (Grimaldi, 1996). As Maria, a seventy-year-old former factory worker in Genoa and one of the volunteers at San Rocco, pointed out during our interview:

> "*If we did not leave the village in the '60s, we would never have had the money to build our house here, and educate our children.*"

Rural marginalization in San Rocco, thus, is not the result of a direct political action imposed by the national elites, as Janice Perlman (1976) describes in the case of the people in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. It is the result of the actions undertaken by members of the community in their active negotiation of their participation within the wider context of the nation. What the community currently experiences is the aftermath (Castells, Caraça, & Cardoso, 2012) of this "success"—an uncanny and disturbing landscape of absences (Fontefrancesco, 2015) that visualize the crisis the community is experiencing. It is in the context of this crisis that the festival should be understood, because, as Pino remembers,

> "*[The Ravioli Festival] started a few decades ago when we felt we had to do something to keep our community alive.*"

Thus, the festival was and still is meant to be a symbolic and social response to this status, a device against marginalization, being a collective gathering able to strengthen the social bonds among members of the community through participation in the event, as well as an event able to reinforce the fame, therefore the cultural importance, of the community within the wider world.

A Broader Phenomenon

The experience of San Rocco can be taken as an example to understand the general demographic trend which rural communities experienced across the country during the twentieth century. Despite the constant rise in productivity of Italian agriculture (Farolfi & Fornasari 2011), this sector plays a minimum role in the present job market: while in 1871 over 70% of the active population was working in agriculture, and around 40% continued to do so in 1951 (Bravo, 2001), in 2019 only 5% is still working in agriculture (ISTAT, 2019). This decline is, first of all, the result of the precarious condition associated with agriculture in the past century. As Gian Luigi Bravo (2001, p. 91) described:

> "*The Inchiesta Agraria e sulle Condizione della Classe Agricola [Agricultural Survey about the Living Conditions of the Agricultural Class], which was commissioned by Parliament in 1877 and directed by S. Jacini, and other surveys and documentation of the time show a rural population living widely in poor material conditions. It is malnourished, drinks unhealthy water, is affected by pellagra and malaria; is illiterate, has very low income and frequently lives in hovels, together with poultry, pigs, and goats. [In the rural areas] the number of taverns is increasing, and people live in a regime of insecurity because of the widespread theft and petty delinquency. Many have no other choice but to emigrate.*"

Between the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the early 1920s, Italy experienced the first massive wave of emigration from the countryside, directed largely abroad. About 15 million people left the country during this period (Audenino & Tirabassi, 2008). After World War II, without the limits to internal mobility that the Fascist regime

imposed, another wave of emigration occurred from rural areas. This time, people were mostly directed to Rome and the industrial cities of the north, in particular Genoa, Milan and Turin (Bravo, 2001, pp. 115–126). The process started in the 1950s, had its peak during the 1960s and 1970s, and only came to an end in the 1990s (Grimaldi, 1996). The rural exodus (Rosental & Casarini, 1991) may be stopped, but at present young people still generally move away from the countryside seeking better job opportunities and services. Despite widespread public rhetoric celebrating a renewed participation of young people in agriculture, still, in 2019 (ISTAT, 2019), the sector is struggling to attract new generations and is facing a dramatic process of senilization (Cagliero & Novelli, 2012). This has led to a vicious circle that is dangerous for rural development. It combines reduced profits, ageing and impoverishment in a dynamic that is unable to trigger new investments and offers the farmers an uncertain perspective on the future.

The urgency of the situation also emerges from public debate. In the recent past, as Enrico Borghi (2017) describes, scholars and politicians have started questioning the future of "internal areas", or those rural areas which are characterized by the scarcity of public and private services, great distances (in terms of actual distance or easiness of connection) from main urban centres, scarce infrastructure regarding ITC, services and mobility, and economic marginality despite the potential in terms of natural resources and heritage (Monaco & Tortorella, 2015; Vincenti, 2018). San Rocco is just one example of a community located in this rural periphery that is facing challenges with respect to depopulation, ageing, isolation and impoverishment. San Rocco is one among many: on 1 January 2019 (www.tuttitalia.it), 31% of the Italian population lived in only 1% of the municipalities (the 106 municipalities with a population of more than 60,000 people) which cover 7% of the Italian land surface, while 21% of the population lived in about 70% of the municipalities (the 5498 municipalities with a population of less than 5000) which cover over 60% of the Italian land surface. In 2013, the national government formulated the first plan, the so-called Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne (National Strategy for Internal Areas), to counter the difficulties rural communities experience, focusing on specific objectives and a few specific target areas. The national government invested around

200 million euros in the strategy between 2013 and 2020, and financed the realization of infrastructures as well as actions for economic recovery and business development in twelve areas of the country (Lezzi, 2018; Vincenti, 2018).

However, most of the communities have only been marginally supported by the plan or by similar, but smaller, actions undertaken by regional councils. In the face of this situation, while scholars are pointing out possible alternative or complementary strategies to revitalize marginal areas (e.g. De Rossi, 2018), local communities are developing their own grass-roots responses. In the wake of new demand for "genuine", "artisanal" and "traditional" foods coming from urban centres (Corvo, 2015), as pointed out in the previous chapter, tourism and gastronomy (Corvo & Fontefrancesco, 2019) appear as a *"light at the end of the tunnel"* (Fontefrancesco, 2018) and *sagre* an effective device to be employed.

Conclusion

This chapter has questioned the causes of the proliferation of *sagre* in rural areas of Italy over the past few decades. In this context, it is possible to draw an ethnographic conclusion. It is not just a matter of gastronomic fashion trends, nor mimesis.

Analysing the circumstances that led to the organization of San Rocco's Ravioli Festival suggests that the festival and the effects that link the population to the event, the chapter revealed a connection between the festivity and the urgent sense of sociocultural marginalization the community lives. The voice of the people of San Rocco explains why the festival is a device for countering the perceived decline of the community, on the one hand, involving the entire population of the village in the organization of the event thereby strengthening the social ties among them, and on the other by creating a new form of social centrality for the community through the gastronomic tourism the festival generates.

The case study of San Rocco can be viewed in the broader picture of the country and the increasing marginalization rural areas are facing. Like San Rocco, most rural communities are experiencing issues of depopulation, ageing, isolation and impoverishment. Through making

an ethnographic comparison, therefore, the chapter suggested that the contemporary proliferation of gastronomic festivals is not a matter of fortuitous circumstances or fashion, but rather it is directly correlated with the ongoing rural marginalization, insofar as to make the organization of such events a widespread grass-roots strategy for supporting the life and social integrity of the community.

In the next chapters, the analysis will go deeper and point out the different levels on which *sagre* affect local communities contributing to their development. In particular, it suggests that the festivals are devices able to maintain socialization, produce a deep reconsideration of the sense of place and, finally, sustain the local economy.

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3

The Socialization Device

Community, Festivals and Building Socialization

In the wake of the Second Industrial Revolution (Olwig, 1996), German scholar Ferdinand Tönnies (2001) proposed a distinction that would become foundational for the discipline. It is a categorization that sets communities against societies, and rural settlements against cities. The scale of the settlement is key in this reasoning. For two centuries, scientists have struggled to recognize the level of mutual knowledge and strong emotional and social ties (Bian & Galaskiewicz, 2011, p. 628) that distinguishes a village from a broader urban setting. This strong relationality fosters a sense of belonging to the bounded community where individuals live (Candea, 2010). However, as Benedict Anderson (1991, pp. 19–37) points out, people also nurture a sense of belonging to larger, more complex, possibly imagined, communities. This affect is built on participation in big and small, private and public rituals; rituals shared and taken part in by the majority or the totality of the members of the community. Among rituals, public festivals are the most important because able to transform the private and public space of the members

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M. F. Fontefrancesco, *Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53321-2_3

and are able to visualize and materialize a strong image of the community through the festive apparatus (Anderson, 1991, pp. 19–37). Thus, festivals are the foundations of a community and their role exceeds the mere pursuit of entertainment and brings into discussion the very reason why a community manages to stay together and create and reinforce the social bonds among its members while coping with the effects of socio-economic marginalization that may exist.

Since the seminal works of Emile Durkheim (1915, p. 226), anthropologists have pointed out the role of rituals in strengthening the bonds among the members of the feasting community. Festivals fulfil a crucial role in regenerating the political relationship within the community, as in the case of the Swazi ritual of *incwala* studied by Max Gluckman (1963), and establishing the social roles that the members of the community will assume after the ritual, as in the case of the installation ritual of the Ndembu chief studied by Victor Turner (1969). Above all, they are able to multiply and intensify the social ties that bond the community.

Hence, the organization and celebration of a festival foster cooperation between the members of the community, first, and between the community and the visitors, later. They create multiple links between the different actors and they thicken and expand the social network of the community and reinforce its social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In this process, festivals shape a new conviviality in the community, which is the capacity of the members of a community to live meaningfully with different people sharing and shaping the same space and occurrences (Phull, Wills, & Dickinson, 2015; Wise & Velayutham, 2014). Thus, a festival reinforces the community's social cohesion (Parla, 2019; Schiffauer, 2019) and, in so doing, is a device for socialization, through which the members of the community learn and embody the society's norms and rules (Luykx, 1999) as well as shared worldview (Max Harris, 2003). This is a process that is expressed through the processual and performative nature of the festivals, which mobilize the members of the community in order to transform the space and the rhythms of the life (Apolito, 2014). In so doing, festivals set the time of a community and the one of the lives of its members (Grimaldi & Nattino, 2009). Moreover, where food is at the centre of the festival, it becomes the symbol and the fulcrum of this enhanced sociality (Humphrey &

Humphrey, 1991). In this chapter, I will use the term socialization to refer to the double process of reinforcement of social capital and embodiment of a shared culture.

Modern *sagre* fulfil this important role of social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Through the ethnographic and historical analysis of two case studies, the Trofie Festival of Castellino and the Grape Harvest Festival of Lu, the chapter shows how a *sagra* can revitalize a community and expand its social cohesion being a socialization device. Moreover, the analysis of the festivals, sharing a common history (as both were invented in order to revitalize the village by coping with social change and the crisis of the traditional festival of the Assumption, which takes place on the 15th of August) although dating back to different periods (the 1960s in the case of Lu and the 2010s for Castellino), points out that a festival with its events should always correspond to the expectations and needs of the community to play its social function, while the community looks at tourism not just as an economic opportunity but rather as a element of legitimation for the local community in respect of the wider society of the region and the country.

Castellino and Its Food Festivals

Surrounded by wheat and corn fields, Castellino lies in the wide valley of the Tanaro River, in the southern part of Piedmont., just a twenty-minute drive from San Giovanni and the UNESCO area of the Monferrato, Langhe and Roero hills (38th World Heritage Committee, 2014). Viticulture disappeared from the village over forty years ago in favour of extensive cereal growing. In the 1970s, Castellino was one of the many villages that made the province of Alessandria a "granary of Italy", thanks to the excellence of its territory with regard to the quantity and quality of its cereal production (Castronovo, 1992, pp. 79–80; Eco, Beltrame, & Forte, 1981, pp. 127–140). However, in the new millennium wheat and other cereals have lost their profitability and the community has started to question the practice of cereal cultivation because wheat alone does not appear capable of providing a solid future for the people of the village.

Castellino is little more than a hamlet with a few hundred inhabitants. The village extends along two main streets, which small one- and two-storey houses line, with their facades and architecture describing two centuries of urbanization.

The main building is the parish church dedicated to the Virgin Mary that stands in the centre of the village, overlooking the square of Castellino. In the same square, there is the town hall: a two-storey building constructed in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and originally used as the community school. The school itself closed in the late 1960s and since then the building the municipality has used while every morning the municipal school bus takes the children to a nearby village to attend classes.

Only at night or over the weekend can one find working-age people around in the village. Until the 1990s, the presence of a small industrial centre a few kilometres from Castellino provided employment to a large number of families, but with the closure of the main companies and the relocation of their production facilities abroad, the majority of the population of Castellino had to find jobs outside the village. Today, they mostly work in the nearby cities of Alessandria and Asti, both a thirty-minute drive, or even farther away.

Agriculture was the backbone of the local economy until the post-World War II period, when over a third of the local population emigrated to other cities in Northern Italy, mainly Turin, seeking jobs in the car manufacturing industry. Today only thirty people are officially employed in agriculture, although one can count many dozens of pensioners working in the fields and in gardens. As one of the younger farmers, a man in his early fifties, points out:

> "*Our agriculture is not rich. We produce mostly cereals and some vegetables. In recent years someone has tried to start producing hazelnuts, but the results have yet to come. No one is breeding cattle anymore. The last one closed about 20 years ago… around the time of the 'mad cow' scandal [1996-2000]. Thank goodness there are pensioners who keep the last farms going. Farming keeps them active and what little they earn from farming supplements their meagre pensions. For the rest, I do not see a great future for our farms… but when there are no more farmers, who will manage our land?*"

There is no shop in town, as one of the villagers poignantly remarks:

> "*The last shop to close was Martha's. She had a convenience store a few metres from the church. It was in the mid-nineties. She was old. No one had the courage to continue the business after her. Today, if you need salt or milk at the last minute you ask your neighbour, or you have to take the car.*"

The local Pro Loco runs the only bar in the village. It is open just a few hours a day and is the most frequented place by the many retired men of Castellino who meet there to play cards, chat and have a drink or a coffee. This is also the main arena for everyday political discussions among the people of the community, who meet and chat about the big and small issues currently affecting Castellino: from bad roads and a bad harvest to depopulation and impoverishment.

Overall the economic fabric of Castellino appears fragile, tattered by years of depopulation, and lack of investment. Despite this, in the past ten years some new and young families have moved to the village from the nearby towns of Alessandria and Asti, attracted by the tranquillity of the place and the affordability of houses: a few thousand euros can buy a semidetached house with a small garden, while in Milan one could not afford to buy a garage with the same money. Moreover, in the past twenty years, few families of migrants of Eastern European origins settled down in Castellino, after few women arrived in the mid-2000s working as caregivers in the village and their relatives joined them after few years. Overall, most of the new families, both Italian and migrants, have integrated well with the locals and have joined the Pro Loco and the Parish, organizing and participating in activities. Moreover, summer, in particular July and August, is the time when the village becomes livelier, as the many families that have a country house there return for the season. They are mostly first- or second-generation emigrants from Castellino who moved to the larger cities of Northern Italy in the last few decades and have come back to the village to enjoy a period of relaxation during their holidays, far from the heat and confusion of urban centres. Many of them are involved in the social activities occurring in the village, directly helping the Pro Loco organize its events.

Overall, the Pro Loco is the main promoter of the sociality of Castellino as it manages the local bar as well as organizes cultural and leisure activities, such as meetings, debates, excursions, and during the summer, public, outdoor events; the main one being the "Sagra of Castellino" held on the weekend closest to the 15th of August, day of the patronal festival in honour of the Assumption.

The feast is a food festival that last three nights (Friday, Saturday and Sunday), and, for over twenty years, the Pro Loco has based it on *trofie* (pronounced [troʊfi:e], a kind of pasta typical of Liguria, offered along with dishes more reflective of Piedmont's traditions. *Trofie*, ravioli stuffed pasta, polenta, risotto, mixed fried fish, grilled meat and wine of the territory mark the foodscape of the festival : a gastronomic heterotopy in which, paraphrasing Michel Foucault (1998, p. 310), dishes "*in some way are in agreement with all the others and that, however, contradict all the others*". The menu may appear a contradictory selection of food, which reflects more regional traditions. However, it mirrors the peculiarities, first of all, of the people organizing the event: people born and bred in Castellino together with people of Castellino origin but who grew up away from the village and Piedmont. Moreover, the selection of food corresponds to the peculiarity of the very area in which Castellino is located: a commercial crossroads between Liguria, Piedmont and Lombardy since Roman times, where dishes from Liguria, in particular, are commonly prepared. As the president of the Pro Loco puts it in an interview, the decision to use *trofie* as the main hallmark food was taken because:

> "*In this area, everyone knows what trofie are and I don't know anyone who doesn't like them. When we started, almost twenty years ago, there was no food festival that offered a decent plate of trofie with a pesto sauce worthy of being called pesto. That's why we decided to bet on trofie. It was to distinguish ourselves in a too crowded landscape.*"

Since its inception, the local municipality has supported the festival and provided for the venue and financially supports the Pro Loco. As one of the organizers, a long-time council member, explains:

"*When we launched the festival, it was done not just for tourism. It was for our community. We needed a feast; a time to be together and to try to hold together a community that was breaking down too fast. Every year a dozen young people were leaving. The crisis of the local factories did not help. We needed something and we decided on a food festival.*"

The festival was organized by reviving the patronal feast, as a villager, a man in his eighties, remembers:

"*Once, when I was young, for the Assumption, we organized a ball in front of the church. But it was in the Seventies when we stopped. No one cared anymore. People went to the sea for holidays and only a few remained in the village in August.*"

At the beginning of the 1990s, the feast was celebrated only with a mass, not particularly well attended by the community. One of the organizers, a woman in her seventies, explains:

"*We did not have a proper festival, but, on the other hand, in August Castellino was alive, with many people here for the summer. We decided to organize a new festival on this date precisely for this reason; to 'exploit' the vacationers, to involve them, to tie them to the village; as well as, clearly, to attract a few people from neighbouring towns: a few tourists do not hurt!*"

Each night of the festival after dinner the Pro Loco organizes other activities, such as lotteries, concerts and balls, completing a program that the local people as well as the tourists that have come appreciate. Several hundred people attend the event every year; some of them come for the food, others for the opportunity to spend a night outside the city.

The panorama of the event is characterized by several things: the conspicuous presence of families and friends sitting at the tables eating or waiting in front of the marquee tent where food is prepared, the unpretentious service typical of food festivals, the smells of food preparations, including ravioli and *trofie*, tiramisu and wild boar stew, all served with red or white wine, cola and sparkling wine. A babel of voices and foods representing the feeling of abundance of the festival, as the verses of the Alessandria poet Giovanni Repetti (2016) poetically describe:

> "*Ra fim 'd cudghein e còj vìan l'èua an buca pulèinta 'nsima dl'ass suta chi tuca" (the smoke of a cotechino which makes the mouth water, polenta on top and now come on, whoever's turn it is).*"

In the past decade, the Pro Loco has copied the format and organized other gastronomic events during the summer, from June to September. These feasts may last for one or two nights and have a structure very similar to that of the August festival. All of them offer menus that combine local dishes with a main dish, generally taken from another region.

All these festivals are organized with the common objective of animating the village by involving the entire population. Involvement is achieved not only from participation in the dinners, but, above all, through active participation in the organization of the events and the voluntary work of serving at tables or cooking in kitchen. As one of the organizers, a man in his thirties who just recently came to live in the village, highlights:

> "*We're not from here, but we bought a house in Castellino some years ago. Working at the festival allowed me to meet many people, to become friends with many. Somehow, I can say that it was the easiest way to become part of this small community that I now call home.*"

Preparation for the festival begins every year in March. The members of the Pro Loco gather to decide what events to hold during the summer, and, in particular, how to prepare the *Sagra*, what food to serve, and what extra activities to organize. The members attend several meetings before making a final decision. During these occasions, they build relationships through the exchange of ideas and information about the community. As one Pro Loco member describes it:

> "*We have so many meetings. I am sure they are not really necessary, but they are fun and we enjoy staying together, sharing our stories and ideas, learning about the past and discussing the future of Castellino. We do not organize a festival then; we organize our community.*"

Beginning in April, the Pro Loco starts contacting sponsors. The sponsors are mostly local shops, enterprises where the people of Castellino work or firms whose owners know people from the village. At the same time, the Pro Loco contacts secure contracts with the suppliers for the event.

While this operation mostly involves the most active members of the Pro Loco, more people join the activities in early summer, providing voluntary labour. Volunteers help with the organisation of the space, the kitchen, and serving. This work furthers a shared sense of belonging. As a migrant caregiver explains:

> "*It was the son of the lady I assisted who convinced me to help during the festival. I was not speaking Italian well and was shy because I knew only a few people in Castellino. He told me this was a good reason to participate. It was true. It was five years ago. I helped in the kitchen and met so many people. I worked with them and became friends with them thanks to the Sagra. That's the reason I have helped every year since then.*"

The organizers comment positively on the local impact of the food festivals for the community. One of the members of the organizing committee explains, overall, the festivals: "*make the community come together, discovering itself as a community*" and have reinforced people's "*awareness that to restart our villages, food is essential*".

Despite the fact that some of the visitors may not share the same appreciation (e.g. some interviewed citizens, who came to the village for the first time for the event, mainly remembered the pleasantness of the occasion and the annoying mosquitoes, but had just a faint memory of Castellino and its community), the festivals appear, to the local eye, to be *"the device [*strumento *in the original] we used to keep our community together,"* as the mayor of Castellino put it.

The Grape Harvest Festival of Lu

The case of Castellino is not isolated in space and time. In south Piedmont, food festivals have become a common feature of the foodscape

since the 1990s (Fontefrancesco, 2018a). However, the origins of the phenomenon can be traced back to the post-World War II period. One of the earliest examples is the Grape Harvest Festival of Lu (Fontefrancesco, 2014).

Lu (AL) is an agricultural community on the border of the UNESCO site of Langhe, Roero and Monferrato, and a well-known centre of gastronomic tourism thanks to its restaurants and its wine and hazelnut production. Lu was one of the first communities in the region to organize a food festival after World War II (Fontefrancesco, 2014). Similar to that of Castellino, at the basis of the new festival there was a clear attempt by the local population to counter the emerging signs of social disaggregation caused by the strong emigration the community faced after World War II. Luigi Busto, the president of the organizing committee for the first Grape Harvest Festival, describes the impact of the transformation:

"*Every day many young people commuted from Lu to nearby cities or came to Lu only on the weekends or for their holidays. Only the elderly stayed in Lu and thanks to the growing number of cars and motorcycles, young people no longer sought to spend their free time here and even less their holidays. The town had changed and needed to be revitalised. For this reason, we came up with an idea for a new festival.*"

As in Castellino, the revitalization of the local community was pursued through the transformation of the traditional festive calendar. While in Castellino, revitalization involved the transformation of a traditional feast, in the case of Lu, it involved the establishment of a new festival, created to fill the void the decline of the festival dedicated to Our Lady of August, celebrated on the 15th of the month, generated. Similar to that of Castellino, this festival took place during a break in the agricultural year: after threshing and before grape harvest. As Gino Garlando, one of the musicians who often played at the festivals, recalled in an interview in 2006, even in the early years after World War II:

"*It was the festival the young people loved the most. The most anticipated event of the summer. Everybody looked forward to the festival and, especially, to the public ball, the most important [event] of the year. The entire square, Piazza Gherzi, was decorated and in the middle of the square a wooden stage*

was built. Everybody in town waited for the ball. It was the most important event for the people of this community, people who had never even been as far as Alessandria in their lives. It was the event in which the young people made their debut into society, people sought company, and marriages were arranged or destroyed."

However, after World War II, and in particular with the rapid post-war industrialization of the area (Beltrame, 1981), the festival started its decline; a fall marked by the decreasing number of young people who attended the event, once the main protagonists of the feast. As Federico Scarsoglio (1977) reported:

"*The increasing number of cars has solved the problem of the lack of places to socialize: many young people flock to social venues springing up in numerous places, not to mention the cinemas in the towns. Furthermore, everybody, especially young people, long to spend the days of mid-August resting in a place by the sea or in the mountains. Only the old people and those who have work there stay in town. The traditional "Mid-August Festival", once long-awaited, is now neglected; sometimes it causes arguments between parents, who want to celebrate this event with all the family, and children, who want to enjoy their summer holidays by the sea. It was so different and so beautiful before, when the young girls still used to show off their new dresses they wore to go dancing, while the town's gossipers, who did not take part in the big dance, looked them up and down! And the proud mums observed their elegant and perfumed daughters, while the young men gazed at them, hoping to dance or win the heart of one of the girls! Now those beautiful and lively girls are on a beach, basking in the sunshine, or wandering around, clumsily dressed in blue jeans patched like quilts. This being the case, over the last few years, the Pro Loco has wondered if this festival, which is no longer loved by young people, should be organised at all. […] So, why should we organise a festival that young people do not love anymore?*"

Scarsoglio pointed out the mass motorisation among younger residents of Lu irreparably shattered the microcosm of society in the village. More broadly, the deep socio-economic transformation that occurred in the decades after World War II forced the self-contained, rural economy to become an integrated element within a wider local employment system (Basile & Romano, 2002). As a result, cultural consumption evolved,

leading to the demise of the Mid-August Festival in 1977. Facing the decline of the festival, teenagers and young adults still felt the need for an event in which the community could gather and reinforce their sociality. This was at the basis of the decision to organize the first Grape Harvest Festival. Luigi Busto, originally from Casale Monferrato, remembers:

> "*When I arrived in Lu, at the end of the 1950s, the Mid-August Festival was becoming progressively less popular among the younger residents of Lu. The custom of spending the holiday at the seaside and of leaving Lu during the month of August began to spread, and the only people who remained in Lu at this time were the old people. The Mid-August Festival celebration was, however, organized by young people for young people and therefore could not survive without them. But then, those young people who would leave for the holidays and would return to Lu in September still felt the need to have a celebration just for themselves. That is how the idea came to us of organizing a celebration in September. Furthermore, during the 1950s and 1960s Lu's population was decreasing. Faced with this worrisome fact, the question of how it would be possible to revitalise Lu and attract new people to live there naturally followed. A celebration that would attract tourists seemed like a good idea to us and so that is how the Grape Harvest Festival was born.*"

The idea of the festival developed in order to tackle two main issues: to offer a celebration capable of once again involving the young people in Lu and to relaunch the town's tourism. In order to achieve these objectives, in 1967, the organizers decided to follow a model that only a few communities at the time were experimenting with, namely food festivals. As Busto (1992) wrote:

> "*I remember how one night, after playing the card game Mariana for a long time, we moved out of the bar in search of a bit of fresh air and to find Aldo Capra, then mayor, who had been in Milan that day to deliver some wine. On his return he saw two posters advertising two different festivals, one was for peppers and the other for asparagus, and he said: "Why don't we also do something like that to promote the fruit of our land?" The idea was talked about until the early hours and that same night it took shape and was passed. Grapes as an illustrious product of Lu and its surrounding area became the main focus of our discussions that evening and for many evenings thereafter.*

> *The Grape Harvest Festival was the first of a long and continual series of celebrations.*"

It was the first festival of its kind in the region, as previously there had never been any organized celebrations for the grape harvest outside those few held privately on farms. Without a precise model to follow the organizers designed the festival according to an example seen on television.

> "*In order to create a festival that attracted tourists, something unique had to be created, something that would intrigue and appeal to people from all over the province. For this very reason, we sought ideas from television and were inspired by the Grape Harvest Festival of Lugano (Switzerland). Back then, we could still see Swiss television in Lu and became acquainted with this festival. It was a very important festival with crowds of people. The lakeside parade of festival floats dedicated to the grape and the vine was the highlight: no other provincial festival offered a float parade outside the carnival period.*" (Busto, 1992)

The Grape Harvest Festival of Lugano was first organized in 1933 and since the very first event festival floats have been its main attraction (Chiesa, 1949). Over time, while remaining anchored in the traditional theme of the grape harvest, the floats in the Lugano festival began to explore new combinations of themes, linking the agricultural ideal with elements drawn from cinema, fashion, and current affairs. Similar to that of Lugano, the organizers of the festival in Lu decided to organize a parade themed on wine. The parade managed to adapt a custom that was already known to the town, the procession of symbolic floats, and exploit the proven ability of at least some of the organizing committee to design and build floats. These elements combined to create a festival that was wholly unique to the Alessandria region of the 1970s. In addition to the float parade, the *ballo a palchetto*, the ball, was reintroduced, so that the new festival included the same kind of festivities as that of the Festival of Our Lady of August which was waning in popularity. Finally, to allow tourists to sample the local wine and grape products, the organizing committee decided to give tourists a bottle of wine as a gift and organize stands to sell local grapes and wine. The idea was a success in

town. One of the youngest members of the organizing committee of the first Grape Harvest Festival in Lu remembers:

> "*Everybody liked the idea of building floats like those for our festival. A parade of floats in September was something completely new, but at that time in Lu there were already people – including some of us [the members of the first organizing committee] – who built the carnival floats in Alessandria and Casale every year. There was a widespread participation among the young people and in a few months Lu had a new highly attended summer festival.*"

The first Grape Harvest Festival that took place in 1969 successfully attracted a lot of public interest that pushed the organizing committee to continue with the event and add to the programme in following years. While the festival was thriving, the festival of Our Lady of August declined and ceased altogether in 1977. As Federico Scarsoglio (1977) observed it:

> "*The Pro Loco cannot afford two festivals close together – as the town councillors can confirm – because they wear out both people and enthusiasm. […] If, in the immediate future, there is not a town committee that can take on the responsibility of continuing to organize the festival, I think we should cancel it and organize a wonderful grape harvest festival.*"

In 1978, the Pro Loco did not organize the mid-August festival and focused its efforts only on the Grape Harvest.

Over the next forty years, the role of food became more and more prominent in the festival. In the early editions, gastronomy played a marginal role, with the Pro Loco only organizing a few stands to promote and sell local wines. The first attempt at catering was introduced for the first time in 1972, during the 5th Grape Harvest Festival. For this event, the Pro Loco hired the "Famous chefs of Ponti" who were invited to return in 1978 to prepare their famed polenta and cod. Catering services were properly introduced with the 10th Festival, located in the restaurant Papà Francesco in via Colli. Local dishes of Piedmontese tradition characterized the menu. For the 11th to 14th Grape Harvest festivals, the catering service was provided intermittently. Only with the 15th annual

Photo 3.1 The Grape Harvest Festival and the "Herbie il maggiolino tutto ciucco" float (*Credit* Davide Capra [2005])

Photo 3.2 The "Fred Barbera e Ginger Cortese" float (*Credit* Davide Capra [2005])

event did the restaurant take on a prominent role. Having bought field kitchens, which were used until 2012, the Pro Loco organized catering in the Cantina Sociale in Via Roma, and the catering remained there until 1998. The 23rd event saw the catering moved to the courtyard of the town hall, and in the last two editions, the restaurant was moved to the town's football stadium where the Pro Loco built its kitchen, which was used until 2014 when it was closed.

The prominence of catering can be explained from an economic perspective. On the one hand, the restaurant was a profitable activity for the Pro Loco which financed its annual activities through the profit generated by the meals served during the festival. On the other hand, it was a distinctive feature of the festival that stood out from the others, if not for the menu, for the quality of the food and its reasonable prices. Even though food was vital for the profit and reputation it generated, it played an even more relevant social role. As one of the members of the Pro Loco remembers:

> "*Preparing food and wine, together with the floats, was the way we keep the village together.*"

Thanks to its originality and the enthusiasm it was able to generate for over thirty years, the Grape Harvest Festival remained the key summer celebration for the village until the mid-2000s, when it started to decline, and the festival was finally discontinued in 2014. As one of the first organizers suggests:

> "*[About the end of the Grape Harvest Festival], we can blame so many people and so many things: local politics, competition with a thousand other new festivals organized by other villages in the region which have fragmented tourism, the people of our own community. The truth is perhaps another: the festival was born because another feast did not change to meet the new needs of our people; the festival lasted forty years without changing and, especially in its last years, it did not change to interpret the needs of our people and this territory. It ended up being outdated. That's why it ended.*"

Apart from the expansion of the gastronomic offerings, the arrangement of the festival remained mostly unchanged from the 1980s onwards

(Fontefrancesco, 2014): a programme taking place on one or two weekends in which the core attractions were the restaurant and dance, and then, on the second Sunday of September, in the afternoon, the float parade (e.g. Photos 3.1 and 3.2). Such rigidity of the programme did not reflect a static socio-economic condition for the community of Lu. During the decades following World War II, the community experienced a progressive and constant demographic decline, as well as a gradual reduction in birth rates. In the face of local change, and the proliferation of gastronomic festivals in the region (Fassio, 2009), the festival faced a twofold crisis in terms of attractiveness and participation. While in the early 2000s over two thousand people participated to the parade, in the ten years that followed the number dwindled down to a few hundred individuals mostly living in Lu (see Fig. 3.1). As one of the organizers of the last editions of the event explains it:

> "*I miss the festivals of my youth. But I do not regret that the festival is dead. I cannot imagine the festival today. It became a sort of dinosaur unable to energize the community. Rather than a feast, it seemed a sort of duty we were obliged to organize every year. When the Pro Loco decided not to organize it, I felt almost relieved. The festival was born to fill the void left by the decline of the August festival. After fifty years the patch had worn out.*"

Thus, the end of the festival can be linked on the one hand on the difficulties for the local Pro Loco to motivate local participation, as well as the inability of the festival as it remained to continue attracting tourists for the event, in a landscape that over forty years grew crowded with new *sagre* and other touristic initiatives. In 2014, the unavailability of some facilities used for festival activities was the last straw and the *sagra* was suspended, leaving a hole in the festive calendar, as a recent initiative promoted in early 2020 by the municipality well testifies (Fig. 3.2).

Anatomy of a Device and Its Effects

The *sagre* of both Castellino and Lu are examples of how communities react to their marginalization employing food festivals. In the previous

"[About the end of the Grape Harvest Festival], we can blame so many people and so many things: local politics, competition with a thousand other new festivals organized by other villages in the region which have fragmented tourism, the people of our own community. The truth is perhaps another: the festival was born because another feast did not change to meet the new needs of our people; the festival lasted forty years without changing and, especially in its last years, it did not change to interpret the needs of our people and this territory. It ended up being outdated. That's why it ended."

1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
2692	3136	1811	1526	1295	1213	1181

Fig. 3.1 Population of Lu from 1951 to 2011 according to the national survey (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2020])

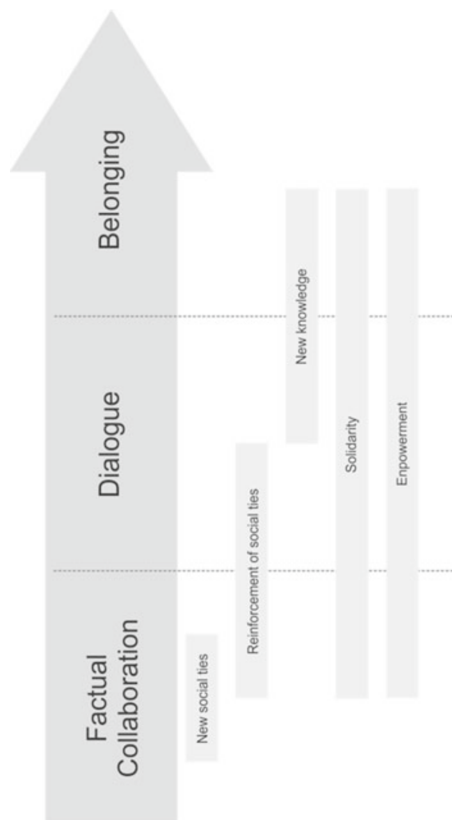

Fig. 3.2 "AAA Looking for sagra". The municipality of Lu holding a public meeting in order to organize a new sagra (*Credit* Comune di Lu e Cuccaro Monferrato [2020])

chapter, we discussed how rural marginalization impacts a community by weakening and reducing the social ties within it, eroding shared knowledge and a sense of belonging, and disempowering individuals and collectivity. In this respect, *sagre* counter these effects by prompting a process of socialization that develops through a process that moves from factual collaboration organizing the event, to the creation of a dialogue and exchange of knowledge among people, and reinforcement of the sense of belonging and self-identification with the community tattered by marginalization. The participation to a sagra is about how people learn to be a community (Favole, 2015). Figure 3.3 summarizes this process.

The stories of Castellino and Lu start from a common premise. That is, the people of the village, especially the young adults, react to the loss of sociality within the community and the failure of old festivals to attract and involve the local people. In so doing, the history of the traditional festivals of the 15th of August celebrated in the two villages demonstrate how a festival becomes socially ineffective and outdated when its forms and rhythms do not match the new needs of the community that emerge after sociocultural transformation pervades a community. However, those festivals, like the ones celebrated in other nearby communities (Grimaldi, 1993; Grimaldi & Nattino, 2009), had a fundamental role in the organization of agricultural activities until the post-World War II period, as it was an important time of redistribution within the community of the economic resources derived from the harvest. Redistribution took place mostly through the sharing of food and involved the community on different levels. First, it happened on the individual farm level. At the end of the harvest, farmers were used to organizing a meal in the farmhouse, bringing their families together with the families of their labourers (Rapetti, 1984). In addition, redistribution happened on the community level during the celebration of religious celebrations, such as patronal or Marian feasts (Grimaldi, 1993). During these celebrations, local youth associations organized public balls as well as dinners open to the local population and, in particular, the poor (Grimaldi, 1996).

However, these traditional feasts developed in the context of a peasant society did not cope with the emerging needs of a society shaped by rapid socio-economic transformations, the depopulation of rural centres

Fig. 3.3 Representation of the process of socialization triggered by the festival device. In the arrow, the main phases of the process, below the effects fostered by the device (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2020])

and the mechanization of farming, ending up losing their social meaning and being disregarded by the local population.

The crisis of the old festivals prepares the ground for new initiatives, such as the organization of a food festival. In this decision, we recognize two different motivations. The first one is linked with the very social meaning of the folkloric institution of community feasting. The organization of a festival based on the idea of shared food reconnects with feasting, the earliest forms of socialization in which food surpluses are used to create a socially dense environment and build alliances and stable social bonds among table companions (Dietler, 2001; Hayden, 2009; Symons, 1994). Feasting mobilizes labour, encourages cooperation, creates political power and achieves social justice (Hayden, 2001), while the rituality of the festival suspends quotidian reality and reconstructs it in a sophisticated and meaningful way marked by specific, extraordinary rhythms and practices (Apolito, 2014), and, as Alexander Robertson suggests in his analysis of Catalonian *sopar* (Robertson, 2010), sustains social interaction between villagers coping with the sociocultural crisis the post-war modernization caused.

The second motivation that moved people in Castellino and Lu to organize a food festival is deeply linked to the contingency of the moment. Both festivals were organized by copying other experiences, other festivals that the community recognized as interesting, promising, or prestigious models to follow. This decision is underpinned by a rational choice aimed at taking advantage of a consolidated experience. Together with it, however, there is a fundamental ludic aspect in the choice. The aim of organizing a *sagra* is to experience first-hand a festive model considered actual, vital and fun. In this perspective, the *sagra* represents collective game, according to the famous definition by Joan Huizinga (1980, p. 28):

> "*a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social*

groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means."

Through this game, the organizers engage the community in order to revitalize it, as the old plays, old festivals, are no longer working. The objective, then, can be achieved in different ways: in Castellino, the organizers transformed the old feast into a modern food festival, moving the semiotic focus of the event from the sacred to gastronomy; in Lu, the old festival was abandoned and a new one was created. In both the cases, the new festival is able to expand the active and passive participation of the community in the festival, thus coping with the perceived loss of social cohesion in the community. In so doing, though, what is central is not the event per se.

The organization is the process that triggers the process of socialization. The need for real collaboration among many actors in the community lays the groundwork for new relationships among the local people, involving new and old residents in the design and preparation of the event. As I have pointed out in previous publications (Fontefrancesco, 2018a, pp. 128–129):

"*Starting from the primary group, participation rises, directly involving a growing number of people in setting up the location, cooking, serving, and managing performances. This proactive collaboration not only creates the anthropological conditions for the festival experience [...], but also corresponds to a reactivation of the bonds of sociality among the different groups and members of the local community, thus confirming the role of social reconstitution, which was already typical of folkloric traditional holiday systems, such as Easter gatherings [...]: while in the case of such practices the feast reconstituted the unity of the community after the disintegration caused by winter seclusion, in the case of festivals reconstitution takes place to counterbalance the effects of daily or seasonal commuting, typical of contemporary society [...].*"

Collaboration leads to establishing a new dialogue among the participants, sharing knowledge about the vicissitudes of their lives, professional know-how, as well as the history of the community. This process, together with active participation, reinforces the very quality of the social

ties (Granovetter, 1973), reshaping tenuous relationships into stronger acquaintanceships and friendships.

The process fosters interpersonal solidarity, which lies in the identification of another as a companion involved in the fulfilment of a shared project of community that is actualized through the festival (Herzog, 2019). This commitment develops over time and goes beyond the celebration of the feast itself. It proceeds from the months and days before the festival, during which time the event is organized, to participation in the service during the festival, and then to the cleaning which follows the event. In this respect, the experience lived in Castellino and Lu is close to what Cloe Nahum-Claudel (2017) highlighted in the case of the Amazonian Enawenê-nawêm festivals. Even if in the event inebriating drinks are shunned, and feast foods are just ordinary foods which people eat in moderation, the preparation of the festival is not just functional, it is the feast that gathers the community, creates a commonality of intents, and coordinates their actions, thus generating unity among the people. In so doing, the very meaning of the local space is reshaped and reinforced, insofar as Alberto Corsín Jiménez (2003, p. 140) pointed out:

> "*space is no longer a category of fixed and ontological attributes, but a becoming, an emergent property of social relationship. Put somewhat differently, social relationships are inherently spatial, and space an instrument and dimension of space's sociality.*"

Overall, therefore, the organization and celebration of the event generates a new sense of belonging to the place and being part of a living community. This process entails a growing sense of empowerment that is measured on the basis of the participation of the community in the event and, above all, the lens of tourism. The previous chapters suggest that food festivals are Janus-faced devices that simultaneously look at the need of gathering local people and the attempt to attract tourists (Fontefrancesco, 2015). The attention to tourist attractivity should not be considered just a mere attempt at improving the economic sustainability of the event. Communities invest in promoting and spectacularizing their products to garner attention from other, more prominent centres. This attempt illustrates the struggle to achieve social legitimation from

the rest of the country (Fontefrancesco, 2018b); a status that the presence of tourists confirms. Thus, the attempt to achieve touristic success can strengthen the interactions between different members of the community mobilized during the year for the organization of an event. However, the decline in tourism appears to be the confirmation of marginalization; a fact that diminishes the festival's social value. The capacity to respond to the needs of the community in terms of sociocultural legitimacy with respect to the nation and the aggregation of its members sustain the life of modern food festivals and determine their likelihood of enduring. In the case of success, food festivals mark the time when the community activates its members during the year. However, when they fail, the apparatuses are discontinued, leaving a new hole in the fabric of time of the community, as the case of Lu shows.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter aimed at presenting the role of *sagre* as socialization devices. In so doing, it presented and investigated two ethnographic cases: the Trofia food festival of Castellino and the Grape Harvest Festival of Lu. The chapter reconstructs the history of these food festivals and the role they play in strengthening the sociality of the communities in the face of their continuing erosion. In this way, it proposes a modelling of the role the festival plays, pointing out the importance of the preparation of the event in order to reinforce and expand local social ties and foster a new shared knowledge and sense of belonging. In this process, the chapter sheds light on the role of tourism in the festivals. It interprets tourism as proof of social legitimacy, while the discussion continues in the next chapter by exploring how *sagre* are actually able to shape the very perception of the local landscape in an attempt to achieve touristic success by encouraging communities to examine their history and economy and by promoting local products.

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4

The Reterritorialization Device

Paths of Territorialization

In the previous chapter, I showed the important role food festivals play in reconstructing and supporting socialization within a community facing the impact of socio-economic marginalization. Although based on gastronomic heterotopias, as in the case of Castellino, these events fill an intangible gap in the life of the community, creating a platform for participation in which old and new villagers can join. In so doing, however, a new form of attachment to the community, and its territory is created; and food has a major role in this process.

This chapter investigates the process of reterritorialization that *sagre* entail. "Territorialization" evokes the careful analysis of the relationship between humans and their surroundings which passes through a process of socialization of the landscape (Raffestin, 1980). As Angelo Turco (1984) pointed out, this process encompasses the study of the symbolic, material and organizational forms of control over the environment enacted by the community, the methods used to give value and meaning to the act of living in a place, and the very processes

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M. F. Fontefrancesco, *Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53321-2_4

people use to shape their surroundings. The seminal works of Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) and David Harvey (1990) provided a strong impetus in the study of the processes of territorialization by exploring the impact of the fast economic transformation that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. In particular, financialization of the world's economy (e.g. Gallino, 2011; Langley, 2014; Tett, 2009), as well as the increased internationalization of people and goods (e.g. Bauman, 1998; Eriksen, 2003; Giddens, 2000; Sassen, 1998), have deeply impacted the perception of space by weakening the cultural bonds that link community and places. The transformation may occur through weakening of ties (Bauman, 2000) or their oblivion (Connerton, 2009). In rural Italy, it is intertwined with the progressive abandonment of villages (e.g. Bravo, 2013; Fontefrancesco, 2019; Grimaldi, 1996; Teti, 2004; Tiragallo, 1999; Viazzo, 1989), that affects the perception of the environment, as in the case of San Rocco, in Chapter 2. Similarly to what Kathleen Stewart (1996) described in West Virginia, rural marginalization makes the local population experience the local landscape as place of the uncanny, the physical signs of abandonment mark. Facing this landscape marked by a sense of detachment (Yarrow, Candea, Trundle, & Cook, 2015), *sagre* play a role in reterritorializing the community.

"*Reterritorialization*" is not just about place, but also meaning. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983) regard territorialization as a constant process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in which an element is extracted (i.e. deterritorialized) from a regime of meaning (referred to as an "assemblage") and embedded (reterritorializated) into a new one. It is a psychological process at the basis of human understanding that can also be applied to the very understanding of landscape. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, pp. 333–334) use landscape and environmental knowledge as examples by which to explain the process, pointing out how a particular element, such as a bird, can be understood as different assemblages, each one representing understanding of a specific landscape. They use the term "*machine*" to refer to the process that deterritorializes an object from an assemblage and reterritorializes into another one. With whimsical phrasing, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 333) describe a

machine as: "*a set of cutting edges that insert themselves into the assemblage undergoing deterritorialization and draw mutations and variations to it.*"

Moving away from the poetic language of the French scholars, this chapter suggests that the *sagra* is actually the initiative, the device, through which a community is able to revalue the meaning of their place, ideally moving it from an interpretation situated within a negative vision of the future into a new, more promising one. In so doing, however, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggested, the idea of the community, its history, and production is enhanced in a process that hinges on the design, narration and valorisation, which is the rise in value (Graeber, 2001), of the food on which the festival is focused.

Focusing on the case studies of the *Fasolà* Festival of Oltrepasso, which took place in 2015, and the Pink Asparagus Festival of Mezzago (MB), which took place in 2019, this chapter explores the process through which a community reinterprets its history and landscape, writing a new regime of historicity of the place (Hartog, 2015), "*the culturally patterned way […] of experiencing and understanding history*" (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1990, p. 4). This new regime of knowledge (Foucault, 1971) about the development of the community is functional as it attempts to counter the effects of rural marginalization and foster a new vision of the future, alternative to the one portending a gloomy decline.

Thus, the chapter suggests that *sagre* are reterritorialization devices that entail collective processes through which the historicity of the community is produced and transformed. By participating in the event, organizers and visitors contribute to the process that selects, organizes and reshapes elements considered significant in the community's past, leaving those considered insignificant to be expunged. In this way, a new narrative of the past is forged, informing the self-perception of the community and directing its action concerning the management of its environment, as the ethnographic cases of Oltrepasso and Mezzago show.

The *Fasolà* of Oltrepasso

Oltrepasso is a town of little more than one thousand inhabitants located close to the mountainous area on the border between Liguria and Piedmont. It is mostly a community of commuters, and only about one hundred people are employed in local agriculture. A rich family of merchants from Genoa founded the town in the medieval period as a trading post on the road from Genoa to Milan. Standing on a rise, the medieval castle, originally owned by the founding family and today maintained by the municipality, dominates the skyline of Oltrepasso. Small houses, one to three storeys high, sit around the historical building, preserving the original medieval plan of the settlement.

Recent woods of acacias and other fast-growing trees that little have to do with the original flora of the Apennines mountain region (Abbà, 1980; Molinari & Cevasco, 2009), cover the landscape around the village. Some vineyards, pastures and tilled fields are also still visible in the glades. However, they are only a few hectares in size: last remains of a recent past when almost all the population of Oltrepasso was involved in farming and the entire hill was cultivated. The agriculture of Oltrepasso, like that of many villages in the Italian countryside (Bravo, 2013), was part of a subsistence economy in which the main source of monetary income was the sale of local wine. That peasant society came to an end during the post-World War II period, when the community experienced a rapid demographic decline. Most young people left Oltrepasso, abandoning its meagre economy, and moved to Genoa in order to get a job as factory workers in the industries of the Ligurian capital. *"The village was dying,"* one of the informants, a farmer in his late seventies, recalls. *"We were all leaving – I left as well for a few decades – and only the older people remained here. It seemed there was no future in staying here. Fortunately enough for Oltrepasso, we were wrong."*

In the early 1980s, the village reached its lowest demographic point, with less than one thousand people. The construction of a new highway down in the valley, with a tollbooth about ten kilometres from Oltrepasso, rekindled life in the village and created new opportunities for its inhabitants to commute to Genoa and other cities. Starting in the mid-1980s, many Oltrepasso emigrants returned to the village and new

families from Liguria settled there, attracted by inexpensive properties and the growing reputation of Oltrepasso as a good place to live.

In the past thirty years, Oltrepasso has also acquired a good reputation as a food tourist destination thanks to its spectacular location, as well as the quality of its wine and the recognition of its restaurants. Especially during the summer, people mostly come at the weekends to enjoy a meal based on local products, in particular Oltrepasso's delicacy: *fasolà*, "bean soup" in the local dialect.

The dish is a soup of pasta and beans with a pungent taste of garlic. The villagers consider it an identity dish, through which they find a strong continuity between the present and the remote past of the settlement. As one of the local restaurateurs points out: "*Only in Oltrepasso can you eat real fasolà. The recipe is a secret handed down from mother to daughter in our community. It is a dish with a medieval past. In medieval times, people in Oltrepasso had fasolà as a special dish during festivities*."

Similar rhetoric permeates all the tourist materials published by the municipality of Oltrepasso as well as its Pro Loco; a message based on the celebration of a long-gone past, as well as a sense of tradition tied to the dish.

The touristic success of *fasolà* is strictly linked to the *Fasolà* Festival, the Oltrepasso Pro Loco organizes. The last chapter showed how gastronomic festivals are devices of socialization for local communities. The participation of the population in their organization creates a web of new relationships and a context for the profound sharing of knowledge. In this context, people share stories, memories, and experiences. Through this proactive participation, the villagers establish a shared understanding of the festival, and, more broadly, the community, its people and its history. Thus, as is the case for the famous Balinese cockfight, Clifford Geertz (1973) described, the food festival, including that of the *Fasolà* Festival, becomes the index of a broader shared worldview that brings about community.

The event in Oltrepasso, which is held in August, is one of the most prominent food festivals in the area. In past editions, over 5000 people have flocked to the event, queuing for up to an hour to have one plate of *fasolà*. The structure of the festival is very simple. For one weekend, the Pro Loco sets up a restaurant in the main park of the village. Tables with

approximately 300 seats are arranged in an open space in front of the building where the association has its offices and a professional kitchen. People queue at the counter and order their dinner from a menu that includes *fasolà*, as well as other pasta dishes, such as ravioli or *trofie*, some meat, vegetables, desserts, soft drinks and wine. After paying, visitors sit at the tables and the volunteers of the Pro Loco serves them. Every night of the festival, at around 10 PM, the programme includes some live music with a ballroom dance orchestra or cover rock bands depending on the expected public of the night.

The organizers of the current edition highlight that there are more than one hundred volunteers. Many of them are born and raised in Oltrepasso, but at least twenty are "foreigners", vacationers who have their summer houses in town or people from nearby communities who have become involved in the festival through their Oltrepasso friends. *"Every year, someone new joins us,"* the president of the Pro Loco explains, *"Mostly they are young people from the village, or friends of some volunteer. For those who come to live in Oltrepasso from outside, it is a way to become part of the community; to make themselves known and appreciated by others."*

The inhabitants of the village highly regard the participation in the festival. *"I've been taking part in the festival for more than twenty years, helping out in the kitchen,"* a volunteer in his forties, remarks. *"My wife also helps at the counter, even though she wasn't born here. My daughter started this year and it's a point of pride for me to see all my family working for our community."*

For many volunteers, the party is above all: *"a way to be together and make our village live,"* a twenty-year-old volunteer serving at the tables, explains. *"Being with older people, I learned many stories about the people of Oltrepasso; people who are no longer here. I can say that the Fasolà Festival was my history book; it is here, being with the others, that I learned the history of the community since its origin in the Middle Ages, listening to others, learning the stories of the village."*

Participation in the organization of the festival exposes participants to stories about the mythical past of Oltrepasso and its *fasolà*, as well as to other stories of a more recent past, which together outline an oral history of the past century. It is a vernacular history made up of

stories about distinguished people and extinguished families, eccentric people and past customs, buildings and neighbourhoods. *Fasolà*, therefore, plays a fundamental role in creating a shared understanding of the life and history of the community. Being the centre of the festivity, the dish represents the discursive framework (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 65) within which all aspects of the festival and participation in it develop. In fact, *fasolà* is not just a piece of material goods but rather a hub in the network of socialization (Soldano, 2011, pp. 114–121). Over a century of debate in anthropology has pointed out the multifaceted social role of food in a community: from kinship and politics (Allison, 1991; Boas, 1921, 1925; Herzfeld, 2016; Malinowski, 1922, 1929), to religion and symbolism (Boylston, 2014; Ciancimino Howell, 2018; Douglas, 1966; Levi-Strauss, 1964, 1966, 1968; Malinowski, 1935; Parasecoli, 2005; Staples, 2016; Zafar, 1999), moving through environmental knowledge and economic practices (Harris, 1985; Kloppenburg, 2014; Leitch, 2003; Mintz, 1985; Paxson, 2010; Rappaport, 1967). In all these different aspects in the life of a community, food has a role. Moreover, the articulated disciplinary history highlights the role of food as an object that creates the social space by being an evocative object (Turkle, 2007), signifying affection, experiences and life stories. In particular, as Alberto Cirese (2002) demonstrated in his analysis of the practices related to the preparation and use of Sardinian ritual bread, the role of food, both in sacred and profane contexts, is not limited to visual or haptic aesthetic enjoyment (Perullo, 2016). Rather, its preparation and consumption entail and mobilize a complex system of symbols, aesthetics and mythical narratives involving and characterizing the community. By using food, therefore, people learn and embody this knowledge and in socializing the product, as David Sutton (2001) highlighted, a community learns, actualizes and shapes the very perception of the community's history. Thus, in a food festival, food becomes the centre of a "*endless process of re-membering [sic], re-telling, and imagining things*" (Stewart, 1996, p. 8), like in Proust's famous literary game (Proust, 2002, pp. 45–48).

As the volunteers of the Oltrepasso festival show, individuals' memories as well as stories from the past of the village are shared, and in so doing people create their new historicity, shaping the very way in which

they consider, interpret and voice their past, present and future development. In the case of Oltrepasso, despite the deep transformations that marginalized the socio-economic role of agriculture in the community, the festival shapes a regime of historicity through which the community revalues this aspect of the history and economy of the community. In this way, the festival plays a role in promoting and relaunching Oltrepasso not only on a touristic level but, first of all, on a cultural level countering the effects of rural marginalization. This is the objective that has been pursued since the inauguration of the festival.

The first *Fasolà* Festival was organized in the late 1970s. One of the organizers of the first edition remembers that:

> "*It was during a period when the future of Oltrepasso appeared particularly dark. People were still leaving. The village appeared abandoned with most of the houses closed throughout the year, and our agricultural economy was fading away. But for few days in the summer emigrants came back. We did not have big festivals. Even the festivity on the protector saint's day was just a pompous mass. Other villages around us where organizing food festivals during summer. It was a way to have people come to visit the place, and to involve the local population. Others were organizing festivals based on their local productions, unique products. We did not have anything like typical vegetables. However, we found fasolà…*"

During the festival, the volunteers are keen to present the local dish, describing it as "traditional", "typical", "unique" and a legacy of the medieval past of the village. Similarly, during the year, the restaurateurs who serve the soup in their eateries present *fasolà* in analogous terms. In the village, most people asserted that the dish is old and local; however, very few affirmed that they have prepared *fasolà* at home. As one woman in her sixties points out: "*Today, we generally eat fasolà during the festival. We buy it from the Pro Loco and share it with family and friends. I do not remember my mother preparing it. We used to have many soups and there was also bean soup with pasta. I cannot say it was the same recipe, though.*"

Other informants highlighted they started preparing *fasolà* only in the past few decades, after the festival gained its favourable reputation. Despite the soup appearing not to be rooted in the gastronomic practices

of the community, it holds a key role in food imagery. As the president of the Pro Loco suggests: "*Fasolà is the heritage of this community. No one in Oltrepasso would say anything against it. It does not matter the actual origins, whether or not it is a medieval dish. Fasolà is Oltrepasso, and Oltrepasso is fasolà.*"

This process of re-appropriation develops primarily on a definable level of legend, "*beyond the limits of historical time [...] in which a certain element of historical fact may be supposed to be incorporated in a complex of myth*" (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 107). In reality, a medieval origin of the dish can be excluded as beans became part of the gastronomy of Italy only late in the sixteenth century, during the Early Modern Age (Capatti & Montanari, 2003). Soups that combine pasta with other vegetables, however, were already common some centuries before (Serventi & Sabban, 2000). From Early Modern Times, beans became part of domestic agriculture across Italy, being used for soups and other preparations. Thus, it is almost certain that before the festival in Oltrepasso families prepared some soups with beans and pasta. However, the actual origins of the *fasolà* recipe cannot be found in historical records. Today, the official recipe is a secret of the Oltrepasso Pro Loco, jealously guarded from prying eyes although the main ingredients, such as garlic, beans and fresh hand-made pasta, have been in the local gastronomic tradition for many centuries. Even the local restaurateurs have not been given the precise recipe and have had to reinvent it to serve the dish in their restaurants. *"We keep it secret because the recipe is property of the Pro Loco,"* one of the organizers of the early editions explains. *"In many ways, we can say the recipe was born with the festival. The name fasolà was part of our history, but when we organized the festival, we had to set the recipe, document the oral knowledge of the community in order to create the recipe. Slanderers could say we invented the dish. I would say we established a norm and a dish that is the heritage of our people. Above all, I believe fasolà created a strong link between the people of Oltrepasso and the history of the village, in a moment when everything seemed lost. Nowadays there is no one in Oltrepasso that would say fasolà is not part of our village and its history. I believe in them."*

The sense of mystery became part of the gastronomic charm of this food, and one of the reasons for the curiosity of visitors to the village.

Besides this curtain of uncertainty about its actual origins and recipe, by sharing stories about the birth of the product, its history and preparation, the community embedded *fasolà* and its festival in its historicity. In so doing, new value was created for the agricultural and rural aspects of the past, which appeared to be doomed by the deep socio-economic changes that occurred in the mid-twentieth century. Through the narratives (Scholliers, 2001) woven around the festivals' dishes, the food and its festival are, moreover, loaded with affective investment which strengthens the link between them and the community. Thus, if history is first of all based on myths and affection, as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966, p. 257) suggested, *fasolà* appears to become the history of the community, and its festival secured a historicity that reinforced the cultural cohesion of the community in face of the impact of the process of marginalization that Oltrepasso is still experiencing. As the mayor of the town suggests:

> "*Everyday people in Oltrepasso live the problems that many of our small countryside towns live in terms of the reduction of public services, economic constraints, and lack of investment. However, while many wavered in front of these difficulties and got lost, we know our history, we know what the meaning of this place is and why it is still worth living in. In all of that, the Fasolà Festival did its part in reminding us who we are and why we should be proud of our history.*"

The Pink Asparagus of Mezzago

The process that a food festival entails moves on a symbolic level (Blumer, 1969) creating a new, "edible identity" (Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2016). It also turns into a strong driver for local communities to reconsider the landscape in which they live and develop new ways of managing it. The case of Mezzago Pink Asparagus Festival exemplifies this.

Mezzago (MB) is a town of about 4500 inhabitants, located in the productive district of Vimercate. It is mostly a residential centre, surrounded by a green ring of fields and woods. Most of its population commutes daily to nearby urban centres, among which Milan and Bergamo. Thanks to its strategic position, the ethnic composition of

Mezzago has diversified since the 1990s. In 2019, over 400 migrants, mostly from Morocco (50%) and Romania (45%), lived in the town.

Agriculture still defines the landscape of Mezzago. Since its foundation in the Middle Ages, its economy has been based on agriculture, especially horticultural and cereal production. From the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, Mezzago thrived thanks to sericulture, like many other towns in the region (Cento Bull & Corner, 1993; Ghezzi, 2007). This industry quickly became the main occupation for about 10% of the population, mostly women and minors (Agostini, 2015). During the twentieth century, the population continued to grow despite the lack of industrial development, which arose in neighbouring municipalities. The members of the community coupled their activity as small farmers with jobs as workers in the nearby factories of Monza, Milan and Bergamo. After the end of World War II, Mezzago became a predominantly residential centre, while the role of farming was marginalized to the work of few families (de la Pierre, 2011). Consequentially, the very perception of the cultivated land that surrounds the village changed in the eyes of locals. What was a contested resource among members of the community and today may appear a pleasant peculiarity of the town, a green ring that divides Mezzago from neighbouring centres of Bellusco, Busnago, Cornate d'Adda and Sulbiate, turned into a material symbol of the decline and failure of a socio-economic model (Stoler, 2008). The post-World War II period marked a change in the very perception of the value of the land: a moving away from "*what you can grow with it*" to "*what the owners can build on it*", as a local farmer in his mid-seventies pointed out. This distinct perception of value, embedded in the life and work of the community, breaks away from an Edenic and idealized understanding of the countryside (Williams, 1973), and raises the question of how a community can recreate a connection and a deeper bond with its rural surroundings. An answer to this question comes from the local cultivation of pink asparagus and its festival, one of the main food festivals in Lombardy (Agostini, 2015).

In 2019, Mezzago celebrated the 59th annual Pink Asparagus Festival (Photo 4.1); a food festival that showcases the local production of asparagus. This production is regulated and protected by a municipal denomination of origin brand (De.Co., approved by

Photo 4.1 Poster of the 59th Pink Asparagus Festival (*Credit* Pro Loco Mezzago [2019])

Town Council Resolution 11/2004), registered in the Slow Food Ark of Taste (https://www.fondazioneslowfood.com/it/arca-del-gusto-slow-food/asparago-di-mezzago/), and conducted by eight agricultural enterprises subscribing to production regulation (approved by Town Executive Council Resolution 35/2019).

The origins of asparagus cultivation and the specific reasons for its introduction into Mezzago are uncertain; however, the inhabitants tend to link them to the history of "Muschen":

> "*Giovanni Brambilla, whom everyone called 'Muschen', was from Mezzago and at the beginning of the twentieth century he announced his departure to America; nobody knew if he would return. He returned and brought with him the roots of a strange pink asparagus, which immediately adapted to the soil of the area, so much so that it became its symbol in a few years. Thus, according to this legend, the pink asparagus of Mezzago was born.*" (Malvasi, 2012, p. 250)

Perhaps that is only a legend. However, the narration introduces us to the history of Mezzago; a town that in the early twentieth century was coming to terms with growing emigration to urban centres and abroad, and was attempting to diversify its agricultural production at a time when sericulture was in decline. The production of asparagus, therefore, represented, alongside mulberry and silkworms, a possible source of income for the small farmers of Mezzago. Each farming family had a few rows of asparagus, usually grown in association with vegetables from the *Liliaceae* family, such as garlic, shallots and onion. Asparagus was produced almost exclusively for sale; being the farmers rarely consumed them. In a municipality of about 2000 inhabitants, there are currently around 400 producers with a total production of about 4000 kg (on average 10 kg per producer) per day during the collection period (Agostini, 2015). The success of this crop is connected to the harvest period of asparagus, between April and May, which is earlier than other horticultural and cereal crops, and provides families with a much-needed source of income after the winter.

Given the widespread use of the crop in the area, in 1959, the Municipality of Mezzago created the Asparagus Festival. As Antonio Colombo, mayor of Mezzago from 2004 to 2014, recalls:

> "*The festival at the time had nothing to do with its present version. It used to be a competition between asparagus producers who were awarded a prize for the largest asparagus, the most beautiful bunch, the greatest production, and so on. Surely, that tells us how much asparagus production means to the community, but the history of the festival as we see it today was born later and in a different context.*"

The festival changed in the early 1980s, turning into a culinary festival intended to be a celebration of the gastronomy of asparagus. The first edition of the new festival dates back 1982. It was a period when Mezzago families were abandoning small-scale horticulture and cattle and pig farming and turning to full-time employment in the then expanding manufacturing industry. The ARCI club of Mezzago together with other local volunteers (de la Pierre, 2011) promoted the transformation of the festival, "*making the festival an important opportunity for participation and involvement of the community of Mezzago*", as Colombo affirms. Over the course of a few years, the festival grew and expanded and since 1989, with the birth of the Pro Loco, its organization has become one of the main responsibilities of the new association.

Right from the early editions, the "new" festival presented a gastronomic offer focused on asparagus. However, it encountered increasing difficulties in finding local products.

> *"Mezzago had changed and fewer and fewer people had the soil for asparagus production" as Giovanni Vitali, president of Asparagus Producers Cooperative (hereafter APC), remembers. "By the end of the eighties, finding asparagus for the festival had become virtually impossible. We started buying them in Veneto, and continued to do so until we went back into production with the APC."*

The APC was founded in 2000. Vittorio Pozzati, current president of Co-op Mezzago and former Mayor of Mezzago from 1996 to 2004, remarks:

> "*In the late nineties, a local newspaper published an interview with a citizen who declared that 'There is no such thing as the Mezzago Asparagus Festival, asparagus are no longer produced in Mezzago. It was a cold shower, but it was a great opportunity to re-launch asparagus cultivation by combining new opportunities with the need to preserve the territory of the municipality from further overbuilding.*"

The municipal administration in those years was engaged in soil protection and enhancement of the agricultural and environmental heritage of the municipality (de la Pierre, 2011). The municipality undertook the activity to promote asparagus culture began in 1998 (after the first failed attempt in 1983). It created a partnership with the Experimental Institute for Horticulture of Montanaso Lombardo. In addition to providing technical support, in 2000, the municipality, in association with the Lombardy Region, purchased 70,000 roots, 60,000 for the members of the newly formed APC and 10,000 for other small local farmers intending to revive cultivation (Photo 4.2).

As Antonio Colombo recalled, the beginning of the collaboration with the institute of Montanaso Lombardo also coincided with a substantial modification of the agricultural system and practices linked to the production of asparagus. Following the advice of the institute, various innovations concerning asparagus production were introduced: the width of the asparagus production area was widened from 120 cm to 2 metres; the number of asparagus rows was reduced from 3 to 2; and the soil and heaps were prepared with a tractor. Black plastic sheets were also introduced to protect the vegetables from sunlight and to prevent the tips of the asparagus from turning green. In following years, the experience gained from collaboration with the community of cultivators from the German city of Reilingen, which encouraged the introduction of further technological innovations related to production, collection and cleaning operations. According to Colombo and other members of the APC, the older generations of Mezzago cultivators at first seemed sceptical of the introduced innovations.

In addition to the reticence of the elderly, "*The real initial obstacle,*" explained Vitali, "*was to find owners who wanted to rent the land to us*". Asparagus cultivation lasts for 10–12 years. *"In a historical period of rapid*

Photo 4.2 Mezzago and the asparagus field (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2019])

urbanization, everyone saw the ownership of agricultural land as bank checks to be held because in the following years it would become building land of much higher value. Finding someone who was willing to rent a field for ten years was not simple," Pozzati concludes.

The APC began its activity with 3 hectares of land and gradually expanded to the current 6 hectares, with a production capacity per cultivated hectare of about 4000 kg per annual harvest. In 2019, the cooperative members have produced exactly 25,291 kg of pink asparagus. Actual production began in 2003 and in 2004 the product was subject to one of the first De.Co. Right from the start the product was primarily intended for the festival and packaged with its characteristic pink and black label.

In the mid-2000s, the Mezzago Festival reverted back to be the Festival of the Mezzago Pink Asparagus, local growers produce by means of an economic collaboration involving the Pro Loco, the APC, and other asparagus cultivators. In fact, the Pro Loco is committed to purchasing the quantity of asparagus required for the festival from the APC which, on the one hand, prefers to sell to the Pro Loco and, on the other, guarantees a fixed purchase price, thus establishing a supply chain agreement based on guaranteeing the sale of the product and the security of the sale price. Thus, the festival is not only a showcase of local production, but also the main commercial outlet of pink asparagus. The APC and by other producers sell their products preferentially at the festival, when about 60% of total production is consumed. The remaining part is marketed at the regional level in retail outlets (e.g. Esselunga, Co-op, Gigante and Eataly) and markets (e.g. Slow Food Earth Markets and Coldiretti's Mercato Campagna Amica) in Lombardy, particularly in Milan and Monza, in its distinctive packaging.

Therefore, this economic system guarantees a clear and positive impact of the festival on the local economy and a synergy between producers and the world of volunteering. The success of the festival is linked to the Pro Loco's ability to gather and activate a large part of the local population. Alessio Colnago, the president of Pro Loco, underlines:

> "*This year we had over 90 volunteers in the kitchen and serving at the tables. Others helped us with the events. We have volunteers of all ages and from*

every political and religious background. Whoever wants to help is welcome and we are happy to have them on board. The success of the festival is in the ability to network with all the positive people in the area, creating a festival that involves the whole community."

The Pro Loco The promotes synergies and initiatives during the festival that also extend to other companies operating in the local agri-food business. In addition to local producers and artisans involved in the supply of materials and associations operating in the environmental field, the event intersects and involves small businesses and projects in the social, cultural and educational fields operating in Mezzago and its surroundings. Giorgio Monti, mayor of Mezzago from 2014 to 2019, explains:

"*The festival works because all the actors of the territory collaborate. It is a platform that brings together the Municipality and civil institutions, the population of Mezzago through voluntary associations and the parish, and companies and producers through the APC and the Co-op. It is through this collaboration we recreated a profound bond between the community and its rural history and landscape. The Festival is pivotal in this work.*"

Paola Filippucci (2016, p. 2) pointed out that the socio-economic and political events a community endures can generate symbolic associations with the landscape, and they contribute to the production and reproduction of the phenomena. While for Israel and the Palestinian territories the events are associated with violence (Weizman, 2007), in the case of Mezzago, and other Italian communities, they were related to post-World War II rural marginalization. In this instance, agricultural decline led to the reduction of tilled soil surrounding the village and the loss of profitability, and the prospect of the advancement of the wild, as in the case of Oltrepasso, or progressing urbanization, as in the case of Mezzago, reinforced the sense of failure about the economic and social organization model based on agriculture, leaving little space for hope in a positive, rural future. The Pink Asparagus Festival, however, illustrates the possibility of breaking this heuristic, vicious circle and fosters new actions

concerning the recovery of rural heritage that passes through the transformation of the landscape. It is a process that entails different actors, as Monti suggests, and derives from the festival.

The festival involves public administration, community and economic actors working together in order to strengthen the prestige of the product and its cultural relevance, expand the market, and create an opportunity for dialogue and creation of new knowledge in the community that also includes establishing a new regime of historicity in which asparagus production and rural heritage have a pivotal role and an uninterrupted legacy. Overall, Mezzago shows that a festival can generate the collaboration of different actors which support and reinforce the community's capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In so doing, it also affects the management and very perception of the community's landscape.

After World War II, in the wake of rapid post-war reconstruction, the cultivated fields around the village appeared no more than a haunting presence in the eyes of locals, and in particular farmers. Somewhat similar to the experience Turkish-Cypriots lives confronted by houses confiscated from Greek-Cypriots after the war in 1974 (Navaro-Yashin, 2009), an awkward feeling of melancholy and uncanniness, derived from the resurgence of a stifled production experience, tints the sight of fields. The success of the festival, and the subsequent rebirth of asparagus cultivation, marks a shift in this perception. Today the asparagus fields, which are cultivated with artisanal agricultural practices similar to the ones used in the early twentieth century, are realms of memory (Nora, 1989) for the community, a symbolic object that reminds locals of their rural heritage and its value. This transformation expresses a new regime of historicity based on the recognition of the value of the local agricultural experience the festival prompts. It expresses a link between present-day Mezzago and its agriculture that the festival through its initiatives and, above all, its gastronomic offer nurtures.

In 2019, the 59th edition of the Pink Asparagus Festival in Mezzago is celebrated from 27th April to 24th May. The festival is organized by the local grass-roots organization, the Mezzago Pro Loco, takes place at the Architi Palace, one of the oldest buildings in the municipality (which is nowadays owned by the Mezzago Co-op and intended to function as a multi-purpose centre equipped for catering). The calendar of events

includes public meetings, workshops, concerts, dances, small markets and exhibitions. In addition, the 2019 programme includes meetings in support of agricultural, environmental and naturalistic activities, such as the MezzAgro initiative, a collaboration between the Municipal Administration, the North East Agricultural Park (www.parcoagricolonordest.it) and Ciboprossimo (https://ciboprossimo.net), which is currently in its second edition (the 2019 edition centred on the theme "Seed exchange, plants, and surroundings" and is intended to bring the festival closer to social and environmental issues).

The cornerstone of the event, however, is the restaurant that catered for about 500 people per meal thanks to the large group of volunteers and the large professional kitchen, which the Co-op and the Pro Loco set up in the large spaces of the hall and the arcade of Palazzo Arditi. The president of the Pro Loco says that:

> "*A hundred volunteers, coming from Mezzago and from neighbouring counties, made the success of the event possible … they cooked and served in the dining room and strived for the success of the event. Thanks to their commitment, it was possible to grow the event and serve over 6000 people in the restaurant during the holiday month, which made the festival one of the most attended gastronomic events in the Brianza area.*"

The professional kitchen of the restaurant is equipped with professional grade equipment. Recently, the Pro Loco has also provided for the purchase of specific asparagus processing tools, such as a special machine for trimming and peeling, which volunteers previously did manually. Lombard and Milanese traditions inspire the gastronomy of the festival and focus on pink asparagus as a distinctive element. This is immediately evident in the menu, which is reproduced below (Fig. 4.1).

The menu centres on pink asparagus following traditional recipes (e.g. as an ingredient for risotto, or boiled and accompanied with eggs) or in innovative dishes resulting from research on Lombard gastronomy conducted by Pro Loco volunteers in collaboration with catering experts. The innovations that characterize these courses often result from a creative process which, starting with the volunteers themselves, expands outside the boundaries of the community and involves various actors from regional and national gastronomic sectors.

FESTIVAL MENU	
APPETIZERS	
Mixed starters	8.00 €
Prosciutto crudo with Mezzago Pink Asparagus	8.00 €
FIRST COURSES	
Risotto with Mezzago Pink Asparagus	6.5 €
Lasagna with Mezzago Pink Asparagus	6.5 €
Homemade ravioli with Mezzago Pink Asparagus cream	7.5 €
Mezzago Pink Asparagus soup	5.5 €
Pasta with tomato sauce	5.0 €
SECOND COURSES	
Mezzago Pink Asparagus with eggs	9.5 €
Mezzago Pink Asparagus with butter or oil	8.0 €
Carpaccio with Mezzago Pink Asparagus and Parmesan	8.5 €
Roast beef with Mezzago Pink Asparagus	8.5 €
Veal stuffed with Mezzago Pink Asparagus	8.5 €
Beef in oil with Mezzago Pink Asparagus	8.5 €
Milanese cutlet	8.0 €
Mixed fried fish	9.5 €

Fig. 4.1 Menu of the 59th Pink Asparagus Festival (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2020])

CHEESE AND SIDE DISHES	
Chips	2.5 €
Salad / Tomatoes	2.5 €
Principi delle Orobie cheese plate	9.0 €
DESSERTS	
Chocolate asparagus with ice cream	3.5 €
Strawberries with or without ice cream	3.5 €
The house cake	3.0 €
Jam tart	3.0 €

Fig. 4.1 (continued)

Given the centrality of pink asparagus, the food and wine derive from local food specialities and the broader Lombard territory: vegetable raw materials, meats and pastry products are purchased locally; fresh pastas are produced by an artisan pasta factory in the neighbouring municipality of Usmate; and the cheeses (including ancient Stracchino of the Orobiche Valleys and Salva Cremasco) come from small dairies located in the nearby provinces of Bergamo and Crema. Drinks too, thanks to the voluntary collaboration of experts in the wine sector, are intended to promote the products of the territory. To quote one of the Mezzago volunteers:

> "*we are proud of our menu, because it tells our story. Research, discussions, attempts, failures and many successes come with each recipe. Overall, we are certain that this menu can best emphasize the product of Mezzago, our asparagus. But above all, I believe each dish expresses the connection our community has with its land; a connection our visitors enjoy and find unique.*"

As emerges from the volunteer's words, the food of the festival is not only a tool for sensory satisfaction; it is a strong semantic device that conveys the message of the link between Mezzago and its agricultural heritage. Other festival activities, such as the market and conferences, reiterate this message that is conveyed throughout the year, through the various activities the different actors of the festival (i.e. the Town Administration, the Pro Loco and the Producer Cooperative) carry out. The message is clear and aims at promoting the community through its asparagus cultivation.

Overall, this activity strengthens the new regime of historicity and creates the cultural basis on which political actions of environmental conservation are introduced, as the rewriting of the town development plan in the early 2000s exemplifies (de la Pierre, 2011). In so doing, the attitude that is at the base of the new regime of historicity is expressed and turned into a direct action able to shape the environment in such a way as to create a new heuristic circle between food, festival, rural landscape and community.

The Functioning of the Device

The previous chapter pointed out the role of food festivals in activating new socialization. It was shown that this process entails the creation of new shared knowledge. This chapter investigates the forms of knowledge generated in the process and what impact they have on the local community. In so doing, the case studies of Oltrepasso and Mezzago reveal how *sagre* can foster a profound reorientation of the way a community views its space. Figure 4.2 summarizes this process.

The process draws on "*the intricate strengths and fragilities that connect places to social imagination and practice, to memory and desire, dwelling and movement*" (Feld & Basso, 1996, p. 8) and in particular it makes use of some specific objects, strictly interconnected and deeply involved in the making of the festival: local food, the economy of the community, its surroundings and history. These four components are at the centre of the discussion that takes place during the preparation of the festival and are the main pillars on which the characterization and promotion of the

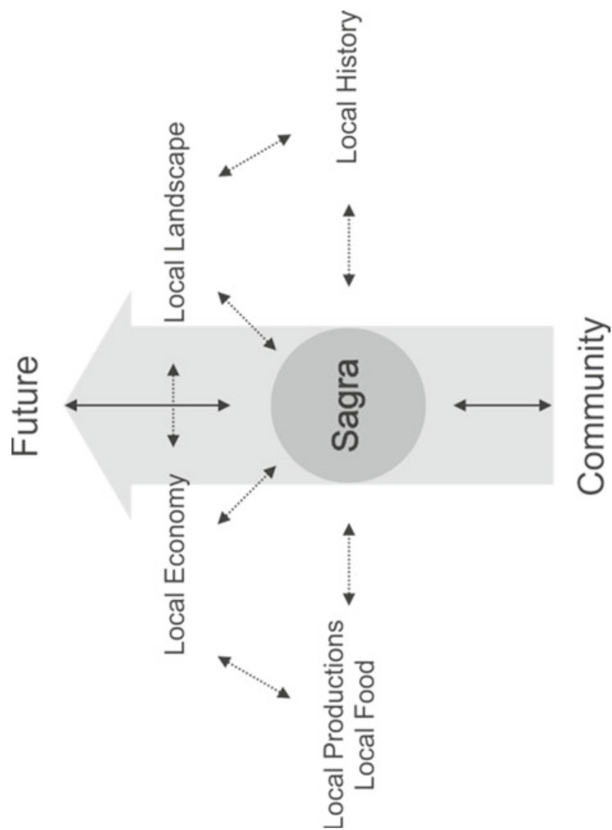

Fig. 4.2 The role of *sagre* in creating a new understanding of the local space and the future of the community (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2020])

event are organized. The process involves their invention and reinvention (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) as well as their embedding into the broader narration of the community and actualized into the reality of community life through the festival and its food and activities. The new knowledge generated in the preparation and celebration of *sagre*, though, has an impact on the entire community, far beyond the constraints of the event. In fact, the cases of both Oltrepasso and Mezzago show that the event becomes a fundamental basis for rethinking the local landscape and relaunching tourism, gastronomy, and, specifically in Mezzago, agriculture. Thus, while a *sagra* is a collective, maieutic exercise capable of bringing to the forefront those background potentialities of the landscape (Hirsch, 1995, p. 5) otherwise left unexpressed and silent, it is able to deterritorialize the community from the gloomy perspective marked by rural marginalization and reterritorialize it into a new perspective shaped by the success of the local gastronomy, completing a reorientation of the community and motivating it with a hopeful vision of the future.

In this process, promoting local gastronomy facilitates the process of territorialisation. In fact, this choice does not ask the community to comply with a historical, economic and gastronomic model outside of local reality. Rather, it motivates the organizers, and the members of the community at large, to rethink their territory, to search for value in the community's history and geography, to promote local uniqueness, and to share the experiences of individual families. In this way, a new understanding and narration of the place are woven; a representation that has historical depth and rootedness. To this discourse, each local family is potentially an equal protagonist and co-maker. Such historical research, as the case of Mezzago demonstrates, is not limited to an antiquarian effort (Momigliano, 1950) aimed at identifying objects of the past and keeping them immaculate. It opens gastronomic products to modernization exploring new ways of presenting local products and preparations to the public. In so doing, it opens up local gastronomic heritage to innovation and contribution from new members of the community, who then become co-makers of the local tradition. The promotion of local gastronomy, therefore, becomes a mythopoetic tool (Wu, 2004, pp. 24–33) that other forms of *sagre*, which promote exogenous gastronomy, such as that of Castellino, cannot enjoy. The choice of celebrating more

generic and exotic gastronomic products limits potentiality in terms of the territorialization of a food festival.

Conclusion

The chapter views *sagre* as reterritorialization devices for local communities in the context of rural marginalization. In so doing, it explores the role of festivals in triggering a process of reconsideration of place, able to redirect the community to a proactive perception of a positive future based on the recognition of the value of its history, heritage and landscape. This process moves on a symbolic level and directly affects the reality of community space and activity, supporting a different use of the community's space and motivating new forms of enterprise. This discussion, therefore, lays the groundwork for a deeper analysis of the economic role the festivals play, which is developed in the next chapter.

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5

The Development Device

A Premise of Anthropology and the Economic Impact of Festivals

Since the seminal works of Borislaw Malinowski (1922), Marcell Mauss (1967) and Edward Evans-Pritchard (1940), anthropologists have analysed the modes of living of local communities and how they become part of a wider network of exchanges, collaborations and redistribution. Following widespread understanding, the theory of peasant economy of Alexander Chayanov (1966) well exemplifies, rural communities, even in Western contexts, have been commonly considered closed networks whose economies are primarily oriented towards subsistence, rather than the maximization of production. The centrality given to the primacy of subsistence as the distinguishing characteristic of peasant communities underpins the theory of "the domestic mode of production" of Marshall Sahlins (1972), as well as the more recent contribution of cultural economic anthropologists (Hann, 2018) who view the space of the household and the one of the community as a different economic sphere of exchange (Bohannan, 1955) from that of the market. New ethnographic contributions, which have pointed out the deep integration

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M. F. Fontefrancesco, *Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53321-2_5

between the global market and local socio-economic dynamics, problematize this understanding. There is a deep dialectical relationship that links the development of local rural communities across the world with the global market. This is shown by elements, such as:

- the importance of public politics, in terms of economic subsidies and investments (e.g. Emery, 2015; Emery & Carrithers, 2016),
- private initiatives concerning the intensification of the extraction of resources from local communities (e.g. Tsing, 2005),
- the introduction of new species and varieties aimed at suiting the global food commodity market (e.g. Stone, 2010),
- the introduction of alternative production practices in open criticism to the globalization of agriculture (e.g. Münster, 2018; Rosenberger, 2014).

This interconnection reveals the structure of a global value chains (Miroudot & Backer, 2015) that links and integrates local communities with other economic actors on a regional and international level. An anthropological research should look at how this relationship develops and to what devices local communities employ to establish and govern their relationship with the wider world. One of these devices is the *sagre*.

The previous chapter has shown how these food festivals play a role in the rural community in countering the effects of their socio-economic marginalization. They support socialization and create a new sense of place (Feld & Basso, 1996), as well as a fresh perspective for envisioning a new, positive future for the local people. This chapter looks closer at the role of festivals in terms of socio-economic development and how it has evolved over time. It focuses on the ethnographic case of Sant'Ambrogio and its 2016 food festival. The analysis suggests *sagre* are important in constructing a community's economic base (Gudeman, 2005) and in supporting local business. In so doing, however, it challenges the common assumption that *sagre* and traditional foods are always effective in supporting the development of the local economy.

The Case of Sant'Ambrogio

Sant'Ambrogio lies in the valley of the Bormida River, on the border between Piedmont and Liguria. It is a town of little more than 1000 inhabitants. The main settlement is on the river, close to the confluence of the Bormida and a smaller mountain stream. More than half of the population lives there, while some few hundred people live scattered in numerous rural hamlets and farms. The village was one of the most important settlements in the valley until the 1970s. It was one of the first villages that received electricity and public lighting in the late nineteenth century thanks to the construction of a hydroelectric dam. Commerce developed thanks to the railroad and the construction of one of the main state roads that linked the two regions. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the municipality experienced steady industrialization, the establishment of iron manufacturing companies mostly propelled. After World War II, the municipality had a population of about 3000; however, despite good local services, Sant'Ambrogio, as well as most Italian rural communities at the time, suffered a steady demographic decline in the 1950s and following decades. The decline of local commerce and industry was followed by factory closures in the early 1970s, as well as the emigration of young people to the nearby cities of Alessandria, Savona and Turin, reducing the population to the present figure. This transformation impacted the community and coincided with the steady ageing of the local population, while agriculture gained a new importance. Farming is concentrated in the valley, while the mountainous areas of the municipality are largely covered with woods. In the past several decades, hazelnut production has become prominent, being in the area of the *Nocciola del Piemonte*, Hazelunt of Piedmont, PGI.

Besides being a rural community, the food system appears to be deeply integrated with the regional and national market. In the shops of Sant'Ambrogio, most of the vegetables come from outside the community, bought from wholesalers and retailers. As one of the shop sellers points out:

> "*Maybe eggs and some vegetables the people here cultivate at home, but for the rest, people here buy from shops like all other people in the world, and*

> *they have vegetables from the South of Italy, milk from Asti and Alessandria, flour made of grain coming from who knows where.*"

Against Stephen Gudeman and Chris Hann (2015), who contend that the community is an economic sphere different from the one of the market and characterized by exchanges based on the principle of reciprocity and the household, the case of Sant'Ambrogio indicates that the community is a space market logic and exchange permeate. Above all, the community is fully integrated into a wider commercial network. In terms of food networks (O'Neill, 2014), families only marginally rely on self-production or local products. Thus, the everyday structure of the farming economy in Sant'Ambrogio moves mostly outside the borders of the community, dependent on negotiations with suppliers and traders, while the connection with the food industry, as well as the one with final consumers, is weak. As Giorgio, a farmer in his late sixties, emphatically explains:

> "*We are stuck in this situation. We cannot work with the food industry because at the end of the day we are too small and cannot provide the quantity or respect the timetable they want. We do not work with the people [the final consumers] because we are too big and produce too much for some families to consume. We cannot just decide to go to all the markets there are around. It is too time consuming. We have to work the land first, and then if we have some spare time and spare energy, we can decide to do a market or two…*"

Facing this economic situation, the Pro Loco of Sant'Ambrogio, together with the town council and some of the local farmers and entrepreneurs, decided to promote a new food festival: "The Treasures of Sant'Ambrogio".

The first edition of the event was celebrated in 2014 and focused on the promotion of local food products and gastronomy through a 2-day programme when? in which the two main attractions were the Pro Loco restaurant and the Sunday farmers' market. The event started on Saturday evening when the Pro Loco opened the restaurant. The president of the Pro Loco explains:

"*We wanted to offer a menu that was part of our culinary tradition. That's why we decided to prepare only local dishes. Visitors like that: tajarin pasta (pronounced [taja:riŋ], it is a kind of egg noodles) with rabbit-meat sauce, roasted veil tongue with green sauce, and bonnet cake (a cocoa, hazelnut and amaretti biscuit based dessert).*"

On Sunday morning, the farmers' market gathered some dozen producers from nearby municipalities, who offered their products: wheat and corn flour and bread, preserved vegetables, honey, mushrooms, beer, sweets, wine and cheese. Some other activities, such as visits to local monuments and landmarks were organized alongside the market to enrich the attractiveness of the event.

In just two editions the event expanded, and in 2016 the invitation to participate in the event came after a broader discussion that took place at the beginning of June 2016. I was discussing with some of the mayors from the southern part of Alessandria Province the challenges for agriculture in the region and the possible role hazelnut production could have in supporting rural development. During the discussion, the mayor of Sant'Ambrogio suggests:

"*If you are interested in hazelnuts and food festivals, you should come to our event in July. We have expanded our summer food festival to include an event dedicated to our hazelnut. It is a cake contest. It will be fun, and I hope it will help the food festival to expand and contribute to the reconstruction of our local economic network.*"

In July 2016, Sant'Ambrogio celebrated its third edition of "The Treasures of Sant'Ambrogio Monferrato" introducing the hazelnut cake contest. This was the main event of the festival, gathering people from all around the province, thanks to the participation of famous guests, such as TV celebrities and famous Italian chefs, but above all the deep relationship between the area and hazelnut production, which has made hazelnut cake a common and traditional dish among local families. For the occasion, as one of the judges, the organizers invited a famous television food journalist, who was able to attract the attention of regional and national media to the event. The president of Pro Loco underlines:

> "*Our festival wants to celebrate the gastronomic treasures of the community. We believe that the contest can joyfully promote one of the key treasures that had little space in past editions: our hazelnuts. We will see how the public responds.*"

They responded positively, with hundreds of people coming and dozens participating: a success for the organizers.

Building the Base of the Economy

The food festival of Sant'Ambrogio was established with a specific economic objective, as the mayor explained:

> *"We need new opportunities for our economy. The festival is not just fun. It binds together the people of Sant'Ambrogio, and in so doing creates the basis for promoting the village. It makes the village known to the general public and offers opportunities for local producers. This is why I believe this festival is important for our community." This understanding is mirrored in the opinion of the organizers, and many local producers: "Thanks to the festival we [local producers] have started collaborating and it has created the opportunity to participate in other events together as well. Moreover, it is a nice venue for making our products known."*

On the basis of the words of the elected representative, as well as the impressions of other organizers, it appears the festival has a multi-layered economic impact: first building collaboration among different actors, then supporting sales, at least in the days of the festival. Thus, the first contribution comes from constructing what Gudeman (2005, pp. 97–98) refers to as the "*base*" of a local economy:

> "*Consisting of entities that people appropriate, make, allocate and use in relation to one another, the base is locally and historically formed […]. The base everywhere consists of skills, knowledge and practices that are part of a changing heritage that is always necessary for market trade, from language to hand signs and from cognitive skills to values. The base includes parts of the material world as well as accumulations gained through productive use of*

resources, and a community may specify materials or activities that cannot be used or supported by it."

Specifically, the base is constructed through reinforcing the relationship that links the different local actors that organize and support the event, which encompasses actors from the local public, private and non-profit sectors. The local Pro Loco, the main association of the third sector of the village, organized "The Treasures of Sant'Ambrogio" festival. The association, however, received full support from the municipality, which offered the free use of facilities, provided direct and indirect economic contributions, and supported the association with the bureaucratic process of authorization. At the same time, the association involved local producers, providing them with stands and affordable advertisement materials. Equally, the producers offered their products at a discounted price to be used during the event. In this way, the festival involves the most important institutions of the local public, private and non-profit sectors and, in so doing, ideally the entire community, as visualized in Fig. 5.1.

The festival becomes a space of mutuality among these actors, who contribute to the success of the event with different resources. This process involves all of them in a collective effort that results in the overall strengthening of the economic, social and cultural capital of the community. It creates the premises needed for strengthening the prestige of the product and its cultural relevance, expanding the market, and creating an opportunity for dialogue, confrontation and new knowledge among the inhabitants of the community and the countryside.

It also involves the redistribution of the economic resources the festival generated. The *sagre* are usually managed by non-profit organizations, such as Pro Loco associations, as in all the cases presented in this volume. The net income the festival generated (from activities such as selling food in the festival's restaurant, or tickets and gadgets, as well as donations from public and private bodies and also individuals) is received by the association, which must use the proceeds for the organization of new initiatives (such as art exhibitions, concerts, renovation and maintenance of public buildings, training courses) or for economically supporting local public and private institutions (such as schools,

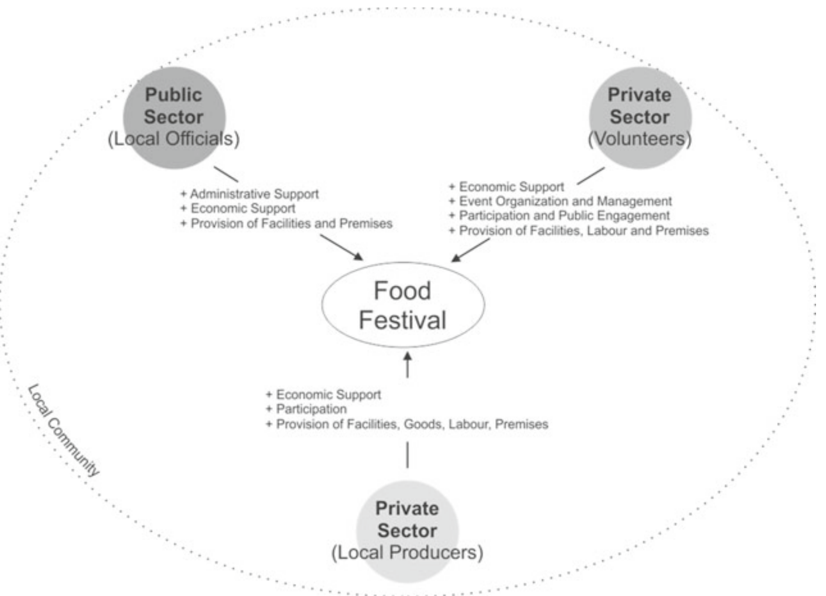

Fig. 5.1 Representation of the contribution of the different actors organizing the festival (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2020])

hospitals, sport teams). In this way, the festival becomes beneficial for the entire community, funding its activities during the year.

Thus, the *sagra* works as a device for local development as a result of the collaboration of the different actors. It is a fragile equilibrium that can be disturbed. As the strengthening of the contribution the actors synergistically provided leads to an overall reinforcement of the festival, the partial or total disappearance of contributions always diminishes the festival and its local effect, and, in many cases, leads to the end of the festive experience. This happened, for example, in Sant'Ambrogio. In 2018, after another successful edition of the festival, the organization of "The Treasures of Sant'Ambrogio" was suspended. Primarily at issue was the difficulty for the Pro Loco to locally find the economic resources as well as the people needed for managing an event that scaled up too fast. This also occurred in Lu with their Grape Harvest Festival, analysed in Chapter 3.

The Economic Structure of the Sagra

The construction of this base is functional for the economic organization of the *sagra*, in which public and private institutions, enterprises, non-profit organizations, and visitors are involved. The festival of Sant'Ambrogio offers a starting point for exploring and understanding it. Figure 5.2 presents a model of the economic structure of a *sagra*.

At the centre of the economy of the *sagra*, there is an organizer. As in the case of San Rocco, it is often a non-profit organization, such as Pro Loco. The organizer designs, promotes and organizes the different activities of the *sagra*. These activities can be clustered into three main groups: the market, the restaurant and the other activities. Under the rubric of the market are all the events that involve direct sale, from the organization of a few stands in front of the restaurant to the organization of a large marketplace. The rubric of the restaurant covers all the events involving the preparation and sale of food. This includes the organization of temporary restaurants as well as other gastronomic events or services (e.g. street food stands or temporary pubs and bars).

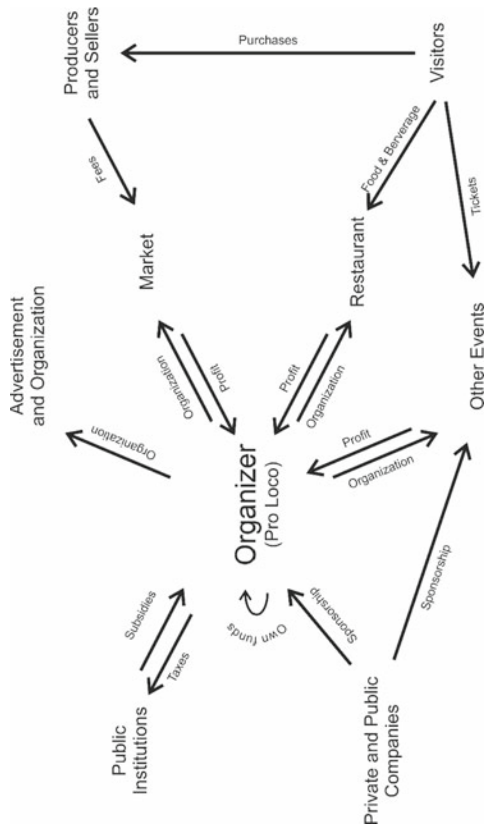

Fig. 5.2 Model of economic structure of a *sagra* (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2020])

Other events include the other events of a *sagra*, such as gastronomic competitions (e.g. the cake contest), art exhibitions and concerts.

The organizer gathers the economic resources needed for the organization of the activities from sponsorships and subsidies as well as from personal investment. In the case of Sant'Ambrogio, local food companies provided most of the sponsorships. There were no public subsidies. Rather, the municipality supported the initiatives by bestowing its patronage (it. *patrocinio*), waiving the taxes the Pro Loco would have had to pay to the municipality.

The organizer uses the resources for the organization of the event and its marketing. The main source of income in the case of Sant'Ambrogio is the restaurant. With members of the Pro Loco working voluntarily to cook and serve the guests, the organizers estimated the net margin for the Pro Loco corresponded to more than half the selling price of a meal. The profit finances all the activities of the Pro Loco during the year, from the organization of new festivals and events to activities and investments for the community.

In the case of Sant'Ambrogio, all other events were free. However, the organizers can ticket the entrance to events, such as concerts or art exhibitions, to generate further profit. Similarly, the organizer can request fees from the sellers who want to join the market.

Considering the structure of the *sagra*, the organizer is not just the centre of the economy of the festival, but also the main interface that creates a direct economic impact on the community. However, the largest impact of an event is indirect, in that it lies in its capacity to attract tourists, and thus, generate market possibilities for local shops, restaurants, hotels and producers.

In fact, as the researches of Giuseppe Attanasi highlights, the indirect impact may be very relevant. In the case of the 2017 edition of the Toma cheese festival in Usseglio, a five-day event that attracted over 27,000 visitors to a community of 200 inhabitants, the direct economic impact (Attanasi & Poli, 2017) was 86,670 euros (which includes the revenues of the restaurant and the events of the festival) while the indirect impact was 69,336 euros (which includes the purchases made from local shops and producers, as well as the amount spent on accommodation and meals outside the festival restaurant). Even bigger was the impact of the Bell

Pepper Festival of Carmagnola in 2016 (Attanasi & Rotondi, 2016), a ten-day event that attracted 250,000 visitors to the city of Carmagnola. The direct impact was 1,333,718 euros, while the indirect impact was 2,159,804 euros.

Stimulating Commerce

These figures suggest the role of the festivals in supporting the economy of community. On a different level, the festival provides an opportunity for local commerce. The forms of this contribution have evolved over time through a long sociocultural history strongly connected with the positive structure of the local economy that is mirrored in the very etymology of the word that is mostly used to describe the festivals: *sagra* (Fontefrancesco, 2018).

"*Sagra*", or "*Sacra*", is the name Italians use to refer to most rural food festivals. It derives from the Latin *sacra*, sacred, and since the fourteenth century (Battaglia, 1961) it has been used to denote the festivities associated with the consecration of a church and its commemoration. The meaning of the word expanded per antiphrasis over the centuries and has become the term used to refer to all the main festivities celebrated in rural communities.

Confraternities and youth associations (Grimaldi, 1995), with the endorsement of the community's civil and religious authorities (Testa, 2014), organized *sagre* for celebrating religious festivities, such as Saint Protector's Day or one of the festivities linked with the cult of the Virgin Mary (such as the Assumption, on the 15th of August). They were part of the religious life of the community, but also marked the process of agricultural activities, celebrating the outcome of the harvest (Grimaldi, 1993). During these events, markets were set up; an exceptional event in a context in which markets were rare in the countryside, being organized few times a year (Cipolla, 1974; Di Francesco, 2013; Fontefrancesco, 2018; Grimaldi, 1993; Le Goff, 1988). They were particularly important for the economic life of the community. They represented one of the few opportunities, during the year, for the community to open their household economy (Gudeman, 2005) based on subsistence farming (Bravo,

2013; Federico & Malanima, 2004) to exchanges with people and traders from other, sometimes distant communities.

Figure 5.3 visualizes this role within the context of the community's economy. In order to explain the role of *sagre*, the figure distinguishes between three different economic spheres: the everyday life of the community, the festival, and the space outside the community. They are distinct spheres through which the economic activities of a farmer develop, moving from an everyday dimension in which exchanges are limited to within the community. The festival and its market provide new opportunities for farmers who can sell their products to visitors and in particular traders coming to the event. The traders will be, then, the people that will take the products outside the community to cities, new processors and consumers.

Sagre were important moments in which rural communities opened their mainly subsistence economy to the outside. Food might play a central ritual role, in so much as leading to the association of a festival with a particular product (Di Francesco, 2016); however, tourism was not a dimension of these events.

Modern tourism developed only in the nineteenth century in Italy (Berrino, 2011), and until post-World War I mostly focused on the bigger and historical cities, spas and only few natural places, such as the main lakes and sea coasts (Berrino, 2014). It is only in the 1930s that tourism became a fundamental element in the organization of food festivals. In this respect, one of the main examples that marks the touristification (del Romero Renau, 2018, p. 1) of the local food festival can be found in the invention of the Grape Harvest Festival in 1930.

The "Sagra dell'Uva" or "Festa dell'Uva" (hereafter Grape Harvest Festival) is a gastronomic festival (Fontefrancesco, 2014) held across the country. It is a public tourism event organized, for the most part, in rural communities and run by local non-profit organizations, such as the Pro loco, aimed at promoting local grape and wine production. Most grape harvest festivals share, consistently across the country, a number of common features, such as a float parade, traditional ballroom dancing, and market stands to promote and sell local wines and grapes (Bianchi, 1999; Fontefrancesco, 2018); a legacy of the original model promoted in Italy in the 1930s under the Fascist regime.

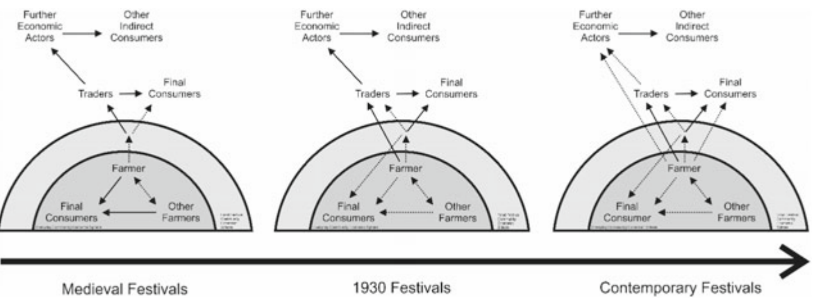

Fig. 5.3 Transformation of the economic impact of the festival across the three models (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2020])

The "First National Day of the Grape Harvest Festival" was celebrated on the 28th of September 1930 (Cavazza, 1997, pp. 122–125), turning the initiative of Arturo Marescalchi, the then under-secretary of agriculture, into a reality. In fact, he wanted to find an effective way to boost grape and wine sales nationwide through an extensive schedule of festivals centred on grapes and wine. Before this celebration was made official, Fascism had already promoted and advertised single-themed festivals, centred on specific crop production, such as strawberries, wheat and grapes. These proved to be effective tools to relaunch local economies (Cavazza, 1997).

From 1930 onwards, based on these first experiences, the Fascist regime enforced a vast national program of grape harvest festivals in order to revive the wine growing and producing sector that suffered from the recession of the entire national viniculture market. These festivals had to be organized by local committees and had to conform to certain criteria: provide a contest for "the best offer of grape sales" and set up a parade with people dressed up as traditional peasants and decorated festival floats, which represented themes linked to wine growing and agricultural life. The archive of the Luce Institute possesses several video accounts of some of the first grape harvest festivals (https://www.archivioluce.com/). The model of the Grape Harvest Festival became very popular and widespread across the whole of Italy, triggering a deep transformation in the way local, rural communities perceived their wine production, including its economic and tourism potential. It also radically affected the way in which local communities communicated and promoted their production, creating a standard that was continued throughout Italy after the Second World War and the fall of Fascism in the post-war period, and beyond to the present day. Indeed, after almost eighty years, some of the grape harvest festivals created during the Fascist period continue to take place every year (Di Francesco, 2016; Fontefrancesco, 2014).

As Fig. 5.3 illustrates, grape harvest festivals introduced, at the national level, a new model of relationships and exchanges. In a country where the agricultural economy was still largely based on subsistence, although moving towards full integration in the market (Farolfi & Fornasari, 2011), the festivals were a platform for tourism experimentation. In this context, the food festival turned into an initiative able

to strengthen local consumption, as well as to provide a new opportunity for local producers to sell their products to interested urban visitors. Contemporary food festivals further developed this model, as the case of Sant'Ambrogio shows.

In the case of contemporary rural communities, the festival is not the first outlet for local enterprises. Sale on the local market is consistent but overall marginal. Their economy is based on daily work conducted with traders and other businesses, as well as the sale of their products to consumers during their visits to establishments or online. A festival, however, represents a further opportunity for intensifying contact with final consumers and revitalizing local commerce, as illustrated in Figs. 5.2 and 5.3.

In the case of Sant'Ambrogio, the organizers welcomed over a thousand visitors to the festival and a few hundred members of the community directly involved in its organization. "*The event was able to animate our community and allowed it to be experienced by a wide public of potentially new visitors coming from two regions*", the president of the Pro Loco explains after the event. Moreover, the event was able to provide about twenty local food producers and farmers a positive outlet for their products. "*It was a positive day. Many people visited our stalls and purchased our [food]. I hope some of them will come back to Sant'Ambrogio and visit our farms*." While aiming to boost touristic attractiveness ("*Today, if we consider the history of Sant'Ambrogio, and the characteristics of the community, the only possibility for economic development passes through tourism. We are a place on the side of the road that goes to Liguria. If we learn to promote our landscape, and our agricultural production, we can have the chance that someone stops by, buys here, and invests here. The festival is just an attempt to move in this direction*", the Pro Loco president explains), the festival "*create[s] an opportunity for our commerce and economy by promoting consumption by activating both local producers and families through the valorisation of a feature of our food tradition of which we are very fond*", as the president of the Pro Loco explained at the inauguration.

It achieves this objective following a twofold path like the one with which the Grape Harvest Festival experimented. First of all, it is able to activate the community, also creating for the local population an opportunity to taste and buy products. Moreover, contact with tourists creates

a privileged opportunity for enhancing exposure to final consumers, who come to the festival and try the products. This first contact, which commonly ends up in a purchase, provides the opportunity of creating a more stable relationship with a consumer that may be interested in coming back to Sant'Ambrogio to buy its products or in ordering products from home. In the light of this, tourism represents an opportunity for local producers to extend their reach and potential public and, therefore, a way for the community to attract external, fresh resources and redistribute them by supporting the commercialization of products that are mostly locally rooted. For this reason, scholars, such as Santini et al. (2013), Su (2015) and Privitera et al. (2018), have indicated the necessity for food festivals to promote foods which are part of the local gastronomic tradition. However, this may not be enough to obtain the best results.

The Tricky Path of Promoting Local Gastronomy

Linking a food festival with products from local traditions is a common practice of many initiatives in Italy, such as the one in Mezzago and Oltrepasso, as well as Ascoli Piceno, Fabriano, Marino (Di Francesco, 2016) and Perugia (Chirieleison, Montrone, & Scrucca, 2013), and abroad, from Iowa (Çela, Knowles-Lankford, & Lankford, 2007) to Lanzarote (Duarte Alonso, 2014) to Fundão (Baptista Alves, 2010). From a touristic perspective, this is a way to increase destination attractiveness. It is commonly suggested to base the offer of the entire event on traditional products; however, this may not be enough to boost the local economy.

The festival of Sant'Ambrogio offers two examples that shed light on the actual features a gastronomic product should have in order to maximize its impact on the local economy: tajarin, the key dish of the festival restaurant, and hazelnuts, promoted through a cake competition.

On the menu of the festival, tajarin has a prominent place. This dish is a Piedmontese regional variant of a wider culinary tradition spread across the Po River valley involving egg noodles (Serventi & Sabban,

2000). They are square cut spaghetti-like egg pasta with a porous texture that allows sauce to adhere well. They are generally around 30 cm long and made with water, flour and eggs, in variable quantities according to custom, taste and family creativity. They are commonly served with melted butter and sage, tomato sauce, or a sauce made with roast or braised meat, such as beef, pork or game. This kind of pasta is common all across the southern part of Piedmont and is produced with a mix of industrial and domestic methods. Thus, this kind of pasta is characterized by a social sphere of uses, rhetorical and complex dynamics that exceed the limited borders of a single community and involves a large area wherein tajarin attests to its strong embeddedness, from a historical point of view but also from the economic viewpoint of consumption practices of this product.

Commonly, in the individual or family diet, the consumption of tajarin is popular and frequent but not daily, and it is perceived as a gastronomic symbol of celebration (Fontefrancesco, 2020). Due to this particular cultural role, this kind of pasta is very often present on food festival menus, as visitors appreciated it. This is also the reason why, in Sant'Ambrogio, the Pro Loco introduced this product, having good success in its sale.

> *"It is the main first course. People love it. It is part of our tradition. In particular, the rabbit sauce comes directly from the peasant tradition of having rabbit on farms and using them as fresh meat on Friday. People use the leftovers of the meal, the sauce and the remaining meat for making the sauce. It is like a lighter Bolognese sauce without tomato. In this way they had a delicious sauce for the tajarin for Sunday lunch. Therefore we decided to have it on the menu,"* the Pro Loco president pointed out.

All considered, in the foodscape of Sant'Ambrogio, as well as in Piedmont in general, tajarin is an example of the local gastronomy, being part of the culinary history of the place, and its economic cycle of production and sale being completed within the small space of a village or a valley. In the eyes of visitors and organizers, therefore, it is the quintessential example of a local and embedded product that a festival should offer and

promote. However, the perception of typicality encloses the product in a black box (Latour, 1996). As Latour explains:

> "*When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become.*"

In front of the sense of embeddedness that a product, such as tajarin, elicits, little attention is given to the wider network of exchanges that underpins the product, in particular its ingredients. Similar to what happens with other traditional dishes (Fontefrancesco, 2020), the pasta of Sant'Ambrogio is a blend (Ingold, 2015) of wheat flour coming from Ukraine, eggs, water, vegetables and meat coming from different parts of Piedmont and Liguria, salt coming from the South of Italy, and spices coming from South Asia, such as black pepper.

Examining and explaining business strategies needed to maximize the profit of an enterprise, Micheal Porter (1985) paid close attention to the linking of the various steps of production of goods, and their position in the company and in the territory. Porter's model of the value chain offers a base which still stimulates a more precise analysis of the real spread and localization of the production network, because for each step of the production chain resources are distributed in specific surroundings. In the value chain of Sant'Ambrogio, we can distinguish three main steps: ingredient production, manufacturing and product sales. While selling involves the community, the other two steps are distributed across a larger area which encompasses transnational and transregional exchange, reducing the actual economic impact of the festival on the local community. Thus, to be part of the local cuisine is not enough to be ipso facto a factor of local growth. This aspect can respond to the intangible expectations of consumers and reinforce the idea of community and territory, being a factor of territorial cohesion. However, in order to fully support the local economic milieu, it is not the cultural embeddedness of the festive food that counts but rather the localization of its entire life cycle (from production of the ingredients to sale and consumption).

In this respect, hazelnuts represent a good counterexample. Hazelnuts are part of an agro-industrial chain linked to the confectionery sector, with a worldwide production estimated to have been approximately 1,000,000 tons in 2015 (Fontefrancesco & Balduzzi, 2018). Italy is the second largest producer, after Turkey, with a yearly production of 125,000 tons, or 12% of the global total. Production is historically rooted in four regions: Campania (45,000 tons), Lazio (55,000 tons), Piedmont (20,000 tons) and Sicily (10,000 tons). Between 2006 and 2015, hazelnut production grew (from 69,685 hectares in 2006 to 79,951 in 2015), especially in Piedmont (+41% extension, +70% production) and in particular in the province of Alessandria (+515% in extension; +565% in production) (Pansecchi, 2018). This success is closely linked to its local hazelnut variety, the *Tonda Gentile del Piemonte*, which is certified with the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) seal (https://www.nocciolapiemonte.it/). Its fruit is round, easy to peel, with a high yield (around 50% of the gross weight), a moderate shelf life and a delicate but marked taste that has made it the reference product in the field of pastry and chocolate. The most recent data show a remarkable growth in both production (from 4850 tons in 2016 to 6186 in 2017) and revenue (17 million euros in 2016 and further increased to 22 million in 2017) of *Nocciola del Piemonte* PGI (Qualivita, 2019, p. 28).

Sant'Ambrogio is in one of the key areas for the production of Nocciola del Piemonte PGI, a few dozen kilometres away from the main centre of hazelnut trade in Cortemilia (CN), where some of the most important hazelnut traders and shelling companies are located. Proximity to Cortemilia, as well as profitability, has promoted the spread of hazelnut cultivation in Sant'Ambrogio. Thus, as in many other parts of Southern Piedmont (Ires Piemonte, 2017, p. 14) many local farms have invested in hazelnut production and moved away from other, more conventional crops, such as wheat, corn and soy. However, this innovation did not transform the economic structure of a business. Giorgio, a farmer in his sixties, explains:

> "*With hazelnuts it is the same as it was with cereals. "This is not about seeds but grafted plants; however, it is always about buying from some seller in Cortemilia or elsewhere, then harvesting and selling the product to traders*

> *coming from Cortemilia, Acqui or other places… With corn and wheat it is the same story; always about buying in and selling out. There is very little that remains in Sant'Ambrogio.*"

The local farms specialized their activity in the production of the nuts. However, due to proximity to the shelling companies of Cortemilia, local farms did not invest in expanding their activity to carry out other phases of production, such as shelling and roasting. Giorgio points out:

> "*Actually, the traders come here for the fresh products. They do not want shelled or roasted nuts. If we start processing the nuts we would end up having tons of products but no buyers. That means further work, chasing possible clients among restaurants, pastry shops and confectionery firms. We are farmers, not traders, though.*"

Due to the business structure, on the day of the *sagra*, hazelnuts were not present in the market stands of the festival. Visitors were not able to find shelled and roasted nuts, as hazelnuts are commonly consumed in Italy. For most of the visitors this absence was a source of disappointment. Despite the explanation the producers at the stands provided, to the eyes of the tourists the lack of nuts created a dissonance between the message of the initiative, which prefigured a foodscape in which hazelnuts have a prominent role, and the commodity offered at the festivals and the cake contest that celebrated this local product. As one of the producers in the market comments:

> "*To give them some hazelnuts for their snacks I would have bought them elsewhere because we don't make them. Is it too much to ask them to understand the world is not how they imagine it?*"

Conclusion

This case again shows the nature of the touristic offer, shaped by mediation of the expectations of visitors and the hosting community (Skinner & Theodossopoulos, 2011). However, it also clearly highlights the limits that underpin the promotion of local gastronomy and, above all, the

fallacy of the hosting community's expectation that equates the promotion of local food with the certitude of a positive experience for visitors. The case of Sant'Ambrogio, however, is very useful in challenging a simplistic mantra that is repeated time and again in the literature, as well as in public debate, about the centrality of promoting products that are part of the local gastronomy and foodscape. Hazelnuts together with *tajarin* suggest that to be embedded in the locality is not enough, but rather it is crucial to look at the very structure of the value chain and the production process of the products. Both examples show that when these are not concentrated in the locality, resources are dissipated and the touristic experience diminishes. In this respect, both on the intangible level of affects, and the tangible one of commerce, the case study of Sant'Ambrogio suggests looking at the production specificities of local products, rather than just their embeddedness, in order to choose the food offered at the feast.

Despite this aspect, however, the case study points out the important role *sagre* play in terms of socio-economic development. They are actually devices the community employs to bolster their economy. Their contribution moves on different levels. First of all, being able to mobilize and create collaboration among different actors of the community, the events are able to create a solid base for the local economy. On this basis, the festival is able to produce a positive effect on local enterprise in particular enhancing the exposure and contact of local firms with final consumers. This contribution, thus, adds to the other positive effects that *sagre* have on rural communities in terms of socialization and territorialization, completing a comprehensive portrait of the reasons that make *sagre* a device for human development in the countryside of Italy.

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Conclusions: The Community Device

A Multipurpose Device

Rewinding the common thread that connects the chapters, we come back to the initial question about the motivations behind the spreading of *sagre* in Italy. This volume suggests looking at the unchecked process of rural marginalization that communities are experiencing across the country and to their attempts at countering this phenomenon. The research addressed this situation and asked an interpretive question: Should we view the proliferation of food festivals as the last masque before the Red Death comes, as in the famous short story by Edgar Alan Poe (Poe, 1938, pp. 269–273)? Or is it a sign of an incipient rural renaissance?

The research identified food festivals as devices used in order to counter the impact of marginalization. If *sagre* are devices, then the answer to our question lies in between the two extremes, swinging from one to the other on the basis of the success of the festivals in animating, involving and keeping together communities in the face of their progressive waning.

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M. F. Fontefrancesco, *Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53321-2

The book explores how these devices are created and enacted. The different case studies analysed in this volume, from San Rocco to Sant'Ambrogio, show how draw festivals develop becoming important part of the life of the communities where the participants construct and share ideas, affects and relationships. For this reason, food festivals are able to reinforce and extend the local social network while communities face population reduction and the weakening of social ties.

All the case studies, which the book analyses, exemplified this role. However, the cases of Lu and Sant'Ambrogio point out a primary implicit constraint on this function. To be effective as a socialization device, the community must participate, emotionally and practically, in the *sagra*. Thus, it is key to the everyday ordinary affects (Stewart, 2007) made of enthusiasm, hope, determination, curiosity and love that motivates the organizers and patrons of the event. This underpins an affective economy (Ahmed, 2004) that propels the *sagra* and makes the festival an intangible milestone for the community. However, as in the case of the feast dedicated to Our Lady of August in Lu, discussed in Chapter 3, in order to stir emotions and excite participation, the festival should correspond and adapt its practices and forms to the taste and needs of the time. Moreover, on the practical side, as the case of the Sant'Ambrogio *sagra* highlighted in Chapter 5, all the different actors that organize the event (i.e. public institutions, civil societies and economic actors) must be able to play their part and provide specific skills and resources needed for the event, maintaining a dynamic and fragile equilibrium made of individual expectations, eager anticipation of results in terms of public participation and sales, and the hope of a positive economic impact for the community.

Facing an everyday reality consisting of abandonment and ruination of the landscape, a *sagra* is a device able to reconstruct the local space. This process develops on two distinct levels. First of all, it affects the imagery of the community, crafting and narrating a new sense of place (Feld & Basso, 1996). This is a creative process through which local communities draw on their past and their present, their history and memories as well as their current customs and tastes, and weave a new narration of the community and its surroundings. In this process, as the cases of Oltrepasso and Mezzago attested to in Chapter 4, the identification of a

"typical" food product, embedded in the community, is functional and, at the same time, an index (Short, 2007) of this process, while the *sagra* is the device that affirms this new narration of the local and legitimizes it through public participation. Insofar as the new understanding celebrated by the *sagra* is shared by the members of the community and becomes the lens through which the local space is viewed, the process of reterritorialization, the festival triggers, moves from the level of the imaginary to one of factuality, creating the conditions for changing the very use of the surroundings. In this respect, the case of the pink asparagus of Mezzago, discussed in Chapter 4, well illustrates this process and the role of the *sagra* in supporting a change in town urban planning in terms of the preservation of the rural landscape, as well as in fostering the launch of new asparagus production in the municipality.

The case of Mezzago, therefore, also highlights the economic role that a *sagra* can play in a community. However, as in the case of Sant'Ambrogio discussed in Chapter 5, this role is not a linear one. The brief historical analysis presented here suggests that the role of *sagre* has changed over time, from being the key moment of the local market economy of a rural community, otherwise based mostly on a household economy, to just an interesting opportunity for intensifying the exposure of local producers, who are embedded in a wider market economy, to the final consumers. Rather than just in sales during the festival, the economic importance of a *sagra* can be found in supporting the creation of collaboration among all the social and economic actors of a community and in increasing the visibility and intangible value of local products. However, the actual economic impact may vary depending on the actual value and production chain of these products.

Overall, *sagre* represent multipurpose devices able to empower communities in face of the challenges of everyday life. This role does not depend upon the historicity of either the event or the festive food, but rather on the level of participation and involvement of the community.

From Valuable to Indispensable

These results are useful for viewing and rethinking the current public debate about Italian *sagre*. As mentioned in the introduction of this volume, scholars as well as grass-roots associations, public bodies and local producers have woven a discourse that links the value of the festival to a keyword (Williams, 1983), which is "authenticity". In so doing, the debate establishes a system of classification able to separate and distinguish true and false (Paolini et al., 2010), as well as low-quality and high-quality, *sagre* (Corti, 2014) festivals. This classification is intended to be useful for helping tourists to choose what *sagra* to attend. Where a value statement reveals the system of values that underpin it, it appears that the recognition of authenticity is bound to the persistence of the festival over time and space. Time and space are encapsulated in the recognition of value measured in the number of editions of a festival, which is praise for continuation over time, and in the celebration of local gastronomy and local food products, which is the insistence on local production. In this hierarchy of values, one can observe the continuation of an ethos shared by Italian traditional peasant communities that Piercarlo Grimaldi (1993) suggests is based on limited mobility and a pervasive sense of circular temporality. Even more than that, the system of classification expresses the same worldview that Maurizio Bettini (2012) suggests underpins the metaphor of "roots" often used in public debate in order to construct a specific, genealogical link between the present and the past. This is based on the celebration of the value of linear descendance, linking the idea of purity with one of autochthony and forgetting the actual importance that change, exchange and unpredictability had in shaping the history of a community. If danger is what is out of place, as Mary Douglas (1966) explained, in this perspective everything that is new and based on cultural hybridization appears worrisome or worthless. As such, new festivals and festivals based on gastronomic heterotopia appear to be meaningless and despicable, as the Federazione Italiana Pubblici Esercizi (Italian Federation of Commercial Enterprises) recently remarked (Pascale, 2019).

This book, however, suggests another key of interpretation. Embracing the challenge represented by the ongoing transformation that communities are facing, the volume suggests that the value of a *sagra* lies not in its philological search of a truth, but rather in its ability to activate a community, to establish new relationships within the borders of the village and with the vast outside world: this is what makes a *sagra* indispensable in face of rural marginalization and its consequences.

The Power of Food

Food is the centrepiece of the *sagre* and its quality is at the centre of public debate. In particular, this attention hinges on the exaltation of authenticity and culinary embeddedness. Thus, the recognition of value is bound to the metaphor of "roots" and local rootedness. The ethnographies of the different localities that this book has explored indicate, however, limits to this perspective.

For example, in terms of actual economic impact than the promotion of dishes from local traditions and the production of goods by a community, as in the case of *tajarin* and hazelnuts of Sant'Ambrogio, the research suggests moving away from a desperate search of a philological ethnic authenticity and instead focusing on the actual structure of the production and value chain of the products and dishes used in the *sagra*. It is common knowledge that, as Michael Porter (1985) discusses, an economic cycle augments its efficacy from the reduction of its value chain and boosts its regional impact by localizing its production chain. This principle should be pursued by the community in organizing the food festival to increase the positive economic effect of the *sagra*. This does not mean neglecting local gastronomic traditions, tastes and foodways, but rather being able to perceive the actual opportunities local food production offers and proactively embrace them. The case of Mezzago shows that a festival and a community can thrive when the *sagra* is based on short value and production chains. Moreover, it also points out that the festival can effectively sustain, promote, and expand local production and, in so doing, reinforce a virtuous circle that links the community, local farming and food production, and the festival. This process builds

an entirely new economy shaping the landscape and creating a gastronomic typicality which is fully embedded in the local milieu. In the case of Mezzago, the process was based on a product that was part of the history of the place; however, as the case of the *Fasolà* of Oltrepasso testifies, it can also focus on invented traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), as well as on exotic products. Overall, what the two cases clearly highlight is the importance of food creativity in supporting this process by combining different elements from different cuisines and creating new gastronomic products that substantiate the festival and make it into a unique attraction for local communities as well as for tourists.

The role of food goes far beyond its economic aspect. As the festivals of San Rocco and Castellino, as well as the one mentioned earlier, show, the design and preparation of a *sagra* activate the community. Curiosity, pleasure and interest in food animate the community and support it in its process of rethinking and revitalizingthe locale. It is not food historicity that matters, in this respect, but rather the capacity of the object to match the expectations of the community and the festival's patrons. Thus, even a heterotopic product, such as the *trofie* of Castellino, can make the festival a time of local regeneration. Considering this result, and in the light of the history of the Grape Harvest Festival of Lu, despite the strength of the rhetoric concerning the value of traditions, a community should resist the temptation to crystallize the form of the festival and its gastronomic offer in an attempt to preserve its authenticity. Rather, the community should be open to innovation in order to keep the flame of local interest alive and maintain the festival at the centre of the ordinary affects that move the community and regenerate it. This is to make a *sagra* into a community device.

To Make Community

In 2019, the Pink Asparagus Festival closed on Friday the 24th of May. On Saturday night, all the volunteersof the Pro Loco gathered together for a closing dinner (Photo A.1). It was a unique dinner, with no asparagus on the menu, only couscous and tagine. The members of the Associazione Assalam, an Islamic cultural association based in Mezzago

Photo A.1 Composition of moments of the Pink Asparagus Festival closing dinner (*Credit* Pro Loco Mezzago [2019])

that brings together migrants from different Muslim countries, mostly from North Africa, prepared the dinner. The dinner was offered as sign of appreciation to the Pro Loco for its effort to involve migrant families in the life of the community, as Rachid, the leader of the association, explained in his opening speech. Their collaboration had also been visible during the *sagra*, in which members of Assalam volunteered to serve at the restaurant and help with various events. When Rachid finished his speech, a Pro Locovolunteer looked at me, she was almost crying:

> "*You see, this is the power of our festival. It makes our community. It makes people from all around the world be part of our community; to be Mezzago!*"

I close this book with this last ethnographic vignette. It remembers how the rural communities of Italy are facing different challenges, from abandonment and impoverishment to cultural diversification and economic transition. In any case, *sagre* are devices able to support communities and, insofar as they are meant to be inclusive and open, reinforce and expand the community, revealing a new, positive future. Food festivals can provide this boost.

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Post-Scriptum: *Sagre* After COVID-19

What Future for the *Sagre*?

I finished this volume in the winter of 2020, when COVID-19 appeared something remote; something that, like SARS in 2003 (Kleinman & Watson, 2006), would never directly influence Italy and its communities. I was wrong. COVID-19 reached the country and in late February the first Italian hotbed was detected. It was just the beginning of a social, medical and economic crisis that has since engulfed Italy and Europe. This post-scriptum completes the volume, looking at what scenarios the COVID-19 pandemic has opened for the future of Italian *sagre*.

At the moment, nobody knows whether the impact of the pandemic will last another six months, one year or more. Too many voices and opinions populate the debate. In any case, spring and summer 2020 will be seasons without *sagre*.

On the 4th of May, the off-peak period, the so-called COVID-19 Phase 2, started. Phase 2 should be a slow return to normality, to life pre-crisis. During Phase 2, the severe prohibitions that had been enforced since the beginning of March have been eased and, eventually, will be

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M. F. Fontefrancesco, *Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53321-2

suspended. Despite the loosening restrictions, the festivals that should have taken place in May and June have already been cancelled. This is the case, for example, for the 2020 Pink Asparagus Festival in Mezzago. The events scheduled for late summer, such as the Trofie Festival in Castellino or the one in San Rocco, are also at risk of being cancelled or undergoing serious changes.

The Italian government's health and safety measures for the post-peak period hinge on two main pillars: the use of personal protective equipment and the implementation of social distancing in all aspects of everyday life: from public transportation to the workplace and, of course, public events. At the moment (beginning of May), the national and regional governments have not yet fixed the distance required for social distancing, but it is possible that it will be at least one metre. The implementation of this policy will deeply affect how *sagre* can be organized and celebrated. The current *"Linea guida per l'individuazione delle misure di contenimento del rischio in manifestazioni pubbliche con peculiari condizioni di criticità"* (guidelines for risk reduction in high risk public events), published 18 July 2018, fixes the maximum crowd density at 2 people per square metre. The implementation of one-metre social distancing would lower this density to 0.34. This precautionary measure will clearly transform the actual possibilities for using the spaces that Pro Loco and municipalities have used for years. Moreover, in a moment when the debate about what kind of personal protective equipment should be implemented in restaurants (e.g. high Plexiglas screens to separate people at the same table, one-person tables, a ban on air-conditioning) is still ongoing, it is difficult for local associations and professionals to envision what kinds of actions to take in order to organize a festival. This point has been recently raised by professionals, such as Canzio Marcello Orlando, manager of some of the largest food festivals in Italy, among which the Cous Cous Fest in San Vito lo Capo and Girotonno in Carloforte (Garibaldi, 2020).

A Matter of Space, Crowd and Economy

Thus, there will be no festivals in Italy, or in other countries around the world, this summer. What will this absence do? One possible answer comes from an examination of the very spatiality of *sagre*, the ways in which people use and experience space during the festivals (Kobayashi, 2017). Following a long tradition within anthropology (Edwards, 1992), photos provide visual evidence for understanding spatiality. Here, I rely on the works of Mario Marchesini, a professional photographer I collaborated with throughout the writing of this volume (Fontefrancesco, 2018d). The photos (from B.1 to B.11) depict scenes from the festival of Budrio (BO), the city where he lives.

Marchesini took the photos in 2019, during the AGRIBU 2019 Festival, Budrio's main *sagra*. It was the fiftieth edition of the "Festa della Campagna", or Countryside Festival, celebrated in the city every year since 1969. The *sagra* celebrates the rural past of the community and its gastronomy, through a vast programme of activities, including gastronomic events, such as the restaurant and the food market, as well as religious and cultural initiatives: an array of activities characteristic to many *sagre* (Fontefrancesco, 2018a).

The photos are a vernacular portrait of the events (McCarroll & Barrett, 2008). They capture the dimension of the everyday life of the festival. In so doing, they show how a festival transforms the geography of the community during the days of the event, imposing new uses to its places: squares normally used as parking lots turn into field restaurants, churches into exhibition centres, roadways into marketplaces. Hence, a *sagra* is an exercise of an alternative, almost subversive, use of space that blurs the distinctions between public and private, between religious and secular. Following Max Harris (2003), these forms of festivities also foster a spatial transformation that is functional to the life of the community because they renegotiate the relations between the members, their environment and their values and beliefs. The presence and experience of the crowd are crucial to this process. Following Paolo Apolito (2014), the sense of a festival is deeply connected to physical contact, proximity, being pushed and pushing in return. This commotion conveys the sense of celebration, of exceptionality, of participation in the community

Photo B.1 Getting into the restaurant (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

Photo B.2 Inside the restaurant (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

Photo B.3 In the kitchen (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

Photo B.4 The street market (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

Photo B.5 The street market (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

Photo B.6 Moments of the festival: selling local food products (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

Photo B.7 Moments of the festival: other stands (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

Photo B.8 Moments of the festival: a display of a traditional loom (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

Photo B.9 Moments of the festival: a demonstration of how to make Parmigiano cheese (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

Photo B.10 Moments of the festival: art exhibition Tourism exhibitions (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

Photo B.11 Moments of the festival: the blessing of the harvest (*Credit* Mario Marchesini [2019])

and, above all, of embodiment of the sense of belonging to the community. When the crowd is missing, this process interrupts and the feast is depowered.

The photos highlight a further and fundamental aspect of *sagre*. They are moment of economic activity. The festivals are about consumption and trade and support a vast economic network made of different actors: visitors, farmers, local producers, merchants, associations and public institutions. The event both directly and indirectly attracts economic resources to a community otherwise precluded. The impossibility of celebrating *sagre* means depriving the communities and their economies of these supplementary resources.

Facing Empty Squares

The COVID-19 pandemic, thus, leaves empty squares behind. It leaves gaps in the ritualcalendar of the communities and a hiatus in the *tempo* of their life. Facing the emptysquares, the fragility of a grass-roots strategy aimed at easing the impact of rural marginalization becomes clear. Consequentially, the need for complementary economic and political initiatives to support the communities, particularly in this moment of uncertainty, becomes even clearer.

If the suspension will be limited to just one year, the impact will be mainly economic and caused by the impossibility for the community at large to rely on the resources the *sagre* used to produce. However, those who have already been undermined by the pandemic will be those to pay the greatest price (Petrei, 2020): small producers, restaurateurs, hotel owners and shop keepers who benefit from tourism. They are the first ones who ought to receive assistance from initiatives to support the rural community.

In conclusion, *sagre* are a fundamental opportunity for cultural, economic and social development for rural communities and a bridge between rural and urban worlds. The COVID-19 pandemic left the bridge in ruin. The empty squares are, thus, a call for reconstruction and a call to commit public and private efforts to putting an end to the uncertainties of the moment. If empty spaces can be easily filled, this

is the moment to invite reflection on what old and new devices can be employed to achieve this goal. New research will be needed to explore what role *sagre* will play in the post-pandemic world and to support rural communities with new insights and tools for paving their way to a better future.

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M. F. Fontefrancesco, *Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy*,
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M. F. Fontefrancesco, *Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53321-2

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