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THE RESTORATION OF TRADITIONAL GASTRONOMY AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN CILENTO (ITALY)

1. The territory of Cilento

Cilento is a geographical territory at the southern extremity of the Salerno Gulf and delimited in the north by the Sele River, in the east by Vallo di Diano, in the south by the Policastro Gulf and in the west by the Tirreno Sea. Cilento is well known for its coastline from Agropoli to the mouth of the Bussento River and the best known resorts are "Marina di Camerota, Capo Palinuro, Marina di Ascea, S. Maria di Castellabate".

Since 1991, almost all the area has been protected by the institution of a national park. The National Park of Cilento e Vallo di Diano (181.048 hectares) is the second largest protected area in Italy. The size of the Park determines the simultaneous presence of different areas of great natural and environmental value and beautiful landscapes. There is also historical and cultural heritage of great worth. The following three quo-

tations reflect the most important issues for the development of the region, in which the park may play a crucial role.

"In the Cilento territory the countryside is ordered as semi-ring around the mountains and valleys and, depending on the municipality, constitutes a strong link between human settlement, links that we always find in historical territories and that preserve, as a physical limit, inalterable individuality [Gambardella, 2003, 122]."

"Landscape, rich in environmental and cultural values, is the expression, in inland areas of strong integration between nature, architecture and environmental protection, in the structure of cultivation, in the organisation of routes, in the system of settlement, traditions. In these areas, even in presence of deterioration caused by a lack of maintenance, the conservation of the identity of towns and villages is assured by limitations on the level of transformation, in the absence of economic resources and opportunities for economic development. The coastline, on the contrary, is characterized by touristic development that has initiated processes of deep transformation, exploitation of the soil and resources and is very compromised in the conservation of its identity [Caterina, 2001, 283]."

"The formation of the park could be, for these settlements, a factor of active evaluation and instrument of management and dynamic conservation, through the utilization of the system of vincoli, governed by the law of environmental protection, resulting in new opportunities for the development of local economies [Caterina, 2001, 283]."

2. The agro-food heritage of Cilento.

A survey in the context of the Regional Centre of Competence BENECON

The inland areas of Campania, similarly to such areas in *Cilento* (the object of our survey) are characterised by the importance of agriculture in terms of employment, economics, production and revenue. We demonstrate this through the presentation of a recent survey we conducted in this area. This research was initiated in the context of our participation in BENECON, a Regional Centre of Competence, which was created some years ago with the purpose of realizing a network of expert teams.

In the last few years a project called 'Il Mulino Verde' (*the Green Mill*) has illustrated the opportunities for the protection, valorisation and safety of the cultural heritage of Cilento through a system of mills that represents a possible direction for a strategy of territorial development. The territory of Cilento was subdivided into 18 'Unità Ecogeometriche'

(‘Environmental and Landscape Units’), in which the integration between the restoration of mills and of the landscape is very easy. This study was the initial project of BENECON, a Centre of Competence for Cultural Assets, Ecology and Economy in the Campania Region.

The project has the following main purposes:

- 1) Promotion of economic development and creation of employment;
- 2) Creation of ‘green companies’ in different fields: building, handicrafts, agriculture and food, accomodation and catering etc.; linked to ‘green companies’ we have also highlighted the system of ‘green work’, which is a comprehensive system of new environmental careers;
- 3) Creation of a *Quality Handbook* and a brand of quality for green companies;
- 4) Harmonising economics and ecology as instruments of the valorisation of cultural and environmental assets;
- 5) Valorisation of local culture as an instrument for local development.

Studies during the first three years of the project have been carried out in the geographical Units of Calore Valley, Mount Stella, and Upper Alento (Figure 1).

The Operative Unit ‘Biology and Ecology for the Preservation of the Environment’ has already realised two goals:

- 1) Completion of a data-base on environmental, architectural, folklore, business and productive assets in the municipalities of the three units;
- 2) Models and methods of surveying organisational characteristics of local business (a model of a questionnaire on monitoring);
- 3) Analysis of a system of certification of environmental quality.

At present, the operative unit is working on the monitoring of environmentally-sound businesses (as BENECON calls them ‘green companies’) and organising this results of this research into a data-base. The unit is also working on the elaboration of models of environmental analysis used for the certification of quality of environmentally-sound businesses.

Our research on topics of III step BENECON Research has highlighted the prevalence of agriculture in the local economy. The agro-food industry in Cilento dominates other business sectors: building, tourism, services, handicrafts. Although we have not yet collected all the data in this field, we have already demonstrated the prevalence of agriculture over other economic sectors.

The general goal of the project is the creation of a system of green companies in the agro-food sector certified by the ‘BENECON brand’ (the implementation of a ‘BENECON’ brand is planned, which the Centre of Competence will use to certify the production processes and pro-

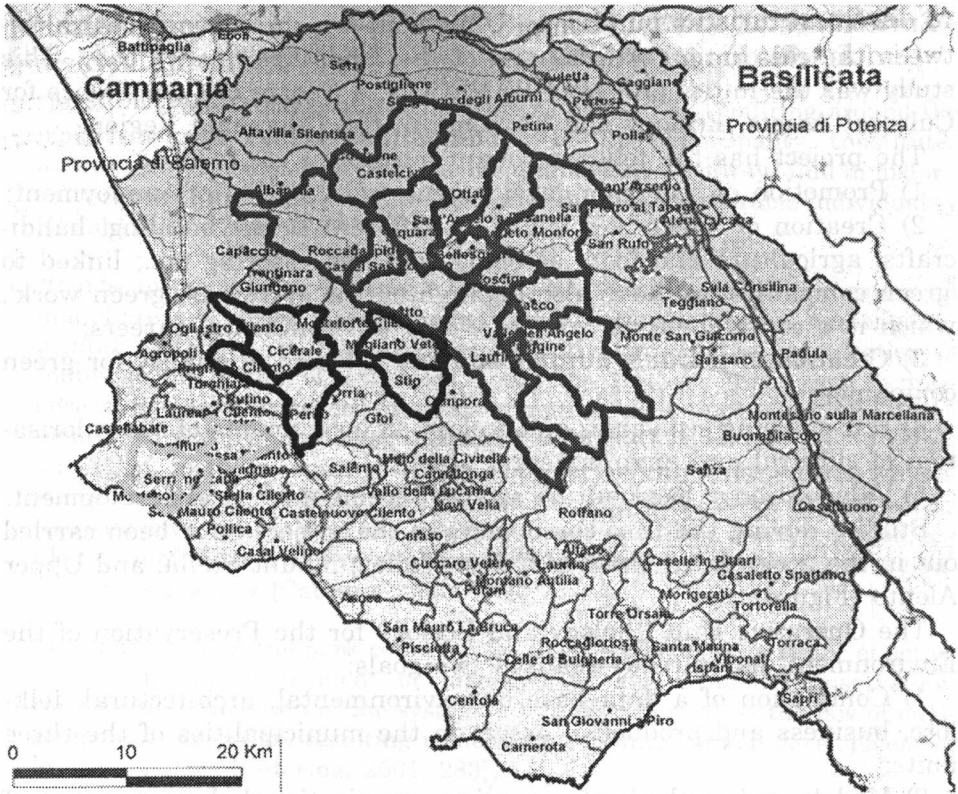


Fig. 1. The "Calore Valley", "Upper Alento" and "Mount Stella". The area highlighted in red is Unit 2 'the Calore Valley', in blue is Unit 4 'Upper Alento', in yellow is Unit 9 'Mount Stella'

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Celata, 2002.

duct quality of green companies). This brand could contribute to an increase in the competitiveness of agro-food businesses through the valorisation of quality and environmentally-sound products. Furthermore, from a regional marketing point of view, it could contribute to increased visibility of these companies on the local market in terms of revenue and economical prosperity.

"From this point of view, marketing is an element connecting different components of the supply system that find their expression in a collective brand, which is often is linked to the brands of various companies and the market [Antonelli, 2000, 54]."

The environmental goals of green companies that we have highlighted consist of two complementary aspects:

- The 'Charter of Quality';
- Environmentally friendly production.

The first is a general statement about the engagement of companies in the production of goods/services based on the principles and goals of quality. This document, derived from an analysis of strategic aims regarding the main elements and instruments of quality, demonstrates how we go from *Global Quality* towards *Environmental Quality*. The management models of Total Quality, when applied to territorial systems which are fragile from an environmental point of view, are not exhaustive and the present focus is on environmental quality as an instrument of environmental analysis and verification. Companies engage themselves in green methods of production due to the number of present and potential customers.

"In particular, agro-food companies are in the vanguard of a more caring and demanding customer, who is selective in his choices, less faithful to brands and products [Antonelli, 2000, 47]."

The second is the instrument applying the principles of environmental quality from the charter and define the conditions that companies need to fulfill to obtain the BENECON brand (conditions related to energy, waste management, vibrations and noise, dangerous emissions).

The brand BENECON may be granted only after verification that these conditions are met *i.e.* the production process conforms with the principles of Environmental Quality. Hence, the brand is intended to validate the *eco-value* of green agro-food companies. This innovative value (in addition to the traditional value to a company of revenue) represents competitive success in comparison with other companies.

This in itself leads to the affirmation that the quality of agro-food production is strictly linked to a regional vocation. The appreciation of the value of these products reduces the growing cultural distance between the place of production and the place of consumption.

The specificity of such a product could be seen as an opportunity, because the product/ territory link is very strong. However, at the same time agro-food heritage is insufficient for success if it is not accompanied by the wide availability of environmental tourism.

"The territory in which food has been produced has to have a high level of environmental quality, the same characteristics that are required in a territory that is a popular destination for tourists. So the union between eco-tourism and production of traditional food of high quality has the same starting point [De Iulio Vernillo Morrongiello Aloj 2003,79]."

"So, tourism protects, rewards and validates traditional food that the paroxysm of modern life has marginalised [Cantarelli, 2000,182]."

"Traditional products and gastronomy do not have a secondary role in territories with touristic potential, because they combine with other elements to stimulate curiosity and attention and thus have a crucial function of increasing demand [Cantarelli, 2000,182]."

3. Restoration of traditional gastronomy as an opportunity for environmental and cultural tourism in Cilento

The statements at the end of the last section are true when we consider an area which is socially and economically marginalised, such as Cilento, which implements a policy of integrated development, together with a strategy which takes advantage of the competitive advantages of the territory, combining accommodation, gastronomic resources and tourism to satisfy the trends in demand. Hence, in order to define a strategy for the widening the supply of tourism and to reach new targets, we have to consider local accommodation and gastronomic resources, together with the National Park and cultural assets, as having strong potential for the sustainable development of the Cilento region.

"The sustainable development of a territory is, in fact, the result of specific choices of environmental management, so it is becoming more and more necessary to establish an equilibrium between economic, ecological, cultural and social development [Aloj, 2000, 81]."

Such a strategy consists of overcoming the marginalisation of areas by intervention and policies which do not destroy the values and character of an area. Valorisation is based on material and non-material resources guaranteeing the economic mechanisms of sustainable development. Areas achieve sustainable development, due to their potential for development through strategies based on the sustainable exploitation of natural resources (air, water, soil, etc), cultural resources and on well developed models for organising productive agricultural activities.

4. The strategic role of communication on environmental issues for agro-food companies in Cilento

The next steps of the research project of the Regional Centre of Competence BENECON will try to focus attention on the strategic role for

green companies of communication on environmental issues. We try to explain this using the following diagram:

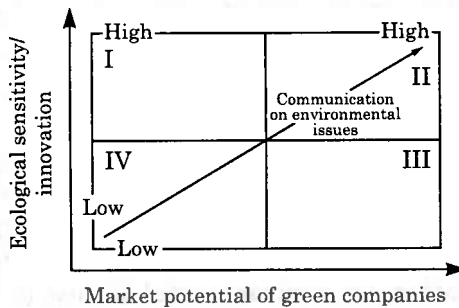


Fig. 2. Ecological sensitivity/innovation and the market potential of green companies: a new approach for green companies

Source: Own research on topics of III step BENECON Research.

When the market potential of green companies is low and ecological sensitivity/innovation is low (quadrant IV) a company is not interested in the environment and the problem of environmental impact is ignored. Hardly any company respects environmental law. When the market potential of green companies is low and ecological sensitivity/innovation is high (quadrant I) social engagement plays an important role for green companies. When the market potential of green companies is high, but ecological sensitivity/innovation is low (quadrant III), ecological business activity is very hard, because the market is potentially good, but it is difficult for a company to adapt to the demands of ecological production and could be overcome by competitors.

When both the market potential of green companies and ecological sensitivity/innovation are high (quadrant II) communication on environmental issues is part of an integrated strategy of a green company to achieve competitive success compared to direct and indirect competitors.

So, due to these considerations, our proposal for further research is the realisation of a *Handbook* in which there will be an iconographic collection of the traditional food products, material culture and handicrafts of Cilento. The handbook will not only be a presentation of traditional agro-food products, but represent an instrument of communication for all the services linked to eco-gastronomic tourism that represent a way of environmental tourism that underlines the value of the quality of these food products. The characteristics of such food are strongly linked to the area in which it is produced and this link does not make qualitative standardisation easy: so, while the trend of the tourism market is

heading towards globalisation, communication on environmental issues could open interesting perspectives for target markets in which culinary traditions, the environment and material culture represent strong points of an integrated, high quality supply of tourist services.

5. Conclusions

The valorisation of the eco-gastronomy of a territory through communication on environmental issues has to be considered from the point of view of environmental marketing and linked to the quality of food and services aimed at tourists. We propose a way of promoting the Cilento through communication on environmental issues (a handbook), which will make the gastronomy of the territory more visible, giving the area a renewed identity in a sustainable form. This could represent an integration of traditional instruments of managing the demand for tourism and also support for local governance by developing knowledge (of traditions, material culture, natural resources).

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