

From agriculture to rural development: the case of saffron (*Crocus Sativus*) in Umbria (Italy)

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Abstract: *Saffron cultivation was practiced in Umbria (Central Italy) several centuries ago, but since the XVII century it had slowly disappeared. Quite recently, during the '80s, the saffron has been rediscovered, thanks to the efforts of some individuals, university researchers, farmers' organizations, the agriculture development authority and some local administrations. Two producers' associations have been established in 2002 and 2003, in different areas of the region. The saffron, besides being processed and marketed with highly priced packaging, has generated an interesting case of multi-sector development, with links to cultural heritage, gastronomy and rural tourism. The two groups presently have 28 and 32 members, while several independent producers operate in other parts of the region. Some problems however persist and questions may arise about the future of this experience: survival or further development? Competition from other areas is growing and external markets demand lower prices. Finally, the paper also defines guidelines for similar experiences.*

Keywords: *Saffron, Umbria, Applied Research, Extension, Marketing, Agro-tourism*

Introduction

The profound crisis experienced by mainstream agriculture (Bevilacqua, 2002; Baker, 2006) during the last decades has led to the formulation of development hypothesis based on the re-introduction of some key concepts, such as farm diversification and rural development. Such concepts are as old as agriculture itself, but their retrieval and re-utilization reveal the tragedy of modern agricultural policies which have pushed entire farming systems and rural economies into the treadmill of simplification (Cochrane, 1958).

This happens in both developed and developing economies, since the same concepts can be found in the EU documents (De Filippis and Fugaro 2004) as well as in those of the World Bank (2007) and FAO (2002). The massive production of few commodities for the global market has been the goal of entire agri-food systems, including public research and extension services. The overall results have been at least contradictory: while the output of some commodities has increased enormously, biodiversity has fallen, large areas have been marginalized, millions of agricultural jobs have been lost, consumers are increasingly unsatisfied by what they find in the shelves of the supermarkets and search again for food “as it was once” or for new products.

Nowadays farm diversification and rural development are again “à la mode”, but these goals require new products (novelties) and coordinated efforts (Milone, 2009). To some extent, such high quality products are a sort of “public good” and their survival and success, as well as overuse and disappearance, can be explained with the same categories used to analyse other public goods. On the other hand, how can a novelty be created, reinvented *ex-novo* and how can it become a reality? Tradition and novelty, can they be combined? Such diversifications do not happen *spontaneously*. Some “traditional” novelties emerge, even explode in the market, while other products, potentially very interesting, do not experience the same evolution and may even be totally wiped out, when the last growers give up farming. Our hypothesis (Bariolle and Sylvander, 2002) was that individual private efforts are required, to start up the process and to keep it alive, while public intervention is needed to match the scarce resources which generally characterize the private operators of the primary sector.

The saffron in Umbria

Saffron (*Crocus sativus L.*) was well known since remote times and its relationship with love: Homer wrote that the bed of Jupiter and Juno was covered with crocus flowers; for the Greeks the saffron was the symbol of the unhappy love of the young Crocos for the nymph Smilax, while for the Romans the God Imeneus, protector of the wedding contract, wore a robe of saffron colour. Saffron stigmas were not only used for food recipes, but also as ingredients for medicines and for colouring textiles.

Saffron in Umbria was cultivated already several centuries ago, although it is impossible to know when it had been introduced. In a document of the Municipality of Perugia, dated 1279, its cultivation was allowed only to native peasants; in other ones, dated 1537 and 1539, trade norms and duties are defined, while the use of saffron as colouring material for textiles was also regulated. In 1510, a local author wrote a poem about its cultivation “De croci cultu” (On the cultivation of crocus). In those times, saffron was grown in several parts of the Italian peninsula (Giacché 2010). During the XVII Century the Italian production was almost totally replaced with imports from Spain. The reasons of such decline are not known; some explanations relate to untreatable pathologies or insects, and even to unfavourable trade conditions, due to the fact that in the XVII Century most Italy was under the Spanish Crown.

Saffron cultivation, harvesting and processing were and still are almost totally manual, and they require a great deal of attention, skills and care. The agricultural phase and the processing / packaging require up to 122 h/100 m². For this reason, considering the high cost of labour in Italy, only small producers, with family labour available at acceptable opportunity cost, are interested in this crop.

Materials and methods

This paper is based on the assumption that endogenous, bottom up development occurs when and where several concurring actors, both individuals and institutions, co-operate for a common purpose. On the other side, in a case like this one, the “common purpose” is not defined since the very beginning and – to some extent - it is the final result, the output, of a series of facts, events, inter-relationships, which largely happen by pure chance. The paper defines a diachronic institutional and stakeholder mapping, since it describes “the actors, resources, interest and institutions... trajectories, laws of motion, natural histories and accidents and contingencies..” (Dragos Aligica, 2006, page 86). An initial research, realized during the first semester 2005, has been updated with a second study, carried on during the first semester 2009. The first study (Novelli, 2006) was implemented (Creswell and Maietta, 2002) through a) the individualization of all persons who had been involved in the retrieval and revival of the saffron in Umbria; b) the individualization of the public agencies and non governmental organizations; c) separate interviews with all concerned parties; d) analysis of grey papers and documents about this second youth of saffron. The interviews were conducted with a semi-structured questionnaire. The interviews and their analysis, as well as the collected documentation, have allowed the reconstruction of the stories behind the renaissance of saffron in two areas of Umbria: Castiglione del Lago and Cascia, about 150 km apart, where two groups of producers have been formally established in 2002 and 2003. The second study, in 2009, has followed the same procedures, by interviewing again the main actors and visiting again the institutions involved in the various activities. The interactions between individuals, as well as those between individuals and institutions have been identified and their temporal sequence has been reconstructed (Figure 1).

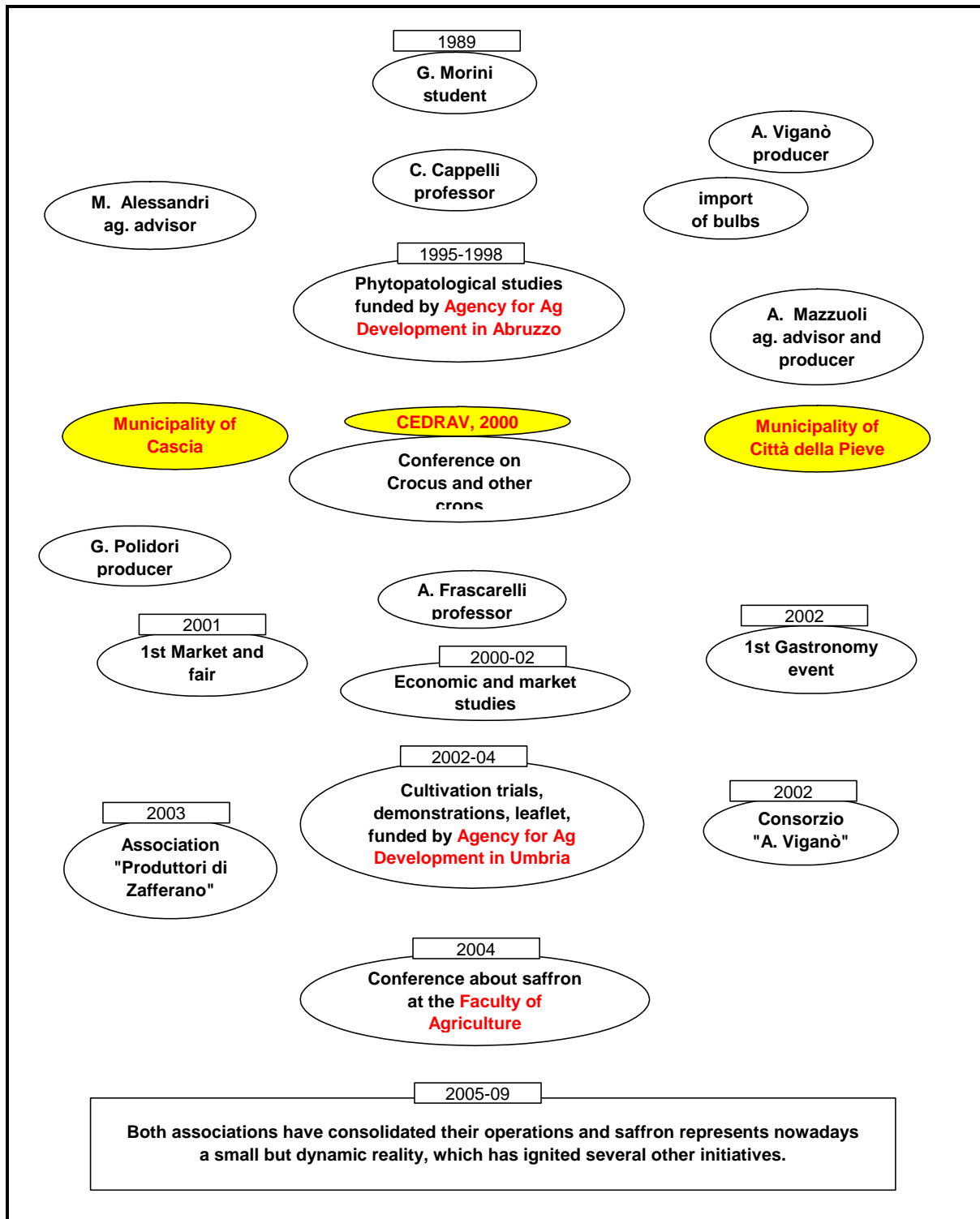


Figure 1. Diachronic design of individuals and institutions which have interacted for the reintroduction of saffron.

The people and the events

The re-introduction of saffron into Umbria is due to the late Alberto VIGANO', an agronomist and farmer, who knew that saffron had been grown in his area, long time ago, and he was curious to check its cultivability again. In the mid-80's Viganò imports some bulbs from Spain and grabs some cultivation guidelines from people in the only place where saffron was still cultivated: the highlands of Navelli, near L'Aquila, about 200 km south of Umbria.

For some years, this almost hobbyist activity is carried on in total loneliness, without any market ambitions, with the output used at home or given as a gift to friends. It is only after some years, with the colourful flowers attracting the curiosity of the neighbours, and with the rumours about the taste of the food prepared with this ingredient, that some of his fellow villagers ask for some bulbs and for his advice about the cultivation techniques, the harvesting procedures and how to store the stigmas.

About in the same period, without any relationship with Viganò, a student attending the Faculty of Agriculture in Perugia, proposes to develop his master dissertation about saffron in his native area, the highlands of Navelli (Morini, 1989). By doing so he stimulates the interest of a professor of plant pathology – Curgonio CAPPELLI –, who begins to study this plant, its cultivation, its diseases and parasites and still he is one of the main actors of the “saffron scene” in Italy. In those years, some trials are carried out by several researchers, financed by the Ministry of Agriculture, in other parts of Italy, and in 1989 an international conference is organized in L’Aquila. From 1988 to 1998, some lab trials are carried on by Cappelli, at the Faculty of Agriculture, while most field work takes place on the fields of a group of small producers, located in Navelli. These research activities are funded by the Authority for Agricultural Development of Abruzzo, one of the 20 Italian regions. Cappelli establishes a link with professor Renzo LANDI, at the Faculty of Agriculture of Florence, who has been studying saffron cultivation from several years, and still is considered one of the best experts.

In 1998, a young Confagricoltura (Large farmers’ union) advisor, Marco ALESSANDRI, based in Cascia, a small town on the Umbrian mountains, calls the professor for some information, because he believes that some of his farmer clients could be interested to try to cultivate the saffron. Thanks to the advice received, in 1999 he elaborates a research and extension project, submitted to the Department of Agriculture, which denies its support. Alessandri however links with the Confagricoltura local office in L’Aquila and organizes study visits to Abruzzo, for some willing-to-be producers from his area, who can finally meet other long time producers and have some friendly and fruitful exchange of ideas.

Five farmers buy the bulbs and begin to experiment the cultivation of this “new” crop. Data about vegetation cycle, labour requirements, are collected by each producer and summed up by Alessandri. One of these first innovators is Gianluca POLIDORI, a “neo rural”, moved from Roma to a small holding, owned by his family from generations, where he intends to develop a didactic farm, an olive oil museum, and small scale production of high value crops.

Stimulated by Cappelli and Alessandri, the Umbria’s Agency for Agricultural Development (ARUSIA) finally decides to allocate some resources for applied agronomic and economic research, to be implemented within the 2000-2006 rural development plan. Local, Roman and European bureaucracies unfortunately slow down the procedures and the agronomist in charge – Donatella MARRANI, can only begin to read, to meet with some producers and begins to learn something about saffron and its cultivation.

In 2000, Alessandri and the first saffron growers of his area elaborate a draft of the guidebook “Cultivation and processing guidelines for saffron”.

In this same year, thanks to personal efforts of the director of the local public library - Fulvio PORENA, the Municipality of Cascia organizes in October a national conference, in cooperation with the Centre for Documentation and Anthropological Research in Valnerina (CEDRAV), with university researchers, anthropologists and historians, about the feasibility of the reintroduction of saffron in the area. This meeting marks also the conclusion of a multi-annual research project carried out by a group of anthropologist of the University of Perugia, on the traditional activities on the Apennines. This event represents the convergence of historians, agronomists, economists and anthropologists. The grant funding the research comes from the National Research Council and allows also the printing of proceedings. The CEDRAV is directed by Luciano GIACCHE’ – a social scientist and activist, who promotes further research in the historical archives of the different municipalities. CEDRAV also collects documents about other minor crops, almost abandoned, typical of this mountain area of Umbria, such as *farr*, *cicerchia*, *roveja*, soft sheep cheeses, etc. and Giacché, who from several years scouts the ancient archives of the area, is eager to move from documentation and retrieval to action.

In 2001, Marrani at ARUSIA produces a first leaflet about the cultivation of saffron, which is distributed at Agriumbria, a major agricultural fair, taking place annually. In the next year, she produces the contents of a website about saffron and also supervises the production of a video, in cooperation with some producers in Cascia and in Città della Pieve.

In October 2001, the first Saffron Fair and Exhibition is organized in Cascia, by Porena and with the support of the Municipality. Just a few local producers can propose their saffron based products, but several other farmers attend, to sell other local products, from lentils to smoked ham, and cheeses.

Almost contemporarily, the Technological Agro-food Park – an entity strongly supported by the Regional Government of Umbria, begins a biannual research project entitled “Survey about the typical regional products which could potentially achieve EU recognition”, with saffron being one of the investigated crops.

Back in 2000, in the area of Città della Pieve, in a totally different ecological environment, on the low hills surrounding the Lake Trasimeno, Leonardo LORENZONI, an employee of the local Municipality, knows that saffron is part of the cultural heritage of his town and begins to think that this plant could be an interesting tool to promote tourism; he has read in the local newspapers about what is happening in Cascia and knows that around Città della Pieve there are several small producers already growing some saffron. He begins to involve people, within the administration, and meets with the local agricultural advisors.

In February 2002, after months of talks and meetings, thanks to the personal involvement of a local agricultural advisor, Alessandro MAZZUOLI, who works for Coldiretti, another major Farmers’ Union, the Saffron Producers Association “Alberto Viganò” is established in Città della Pieve by 10 local farmers. Mazzuoli, who is also a producer, is elected President.

In this year, some soil research is carried on by Rolando CALANDRA, of the Geology Section of the Faculty of Agriculture, to locate the most suitable zones for the cultivation. Very quickly, the Saffron Producers’ Association registers its trade mark. In cooperation with the Tourism Promotion Office, with the local branch of the Slow Food Movement, with the Mountain Community “Mounts of Trasimeno” and with the Cooperative “Lagodarte”, a major event is organized in May: “Paths of taste: between arts, food and handicrafts in the country of *Perugino*”. This is the nickname of the early renaissance painter “Pietro Vannucci” (Città della Pieve 1450 – Fontignano 1523), well known for being the master of Raphael. The event combines cultural moments, exhibitions, special menus proposed by local restaurants, open air market, music, and attracts thousands of visitors from all over Italy.

The municipality of Cascia applies for membership in the Association “Towns of Tastes”, which links together municipalities with typical products, all over Italy. This association and its activities are supported by the Italian Ministry for Cultural Goods and Tourism.

Some Cascia producers participate in a major food fair, annually held in Foligno, called “The first (courses) of Italy”, which promotes recipes based on pasta and rice. This event lasts one week, combining conferences, exhibitions, training courses, lectures, shows, and is sponsored by all major pasta and rice companies operating in Italy. It attracts hundreds of operators (chefs, restaurant owners, caterers, etc.) and tens of thousands of consumers.

The applied research program financed by ARUSIA begins its operations and Donatella Marrani can work in cooperation with the groups of farmers and with prof. Cappelli.

In 2003, again after months of talks and meetings, the “Saffron Producers Association of Cascia” is legally established by 25 founding members and Polidori is elected President.

In 2004, several conferences mark the achievements: in March, a technical and scientific meeting about saffron cultivation and its prospects in Umbria is organized by ARUSIA at the Faculty of Agriculture in Perugia; several speakers share their knowledge, while the video about saffron is shown to the participants. A more “cultural” conference is organized in June in Città della Pieve, within the framework of the several initiatives organized region wide to commemorate the

"Perugino". Another conference is organized in October in Cascia, about "Saffron and other traditional quality products", to stimulate further interest by the authorities and producers.

The producers of Città della Pieve participate with a booth at the event "Saffron in the World" in Florence, organized by the association "Saffron of the Florence hills".

A group of gourmets and saffron lovers establishes in Perugia the "Italian Academy of Saffron", which organizes several events, some of which in cooperation with an association supporting people with handicaps.

In 2005, the pages about saffron within the ARUSIA website are updated. Thanks to funds provided by the Foundation "Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia", the Cascia producers set up a quite complete website.

In Città della Pieve, an agreement is signed with the Local Action Group implementing a LEADER project, to realize a "Saffron Route", with marks and billboards guiding the tourists through the territory. The Municipality supporting the valorisation of saffron; during the summer months (July through September), when the area receives thousands of tourists, both Italians and Foreigners, guided visits to churches and palaces are organized, and they also include tasting of saffron based recipes at local restaurants. Ancient recipes are retrieved and promoted through local food artisans (chocolate with saffron, pasta with saffron, etc.).

In 2006, both Associations elaborate guidelines for saffron production, harvesting and processing. HACCP manuals are produced in collaboration with the Farmers Union Coldiretti and the Health Authority of Umbria. A producer of the Città della Pieve association makes available to all his fellow producers some spaces at his farm, to be restructured and organized, respecting all hygienic rules imposed by the law. From this moment on, all producers come here for processing their output.

In the following years, 2007-2009, both groups of producers keep organizing their annual events and the collaboration continues with restaurants and promoters of cultural events, to attract tourists to the area and to keep the restaurants and the final consumers demanding this expensive spice.

Some producers take part – individually - in fairs and markets organized in other parts of Italy, to sell the saffron and other typical products from their farm and/or from associated farmers.

In 2008, the Producers of Città della Pieve invite local artists to produce paintings by using only saffron based colours; the paintings (a sort of watercolours with all nuances of yellow and brown) are then auctioned to promote the restoration of an ancient organ. The event attracts lots of visitors and collects a good amount of money. Something similar is annually organized by a large wine producer, at about 50 km distance, who from several years promotes a "winecolours" Sunday, with famous artists painting outdoors, and tourists all around.

In 2009, an applied research proposal is elaborated by Andrea MARCHINI, an agro-economist at the Faculty of Agriculture, and by Roberto COLI, a nutritionist, in cooperation with Cappelli, the Cascia association and Grifolatte, the biggest dairy cooperative operating in Umbria, to develop a new yogurt, with saffron as ingredient; the response of the funding agency is still pending.

The original idea to apply for a formal PDO recognition is put aside by both groups, being considered too expensive and with an excessive bureaucratic burden, if to be implemented.

The Saffron Route still has to be established, but some giant billboards have been set along the roads entering into the Municipality of Città della Pieve and they remind the incoming tourists about the precious spice.

The institutions

The number and heterogeneity of institutions which have, occasionally or permanently, played a role for the re-introduction of saffron into these two areas of Umbria is daunting: the Municipalities of Cascia and Città della Pieve, the Mountain Community of The Mounts of Trasimeno, the Universities

of Florence and Perugia, with researchers and professors from the Faculties of Agriculture, Human sciences and Medicine, the CEDRAV, which has also some professors from Roma University among its members, two Farmers' Unions (Coldiretti and Confagricoltura), the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Handicraft and Agriculture of Perugia, the Foundation "Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia", the Department of agriculture of the Region of Umbria, the Authorities for Agricultural Development of Abruzzo and of Umbria, the Technological Agro-food Park of Umbria, the Local Action Group of a LEADER Project, a local club of the SLOW FOOD Movement, and probably some more.

The saffron in Umbria: the present (and the multiplying factor)

The Producers' association "Alberto Viganò" in Città della Pieve keeps growing and counts now with 28 members and 2.5 – 3.00 kg of annual total output, on a total area of about 3,000 – 5,000 m², while the "Saffron Producers Association of Cascia" has now 32 members and 3.5 kg total output. In both cases, the new associates are younger and more professional producers.

The stigmas are processed manually and valorised with extreme care, being one of the most expensive spices in the world. They are put into tiny jars, containing only 0.25. grams, with elegant labels, explanatory leaflets, nice cardboard boxes. The price for the final consumers is about 8€/g. Some other individual producers are appearing, in several parts of the region, and saffron has been also reintroduced in other regions.

In 2005, the PDO recognition was granted by the EU (Reg. 205/2005) to Saffron of L'Aquila, where the PDO management consortium has been established on May 13th, and in 2009. A similar recognition has been granted to Saffron of Sardegna (EU Reg. 98/2009) where the consortium has been established on October 1st, 2007. In both cases, these competitors, who are also proud of ancient history and tradition, have the support of the regional governments, grow larger areas (several hectares) and achieve a much higher total production (Orologio 2010). Furthermore, in both cases the local economic conditions determine a lower opportunity cost for labour than in Umbria. Consequently, their products can be found in the national market (expensive food boutiques in Milan, Turin, Rome, etc.) or in the internet, at much lower prices than the ones presently offered by the Umbrian producers, who only sell locally, through restaurants, typical grocery shops and at the farm.

Other small groups are located in Tuscany, on the hills near Florence and in the Maremma, and their marketing strategies are similar to the Umbrian producers.

The valorisation of the saffron stigmas requires relatively expensive inputs: tiny jars or small potteries, elegant cardboard boxes, explanatory leaflets, etc. which are locally produced by medium and small size enterprises; the books with saffron history and recipes are printed by local firms and sold at local shops, etc.

If the total value of the raw saffron produced is compared with the total amount of direct and indirect costs borne upon all the Institutions involved, the cost – benefit analysis would be (very likely) extremely negative. A relatively large amount of resources and money has been spent to favour, directly, only a very limited number of producers and their families.

On the other hand, the very mission of such Institutions is to favour local development, against the prevailing market mega trends, which are still pushing towards farms de-activation, closing of firms in rural areas, and finally rural depopulation. To keep spending public resources on major crops, such as corn or tobacco, which have been subsidized for decades, seems meaningless. Research and advisory services, as well as regional marketing efforts, should be re-oriented towards high value crops, labour intensive, capable to find niche markets.

Furthermore, this super-niche product – the saffron – has pushed some producers to re-orient other agricultural activities, by diversification (other crops) and by adding value through some processing (bottling, packaging, etc). Some other minor crops have also benefited from an increasing demand from restaurants, gourmet shops, and final consumers.

This saffron-based process has generated on farm and off farm employment, thanks to all the gastronomy tourists coming to local restaurants and lodging in pensions, bed and breakfasts, country houses and farmhouses. Most visitors also purchase other typical products, from cheeses to wines, olive oils and processed pork meats, as well as handicraft items such as potteries, textiles, olive wood objects, etc. Tourists rent bikes and horses, purchase postcards and stamps..., and also this allows keeping the local post office alive, in a period when rural post offices are being shut for lack of turnover. It is not possible to affirm that tourists come to these areas only for the saffron, because there are so many other attractions (churches, monasteries, museums, natural parks, etc.), but surely saffron - and all the mass media attention which it has stimulated - has been a stimulating enrichment of the touristic offer.

Conclusions

Several interesting considerations can be derived from this case study.

As defined by Rogers (1962) since his very first edition of his “diffusion of innovations”, also in this case the innovators were leading the way, far ahead of the research institutions. Mr. Viganò, who first reintroduced saffron, was the typical innovator: well educated, curious, informed, a traveller, risk-prone, actively searching for information. Only in a second moment the institutions have stepped in, but most of the knowledge about cultivation techniques has been co-generated by farmers and technicians. The Section of agronomy and crop sciences of the Faculty of Agriculture was not interested at all, being too much involved in “important crops”. Happily, two field level technicians of two farmers’ organizations were willing to cooperate and they became pivotal for the relationships with several other groups and institutions. It was a kind of informal “farmers’ field school” (Braun, Thiele and Fernandez 2000), where farmers generated the guidelines for production and processing, and the HCCP code of conduct. Thanks to the presence of these two advisors, some other farmers could join the process, a small number belonging to the early adopters. This fact leads to reaffirm the importance of a public presence in the advisory system. Both advisors, whose salary and other running expenses are mostly paid by the tax payers, could engage themselves into this experience, thanks to the high level of operational freedom that other advisory services, private or more demand driven, can not ensure.

On the other hand, it is not the Institutions as such that act, but some individuals within the Institutions: some professors within the Universities of Florence, Roma and Perugia, the librarian at the Municipality of Cascia, another employee dealing with local economic development at the Municipality of Città della Pieve. Curiosity, pro-activism, desire of change have been the major drivers of these persons, who have been networking to improve their knowledge and to promote their areas. The human capital confirms its relevance for any development process.

On farm and off farm diversification happen when curious and motivated individuals take the lead, but they (or small groups) need the support of several different public organizations: municipality, regional government, health authority, university, national research council, agency for agricultural research, etc.. Also non governmental organizations have played important roles: the farmers’ unions, the Slow Food movement, the CEDRAV, the LEADER Local Action Group.

Innovators are a must to open the way for others to follow, but the adopters require some institutional support (research, extension). The opening of new markets comes next, as well as all activities to attract consumers into the area: here again the support of some public agencies is of vital importance, because of the public good value of such action.

Human resources on one side, social networks on the other side, both require time. Time is another needed ingredient, which allows to nurture ideas, links to be established and consolidated, problems to be solved.

Saffron is nowadays a common good, a traditional and typical product, rooted in history, which embodies hard work, passion, culture, gastronomy. It is extremely expensive and consequently the risks of free riders and frauds are extremely high.

Another question concerns the future: can saffron cultivation be expanded in Umbria? Could this niche product be cultivated by more producers in the same two areas, or by other farmers in different areas of Italy? Both producers associations are well aware to be in an impasse: their turnover is too small to allow for some needs (a paid employee, for example), but the risks linked with a drop of the price are quite strong. “Small is beautiful” is surely true, but in a period of increasing competition, immobility could also be dangerous. Up scaling and diffusing niche products is however difficult and even impossible by definition: a niche product is such only because it is not mass produced.

Furthermore, both associations still have the same presidents elected a few years ago. Both of them still appear relatively young (54 and 52), active and enthusiasts, but they also declare that they would like to see somebody else ready to replace them and both express some worries about the future of the crop and for the survival of agriculture in their areas.

The expansion that took place in the years 2000-2005 is over, the recent years have allowed consolidation, and the future will surely bring new challenges.

Guidelines for similar cases

To develop similar experiences, the following “ingredients” are required:

- Human resources: farmers, technicians, and people with open minds within the administration(s);
- Social networks: these individuals should link with each other and should be able to work together, overcoming jealousies as well as social, cultural and political barriers;
- Institutions: local administrative authorities, research institutions, funding entities, etc. should be open to support the innovators, devoting resources for novelties, even if this means to shift resources from other initiatives;
- Institutional networks: institutions must cooperate, as individuals have to, overriding competitions, rivalries, political heterogeneity or conflicts;
- Applied and participatory research: co-generation of knowledge, with a participatory bottom up approach should be facilitated, and should be supported by more formal research activities, still coordinated with interested producers;
- Advice and animation: agricultural advisors, as well as social animators (employed by local authorities such the Municipalities or the LEADER Local action groups) facilitate the links with research, with the institutions, and represent the pivots around which the different stakeholders get organized;
- Market led approach: the growth of output should be accompanied or even anticipated by an expansion of the demand, through individual or – even better – common actions, at local and regional / national level;
- Common rules and regulations: through a participatory process, farmers and technicians have to elaborate the guidelines for producing, harvesting, processing, pricing and marketing the new product. The establishment of a formal association, with a trade mark and enforcing power, becomes a necessary requirement;
- Links with other sectors (handicrafts, catering, cultural heritage): a niche product, by definition, lacks the economic dimension to support, alone, rural development dynamics (basically income improvement and job creation); cooperation with other economic sectors develops beneficial synergies;
- Regional marketing: thanks to the inter – institutional cooperation and to the inter – sector dialogue, it becomes feasible to promote the entire territory and to attract visitors and even new residents and new economic activities;

- Fantasy and creativity: are a must, for all categories involved – farmers, animators, change agents, food processors, chefs of restaurants, artisans, to be able to elaborate new products, new recipes, new activities – rooted in the tradition, but able to attract and to ignite the curiosity of modern consumers.

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