Development of a marginal area through the valorization of black truffle and creation of a voluntary land owner association

Simone Blanc, Filippo Brun, Angela Mosso
E-mail: simone.blanc@unito.it
Department of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences - University of Turin

This work describes a valorization process in a marginal territory of Italy, where the recovery of black truffle process and the setting up of a landowner association, allowed to revive a local and sustainable supply chain, through the development of a traditional resource able to produce significant impacts, both on the local economy and on the land management.

The purpose is to describe the study-case of Grana Valley producers, analyzing the distinctive aspects and evaluating its reproducibility in similar conditions, which are typical of rural European lands.

The territorial frame

Valle Grana is a rural territory where the recovery of natural truffle trees and the planting of new ones allowed to revive a local and sustainable supply chain, through the development of a traditional resource (Grana Valley is one of the few Piedmont areas suited for the production of black truffle). This happened thanks to the initiative of several local producers that took part in a “Interreg” research project with a real conviction, by acting as catalyst for a wider development.

Such successfully activity has brought to the recent setting up of a “landowner association”, based on voluntary agreements among private owners, with participation and support of the municipality.

The study area is a mountain valley, with 9 municipalities and 20,000 inhabitants, landlocked and with a territory marked by several negative characteristics of marginality, but with high quality environmental resources. The main local economic activity is livestock and the production of a prized DOP cheese.

The restoration of natural truffle trees has been gradually structured around a network of relationships between a growing number of involved actors. This process of “active territoriality” was started by several dynamic actors and extended to the remaining players of the area, generating an innovative network that try to expand itself in a non-competitive frame, to the advantage of the entire community.

Discussion

The valorization action has started thanks to a new territorial strategy, setting up black truffle plantations and taking care, in the same time, of surrounding marginal lands in a non-competitive frame. The success has represented the background for the creation of a voluntary land owner association which takes care of about 100 hectares of pastures.

To effectively overcome the marginalization it is necessary to set-up an integrated and long-lasting project, including the participation of numerous economic operators and with the support of local governments.

This is what happened in Grana Valley, where, thanks to the truffle, since 2003 it has been possible to overcome some structural handicaps, turning them into a strength.

Which are the key ingredients for the success of the recipe? 1) A local product, which is not yet sufficiently developed and able to generate a multisectorial integration in supply chain. 2) The presence of a nucleus of dynamic actors. 3) A collaborative frame that encourages start-up or, at least, do not penalize it.

Specificity, territorial cohesion and identity are the key words to develop processes based on the “valorization of the differences”.

Given the abundance of local products and of human resources, there are all the conditions to replicate the success achieved in Valle Grana. According to this view, rural areas should become more integrated with the urban nodes, taking advantage of the many strengths (quantity and quality of resources, social security, cultural identity, the possibility of a sustainable development), which make them strategic territories.