



Figure 1. Salinas de Añana. Source: Author's elaboration, 2016.

FOOD CYCLES: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND NEW URBAN COMMUNITIES

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In recent years, researchers and practitioners have paid increasing attention to the field of food, nutrition, sustainability, innovative and traditional productivity, and how they affect communities. The present paper analyses the contemporary literature and aims to explore the current situation in Europe. In this study, three European experiences of social innovation in food production and consumption are analysed and compared. The article presents a review of these studies and shows risks, limits, and opportunities. The results reveal that new urban communities can be the engine of creative food cycles and local development. In conclusion, this study represents a contribution to the existing body of knowledge and presents implications of the results and possible future research directions.

food cycles / social innovation / urban communities / local resources / European experiences



Figure 2. Un posto a Milano. „Chef e food lover” event. Source: Cascina Cuccagna, 2020. With kind permission of Cascina Cuccagna.

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on food, sustainable production, gastronomy, and their impacts on people’s lives and urban and territorial contexts. Researchers and local community activists have shown an increased interest in these topics creating a fertile ground for interactions and cross-cutting paths among universities, enterprises, associations, and citizens. Today, food is not only conceived for its nutritional aspect, but it also assumes a creative role in the contemporary society, in the definition of urban food systems, the impulse for alliances among cities, and the reconnection of urban milieus (Rigoberto Anguiano, Guadalupe Reyes 2008; Sommariva 2019; Sposito 2019). Social networks such as Instagram are full of images and hashtags about food. Many projects, relevant exhibitions, and events have been oriented around this theme, e. g. EXPO 2015. Nevertheless, several studies have also highlighted critical aspects in the overuse of these terms and their influence in the community (Urroz 2008). The current trend illustrates the risks of abusing this topic for local marketing, contributing in the touristification and development of entire roads and districts mainly designed for food consumption (Fernandez 2008; Palermo, Ponzini 2014). Despite these critical issues, food can be seen as a protagonist of innovative experiences that combine culture, social engagement, and local development.

Creative Food Cycles considered as cycles that foster civic participation, active



Figure 3. I coltivatori di musica. Resistenza Gastrofonica Viaggiante. Source: Cecilia Sammarco, 2015. With kind permission of ex convento/spazio culturale.

engagement in co-design, and combine it with new models of collaborative and social entrepreneurship (Schröder 2019). This paper illustrates how innovative urban communities can generate creative food cycles and support the development of urban and territorial futures. According to Caroli (2015) and Neumeier (2012), social innovation fosters new forms of management and entrepreneurship, whose goal is to respond to a social problem and create benefits for the local community (Moulaert et al. 2005; Marra et al. 2015, Phills et al. 2008). Therefore, this paper aims to show three international experiences recognised as cases of social innovation, where food is the main activator of new urban circularity. The three cases were selected from a wider database that include fifty experiences of reactivation of cultural resources (Scaffidi, 2019). The article focuses the attention on the analysis and comparison of these cases considered as an important branch in the European scenario regarding creative food cycles and social innovation.

SOCIALLY INNOVATIVE VIBES: FOOD CYCLES AND NEW URBAN COMMUNITIES

In this study, the cases Valle Salado de Añana, Cascina Cuccagna, and Resistenza Gastrofonica Viaggiante are analysed and compared. The main objective is to explore how gastronomy, food production, and correlated local activities suggest



Figure 4. Festival I Teatri della Cupa - Novoli e Campi Salentina. Source: Ph. Eliana Manca, 2015. With kind permission of ex convento/spazio culturale.

new directions for local development.

Resistenza Gastrofonica Viaggiante (Gastrophonic Traveling Resistance) was a project of “ex convento/spazio culturale” born in 2013 in the former Capuchin Monastery of Belmonte Calabro, a town in the Southern part of Italy, in the Calabria region. The main objective of the project was to promote the active engagement of local inhabitants through cultural events, in which food was the main protagonist (Fig. 3). The project had two relevant parts: i) the itinerant one was based on the ambition to spread the motto “do not make war but gnocchi and tomato sauce” around Italy, with cultural events aiming to promote socializing moments (Fig. 4), and enhance good music and local cuisine (Marazzo 2015); ii) the second one was based on the valorisation of the former monastery and the involvement of Belmonte’s community with traditional cooking experiences in a suggestive atmosphere, between the sea and the mountains. This second aspect was a site-specific intervention that uses the former monastery outdoor spaces for their events. The project also organised several activities and projects with other creative communities in Southern Italy, such as Farm Cultural Park in Sicily. The idea was to combine food and music as vehicles of socialization and to create cultural performances that enhance local products and involve musicians, artists, and other talents of the territory. As the promoters confirm, the project wants to break predefined pat-

terns of public food consumption and create more vibrant realities able to innovate the town and define new directions for the creative development of the place. Resistenza Gastrofonica Viaggiante wanted to overturn traditional models of use of public spaces with traditional tools. Food, specifically “gnocchi e pomodoro”, are the main ingredients of this resistance. The project promoted new cultural pathways for the future development of the territory.

Cascina Cuccagna is a cultural centre located in a seventeenth century farmhouse in Milan, reactivated by Associazione Consorzio Cantiere Cuccagna (ACCC), thanks to the twenty-year assignment of the property by the Municipality of Milan. The Association ACCC is a centre of aggregation and social involvement (Fig. 2). They support initiatives of community development, orientation, and social interaction between Italians and foreigners. Since 2012, Cascina Cuccagna is a place of culture and participation that spreads ideas of innovation, sustainability, and creativity (Mattioli, Treville 2013). The site belonged to the Fatebenefratelli Fathers who cultivated the officinal herbs for the Ospedale Maggiore. Today, Cascina Cuccagna reactivated the productive dimension becoming an agricultural hub in the centre of Milan. The objective of the promoters is to create a connection with the territory, local producers, traditions, and sustainable food and to innovate by organising new interactive experiences, teaching courses, laboratories, and workshops. They pay particular attention to the food quality, seasonality, and the short supply chain, and support small farms and artisans that work with respect for the environment and workers’ dignity. Cascina Cuccagna also has a kitchen, bar, and guest house called Un posto a Milano where genuine dishes with raw materials selected by small and medium-sized farms in Kilometro Vero are served. They organise several projects that promote “agroecology”, solidarity, social art, and passion for cooking. Food is one of the central aspects of Cascina Cuccagna. The promoters believe that it is possible to have good meals and to eat “slow food” and high quality raw materials even in a big metropolis such as Milan. For this reason, Cascina Cuccagna is an important centre for artisanal companies and small farms of the local territory, place of encounter of local producers, workers, and cooking passionate. Il cucinista. All around food is a cooking school, a laboratory for catering and a location for events. It organises cooking classes, corporate food events, team cooking and show cooking. Cascina Cuccagna is a place where creative food cycles are combined with processes of sensitisation, love for the local territory and its resources.

A similar objective can be found by analysing the case of Salinas de Añana in Spain. Valle Salado is a saltworks that has been reactivated thanks to the Foundation

	Resistenza Gastrofónica Viaggiante	Cascina Cuccagna	Valle Salado de Añana	Limits & risks	Opportunities
KEYWORDS					
Social engagement and participation	■	■	■	Manipulation & social washing	Higher sense of community
Music and social art	■	■	■		Creativity and socio-cultural development
Solidarity and orientation		■			Higher sense of community
Agricultural hub		■	■		Development of urban food hotspots
Food quality, seasonality	■	■	■	Brandization	Community awareness
Kmo 0, short supply chain		■	■		Community awareness
Traditional cuisine	■	■		Limitation: local focus	Valorisation of local traditions
Traditional production techniques		■	■		Valorisation of local traditions
Territory: local raw materials	■	■	■	Limitation: local focus	Local development
Territory: local producers (farms and artisans)	■	■	■		Local development
Territory: cultural resources (neglected assets)	■	■	■		Local development
ACTIVITIES					
Events: concerts, exhibitions, show cooking cooperate food events, virtual tours	■	■	■	Social washing	Creativity and socio-cultural development
Cooking classes		■	■	Social washing	Socio-cultural awareness
Team cooking		■			Social engagement and team working
Laboratories and workshops		■	■		Creativity and socio-cultural development
OBJECTIVES					
Spreading the culture of good food	■			Brandization	Community awareness
Spreading the culture of good products		■	■	Brandization	Community awareness
Networking for local producers		■			Local development
Networking for international productive cultural resources			■		Internationalization
Discovering of traditional production techniques		■	■		Valorisation of local traditions
Innovating in services and productivity	■	■	■		Local development and innovation
Involving communities, visitors and citizens	■	■	■	Manipulation & social washing	Social participation

Figure 5. Comparative analysis. Source: Author's elaboration, 2020.

Valle Salado. The mission is to preserve and recover the site, develop cultural and touristic initiatives with citizens' participation and produce high-quality salt with traditional techniques. In 2013, the Management Plan updated the guidelines of the Master Plan from 2000–2004 and works on the general objective to make Valle Salado a key point for revitalizing tourism and for addressing its cultural, economic, and social dimensions for the province of Álava and the Basque Country. The Valle Salado de Añana Foundation also promotes many activities open to citizens and at the same time it promotes scientific researches, the valorisation of other local resources, and the dissemination of traditional construction and production systems. The productivity of the salt of Salinas de Añana is the main aspect of this process (Fig. 1). Around it revolves many offers and services for local people and visitors. People can get a cultural experience in the salt valley, getting to know a unique territory, feeling immersed in a wonderful atmosphere that involves architecture, natural and geological landscape, history and archaeology. The project promotes salt workshops for children, school and university students and adults, visits to the Salt Valley and the productive process, virtual tours and the saline spa. The collaboration with other international cases of salt production and with national and international chefs contributes to promote the quality and consumption of the Añana salt, but also shows the interesting experience of Valle Salado in the world. The original aspect of this project is in the general development of the valley and the ability to generate new offers, innovative experiences, and to attract many people, new inhabitants and tourists, to a small village of the Basque Country (Scaffidi 2018). Salt is the real activator of the development of this site. Furthermore, the sale of the products and services contribute to the self-financing of the project.

The three presented cases show different locations and missions; however, they activate new food-oriented circularity and develop socially innovative urban communities for specific territories.

DISCUSSION: CREATIVE FOOD CYCLES AS SOCIAL INNOVATION?

The study illustrates three experiences of social innovation in Italy and Spain that focus their development on food production and consumption. The findings provide a general overview of the cases, the selection of specific keywords, the comparison of the main activities and objectives related to food cycles, and possible limits, risks and opportunities. A relevant aspect to consider is the ability to succeed over the years, and also to refresh themselves, as evidenced by the experiences of Cascina Cuccagna and Valle Salado de Añana. All three cases have the

goal to regenerate the space in term of spreading new cycles and influencing sustainable urban futures. As Figure 5 shows, there are some common keywords that illustrate the tendency of these examples to innovate the territory by improving local raw materials, enhancing cultural resources and local production, but at the same time this can be a limit, if the development is only focused to the local level. The local focus can be an opportunity if it enhances the cooperativeness, the solidarity and networking. Cascina Cuccagna, for example, is a centre of aggregation that support the community, provides orientation facilities and connects people through food. Resistenza Gastrofonica Viaggiante aimed to provoke Italians with their motto defining new experiences of food consumption, whereas Valle Salado innovates a simple product, salt, creating new cycles for the whole territory.

Other relevant aspects assumed as creative food cycles are the activities promoted by these communities, such as the organization of cultural events, cooking classes, laboratories, show and team cooking. These aspects can be considered as opportunities to strengthen the socio-cultural dimension, engaging people in creative experiences, but they can also conceal the risk to give in to “social washing”. The findings illustrate the possibility to trigger positive and negative results. Food events, new products, cooking laboratories, show cooking, or virtual tours are activators of creativity and new cycles in food production and consumption, but are they promoters of social innovation? The findings show the way these centres approach innovation, how they find new solutions to emerge from the ashes, from neglect and decay. From the data in Figure 5, it appears that the spreading of the culture of good food and products, the discovering of traditional production techniques, and the development of new networks among productive cultural resources and local producers are important goals for the selected cases. The identification of high quality of food products and traditional productive techniques, and the development of new networks facilitated the reactivation of these resources and innovate the social interaction as well.

These actions are also relevant for the improvement of the community awareness, internationalisation and local development; nevertheless, at the same time they can conceal the risk to limit the development to “brandisation”. From the evaluation in Figure 5, it becomes also clear that the main objectives of the analysed cases are the innovation in services, in productivity and in the involvement of local communities. According to recent literature, social innovation promotes participation, social engagement, improves networks, economies, and creates the conditions for a better use of local resources and goods (Caroli 2015; Moulart et al.

2005; Marra et al. 2015, Neumeier 2012; Phills et al. 2008). Therefore, the present study confirms that Creative Food Cycles, conceived as creative actions that promote food culture and new circularity, are also activators of social innovation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the last few years, numerous studies have focused on the food topic and many researchers have discussed about its impacts on urban development, the risks of touristification, and its influences in the urban context; nevertheless, another field of discussion put the attention on the socially innovative vibes that can be created around food. In this study, three experiences of Creative Food Cycles and social innovation were analysed and compared. The study was designed to determine the effect of food production and consumption in the urban community, observing the limits, the risks, and the strengths of these experiences. The presented results may facilitate improvements in this field of knowledge, comparing these cases to others outside Europe, for a better understanding of the involved dynamics and the influence in the urban and territorial dimension. This research is conceived as a specific view in the context of resources' redevelopment, food and social innovation, further studies might extend the selection to a different set of experiences.

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