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Food Festivals and Local Development in Italy

A Viewpoint from Economic Anthropology

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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.

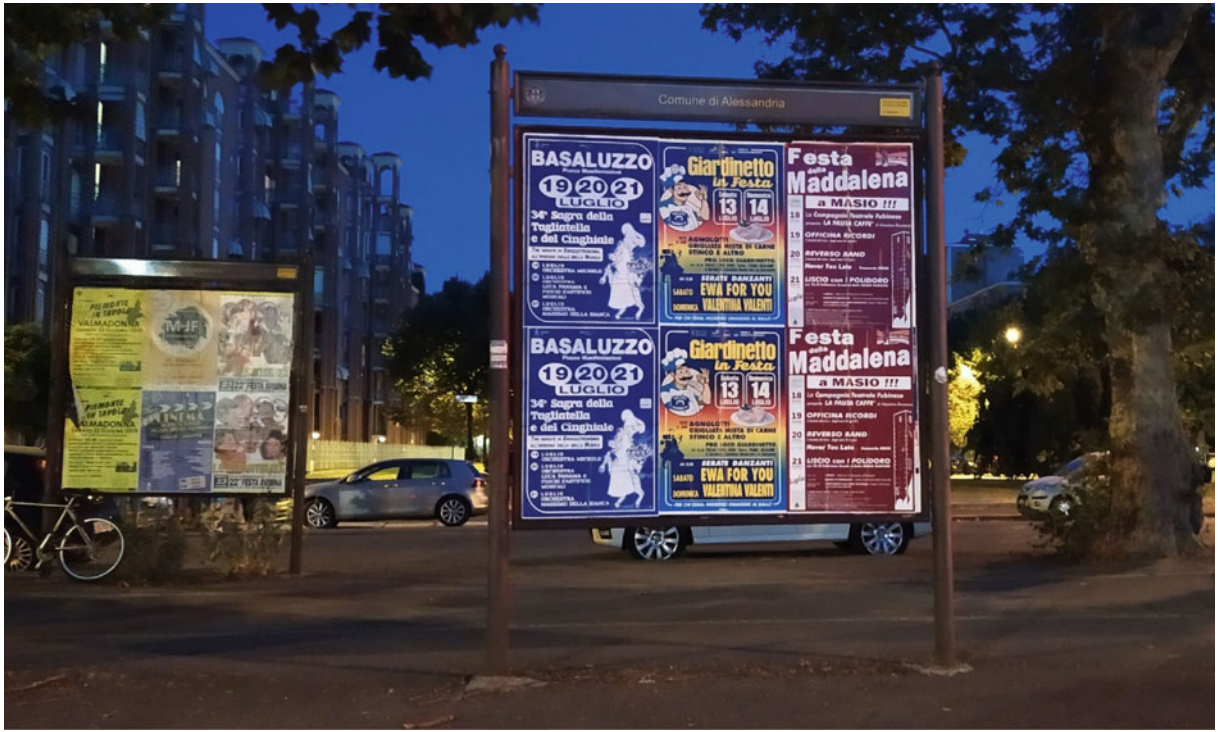

Photo 1 Advertisements of *sagre* in summertime (*Credit* Michele F. Fontefrancesco [2018])

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