

## URBAN REGENERATION THROUGH TRADITIONAL FOLK EVENTS. "DO FOOD FESTIVALS RECONVERT THE TERRITORY?"

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**Abstract:** The massive consumption of resources causes significant changes in landscapes and affects the regenerative capacity of agricultural land, contributing to the deterioration of the territorial, economic and social conditions of geographically disadvantaged areas. A useful, albeit unusual, tool for limiting resource waste, revitalising the area and regenerating the land is the use of local food systems, expressed in the form of food festivals. Food and wine events in themselves do not directly improve disadvantaged communities, but combined with marketing techniques they act as a glue between agro-ecological practices and urban regeneration. In fact, by offering typical local agri-food products, it is possible to channel the flow of visitors to the various sites, favouring an economic influx which, in turn, influences socio-territorial regeneration. The aim of the study is to investigate the value of local agri-food events and their contribution to socio-territorial regeneration. The work carried out consists of examining official data on Italian agri-food performance over several years and collecting information and first-hand accounts of the various food festivals in the South.

**Key words:** food-festival, urban regeneration, agroecology

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## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS AND THE TOURISM SECTOR

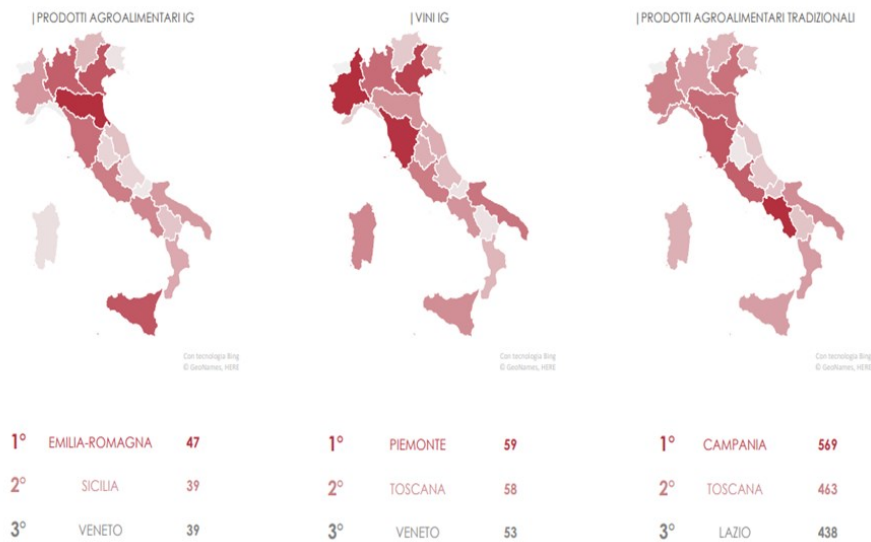
Local agri-food systems, i.e. an integral part of the economic system that supplies the country with food as an essential commodity, are usefully linked to social dynamics to compensate for the excessive and inefficient consumption of natural resources and then foster socio-territorial regeneration (Bocchi & Maggi, 2014). From this preliminary consideration we extrapolate the input, i.e. the food chain, as well as the output, i.e. the goal to be achieved identified in regeneration and sustainability. However, we need to shed light on the intermediate process that leads to the achievement of what is desired; therefore, we can ask ourselves how to profitably exploit agro-food systems, to which agro-ecological networks are linked (Garibaldi, 2023). In this regard, an excellent *trait d'union* between input and output has been identified in the tourism sector, especially following the revolution it has undergone, bringing to the fore places otherwise marginalised by traditional travel routes because they are not valued (Di Matteo & Cavuta, 2016). The tourism sector can greatly benefit from the strongly environmental sustainability-oriented approach of the Italian agri-food chain, to enhance the products, places and traditions of the locations that travellers desire.

By leveraging typical food and wine products, eminent exponents of history and popular culture, the spotlight is turned on the peripheral areas where these same excellences proliferate (Garibaldi, 2021). In this way, food and wine enter by right among the marketing tools aimed at upgrading specific territories and promoting alternative experiences to increasingly demanding consumers, one based on the specialities of the table (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Italian identity is rich in history, culture and emblematic landscapes as national cornerstones that characterise and distinguish us throughout the world. Among the many elements of popular tradition, continually subject to imitation by foreigners, one cannot forget the culinary excellence, with products certified for each region, which are rightfully part of the heritage of the *Bel Paese* (Dall'Ara, 2011). Products and preparations are so iconic that they become the reason for the trip itself, for visitors in search of quality (Richards, 2015). The fact of considering food as a driver for choosing a destination to visit has become increasingly redundant since the three-year period burdened by the dross of the pandemic legacy, more precisely in the year immediately following the advent of Covid-19, reporting in 2021 about 13% of online bookings, data collected by the well-known travel portal Tripadvisor, to discover Italian food and wine flavours (Federvini, 2023). A travel idea second only to tours of a cultural nature (27%) to the peninsula's great cities of art.

The paper aims to shed light on the close link that has been established between two sources of wealth and the possible advantageous combinations and then meet the challenge of making the tourist himself feel part of the experience (Smith, 2005). In this respect, "food tourism" is not necessarily a useful secondary tool that one uses once one has chosen one's tourist destination, it can to all intents and purposes represent an attraction (Richards, 2014). The subtle difference lies in the position that food consumption occupies in the visitors' scale of priorities during an unfamiliar experience; it can be configured as a mere support to the realisation of travel intentions or, on the contrary, as the highlight of the experience itself (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2011). This practice has been around for years but has recently become more popular (Brewers Association, 2015). The turning point is undoubtedly linked to the pandemic crisis of 2020, which dealt a severe blow to national economies by freezing commercial activities and, for a time, tourist travel, resulting in the suspension of various festivals and village fairs (AssoBirra, 2015). Where there seemed to be only negatives, an opportunity for a rebirth was glimpsed, since travel beyond national borders was not allowed, the Italian citizen was able to rediscover the beauty of his own land and did so thanks to specific activities, among which we can mention "food tourism" (Peroni, Formisano, Matiddi, & Sfodera, 2008).

Before going any further, however, it is necessary to shed light on the rising tourism product just mentioned. This term is used to identify events aimed at discovering the territory with a food and wine theme, whether they are single-issue events dealing with wine, beer, oil and so on,

or include various excellences (Cocco & Pozzi, 2001). Such expressions of popular culture differ from a normal business performance in that they arise from the collaboration of several operators in the tourism sector, from reception to catering, who combine their services and products to provide the visitor with immersive experience in local traditions (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). It is natural to associate a particular food and wine product with a location, but this, especially in the past, was a one-way connection made by tourists driven by the desire to visit a certain destination and, with the occasion, also taste the typical dishes (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). In contrast, today, the search for a particular food and wine product as a motivation to travel to discover new flavours, sensations and experiences, is much more in vogue and attracts greedy tourists who, with the occasion, also visit the location and trigger consumption (Di Matteo & Cavuta, 2018). This form of tourism is particularly favourable to those usually marginalised areas that would not be the first travel choices, such as villages and small inland towns rich in history and culture (Garibaldi, 2021). The relations established between the areas burdened by spatial peripherality with respect to the larger centres favour rural diversification practices, the strengthening of local identity and a sense of community, as well as a point of reference in the tourist promotion of the place (Cavuta & Di Matteo, 2015). Today, there is no denying the centrality of “food tourism” as a point of reference in tourism promotion as well as the introduction of food and wine tourism practices in strategies to enhance regional identity, with the consumer taking part in the chain of relations as the last member of the chain (Garibaldi, 2023).



**Figure 1.** Numbers of certified products per region (excellent products of 2021)  
(Source: Garibaldi, 2022)

Our analysis highlights statistical data and information concerning the trend of the tourism sector and, specifically, of slow tourism. This sector is on the rise thanks to the substantial contribution of the food and wine context expressed in the form of food festivals. The role of Italian food and wine tourism in a comparison with European competitors will be examined, as well as the narrow national context, highlighting the position gained, in the food and wine tourism market, by the Italian regions. Subsequently, attention will be turned to observing how the social and economic weight of these tourism products has changed over the years, from Covid-19 to today. The data under examination are taken from official bibliographic sources (Garibaldi,

various years) published in reference years. In addition, the case studies are the result of the authors' meticulous selection in search of food and wine events that are already nationally known and therefore have data useful for analysis, or celebrations that are particularly characteristic and have considerable potential for attracting the public. The information provided for each event is the result of careful research and direct testimonies of individuals who took part, thus providing a qualitative and quantitative opinion of the festivals. The contents are made after comparing several documentary sources, considering, however, that these sources may be subject to change, especially the data concerning the events, due to the lack of official records.

## POSITIONING ITALIAN FOOD AND WINE TOURISM IN THE EUROPEAN MARKET

The richness of our country, which boasts a diverse heritage of products, identities, cultures and landscapes, could enable Italy to become a leader in food and wine tourism in the coming years. Italy's food and wine heritage is increasingly at the centre of the tourism dynamic, playing the role of ambassador of “Made in Italy” in the world, attracting visitors from all over the world. Figure 1 clearly shows the potential of Italian food and wine tourism, identifying the most popular destinations for those seeking typical dishes, fine wines and quality products.

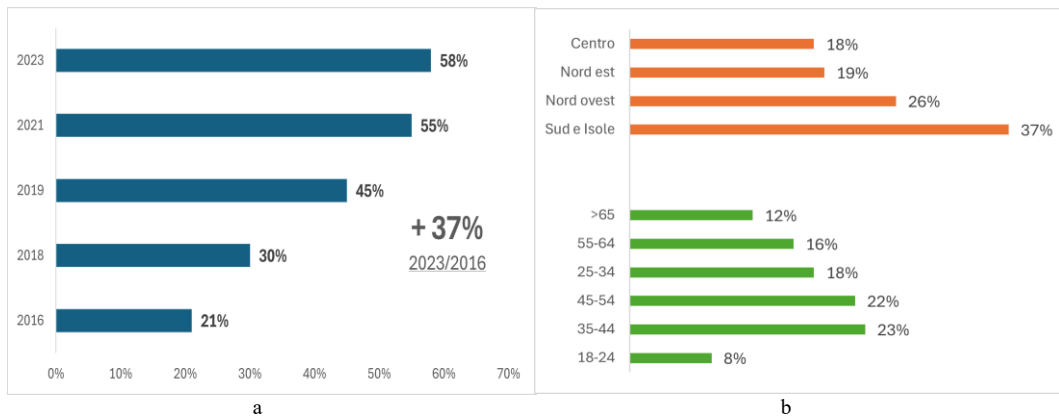
The following “competitiveness map”(Figure 2) relates the number of products/companies directly or indirectly involved in food and wine tourism to the level of competitiveness of the host region. As can be seen from the map, all the southern regions are located in the two lower quadrants, the least favourable and competitive market positions. Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria and Molise have limited resources and a low regional competitiveness index. As the map shows, these areas cannot currently aspire to a better position in the Italian food and wine production system, because they do not have sufficient raw materials to convert into wealth and greater competitiveness. An even more unfortunate fate for Campania, Puglia and Sicily, which, despite their wealth of agro-food resources, do not sufficiently exploit all their potential to achieve a more competitive position at national level, paradoxically showing the worst combination of the variables considered.



**Figure 2.** Positioning of offering in the regions (competitiveness map)  
(Source: Garibaldi, 2022)

### DATA ON FOOD AND WINE TOURISM IN ITALY

Tourism and, consequently, the tourists embody the resilient spirit of the mythological phoenix, which is reborn from its ashes, just like the economic activity in question which, from its darkest hour, a kind of death of tourism, has been able to rise again (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The path of rebirth undertaken by tourists has also spread to them a greater awareness of their own tastes and what was important. The traveler today is more 'mature' and innovative in planning activities; he is interested in the territory and its history; he seeks local and authentic food and wine experiences (Garibaldi, 2021). The tourist is also curious; he is eager to hear stories about ancient culinary traditions that are now part of popular culture. This gets in touch with the place visited and its people. More than half of Italian tourists claim to adopt this new holiday vision (Garibaldi, 2023). From the evidence of annual percentages, from 2016 to date, the increase in tourists closely linked to food and wine events is progressive, far exceeding the figures for 2019, the year of the tourism boom (Garibaldi, 2022). A slight slowdown is only discernible in recent periods, partly due to the total resumption of travel of all kinds, previously interrupted by the pandemic.



**Figure 3.** Food and Wine tourism trends (a) profile of food and wine tourists (b) (Data source: Garibaldi, 2023)

Digging deeper into the analysis of food and wine-based trips, as shown in the table above, one notices a slight majority of the male gender taking part in such activities and the age range, naturally referring to the totality of tourists in question, sees a fair degree of participation for each age group with the category in the workforce, from 35 to 54, dominating the scene with 45% participation. This is the category defined as the “bleisure tourist”, i.e. the traveler who combines business and pleasure (Di Matteo & Cavuta, 2016). Since our analysis focuses on the southern area, it is only fair to also report the national segmentation of food and wine tourists, with the highest adherence precisely in the area under analysis. In the year of the actual start of recovery following the health crisis, 2021, almost all (92%) of Italian tourists had participated in at least one food and wine experience in the past three years. While, in the following year, 2022, 67% of Italian travellers had taken part in at least five experiences, demonstrating the interest that such activities triggered in the public. In fact, the comparison between the two periods just mentioned sees a clear increase despite a gap of only one year 42% for 2021 and 67% for 2022) but, not yet at the levels of 2019 with a share of 86% (Garibaldi, 2022). The following table (Table 1) shows the shares of participation in food and wine experiences over the three years, looking both at the overall panorama of the tourist scene in question and at the percentage of Italian tourists, who verge on totality in each category. The second item “visits to places of production” in the above table is directly linked to the next table (Table 2), which identifies the places of production of local products that tourists prefer to visit during their holidays.

**Table 1.** Participation in food and wine events in the last three years  
(Data source: Garibaldi, 2023)

	Food and wine tourists	Total Italian tourists
Culinary experiences in restaurants	97%	94%
Visits to production sites	85%	74%
Food and wine events	70%	60%
Active food and wine experiences	68%	53%
Thematic tours and itineraries	63%	48%
Other food and wine experiences	68%	65%

Note: Multiple answers was possible, so the total is higher than 100%.

**Table 2.** Participation in events at production sites in the last three years  
(Data source: Garibaldi, 2023)

What to visit	Food and wine tourists	Total Italian tourists
Winery	41%	34%
cheese factory	34%	28%
local farm	32%	28%
brewery	24%	19%
oil factory or mill	19%	15%
charcuterie factory	17%	14%
chocolate factory	16%	12%
pasta factory	16%	12%
distillery	12%	9%
orchard	11%	9%
confectionery tour	9%	7%
guided tour of an ice cream parlour	7%	5%



**Figure 4.** Food and Wine Tourism Offer, Comparison between Italy and European Competitors  
(Source: Garibaldi, 2023)

This figure compares the performance of Italian food and wine with the rest of Europe and highlights the importance of "Made in Italy" dishes. Italy leads in almost all categories, demonstrating the quality of the sector. The first point is the European lead in certified products (IG), with a total of 814 types of products, of which 315 are agri-food products and 526 are wines, followed by France in second place (Bocchi & Maggi, 2014). The hierarchy is reversed when it comes to the number of Michelin-starred restaurants. The „Bel Paese" is in second place with 377 starred restaurants. Food culture is deeply rooted in Italy, which is also reflected in the rankings for the number of companies operating in the catering sector and the amount of Unesco heritage linked to food and wine. The only negative note, compared to other successful categories, is fourth place for the number of microbreweries in the area. Despite the rankings and awards, the overall assessment of global food and wine production up to 2023 is that the country with the most widespread and appreciated cuisine is Italy.

### THE RELAUNCH OF FOOD TOURISM

These innovative frontiers of tourism, closely aimed at customer satisfaction based on more and more specific demands, delineate new economic-commercial concepts, such as the experience economy, which finds its place in modern tourism dynamics characterised by the involvement of visitors themselves in the creation of wealth at the local level, with their purchasing behaviour (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Richards, 2011). Speaking of "food tourism", it is natural to make a direct example with one of the most well-known destinations of this form of travel, namely participation in 'food festivals' such as themed festivals of typical local food and wine products or national and international gatherings of culinary propaganda open to the public, also known as "street food". The perceptions created after taking part in such events are the result of "a holistic and multi-sensory experience, closely linked to the visited environment" (Di Matteo & Cavuta, 2018). This is the result of several studies aimed at investigating the driving motive for participation, i.e. why the tourist's interest is focused on such a food and wine consumption experience and how it influences the supply and demand of these generally peripheral local communities (Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Hall & Sharples, 2003). The greater the demand for traditional Italian food products, the greater the interest of producers in providing authentic examples of local gastronomy. The aim will therefore be to observe if and how these events are able to provide socio-territorial redevelopment and regeneration in these areas traditionally with a limited carrying capacity (Gómez & Molina, 2012). The first piece of evidence is that these marginal areas must necessarily maintain a limited reception of tourist flows both to guarantee and preserve the ecosystem balance between nature and human presence, and to avoid attracting excessive foreign audiences that would exogenously condition food festivals and local commerce, making them lose the *raison d'être* of the event itself (Yeoman et al., 2007). The phenomenon of local and regional food and wine festivals on Italian territory has become more significant among the public in the last ten years, and food and wine producers relish the economic potential (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Despite the growing numbers boasted by taste events, the absence of an officially recognised national register of events does not allow an overall estimate at national level (AssoBirra, 2015). As a demonstration of the growing interest shown in food festivals, the following analysis proposes the study of some useful variables to measure the degree of satisfaction in visitors' consumption behaviour. The geographical area under observation is limited to Southern Italy, with a magnifying glass on one specific food and wine event per region. The selection of the event is conducted based on the representativeness of the location by means of the product celebrated or, alternatively, based on the great attractiveness of the festival itself such as complying with the poor link between product and territory (Brewers Association, 2015).

Starting with the region of *Abruzzo*, which, if one wishes to follow an alphabetical or geolocalisation order, is in any case the first southern region, the case study focuses on the culinary celebration of the municipality of Castellalto, in the province of Teramo. For the past eighteen years, in 2005, the locality has been hosting a well-established event in the community's

tradition, albeit a recent one, the “Castellalto Beer Fest”, reaping success within and beyond regional borders. However, due to the lack of an officially recognised register, it is not possible to obtain overall estimates but, according to unofficial estimates, over the years the number of participants has been growing steadily (12th edition in 2017, the size of the audience involved seems to have reached around 8000 visitors) (Casini, Contini, Romano, & Scozzafava, 2016). The event is undoubtedly an excellent means of revitalising tourism in the municipality, the province and the region itself, with reception facilities and attractions to complete an attractive stay. This is a first example of how the active involvement of the visitor, with reference to four variables associated with it such as the general perception of the stage, the emotional sensations, the pleasantness of the environment and the visual setting of the food and wine itineraries, can trigger positive effects on the overall experience that the tourist has, thus creating a happy memory, a bond with the event and the location itself, and also stimulating a sense of loyalty (Getz, 2010; Dall’Ara, 2011). The evaluation is made on the basis of the testimonies collected from the participants who were asked about the degree of “escapism” from the daily routine of life during the festival, leveraging on the emotional sphere of the economy of the experience, and also asked for an overall comment on the pleasantness of the surrounding environment and the quality of the culinary proposals, thus a question purely focused on the hedonism of the festival (Quan & Wang, 2004; Bocchi & Maggi, 2014). The questions aimed at touching on the emotional and aesthetic spheres are aimed at understanding the extent to which the tourist feels involved and the capacity of the food and wine event to create a unique and inimitable atmosphere so as to convince the consumer to return, with the first question, while the second was aimed at assessing the pleasantness of the local context, the appreciation of which is not to be overlooked at all, and, last but not least, the appreciation or otherwise of the food and wine proposals (Garibaldi, 2022; Garibaldi, 2023).

As far as *Molise's* culinary culture is concerned, it is told by the long-lived event, and one of the most significant in the region, known as “*La Pezzata di Capracotta*”, this year in its fifty-seventh edition. It is usually celebrated on the first Sunday in August, in the province of Isernia, specifically in Prato Gentile as a tourist location par excellence in which to enjoy the experience. The event, also known as the “*sagra dell'agnello alla brace e della pecora bollita con erbe aromatiche*” (festival of barbecued lamb and boiled sheep with aromatic herbs), since the main course is very often accompanied by a lamb roast, brings back memories of past times when the art of transhumance was practised, a typical activity carried out by shepherds who took their flocks to graze in southern Italy with the coming of winter. This practice naturally entailed various dangers, such as the loss of a member of the flock, so the shepherd had to strip the animal of its fur and then make it the main course of the meal. These inconveniences gave rise to the recipe that only in the 1960s found celebration in the well-known festival. It revived the pastoral tradition fully expressed in this typical dish, so simple in its ingredients and preparation but, at the same time, iconic and standard-bearer of Molise's culinary tradition. Over the years, the recipe has been preserved by the native population, without any additions or changes, and this preserved loyalty has earned it the current certification as a “*Prodotto P.A.T.*” (traditional agri-food products). The sheep's meat, the essential element of the dish, is cooked according to tradition in large copper cauldrons and then the excess fat that has risen to the surface is removed. The remaining fat is absorbed by adding potatoes and a few tomatoes, and finally it is left to cook for another four hours. The event is the perfect opportunity to immerse oneself in Molise's history and to taste the ancient flavours of the table. The village prepares to welcome the gluttonous visitors by setting up an open kitchen early in the morning to provide refreshment while enjoying the mountain landscape. In commemoration of the festival, there is a small pampering for visitors, who receive a wooden fork, a bowl and an earthenware glass, so that they can fully enjoy the pastoral experience. The “*Sagra della Pezzata*” (Feast of the Pezzata), strongly rooted in the local culture, expresses an even deeper meaning than a simple re-enactment of a typical Molise dish. It is, to all intents and purposes, a historical commemoration through mountain flavours. Therefore, the *Pezzata*, characterised by the fact that



it is a *nocchia* recipe, is an identity value for the territory and its history (Dall'Ara, 2011; Garibaldi, 2023). Seven weekends are dedicated to the festival of greatest fervour in the municipality of Roccamonfina in the province of Caserta (*Campania*), at the bottom of Mount *Santa Croce*, giving rise to an evocative culinary experience with tastings of the area's traditional delicacies, including mushrooms, chestnuts, wine and more. The event is not limited to the table but is adorned with folkloristic elements such as street markets, excursions, exhibitions and guided tours, as well as shows and concerts for entertainment for young and old. The geographical location is an attractive element as it is situated in the crater of the ancient and long-dormant volcano of the same name. The area surrounding the municipality is rich in greenery, with centuries-old chestnut groves and fruit trees, the source of the delicious foodstuffs that have been the protagonists of the festival for generations, providing nourishment for the population.

From the long-lived cultivation of this natural heritage come the recipes of popular tradition, which are still appreciated today and attract curious visitors in search of delicious experiences. Chestnuts and porcini mushrooms are the stars of the famous Roccamonfina festival. Each generation passes on to the next the secrets of combining the flavours of the two “food principles”, resulting in unique dishes that are highly favoured throughout the region. A noteworthy fact, in reference to the holding of this event, is that the 2022 edition was suspended, just a few weeks before opening, due to too much success. This is no joke, the festival was forced to close its doors due to the unforeseen over-subscription, with around thirty thousand daily visitors attending. Having exceeded expectations and consequently also the capacity of the area concerned, the most obvious solution was to suspend it for the entire 2022 period, because the security plans were not designed for such tourist flows. An unforeseen event that we naturally hope will not be repeated for the 2023 edition, to avoid once again suppressing an event of such magnitude that, leaving aside the inconveniences linked to the previous edition, had undoubtedly brought great benefit to the “incriminated” area, from an economic and fame point of view (Cavuta & Di Matteo, 2015). The aim for the 2023 edition of the Roccamonfina Chestnut and Porcini Mushroom Festival is to cope with the oceanic influx. The programme is rich and includes not only the gastronomic delicacies and cooking shows, but also the possibility of personally picking chestnuts accompanied by an expert guide who will entertain the public with curiosity about the flora and fauna living in the forest, as well as the possibility of climbing the 106-metre altitude of the *Roccamonfina* volcano.

It is in the heart of the city of Brindisi that the manifesto linking eno-gastronomic Apulia, and the rest of the peninsula is hosted, offering the opportunity to immerse oneself in the full breadth of eno-gastronomic Italy with the meeting of the typical dishes of the tricolour and above all the 'heel of the boot' region, giving life to the area known as “Triptaly” (Di Gennaro, 2018). The area just mentioned can be identified as a route surrounded by the city itself with its monuments, historical buildings and the renovated seafront. The adventure is accompanied by the ever-present national and international musical entertainment, providing the backdrop to a culinary crusade transported by the most varied flavours, between tradition and originality. Therefore, the event will offer the curious of taste and lovers of good food, multiple opportunities to taste Apulia and encourage comparisons with the art of drinking and eating in the Italian way, finding refreshment in the numerous wine bars like satellites orbiting the 20,000 square metres of the urban area or, under the guidance of expert sommeliers and great chefs, they will be guided to taste wines, oil and Mediterranean flavours (Santoro & Russo, 2020).

Of course, the expert chefs of tomorrow will not be left out. In fact, numerous activities are planned for children, who will be able to learn how to juggle in the kitchen with culinary itineraries that refer to the territory, such as making homemade pasta, pressing grapes, preparing tomato sauce, and many other activities as in their grandparents' time (Giuliani, 2019). As the name suggests, the star product is naturally the wine of the same name produced from the Greek grapes that have landed on the shores of Salento. That's not all, however, as it is accompanied by the land and sea specialities of the area, including mashed broad beans and chicory and the ever-

present orecchiette pasta with turnip tops, a dish evocative of Salento culture, while fish products include stewed octopus cooked in a unique earthenware pot (*lu purpu alla pignatta*) as it was in ancient times (Carlucci, De Santis, & Lorusso, 2021). Accurately defined as an “unstoppable kermesse of emotions and boundless space given by the alchemy between music and flavours” (Marconi, 2022), the Negroamaro Wine Festival does not want to wear the guise of a mere food and wine festival that attempts to provide entertainment to a passing public in search of food and drink, but rather, proposes an effective model for promoting the area with the active participation of producers flanked by the institutions that best represent the locality and its potential. There are numerous food and wine experiences that *Basilicata* offers each year for an in-depth knowledge of its culinary culture, transmitted in such a way as to feed the curiosity of the local public and on a European scale (De Luca, 2020). For each month of the year, food and wine events are “set up” that combine simplicity and attractiveness, offering compositions that range from the varied flavours of the land. To celebrate one of the symbols of Lucanian excellence, a festival in honour of the *peperone crusco* (PGI) is organised in Senise. This product is recognisable by the lush, bright red tufts that, during the August days dedicated to the festival, adorn the streets of the town centre, in the famous “pepper alley”. Once again, the celebration is not limited to the different ways of enjoying the food but is rich in cultural and goliardic events (Sacco, 2021).

For the region of *Calabria*, the month of July smacks of culinary tradition as it gets decked out in celebration with the Sagra del Pesce Azzurro (Festival of Blue Fish) and the Cipolla Rossa di Tropea (Red Onion of Tropea), in honour of two basic ingredients of local cuisine (Romano, 2019). The two prized gastronomic products are the spokesmen of ancient eating traditions, presenting themselves in harmonious combinations of flavours. Thus, the municipality of Tropea is not merely a tourist resort offering a spectacle for the eyes, as it belongs to the circle of “the most beautiful villages in Italy” but also proposes a holiday for the curious palate. As with the previously mentioned festivals, the undisputed protagonist is undoubtedly the food, but there is also great emphasis on the celebration of Calabrian folklore. The festival is repeated annually, enjoying a certain success not only in the national borders, but also finding the interest of greedy tourists in search of quality and authentic flavours (Bianchi, 2020). Despite its boasted notoriety, this is not the most famous red onion-themed celebration. In mid-August, in fact, the most famous event is held in the neighbouring municipality of Ricadi (Lombardi, 2018).

April 2023 sees the start of the second edition of the travelling festival of Sicilian Street Food (*Sicilia*), unearthing inviting aromas and flavours characteristic of the island's ancient villages. The various stages will not be limited to presenting typical dishes from the popular recipe book such as Arancino dei Nebrodi and Palermo's Cannoli (Montanari, 1999). In fact, they will also host culinary expressions from selected chefs, with innovative proposals and high standards (Cinelli Colombini, 2007). Speaking of Sicily, it is impossible not to mention a stage linked to the sea and its products. Therefore, reference is made to the fifth stage of the food and wine tour, which is headed by the municipality of Furnari and its hamlet, Tonnarella, invested in the role of protagonist of the festival in the days of late July (Garibaldi e Pozzi, 2022). Here, the coastline dominates the scene with the fascinating colours of the shoreline acting as a backdrop to sensational fish dishes and more. The sea, therefore, acts as both stage and actor, offering joy to the eye as much as to the palate, and this is certainly a great asset that attracts tourists from all over (Santini, 2020). The variety of recipes caters for every culinary curiosity, offering both the cuisine of small local companies with “rustic palate Cadeau” and more refined “haute cuisine” experiences (Parisi, 2017). Gourmands of maritime dishes will certainly be satisfied by the variety of themed dishes that dominate the event. In numbers, we are talking about 70 per cent of the menus proposed based on fish, while the remaining quota is spread over as many delicacies that do not have the mere function of an “extra” in this food theatre, since they too can be defined as pivotal dishes of Sicilian culture, including fried pizzas and meat products (including *Messina braciolette*, *falsomagro al ragù*, etc.) providing tasty alternatives even for the youngest tourists, such as pastry

and ice-cream delicacies (Montano, 2019). An event of this magnitude, aimed at welcoming, hosting, entertaining and, most importantly, satisfying the palate of tourists, necessarily stems from the collaboration of tourist and commercial operators as well as municipal administration (Santini, 2020). From the cases of food festivals on a local scale submitted for analysis, it emerges that the scheme adopted to achieve success, on the one hand, depends on the respect shown by visitors to the local population and the area itself, as well as the satisfaction of those present such that positive word-of-mouth publicity is fostered (Tornatore, 2021).

On the other hand, the necessary centrality of the enhancement of the food and wine landscape as the foundation of the event and the greater active involvement of the visitor with whom a positive bond will be created arise (Capatti e Montanari, 1999). Another piece of evidence common to the food and wine events studied is that the host rural areas are not only synonymous with peripherality but usually boast a certain wealth of vernacular foods identifying with the territory and popular culture (Serra, 2020). Given the attractiveness of the food's potential, these same locations are naturally more inclined to organise themed festivals (Garibaldi e Pozzi, 2022). Hence the conceptualisation of "food consumption" that has evolved from the mere fulfilment of household habits to the more profitable food and wine experiences, to the birth of wine tourism where the search for gastronomic novelty is itself the leading activity of the trip.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the considerations on the national tourist offer of food and wine, it is possible to make assessments on the actual and potential attractiveness of Italy's excellent food products and, thanks to them, how individual regions are positioned in the national market or how Italy is positioned in the international market. This is where the work of the "Italian Food and Wine Tourism Report" comes in, which presents in numerical terms the essential elements to include a location in the round of possible food and wine destinations in the tourist panorama.

Of course, single numerical data has no value in assessing the opportunities and market power of a certain geographical area or a certain product, albeit of culinary excellence. As a matter of fact, these data become relevant when considering the year-on-year trend of the same elements, studying whether there is a positive trend or not. To date, however, problems persist in the collection of data and the related evaluations over the years, since there are no official registers to accurately track the subject of our analysis, i.e. food tourism events.

Regardless of the statistics presented and the inconvenience of the lack of officiality in their collection, it is a fact that such events enjoy considerable value among the public, offering enjoyment and refreshment in the most inclusive way possible, involving different generations, social statuses, cultures, languages and locations. All this is evident even without the collection of data; the most relevant requirement, in fact, is the mere participation in the events, like a normal visitor filled with curiosity about exploring new realities and discovering new flavours. In fact, the case studies analysed stem both from the authors' careful research and from the direct testimonies of ordinary citizens who took part in some of the celebrations mentioned, giving concrete evidence of the pleasant experience and confirming the strong attractiveness of the festivals, which thus found themselves hosting visitors from all over, not only zero-kilometre customers.

Therefore, where study encounters limitations due to lack of tools, the factor of direct experience takes over, which can provide valuable information and at the same time give great emotions. At the end of the examination resulting from the work of the authors, it emerges from the murky waters of the initiatives aimed at social and territorial requalification that the specific instrument of Food Tourism expressed in the form of wine and food events linked to tradition, or commonly known as Food Festivals, reveal considerable potential useful for the urban requalification of interesting areas, namely the South in this paper. Therefore, trying to answer the question underlined in the title "Do Food Festivals redevelop the territory?", the answer would seem to be positive with reservations, since the event itself cannot generate such a significant

impact and hope to bring about change. The objective can be efficiently achieved with the strategic synergetic combination of the various elements and actors operating in the tourism sector.

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