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Abstract

This paper summarizes the results of an anthropological analysis – conducted with the methodological instruments used in ethnographic research – based on a virtuous model of territorial development. This study was aimed at enhancing the natural landscape of a small urban area, principally dedicated to tourism, through the recovery of the traditional manner of olive cultivation which is at risk of extinction. The case study in reference is situated in Campania, on the Island of Capri, and specifically in the small town of Anacapri which only numbers 6,684 residents. Action aimed at recovery of the agricultural areas began in 2014 and has been brought forward with determination by the L’Oro di Capri Association, established by several private backers in conjunction with local farmers with the objective of recuperating ancient, abandoned olive groves and converting them to organic cultivation in order to produce very high quality olive oil. This enhancement project led to several unexpected results as it has contributed to redefining local community identity, strengthened social ties and reawaken ancient feelings of heritage.

Keywords: heritage; identity; mediterranean diet; olive oil

1. Spanning the gamut from local to global oil: intangible heritage and an identifying emblem

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In addition to being one of the primary elements of the Mediterranean diet launched as a global dietary model by recent UNESCO heritage policies (Moro, 2014), the symbolic origins of extra-virgin olive oil are rooted in Greek mythology according to which a fruit bearing olive tree was given to man by the goddess Athena. Legend has it that through her precious gift, Athena the divine warrior and daughter of Zeus, managed to thwart Poseidon and earn the right to have the most important city in Hellas named in her honour (Niola, 2009). Therefore, as Marino Niola observes «the myth attributes both dietary and political significance to the olive tree and olive oil » (Niola, 2009).

It should be further noted that, since the Nineties, this precious staple, as well as other products such as wine, cheese, cold cuts – which derive from the processing of local productions characterized by local particularities – have been gathered under the umbrella of specific EEC-regulated mechanisms of economic protection. Indeed, Law 169 of 5 February 1995 recognized the PDO (protected designation of origin) label for virgin and extra virgin olive oils.

Within the context of this regulation, individual countries have adopted specific rules defining selected traditional specialities as PDO (protected designation of origin) or PGI (protected geographical indication) which are those agricultural or foodstuffs closely associated with a geographical context and local traditions of production. The quality of PDO and PGI products must be attributed “essentially or exclusively to the geographic context which includes natural and human factors; production and processing must take place in a clearly delimited geographical area”. The case of TSGs (Traditional specialities guaranteed) involves products which are not tied to a delimited geographical area but rather to tradition and thus the use of traditional raw materials) or to traditional composition or method of production and/or processing. If in the first two cases, protection is provided for products, which are characterized by a specific area, in the third case, however, protection is provided for a product which is characterised by tradition (Papa, 2000). As noted by Cristina Papa, although not all typical products are granted the European label of origin, they are distinguished as objects of heritage owing to two fundamental characteristics: they serve as a constant expression of a territory of reference and as identifying emblems for they are recognized by a local community as being of that community. Thus, they are concurrently “material heritage” in that they are tangible entities with their own distinctive utilitarian dimension and market value, as well as “immaterial heritage” for they embody tastes, techniques, customs, traditions and resources passed down through the generations. They are thus an integral part of a “local ethnological heritage” (Papa, 2000) and, similar to the community which they represent, are expressions of a vibrant, continuously developing culture.

It is precisely owing to this constitutive ambiguity, which situates these products between material and intangible, between an economic dimension and a symbolic dimension, between the market and heritage, between locality and universality, Cristina Papa has defined such cultural heritage as “oxymora” which require a multifocal perspective and interpretation.

In any case, the very concept of identity – which is the key to interpreting all intangible cultural heritage, of any heritage which is, by definition, intangible or, expressed in other terms, of any patrimony permeated with life – is in and of itself difficult to circumscribe because, as Claude Lévi-Strauss reminds us: “Identity is a sort of virtual centre to which we must refer to explain a multitude of phenomena of which observation of the production and the reproduction processes would seem opportune […] a sort of project in which both individuals and social formations find themselves simultaneously involved.”(Lévi-Strauss, 1997).

Identity can never be circumscribed to an “object”, but must always be interpreted as a “process” in continuous development with negotiating value, which is the result of community poetics and, moreover – because these projects involve social formations– they also become venues of political action.

We may thus affirm that identity falls within an intermediary space, in a limbo between the poetic and policies, in an extremely delicate frontier area, which may only be explored and understood through the use of the instruments of social science. Thus, anthropologists are the social scientists delegated to operate in this frontier area. They are the most suited to do so owing to their ability to apply that method which Ernesto de Martino defined as “critical ethnocentrism” (Lanternari, 1990) and also because, by virtue of professional ethics, they strive to observe the world bearing in mind both local global aspects, one eye turned to us and one eye towards others, avoiding that they become engulfed by either dimension.

Therefore, the true mission of anthropologists is to act as mediators between the poetics and the heritage policies, to interpret the poetics of a community and translate them into a language which is comprehensible to those institutions which advance increasingly efficient policies aimed at enhancing intangible cultural heritage.
2. *Oro di Capri* like a fairy tale

First and foremost, the task of the anthropologist is to describe intangible heritage through its ethnography, that is through the data that he or she gathers directly on site in what is known as “participant observation”. The history of the “Oro di Capri” Association and products as recounted here – has been reconstructed through direct ethnographic research – entwining various narrative levels and interpreted according to the structural semantic model which Vladimir Propp and Algirdas Julien Greimas (Greimas, 1966) adopted in their morphology of fairytales. Said interpretive model has recently been experimented by Piercarlo Grimaldi and Davide Porporato, together with a research group at the University of Gastronomic Sciences (Pollenzo – Bra), and applied in the analysis of certain small and medium-sized food companies with the aim of elaborating a qualitative paradigm to provide the companies with a specific certification of quality, certification of “good, clean and fair”, known as the “Pollenzo Index”.

Based on the Greimas model, it is possible to identify a “transcendent aspect”, that is, an “ideal” which drives the action, one or more “heroes” who guide the action, a few assistant or opponent “agents”, co-protagonists of the action, an “object of value” around which the action develops and an “immanent aspect” which is the ultimate aim of the action.

The “transcendent aspect”, which drives the entire *L’Oro di Capri* Association project is the will to recuperate the original landscape of the olive groves and terracing which descends towards the sea, using the typical dry stone walls which once characterized the Anacapri landscapes in the Mesola and Migliera areas on the slopes of the Faro (light house) and the Blue Grotto and even in the more inaccessible areas of Capri on the slopes of the Tiberio hill and the small Palazzo a Mare valley.

On the basis of this ideal, the *L’oro di Capri* Association was founded by a few local and outside founders and supporters in July of 2015. The presidency was entrusted to Pierluigi Della Femina, a local building contractor, while Gianfranco D’Amato, another businessman, was named honorary president. The association is non-profit and all members share in a common passion and love for the territory of Capri. As Pierlugi Della Femina states: “at the start, the project was almost a whim and then became something very serious. Our common idea was to restore Capri to what it once was, and recuperate what was once there, gold which comes from the land, from our origins, something which dates back to a distant, ancient time”.

The objectives are clearly stated on the association website (www.orodicapri.com) and in its charter:

- Promote the recovery of the olive groves present in many areas of the Island of Capri
- To divulge the culture needed for the biological cultivation of olives
- To safeguard the rural Capri environment and landscape
- To guarantee the quality of Capri oil by providing technical-scientific support during the phases of olive cultivation and processing
- Recuperate and enhance traditional culture and agricultural practices

Assisting in the initiative are other co-protagonist heroes, positive agents and specialized technicians: Attilio de Gregorio, farmer, Carlo Alessandro Lelj Garolla, agronomist and green house owner who charted a map of island vegetation’s in 1991, Vincenzo Torelli, Aniello Catuogno, the agronomist Angelo Lo Conte, from Irripinia and an expert in Ravece quality olives, the olive press operator Gennaro Gargiulo and some fifty local farmers.

Thanks to significant investments and the expertise of all involved, within two years the association has managed to bring ancient abandoned olive groves back to life, some 30 hectares of land have been recuperated and new olive trees have been planted next to the old trees. The olive varieties include Ogliarola, Rotondella, Frantoio and Leccino. Any illegal constructions found on the lands have been demolished. The association has decided to produce 100% natural olive oil of the highest quality.

The “object of value”, which transforms the initial “transcendent aspect”, must be rigorously eco-sustainable and healthy. As Pierlugi Della Femina affirms «at one time, there was an olive press on the island and olive oil was produced in such quantities that the islanders managed to export a part of the production. If our parents managed to make a profit from this heritage, it would only be just that our children manage to do the same». The transcendent idea is, therefore, to recuperate and ennoble a traditional activity permeated in identifying values in order to leave this heritage to our children.
The association provides technical assistance to farmers with the aim of obtaining high quality oil without the use of chemical products. Indeed, during the productive cycle, members are guaranteed monitoring for the most frequent types of parasites, assistance with fertilizing, and pesticide treatments, consultation related to pruning methods, tillage, irrigation and assistance with harvesting. The production specifications followed are those in effect for PDO oil from the Sorrento Peninsula and the organic protocol require the exclusive use of natural fertilizers and pesticides, mechanical traps utilizing yeast which serves as insecticide and use of kaolin against the olive fruit fly which is by far the most serious risk owing to its undisturbed proliferation for years in the abandoned olive groves. Each member is held to following this method of cultivation and is responsible for the quality and integrity of the oil produced.

After almost two years, in September of 2015, the trees began to bear fine quality fruit. The harvest occupied members for nearly three weeks, the olives are brought to the nearest olive press located in Massa Lubrense on the Sorrento Coast the very day they are harvested. The farmers who have scrupulously followed the shared protocol manage to obtain extra-virgin olive oil which, with excellent results, far exceeding the Naples Chamber of Commerce chemical analyses and panel tests.

In this happy ending, there is only question which remains unanswered which is: were there “opposing agents” and, if so, who were they? Some local farmers may be identified as such because, owing to their unfamiliarity with organic cultivation, they protested against the idea of harvesting olives not fully ripened which is the strategy adopted by the Oro di Capri agronomists aimed at averting olive fly attacks prior to harvest. To all effects, not fully ripened olives better conserve aroma but, lend a slightly piquant taste to the olive oil, quite unlike the sweeter taste which is more frequently found on the market and, moreover these olives produce less juice. For this reason, some local producers who formally joined the Association, subsequently decided not to fully comply with regulations and thus did not obtain a truly extra virgin oil in the production and bottling phases and were thus not allowed to use the L’Oro di Capri trademark.

Initially, the entire local community was also opposing “agents” who openly declared their skepticism for an initiative which was strongly advanced and promoted by two businessmen. During the work to recuperate the olive groves, rumours spread around town that the real objective was that one of the two partners intended to build a heliport in the area adjacent to his villa and the final objective was to privatize the area known as the Sentiero dei fortini. The fear of the local population was that the businessmen, driven by utilitarian objectives, wanted to transform Anacapri into an exclusive tourist village, depriving it of its original identity. It is important to note that the self-representation of Anacapri identity is built precisely in relation to the naturalness of their territory and is deeply rooted in the distinctive characteristics of rurality, tradition and genuineness in stark contract with Capri which, with the exception of the Tiberio area, is, in the descriptions made by the people of Anacapri likened shopping mall, a false, fictitious place” – or, a non-place as Mar Augé would have commented [9] where the only tourists who arrive are those who “want to be seen” ¹. The Anacapri community found it difficult to belive that the aims of the promoters were only to recover the natural landscape and promote the quality of local olive oil.

In reality, the businessmen who supported and financed most of the operation were not in the least driven by utilitarian objectives which is clear in the words of Gianfranco D’Amato: “for me, the driving force was the desire to improve the oil I was already producing in my own groves, out of sheer passion. I had been impressed with postcards of Anacapri from the 1930s in which olive trees were an outstanding feature of the landscape and I began speaking with the owners of other olive groves and came to learn that in the past, many Capri families had engaged in producing olive oil and that this tradition had been more deeply-rooted than one would think. Many continued to produce it, albeit in minimum quantities, for their own use, following techniques which had been passed down through the generations. Each of them was convinced that his oil was truly genuine and, above all, that it was the best. My intention was to try and produce an oil which was truly organic, but I couldn’t do this alone».

When D’Amato began consulting with agronomists and experts about his trees, he realized that attempting to limit organic production to only his own property without extending it to a large area would have only been in vain. He therefore decided to try “educating” all the Island farmers about organic cultivation and offered free consulting by his own specialized technicians. He encouraged debates and encounters between the farmers and the technicians. Gradually the farming community began to believe in and became part of the project through a “democratic education” to the quality. Almost all of the farmers, even the traditionally-minded (with very few exception), accepted the

¹ These observations were collected between December 2015 and January 2016 during some of my interviews with local witnesses.
challenge to put their own product to the by converting to organic methods.

Unpredictably, as if in a distant past, oil became the subject of common interest, a new meeting theme.

The high quality oil, which both businessmen were able to produce, did not enter into commercial circuits also because, for the moment, it would be priced out of the market. The production costs for each liter of this oil is in excess of 100 euro.

As such, it is an “object of value” which can only be exchanged in gift form, similar to those objects analysed and described by Marcel Mauss as the fulcrum of ceremonial exchange which, for precisely this reason, are not governed by the laws of purchase and sale but rather by the three fundamental social obligations: “giving”, “receiving” and “reciprocating” (Mauss, 1965).

Within the gift circuit, oil, laden with identity, is a symbolic asset and, as all ceremonial objects, itself contains something of the giver and is a precious substance which expresses the social prestige of the giver and, in this case, community ties.

As ethnographically demonstrated, in an analysis of the production of this gift, it came to light that the recovery of the olive groves more or less served as a “total social fact” (Mauss, 1965) owing to its capacity to involve all levels of the community around a common interest, a new totemic product which asserts a their renewed Mediterranean identity and through which community ties are reinforced creating new, shared emotions of heritage.

In this case study, the production is not based on pure utilitarian logic but rather, above all, on cultural intentions, that is the productions of significance (Sahlins, 1982).

As we have seen, the landscape and, more specifically in this case, the olive groves, have been reconsidered as a legacy which fathers have recuperated and ennobled with the intention of passing them down to their own children and thus also contribute to consolidating the ties between generations. This is the “immanent aspect” or the potential of the narration which, only in the future, may also evolve from a financial perspective: the production of oil may, indeed, favour a more diversified image of the island, recuperating its identifying rural characteristics and suggesting alternate itineraries, far from the touristic stereotypes which reduce the image of Capri to that of an artificial paradise for VIPs and a luxury shopping destination. Furthermore, it represents a sustainable model of entrepreneurial development on the territory because, by respecting the environment it adds value to a precious, endogenous natural resource and might induce local youth to remain on the island and, concurrently, discourage the current phenomena of demographic depopulation and property speculation.

References