

The wine routes: analysis of a rural development tool

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Abstract - The wine routes: analysis of a rural development tool. The European Commission's rural development policies offer more and more tools for integrated, multi-sectoral development. One of the most concrete applications of these policies are the *food and wine routes and wine routes*. The wine routes provide a form of tourist promotion which is able to create "virtuous circles" which not only valorise the culinary delights of the rural areas but manage to integrate all the players in the same food processing supply chain.

The doubt may arise as to whether these tools are really effective in generating returns for the whole territory and the local production realities in terms of economics and image. The question is whether these routes are able or not to generate economies of scale and economies of system which can improve the local supply chains and at the same time improve the conditions within the rural territory they originate in.

The aim of this study is therefore to understand whether tools such as the wine route, offering an opportunity for the producers of typical products, can be effective in re-activating and safeguarding rural areas.

1. Introduction

The establishment of the rural development policies linked to the second pillar of the CAP, allow agricultural enterprises to diversify their activities through the provision of tourist services linked to the production of foodstuffs, with the aim of promoting integrated development in rural areas and combining traditional activities with new forms of tourism-linked commerce.

From this, initiatives have been developed to valorise food products which are considered typical and which are able to attract tourists. The tool used to reach this aim is represented by the creation of *routes or itineraries* which are associated to the products of a determined area, such as wines and P.D.O. products.

Also in the province of Parma, three routes have been recently established which are linked to P.D.O. products and wine: *the Culatello di Zibello route, the Porcini Mushroom route of Borgotaro and the Wine and Prosciutto route of the Parma Hills*. They include typical product producers, entrepreneurs in the field of tourism and representatives of the public sector.

The challenge lies in using the "route" as an effective tool for re-activating and safeguarding the rural area, which as such makes it a rural development policy, and for this reason the aspects which may limit its potential also need to be examined.

With this aim, this study has concentrated its attention on the *Wine and Prosciutto route of the Parma Hills*, in order to examine whether or not it has been able to represent and valorise its typical products and the territory they are produced in, and provide a concrete opportunity for local enterprises.

Starting from the basic principles of the Regional Economy and thanks to the concept of "network" and the theories of the Neo-Institutional Economies and Convention Economies, we have a theoretical base for understanding the origin, creation, development and economic

effects of this rural development tool (par. 2). The legislation linked to the wine route on a European, national and local level is presented briefly (par. 3), showing its concrete application in the province of Parma. From the analysis of the information gathered from the companies who participate in the *Wine and Prosciutto route of the Parma Hills* (par. 4), an analysis is also made of the strong and weak points of these rural development tools (par. 5).

2. An economic analysis of the food and wine and wine routes

The analysis of the potential of rural areas has been the subject of recent development thanks to the theories expressed by some economists who see the territory as a “container” of natural, environmental and *know-how* factors (Delfosse, 1996). From here, the view of the territorial economy as a system of relationships between economic, individual and collective subjects, is growing ever stronger. This promotes the growth of a process of economic know-how and cultural aggregation which is of fundamental importance for the development of a network of relationships and the creation of added value (Storper, 1997).

The creation of a system of relationships between operators leads to the characterisation of the territory, which becomes the centre of a process of social construction of the products offered by the territory and provides it with a specific identity (Rossi and Rovai, 1998, Barjolle, Chappuis, Sylvander, 1998), as economic, organisational and technical relationships which develop horizontally and vertically become an intrinsic characteristic of the territory and all that is produced in it (Pacciani, Belletti, Marescotti, Scaramuzzi, 2001).

The study of local systems has highlighted the role of *specific organisational resources* for the promotion and creation of “*systemic*” or “*networked*” organisational forms which allow the development of companies which can compete in the market by concentrating on the typicality and originality of their products. These resources promote the division of production activities within a determined local system and set off a virtuous path through which the relationship between the local subjects can be valorised.

In this sense Iacoponi (Iacoponi, 1995) formalises the relationships within a territory with the hypothesis of the existence of a “*local agricultural system*” which is a territorial union within which modern forms of organisation are used among the agricultural enterprises and original forms of interaction are developed among global and local systems”. This interpretation justifies the existence of particularly evident phenomena in the analysis of agricultural companies, characterised by the growing diversification of activities, particularly in the fields of agri-tourism and rural tourism.

If in theory the term “wine route” conjures up an image of recreation, from a strictly economic point of view it may be considered as an integrated supply system. The system of relationships between enterprises is associated with a “network” which creates advantages due to the existence of economies of scale, economies of system and economies of scope (Antonioli Corigliano, 1999; Morroni, 1992).

The economies of scale cannot be directly seen at company level, but are clearly visible when considering the entire production system and the relationships present within the territory. On the other hand, the economies of scope benefit endogenously from the spread of needs among the companies present in the territory, generating management tools which are able to satisfy the collective needs. (One example of this is the Consortia for the protection and management of the Routes).

The involvement of all the public and private operators who contribute to the creation of the local tourist product make it possible to use a *bottom up* approach in creating effective interconnection among the networks. There are both “soft” and “hard” elements to the network, which is to say the structural part, the foundation of the concept of the territorial

network, which can best express the co-existence of different territorial development models within a determined area (Gatti Incerti, 1997).

In those networks which involve public institutions, their role is very important as it stabilises the relationships between companies and guarantees them a path for growth and expansion in terms of structure and human resources.

The efficiency of a network and its ability to “activate” endogenous development at local level is therefore strictly linked to the presence and the value of a structure which is able to set off the enterprise relationship chain.

In the case of the “Routes”, the ability of the operators to use the information value of the territory (understood as *terroir*¹) in all its dimensions (natural, social and heritage), is due to the joint presence of numerous factors. The variables involved (summarised in Figure 1) concern the regulatory, organisational and human aspects which are integrated together to produce a valorisation path of the “territory system” and therefore of the products it offers it (Belletti, 2000).

The “route” product must necessarily grow around a base comprised of an important basket of local products and the presence of historical, cultural and/or natural attractions, accompanied by a high level of customer service. These factors generate positive externalities which characterise a specific path, and make it unique.

At this point, the organisational structure of the local production system can be examined, through the analysis of two elements which are strongly linked:

- a) The nature of the relationships which are created between the enterprises within the territorial system;
- b) The relationship between the tourist/consumer of the Route product and the Route operators.

2.1 Analysis of the relationships between enterprises

Regarding the analysis of the relationships which exist among enterprises, this depends on the characteristics and the typology of operators who participate in the Route, whether they be private companies, public bodies or “intermediate institutions”.

Among private companies there are agricultural concerns, food processing companies, enterprises operating in the tourism sector and companies which sell local products. Each typology of company may cover more than one segment of the product chain, and will in any case guarantee strong links within the territory and will contribute to the “collective” image of that territory.

The public bodies concerned are mainly the municipal and provincial councils. These bodies mainly cover a role of co-ordination and collective management of the Route product, as they are directly involved in the activities which are carried out in their territory. Their task is to provide bureaucratic, organisational and training tools to create and develop the Routes in the name of the collective interest.

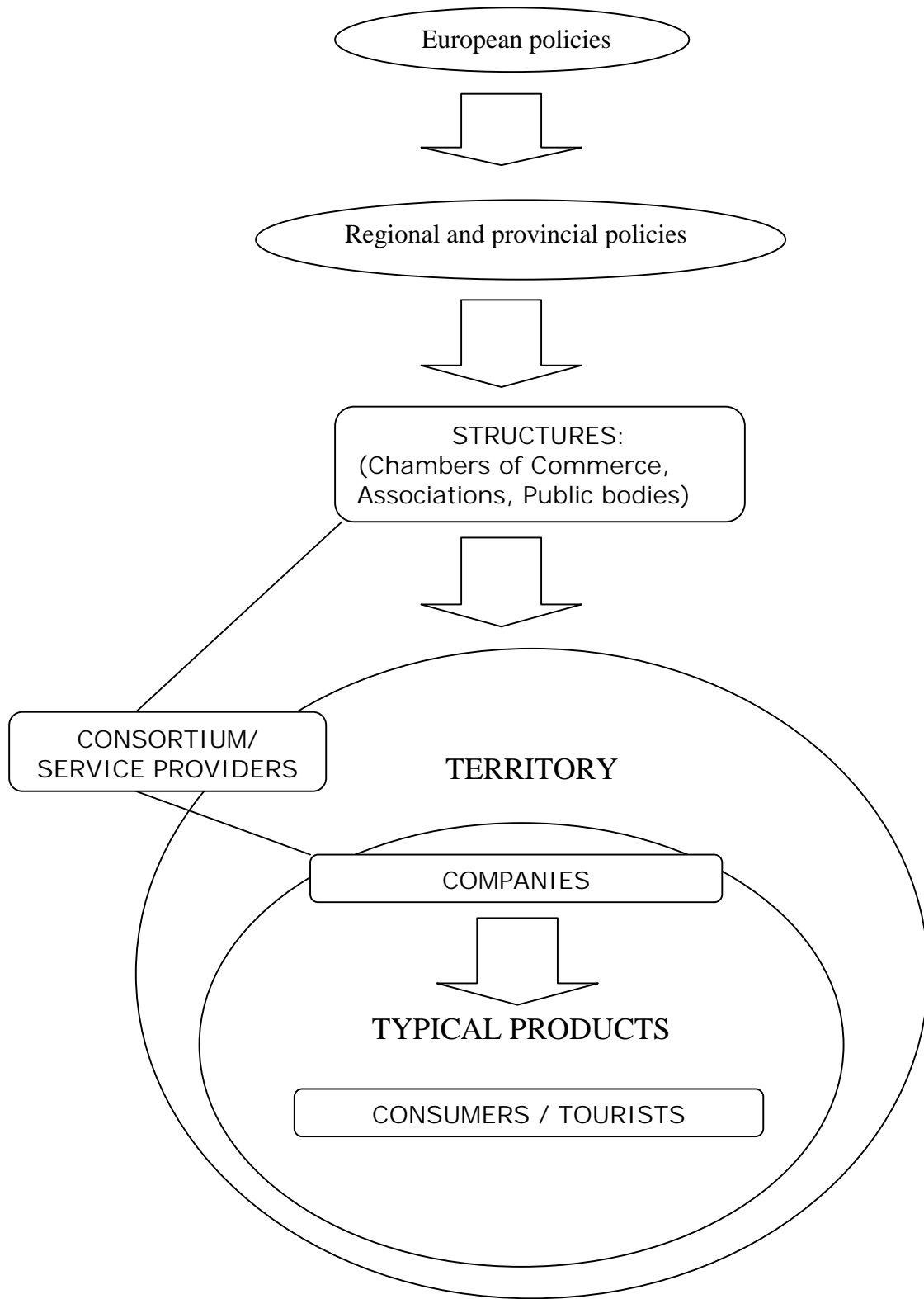
As far as Intermediate Institutions are concerned, these are Chambers of Commerce, Tourist Boards and Consortia for the protection of the local typical products. Their task is to co-ordinate the private companies in the management of the Route, basically providing the tools to develop collective marketing tools and offering a guarantee of the quality of the Route products to the tourists and consumers.

The analysis of the relationships which exist between enterprises can be done by examining the theoretical framework provided by the Neo-Institutional Economy and repeated in the

¹ By *terroir* we refer to a group of pedo-climatic, technical and organisational particularities and a group of producers selected over the course of an historical journey of the specification of the product itself (Dedeire, 1995).

Economic Theory of the Conventions (ETC) (Lewis, 1969; Schelling, 1977; Eggertsson, 1990).

Figure 1. Operational model of a Wine Route



Source: University of Parma, Faculty of Economics, 2001.

It is precisely the existence of conventions within the socio-economic system which allows us to verify the role of the social interaction mechanisms in decision making. These can be institutionalised by an authority able to ensure the co-ordination of the single organisations and the consequent reduction of uncertainty in the exchanges (Parri, 1996).

Applying this reference framework to the Route, it becomes a *relational space* within which specific agreements are made regarding the criteria for product and operator qualification, which are useful for improving the co-ordination and collective image of the product. This is the result of a voluntary negotiation, based on a *civic convention*² supported by the retrieval of a *domestic convention* (Letablier and Nicolas, 1994), a clear link between local production and rural development, promoted by a collective group able to identify the tools and goals to reach it (Long Van Der Ploeg, 1994, Romano, 1996, Brunori, 1999).

The ability to maintain constant product characteristics along the food and wine itinerary and constant characteristics of the itinerary itself, and the relationship between the operators, through the creation of "*specific standardisations*"³, leads to the creation of a local market. In this way, a local system of agricultural and food-processing enterprises is born, in which, on top of its easily accessible technological environment, provides easy and low cost transactions and high product specialisation, with the possibility of collective planning in which the individual projects and companies are created bearing in mind (implicitly or explicitly) the other companies within the local system (Iacoponi, 1995). In other words the performances and benefits of every enterprise are a function of the collective performances and benefits. In this way it is possible to lower the transaction costs among the enterprises, reduce the risks linked to the start up of complementary activities and profit from external economies, with clear benefits from the flexible decomposition of the production process (Brunori, Rossi, 2000, Dei Ottati, 1987).

The *ability to increase system flexibility*, depends precisely on the presence of the above described situations and represents the condition for maintaining and increasing the competitiveness of those markets which are based on the collective construction of a specific identity (Pacciani, Belletti, Marescotti, Scaramuzzi, 2001). In this way it is not the individual goods sold which generate a competitive advantage, but it is the characteristics of the organisational system which identify the product, differentiate it from its competitors and promote its success.

Thanks to the relationships created among the operators involved, a process of *know-how* accumulation is also developed, improving the quality of the services which accompany the products and bringing them even closer to satisfying the needs of the consumer-tourist. This convergence of supply and demand is made possible above all by the presence of a "Service Centre" or of consortia, whose aim is not only to satisfy the "generic" demands of rural

² The main conventions active within economic systems are:

- Market convention: operators have all relevant information to be able to independently evaluate the quality of the products, without any external information support apart from the price, which is the only evaluation criteria for quality.
- Domestic convention: information gaps which are mainly prevented by the operators' "proximity relational system" (in terms of space and culture). At the moment of exchange of trust the counterpart takes on a central role, which originates in the historical and proximity relationship.
- Industrial convention: the organisation is selected on the basis of its ability to adapt to and respect specific process standards and to produce products which correspond to codified rules.
- Civic convention: the organisation is chosen on the basis of its capacity to satisfy collective objectives and/or respect the principles of a higher order.
- Opinion convention: the qualification of the organisation is based exclusively on the opinion other operators have of it. (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1987)

³ These are understood as special relational goods, deriving not only from the vicinity but also from the production traditions and the relationships between the operators (Storper, 1997, De Rosa, 1999)

tourism, but also to organise and guarantee the quality of the goods and services supplied to the tourist. In this sense the main role of the Consortium is the establishment and promotion of regulations regarding product and service standards and quality, and the management of all the activities linked to communication (organisation of events, trade fairs, and information centres such as web sites). The tasks carried out by the Consortium also concern the provision of effective services for the creation of local tourist products. Consortia become a cohesive element which is able to organise and integrate the resources and tourist activities in an area, in the most economically efficient and socially acceptable manner, developing a global strategy for promoting the respective territory (Antonioli Corigliano, 1999).

2.2 Analysis of the relationships between enterprises and tourists

As far as the relationships between Route enterprises and tourists are concerned, these can also be analysed using theoretical tools provided by the Conventions Theory, and more specifically by the *Quality Conventions* and the *Qualification Conventions*.

The *quality conventions* refer to the process of qualification of a product as the definition of quality is the result of a process of social construction, the result of the integration and agreement of individuals and is continuously subject to re-negotiation over time. The different meanings of quality which emerge from this process therefore represent conventions which improve the co-ordination of the activities of the operators (on equal pegging with other conventions), becoming collective reference points and information providers which simplify the decision-making process.

The *qualification conventions*, on the other hand, refer to the criteria with which the customer evaluates and selects the companies when he is not able to evaluate the qualitative characteristics of the product before purchase, or when the product has no quality criteria. At these conditions the qualification conventions constitute a further tool to be used during exchange, as they provide the customer with the criteria he needs for evaluating quality, and therefore for choosing (Marescotti, 2000).

To summarise, therefore, from this point of view the quality of the product which becomes clear at the time of purchase, and which is perceived and identified by the consumer, is the result of a social construction process of the value and the organisation of the production resources which are guided by shared criteria.

The Route product can be considered as the result of collective action of both a material and immaterial nature, and this result is capitalised in a collective immaterial resource, that of the *reputation*, linked to the name of the Route, the territory or the product.

Therefore alongside the *individual reputation* of the company through the quality and the image of the offered product, runs the *collective reputation*, originating from the convergence of behaviour of the individual reputations of a group of operators which becomes immaterial and shared among a group of enterprises.

In order to create a collective reputation, strategic behaviour is needed which can act as an incentive for a series of collective actions which, however, have costs in terms of co-ordination of the whole network which is developed among the operators. It goes without saying that the co-ordination costs are proportional to the number of subjects involved, their similarity in terms of understanding and availability of resources. For this reason, the creation and management of a collective good, such as the Wine Route, through the presence of institutional figures such as the Provincial Administrations and Consortia allow for stronger co-ordination among the subjects and a reduction in transaction costs (Barjolle D., Chappuis, M., 2000).

Examples of well-run Wine Routes can be found in the Napa Valley, in California and in the *Chateaux* beyond the Alps, both excellent examples of valorisation of the territory, created

through the able management and support of the tourist bodies and local institutions. In these two cases the promotion is not centred around the individual company but around a whole area, where there are a number of subjects who, working together, contribute to improve and create the Route “product”.

The management of the image, communication, and marketing on the one hand and the infrastructure, the consortia, the relationships between the subjects, the *know-how* and the products which comprise the environment on the other, are elements which help to determine the success or failure of the Route and consequently its ability to valorise the surrounding territory.

To this regard it may be useful to examine the case of the food and wine Routes in the Province of Parma to see whether this “product”, as it is presented to tourists in terms of the goods and services on offer, can be used to valorise the rural territory.

3. Origin and legislative analysis of the Wine Routes

The valorisation of the territory has been an objective of the rural development policies of the European Commission for a number of years. The process began at the end of the 1980s with the first phase of Structural Fund reforms, and followed with the Cork Conference (European Commission, 1996), reaching a peak with *Agenda 2000*, with the clear objective of making European agriculture more competitive, more suited to the demand for quality products and the respect for the environment and well as the need to re-qualify and support rural areas.

The application of the EC regulations in the Emilia Romagna region has led to the implementation of the *Regional Plan for Rural Development -2000*, based around three main themes, Theme 1 enterprise competitiveness, Theme 2 the environment and Theme 3 integrated local development (Emilia Romagna Region, 1999). In relation to integrated interventions for local development, the latter refers to the diversification of economic activities and a suitable valorisation of the territory⁴, measures which have been taken also in the Province of Parma, in its *Provincial Operational Plan*⁵.

The rural territory therefore takes on a key role in the possibility to revitalise the natural environment, through the control of the phenomena of rural depopulation, and above all through the support for employment in agricultural and traditional sectors, including the production of wine and typical products. These can be considered the real driving force of the image and the economy of the territory, as they are able to create a thread linking places, structures and services within the itineraries which join together the environment, the territory and the economic agents and make them interact.

And it is to these aspects that new forms of *food and wine* tourism look when searching for products linked to a given territory, and which create virtuous circles not only for the promotion of those products but also for the production and commercial sector, as it concerns the whole food-processing industry linked to that production chain. Among the various initiatives, the "Wine Routes" represent a concrete demonstration of the rural development policies based on the valorisation of the products within a territory. The Wine Routes have been defined in the Italian Law No. 268/99, as “... *specifically signposted and advertised itineraries, along which features of natural, cultural and environmental value can be found, vineyards and wine cellars owned by agricultural enterprises which are open to the public;*

⁴ The measures of diversification of economic activity aim to develop services and integrative activities for agricultural income and promote agri-tourism structures and circuits, while the measures of valorisation of the territory foresee the sale of typical and quality products linked to the territory with the support of rural infrastructure and works for the safeguard of the agricultural heritage.

⁵ Within the 3rd theme, particularly important are the 3m measures, relating to the sale of typical quality products and 3p relating to the diversification of activities within the agricultural and similar sectors.

they constitute the tool through which the associated territories and their relative local productions can be spread, sold and used as a source of supply for tourism”.

In the Emilia Romagna Region, in applying the Regional Law No 23/00, the *Wine and Taste Routes* have been constituted, joining the food and wine itineraries of the Region, generally one per province, based on the valorisation of wines and typical products. Within this initiative, the Provincial Council of the Province of Parma has interpreted the Regional Law No. 23/00, in its deliberation no. 927 of 16th November 2000, and has established three itineraries within the provincial territory, which are the *Culatello di Zibello Route*, the *Porcini Mushroom Route of Borgotaro* and the *Wine and Prosciutto Route of the Parma Hills*.

4. Parma case study: an investigation of the Wine and Prosciutto Route of the Parma Hills

The itinerary of the *Wine and Prosciutto Route of the Parma Hills*, covers a territory of eight municipalities (Calestano, Collecchio, Felino, Langhirano, Lesignano Bagni, Montechiarugolo, Sala Baganza, Traversetolo) following the high plain and the foot hills of the Parma Appenines. The municipalities involved can be considered as economically and culturally “vital” areas and they all include strong tourist attractions based on the integration of natural, cultural and food and wine resources.

The products which characterise this itinerary are the CDO wines of the Parma Hills, (*Malvasia, Sauvignon and Rosso*), Prosciutto di Parma, which together lend their name to the itinerary, Parmigiano Reggiano and Fragno Black Truffle. These products are known to the consumer not only on a local level but also have a strong reputation at a national level and abroad.

The body in charge of managing the itinerary is the *Wine and Prosciutto Route of the Parma Hills Association*, officially founded in January 2000. This non-profit association comprises the Council Department for Food and Agriculture, the Provincial Council Tourist Department and the Chamber of Commerce of Parma, as well as the public bodies of the municipalities, trade associations (5), local tourist boards and production companies (58). This last group can be further divided into: wine cellars (11), cheese factories (13), prosciutto and sliced pork meat plants (14), hotels and restaurants (11), agri-tourisms (4), farms (3) and typical product retailers (2). From this picture it is clear that there is a wide variety of economic operators, belonging to very different groups, and which all need a certain amount of uniformity from the organisation point of view and as far as the supply of services is concerned, to be in a position to present and develop a product with a common image.

The Route initiative is still being defined and developed. The original association of 58 partners has since become 77, 62 of which are private companies, which shows an ever-growing involvement of the companies within the territory as time passes. Among these companies, in terms of operations, the prosciutto plants stand out, some of which cannot even manage to satisfy the requests for guided visits, (above all from abroad) for structural and organisational reasons.

From a promotional point of view, recently a web site has been created (www.stradadelprosciutto.it) and a press office (info@ella.it), which are able to provide information regarding the initiatives and events which may directly or indirectly involve the itinerary. Most events are linked to important local festivals such as the Prosciutto Festival, the Parmigiano Reggiano Fair and the Black Truffle Festival, as well as other gastronomic fairs which are traditionally and annually organised in the towns and villages along the route. Among the indirect initiatives, two permanent cultural structures linked to the products of the territory are also being founded, the *Prosciutto di Parma Museum*, and the *Tomato Museum*.

And from a structural point of view, the companies are rapidly complying with the regulations of the Specification in view of the foreseen inspections to be carried out by a Regional Control Commission, which will verify the conformity of the companies to the required requisites and which has the authority to exclude any companies which it does not consider suitable. Furthermore the signposting which provides a common identification and logo for the Emilia Romagna region is currently being laid, a “stylised sun” has been chosen as the symbol of the Emilia Romagna Wine and Taste Routes.

Finally, to promote greater participation by the operators and an improvement in the competitive advantage of this project, training courses for the staff of participating companies are also being designed, with the aim of increasing the understanding of the problems linked to hospitality and tourist marketing, and which will create new professional figures with competencies and methodologies which can be used for continuous improvement of the services provided.

4.1. Analysis of structural data

In order to understand if, also within this economic-tourist project, the assumptions exist for a positive impact on the territory through the establishment of a network of relationships between enterprises and tourists, a survey was carried out among the companies taking part in the initiative.

The Route enterprises were contacted in person, by telephone and by post, with a specific questionnaire according to their field of activity (Wine cellars, Cheese and Prosciutto plants, restaurants – hotels - agri-tourism establishments) with a response rate of 71%.

The questionnaire was organised into three sections: the first concerned structural and production data, specific to each category. The second section requested a description of the state of the initiatives connected to the Route activities such as guided tours, tasting events and production demonstrations, as well as any practical changes which have been made. The third and final section analysed the views of the entrepreneurs on the issues strictly linked to the management of the Route, such as: the reasons why the company decided to participate in the project, the willingness of the company to participate in a training course and their overall evaluation of the Route project.

The part of the questionnaire pertaining to the analysis of the company structures led to the confirmation that almost all the companies participating are family-run businesses, with a low number of staff, despite the fact that most of them have a divided company structure (limited company, professional partnership, joint stock company and private partnerships).

On average, the wine cellars cover an area of about 14 hectares, with production strongly oriented to quality and almost totally covered by CDO protection (around 80%). Only a small number of producers (around 20%) have decided to dedicate their activities to the production of P.G.I. table wine for local consumption. All the producers make wine using their own grapes and have a company label to accompany their bottles.

The cheese, prosciutto and pork meat producers, as producers of P.D.O. protected products process the milk and meat according to the production specification and therefore use raw materials from the typical production area. The companies participating in the Route are all small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and are characterised by strong artisan-style production.

As far as the hotels, restaurants and agri-tourism establishments are concerned, they are well established in the local tourist system and are almost always included in the tourist packages offered by tour-operators. The restaurants are mostly small but offer high quality services, and the majority offer accommodation as well as food.

4.2 Analysis of the Route initiatives

The analysis of the Route initiatives is of particular importance as it can be considered as an indicator of the relation between the companies and the consumer-tourists through a range of initiatives developed and offered by the companies, such as:

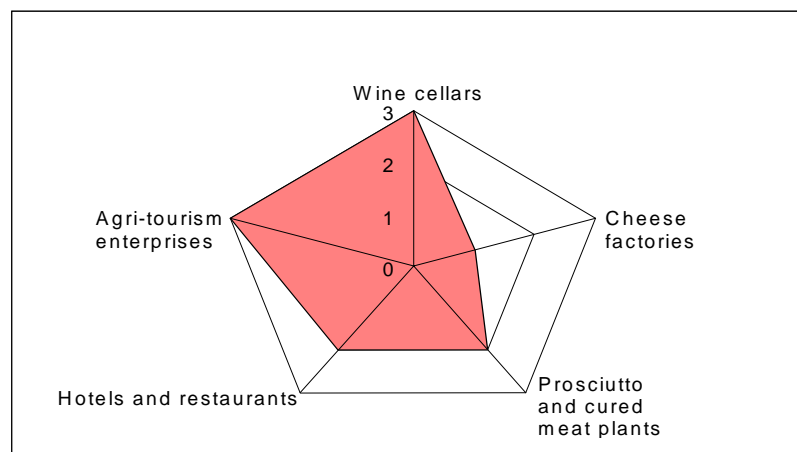
1. Guided tours of the companies,
2. Tasting events,
3. Explanations of the important production phases.

These initiatives have until now only been activated by 10% of the companies, mainly wine cellars, who had however already been offering such services for some time. From the collected data, it also emerges that there are very limited extra-promotional activities carried out by the companies (such as *merchandising*), which shows that the reality of Parma still has a long way to go to reach the examples in France or the Napa Valley.

The changes in the traditional company activities probably still go unnoticed even though from a structural point of view the companies have had to carry out some form of restructuring and modification of their organisation in order to be able to accommodate the tourists.

For such activities a Route Specification is foreseen, a kind of list of quality standards regarding not only modifications to structures but also to services, which on the one hand continue to ensure the working activities but on the other hand allow the company to better provide for the tourist-customer and satisfy his curiosity. To this regard, from the analysis it has been seen that the companies mostly respect almost all the requested standards with the exception of the common lack of suitable structures for the handicapped and the lack of staff speaking foreign languages, thus confirming the high quality of the service offered despite the fact that this is still small scale and with limited experience.

Figure 2. Quality analysis of the services offered



Source: University of Parma, Faculty of Economics, 2001

Not all of the companies are however on the same level in terms of the quality of the services offered (Fig. 2). While the wine cellars and agri-tourism concerns show that they have reached a satisfactory quality level, the hotels, prosciutto plants and cheese factories need to improve the image of their companies and the Route, and need therefore to improve their attitude towards the tourists and pay more attention to them, offering better quality services.

4.3 The opinions of the companies

The questionnaire also allowed for the verification of both the opinion and the attitude of the entrepreneurs to the Route, by asking them:

- a) Their reasons for participating,
- b) Their wish to participate in training courses,
- c) Their overall opinion of the project.

For the first two questions, they were asked to express their opinion on a scale of 0 to 3.

More precisely, the reasons for participating reflect three possible justifications: (i) the company is representative of the territory, (ii) the company believes in the project, (iii) the company sees economic advantages.

From the replies received it has been seen that only agri-tourism establishments and farms strongly believe in the project, while the majority of the other companies participate in the Route because they believe their company to be representative of the territory, while they do not explicitly believe in the success of such projects and pay little attention to the potential for future economic advantages, despite the fact that these represent the basis for their expectations for growth. (Fig.3).

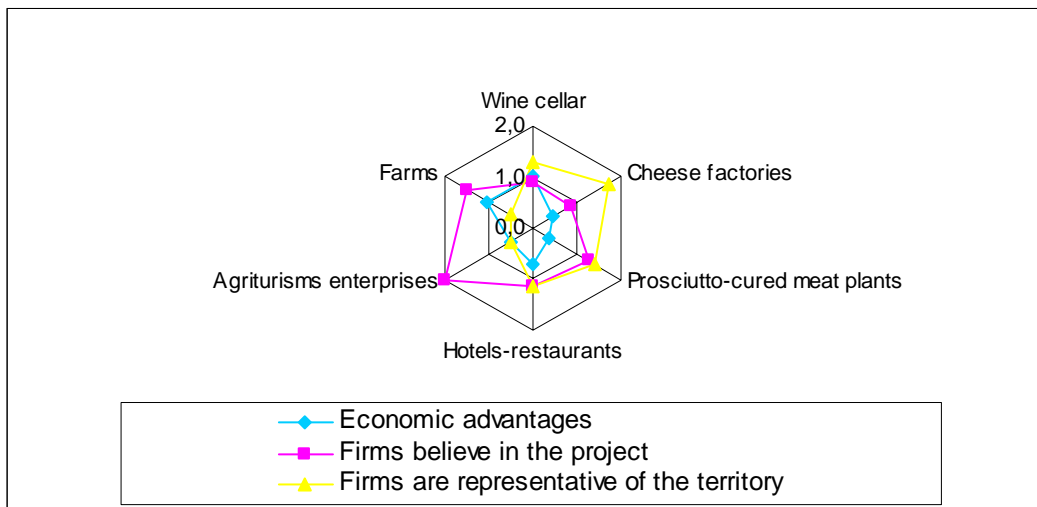
As the ability to interact with the tourists is a necessary requisite for increasing the quality of the itinerary, the opportunity to participate in training courses on sales techniques and tourist hospitality methods is still considered a fundamental possibility.

To this regard the enterprises were asked if they were willing to participate in specific training courses aimed at improving staff qualifications, to better understand the characteristics of the Route and the other operators, as well providing the chance to visit other food and wine itineraries in Italy and abroad.

The replies received highlight the fact that not all the operators involved have the same desire to improve their level of knowledge. Overall only 58% of those who answered the questionnaire declared their willingness to take part in training courses. In particular the agri-tourism concerns feel that the subjects dealt with are important, while the remaining operator categories feel that only the aspects dealing with staff qualification are important (Fig. 4).

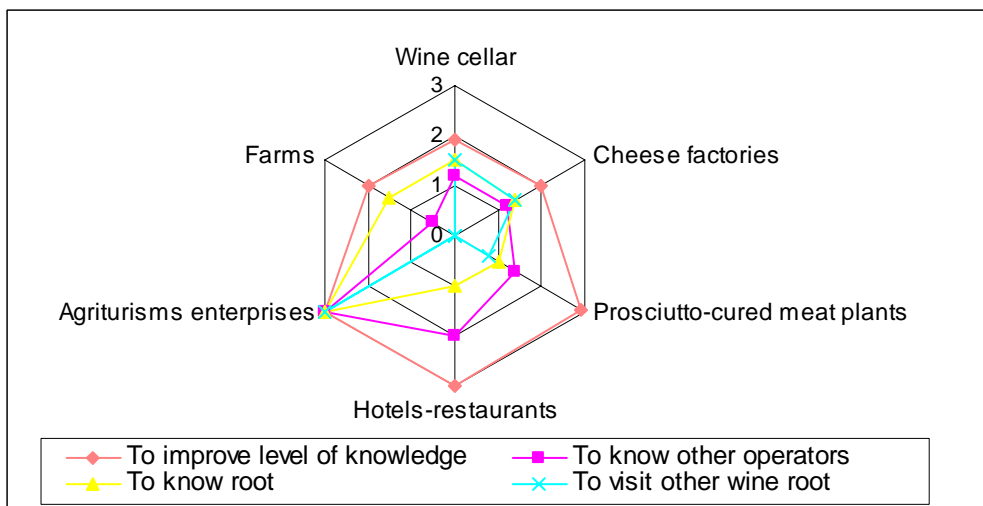
It is however significant that all kinds of companies consider the Route initiative to be useful for improving the socio-economic components of the territory which are pertinent to the itinerary. In particular, restaurants feel the project to be useful for developing new forms of tourism, producing benefit of the companies and the territory, while the most productive type of company, such as wine cellars, cheese factories and prosciutto plants, to different degrees, underline the need to improve some organisational aspects of the Route management. From this it is clear that the project has – rightly so – been interpreted not only on a purely economic level by the companies, but has also been perceived as a tool which, as it should be, is able to promote the territory (Fig. 5).

Figure 3. Reasons for participating in the Route (media)



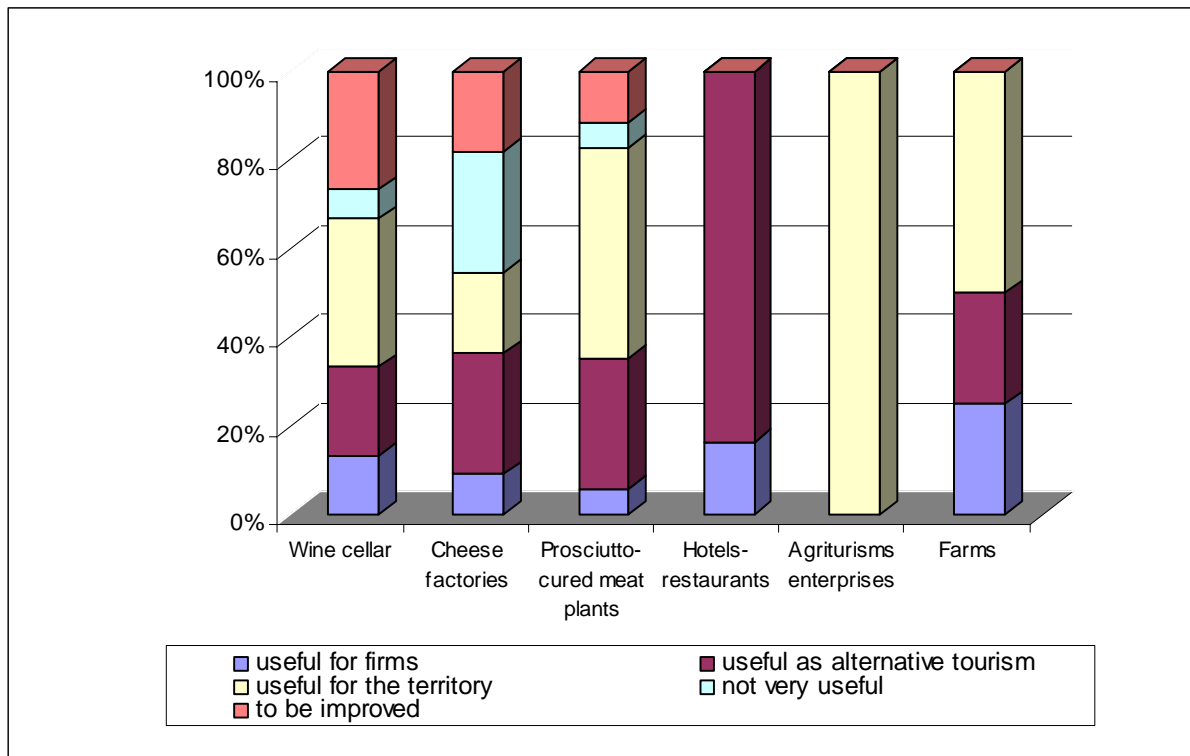
Source: University of Parma, Faculty of Economics, 2001

Figure 4. Willingness to participate in the training courses (media)



Source: University of Parma, Faculty of Economics, 2001

Figure 5. Evaluation of the project by the companies involved (perceptual)



Source: University of Parma, Faculty of Economics, 2001

The last question, left open to the criticism and suggestions of the companies, highlights the lack of total satisfaction by the companies as far as the project management is concerned, which inevitably leads to a lack of active involvement and participation on the part of the companies, which are not sufficiently motivated to collaborate not only between themselves but also with the institutions, being instead passive and distant.

Along the same lines, the answers highlight a lack of good route promotion, possibly through the creation of a web site and with the (economic but not only) support of representative bodies such as product protection consortia along the itinerary, to try and overcome the lack of an organisational “system” and an entrepreneurial mentality which is open to these new forms of business.

To fill these gaps, the common opinion emerging from the companies is the need to improve the involvement of the operators in the Route management and communication with the public bodies responsible for the co-ordination of the activities, with the aim of creating a real “organised system” where all public and private players have an active and participating role in the success of the project.

It would equally be necessary to delegate some of the public administration functions to a full time “project manager” or to create a permanent committee able to follow the Route constantly and guide its development through a strategic marketing plan which takes into consideration all the types of company present along the route and the products they offer, in order to provide a single quality image for the services offered to the food and wine tourist.

Finally, it is strongly hoped that the prices of the products offered along the route can be streamlined, and that it may also be possible to sell the products of other associates, providing baskets of mixed local food and wine products coming only from the participating companies, as well as the exclusive inclusion of wines coming from the participating cellars in the local

tourist menus, in order to promote the itinerary, the participating companies and the territory to the full.

5. Parma case study: the present and the future

The study of the Parma case can be considered an example and a basis for understanding if itineraries organised in this way can be an effective and useful tool for the valorisation of a territory, its products and its production realities.

With respect to the two characteristic elements of the Wine Route matrix, presented in the first section during the economic analysis (see parag. 2), the case of Parma can be “re-read” as follows:

5.1 Analysis of the relationships between enterprises in Parma-case study

As far as the type of company participating in the project is concerned, these are all small and medium enterprises, all characterised by high-quality production, among which there are also horizontal relations, often with elements of competitiveness, rather than synergy, which is particularly important for small companies working in the agricultural and tourist sectors.

There is therefore a lack of team spirit which reaches across all operators of a given sector, which could help to join forces for the promotion of “collaborative competition” in which everybody is truly united in the effort to attract and earn the trust of an ever greater number of customers, enjoying the economic development in that area as a common success.

In general, among the associate companies there remains a certain dichotomy: on one hand a rather passive position, together with a lack of interest, given that the vast majority of companies do not possess the right mentality to welcome initiatives of this type, while on the other hand a few companies, involved from the start in the establishment of the Route, are more willing to participate but are not fully satisfied with the Route management.

The producers are fully convinced of the importance of the project in terms of positive effects on the territory and the possibility to create a kind of alternative tourism in the area, but the clear and perceived potential of the Route has not yet been realised due to it still being in the relatively early stages of life.

For these reasons the effect created by the Route, at least at the beginning, has not led to the creation of economies of system, as no improvement has been seen in the management of information, communication between companies and the collective image. The so-called “specific standardisations”, which derive from the closeness of the activities with the production traditions, which make the characteristics of the itinerary special and constant, have unfortunately not created the local enterprise system which is at the route of the facilitation of low cost transactions. In this way, therefore, until now there has been no valorisation of the specific identity of the “Route” product, which must be based on the specificity of the production organisation, standing out from other itineraries, and must lie behind its success.

From these considerations, initiatives are being started to make the route fully efficient, and to create and organise an intermediate meeting point, such as the Route Consortium, a synergy and agreement among the various players who, having defined the tasks, will have to participate according to their own commitments and possibilities. Thanks to a stronger co-ordination by this intermediate body, both the public and private parties involved in the project shall be involved in the same way and shall be equally active in its success, despite the physiological differences in their roles.

In the same way, at company level, the sectors involved should become synergetic amongst the different products offered, which are characterised by strong specificity but which are at

the same time standardised in terms of the services offered, without “flattening” the distinctive features of each one compared with the others but offering a concrete commitment from everyone to be open to wine tourists in the same way, without excessive inequalities, at least for the basic services such as tasting, company visits and production demonstrations. Strong collaboration will allow for the resolution of common problems in order to reach equally common targets, setting aside competitive relations within the production category because the benefits gained as an individual will clearly have a positive knock-on effect on all the participating companies and therefore on the territory they represent.

Finally, the production categories with the least experience in the organisation of wine-tourism initiatives must obviously conform to the required structural standards, also learning new competencies and methodologies through their participation in training courses which target the creation of new professional figures, which are useful for the continuous improvement of the services provided and the creation of a valid competitive product.

5.2 Analysis of the relationships between enterprises and tourists in Parma case-study

On the other hand, the relationships between internal project subjects and external subjects (i.e. the consumers) will benefit from the image projected by the Route, not so much for the route itself as for the image of the territory in which it is located.

In the territory of Parma, extra-economic networks are a common occurrence, and their strength and presence of the local community and its institutions increase the value of the traditions of the area even further, in terms of both agriculture, wine and gastronomy, making the Parma area the symbol of *Food Valley*. The *Prosciutto and Wine Route of the Hills of Parma*, for its organisational characteristics, cannot however yet manage to confirm in a concrete manner the high reputation enjoyed by the territory in which it is located.

The elements which make up and characterise an food and wine Route are all present: important cultural and natural territory, famous and appealing typical products, public and private organisations joined in a consortium, but the missing element remains the suitable underlying organisation and management of the whole itinerary, through the combination of agro-industrial production initiatives and more tourist-oriented activities, which link the competencies of different levels of the territorial hierarchy.

In other words, the reputation linked to the distinction of the territory and the products included in the Route has not yet managed to transform the “cultural” surplus value into an “economic” one, or rather the materialisation in monetary terms of the origin and typicality. Consequently, precisely because it is still early days, the Route cannot create a collective reputation, born from the individual reputations of the single products and territories, and therefore cannot succeed in valorising its economical potential.

In order to provide full customer satisfaction in terms of services, making the whole itinerary a product which deserves the territory it represents, a strategy is needed to promote non-competitive choices, in order to maximise the objective of all the firms, reducing as far as possible the costs of co-ordination and, thanks to a common image, to promote the overall image of the Route through a suitable marketing strategy.

6. Conclusion

It is still early days for the *Prosciutto and Wine Route of the Hills of Parma*, and it is therefore very likely that modifications will be made to improve its efficiency. If this should not be the case, this initiative would seem to be an empty box, pretty to look at but with nothing inside,

around which public and private operators, all aware of the importance of the project, rotate but find it hard to find a profitable level of collaboration and internal reorganisation in terms of providing quality services.

The example of Parma shows how many factors are involved in the satisfactory creation and establishment of a wine route, all of which are inevitably important and which, above all, are interconnected. Legislative support, a valid territory, famous typical products, or the presence of high quality infrastructures and producers, are not enough. What is most needed is above all the capacity and the willingness of the operators to interact with each other to create a real “network” which is able to valorise the whole production system within which the Route is located. In this sense, activities aiming to create strong co-ordination among the project partners, increase the level of quality of the services offered and the reputation of all the players involved, are of fundamental importance. To obtain such results, the public, private and intermediate institutions must work towards making every single subject indispensable and at the same time complementary, with roles which do not overlap but which are closely linked to the others.

In this regard, it is essential to define a common objective among the players through the presentation and sharing of the project and its working methodologies for all concerned, involving them all directly and making them aware of their role.

The presence of a co-ordinator able to organise the work therefore becomes of strategic importance. For this reason the Route Consortium becomes the centre of the project, as it makes its development easier, without creating any vacuums and eliminating all critical points. This awareness and understanding of being a part of a larger project comes about through the meeting with other route operators belonging to different categories, which help to create the “competitive” climate which can stimulate the continuous improvement of performances, but at the same time being an indispensable element for close collaboration, as the advantages for a company are re-distributed across the whole group of participating producers.

In an economic context which is dominated by global markets and products, the winning strategy to be applied to the promotion of the “Route product” is most definitely high level professionalism in the management of the whole itinerary combined with the high quality of the food and wine products, the culture and the traditions of the territory.

It is only in this way that the fragrance of the pork meats, the intensity of the cheeses, the perfumes of the wine, the delicacies of the soil ... can truly swing the balance, and promote the territory which, being their birth place, deserves just as much attention.

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