



Urbanistica n. 132

January-April 2007

Distribution by www.planum.net

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Structural works, multifunctional and self-supporting ability of agricultural firms in the urban context

Francesco Gandolfi

With the Dgr 3909 of 31/12/03, the Campania Region set up a self-supporting management model, experimented in areas that could be defined as rural in the traditional sense but applicable to agricultural firms in the urban context. This model aims at:

- bringing these firms in direct contact with consumers, engendering a climate of trust;
- establishing rules and monitoring their observance;
- highlighting and giving added value to the commitment of those who work at the various levels to obtain high quality products;
- giving added value to the resources: tradition and culture, expressed by agricultural firms in the various contexts of the regional economy.

The attribution of added value to agricultural firms is achieved by the use of a quality certification system, that engenders a feeling of trust in consumers, as well as creating a more direct relationship between citizens and the agricultural firm, encouraging direct purchase at the source ('shopping at the farm'). Moreover, the typical concept of a restaurant has been redefined, associating the correct preparation of traditional recipes to the use of raw materials produced in the same territory. This encourages the creation of a short production line, in other words the supply and use of raw materials at local level.

The adoption of quality certificates directly involves the Regional body in the creation of a climate of trust between producers and consumers, by means of a voluntary control system set up through the Is.Me.Cert.

(third party body, operating in conformity with the European norms En 45011 and 45012), and depends on the agricultural firms' commitment to supplying products and/or services conforming to the stipulations in the 'Regolamento per l'uso del marchio Sapore di Campania' (Regulations for the use of the 'Taste of Campania' quality mark). Control and monitoring of the different activities is entrusted to a 'Consulta di Partenariato' (Consultancy partnership), officially instituted by legal provision, that includes representatives of the Aldermanships involved (agriculture, tourism and productive activities), of Professional agricultural organizations, of Associations of the categories involved, of Consumer associations, municipalities, Park bodies and Mountain communities. One of the essential aspects underlying the adoption of the quality certification system has been shown to be the training requirements. Specific training paths have been identified, and are currently underway, featuring some modules common to all the different firms while others are specific to the productive field. Particular attention has been paid to the training of the technicians working in the Agricultural development services of the Aldermanship, notably widening the initial skills, thanks to instruction by different professional figures, both of institutional type and pertaining to the specific production field.

Previous experiences

The intention to restore urban agricultural areas is not confined to the Campania Region. In fact, many such experiences have been conducted at national and European level. Some have been highly successful, and are

now a part of the folklore of the cities where they were achieved, such as: 'le dernier vigne de Paris' (Vigne de Montmartre) and the Austrian heurigen. Another fine example as regards choice and evolution is the pilot project 'Elaborating technical-normative proposals and setting up pilot projects for the preservation, improvement and attribution of added economic value to the peri-urban agricultural zone of the metropolitan region of Barcelona'. The actors promoting this project were a professional agricultural organization (Unió de pagesos de Catalunya) and two local administrations (Diputació de Barcelona and Consell comarcal del Baix Llobregat). The area involved was the region of Baix Llobregat, that surrounds the metropolitan area of Barcelona. Here, agricultural zones, the river and natural or naturalized spaces vie for space with a wide built-up surface, strong anthropomorphic pressure and the resulting environmental consequences. The agricultural park has renewed the confidence of most of the agricultural firms, promoting quality products at low environmental cost. The success of the program is demonstrated by the fact that new cooperatives have been set up and young people are entering the agricultural firms. Meanwhile, society has regained green spaces that otherwise risked extinction.

The project

Hortus conclusus

In July 2004 the hills of Naples regional metropolitan park, the Naples municipality and the Aldermanship for agriculture of the Campania Region stipulated an agreement to set up the project *Hortus conclusus* adding value to agricultural activities in the

urban context, along the lines defined by the already existing program 'quality products and development of local systems' described above.

The promotion and attribution of added value to agriculture in the urban context of the Naples municipality currently has a strategic value that goes well beyond the simple economic or environmental landscape values. Urban agricultural areas offer a unique opportunity to create a closer dialogue and relationship between a 'rural' type culture and the metropolitan culture. They may therefore take on the role of 'laboratories' for new social, economic and production relationships. The most recent Istat data (October 2000) indicate that in the territory of the Naples municipality there are no less than 1.318 agricultural firms, about 79% of which have an Agricultural surface occupied (Aso) of less than 1 hectare. The mean extension is 0.59 hectares, demonstrating the prevalent subdivision into strips of the Neapolitan agricultural territory. The most common crops are vegetables (63%) and the firms are mostly family-run (88%). The agriculture in the selected zone is of a peri-urban nature due to the presence of the metropolitan territory, which is responsible for a series of restrictive impacts. These include above all the subdivision of the land into small strips penetrated by bordering activities not related to agriculture, the rising prices of land in view of its potential value, unauthorized building, polluted air, water and soil, theft, destruction or alterations of agricultural infrastructures, difficult access to agricultural zones, continual expropriation to allow the passage of infrastructures or service networks, resulting in further subdivision of properties.

Agriculture plays a determinant role in defining the Neapolitan landscape, despite the fact that the resource is largely ignored or at best passed over by the citizens. The agricultural firms that survived the building boom suffer from such serious structural and sales problems that their very existence hangs in the balance.

Above all, the firms are handicapped by too small an economy, too high a mean age of their managers, poor facilities that in some cases are seriously degraded. On the other hand, their progressive isolation has resulted in a high grade of conservation of traditional values, in terms of the ecotypes grown (so much so that these firms may be seen as true biodiversity tanks) and the cultivation techniques, that make little use of chemical products. Finally, consociations are widespread, and have contributed greatly to the definition of the landscape. To deal with these problems satisfactorily, strong reliance has been made on an innovative tool serving to ensure the preservation of agricultural zones and their environmental value, salvaging agricultural activities by finding new sources of income. The project Hortus conclusus proposes to lay the foundation conditions for creating socializing spaces and increasing the attractions of the territory, by means of targeted interventions on urban agricultural areas. These aim to foster the implementation of economic activities linked to the development of urban rural tourism, and more generally, to widening the opportunities for enjoying rural spaces in the urban context. For these purposes, three orders of needs have been identified, and hence three corresponding lines of intervention:

- structural work, to adapt the land and buildings to the new needs for revitalizing the agricultural activities, harmonizing them with the primary needs to build the landscape and actively maintain the territory. To this end, a tool for structural intervention has been set up, conforming to the Eu norms, that provides incentives for firms to endow themselves with better equipment, adapt pre-existing facilities and convert them to suit the new activities.

- the promotion of multi-functionalities, reinserting agricultural firms-enterprises in the urban context. They need to become economic resources and development motors, creating new income, even as the prevalent source, from teaching, agro-museum, tourist, cultural activities, etc. Above all, in accordance with art. 15 of the Dlgs. 228 of 18/05/2001 (orienting and modernizing the agricultural sector) the agricultural managers in the zone must be entrusted with the maintenance of public green areas and agricultural zones, being given the charge of managing restoration and maintenance activities in the park. This possibility creates concrete sources of income without requiring conspicuous investments, thanks to being able to rely on the normal farm equipment, and on training programs for the managers that may allow them to carry out naturalist engineering works, for example.

- the promotion of self-supporting abilities, in the sense of management models that can guarantee satisfactory, stable levels of income thanks to multi-functionalities stemming from a wider field of activities adapted to suit the urban context. A survey of the agricultural areas is being carried out jointly by executives of the Agricultural development services Aldermanship and

technicians of the Urban planning department of the Naples municipality, which is now at an advanced stage. This survey has the aim of assessing the state of advancement of improving works, of the crops and the types of cultivation practiced, the title of ownership (one of the main problems is the impact of the crisis of farming contracts, which for obvious reasons is particularly acute in this area).

In fact, the following information is requested of the managers (i.e. those in practical possession of the areas):

- Section 1) general data about the firm: surface devoted to cultivation, animals bred, legal status, membership of associations, title of ownership of the land and buildings, presence and quantity of agricultural machinery;
- Section 2) location of the cultivations: land map reference coordinates;
- Section 3) characteristics of the crops, distinguished by species, variety, year of planting, type of cultivation method (biological, integrated, conventional);
- Section 4) information on the types and methods of cultivation: principal problems of phyto-sanitary type, cultivation techniques adopted;
- Section 5) the firm's property and facilities: the presence of habitations, cellars, deposits, refrigeration cells, grottoes, stables, the conditions of internal roads or lanes, information on the age of the buildings, their state of use and preservation, materials; water supply sources;
- Section 6) information on the entrepreneur and family: age, family nucleus, prevailing employment, academic qualifications, professional qualifications, updating courses attended;
- Section 7) lifestyle of the head of the firm: management of working

hours and leisure time; Section 8) data on employment in the firm's activities, type and origin of the workforce; Section 9) promotion and sales activities of the firm's produce.

As can be seen, a large quantity of information is requested, of complex quality and type, which took more than a year to collect, in a collaboration by the facilities and Bodies involved. The first results will be available on 2007.

Pilot actions

The project aims at developing multifunctionalities, recreating a place in the urban context for agricultural firms, that need to become economic resources and development motors, creating new income, even as the prevalent source, from teaching, museum, tourist and cultural activities. Three different pilot activities have been identified, that have a largely demonstrative purpose, to be conducted in three firms selected on the basis of the interest they arouse. The pilot activities will involve minor structural work, to restore the functions of preexisting spaces and buildings, replant and restore traditional vegetable species and cultivation methods, re-open footpaths, rebuild dry stone walls and protective plants (pergolas and 'pagliarelle', thatched coverings). The management of these areas and of the restoration work will, where possible, be entrusted to the agricultural firms themselves, in conformity with the current legislation. The first pilot action consists of creating spaces and facilities equipped to receive school trips, offering practical teaching experiences on the issues of environmental and nutritional education, under the guidance of specialist

teachers and staff. These are linked to the activities already conducted by the Aldermanship, together with the Fondazione Itis at the city of science, in Bagnoli (Naples) in the context of the Food education program addressed to primary and middle schools.

The second pilot action is that of creating a multi-functional space devoted to cultural activities of various types, promoted by the Naples municipality. This includes specific programs of events as well as activities inserted in other programs, such as the May monuments program, for example.

The third pilot action, carried out in collaboration with a Consumers association, adapts selected agricultural firms facilities to fit in with the 'Shopping at the farm' project. This involves direct sale to the citizens of the firm's produce, as well as additional services of various types (information leaflets about the nutritional and dietary value of the produce, traditional recipes, etc.).

The quality mark 'Sapore di Campania' (the taste of Campania) now numbers 1,300 members, including agricultural firms, restaurants, transformation firms and sales outlets, located in Campania and outside; of these, 161 have qualified for permission to use the mark.

The project *Hortus conclusus*, which is the vehicle for this quality mark in the hills of Naples regional metropolitan park, has a particularly important role in view of the special characteristics of the firms involved and the strategic interest of the areas included. Ten among the best restaurants in the city of Naples now offer a 'Sapore di Napoli' menu using raw materials produced by the agricultural firms inside the park, also included among those qualified to use the mark.

The improved lifestyle of the populations in the city of Naples and the preservation of the Neapolitan landscape, safeguarding the environment and hydrogeological profiles, are all essential steps along the pathway to improving the quality of life of all the citizens, who are called upon to revive the embers and forge a more balanced relationship with their history and traditions, that are still alive but currently running a grave risk of being lost and forgotten. The agricultural firms, in their turn, have the important responsibility of highlighting the importance of their work for the well being, health and safety of us all.