

## **From peripheral hamlet to craft beer capital: Apecchio and the ‘Alogastronomia’**

**Maria Giulia Pezzi**

Post-Doc Research Fellow, Gran Sasso Science Institute  
Viale Francesco Crispi 7, 67100, L’Aquila, Italy giulia.pezzi@gssi.it

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In 2012, the Italian Ministry for Territorial Cohesion launched the ‘National Strategy for Inner Areas’ (SNAI), a development strategy aimed at enhancing the quality of life and the access to essential services (health, education and transport) in areas considerably far from urban centres, which have been suffering from processes of increasing marginalisation and de-anthropisation since the 1950s.*

*The current contribution focuses on how tourism is locally interpreted in peripheral areas, taking the cue from a wider research on the implementation of SNAI in the Marche’s Apennines carried out between 2015 and 2016. The underlying hypothesis is that the creation of a tourism market in such areas requires, on the one hand, the selection of few cultural traits*

*perceived as more 'charismatic', often enhanced through dedicated events, and, on the other, the creation of new potential attractors in line with the expectations of prospective rural tourists. In particular, the 'Alogastronomia' phenomenon will be analysed, highlighting the cultural and environmental factors which have brought the local administration to create a territorial marketing strategy linked to a peculiar craft beer and gastronomic culture, and considering whether specific niche tourism can contribute to giving some kind of 'centrality' to areas otherwise considered as marginal.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This article looks at how a particular kind of gastronomic tourism, focused on the production and consumption of craft beers, is imagined and constructed in the peripheral rural/mountain areas of the Marche region (Italy). Particularly, it concentrates on the new 'Alogastronomia'<sup>1</sup> movement in the village of Apecchio, which was the promoting municipality for the creation of a National Association of Beer Cities, established officially in 2015. The article shows that in the latest years, it has not been uncommon for rural areas to focus on the creation of food-related tourism sectors, which, on one side, allow the conservation of local and localised food productions and, on the other, allow such areas to maintain a strong identity connotation. The creation of a so-called niche food tourism, moreover, implies taking into consideration two other coexisting dynamics, that is the tendency to put a stress on the importance of locality, which often speaks for originality and exclusiveness of the locally produced goods, and the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Alogastronomia' is a neologism that indicates a peculiar relationship between craft beers and food, as it will be explained in later sections.

necessity to create a demand for such products that is strong enough to sustain their existence in a 'glocal' market.

Addressing the issue of considering local products of rural areas as possible drivers for tourism development entails demarcating the concepts attached to gastronomic heritage (Bessièrè & Tibere, 2013); food as a vehicle for discovering a location (Bessièrè, 1998); food tourism as a niche market (Hall & Mitchell, 2000; Novelli, 2005); the experiencing of 'tastescapes' in gastronomic tourism (Vittersø & Amilien, 2011) and the importance of recognizing the related 'foodscapes' (Guigoni, 2004). Moreover, the article will provide a short analysis of the rather new phenomenon known as the *craft beer revolution*, highlighting the variety of multidisciplinary perspectives addressing the issue, i.e. economic geography (Gatrell, Reid & Steiger, forthcoming; McLaughlin, Reid & Moore, 2014) economics, marketing and branding (see i.e. Hede & Watne, 2013); ethnography and anthropology (Gómez-Corona *et al.*, 2016; Manning & Uplisashvili, 2007).

The data were collected through field research conducted in 2016 as part of a research project on the 'National Strategy for Inner Areas in Italy' (SNAI). This development strategy was launched in 2012 by the Italian Ministry for Territorial Cohesion and was aimed at creating those tools likely to foster a series of improvements in access to basic services (health, transport, and education), which should lead to a desired inversion of the current negative demographic trend.

As this study branches out from a wider research on the bottom-up policy implications of SNAI, the current contribution presents the local stakeholders' perspective on the potentialities of entrepreneurship and their perceptions on the feasibility of the creation and implementation of a food/craft beer led tourism offer in accordance with the development trajectory chosen by the Marche inner area 'Appennino Basso-Pesarese e Anconetano'.

The underlying hypothesis is that the creation of a tourism market in such areas requires, on the one hand, the selection of few cultural traits perceived as more 'charismatic', often enhanced through dedicated events, and on the other, the creation of new potential attractors in line with the expectations of prospective rural tourists. In particular the analysis of the 'Alogastronomia' phenomenon will allow us to consider the cultural and environmental factors which have brought the local administration to create a territorial marketing strategy linked to a unique craft beer and gastronomic culture, considering whether specific niche tourism can contribute to give some kind of 'centrality' to areas otherwise considered as marginal. The final intent of this contribution is to show how an anthropological perspective on local tourism development can dialogue with other disciplines in the analysis of complex mechanisms, such as local entrepreneurialism and tourism marketing, in an attempt to let emerge the ambiguities inscribed in the use of dichotomies, such as 'authentic' vs. 'inauthentic', and 'traditional' vs 'innovative', in relation to gastronomic productions and food tourism.

#### **'THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR INNER AREAS': SETTING THE WIDER RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

Inner Areas are defined as 'areas at some considerable distance from hubs providing essential services', namely education, health and mobility (Barca, Casavola & Lucatelli, 2014, p. 7), which feature a high degree of social and environmental capital, in addition to a high potential for local entrepreneurship and innovation, hindered by a condition of economic and geographical marginality.

Well aware of the existence of these dynamics, in 2012, the then Italian Ministry for Territorial Cohesion launched the 'National Strategy for Inner Areas', aimed at finding an integrated approach that

could function as a catalyst for the creation of a development strategy to be applied to a series of selected areas during the seven years (2014–2020) of the program. The final goal of this strategy is to generate an inversion of the above-mentioned negative demographic trend<sup>2</sup>, which has been witnessed since at least the end of the 1950s.

Through the screening of the Italian territory, on the basis of a specific indicator of proximity to urban centres (calculated through travel time) as well as on the quality and quantity of services available, it has emerged that Inner Areas actually cover about 60% of the country, and circa 23% of the whole Italian population lives in these areas (Fondazione IFEL, 2015).

The drawing up of SNAI has led to the selection of 65<sup>3</sup> areas as of January 2017, 21 of which—considered as prototypal—have already begun the policy-design process, focusing on five core innovations, if compared to the previously adopted policy-making strategies: 1) adjusting the standards of services provided in this areas through the valorisation of the natural and cultural heritage; 2) focusing on goals and results through the elaboration of specific policy documents that should emphasise the key idea behind the proposed strategy, providing a list of expected results that should be measurable over time; 3) fostering association and cooperation among municipalities of the same area; 4) concentrating human and economic resources in areas

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<sup>2</sup> According to the available data, the area has suffered from a population variation of -12% from 1971 to 2011, relatively higher than the average of Marche's inner areas for the same period, attested at -4,8%. Source: [http://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/opencms/export/sites/dps/it/documentazione/Arree\\_interne/Marche/REPORT\\_ISTRUTTORIA\\_MARCHE.pdf](http://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/opencms/export/sites/dps/it/documentazione/Arree_interne/Marche/REPORT_ISTRUTTORIA_MARCHE.pdf), p. 15 [accessed on 8th May 2017].

<sup>3</sup> The full list is available here: [http://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/it/arint/Selezione\\_aree\\_progetto/Istruttoria\\_e\\_documento\\_cumentazione\\_per\\_regione/Istruttoria\\_e\\_documento\\_cumentazione\\_per\\_Regione.html](http://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/it/arint/Selezione_aree_progetto/Istruttoria_e_documento_cumentazione_per_regione/Istruttoria_e_documento_cumentazione_per_Regione.html) [accessed on 9th April 2017].

where they are scarce or not very well organised; 5) using an open and participatory method to select interlocutors, actors, entrepreneurs, stakeholders, etc. (ibidem, pp. 36–39).

This last feature is to be considered particularly innovative in the current Italian policy-making panorama, as it constitutes one of the first examples of the implementation of a place-based approach to local development (Barca, 2009), which entails the enactment of a development policy in a certain place by an outsider public actor who actively promotes innovation through the collection and the recombination of knowledge toward the building of a long-term development vision. One of the core instruments of this sort of maieutic policy-making approach is the challenging of existing networks toward the creation of new ones functional to newly established objectives, seeking to reach innovation through entropy.

The main SNAI policy tools are three consequent strategic documents (*Draft, Preliminary and Area Strategy*), produced by each area with the help of technical assistance, in which they specify their chosen development trajectory in an increasingly detailed way.

The drafting of the above-mentioned documents needs to follow a series of guidelines provided by the National Committee on Inner Areas<sup>4</sup>, focusing on two main pillars: access to essential services and local development. The latter emphasises, among other elements, the possibility to rely on tourism as a 'tool' for development and the idea that has been positively accepted by many Inner Areas, among which one can find the one that serves as the object of this research.

Although the debate on whether tourism actually plays a role in local development and whether it weakens or enhances (or both at the same

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<sup>4</sup> Accessible here:

[http://www.agenziacoessione.gov.it/it/arint/Documenti\\_di\\_lavoro/index.html](http://www.agenziacoessione.gov.it/it/arint/Documenti_di_lavoro/index.html) [8th May 2017]

time) the pristine qualities of a nearly untouched place has been a source of debate now for decades in a variety of academic fields (see i.e. Abram & Waldren, 1998; Brown & Hall, 2000; Christaller, 1963; Hall *et al.*, 2013; Salazar, 2013; Salvatore & Chiodo, 2016; Smith, 1989; Wanhill, 1997), a document recently published by the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism (MiBACT) titled 'Guidelines for the National Strategy for Inner Areas'<sup>5</sup> (MiBACT, 2016) encourages the idea that the two above mentioned pillars are complementary and sees tourism and culture as development factors that could also have an impact on essential services in an integrated approach:

Tourism actions, as a part of a multiform territorial development strategy, need to be transversal, to the advantage of the entire area, and above all, they need to be linked, as much as possible, to other initiatives, both on the side of local development and on the side of services (ibidem, 2016, p. 7, author's translation).

MiBACT, though, also explicates its awareness of the dangers inherent to this approach, stating that 'tourism is not the universal solution to the problems arising from a lack of development. It would be wrong to see in that sector the only alternative to a situation of economic difficulties' (ibidem, p. 4). Therefore any proposals should go through an attentive evaluation of the effective tourism potentialities and their impact on local economies.

## **FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY**

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<sup>5</sup> 'Linee Guida per la Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne' in Italian.

As of January 2017, five of the 21 prototypal areas have already concluded the project phase and the drafting of the three documents and are ready to start the implementation phase. One of these is the area 'Appennino Basso Pesarese and Anconetano'<sup>6</sup>, situated in the Marche region, and on which this contribution is based. The Marche region is located in the Central area of Italy and borders Emilia-Romagna and the Republic of San Marino to the north, Tuscany to the west, Umbria to the southwest, Abruzzo and Lazio to the south and the Adriatic Sea to the east. The land is hilly, except for river valleys and the often very narrow coastal strip.

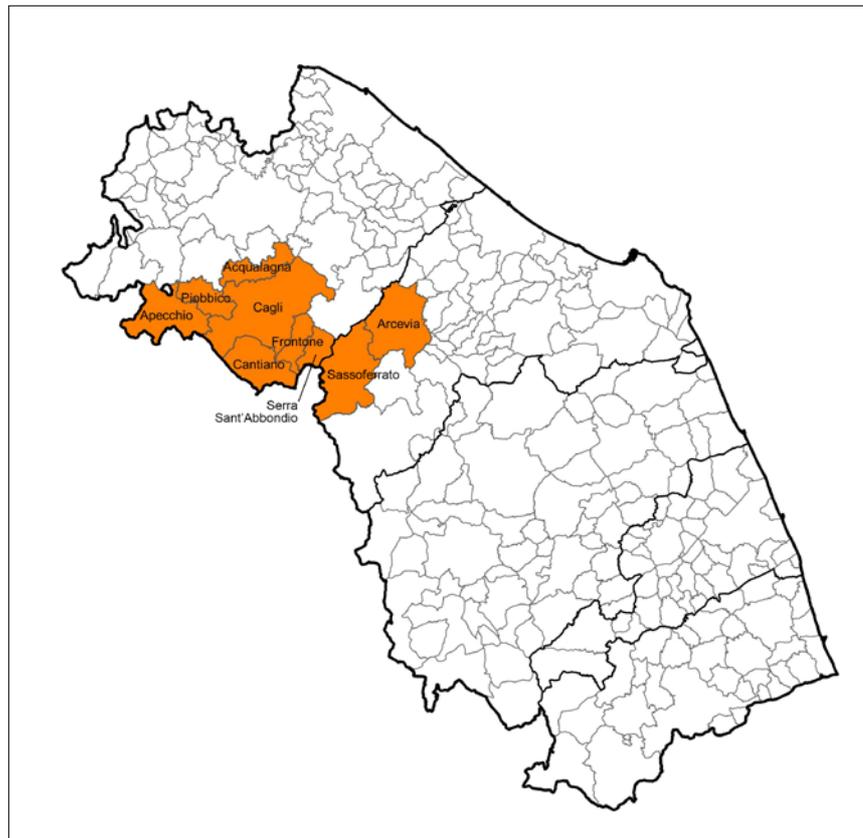
The Area has submitted its Area Strategy in July 2016 (VVAA, 2016), which was approved shortly after.

The local development trajectory chosen by the area is that of fostering local development through the creation, or the implementation, of cultural events and a culture-led tourism, leveraging on already existing material and immaterial heritage, on the one hand, and on agro-food productions on the other.

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<sup>6</sup> Constituted by an association of districts, the Unione Montana 'Catria e Nerone', that includes nine municipalities: Arcevia, Sassoferrato, Cantiano, Serra San'Abbondio, Frontone, Cagli, Acqualagna, Piobbico and Apecchio.

**Figure 1 - The Marche Region and the Inner Area 'Appennino Basso Pesarese and Anconetano' (in orange).**



Source: Elaboration by Grazia di Giovanni (GSSI)

The village of Apecchio, in particular, has served as the main field of this research. Considered by SNAI as the most peripheral municipality of the 'Appennino Basso Pesarese and Anconetano' area, situated at an altitude of almost 500 meters over the sea at the foothills of Mount Nerone (1,525 mt.), Apecchio has one of the largest territories in the province of Pesaro and Urbino (ca. 100 Km<sup>2</sup>) and a population of a little less 1,900 inhabitants in 2015 (source: DemoISTAT.it, Bilancio Demografico, 2015), which means the population density is very low.

Despite, and to some extent thanks to, its peripheral condition, Apecchio is the seat of three craft breweries, which have lately gained broad recognition for the quality of their craft produced beers: Tenute Collesi (est. 1870), Birra Amarcord (est. 1994) and Microbirrificio Venere (est. 2014). Taking the cue from the high concentration, in relation to the total population, of local craft beer breweries, Apecchio has become the seat of the Associazione Nazionale Città della Birra (translatable in English as *National Association of Beer Cities*) in 2015, which includes 14 'beer cities' in 4 regions, aimed at creating a network with the final goal of sustaining and fostering a craft beer-based tourism circuit. On the wave of such events, the city of Apecchio has organised since 2012 what will be referred to, for simplification purposes, as the 'Alogastronomia Festival'—namely the 'Mostra mercato del tartufo e dei prodotti del bosco, Alogastronomia e birra'<sup>7</sup>—an event that will be analysed in later paragraphs.

The research on which this contribution is based was carried out since September 2015, in regard to desk analysis of the available data, and in July and October 2016 for what concerns fieldwork research. It used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, with a strong accent on the former, particularly through observation and semi-structured interviews. Interlocutors have been selected among local politicians and civil servants, as well as among local entrepreneurs, involved in the drawing up of the strategic documents for this area, in which they were listed as 'relevant actors'. In regard to observation, the author has participated as an observer to the 2016 edition of 'Alogastronomia Festival', held between Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> and Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup>, and

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<sup>7</sup> Literally translatable as 'Market and Exhibition of truffles and other woods products, Alogastronomia and beer'

has visited the craft brewery Tenute Collesi in August of the same year.

### **FROM LANDSCAPES TO TASTESCAPES? NICHE FOOD TOURISM IN PERIPHERAL AREAS**

Food consumption is to be considered one of the core components of the tourism experience and can be generally divided into two macro groups of attitudes: on the one hand, there are tourists who seek to maintain a continuity with their eating habits and routine when travelling and do not see the need to try exotic (or 'ethnic') food; on the other hand, other tourists consider eating the local cuisine as a way to get a closer understanding of the local culture, as well as an unmediated relationship with local people (see i.e. Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2014). A sub-group of the latter might even consider local food consumption as the first travel motivation, although it usually coexists with other interests, i.e. environment and architectural attractions. Bessièrè and Tibère (2013), in a study on French tourism experience in rural spaces, came to a systematisation of tourists' attitudes toward food consumption, starting from the assumption that it indeed constitutes a driving force for a stay in rural areas. They individuated three kinds of food-tourism relationships that can help in gaining a better understating of how a food-led tourism market can serve as a factor for local development: 1) *food as a vehicle for self-discovery*, which sees local food consumption as a form of initiation and a learning experience which enriches the tourist, who ends up 'incorporating' the indigenous culture; 2) *food as a vehicle for discovering the 'other'*, which entails a process of acculturation through the discovery and appropriation of local cultural features as a consequence of direct contacts with producers; 3) *food as a vehicle for discovering a location*, which is linked with the possibility to gain enough information on the traceability and genuine character of local

products, that reflects in the possibility to 'know' a territory and of developing a feeling of familiarity with its produced food (ibidem, pp. 3420–3422).

Rural areas, generally speaking, are getting more and more engaged into (re)defining their rural identity on the demands of the tourism market. These areas, in fact, are often associated with tranquillity, with more genuine tourist-local encounters, with authenticity, with material and immaterial heritage conservation, with traditional customs and craftsmanship, etc., although it is worth noting that 'present day rurality cannot be associated with the former "peasant" society' (Bessière, 1998). As a consequence of two interdependent processes—the quests for authenticity by tourists and for local and economic development by locals—it is not uncommon to see such rural-peripheral areas relying on gastronomic tourism, since 'gastronomy meets the specific needs of consumers, local producers and other actors in rural tourism' (ibidem, p. 21), a process which bears certain degrees of ambiguity.

Local food products and the linked gastronomy—a word etymologically derived from ancient Greek, meaning 'the art of regulating the stomach'—constitute part of the cultural heritage of a location in its broader sense: food consumption involves the knowledge and the preservation of traditional food production methods and the linked craftsmanship and production chain's know-hows, as well as customs and beliefs, to the extent that one could speak of culinary heritage as a form of cultural preservation.

In her study on food as a tourist attraction, Bessière (1998) offers a hypothesis, which finds many similarities to the premise under which this research was conducted, as indeed she states that

the promotion or 'valorization' of culinary heritage encourages independent and collective initiatives and is seen as a process by which local action and appropriation cater for the development of

rural tourism. In an ever-changing environment, the evolution of rural space is focused on common memory and the transmission of skills. Heritage may play a major role in declining areas (ibidem, p. 29).

As it is known from folklore and heritage studies (Adell *et al.*, 2015; Bendix, 1989; Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, 1998; Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, 2004), heritage can be defined as a 'production of the present that takes recourse to the past' (Bendix, 2009, p. 256). Outlining heritage as 'production' presupposes the consideration of the processual component of heritage-making, deriving from complex courses involving the—often arbitrary—(re)appropriation, selection and re-nomination of certain cultural elements at the expense of others. Bessière (1998), again, provides more insights into the topic, talking about 'heritage building' as the actualization, adaptation and reinterpretation of elements from the past by combining conservation and innovation, stability and dynamism: 'this way, heritage elements would produce and reproduce identity' (ibidem, p. 27).

Food tourism and local products, indeed, constitute good leverages for the creation of a tourism niche market by establishing closer relationships between local producers and tourists-consumers. In fact, 'rural areas with their specific history, traditions and eno-gastronomic heritage seem suitable for the development of successful food niches' (Sidali, Kastenholz & Bianchi, 2015, p. 2).

Robinson and Novelli (Robinson & Novelli, 2005) define niche market as a group where the individual members are identifiable by the same specialised needs and, consequently, have a strong desire for related products on offer (ibidem, p. 5). Hence, niche tourism can be defined as a market 'breaking down into still relatively large market sectors (macro-niches—i.e. cultural tourism, rural tourism, sports tourism, etc.), each capable of further segmentation (micro-niches—

i.e. geo-tourism, gastronomy tourism, cycling tourism, etc.)' (ibidem).

Hall and Mitchell (2000), finally, define food niche tourism as 'the visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting [...] is the primary motivation factor for travel' (ibidem, p. 308), and although it does not constitute the major motivation for rural tourism in general, it becomes a relevant part of the attraction power of a location.

Talking about local food products, though, requires further specifications, as the site of production and the site of consumption play a role in the way they are conceived. Vittersø and Amilien (2011) propose a fundamental categorization, implying that one needs to distinguish between 'local food products' and 'localised food products'. The former are short-travelled products featuring a close relationship between consumer and producer. The latter, instead, are 'products from a particular geographical area in which they have strong spatial and culture roots' (ibidem, pos. 3), which can serve as added values in the scope of tourism marketing. Following Urry's *The tourist gaze* (2002), and more generally paraphrasing the theorization of the existence of '-scapes'<sup>8</sup> by Appadurai (1996), the authors imply

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<sup>8</sup> A. Appadurai, in his book *Modernity at Large* (1996), suggested the use of the suffix '-scape' (typically accompanied by either of these five prefixes *ethno-*, *media-*, *techno-*, *finance-* and *ideo-*) as a framework to examine the 'new global cultural economy as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models' (p. 32). Therefore, the terms with the suffix '-scape' indicate that they 'are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements' (p. 33).

that due to the many senses involved in the tourist experience (such as sound, smell, taste, etc.), which produce 'sensed environments' within the tourism industry, talking about 'landscapes' necessarily involves considering the existence of the relative 'soundscapes', 'smellscapes', 'tastescapes', etc. (Vittersø & Amilien, 2011, pos. 16), which constitute further declinations of 'foodscapes' as analysed by Guigoni (2004; 2009, p. 166).

This process of 'gaze' specialization, or of the creation of tourism-related '-scapes', may include developing new products, where 'the localness of local food is not only a question of locality but also a question of definition and marketing' (Vittersø & Amilien, 2011, pos. 40) that has strong links with agricultural and tourism policies as well as with the preservation (and/or creation) of cultural identity(ies).

The following section will be, indeed, dedicated to providing more insights on how such heritage and locality-making practices are fully embedded in the creation of tourism niches, particularly the food-gastronomy sub-niche, and if and how they do mirror already existing, or policy-driven, development processes. Before addressing the issue, though, a more in-depth analysis of the peculiarities of the craft beer industry, which serve as a basis for this research, is necessary.

*The craft beer industry in a nutshell: making sense of locality and authenticity*

In recent years, the craft beer industry has experienced a steady increase in the making of local craft beers, particularly by small producers and local entrepreneurs who have seen in the craft beer industry a way to rediscover traditional products and to ensure economic sustainability through the use of innovative production and branding strategies. The so-called *craft beer revolution* (emerging in the US in the '70s and in Italy since the early '90s, see Fastigi, Esposti & Viganò, 2015) has been a topic of research for some years already

from a variety of perspectives and through different research approaches: economic geography (McLaughlin et al., 2014; Reid & Gartell, 2015; Reid, McLaughlin & Moore, 2014), particularly in regard to the US case; economics, marketing and branding (i.e. Hede & Watne, 2013, and in regard to the Italian case, Fastigi *et al.*, 2015); ethnography and anthropology, as in the case study on Mexico presented by Gómez-Corona et al. (2016) or in the study of the post-socialist rebranding of beers in Georgia by Manning & Uplisashvili (2007).

The common thread along all these studies is that the craft beer industry seems to be facing two opposite, although equally strong, forces. The first one pushes toward a hyper-specialization of craft beer products, which normally embodies the high degree of differentiation among the localities of production; the second force is constituted by the need to place such products on a niche market, which has to be sufficiently small to be perceived as exclusive but large enough to provide the benefits of a scale economy. Additionally, a third element to be taken into consideration is that to ensure the survival of such small enterprises (the scale of which often allows talking about micro-breweries), their products need to be placed on markets which are much larger than the local beer-tasting opportunities on the site of production, to the extent that some of them seek to maintain their 'local' connotation though being available for purchase in the global market.

These three elements, which characterise the craft beer industry, pose further issues if considered in relation to tourism and the feeling of place attachment consequent to the tourist experience. First of all, one needs to emphasise the link between craft beer and locality, as McLaughlin et al. (2014) maintain in relation to the so-called *neo-localism* movement:

the concept of neo-localism has also been invoked to explain the increasing popularity of craft breweries. [...] A number of authors have argued that many craft breweries are utilising naming and labelling to create such a sense of place and thereby a connection to the local community (ibidem, p. 137).

The nexus between nature, place and identity has been identified also by Gatrell et al. (2017) as one of the possible causes for the recent growth of the craft beer industry. Moreover, the authors stress that

the craft beer brands need to be embedded within, we would argue, a shared socio-spatial landscape that is simultaneously a link to place, region, and the dynamics that promote sustainability. Authenticity and authentic geographies [...] are critical to the success of long term strategies, policies, or branding initiatives (ibidem, p. 5).

The reference to authenticity is particularly relevant to this study, as it allows a wider reflection on the experiential view of the tourist experience. First, because tasting local food in a context of proximity with the site of production enhances 'place attachment and correspondingly destination loyalty' (Sidali *et al.*, 2015, p. 12). Secondly, because, as Cohen (1988) maintains in his classical study, authenticity can always be negotiated and is often the result of the process that makes the tourists come to terms with their own experiences:

recreational tourists, whose concern with authenticity is relatively low, may well accept even a substantially staged product and experience as 'authentic.' This would not be necessarily because they have been misled by the staging but because even the faintest vestige of, or resemblance to, what experts would consider an

'authentic' trait of the product may suffice for them to play the make-believe game of having an 'authentic' experience (ibidem, p. 379).

Taking authenticity in consideration also implies the reference to a temporal component, which usually entails the favouring of cultural elements that can be attributed to an either near or distant past but, usually, hardly comes to terms with contemporary times. One linked declination to be considered is that of the 'emergent authenticity', a concept that finds its legitimation in the belief that authenticity is always negotiable and socially constructed and so is the conception of what heritage is. According to Cohen, in fact, 'a cultural product, or a trait thereof, which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognised as authentic' (Cohen, 1988, p. 379).

We'll see, though, that the case of craft beer brewing in Apecchio requires us to go beyond the usual dichotomies of authentic vs. inauthentic or traditional vs. innovative because it shows such dyadic oppositions can, and need to, be deconstructed in order to be able to grasp the complexity of such tourism identity construction processes.

### **'ALOGASTRONOMIA': BETWEEN LOCAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP, INNOVATION AND CRAFT BEER TOURISM**

There is only one street that leads to Apecchio, and that's the county road departing from the village of Acqualagna: thirty kilometres in the countryside, mountains and hairpin turns that suddenly open on small little-inhabited valleys, until the street goes through Apecchio and then continues, far from major transport routes, toward Umbria, first, and then Tuscany. The feeling is that one cannot just end up in

Apecchio; one needs to have a reason to go there. Nevertheless, just outside the centre, the visitor can spot two welcoming boards that inform them the village is actually part of two gastronomy-related networks: it's a 'beer city' (that is, it is a part of the National Association of 'Beer Cities', of which Apecchio is the leading municipality) and a 'truffle city' (meaning it's a municipality that adhered to the National Association of 'Truffle Cities'), the latter being one of the biggest tourism attractors in the area for the last three decades. This fact can be considered representative of the effective possibility of considering food as a vehicle for discovering locations, implying they can at all effects be 'tasted' and 'experienced' through their typical flavours. Moreover, although Apecchio is a peripheral village, it is not left out of rural tourism routes and actually attracts a certain number of tourists, particularly from northern Europe.

Since 2012, the public administration of Apecchio has started developing a territorial marketing project called 'Apecchio Città della Birra' (*Apecchio the Beer City*) based on the fact that the village's territory is the seat of three craft breweries: Tenute Collesi, Birra Amarcord and Microbirrificio Venere. The city councilman M.C. recalls the birth of the initiative as follows:

these craft breweries present on our territory have brought jobs, have brought movement, and then we thought ... since all our neighbour municipalities invest on truffles, and do not seek to innovate anymore, let's try to do something new. [...] so we tried to start this new project 'Apecchio Città della Birra'. First, we started putting together two craft breweries which had similar features—because they export all over the world, and they make quality products—but the main common feature is that they both use Mount Nerone's spring water, which has important characteristics for the kind of beer they make. This is 'Apecchio Città della Birra', but from the very beginning, it was not meant to

be a commercial product. It's not the kind of beer that you drink while eating pizza; it's a cultural element ... *beer creates culture, beer creates tourism*, this is our motto. There are many kinds of tourism and tourists; we have decided to aim at beer tourism. It's difficult, but we're trying [M.C., city councilman, interviewed in August 2016].

Combining beer with culture and tourism has made explicit the need for the creation of a niche-tourism market, something that would perfectly embody the Apecchio-ness of craft beer production and, particularly, of its consumption: given the fact that these craft beer brands already existed, the necessity to construct a location's brand emerged. As a consequence of this awareness, the neologism *Alogastronomia* was created (and is now a registered trademark) from the merging of two words: *ale*, a kind of fermented beer, and *gastronomy*, which we have seen means the art of regulating the stomach. M.C. explains the motivations behind this choice:

we focused on this neologism. We've created this word, and we registered it with the aim of reuniting the whole territory thanks to craft beer. Alogastronomia does not only refer to beer, but it refers more broadly to the territory, so it becomes a container for many things. In the same way, the Alogastronomia Festival is not a feast in itself; it is a container, but also a window. In that moment, you can put yourself on display, show tourists what you have to offer [city councilman, interviewed in August 2016].

The Alogastronomia Festival has come to its 4<sup>th</sup> edition in 2016 (Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>–Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup>) and, according to the Apecchio public administration, could count on about 4,000 visitors in the three days of the festival [source: personal communication]. Its focus is that of creating a

syncretism between an experiential tourism approach and cultural intimacy: the events are organized along the streets of the medieval citadel and include cooking shows, concerts, live music, trattorias offering the chance to taste craft beers while eating local food cooked using products from neighbouring cities and villages, and particularly the truffles from Acqualagna, bread and cherries from Cantiano, ham from Carpegna, cheese from Urbino, olive oil from Cartoceto, mushrooms from Piobbico. The posters created to advertise the Festival (see below) perfectly show this view of Apecchio's craft beers as a unifying element, featuring a photo of the above-mentioned local products with a glass of beer in the middle, also implying the centrality of Apecchio in this territorial marketing strategy. Moreover, this approach seems to be demonstrative of the fact that diversity, if properly marketed, can be an economic asset that can generate sustainable and inclusive forms of development (see i.e. Jenkins, 2000), and the above-mentioned local and localised products seem to rightly serve this purpose.

**Figure 2 - The flyer to the 2015 edition of the ‘Alogastronomia’ Festival**



Source: Associazione Nazionale Apecchio Città della Birra (used with permission)

One needs to underline, though, that craft beers are actually not historically a local product of Apecchio, in the sense that its production officially does only date back to 2007, when Tenute Collesi (est. in 1870), which until then had only produced spirits, particularly gin and vodka, decided to enter into this new market. A factory worker explained the genesis of craft beer production at Tenute Collesi with what resembles a true founding myth: a German visitor, after having tasted their produced vodka, realized that the

calcareous water from Mount Nerone would have been perfect for beer brewing and talked the owner of Tenute Collesi to get into this new business [Man, interviewed in August 2016]. Nevertheless, craft beer brewing in Apecchio and Alogastronomia show that traditional and innovative productions do not mutually exclude each other in the creation of food-niche tourism but actually reinforce each other in the promotion process. While asking oneself the question of whether craft beer can be considered as authentically typical of Apecchio, the embeddedness of its production in the local economy demonstrates the legitimacy of seeking to deconstruct the dichotomy authentic vs inauthentic, on the one hand, and that of innovative vs. traditional on the other, as it shows that such processes are interested by complex dynamics that cannot be reduced to strict categories, which instead should be seen as negotiable aspects of the tourism identity construction of the whole area.

It is then easy to understand that although situated in an inner area, and therefore suffering from economic and geographical marginality as well as population ageing and depopulation, Apecchio is the seat of peculiar bottom-up initiatives that in the long term could be successful in providing a new centrality to an otherwise fringe area and turning Apecchio from an inner area village to the craft beer capital. Simultaneously, though, there is another element that needs to be taken into consideration: the very peripherality, genuineness and ruralness of Apecchio that work as the main attractors for prospective tourists are all attributes that relate to 'centrality' in a problematic way.

The local public administration, so far, has been positively involved in providing a unitary view on the development path to be undertaken and has seen peripherality as a plus value rather than a limitation, as the mayor of Apecchio has clearly stated: 'We are in the Inner Areas, and we are the most peripheral municipality, but we are also the ones

that can turn distance into the core element from which our qualities can be exalted' [V.A. C., mayor, interviewed in October 2016]. One other interesting view on the matter of being involved in the SNAI strategy has been also evidenced by M.C.:

'I believe [SNAI] will be our safety, inner areas seen maybe as incubators, as startups ... indeed, now that you make me think of it, inner areas are to be considered as a startup. I mean ... they kick you off to create a project, then it's the cooperative, or the society, etc., that need to pull something valuable out of it' [city councilman, interviewed in October 2016].

This quote seems to suggest that SNAI could positively work as the fuse for processes that already existed in potential but had not yet received the necessary energy to kick off. M.C. concluded our talk by stating 'SNAI can be our turning point, if it really manages to trigger such a mechanism that ... otherwise, it'll be over'.

The selection of charismatic cultural elements, such as a wide gastronomic heritage that speaks for cultural richness and vitality, enhanced through dedicated events and a consistent branding strategy, could indeed be successful in triggering sustainable development processes, which, considering their current small scale, could well insert themselves in the new-localism movement and in a dedicated food niche tourism market.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The gastronomic heritage of an area is often anchored with peasant traditions in relation to the ways food is produced, to the ways it is consumed and to the meanings and beliefs culturally attached to it. Therefore, it can be considered one of the elements that create the

strongest sense of place and place attachment on the basis of the fact that 'foodscapes' and 'tastescapes' contribute to the identity construction of a locality, not only individually but also in the sense of a 'collective sense of territoriality'.

It has been shown that craft beer brewing, if considered in relation to prospect tourism development, can be considered simultaneously as a cause and as an effect of the creation of a food tourism-niche, since on the one hand, it is characterized by an aura of exclusivity and, on the other, is sufficiently 'unrestricted' to be available for mainstream tourists.

One aspect which cannot be left understated, though, is the relationship between tradition and innovation when it comes down to analyse products like craft beers in Apecchio, which although they do not have a long history, are considered local productions because of the strong linkages with the territory. If the question is whether a 'new' product deserves to become a part of the food heritage of a specific area, then the answer, in this case, is probably positive, provided that new products can be filled with other culture relevant elements. Related events, as for example the 'Alogastronomia Festival', certainly concur to this process through their cyclical repetition that not only constitutes the basis for the building of a collective identity but also provides historical continuity, inscribing Apecchio simultaneously within a territorialized and a globalized identity, in a constant tension between global homogeneity and local heterogeneity.

In the case of craft beers in Apecchio, moreover, one cannot talk about revitalisation but rather of recreation of gastronomic heritage, which is produced, packaged and marketed as a local product of the territory that is able to provide a genuine tasting experience, thanks to Alogastronomia. The invention of this neologism manifests that peripheral areas do maybe find themselves in a condition of geographical marginality but do also experience peculiar states of

local agency and entrepreneurship that can lead to innovative solution attempts to old problems.

It could be maintained that in the case of the Marche's inner areas in general, and of Apecchio in particular, their inclusion into the SNAI project has implemented the awareness of being situated into a system of relations that functions at a much bigger scale than the basic territorial one: a periphery only exists in relation to a core. And yet, in this case, a peripheral area seeks to become a tourism core, implying not only the coexistence of two parallel modes of being but also a processual approach to the implications of peripherality.

The selection of those heritage elements that should constitute the primer for tourism is definitely a process that depends on cultural, political and economic factors as well, as maintained, for example, by Guigoni (2009), who affirms that such heritagisation processes also entail the commodification of immaterial elements, the pricing of emotions, tastes and gazes linked with certain landscapes (*ibidem*, p. 174). This makes it possible that some elements might be picked up at the expense of others on the basis of their potential, thanks to the presence of actors, entrepreneurs and stakeholders and know-how able to provide particular kinds of agency.

It would be interesting to analyse, in the longer run, whether the craft beer industry in Apecchio will effectively work as a trigger for a more generalised, yet sustainable, local development. Future research perspectives should be aimed at investigating whether such 'endogenous' practices lead to resignifying processes by the local inhabitants in relation to their identity and to the possible positive and negative outcomes, in terms of life quality, of the creation of a tourism market so conceived in the area.

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#### **SHORT AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:**

Maria Giulia Pezzi is a Social Anthropologist, Post-Doc Researcher at Gran Sasso Science Institute, Italy. Her research interests include Tourism Studies and local development.