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**Food, place, territorialization.**  
**From territory appreciation to successful businesses**

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*To Davide and Federico*

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# Introduction

The last years have seen a revival in the interest in food provenance and origin. No longer satisfied with standardized and rootless products, consumers rejecting anonymous mass-produced food and calling for seasonally available foods, regional cuisines, organic products, environmentally and socially food has been growing (Feagan, 2007; Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation (FAO, 2008), European consumers increasingly demand traditional agricultural food products, which plays a fundamental role in the renewed interest of local farmers and distributors in these kinds of products.

Many are the data which support the increase of this interest. According to Eurobarometer findings on food quality surveys, for example, the percentage of Europeans who consider the origin of food as an important criterion they look for when they buy, shifted from 30% in 1998 to 71% in 2012. Moreover, farmers' markets had an exponential development in many areas of the world: in 2011, for example, they had an increase of 28% in Italy and of 17% in UK. At the same time, agri-tourism, another phenomenon related to local food consumption, foodstuff traceability, and promotion of traditional food products, has grown. In Italy, for instance, it increased about 42% in the five-year period between 2003 and 2008 (Giudici and Dessì, 2011) and it continued to increase (+ 5% in 2010 and + 2,2% in 2011)<sup>1</sup>.

The importance of this phenomenon is even more evident if we consider the offer of food companies, restaurants and supermarkets, where – at least in Italy – the references to and the valorization of the origin of food products are more and more frequent. As a matter of fact, the number of commercial initiatives related to place-based food has gradually increased, and many are the adverts which refer to the origin of products in order to exploit existing associations towards a region, and provide products that have a specific image (van Ittersum et al., 2007). It is interesting to note that this process concerns not only typical products offered by small local firms which operate in the context of origin of food products. On the contrary, also the offer of restaurants, retailers and discount stores has progressively changed, paying increasing attention to the territorial dimension. In some cases (e.g. Barilla with the Regionali pasta line), it is a recovery of bonds and values related to territory, which in the

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<sup>1</sup> [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)

course of time have been lost in the effort to go always global. In other cases (e.g. McDonald's and its McItaly lines), it is the incorporation of elements and values that not only have never been part of the company's philosophy, but have always been totally distant from their strategy.

Starting from the awareness of this scenario, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore in depth the phenomenon of place-based food: firstly, it aims for a better understanding of the concept of place-based food, analyzing scholars' contributions; secondly, the purpose is to study the territorial orientation of food companies, trying to understand how local and global food companies could interpret better and employ in their strategies the link with territory.

This dissertation is composed of three essays. In Essay 1, we intend to improve the comprehension of place-based food concept, and then we focus on consumers' attitudes and perceptions. The central questions we address are: What are the main characteristics of place-based foods? What reasons drive people to increase their attention to territoriality? What meanings do consumers attach to territorial food consumption? To answer these questions, we reviewed the existing multidisciplinary literature related to food and place. Firstly, the analysis carried out emphasizes that, considering the variety of studies dealing with this relationship from different points of view and perspectives, there is not uniformity in the terminology used (e.g. traditional food, typical food, regional food and so on) and in the concept associated to place-based food. As a matter of fact, in the food literature, the concept of place variously refers to the concept of locality, embeddedness, territoriality and *terrior*. Even the basic understanding of what the link between food and place means is not universal. This bond can be understood either in terms of the spatial connotation of place, favoring the notion of proximity, or in terms of the special characteristics that foods can acquire considering the place in its broader sense, which also includes temporal and social dimensions. Focusing on this latter understanding of the link between food and place, in line with the *origin of food perspective* (Fonte, 2008), we identified the main characteristics of place-based food in traditionality, history, typicity and knowledge. Concerning the motives of the growing interest in place-based products, four topics were identified: health and food safety concern; concern for the environment; resocialize food and rebuild local communities; regain connections with place, roots and traditions. Finally, with specific reference to consumers' attitudes and their perceptions of place-based food, the review suggests that further researches focusing on values, attitudes and lifestyles could reveal profiles of place-based food consumers that could offer interesting insights for stakeholders of the food sector.

Essay 2 and 3 aim to explore the relationship between food and place in an organizational point of view, and investigate the territorial facet of food companies. In Essay 2 we focus on local companies in order to verify the possibility to shift from the concept of *terroir* products to the concept of *terroir* organization. Specifically, the research questions are as follows: How a local food company which serves typical and traditional products manages its linkage with the territory? What are the implications of the fact that the company itself shows a strong link with the territory of origin of the food products offered? To what extent does the connection among firm, food and territory influence the firm's strategy? In contrast to Essay 2, in Essay 3 the purpose is to investigate how global companies have progressively changed their offer, paying increasing attention to the territorial dimension. What are the main factors that determine the new face of transnational companies? To what extent does the link between food and place influence their chosen strategies?

To explore these issues, both in Essay 2 and 3 we examine a case study based on qualitative inductive techniques (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, Yin, 2009). Specifically, in Essay 2 we analyze the case of MeC Puddu's, a Sardinian restaurant deeply embedded in its territory of origin, which offers Sardinian traditional dishes in an unusual fast-food way. In opposition, in Essay 3 we consider the case of McDonald's that, over the past four years, has undertaken on the Italian market a process of developing Italian products by launching a new line of products based on Italian recipes and produced with certified Italian ingredients.

Taken collectively, the three essays in this dissertation contribute to a better understanding of the place-based food phenomenon. Systematizing the existing literature about food and place, Essay 1 not only offers a valid support to marketing strategies, but it also builds the foundations from which to start more detailed and specific analysis. Thus, having clearly in mind what are the key elements of place-based foods and what reasons provoke the increase of attention in the origin of food products, it was possible to consider the relationship between food and place in an organizational point of view. In this regard, this work highlights two different ways to use territorial links in the firm strategies, and two reverse implications of the territorial orientation related to the mix between local and global elements.



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# Essay 1.

## Understanding the link between food and place

### Abstract

*Starting from the awareness that a better understanding of the link between food and place and of place-based foods consumers is important not only in its own right, but also in terms of responses to changes in the market dynamics, this essay aims to provide an in-depth analysis of place-based food phenomenon collecting findings from existing studies. We first focus on the multifaceted ways to define place-based foods, analyzing the various related concepts and the different perspectives to interpret the bond between food and place. Then, we consider the kinds of place-based foods and the main features that characterize these products. Finally, we explore the reasons for the growing attention towards place-based products, and consumers' attitudes towards and perceptions of these kinds of foods. We then conclude with implications and suggestions for further research.*

## 1.1 Introduction

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century globalization led to a process of homogenization and standardization of products, which overshadowed the concepts of place and geography. With specific reference to the agri-food sector, the industrialization of agriculture and the so-called McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1983) expanded the food chain and reduced its transparency, increased the physical and mental distance between consumers and producers, thus removing consumer control from food production (Roos et al., 2007). In this way the focus to the origin of food and ingredients was reduced (Parrot et al., 2002; Pratt, 2007), affecting quality and safety, and jeopardizing the local gastronomic identity (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2007; Gade, 2004).

Regardless of this attempt of deterritorialization, the concepts of place and territoriality have never disappeared. As Rusten et al. (2007) underline, *“to argue that all places and products are becoming similar and that geography no longer matters is to misrepresent or simplify the relationship between place and economy. It is worth remembering that the majority of people are bound by the location in which they live and that they draw on particular place-based cultures, meanings, traditions, histories, and languages”* (p. 143). Place is an essential element of human existence, and *“if the experience of movement and non-place has become fundamental for modern identity and everyday life, the experience of place continues to be important for many people worldwide. Place and non-place are more than contrastive modalities”* (Escobar, 2001, p. 147).

Consequently, the erasing of place is only an ostensible aspect of globalization and McDonaldization. As a matter of fact, the homogenization and deterritorialization trend of modernity increased the attention towards locality (Hinrichs, 2000; Roos et al., 2007), supported a new articulation of places (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2007; Feagan, 2007) and drove to embed place-based production into modern economies (Gade, 2004; Hinrichs, 2003; Winter, 2003).

As a result, interest in the origin of food products has grown remarkably. Consumers increasingly demand foods with a defined and clear origin and with a distinctive character or image insisting on the fact that they are grown or produced in a defined geographical area (Bessièrè, 1998; Bowen and Zapata, 2009; Parrot et al., 2002). Parallel to this interest, there are many initiatives in the food sector that attempt to answer to these requirements.

In the light of this re-evaluation, the issue of “place” has been investigated in the last decades from a variety of disciplines and perspectives. In particular, considerable academic

interest has revolved around the link between place and consumption. In his analysis of “consuming places”, Urry (1995) suggests that places are themselves consumed. The consumption of places is not only a visual cultural act, places are also consumed in an economic sense, through a variety of activities such as sale of products which reflect their place of provenance (including food products), trade of land, and investment in specific geographical areas (Overton, 2010).

Rusten et al. (2007) analyzes the connection between place and products as firms’ strategies able to affect consumer perception, and give companies a competitive advantage. According to the authors, place-based products operate like advertisements, and they incorporate in their significance the connotation associated to a particular place. This translation of significance implies: the comprehension of the meaning connected with specific places, and the perception of the differences in the connotations of places (Rusten et al., 2007). This perception, in turn, refers to the concepts of uniqueness and authenticity and to the awareness and recognition of the fact that places have value. A value that, as Overton (2010) underlines, can be more or less tangible, depending on the fact that its nature is cultural and spiritual, or essentially economic.

With specific reference to food products, many scholars (e.g. Caporale and Monteleone, 2001; Iaccarino et al., 2006) underline that information about origin may represent a cognitive sign, and informational stimuli for products; it also has symbolic and emotional meanings. Accounting for this, marketing strategies often put emphasis on product characteristics linked to the origin of products, thus creating new opportunities for satisfy needs of consumers more and more interested in values such as uniqueness and authenticity. According to Dagevos (2005) new consumers “*search for products with a value-added extras in terms of intangible assets such uniqueness, originality or authenticity, warm-hearted attention, sincerity, or integrity. Nonmaterial consumption, in other words, is crucial for new consumers’ behaviour. New consumers embody the meaning modern people attach to consumer goods. Consumer products and places to worship consumerism [...]are part (and parcel) of people’s identity and individuality; of their quest for some real or ideal self*” (p. 36).

It is exactly because the relationship between food and place has been analyzed under different perspectives and points of view, the terms and the concepts used are many, and there is no uniformity in the body of literature. Furthermore, the evolution of attitudes towards food origins has not been sufficiently reflected on in the existing literature about food consumption and behavior. At the same time, the growing interest towards food origin calls for a better and

clearer understanding of the place-based food phenomenon. In fact, the rising attractiveness of place-based foods raises important questions of interest to food companies, producers, distributors, retailers, marketers and stakeholder in general. The main questions before them could be summarized as follows:

1. What are the main characteristics of place-based foods?
2. What reasons drive people to increase their attention to territoriality?
3. What meanings do consumers attach to territorial food consumption?

The purpose of this essay is to analyze the existing multidisciplinary literature concerning the bond between food and place, thus trying to answer the highlighted questions.

We started with an analysis of the concepts related to place-based foods, underlining the different perspectives to understand the link that connects place and food. Then, adopting a broader conception of place-based foods, which combines the spatial dimension with temporal and social elements, we attempted to identify the main characteristics of place-based foods. Finally, we focused on empirical studies identifying consumers' attitudes towards and perception of place-based foods.

The content of this essay is organized in paragraphs and sub-paragraphs necessary to give rationality to a topic really not simple to analyze. After this introduction, the next paragraph explains the adopted methodology; then the subsequent points are devoted to present the literature contributions on the multifaceted ways to define place-based foods, the different kinds and main features of place-based foods, and the motivations of the increasing interest in place-based products. Finally, we analyze consumers' attitudes towards and perceptions of place-based food.

## **1.2 Research methodology**

The focus of this study is threefold: firstly, to identify the main features of place-based foods; secondly, to understand the forces and factors that drive place-based food consumption; thirdly, to review and synthesize published researches concerned with identifying consumers' attitudes towards and perception of place-based foods.

This study is based on data collected from January 2012 to May 2013 and it comprises 55 articles from the period 1988 to 2011, 8 books, and a chapter in edit book. Several steps were followed in selecting the literature to be reviewed. The iterative search and retrieval process started with developing a set of concepts related to the research questions, thereby relating to various ways of conceptualizing a place (territory, region, origin, provenance,

geographical area) as well as the bond between food products (localization, regionalization, embeddedness, territorialization) and also the different properties conferred to food products in relation to their origin (local, terroir, traditional, typical, regional). With specific reference to the analysis of the consumers' point of view, we also considered the different understandings of consumer propensity towards place-identified foods (consumption, motivation, perception, interest, attention, attitude). At a later stage, the concepts specified above were variously combined and used as keywords in an interdisciplinary search in online databases including Google Scholar, Proquest, Web of Science, and Elsevier. Furthermore, we considered in detail a web journal dedicated to the social science of food and entitled *Anthropology of food*. This journal is of particular interest for the issue that we aim to analyze because it extensively analyzed the relation between food and place under different points of view.

Table 1 shows the number of articles and the name of journals considered in this study, classifying them on the basis of the disciplines to which they belong. We can note that journals from the academic disciplines of food, anthropology, geography and sociology are the most numerous.

**Table 1** Numbers of articles retrieved, classified on the basis of the name of the journal and the discipline to which they belong

Discipline (n° of articles)	Name of the journal
<b>Food (topical journals) (16)</b>	Food Quality and Preference (5)
	British Food Journal (4)
	Appetite (3)
	Food Control
	Food Research International
	Qualities of food
	Trends in Food Science and Technology
	<b>Anthropology (11)</b>
	Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute
	Critique of Anthropology
<b>Geography (11)</b>	Journal of Rural Studies (3)
	Progress in Human Geography (2)
	Annals of the Association of American Geographer
	Economic geography
	Geoforum
	Norwegian Journal of Geography
	Political Geography
<b>Sociology (7)</b>	Sociologia ruralis (4)
	Journal of Rural Sociology

	Journal of sociology
	Rural Sociology
<b>Regional studies (2)</b>	European Urban and Regional Studies (2)
<b>Agriculture (2)</b>	European Review of Agricultural Economics
	Journal of Agricultural Economics
<b>Management (2)</b>	Journal of Business Research
	Journal of Macromarketing
<b>Social Science (2)</b>	Journal of material culture
	Social science information
<b>Economy (1)</b>	Economy and society
<b>Interdisciplinary (1)</b>	Time Society

Source: the Author

In addition to these Academic sources, documents of the Commission of European Communities (CEC), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation (FAO), Italian Ministry of Agriculture, and Slow Food were taken into consideration.

### 1.3 The multifaceted ways to define place-based foods

#### 1.3.1 Relating Food and place

In the food literature the concept of place commonly refers to the concepts of locality, embeddedness (Bowen, 2010; Hinrichs, 2000; Murdoch et al., 2000) and territoriality (Bowen, 2010; Sonnino, 2007; van der Meulen, 2007). Furthermore, *terroir* is another concept able to explain the link between food and place. It will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Commonly, the term local brings to mind the notion of boundary, and it is generally adopted to describe something that is related to a circumscribed area, or a shorter distance (Roos, 2007). However, the link between food products and a specific location may also refers to territories that are not geographically limited, but may be related to specific products via proximate cultural networks intended in terms of know-how or tradition (Amilien et al. 2007). As Roos et al. (2007) underlines “*local food is no longer food that is just produced near you by people you know. It is also the product waving from the shelf of a supermarket, having travelled miles, with a label reminding consumers of the local dimension embedded within. [...] Local food is thus conceived today in terms of gastronomy, tradition, authenticity, origin, quality, distance, social relations, production, provisioning, sustainability and politics*” (para. 6). Consequently, depending on whether the emphasis is placed more on social

and environmental aspects (proximity) or on cultural values (typicity), the relationship between food products and their territorial contexts of origin may assume different meanings.

Embeddedness, intended as social connection, reciprocity and trust (Hinrichs, 2000), links food systems to social and environmental sustainability (Bowen, 2010), leading to questions about food provenance and the relations of production that surround these products (Murdoch et al., 2000). Finally, territoriality is defined as “*the ecological and cultural relationship that a food system has with its territorial context*” (Sonnino, 2007, in Bowen, 2010, p. 212) or as “*the degree of physical connection with the place of origin*” (van der Meulen, 2007, para. 30).

Furthermore, the re-evaluation of place is associated with the reconfiguration of food supply chains and the emergence of an alternative food system. With the aim to shift food production out of the standardization and anonymity of the industrial system, these processes attempt to re-establish a connection between production and consumption, and to recover its cultural and historic roots (Bowen, 2010; Marsden, 2004; Pratt, 2007; Sonnino, 2007). In this way, these processes give an increasing prominence to the origins of food and the concept of locality. A key ingredient of these processes is its potential capacity to give new sociality and spatiality to foods that allow the consumer to differently evaluate the desirability and quality of foods, using their own knowledge and experiences (Marsden, 2004).

### 1.3.2 The concept of *terroir*

*Very crunchy due to high altitude. Much sun, little precipitation and a significant difference in temperature between day and night: this makes the difference between a Val Venosta apple and any other apple (Advert of Italian apples).*

The advert of these apples emphasizes that the natural and climate conditions of the place of origin contribute to creating a special kind of food, with unique features. As the French concept of *terroir* (Barham, 2003; Demossier, 2011; Maréchal, 2009; Trubek, 2008) reminds us, an intimate connection between soil, air, water, climate, seasons, and foodstuffs exists. Deriving from the Latin *territorium*, which means territory (Maréchal, 2009), *terroir* is a French term connoting the interaction between people, place and taste (Trubek, 2008). Originally associated with the vineyard, the concept of *terroir* has been extended from its initial use in the production of wine, and it “*has been used as a synonym for origin to evoke a sense of place and combine implicit reference to distinctive attributes of locality and terrain. It denotes the notion that a rural region must be considered as shaping the distinctive*



*characteristics of its inhabitants, language, or local culture, including the local accent (accent du terroir). This usage associates social and cultural practice, and place with connotations of roots and origin, tradition, and heritage”* (Maréchal, 2009, p. 921).

The concept of *terroir* is not just a geographical concept, but also a cultural one. It includes temporal, spatial and human dimension, which combine natural and social elements (Amilien et al., 2007). On one hand, it is a physical concept which comprises of the material elements related to the environmental conditions in which food products are grown, bred or collected. On the other hand, it reflects the strong interaction between natural and social aspects, emphasizing the evaluation and the preservation of rural and traditional knowledge and cultural roots (Barham, 2003; Dekhili and d’Hauteville, 2009; Maréchal, 2009; Pratt, 2007).

### 1.3.3 Different perspectives to interpret the bond between food and place

In the light of the different initiatives that claim a localization of food products and a rediscovery of their link to territory, it is possible to identify different perspectives and different types of place-based food.

Fonte (2008) contribution distinguishes between the *reconnecting perspective* and the *origin of food perspective*. The first sustains that local food is intended as products produced, retailed and consumed in a circumscribed geographical area, considering locality in its physical and concrete facet. This approach mainly concerns northern Europe and the USA, and is aimed to create a closer relationship between producers and consumers and to reduce the distance travelling of products, thus satisfying ecological and social question. “*Local food is seen as a way to both protect the environment and respatialise and relocalise food, establishing direct contact between farmers and consumers and generating a link of trust and reciprocal benefits between them*” (Fonte, 2008, p. 204). On the contrary, the *origin of food perspective* focuses not merely on spatially orientated characteristics (zero miles), but also on the dimensions of time, history and tradition. It affects especially the Mediterranean countries. In this case, “*proximity refers to a common place but also to a common history, a common belonging that is solidified in collective norms and regulations. [...]. Food is not only an occasion for sociability, but a patrimony and, as such, a strong element of local identity and culture*” (Fonte, 2008, p. 207).

In a market-driven viewpoint, Tregear (2007) proposes a typology of local food systems based on two specific dimensions: the identity that a specific local food has in the

marketplace, meaning whether it is a commodity or a product with special territorial characteristics; and the nature of producer-consumer relations in the system, considered in terms of proximity and distance. This dimension results in three kinds of local food: *direct produce*, that are commodity identity products with proximate relations; *close typicity*, considered as special character products with proximate relations; and *distant speciality*, special character products with low proximate relations. The first type of products refers to food without any special link to a local territory, considered local just because they are grown and sold within a circumscribed area. An example could be the unpackaged farm products sold in the farmer-markets. This type of food represents for consumers freshness, healthiness, and the opportunity to support local farmers. *Close typicity* refers to food products which present special characteristics due to the link with their territory of origin, and that are retailed in a context characterized by a strong cultural proximity between food, consumers, and producers. Often the link with the local territory is indicated in the name of the products. The third type of local food presents special territorial characteristics as the second one, but they are retailed and/or consumed at significant geographic distance from their place of origin. Consequently, the proximity between consumer, products and producers is quite low, rising some doubt about products authenticity.

Analyzing local food from a symbolic point of view, Brunori (2007) distinguishes between *local*, *locality* and *localist* food products. *Local food* is the expression of a local community where there is short distance between producers and consumers, and traditional circuits are preferred. It belongs to everyday food habits and to local knowledge: consumers' choices and producers' strategies are based on routines. Consumers know the provenance of the products because they are personally acquainted with producers and distributors, and quality is essentially related to freshness and absence of risk. *Locality food* derives from the separation between the context of production and the context of consumption. Consumers and producers are not part of the same community and frequently they are not personally acquainted. Consumers are guaranteed of the origin of food by specific labels and insurance systems, and their choice is driven by the awareness that the place of origin conveys particular characteristics to these products. Finally, *localist food* is not connected to usual food habits. Consumers, who belong to the same place of producers, consciously purchase local products with the aim to reconstruct local identity and rebuild the community to which they belong. Product quality is thus associated not only with environmental factors, safety and freshness, but also with identity issues. The element that differentiates *localist* from *local* food is just the reflexivity of consumption which is much higher in the first.

Despite the different terminology used to highlight the dissimilarities in the meaning attached to the food-place relation, the categorizations described above share some significant elements. In the light of these similarities, it may be helpful to identify two main complementary perspectives, basically attributable to the categorization proposed by Fonte (2008).

The first perspective suggested considers the concept of place in its spatial connotation, mainly referring to the notion of proximity. This reconnection is, both in terms of the opposition between the anonymity of impersonal transactions and personal face-to-face interactions, and the juxtaposition between artificial and reconstituted foods and products, recognized to be authentic and genuine (Pratt, 2007). The second perspective encloses a broader understanding of place that goes beyond its spatial meaning. As a result, place-based foods have a collective dimension and belong to local culture, and this allows to distinguish provenance (intended as ‘to issue from a place’) from origin (intended as ‘to be from a place’) (Bérard and Marchenay, 2007). Locality is thereby understood as value-added products that may not necessarily be sold and consumed in the region of origin, but be also exported beyond it (Brunori, 2007; Morris and Buller, 2003; Tregear, 2007). Furthermore, in this second approach, place-based products recall a romantic idea of the local, the traditional and the authenticity, and their rediscovery derives from the interest in regaining a connection with nature, culture, and traditions of national and regional heritage progressively lost (Gade, 2004; Giudici and Dessì, 2011). As Bessièrè (1998) underlines, “*modern home cooking goes beyond traditional family dishes, creating nostalgia for food eaten in one’s childhood and adolescence. Newly-found aspirations translate this nostalgia into the desire to go back to culinary roots, as if this were a return to the beginning. It is as if eating were a quest for nutrimental truth and essence hidden within a dish*” (p. 25).

#### 1.3.4 Food-place link as quality cue

Irrespective of the meanings attached to the link between food and place, this connection responds to the increasing consumer demand for products that incorporate a new dimension of quality. The notion of quality is not intrinsic. As Muchnik et al. (2005) underline, quality is defined via a process of qualification that interprets the products through specific criteria of evaluation. According to Marsden (2004) there is not a clear definition of quality, but it is the result of the consumers’ associations which create linkage between different quality elements. Moreover, the concept of quality refers not only to the production

aspect, but it also depends on consumers' perceptions and expectations affected by their personal knowledge, interest and cultural back-grounds. As a matter of fact, "*consumer choice behavior and decision making processes depend on product "image" created by the consumer prior to purchase and the act of consumption. This 'a priori' perception of a product is based on consumer expectations and is referred to as "quality expectation" in the quality perception process*" (Kupiec and Ravell 1998, pp. 237-238).

In consideration of this, it is even clearer that local food is a multi-dimensional concept which acquires different meanings on the basis of those elements on which is given emphasis. Thus, for example, for some products the bioclimatic conditions represent the fundamental aspect of localization, for others - traditional knowledge and cultural roots are the main features of the local attribute (Muchnik, 2005).

According to Callon et al. (2002), the intrinsic qualities of products are bound with the way they are marketed, and communication plays a pivotal role in the process of singularization and attachment that create products identity through a strict connection between consumer expectation and the product offered. Consequently, qualities of goods are not simply observed by consumers, but they are progressively defined by a process of qualification which implies their active participation.

#### **1.4 Kinds of place-based food**

Place-based products span the whole agri-food sector, including plant, animal-based food and also processed food products (e.g. cheese, bakery products, oils) (Bérard and Marchenay, 2008). As previously highlighted, there is not a unique understanding of the link between place and food. Consequently, to account for this lack of clarity, the analysis will be based on the broader understanding of place-food connection which, in line with the *origin of food perspective* of Maria Fonte (2008), enriches spatially oriented characteristics with dimensions such as time, culture, history and traditions.

Many are the food products configurations that may be inserted in this multi-dimensional concept. In literature, food products which have a strong bond with their territory of origin are variously indicated as traditional foods (e.g. Almli et al., 2011; Guerrero et al., 2009; Jordana, 2000; Pieniak et al., 2009; Trichopoulou et al., 2007), typical products (e.g. Caporale et al., 2006; Iaccarino et al., 2006, Muchnik et al., 2005), regional foods (e.g. Kuznesof et al., 1997; Tregear et al., 2007), and terroir products (e.g. Aurier et al., 2005). A phenomenon not new but increasingly attracting attention is related to certified food products.

#### 1.4.1 Traditional foods

As Trichopoulou et al. (2007) underline, traditional foods are an expression of culture, history and lifestyle. According to Bertozzi (1998, in Jordana, 2000), a traditional product symbolizes a group, it belongs to a specific territory, and it is part of a culture, therefore entailing the cooperation of individuals operating in that defined area. Starting from this sociological definition, Jordana (2000) deduced that *“in order to be traditional, a product must be linked to a territory and it must also be part of a set of traditions, which will necessarily ensure its continuity over time”* (p. 147). The unique formal definition of traditional food products comes from the Italian Ministry of Agriculture that defines this kind of products as *“agrifood products whose methods of processing, storage and ripening are consolidated with time according to uniform and constant local use”* (Ministero Agricoltura, 1999). Furthermore, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2008) *“traditional agricultural and food products represent an expression of culture and lifestyle resulting from the local climatic, agricultural and economic conditions that determine production and processing practices. As a consequence, the traditional nature of a product is based on a collective heritage and is linked to a specific territory although it is transmitted by the migration of individuals and populations”* (p. 2). Finally, Guerrero et al. (2009) define this concept from a consumers’ viewpoint as *“a product frequently consumed or associated with specific celebrations and/or seasons, normally transmitted from one generation to another, made accurately in a specific way according to the gastronomic heritage, with little or no processing/manipulation, distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated with a certain local area, region or country”* (p. 348).

#### 1.4.2 Typical foods

According to Caporale et al. (2006) typical foods are characterized by a certain sensory profile ensued from various factors such as geographic origin, culture, tradition, environmental factors, genetic properties and the manufacturing process know-how. The typicality is closely related to the detection of a specific quality which represents a key element to differentiate it from other products belonging to the same commercial category. As a result, typical products are mainly identified by consumers familiar with these sensory features. The authors also suppose that: *“the quality of typical food products is related to the conformance of these products to a characteristics sensory profile, and thus we can assume*

*that when these products are experienced and respond in terms of expected and actual sensory profiles, they are accepted by consumers and present a high quality level” (p. 117).*

Iaccarino et al. (2006), instead, identify the key features of typical products in their environment of production that must be non-industrial, traditional or unique, and characterized by small-scale batch production with limited mechanization. It could also be characterized by place and human-related elements.

### 1.4.3 Regional foods

The investigation of consumer perception of regional foods in England conducted by Kuznesof et al. (1997) reveals that regional foods are defined by place and human-related factors. Hence, regional foods are strongly associated with a specific area, whose raw materials are able to confer distinctive qualities to these products. They are also closely associated with traditional means of employment. Other important features of regional foods are: tradition and heritage, customs, and authenticity. Furthermore, in this study the authors distinguish between regional products characterized by high-value, specialty or hand-crafted products, and regional dishes or recipes associated to home preparation and cooking.

Similarly, Tregear et al. (1999, 2007) consider regional foods as agro-food products with special features associated to their territory of origin, and determined by both the physical characteristics of the environment and socio-cultural practices existing within a geographical area, therefore conferring to regional foods a tradition or heritage.

### 1.4.4 Terroir products

Terroir products (Aurier et al. 2005) “*make reference to a limited area where natural conditions and know-how of products provide special characteristics to the product*” (para. 1). In addition, this kind of products also reflects the beliefs associated to the place and the area reputation in terms of culture, history, people, skills and so on. These authors identified three main characteristics of terroir products:

- their production is with local raw materials;
- a localized traditional recipe or know-how, concerning the reputation, culture and history of the place of production;
- the location of the firm in the territory for a long period.

### 1.4.5 Geographical indication labeling

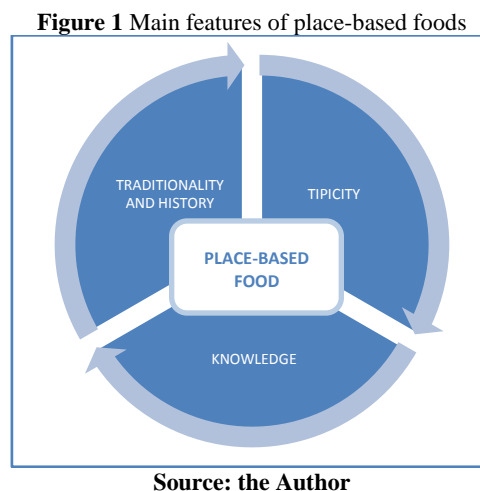
Geographical indications (GIs) are place-based names which connect countryside products to their geographical origin and their cultural and historical identity, conveying a certain quality, reputation or further characteristics due precisely to the fact of growth or made in a specific environment (Barham, 2002; Bowen and Zapata, 2009, Ilbery et al., 2005; Trubek et al., 2010). Consequently “*label of origin [...] holds the potential of re-linking production to the social, cultural and environmental aspects of particular places, further distinguishing them from anonymous mass produced goods, and opening the possibility of increased responsibility to place*” (Barham, 2003, 129).

This type of differentiation is not new. The French system of AOC (*Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée*) was created in 1935 to specify place of origin and the techniques employed in the production of wine, protecting in this way the integrity, prominence, recognition and quality of wines (Barham, 2003; Ilbery et al., 2005; Maréchal, 2009; Trubek et al., 2010). Inspired by the French AOC labeling, in 1993 The European Community created a quality label system for local products (CEC, 1992a; 1992b) in order to support diverse agricultural production, protect product names from misuse and imitation, and help consumers by giving them information about the specific qualities of food stuff. The European Union uses three official categories for local products: Protected Designations of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG). The first one, PDO, is given to agricultural products or foodstuffs with characteristics essentially or exclusively associated to them being produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area using recognized know-how. The second designation, PGI, is less exclusive. It requires a uniquely defined geographic region but the geographical link must occur in at least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation (CEC, 1992a). Finally, TSG does not directly refer to the origin of foods, but highlights their traditional character due to the composition of products or the methods of production, hence emphasizing their regional characteristics (CEC, 2006). The notion of tradition, just implicitly referred to by PDO and PGI products, is explicit in TSG. According to the EU legislation, traditional means proven usage within the Community market for a period showing transmission between generations; this time period should be the one generally ascribed to one human generation, at least 25 years (CEC, 2006). Consequently, in this case “*local roots are linked to know-how that has been handed down to the present generation, bearing in mind*

*technological progress and the particular socio-economic context*” (Bérard and Marchenay, 2007, para. 17).

## 1.5 Identifying the main features of place-based foods

Regardless of the differences in the terminology used to specify place-based products, and despite the fact that in the various cases the emphasis is placed on some elements rather than others, the definitions described above present many shared elements. Consequently, it is possible to identify the main attributes that define food products relationship with space, place and time, helping to discriminate provenance to origin (Bérard and Marchenay, 2008). As shown in Figure 1, the features which delineate the character of place-based products, distinguishing them from the other food products not associated to their place of origin are: traditionality and history, typicity, knowledge.



### 1.5.1 Traditionality and history

Considering the etymology of tradition from the Latin verb *tradere*, which means to transmit or to deliver, it is quite obvious that traditionality entails a connection between past and present (Bessière, 1998). According to Pouillon (in Bérard and Marchenay, 2007), tradition in European cultures belonged within a cultural representation of time and history that regarded the past as behind us (para 19). Inverting this perspective, Lenclud (in Bérard and Marchenay, 2007) state that it was not the past that produced the present but the present that shaped its past: in other words a selective interpretation of the past is based on culturally significant criteria (para 19). Hervieux-Léger (in Bessière, 1998) “*defines tradition as the combination of representations, concepts, theoretical and practical know-how, behavior,*



*attitudes, etc. that a group or a society accepts to ensure the continuity between past and present”* (p. 26).

The most tangible aspect of traditionality is the time elapsed from the first appearance of the food products. However, it is very difficult to speculate about this length of time. As a matter of fact, this span-time has a meaning that creates the history of place-based products. There is not a direct link between the passage of time and the existence of a documented history and the traditional status. Moreover, traditionality is not proportional to the extent of historical depth (Bérard and Marchenay, 2007, 2008).

Other aspects of traditionality relate to the degree to which place-based products are still made in a traditional way, and the link with the local consumers' habits (Bérard and Marchenay, 2008; van der Meulen, 2007, para 45). The first one is sometimes difficult to establish because traditional-method producers, in general, have not written records about production techniques (van der Meulen, 2007). The context and the characteristics of local consumption are parts of the cultural dimension of place-based products. In certain cases, for example, consumer familiarity with products feature and awareness of the way of preparation and cooking of foods, and the associations with particular occasions and cultural values are essential to completely appreciate them (Bérard and Marchenay, 2008).

### 1.5.2 Typicity

Typicity refers to the distinctive sensory characteristics of food products, which are the expression of the special relationship between people, place and taste, and determine their specificity (Caporale et al., 2006; Tregear, 2007; van der Meulen, 2007). As van der Meulen (2007) underlines “*a powerful element in the perception and non-replicability of typicity is the mystical ‘marriage’ between, on one hand, the properties of the raw material conferred by soil, microclimate and agricultural practices, and on the other hand the special processing techniques used*” (para 43). As a matter of fact, typicity is the result of the cultural diversity and the ecology of a territory, and the culinary habits that derive from these. Factors such as climate, altitude, soil composition, traditional knowledge and so on, influence food products so that “*uniqueness can be undermined if producers in another, quite similar area start to use the same generic material and production methods*” (van der Meulen, 2007, para 40).

### 1.5.3 Knowledge

According to Fonte (2008) “*in the case of local food [...]knowledge refers to the technical knowledge utilized by farmers and producers to grow and prepare in the specific agri-ecological context in which they operate. It includes knowledge about production and preparation techniques, local natural environmental processes and the characteristics of the product*” (pp. 210-211).

It is a technical form of knowledge strictly related to the particular place and culture in which it grows, and it is acquired via experiences during informal circumstances of learning. With the industrialization of the agri-food system and advancement of the scientific knowledge that significantly altered the food production processes, this local knowledge began to be considered something out-of-date and no longer useful, and often labeled as traditional (Fonte, 2008).

As a result, in many regions traditional knowledge belonging to the local culture, the related method systems of production and processing, and also the ecosystems necessary to the growth of local varieties of plants and animals have risked to disappear (FAO, 2008; Fonte, 2008). This awareness has nurtured the insertion of culinary heritage and traditional products in a process of patrimonialization, which valorizes the origin of food and the rediscovery of traditional knowledge, especially via inventories. At the European level, for example, the EU-founded program Euroterroirs (1993-1997) sustained in Western European countries in creating inventories of regional and traditional products. Similarly, in 1996 Slow Food created the Ark of Taste, an online catalogue which collects “*small-scale quality productions that belong to the cultures, history and traditions of the entire planet*”<sup>2</sup> with the aim to point out the existence of these products, draw attention to the risk of their extinction and involve people in their protection. Currently the Ark of Taste collected 1,262 products all over the world.

Another initiative committed to preserve traditional knowledge in the form of techniques of production, local ecosystems, biological diversity and cultural identity, is the project for the dynamic conservation of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS), started by FAO in 2002<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.slowfoodfoundation.com](http://www.slowfoodfoundation.com)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fao.org/giahs/en/>

## 1.6 Motivations of the increasing interest in place-based products

In the agri-food sector various are the initiatives that claim a recovery of the local dimension and the connection between food and place. Four topics were identified to summarize these forces (Tab. 2). In the following lines some words will be devoted to explain the four topics, also if we focused particularly on the fourth one because it best reflects the broader understanding of the link between food and place previously selected.

**Table 2.** Motivations for the purchase of place-based foods

- |   |
|---|
| 1. Health and food safety concern                       |
| 2. Attention for the environment                        |
| 3. Resocialize food and rebuild local communities       |
| 4. Regain connections with places, roots and traditions |

Source: the Author

### 1.6.1 Motivation 1: Health and food safety concern

Initially, the increasing interest in food provenance and origin was linked to concerns about environmental and human health. As a matter of fact, the food-safety disasters that have succeeded one another in the closing decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are scaring (e.g. “Mad cow” disease; dioxin-tainted foods; and *Escherichia coli*-tainted fresh vegetables) and it contributes to re-evaluating and rearticulating the association between food and place. These scandals, in fact, resulted in the mistrust of standardized and placeless food produced by industrial agriculture, leading to consumer reflexivity about the origin of food tuff and giving added salience to transparency and quality in agro-food production practices (Bowen and Zapata 2009; Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002).

### 1.6.2 Motivation 2: Attention for the environment

Progressively, a new ethics of food has emerged. As Sassatelli and Scott (2001) suggest, in responding to food crises, consumers have changed their purchasing behavior to distribution channels that they trust more. Furthermore, consumers, increasingly encouraged to take responsibility for promoting sustainability, have demonstrated a new “*interest in food which is not only felt to be safe, but which is traceable, and associated with ideas of sustainability and ecological-friendliness*” (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000, 290). Consumers are not only increasingly concerned with issues of food safety and quality, they aim to associate their lifestyle to ecological, ethical and community responsiveness (Fonte, 2008;

Holloway and Kneafsey 2000), and consequently, they prefer eating seasonally and regionally.

### 1.6.3 Motivation 3: Resocialize food and ethnocentrism

At the same time, the relocalization of food responds to an increasing demand to recover social facets of consumptions. On one hand, people try to establish personal contact with farmers and producers (Brunori, 2007; Fonte, 2008; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000). On the other hand, they hope to contribute to the development of the community of origin of food products that in most cases is also the territory of belonging (Brunori, 2007; Fonte, 2008; Vanhonacker et al., 2010).

### 1.6.4 Motivation 4: Regain connections with places, roots and traditions

Over time, the re-evaluation of place-based foods has been more and more associated to a social identity crisis, which has driven people to restore meaning, authenticity, security and identity not only to food, but to life in general. As a matter of fact, products able to reflect the interaction between human beings and their milieu may be considered as a counter force to concerns generated from globalization and rapid changes, attracting more and more consumers looking for roots, familiarity, continuance in place, identity and tradition (Bessièrè, 1998; FAO, 2008; Fonte, 2008).

For a better understanding of this fourth topic, it could be helpful to consider the development of slow orientation to life and the activity of Slow Food movement.

#### 1.6.4.1 Slow orientation to life

The slow orientation is a cultural revolution. It is a new approach to life that has recently started in conjunction with the slowing down of people's rhythms, the rediscovery of connections with local culture, traditions, and places that they have progressively lost, is also comprised of a reconnection between producers and consumers and a new evaluation of traditional local products, including food (Giudici and Dessì 2011; Honoré 2005). Despite its name, the slow philosophy is not about doing everything at a snail's pace, on the contrary, it promotes acting at the right speed, focusing on quality rather than quantity, and savoring the flow of time (Honoré, 2005). In this sense, the implementation of slowness allows people to create alternative practice of work, leisure, family and sociality. It gives people the freedom

and, in certain sense, the responsibility to adopt diverse behaviors that can help them to enjoy nature, the countryside, gastronomy, history, and cultural traditions (Contigiani, 2001; Hadot, 1995) by living without feeling hurried. As Parkins (2004) underlines, “*slow living involves the conscious negotiation of the different temporalities that make up our everyday lives, deriving from a commitment to occupy time more attentively. Implicit in the process of slow living is a particular conception of time in which ‘having time’ for something means investigating it with significance through attention and deliberation. To live slowly in this sense, then, means engaging in ‘mindful’ rather than ‘mindless’ practices which make us consider the pleasure or at least the purpose of each task to which we give our time*” (p. 364). This is certainly true also for food products. The new attention towards the origin of food and all the value related to this kind of consumption, is in fact an attempt to give a meaning to an activity that has lost its significance in the course of time, hence transforming it from a “mindless” action to a “mindful” experience. Furthermore, the fact that food has not only nutritional characteristics is not new (e.g. Bessièrè, 1998; Fishler, 1988). Lockie (2001) highlights that geographical knowledge of food affect “*the construction of ‘selves’, ‘communities’ and ‘regions’, since human subjects are just as knowable and known through their spatiality and temporality as the ‘places’ and the food they consume*” (p. 242). According to Bessièrè (1998), “*food is part of a physico-logical, psycho-sensorial, social and symbolic environment. It has, in addition to hygienic and nutritional values, psycho-sensorial and symbolic characteristics*” (p. 23), and this symbolism may also have different aspects. Food may be a symbol that stimulates fantasy and concentrates symbolic virtue; it may be intended as a sign of communion and therefore a means of socialization (is the case of business meals or family celebrations); foods such as champagne or caviar are class markers; finally, foods may be an emblem that characterizes and is characterized by a specific geographical area and its inhabitants.

#### 1.6.4.2 Slow Food movement

The Slow Food movement is certainly the largest movement devoted to restore meaning to food. According to Carlo Petrini (2007), founder of the movement, food “*is far more than a simple product to be consumed: it is happiness, identity, culture, pleasure, conviviality, nutrition, local economy, survival*” (p. 166). Since its origin in 1989, Slow Food has committed to challenging conventional approaches towards food, trying to modify the production and distribution systems. Being aware of that, in the name of productivity, Fast

Life has changed our way of being and consuming, Slow Food positions itself against the homogenization of taste, the unrestrained power of the multinationals, industrial agriculture and the insidious virus of the “fast life”, which disrupts our habits, invades the privacy of our home and forces us to eat fast food (Petrini 2001). Slow Food’s official goal is not only “*to defend good food and gastronomic pleasure, hence to support a slower pace of life*”, but also “*to protect traditional food, primary ingredients, conserving methods of cultivation and processing, and defend the biodiversity of cultivated and wild varieties*”<sup>4</sup>. In place of fast food and fast life, Slow Food thus returns cultural dignity to food and the slow rhythms of conviviality to the table, promoting taste, flavors, regionalism, locatedness, but also international exchange (Parkins 2004). This initial aim to support and defend good food, gastronomic pleasure and a slow pace of life was successively broadened to embrace the quality of life and the environmental protection of our planet, linking pleasure and food with awareness and responsibility. “*With food so central to daily life, it naturally follows that what we eat has a profound effect on our surroundings as well as the rural landscape of the countryside, the duration of tradition and the biodiversity of the earth. For a true gastronome, it is impossible to ignore the strong connections between plate and planet*” (Malatesta et al. 2005, p. 3).

Slow Food works to defend biodiversity in the food supply chain, spread taste education and connect producers of excellent food with consumers (or better, co-producers; people who are informed about how their food is produced and actively support those who produce it thereby becoming partners in the production process) through events and initiatives (Petrini 2001). This movement runs counter to the trends of fast food, fast living, non-sustainable food production and the erosion of local economies, providing hope for a better future (Parkins 2004).

Slow food believes that the enjoyment of excellent food and wines should be combined with efforts to save the countless traditional cheeses, grains, vegetables, fruits, and animal breeds that are disappearing due to the prevalence of convenience food and agribusiness. Consequently, this movement protects places of historic, artistic and social values that form part of our food heritage, acknowledging the history and culture of every social group as it interacts with in a broader network of reciprocal exchange. The main activities of Slow Food are a network of Presidia and awards which financially support farmers and artisans around the world with the aim to promote traditionally-made products

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<sup>4</sup> [www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com)

and guarantee a viable future for traditional foods. In Italy, for example, 193 Presidia involve over 1,300 small producers and protect a wide range of products: from Veneto Burlina cattle, whose milk is used to make Grappa Marlocco Cheese, to Tuscan Garfagnana Potato Bread, made of wheat and mashed potatoes; from Friulian Pitina, cured mixture of goat, mutton and venison, to the Sicilian natural sweetener known as Manna, extracted from the bark extracts of two types of ash trees, and so forth. With the addition of more than 100 international preside, the Slow Food universe has expanded to embrace biodiversity in almost 50 countries<sup>5</sup>.

## **1.7 Consumers' attitudes towards and perceptions of place-based foods**

After considering scholars contribution on place-based foods and initiatives of the main national and international organizations, this point is devoted to understand consumers' point of view. To reach this purpose, we take into consideration several empirical studies that focused their attention to verify, on one hand, attitudes towards place-based foods and, on the other hand, meanings that consumers attach to information of origin. In Table 3 are summarized the main contribution on the considered topic, with details regarding countries where researches took place, products considered, methods adopted, and the major authors' conclusions.

Overall, we can observe that these researches focus on specific category of foods (e.g. olive oil, wine, beer, potatoes) or certified products (PDO and PGI), consider consumers from defined geographical area, and use different research methods. Furthermore, the aspects on which these analyses of consumers' attitudes and perceptions have focused are multiple: from products' acceptability and hedonic expectations (Caporale et al., 2006) to the willingness to pay a premium price (Skuras and Vakrou, 2002). From the understanding of consumer products' evaluation (van Ittersum et al., 2003, 2007) to the relevance of an affective feeling towards products area of origin (van der Lans et al., 2001). However, in many instances, studies are exploratory, samples considered are small and not representative and consequently results cannot be generalized.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com)

**Table 3:** Illustrative research pertaining to consumers' attitudes towards and perception of place-based foods

Authors	Countries and products considered	Method and major conclusions
Caporale et al. (2006)	Italy – Extra virgin olive oil	Panel sessions - Explored how information about product origin affects the expected and perceived hedonic and sensory qualities of extra virgin olive oils. Results confirmed that information evoking origin of food products has an impact on products' acceptability and creates a positive hedonic expectation in familiar consumers.
Conter et al. (2008)	Italy – Traditional dry Fermented sausages	Interview – Explained the factors that influence consumers' choices in the purchase of traditional, dry fermented sausages, reinforcing the impression that food consumption is neither an isolated phenomenon nor exclusively focused on food products per se, but is a part of a wider social context in which food consumers wander about.
Dekhili et d'Hauteville (2009)	France and Tunisia – Olive oil	Opened interviews and Delphi methods – the image of a region is multidimensional and the perception of its characteristics reflect differences in local experience.
Dekhili et al. (2011)	France and Tunisia – Olive oil	Open-ended telephone interviews - Results underlined that country of origin, region of origin, and olive variety are important for both samples.
Dimara and Skuras (2003)	Greece – Certificated wine	Survey – the relevance of certification, geographic association and traceability as quality cues varies among consumers, so these cues can be used to target specific segments of the market. Certification targets highly-educated, single consumers that do not spend time to receive information from specialist columns in the media but rely on information received from personal contacts and the product's label. Geographic association and traceability target consumers that, due to their urban origin, are seeking the authentic and traditional product from the product label.
Skuras and Vakrou (2002)	Greece – Quality certificated regional wine	Survey –Results underline that consumers are more attracted to quality features and are generally inclined to pay a premium price when product characteristics such as specialty and authenticity add to their requests and when these attributes are guaranteed from a certification label.
Tregear et al. (1998)	UK – Typical North England foods	Focus group – Regional foods are thought as foods with a tradition and heritage, but it is the perceived authenticity of these features that confirm products' regionality, and that seems to enhance their attractiveness and appeal. Official certification is not the unique way to communicate perceived authenticity. As a result, the appearance of official designation may not be sufficient to add value if other marketing mix elements (e.g. packaging materials, product design, retail environment) do not convey authentic regionality to consumers.
van der Lans et al. (2001)	Italy – PDO Extra virgin olive oils	Conjoint study - Underlined that the success of a marketing strategy based on the region of origin requires that consumers have an affective feeling towards this region and a realistic perception of its value.
van Ittersum et al. (2003)	Netherlands – Beer and potatoes	Self-administrated questionnaires - Studied in what way regional indication influences the evaluation of products. Results showed that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the region of origin have a product-specific influence on product preference;</li> <li>• product preference is influenced by product attribute perception that, in turn, depends on the perceived product-specific regional image;</li> <li>• the product-specific regional image have an indirect effect on product preference via product attribute perception;</li> <li>• the attitude towards the region affects product preference both directly and indirectly;</li> <li>• regional products are more successful if there is a matching between their specific characteristics and the consumers' image of the region intended in terms of human and natural environment aspects.</li> </ul>
van Ittersum et al. (2007)	European countries – PDO and PGI products	Face-to-face interview – this Pan-European research examined consumer appreciation and attitudes toward PDO and PGI products. It proposed and tested a model on consumers' product evaluation on PDO and PGI labelled products, considering the effect of the attitude towards region of origin, and the effect of the image of regional certification labels. The empirical results illustrate that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consumers of regional products value regional certification</li> </ul>



- labels and they have a favorable image of them;
- the perceived higher quality is the main factor affecting consumers' willingness to buy and pay for protected regional products.

Source: the Author

## 1.8 Conclusions

This essay aimed to analyze the existing literature in order to clarify the place-based food concept and elucidate some questions related to this topic. In particular, this study focused on three principal objectives: to identify the key characteristics of place-based foods, understand the elements that drive this growing interest in food origin, and finally, synthesize meanings and perceptions that consumers connect to territorial food consumption.

Drawing from a multidisciplinary literature which analyzed the connection between food and place under different points of views and perspectives, we tried to explain the multifaceted ways to define place-based products. With specific reference to the different understanding of what the link between food and place is, we summarized the existing categorizations in two main perspectives to interpret this bond, essentially in line with Fonte (2008) contribution. The first one considers the food-place link in terms of only spatial connotation of place, favoring the notion of proximity. The second perspective embraces a broader meaning that also includes temporal and social dimensions, therefore focusing on the special characteristics that food can acquire from the specific characteristics of its territory of origin.

Then, adopting this latter broader understanding of the link between food and place, we identified the main characteristics of place-based foods in: traditionality and history, typicity, knowledge. These are the focal features that differentiate food products embedded in a defined geographical area from anonymous products that do not show a clear origin. As a result, these may be the elements on which food producers and retailers should focus their marketing strategies. By leveraging on these facets, in fact, is it possible to differentiate food products not only from those foods that do not have link with their place of origin, but also from those that come from different geographical areas.

We then analyzed the reasons that have contributed to increase the interest in place-based products. We identified four topics: health and food safety concern; attention for the environment; resocialize food and rebuild local communities; regain connections with places, roots and traditions. In line with the above mentioned choice, to consider the link between food and place in its broader meaning, we focused on the we focused on the forth topic, trying to explain why people want to regain connections with place, roots and traditions. In this

direction, it emerges that the recent attention towards the origin of foods is part of a cultural revolution (slow orientation to life) that attempts to give meaning to the action of our daily lives. Slow Food movement is an example of how to implement this challenge, defending biodiversity and returning meaning to food.

Finally, we moved on to consumers' attitudes towards and perception of place-based foods. Considering the nature predominantly exploratory and the different focus of the existing studies which analyzed these aspects of place-based food consumption, emerged the necessity of an in-depth analysis of this important issue. As a matter of fact, further researches focusing on values, attitudes and lifestyles may reveal profiles of place-based food consumers that may offer interesting insights for stakeholders of the food sector.

This essay contributes to the literature on food by providing clearer suggestions of what constitutes the link between food and place, what are the main features of place-based foods and what are the motivations of the growing attention to the origin of food. Consequently, it offers a valid support to marketing strategies to be adopted in the food industry. Furthermore, some questions concerning place-based food consumers emerged, so that marketing strategies could better reflect consumers' requirements and perceptions. In the light of the suggestions provided in this essay, the next research questions in the field of food consumption should explore: How do food consumers use place-based products in their every lives? How do they experience place-based foods? What values do they associate to these kinds of products and consumption?

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## **Essay 2.**

# **From *terroir* products to *terroir* companies: insights from MeC Puddu's case**

### **Abstract**

*This essay analyzes the territorial facet of a local company with the purpose of verifying if it is possible to shift from the concept of terroir products to the concept of terroir organization. Specifically, the research questions are as follows: How a local food company which serves typical and traditional products manages its linkage with the territory? What are the implications of the fact that the company itself shows a strong link with the territory of origin of the food products offered? To what extent does the connection among firm, food and territory influence the firm's strategy? To explore these issues we analyze the case of MeC Puddu's, a Sardinian restaurant deeply embedded in its territory of origin, which offers Sardinian traditional dishes in an unusual, fast-food way.*

## 2.1 Introduction

The concept of *terroir* (Barham, 2003; Demossier, 2011; Gade, 2004; Maréchal, 2009; Trubek, 2008) reminds us that the territory of origin confers specific qualities to food products. On one hand, the natural and climate conditions contribute to creating a special kind of food products which have unique features due just to the fact of being grown, bred or collected in a specific place. On the other hand, the strong interactions between natural and social elements, bestows a symbolic value that evokes rural and traditional knowledge and cultural roots.

As many scholars (e.g. Feagan, 2007; Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002; Sims, 2009) underline, in the course of the last decades the awareness about the bond between food and its territory of origin has grown, and food perceived to be local and traditional has increased in attractiveness (Conter et al., 2008; Dekhili and d’Hauteville, 2009; van Ittersum et al. 2003). Consequently, tired of standardized and rootless products, consumers increasingly demand food with clear origin, history and identity (Conter et al. 2008; Dekhili and d’Hauteville, 2009; van Ittersum et al. 2003). The absence of any distinct place of origin that characterized many industrially produced foodstuffs not only overshadows the relationship between production and consumption, but it also contributes to alienate consumers from their own sense of self. Since there is not a relationship between the ingestion of food and the place-related meanings associated with that food, one is liable to lose the awareness or certainty of what oneself is (Fishler, 1988, in Lockie, p. 242). By eating food with an origin, a history and an identity “*the eater seems to incorporate, in addition to nutritional and psycho-sensorial characteristics of the food, certain symbolic characteristics: one appropriates and embodies the nature, culture and identity of an area*” (Bessière, 1998, p. 25).

In literature, the investigation of the connection between food and place has mainly focused on the analysis of specific products and category of food, and on the investigation of values and meanings that consumers attach to information of origin. Concerning the first aspect, for instance, de Roest and Menghi (2000) analyze the socio-economic effects of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. Muchnik, Biénabe and Cerdan (2005) examine the case of the “coalho” cheese in the Northeast of Brazil, in order to understand the relationship between food identity and food quality and the consequences for farmers’ production. Di Monaco, Di Marzo, Cavella, and Masi (2005) evaluate if a traditionally produced cheese named Provolone del Monaco is perceived as a typical and identifiable product and if consumers perceive it as different and recognizable from homologous, industrially produced cheeses. In another study,

Sonnino (2007) compares two local systems (saffron in Tuscany and Steve Turton meats in South West England) to explore meanings and implications of the notion of embeddedness. Bowen and Zapata (2009) analyze the case of tequila in order to examine what is the potential of geographical indications. Moreover, Paxson (2010) analyzes how cheese-makers applying traditional methods of production rework the concept of *terroir* for U.S. landscapes. With reference to consumers' studies, on the other hand, Caporale et al. (2006) confirm that information evoking origin of food products (virgin olive oils in their study) affects products acceptability and creates a positive hedonic expectation by familiar consumers. The results of a study by van Ittersum et al. (2003) show that the region of origin has a product-specific influence on product preference. In another research, van Ittersum et al. (2007) examine consumer appreciation of regional certification labels, concluding that: first, consumers' image of regional certification consisted of two dimensions, composed of a quality warranty dimension and an economic support dimension; second, consumers of regional products value regional certification labels. Furthermore, Skuras and Vakrou (2002) examine the way in which a consumer recognizes a quality regional wine, by identifying his willingness to pay a higher price. Finally, a survey by Conter et al. (2008) explains the factors that influence consumers' choices in the purchase of traditional dry fermented sausages, reinforcing the impression that food consumption is neither an isolated phenomenon nor exclusively focused on food products per se, but is a part of a wider social context in which food consumers wander about.

In contrast, the relationship between food and territory remains almost unexplored in an organizational point of view. Recently Maréchal, Linstead and Munro (2013) underlined how the concept of *terroir* may enhance organizational research. As it is known, the concept of *terroir* was originally associated with the viticulture. In the course of time, this concept has been extended from this specific use, and “*reference to terroir is now widely used commercially to market and strengthen brand identity for gourmet foodstuffs (wine, cheese, oil, meat products, nuts, vegetables, or regional culinary specialties), connoting tradition, locality, distinctiveness, or quality more generally*” (Maréchal et al., 2013, p. 198). Additionally, the use of this concept was further extended in fields such as literature and philosophy, thus acquiring novel symbolic and discursive connotations. In light of this expanded meaning of the *terroir* concept, Maréchal et al. (2013) suggested that it could contribute to organizational issues both in material and metaphorical terms. As a matter of fact, just as material and symbolic characteristics of the territory bestow specific qualities to food products, the environment in which they operate affects the behaviors of human beings

that belong to organizations, conferring them qualities, taste, aroma and savor. Furthermore, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's idea of territory, Maréchal et al. (2013) identified another alternative use of *terroir* concept by studying organizations. In this understanding, *terroirs* are not material sites of cultural origin, but they derive from cultural processes of territorialization and deterritorialization that anyway provoke changes of characteristics related to time and place.

Starting from this interesting contribution, the purpose of this essay is to investigate the territorial facet of a local food company and to verify the possibility to shift from the concept of *terroir* products to the concept of *terroir* organization. Specifically, the present work has the aim to investigate the following points: in what way is it possible to face the growing requirement of foods linked with territory, history and traditions? How a local food company which serves typical and traditional products manages its linkage with the territory? And as a result, what are the implications of the fact that a company itself shows a strong link with the territory of origin of the food products offered? To what extent does the connection among firm, food and territory influence the firm's strategy?

To find answers to the presented questions, this essay is organized as follows: the next paragraph is devoted to presenting the adopted methodology, followed by a short presentation of MeC Puddu's firm, chosen as a case study. Then, we analyze the specificities of this case: the bond between MeC Puddu's products and their territory of origin, MeC Puddu's attachment to Ogliastra territory, and the oxymoronic associations that characterized the Sardinian fast-food. We conclude with some considerations about the possibility to consider MeC Puddu's as a *terroir* company.

## **2.2 Methodology and data collection**

Considering the importance that the phenomenon of place-based food has assumed, and the lack of existing theory and empirical evidence about the territorial facet of food companies, we chose to explore this issue drawing on a case study based on qualitative inductive techniques (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) and using empirical material as input for theorizing (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). Specifically, we analyze the case of MeC Puddu's, a Sardinian restaurant deeply embedded in its territory of origin, which offers Sardinian traditional dishes in an unusual fast-food way.

As Yin (2009) underlines, case studies are rich, empirical descriptions that investigate a contemporary phenomenon emphasizing the real-life context in which the phenomena

occurs, and are a preferred approach when “how” or “why” questions are being posed. Furthermore, according to Eisenhardt (1989), qualitative case studies are well suited to support and facilitate understanding of phenomena that are not well understood. Consistent with the above mentioned choice to build theory from a case, we adopt a theoretical sampling that, according to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), consists in the selection of cases that are “*particularly suitable for illuminating and extending relationships and logic among constructs*” (p. 27). In particular, we have chosen a single case, because we thought that the selected case is particularly revelatory, exemplar and emblematic (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). This illustrative case pertains to MeC Puddu’s, a small local fast-food restaurant which tries to rearticulate the traditional products selling by offering traditional food strongly associated with a Sardinian geographical area (Ogliastra) in an bizarre fast-food version. A peculiarity of this Sardinian fast-food concerns its argument with McDonald’s lawyers who, in 2010, cautioned MeC Puddu’s owners for having used the prefix “Mc” in the first version of their restaurant’s name.

To analytically develop the MeC Puddu’s case, we draw on multiple sources of empirical material<sup>6</sup>: individual interviews, observations, document analyses and social network analysis through computer monitoring (Garton et al. 1997; Kozinets, 2010).

MeC Puddu’s owners, Ivan Puddu and Martina Loi, were interviewed several times. The first time in May 2011, then in March 2012 and in July and in October 2013. These interviews lasted from 1 to 2 hours and were recorded. Besides, we repeatedly visited the case study sites, initially the MeC Puddu’s restaurants in Santa Maria Navarrese and, after its opening in March 2012, also the restaurant in Cagliari. Furthermore, we conducted an archival study through Sardinian, Italian and also international newspapers aimed to collect information pertaining to the Sardinian fast-food restaurant, especially with reference to the affair with McDonald’s. Finally, we monitored MeC Puddu’s website and its facebook pages<sup>7</sup> from March 2012 to December 2013, in order to gain empirical material about its communication and interactions with customers.

This longitudinal data collection provided a measure of validity through triangulation, helping to mitigate retrospective sensemaking and impression management (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

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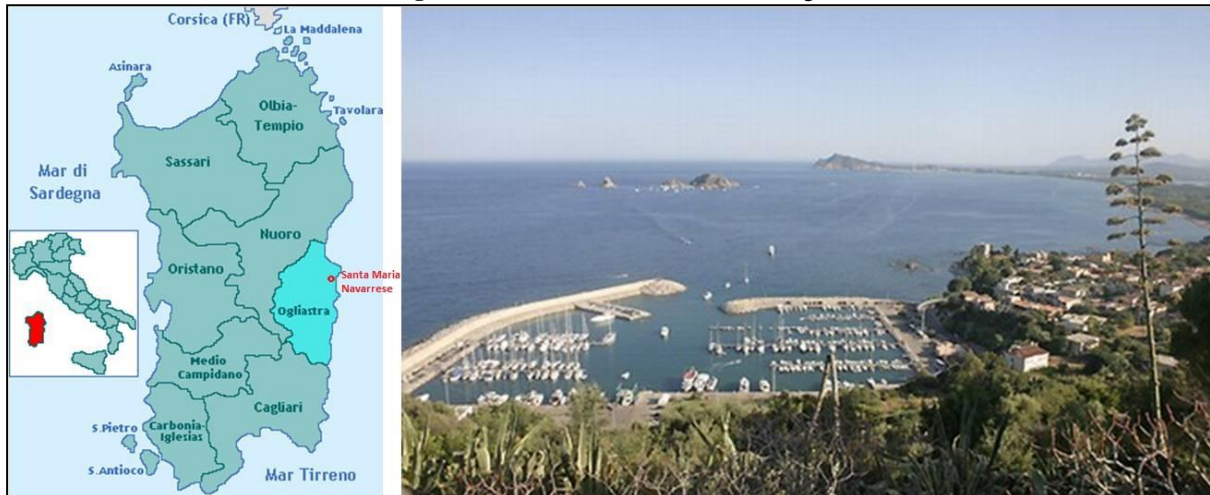
<sup>6</sup> According to Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) “*empirical material is an artifact of interpretations and the use of specific vocabularies. Data are inextricably fused theory. [...] The empirical material may be mobilized as a critical dialogue partner – not a judge or a mirror – that problematizes a significant form of understanding, thus encouraging problematization and theoretical insights*” (pp. 1265-1266).

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/67994078695/> and <https://www.facebook.com/mecpuddus?fref=ts>

## 2.3 Introductory words about MeC Puddu's

MeC Puddu's, is a small, local fast-food restaurant which offers typical dishes of its territory. It is situated in Santa Maria Navarrese, a seaside hamlet of Baunei, one of the most important villages in Ogliastra, an area in the central-eastern Sardinia, overlooking the Tyrrhenian coast (Figure 1).

Figure 2 Santa Maria Navarrese and the Ogliastra area



MeC Puddu's was founded by Ivan Puddu's and his wife Martina Loi, two young Sardinian entrepreneurs who, responding to tourists' requirements to discover and eat traditional Sardinian food, decided to sell and promote the typical dishes belonging to the Sardinian culinary tradition, with particular attention to the customs of the Ogliastra area.

During an interview, Martina clarified the reasons that led to the birth of their firm.

*Drawing on our experience as hoteliers, Ivan and I realized that the guests often complained that they wanted to taste the typical foods of Sardinia, but restaurants in the area frequently offered them products and dishes that were not typical, or were not typical of these places anyway. They were looking for the typical recipe dishes but often found themselves offered dishes like pasta al pesto Genovese or standard dishes already internationally known. So we decided to offer something really typical of Sardinia, and in particular typical of Ogliastra. It is also because here in Ogliastra we have products that are truly special, and it would be a shame not to exploit these resources.*

MeC Puddu's, which at that time was still called McPuddu's, was overwhelmed by an

unexpected notoriety in the summer of 2010, when a local journalist noticed the unusual word “censured” on the Mc prefix in the sign of the Sardinian fast-food and decided to investigate why. The reason was that Ivan Puddu and Martina Loi were cautioned by McDonald’s lawyers, who invited them to immediately stop any use of McPuddu’s trademark, and remove it from the shop signs and any other advertising material, including the website and facebook profile. The concern was that consumers may have been misled by this brand and may have confused the tiny fast-food restaurant with the multinational fast-food chain.

Despite this apprehension of McDonald’s lawyers, during the years of McPuddu’s activity that preceded the legal warning and resulted in the change of the name to MeC Puddu’s, no customer was ever confused. As Ivan Puddu argues on this point:

*No one has ever come into our restaurant thinking that they were walking into a McDonalds. Probably they would have thought it if it had been a traditional fast-food restaurant. It has occurred that someone has asked for chicken nuggets or chicken wings, but no customer has ever thought that McPuddu’s belonged to the McDonald’s chain. (However, some people expected to be in a traditional fast-food restaurant, where they could eat chicken nuggets or chicken wings, but no customer ever thought that McPuddu’s belonged to the McDonald’s chain).*

Effectively, Sardinian fast-food does not remind us of the well-known American chain. McPuddu’s, in fact, shows a strong link to the Sardinian tradition not only through the food offered, but also through the elements that characterize the physical environment of the restaurant. Although there was no real risk of confusion to consumers and there was no certainty of losing a potential lawsuit against McDonald’s in the event that Ivan Puddu and Martina Loi decided to proceed with legal actions, the two Sardinian entrepreneurs chose not to go against a giant like McDonald’s. As a result of the McDonald’s warning, Ivan and Martina changed the name of their Sardinian fast-food first to the more Italian DePuddu’s, and later to the current MeC Puddu’s, which shows more clearly its identity elements. As a matter of fact, in the current name, the pronunciation remained the same as the first name, leaving almost unchanged the clear reference to McDonald’s and the fast-food concept that this well-known chain symbolized. At the same time, however, the two letters of the prefix have a specific meaning which directly refers to the Sardinian culinary heritage and tradition. Therefore, adding them shows a direct association also to the Slow food values that, inter alia, represent the core of MeC Puddu’s offer. As Ivan Puddu explains to us:

*M is the initial of malloreddus, and C is the initial of culurgiones<sup>8</sup>. By explaining this we have removed any doubt about our intention: to promote typical Sardinian products in a fast-food key.*

Within a very short time, many regional, national and also international newspapers reported the bizarre affair between the local entrepreneurs and the McDonald's lawyers. In this way, the Sardinian fast-food restaurant benefited from an enormous fame that led it to a great success. As Martina stated:

*We would have never been able to get visibility at the national level and to achieve in such a short time this extent of notoriety. For this, we will always be grateful to the journalist who realized the "censured" on our sign. We put it because we were worried that our restaurant would have been closed, and putting the word censured seemed to us the only solution immediately applicable. It was August and everything was closed for the summer holidays, so it was very difficult to change our sign in a short time.*

In the wake of this success, in March 2010 MeC Puddu's opened another restaurant in Cagliari, the capital of the Sardinian island. With this restaurant, MeC Puddu's started to overcome the boundaries of its geographical area, the Ogliastra, waiting for the possibility to transmit and communicate the cultural and traditional facets of its products and its place of origin also beyond the regional boundaries. Although the physical distance between the Ogliastra and Cagliari is not huge, just 150 kilometers, the cultural differences between these two geographical areas are much more substantial than one might imagine. Cagliari is a dynamic and modern city, which at first glance does not reflect the traditional Sardinia. Due to its position in the Gulf, since the most ancient times the area of Cagliari has been inhabited by many foreign visitors and invaders, who deeply influenced its customs and traditions.

On the contrary, the Ogliastra region, due to the particular distribution on the territory, is a relatively remote area, where the communication, even with the rest of the island, has always been difficult. It has become more accessible only in recent years through the construction of a fast road. Previously it was taking several hours to reach Ogliastra from Cagliari, and in addition, a large part of the journey was over narrow roads that wind up and down and through the mountains. This geographical isolation allowed preserving a sense of local identity, facilitating the retention of values and traditions.

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<sup>8</sup> Malloreddus and culurgiones are the most typical food products of Sardinia.



## 2.4 The bond between MeC Puddu's products and their territory of origin

Aware of the fact that in Ogliastra there was not an appropriate offer of local products, MeC Puddu's aims to serve and convey the traditional Sardinian cuisine, following old traditional recipes, mainly of Ogliastra.

*There is a paradox here in Ogliastra. There are few restaurants which serve typical dishes of our territory, such as culurgiones. And if they do, they do not give the right importance to these products, putting them, most of the time, at the bottom of their menu. And they are never of good quality, the culurgiones offered are not traditionally-made products, and often are the same industrial products that we can find at the supermarket and last fresh for a month. How is it possible? This goes against the laws of physics! This was one of the reasons which gave birth to MeC Puddu's: making known to the tourists who visit Santa Maria Navarrese what are our dishes and our culinary traditions. Our goal was to offer what people ate in Ogliastra homes 50 years ago.*

Historic roots, traditionality, typicity and knowledge are key ingredients of Mec Puddu's offer. Accordingly, MeC Puddu's proposes in its menu a selection of dishes, all rigorously made in Sardinia, with Sardinian ingredients, and according to the gastronomic heritage of Ogliastra or anyway of Sardinia.

*The recipes of our dishes are largely from Ogliastra, but in reality there are some influences from all over Sardinia. Likewise, if it is possible to choose ingredients from Ogliastra, we prefer them. However, the problem is that in Ogliastra there are few producers. So we turn to the rest of the island. The essential thing is using Sardinian products.*

So, MeC Puddu's menu proposes a variety of dishes. From home-made *culurgiones* (a Sardinian form of stuffed pasta filled with local sheep's cheese and potatoes) according to the recipe of Baunei which, unlike those produced in other parts of Sardinia, are without garlic and mint, to *malloreddus*, undoubtedly the most classic and famous Sardinian pasta; from *gathulis* (a ring shaped typical snack from Ogliastra, made of flour, potatoes and cheese) to *sebadas* (a typical Sardinian fried dessert made of fresh pasta filled with sweet cheese and served with honey or sugar) (Figure 2).

**Figure 3** In order: culurgiones, malloreddus, gathulis, and sebadas



Source: MeC Puddu's Facebook page

With reference to the recipes Martina explains us:

*The recipes are home recipes. We try to offer the home cooking of the housewives, when they could make great dishes with few ingredients. The tomato sauce, for example, follows a long process of refinement, it is cooked for hours as it was once done in the Baunei family in occasion of weddings. Everything followed a specific procedure on these occasions, even the pot of tomato sauce. And the same is valid for our recipes.*

Always looking into the Sardinian culinary tradition, MeC Puddu's looks around to find new ideas and new products, in order to prevent that its customers get bored of its offer.

*Every winter we sit around a table and we wonder how can we extend our menu? How can we improve it? [...] We are always looking for new products. Also for the meat, we seek new cuts, new typology, but always from Sardinia. For example, we have just introduced the meat of Sardinian Modican Cow. [...] It is very important looking for new ideas, new horizons. For this reason, we do not offer products only from Ogliastra, but it happens that our offer moves in the surrounding areas. So we offer products from Nuoro traditions, such as the purpuzza, that we do not cook here in Ogliastra, but the neighboring village Orgosolo yes! And this is a good answer for our client. Although it is not typical of Ogliastra, it is in any case Sardinian, and that's fine too!*

Expanding the places from which to draw its recipes, MeC Puddu's has increased its offer over the years, inserting certificated products, for instance – as we can note in Figure 3 – the meat from the *Consorzio del bue Rosso della razza Sardo-Modicana* (Consortium of the

Red Steer of the Sardo-Modicana Breed) that is also a Slow Food Presidium<sup>9</sup>. Acknowledging, protecting and adding value to traditional productions and regional foods, Slow Food presidia reinforce the values of this movement (Counihan, forthcoming 2014).

Figure 3 MeC Puddu's and Consorzio del Bue Rosso della razza Sardo-Modicana logos



Source: MeC Puddu's Facebook page

To emphasize the qualities of this typical breed, MeC Puddu's quotes in its Facebook page the Slow Food description of the Sardinian Modican Cow: *“The Montiferru pastures, scented with myrtle and wild chamomile, are crisscrossed by black lava rocks marking out a grid of dry-stone walls. The copper-red coats of Sardinian Modican cows are conspicuous against this backdrop. The hardy breed roams freely all year, summer and winter, day and night. Developed at the end of the 19th century from a cross between local animals from the Podolica line and Modican bulls imported from Ragusano, the breed produces excellent milk and flavorful, highly nutritious red meat. Today, just over 3,000 animals remain, and their market is exclusively local.”*<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, although trying to respect the traditions as much as possible, in some cases some products and some recipes have been adapted to consumers needs.

*For gathulis (fried rings made of potatoes and cheese) we had to change a bit the traditional recipe. Since the original recipe calls for the use of very seasoned pecorino cheese, the gathulis have a very strong flavor that is not always suited to our customers' taste. So, we have revised the recipe and we now use a more delicate pecorino cheese. [...] Also for the anguli de curcuriga (a typical dish made with pumpkin, onions, tomatoes and fresh traditional cheese), according to the traditional recipe, we should use lard. Initially, we followed this recipe, but then we had to change it in order to make it a dish suitable for vegetarians. In*

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.slowfoodfoundation.com/italian-presidia/details/3386/sardinian-modican-cow>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.fondazione Slow Food.it/presidi-italia/dettaglio/3386/razza-sardo-modicana>.

*Sardinian menu it is very difficult to find something without meat. So, it was essential to do some adjustments.*

## **2.5 MeC Puddu's attachment to Ogliastra area**

*MeC Puddu's could not exist without the Ogliastra.*

These words of Martina Loi best express the strong bond between MeC Puddu's and its territory. Accordingly, in order to better understand the Sardinian fast-food it is necessary to know something about Ogliastra.

Ogliastra is one of the most beautiful sub-regions of Sardinia, and perhaps one of the least known. It offers some of the most various and fascinating landscapes that can be found in Sardinia: wild areas densely wooded, hills of unique beauty, and a coastline dotted with numerous coves still pristine. As a result of its historical and geographical conditions, this area has always been quite remote, to the extent of being often considered as an island in the island (Martini, 2005). This remoteness triggered in its inhabitants a strong attachment to traditional values and a strong identification in their own territory of belonging. As a matter of fact, the Ogliastra population attempts to strongly defend its values from any possible threat. As Martini (2005) notes, they react to the influences of the modernization process with an entrenchment in their traditional values and culture, showing a need to safeguard the integrity of their group to a greater extent than the inhabitants of other Sardinian areas.

MeC Puddu's owners themselves own many of these characteristics. They reveal a strong sense of belonging to Santa Maria Navarrese, Baunei and the Ogliastra region more specifically. In light of this, they show a strong determination to contribute to the development of their territory.

*We were born and grown up in Santa Maria Navarrese, and we love this place. We created this enterprise also for the sake of Santa Maria. [...] We aim to promote and raise awareness, both in Sardinia and in the rest of Italy, about the products of Baunei and everything Ogliastra offers. And we have done all that work also to demonstrate to our fellow citizens the potentiality of our territory of which they still do not have enough awareness. [...] We have done it, we are succeeding working with the products of our territory. Why don't you try to do it too? Our fellow citizens have to make production and push forward the promotion of local products. We opened Mec Puddu's also as a re-conquest of something forgotten responding to our desire to make known the name of our territory, the*

*Ogliastra, as a synonym of products' quality and genuineness.*

Accordingly, whenever possible MeC Puddu's employs products of its territory of origin.

*Recently was established a new winery in Baunei and we immediately started to sell their wine, a Cannonau 100% pure. As you can note, we always try to promote what is typical and local. We hope that this choice rewards us.*

Not only because they are proud of their origin and of their belonging to the local community, but also because they are aware that the surrounding context plays an important role for their customers, especially if they are tourists, Ivan and Martina attempt in various ways to make known their territory and to illustrate where MeC Puddu's products are from and how they are made.

*The surrounding context plays an important role as tourists, not only foreigners but also those from Cagliari and Sassari, tend to fall in love with the territory. For example, when we offer a special product, such as the goat cheese, we always tell our customers that there is the possibility to go to the shepherd to see how he produces it. Tourists are fascinated by this. On the contrary, for those who live here it does not have the same appeal because it is part of their everyday life.*

With the aim to emphasize its strong link with gastronomic heritage and tradition, since the summer 2011 MeC Puddu's has offered another interesting service to its customers.

*Since the last summer, every morning there are two women from Baunei who prepare the turredde, typical bread from Baunei made from potatoes and desiccated tomatoes. [...] These two ladies show how this typical Sardinian product is processed. It is another way to continue keeping the traditions alive, and to share them with the many tourists who come to visit us and who appreciate these things very much.*

To explain the peculiarity of this particular bakery service offered Martina stated:

*I believe the term that best defines these ladies is "typical". Obviously, they do not speak foreign languages, and sometimes they let it slip some phrases in our local language – it only adds to them being typical in all aspects. Yet, they are able to explain to tourists all the traditions related to the preparation of bread. Our customers are very impressed by the manual skills and gestures of these*

*women. They follow various traditions when they make bread and they explain them to our customer. There are prayers to make or specific gesture to follow when they put salt, for example.*

In the light of the strong sense of belonging and also because Ogliastra, and in particular Baunei and Santa Maria Navarrese, have a fundamental role for MeC Puddu's identity and the appeal of its products, MeC Puddu's tries to raise awareness about these places, and to contribute to their development by promoting them as a tourist destination.

*To a certain extent, we also operate as a travel bureau, an open-air museum. We tell our customer the history and traditions related to MeC Puddu's dishes. We seek to convey our territory because it is important to reveal where our products are from and raise awareness about the cultural context from which they originate.*

As a consequence, customers have at their disposal maps of the area and pamphlets which illustrate the various tourist initiatives offered. Moreover, MeC Puddu's constantly supports initiatives of the Ogliastra area also via its facebook pages. During the last spring and summer many were the events made known in this way. From excursions into the territory, such as hiking to the hikes of the Supramonte, to initiatives aimed at the discovery of values and traditions of the past such as *Artes e Tastes de una ie*. These events, which in Sardinian language means "Arts and tastes of time ago", every spring offer a cross section of Bunei life at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. For two days, Baunei relives its past: everyone wears the traditional dress of the village, trying to recall ancient manual labor and unique flavors of its culinary tradition (Figure 4). Both inhabitants and tourist have in this way the possibility to discover, or rediscover, the roots and the strong identity of this community and its territory<sup>11</sup>.

MeC Puddu's shows the strong link to its territory also through the elements that characterize the physical environment of the restaurants. In the selection of material, for example, the use of wood and Sardinian granite was favored, contributing to a warmer and more homely environment than the conventional fast-food restaurant. Moreover, even on a visual level, typical Sardinian products such as *malloreddus* and *culurgiones* are always present: they are depicted on almost all the walls of the fast-food restaurant (Figure 5). Also concerning the furniture, the fact that MeC Puddu's is not a traditional fast-food outlet is quite

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<sup>11</sup> [www.visitbaunei.it](http://www.visitbaunei.it)

evident: chairs, for instance, are typical Sardinian straw chairs, under the counter there are two wooden statues depicting Sardinian women in their traditional clothes (Figure 6), and on the walls there are various blowups of the typical costume of Baunei.

**Figure 4** Some pictures of Artes e Tastus de una ie 2013.



Source: [www.visitbaunei.it](http://www.visitbaunei.it)

**Figure 5** Pictures of malloreddus and culurgiones hang in the walls of MeC Puddu's restaurants



Source: The Author

**Figure 6** One of the two wooden statues under the counter in MeC Puddu's restaurant in Santa Maria Navarrese



Source: The Author

To compensate for the geographical distance, in the restaurant in Cagliari the reference to the territory of origin is even more accentuated.

*We decided to plaster the walls of the restaurants in Cagliari with images of our territory because we want to get Cagliari closer to Ogliastra. We want to let customers know where our products come from, illustrating some landscapes of the places where these products grow naturally.*

As a result, as we can observe in Figure 7, in Cagliari MeC Puddu's customers eat surrounded by the most evocative landscapes of Ogliastra such as: the Grotta del Fico, which owes its names to the huge fig tree that protected the entrance of the cave, with roots still crossing, seen in the main hall - this tree is important because it was one of the last refuge, hiding places of the monk seal; Cala Mariolu, one of the most popular beaches of the Baunei coast, called Ispuligidene by the inhabitants of Baunei (it derives from the Sardinian language of Baunei "on pulige de nie" which means snow fleas, and which refers to the poetic name given by the shepherds who, looking from the high mountains, saw as snow fleas the white pebbles smoothed by the waves; the Litica Face, a basaltic wall, about ten meters high, which presents an anthropomorphic profile due to the erosion caused by the forces of nature; or the St. Peter church, built around the end of the seventeenth century and situated in the plateau of Golgo.

**Figure 7** Pictures evoking Ogliastra hung in MeC Puddu's restaurant in Cagliari



**Source:** the Author

In spring 2013, MeC Puddu's launched a customer loyalty program that also promotes the discovery of Ogliastra area. Every month, retaining the receipt of a meal in the MeC



Puddu's in Cagliari, consumers can win a weekend stay in Santa Maria Navarrese. MeC Puddu's emphasizes in this way its strong link with its proper territory.

## 2.6 The oxymoronic associations of MeC Puddu's

Along with the strong link with Ogliastra and the culinary heritage and traditions that characterize this territory, MeC Puddu's shows a series of apparent contradictions. As previously underlined, the peculiarity of MeC Puddu's offer is that traditional dishes are served in a particular fast food version, combining culinary heritage and territorial identity with attributes typical of globalization and industrialization.

Many are the definitions of fast-food. Bender and Bender (1995), for example, consider it as a *“general term used for a limited menu of foods that lend themselves to production-lines techniques; suppliers tend to specialize in products such as hamburgers, pizzas, chicken or sandwiches”*. The free dictionary<sup>12</sup> defines fast food as *“inexpensive food, such as hamburgers and fried chicken, prepared and served quickly”*. According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary<sup>13</sup> fast-food is *“designed for ready availability, use, or consumption and with little consideration given to quality or significance”*. As per Dictionary.com<sup>14</sup> fast-food refers to *“food, as hamburgers, pizza, or fried chicken, which is prepared in quantity by a standardized method and can be dispensed quickly at inexpensive restaurants for eating there or elsewhere”*. On the whole, thus, with its suggestion of speed, standardization, and homogenization of taste, fast-food concept seems to symbolize just the reverse of traditional dishes and gastronomic heritage (Fantasia, 1995).

Furthermore, Ritzer (1983) considers the fast-food business just as the epitome of a society more and more standardized and increasingly obsessed by rationality, speed and efficiency. Based on this definition, he labeled the rationalization process of the world as McDonaldization, referring to the popular fast-food chain McDonald's. What is more, Ritzer (1983) underlines that fast-food restaurants and McDonaldized organizations are deeply processed and follow the sequential steps of a prescribed procedure. They operate in accordance with four main principles (efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control)<sup>15</sup>,

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/fast+food>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fast-food>

<sup>14</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/fast+food>

<sup>15</sup> Efficiency entails the selection of the best possible, defined in terms of speed and effortlessness. Consequently, many companies attempt to guarantee that consumers will get satisfied straight away. Calculability emphasizes size and measurement, and quantity is often used in place of quality in the evaluation of products and services (bigger is better, and often enormous portions contribute to a better meal). Predictability

which affect the way in which food preparation, service delivery and consumption take place (Weaver 2005), reducing focus to the origin of ingredients. The Mcdonaldization process deeply transformed the link between consumers and production and the route of the food from ‘farm to fork’ (Parrott et al. 2002).

Regardless of these negative connotations, MeC Puddu’s has tried to emphasize, from the very outset, the fact of being a fast food. Indeed, initially these aspects of MeC Puddu’s offer had a prevailing significance, especially with reference to the choice of the first name (McPuddu’s). As Ivan Puddu explains to us:

*The idea of the name started as a joke. It was meant as a fast food restaurant, but only with products that are typical and Sardinian, and were coming from the close region or nearby. It was not a conventional fast food restaurant; it was a fast food in a Sardinian way. To express the geographical connection to Sardinia we wanted to play with my last name, which is typically Sardinian, and with something that could make it sound more international. We were wondering between McPuddu’s and FastPuddu, and then we went for the first.*

This preference for McPuddu’s instead of Fast Puddu’s has a further implication. As a matter of fact, it shows a clear intent to specifically refer to McDonald’s. Why this decision? Why associating traditional products strictly related to culture, heritage and tradition to a global chain often contested and taken as example of junk food?

Conscious of this negative connotation, the Sardinian fast-food itself often shows the need to remark the differences between its offer and those of conventional fast-food, and in particular of McDonald’s. In its Facebook pages, for example, more than once the Sardinian fast-food posted disapproving links or images about the American fast-food chain, using these occasions to emphasize the quality of its ingredients, all of Sardinian origin.

As a matter of fact, MeC Puddu’s have little in common with conventional fast-food, embodying instead the principles of Slow food philosophy. Accounting for this, is it possible to consider MeC Puddu’s as a “Slow” fast-food? A slower approach to life promotes the recovery of real connections with everything surrounding us, including food. The slow orientation promotes acting at the right speed, focusing on quality rather than quantity, and savoring the flow of time rather than merely counting it (Honoré, 2005). Just as Slow Food

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is tied to the standardization of products and services across time and space: in fast-food restaurants customers have certain expectations of size and quality of food portions and also of the way in which products and services are provided. External control, finally, is strictly related to the achievement of the other three principles (Ritzer, 1983).

movement<sup>16</sup>, also MeC Puddu's defends good food and gastronomic pleasure and protects traditional foods, primary ingredients, conserving processing methods and so forth, but it also promotes all these elements in a particular way which probably helps to reach also other types of consumers.

*Our idea was to open a restaurant aimed at a younger clientele, and different from the classic restaurants where you have to sit and eat at the table for hours. The fast-food version allows tourist to have more time to spend on the beach or in contact with nature, admiring the beautiful landscapes of our land, but at the same time gives them the opportunity to discover and eat typical dishes of our culinary tradition.*

*We decided to use the same formula in Cagliari, where, especially at lunch, most of our clients have limited time and appreciate the possibility to eat not expensive but quality food. What they are looking for is a simple dish, like the ones you would make at home and that are difficult to find in the supermarket. We offer a solution that is both fast and of great quality.*

This peculiar link between fast and slow elements became clearer with the adoption of the current name MeC Puddu's. If in the previous restaurant's names the allusion to the global had a priority, with the current name and the current logo this oxymoronic association became more evident also at a visual level. As we can observe in Figure 8, in the first two logos there is not any allusion to Sardinian culinary tradition, and the only reference to Sardinia is the last name of Ivan, typically Sardinian. However, this factor, taken by itself, is not able to communicate the distinctive elements that characterize the Sardinian fast-food. Actually, the hamburger and the cock (which is the meaning of Puddu in Sardinian) lead to erroneously think that it serves conventional fast-food products. On the contrary, in the current logo MeC Puddu's identity is well represented. Malloreddus and culurgiones, and with them the traditional food products that they symbolize, became keys elements both as images and as part of the restaurant's name, able to communicate the peculiar association between tradition and typicality, as well as the fast-food notion that characterized MeC Puddu's.

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<sup>16</sup> [www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com).

**Figure 8** The evolution of MeC Puddu's name and logo from its opening to now



Source: The Author

As a consequence, it is possible to consider the MeC Puddu's idea to serve traditional foods in a fast-food version as a possibility to enjoy gastronomy and cultural traditions also when people have little time (e.g. lunch break), or, for example, when during a holiday people want to enjoy the local nature, the seaside and countryside without ignoring to experience the taste, flavors, regionalism and locatedness of traditional foods.

According to Ivan and Martina, the choice of the restaurant's name and the idea to offer traditional products in a fast-food way, also reveals their desire to operate in an international context. In a certain sense, the fast-food version represents a tool that can facilitate this internationality. In the light of this, is it possible to consider MeC Puddu's as an example of reverse glocalization? Drawing on the Canclini's concept of cultural reconversion (1997), Ogan et al. (2007) use the reverse glocalization concept with reference to the Cola Turka ad campaign. Just as Coke has for years capitalized on combining the global with the local in their ads, Cola Turka reverses this process. Cola Turka is a local product that is advertised as if it were a global product that everyone wants to drink because they will achieve what the whole world wants (the Turkish dream). The advertising campaign of Cola Turka are aimed at Turks and use the New York/American setting and the combination of English and Turkish to pretend that Americans are dying to drink it with the aspiration of becoming cosmopolitan and cool (in Turkish cultural terms) by drinking this new beverage. Hence, they used a western vehicle (the Hollywood film) with American actors and an American product (a cola) to deliver that message to the Turks. The advertising campaign associated with Cola Turka is glocalizad but aims not to sell a global product within the context of a local market. Instead, it aims to lend prestige to the product by associating it with the people and the cultural features of a global power (Oegan et al., 2007).

Similarly, MeC Puddu's uses a global tool (the fast-food version) not to sell a global product within the context of a local market. On the contrary, the Sardinian fast-food aims to sell local foods which have a strong connection with the Sardinian culinary traditions, and, in particular, are associated with a specific geographic area of this Italian region, the Ogliastra, not only in the local context, but also abroad. Moreover, it tries to propose its offer not in a traditional way, but using a kind of catering closely related to globalization: the fast-food.

*We had various proposals to open Sardinian fast-food restaurants in Munich, where there is a strong community of Sardinian people, and also in England. We are thinking about it. For the moment we are going to open some other restaurants in Cagliari, and then we'll see. Surely, this will be a great opportunity not only for us, but also for the local economy.*

The first step of this process was the opening of a MeC Puddu's restaurant in Cagliari. Considering the cultural differences between the capital of the Sardinian island and Ogliastra territory, this opening represented a first obstacle to overcome. How to maintain the strong bond with Ogliastra area while being in a very different context? As previously noted, to compensate for the geographical distance, in the fast-food restaurant in Cagliari the walls are covered with many images of Ogliastra landscapes, and customers have at their disposal maps and tourist pamphlets of the area. Moreover, the communication via Internet and especially via Facebook contributes to fill this gap, trying at the same time to stimulate consumers' interest to visit Santa Maria Navarrese and the Ogliastra territory. Thinking about the possibility to a further growth and the opening of new restaurants, both at a regional and national level, Ivan and Martina are considering new modus operandi in order to manage the distance from their territory of origin.

*We are planning to propose, in addition to our products, traditional products of the regions that will host MeC Puddu's, placing them alongside the Sardinian ones.*

Once again, the option proposed seems quite bizarre. Why promoting its territory placing Sardinian food products alongside the products typical of other places?

## **2.7 In summary: Is MeC Puddu's a *terroir* company?**

As it emerged from the previous analysis, in MeC Puddu's case, places and territories play a fundamental role. As a matter of fact, MeC Puddu's is deeply rooted in its territory of

origin. In addition, its embeddedness is not limited to the products offered, but it embraces various firms' facets. From the choice of recipes related to culinary tradition of Ogliastra and Sardinia, to the choice of ingredients and suppliers as close as possible to the territory. From the pride to show its belonging to the Ogliastra, to the will to raise awareness about this area by means of all the available tools. Is it thus possible to consider Mec Puddu's as an example of *terroir* organization?

First of all, from the data it emerges that the linkage between food and territory acquires a double meaning and has various implications which are closely interrelated. On one hand, as many scholars (e.g. Aurier, 2005) underlined, the surrounding context helps customer to understand and to really appreciate the dishes they eat; hence, MeC Puddu's desire to offer various activities to raise awareness of Santa Maria Navarrese, Baunei and Ogliastra area. On the other hand, food represents a means to discover and rediscover places, people and ancient knowledge (Aurier et al., 2005), and a possibility of development for a community that often has not been able to fully exploit the resources at its disposal.

Furthermore, intended in its metaphorical connotation, the concept of *terroir* helps to understand MeC Puddu's identity and strategy. Just as the natural and social conditions of the place of origin are able to confer to food products specific qualities, so are people and the organization itself, they could acquire particular characteristics due to the close bond with territory.

What is more, in a certain sense, also the oxymoronic associations that characterized MeC Puddu's reflect its territorial linkage. The choice of a name strictly related to global elements, for instance, despite appearing as the antithesis of an offer of traditional products actually responds to Ivan and Martina's desire to make their project more international, and thus able to attract the largest possible number of customers. Similarly, with the choice to offer traditional dishes in a fast-food version, MeC Puddu's aims to satisfy the requirements of traditional products of customers that, for different reasons, do not have much time to do this (e.g. tourists, cruisers, students, employees during the lunch break). Opening up new opportunities for MeC Puddu's creates also a possibility of development for the Ogliastra area which MeC Pudds's is so closely linked to. And it is just in this perspective that MeC Puddu's could be also considered as an example of reverse glocalization (Ogan, 2007), aimed at rearticulating ancient values related to history culinary traditions in a "modern" approach.

The question is: is it possible to maintain this close link with Ogliastra and Sardinian culture and traditions also outside Santa Maria Navarrese, and in particular outside Sardinia?

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## **Essay 3.**

# **The new territorial orientation of transnational companies: The case of McDonald's Italy**

### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this essay is to investigate how global companies have progressively changed their offer, paying increasing attention to the territorial dimension. What are the main factors that determine the new face of transnational companies? To what extent does the link between food and place influence their chosen strategies? How global elements can be mixed with local elements? To answer these questions we chose to adopt the case study methodology, based on the analysis of the peculiar case of McDonald's. Over the past years, the American fast-food chain, frequently associated to the concept of homogenization of tastes and junk food, has undertaken on the Italian market a process of developing Italian products by launching a new line of products based on Italian recipes and produced with certified Italian ingredients. The study underlines that the territorial path undertaken by McDonald's not only helps the fast-food chain to expand its menu, incorporating local Italian tastes, but also is part of McDonald's effort to shake-off the troublesome label of junk food, associating itself to quality and traditional food.*

### 3.1 Introduction

Many scholars (e.g. Bowen and Zapata, 2009; Parrot et al. 2002; Pratt, 2007), underlined the renewed interest in food provenance and origin that has featured in recent years. As Erickson and Roberts (1997) point out, over the last few decades the traditional identity of local places has suffered the invasion of transnational companies, retailing their products through and to a worldwide market. In the same period, many problems have been raised and have acquired stronger evidence: the environment and human health (Bowen and Zapata, 2009; Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002) and the renewed pursuit of sense-of-place (Mayes, 2008). The main implication involved consumers who are no longer satisfied with standardized and rootless products and require food which offers a connection with territory, history and traditions (Conter et al. 2008; Dekhili and d'Hauteville, 2009; van Ittersum, Candel, and Meulenbergh, 2003). This means an increasing awareness to regain connection with local culture, traditions, and places progressively lost (Giudici and Dessì, 2011; Honoré, 2005). In answer to this new requirement of products linked to regional identity and sensory quality (Conter et al., 2008; van Ittersum et al., 2003), firms have changed their strategies by developing new product lines which reflect an accurate and strong image of their origin and roots in a specific geographical area (Iversen and Hem, 2008). Hence, some firms have adopted the product place of origin of the product as a marketing tool (Skuras and Vakrou, 2002). Interestingly, this attention toward territoriality affects not only local companies, but also transnational ones.

Until now scholars have almost exclusively focused on the investigation of specific products and category of food (e.g. de Roest and Menghi, 2000; Di Monaco, Di Marzo, et al., 2005; Muchnik, Biénebe and Cerdan, 2005; Sonnino, 2007; Bowen and Zapata, 2009), and on the study of values and meanings that consumers attach to origin information (Caporale et al., 2006; Conter et al., 2008; Skuras and Vakrou, 2002; van Ittersum et al., 2003, 2007). Conversely, little attention has been paid to the rediscovery of territorial values in an organizational point of view, and even less to the territorial orientation of transnational food companies. Considering this lack and also the importance that the phenomenon of place-based food has assumed, the purpose of this essay is to question the existence of an increased interest of transnational companies in regional products, and to analyze the implications of the insertion of territorial elements in their strategies.

In particular, this work is aimed to answer the following questions: What are the main factors that determine the new face of these transnational companies? To what extent does the

local dimension influence their strategies? To explore these issues, we examine a case study based on qualitative inductive techniques (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Specifically, we consider the case of McDonald's that, over the past years, has launched in the Italian market a new line of products based on Italian recipes and produced with certified Italian ingredients.

## **3.2 Theoretical background**

### **3.2.1 Place and food companies: towards re-territorialization**

The industrialization of agriculture, the growth in food processing and distribution industries, the liberalization of trade, and the changes in consumption, both in diet and eating patterns, have reshaped the agro-food market (Parrott et al., 2002; Pratt, 2007). Mass market and standardization, often labeled as "McDonaldization" (Ritzer, 1993), have distanced the consumption of food from its production (Ilbery et al., 2005), blurring the link between place and food (Parrot et al., 2002; Pratt, 2007).

The gap between place of production and consumption clearly appeared in the internationalization phase of development of brands. Encouraged by numerous perceived potential benefits and advantages such as economies of scale, sourcing advantages, and duplication across countries (Yip, 1992), as well as cost savings or reductions, and the reorganization of internal logistic operations (Segal-Horn, 1996) leading to significant competitive advantage in the marketplace (Levitt, 1983; Simon-Miller, 1986), many are the companies that during their internationalization process adopted or tried to adopt a global strategy. Provocatively, in 1983 Levitt asserts that well-managed companies have moved from emphasis on the customization of their offers, focusing on globally standardized products that are advanced, functional, reliable and low-priced. The perception of this new global market, based on uniform products and serviced, leads food brands to organize their activity to satisfy a wider range of consumers (Schuiling and Kapferer, 2004).

However, the expression of a global marketing appeared more complex than was supposed (Sirkeci, 2013; Wilken and Siclair, 2011). Consequently, even companies often portrayed as the epitome of standardization such as Coca Cola and McDonald's have learned that in order to be successful, it is important to adapt the original offer to local tastes and needs, which are different in the various countries in which they operate. As scholars have underlined (e.g. Champy, 1997; Wind, 1986), people who live in countries located in different continents of the world have maintained their own culture and behavior patterns, and even

when they share values that transcend national borders, they – consciously or unconsciously – modify their behaviors by adapting local values and customs. This can be considered as the premise of the birth of glocalization (Robertson, 1992), both as a word and a concept. More precisely, the concept of glocalization arose just because transnational companies understood that the single advertising campaign for all markets was not very effective in all cultures (Ilbery et al., 2005).

Robertson (1992), rejecting the false dialectical opposition of the global-local and universality-particularism models as inadequate, proposed the term glocalization as a way of considering both global and local. The word glocalization derives from the Japanese term *dochakuka*, meaning “global localization” or, in micro-marketing terms, the tailoring of global products and services to suit particular cultural tastes (Robertson, 1992). Glocalization highlights the co-presence of interconnected processes of homogenization and heterogenization (Robertson, 1994; Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007). The way this concept is usually applied by transnational companies consists of the insertion of a product into the market by appealing to local preferences and customs.

With specific reference to the food sector, in recent years the standardization rejection has been enriched by new elements. Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present, consumers have become more attentive in acquiring information and sharing opinions with other consumers, and the interest in food provenance and place of origin has grown (Bowen and Zapata, 2009; Parrot et al., 2002; Pieniak et al., 2009; Pratt, 2007). There has been an increase in the demand for local foods that are often perceived as of a higher quality (Chambers et al., 2007), sustainable and eco-friendly (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000; Risku-Norja et al., 2008), and belonging to a cultural heritage and tradition linked to regional identity and sensory quality (Conter et al., 2008; van Ittersum et al., 2003). Kunzmann suggests that “*in times of globalization local identity has become a key concern*” and that “*[...] the cultural content remains the last bastion of local identity*” (Kunzmann, 2004, p. 387). The strong link between food products and their geographic origin is due to the relationship between the natural conditions under which food products are grown, bred, or collected and their distinct physical qualities that sometimes stimulate emotional or imaginary perceptions (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2007). As the French concept of *terroir* (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2007; Barham, 2003; Demossier, 2011; Maréchal, 2009; Pratt, 2007) reminds us that there is an intimate connection between soil, air, water, climate, seasons, and foodstuffs. All these elements contribute to creating a special kind of food, with unique features “*connoting traditions, locality, distinctiveness, or quality, more in general*” (Maréchal, 2009,

p. 922), and are able to evoke an emotional attachment to food products as belonging to a certain cultural heritage and tradition, possibly in the form of a refined gastronomical tradition (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2007). The concept of *terroir* is not just geographical, but also cultural emphasizing evaluation and preservation of rural and traditional knowledge and cultural roots (Dekhili and d’Hauteville, 2009; Maréchal, 2009; Pratt, 2007). With *terroir* in mind, it may be easier to understand the connection between food and place, as Barham (2003), Bowen and Zapata (2009) have pointed out. Many countries have adopted “labels of origin” that are place-based names which connect agricultural products to their geographical origin. Hence, such labels connect products to their cultural and historical identity, quality, reputation or further characteristics due to the fact of having been grown or manufactured in a specific territory.

The combination of the product characteristics and the communication of the place of origin determines a synergistic effect that contributes to the creation of a distinct product identity (van Ittersum et al., 2007). Some firms have recently developed new lines of products reflecting characteristics which are strictly related to a particular place associated with the product, or line of products (Chlivickas and Smaliukienė, 2009; van Ittersum et al., 2007).

It is not simple to define the concept of territorial identity because in general, identity is an elusive concept (Erickson and Roberts, 1997). Mayes stated that place identity and sense of place are considered as deriving from the intrinsic features and history of a given place and a shared relationship to these elements (Mayes, 2008). According to Dekhili and d’Hauteville (2009) many regions in Europe gained a specific identity linked to specific and characteristic local products. The ability to communicate identity and cultural heritage, can be a firm’s strength to exploit characteristics of specific territories and develop cognitive emotional associations (van Ittersum et al., 2003) while creating dialogue with consumers to remain in their mind. Consumers often have a strong relationship with the place of origin and cultural heritage (Bessière, 1998). Therefore, transnational companies should be able to emphasize specific emotional values which can evoke main characteristics of the region of origin. Transnational food companies in particular, can seize the opportunity to take advantage of food products that are rooted and produced in certain territories. Adopting such a strategy, as highlighted by several scholars (Caporale et al., 2006; Letablier and Nicolas, 1994), transnational companies re-territorialize their offer (Dekhili and d’Hauteville, 2009) with a focus on local quality perceptions of consumers. Thus, food companies can exploit the historic and symbolic links between regions and foods (Delamont, 1995).

### 3.3 Methodology and data collection

To explore the new territorial orientation of transnational companies, we chose to adopt the case study methodology. According to Yin (2009) “*the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events*” (p. 4), and are a preferred approach when “how” or “why” questions are being posed. Considering the exploratory and revelatory nature of our analysis, we used a single-case study based on qualitative inductive techniques (Eisenhardt 1989).

Specifically, we consider the emblematic case of McDonald’s, the well known American fast-food chain, which has recently introduced in the Italian market a new line of products based on ingredients linked to the Italian territory and tradition.

Document analyses and social network analysis through computer monitoring (Garton et al., 1997; Kozinets, 2010) were the sources of data used to analytically develop McDonald’s case. First of all, we conducted a document analysis both internal (specific archival data and similar information) and external (any document, analysis and comment concerning McDonald’s and fast-food, more in general). With reference to the internal documentation, the majority of information comes from the company web sites<sup>17</sup>. In addition, not having had the opportunity to collect data from individual interviews, we analyzed some existing interviews of Roberto Masi, Marco Ferrero and Paolo Merghetti, respectively CEO, marketing director and communication manager of McDonald’s Italy available on Internet and YouTube<sup>18</sup>. Concerning the external documentation, we conducted an archival study through Italian and international newspapers, aimed to collect information pertaining to McDonald’s Italy and in particular McItaly line. Furthermore, we considered the web pages of various organizations somehow related to McDonald’s, such as the Italian Ministry of agriculture<sup>19</sup>, Qualivita<sup>20</sup> and Slow food<sup>21</sup>.

Finally, we monitored McDonald’s Italy Facebook page<sup>22</sup> from December 2012 to December 2013, in order to gain empirical material about its communication and interactions with customers. This monitoring allowed us to corroborate and enhance the evidence of the document analysis, thus constructing validity through triangulation (Yin, 2009).

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<sup>17</sup> [www.aboutmcdonalds.com](http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com); [www.mcdonalds.com](http://www.mcdonalds.com); [www.mcdonalds.it](http://www.mcdonalds.it)

<sup>18</sup> [www.youtube.it](http://www.youtube.it)

<sup>19</sup> [www.politicheagricole.it](http://www.politicheagricole.it)

<sup>20</sup> [www.qualivita.it](http://www.qualivita.it)

<sup>21</sup> [www.slowfood.it](http://www.slowfood.it)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/McDonaldsItalia?fref=ts>



### 3.4 McDonald's background

Two brothers, Dick and Mac McDonald opened McDonald's Bar-B-Q restaurant in California, in 1940. In 1954, the agreement for a franchising deal with the milk-shake mixer salesman Ray Kroc led to the birth of the world's biggest restaurant chain. The following year, Kroc opened his first McDonald's, giving to his fast-food restaurant a particular connotation: a red and white tiled building with the golden arches which are still the symbol of McDonald's. The international venture of the American fast-food chain started in 1967, with the opening of a restaurant in Canada and Puerto Rico. McDonald's is now the chief global foodservice retailer with over 35,000 local restaurants serving nearly 70 million people in 119 countries every day<sup>23</sup>.

#### 3.4.1. From global standardization to glocalization

The initial aim of McDonald's chain was to offer standardized products and services across time and space, using the techniques of the assembly line to minimize costs of production and sale and maximize the speed of service. As many scholars underline (e.g. Cox and Mason, 2007; Schlosser, 2012) standardization and uniformity are the key elements of franchising. On one hand, standardization allows to minimize costs in terms of purchasing, marketing and implementation. On the other hand, uniformity permits a consistent communication across space able to build and maintain a distinctive image amongst customers (Cox and Mason, 2007). This homogeneous image offers a feeling of reassurance (Schlosser, 2012). A familiar brand attracts customers who avoid the unknown and "*seek the common consumption experience that the trademark represents*" (Michael, 2002, p. 328). Schlosser (2012), reported this interesting speech of Ray Kroc, angered by some of his franchises "*We have found out ... that we cannot trust some people who are nonconformists [...] We will make conformists out of them in a hurry... The organization cannot trust the individual; the individual must trust the organization*" (p. 5).

In consideration of this - McDonald's propensity towards rationality, speed and efficiency, the American fast-food chain has been frequently taken as an example of globalization and standardization. Ritzer (1993) for example, just referring to McDonald's, labeled as Mcdonaldization the rationalization process that characterized modern society, stressed by large scale production, routine and standardization.

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<sup>23</sup> [www.aboutmcdonalds.com](http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com)

However, as underlined in the theoretical background, even though for a while the offer of standardized products was a good strategy, the world has evolved and generic products and communication were no longer able to satisfy consumers' expectations, opening the doors to glocalization. Thus, aware of the necessity to appeal to local preference and customs, McDonald's has progressively adopted the concept of "think global, act local" (Vignali, 2001). Though replicating its corporate philosophy and symbols worldwide, McDonald's simultaneously caters to local tastes and preferences. Therefore, although McDonald's keeps its golden arches and red color the same everywhere (Matusitz, 2010), it has included in its menu a variety of supplemental dishes, able to accommodate various local cultures (Ram, 2004).

*"[...] we didn't get to be a global company by losing sight of what made us successful. But we also understand that tastes vary around the globe. That's why, in many markets, we supplement our iconic menu items with distinctive offerings that embrace local tastes. But instead of simply duplicating local favorites, we take what's familiar and put a McDonald's twist on it."*<sup>24</sup>

Many are the examples attributed to this adaptation strategy. In India, for instance, McDonald's restaurants chose to offer vegetable McNuggets and mutton-based Big Macs, thus trying to satisfy the needs of a population that is highly differentiated in terms of religious laws and customs (Hindus do not eat meat, Muslims do not eat pork, and Janis do not eat any type of meat). Similarly, in Malaysia and Singapore, McDonald's has undertaken a process of certification by Muslim clerics to ensure the total absence of pork products (Vignali 2001). Conversely, in other situations McDonald's has adapted its menu only to satisfy particular food preferences and tastes. Consequently, beer is available in Germany, chilled yogurt drinks in Turkey, and espresso and cold pasta in Italy. Teryaky burgers are served in Japan, vegetarian burgers in The Netherlands, McSpaghetti in the Philippines, and McFalafels in Egypt (Matusitz, 2010; Vignali, 2001). Furthermore, McDonald's serves a Quiche de Queijo (cheese quiche) in Brazil; in Hong Kong, where red beans are often used in desserts, it offers Red Bean pies, and finally in Portugal McDonald's customers may order a traditional soup made with cabbage, kale, onion, potato and chorizo<sup>25</sup>.

Recently McDonald's has further expanded the range of its products, considering local know-how in order to satisfy local tastes and stimulate customers' curiosity.

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<sup>24</sup> Catering to local tastes, [www.aboutmcdonalds.com](http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com)

<sup>25</sup> Catering to local tastes, [www.aboutmcdonalds.com](http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com)

According to Dan Coudreaut, McDonald's executive chef and vice president of Culinary Innovation, "*the world is getting smaller, tastes seem more and more daring and we need to broaden our product range*"<sup>26</sup>. In this perspective, during the Olympic Games in London, for example, McDonald's offered, in the Olympic venue restaurants, menu items typical of the UK such as porridge and an assortment of wraps<sup>27</sup>.

As Matusitz (2010) underlines, these examples demonstrate that glocalization constitutes a model that is both global and local at the same time, and also mean that glocalization is synonymous of relocalization, that is, the integration of local elements into global themes, products, or services. As a matter of fact, despite these variations and adaptations, the structure of McDonald's menu remains essentially uniform in each country (Vignali, 2001). The same applies to the symbols used and to the experience that McDonald's want to bring into existence for its customers. And in fact, McDonald's mission and values are always the same:

*McDonald's brand mission is to be our customers' favorite place and way to eat and drink. Our worldwide operations are aligned around a global strategy called the Plan to Win, which center on an exceptional customer experience – People, Products, Place, Price and Promotion. We are committed to continuously improving our operations and enhancing our customers' experience.*<sup>28</sup>

Nick Hindle, vice president of communications for McDonald's UK and Northern Europe, explained in an interview how McDonald's has changed in recent years without losing its identity:

*We said we wanted to be a modern, progressive burger company and those four words are critically important. We wanted to modernize the brand, the offering and the environment and be a business that leads and takes action. But at the end of the day, McDonald's is a burger brand and while we want to have the best offer on the menu, let's not pretend we are something we are not.*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Zampaglione, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> [www.mcdonalds.co.za](http://www.mcdonalds.co.za)

<sup>28</sup> [www.aboutmcdonalds.com](http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com)

<sup>29</sup> Branwell, 2012

### 3.5 McDonald's Italy

Within this growing McDonald's attention towards local preferences, the glocalization process in the Italian market reveals interesting peculiarities. Similarly to other countries, McDonald's attempt to satisfy preferences and tastes of Italian consumers started with the insertion in the menus of Italian restaurants of products closer to Italian food habits, such as espresso and pasta. Furthermore, McDonald's undertook also in Italy a path of relocalization, shifting in the last 6 years from 10% to 80% of purchases from local suppliers. Particularly relevant in this regard is the partnership with Barilla, the Italian food company leader in the pasta business worldwide. As Roberto Masi, CEO of McDonald's Italy declared:

*“We are proud to launch this partnership with Barilla, the pasta company symbol and icon of Made in Italy. The launch of pasta salad represents for McDonald's a key point in its path toward Italian tastes, flavors and habits. McDonald's is implementing with commitment and success this strategy approaching the typical products of our country, on one hand by responding to the tastes of the Italians, who are the main consumers and connoisseurs of pasta, on the other - choosing the Italian productive excellences, of which Barilla is a great example.”<sup>30</sup>*

In addition to this, in 2008 McDonald's began a process of Italian products valorization, launching a new line of products based on Italian recipes and produced with certificated Italian ingredients. Among the McDonald's proposals, is a salad enriched with Bresaola from Valtellina PGI and PDO Parmigiano Reggiano, as well as dishes that use other typical PGI or PDO products as main ingredients (such as Asiago cheese, and speck from Alto Adige Region) and regional products such as red onion from Tropea, bacon from Val Venosta and Roman artichokes. This could be reasonably considered as an effort to adapt the classic McDonald's offer to suit particular cultural tastes of Italian consumers. The distinctiveness, in this case, is that the glocalization strategy of McDonald's has been enriched by new elements. Until now, trying to satisfy tastes and preferences of consumers in different countries, the American fast-food chain has adapted its products to different local cultures, paying attention to local tastes and local dishes, but not taking into great consideration details such as origin and traceability of ingredients. On the contrary, in the Italian market, McDonald's launched a new line of products based on Italian recipes and produced with certificated Italian ingredients, issues considered very important by Italian

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<sup>30</sup> Barilla, 2013.

consumers. As a matter of fact, according to Ferretti and Maguadda (2006), Italian consumers have little trust in food, and they give a remarkable significance to food origin, and have a strong preference for food produced locally and nationally.

Consistent with this, Roberto Masi the CEO of McDonald's Italy stated:

*“We have been devoting a lot of energy and investment to make products that have been closer to the taste of Italians for a long time. We successfully did that with Parmigiano Reggiano, which we will introduce to French and Swiss stores next week. And we will do it again with Sicilian orange ice cream, for which we have finally found a supply chain that is able to provide for all our sales networks.”*<sup>31</sup>

*“Our customers' continuous appreciation of these recipes shows that Italians, in addition to our icon sandwiches, also ask for recipes that are closer to local taste and to Italian tradition. We know that customers have really appreciated these proposals close to the local taste, recognizing their value, awarding their quality, and making them successful cases as shown by the sales figures. The McItaly, for example, has sold over 3,000,000 sandwiches in the 8 weeks in which it was expected in McDonald's restaurants, thus confirming our sales forecasts.”*<sup>32</sup>

### **3.6 McItaly lines: McDonald's speaks Italian**

#### **3.6.1 The launch of McItaly line**

The products most representative of this attention towards Italian customers belong to the McItaly line. Launched in 2010, this line consists of sandwiches and salads certified to be prepared with ingredients 100% Italian. The launch of this line was also sustained by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture at the time of Luca Zaia. During the presentation at the historic restaurant<sup>33</sup> near Piazza di Spagna in Rome, the Minister declared:

*“McItaly is a great goal that I set before myself and that has been achieved, allowing us to look into the future and to broaden the horizons of our agriculture. A worldwide network as McDonald's is an important opportunity for our farmers*

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<sup>31</sup>Da McDonald's arriva McItaly, 2010

<sup>32</sup>E.R., 2010

<sup>33</sup>It was the first McDonald's restaurant in Italy. In 1986 its opening inspired a relatively unknown Tourin gourmet, Carlo Petrini, who gave birth to Slow Food, the chief international movement that embraces local, organic and traditional food in contrast to fast-food, standardization, and the industrialized food chain.

*to place their products in new market segments. Our agriculture could not ignore this opportunity, and statistics confirm this: 1,000 tons of Italian products used (in a month), for a value of 3.5 million of euro. [...] We want to give an imprint of Italian flavors to our youngsters, introducing Italian flavors to the huge numbers of young people who go to McDonald's Italy [...] We are for the protection of the Made in Italy, for the defense of our identity, and for this reason we cannot limit ourselves to the distribution channel: we have also to consider quality. McItaly is the quality, the first sandwich entirely traced, not anonymous, through which we can globalize the identity of Italian agriculture.”<sup>34</sup>*

As we can note in figure 1, in the McItaly sandwich advert McDonald's tried to call attention to both the use of Italian certified products and the support from the Italian Ministry of Agriculture.

**Figure 1** - McItaly sandwich advert which emphasizes the use of Italian certified products and the support from the Italian Ministry of Agriculture.



Source: McDonald's Facebook page

Particularly interesting is the slogan of the McItaly advert: “The McDonald's taste speaks Italian”. It underlines the McDonald's intention to integrate Italian elements in its global image and philosophy. This slogan, and the McDonald's line of Italian products, more in general, triggered many protests by movements (first and foremost Slow food) and activists who, defending products' authenticity and their relation with place, culture and traditions, consider unpleasant and untruthful the association between McDonald's and the traditional Italian cuisine. In a front-page opinion piece in La Repubblica newspaper, for example, Carlo Petrini challenged the Minister Zaia and McDonald's to back up their claims of helping

<sup>34</sup>Ministero delle politiche agricole alimentari e forestali, 2010

Italian farmers with a kilo-by-kilo accounting of how much farmers were being paid out of the deal. In particular, the Slow Food founder criticized the Zaia's suggestion that McItaly would "*globalize the identity of Italian agriculture*", underlining that "*taste, like identity, has value only when there are differences*" (Petrini, 2010).

A further remarkable step in this Italianization process of McDonald's was the launch of Mozzarillo, the sixth Italian sandwich launched by the American fast-food chain, which was supported by a particular campaign. On one hand, it was officially presented during a meeting where the quality and the traceability of ingredients were discussed, emphasizing McDonald's intentions of territorialization. On the other hand, to celebrate the new Italian specialty, McDonald's organized a "White Night" during which Mozzarillo sandwiches were offered for free in all the restaurants that had joined this initiative, hence demonstrating that the American multinational company had great confidence in this new line of Italian products.

### 3.6.2 The collaboration with Gualtiero Marchesi

Another step in this direction was the launch, in the Autumn 2011, of a new line of McItaly created by Gualtiero Marchesi, one of Italy's most famous and celebrated chefs who collaborated for the Italian menu of the well known American fast-food chain. The 81-old Milanese chef said that he decided to work with McDonald's after studying where young people went and what they wanted to eat. The result of the Marchesi-McDonald's partnership is two limited edition hamburgers, Vivace and Adagio, and a tiramisu Milanese style dessert called Minuetto. All these products are made with local and traditional products, such as eggplant, spinach, and the Italian cheese Ricotta salata (salted Ricotta). Furthermore, several of these ingredients were PDO products.

*"Cooking is like life, it moves to sudden changes. When you consider the before and the after, you realize that the step was too fast. You are already there. It was exactly like that when I introduced the nouvelle cuisine in Italy, and at the same time, I began to observe closely, without prejudice, the young. Where are they going to eat? What do they eat? These were simple questions which led to my decision to team up with McDonald's. If it is true that the high class, haute cuisine has made a revolution in the tastes of daily dishes, now is time to bring this change to everyone, starting, of course, with the youngest. The real news is that with these two sandwiches I opened the doors of the kingdom of burgers made of eggplant and spinach. It is a big revolution! For dessert, I wanted to pay homage*

*to the two Italian desserts par excellence by bringing them together: the Venetian tiramisu and the Lombard panettone. I am sure that they will be successful among the millions of young customers who visit the Italian McDonald's restaurants every year and also among the other customers. Because it is the sandwich that is young, just like them!*”<sup>35</sup>

The name of all these products is inspired by classical music because the separate ingredients are expected to come together like a symphony, according to a company's statement. In addition, as Marchesi said, Adagio and Vivace also represent the combination of two opposing philosophies: Slow and Fast. A concept underlined in the advertising slogan “Fast food has never been this Slow” (figure 2), which, also in this case, appears quite provocative. It highlights the willingness to create, not only an interpenetration between global and local elements, but also to create an oxymoronic association between slow-food and fast-food.

**Figure 2** - Advert of McItaly line in collaboration with G. Marchesi



Source: McDonald's Facebook page

In accordance with Gualtiero Marchesi's expectations, this McItaly line was a hit. As a matter of fact, due to consumers' demand, the McItaly line created by the Italian chef was offered in the Italian McDonald's for nearly two month longer than the three weeks initially planned. This popularity contributed to tighten up the debate among the Slow Food activists who criticize the association between the fast-food industry represented by McDonald's and the local food communities and traditions that inspire Slow Food values. As a result, Slow Food International made a public statement against this partnership of McDonald's and the

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<sup>35</sup> FIPE, 2011



local Milanese chef, contesting the slogan “Fast food has never been this slow” (Figure 2) with its own version “Fast food has never been ~~this~~ slow” (Figure 3).

**Figure 3** – Slow Food answer to McDonald’s provocative advert



**Source:** McDonald’s Facebook page

*“We put the words in their proper, correct place. It is not clear why – beyond marketing issues – McDonald’s continues to pursue the Slow Food model. An informed and educated consumer knows the differences and, when he goes to a fast food, he is not looking for the dishes of a great chef or for fresh, seasonal and local food. Slow is not a slogan that is sufficient to exhibit on a showcase. It is a holistic approach to food and life, the antithesis of a uniformity represented by thousands of restaurants identical all over the world. So, viva differences! Nevertheless, it is important not to mix it up: slow and fast cannot get along, and even less for advertising reasons.”<sup>36</sup>*

### 3.6.3 Another step: Italian regional products and “I Moderni”

The territorialization process of McDonald’s does not stop. On the contrary, the fast-food chain uses every opportunity to emphasize its approach towards typical products of the Italian territory. Here is the illustrative case of the closure of a historical McDonald’s restaurant in the Arcade in the center of Milan, closed after twenty years of activity as a result of the eviction notice received by the municipality. On this occasion, the fast-food chain invited the Mayor and all the inhabitants of Milan on a free tasting of some of the Italian culinary excellence, six of which are protected products: Parmigiano Reggiano cheese PDO,

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<sup>36</sup> Slow Food, 2011

Asiago cheese PDO, Provolone Valpadana cheese PDO, Speck from Alto Adige PGI, air-cured beef from Valtellina PGI, Extra virgin olive oil Bruzio PDO, and Salami from Calabria region (figure 4 and 5). Once again, McDonald’s slogan promoting this event was quite ambitious: “To taste the flavor of Italy, come to the Arcade of the Gallery! Today!” (figure 6).

**Figure 4** – An image of the free tasting in Milan



**Source:** McDonald’s Facebook page

**Figure 5** – Some examples of the culinary excellence offered during the free tasting in Milan



**Source:** McDonald’s Facebook page

**Figure 6** – The slogan advert promoting the free tasting in Milan



**Source:** McDonald’s Facebook page

On this occasion McDonald’s, not only stressed its linkage with Italian territory, but it also gave emphasis to the importance of its activity in a sort of democratization process which makes typical Italian food accessible to everyone. Furthermore, this event anticipated the launch of the McItaly line of 2012 that used as ingredients exactly some of the Italian certified products’ stars of taste.

The McItaly line launched in 2012 and once again was promoting the use of Italian traditional ingredients. This line consists of a salad and four new sandwiches, each one aimed to enhance typical local products closely related to the culture and traditions of the specific Italian region of their origin (specifically Calabria, Lombardia, Trentino Alto Adige and Veneto). As a result, the Veneto sandwich was made with Asiago cheese PDO, the Calabrese one with Salami from Calabria region, the Lombardo with Provolone Valpadana cheese PDO, and finally, the Tirolese with Speck from Alto Adige PGI. Once again, the advertising campaign was devoted to bring to light the use of certified products and the existence of a link with Italian territory. In this case, to stress the regional origin of the four new sandwiches, in the adverts, structured as cartoon bubbles, the four sandwiches of the new McItaly line talk to each other using the dialect of their region of origin, emphasizing the typical accent that characterized each of them (figure 7).

**Figure 7** – Two examples of the adverts of Lombardo, Tirolese, Veneto and Calabrese sandwiches



Source: McDonald's Facebook page

In addition, in order to underline its attention towards youngsters, McDonald's engaged in the advertising campaign of this McItaly line an emerging band, fresh from its participation in the well-known television talent show X Factor. As Marco Ferrero, Communication and Marketing director of McDonald's, underlined:

*“Our partnership with I Moderni gives us the opportunity to stress once again the McDonald's attention to the youngsters: I Moderni and their music convey a contagious positivity, the same that we try to put in our daily work.”<sup>37</sup>*

<sup>37</sup> Moderni testimoni di McDonald's, 2012.

This partnership consists of multiple communication tools, all designed for a young audience. A commercial, in which the four singers of the band become judges of a talent show called The Italian show, where customers are invited to vote via McDonald's Facebook page about their favorite regional sandwich of the new McItaly line (figure 8). A Facebook application, in which the group is leading users in the creation of photographs, inspired by the main ingredients of the regional McItaly sandwiches. It is a contest in which users are invited to send photographs that depict them in poses and grimaces that could somehow recall the "Provolone cheese face", the "Salami face", the "Speck face" or the "Asiago cheese face". Finally, this McItaly line promotion also includes a concert of the band in Reggio Calabria, the biggest and most populated city of Calabria region, one of the four protagonists of this McItaly line.

**Figure 8** – The Italian show used in the promotion of Veneto, Calabrese, Lombardo and Tirolese sandwiches



Source: McDonald's Facebook page

### 3.6.4 The territorialization process carries on: Gran Chianina and Gran Piemontese

The latest step of this McDonald's process of Italian products' valorization was the launch of Gran Chianina and Gran Piemontese sandwiches, which were alternated in the Italian McDonald's for six weeks (three weeks each one), starting from November 13, 2013. As McDonald's reported in its press release announcing the launch of these new sandwiches<sup>38</sup>, this new offer constitutes the result of the partnerships with the Consortium for the Protection of the white veal of Central Apennines PGI (Consorzio di tutela del vitellone

<sup>38</sup> [www.mcdonalds.it](http://www.mcdonalds.it)

bianco dell'Appennino central IGP) that ensures the certification of Chianina breed, and Coalvi, the Consortium for the protection of the Piemontese breed (Consorzio di tutela della razza Piemontese). In addition to the use of high quality meats coming from Italian livestock of young steer of the two autochthonous breeds of central and northern Italy, the two recipes are also based on using ingredients exclusively coming from Italian suppliers.

In its press release<sup>39</sup>, McDonald's also explains that:

*“The Chianina PGI, famous throughout the world for the cutting meat called “Fiorentina” is a precious and succulent meat, with important nutrients and fortifying properties. Rich in iron, it is obtained from Chianina cattle between 12 and 24 months old, weaned with breast milk, fed with forage and natural products from traditional breeding and slaughtered in their production area”*

*“The Piemontese is the most important Italian beef breed per livestock numbers. It is a very high class meat, tender, lean, low-fat and of high nutritional quality, as well as low in cholesterol. It is a fairly common meat in the butcher's traditional retail and large-scale retail trade, but not in restaurants, where it is present only in a few restaurants concentrated in the area of production”.*

Also, on the occasion of Gran Chianina and Gran Piemontese presentation and launch, McDonald's confirmed its willingness to continue its path aimed to discover and appreciate the typical Italian flavors, offering to Italian consumers, and in particular youngsters, the opportunity to enjoy highest quality ingredients at an affordable price. During a presentation in Firenze, Marco Ferrero marketing director of McDonald's Italy said:

*“For some years we have been trying to use ingredients of excellence, and, of course, looking for excellence we come to the Italian products. At the same time we are trying to convey the Italian agro-food culture to the youngsters. We are a par excellence restaurant for young people, so what better vehicle than McDonald's to try to rise attention on topics such as good nutrition, the importance to eat in a balanced way and not unbalanced with attention only to certain products. [...] To communicate these messages it was necessary to undertake a process. A process that has seen our participation in other adventures, first of all, the partnership with the Consortium of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. [...] We claim to be the leader in the field of quality burgers*

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<sup>39</sup> [www.mcdonalds.it](http://www.mcdonalds.it)

*and, with Chianina and Piemontese meat, we believe to give a very clear answer about how the quality burger could reach young people at a price suited to them, highly competitive and accessible.*”<sup>40</sup>

An interesting element that characterizes the advertising campaign of Gran Chianina and Gran Piemontese concerns the growing importance given to territories and landscapes. Although the desire to rediscover and enhance the typical products of the Italian territory, associating them to McDonald’s values, has characterized McItaly lines from their beginning, in this latest 2013 line, places acquired even greater relevance, becoming true and real key players of McDonald’s communication. As a matter of fact, in the initial McItaly lines, the connection between products and territory was present, but it resulted to be less tangible. If we consider the advertising images in figure 9, on the contrary, we can observe that in Gran Chianina and Gran Piemontese ads, the Val di Chiana and Piedmont countryside, where the two types of meat used in the preparation of hamburgers originate from, and are an integral part of McDonald’s communication. Accordingly, in these ads the two sandwiches are placed into a background which tries to depict the countryside landscapes from which their ingredients come from. This choice can be regarded as McDonald’s effort to give more emphasis to the ingredients’ origin, and also to confer to McDonald’s sandwiches attributes such as genuineness, sustainability, typicity and quality in general.

**Figure 9** – Adverts of Gran Chianina and Gran Piemontese



Source: McDonald’s Facebook page

In the commercial of Gran Chianina and Gran Piemontese, this allusion to territory capability to create special kinds of food with unique characteristics becomes more explicit.

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<sup>40</sup> Trattoria Da Burde (2013)

Both commercials of Gran Chianina and Gran Piemontese put great emphasis on the place of origin of the ingredients used in these recipes, underlining how territory characteristics are able to convey specific qualities to food products, and particularly to the two particular types of meat used. As a matter of fact, the two commercials are respectively set in the Val di Chiana and in the Piedmont countryside, and they narrate, through the voice of the inhabitants of these places, the story and the peculiarities of the ingredients used in the new McItaly recipes. Therefore, what stands out in these commercials are elements such as cultural and traditional values, transmission from generation to generation and close bond between territory characteristics and food products' attributes. Thus, with a typical Tuscan accent, a young man says: *“This is the Val di Chiana. Here I was born, as was my father and also the best meat of Italy.”* Similarly, but with a typical Piedmont accent, some Piedmoteses explain: *“Here in Piedmont we have everything: clean air, truffles and the best meat. It is tender and tasty. It’s a very carefully, highly selected breed. You don’t find it everywhere.”* Everything is accompanied by the same final slogan aimed to recall McDonald’s attention not only to quality, but also to prices: *“Today, the best is at McDonald’s. At the unbeatable price of McDonald’s.”*

### **3.7 Discussion and conclusion**

The analysis presented in this work, has demonstrated that McDonald’s, the epitome of a transnational firm, frequently still associated to the concept of homogenization of tastes and junk food, has enriched its strategy of elements and values very different from this belief. The process of glocalization undertaken in the Italian market goes well beyond the adoption to local preferences in order to remain competitive in the marketplace. Via the insertion in its Italian offer of Italian typical products, often certificated, and Italian regional recipes, McDonald’s is trying to change its image.

On one hand, McItaly line helps the transnational fast-food chain to expand its menu, making it increasingly varied and tasty and taking at the same time into account the specific requirements of Italian consumers, always closely tied to their culinary roots. According to Roberto Masi:

*“We strongly believe in this path, particularly in Italy; we are pursuing the valorization and the use of typical local products that are very popular on the Italian market. We see that our customers ask for them. It is a success, offered*

*together with our classic products, such as Big Mac and Hamburger, it is a winning mix which satisfies Italian consumers.*”<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, McDonald’s has attempted to shake off the troublesome label of junk food. As Marco Ferrero, marketing director of McDonald’s Italy stated at the press conference for the launch of Gran Chianina sandwich: *“For many years we are working on challenging projects related to quality. In this way, we are trying to free our company from the prejudice that, unjustly, leads to associate it with the supply of low quality products. Broadly speaking, I would say that not only sandwiches made with Chianina meat are quality products.”*<sup>42</sup> Consistent with this, during the 5<sup>th</sup> European Forum on Quality held in Brussels in 2011<sup>43</sup>, Roberto Masi, CEO of McDonald’s Italy, clearly explained that the union between the American fast-food chain and Italian typical products, often certificated, falls within a larger quality program devoted to modify McDonald’s positioning from fast-food to good food fast. A goal widely supported by recent McDonald’s choices, especially at a communication level. Slogans such as “Fast has never been this slow” best comply with this objective. The same applies to the introduction of attributes such as excellence, genuineness and typicity and to values like history, culture and tradition, and also McDonald’s increasing participation in high quality gastronomy exhibitions. The paradox is that not only McDonald’s lay hold on these values, but it attributes to itself the role of harbinger for youngster, in a process over and over again defined as a democratization of tastes. Basically, this process of democratization consists in offering high quality products, closely related to the culinary traditions of Italian regions, at a price and in a way that are well suited for young people. In this respect was interesting the following speech of the marketing director Marco Ferrero:

*“If we could convey even only a fragment of this type of memories and culture to our children, I think it would be a gift for society. [...] If we could transmit to our hundreds of thousands of customers, mainly young people, the curiosity to go and find out what’s behind the label Chianina meat, I think this will be a great success for everyone.”*<sup>44</sup>

Once having identified McDonald’s purposes, some questions about consumers’ perception of this territorialization strategy arise. As Bessièrè (1998) underlines, *“there is a*

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<sup>41</sup> Wwww6tv (2010)

<sup>42</sup> Trattoria Da Burde (2013)

<sup>43</sup> F. Qualivita (2012)

<sup>44</sup> Trattoria Da Burde (2013)



*reversal in the awareness about food; cuisine with a country touch, and 'natural' products have increased in popularity: black bread or bread, baked in brick ovens, farm fresh products, country buffets and country home-style Sunday lunches are often featured at higher priced restaurants. [...] Advertising and marketing professionals are unscrupulous in hoodwinking consumers into believing that they are actually buying grandmother's jam or farm-fresh pâté, which are in fact mass produced"* (p.24). The queries are now: How do consumers really perceive this new face of transnational companies? Does McDonald's succeed in its aim to enrich its business with elements and values, such as quality and culinary traditions' valorisations'?

In the light of these questions, for future research, it might prove interesting to further analyze this territorialization process also considering consumers' point of view.

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# Conclusions

The analysis presented in this dissertation provided an in-depth consideration of place-based food phenomenon. The increasing attractiveness of food products that show a strong link with their territory of origin raises important questions. Firstly, emerged the necessity to clarify the place-based food concept and to understand the elements that characterized the link between food and place (What are the main characteristics of place-based foods? What reasons drive people to increase their attention to territoriality? What meanings do consumers attach to territorial food consumption?). Secondly, arose the necessity to investigate the food-place bond in an organizational point of view, underlining how local and transnational companies manage this link and in what way they integrate this territorial facet within their strategy.

From this study clearly emerges that both academic studies and entrepreneurship experiences are changing their attention to place-based foods phenomenon.

On one hand, the collected literature allowed us to identify the fundamental elements that characterize a phenomenon until now analyzed on a piecemeal basis. On the other hand, the cases presented (the local company MeC Puddu's and the global one McDonald's) taken collectively, not only illustrate two different ways to use territorial links in the firm strategy, but they also underline two reverse implications of the territorial orientation related to the mix between local and global elements. In this respect, MeC Puddu's desire to become a global promoter of traditional products of their land can be considered as the opposite of the McDonald's attempt to approach the Italian market via the McItaly line. Just as McDonald's tries to replicate its corporate philosophy and symbols, while simultaneously catering for Italian preferences for food produced locally and nationally, MeC Puddu's aims to reverse this process. The Sardinian fast-food aims to transmit and communicate the cultural and traditional aspect of its products and its place of provenance overcoming the regional boundaries.

Furthermore, an interesting aspect emerging from both cases is the will to create an unusual, and in a certain sense oxymoronic, association between Slow Food values and fast-food. As a matter of fact, both MeC Puddu's and McDonald's – even if starting from different points and objectives – try to rearticulate the concept of fast-food, eliminating the negative connotation that associate this kind of restaurants to junk food. MeC Puddu's and McDonald's attempts offer a dual stimulus for reflection. On one hand, it underlines the

reduction of the distances between the local and the global, emphasizing that glocalization is a circle without starting and end points. On the other hand, it confirms clearly the further diffusion of the phenomena of place-based food. As a matter of fact, MeC Puddu's and McDonald's suggested the emergence of a "territorial glocalization" that inserts in the mix between global and local elements a novel ingredient: the link between food and place.

The implications of this dissertation are both theoretical and practical. On a theoretical level, it contributes to a better understanding of the concept of place-based food, showing at the same time the need for further research to better understand the place-based food consumer. Additionally, this dissertation enlarges the study of the relationship between food and territory, by considering it in an organizational point of view, and contributes to the development of glocalization literature, by adding the bond between food and place as a new element to consider in the balance between global and local forces. On a practical level, the dissertation offers valid support to marketing strategies to be implemented in the food sector, also emphasizing the potentiality of the adoption of a territorial orientation in firms' strategies.

Starting from these contributions, future researches firstly could explore place-based food in a consumer point of view. Secondly, they could analyze in depth the "territorial glocalization" phenomenon, observing its development in the course of time and also considering different geographical areas.