

The concepts of “local” and “traditional” in the perceptions and food manufacturing practices of rural crafts-women. A case study in Greece.

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Nowadays consumers weary of mass-produced industrial products and sensitive to the nutritional risks of industrially-processed food are on the lookout for local traditional foods which are both safe and of specific quality linked to the place of origin. The quality turn by consumers towards local agri-food produce offers thus significant prospects for small-scale food business of rural women that know recently a significant flourishing in the Greek countryside.

Drawing on empirical data from a local survey in the region of Peloponnese, the paper aims to explore the extent to which these products are truly “linked to their place of origin” in the sense that the basic ingredients come from the indicated geographical region, and the know-how and manufacturing practices are specific to that territory. The paper furthermore investigates how crafts-women themselves understand the “local” and the “traditional” being at the same time consumers (nurturers of the family) and professionals (crafts-food producers).

Key words: rural female small business, women’s local traditional foods, food quality perceptions, Greece

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La desconfianza que muestran, en la actualidad, los consumidores hacia los productos masivos industrializados, así como la conciencia hacia los riesgos nutricionales de los alimentos procesados, explica el interés que están adquiriendo los alimentos locales y tradicionales que son considerados, debido al vínculo que mantiene con su lugar de origen, como más sanos y de mayor calidad. La orientación de los consumidores hacia la calidad, y de forma más concreta hacia los productos agroalimentarios locales, ofrece interesantes perspectivas para las pequeñas empresas agroalimentarias regentadas por mujeres rurales que se están surgiendo en el medio rural griego.

Este trabajo se nutre de datos empíricos obtenidos de una investigación desarrollada en la región del Peloponeso. El objetivo de este artículo es explorar el grado de vinculación real de estos productos con el lugar de origen, haciendo especial incidencia en el hecho de que los ingredientes básicos del producto provengan de la región indicada y que el saber-hacer y los procesos de elaboración y transformación sean específicos del territorio. Asimismo, el artículo analiza el modo como las mujeres artesanas, así como los consumidores (con especial referencia a aquellos encargados de la provisión de alimentos a la familia) y otros profesionales (sobre todo los que se dedican a la producción de alimentos artesanos) perciben los conceptos de "local" y "tradicional" .

Palabras clave: empresas agroalimentarias; mujeres rurales; alimentos tradicionales locales; percepciones de la calidad de los alimentos; Grecia

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INTRODUCTION

Diversification strategies by emphasizing local traditions and heritage become a key element for supporting competitiveness of rural territories seeking to promote endogenous development. This may involve a new approach to a sustainable agricultural perspective, particularly in disadvantaged areas, through an emphasis on traditional food products processed and sold by farmers and local producers.

Actually, a growing number of rural areas throughout Europe are seeking extra sources of income by diversifying their on- and off-farm production and emphasizing local traditions and heritage. For over two decades traditional food products and agri-tourism have been available as diversification options within a framework of rural development goals of the CAP. In this context, rural women often prove to be pioneers when it comes to taking entrepreneurial initiatives in these sectors, which are often perceived as gendered because these activities (food processing and preservation, catering and accommodation) have traditionally been performed by women (Anthopoulou, 2010; Bock, 2004). For policy makers and local action groups the activation of women - as potential founders of new small businesses- not only contributes to utilization of an untapped source for the local economy but also to the preservation of natural and cultural heritage in rural areas (Allen et al., 2008; OECD, 2004). Moreover rural policies draw attention to increasing the value of the share of local actors in the production chain, and generally to increasing territorially produced added value.

At the same time, consumers weary of mass-produced industrial products and sensitive to the nutritional risks of much industrially-processed food are on the lookout for local traditional foods which are both safe and “of specific quality” associated with the place of origin (natural and human milieu). What they are essentially seeking is a wholly different type of relationship with farmers and food producers, based on reciprocity, trust and shared values (Marsden et al., 2000; Parrot et al., 2002). The quality turn by consumers towards local agri-food produce offers thus significant prospects for small-scale food production workshops of rural women; consumers in a face to face contact with them they can learn about distinctiveness of raw materials, traditional recipes, healthy eating, and so on.

In the Greek countryside in recent years there has been an increase in the number of small businesses run by women active in the rural and farm-dependent sector of the economy, as individuals or as members of co-operatives (Anthopoulou, 2008; Gidarakou, 2000; Iakovidou, 2002; Koutsou et al., 2003). These businesses are primarily oriented towards what are regarded as sectors involving “women’s skills”: rural tourism (provision of food and accommodation, general catering services) and production of foodstuffs (sweets, biscuits, pastry, cheese, etc.). The chronic crisis in the agricultural sector and the related unemployment, which is more serious for women, is impelling them to try to find sources of additional income outside the narrow boundaries of the family farm. The typically low level of formal education and professional training of rural women orients them towards familiar forms of

occupational activity, such as food processing, hosting visitors and catering for them. They become active, in other words, in areas where they are able to make use of tacit knowledge and know-how as housekeepers and nurturers of families (Bessière, 1998; Kaberis, 2008; Oughton et al., 2003; Whatmore, 1988). At the same time, empirical studies in the Greek countryside show that women’s local traditional food produce responses to an emerging consumer demand for food of specific quality. Women’s artisanal food production is thus tending spontaneously to acquire in the imaginary of consumers the characteristics of a special informal quality labeling, a “female label”, with connotations of “home-made” and so traditional, pure and healthy (Anthopoulou and Koutsou, 2010).

Drawing on empirical data from a broader local survey in the Peloponnese region focusing on aspects and dynamics of rural women’s entrepreneurship in local agri-food production¹, this paper aims to explore the extent to which these products are truly “linked to their place of origin”; in the sense that the basic ingredients come from the indicated geographical region, and the know-how and manufacturing practices are specific to that territory. The paper furthermore investigates how crafts-women themselves understand the “local” and the “traditional” being at the same time consumers- as the main responsible for food shopping and the preparation of family’s meals and professionals- as crafts-producers of “local traditional products”.

The renewal of local produces: In search of quality and qualification benchmark.

The recent food crisis has made consumers more aware of where their food is coming from and how it is processed. A relevant literature has sought to explore health concerns as a motivation for reflexive practices and growing trust in local food (Weatherell et al, 2003). Cultural motivations are also of increasing relevance to the broader consumption choices for local food as an alternative to conventionally produced food through intensive agricultural practices and major commodity chains. As Ilbery and Kneafsey (2000, p. 217) note in this connection, consumers are interested in finding out about the origins of their food and the methods used in its production, not only for reasons of health and security but also to satisfy a pervasive nostalgia which harks back to a perceived time of “real” and “wholesome” food.

Within this general context of seeking out foods offering safety and other specific qualities (e.g. those of protected geographical provenance, organic, peasant, on-farm processing) it often appears that “rural women’s foods” could in themselves constitute a distinct category of local traditional food (Anthopoulou, 2008). They benefit from their associations with inherited recipes, good housekeeping, and pure ingredients. Food produced by women is imagined as being prepared in accordance with long-standing ancestral traditions and

¹ The research was funded by the Programme: GENDER-PYTHAGORAS II- Funding of Research Groups in Panteion University – Athens (Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs- Managing Authority of Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training).

artisanal methods. We are thus invited on a 'nostalgic trip back to the realms of the food "granny used to cook" ' (Ashley et al., 2005:88). It appears that in the imaginary world of the consumer an ideal image is evoked of a country woman (and mother) who, by virtue of her "natural" position as nurturer and cook for the farming family, acts out a multiplicity of roles within an idyllic rural setting: she takes care of the garden of the family farm, the farm animals that provide us with their fresh, pure, clean, healthy products. She works up the fruits of the annual harvest for use in the home: pasta, sausages, cheese, sweets, etc. She cooks every day in accordance with implicit codes of proper diet and local culinary cultures (freshness, seasonality, fasting and other religious codes, adherence to custom). The notions of so-called "traditional" food and culinary heritage are thus ideologically freighted with social stereotypes of how, within a given rural area or community, skills and tacit know-how are transmitted from woman (older) to woman (younger) (Little & Austin, 1996), even if within the prevalent extension of the urban consumerist model 'the daughter or granddaughter no longer inherits secret family recipes, and modern home cooking does not go beyond traditional family dishes' (Bessièrè, 1998: 25).

Literature on women's work and food habits has revealed the specific contribution of rural women to the production and preservation of farm products and to the reproduction and transmission of recipes for local traditional foods. The social demand for local traditional food and culinary traditions is an illustration of how people aspire to short-lived appropriation of a rural identity via socially constructed peasant food or via an unspoken desire to rediscover lost rural roots through the medium of eating practices (Bessièrè, 1998). Consumers have now been written in as active agents in attempts to understand the shift towards local traditional food and food relocalisation. However, even though gender issues have arisen historically in the production, preparation and consumption of food, gender is a neglected area of interest in the study of local food consumption (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Little et al, 2009).

In Greece, where links with one's place of origin and with the countryside have not been completely severed (a relatively recent rural exodus in the 60s and 70s), the turn in the last years towards traditional, home-made or village food activates memories of childhood food experiences, the nostalgia for "primordial tastes" of infancy (Bourdieu, 1984: 79). For those who do not possess living roots in the countryside, the return to local food gives substance to (re)invented culinary references and lifestyles in which rural women play an important role.

In the context of the current all-enveloping patrimonialisation movement, the recent blossoming of rural women's cooperatives in the Greek countryside ²

² A notable flowering of rural women's co-operatives was observed in Greece towards the end of the 1990s engaged in local agri-food production and tourist accommodation. It appears that the women are comparatively willing to undertake entrepreneurial initiatives on cooperative basis rather than on individual one because the collective structures provide the

specializing in local traditional food is revealing of the existence of a specific clientele looking for products offering quality guarantees in the sense of genuineness and food safety. Women's cooperatives sell their products locally (to local households, tourists and visitors) and even to distant markets (local delicacy shops in the region's townships and in Athens). The label "women" or "women's cooperative" seems to act as an additional quality sign or benchmark of locally-produced foods. Similarly, private labels from women's workshops displaying the crafts-woman's first name as a first indication of origin / product distinction (i.e. Anna's sweets, "Sweet Tradition", Monemvasia-Laconia), as well as the locality and other qualifications, such as "home-made recipe", "pure ingredients", "hand-made" are revealing of the emerging interest for local traditional products; the evocation of the crafts-woman may guarantee – at least to the perception of some consumers – of the products' authenticity and purity. Beyond this, these foods re-attach in a symbolic way consumers with their rural roots or place of origin within an idealized countryside where woman is the guardian of rural values and knowledge.

In Greece, however, there is neither tradition of quality policies based on specific references (i.e. the concept of superior, traditional or distinctive quality) nor experience in food labeling linked to a territory, to a social producing group or to an inherited culinary intra-regional tradition. Such policies and labeling would enable authenticity protection, as well as the exclusive use of a label name for the specified product and the marketing of these products using quality signs. Currently, the only existing signs are those of a top-down, imported and relatively recent process (i.e. European Regulations such as PDO and PGI, the Traditional Specialty Guaranteed and organic farming in 1992). These signs have subsequently been adapted by virtue of a set of Decrees issued by the Hellenic Ministry of Rural Development and Foods. All things considered, with the exception of agri-food products already categorized as mentioned above ³, reference to geographic origin accompanied by the mentions of traditional or local in their territorial sense is arbitrary and, occasionally,

country women with the wherewithal to overcome both their professional inadequacies and the gendered social stereotypes and related obstacles (Koutsou et al. 2003). Today there are approximately 140 women's agri-tourist co-operatives in operation all over the Greek countryside, especially in mountainous and insular areas. According to the statute establishing women's agri-tourist cooperatives all members are working in agriculture or are farmers' wives either have farm incomes. In any case, this activity is generally part of the pluriactivity of rural households. The successful examples in terms of economic viability, the social programmes of subsidies (Leader, Now, Equal, etc.) in conjunction with the general decline in farm incomes as a result of reform of the CAP and the women's search for ways of boosting their family income, has contributed significantly to spreading the idea. They constitute a peculiarly Greek innovation, brought into existence and provided with initial support through a top-down national policy (Iakovidou 2002).

³ To date Greece has had 66 products recognised as PDO products (20 cheese, 17 olive-oil , 9 table olive, 20 fruit, vegetables and dried pulse types) and 23 PGI products (of which 10 olive oil types).

misleading, product of individual initiative and fragmented within a given territory. It is not the outcome of a grassroots collective concertation process initiated by the actors involved in the production and marketing of this distinctive product in relation to its geographical origin. However, the acquisition of any label requires prior consensus among the stakeholders in the value chain concerned on a code of practice regarding modes of production, processing, packaging, labeling etc., aiming at protecting and valorising of local know-how (Vandecandelaere et al., 2010). Cooperation and confidence is also required between enterprises, including competitors in order to consolidate the label (Delfosse, 2002). In Greece, the, still, abundant existence of identity-related resources and tacit, undervalued and usually fragmented know-how, the loose links between local production and place of origin in the sense of vesting of the geographical identification, as well as the lack of tradition of cooperation between actors involved in the value chain are significant obstacles to the joint setting up of a place-based quality label. Given that a quality label serves as “a contract” between producers and consumers, in other words as a set of promises on quality (Valceschini, 2000: 491-492), we propose to examine –through our local survey- how crafts-women perceive and interpret the information provided by the, spontaneously used, signals of “local” and “traditional” as regards specific attributes linked to place of origin.

Local agri-food products manufactured and marketed by crafts-women in the Peloponnese
Framework of the field study performed in the region of the Peloponnese

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, a recent relative booming of small agri-food artisanal enterprises run by women has been observed in Greece in response to new social demands for local traditional products. These initiatives are frequently part of public policies aiming at the rural development or at the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as women.

Thus, one of the central objectives of our field research was to learn how and to what extent are these activities integrated into local socio-productive systems and whether they are viable or not. Along the same lines, we also investigated whether women’s agri-food enterprises are not simply a conjectural phenomenon, namely the EU funding, where rural women are content to use EU grants just to supplement family income in a period of farming crisis and of general economic recession.

The field study was conducted in the area of intervention of the two Local Action Groups administering the LEADER programmes in the Eastern Region of Peloponnese (March-May 2006 and February 2007). The region in question comprises mountainous and Less Favoured Areas -as defined by the European Directive- characterized by small-scale agricultural structures (a small proportion of farming land in the overall total, of the order of 14%; fragmented farm holdings) and is overwhelmingly agricultural in character (with a predominance of traditional olive cultivation) (Figure 1).

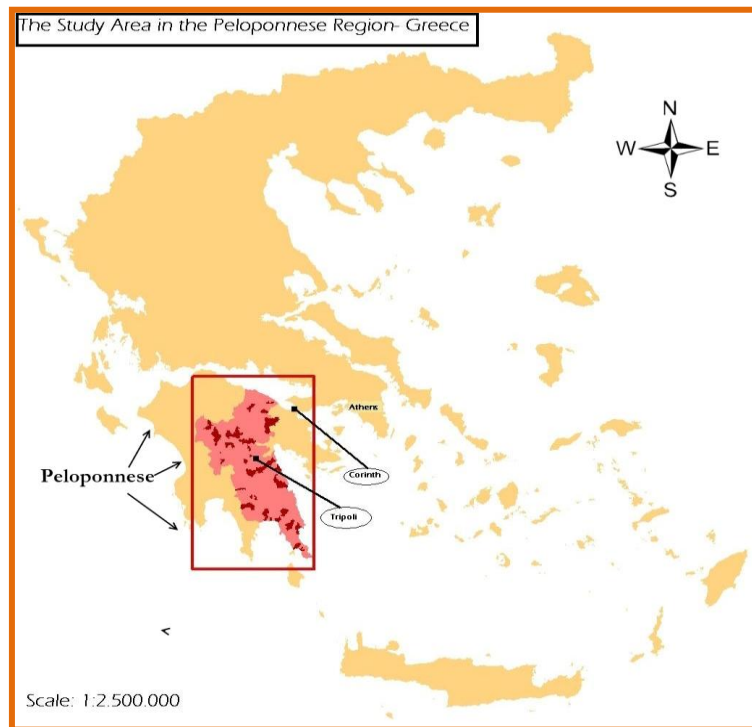


Figure 1. The Study Area in the Peloponnese Region- Greece

The businesses were located through registers of the four local Chambers of Commerce and Industry and subsequent on-the-spot updating (the “snowball” technique) so that the final data base would include - insofar as this was possible- all women’s businesses in the area. In all, 74 businesses responded, out of a total of 81 that had been located (91% of the list finally arrived at). Of that number, 61 were individual businesses (82.4%) and one a co-operative (the women’s agri-tourist co-operative of a mountain community, 9 members). The others (12 in number) were companies but all of them family based in structure and organization. The food sectors included, all involving processing of primary production, were the following: sweets (traditional “pan sweets” and “spoon sweets”, jams, 15 workshops); pasta and “trahana” (semolina with curdle goat milk)⁴ (15 workshops), traditional bread-making (10 bakeries), olive oil (13 olive presses), cheese (7 cheese dairies), wine (8 wineries), other products (honey, salted and spiced meats, drinks) (6 workshops).

Profile, motivations and «entrepreneurial» strategies of women in agri-food production

We present here some key socio-demographic characteristics and motivations for entrepreneurial initiatives of rural women to better understand and interpret crafts-women conceptions of the “traditional” and the “local” related to specific quality of their agri-food production.

The average age of crafts-women on the date of the survey was 46 years and at the “commencement of operations of the business under her direction” was 34 years. The relatively high deviation from the typical age of entry into the labour market (at least a decade) confirms the fact that the women decide to become professionally active after some disengagement towards family obligations (for example up to the schooling of their children). The women are mostly of rural origin, that is from the district in which their business has its headquarters (72.9% of the total) or from another province of Greece (6.7%). They live in the community where their business is established (91%) having the possibility to better balance family obligations with professional commitments.

As regards educational level and the standard of the crafts-women’s professional training, the findings of the study reveal the limited access of rural women, especially those now more advanced in years, to education. Most of the women (54% of the total) are of a low level of education in the sense that they have attended (for all or some of the relevant grades) only the compulsory levels of schooling (primary and junior high school). As for women having pursued tertiary-level studies was minimal, only 5.4% of the overall total held a diploma from a university or technological institute. Their low level of education nevertheless did not prevent the women in question from engaging in entrepreneurial activity in the food sector, where they

have acquired empirical mastery of the techniques of production, with the women themselves seeing their workshop as “an extension of their kitchen” (in the case of sweets, pasta and bread-making) or as part of the well-known (to them) family business they have inherited (principally in the case of olive press, winery, cheese dairy).

Moreover to the question “how did you initially acquire the knowledge and learn the techniques for manufacture of your products” (multiple-choice answers) most of the women (89.2% of the total) replied that this had taken place in the family. The mother (and the grandmother, who usually lives together with, or in close proximity to, the parents) transmits to the daughters basic practices, including the “mysteries” of cooking and above all the general rules of good household management, reproducing in a very specific manner “female roles” such as the “housewife”, the “good girl”, the “good bride” (Kaberis, 2008). These primary presentations and experiences, this tacit knowledge, these meanings and values would be with the women in every demonstration of good household management, within and outside of their later families and ultimately also their businesses: *‘mother kneaded the dough at home and from my early childhood I helped my mother to make bread..I learnt cheese making from a very young age’*, as one producer of traditional bread in Laconia mentioned. A much lower number of the women (12.3% of the total) replied that they had learned through apprenticeship to another enterprise (empirically). It is interesting that some of the producers (9.5% of the total) defined themselves as self-taught (having learned from reading, from asking other producers, from experimenting with recipes). Finally, to a very limited extent, the women had acquired knowledge through the official education system: 2.5% from professional education and 6.5% from training seminars.

To the question on women’s “basic motivation in starting their specific food business” (with multiple-choice answers), crafts-women answered in order of preference: “to give financial help to my family” (frequency 68.9%), “to continue the family business or an inheritance” (40.5%), “for the enjoyment of using one’s knowledge and skill” (37.8%). We observe that the establishment of the business is to be situated in the broader context of family strategy where, given the contraction in farm income that has been seen in recent years, and indeed the more general economic crisis that is gripping the countryside (a shortage of paid work, unemployment) country women are on the lookout for additional income from quasi-rural employment, making use of their “propensity to mobilize skills they already possess” in the food businesses in question.

Based on the above analysis on the profile and motivations of crafts-women of the research area, we note that the great majority of them are people who were born in, and continue to live in, that area. They are of a relatively low level of education, and generally of rural origins. The majority of women started out their business activity with their sole initial assets their empirical knowledge and know-how they acquired inside the family and the local community, their enthusiasm and need for creative self-expression, and personal work often on the edge of overwork. Given the

⁴ Typical product, primarily of mountain areas, widely encountered in pastoral regions of Greece; it is eaten as a soup in winter time.

narrowing of the income of the farm and the wider economic downturn that affects the rural areas (reductions in CAP subsidies, lack of supply of employment or other employment opportunities, unemployment) women decide to become active in artisanal food production to contribute to the family budget.

Traditional know-how and innovation of crafts-women

Almost all the crafts-women (95.9%) declared that their “food products are based on local recipes and processing techniques”. This occurred also in primary processing sectors, including the production of olive oil and wine, where production methods are standardised and simple. Despite this, the women responded positively in the sense that they perceive olive oil and wine as an integral part of their cultural identity, of the rural landscape and of the reputation of their region, while quality is linked to local varieties and to the natural environment (i.e. PDO varietal wine *Agiorgitiko* from Nemea or PGI *Kalamon* olive oil from Laconia). Moreover, the women answered as follows (in order of frequency) to the question “why have you chosen to work in the production of local traditional food products?": “because this is what I could do / I prepared food products at home” (frequency: 47.3%), “because there is demand for the products of our region” (37.1%), “because I have inherited the firm” (33.8%), the latter answers mostly concerning olive oil mills and cheese dairies. This statement of a young woman having recently opened a traditional wood oven bakery is indicative: *‘Athenians spend their holidays here and when they leave they fill their car boot with bread, pasta, garden produce...a bit of everything...they are crazy about local products...I mean, how much can their car take? My cousins living in Athens asked me to bake bread for them so they could take some home...that's because I'm good at baking bread with my own leaven, just like my mother taught me to. So I said to myself, why not set up my own enterprise and produce bread using my recipe? I am going to bake bread in the wood oven without altering the traditional recipe...’*.

It seems therefore that the choice of the local food stuff sector instead of a different line of trade is, in principle, linked to the familiarity of these women to this set of activities, either with culinary culture in the wider meaning of the term and personal cooking experience or, more strictly, with mastering specific food production practices within a family enterprise that they have inherited.

To the question “are you employing a quality label of some sort?” there were relatively few affirmative answers (approximately one in four enterprises). Affirmative answers mainly relate to food safety control/assurance certificates, such as ISO or HACCP, mostly used as promotional tools for their products since according to the women respondents “it’s a market requirement”. The above mentioned industrial type labels are used by certain olive oil mills, wineries, cheese making plants and by some home-made pasta workshops. Geographic origin certifications and organic product certifications are equally few. On the whole, only 20 out of 74 enterprises (27%) have been certified, including HACCP (10 enterprises out of 74), ISO (5),

Bio (5, olive oil and cheese), PDO (2 cases of feta cheese and one case of fir honey from Mainalon mountain) and PDO wine (3 wineries out of 8, despite the fact that all the wineries are in PDO designated area *Agiorgitiko Nemeas*). Although the percentage of enterprises using some sort of quality label is relatively low in the study region, it is worth noting that this is quite representative of most agri-food SMEs in rural Greece (Labrianidis, 2004). One explanation for this attitude would be the lack of information and technical support from institutional actors both at the central level (i.e. failure of the Hellenic Ministry of Rural Development and Foods to organize an information campaign targeting both producers and consumers) and at the regional level (i.e. at the level of the competent Prefecture Directorates, Chambers of Commerce and Industry). In fact, the three major reasons why the women of our survey had not acquired a quality label were the following: “I have not been informed about these labels” (50% of negative answers), “I don’t think they are useful” (24%), “There is no support from public authorities” (12%).

Almost half of the women (47.3%) have declared that they have upgraded their enterprise. These innovations are mainly technical, such as the renewal or modernization of machinery or equipment (i.e. acquisition of stainless steel olive oil or wine tanks, or of a grinding machine for dried fruits used in the preparation of sweets) in order to improve productivity and end-product quality. Sometimes, innovations relate to the products themselves in the sense of differentiation and adaptation to new consumer requirements: Diet pasta (from whole durum wheat) or “coloured” (with vegetable extracts), diabetic sweets, organic products or bread prepared using traditional methods (hand-kneading, natural leaven, baking in a wood-oven). The remaining women (30 cases or 52.7%) that did not upgrade their enterprise declared that: “There was no need for it” (53.8% of negative answers), while a far smaller percentage (10.3%) answered either that “they had no information” or that “there wasn’t enough money for innovations” (10.3%).

Traditional recipes and “attentively selected” raw materials

With regard to production organization and producer-supplier cooperation upstream of the enterprise (integration into the local socio-productive system), our survey shows that mostly primary transformation plants (oil mills, wineries, cheese and honey production plants), being closely linked to one of the basic products, maintain close relations with local farmers and put local farming production to the best possible use.

As regards all the other businesses (sweets, pasta, bread) the origin of basic materials used by crafts-women depends, first and foremost, on the availability of the materials locally. It also depends on the perceived quality of basic materials according to these women, in other words on their effort to meet the health, safety and hygiene requirements and at the same time to preserve the traditional character of the end-product. Typical of this situation is the case of pasta products. There is almost no local production of the main basic material, flour (formerly cultivated on terraces and small shelves) while home-made milk and eggs might not be

available in adequate quantities. Moreover, certain crafts-women believe quality is primarily linked to hygiene and food safety and thus they turn to major agri-food companies for their supplies (i.e. pasteurized milk from industrial dairy plants or eggs from major quality assurance certified poultry plants). There are crafts-women, however, that they understand quality in terms of tradition / product purity and taste and prefer to turn to small-scale production plants and local producers for their supplies (i.e. milk from small dairy units and local animal farmers and eggs from local farmers).

In fact, as regards the production of pasta and of *trahana*, the flour and semolina are in the majority of cases supplied by industrial plants outside the study region- e.g. in Central Greece (11 out of a total of 15 pasta workshops). There are a few crafts-women that purchase flour from a regional mill (2 workshops) or produce their own flour (3 workshops). As regards milk, some workshops produce their own (4 cases) or purchase milk from local animal farmers (6 cases) or local dairy plants (2 cases). On the whole, one in three pasta product workshops exclusively use pasteurized milk from major dairy plants that supply the whole country. According to one of the crafts-women: *'I use pasteurized milk supplied by a major company to avoid concerns related to microbes and diseases'*. Most of the eggs are produced locally, either the crafts-woman herself (7 cases) or by neighbouring farmers (6 cases). One out of three pasta workshops purchases eggs from local poultry plants because they are ISO and HACCP quality certified. In fact, a young crafts-woman from Monemvasia has made the following comment: *'At present, things with the flow plague are so bad that nobody knows what the next day will bring. When I buy my eggs, I go directly to the poultry farm manager at Corinth and ask him to show me the documents proving that everything is fine...I want to stir clear of trouble. I want my pasta to be as pure and safe as the food I'm trying to give to my children'*.

In the case of sweets, marmalades and fruit and vegetable syrup-based preserves (tomato, eggplant PDO "Tsakoniki"), the basic materials are primarily produced locally (family garden or neighbouring farmers for 9 out of 11 workshops). The honey and olive oil used to prepare certain sweets are also locally produced. On the contrary, dried fruits, almonds and walnuts, used in the preparation of traditional "oven-baked" sweets (such as *baklavas*, *rafiolia* and others) are rarely locally produced (one in three cases) since the almond and walnut trees that in the past served family needs and, sometimes, produced a small locally saleable surplus are in a state of near-abandonment. Crafts-women purchase the necessary items from wholesalers, trying to at least find Greek's origin dried fruits, which are considered more tender and tastier.

Although both in the case of pasta products and sweets, the basic materials are often purchased outside the region while, at the same time, many products cannot be regarded as local specialties from the point of view of the recipe or production technique used (flour gruel and *trahanas*, marmalades and syrup-based fruit preserves, *baklavas* and others) since the same recipes or products are present all over the Greek countryside, when asked "why do you personally think these

products are labeled as local or traditional?", the crafts-women gave the following answers: *'they are considered local and traditional because the recipes and production practices have been bequeathed to us by our mothers and grand-mothers, because they are home-made and the ingredients used are pure, without preserving agents or additives'*. For all of the above mentioned reasons, crafts-women consider their products traditional and claim that this is obvious *'not only upon tasting them but also upon looking at them'*.

To the question regarding the criteria used to choose their suppliers, the three major criteria are: "The good quality of the supplied basic materials" (frequency 81.1%), "basic material prices" (43.2%) and "local origin" (25.7%). It seems that quality and local origin are perceived as determinant parameters for the production of "pure" and "traditional" products that are competitive in an informed consumer market.

In the context of this research linking the notions of local and traditional to that of quality, it is interesting to mention that during the summer (from June to September) many extended village households use local pasta workshops to produce their "annual stock of pasta and *trahana*" using basic materials of their choice. In fact, based on the crafts-women's answers, 13 out of 15 workshops produce various types of pasta, as well as *trahana* upon order, thus serving the needs of 50 to 1,000 households per workshop. On the one hand, rural women seem to exploit the facilities and equipment of these workshops to produce their own food products with the support of the owner. This is a comment made by an elderly woman: *'Young girls want to have nothing to do with it...and we, elderly women, are too old, we suffer from arthritis and cannot knead anymore because our hands ache... Back in the good old times things were different...we gathered one day at this house, the next at the other and we worked together...we had fun and time passed very quickly...'*. On the other hand, there are women originating from the area that return for the holidays and seize the opportunity to produce "their own pasta and *trahana*" to take and cook at home in the city during the winter as a village specialty. The main reasons pushing these women to produce their "like in the old times" food products are quality assurance, as well as a longing for life as it was in the past, in the countryside. This intensive small-scale production for private consumption, linked to old rural life collective traditions and daily family nutritional needs, indicates the willingness of women originating from the study area to preserve the "traditional tastes of home" as a souvenir of their childhood years at the village and of an idealized rural world giving emphasis to the domestic origin of these products: "consumed by our parents". Urban women visiting the village are incentivized by the urge to discover a new culinary culture and, at the same time, participate in the process of "making with their own hands" the food of their families. This mobilization should be interpreted using the principle of the "return to a healthy way of eating" frequently synonymous with the recently re-discovered in Greece (and not only there) Mediterranean diet.

The concepts of “local” and “traditional” as perceived by crafts-women

The concepts of local and traditional, widely used in everyday discourse both among producers and among consumers, continue to remain vague, thus confusing and even frustrating consumers. According to C.de Sainte Marie and E.Valceschini (1996: 30), a definition of the “traditional character” concept is actually missing from European Regulations using it (IGP, Traditional Specialty Guaranteed). This ambiguity is questionable to the extent that “confusion paves the way for manipulation and fraud”.

As far as the crafts-women of our study are concerned, the difficulty of defining the terms local and traditional due to the conflict between two different perceptions of quality is obvious: Preserve the distinctive taste of local traditional old-time products or introduce quality assurance norms in order to promote the standardization of these products. Along these lines, would pasta products continue to be “traditional” if pasteurized milk from a major agri-food company was used in their preparation in order to guarantee health quality? What if machines were used to knead cut and dry pasta? Would these production plants maintain or lose their “traditional” image? Would traditional “local” almond-based sweets lose their quality if almonds from other regions were used since almond trees have disappeared at the regional level? The majority of crafts-women have no doubts about it since the recipes used to prepare these products have been “bequeathed to them by their mothers and grand-mothers”, the ingredients used are attentively “controlled and selected” by the crafts-women themselves (origin, freshness, etc.) and the preparation process is manual (this was notably mentioned by bread and sweet makers) or, at least, at small-scale. The “home-made” quality of the products marketed by these women enables them to preserve their authenticity. They perceive their products as the embodiment of inherited local traditions even if some techniques have evolved to facilitate work and improve quality and performance or some ingredients are no longer locally supplied.

In fact, answers to the question “what is the meaning of the term ‘local product’ for you?” vary depending on the perceived geographic scale which in itself reflects the existence of both proximity and familiarity links and administrative limits (village, municipality, department): ‘A local product is a product produced here, around me, in the village’, ‘is produced in the villages of the region of Mani’, ‘is produced here and, generally, in Laconia [the department]...for example we produce nougats in our village and all over Laconia...’. In all these cases, according to the stereotype answers given by the women, a tasting of local products readily reveals their “superior quality”: ‘A local product has a distinctive taste’.

In answering the question “what is the meaning of ‘traditional product’ for you?” the women focused on the transmission of know-how and family skills: ‘traditional is that which preserves tradition. A sweet, “samousas” for example prepared by my mother and now by me and which is typical of our region...is traditional’, ‘when I use the word traditional I mean something that is going from one generation to the next, that somehow perpetuates tradition, where the ingredients, the quality and taste do

not change with time...and thus it becomes part of our tradition’. Answers also focus on ingredient quality, highlighting their “purity”, “freshness” and “home-made” character: ‘I prepare bread with my own leaven, as taught by my mother, and not with market leaven and such, this bread makes you patient...home-made leaven does not have the force of leaven purchased at a shop’, ‘traditional means traditionally prepared...with pure and fresh ingredients not processed like powder milk and powdered eggs...one should use fresh milk and eggs and mill-ground flour’. The appearance, taste and smell of traditional products confirm their superior quality: ‘I can tell a traditional product, we used to eat them when we were children and we cherish childhood memories...’, ‘traditional is a product that brings back tastes and smells of the “good old times”...leaven, wood used to bake bread, if you sit here from morning to noon you’re going to hear many touching remarks like ‘this smell reminds me of my village, my grand-mother when she baked her bread’’, ‘I can tell by looking at it, shepherd-made cheese has all its butter...’.

Tradition is rooted on local know-how adapted and transmitted although, according to Sainte-Marie and Valsechini (1996: 28), this implies the ability to vary or even to create based on a common, shared and age-old practice. In fact, innovations introduced by Peloponnesian crafts-women with the objective of differentiating / improving the quality of their products should be interpreted as efforts to evolve and/or adapt to market requirements. Thus, marketing vegetable-extract coloured pasta and *trahana*, herb-scented olive oil, sweets for diabetic, organic cheese... is a response to recent requirements for wholesome and healthy products.

The crafts-women's answers highlight the fact that the concepts of “local” and “traditional” evolve in tandem with consumer demands, perceptions and expectations in a given socio-cultural and economic context. The term “local” could be extended including the department's boundaries or even the whole country, as in the case of dried fruits used in certain sweets, which, given the absence of local production, are acceptable as long as they are Greek. At the same time, the term “traditional” includes elements of progress. The debate regarding tradition involves two opposing perceptions of progress according to the reflections on the bearings of qualification of Sainte-Marie and Valsechini (op.cit: 30). Progress implies evolution in the sense of technical innovation (i.e. the introduction of the almond grinder or pasta drier) or improvement of already existing practices, know-how and habits (i.e. produce sweets for diabetics). The evolution / adaptation of the concepts of local and traditional also implies that the recognition of quality, as a social construction, is a process that in addition to products, involves the interaction of the actors involved in the production, purchase, sale and consumption of these products (Casabianca & Valceschini, 1996; Hubert, 2001: 208-209).

CONCLUSION

Food products prepared by women in the Peloponnese are generally met in the Greek countryside and constitute “old-time” daily nutrition basics produced in

the past by rural households. Despite this, even if these traditional / local products are not typical of a locality in the strict sense of uniqueness linked to the distinctive characteristics of the place of production, they have special features since they are the expression of dietary traditions and local know-how. They are traditional products to the extent that they transmit local culinary practices, dietary habits and daily customs in their production region at the time they were important components of farming families' diet.

Nowadays, local territories (re)discover their cultural identity in an effort to promote their specificities, including their agri-food products in order to differentiate themselves from other territories and stimulate local economy: The concept of "local" constitutes in fact a social construction of scale (Hinrichs, 2003). These initiatives, however, even if they are lead and supported by a Project Leader, as is the case in the Peloponnese, are mostly individual and not integrated into a consistent territorial project. In this context, the labels of these micro-firms use the term "traditional" to define their products because of the pure basic ingredients and inherited recipes of home traditions. The absence of collective actions aiming at claiming/ preserving any locally distinctive agri-food products (identification of the product, processes and best practices, etc.) results in various types of local products mainly dependent on how crafts-women perceive themselves quality: the range varies from more "small-scale industrial type" products prepared by women mainly focused on health and product safety to more "domestic hand-made" products preferred by those attached to local tradition and defending the authenticity of "superior taste".

In any case the practical know-how, skill, enthusiasm and personal commitment of these craft-women generate revenue thus fulfilling expectations and successfully coping with family projects. Empirical research results have, moreover, demonstrated that these enterprises are not fragile purely conjecture-related ventures (European grants, inheritance / succession). On the contrary, in their majority they are flexible and dynamic businesses capable of adapting themselves and responding to consumer market needs (Anthopoulou, 2008).

The movement for the renewal of local traditional productions demonstrates, on the other hand, that there is specific demand for these products that target various types of selective consumers: Those looking for pure and healthy products for themselves and their family, those wishing to return to their rural roots or on the look-out for a cultural reference and those for whom consuming distinctive products is a mark of prestige and social status. These consumers interpret quality, in addition to regulatory criteria (many actually ignore the existence of labels such as PGI and PDO) by the care given to "home-made" preparation processes, to the nature of the "attentively selected" basic materials and to health and well-being features frequently linked to the Mediterranean diet. All these characteristics are briefly mentioned on the product label. Both natives and simple village visitors do their shopping locally, discuss and observe the crafts-woman at work, appreciate the products by looking, touching and smelling them and thus feel more confident as consumers; in its representations, it is a traditional product made locally

with the care of the craftswoman. The crafts-woman sells "the local", "the traditional", and the "rural idyll" so highly appreciated by consumers that purchase them in a context of confidence and familiarity where the benchmarks in the construction of quality are related to the place of manufacture, the time or even the personal contact with the producer /salesperson. This can range from folklore to a real interest of savvy consumers seeking for authentic traditional food products: pure, healthy and tasty. All things considered, food locally produced by crafts-women with or without all raw materials of local provenance (but fresh and attentively selected) and using inherited family recipes (even if this traditional knowledge is to be met with some nuances all over the Greek countryside and if some manufacturing processes are mechanized) reflect the "home-made" character referring to "local, traditional" products. According to multiple references in the European literature on quality benchmarks, the concepts of "local" and "traditional" are socially constructed. The link to the place and the tradition exists only through the perceptions and values that consumers attach them. Seeing that both nutrition and local/traditional - linked perceptions are constantly modified and adapted, the preservation and replication of different forms of agro-alimentary heritage requires the ability to both safeguard and innovate knowledge and procedures while preserving the link to the locality of origin.

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