

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

Mountain farming has been viewed since long as an agricultural activity that is under considerable pressure due to limited production scope and productivity compared to more favourable regions. While in the past the resulting income gap of farmers has led to compensation policies, more recently integrative consideration and strategies to develop specific product potential and quality have been increasingly elaborated. One approach to value specifically the uniqueness of mountain contexts and socio-cultural experience is the recognition of particular local and regional assets and shaping of appropriate origin and high-quality based labels, based on various labelling initiatives, like the public quality signs (geographical indications, or the European “mountain origin”, organic food), or private initiatives, like the 100% local (as for example implemented in the Valposchiavo in Switzerland). “Mountain origin” public labelling has been elaborated over the past two decades, not least through the commitment of mountain stakeholders, particularly supported by EUROMONTANA and a widely shared spirit of mountain actors that alpine laboratories of transitions might turn to ‘models’ of sustainable food systems.

The cross-sectoral view and impacts on local development issues have raised interest for these strategies of various ways of product differentiations in countries that are rethinking their mountain development concepts and striving for a holistic strategic approach (e.g. Georgia, Romania, Cyprus, Morocco etc.). Labelling the products (i.e. with the ‘mountain origin’ public label) can be considered not just an opportunity for market elaboration, linking products to unique basis of production, but also provide important potential for raising attractiveness of mountain areas as destination areas for tourism and changing the narrative of place concepts. This “meaning of the places” is a crucial aspect for economic performance, awareness of the need to preserve ecological quality and has the power to contribute to processes of territorial identity shaping.

The paper will discuss the key conditions for such kind of strategies, based on studies assessing the contribution of local culture to elaborating various mountain products in Alpine contexts (e.g. Switzerland and Austria) and emerging initiatives to discuss the potential of territorial branding of mountain products (e.g. in non-European mountain ranges like Caucasus) for narratives enabling and enhancing such place-sensitive strategies.