



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI  
STUDI DI TORINO

# Development of a marginal area through the valorization of black truffle and creation of a voluntary land owner association



Simone Blanc, Filippo Brun, Angela Mosso

E-mail: [simone.blanc@unito.it](mailto:simone.blanc@unito.it)

Department of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences - University of Turin

This work describes a valorization process in a marginal territory of Italy, where the recovery of black truffle process and the setting up of a landowner association, allowed to revive a local and sustainable supply chain, through the development of a traditional resource able to produce significant impacts, both on the local economy and on the land management

The purpose is to describe the study-case of Grana Valley producers, analyzing the distinctive aspects and evaluating its reproducibility in similar conditions, which are typical of rural European lands

## The territorial frame

Valle Grana is a rural territory where the recovery of **natural truffle trees** and the planting of new ones allowed to revive a **local and sustainable supply chain**, through the development of a traditional resource (Grana Valley is one of the few Piedmont areas suited for the production of black truffle). This happened thanks to the initiative of several **local producers** that took part in a "Interreg" research project with a real conviction, by acting as catalyst for a wider development. Such successfully activity has brought to the recent setting up of a "**landowner association**", based on voluntary agreements among private owners, with participation and support of the municipality

The study area is a mountain valley, with 9 municipalities and 20,000 inhabitants, landlocked and with a territory marked by several negative characteristics of marginality, but with high quality environmental resources. The main local economic activity is livestock and the production of a prized DOP cheese



The restoration of natural truffle trees has been gradually structured around a **network of relationships** between a growing number of involved actors. This process of "**active territoriality**" was started by several dynamic actors and extended to the remaining players of the area, generating an innovative network that try to expand itself in a non-competitive frame, to the advantage of the entire community



### Which is the most suitable structure for managing rural areas?

In rural areas the land is extremely divided, often uncultivated and abandoned. Sometimes, the main problem is find the owners. More than fifty years of failures show that land consolidation tools, such as purchase, exchange and rent, cannot be used, due to high costs of transactions and related operations

High costs are not compatible with the low profitability of marginal land and public incentives are often necessary to start-up of any economic activity

In Italy, at present, kinds of **collective management** can be realized through the constitution of "consortia" (e.g. consortia of management, c. of land reclaim) based on Civil Code, or on forest law (RdL. 3267/1923), or on "mountain law" (L. 991/1952)

This organizations, however, requires **considerable establishment costs** which can only be faced by subjects with strong and structured interests. Nevertheless, new forms of associations are also useful for Italian owners, such as the "voluntary land owner associations" among owners of abandoned land

## The study-case

Since 2003, the "Valle Grana Truffle Growers Association" (<http://www.tartufovallegrana.com/home.html>) has realized 7.5 ha of truffle plantation (1900 mycorrhized-plants). According to our assessments, these plantations are able to adequately remunerate the investment, giving rise to good economic results in the medium – long term. Ten years later, a "landowner association" was founded by the same actors, involving other 64 owners, for a total of 100 hectares, which are being recovered from abandoned pastures. The private owners have no direct economic incomes, but they participate in a project aimed at valorizing their territory, with long term spillovers

A **voluntary land owner associations** is primarily devoted to the owners of a well-defined territory, may be open to all people who share its statutory objectives; it is characterized by a democratic structure and, in particular, each member has the same rights (e.g. one person, one vote). In the early years of its life, incomes (such as those obtained from renting land) are reinvested to improve properties environment and structures and the association doesn't have any profit. In the follow, economic activities may assume greater importance, needing, as a consequence, changes in the administrative structure

## Discussion

The valorization action has started thanks to a new territorial strategy, setting up black truffle plantations and taking care, in the same time, of surrounding marginal lands in a non-competitive frame. The success has represented the background for the creation of a voluntary land owner association which takes care of about 100 hectares of pastures

To effectively overcome the marginalization it is necessary to set-up an integrated and **long-lasting project**, including the **participation** of numerous economic operators and with the support of **local governments**

This is what happened in Grana Valley, where, thanks to the truffle, since 2003 it has been possible to overcome some structural handicaps, turning them into a strength



from: www.sustainability-lab.net



from: www.conipiediperterra.com

Which are the key ingredients for the success of the recipe? 1) A local product, which is not yet sufficiently developed and able to generate a multisectoral integration in supply chain. 2) The presence of a nucleus of dynamic actors. 3) A collaborative frame that encourages start-up or, at least, do not penalize it. **Specificity, territorial cohesion and identity** are the key words to develop processes based on the "**valorization of the differences**"

Given the abundance of local products and of human resources, there are all the conditions to replicate the success achieved in Valle Grana. According to this view, rural areas should become more integrated with the urban nodes, taking advantage of the many strengths (quantity and quality of resources, social security, cultural identity, the possibility of a sustainable development), which make them strategic territories