MOVING
MOuntain Valorisation through INterconnectedness and Green growth

Policy Brief

NORTHERN APENNINES
Chestnut flour

Photo credit: Simone Batini

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 862739. The content of this document does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely with the author(s).

MOVING
MOuntain Valorisation through INterconnectedness and Green growth

Chestnut flour "Northern Apennines"

Tarek Allali and Michele Moretti

Summary

The chestnut flour value chain represents probably the most valuable heritage for communities in the Northern Apennines. This document summarises a few key local and European policies that have impacted the chestnut flour value chain and its surrounding territory. Additionally, we report a series of recommendations that emerged from the MOVING project. These recommendations were gathered from various stakeholders involved throughout the different phases of the project, that should be considered in future policies.
The recommendations are clustered according to their expected application up to the year 2050. They emphasise the preservation of this heritage through local communities' involvement, stakeholders' diversity, efficient knowledge sharing, and supporting local wellbeing.

Figure 10: Two processors inside a traditional drying building (metato), preparing dry chestnut for grinding.

Key Policy Messages

- ☞ Local farmers shall have a key role in preserving the territory: 'Custodians of the territory.
- ☞ Stakeholder diversity is crucial, more involvement of the regional parc is needed.

1. *More of brown gemstones than ordinary chestnuts – A Tuscan heritage and a local pride:*

The very steep landscape in the MRR is crossed by a dense network of water streams passing through a diverse Mediterranean vegetation, where forests and shrubs (e.g., pine, oak, chestnut, etc.) occupy a large part of the territory.

It is noteworthy that despite the existence of more profitable activities (i.e., marble business and seaside tourism), people are still being engaged in the chestnut flour value chain. Their attachment to this activity in particular expresses their belief that chestnut represents a pillar for their identity, considering that the region has a long tradition with chestnut and related activities that dates to the 11th century.

2. *Value chain contribution to resilience and sustainability*

The Chestnut flour value chain can contribute to the resilience and sustainability of the Northern Apennines in various ways. Form the economic perspective, the value

chain represents an additional source of income for local communities, especially for those relying on small scale agricultural activities. Moreover, involving individuals along the different stages of the value chain provide job opportunities; preventing population exodus, which is found as a major threat to the territory.

From the environmental perspective, cultivating and preserving chestnut trees prevent soil erosion, enrich biodiversity, and strengthen soil health. Additionally, the chestnut flour value chain contributes significantly to carbon sequestration and water retention, particularly at the production stage.

Regarding the social dimension, the chestnut flour value chain in the Northern Apennines can foster community cohesion and collaboration during crisis. It is to be highlighted that the practices conducted along the chain represent a very valuable cultural heritage and traditional knowledge that must be protected. For centuries, chestnut flour has been providing a locally produced nutritious staple food benefiting a range of vulnerable consumers (i.e., gluten intolerant). Therefore, chestnut flour could be an optimal solution contributing to food security.

3. Policy experiences

The Tuscany Region has been an arena to implement different European policies. For instance, the 'Cohesion Policy' implemented through the European Structural and Investment funds (ESIF)[1] showed significant returns, especially in terms of growth and employment.

At the Regional level, the 'Custodians of territory'[2] policy, which is a collaborative initiative aiming at improving territorial sustainability mainly through the direct engagement of local communities. It is based on agreements between farmers and local authorities to provide environmental services (e.g., biodiversity conservation). The core idea of the policy is to provide farmers with payments for maintaining and improving the natural resources in the area. In the MRR and for the chestnut four value chain, this policy is perceived as a successful experience for fostering a sense of community and responsibility, preserving the chestnut groves, protecting the environment, and enhancing the sustainability of the MRR.

4. Recommendation for future policies

Based on the outcomes that emerged from the exhaustive discussions and meetings throughout the MOVING project, we address here a series of recommendation considering the economic, environmental, and social aspects. The suggested recommendations aim at fostering the sustainability and resilience of the Northern Apennines mountains in Central Italy.

For the short term, policies should consider new incentives' frameworks targeting depopulated mountain areas. Furthermore, in future policies is highly recommended to integrate trainings, technical assistance, and extension workshops for farmers and their organizations (e.g., associations, cooperatives) to ensure knowledge sharing and information flows.

For the medium term, it is required to promote and assist small-scale farms

emphasising agroecological practices, and quality standards focusing on crops such as chestnut. Additionally, it would be valuable to establish context-based communities for rural development, emphasising sustainability and quality of life.

In the long-term horizon, future policies are required to consider lowering taxes for mountain residents attempting to boost sustainable entrepreneurship initiatives. Moreover, new frameworks shall be applied to common resources management by local communities (water, pasture, forest, etc.). Stakeholders' diversity and engagement shall be encouraged, for this the 'Regional Apuan Alps Park' must be given a primary role in promoting and supporting the local community engagement.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all the stakeholders who took part and actively contributed through the activities related to the MOVING project within the MAP of the Northern Apennines.

Reference

[1] https://sfe.lnl.infn.it/the-european-structural-and-investment-funds-esif-2021-2027/

[2] https://open.toscana.it/web/custodi-del-territorio

Authors

Tarek Allali

tarek.allali@phd.unipi.it

Michele Moretti

michele.moretti@agr.unipi.it