



Economic analysis of the traditional cultural vineyard landscapes in Italy



Biancamaria Torquati^{*}, Giulia Giacchè, Sonia Venanzi

Department of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science, Borgo XX Giugno 74, 06121 Perugia, Italy

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ABSTRACT

The Traditional Cultural Landscapes (TCLs) have been studied from different points of view since the pioneering work of Antrop (1997). The aim of this study is to analyze the TCLs from a bottom-up perspective, focussing on the internal organization of a number of farms and looking at technical and economical characteristics, and also at social and cultural aspects. The focus is on Traditional Cultural Vineyard Landscape (TCVL) because the viticulture sector is the one most integrated with the kind of tourism that is interested in quality food products associated with a specific place of origin, and also the sector that, more than others, has responded to market changes by increasing the appeal of their products. Accordingly, the economic performance of three Italian winemaking farms was analyzed by means of cost-based method to explore: the cost of restoring a TCVL; the cost of producing the grape and the wine; the economic profitability of the investment in the TCVL; the relationship between entrepreneurial strategies and the use of landscape in a functional perspective. The positive financial results achieved by these farms in different part of Italy suggest that the financial success or failure of an investment in landscape is not determined by the socio-economic context but by the ability of the farm to differentiate its product, gaining a competitive advantage by offering customers greater value. The key issue is not the contrast between those who support the costs of landscape preservation (vineyard owners) and those who reap its benefits (the community as a whole), but rather in the way in which the added value resulting from preservation of the landscape is being obtained and distributed. The results demonstrates that landscape preservation can be a driving force for improvements in farm management and farm income but it is still necessary enlarge the duty to contribute to their preservation improving government measures for the restoration and preservation of the TCLs, and consumer awareness about the importance of products from these areas with TCLs.

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1. Introduction

The conservation of traditional cultural landscapes (TCLs) has been extensively discussed during the past decade and is an issue of growing importance (Cullotta and Barbera, 2011).

In the literature about landscape, the terms 'cultural' and 'traditional' take on slightly different meanings. Cultural landscapes are cultural properties formed by the "combined works of nature and of man" (Unesco, 1994; Mitchel et al., 2009) through long-term interaction between humans and nature, while traditional landscapes have long histories of ongoing activity and land-

management by farmers, with slow rates of change that respect the environment (Antrop, 1997, 2005). According to Moran (2005) both words stress the importance of landscape as a social construct.

In the present paper, inspired by the pioneering work of Emilio Sereni (1961), we intend to approach the study of the agrarian landscape from a bottom-up perspective, focussing on the internal organization of a number of farms and looking not only at technical and economical characteristics, but also at social and cultural aspects. We decided to focus on viticulture because this agricultural sector is the one most integrated with the kind of tourism that is interested in quality food products associated with a specific place of origin, and also the sector that, more than others, has responded to market changes by increasing the appeal of their products rather than cutting production costs.

The goal of our study was to assess the economic performance of three Italian winemaking farms that have restored traditional

^{*} Corresponding author. Current address: Department of Economic and Food Science, Borgo XX Giugno 74, 06121 Perugia, Italy.

E-mail address: bianca.torquati@unipg.it (B. Torquati).

cultural vineyards and produce quality wines. We explored, in particular: 1) the cost of restoring a traditional cultural vineyard landscape (TCVL); 2) the cost of producing the grape and the wine; 3) the economic profitability of the investment in the TCVL; 4) the relationship between entrepreneurial strategies and the use of landscape in a functional perspective.

This paper is structured as follows: after this introduction, the second section explores the literature on traditional cultural landscapes and describes the most significant aspects of the gradual simplification of the Italian vineyard landscape and the new interest in traditional vineyards arising among certain types of farming businesses. The third part reports our methods of data collection and analysis. The fourth part presents the case studies. The paper continues with the presentation of results in the fifth part that are discussed in the sixth section following by some conclusions in the seventh and last part of the study.

2. Traditional cultural landscapes (TCLs)

The TCLs were largely stable until the mid-twentieth century in Mediterranean countries (Antrop, 2005; Cullotta and Barbera, 2011) that is, as long as agriculture provided subsistence for farm families who worked the fields. Subsequently the emergence of the modern agricultural system, the exodus from the countryside, the market economy, large-scale production, and high mechanization caused a progressive reduction of TCLs, especially in the second half of the twentieth century.

Since the pioneering work of Antrop (1997) about the concept and definition of traditional landscape, TCLs have been studied from different points of view, such as from a cultural perspective, or with an interest in biodiversity and habitats, as places to work and to live, from the recreational perspective, as a means of a livelihood, and as an eating landscape. In 2005, the same author wondered how the values of past landscapes can be integrated with the future demands and needs of society characterized by an ongoing urbanization and globalization (Antrop, 2005).

The polarization of town and country typical of industrial societies has been weakening over the past few decades with the emergence of the “new socio-economic development area”, neither town nor country, in which the various functions of industrial and post-industrial society are performed (Merlo, 1995). Currently, experts tend to think of the urban and the rural as related, and emphasize society's new attitude towards the countryside, generally associated with positive values such as beauty, peacefulness, a healthy environment, wholesome and delicious food true to local traditions, and positive social interactions (Torquati and Giacchè, 2010). This new context opens up new opportunities for farmers as a result of the combined demand for a quality environment and quality food products. More specifically, there is a growing consumer interest in enjoying healthy and traditional foods in the context of beautiful landscapes, rural tourism, recreational activities and visits to production facilities. Accordingly, the structural and functional confines of the farming business have become less defined and more complex than in the past. Within this “new socio-economic area”, farms are resuming their historical leadership in local economies by offering services and goods that make the most of natural, historical and cultural resources, while respecting them. A number of farms have begun to promote their products and their image using the natural and historical assets of the local agricultural landscape, especially in the hilly areas of south-central Italy, where smallholding was the dominant form of property.

Although there is extensive literature on the TCLs in general, few studies have been done to examine the affected farms in terms of their management practices and potential income. Notable exceptions are two works on Protected landscapes (PLs). In particular

Mittenzeweï et al. (2010) studied the effects of PL on management and income of the farms involved in Norway, and Nautiyal and Kächele (2007) studied long-term changes in farm management in Himalayan protected areas.

Some authors have analyzed the importance of traditional landscapes as a driver of rural development (Paquette and Domon, 2003; Domon, 2011; Agnoletti, 2013) while Mettepenningen et al. (2012) explored the synergies between place branding and agricultural landscape management as a rural development practice. Buijs et al. (2006) and Mittenzeweï et al. (2010) emphasized the link between traditionally managed landscape elements and attractive landscape for recreation, peaceful relaxation, and biological diversity, viewed as leisure commodities.

Several researchers have analyzed the ecological implications of traditional management and evaluated its sustainability in different vineyard systems (Altieri and Nicholls, 2002; Abbona et al., 2007), and the implications for biodiversity and sustainable management of traditional landscape in a mountain area (Agnoletti, 2007). Other authors have studied the role of indigenous and local communities in managing and conserving the traditional agricultural landscapes (Tempesta, 2010; Tempesta et al., 2010; Brown and Kothari, 2011).

Making the most of the landscape requires entrepreneurs who combine efficiency with a creative capacity for innovation, as seen in figures like Schumpeter's innovative entrepreneur (Schumpeter, 1971), Knight's risk-taker (Knight, 1921) or Cole's decision-maker (Cole, 1959) that is, entrepreneurs with an instinctive ability to innovate and sense new market opportunities, combined with skills in risk evaluation and decision-making who thus succeed in exploiting emerging markets. They must also be aware of external factors (Corno, 1995) in order to identify new opportunities. An ability to exploit new opportunities, however, does not necessarily ensure financial success (Viaggi, 2012). Success is determined by the overall project, which is informed by the business mission in its entirety.

The restoration of TCL in rural areas can be an opportunity for farmers if it is combined with innovative entrepreneurship aiming at restoring aspects of the landscape in a functional perspective. By functional perspective, we mean the recreation of the productive value of historical forms, and of their role in protecting the environment and biodiversity in ways that stimulate local economies. The restoration of the TCL must go beyond the mere preservation of landscape, rediscovering the combined work between nature and man and the positive effects on the environment.

2.1. Traditional cultural vineyard landscapes (TCVLs) in Italy

Starting in the 1950s, there has been a gradual transformation of the Italian viticultural landscape, notably as regards cultivation methods, vine-training systems, and the management and geographical location of vineyards. In the past, each region had its own distinctive traditional method, such as pergolas in the Trentino region, the *piantata* and the *vite maritata* (or *alberata*) in Tuscany, Umbria and Emilia (the latter two involving the training of vines on trees) and the *vite ad alberello* (bush-vine system) in southern Italy. Nowadays, vine training has become increasingly simplified and standardized, and mechanization is steadily increasing. Vineyards are mostly trained on espaliers because these are better suited to mechanization. New vineyards show closer plant spacing, and even in the old vineyards replanting is carried out to increase density. The wooden stakes used for trellising, common till the end of the 1970s, have been gradually replaced by concrete ones (in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in espalier vineyards) and later by metal ones. The choice was due both to the cost of posts and to production requirements. The gradual mechanization of vineyards and the

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