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Assessing the resilience of a regional food system: the case of ValPoschiavo

ValPoschiavo is a remote valley of the eastern Swiss alps, populated by 4'500 inhabitants. Its geographical isolation has led to a linguistic and cultural isolation, being one of the few Italian speaking valleys in the mostly German-speaking canton of Graubünden. Over the recent years and thanks to the dynamism of its protagonists, ValPoschiavo has nevertheless managed to build its regional resilience through a strategy centered around its food system. This work explores how a regional agri-food strategy may enhance the socio-ecological resilience of a mountain region. We follow Holling & Gunderson's definition (2001) of a Social-Ecological System (SES) resilience: "the capacity of a system to undergo disturbance and maintain its functions and controls", by considering the region and its sectors as a SES. After having interviewed fifteen key actors of the valley's food system, we discuss the existing links between regional resilience and the localness of the agri-food sector.

The geographical isolation of ValPoschiavo led to the development of a unique identity and specificities on which the strategy relies. In the 2000's the valley has taken steps to be declared, alongside the local railway, as a UNESCO World Site Heritage. This candidacy led the protagonists of the valley to elaborate a common development strategy: 100% Bio. This strategy, aimed at preserving the landscape and the biodiversity by reaching 100% of organic farming in the valley. Few years later, the agriculture strategy has been extended to the whole regional food system with the creation, in 2017, of the 100% Bio ValPoschiavo regional development project. This project, built on a tourism-gastronomy-agriculture nexus, has strongly fostered the attractiveness of the valley and led to the creation of 100% ValPoschiavo label.

The valley's community of actors has been able to organize itself to develop a coherent project centered around its agri-food system which helped fostering the valley attractiveness, economy, biodiversity and life quality. ValPoschiavo has also learnt from its vulnerabilities and adapted to transform them into assets leading to building buffer capacities in several fields (financial, social, human, physical and natural) and to recovering a high functional and response diversity in agriculture, ValPoschiavo has developed, through its agri-food strategy, the key characteristics that, according to (Carpenter et al., 2001), make a SES resilient.

Provided a strong preexisting cultural identity and social cohesion, the promotion of a more localized agri-food system appears to be a powerful strategy to enhance the resilience of particular mountain regions

Bibliographic references

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