

Wine and Its Legality—A Survey to Know the Consumer Opinions on the Activities of Sicilian Wine Companies Operating on Lands Confiscated from the Mafia

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Abstract: The current guidelines of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy face the agricultural sector in the position of the backbone for the economic development of rural areas and regions with difficult economic differentiation. The EU Common Agricultural Policy defines agriculture as “multifunctional” and among the different roles and functions expected, there is also the “social function”, defined as the ability that the farm has to generate services with respect to a population with risk of social exclusion. This paper investigated all the agricultural initiatives with social impacts that were carried in the lands confiscated from the organized crime (called mafia), mainly in the South of Italy and especially in Sicily. Through an Italian law, these lands could be used with social purposes by a particular kind of associations which might exercise an agricultural activity with the aim to produce food products, sell them in the market and offer employment opportunities in the agricultural sector. In particular, in Sicily, the activity of the “Social Cooperative Placido Rizzotto-Libera Terra” and its winery “Cantina Centopassi” which received honors and awards for its production of wine obtained from the earliest harvests and for its social work in that territory were well known. This work, which was part of a much broader study on “wine and legality”, aimed to know the opinion of Sicilian wine consumers and their knowledge about this topic with particular reference to the Cantina Centopassi.

Key words: Social agriculture, multifunctionality, consumer behavior, systematic sampling, stratification.

1. Introduction

In the European Union, since the mid-90s with the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the term agriculture was joined to that of multifunctionality as stated in the second pillar of the CAP. In fact agricultural sector was placed in front of new challenges, with a role of backbone for the economy of all rural areas with low capacity to achieve economic diversification.

Actually, with the multifunctionality, the agricultural sector is no longer considered the one which only produces food goods, but also it has new and different functions, including those of preserving the environment and the rural landscape and

supporting the socio-economic development of rural areas through the creation of employment opportunities.

In particular, among the different aspects provided by the multifunctional role of agriculture, the social function [1] is the one that has spread and established itself more and more, especially in recent years in Sicily, where, as social, it means the ability of the farm to generate services to a population considered at risk of social exclusion [2].

In this regard, all the initiatives for agricultural purposes that are pursued, mainly in the South of Italy and especially in Sicily, in those lands confiscated from organized crime (the so-called mafia) are believed to be very interesting. In fact, just thanks to the Italian law n.109/1996 it is permitted to particular legal entities (cooperatives, associations, non-profit,

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etc.) the use [3, 4] with social purposes of all the assets and properties confiscated from organized crime, among which also included the agricultural lands that, otherwise, would remain inevitably abandoned¹. Instead, thanks to the application of this law, these legal entities can exercise an agricultural activity aimed, in addition to food production regularly put on the market, also to offer employment in the agricultural sector [2].

In this context, the activity of the social company (cooperative) “Placido Rizzotto-Libera Terra” in Sicily is well-known. It was founded in 2001 within the project “Libera Terra”², promoted by the “Libera”³ and the prefect of Palermo and, through a contract of loan for use, it got into management and now it cultivates over 150 hectares of land confiscated from the mafia that fall in some municipalities of the Province of Palermo. Inspired by the principles of solidarity and legality, the company Cooperativa Placido Rizzotto⁴ performs an agricultural activity [5], and at the same time, encourages the employment of

disadvantaged people living in those areas creating new employment opportunities [6].

Within the company Cooperativa Placido Rizzotto Cantina Centopassi⁵, whose wine production is also carried out according to the criteria of respect for environment and quality, which the wine industry today requires, has arisen. The winery (Cantina Centopassi) from the early harvests has won prizes and awards from the major magazines, trade shows and wine guides.

In this work, which is part of a much broader study on wine and legality, it aims to know the opinion⁶ of Sicilian wine consumer on this topic through a survey.

In particular, through interviews to a sample of consumers aged between 21 years and 50 years, the authors wanted to know their current information and their opinions with respect to the particular business activities [7, 8] of the association “Libera”, with particular reference to the Cantina Centopassi and the quality of the wines produced by it. In fact, the choices of purchase and consumption behavior can be a valuable tool to observe and interpret the changes of a society that, now more than ever, is constantly evolving.

With regard to the group of the youngest consumers (21-30 years old), the main objective was to learn about their behavior and attitude towards business decisions avowedly anti-mafia, to assess whether the possible purchase of these special wines was a conscious choice or just a phenomenon linked to a current market trend. In addition, the opportunity to observe purposeful young people’s free from mafia-type constrains, would be an important factor for themselves and a possible driver to entrepreneurial activities in this field, thus creating jobs in a legal context. While, as far as the adult consumers (41-50 years old class), it was considered that it was also interesting to know their opinions and attitudes, because, being probably involved in a stable work

¹Companies confiscated from organized crime are spread over the whole Italian territory, but with a strong concentration in Sicily. 18% of the confiscated goods are farmland and 6% of the confiscated companies work in the agricultural sector and in particular in the production of wine (Source: National Agency of Seized and Confiscated).

²Libera Terra: Free land.

³Libera: Associations, names and numbers against mafias, is an association of social promotion, recognized by the Ministry of the Interior, devoted to solicit and coordinate the civil society against all mafias and to foster the creation and the development of a community alternative to the mafia itself. It is a coordination, born in 1995, in order to urge the civil society in the fight against the mafia and currently consists of about 1,500 associations, groups, schools, grassroots groups, territorially committed to build synergies political-cultural and organizational able to promote a culture of legality. The law on the social use of property confiscated from the mafia (L. n.109/96), education for democratic legality, commitment against corruption, mafia training camps, projects at work and development, business wear, etc., are some of the concrete commitments of this coordination. “Libera” is also recognized as a social promotion by the Ministry of Social Solidarity. In 2008, Eurispes (private institute for policy studies, which operates in the economic and social policy research, economic, social and training) has been inserted between the Italian excellence.

⁴The cooperative adheres to Libera: Associations, names and numbers against mafias.

⁵Cantina Cantopassi: Centopassi Winery.

⁶Opinion poll.

context [9], they could play roles of coordination, leadership, autonomy, etc., such as to be able to also affect, positively or negatively, individual behavior of colleagues or employees and more generally the context where they operate [10].

2. Materials and Methods

For the purpose of the investigation, it was decided to conduct a poll on a sample of $n = 180$ respondents, obtained through a systematic sampling with stratification of the sample size [11].

Preliminarily, the characteristics have been identified that, for the purposes of the survey, there should be the sample of wine consumers to interview, such as age between 21 and 50 years old, students, workers and unemployed, as well as various income ranges. The sample was subsequently stratified into three sub-samples, corresponding to each of the following age ranges: 21-30, 31-40, 41-50 and each consisting of 60 units. 180 consumers in total were extracted and interviewed, and identified as $n_1 = 60$ for the age group 21-30 (1° stratum), $n_2 = 60$ for the age group 31-40 (2° stratum), and $n_3 = 60$ for the 41-50 (3° stratum), accepting an error $\varepsilon = 9.6\%$, $P = 95\%$.

As it was impossible to know the numerosity of the population (it was a so-called dynamic population) [12], it was not possible to establish, first, a list of individuals to be interviewed, from which to extract, then, a random sample, so the systematic sampling method was chosen, because its applicability is not bound to the knowledge, “a priori”, of the elements that form the population. The units have been extracted on the basis of the passing order of people in front of the detection point, after having pulled, randomly, the value of the first element, t , to be interviewed. The other units, extracted according to the systematic sampling used, are those marked by the symbols $(t + k)$, $(t + 2k)$, $(t + 3k)$ and so on, until the n -th unit. Even k was pulled randomly and it resulted $t = 6$ and $k = 4$ [13]. The detection point was allocated

near the Cantina Centopassi exhibition shop in Piazza Castelnuovo⁷, at a time that goes from 11:00 to 20:00.

To carry out the interviews, a questionnaire has been prepared and divided into two parts: the first was with questions to know about these wine consumers’ purchasing behavior and the second aimed to know their level of information regarding the topic “wine and legality” and to investigate their level of awareness when purchasing the wines produced by the Cantina Centopassi (about the qualitative characteristics of wines and, above all, about the social value of this business). Other questions were also designed to elicit the respondents’ opinions with regard to the need of a bigger promotion campaign and of more information on these products. All respondents, before the beginning of the interview, had to assert to be consumers of wine and to buy it personally for their own consumption or to make it a gift.

3. Results and Discussion

The sample of respondents resulted as follows: those who belong to the age from 21 to 30 years are, for most part, college graduates or university students (80%) and a small part of them are university graduates (20%), of whom, the 47% are males, while the remaining 53% are females. The 82% of the total sample are looking for a permanent job and have a nil or very low income, while the remaining 18% are free-professional and perform as staff in firms of other professionals or do other type of self-employment. The age group ranging from 31 to 40 years are university graduates (15%) or college graduates (85%); the 56% are males, of whom, the 86% are professionals or employed at public institutions and the remaining 14% held their own business, while the 44% are women, of whom, the 68% are permanent employed at private companies or public institutions and the 32% are

⁷The Cantina Centopassi exhibition shop is located at Piazza Castelnuovo, one of the main squares of the city of Palermo. The square, which is located in the heart of the city, at the end of Via Libertà and at the beginning of Via Ruggero Settimo, very closed to the port of Palermo, sees every day the passage of a large number of people, not only from Palermo.

professionals or do other types of self-employment. Finally, with regard to the age group ranging from 41 to 50 years, it resulted that the 62% of respondents are university graduates and the remaining 38% are high school graduates. Regarding the jobs, the 71% of the sample declared to be employed at public institutions of various kinds. In the sample it also can be observed that 47% are women and 53% men, and 60% of the women are employed with a permanent contract, 20% are housewives and the remaining 10% are professionals, while the men are 35% professionals, 33% employed at public institutions, 25% employees or managers in private companies and 7% is employed on their own, particularly they have craft or manual jobs.

From the poll, with regard to general questions on the subject “wine and legality”, 88% of respondents say they were aware of the existence of food products from companies confiscated from the mafia, while 12% say not be informed. Among those aware of their existence, 77% know about the production of wine by the Cantina Centopassi, while 23% of them do not know the existence at all, but want to get more information on this topic. The poll also shows how almost the whole sample, 96%, has a great sensitivity to these issues and considers that the development of these types of companies and the purchase of their products is an attitude of openness and social ethics of our country. In particular, respondents appear to believe that, in doing so, these companies⁸ promote the employment of people experiencing social disadvantage⁹ and, at the same time, gives the opportunity to the rural areas, or abandoned, to be exploited positively and re-launched with a new image, which is to support the fight against the mafia. This

view is also confirmed by the official statistics provided in Italy by ISTAT (National Statistics Institute), according to which 4% of the national population is represented by persons belonging to the category of disadvantaged people. Therefore, the opportunity for these individuals to find employment in a social cooperative of this type can be, for them, an instrument of great help to recover motivational stimuli. In fact this people, participating to an agricultural activity, do also a path of social integration, and at the same time, rural or abandoned areas have the chance for the rebuild of a new image of fight against the mafia. The legislation on the social use of confiscated property has the chance, in the long run, to create and build an expanded tissue of trust, that mafia organizations tend to destroy, or also the idea of trust as a public good that, generally, criminals turn into private [14].

In confirmation of this, 94% of consumers say that they have no problem to buy these wines because they recognize in them a number of advantages, not only with respect to the quality of the product itself, but also about the fact of engaging in production processes disadvantaged people, demonstrating, thus, to fully understand the social and ethical is the basis for these activities. For these reasons respondents say they are willing to pay a higher price for a wine of this type, which supports the intrinsic quality of a strong social value.

This fact allows consumer to make a purchase associated with the possibility of promoting a good cause or to contribute to the emergence and dissemination of anti-mafia and legality principles. In addition, respondents claim to believe these wines qualitatively superior to others in the same price range and, in particular, 93% of the sample declared that, for the same price and quality with other wines, they prefer to buy one of the Cantina Centopassi.

However, there is also a small part of the sample, corresponding to 6%, which expresses freely to have some doubts regarding the purchase of these wines

⁸According to the Italian Law n. 381/1991, social cooperatives are: those which carry out different activities (agriculture, industrial, commercial or service) aimed at providing employment for disadvantaged people.

⁹According to the Italian Law n. 381/1991, disadvantaged people is: physical, mental and sensory disabled, former patients of psychiatric institutions, people under psychiatric treatment, drug addicts, alcoholics, minors of working age in situations of family difficulties, convicts admitted to the minimum measures alternative to imprisonment.

because they do not believe in the real utility of social and ethical application of the Law n. 109/1996. This aspect comes from the fact that, in the territorial contexts in which these companies operate, there are strong issues such as high unemployment, illegal employment, the presence of the mafia, and so on. Because of these problems, such areas are often lagging behind of development and the logic of doing business is strongly influenced by the presence of the mafia, which limits these activities [15]. That, which now prevails, in the popular imagination, is that, regardless of the mode adopted to intervene on behalf of these areas, nothing will change, because it is difficult to re-establish a society that seems adamant in his character of social and economic backwardness. Moreover, this part of consumers believes that any form of propaganda is exploited for private purposes, and that these particular businesses do not have anything better than the other.

Looking at the consumption behavior, the 92% of respondents would like to learn more about the meaning of social commitment of companies operating in the agro-food sector, as it is believed that this element is very important to lead consumer purchase choices. In particular, the consumers surveyed suggest highlighting this aspect in the labels of wines (and in all products of this type in general), in order to give proper emphasis both to the territory of production and to the right cause that they pursue and thus enhancing the purchase.

The additional information requested has allowed us to know how the sampled consumers believe that these wines should be supported by more information and promotion in the market [16]. Actually, 96% of respondents said that they would like to know more about the history of the Cantina Centopassi (and about all business activities of this type) and the types of wines produced by it. Indeed, a stronger advertisement campaign, through, for example, the mass media (television, newspapers, magazines or special promotional campaigns), would give, according to

respondents, the right support to make the market aware of the existence of these high-quality products, with business assumptions of great value. This aspect indicates how the consumer is very concerned about it and, in particular, the youth. In fact, especially youth who would like to undertake an entrepreneurial activity in agriculture, say they are very interested about the social aspects of these companies and the positive impact generated in the economy; this confirms that the legislation on confiscation of assets from the mafia has an impact not only on the economic side, but also on the cultural and social side [17].

For several years the large-scale distribution (LSD) has been proposed in trying to promote products closely linked to ideologies of legality and consumer solidarity. In this context, the COOP (Italian network of supermarkets and hypermarkets)¹⁰ is committed to spread this culture, selling in their supermarkets also products branded “Libera Terra” and a line of wines created to COOP by the Cantina Centopassi¹¹. However, only 35% of surveyed consumers are aware of this initiative and this highlights, once again, that a stronger promotion would be required, even made by the COOP itself.

4. Conclusions

The results of this work show that, today, consumer has got a strong sense of responsibility, which is reflected, as a result, in his purchase behavior. The majority of consumers, in fact, knows and above all, shows interest in the wines produced by companies that operate on lands confiscated from the mafia. They

¹⁰The “COOP”, which stands for “Cooperative of Consumers”, is a brand that characterizes a system of Italian cooperatives which manages a network of supermarkets, hypermarkets and discount stores.

¹¹It should be emphasized that, in recent years, the Cooperative Libera Terra, and thus the Cantina Centopassi, has signed a trade agreement with the COOP and in that regard, Centopassi annually provides about 220,000 bottles (corresponding to 60% of the total number of bottles produced annually) of a product line designed specifically for this market segment and the brand “Libera Terra” in the wine label is clearly highlight.

think these wines are of a superior quality than the norm and this happens many times also without actually having tasted them, perhaps because they imagine that behind a good cause, there should be only a product of excellent quality. In addition, as mentioned above, they are willing to prefer them to other wines with the same price and quality and this shows the curiosity and the interest they arouse in the eyes of consumers. The data that emerged from the interviews are also perfectly in line with those published by other official sources (from surveys carried out at national level), in fact, more than half of the respondents claim to have bought at least once in three months this type of products.

A further consideration that deserves to be highlighted concerns, of course, the need of more attention to consumer's information about these wines and all the initiatives and projects of ethic entrepreneurship, as well as the need of a more detailed and incisive market promotion by both the entrepreneurs themselves than by the institutions. It is not only because from a social and ethical point of view, its diffusion is of paramount importance, but also because, through appropriate dissemination and promotional campaigns, companies can more and more directly or indirectly address the purchase choices of consumers. In fact, the great interest shown by consumers for this type of social companies and their products could be an aspect not to be underestimated by the Cantina Centopassi in order to enhance this very important corporate strength they have.

Undoubtedly the recovery of firms confiscated from the mafia and given to be managed for social purposes, affirmed, in recent years, an approach to employment that involved a large part of the local population, transforming, therefore, the confiscated property in a resource for the socio-economic development of a region plagued by serious problems, but, luckily for itself, geographically suited to grape growing and wine production.

In this context, the relationship between legality and wine was very strong among consumers surveyed and this fact allows us to say that, in Sicily, regional policies should provide more measures to boost social agriculture, especially considering the great work done and successes achieved by these activities. By means of appropriate public funding, all the entrepreneurs who carry out social farming may, thus, not only help to improve the quality of life in rural areas, but also keep all those essential services intended to prevent the depopulation of these areas. In Sicily, in addition, these initiatives can certainly be additional resources to promote the socio-economic development and they can contribute to the support of the agricultural sector and of the people at risk of social exclusion that lives in those rural areas.

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