

THE ROLE OF FOOD AND CULINARY HERITAGE FOR POSTDISASTER RECOVERY: THE CASE OF EARTHQUAKE IN THE MARCHE REGION (ITALY)

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The aim of this study is to analyze the role of food and gastronomy in expanding the tourism sector in the territory of Marche region (Italy), hit by major earthquakes in 2016 and 2017. One of the first actions taken by individuals, municipalities, institutions, and nonprofit associations was to set up e-commerce initiatives to sell local food and wine products in order to support farms and businesses affected by the earthquake. Five e-commerce companies were interviewed to understand the level of involvement of local actors and the importance of food and gastronomy in the recovery phase. They indicated a need for more initiatives similar to these to promote sustainable development and proposed that the tourism sector could be drawn into a collaboration with food and wine producers and sellers, so as to offer consumers and tourists a more complete and typical experience of the Marche region. Finally, they felt that the efforts of local communities must be supported by cooperation from the regional and national government.

Key words: Postdisaster recovery; Earthquake; e-Commerce; Resilience; Food tourism

Introduction

When natural disasters occur, they cause emergencies that are often very hard to manage, both economically and socially. According to the European Commission Staff Working Document, “Overview of Natural and Man-made Disaster Risks the European Union May Face” (European Commission, 2017a), floods, storms, and earthquakes cause the greatest economic damage. In particular,

earthquakes can dramatically impact communities, infrastructures, the economy, and the environment, in limited areas or across large regions. In the last 20 years, a number of major earthquakes caused important economic losses across Europe (Italy in 2003, 2009, 2012, and 2016; Spain in 2011; Greece in 2014 and 2016).

When these events occur, the whole economic fabric of a territory has to be restored by rebuilding infrastructures and buildings, but equally important,

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by focusing on the human resources rooted in the territory. In those cases, a strategy promoting sustainable development could be useful to face the emergencies and restore the economic and social life of the affected areas.

In a postdisaster situation, a recovery strategy could be to not only identify actions for medium- to long-term recovery but also plan for ways to gain feedback on and evaluate these efforts, so that lessons can be learned for future prevention and planning strategies for the improvement and development of both a tourist destination and its member companies (Ritchie, 2009). In addition, a successful local recovery plan involves the members of the local communities (Mileti, 1999) because they are more familiar with the territory they live in and its features, which can help in governing the conflict between citizens and administrations and can gather ideas and define development priorities (Wilson, 2009).

One of the sectors immediately affected by a crisis is the service sector, and when tourist destinations are struck by a natural disaster, local tourism-related businesses are very vulnerable to failure (Santana, 2004). Earthquakes are particularly devastating because, unlike such events as typhoons or hurricanes, they occur with no warning and tourism activities cannot be closed in advance (Ghimire, 2015). As tourists generally plan their trips in advance and travel a long distance from their home, the sudden disruption may leave them stranded without accommodations, meals, or transportation. To solve this problem, it is essential to have a tourism strategy that can be implemented even in emergencies like these.

In October 2016, the Marche region in central Italy was hit by a series of devastating earthquakes that caused serious architectural damage, forcing thousands to abandon their homes and entire towns to be declared off limits, as well as very significant environmental damage, with major disruption of rivers, streams, and springs, lowering of land levels. The extensive disruption and resulting instability led to an economic recession. In response, the local, regional and national government as well as individuals and groups in the private sector set into action many initiatives. One of the first actions taken by communities, small enterprises, municipal governments, institutions, and nonprofit

associations was to set up e-commerce companies to sell local food and wine products to support farms and businesses affected by the earthquake. Before this event, e-commerce activities in the Marche region were not particularly developed. Thus, this disaster became the opportunity to make a virtue out of a necessity, the most immediate tactic for the resolution of several problems faced by local farms, shops, and businesses.

This article explores some of these initiatives undertaken by local actors and the importance of food and wine tourism in the recovery phase of the Marche region. First, it sketches the distribution of economic activities pre- and postearthquake to provide the background context. Second, a brief review of the literature points to the importance of engaging local actors in the development of a territory and the role that food and wine tourism can play during the recovery phase. Third, it analyzes several initiatives in the postearthquake period in the Marche region aimed at setting up online sales of typical food products, to allow buyers to express their solidarity and support with concrete purchases. It looks at how community involvement and social support from outside can help the territory recover and assist in the development of the tourism sector.

Regional Context

Geography and Economy

The Marche region is located in central Italy, bordered by Emilia-Romagna and the Republic of San Marino to the north, Tuscany to the west, Umbria to the southwest, Abruzzo and Lazio to the south, and the Adriatic Sea to the east. Its economy has long been based on the production of handcrafts, food, and wine, and it is characterized by a high proportion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), organized in industrial clusters that operate mainly in such traditional sectors as furniture, musical instruments, shoes, paper, leather goods, and wine and food (Potter, Proto, & Marchese, 2010). Their innovative activity is mostly informal and linked to the constant interaction between suppliers and producers (Ciffolilli, 2014).

According to the European Commission's (2016) Regional Innovation Scoreboard, the Marche region

is a “moderate innovator,” though innovation performance decreased strongly between 2014 and 2016 (−11%). The relative strengths in the regional innovation system were “employment in knowledge-intensive industries,” “exports of medium and high-tech products,” and “SMEs innovating in-house.”

Promotion

The Marche region rural development program for the period 2014–2020 views the rich historical and architectural heritage throughout the territory, some also known internationally and, much of it, in rural areas, as a prime resource to be valorized. The rural development program includes initiatives to increase the attractiveness of these areas for artistic–cultural tourism in order to bolster local and thus regional development (Regione Marche, 2017a).

Nevertheless, for the most part, “The Marche region is hardly known outside Italy. One of the reasons might be the understated attitude of its population, which is characterized by being hard working, but less interested in promotion” (Potter et al., 2010, p. 31). The paradox is that even though the Marche region is home to excellent “Made in Italy” products known worldwide, such as Tod’s or Church shoes, these brands are generally not known to be from the Marche region (Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2016). As for tourism, in 2015, the Marche region recorded 2,384,750 tourist arrivals and 12,735,174 overnight stays (Regione Marche, 2015), compared to 113,400,000 arrivals and 392,800,000 overnight stays throughout Italy (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica [ISTAT], 2016).

Tourist demand in the Marche region is strongly seasonal, mainly linked to seaside holidays. In fact, fully 68.4% of tourists (both Italian and foreign) come to enjoy the seaside, while far fewer visit to see the cities of art (16%) or enjoy the mountains (9.5%). The main reason for choosing the Marche region is the expectation of finding a hospitable environment (47.3%) and a good quality/price ratio for the goods and services offered (32.5%); other reasons indicated are its reachability and local mobility (31.4%), a varied cultural offer (21.7%), a quality food and wine offer (21.2%), entertainment opportunities, and good organization (Pennacchioni, 2016).

The regional government’s promotional campaign, like those of other Italian regions, seems to be mainly based on the so-called “Marche” brand, a plural representation that seems to encompass the numerous excellences. However, the promotion of coastal and mountain areas seems fragmented and fails to propose activities that connect these two territorial areas. In addition, “various and different isolated initiatives in the Region over the years have probably lacked the consistency of message that should characterize long-term communication campaigns” (Pennacchioni, 2016, p. 19). This aspect could be a disadvantage for the region, since it is not able to communicate a single message that differentiates it from other more famous Italian regions such as Tuscany or Umbria.

Gastronomic Products

In the food and wine sector, the Marche region does not have one specific product that characterizes the territory, but a bundle of typical products of the local tradition, which are also common to other Italian regions in central Italy, and thus it is difficult to identify one key product representative of the Marche Region (see Fig. 1). The Marche region has 16 gastronomic products registered as Protected Denomination of Origin, Protected Geographical Indication, or Traditional Specialties Guaranteed and 21 such wines; in the whole of Italy, there

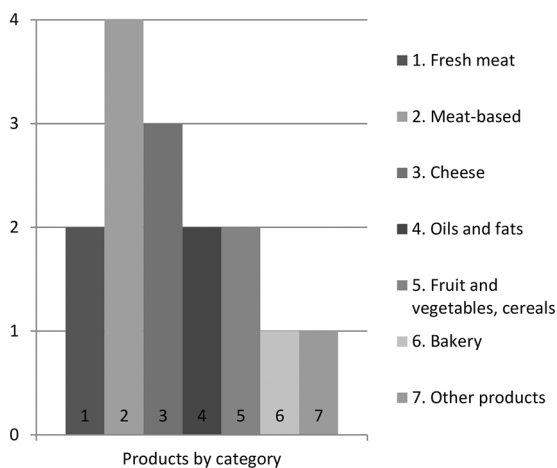


Figure 1. Marche Region gastronomic products by category (source: Qualigeo, 2018).

are 299 such gastronomic products and 526 wines (Qualigeo, 2018).

Among the most important products are Ciauscolo PGI, a soft, spreadable variation of traditional salami, Lenticchia (lentil) di Castelluccio di Norcia PGI, Oliva Ascolana del Piceno PDO, and Olio Marche PGI. These products are very famous locally but not well known outside the region.

In addition to these certified products, there are 152 other products registered by the Marche region, some of which are very well known locally: Mele Rosa of Sibillini Mountains (a kind of apple), the Pecorino of Sibillini Mountains (a local sheep's cheese), the Cicerchia of Serra de' Conti (a cereal), the Fabriano Salami, the Lonzino di Fico (a cake), and the Mosciolo of Portonovo (a particular kind of mussel). The Slow Food Association has launched specific projects to promote these products, establishing 10 presidia for the preservation of the products and economic development through their production and sale (Slow Food Association, 2019).

In order to enhance and protect the many excellent agricultural and food products of the territory, for some years the Marche region has been using the regional brand "QM—Guaranteed quality from Marche Region." The QM brand, after having obtained approval from the European Commission in 2005, became fully operational in 2006 with the publication of the first production specifications. Currently, over 1,500 producers are part of the "QM circuit," with more than 60 certified products, 15 approved specifications, 2 transposed regulations, and 5 authorized control bodies (Regione Marche, 2017a).

Though the Marche region is little known abroad, it offers a very attractive bundle of gastronomic products, a great many of which hold certifications of origin and quality, and counts a significant number of stakeholders involved in promotion of their food and wine products and related tourism.

The 2016–2017 Earthquakes

Between August and October 2016 and then in January 2017, a series of devastating earthquakes hit the Marche region, Lazio and Abruzzo, causing great personal suffering, destroying whole cities, forcing the population to leave their homes and

live in temporary solutions in other cities or even regions. It was a terrible shock in human and economic terms, destroying the historic and social fabric of the inland part of the region.

In the Marche region, the first strong earthquake struck on August 24, causing a state of emergency in the municipalities of Acquasanta, Arquata, Montegalfo, Montemonaco, Montefortino, Amandola, and Castelsantangelo sul Nera. On October 26 and 30 there were three other strong earthquakes, causing the collapse or severe damage of many public and private buildings and infrastructures, in particular in the provinces of Macerata, Fermo, and Ascoli Piceno. Thankfully, those last two earthquakes did not cause victims. Fully 42% of the Marche region (3,978 km²) was affected by earthquakes. The national government designation of the "crater" zone of earthquake damage indicated 131 municipalities, 80 of which are in the Marche region. In addition to those 80, another 90 outside the official crater reported damage.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, the Italian government provided temporary housing for 31,714 people in 2,896 hotels (Regione Marche, 2017a). About 1 billion euros were allocated to the region by national and international bodies such as the European Union, the Italian Government, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, the National Autonomous Roads Corporation, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. This money has been invested to rebuild schools and health facilities, restore public works, protect the environment and deal with hydrogeological instability, help businesses start again, repair roads, restore buildings and sites important for the cultural heritage, and promote the territory and tourism. In each municipality inspections have been carried out, rubble has been removed, and emergency housing modules, stables, and barns have been built and occupied. Three years after the earthquake they started to renovate houses and buildings. All these reconstruction works are still under way and the estimated time for their completion is at least 10 years.

The Aftermath of the Earthquakes: Demographics and Economy

Some data about population and economic activity in the Marche region can help fill out this

sketch of the background context. During 2017, the demographics of the region underwent no unusual changes: there was a 0.4% decrease in the population. Compared to 2016 data, the economy of the region in 2017 showed a higher share of employment in manufacturing and a lower share in services, utilities and construction, public administration, and agriculture, probably because these are the sectors most affected by the earthquakes. However, despite this, 2017 saw a slight increase in in-house innovation by SMEs and in collaboration between them and other companies (European Commission, 2017b).

Regarding the tourism sector, the Marche Region Councillor for Tourism and Culture stated that:

the 2017 tourist season has been difficult, conditioned above all by the earthquake that hit the Region. . . . Despite a worrying start that recorded a -72% of bookings for the year 2017 compared to the same period of 2016, thanks to the tourism promotion campaign put in place by the Region, incoming flows remained constant. In the period January–September 2017, there were over 2 million arrivals (1,670,167 Italians and 348,532 foreigners), over 11 million and 400 thousand visitors (9,388,645 Italians and 2,037,588 foreigners). Compared to the previous year, there were -4.89% arrivals and -0.10% of tourist overnight stays. (Regione Marche, 2017b)

However, there were increases in 2018: in relation to 2017 the increase is 6.51% for arrivals and 0.98% for tourist overnight stays.

Postdisaster Recovery Approaches

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction defines a disaster as a “serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts” (<https://www.preventionweb.net/terminology/view/475>). Natural disasters intimately affect processes of human development, and put economic growth at risk. In fact, the development choices made by individuals, communities and nations can pave the way for unequal distributions of disaster risk (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2004).

A natural disaster is followed by a phase of reconstruction of the damaged urban fabric. Recovery is the process of the restoring or improving the livelihoods and health, as well as economic, physical, social, cultural, and environmental assets, systems, and activities of a disaster-affected community or society, aligning with the principles of sustainable development and “build back better” to avoid or reduce future disaster risk (<https://www.undrr.org/>).

It is very important for a community exposed to hazards to learn resilience, the ability to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform, and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, also through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management (<https://www.undrr.org/>). Resilience implies an ongoing process of adjustment, adaptation, and renewal, which incorporates processes and actors at a variety of scales; it is not viewed as a return to normality but as a dynamic capacity to adapt (Halkier & James, 2017).

The UNDP (2004) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2013) published official reports analyzing approaches for dealing with postdisaster situations, based on the direct experience of countries often hit by floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, or other such disasters. Their experts studied the reconstruction phases of some cities affected by natural disasters, identifying the approaches used to face the problems and analyzing the actions and strategies implemented to rebuild infrastructure, culture, tourism, and agriculture. In particular, they noted that because the tourism industry comprises many individual businesses, many of them small or microbusinesses, from a wide range of sectors, as well as international, national, regional, and local public sector organizations, an integrated approach to crisis and disaster management is required. In fact, as others have noted, local or regional plans need to be integrated with national-level disaster and crisis strategies (Ritchie, 2004).

The Role of Community Involvement in Predisaster Planning and Postdisaster Recovery

“Successful plans for local disaster recovery must necessarily involve the community” (Mileti,

1999, p. 240). Stakeholders who will be affected by postdisaster decision-making have the opportunity to provide input to reduce conflict and aid the development of a plan that reflects local needs (Smith & Wenger, 2007). Such a bottom-up approach gives voice to citizens and local partnerships so they can directly participate in defining the development guidelines of the area, in accordance with their vision, expectations, and projects.

According to the OECD (2013) report based on the earthquake experience in Abruzzo, community engagement and greater involvement of all stakeholders proved to be essential to improving the quality of the decisions made in post-disaster situations. The report gave four reasons for engaging the community and working with members:

- community engagement can help in governing the conflict between citizens and administrations, which is often amplified by the natural disaster (Wilson, 2009);
- it can facilitate overcoming the tension between short-term recovery decisions and long-term effects;
- community engagement can be a way to identify or strengthen leadership that can catalyze the development efforts;
- community engagement is useful in order to gather ideas and to define development priorities, because local people know the context in which they live.

When a community is economically dependent on tourism-related activities, there is the need to maintain a positive image of attractiveness for its survival and prosperity (Santana, 2004) through collaboration between different organizations, government departments, emergency personnel, media organizations, and other stakeholders (Ritchie, 2004). In his model, Ritchie stressed that before and during a disaster, emergency organizations are primary stakeholders, together with tourist organizations (including National Tourism Agencies, DMOs, and industry associations) and tourism businesses; Ritchie suggested that after the disaster it might be useful for tourism organizations and businesses to take the leading role. In the aftermath of a natural disaster in such a community, cooperation between these stakeholders can be an excellent

solution for managing what has happened. Other researchers reason that such a bottom-up approach empowers local communities to articulate a vision for their place and gives them more autonomy in shaping more inclusive place brands (Goulat Sztejnberg & Giovanardi, 2017). In order to get involved and work together, the community needs to have a global vision of what its destination has to offer and work on this, to create a destination brand that is attractive to tourists.

In a postdisaster situation, those responsible for developing a recovery strategy need to think ahead about medium- to long-term recovery, but also plan for ways to gain feedback on their efforts and evaluate them, so that lessons can be learned for future prevention and planning strategies. (Ritchie, 2009).

Innovation in the Aftermath of a Natural Disaster

In their analysis of the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, Bernan and Roel (1993) wrote that “crises bring about marked regressions as well as opportunities for creativity and new options” (p. 82) because they create an opening for disruptive innovations. Even in noncrisis situations, innovation can be a form of creative destruction, in the opinion of Abernathy and Clarke (1985). They stressed that the essence of innovation is the use of new concepts in technology to forge new market linkages and meet the needs of the client and the surrounding reality.

More specifically, regarding the tourism sector, Hjalager (2002) stressed that in many cases innovation can be attributable to the category of Niche in the Abernathy and Clarke (1985) model, because it often tends to challenge collaborative structures, but not basic competences and knowledge. This is the case of the activation of small-scale tourism activities in connection with agriculture as well as the establishment of new marketing alliances (e.g., with specialized tour operators in order to access new customer groups). It is important to note that these effects tend to take place over a significant period of time and they require an organizational environment and managerial skills that support the pursuit of such goals (Abernathy & Clarke, 1985).

The collaboration of tourism enterprises with emergency or disaster managers, to restore and

rebuild tourism destinations affected by crises or disasters, provides an opportunity for change and transformation that can be viewed as positive in the long term, especially if learning results from such collaborations (Ritchie, 2009).

The Role of Food in Postdisaster Recovery

Local food and wine often expresses the identity of a local community, consumers, and producers alike. It is principally chosen because it forms part of ordinary food habits, and is mainly marketed through traditional, short distance circuits (Brunori, 2007). Food and wine can connect people of various ages, cultures, religions, and social backgrounds; production of these resources is one of the oldest activities contributing to local development and growth (Cavicchi & Stancova, 2016). Typical products have a collective dimension, in the sense that producers collaborate with shops, distributors, and other actors in the area.

The sale of local food and wine provides revenue for an area's producers, but its value does not end there. Regional leaders can exploit the uniqueness of the area's typical food and wine in defining the distinctive attractiveness of their area and developing its "brand," not only to improve marketing of local products abroad but also to promote food tourism in their area. Thus, the branding and promotion of local products and destinations can serve to position local economies in a global world and support place development in a sustainable way (Rinaldi, 2017). In fact, a clearly defined gastronomic identity and heritage can be exploited in crucial processes of differentiation and rejuvenation, helping to convey a unique sense of place (Henderson, 2009). The benefits accrue not only on the regional but also on the local level, as the promotion or "valorization" of culinary heritage can boost independent and collective initiatives in a process through which local action enhances the development of rural tourism (Bessi re, 1998).

In this context, local agricultural production and traditional food and wine can be used to promote the recovery of local identity and culture and help reinforce community pride. In particular, food and wine tourism is one of many tools a territory can use to drive sustainable development in postearthquake recovery. A successful collaboration can be

formed when the food networks and tourism actors care about the best interests of the community, want to support it, and create a brand image for it.

The case of the postearthquake period in Christchurch, New Zealand, exemplifies how food can be fundamental to promoting resilience within the community. The community created spaces for sharing food and, through this, socializing. The supply of local food can be used as a means of engaging communities in promoting resilience as well as supporting the idea of sustainable communities. Some entrepreneurs have been involved in order to promote community resilience. Berno (2017), commenting on Morris' 2014 analysis of Christchurch, wrote:

ever since the earthquakes, there has been a real shift in public perception about where our food comes from, and now there is an unprecedented opportunity with so much land available for growing to become a truly food resilient city. Christchurch is uniquely placed to be a world leader in this area. (p. 153)

Of the many laudable postdisaster initiatives undertaken by individuals, food networks, and tourism actors, some in response to the 2012 earthquake in Emilia Romagna and the 2016 earthquake in Amatrice, are particularly interesting.

The Emilia Romagna region is famous for the production of Parmigiano Reggiano, which ranks among the top 10 Italian quality foods in terms of turnover. The May 20, 2012 earthquake not only caused the deaths of 7 people and left about 5,000 homeless, but it also caused extensive structural damage to the region's dairies and the cheese maturing warehouses; about 20% of all the 40 kg forms of Parmigiano Reggiano in the region fell to the floor and were broken into pieces. Local producers and other people of the region responded with novel initiatives. The night of the earthquake, writing on her laptop in her truck, the only safe place to sleep, one local cheese producer wrote an email to her 200 contacts and clients: "Everything has collapsed. We saved over 40,000 pieces of Parmigiano Reggiano. Please buy the pieces." Her appeal went viral and, within a month, she had received 15,000 responses from all over the world, which, unable to meet the volume of offers, she forwarded to other cheese producers in the area as well (Il Fatto Quotidiano, 2015).

In another initiative, Chefs Igles Corelli and Massimo Bottura, members of the *Cheftochef* association, which promotes Emilia Romagna's gastronomy throughout the world, raised funds from well-known restaurateurs to help the lesser known ones affected by the earthquake, who faced greater difficulty in restarting. In a second phase, they worked for the long-term objective of trying to encourage customers to dine at these lesser known restaurants. Furthermore, to promote the use of Parmigiano Reggiano and to keep consumers aware of the situation in the earthquake zone, chef Bottura publicized an adaptation of the traditional "Risotto cacio e pepe" (risotto with cacio, a sheepmilk cheese from Tuscany, and pepper), a simple and tasty recipe that can be made in any home, calling for Parmigiano Reggiano instead of cacio.

Amatrice, in the Lazio region, famous for its traditional "Pasta all'Amatriciana," was devastated by the earthquake of August, 24, 2016, with 237 dead and most of its buildings leveled. A few hours after the quake, the food blogger Paolo Campana invited restaurateurs to add two euros to the price of each dish of pasta they served, one euro to be donated by the customer and the other by the owner, for efforts of the Italian Red Cross to aid Amatrice. Over 1,000 Italian restaurants participated. All told, 528 million euros were collected through this initiative and others promoted by groups such as SlowFood (which solicited donations to the city of Amatrice), Confesercenti, the national federation of small and mid-sized businesses, which organized 94 benefit culinary events, and Eataly, which hosted the Amatriciana festival in Rome (La Repubblica, 2017).

These initiatives not only helped the people and businesses in the areas in their recovery from the earthquake, but also helped publicize their typical product and dish, making consumers aware of the link between these items and the place of production or origin.

Methodology

In light of the literature review outlined in the previous section, it is valuable to investigate postdisaster dynamics that may have affected local communities after the 2016 and 2017 earthquakes in the Marche region and, in particular, the role of food as a "facilitator" of community engagement and empowerment.

Furthermore, it is important to investigate the medium- to long-term strategies implemented to provide sustainable opportunities for the affected destination and its business players, in particular some initiatives related to the promotion of the territory through e-commerce sales of food and wine.

In this article, a multiple case study design was used to produce detailed descriptions of the bottom-up phenomenon in the Marche region. The case study method:

is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, audio-visual material, documents and reports and provides a case description and case-based themes. (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano & Morales, 2007, p. 245)

Multiple case studies can be used to predict either contrasting results for expected reasons or similar results in the studies (Yin, 2003). In this way, the author can clarify whether the findings are valuable or not (Eisenhardt, 1991). When the case studies are compared to each other, the researcher can also provide the literature with an important influence from contrasts and similarities (Vannoni, 2015).

Thus, for this case study we interviewed representatives of five e-commerce companies created in the Marche region crater after the earthquakes. The total number of such typology of companies is not clear, as neither the official data of Marche region nor press releases agree on the boundaries of this phenomenon that emerged after the earthquake (from 20 to 100 companies reported). However, our research has not been able to identify all the firms or projects because a database listing all the activities, projects, or companies does not exist. Five out of 30 companies identified and contacted for an interview provided their availability.

Qualitative interviews were carried out to obtain general data and information on the activities, such as their organizational structure, turnover, mission, and the time of their foundation. The answers were compared to understand the differences between the five companies.

A second part focused on three specific research questions related to issues raised in the literature:

- Q1. How would you evaluate the initiatives for postearthquake recovery and the level of involvement of local actors and communities?
- Q2. To what degree have food and wine tourism been useful for this process?
- Q3. Do you think your company and its initiatives are sustainable?

The interviews lasted between 30 and 40 min; they were then transcribed and the data assembled and coded. During the coding of the data, categorizations were made of what emerged from the responses. The data were organized, rearranging the affirmations and comparing the answers, noting similarities or differences between them. Once this was done, the data were interpreted and divided into the categories below. No difficulties were found during the interviews or during the analysis of the results. The only limitation occurred before starting, because it was not easy to identify e-commerce firms in the crater area, and, when contacted, most did not choose to participate in the study.

Case Studies

The Background Context

In the immediate aftermath of the August and October earthquakes, no initiatives were undertaken to encourage tourists to visit the mountainous interior of the region, especially the earthquake zones along the Amatrice–Visso–Norcia axis, where over 6,400 quakes of magnitude 2.3 or more took place between August 2016 and August 2018. Considerable areas of the Sibillini Mountains Park were deemed unsafe for hiking, as they were prone to landslides and falling rocks. The intense damage made extensive rural areas and many ancient city centers entirely unsuitable for tourism, as many villages had to be abandoned, and numerous hotels, restaurants, bars, and agritourisms were forced to close. Many roads were also ruled off limits because buildings alongside them were at risk of collapse, or because of diverted streams, damaged roadbed, or unsafe bridges. Because damaged barns and stalls were dangerous and unusable, the unusual cold of the winter of 2016 meant considerable losses to farmers, with the death of their cattle, sheep, and pigs from the cold. Often the farmers themselves

lived in tents or campers, near their condemned home. It was hardly a situation that would attract vacationers. The coastal areas, instead, which were farther from the epicenters and suffered little or no damage, were promoted in campaigns to inform tourists that they were open for the summer season.

Immediately after the earthquake, despite the climate of fear, uncertainty, and desperation, the population reacted by creating associations, volunteering, and cooperating with public and private institutions and many economic actors in the area to bring life back to normal and to keep the territory from being abandoned. They joined forces to work together on reconstruction. Local people, as well as concerned parties outside the crater, launched many initiatives for the revival of the economy in general and in particular of tourism and agriculture in the Marche region, running fundraising campaigns, promoting the sale of local food and wine products, holding charity events and opening websites to promote tourism in the Region.

In the period immediately following the earthquake, private businesses or associations, as well as public institutions, created e-commerce websites or expanded existing ones to support the local food economy. In some cases, e-commerce firms contacted local companies affected by the earthquake, asking them if they wanted to sell their products online, generally opting for items with long shelf life and easy maintenance. Some were created by local and regional entities, but also had the support of national and international associations such as Slow Food, Incibo.it, Legambiente, Coldiretti, and many others. People from all over Italy and the world showed their solidarity and sensitivity to those who suffered because of the earthquake by buying typical products from the affected areas, especially during the Christmas period. They purchased IGP products (indication of geographical protection, which shows the quality or reputation of the product is linked to the place or region where it is produced, processed, or prepared) such as the lentils of Castelluccio di Norcia or ciauscolo (a traditional salami), as well as other types of meats, many kinds of cereals and grains, red and white wine, a liqueur made from star anise, egg-based pasta of local companies, cheeses, honey, jams, olives and olive oil, and other delicatessen specialties. In addition, they bought typical handcraft local products, such as woolen yarns and lavender.

The e-commerce websites offered simple shipping of the products, as well as delivery of beautifully arranged baskets or boxes of these products, as gifts for Christmas and other occasions. There was a lot of response, especially in the first period, as mentioned above, and from all over Italy people bought these products.

In this context, two observations are in order. First, no one product was promoted as the symbol of the area affected by the earthquake. Instead, in an effort to help as many producers as possible, all the typical food and wine products of the region were sold. Second, it was not easy for consumers to find these e-commerce sites because there was no central list.

To do this, the people involved in the e-commerce initiatives contacted many local companies affected by the earthquake asking them if they were willing to sell their products. Then they selected the products that were easiest to sell (those with long shelf life and easy maintenance) and organized them for sale.

Characteristics of the Five e-Commerce Companies Studied

Via Terra. This project started a year after the earthquake in Amandola, in the province of Fermo, and was launched at the end of 2017. The project is a social enterprise that involve seven stakeholders: the leaders are CARISAP and Cacuum (a youth association in the town of Amandola) that work in collaboration with Copagri Ascoli-Fermo (Agency of Rural Development), the Municipality of Amandola, the OPEN Association, the local branch of the National Confederation of Crafts and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Fermo, and the Co-Work cooperative society. They generally select local farms on the basis of the quality of their production, without neglecting the care for the environment and the territory. The customer can know the farmers, their history and their activities, order products, and receive them at home.

DajeMarche. The idea of DajeMarche ONLUS Association began to emerge a few days after the last strong earthquake on October 30, 2016. It flashed across the mind of a graduate in architecture, who wished to meet the needs of shopkeepers, artisans, and groceries in the town of Tolentino. He asked

for the collaboration of graphic designers, computer scientists, and photographers in the creation of a website, and about 100 people replied to the call. About a month after the earthquake, 150 commercial activities located between Tolentino and the neighboring towns of San Severino, Camerino, Visso, Muccia, Pievetorina, and Pievebovigliana were included in the e-commerce initiative. The site listed the products of these businesses, took orders, obtained the products, packaged and shipped them to customers, and then sent the earnings to the businesses. The project was entirely carried on by volunteers with the aim of helping all the companies that suffered earthquake damage.

MYmarca. This company based in Macerata has been active since before the earthquake. The owner and two employees run a website and have a point of sale for food and wine products as well as handcrafts of all kinds, all typical products of the Marche region. The main goal of the company is to promote the Marche region; however, after the earthquake, with the help of the branch of Confartigianato in Macerata, MYmarca decided to help many suffering farms by selling their products online.

#uniamoci. The University of Macerata, in collaboration with Playmarche Ltd, the university's spin-off company, launched the project immediately after the earthquake of October 26 with the help of its substantial network of stakeholders in the field of tourism and cultural heritage. The aim is to make available this wealth of knowledge and contacts in order to support the small businesses affected by the earthquake.

MarcaCamerino. An employee of Elios, a University of Camerino spin-off company, wishing to help the retailers of the city of Camerino, which was seriously damaged by the earthquake, involved some young people eager to help their town in this project.

The People and Groups Involved

Two of these initiatives were supported by local universities, which, acutely aware of the conditions of the population, decided to help businesses

affected by the earthquake. As can be seen in Table 1, #uniamoci [company 4 (C4)] had the help of the University of Macerata, while MarcaCamerino (C5) was assisted by the University of Camerino. The latter also involved young people who wished to help the retailers of their town.

In the case of Via Terra (C1), the idea was fostered by a group of professionals, some associations, companies, and a local agency for rural development, in collaboration with a town government, and thus the initiative involves volunteers as well as public institutions.

The DajeMarche (C2) project involved volunteers without previous specific experience in the field of e-commerce, who do not belong to any association. They only had computers and the essential technical skills and decided to collaborate with each other motivated by their strong sense of belonging to their land. MYmarca (C3), instead, has a strong background in e-commerce and the employees are professionals in this field.

The Timing of the Creation of the Initiatives and Trends in Turnover

Another interesting fact is that DajeMarche (C2), #uniamoci (C4), and MarcaCamerino (C5) started just after the earthquake in October 2016,

in order to face the emergency by providing commercial support to companies affected by the earthquake, selling their products online and helping to expand the visibility of small enterprises in the earthquake “crater.” The same can be said for MYmarca (C3) which, despite being active even before the earthquake, set the objective of “selling and promoting 100% Made in Marche products through both territorial and virtual actions.” The only exception is Via Terra (C1), which was launched after the emergency ended (November 2017), with a long-term vision. They explain that, in addition to the sale of food and wine products, their main aim is to contribute to the creation of employment in the surrounding territory, as many people have lost their jobs in the aftermath of the earthquake.

The turnover data clearly show that sales decreased significantly after the period of emergency. In the beginning, these initiatives received extensive media coverage and consumer demand was high, motivated by a sense of solidarity and the desire to help the populations hit by the earthquake by buying local products. The coincidence of the start of these enterprises near the Christmas season may also have influenced their sales success, as buyers took the opportunity to give these products as gifts.

Table 1
Data of the Respondents

Name	Via Terra (Company 1)	DajeMarche (Company 2)	MYmarca (Company 3)	#uniamoci (Company 4)	MarcaCamerino (Company 5)
Business type	Social cooperative	Nonprofit organization	MYmarca of Emanuele Conforti	Ltd.	General partnership
Approach	Bottom-up	Bottom-up	Bottom-up	Top-down	Top-down
Timing	Postearthquake (2017)	Postearthquake (2016)	Before earthquake	Postearthquake (2016)	Postearthquake (2016)
Turnover	2016 ^a : €0; 2017: €0; 2018: not able to define it	2016 ^a : €300,000; 2017: €140,000	2017: €300,000; 2018: €350,000	2016 ^a : €10,000; 2017: €35,000; 2018: €25,000	2016 ^a & 2017 (until Easter period): €75,000
Stakeholders	A municipality; Some associations; A local agency of rural development	Volunteers	Owner; Two employees	University of Macerata; Play-Marche (spin-off of University of Macerata)	Elios (spin-off of University of Camerino); Volunteers

Note. ^aAll data for 2016 refer to the months of November and December.

Perceptions About Community Involvement

All the interviewees believed that it is important to involve local people and associations, because, living and operating in the area every day, they have a better perception of the local issues and potential than do external actors. According to two of the e-commerce companies, the community can contribute “not only from an organizational point of view but also in the promotion of this kind of initiative.” In fact, #uniamoci (C4) considered the role of the community to be significant. As they stated, “thanks to word of mouth, the communities contributed by promoting this kind of initiative even in Tuscany, in northern Italy and in Germany as well.” In this case, many products were bought by companies as Christmas gifts for their employees; even some charitable associations decided to help, ordering products to be distributed to needy families.

DajeMarche (C2) said, “Without the help of citizens, even in the delivery of products, the success of this initiative would not have been possible.” According to Via Terra (C1), the involvement of local actors and citizens is fundamental: “the success of a company in an area affected by the earthquake is an aspect that also involves the local community as well as the entrepreneurs themselves.”

The MarcaCamerino (C5) initiative prized community involvement and initiatives, as the participants live in in this earthquake-struck area every day and are more aware of the difficulties to be faced and the things that need to be improved: “Local communities are closer to the reality”. However, according to them, “it is also necessary to involve public institutions that, thanks to the role they play and the importance they have, could better manage this kind of initiative, which otherwise may be ruined by personal selfishness when left in the hands of the community alone.”

The Role of Food and Wine Tourism in Postdisaster Recovery

Food and wine products are very important assets throughout the entire e-commerce sector; in this geographic area there are many food and wine products that could be a driving force for the economy and tourism sector. There is enormous potential to be exploited, perhaps even too much, as there is such a

variety of products that tourists probably cannot identify the Marche region with a single product, unlike other Italian regions, and thus feel a bit disoriented.

As revealed in the literature and the opinions of the interviewees, the Marche region struggles in making itself known outside regional and national boundaries and exploiting its potential, because “it is not a branded territory like Tuscany,” as MarcaCamerino (C5) affirmed. According to #uniamoci (C4), “food embodies history, culture and lifestyle that many visitors and food & wine experts appreciate and search for, especially when they come to these places”.

DajeMarche (C2) also confirmed that the Marche region has very beautiful landscape and rich gastronomic offerings, “you can go from the mountains to the sea in less than 100 km, buying local products such as wines, lentils, chickpeas, cheeses and cured meats that are the pride of the Sibillini mountains area and enjoying the best dishes of Marche’s gastronomic culture”.

As some of them said, the Marche region can rely on a wide variety of typical local food and wine products that could help build a stronger economic future for the region. The Via Terra (C1) interviewee underlined the link between tourism, and food and wine production and exploitation, saying that, “this project was designed to facilitate and implement tourism and the exchange of goods/services in the food and wine sector,” which is also confirmed by MYmarca (C3), according to whom, “it [the link] is an instrument to make the territory known outside its boundaries and to send a message of continuity and life in these damaged areas; food and wine tourism is important to promote a territory.”

Thus, these interviewees believe that this is a very useful tool for the revival of the region’s economy. As confirmed by DajeMarche (C2), “food and wine tourism is one of the new industries that could raise the destiny of our region, and in a broader perspective of our nation.” In their opinion, therefore, this instrument can help make the region known with all its excellence and peculiarities and assist the companies in recovering from the earthquake.

Long-Term Goals of e-Commerce Initiatives

Three of these e-commerce companies plan to create a tourism offer based on the sale of a single

product, and involving accommodation facilities, restaurants, and many operators in the tourism sector, organizing visits to the companies affected by the earthquake as well as experiential activities, such as truffle hunting, cooking lessons, boat trips, nature walks, and outings to taste local wines, beers, or cheeses. One interviewee would like to develop stronger networking among companies and propose a quality label for the typical meat of the Marche region and for the production of handicrafts (e.g., shoes and musical instruments), a field in which the region excels. #uniamoci (C4) would like to involve other producers and “create a physical space suitable for occasions to display and sell the products.” Daje Marche (C2) planned to develop a network of similar websites and export it to other regions of Italy. As ViaTerra (C1) said, “This project is part of a broader strategy. The latest data on e-commerce led us to think that it is essential to adopt this system in the short-to-medium term, therefore it is not enough to sell the single product: we need to build a complete offer that helps the promotion and growth of the territory.”

Nevertheless, it seems that the e-commerce projects analyzed in this work are not characterized by strong features of innovation. For example, the MarcaCamerino (C5) project and Daje Marche did not extend their efforts to other activities beyond the sale of products online, and soon had to close. Furthermore, during the interviews and in line with the observations noted above, other e-commerce companies expressed the desire to expand their offer beyond the sale of food and wine products.

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the interviews confirms that community engagement is useful in order to gather ideas and define development priorities, because members of the local community know the context in which they live (Wilson, 2009). Most members of these e-commerce companies belong to the communities hit by the earthquake, and knowing well the challenges of this period, desire to help the local populace and economy. Their bottom-up approach demonstrates how valuable it is for local communities to articulate a vision for their place, and exercise their autonomy in shaping more inclusive place brands (Goulart Sztejnberg & Giovanardi,

2017). Communities have a desire to get involved and to repair what has been destroyed.

However, evidence from this study clearly demonstrates that coordination and cooperation among local actors are needed. As #uniamoci (C4) stressed, in the Marche region, the various support initiatives are often fragmented; the person interviewed expressed that hope that a union of forces could amplify the effects benefits for the economy and tourism in the crater areas. However, some of the interviewees reported that local people are not willing to share their ideas and experiences, and they felt that this reluctance slowed the recovery process. They noted that there are initiatives supporting the recovery but little cooperation among them. In fact, many e-commerce initiatives were started with their own gain in mind, instead of working toward a collective gain.

This tendency to eschew collective goals was articulated in a 2016 study in which local actors were asked to voice their attitudes about the Marche region, fellow entrepreneurs, and the tourist potential of the region. The author noted that:

one of the founding features of the spirit of the Marche Region is a certain closure with respect to the outside world, which also has the sense of proud belonging to its own land, thus distinguishing itself for its individual sacrifice and passion for the goods and excellence of the qualities of the Region. It seems that the different territories of the Region compete with each other instead of seeking organizational and promotional synergies. (Corinto, 2016, p. 70)

From the analysis of the interviews, it emerged that when there was solidarity-motivated demand for the product, the commercial activity grew, but after this period of solidarity and emergency, the demand decreased and the products lost their appeal. In two of the cases analyzed, this saturation phase caused the closure of the activity.

It seems that in order for these businesses to continue to operate, they also need to improve the managerial skills of their staff, and obtain support of local and regional governments, as community involvement alone or solidarity-motivated customers are not enough to keep them solvent. In addition, as one of those interviewed noted, it is crucial to come up with innovative ways to keep tourists

and customers attracted to the Marche region and its products, now that the initial phase of emergency and solidarity are past and people tend to forget what happened.

Rinaldi (2017) asserted that the promotion of local products and the branding of products and destinations are effective tools for positioning local economies in a global world and supporting place development in a sustainable way. In this context, e-commerce sites selling food and wine tourism could play a key role in the Marche region and boost the economy of this area.

Tourism has great potential to truly change the Marche region's economy after the earthquakes. In particular, if postearthquake e-commerce initiatives, as well as long established food and wine producers, could expand to incorporate tourism featuring the excellent food and wine of region, this might not only help face the postearthquake recovery phase but also prove to be sustainable in the long term. In fact, the MarcaCamerino (C5) e-commerce initiative, which focused exclusively on online sales of food products on behalf of the Camerino merchants did not prove to be viable, with the drop in sales after Easter 2017. Similarly, DajeMarche, after 2 years, has since gone out of business. Instead, it is essential to build a complete tourism offer around the sale of the product, drawing together lodging, meals, tour guides, transportation offers, entertainment and recreation options, lessons and cultural activities, and other aspects, as suggested by some authors in the literature. In fact, the other e-commerce companies are seeking to expand their offer with other initiatives such as the creation of a tourist offer based on the product they sell.

One possible contribution to reviving the region's economy could be to improve tourism offerings by engaging different sectors and companies in collaborations to provide a holistic offer combining culinary, historical, artistic, cultural, and recreational aspects. The aim would be to offer something that tells the story of the region that makes it known in a global way. This would require the creation of a long-term strategy for cooperation among operators. Thus, for example, in parallel with the sale of the single product, businesses could offer experiential activities such as a visit to the company where the product is made, combined with stops in the village and the surrounding area

to see the treasures of art and architecture, savor the local cuisine, and enjoy the opportunities for walking, riding, or other activities.

Another approach could be to create a regional brand around a food or wine product, in such a way that consumers would think of the region when they think of the product. Some assert that food provides a direct connection with landscape, and tourists can recognize the origins of food (Cavicchi & Stancova, 2016). In this regard, for example, chef Massimo Bottura suggested "the Sibillini truffle." Thus, this prized food could be integrated into the holistic tourism approach by, for example, offering hiking and culinary itineraries in the Sibillini National Park, with dining at local restaurants or agritourism businesses that feature truffle dishes.

In some cases, the bottom-up approach seen in local initiatives could benefit from top-down assistance by the Marche region government. One suggestion would be for the regional government to create a single portal to showcase the e-commerce firms that have been created. In this way, potential tourists and customers could easily find the various online offers in one place, rather than navigate the disorienting hit or miss reality of current browsers. Another idea could be for the Marche region or a local association to collect the products of all the companies damaged by the earthquake, thus creating a single e-commerce. It is necessary to organize a unitary long-term offer that shows tourists these elements: local excellence and the willingness to engage and cooperate.

Well before the 2016 earthquakes, a study by the OECD (Potter et al., 2010) had urged closer collaboration between "agricultural and tourism industries to exploit entrepreneurship opportunities throughout the Region, taking advantage of the natural scenic resources of Marche" (p. 34). In this postdisaster scenario, there is more need than ever for closer collaboration among public and private actors to promote rural tourism that can help the population create jobs and stimulate the economy.

The media visibility enjoyed by the Marche region because of the earthquakes has made it better known internationally, and could be exploited as part of strategies to attract many more visitors. Foreign tourists in particular are interested in places of historical, cultural, and environmental interest, and the Marche region is especially richly endowed

with such attractions, especially in the inland areas (Regione Marche, 2017a).

So despite all the problems to be taken into account and despite the fact that the Marche region is not well known, the local communities are aware of the strengths of their land and culture, and in response to the earthquake have demonstrated the desire to create a network and learn from each other to help the growth and promotion of their region.

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