



Food, Design, and Territory: the Valorization of Manna in the Madonita Area

Benedetto Inzerillo and Samuele Morvillo

EasyChair preprints are intended for rapid dissemination of research results and are integrated with the rest of EasyChair.

March 18, 2024

Food, Design, and Territory: The Valorization of Manna in the Madonie area.

First Name/s Last Name/s¹, First Name/s Last Name/s² leave blank for anonymous submission
contact.authors@email.mail (separated by comma) leave blank for anonymous submission

¹Affiliation name, Country leave blank for anonymous submission

²Affiliation name, Country leave blank for anonymous submission

Abstract

The contribution explores the connection between food, design, and territory, focusing on manna, a typical product of the Madonie region. It highlights the importance of manna, not only as an economic pillar but also as a cultural one for the local community, through the analysis of traditional agronomic practices and artisanal harvesting techniques. The work emphasizes the intrinsic value of manna, both in its raw form and as a component in innovative products, with examples like Fiasconaro Panettone from Castelbuono and "Birra artigianale delle Madonie," which uses manna as a key ingredient. It also discusses the territorial history, referencing the manna museum in Pollina and suggesting its redesign to enhance the story. Manna is showcased as a paradigm for demonstrating how a "unique" raw material can boost the development of a territory.

Keywords: inner areas; Design; Madonie; food design

Introduction

The paper examines the interaction between food, design, and territorial context, with a particular focus on products that, through the use of raw materials and the transmission of unique traditions present only in certain contexts, define the identity of places and activate positive processes for territories. Through the valorization of such resources, territorial identities are generated that activate cultural dynamics, such as the creation of museums and pathways for their protection. This process stimulates economic development, thanks to the valorization and artisanal or industrial transformation of the products, contributing to the creation of processed or

semi-processed items that enrich the local context (Tantillo, 2023). These products catalyze a wide range of design processes, ranging from product design to communication, from packaging to food design, up to the planning of services (Spence, 2020). These processes, far from being isolated, intertwine in a complex interdisciplinary mosaic that blends design, tradition, and culture. In this way, design becomes a bridge between food, territory, and cultural identity, creating a dynamic interconnection that enriches and valorizes the local context through a holistic and innovative approach (P. Tamborrini, 2022). The article examines the theme through the analysis of specific case studies like the Immaterial Micromuseum of Wheat and Bread, located in Borgo Santa Rita, represents an emblematic case study on the ability of design to renew the cultural heritage of rural areas, skillfully integrating traditional and innovative elements. The initiative represents an example of territorial development initiated by the community, where this space, dedicated to identity and territory, innovatively combines material and immaterial heritage, offering an experience that embraces history, individual and collective memory, science, and technology (Monterosso, 2023).

Another ongoing case study is the “Innova-Pollina” research project developed with the agreement between the Department of Architecture of Palermo and the Municipality of Pollina, has emerged as a result of the research, the importance of one of these unique products, the Manna. This same raw material, identity and distinctive of the Madonita landscape, is one of the selected case studies, also thanks to its detailed agronomic practice and artisanal collection techniques. This study aims to highlight the crucial role of Manna not only as an economic foundation but also as a cultural bulwark for the local community, which has given life to various local initiatives such as startups for the territory. The work underlines how Manna, extracted following methodologies handed down in history, retains intrinsic value not only in its raw form but also in its transformation into innovative products.

Food, design and territory

The concept of territory transcends the mere geographical definition to assume the role of a dynamic scenario, in which cultural practices, traditions, and innovation manifest. This perspective transforms the territory into the foundation of community identity, emphasizing how the relationship between individuals and their environment is crucial in the construction of social and cultural dynamics (Manzini, 2015). Within this context, the role of food is elevated from a simple sustenance element to a symbol of connection between the past and the present, as well as between the local and global realm. Food thus becomes an expressive vehicle of identity and traditions, significantly contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage and responsible innovation. Some products of excellence, such as manna whose traditions represent

a collective knowledge heritage, offer critical insights for reflection on sustainable development modes and the transmission of knowledge (Galati, 2006). The valorization of food-related traditions emerges as a vital strategy to consolidate territorial identity and encourage cultural tourism. The revival of ancestral harvesting and processing techniques, together with the celebration of indigenous products, allows communities to infuse new life into local economies and promote a more equitable and sustainable development. Consequently, the interaction between territory, identity, food, and traditions configures as a prism through which to deepen and exalt cultural diversity. Through active engagement in the protection and promotion of the intangible heritage, it is possible not only to safeguard the foundations of a community but also to prepare the ground for a sustainable and meaningful future (Daverio, 2013).

In this context, design manages to pour its processes into different aspects and sectors, enhancing and enriching the possibilities of use and systematization of these values. From the realization of services thanks to the material and intangible heritage, which allows the correct enjoyment and use of what today we can call the "experience" of these unique features, to the communication of the territory through orientation systems and valorization of cultural places like museums, or still pertaining to visual communication, that of the creation of territorial branding or typical products and traditions or of packaging that not only tell as they usually tell a product, but tell its story, its culture, and its territory.

The Immaterial Micromuseum of Wheat and Bread In the geographical context of southern Sicily, precisely in the province of Caltanissetta at "borgo Santa Rita," a marginal territory, known for the cultivation of wheat, which is still processed using traditional methods and for the production of organic bread and pasta, considered among the best in Italy, so much so as to attract the interest of tourists, academics, journalists, food enthusiasts, and renowned chefs from all over the world. Thanks to the natural vocation of this territory, in addition to the passion of stakeholders who have developed participation processes, through entities such as GALs and third sector associations. The wheat product that is transformed into bread becomes a cultural event, thanks to the birth of a micro-museum that uses technological tools for narration, becoming a place where memory, knowledge, and interaction merge into storytelling. This innovative space integrates historical-anthropological aspects with scientific and educational approaches related to the world of wheat and bread, offering an emotional and sensory narration of the universe of Borgo Santa Rita. The fundamental objective of the micro-museum is to valorize this place not only by transferring simple information to visitors and tourists with the exaltation of the unique characteristics of the artisanal processing of wheat, but also wants to preserve and transmit to future generations the traditions and collective memory of the place, so as to conserve in that territory, the memory of an intangible heritage (Monterosso, 2023).

The manna, identity by Madonie

Most Sicilian municipalities are distinguished by their rich historical, landscape, gastronomic, and cultural heritage. However, among these marvels, Pollina stands out for its abundant legacy, despite its limited visibility in the tourist landscape due to its relative obscurity. Sicily is renowned for being the principal producer of manna since the late 19th century. This substance is masterfully extracted from the *Fraxinus Ornus*, which appears as a normal ash tree. However, in July and August, its exceptional capacity to produce manna through a simple incision in the bark is manifested (Lentini, 1983). This natural sweetener, with its notes of sugar, earth, wood, and a subtle honey trace, is delicately fragrant, evoking the smell of moss or wet wood. Manna is usually transformed into "cannoli," representing the most widespread form in which it is marketed (Figure 1). This substance, also known as "Dew honey," "Secretion of the stars," or "Nectar of the gods," played a key role in the local economy until the mid-20th century, generating employment for local inhabitants called frassiniculturists, or "Ntaccaluòru" in Sicilian dialect. This practice has maintained its continuity thanks to the determination of a small group of elders who, resisting the process of industrialization, have perpetuated the traditional techniques season after season. Manna and the traditions associated with it face significant challenges, particularly the emigration of the young, potentially future farmers and producers, threatening the definitive disappearance of this product. Despite these difficulties, enthusiasts of the tradition and those who dedicate themselves daily to its preservation are firmly intent on not letting it disappear.



Figure 1. Manna natural process. By <https://www.consoziomanna.it/it/content/6-cos-e-la-manna->, 28/02/2024.

The manna product

Manna and its processing articulate a strong vocation towards the enogastronomic production of the territory, allowing creative space for local artisans to produce new

products or to develop their Re-Designs of traditional products, using the local raw material, which is manna, to develop unique identity products.

The Fiasconaro "Oro di Manna" Panettone from Castelbuono represents a reinterpretation of the Milanese panettone, characterized by the use of manna as a peculiar ingredient. This product, born in an artisanal laboratory (now an industrial laboratory), has gained international fame, demonstrating the positive effect of the valorization of unique territorial resources on the economy and regional culture (Scrofani, 2019). In addition to the panettone, various products stem from the local genius of Master pastry chef Nicola Fiasconaro, who precisely from manna in his premises produces creams and other sweet leavened goods. Fiasconaro today, a well-established brand, becomes a driving force for the territory, also thanks to its culinary innovation activity and its innovative recipes, has given a significant push for the nomination of Castelbuono as "Creative City Unesco." Especially for communication, design is a fundamental discipline for the Fiasconaro brand, from the creation of its brand, which today is recognized worldwide, with precise and recognizable branding and well-positioned, from the timely and well-designed packaging with attention to details from materials to the communication system (Rundh, 2009). The proof of the brand's importance internationally is with the partnership with a globally recognized brand like "Dolce & Gabbana", where thanks to the union of these two realities, Sicilianity is communicated, through packaging with Baroque style or colors, which recall the uniqueness of Sicilian carts. These Packagings become touchpoints that communicate territorial uniqueness in various international locations like Airports or Dolce & Gabbana stores (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Fiasconaro Product. By <https://www.fiasconaro.com/prodotto/oro-di-manna/>, 28/02/2024.

Beyond already internationally established realities, manna today becomes a design opportunity for the creation of new products, thus can give life to new startups as it was for the "Madonie Craft Beer" project produced in Pollina. The idea is to produce a local beer, incorporating manna, highlighting innovation in the food sector through experimentation and the use of local resources. This intuition gave life to the birth of the beer "Manna Crystals and Ash Flowers" born in the heart of the Madonie Park, fruit of the collaboration between Peppe Genchi, marketing consultant and craft beer enthusiast, and Beppe Cassataro, entrepreneur and manna expert. This beer, defined by its creators as "Mystical", aims to stand out, thanks to its recipe that integrates manna and makes it unique in the Sicilian panorama of craft beers. The originality and territoriality of the project are also evident at the communicative level, in its branding and its label, which wants to unite "beer and art", this by collaborating with local craftsmen and professionals, like the artist Stefania Cordone, who creates the illustrations then used in the labels and in the visual artifacts, which represent a homage to nature, and to the product "manna" creating a real "Cameo". The artistic illustrations are then curated and systematized by the designer Mariano Norata, who realizes the visual system of the product.

The research group of the "innova-pollina" project, taking inspiration from these researches, has developed other analyses on the Madonita territory, focusing in particular on that of Pollina. The research has highlighted, for example, how the production of sweets based on Manna in the territory of Pollina is substantially absent; this once again shows the need to plan and implement projects useful to enhance the potential of a territory. A research group has therefore developed a project hypothesis aimed at creating Manna biscuits, aiming to expand local production developing possible job opportunities and attracting visitors drawn by these specialties that could become recognized excellences on a larger scale, as in the case of Fiasconaro products. In this hypothesis, Food Design, incorporating other disciplines, considers food a design product, emphasizing sustainability and innovation, from the creation of the product recipe, to the shape, which determines the actions of fruition and therefore its "User Experience" (Heapy, 2019). Moreover, the usability and the shape of the product, is combined with the design of its packaging, which unites the functionality and communication of the product. The idea is to propose an exclusive artisanal product of the Pollina territory (Mangano, 2014). The product's name is "Frassini", grissini biscuits, inspired by the slender and elongated shape of manna, aiming to evoke the natural and irregular aspect of the sap, with dimensions of about 12 cm in length and 1 cm in diameter. The integration of orange in the recipe not only facilitates the production process, thanks to its preexistence, but also creates a taste.

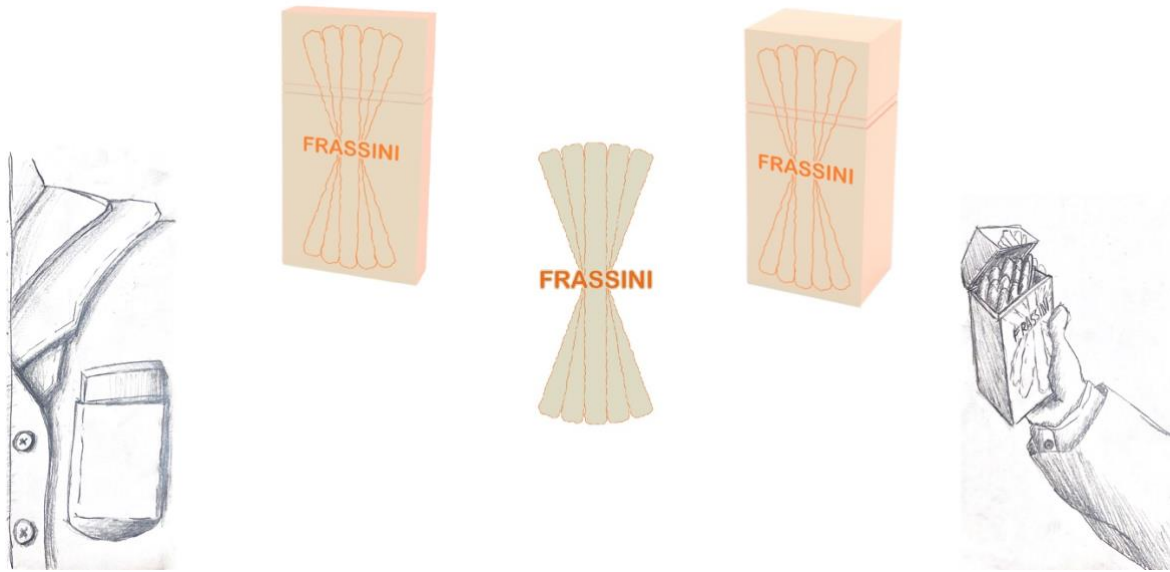


Figure 3. Product in project “Innova-Pollina” designer team: Marina Alfonso, Gioia Campo, Mattia Caronia.

The Manna Museum: Status and Possible Future Visions

Since 2011, the town of Pollina has been home to the Manna Museum. Located in Piazza Duomo on the first floor of the building that formerly housed the town hall, the museum hosts an exhibition of historical objects and tools used for manna production, in addition to several informative panels funded by the Madonie Park Authority. As part of the Madonie Park Museum Network, the museum offers a guide that narrates the history of manna and includes product tastings.

Despite being part of an established network, the museum requires a comprehensive project overhaul to more effectively tell its story and enhance the presentation of its exhibits. The current layout is inadequate and disorganized, and the lack of a strong presentation of the exhibited items significantly hinders the museum's ability to convey the intrinsic narrative of the exhibition space (Figure 4).

The absence of a cohesive visual identity and a clear wayfinding system prevents visitors from fully enjoying the museum experience. Today's design tools allow for a more engaging and immersive experience. In this direction, detailed analyses of visitor preferences have led to the design of a new internal layout, the development of a visual identity with a new brand, a new signage system, and the optimization of wayfinding to facilitate navigation within the museum, redefining the experience of the existing museum system (Villani, 2018).



Figure 4. Pollina "manna" Museum.



Figure 5. Product in project "Innova-Pollina" designer team: Federica Sciortino, Nadia Geraci, Maria Chiara La Monica, Cecilia Serraino.

The Manna Museum has the potential to become a focal point of cultural, social, and historical significance for the Madonie area. By narrating the history of manna, its production processes, identifying the "mystical" sites where ash trees grow, and mapping the stakeholders involved in its production, the museum can significantly enrich the territorial context. The introduction of a space dedicated to product tasting, realized in collaboration with producing companies, offers the opportunity to develop immersive experiences directly aligned with the museum's objectives.

Conclusion

This study delves into the significance of manna in the Madonie region, highlighting how the synergy of food, design, and landscape can catalyze economic and cultural revival in the area. Through the incorporation of innovative products such as Fiasconaro Panettone and craft beer, manna emerges as a development catalyst, showcasing the effectiveness of blending traditional practices with innovative approaches.

The analysis focuses on the designer's role in interpreting the identity and potential of the region, identifying and enhancing its unique features. Termed as "design opportunities," these potentials necessitate the development of targeted strategies, supported by appropriate tools for their promotion. Thus, the designer acts as a facilitator, coordinating and implementing these strategies.

It is underscored that these processes can undoubtedly bring benefits to the economy, culture, and social fabric of inland areas, reinforcing the identity of communities that preserve the culture and traditions of an Italian territory, which would otherwise risk losing its cultural heritage.

References

- Calabretta, G., Gemser, G., & Karpen, I. (2016). Strategic design: Eight essential practices every strategic designer must master. BIS Publishers.
- Cacciato, A. (2021). La Sindrome del Gattopardo: La cultura dell'innovazione nell'era post lockdown. Rubbettino Editore.
- Daverio, P., & Trapani, V. (2013). Il design dei beni culturali: Crisi territorio identità– Cultural heritage design: Crisis territory identity. Milano: Rizzoli.
- De Rossi, A. (2019). Riabitare l'Italia: Le aree interne tra abbandoni e riconquiste. Donzelli Editore.
- Gaiardo, A., Remondino, C. L., Stabellini, B., & Tamborrini, P. (2022). Il design è innovazione sistemica: Metodi e strumenti per gestire in modo sostenibile la complessità contemporanea: Il caso Torino (pp. 1-179). LetteraVentidue Edizioni.
- Galati, A. et al. (2006). La rivalutazione della frassinicoltura per la produzione di manna come prodotto officinale. In Workshop "Colture artificiali di piante medicinali" (p. 287-297). Pisa.

- Heapy, J., King, O., & Samperi, J. (2019). Customer Experience Design: Imparare a mettere i clienti al centro con il design thinking. Apogeo Editore.
- Lentini, F., & Mazzola, P., Not, R. (1983). I frassini da manna. *Natura e Montagna*, 30(4), 21-33.
- Mangano, D. (2014). Che cos' è il food design (Vol. 496). Carocci.
- Manzini, E. (2021). *Abitare la prossimità: Idee per la città dei 15 minuti*. Egea.
- Rundh, B. (2009). Packaging design: Creating competitive advantage with product packaging. *British Food Journal*, 111(9), 988-1002.
- Scrofani, L., Petino, G., & Novembre, C. (2019). Le attività culturali e creative per il rilancio turistico delle aree interne in Sicilia. Il caso studio dell'Ypsigrock Festival. *Bollettino dell'Associazione Italiana di Cartografia*.
- Spence, C., Medici, L., & Sedehi, S. (2020). *Gastrofisica: La nuova scienza del mangiare*. Readrink.
- Tantillo, F. (2023). *L'Italia vuota: Viaggio nelle aree interne*. Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa.
- Villani, T. (2018). Materiali e soluzioni tecniche per il wayfinding nei musei. *TECHNE: Journal of Technology for Architecture & Environment*, (16).