

Assessment of general pueyrredon county for the production of slow food

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to determine if General Pueyrredon County is suitable for the production of slow food. Slow food consumption that started as an alternative, is becoming a global phenomenon, encouraged by health, social, ethical and environmental concerns. Fruit and vegetable production is analysed as a case study and as a final product in itself or as raw material for the manufacturing of another food product. The scope of the research belongs to an exploratory study and it adopts the type of qualitative research. From the analysis, the existence of family-owned establishments that work under the slow food philosophy arises, which together with artisanal production with a strong relationship with family agriculture, agroecology and organic production - driven by national and local governments and institutions inserted in the region - makes slow food growth feasible in General Pueyrredon County.

Keywords: slow food, food production, fruit and vegetable production, family-owned establishments.

1 INTRODUCTION

In Argentina, as well as it happens in other parts of the world, a hectic working schedule drives people to eat fast food. People disregard the importance of a healthy meal for which a lot of time is needed in order to maintain the nutrients in the food. These aspects are fundamental to the Slow Food philosophy. This philosophy is born in Italy in 1986 and can be considered a framework for health, quality of life and good taste (Wicke & Candia, 2009).

The international Slow Food (SF) movement opposes standardisation and it promotes the spread of a philosophy that combines pleasure and knowledge in relation to the concept of eco-gastronomy. This concept recognizes the connection between food, soil and the planet. 'This union is intimately related to cultural and social heritage which is given a new value by a national and international touristic movement that searches to know the history and culture of each region' (Colamarino & Curcio, 2009, pág. 11).

Fruit and vegetable production in Argentina reaches almost all the territory due to the diversity of climates present in the country. As regards the fruit production sector, the General Pueyrredon County (GPC) is in the middle of an expansive productive stage in quantity, quality and variety of crops. These crops come from the so-called fruit and vegetable production belt surrounding the city of Mar del Plata

(Mdp), which is the main city in the GPC. This area is well-known for the volume, variety and quality of the products obtained.

In the GPC, as well as it happens in other regions in the country, the ‘environmental question’ has been installed in society in general. There is a questioning of the impact of some productive practices. These practices, both industrial and agricultural have or could have a serious impact on human health and on the safety of food due to environmental pollution. Due to this situation and to avoid damage to the health of neighbours and workers exposed to agrochemical spraying and environmental pollution, the Honorable Council of the GPC passes the ordinance No. 18740/2008, which was later modified by the Ordinance 21097/2013 (González, Diurno, Caetano, & Rattin, 2017).

Another instance of the relevance of the SF products is present in the Fòrum Gastronòmic de Girona 2011, in which cooks from Spanish restaurants are acknowledged for ‘their use of local products and their defence of biodiversity’ (Escuela Superior de Hotelería y Gastronomía, 2015)

The School of Hospitality and Gastronomy (ESHyG) presents the book ‘Slow Procedures – a Theoretical and Practical Guide of Recommendations to Incorporate the Slow Food Philosophy, Good Practices in Production and Development of Gastronomical Enterprises’ in the GOURMONDE MAR DEL PLATA 2011 – Latin American Congress of Gastronomy, Tourism and Hospitality. This book arises from the need to spread good food practices, and the wish that these said practices be adopted in order to improve the quality of life. There is also the belief that eating well is a sovereign right. Therefore, it is essential to have information about the way and methods of the production of Slow Food. The book aims to become a practical manual of recommendations to guide entrepreneurs. They will later on be able to obtain the international certification of quality norms in the gastronomy field (Santander Spataro, Enev, Garcia, & Ahumada, 2013).

Slow Food Argentina is founded on 28 June, 2012 as a ‘non-profit eco-gastronomic association which defends the access to Good, Clean and Fair’ (Slow Food Argentina, 2015).

In a meeting in the College of Agronomy of the University of Buenos Aires, the Italian sociologist Carlo Petrini, founder of SF, presents a complex situation and he claims: ‘If industrialization is not modified, there will be more and more food in the world, but at the same time hungrier people’. These are the concepts to consider:

‘Promote respect for the organoleptic, cultural and ecological quality of food and a social justice from the point of view of the producer as well as from the consumer’. ‘I wanted to mention this University, which is one of the most enthusiastic about the philosophy of productivity, to encourage those few who are willing to do research and spread agro-ecology’. ‘We cannot allow the logic of corporate maximum profit to be installed in our food production’ (Sección Sociedad - Tiempo Argentino, 2014, pág. 32).

There is a strong international awareness for the consumption of healthy food and there have been studies which indicate that consumers are willing to pay a higher price for healthier or guaranteed quality foods. However, there is little research about how much the consumers would be willing to pay for the characteristics mentioned above. There is no information about the preferences of the consumers when choosing a gastronomic place. Neither is there information about consumers choosing gastronomic places where the concepts of healthy food, or more importantly SF have been incorporated.

Taking into account this information and the diversity of products, the research has focused on the fruit and vegetable production that can be both considered as a final product or raw material for the production of food products.

In addition, the region has high-level institutions that promote the productive development such as the College of Engineering, the College of Economics and Social Sciences and the College of Agricultural Sciences from the National University of Mar del Plata (UNMDP). The last college mentioned is part of the Integrated Unit Balcarce (UIB) jointly with Balcarce Agricultural Experiment Station (EEAB) belonging to the South Buenos Aires Regional Centre from the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA). This place is located on national route 226,15 km away from the city of Balcarce and 73,3 km away from the city of Mdp, on the southeast of the Province of Buenos Aires (PBA). The EEAB, usually called INTA Balcarce, develops the Programme PRO-HUERTA which represents an alternative to improve the eating of the poorer social sectors by the self-production of food at a small scale through models of vegetable gardens and farms. These gardens and farms are family, school, community and institutionally oriented, and it helps to diversify the diet for the people in need. It is also important to mention that INTA has a Technical Information Office in the city centre of Mdp.

At a governmental level, there is a programme called 'Control of agrochemical waste and microbiological contaminants in fruit and vegetable fresh produce' which is run by the Department of Bromatology of the GPC.

The National Law No. 27118/2015, which is considered to historically repair family agriculture, expresses in the article 25 the following:

The universities, technical and technological institutes, superior technological colleges and other public, private and community institutions which develop innovations, will carry out research that includes sociocultural, productive and organizational aspects in order to strengthen family, farm and indigenous agriculture. The research will be included in the context of state priorities and will follow the guidelines of the governing body from the National System of Science and Technology.

2 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The research is part of an exploratory study since it aims to examine a topic that is only addressed from a touristic and gastronomic point of view.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 SOCIO-ECONOMICAL, CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

The GPC is located on the southeast coast of the PBA, and its main city is MdP. Figure 1 shows the geographical location of GPC within the PBA and Argentina. The fruit and vegetable belt of GPC is an area of 25 km of rural zone on the west surrounding the city of MdP. This belt is within the National Route 226 and Provincial Routes 2 and 88. (Municipalidad de General Pueyrredon, 2015); (Portal puntomardelplata.com, 2015).

Figure 1: geographical location of GPC



Source: design based on images from Google and Google Maps

In the region there are institutions encouraging the productive development which are recognized internationally, such as the College of Engineering (FI), the College of Economics and Social Sciences (FCE) and the College of Agricultural Sciences (FCA) which belong to the National University of Mar del Plata (UNMdP). This university, as it was mentioned before, is part of the EEAB. There are ten (10) bachelor degrees that are available at the College of Engineering. Among those ten, Industrial Engineering and Food Engineering are present and they both have research groups related to regional productive development (Facultad de Ingeniería, 2015). At the College of Economics and Social Sciences there are several research groups, one of them being Agrarian Economy. This research group, given the growing tendency towards healthy food, focuses on the choices of food having good quality. Another research

group is Ecological Economy which centers its attention mainly on analyzing the economic, social and political sustainability (Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Sociales, 2015). The EEAB develops the Programme PRO-HUERTA which includes among its strategies of action, the progress of fruit and vegetable products and organic farm activities. This programme stimulates the growth of productive abilities and community based development by allowing the communities to harvest vegetables and fruit for their own consumption (Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria, 2013).

3.2 THE SLOW PHILOSOPHY AS A SYNONYM OF HEALTHY FOOD AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

Kotler et al (2002) indicated that one of the tendencies of society is the desire to live longer, which completely opposes the current lifestyle (a sedentary lifestyle, the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and drugs, and the eating of inadequate foods). For this reason, people are being more careful when choosing food and doing more physical exercise regularly (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2002).

The Slow Food philosophy upholds the rights of the individuals to enjoy eating and the responsibility to preserve their culinary heritage, tradition and culture which make enjoying eating possible. In other words, this SF tendency wants to preserve gastronomic heritage respecting their connection to the earth. This is achieved by studying and being part of the process which consumer products go through. Producers and consumers have to be in contact so as to strengthen the balance between Good, Clean and Fair. When food is standardised, many flavours are lost and SF is against this practice that affects both the land and the lifestyle of people. SF aims at re-educating people on the sense of taste and the pleasure of sharing a meal. At the same time, the SF movement wants to emphasize the importance of the origin and the ways of production of the food as well as the producers (Petrini, 2005).

The SF movement follows the following assumptions (Santander Spataro, Enev, Garcia, & Ahumada, 2013, pág. 13):

- ✓ to prioritise and promote the use of products and raw materials that are obtained through a system that does not harm the environment, that does not deplete the land resources, and that are produced with the minimum of external resources (pesticides, synthetic fertilisers, among others);
- ✓ to obtain raw materials and products in a socially fair framework;
- ✓ not to use genetically modified organisms (GMO);
- ✓ to minimise the use of products that contain additives or synthetic chemical preservatives, that is to say that they do not have a natural origin, but that they have been manufactured by men;
- ✓ to eliminate actions that cause a negative impact on the environment, use biodegradable detergents and have a proper disposal and an appropriate treatment of generated waste;

- ✓ to obtain a larger quantity of organic produce and farm produce by promoting the consumption of vegetables, fruit and spices at the moment of their harvest or gathering (seasonal products);
- ✓ to establish strategic alliances with the producers of raw food in order to reach a compromise and quality requirements, and in this way fostering economic sustainability of the producers and allowing a productive plan of action based on demand to take place;
- ✓ to have knowledge of the natural resources (flora and fauna) of the region and evaluate which can be incorporated to food preparations; and
- ✓ to promote the consumption of raw food. (Raw Food)

The quality of food can be described by the group of characteristics that make it tasty, suitable and safe for the consumer. The quality is the sum of the facts and characteristics of a product that have to do with the possibility of satisfying the needs of people. In that sense, Wicke y Candia (2009) define the quality of a product through different aspects: ‘nutritional quality, hygienic or sanitary quality, and sensory quality or organoleptic quality’ (Wicke & Candia, 2009, págs. 26-28). A useful definition of healthy eating is (Basulto, y otros, 2013, pág. 1):

‘one that allows reaching and maintaining the optimal functioning of the organism, conserving and re-establishing health, diminishing the risk of developing illnesses, ensuring reproduction, pregnancy and lactation, and promoting optimal growth and development. It has to be satisfactory, sufficient, complete, balanced, safe, adapted, sustainable and affordable’.

There are several studies that show that eating fast and the lack of concentration at the time of eating deteriorate the natural association between the sensory signals and the metabolic consequences and it is believed that the capacity of the body to regulate the amount of intake of energy in healthy levels is reduced. That is why future investigations should focus on underlying physiological, neurological and molecular mechanisms where our eating environment affects our control over the food intake. Due to this reason, SF has a strong connection with healthy eating saludable (Graaf & Kok, 2010).

Having started as an alternative tendency, the model of consumption of slow food is developing into a global phenomenon. Due to several healthy, social, ethical, and environmental worries, consumers are against the industrialisation of the agri-food system and demand more natural processes of growth and transformation. At the same time, they see the standardisation of food products as ‘organoleptically boring’ and feel that the homogenisation of food contributes to the gradual loss of the cultural identity of people (Nosi & Zanni, 2004).

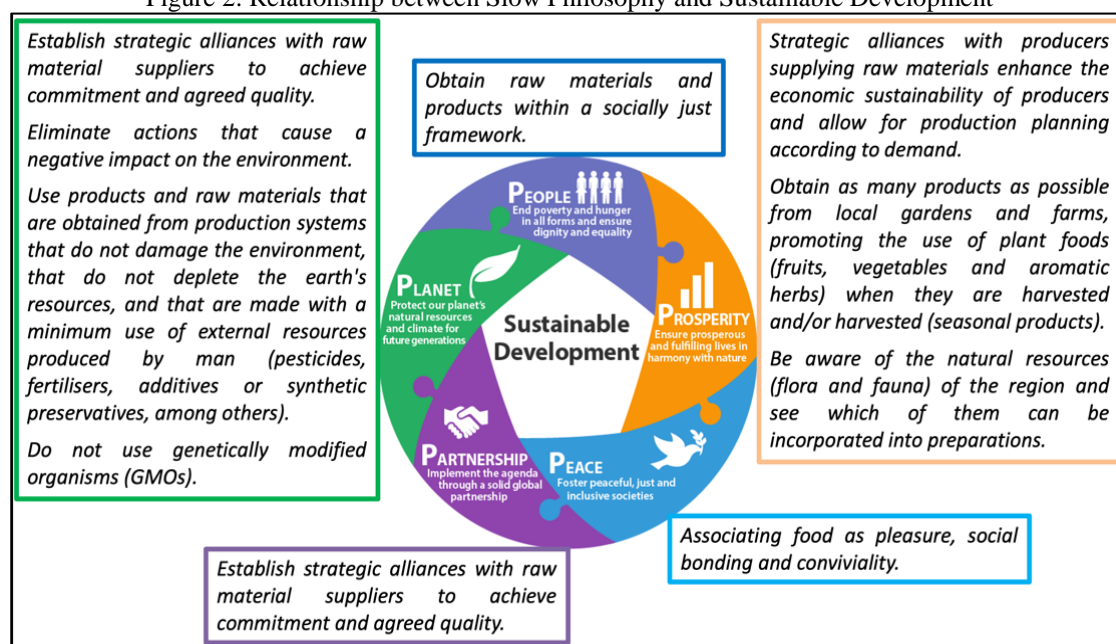
SF plays an important role in the agri-food system because it contributes to reduce the information asymmetries between the production and consumption sectors. In this way, it can be said that SF operates

as a multi-level provider of services representing an emergent entrepreneur actor in the business of typification (Nosi & Zanni, 2004).

In September, 2015, the Summit of Sustainable Development was carried out where more than 150 Chiefs of States and Governments took part and 17 objectives of global application were agreed upon and these objectives are in place since 1st January, 2016. It is stated that to end poverty, the strategies have to promote the economic growth taking into account social needs such as education, health, social protection and opportunities of employment. These strategies promote the protection of the environment (Naciones Unidas, 2018). Figure 2 shows the existing relationship between Slow Philosophy and Sustainable Development.

In 2014, the results of a survey carried out in MdP about the consumption of healthy food gave as a result that ‘all the respondents consider that the (Rodríguez & Lupín, 2015) consumption of vegetables grown in a conventional way is not very healthy because of the use of pesticides and agro-chemicals’ (Rodríguez & Lupín, 2015).

Figure 2: Relationship between Slow Philosophy and Sustainable Development



Source: Own elaboration based on (Santander Spataro, Enev, Garcia, & Ahumada, 2013); (Brunori, 2007); (Naciones Unidas, 2018); (Pinterest, 2018)

3.3 FOOD CONTROLLED SHIELD FOR FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Taking into account the Ordinance No. 18867/08 which is stated in the Agreement of Cooperation with the National Agrifood Health and Quality Service (SENASA) with the aim of establishing and coordinating the implementation of research related to food security and the Decree No. 2257/12 which creates the Programme of sampling and monitoring of waste of agro-chemical and biological pollutants in fresh fruit and vegetable products; in 2017, the first Controlled Food Stamp (SAC) for fruits and

vegetables was created in Argentina. The certification has the aim of adding value to the fruits and vegetables grown in GPC. In this way, the control of quality is endorsed in order to evaluate the presence of agro-chemical waste above the accepted level for their consumption. (Municipalidad de General Pueyrredon, 2017).

That project entails a joint workplan carried out by the city hall department of Productive Development, Health and Bromatology, SENASA, Association of Professional Engineers of Buenos Aires Province (CIPBA) district number II, Association of Fruit and Vegetable Producers and Allied (AFHOPA), and the Analysis Division of Food from the Fares Taie Institute, that is authorised by SENASA and by the Provincial Agency for Sustainable Development (OPDS). In this way, the consumer is assured of buying food which has been produced following a standard of quality. (Diario La Capital, 2017)

4 METHODOLOGY

The research starts with an exploratory approach of the state of the art in the production and consumption of healthy, organic and SF food in the international, national and local spheres. Then, the qualitative approach, with its pragmatic and interpretative aspects, and also based on people's experiences is chosen to fulfil this aim. In this way, starting from the precepts of the Grounded Theory, the process of qualitative research includes the following: the immersion in the day to day life of the studied situation, the value and the attempt to understand the perspective of the participants about their own worlds, and the consideration of the research as an interactive project between the researcher and those participants (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2007).

Firstly, the Units of Analysis (UA) are identified. These units are written documents and people's opinions in GPC. In order to obtain data for the UA, two units of data collection are used: interviews (in the case of individuals) and readings (in the case of documents). Both are units of data collection. The people chosen to obtain information from are researchers, professionals and experienced people with wide experience and well known in GPC that are part of public and private organizations. In the case of a qualitative approach, the job position of a person is more important than the number of people analysed. In this type of sampling, the 'snowball strategy' is used, where each person interviewed introduces someone else and this person, in turn, introduces others and so on. This type of sampling is used in order to be able to interview people who are far away or difficult to locate (Nicolini Leiva, 2015).

The concept of interview has to do with the connection between the researcher and the interviewee, the latter could be only one person or a group of people. The interviewees give a discursive production that involve common aspects and others which are differentiating ones, allowing the researcher to go deep into the topic chosen. During the development of this type of technique, the most important feature is a

comfortable and relaxed atmosphere between the interviewer and the interviewee so that the latter can answer freely and the former can get an idea about the key core points that the participants share.

As qualitative studies deal with limited scopes, where the validity and credibility of the knowledge obtained is more important than the possibility of making generalisations of measurable characteristics of a probability sample of the whole universe, a small number of UA are analysed, i.e. a sub-group is chosen in an intentional way (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2007) .

So, the starting point is an intentional and convenient sampling and the UA correspond to experienced people in the topic chosen, government regulations and newspaper articles.

To find out the existence of the production of SF in the region, an open interview is used. For other interviews, a semi-structured interview is created. This, in turn, is approved by experts in order to evaluate its validity, i.e. the credibility that an argument entails in relation to this investigation. Before carrying out the interview, a short introduction to the goal is given, and trigger questions are used so that the interviewee can talk and enlarge on their knowledge and the interviewer can ask about important aspects necessary for this study (Hernández Sampieri, Fernández Collado, & Baptista Lucio, 2010).

The analysis and interpretation of the information will be carried out from the first data collection. The process involves the data collection, the recording, the transcription, the reading, the coding and the creation of a new theory. All these steps occur as an uninterrupted and recurrent sequence, like a zigzag movement from the data of the first reflections to the end of the project.

The analysis of the information starts with the coding, where names and conceptual categories are given to different relevant parts of the observations (interviews and written documents). This implies dividing the textual data to define the dimensions, categories and sub-categories to understand the situation analysed.

The results obtained from the contextualisation of the categories already defined are interpreted, the results under the slow food precepts are analysed, the conclusions resulting from the process of investigation are given and the proposals for the development of the key competencies in the local sphere are formulated.

5 INTRODUCTION OF UNITS OF ANALYSIS AND THE DIMENSIONS, CATEGORIES AND EMERGING SUBCATEGORIES.

From the analysis of the theoretical framework, it is known that since the 1990s onwards there have been consumption habits which prioritise food free from agro-chemicals, and free from additives and preservatives. There is also a tendency towards the consumption of raw food, regional products and non-standardised products. The existence of the production of raw materials and the production of healthy,

organic and SF food in GPC, the production characteristics and the consumer attitudes were investigated through interviews.

Finally, the following six interviews were chosen as units of analysis: (Agricultural engineer specialized in the slow philosophy from the South Buenos Aires Regional Centre from INTA; Agricultural engineer representative of CIPBA district II; Agricultural engineer from the Bromatology Department of the GPM; Agricultural producer and president of the AFHOPA in GPC; Agricultural engineer from SENASA; and PHP Biological Science from Fares Taie Institute of Analysis and FCA from UNMdP) and four texts (Municipal Ordinance No. 21296/2013; National Law No. 27118/2015; Telam’s newspaper article called ‘Mar del Plata: 90% of people’s urine that was investigated has glyphosate’ and Unernoticias newspaper article called ‘Contamination with agrochemicals in Argentina’).

As a result of the discursive analysis of the selected UA, the Dimensions, Categories and emerging Sub-categories are obtained. These are shown in Table 1 based on the existing relation between Slow Philosophy and Sustainable Development. The SF code is not present in Table 1 because it involves all dimensions.

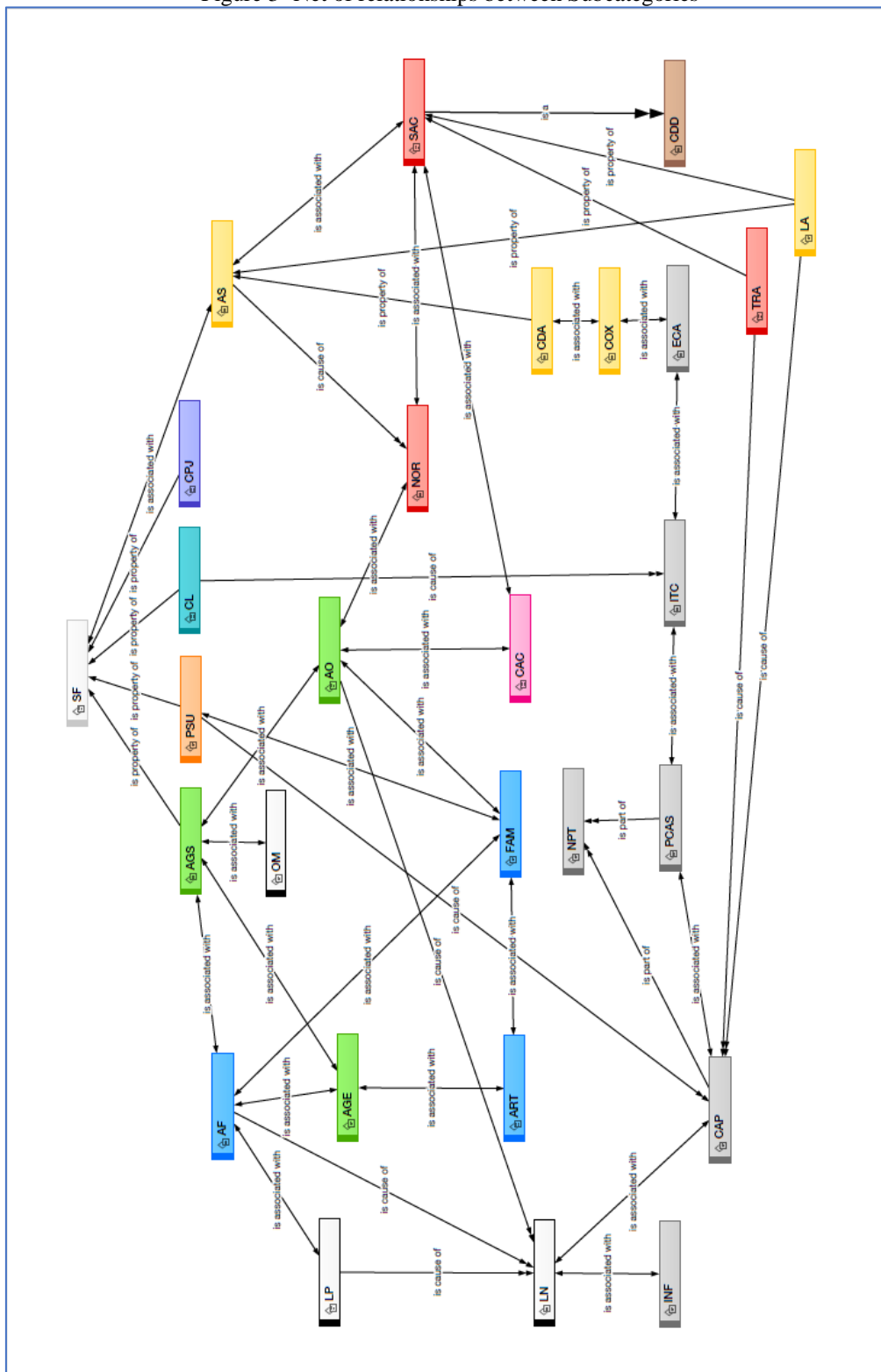
Table 1: Dimensions, Categories and Sub-categories.

Dimensions	Categories	Subcategories	
		Title	Code
CONTEXT	Health	Healthy Food	AS
		Water Quality	CDA
		Contamination	COX
		Agrochemical free	LA
	Social Inclusion	Family-owned establishments	FAM
		Familiar agriculture	AF
		Artisanal	ART
	Environment	Agroecological	AGE
		Organic Food - Organic Production	AO
		Sustainable agriculture	AGS
STATE As a guarantor of social inclusion, health and environmental preservation.	Government regulations that provide for social inclusion, health and environmental preservation.	National laws	LN
		Provincial laws	LP
		By-laws of the city council	OM
	Actions by government agencies that promote social inclusion, health and environmental preservation.	Healthy Food Consumption Policies	PCAS
		Consumer Education	ITC
		Agrochemical content - Effect of containing Agrochemicals	ECA
		Training	CAP
		New jobs	NPT
		Infrastructure	INF
		Sustainable production	PSU
PRODUCER As a participant in social inclusion, health and environmental preservation.	Production model	Sustainable production	PSU
	Marketing model	Differentiation issue	CDD
	Quality and reliability	Traceability	TRA
		Controlled food stamp	SAC
		Standards / Procedural guidelines	NOR
CONSUMER Aware of taking care of their health, preserving the environment and regional development.	Consumption of local food	Local consumptions	CL
	Certified consumption	Certified consumption	CAC
	Fair price consumption	Fair price consumption	CPJ

The processing of UA is analysed with the Atlas.ti software from the contextualization of the categories defined above. In Figure 3, the net of relations between Sub-categories is shown, each colour represents a different defined Category. The white colour is not included because it corresponds to the SF

which includes all categories. Also, it can be observed that have been defined as properties of SF, sustainable agriculture (AGS), the sustainable production (PSU), the local consumptions (CL) and the fair price consumption (CPJ), i. e. the pillars of the slow philosophy on which the SF movement is based.

Figure 3- Net of relationships between Subcategories



6 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The results obtained are analysed taking into account the premises of the slow food philosophy that supports local biodiversity, respect for the earth and the gastronomic culture with regional food in order to offer healthy food for inhabitants all year long.

The National Law No. 27118/2015 states that ‘the familiar, countryfolk and indigenous agriculture is of public interest due to its contribution to the security and food sovereignty of people. This type of agriculture enhances systems of life and production that preserve biodiversity and promotes sustainable processes of productive transformation’ This National law lays the foundation for the agro-ecological production ‘based on the environmental, social and economic sustainability’.

At the same time, the approach of Municipality of the GPC (GPM) to the concept of agro-ecology includes ‘self-sufficient and diversified agricultural systems, providing a balanced environment through the use of ecological principles that favour natural processes and biological interactions’. These are able to fulfil on their own key processes such as organic matter accumulation, soil fertilization, mechanisms of biotic regulation of plagues and crops productivity”.

Due to the reasons mentioned above, from the point of view of the interviewed and who subscribes, the natural producer of slow food would be the agro-ecological one. This, in turn, is very important to determine the need to move towards an agro-ecological production as a basis for the elaboration of food in the slow philosophy. The professionals interviewed believe that an agro-ecological production is more feasible in fruit and vegetable crops than in intensive ones. Moreover, there is a tendency in the population to move towards healthy eating and there is certain concern about the current system of production where there are a lot of agrochemicals used. Awareness is being raised very slowly and the producers are taking the path in the direction of an agro-ecological production which will take at least 15 years to be completed.

However, the success in that sense is strongly conditioned by the compromise of the consumer who does not often have the necessary awareness when buying food and should understand that a perfectly aesthetically appealing fruit and vegetable product does not grow in a natural way and also that a product without a label should not be bought.

With the addition of new technologies which lead to the creation of new job offers, this, in turn, allows the members of a family to enter the productive system without the need to move to cities in order to satisfy their needs of personal development.

At the same time, the lack of an inter-relationship between the sectors of production and tourism is acknowledged. The quality of the products of the fruit and vegetable belt and their by-products used as raw material for the HORECA sector would mean an added value for the choice of Mar del Plata as a national and international touristic destination that is not present today. The SAC does not assure an

agroecological product but it does state that it is suitable for human consumption. It is also demonstrated that local products have superior quality than those from other cities in the region.

All in all, the agroecological production is needed to improve the quality of life, which implies a cultural change. The latter takes time and effort. The production of slow food is achieved through the agroecological production.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The need for a healthy diet which in a way creates the awareness of the consumers, and that should be actively motivated by different levels of the government, leads to more natural crops and transformation of the system of production. This determines the importance of adopting a new system of production, that is, the agro-ecological one, according to the National Law No. 27118/2015, which is the basis for the elaboration of food according to the slow philosophy. However, changing from the present-day model to an agro-ecological one requires time, this transition could take 15 years, that is why the consumer's role is so important to encourage that change at the production level.

The model of consumption of slow food, which started as an alternative tendency, is growing to a global phenomenon in Argentina.

The existence of family farms that work with the slow philosophy plus the artisanal production boosted by the national and local governments with a strong relationship with family agriculture, agroecology and organic production make the growth of the production of slow food in the GPC feasible.

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