

RADICALLY LOCAL SUPPLY CHAINS THROUGH TERRITORIAL BRANDS: INSIGHTS FROM THE 100% LOCAL

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Signpost for the Bohinj cheese tour.

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Radically local supply chains through territorial brands: Insights from the 100% Local project

ABSTRACT: The modernization of food supply chains has marginalized remote agricultural regions such as the Alps. As a result, local actors often adopt new ways of producing, promoting, and selling their products by differentiating them in the eyes of consumers. The labelling of quality local agri-food products through the development and promotion of territorial brands play an essential role in this respect. In the article we address the research question: What are the conditions for the creation, development and sustainability of territorial brands in the agri-food sector? What are the characteristics of some territorial brands, which are an essential development factor and the subject of local identities and local policies? We discuss cooperation between local, regional, and national actors. The aim of this article is to highlight the preparation and role of the 100% Local Model for the successful creation and development of territorial brands in the field of agro-food production in the Alps.

KEY WORDS: labelling, territorial brands, 100% Local, food, agriculture, Alps

Radikalno lokalne dobavne verige s teritorialnimi blagovnimi znamkami: Spoznanja iz projekta 100 % Local

POVZETEK: Modernizacija preskrbovalnih verig s hrano je potisnila oddaljena kmetijska območja kot so Alpe na obrobje. Zato lokalni akterji mnogokrat prevzamejo nove načine proizvodnje, promocije in prodaje svojih izdelkov, tako da jih v očeh potrošnikov ločijo od drugih. Pri tem ima bistveno vlogo označevanje kakovostnih lokalnih kmetijsko-živilskih proizvodov povezano z razvojem in s spodbujanjem teritorialnih blagovnih znamk.

V članku obravnavamo raziskovalni vprašanji: Kakšni so pogoji za oblikovanje, razvoj in trajnost teritorialnih blagovnih znamk v kmetijsko-živilskem sektorju? Kakšne so značilnosti nekaterih teritorialnih blagovnih znamk, ki so bistveni dejavnik razvoja ter predmet lokalnih identitet in lokalnih politik? Razpravljamo tudi o sodelovanju med lokalnimi, regionalnimi in nacionalnimi akterji. Namen tega članka je osvetliti pripravo in vlogo modela 100 % Local Model za uspešno oblikovanje in razvoj teritorialnih blagovnih znamk na področju kmetijsko-živilske proizvodnje v Alpah.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: označevanje, teritorialne znamke, 100 % Local, hrana, kmetijstvo, Alpe

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1 Introduction

The production and provision of food, its preparation, and consumption, are fundamental cultural practices because humans have created a range of cultural practices between hunger and its satisfaction (Mennell, Murcott and Otterloo 1994; Wiegelmann 2006; Finnis 2012). Before the Second World War, as in other non-urban areas of Europe, people in the Alpine region were still dependent on their own food production and subsistence, which was the purpose of most of their economic activities (Godina Golija 2008; Atkins, Amilien and Oddy 2009; Ledinek Lozej 2016). With increasing global food production and trade in food products in recent decades, subsistence food production has been abandoned and trade in cheap food products, which can come from very remote locations, has expanded, leading to a disconnect between the places of production and those of consumption. Contemporary agri-food supply chains have undergone a strong process of de-territorialisation due to the modernisation of agriculture and food production (Popkin and Gordon-Larsen 2004; <https://www.alpine-space.eu/project/alpfoodway/>). Food production has remained important in harder to reach, remote areas, for individuals with low purchasing power and for some elderly people who maintain the economic activities of their youth (Kos et al. 2000).

These are joined by individuals who, for ecological, worldview, political and other reasons, support local food production and greater self-sufficiency and sustainable development, which researchers have found to be a growing phenomenon in the European Union (Pratt 2007; Köstlin 2010; Grimaldi, Fassino and Porporato 2019). This group of consumers is paying attention to local supply chains and healthier food. They are willing to pay more for products embodying different values and logic, including the local production of ingredients, the involvement of small and medium-sized farms, the use of environmentally friendly production practices (Tschofen 2010; Bartsch and Lysaght 2017; Bati 2017; May et al. 2017; Godina Golijan and Ledinek Lozej 2018).

Although the Alps are a remote area, poorly connected by communication routes and new technologies, the last four decades have seen transformative changes and intensification of agriculture. These trends have resulted in the downsizing or disappearance of some agro-food supply chains and productive know-how, in standardisation and homogenisation of plant varieties and animal breeds, the mechanization of agriculture, the increased use of fertilizers and pesticides, and the industrialization of food production. These negative consequences of agriculture and food production are also linked to climate change. Agriculture in the Alps contributes to climate change, and at the same time, climate change affects the agricultural sector in a negative manner (Kienast, Ströbele and Schüpbach 2021). Just to mention the abandonment of small-scale livestock farming and the introduction of intensive cattle farming in some Alpine areas.

There are few in-depth studies on food production transformation and modern food supply in the Alps (Nussbaumer and Exenberger 2009; Rinallo and Luminati 2021). They are mostly concerned about the production, marketing, and heritage of some of the most characteristic agricultural products of the Alps, especially cheese (Grasseni 2011; Ledinek Lozej 2013; 2016; Grasseni 2017; Ledinek Lozej 2021). Less attention is paid to the current problems of agriculture, the need to restructure it and radically change supply chains in the Alps, and to modernised ways of producing food in the face of new social and climatic changes. The Alpine Convention's recent Climate Action Plan 2.0 (2021) also highlights these problems in the Alpine region. It encourages farmers to engage in climate action through »promotion of local Alpine products and increase of locally retained added value from marketing and distribution of climate-friendly products at a local and regional level« and »the set up of a scheme for low-CO₂ or CO₂-neutral agriculture in the Alps, based on a significant increase of the share of Alpine agriculture adopting climate-friendly and organic farming methods, which shall also significantly reduce the use of chemicals in farming« (Permanent Secretariat ... 2021).

Territorial brands (TBs) are a collective marketing tool through which producers from a given area under the coordination of an umbrella organization can promote themselves, differentiate their products with respect to those from other areas, and retain local added value (Bardone and Kannike 2022; Ledinek Lozej and Razpotnik Visković 2022; see also AlpFoodway project and Territorial Brands in the Alpine Region workshop). They differ from the brands of individual producers because of their collective nature. Similar to TBs are destination brands, which focus on tourism promotion and geographical indications, which also can be thought of as collective brands linked to a territory, but which unlike territorial brands focus on one product category only (Rinallo and Pitardi 2019; Logar 2021a; 2021b; 2021c). TBs, destination brands and geographical indications act as a quality signal to consumers, by guaranteeing that recognized products are made within the boundaries of an area by respecting agreed-upon specifications.

Unlike geographical indications or short supply chains, which are much more investigated and recognized as territorial development tools (Rinallo and Pitardi 2019; Lešnik Štuhec 2021; Logar 2021a; 2021b; 2021c), TBs are understudied, little understood, and often confused with other types of brands (e.g., city brands, destination brands, individual brands promoting their place of origin) or with the collective image of an area (Charters and Spielmann 2014; Spielmann and Williams 2016). Limited work has instead looked at territorial brands ‘from the inside.’ One exception is Logar (2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2022), whose analysis of Slovenian territorial brands concluded that they can effectively fulfil their functions only when adopting a long-term perspective. In Slovenia, many territorial brands were established through Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds or the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); most however did not survive much longer the end of the projects through which they were funded, due to a lack of long-term strategy and management capabilities (Ledinek Lozej 2020; Lešnik Štuhec 2021; Logar 2021a; 2021b; 2021c). Clearly, more research is needed on how local support for territorial brands can help them grow and reach a maturity stage where initial investments are rewarded in terms of local economic and image impacts.

The goal of the article is to contribute to the sparse literature on territorial brand sustainability based on insights from the 100% Local financed by Alpine Regione Preparatory Action Fund (ARPAF) II, which developed a model of territorial branding based on radically local supply chains in the Alpine region. A radically local supply chains are defined as the supply and sale of products that are consistently made only from local raw materials and local ingredients. These products are based on only local resources throughout the entire production, distribution and sales process (Figure 1). The premise of the project was that territorial brands can indeed benefit from the signs of discontent and resistance to the intensive agro-business system, which often supplies less tasty food and of lower quality than the food obtained using extensive farming and more traditional production methods (Grasseni 2011; Godina Golija 2012; Kisbán 2016; West 2016; Rinallo 2019; Ledinek Lozej and Šrampf Vendramin 2020; Logar 2021a; see also AlpFoodway project). As the name suggests, the project has developed a model for local territorial brands, focusing on products and services based on the area’s cultural heritage, made with local ingredients and raw materials and entirely processed locally. This model has been tested in different pilot areas. The research question addressed



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Figure 1: Selling local products on a farm in Bohinj.

in the text is how the 100% Local Model was developed, how it was successfully or unsuccessfully adopted, and whether the 100% Local Model is applicable in different Alpine regions.

2 Methodology and research area

This article is based on the results of the research and expert work within the 100% Local project (<https://www.alpine-region.eu/projects/100-local>) in five Alpine areas as a case study: Bohinj and Triglav National Park, Slovenia; Obervinschgau/Alta Val Venosta, Italy; Parco Prealpi Giulie, Italy; Pitztal, Austria and Valsot, Unterengadin, Switzerland (Figure 2). Qualitative research methods were used to prepare this article: analyses of documents and sources, semi-structured interviews, ethnographic fieldwork with cultural analysis (Löfgren 1981; May 2022) and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Field material was collected during the 100% Local project through fieldwork and by conducting interviews in the study areas in 2020. Some of the field material on typical local products in the Alps used and presented in this article was collected before the start of the project, as some of the 100% Local collaborators were already active in the selected areas for other projects, e.g., the AlpFoodway project (<https://www.alpine-space.org/projects/alpfoodway/en/home>). We also collected data on the pilot areas through secondary online sources (e.g., territorial brands' product specifications; tourism statistics).

Besides the described qualitative methods, we also analysed the material from the workshops with stakeholders and the responses to an online questionnaire. The workshops with local stakeholders were held on June 2020 in these areas: Obervinschgau/Alta Val Venosta (3. 6. 2020), Valsot (4. 6. 2020), Pitztal (5. 6. 2020), Parco Prealpi Giulie (8. 6. 2020), Bohinj and Triglav National Park (TNP; 9. 6. 2020 and 16. 6. 2020). The workshops involved exchanging experiences, lessons learned and results of good and less successful practices and addressing the problems encountered in the production, sale, promotion, branding and distribution of local agricultural products and food. Before workshops in May 2020, an online questionnaire was addressed to stakeholders from the five Alpine areas. The stakeholders shared their perceptions

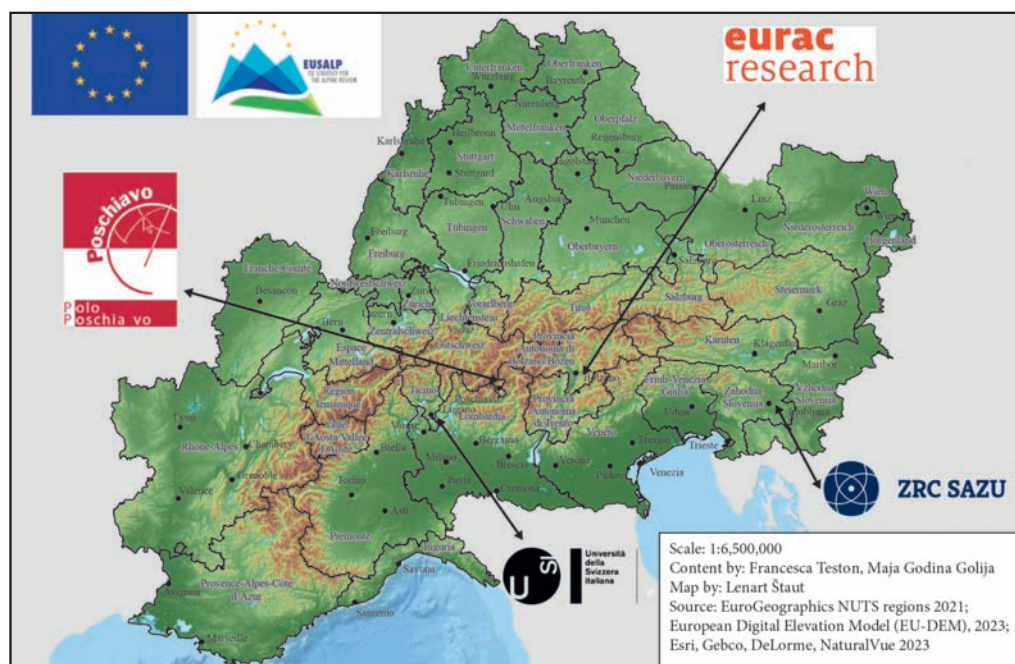


Figure 2: The project areas and partners.

on the most relevant megatrends for Alpine agri-food value chains (accelerating technological change, climate change and environmental degradation; continuing urbanization; growing consumerism; increasing demographic imbalances).

The earlier research results were tested in all five study areas and refined with suggestions discussed with local stakeholders. In doing so, the article's authors and other project researchers were aware of the importance of bottom-up methodology in participatory research (Nared and Bole 2020). In this article, we illustrate how the 100% Local Model, which was developed in the framework of the project work in 2020 and 2021 (Rinallo et al. 2021) was applied in the areas of Bohinj and the Triglav National Park, Slovenia, with a critical discussion of common problems, implementation difficulties, and future prospects.

3 Results

3.1 Construction and characteristics of the 100% Local Model

The 100% Local Model is a result of the European project Boosting the Alpine agri-food value chains with the »100% Local« (100% Local project in short), the project took place in 2019–2021. The project had the goal to develop a sustainable territorial development model based on territorial branding practices focused on agri-food products entirely produced and processed locally.

The project understood the term model as a simplified version of reality capable of reducing the complexity of strategic decision-making. Thanks to the 100% Local Model, local communities can design and manage territorial brands and Territorial Brand Managing Organizations (TBMOs) that resonate with the characteristics of the local community, and to ensure its sustainability thanks to future-proofing techniques.

The 100% Local Model is based on a future envisioning participative methodology in three stages (see Figure 3). We refer to the 100% Local final report (Rinallo et al. 2021) for a more in-depth examination of elements to be included in the analysis and guiding questions. In the next paragraph, we illustrate how the 100% Local Model was applied in one of the project's pilot areas (Bohinj and the Triglav National Park), focusing specifically on Step 1 (Analysis of the current situation) and Step 2 (Participative future-envisioning and collective decision-making) of the methodology, as most initiatives are yet to be implemented. More specifically, background analyses were carried out in April–May 2020 with data provided by local stakeholders. Participative future envisioning workshops with local stakeholders took place online on June 9th and June 16th, 2020. Further online workshops were held on January 26th and April 2nd, 2021, thanks to which a tentative action plan was developed. During April–May 2021, project partner »Università della Svizzera italiana« accompanied local stakeholders in the model implementation through dedicated coaching sessions.

3.2 Applying the 100% Local Model in the case study area Bohinj and the Triglav National Park

The following chapter is based on material related to adapting the 100% Local Model in the municipality of Bohinj.

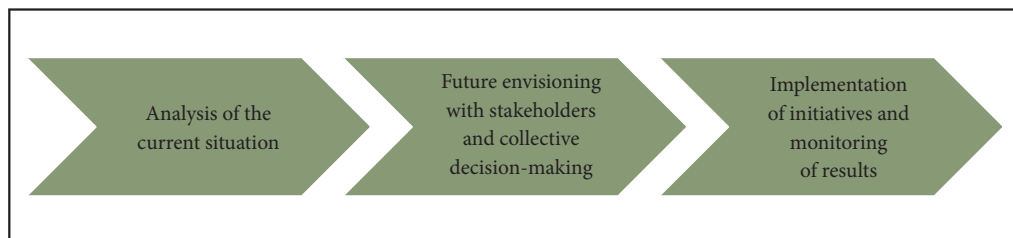


Figure 3: Steps in the application of the 100% Local Model (Rinallo et al. 2021).

3.2.1 Step 1: Analysis of the current situation

In testing the 100% Local Model, we asked local stakeholders to collect data on the economic, social and cultural characteristics of their regions from secondary sources and by interviewing community members. We tested the current situation in the regions using publicly available quantitative data and local actors' perceptions. Our research focused in particular on areas of relevance to the local economy: a description of the current local cooperation network, the existence of territorial brands and other quality certifications in the area, and an analysis of the basic rules (with a particular focus on membership criteria and rules for product inclusion); the state of the local economic system (agriculture, food production and crafts, tourism, etc.), other relevant systems (culture, education, civil society, etc.), as well as the available policy support at the local, regional, national and possibly EU level. We present the key findings from these activities for the municipality of Bohinj, partly for TNP.

The municipality of Bohinj is located in the Upper Carniola Region in northwestern Slovenia. According to the Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia it covers an area of 333.7 km², 66% of which is in the TNP. The municipality has a population of 5,770 (approximately 2,910 males and 2,860 females, spread over an altitude of between 400 and 2,800 metres above sea level).

Bohinj is a well-known tourist destination and in 2019, there were 266,000 arrivals, and 710,000 overnight stays in Bohinj, mainly from Slovenia, Germany, the Czech Republic, the Benelux countries and the United Kingdom according to data of the Bohinj Tourist Board. In 2020, Bohinj had 157,135 guests, in 2021, 216,135 guests and a record number of 299,161 guests in 2022. That year, Bohinj recorded the highest number of overnight stays, 821,942. Tourist workers in Bohinj believe that the high number of visitors in 2022 was due to the Covid 19 epidemic and the introduction of tourist vouchers for the Slovenian population. The analysis of the structure of overnight stays also showed this consequence. The highest number of Slovenian overnight stays in Bohinj during the epidemic in 2020 and 2021, 62.8% and 49.7% respectively, significantly higher than before the epidemic, when the share of domestic overnight stays in Bohinj was only 23.2%. In 2022, 67% of guests visited Bohinj in the summer. In all municipalities covered by the park, tourism (especially foreign tourism) has increased from 2015 to 2021.

Agriculture in the area is concentrated in the lower plains. Crop production is therefore limited by the location of the land, its quality and the climatic characteristics of the area. Instead, livestock breeding and milk production are well-developed. Some radical pastoral and cheese-making practices were abandoned in the past due to the rise of industrial milk processing but have recently been revived (Ledinek Lozej 2016). The better-known products from the Bohinj are Mohant cheese (protected by a protected denomination of origin; Godina Golija 2017), dried meats, and local corn varieties. Some traditional crafts typical of the area have also been revitalised and promoted. Many territorial projects linked to the tri-territorial development were also aimed at passing on traditional skills to new generations. These projects have raised awareness of the local food heritage, linking producers to tourism operators, the market, and consumers, for example, through farm tourism, but much more needs to be done in this area (Razpotnik Visković and Komac 2021).

Bohinj is home to a well-developed territorial brand, Bohinjsko (From Bohinj), owned by the Municipality of Bohinj which registered in 2015 as a collective brand. Bohinjsko certifies agri-food products, crafts and design products, experiences, restaurants (more than 50% of the 30 in the municipality) and accommodation businesses. To be certified, products need to be produced in the municipality, use local ingredients and raw materials, and respect traditional values. The brand, currently counting 70 suppliers for a total of 400 products and services, is managed by the local destination management organization Turizem Bohinj, whose Quality Centre certifies new applicants and vigilates on the respect of quality standards. The territorial brand's activities include the collective promotion of certified products through traditional and digital media, the fostering of collaborations across the supply chain, the improvement of packaging and labels based on a heritage storytelling approach, and the stimulation of innovation (e.g., chocolate with Mohant cheese) and marginal (e.g., modern shapes for traditional products; smaller sizes for the souvenir market). Bohinjsko has been an inspiration for other Slovenian municipalities, who have attempted to create territorial brands based on its model, often without the same level of success (Logar 2021a; 2021b; 2021c). Also the TNP has developed a Park Quality Mark granted to producers of arts and crafts products or service providers in its territory and/or in the Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve. So far, only 11 tourism farms and other accommodation services have obtained the certification. Respect to other pilot areas in the 100% Local Model, Tourism Bohinj and the TNP already had a quite established territorial

brand and cooperation network. By taking part in the 100% Local project activities, they hoped to involve a greater number of local actors, stimulating the adoption of local ingredients in food production and the restaurant business, increasing the number of market-oriented farms, and gaining broader support for some development ideas already circulating in the area.

3.2.2 Step 2: Participative future-envisioning and collective decision-making

We first carried out a participating macro-trend analysis to anticipate plausible, probable, and possible futures using the methodology developed by the European Commission's Competence Centre on Foresight. The Megatrend Engagement Tools we adopted are available at https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/megatrends-engagement-tools_en. Macrotrends bring with them risks and opportunities as they shape populations, the environment, science and technology, work, and consumption habits. Main insights from this stage were as follows: 1) available farmland is being abandoned or converted to housing uses. Thus limits the benefits in terms of jobs and business opportunities deriving from linking farming to food production and tourism services. Farms and farming land thus need to be safeguarded to ensure the sustainability of 100% Local strategies; 2) conflicts of interest over land use, particularly in the case of new inhabitants, are to be expected; 3) farms are of limited size and their owner are aging, which makes generational turnover problematic; 4) technological change and hyper-connectivity can play a role in generating higher volumes of agricultural produce and foodstuffs, which are needed because of consumers' and tourists' greater interest in local food.

Another methodology we applied is the »Three Horizons« (3H) framework (Sharpe et al. 2016), which connects the present with desired futures and contributes to identifying conflicts and incompatibilities between the present and envisioned futures. The 3H framework helps stakeholders to map different and often coexisting ways of thinking about the future, the so-called managerial, visionary, and entrepreneurial mindsets.

The first horizon of the 3H framework is linked to a managerial mindset, focused on the present and on running the current organization or system. In this step of the future envisioning process, local stakeholders were asked to identify current concerns, or the elements in the way things are managed that have been inherited from the past, are effective today, but could sooner or later enter in a crises and become increasingly dysfunctional. Building on the macrotrend analysis, stakeholders from the Bohinj and TNP identified various concerns. First, the Park could end up being a victim of its success, as increased tourist flows could be difficult to control; moreover, farmland could decline resulting in insufficient production of local produce and foodstuffs to satisfy tourism demand. Second, most farmers are aging and show limited interest in organic agriculture or collaboration with tourist activities; additionally, some are discouraged by the complex administrative requirements for organic production, farm tourism, or being part of territorial brands. Third, short supply chains (farmers to hotels, restaurants, or consumers) are under-developed from both the information and logistics points of view, thus limiting collaboration. Fourth, respect to cheaper imports from other areas, local ingredients and products are expensive and their origin is difficult to prove.

The third horizon of the 3H framework focuses on aspirations for the future. Local stakeholders are thus asked to develop a shared vision for the area (say, 20 years or more in the future) and identify the elements of innovation required to make the vision come true. Aspirations for Bohinj and the TNP in 2040 were the following:

- 1) More successful territorial brands, engaging more actors, resulting in a greater number of market-oriented farms and increased production volume, and decreases in prices of locally produced products thanks to economies of scale;
- 2) better marketing and distribution of local products, as well as greater restaurant adoption of local products and recipes;
- 3) heritage-based innovation in foodstuffs, recipes, and tourist attraction, including high-quality gastronomic experiences and themed festivals;
- 4) more cooperation among local stakeholders and municipalities in TNP. Crucial to the realization of this vision would be the establishment of an umbrella organization capable of coordinating individual territorial brands to exploit synergies towards a common cross-sectoral development strategies, financed by the municipalities and the Park, and the creation of a logistics and internal/external communication system.

The second horizon of the 3H framework, associated to an entrepreneurial mindset, encourages to reflect on how it will be possible to introduce innovations by deploying appropriate financial and organizational resources and facing the possible obstacles to the achievement of the vision. Participants of online workshops (on January 26 and April 2nd, 2021) were asked what they could concretely do to drive the system towards its aspired future, reflecting on what should be dismissed, maintained, or innovated in the 3-5 following years. In this stage, participants developed a tentative action plan at the scale of the entire Julian Alps. Crucial to their vision was the constitution in 2024 of a cross-sectoral, professionally managed umbrella organization responsible for business development, promotion, and the provision of a shared infrastructure for distribution, quality control, logistics, certification, and marketing.

4 Discussion

We argue that the results of the development and adaptation of the 100% Local Model are relevant for the wider Alpine region. The region combines natural wealth, agriculture, care for natural and cultural heritage and the rapid development of tourism, particularly rural tourism, in conjunction with local cuisine and the use of typical local products, such as different types of cheese (Ledinek Lozej 2013; 2016; 2021). In this area, some local communities have already developed territorial brands and implemented territorial development models based on the commercial valorisation of agri-food products produced and processed locally (Rinallo and Luminati 2021; Ledinek Lozej 2021; Logar 2022).

During the 100% Local Model development process the model was tested in all four project pilot areas. During this testing, it has been shown that using the model requires a certain amount of pre-preparation or preliminary activities. Nevertheless, the use of the model is also more successful in areas where some territorial branding or forms of local production and distribution of agri-food products have already been developed (e.g., the Territorial Brands in the Alpine Region workshop). In territories where activities to encourage local production and distribution of food are just beginning, e. g. Pitztal in Austria, the use of the 100% Local Model proved less appropriate. Less appropriation is linked to the fact that a deep analysis of the current situation is always required at the outset to apply a 100% Local Model. In local communities where activities to promote local food production and distribution are only at the beginning, there is a need for timely information, and relevant knowledge may be fragmented. In contrast, the successful adaptation of the 100% Local Model has been demonstrated in the Bohinj and TNP area. In this area, local stakeholders very well analysed their current situation, resources, and challenges. They also accelerate an inclusive process of mobilising other actors and increase the success rate of planned initiatives (Logar 2021c). Their activities considered essential factors such as: focus on locally produced and processed products, inclusive stakeholder engagement and participation, consideration of place-specificity, food heritage and futures-proofing.

The advantage of the 100% Local Model is its transferability, scalability and flexibility. The model is scalable and can be applied to different Alpine areas, regardless of their size and economic development, be they remote Alpine areas or more significant regions in the Alpine macro-region. Model 100% Local is also flexible. Flexible means that it can assist various territorial development initiatives in different stages of their life cycle. Notably, the model can also be well applied to various forms of cross-border cooperation between Alpine areas (Ledinek Lozej 2021). Due to the adoption of futures-proofing methodologies, the 100% Local Model very well considers macro-trends and minimises the effects of shocks and stresses of future events on the locally designed production and distribution of food. The model can positively impact the development of local initiatives in Alpine areas and better cooperation between agri-food businesses, tourism, civil society, cultural and educational institutions and policy actors.

5 Conclusion

The article discusses selected findings of the 100% Local project, its model and the conditions for creating territorial brands in agri-food production. In addressing this topic, we have used the results of fieldwork in the pilot areas, secondary and online sources, data collected through, and territorial brand workshops and workshops with local stakeholders in the study areas. We have considered EU and national policy

objectives, targets and recommendations. According to recent research European consumers are increasingly interested in quality food, local products and territorial brands. The development of local food production and territorial brands is often linked to tourism, in particular rural, gastronomic and wine tourism, which has both positive and negative impacts on communities and space. The application of the 100% Local Model has shown the excellent applicability of this model in Alpine areas wishing to boost local food production and distribution. Territorial brands and the development of 100% Local food production are a crucial development factor and the subject of local identities and local policies, and, more recently, cooperation between local, regional and national actors.

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