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Luxury Strategies for Agricultural Products: a New Sustainable Governance Model for the Valorisation of the Tuscan Flower Supply Chain

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Abstract

Today Italian Floriculture is suffering the effects of a globalised market, dominated by high quality and low-cost industrial productions, distributed by the Dutch Market and originating from the South of the World. The Tuscany Region is suffering the lack of policies or collective initiatives intended to redevelop the local floriculture system and valorise its centennial biocultural heritage.

The project aims at valorising a differentiated autochthonous flower supply to be positioned in a niche emerging market, the floral design one, characterised by a low elasticity of demand to the increase of price. The niche escapes flower market perfect competition dynamics, so that marketing mix strategies can be used in order to build a long-term differential advantage for locally-grown flowers.

The identified tool was the activation of a long-term cooperation between a group of local producers, research institutes and local authorities intended to create an innovation multi-stakeholder platform along the value chain. In agriculture, these platforms are increasingly successful in acting as spaces for learning, action and change by which local actors can cooperate and be supported in identifying and solving problems and capitalizing opportunities in new and integrated manners.

The platform will work as a centralized model of governance for the co-design, implementation and control of an innovative shared origin-based qualification strategy, addressed to the value-added niche floral design market. In this sector sustainability and neo-luxury are increasingly influencing consumption, making environmental and origin attributes become sources of value for locally-grown flowers, thus representing an opportunity for Tuscan productions to be seized.

On a theoretical basis, floral design has been interpreted as a luxury niche of the national flower market. An in-depth comparative analysis of the relevant economic literature relating to luxury goods and consumption has been carried out and a theoretical framework for the interpretation of the specific features of the niche floral design market has been drawn. At

strategic level a B2B2C approach was adopted, in order to produce a differentiated offer of high added-value Tuscany-grown flowers to be positioned in the niche.

From a methodological point of view, a Participatory Action Research (PAR) was followed in order to generate an ongoing collective and self-reflective process of research (desk and field), design (strategic planning) and assessment. The activated dialogue between academic researchers and local actors (in-depth interviews and focus groups) allows to share competences, skills and knowledge to support the co-production of an endogenous development strategy.

The main results presented in the paper are: the identification and assessment of the niche with reference to the Tuscan supply chain strengths and weaknesses; the validation of the luxury theoretical framework for the strategy design; the evaluation of the adequacy and potential of an origin-based qualification strategy based on luxury B2B marketing principles; the characterization, the role and structure of the innovation multi-stakeholder platform acting as a centralized sustainable model of governance for the strategic process.

Keywords: Luxury marketing strategies, Supply Chain, Sustainability, Governance models, Floriculture