

Evaluating the Economic Impact of the Slow Food Presidia in Italy

In 2002, the Bocconi University of Economics and Business in Milan, Italy conducted a study highlighting the outcomes of the Slow Food Presidia projects in Italy. The study demonstrated the remarkable measurable economic impact of the projects while also showcasing the unique nature of the Presidia model.

The Bocconi study quantified the remarkable achievement of the Presidia as measured by production quantity, sales price, and product quality. The study looked at 54 Presidia in six areas of production: fish, baked goods and sweets, cheeses, animal breeds, and produce. The groups ranged from four to sixteen Presidia of each type.

The study showed how a Slow Food Presidium acts as a cultural matrix, bringing together territory and product, typicality and quality, in which the term “environment” finds its clearest expression as the “context of life in the local community” – and new recognition in the local market.

Personnel and organization

Depending on the typology of the products, Presidia membership consisted of small family-run businesses, and in many cases the presidium was either based upon a consortium or association or subsequently fostered the formation of one. Each presidium presents a different business model, ranging from groups of only one or two businesses to a consortium or association that gave birth to the presidium project. Notably, during the course of the study, many presidia added the number of businesses and all presidia member businesses either maintained or increased their number of staff.

Per Cent Increase, 2000-2002	Quantities sold	Price per unit
Fish	11% ¹	39.3%
Cured Meats	53%	20%
Bakery Goods and Sweets	36% ²	21.5% ³
Cheeses	46% ⁴	28% ⁵
Animal breeds	161% ⁶	19%
Fruit, vegetables and pulses	74% ⁷	68% ⁸
Average overall growth	63.5%	32.6%

¹Excluding the outlier of Noli anchovies, which experienced a –25% change in production quantities, as the presidium was created to counter EU regulation against trawling.

²Excluding the –1% growth in the case of Meluga biscuits, because the production quantity was specifically restricted by the decision to return to make by hand only, increasing production time considerably.

³Altamura bread is not reflected as the presidium only started in 2002

⁴The 2,500% increase in sales of the Montebore cheese is not included, as the increase in production that took place reflects the fact that the cheese was already extinct and was brought into production again by the presidium.

⁵The Montebore price is also not included in this average, as it was extinct.

⁶Excluding the 1100% increase on the part of the Padovana hen, also previously extinct.

⁷Excluding the 1633% reported increase for Lago Trasimeno bean seed production.

⁸Excluding the Certaldo Onion Presidium, created in 2002.

(continued)

Production quantities and price per unit

In some cases the reported per cent increase in production is extremely high, when involving the complete reintroduction of a product from extinction back into the market: as in the case of the Montebore cheese in the Province of Alessandria that experienced a 2,500% increase in sales in its first year. However, when calculating the average increase as reflected in the table above, outliers such as the Montebore cheese were excluded and therefore the average increase overall in quantities sold of 63.5% is truly remarkable. Compounded with an average price per unit increase of 32.6%, it is fair to say that the Slow Food Presidia model present an extremely viable economic model for business.

Additional factors

Aside from the measurable direct advantage of increased farming income, the study highlights various indirect economic benefits to the local network, including increased tourism, such as in the case of the Robiola di Roccaverano cheese, as enthusiasts come to the Roccaverano area in search of the cheese. The success of the cheese presidium then led to the opening of an ageing facility and retail outlet and the inclusion of another Piedmontese traditional product, Flietto Baciato of Ponzone. The initial project has brought an injection of growth into the local economy that continues to have positive effects.

The study also makes a qualitative assessment of marketing methods used: the articulation of the sales network, composition of the clientele, and varying market areas. The activity of a presidium not only safeguards products and production processes rooted in a well-defined context, it also makes sure aspects such as the identity of a product are known and appreciated. In general, the experience of the various presidia in marketing shows the important hurdles inherent in the startup period of the projects: creation of the production protocol, obtaining the necessary permits and authorizations, and then becoming 'well-known.'

The Role of Slow Food

Slow Food's involvement with the presidia goes beyond mere promotion of an idea and includes a spectrum of supporting activities: assistance in formation, communications, collaboration with the Slow Food Press Office, internet presence, participation in national and international fairs, and presentation of products to commercial contacts. The Slow Food organization can offer a wealth of resources to the presidia through the association's network of food experts, connoisseurs, and enthusiasts. Furthermore, the presidia projects embody the Slow Food philosophy and vision, as the Slow Food name is known to guarantee a high quality, local, typical gastronomic experience.