

## The Use of History in Local Food Movements : The Case of Italian Local Museums

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## **The Use of History in Local Food Movements: The Case of Italian Local Museums**

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### **1. Introduction**

This study is an examination of the relationship between civil (or social) movements<sup>1)</sup> and history. More specifically, it investigates a recent surge of initiatives worldwide that aim to promote and support local foods (hereafter LF)<sup>2)</sup> and examines how history is being utilised in these initiatives. I will especially examine the situation in Italy, focusing specifically on the example of food-related museums that have been on the rise in recent years. I will then point out some of the characteristics that emerge upon examining their utilisation of history, and finally, I would like to propose that this can be taken as an opportunity to rethink the question of what history is, by raising some points that differ slightly from conventional discussions of history.

### **2. Diverse Local Food Movements**

First, let us take a brief look at movements pertaining to LF (hereafter LFM, i.e., an abbreviation for local food movements). Over the past few decades, people's interest in food has risen sharply, triggering various food-related movements across different layers and sectors of society. For example, issues such as food safety and consumer trust, notably the use of chemical fertilizers and additives, and foodborne diseases such as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), as well as food loss and social inequality, environmental problems, and the loss of biological and cultural diversity, have been pointed out at the individual, societal, and global levels. Moreover, the mainstream practices of excessive globalisation, commodification, and large-scale industrialisation have come to be criticised as their causes. Thus, while the activities aimed at changing this status quo are varied in practice, they are collectively referred to as the “alternative food movement” or “alternative food networks” (Dansero and Puttilli 2014; Feagan 2007), foremost among them being LFM.

LF is unarguably the most attention-grabbing keyword in efforts to counter and rethink the globalisation of food (Amelien 2005; Beriss 2019; Feagan 2007; Fonte 2008; Holt and Amilien 2007). Its premise is that the appreciation and revitalisation of the local is itself effective in solving the problems of globalised foods and societies that produce

and consume such foods. In Japan, such practices have become widespread under the catchphrase *chisan-chisho*, meaning “produce local, consume local,” and as an example, there has been an increase in the number of farmers’ cooperative markets selling local vegetables and food products. Globally, there are movements such as the Slow Food movement, which began in Italy to preserve traditional food culture rooted in local communities, and the model of community-supported agriculture in the U. S. and Europe, in which the residents support local producers by purchasing food ingredients from them. Linked to these is the concept of “food miles” and other movements aimed at reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by shortening the distance over which food items are transported as much as possible. These initiatives are equally diverse in terms of how they are organized, ranging from those with a clear membership, such as the Slow Food association, to those that spread through consumer awareness without a distinctive organization. Therefore, one could argue that lumping them all together under the term “movement” (LFM) is out of step with reality, and that the terms “network” or “trend” would be more appropriate. However, since each of those diverse realities is also intricately entangled, we will leave that issue aside and refer to them collectively using the term LFM below.

It can further be pointed out that this movement is not only the grassroots activity of consumers and producers, but also impacts public institutions such as national and local governments and industries involved in food production, distribution, and marketing, who are becoming active players in the movement. For example, support initiatives have often come from local governments, who have actively promoted LF as a means of regional revitalisation. Especially in the field of tourism, attempts to promote local communities by using LF can be found in many places (Montanari 2009; Salvo et al. 2013; Sjölander-Lindqvist and Cinque 2014). It has also led to the introduction of geographical indication (GI) systems by national governments and international organizations to certify and protect the quality and brand reputation of foods produced in specific regions. This system serves to recognise the name of a region as synonymous with a specific type of food, when the characteristics of that food are integrally linked to the environment or cultural peculiarities of the region in which it is produced. It originated in Europe and was similarly introduced in Japan in 2014. Furthermore, the image of LF as fresh, nutritious, and high quality has become widespread, and consumer demand for it has been growing despite its relatively higher cost. Therefore, the food industry has begun to perceive LF as a growth strategy. Companies put the name of the place of origin or the producer on the products and use it to strengthen branding. LF has also become the focus of attention as a means of improving a company’s image in terms of corporate social responsibility and ethics from the perspective that it contributes to solving problems such as the environmental ones. Even McDonald’s, one of the world’s most prominent globalised corporations, has recently become well-known for preparing menus that actively use the ingredients produced in the countries or regions where it operates (Watson 1997).

As shown, LFM today are extremely diversified. Despite their initial concerns about the state of global food systems, they have also begun to be used by and adapted into the strategies of corporations and other global players. Thus, their current state has

been the subject of substantial discussion and debate in recent years (Giraldo and Rosset 2017; Pratt 2007; Sonnino and Marsden 2006; Tregear et al. 2007). While there has been criticism that involvement by governments and companies cannot be considered a part of the alternative food movement, such a trend has also been recognised as an effective tactic for promoting LFM in society at large. There is another criticism that LFM, at least in its current form, leads to the reproduction of social inequalities because the often-expensive prices of LF mean that most people interested in LF are relatively well-off financially. Finally, as LFM itself is dependent on tourism and especially on the recent spread of information through the internet for its sales channels, it has been argued that LFM is closely related to globalisation. This argument is important, but since it is different from the purpose of this study, we will put it aside and focus on LFM and its relationship to history.

### 3. LFM and Their Relationship to History

As illustrated above, the realities of LFMs are varied, but they all share the commonality of being movements that focus on the local as opposed to the global. Therefore, discussing its relationship to history here must inevitably deal with local history.

LFM initiatives often utilise the history of food to prove that it is local, i.e. that it is definitely related to the local community in which it is produced or eaten. It can be argued that interest in LF's history has been increasing further recently, because LF is easy to be linked to public support and added value in the market as mentioned above. In Italy, for example, not only the Slow Food association, but numerous movements to revitalise traditional foods and cuisines have emerged promoting local tourism and industries throughout the country. And now, in most of these cases, various efforts are being undertaken to excavate historical source documents about how long food has been produced or eaten in that region (Leitch 2003). As described below, the apparatus of the museum has come to be used as a site of accumulating and displaying them.

Of course, not all LFMs emphasise the history of food in their activities. More specifically, it has been argued that LFMs can be divided into two main categories (Holt and Amilien 2007; Tregear 2003). The first one includes movements aimed to consume locally produced foods based on the idea that LF helps the environment, supports small-scale producers, and has positive effects on people's nutrition and health. The community-supported agriculture mentioned above is a typical example in this category. In Italy, similar organizations known as *Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale* (GAS), which enable consumers to purchase products through direct contracts with local producers, have been growing in recent years (Grasseni 2013). Japan's *chisan-chisho* movement also likely falls in this category. If this is the case, the 'local' refers first to the distance separating food production and consumption (i.e., production and consumption take place near), and does not refer to an interest in the local community, such as interest in local community development. Thus, LF in this category means the food produced in the region, not traditional food that is indigenous to the region nor food that characterises the local community. Therefore, their interest in the history of food does not go deeper.

In contrast, at the other end of the LFMs are those that bring an interest in the local community to the forefront. More specifically, as in the Slow Food association,<sup>3)</sup> these movements aim to revive and protect the traditional food production and preparation methods passed on in that region; thus, they can be referred to as local community-type movements. In this case, the ‘local’ does not just mean that it is produced in the region, but more importantly, that it is intimately tied to the community or its culture. Thus, the LF is often used as a local speciality product for regional development or as a regional symbol perceived as a part of the local people’s identity. In this type of initiatives, we can usually see a strong interest in history that demonstrates a connection between the food and the local community. The more traditional the LF is, the more appropriate it is as a symbol of the local community.

Therefore, in line with the purpose of this study to explore LFMs’ relationships with history, in the following sections, I will focus on the latter category of LFMs, investigating the case of Italy. Italy’s LFMs generally show strong characteristics of the latter. I would like to add a little about it.

Of course, in every country and region, both categories of LFMs exist side-by-side, and characteristics of both can be observed to some extent in any LFM. However, in Europe as a whole, LFMs in northern countries such as the U. K., Germany, Sweden, and Denmark show strong characteristics of the former, whereas characteristics of the latter are relatively more common in southern countries such as Italy and France (Holt and Amilien 2007). This pattern may be attributed to the strong cultural tendency in southern Europe to link regions closely with food. To illustrate, the word “terroir” in France is widely used to describe the link between a wine and the land (Crenn and Techoueyres 2007). In Italy, there is also a strong notion that food — not only wine — is rooted in certain regions and communities. Furthermore, in Italy, each region and community is strongly associated with its own sense of identity that goes beyond the issue of food, and there is even a word for this, *campanilismo*, which means a deep attachment people feel for one’s own hometown (Udagawa 2015). This is derived from the word *campanile*, the church bell tower that is always located in the centre of the town. We cannot discuss this issue in depth here; however, in Italy, not only does food symbolise people’s strong sense of belonging to their local community, it can also be regarded as what builds that sense of local community (Montanari 2013). This can be argued to have a significant influence on the characteristics of their LFMs, and likely explains why Slow Food, a well-known pioneering movement aiming to preserve traditional LF in defiance of globalisation, originated in Italy.

#### **4. Italian LFMs and Local Museums**

As mentioned above, Italian LFMs are strongly inclined towards preserving the foods in certain regions. There are certainly also other types of movements, such as the GAS. However, what stands out in LFMs of Italy are their great efforts to contribute to the development of their own local community through the preservation of foods rooted in the region, such as promoting tourism and industry by using those foods. Therefore, they

often involve multiple agents and complex relationships with public institutions, such as local and national governments from whom they receive support, and with markets with whom they deepen their relationships to expand LF sales channels.

Thus, Italian LFMs also have a strong awareness and interest in the history of food, which shows how the food is rooted in the region and community. As already mentioned, such history is evidence of the food's locality and serves as a basis for the LFM's efforts to preserve that food. The more traditional it is, with more materials proving the food's history further back in time, the more significant the food's position in the local community becomes. And it can be considered that food-related museums are the embodiment of their strong interest and need for history.

Since around 2000, the establishment of local museums has been popular in Italy as part of regional revitalisation (Maggi 2009). These museums are themed on the culture and history of each region and come in various forms, including those related to the archaeological and historical materials as well as local livelihoods, festivals, and other folk customs. Among them, food is one of the main themes, and recently museums that focus on foods such as bread, pasta and wine have been established in various regions. Some of these museums are directly run by local governments and other public institutions, but in most cases, grassroots organizations with deep ties to LFMs play a central role in their operation while receiving public support.

Though called museums, most of them are small-scale facilities housed in existing buildings. For instance, the wine museum in the town named Monte Porzio Catone<sup>4)</sup> near Rome was built with the support of the local government in converted ground-floor rooms of apartments,<sup>5)</sup> formerly used as wine cellars, by an association of young residents aiming to promote the local winemaking culture. In addition to the exhibitions, this museum holds various educational programs for schools, such as lectures and workshops, and also functions as a gathering place for the community. Such museums rooted in the local community, often displaying their collections onsite without removing them from the environment or context in which they were collected, are generally called "eco-museums" in contrast to conventional museums. This word and idea began to spread in the 1980s, especially in Europe (Corsane et al. 2007; Maggi 2009). Unlike conventional museums, these museums are not planned or operated only by curators with expert knowledge, but rather actively involve the local community in their activities, assuming that the main users of the museums are the local residents, more than outsiders such as tourists. The recent local museum boom in Italy, including the food-related ones, conforms to this approach.

In any case, museums in general are essential places to collect and display things, and simultaneously, present and recognise history through these collections. Therefore, museums can be highly effective resources for considering people's interest in history in a concrete manner, such as how people perceive history and how they try to use and express it. If this is the case, it can be argued that Italian food-related museums clearly show us the historical views and uses of LFMs involved, especially if they take the form of eco-museum. In the following section, I will examine this more specifically, focusing on the "Food Museums" of Parma<sup>6)</sup> as a case study, based on data from a literature

review and interviews conducted in 2017 and 2019.

## 5. The “Food Museums” of Parma

The “Food Museums” of Parma, or *I Musei del Cibo della provincia di Parma*, is a group of seven museums and one of the most famous examples of food-related museums in Italy.

Parma,<sup>7)</sup> located in the hills of central Italy, is a historical region famous for world-renowned musicians such as Verdi, but also known as a “City of Gastronomy” that boasts a rich food culture established around products such as Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese and Prosciutto di Parma, both named after the region. In the late 1990s, the Province of Parma, various LFM organizations, producers’ groups, and businesses joined to promote tourism further by utilising this gastronomic characteristic and created a plan to build food-related museums. Starting with Parmigiano Reggiano in 2003, by 2019, museums were opened for Prosciutto di Parma, salami, wine, tomatoes, pasta, and *culatello* (a type of ham), resulting in the current group of seven museums in total.<sup>8)</sup>

Its initial plan, based on the idea of the officials of the Province of Parma, was to build a single new museum located in the center of Parma city to introduce the food culture of the entire Parma province. However, after much discussion, it was finally decided to follow the proposals of the LFMs in adopting the eco-museum model to establish multiple museums in each of the food-producing areas by reusing historical buildings (Photo 1).

For this reason, seven museums are now scattered throughout the Parma province, making some of them difficult for outside visitors to access. This decentralized characteristic is also reflected in the way the museums are operated. The group of museums as a whole is overseen by the non-profit organization called the Association of “Food Museums” of the Parma province (*Associazione “I Musei del Cibo” della provincia di Parma*), but each museum works on its own in collaboration with local



**Photo 1** Building of the Pasta Museum and the Tomato Museum. This building was used as a large-scale farm until the end of the war, and before that, it was a monastery that served as pilgrims’ lodging. Farmland still spreads around the building. (photo by author, September 2017)

LFM organizations, volunteers, producers, and residents to plan its collection and to contribute to the local community as its primary objective. This shows that the museum is regarded as an apparatus for demonstrating the close relationship between food and the local community, as well as an apparatus for continuing to reproduce that relationship. The former museum group director I interviewed in 2017 said that the primary purpose of the museums is to pass on the respective food culture of each community to the next generation and not to promote tourism.

Therefore, the history presented in these museums is not only the history of the food concerned, but also the history of the relationship between the food and the local community. More precisely, the museums demonstrate how the food was produced in that community and how it has been a part of the people's lives. Of the seven museums, let us look at the Parmigiano Reggiano Museum (*Museo del Parmigiano Reggiano*).

First, the museum building is a cheese factory that was in actual operation until 1977 (Gonizzi 2015) (Photo 2), and its displays make use of the way the factory's interior was constructed. Passing through the entrance, the first area visitors encounter is the section on cheese making technology (Photo 3). This was originally the space where milk was poured into copper vats to form curds, which were then moulded into shapes. The exhibition follows this production process, displaying traditional tools mainly from the first half of the 20th century, while explaining the modernisation and mechanisation of this process over time.

The next section is in a half-underground room, where exhibits show the detailed history of Parmigiano Reggiano — why cheese came to be produced in this region and how it began and spread. More specifically, the first half of this section provides information about the region's environment and explains its history from the ancient Roman period to contemporary times, primarily with photographs, written panels, and copies of historical documents. The second half focuses on the process of commercialisation since the 20th century and contains displays on recent problems such as the global expansion of sales networks, emergence of knockoff brands, and the EU's



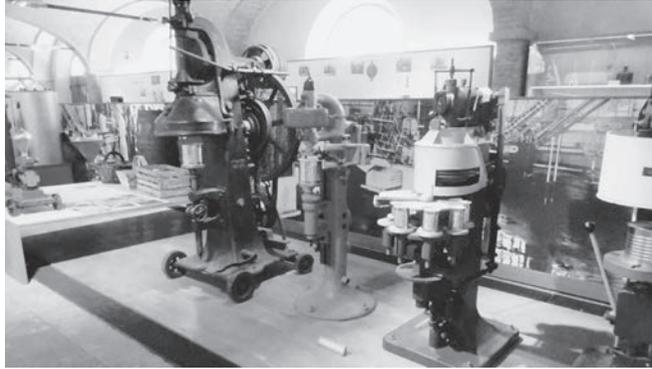
**Photo 2** Front of the Parmigiano Reggiano Museum. The building on the left was once used as a cowshed. (photo by author, September 2019)



**Photo 3** Part of the first section of the Parmigiano Reggiano Museum. Two stairs visible in the back lead to the third section, and in between, the stairs go down to the basement to the second section. (photo by author, September 2019)

GI system.<sup>9)</sup> This room was originally where the cheese that had hardened in moulds was immersed in a pool of brine during the salting process. The pathway of the exhibition utilises the remains of this pool, and visitors can learn about the history of the cheese of Parma by circling around it. The final section is on the second floor in the space that used to be the cheese maturation room. The exhibition recreates a part of that scene with the shelves once used in ripening the cheese, whereas another part of the exhibition centres on posters, magazines, books, and other materials related to product advertising activities that proliferated from the 20th century onward.

Other six museums in Parma exhibit their collections in essentially the same manner. Of course, there are some differences regarding the type of exhibited materials; for instance, the Culatello Museum (*Museo del Culatello di Zibello*) uses mainly photo- and video-based materials rather than objects. Also, different impressions are created depending on factors such as each food's nature, depth of the history of food, and the circumstances of the museum's founding. The Tomato Museum (*Museo del Pomodoro*) has a very modern and scientific atmosphere, as it displays numerous science and technology-related materials on sanitation technologies and tomato can manufacturing equipment that developed rapidly in the area from the late 19th century (Photo 4). The Wine Museum (*Museo del Vino*), in contrast, introduces its section on traditional winemaking techniques with a section that displays ancient Roman artefacts excavated in Parma province.<sup>10)</sup> Furthermore, this museum occupies what was formerly the food cellar of a fortress that governed the area from the 13th century to the 18th century; thus, this museum contains a wider range of regional history, not limited to food, compared to other museums. In any case, a trip through the exhibitions of any of seven museums allows the visitor to follow the knowledge, technology, and history behind the production of its featured food. Accordingly, visitors can understand the ingenuity that each local community has shown in producing its food and the claim that the food is the pride of the local community and representative of its culture.



**Photo 4** Inside the Tomato Museum. Machines for manufacturing tomato cans are on display by age. (photo by author, September 2017)

## 6. Significance of Investigating History in LFMs

Hence, what is distinctive about the histories expressed in these museums? To clarify the issue, I will first discuss why history in LFM initiatives deserves further attention and its significance.

As it is well known, what has traditionally been considered ‘history’ has often been the ‘official’ version created by the majority and those in power. This is also called ‘History with an uppercase,’ and its content tends to focus on topics such as politics, power struggles, and events. However, there have already been many criticisms of this tendency, and the assertion that the life trajectories and memories of ordinary people should also be emphasised is now taken for granted along with the term ‘history with a lowercase.’ Today, history is regarded as a synthesis of both approaches.

Seen in this light, the history discussed in this paper is a case of ‘history with a lowercase’ because the primary agents of LFMs are grassroots people, the side with no or less power. Moreover, we can notice that their history is a self-directed, subjective history created by people involved in LFMs themselves, rather than a history discovered by a researcher or other third party. This means that focusing on their history is on the ongoing site where history is being created. Social movements in general, including LFM, aim to transform and reform established societies. Therefore, it can be said that their activities are the process of causing various conflicts with outsiders such as established powers, having many contradictions and conflicts also internally, and adjusting all of them. If this is the case, their history should be viewed not from the perspective of whether it is a fact or not, but rather from the perspective of the trajectory of the manipulation of such diverse forces and interests. Their history would continue to be created as long as they are social ‘movements.’ In this respect, it goes without saying that researching history in grassroots movements such as LFMs is paramount for history research.

From this same point, one more question may emerge. In both ‘uppercase’ and ‘lowercase’ versions, history is thought to be “created” by an agent (regardless of

whether they are on the side of power). More precisely, just as the ‘history’ of the ruled can become ‘History’ once they reach the side of power, both are the same in the idea of creating history. Behind this, there is the logic that history can be taken as a tool for building the identity and solidarity of a certain party or group, as already pointed out in the Hobsbawm’s concept of ‘invention of tradition.’ History is generally considered to be the recognition, extraction, and expression of memories and records that serve that purpose. However, the question is whether history is always this way. At the very least, such manipulations of history often fail when the party does not achieve the preferred outcome, in some cases bringing about unexpected by-products. If this is the case, we may be able to glimpse another view of history that is different from, or slips through the gaps of, history that is used to create identity and solidarity. Herein lies another significance of focusing on history at the sites of movements such as LFMs. It is not possible to discuss this issue in detail in this paper, but in the end, I will reconsider it a little more.

## 7. Residents’ Memories

Considering the above awareness of the issues, what then do we find by exploring the history utilised and created by Italian LFMs? What features do we observe there? Now we discuss them with the case of the Food Museums of Parma and two other museums I have investigated.

First, significantly more weight is placed on the memories of the local residents than on materials such as archaeological objects and historical documents, as sources of their history. This can apply to ‘history with a lowercase’ in general, where many of the concrete materials are consumables such as everyday items, and since so few of these objects remain, records are fragmentary. Therefore, for these items to be fully recognised as history, it is necessary to supplement and enrich the body of evidence through interviews and other means. In the case of LFMs, gathering people’s memories, such as how food was produced and eaten in the past, is already at the centre of their original activities. The memories obtained from such interviews are essential for the revival and continuation of the disappearing LF and are used in local museums for appropriately understanding and displaying the collected material objects. Undoubtedly, this is simultaneously the process of recognising and showing up the collected knowledge and materials as their history. Moreover, emphasising the memories of residents enables them to become the main agents of history. More precisely, from the point of view of the residents, the history created through their own memories can be more proactively recognised as their “our history.”

It is true that in some places such as Parma, where their food is well known nationwide and has a long history, many objects suitable for an exhibition are preserved, such as historical source documents and paintings of food in art materials. Accordingly, establishing a museum in Parma was relatively straightforward. However, in most regions and communities, food-related records and documents are extremely few and in such cases, people’s memories are inevitably the only thing that can be relied upon. The wine

museum in Monte Porzio Catone mentioned earlier is one such example. In this museum, farming implements and tools related to grape production and winemaking in the town are collected and displayed, but even more effort was put the display of panels and photographs created from the memories obtained from interviews with the residents (Photos 5 and 6). There, the actual names of the residents interviewed are indicated, further demonstrating the proactive involvement of the local people in the creation of LF history.

In another example, at the Mediterranean Diet Museum (*Museo vivente della Dieta Mediterranea di Pioppi*), located in the town of Pioppi near Naples, such interview materials are at the heart of the museum.<sup>11</sup> Pioppi is where Ancel Keys, the American epidemiologist who coined the term ‘Mediterranean Diet,’ lived. The museum was created in 2010 by several LFM organizations (including a regional branch of the Slow Food association) with the aim of promoting the Mediterranean diet following its



**Photo 5** Interior of the wine museum in Monte Porzio Catone. This part explains the traditional method of pruning vines. (photo by author, September 2011)



**Photo 6** Interior of the wine museum in Monte Porzio Catone. This is a partial reproduction of the traditional tavern. (photo by author, September 2011)

inclusion in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Moro 2014). However, rather than focusing on the Mediterranean diet in general, this museum's focus is on promoting the food culture of Pioppi and its surrounding area, with the intent of using its UNESCO registration to stimulate that region. For example, looking at the museum's exhibits, the entrance section introduces the Mediterranean diet and recreates Keys' study (Photo 7). However, it is brief, and the other space is occupied to display Pioppi's traditional fishing techniques, processed foods, and cooking methods. Furthermore, most of that exhibition consists of videos and photos showing local elderly people engaged in fishing and cooking, while as the materials, there are few exhibits, only some fishing implements and cooking utensils (Photo 8). This museum is also unique in that its



**Photo 7** Interior of the Mediterranean Diet Museum. Here, the description of the Mediterranean diet is given in a pyramidal model (on the left) and panels, and pots of herbs from the region are hung on the wall. (photo by author, October 2017)



**Photo 8** Interior of the Mediterranean Diet Museum. In the section on traditional cooking, cooking utensils and ingredients are displayed along with videos on how to make traditional pasta. The people in the videos are all from this town. (photo by author, October 2017)

operation is more centred on programs that cater to local residents and tourists, such as workshops where visitors can experience cooking traditional dishes using the materials in the museum. These cases demonstrate that the memories of the local residents are at the core of the history of LF.

## 8. Natural Environment as History

Another interesting aspect that emerged in the construction of history by LFMs is the natural environment as history. The idea that the natural environment is regarded as history may seem strange at first glance. However, food generally has an intimate relationship with the natural environment. It is produced and consumed in each region based on the characteristics of its environment. Of course, trade and migration have long existed everywhere, and there are many examples of people eating food produced outside the region and producing food brought in from the outside. However, LFMs, which began as critiques of modern society in which sites of food production and consumption have become too separated, are movements that seek to re-evaluate the connection between the land and food. In this sense, the natural environment is a key concept in LFMs, and so it is no wonder that the environment also plays an important role in the history of LF.

For example, looking back once more at Parma's Parmigiano Reggiano Museum, an important part of the exhibition is allocated to the content about the natural environment of the cheese-producing region. The production of Parmigiano Reggiano requires an environment with specific characteristics such as basin-like topography with high humidity in the summer and the presence of soil containing rock salts. Such features of the geography and climate are explained in detail using panels and models in the museum. The same applies to Parma's other museums. Moreover, we must not forget that all the museums were founded, as eco-museums, in places of production. These physical and locational features of the museums clearly show the relationship between the natural environment and food production. For instance, the building of the Culatello Museum, which was constructed in what was originally used as a culatello cellar (part of which is still in use today), is situated on the banks of the Po River to take advantage of the humidity indispensable in culatello production (Photo 9). Also, the unique structure of this building, such as the ingeniously designed windows that control the humidity, has been preserved and integrated into part of the exhibition path (Photo 10).

This LFMs' strong interest in the natural environment is, of course, because understanding and conserving the natural environment that has nurtured LF is critical for reviving and promoting the LF. But not only that, it can connect to the idea that the natural environment is the food's 'foundation,' and its 'origin' from a historical perspective. For example, in most food museums, the section on the food's history begins with an explanation of the natural environment. This indicates the existence of the environment suited for the production of their food, but it can be regarded also as functioning as a part of the history of that food. The natural environment may be the most objective and definitive part of food history, considering that historical materials



**Photo 9** Building on the left is the Culatello Museum, across the bank and immediately on the right is the Po river. (photo by author, September 2019)



**Photo 10** Interior of the Culatello Museum. Part of the museum is still used as a place to mature and store culatello. The small window in the photo faces the river Po and regulates humidity. (photo by author, September 2019)

related to food are relatively few and fragmentary. Moreover, it can be positioned further in the past than conventional historical sources because it is generally assumed that nature has remained unchanged since before human history. In short, the natural environment can be thought of as being seen and used as the most fundamental object for the history of LF, not only in terms of the certainty of its materials but also regarding the depth of its history. Hence, the natural environment is a key element for establishing the history of LF in that it can be transformed as its ‘origin.’

## 9. The Complicated Relationship between Food History and Locality

As mentioned already, in the LFM arena, various other players besides their organizations are involved, such as residents, local governments, and other public institutions, and the

markets involved in sales and other aspects. Therefore, it is easy for friction and conflicts to arise, and this can be said to be reflected in the way in which the history of LF is manifested. Here is another feature of LFM's use of history. For example, there has already been criticism that the history of LF created by LFMs has many problems, such as being overly exaggerated or interpreted too far. However, this is not simply to say that their history lacks reliability, but rather that the sites of grassroots movements are more prone to exposing such conflicts. And in the case of LFM, considering that these conflicts are often associated with the question of locality, that is, where is the 'local,' it can be argued that the history of LF is a site where diverse players negotiate their interests in the form of the locality issue.

LFs are, especially for local community-type LFMs, perceived as closely related to the characteristics of the region. If this is the case, the task of exploring the history of an LF also functions to demonstrate and give the form to a local community through food. For example, I already mentioned that residents' memories are crucial in reconstructing the history of an LF, but this involves inevitably the question of who exactly the residents are. Even if food is considered to be local, it is often just a claim and memories of a particular segment of the residents, or that food can also spread beyond the community concerned. In these cases, questions arise of whether to consider the opinions of that segment to be representative of the community, or whether outsiders' ones should be excluded. Such misalignments can easily come to the surface as conflicts, especially because LFMs often get entangled in political and economic interests, such as obtaining support from public institutions and profitability in the market.

I would like to introduce an interesting case study here. This is research on the production of saffron revived as a LF in a town called Campagnatico in Tuscany region of central Italy. According to Sonnino who conducted this study (Sonnino 2007a; 2007b), this revival was initiated when a teacher with an interest in the environment and agriculture moved to the town after retirement and tried to cultivate it in 2002. Saffron had once been produced in the area, but it had long since been discontinued at that time. Only a few farmers remembered that their grandfathers were cultivating it. However, upon learning that its history in the region dated back to ancient Rome, the former teacher had the idea that saffron was food rooted in the town and a part of its culture. He called together other farmers with the aim of its revival, forming the association in 2003. In the association's pamphlet, saffron is described as 'a traditional spice in our food culture since the Middle Ages.'

Afterwards, the demand for saffron gradually grew, and its production spread to surrounding towns with the name 'saffron of Campagnatico.' Nevertheless, this success soon gave rise to conflict. Nowadays, the production of saffron has become much larger in volume outside of Campagnatico, and producers, especially those producing outside Campagnatico, have been calling for the use of the area name Maremma (of which Campagnatico is a part) as the name for saffron. They claimed that the name Maremma better represents the actual production area, and added that saffron production had originally taken place throughout the entire Maremma area and was not limited to Campagnatico. Many were also of the opinion that Maremma, which was more widely

known than a small town Campagnatico, would enable establishing a wider consumer base.<sup>12)</sup>

This study shows that in LFM the question of what the 'local' of LF refers to can always arise and that the history can often be utilised in this context. The definition of the 'local' will differ not only because LFMs involve various types of players as previously mentioned, but also because of differences in factors such as generation, gender, and newcomers versus older residents. In the above case of saffron revival, the association decided in 2007 to continue using the name Campagnatico for now, since the movement was initiated in Campagnatico and the founder of the movement (the former teacher) is currently still the head of the revival association. However, the spark remains and the association has thereafter focused on creating books and pamphlets to document the fact that the revival began in Campagnatico (Sonnino 2007b). This can be called the historicisation of the revival itself of the LF, which is also a part of the construction of LF history by LFM, for LFM.

I would also like to briefly underline similar issues at play in the museums in Parma. As mentioned above, the original plan for these museums was to build them in one building in the city of Parma, the capital of Parma province. This means that the museum was originally intended to reconstruct the history of Parma's food as representative of Parma city. In the city of Parma, as outlined in tourist pamphlets, there is a well-known baptistery containing what is considered one of the oldest sculptures with the signs of the zodiac and labours of months in Italy. We can see there a lot of motifs related to food, such as sausage-making, grape-treading, and threshing (Photo 11). Parma city has many other materials that show the length of history as a 'City of Gastronomy,' which is why the original plan was to make the museum presenting the whole picture of food culture of Parma area (roughly the province of Parma) in the city. However, in the end, the museums were created in each production area by adopting the idea of eco-museum. This means that in the process arose complicated conflicts over various localities, such as Parma city, the whole region usually called Parma (almost equivalent to the province of Parma), and various production areas. Even in the current



**Photo 11** Sculptures from the early 13th century inside the Baptistery of Parma. They are the signs of the zodiac and labours of months, showing the motifs related to food, such as sausage-making, grape-treading, and threshing. (photo by author, September 2017)

museums, the same problem has not been solved.

For example, considering the case of the Parmigiano Reggiano Museum, first, the geographical extent it represents is not clear when examined in detail. This is because the Parmigiano Reggiano production area does not neatly overlap with Parma province, but rather occupies only a part of it; moreover, includes parts of the neighbouring Reggio Emilia province.<sup>13)</sup> The real area of its production is complicated, also due to political and institutional issues related to the GI system.<sup>14)</sup> The museum shows something about this using the panels, but there is almost no cooperation with producers or LFM outside of the Parma province, not only in terms of the exhibition but also in terms of management. This may be because even though the museum was built in the production area, it is still fundamentally positioned and assumed within the framework of the Parma region. However, the sense of incongruity about this misalignment cannot be made, especially from the perspective of outsiders such as the tourists.

In addition, the de facto operations of the Parmigiano Reggiano Museum are mainly led by volunteers from the town of Soragna, where the museum is located. Their workshops and other activities are mostly aimed at this town's residents. In the early days of the museum's establishment, its management policy, especially with regard to exhibitions, was led by the Museum Association mentioned above, which is based in the city of Parma. However, in recent years, while the association has focused on the further expansion of the museum group, the operation of each museum has been left to the local residents and organizations, and the local colour is gradually becoming stronger. In the case of the Parmigiano Reggiano Museum, interestingly, another small museum named "The Pesante Culture Museum" (*Museo della Civiltà Contadina*) has been built on the adjacent site under the initiative of the Soragna municipality. This museum collects and displays farm tools and domestic items used by farmers in rural areas centred on Soragna and explains their culture and history. It can be said that this area has been reconstructing as a place to show the culture of Soragna more widely without limiting it to Parmigiano Reggiano cheese alone.

This shows that the Parmigiano-Reggiano Museum involves at least three localities that are often offset from each other; 1) Parma (however, it has complicated problems, such as whether it means the city, the province, or a vague area), 2) the Parmigiano Reggiano production area (but, only within Parma province), and 3) Soragna where the museum is located exactly and whose residents mainly use it. At the present stage, due to lack of research, it is not possible to clarify in more detail how these three localities, intricately related to each other, influence the construction of the history of Parmigiano Reggiano as a LF in the form of a museum. I, however, argue that any local museum, not just in this case, can be arguably one of the most vivid sites to reveal conflicts and negotiations of different localities involved. This means that history is one of the most commonly used items in such conflicts and negotiations, and that the history of LFM is inherently unstable and controversial and always continues to be reconstructed.

## 10. Conclusion: Towards the Possibility of Alternative Forms of History

Above, I have indicated the characteristics of how history is utilised in Italian LFMs, mainly through the case studies of local museums. Though the research has not been finished and the discussion is just getting started, I will summarize its main points for future discussion.

For LFMs, the history of LF is the foundation for demonstrating and authenticating the locality of the food. Therefore, most movements are interested in discovering the history of LF, and in Italy, museums (especially those in the form of eco-museums) have been increasing as an apparatus for expressing such interests. However, in general, reconstructing the history of food is difficult due to the usual lack of remaining objective source materials. Thus, museums are also actively focusing on sources that have not typically been historical sources, such as the memories of residents and the natural environment, and are turning these into history. This is one of the unique points of their usage of history. In addition, the history of the LF is a vehicle for conflict among stakeholders with varied interests in the LF, and this often takes the form of a dispute over the locality of LF. This is because the 'local' implied in the definition of any LF usually encompasses discrepancies and differences among the agents involved, and therefore often raises conflicts especially when its history is at stake. In this sense, we could also say that history is good for use as a place where the intentions of various agents are revealed and negotiated.

In the future, I intend to deepen these discussions while proceeding further with my research of the Food Museums of Parma, but here I would like to conclude by reiterating another theme mentioned in Section 6. That is, history used in the movements such as LFMs is also well worth considering in historical research in general.

One of the reasons for this is that grassroots movements demonstrate history's inherent creativity clearly. In the site of the movements, history is often actively used and created in the form of grassroots people searching for their interests and identities, as shown in the cases of Italian LFMs. Particularly, focusing on the conflicts among stakeholders illustrates the complicated process of history generation, manipulation, negotiation, and reproduction. I have pointed out that making history of LF has many difficulties, such as the problem of historical materials and the ambiguity of the definition of the 'local,' and therefore its establishment is always controversial, where stakeholders can make the most of history's creativity. I believe that any type of grassroots movement can be one of the most appropriate research subjects for observing and examining how history is used and constructed.

But that is not all. The final point that I want to make here is that this may simultaneously evoke other questions, such as whether there is anything wrong with this notion of history's creativity itself. For example, as already touched upon, histories asserted by LFMs are often criticised for being too subjective and full of exaggerations and fallacies. People involved in the movements, however, often do not perceive this as a serious problem. How should we think about this gap? This is usually perceived as an inadequate understanding of history on the part of the movements, but the question of



**Photo 12** The area around the remains of the ancient Greek colony called Elea-Velia. There are many olive trees currently almost abandoned and unmaintained. (photo by author, October 2017)

whether it is all that is worth considering.

Thus, here let me take the case of the director of the Mediterranean Diet Museum that I interviewed in 2017. He was then working with local farmers to revive olive oil production after decades of dormancy, and was trying the use of remnants<sup>15)</sup> from the ancient Greek colonisation period (6th to 4th centuries BCE) in that region to show the traditional nature of this oil (Photo 12). However, there is no direct relationship between these remains and that olive oil. Although the ruins are located in the cultivated area of olive trees, the current olive trees are a relatively new variety, and moreover, there are no prominent traditions unique to that region in terms of the quality of olive oil and its production methods. It can be said that connecting these remains to the history of olive oil is only an invention of history. However, we should notice that though the museum director was fully aware of this he did not take it a problem at all. In my interview, he said that the history of ancient Greece was nothing more than a method of raising the recognition of the oil, that is, an advertisement. In other words, the director was using the history, knowing that its usage looks like a mistake.

This is a common case in LFMs and can be often negatively evaluated as being too selfish as the usage of history. However, if we change our perspective here, it will become clear that such evaluation is performed from a particular view of history. This is an idea that history is used and made, and if so, there is an assumption that there is some agent or community behind it, which uses history, or more specifically, someone that links historical materials to its interests and identity to reconstruct its own history. From this view, history is considered to represent the interests (not only economic but also political and cultural ones such as identity) of each agent or community, and therefore, conflicts over history between them are inevitable, as pointed out also in Section 6. However, in the Mediterranean Diet Museum director's attempt, it did not appear (at least to me) that he was premising some sort of community (a production area of the oil or the local community named Pioppi where this area is located) nor trying to create some 'our history.' Of course, he and also local producers expected the use of ancient Greek remains to bring economic benefits, which can be regarded as the usage of history

for their economic interests. However, it is not appropriate to think of this as their creation of 'our history,' that is, the history related closely to their identity. This is clear from the director's words above.

Then, what type of history or attitude towards history can be observed there, when the director was using history with full awareness of his mistake and without considering it as a big deal? Is it another historical view that does not converge on identity and community formation? If so, what exactly is it? These are questions that remain to be explored further. Honestly, the discussion above is just my idea, rather than a thorough research-based consideration. There is room for further discussion even to confirm whether or not the director's attitude towards history can be presented as another way of recognising history. However, I believe that it is important to at least seek out other forms and ideas of history that are not contracted to community or identity, because currently also notions of community and identity are being reconsidered due to the harmful negative effects of nationalism and ethnicity.

In the end, it may be useful to add that the same is true for discussions on locality, which has been another important issue in this paper. For example, the Parmigiano Reggiano Museum has several localities differing in scale and content, such as Parma, the Parmigiano-Reggiano production area, and Soragna. Earlier, I described this in the context where conflicts and friction appear, that is, on the premise of regarding the locality as a community whose members share a common interest and identity that distinguishes them from others clearly. However, we should notice that not all stakeholders of the museum are in conflict over the locality, and that most of them are indifferent or just think these localities are overlapping. It is the way of regarding localities not as communities with clear boundaries that are mutually incompatible and at odds with each other, but rather as ones without any strict boundary that so simply overlap, though misaligned, that anyone can interpret and use more flexibly the locality. This may seem like a compromise of different interests, but it could also be positively assessed as an alternative notion of connecting locality and people. It should also apply to their view of history.

Perhaps I have taken this discussion a little bit too far. But I believe that in the grassroots movements including this case above, it is possible to find an alternative way of thinking about history, especially in their practices that seem to be sloppy or mistaken. Given that the grassroots movements in general, at least at the starting point, have a feeling of opposition and discomfort to the conventional social system, it can be argued that their activities inherently contain different ways of thinking from the conventional view. This can be also applied to their view of history. If so, they are an important subject of research that has the potential to re-examine historical views in general. In any case, I will further examine the use of history by LFMs in Italy, while also keeping in sight this possibility of fundamentally rethinking history itself.

## Notes

- 1) In this paper, the terms “civic movement” and “social movement” are used broadly as a movement that tries to improve a certain problem in the current social situation. The term “grassroots movement” is also used with the same meaning. Therefore, it does not matter how organized or how political it is.
- 2) There is a problem regarding what local food is. The definition depends on whether the focus is on the place of production, place of consumption, tradition, on specificity, and so on. See Section 3 of this paper for what can be roughly divided into two in the field of local food movements.
- 3) In the early days, the purpose of the Slow Food association was mainly to revive traditional food in each region, but in recent years, it has been developed to actively promote the global theme of biological and cultural diversity (Andrews 2008; Petrini and Padovani 2005).
- 4) Monte Pozio Catone is one of a group of towns called *I Castelli Romani* (literally the Roman Castles) in the outskirts of Rome. I have been conducting anthropological research in another of these towns for two years since 1986 and intermittently up to the present (Udagawa 2015).
- 5) This museum consists of three rooms, separated from each other. For this reason, it is called the “diffused museum” (*il museo diffuso*) or the “museum in chains” (*il museo a catena*). For more information about this museum, see Soprano (2012). I conducted interview research there in September 2011.
- 6) For more information about the “Food Museums” of Parma, see the official website; <https://www.museidelcibo.it/> (accessed 31st July 2020). In this site, in addition to the information on the collected items, there is also a wealth of information available in the literature regarding different foods.
- 7) The name Parma includes both a city (a municipality) name and a province name. Parma city is the provincial capital of Parma. From now on, the two will be clearly distinguished and used, but when it is simply described as Parma, as will be described later, it corresponds to the area called Parma that people think of, that is, the province that extends around the city. In addition, the official local system in Italy is divided into three levels: region (*regione*), province (*provincia*), and municipality (*comune*). However, it should be added that the term “region” used in this paper is a general vocabulary, not *regione* in this Italian system, with a few exceptions.
- 8) The official names of these seven museums are: *Museo del Parmigiano Reggiano* (Museum of Parmigiano Reggiano), *Museo della Pasta* (Museum of Pasta), *Museo del Pomodoro* (Museum of Tomato), *Museo del Vino* (Museum of Wine), *Museo del Salame di Felino* (Museum of Salami of Felino), *Museo del Prosciutto di Parma* (Museum of Prosciutto di Parma), and *Museo del Culatello di Zitello* (Museum of Culatello di Zitello). Now (August 2020) the eighth museum, *Museo del Fungo Porcino di Borgotaro* (Museum of Porcini Mushroom of Borgotaro) is under construction.
- 9) Parmigiano Reggiano has been given official recognition as a Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO) by the EU’s GI system. See Note 10 for the problems involved in this GI system. Of the seven foods handled by the Parma museums, Prosciutto di Parma and Culatello

- have also been certified as PDO.
- 10) Interestingly, the museum claims that this section's objects testify how the "modern" way of drinking wine, straight and in glasses, were born in this region, introduced by the Celtic, abandoning the Greek and Latin use of watered and spiced wines.
  - 11) I conducted interview research there in October 2017.
  - 12) This conflict was also due to the end of the Campagnatico town's institutional support. The town supported the association from the beginning, expecting that the saffron production would lead to the development of the town, but decided to end it in 2004, assuming that production was on track and that operations would be possible without future support (Sonnino 2007b).
  - 13) The name *Parmigiano Reggiano* derives from the names of Parma province and Reggio Emilia province.
  - 14) In obtaining the recognition of the EU's GI system, its geographical range must be clarified strictly. Therefore, there are often political disputes over interest, not just ones over the difference in quality and technology (Roset and Menghi 2000). There is an interesting study on this issue that deals with the case of Italian Alpine cheese (Grasseni 2016).
  - 15) This is now called Elea-Velia, the remains of an ancient Greek colonial town. Currently, excavation work has just begun and it is not yet maintained as a tourist destination, but it was known for being the home of the philosophers such as Parmenides and Zeno of Elea.

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