

In the small but complex contexts of the alpine region, conservation and development can go hand in hand, but both demand translating the local histories of seasonal migration and marginal agriculture into globalised practices of agribusiness and/or eco-tourism.

This paradox underlies all attempts to re-invent tradition, celebrate identity and plan the future at the feet of the Alps, as the impact of "global hierarchies of value" (Herzfeld) on heritage areas is being felt.

This paper aims at tracking down the poetics and politics that pervade the lives and problems of modern-day cattle breeders and dairy producers in a valley of northern Italy.

Firstly, discourse of animal beauty intertwines with sociotechnical networks, revealing the complex web that makes up the often contrasting issues of "development" and "local identity". On the one hand, skill profiles highly, as a complex of aesthetic and moral stances, emotional involvement, cognitive strategies and bodily practices. On the other hand, the adoption of breed-selection and the mechanisation of animal husbandry enforces the hegemony of commodification, mechanisation and standardisation in ways that percolate to the micro level of aesthetics, skill and moral order.

Secondly, the mountain communities of northern Italy are confronted with the pressure from the contemporary global market for ethno-foods and with the new European legislative context for dairy production. Moreover, in the Alpine region food production intertwines intimately with tourism development and conservation issues. This reverberates on local practices of production, planning and self-presentation: local development seems to be bound to a capacity to produce a *vision of locality* and a *discourse of taste* that suits the expectation of tourists and deli customers. In fact, the standardisation of food production protocols, and of labelling, leads to a *standardisation* of taste. As a result, quality food is increasingly marketed through *visual* and narrative strategies (e.g. through the visualisation of "traditional alpine landscapes").

Traditional skills (e.g. cattle breeding and food production) and global capital (e.g. agribusiness, breed selection, biotechnology) both interplay in local strategies of development which try to cope with the ever-pending issues of economical marginality for a geographically peripheral area.