



The Cambridge Conference on Global Food Security 2016

23-24 June 2016

# Sustainable food, culture and integration in Solidarity Purchase Groups Movement: the case study of Barikamà in Rome

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# Key Points

1. “Culture” as the 4th pillar of Sustainability: “eco-culture” and the process of social learning
2. Grassroots organizations and the transition towards sustainability: the case of Solidarity Purchase Groups Movement (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidali – GAS)
3. GAS's achievements in terms of:
  - changing *consumers' behaviour* and improving nutrition
  - supporting *local development*
  - enhancing *social integration*
4. GAS Movement and social integration: the case of Barikamà Cooperative in Rome

# Culture and Eco-culture

Brundtland Report (1987): the leading approach to sustainability does not consider “culture” as a driving force of development.

Sustainability and “ecoculture” humans become agents of development (Dessein et al., 2015).

An agent is someone who acts and brings about change:

- *“Greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world, and these matters are central to the process of development”* (Sen, 1999:18).
- In 21<sup>th</sup> century, social conflicts are led by activists, rather than huge organizations (Dahrendorf, 2009)

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In this regard grassroots organizations, such as Solidarity Purchase Groups, come into play: *eco-culture & democratization*

# GAS Movement: eco-culture and sustainable food

Respect for the environment with the sympathy for producers and workers. Sustainability should be based on solidarity among individuals.

In Italy, the number of GAS has increased by 400% since 2008.

The unprecedented rise in social and solidarity economies is linked to: the recession and political austerity measures as specific forms of social self-defence (Ash, 2009); and to a more widespread reflexive-consumerist strain (Giddens, 1990).

New ideas of consumption, self-identity and food production, and a deep change in lifestyle.

Therefore, GAS Movement might play a crucial role in:

1. changing *consumers' behaviour* and improving nutrition;
2. supporting *local development*,
3. enhancing *social integration*.

# 1. Consumers' behaviour and nutrition

Local food networks, an alternative system to achieve economic and physical access to food for a fair price (Goodman e DuPuis, 2002; Renting et al., 2003).

According to Crisci and Fonte (2014) GAS members save up to 72.5% weekly more than they spend buying organic food through other sale channels.

In addition, after joining a GAS, the trend in consumption and lifestyle changes consistently: people consume more organic, seasonal and local food, limit the consumption of meat and start to produce home-made food (Grasseni et al., 2013)

## 2. Local Development

The Solidarity Purchase Groups can also reinforce *local development*.

Their main objective is to support small-medium producers, who cannot survive in the large-scale trade because they are not competitive enough (Retegas, 1999).

The fair price is the result of an agreement between consumers and producers.

Furthermore, considering the difficulties faced by small enterprises, sometimes GAS pay for crops in advance (Savioli et al., 2015).

In that way, producers have disposable cash to plant and the guarantee to sell the product at the pre-arranged price (Grasseni et al., 2013)

# 3. Social Integration

Italy has to deal with a significant flow of migrants and the network of solidarity economy plays a crucial role in promoting integration.

An interesting case study comes from the collaboration between Gas Movement and Barikamà Cooperative, founded by six migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa in 2011: Suleman, Ismael, Moussa, Sidiki, Aboubakar, Modibo.

Barikamà demonstrates how grassroots organizations, such as Solidarity Purchase Groups, can positively improve social integration, contributing to the struggle against poverty.

Moreover, we will focus on the role of food culture in fostering social integration.

# The Case of Barikamà

They crossed the desert by foot in one year, arrived in Libya and then travelled by boat to finally land on Italian coasts. At the beginning, they moved to Rosarno (Calabria, south Italy) where they worked in the orange harvest, with little or no safety measures at all.



In January 2010, after taking part in a riot against exploitation and racism, the six migrants moved to Rome, where they came across people who belonged to Ex Snia squat and established contact with **GAS Movement** (Diara et al., 2015).

From that encounter, “Barikamà” started to rise as a new entity. In Bambarà language Barikamà means “Resistance”.

# The encounter of food cultures: Africa and Italy (1)



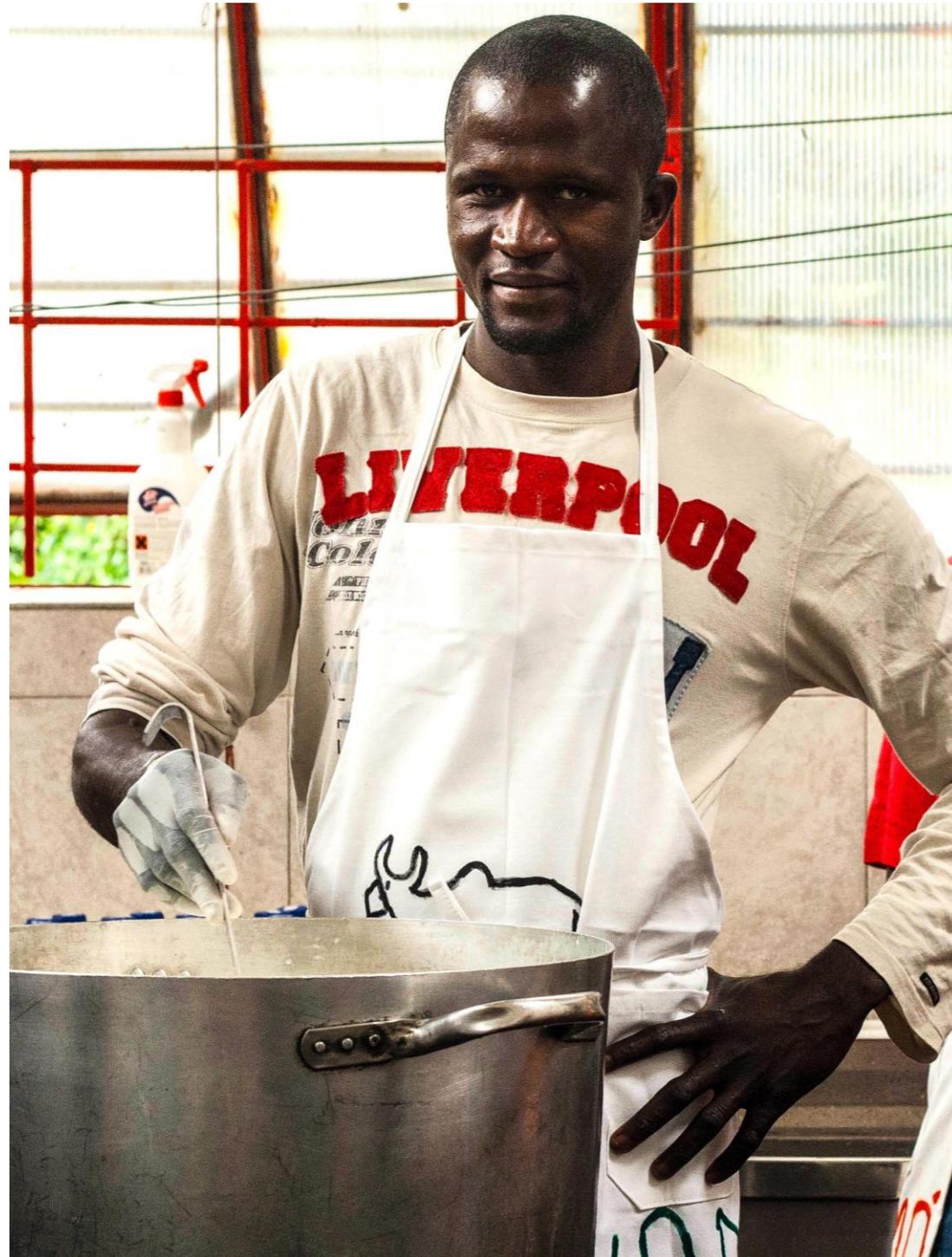
## Sub-Saharan economy

Subsistence farmers: rain fed crops or breeding livestock on small plots of land.

Barikamà's food culture played a crucial role for their social integration in Italy.

Indeed, Barikamà's members started to introduce themselves through dinners where they cooked their traditional dishes to Gas's members.

# The encounter of food cultures: Africa and Italy (2)



## Italian food culture

Freshness and quality of food, as well as a number of social spaces where consumers can purchase directly from producers.

Considering their food culture and knowledge gained both in their countries and in Italy, they decided to produce *yoghurt* to be sold to farmers' markets and to GAS's members.

Hence, food culture may represent a significant starting point to promote social integration.

# A growing experience

In 2014, they started a Social Cooperative thanks to the support of “Casale di Martignano”, a certified organic farm.

As a result of a public regional competition concerning solidarity economy and GAS network crowdfunding initiative, they overall received 46,000 euros as a financial support.

In this way, they were able to buy the equipment needed to improve the quality of their yoghurt and to do home deliveries, such as electric bicycles and new refrigerators.

Recently, a public regional competition assigned a confiscated mafia store to Barikamà.



# Achievements

Today, Barikamà also allows Italian people with physical and mental disabilities to work and also produces organic vegetables.

The yoghurt sold does not have the organic certification because their customers know that labelling is expensive for small producers and could make them less competitive (Pimbert et al., 2006).

GAS's members, and producers, get to know each other and establish a relationship based on shared values of solidarity and eco-friendliness.



# Conclusions

- Food culture might play a crucial role towards social integration
- Even if grassroots organizations are often criticized for being elitist, it does seem that they can positively contribute to the struggle against poverty
- Food communities could also be relevant in promoting virtuous cycle of development (eg. against criminal organizations)

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# Thanks for your attention

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