

Changing Consumption, Changing Consumers: An Analysis of Changing Food Consumption in Southern Italy in the Mid-Twentieth Century

Ailhlin Jane Clark, Lancaster University

Theoretical considerations

In recent years there has been increased interest in food and food consumption in Italy, as exemplified by such researchers as John Dickie (2007) and Carol Helstosky (2004), who assess changing patterns of food consumption over the past century. Their work focuses on increased consumption patterns and the changing emphasis on material culture in Italian society more generally. They argue that in the mid-twentieth century brand names emerged as significant and wide-reaching phenomena and thus also profoundly altered wider consumption patterns. Indeed it has been perceived that these changes were part of the wider socio-economic processes that radically transformed Italy in the mid-twentieth century. Those same authors, in addition to Victoria De Grazia (1996), John Foot (1999; 2002) and John Dunnage (2002), have considered how changes in consumer identities were related to developments in the mass media and, in particular, the influence of television, and programs such as *Carosello*, which showcased consumer items and brand names in a way that was new to Italians. It can be argued, however, that such influences do not operate equally in all settings and that not all consumer groups reacted in the same ways to the new possibilities opening up to them.

Following the end of World War Two, living conditions throughout Italy changed and for the most part improved radically, a process that has been documented by contemporary historians and sociologists (Dickie 2007; De Grazia 1996). However, this phenomenon has generally been approached by researchers from the perspective of the widening possibilities that were readily accepted by consumers as certain products were made available to them and their disposable incomes increased. Somewhat less attention has been given to the various local factors that might have precluded or affected the direct modernization of eating habits in certain parts of the country.

Background

This paper is based on information taken from interviews that formed part of an ongoing research project into social change in Southern Italy. For this purpose I conducted a series of interviews in six participating communities in August and September 2007, with people who experienced the post-World War Two period either as adults or in their youth, and thus were born between 1920 and 1946.¹ In total some fifty interviews with both male and female participants dealt with a range of topics including food and diet. Using this information I analyse the particular situation in the Amalfi Coast from the perspective of the consumers, and not from the point of view of producers and advertisers, as is the case with previous studies.

Information gleaned from interviews can clarify how consumer changes came about, and how shifting patterns of food consumption in the mid-twentieth century were moderated by the particular geographical and socio-economic conditions of an area such as the Amalfi Coast, including high levels of self-sufficiency and irregular patterns of work. Lack of space prevents me from discussing here the methodological issues raised by the use of oral history as my main source of information, notably the reliability of informants and their possible tendency to exaggerate either the extent of change or the hardships of the past. But the emergence of similar themes in so many of the recollections I recorded does suggest that the resulting picture confirms the extent to which consumer culture was affected by local conditions.

¹ Specific information is drawn from six out of the fifteen communities that constitute the Community of the Amalfitan Peninsula or CMPA: Atrani, Maiori, Minori, Ravello, Scala and Tramonti.

Traditional geographic and socio-economic influences on consumption

The *Comunità Montana Penisola Amalfitana*, or CMPA, consists of fifteen communities on the peninsula known as the Amalfi Coast, a part of the Italian South that, on account of its spectacular and inspirational landscape, received considerable attention from various authors and artists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Coast is attributed with directly influencing the works of such individuals as Richard Wagner, John Ruskin, and Maurits Escher. However, less attention has been paid to the local inhabitants of the area, and how the landscape and the social implications of its geography have ultimately shaped their lives. Although the region is often thought of primarily as a coastal area, it can be further divided into coastal (Atrani, Maiori and Minori) and mountain-based (Ravello, Scala and Tramonti) communities. Interestingly, despite the relative vicinity of these communities to the sea, the altitudinal differences between these particular communities are significant: while some villages rise directly from sea level, others are located at a considerably higher altitude and consequently experience quite different weather patterns and socio-geographic conditions.

These particular circumstances mean that despite being geographically close to the city of Naples, in the post World War period the people of the Amalfi Coast were living in small communities and had only restricted access to modern consumerism. Many houses dated from the Middle Ages and were often small with extremely limited space. The area's geography ensured that buildings were clustered together, often on the side of hills or mountains; thus, extending homes to accommodate new facilities or building larger ones was difficult. Many homes contained only a modicum of furniture, and people had little more than something to sleep on, a table and a few chairs, a fact confirmed by interviewees from each of the six communities, in particular, Scala and Tramonti. The resource of water was approached with great respect: many locals accessed it from external sources, such as fountains and springs, or via a tank that collected rainwater for general consumption. This water was then used, whenever possible, to keep foods cool, in addition to other domestic needs including direct consumption. In many homes rudimentary stoves were used to cook and create heat when required, as noted by people from five out of the six participating villages.

Houses were often difficult to access; and were not directly served by a route accessible

to motor vehicles.² Indeed it is still not unusual for people in this area to have a considerable number of steps to ascend or descend to come or go from their home; depending on the particular community in question this can range to over 700 steps, which would certainly influence local lifestyles and eventual changes to them.³ It is also of note that geography and climate have historically influenced the area's ways of life and work, wider economy and local diet. A combination of low monetary incomes and poor transport links meant that food consumption was largely restricted to what could be produced in the immediate locality, so that the way of life was intimately tied to geography, which influenced what people ate and where they would have bought foodstuffs and other consumables. Furthermore, certain communities historically traded with more populated centres. This allowed them to supplement their incomes, and to purchase items that they might not have had access to in their immediate vicinity. The coastal communities often used the sea to facilitate their external contact, whereas mountain communities crossed the mountains, as exemplified by recollections of the *Scalesi* (the inhabitants of Scala) walking to Gragnano or Lettere.⁴

When people living in these communities in the first half of the twentieth century are questioned about what they ate and their general lifestyles, it emerges that life was difficult. People worked hard, ate little and had few expectations as such. The poverty and wider social conditions, often a direct result of the natural conditions of the area, had the effect of shaping a simple local diet that was not subject to great variation, and much of which was produced locally or grown by a family. Methods of preparing and cooking the area's traditional foods were also simple and reflected wider socio-economic conditions. As previously noted, people had access to very few appliances and most cooked on small fires or braziers that offered little control over the cooking process. Indeed, at times of extreme hardship cooking in itself was impossible without access to fuel, generally charcoal or wood. Moreover, in most of these communities people did not have ovens in their homes; rather they paid to use private ovens elsewhere in their own, or nearby, communities, the clear exception to this being Tramonti where a number of families owned ovens.

² While this remains a problem today, in the post World War Two period the road infrastructure was rudimentary and less developed.

³ In this area distances are normally thought of not in terms of kilometres or meters but in steps, reflecting the local geography and lifestyles.

⁴ Scala and Gragnano, for example, are twelve kilometres apart, but a mountain range runs between them, complicating the journey between the two considerably.

On a daily basis, beans (most commonly *borlotti* or *fave*) and other vegetables and legumes accounted for the bulk of what people ate. These would be supplemented with bread, potatoes, oils, fats, or similar alternatives to which people had more limited access. Families in each community kept animals, and while pigs were commonly reared in the area for domestic consumption, cattle, goats and poultry were also kept in certain villages, primarily for products such as eggs and milk.⁵ As interviewees confirmed, other than pigs, animals would only be slaughtered if they were injured or hurt, and only then would they be used for their meat. Virtually all parts of slaughtered animals were used, including the bones, blood and innards, or offal.

In order to prolong the season when foods could be eaten, excess meat, vegetables or other produce would be preserved, so that a family had edible food reserves when supplies of fresh food, and other resources, were scarce. This, in turn, would be supplemented by a form of barter economy, and by visits to small local shops that provided items not generally produced in the area. However, credit was a fundamental part of those visits, as will be discussed later in this paper. For foods that local shops did not sell interviewees revealed that traditional fairs, which came to the area once a season, were generally used as a means of stocking up on other affordable items.

Interestingly, what is generally considered to be one of the staple and stereotypical traditional foods of the Italian poor—pasta—was not accessible on an everyday basis to the majority of people in this region due to economic constraints. Many people only associated pasta with Sundays and special occasions, when they strove to eat a more substantial meal—incorporating meat and pasta when possible—than was possible the rest of the week. Consequently pasta, like meat, was regarded as a luxury; these were the first things that people looked to consume more often when their economic circumstances improved.

Special occasions were often marked by the consumption of particular foodstuffs associated with religious and festive observances, such as *baccalà* or *stoccafisso*, which

⁵ The animals farmed in each community depended heavily on the topography and the climate in the different villages. Pigs were commonly reared in the area for domestic consumption. Meat products included meat and fat; salamis would also be produced in order to prolong consumption.

ate if possible at Christmas, or *capitone*, eaten at New Year.⁶ The often fraught attempt to eat such food appears to have been a marker of such events, as several interviewees confirmed:

[t]here was a set menu; some could buy it, some couldn't. I remember a time, at Christmas, that my father was ill and was in bed, he couldn't go out. I said to him one day, "but, dad, this year it hasn't been Christmas" [because they hadn't eaten the traditional foods]. He replied, "pray that for New Year I'm better, because we haven't bought the eel [yet]; if I'm better we'll buy it."⁷

Despite the geographical situation of these communities, and the reputation that some had as fishing centres, for many families fish was largely limited to times such as Christmas. As one interviewee from a fishing community noted: 'you waited for Christmas to have spaghetti with salted anchovies or sardines.'⁸

Sugar was another ingredient with a limited role in most people's lives up until the Economic Miracle. Interviewees emphasised how valuable sugar was, and when and how they ate it. For the most part people could identify the regular foods made using sugar, and when they would have eaten them. Some of the most widespread sugar-based foods included the *pastiera*, generally eaten at Easter, and the *zeppole*, made at Christmas.⁹ The topic of bought products, such as sweets and cakes, was also raised by interviewees. However they stressed that although a shop in Amalfi sold cakes, or rather a type of cake, this was not something that many people would have eaten.¹⁰ In terms of other sweet foods that people had exposure to but that they might not have eaten, it emerges that although the *fiere* and markets that came to the area during the year, and particularly during important celebrations,¹¹ brought such items with them, people rarely had money to spend on them and contented themselves by merely looking.

⁶ *Baccalà* and *stoccafisso* are varieties of dried cod, which are dried using either salt or air. *Capitone* is a variety of eel.

⁷ "C'era un menu fisso, chi lo poteva comprare, e chi no, no. Io mio ricordo una volta che mio padre, era di Natale, lui stava male, stava al letto, che non poteva uscire. Gli dissi un giorno, proprio così, "Papà quest'anno però non è stato Natale". Lui disse "Prega a dio che sto bene per capodanno che non abbiamo comprato il capitone; se sto bene lo compriamo." [Interview: Tram9]

⁸ Si aspettava a Natale per fare gli spaghetti con le acciughe o le alici salate.

⁹ The *pastiera* is a type of cake commonly made at Easter in Campania; traditionally it was made using either rice or grain. *Zeppole* are normally made at Christmas and were originally boiled producing a type of sweet dumpling.

¹⁰ Andrea Pansa opened a shop in Amalfi in 1830. Until the Economic Miracle he was the only baker in the area, but the cakes exclusively consisted of *millefoglie*. [Interview: Tram5]

¹¹ Market stalls were, and are, a common accompaniment to significant community celebrations, including those dedicated to patron saints.

Furthermore, while some families kept chickens, it emerged from interviews that eggs were such a valuable and scarce resource that people would do their best to acquire enough to make seasonal dishes on special occasions. A clear example of this emerged in Tramonti when an interviewee recounted an incident from his youth. He remembered accidentally breaking the dozen eggs that his mother had obtained for their *pastiera*; unable to afford replacements, his mother, went round her neighbours, each of whom gave her one or two until she had enough eggs for the cake.¹² What this arguably underlines is not simply that she felt it was important enough to put herself in the position of owing her neighbours for helping her out; rather, her quest must have been perceived by those around her to be of such importance that they willingly reduced the number of eggs that they themselves could use.

Changing ideas on food and diet

Although mass emigration, which began in this area in the period following unification, did have an impact on people's lifestyles and habits, the period after World War Two saw the start of more significant cultural and behavioural consumer changes.

Interviewees confirmed that during the post-war period, not all migrants sent regular remittances to their relatives at home, and even when such gifts were sent, the gestures were less influential than changes within the 'home community.' Significant changes came about as a direct result of changing economic activity in the area and as people began to have a more direct rapport with the world beyond their immediate neighbourhood, much of which was achieved through increased access to the media, which propagated new ideas and influenced people's ways of thinking and acting. There was already a certain level of tourism in this area, particularly directed towards specific communities, such as Ravello and Amalfi. Yet it was not yet something that most inhabitants of the local communities came into direct contact with. It also emerges that people in the area did not at first aspire openly to copy visitors' ways of dressing, manners or dietary habits. Local expectations and aspirations would start to change only as contact with the wider world and new influences increased and became more relevant to personal situations. Moreover, it does not appear that ideas changed rapidly or dramatically. Shifts in diet and other forms of consumption related to food occurred gradually, beginning with increased consumption of products that were already familiar,

¹² Interview: Tram4.

and not with any dramatic switch to other types of foods.

Perceivable influences such as television can be said to have encouraged the development of new consumer values on two levels.¹³ Advertisements for developing products—coffees, olive oils or alcoholic drinks, which featured in an increasing proportion of transmission time through programs such as *Carosello*¹⁴—influenced consumption through the propagation of new ideas about food, drink and other consumables. They encouraged a shift away from pre-existing self-sufficiency towards brand names and the different prospects of a modern consumer culture. Furthermore, the increased ownership of consumable durables, such as white goods and motor vehicles, was advocated, and this encouraged more structural developments and the integration of different consumer goods into people's lives. The purchase of a car or other motorised vehicle might not seem directly related to changing dietary habits; yet it should be remembered that it was impractical to buy large quantities of foodstuffs from the new shops and supermarkets that developed in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s if people did not have the means to bring them home.¹⁵ Similarly, however attractive the advertising, simply being able to afford a new product would not necessarily entice the fledgling consumer to buy that product. People needed to store the new foods appropriately and to cook them according to instructions. Thus, a certain degree of home infrastructure was required before such people could become modern consumers.

Geography and infrastructure also influenced the acquisition and integration of larger household items that could facilitate consumption in the region. New cooking apparatuses and refrigerators encouraged new approaches to food conservation and preparation. However the integration of these appliances was complicated. The purchase of a new refrigerator or cooker was a large investment for any family. Even when they were affordable, other factors had to be considered beforehand. Before large household

¹³ From interviews it emerges that the television, together with cinema, were the main forms of media with which people had contact. Indeed only two interviewees discussed having read magazines or newspapers at the time of the Economic Miracle. [Interviews Atra6 and Scal1]

¹⁴ *Carosello* was a highly popular, and influential, extended commercial break made up of a series of ten entertaining 'mini-stories'. It was transmitted in the early years of television in Italy, beginning in 1957, and was subsequently followed by other programs such as *Arcobaleno* and *Tic-tac*. For many Italians this show provided the first contact with modern consumer ideas and behaviours.

¹⁵ A number of supermarkets were established in the 1950s and 1960s. The department store *Standa*, originally established in 1931, opened the first *Supermarket Standa* in 1958, while *Supermarkets Italiani* (now trading under the name *GS*) were launched in 1961.

appliances can function, basic utilities such as water and electricity must not only be present but adequate. The item had to be transported to the family home and installed; the location of homes, then, was an important factor in consumer developments.

Amalfi Coast communities were connected to electricity and water in stages between the 1930s and the 1970s. However, the region's terrain prevented certain villages from being brought, via amenity infrastructure, into 'modern' Italian society. Interviewees from each community recalled the introduction of domestic supplies of water or electricity, and often stressed that the original connection was minimal. In many cases amenities were insufficient to run the appliances that arrived during the Economic Miracle, or even to provide adequate lighting for a home. In the region, moreover, amenities such as water and electricity did not necessarily arrive in any set order. Thus some people might have had electricity, and therefore the possibility of a refrigerator or an electric cooker, some years before they received running water. This was particularly the case for a number of relatively isolated villages and hamlets in Scala and Tramonti. Although the inhabitants had certain amenities in their homes, the new appliances other people had purchased were fundamentally unsuitable for their personal circumstances, even supposing that they had a suitable place for them in their house. As previously noted, many houses were small and over time their internal space had to be altered to meet new requirements. This often resulted in an uneven use of space, such as rooms that served several purposes; for example, in many homes a bathroom was eked out of a kitchen area and limited space remained for other items.

Beyond the presence and adequate provision of utilities another consideration has to be taken into account: where could someone buy a new appliance? A small number of shops sold electrical goods in the Amalfi region. This implies that locals had to travel to another region in order to shop for such goods, particularly given that in small shops there is likely to be a limited amount of stock and, therefore, choice. Yet, interviewees from Atrani and Minori described people accepting what their nearest shop could offer them, rather than setting their sights on a specific brand that might prove to be unobtainable: '[t]o tell the truth it was normally the case of what they had in the shop in Amalfi. There was not much choice, but otherwise you wouldn't have got anything so

that was alright for us.¹⁶ Moreover, a shopkeeper's choice of stock may have disadvantaged local consumers, both in terms of not having available the most modern appliances or those of a particular brand. Additionally, the pricing of new consumer goods would be far from advantageous for the buyer, given that a local merchant had limited direct competition and could therefore set his own prices. In general, given the wider socio-geographic conditions in the Amalfi region, the relationship that people had with new commodities was ultimately determined by the retailer.

Changing consumer behaviours and relations

In the 1950s and 1960s a shift took place in which larger shops and supermarkets started to offer people convenient places to purchase what they needed. However, the trend did not necessarily diffuse throughout Italy at that time. The Amalfi Coast is an example of an area that did not follow this pattern, and it continued to honour more traditional routines. One of the most elementary reasons for this appears to be that no single location was suitable for housing a large store, particularly one intended to service all of the nearby communities. Given the size of the village populations—in 1960 between 1499 and 5854 inhabitants each—the construction of a large store for a single village or community would almost certainly have been impractical, even had a suitable location been found. The sheer number of steps in the region posed a range of problems to development and to consumers alike, the latter finding it more convenient to continue to buy small quantities of food when passing by their local shops or when food was needed. Supermarkets were thus unlikely to open in the region given the low numbers of potential customers. The particular socioeconomic characteristics of the area further discouraged the arrival of supermarkets. As many interviewees in the area confirmed, in the pre-Economic Miracle period poverty was common. Subsequently, credit was fundamental for the maintenance of many families and was not viewed in any way as a stigma or unusual. As one interviewee from Tramonti confirmed: 'you didn't have money, the shopkeeper wrote down everything that you bought, and later, when you could pay, he did the bill and you gave him the money.'¹⁷ However, while a shopkeeper might have granted credit to a family in the local community, it is less likely that a new shop, particularly one that was part of a chain, would have granted that same privilege

¹⁶ 'A dir la verità si trattava di solito di quello che avevano ad Amalfi, lì in negozio. Non c'era tantissima scelta, ma altrimenti non ne avremmo avuto per niente e quindi a noi andava bene così.' [Interview Atr3]

¹⁷ 'non avevi i soldi, il negoziante scriveva tutto quello che tu compravi e poi, successivamente, quando avevi la disponibilità faceva il conto e gli ridavi questi soldi.' [Interview Tram2]

to its customers. paradoxically, the pre-existing relationship between the two parties of locals—shopkeepers and consumers—could also undermine the possibility of new consumer relationships developing, for old loyalties remained important considerations in shopping habits. Established independent shops were likely to regard themselves as providing a service to the community, beyond the making of profits, and to a degree the latter would in fact depend on the former. This would not have been the case with new supermarkets and chain-owned outlets. It has to be recognised that there were also large areas in both the north and south of Italy where, for many reasons, the larger shops did not appear. The Amalfi Coast is arguably representative of a wider trend.

The historically limited levels of consumption in the Amalfi region, then, were fundamental factors in the ways consumer habits and behaviours changed. Indeed, while customers might not have been able to influence what a shop sold, increasing economic well-being did start to strengthen their position in the consumer-retailer dynamic. Previously, families were familiar with the idea of using a local shop where they bought items—if in stock—and often relied on the credit offered to them. People limited what they bought to necessities they did not grow or produce themselves, such as salt, pasta or oil. Most of these foodstuffs were sold *sfusi*, or loose. Local people clearly recalled the way in which they bought such items:

everyone had a large piece of cloth [their *fazzoletto*] which they used for salt and pasta ... Pasta was loose then, there weren't any packets. You took it to the shop, they took the[ir] five kilo bag and then they weighed out the kilo or half kilo that you wanted, they put it in the piece of cloth and then you took it home.¹⁸

Oil was generally bought 100 millilitres at a time, in small bottles that people took to the shop to fill when they required it.¹⁹ And as these practices reveal, consumers had little real choice in what they purchased; there were no recognised brands and often people ate items that others would not, such as the *strugatori*²⁰ and *polponi*,²¹ which people from Atrani and Ravello remember. Locals did not regularly buy legumes, fruit and vegetables from a shop unless they did not have land to tend or could not eat their

¹⁸ [Tutti avevano] un fazzoletto grande, si portavano quel fazzoletto e ci mettevano quel po' di sale ... [o pasta]. La pasta era sfusa, non c'erano i pacchetti chiusi. Prendeva quella [busta] da cinque chili e poi pesava sulla bilancia un chilo, un mezzo chilo, quello che volevi, lo metteva in quel fazzoletto e lo portavi a casa. [Interview: Tram5]

¹⁹ Interviews: Tram1 and Tram5.

²⁰ *Strugatori* were a form of black coarse pasta left over from production processes. [Interview Atr5]

²¹ *Polponi* were a type of coarse black pasta made when people had no flour. Its primary ingredients were ground black olives, capers and dried tomatoes. [Interview Rave2]

own produce for other reasons. When necessary, however, people bulked out their food with natural produce, generally local wild plants that in more affluent areas would have been classed as grasses and weeds.²²

Given that traditional background, and amidst the changing consumer behaviours of Italians in general, it is fascinating to note the appearance of brand names in small local shops, albeit on a limited basis, in the Amalfi region in the 1950s and 1960s. As economic conditions started to improve and poverty became less marked, people were able to acquire and consume foodstuffs, such as packaged pasta, that they could not previously obtain or afford. Slowly, these purchases replaced what they had bought previously. Thus, since locals did not radically change their consumer behaviours, and those behaviours were tempered by the geography and particular conditions, the changes that did occur differed somewhat from those often represented as having taken place in Italy. A degree of appreciation for brand names did come to the area and certain brands started to earn the trust of people; however this came about gradually, as and when economic circumstances allowed. Although locals continued to frequent small local shops and local products remained popular, their wider behaviours only slowly become more consumer orientated. Changing consumer behaviours in the Amalfi region were negotiated in a similar way, hence general marketing methods were adapted to the particular local situation.²³ Thus advertisements and promotions in the smaller shops encouraged change and the breaking down of old ways of thinking about food and its consumption, thus influencing new consumer-orientated behaviours.

Although it can be argued that television in itself was not directly connected with changing eating patterns in ways cognate with the arrival of the fridge, given its direct role in preserving and preparing food, television nonetheless can be viewed as a facilitator of consumer developments that merits consideration. Through exposure to advertisements and the general promotion of new or different products and behaviours, people became aware of new ideas and alternatives to consumer goods that they had previously taken for granted. For the people of the Amalfi Coast, television arrived from 1956 onwards and, as was the case for many Italians, the early stages of television

²² Interview Rave2.

²³ Not only was this area relatively isolated, but its landscape and population dispersal meant that billboards and other forms of mass advertising had to be adapted and altered in order to service the area. Posters could be used, but they had to be used differently from large posters in a city.

viewing were characterised by collective use, rather than private exposure. In certain communities or hamlets television viewing did not become a domestic activity until much later. What then, was the impact or the implications of exposure to television on the people of the Amalfi Coast during those first years? The question suggests the need to understand how the first advertisements, which were a significant part of the earliest television Italian transmissions, were perceived by local people in the Amalfi region.

As stated earlier, television advertisements did not necessarily introduce people to new foods, but rather to new presentations of food products with which they were already familiar. Products that featured on programs such as *Carosello* included branded olive oils, pasta and processed cheese, and although the foodstuffs themselves would have been known by people, the brands would not. Indeed in this period many brands changed from being local to national in nature, and as such moved into previously unknown markets. The questions that then have to be asked is what was the relevance of such products to people in the Amalfi Coast, and was there any resistance to such products given people's unfamiliarity with them, particularly in the 1950s before both increased economic wellbeing and new communication media arrived. Interestingly, the first memories different villagers in this area have of packaged pasta is that the paper was blue; the name appears to have been unimportant and has disappeared from their memory. Nor was the new packaging of particular note to consumers in the area; what they did remember, however, was how their *fazzoletto* was gradually replaced by the new packaged products.

A further consideration is that many items would initially have been somewhat extraneous to people in this area, and while perceptions of such items change within the context of material culture, such attitudes were multifaceted. Products could represent shifting daily needs and preconceptions of food types, or the appropriateness of those same items, and thus indicate new conceptualisations or perceptions. A further consideration, over and above the role that such goods would play in someone's life, is the availability of such items. In the Amalfi area there was not simply a lack of shops or lack of interest in new items or ideas, but rather a general environment that encouraged the maintenance of traditional social roles and behaviours. It does not appear that migration or reverse migration, a significant factor in altering wider economic circumstances in Italy, impacted significantly on the transformation of food

consumption in this area; rather ideas about acceptable behaviour remained anchored to past practices. What emerges in relation to both consumable and durable items is a clear indication that the dynamics of consumer behaviour were not influenced solely by the physical possibility of buying something, being able to afford it, or having somewhere to put it within a home. Also at work was an element of local acceptance of the product and an equally local understanding of where it might fit into someone's life. Thus the relationship with new consumer goods emerges as multidimensional: not only was the development of buying habits dependent on geographical, social, economic and cultural factors, but the same applied to the perceived place for new products or behaviours in someone's life.

New consumption patterns

In comparison with what they ate before and immediately after World War Two, by the late 1960s people in the Amalfi area had a much more varied and balanced diet. However, it was not only what people ate that changed in that timeframe, but also the relationship that they had with the foodstuffs themselves and those who brought it to them. One of the most significant developments in this period was that, if previously people had primarily eaten foods that originated in the area, by the late 1960s they were consuming a considerably higher proportion of products that originated outside their immediate vicinity. This era saw a significant decrease in the self-sufficiency that had previously been central in the survival of generations of inhabitants in the Amalfi Coast. A proportion of villagers who had previously been engaged in agricultural activities aimed at sustaining their families started to take on paid employment, for example in the rapidly developing tourist and service sectors.

The increasing demand for foodstuffs of different types that decreasing self-sufficiency brought about meant that shopkeepers looked to take advantage by increasing the range of products they offered, and hopefully the quantities they sold. Furthermore it can be argued that increased economic well-being and disposable incomes increased the ongoing economic viability of shops, especially since most had run on credit and sporadic incomes, and in turn this may have influenced the range of goods that they sold. However, as noted earlier, given the geographical constraints of the area, this increased dependence on retail sources for foods was not manifested in terms of new types of shop in the immediate area. Rather small, local shops continued to service their local

communities, and people continued to buy small quantities of foods, albeit more regularly, again as a result of the local geographical conditions. Due to this gradual improvement of their economic position consumers who had previously had a relatively weak position in comparison with a shopkeeper would have found themselves in a new and more powerful position, whereby they could withhold their business should they wish, or choose the particular items they wanted to purchase.

Considering that credit was no longer a necessity for many people, at least not to the previous degree, where it did occur this was likely to be a tool of convenience and something a consumer could choose to use. This change in the customer-shopkeeper relationship suggests that not only would retailers have lost much of their earlier power within the local socioeconomic dynamic, but that they would also have had to start to earn a particular customer's business, and as such might have had to start to offer their clients more in return for their continued custom. Most likely, a part of this general process would have been the increased number of products that people could buy from local shops, including a growing number of the branded foods emerging in Italy at that time. Nevertheless it has to be considered that brands, particularly brands that were being marketed and advertised in Italy in general, do not necessarily appear to have penetrated the Amalfi area immediately. While people increased their consumption of packaged goods but they also consumed increasing quantities of locally or semi-locally produced items rather than national brands, and this continues to be the case today.

If, in basic terms, the bulk of what people ate in the first decades of the twentieth century was composed of legumes and vegetables, this changed considerably during the years of the Economic Miracle when the consumption of pasta, meat and fish increased, as did that of sugars and other processed foods. Dishes and foods previously associated with particular occasions and special events came to be eaten on a more regular basis. More importantly, families strove to eat different courses, namely *primi piatti* and *secondi*, more frequently. People were thus able to reinforce their newfound economic stability and distance themselves from the hardship that had been so common in their lives up until then.

Interestingly, many traditional dishes from the Amalfi communities were not replaced during the 1950s and 1960s, as new foodstuffs became available and accessible. Rather

recipes and cooking methods were refined and made more sophisticated over time. Foods such as *baccalà* and *capitone*, which were historically eaten at Christmas and New Year, maintained their place in the calendar. Their place was now more secure, even as the way in which they were cooked and eaten became more complex. Two examples of such developments are the *pastiera*, which is eaten at Easter, and the Christmas *zeppole*. In the case of the *pastiera*, the traditional recipe base of rice was substituted with wheat, or *grano*, as and when people could afford to make the switch.²⁴ As for *zeppole*, not only were additional ingredients, such as liqueurs, added to the mix, but increasingly they were fired rather than boiled, thus changing both their texture and flavour considerably.

Beyond the increased quantity and variety of ingredients that people started to use, the new appliances that so many people had in their homes also changed what they ate, and how it was cooked and stored. In tandem with the preparation of foods using these new appliances, people started to eat more cooked foods. Additionally, many people in communities such as Atrani and Scala, who had previously used privately-run ovens, now had ovens in their homes and were able to cook dishes that they would not have been able to before, including baked and roasted foods. Storage possibilities increased with rapidly developing kitchens, and refrigerators started to open up many opportunities, providing more convenience than the traditional use of external water tanks. However, for certain foods such as cheeses, including *mozzarella* and *caciocavallo*, and salamis, many people continued to use traditional storage methods.

Conclusions

Although changes in terms of food consumption took place throughout Italy in the 1950s and 1960s, this development was not necessarily a one-way process, whereby ‘consumerism’ simply imposed itself on local communities, and with the same impact to the same extent on people throughout the country. The example of the Amalfi coast provides an insight not only into changing patterns of consumption but also into the ways by which consumer modification was influenced by geography and local habits or traditions. What people ate and drank in the Amalfi area did change significantly in the 1950s and 1960s, but not necessarily in the ways that observers might have expected.

²⁴ The name *pastiera* comes from ‘*pasta di ieri*’ or leftover pasta; however, respondents explained that in the early twentieth century it was generally made with rice.

People in the Amalfi Coast did not radically alter their consumer behaviour; rather they modified what they ate and how they approached food. For the first time, foods that did not originate within the area itself started to feature more prominently in peoples' lives. Although relationships between consumers and retailers did develop, for many villagers they represented a continuation of old habits whereby people continued to use small, local shops. That use survived the strengthening of people's consumer power that meant they no longer depended on credit for their survival.

As people became better off for the most part they manifested their increased affluence not through the consumption of new and unfamiliar foods but through the increased inclusion of already familiar ingredients, such as pasta and meat, which had previously featured primarily as festive luxuries. They also started to buy items such as pasta, salt and oil in packaged-form for the first time. The increased availability of a wider range of foods and better-equipped kitchens also influenced the updating and improving of traditional recipes. This evolution constituted one of the first indicators of changing socio-economic conditions, and the adoption of 'modern Italian' ways of life promoted by advertising and the media.

Consumer identities in this part of the Italian south changed neither in a simple or clear manner, nor in a linear progression. Often people were exposed to new consumer ideas well before they had any potential place in their lives. Despite critical claims that television influenced greatly Italian social behaviours, people in the Amalfi area had a more complicated relationship to the new medium than has been credited. People within the wider Amalfitan community were somewhat passive in the face of technological developments in their lives, and were not often placed in a situation where they could make educated consumer choices. Rather they were negotiating an awareness of the consumer choices available to other people in a stronger economic position than themselves. In terms of access to infrastructure and everyday foodstuffs, there was generally a stage when someone else facilitated the expansion of choice for the people in this area. This change was always predicated on an imbalanced relationship. Thus, while consumers did start to take gradual control over their own consumer choices, this was only one feature of the broader socioeconomic changes that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s.

Changing food consumption allows an insight into the nature of such transformations, illustrating that while people's value systems and traditions are not necessarily replaced by increased economic stability, on occasion they are modified and enriched by that stability. What emerges in relation to both consumable and durable items is a clear indication that consumer behaviour was not influenced solely by the physical possibility of buying something, being able to afford it, or having somewhere to put it within a home. Changing patterns of consumerism also required an element of acceptance of the product and an understanding of where it might fit into someone's life. Food consumption in the Amalfi Coast did not change simply because items became available but only when new consumer goods were accepted and adapted by the people themselves

Reference List

- De Grazia, V. 1996, 'Establishing the Modern Consumer Household,' in *The Sex of Things*, (ed.) V. De Grazia, California University Press, Berkeley, 151-162.
- De Grazia, V. (ed.) 1996, *The Sex of Things*, California University Press, Berkeley.
- De Rita, L. 1964, *I contadini e la televisione*, Società Editrice il mulino, Bologna.
- Dickie, J. 2007, *Delizia! The Epic History of the Italians and their Food*, Hodder and Stoughton, London.
- Dunnage, J. 2002, *Twentieth Century Italy: A Social History*, Longman, London.
- Foot, J. 1999, 'Television and the City: the Impact of Television in Milan, 1954-1960,' *Contemporary European History*, vol. 9, no. 3, 379-94.
- Foot, J. 2002, 'Inside the Magic Rectangle: Recent Research on the History of Television,' *Contemporary European History*, vol. 11, no. 3, 467-75.
- Helstosky, C. 2004, *Garlic and Oil: Politics and Food in Italy*, Berg, Oxford.