Alto Salento

# Alto Salento - Italy

Alto Salento is a territory blessed with natural resources, agricultural historical landscapes (century-old olive groves), valuable rural architectural and cultural heritage (i.e. *masserie*, *trulli*, underground olive mills, ancient trails). Thanks to the enduring efforts of local rural champions and animators, pioneer farmers, innovative neo-rural dwellers, environmental activists and committed local institutions, multifunctional farms (offering hospitality, educational and recreational services, on-farm direct selling, social farming activities) flourished in the past decades, especially in the Northern part, and the 'turn to quality' resulted into the diffusion of organic farming practices, increasing attention to preservation and enhancement of local ancient varieties, agro-biodiversity and local foods. In the South, where more production-centred dynamics are at play, significant investments were made to improve the quality and add value to key agricultural productions - olives, wine grapes, vegetables and dairy - through processing, protected origin and sustainable agriculture labelling and territorial marketing initiatives. Over time, portions of coastal and inland agricultural landscapes were protected through national or regional legal frameworks and precious rural built heritage was restored also thanks to EU funds, opening up promising windows of opportunity for the development of individual and collective initiatives of slow, sustainable and eco-tourism. Regular exchanges are in place between certain actors but collaboration is not widespread and only a few consolidated networks really operate in the territory. Different frameworks (e.g. Agenda 21, CETSs, Leader) provided opportunities for participatory visioning and planning, effectively engaging (at least temporarily) a significant number of actors. Advocates of conservation, sustainable and inclusive use of local fragile natural and cultural heritage denounce overexploitation impulses and elitist drifts associated to tourism development. Concerns have also emerged about the risk of diluting the message, losing authenticity and control, due to penetration of new actors, representing non-rural and non-local stakes, in local rural economy dynamics. The devastating spread of the deadly olive tree pathogen *Xylella fastidiosa* is now threatening the survival of century-old olive trees, a unique trait of the Alto Salento landscape, with uncertain solutions and prospects.

## Case study referees

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# TERRITORAL FOOD SYSTEM

## Type of region Rural regions with diversified agriculture

| | Quantitative/objective data | Qualitative assessment and trends |
|---|---|---|
| **Approximate size and population** | 191 330 inh; 926 km$^2$; 207 inh/km$^2$ | depopulation |
| **Main social issues** | | high rate of youth emigration; population ageing index above average |
| **Type of agriculture** | 2.19 ha/farm (about 1/2 of regional average) | olive, grapevine, cereals, vegetables |
| **Presence of agroecological systems** | | organic farming: olives, wine grapes, vegetables; significant support of agri-environmental payments (RDP) |
| **Short circuits (and anteriority)** | | purchase group (Mesagne); on farm direct selling |
| **Specific agri-food system dynamics and initiatives (and anteriority)** | | quality certifications in food supply chains ; Park labels for products in the 2 protected areas (Coastal Dunes Parc; Torre Guaceto Nature Reserve) |

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# AGRIFOOD TRANSITION

| **Main stakes for the transition** | **Agricultural and coastal landscape management and enhancement. Solution options for Xylella problem / Conversion and diversification of crops** |
|---|---|
| **Key obstacles to AE transition** | |
| **Leading actors in the transition** | Apulia Regional Authority, Protected Areas Authorities (with CETS certification); LAG; owners of educational farms; specific projects and links with university and other actors to be detailed; farmers; Slow Food; fishermen |
| **Institutionalisation of the agrifood transition** | |
| **Actors excluded from projects** | |

## 4 innovative initiatives

- **Local Action Group AltoSalento 2020** https://www.galaltosalento2020.it/
- **European Charter for Sustainable Tourism for protected areas (Parco Dune Costiere, Riserva Torre Guaceto)**
- **BioSolequo cooperative** (preservation of local varieties, organic farming, educational activities and guided tours) https://biosolequocoop.com
- **Social and agroecological agriculture: xfarm** https://www.xfarm.me

Case study local partners

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 101007755

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