



LAST MINUTE MARKET: THE FOOD OF SOLIDARITY

TRANSFORMING THE WASTE IN RESOURCE

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALORISATION OF UNSOLD PRODUCTS IN THE FOOD CHAIN

In rich countries in the North the main food concern is related to safety, quality and hygienic requirements. For a part of the population, however, as is the case, for example, with transition economies and poor countries in the South there is a problem of food availability (food security) and its distribution. In recent years, despite a thriving economy and reports of welfare reform success stories, a growing number of people in developed countries have sought emergency food assistance because households did not have access to enough food to meet their basic needs (food deficit). For a variety of reasons, the same developed economies produce a growing quantity of food surplus. This surplus is present everywhere in the food chain, from agricultural production to the retail system. Basically, this is not anymore perfect to sell but it is still safe and thus perfectly eatable.

The potential supply is provided by the so-called profit organizations, i.e. firms, processing industries, food shops, retail stores and the like. For these companies surplus represents actually a cost (transport and destruction of the products), while for society as a whole, a negative externality (environmental pollution). In this picture the part of the (potential) demand is played by a number of charity associations or non profit organizations that not only assist directly and indirectly poor and marginal people, but also animals.

Linking surplus (supply) and deficit (demand) could counterbalance this “imbalanced” food market. A way to provide such a linkage is to create an intermediate body that acts as a counterpart for both supply (for profit organizations) and demand (non profit organizations). The scheme in which the exchange is performed works throughout as a gift transfer between the profit and non profit organizations. This is the Food of Solidarity: Last Minute Market.

This system was tested in a concrete initiative that allowed the transfer of perfectly eatable unsold food products (otherwise transported and destroyed elsewhere) from a food shop to a number of charity associations assisting marginal people. The test was performed in large retail shop in the metropolitan Bologna area. In 2003 some high quality 140 tons were recovered providing each day a meal for 250 person and 500 animals (dogs and cats). By providing a cost-effective service for both profit (food shops) and non-profit (charity associations) organizations, the model resulted not only useful from a social point of view but also economically viable and environmentally sustainable. Thus, the model tested was extended both in term of shops involved and in other Italian town (Ferrara, Modena, Verona, Florence, Empoli, Sicily, Sardegna, etc...). A study to extend abroad the Last Minute Market will be developed in Argentina and Brasil, while the recovery of other products is already started with books: the Book of Solidarity: Last Minute Book.

More info: www.lastminutemarket.org – www.lastminutebook.net

Reference: Andrea Segrè, *Lo spreco utile. Il libro del cibo solidale. Trasformare lo spreco in risorsa con i Last Minute Market: Food & Book*, Pendragon editore, Bologna, 2004, 194 pp.