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The Intersections between Food and Cultural Landscape: Insights from Three Mountain Case Studies

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Abstract: In the last decades, scholars from different disciplines have used the foodscape as a concept and an analytical framework to explore the intersection between landscape, people and food culture. Adopting a comparative case-study analysis, this article aims to show how a foodscape can be used as a lens to investigate cultural landscapes, specifically in mountain areas affected by fast structural socio-economic and ecological changes, identifying key tangible and intangible elements, the underpinning relationship and values, as well as the factors underlying their evolution and transformation. In this way, the article indicates this concept as a key tool for landscape management and conservation. We discuss three different and complementary approaches to the analysis of cultural landscapes, namely, from food products to landscape analysis (Albania), from food production practices to landscape analysis (Kenya) and from food-related rural architecture to landscape analysis (Italy). Overall, the research highlights how implementing a foodscape lens among the different levels of landscape analysis could contribute to the assessment, protection and promotion of local food-related resources. In so doing, it opens new research aimed at defining the limits of this heuristic instrument, where its most promising aspects of the foodscape have been explored in the article.

Keywords: foodscape; traditional food systems; cultural heritage

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1. Introduction

The cultural landscape has been a concept at the centre of the debate concerning heritage preservation, guiding the action of international organisations such as UNESCO [1]. It indicates the dynamic result of tangible and intangible aspects of a place [2] and, specifically, the materialisation of the interaction between humans and the environment [3]. In expressing both the outcome of specific historical processes and a form of the precarious balance of environmental relations [4], the cultural landscape requires professionals, as well as institutions, capable of identifying and protecting the characteristic features of local ecology, biodiversity and material culture [5]. This process is far from linear and free from contradictions [6]. It entails questions concerning the participation, agency and empowerment of local communities in conservation [7], as well as the possibility of designing and adopting strategies to foster sustainable development [8].

In the process of identifying and reading the cultural landscape, food has gained prominence over the last twenty years [9]. The recognition by UNESCO of sites such as the Aflaj irrigation system, the Hani Rice Terraces and the Piedmont Vineyard Landscape confirms and certifies the role of food production as one key generative dynamic of the local landscape, together with others such as religion, defence or mobility. Food is, thus, not only a source of nourishment but a product and a process that results from the acquisition and application of environmental knowledge and the manipulation of the environment by communities to satisfy their social, cultural and economic needs [10]. Food is the result of networks of relationships that involve the management of environmental resources (such

as fertile land, pastures, forests and water sources), both for procurement and processing, along with practices and sociabilities, as well as their architectural elements (mills, storage places, shepherds' huts) [11]. These relations also include labour, knowledge and beliefs that are expressed through the work and language of the local community [12].

Considering the dynamic and adaptive nature of food practices, an analysis of the cultural landscape through the production, distribution and consumption of food offers an additional instrument capable of highlighting the deep and most recent transformations occurring in a place [13]. Hence, food is crucial to understanding the landscape because it traces the lines and nodes on it [14], thus, providing a key to its reading. In this respect, the concept of the "foodscape" can be introduced.

In the last two decades, there has been a growing interest in the intersection between landscape and food. Scholars from a range of different disciplines (including heritage studies, landscape architecture, landscape management and planning) have explored this relation and stressed the importance of tackling it from an interdisciplinary perspective to unpack the mutual relationships among landscape, people and (food) culture [15]. In this context, the concept of the foodscape was initially introduced by geographers to indicate and define the socio-spatial manifestation of the relationship between humans and the environment intermediated by food activities (i.e., production, distribution, consumption and disposal) [16]. The term was suggested by Yasmeen in her doctoral thesis [17] and then by Appadurai [18], while a seminal conceptualisation was given by Adema, who defined a foodscape as "a marriage between food and landscape, both the conceptual notion (idea) of landscape and actual, physical landscapes" [19] (p. 2). More recently, this concept has attracted wide academic attention in both the social and natural sciences [20], and is increasingly being used both as a concept and as an analytical framework in several fields of studies focusing on food and food-related issues [21].

Over the course of the past few decades, the debate concerning foodscapes has moved away from an analysis exclusively focused on the material aspects of the landscape connected to food [22,23] and embraced a wider spectrum of elements including the intangible features of a cultural landscape. Scholars have acknowledged the inextricable link between nature and culture, and between the materiality and immateriality of food systems, thus, framing foodscapes as the sum of material realities, cultural spaces and practices related to food [16,24,25]. This occurred in parallel with the emergence in the 2000s of a "new heritage regime" [26] that recognised the importance and need to protect intangible elements embedded in the cultural heritage of local communities (including food and gastronomy) and acknowledged the dynamism, transformation, re-creation, promotion and revitalisation of these heritage corpora by local communities or heritage bearers, as defined by UNESCO in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage [27].

In this context, the foodscape can be conceived as a social and spatial lens through which to view food and space, with specific attention to place and relationality across scales [18,28,29], as well as distances defining geographies of multiple embeddedness [28,30–33]. These new conceptualisations of the foodscape aim to move beyond the overly deterministic causal relations between people and the material environment, emphasising how foodscapes are complex and interconnected systems whose characteristics are the results of endogenous and context-based elements and interactions, but also of socio-economic, cultural and political dynamics that occur at more-than-local scales [34–38].

Vonthron et al. [21] identified four main aspects (i.e., spatial, social and cultural, behavioural and systemic) that are investigated through the use of this concept. Foodscapes emerge as a potent analytical lens for understanding how social practices and relations, as well as economic and political dynamics, influence the material realities of places linked to the production, commercialisation and consumption of food [24,39]. Deploying the concept of the foodscape in the analysis of a local landscape makes it possible to draw a network that links tangible and intangible aspects of the local milieu, illustrating key knots in the web [35,37]. The material components of the foodscape shape and are shaped by cultural, political and social dynamics [19,34,40], as well as by local and context-based

knowledge, perceptions and representations of food and food-related elements [40,41]. As such, foodscapes are physically and conceptually dynamic and constantly evolving [25,42].

Scholars have analysed those sets of places and spaces linked to food throughout the food chain [43,44] and highlighted how changes in social and spatial practices underpinning food and food production may hinder or promote the transition towards more sustainable food systems [45–47]. In doing so, they have brought to the fore issues regarding the sustainability of food systems and suggested alternative strategies based on food relocalisation and the promotion of food and cultural resources embedded in local foodscapes [48,49]. At the same time, they have indicated the different roles and perspectives that stakeholders can have related to the landscape, suggesting strategies for fostering shared understanding and objectives to reinforce local socio-economic, cultural and political systems [25,34].

On the other side, a decade ago scholars at the *Stockholm Resilience Center* addressed the concept of *bio-cultural refugia* (areas that harbour place-specific social memories related to food security and stewardship of food biodiversity), which could help stop the erosion of diversity in landscapes of food production [50,51]. There is an urgent need to better evaluate the role of these sites that host traditional ecological and food knowledge, when preserving biodiversity and ecosystem services in landscapes of food production and diverse memory carriers, such as natural resources, landscape features, oral and artistic traditions and self-organised systems of rules, must be included in current debates on landscape ecology and sustainable food systems.

Overall, therefore, the debate indicates some important functions of the concept of the foodscape in the context of the preservation of the landscape aimed at the identification and analysis of (1) the tangible elements of the landscape related to the food system, economy and subsistence of local communities; (2) the intangible elements underlying places and activities embedded in the local communities' livelihoods and culture, which are relevant to food procurement, culinary processing, consumption contexts and their sociability; and (3) the historical dynamics of transformation of the landscape based on the evolution of the relationship between food, the environment and local communities.

In recent decades, in the face of the dramatic erosion of biological and cultural diversity, scholars and institutions have brought to the fore the need to rescue and promote the endangered corpora of products, knowledge and practices, paying particular attention to those food-related resources that are embedded in rural and marginal landscapes. Despite their social, cultural and ecological embeddedness in the livelihoods and culture of rural and indigenous communities, they have been progressively neglected and often overlooked [52]. It is only recently, given their potentially crucial role in tackling issues linked to food and landscape sustainability (as well as to the resilience and sovereignty of local communities), that these resources, including what García-Martín et al. [53] defined as landscape products, have been targeted and included in initiatives and programmes aimed at fostering rural development through the sustainable promotion of food and biocultural resources [54,55].

Mountain landscapes have traditionally held an important reservoir of biocultural diversity and played a crucial role as providers of ecosystem services [56,57]. However, in the last century, such regions have been heavily affected by environmental, social, economic and political factors that have exacerbated the vulnerability of these places and the marginalisation of the communities living there. In particular, mountain food-related systems have undergone great social and ecological transformations in the face of specific factors, including the abandonment of traditional and multifunctional agricultural systems, land-use changes, environmental degradation, climate change, poor logistic infrastructure and migration to urban areas [58–60]. The fact that the promotion of local food products depends on the fading socio-ecological system that "generated" it is a complex conundrum, which seems to happen often in mountain areas (see, for example, the Bettelmatt cheese in the Western Italian Alps [61]). While local, national and international institutions have been designing and implementing policies to counter these negative trends, they have often failed in grasping and promoting the complexity and diversity of mountain foodscapes. In

this regard, the specialisation of local food-related economies to the demand of external and tourist markets has often brought poor benefits in terms of fostering the revitalisation, resilience and sustainability of the complex and diverse systems underlying places and activities embedded in the local communities' livelihoods and culture [62–65].

As recently stated by Brand and Pettenati [66], in the face of a growing debate on food systems linked to mountain territories, the attention given by scholars to the analysis of the changes and transitions of these systems needs to be further expanded. While in the Global North, the discussion focuses mainly on urban territories, the literature on mountain territories and communities in the Global South is more extensive, especially regarding the food insecurity and sovereignty issues in geographical contexts such as Latin America and South Asia [67,68].

In this respect, this article examines how foodscapes can be used as a framework to investigate cultural landscapes, using mountain food-related landscapes as case studies. To this end, it discusses three case studies linked to mountain territories located in very different parts of the world, namely, Albania, Kenya and Italy. Despite the geographical, cultural and socio-economic differences, the selected areas share some fundamental commonalities (such as the marginality of places within the economic geographies of individual countries, the recent transition from traditional economic models and food production systems to new ones embedded within national and global economies, the presence of cultural and linguistic minorities and the late activation of territorial preservation processes), that enable a qualitative comparison and, at the same time, an exploration of how, starting from the analysis of different food-related resources, the foodscape lens may be used to investigate the dynamics at play regarding the transformation of cultural landscapes, as well as their conservation and promotion.

Overall, drawing from the experiences of our research group, this article seeks to demonstrate the potentially crucial contribution of foodscape analysis in identifying food-related elements and relations that are embedded in local landscapes and in tracing back their transformation and the underlying factors. We assume that, by shifting the focus back to the foundational elements of the dynamic and sometimes disruptive evolution of food heritage-based resources, foodscape analysis can represent a valuable tool for scholars, institutions, policymakers and practitioners in the field of protection, management, and planning landscapes to understand the dynamics of livelihood and cultural change and adaptation linked to food-related activities and possibly lead the way towards the design and implementation of conservation and valorisation initiatives capable of tackling the challenges related to the local milieu with more suitable and place-based approaches.

2. Materials and Methods

This paper was based on a comparative case-study analysis [69] conducted on three rapidly evolving mountain contexts in Albania, Kenya and Italy (Figure 1). The selected case studies are field sites well known to the authors, where they have carried out ethnographic-based studies over time, mainly through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with local community members.

Despite the geographical, cultural and socio-economic differences, the three case studies share some fundamental commonalities. First, they are all linked to mountain landscapes dominated by woodland and pasture areas where local communities have traditionally based their livelihood systems on a combination of foraging, herding, hunting and horticultural activities. Moreover, in each of the surveyed areas, a rapid transformation of the local ecosystem, resulting from processes involving the modernisation and transformation of livelihood activities, has triggered an ongoing socio-economic marginalisation of the local communities and the erosion of elements linked to traditional food systems and their associated heritage. Lastly, initiatives aimed at protecting, revitalising and promoting food-related resources, supported by different actors and institutions, have been implemented in recent decades in the three areas.

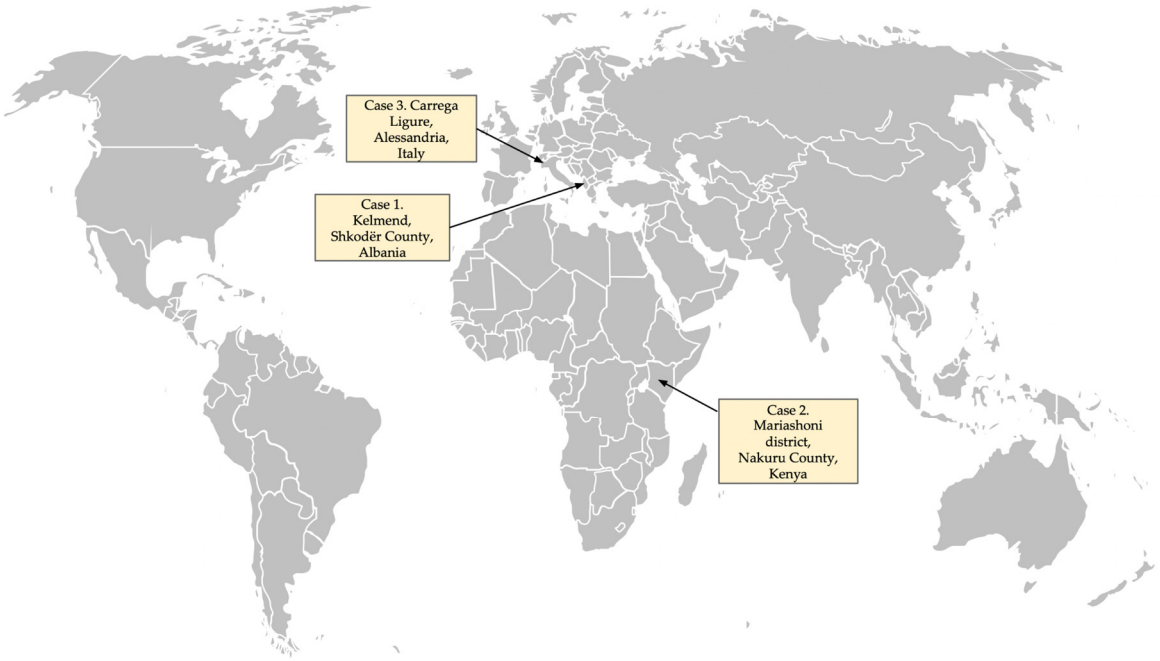

Figure 1. Localisation of the three case studies (Credit: Dauro M. Zocchi, 2022).

The heterogeneity of the cases highlights the adaptability of the foodscape as an analytical tool in different cultural, geographical, socio-economic and political realities characterised by different levels of development [70]. Where the concept of a foodscape indicates the possibility of a gastronomic-centred analysis of the cultural landscape, these case studies offer examples of three different and complementary approaches to this analysis, namely, from food products to landscape analysis (Albania), from food production practices to landscape analysis (Kenya) and from food-related rural architecture to landscape analysis (Italy).

The case studies were investigated during three distinct periods and ethnographic campaigns by the authors, following shared methodological approaches based on food scouting [71]. This methodology refers to "the ethnography-based documentation of folk/traditional perceptions, uses, and management of threatened or neglected plant, animal, and microbial food ingredients used within a given cultural setting/community as well as the folk customs attached to them that developed within a certain area as the result of a long socio-ecological coevolution" [71] (p. 55). Thus, drawing on ethnographic-based methods (e.g., participant and personal observations, structured and unstructured interviews and life history methods), as well as basic ethnobiological and ethnoecological techniques, food-scouting research aims to collect baseline data on local food-related resources, which can serve as an entry point for exploring the embeddedness of precise foodstuffs (and associated food practices and knowledge) in the present foodscapes, as well as tracing their evolution across space and time [72]. In this respect, the field analysis followed the heuristic model represented by Figure 2.

The field activities were conducted separately.

In Northern Albania, fieldwork was conducted during the period 2004–2022, via 13 distinguished research missions. The research aimed to explore the local ecological knowledge linked to wild plants and the food heritage of very diverse Gheg-speaking pastoralist communities. To this end, ethnobiological data on the perceptions, management and use of plant resources were collected through approximately 170 in-depth semi-structured interviews with locals as well as participant observation [73,74]. This paper draws from this extended base of knowledge in order to provide a diachronic analysis of the transformation of the local foodscape. Specifically, the ethnographic account has been developed from the

observation carried out in summer 2022, during which the sparse settlements of the Upper Kelmendi region were visited to conduct food scouting with the inhabitants.

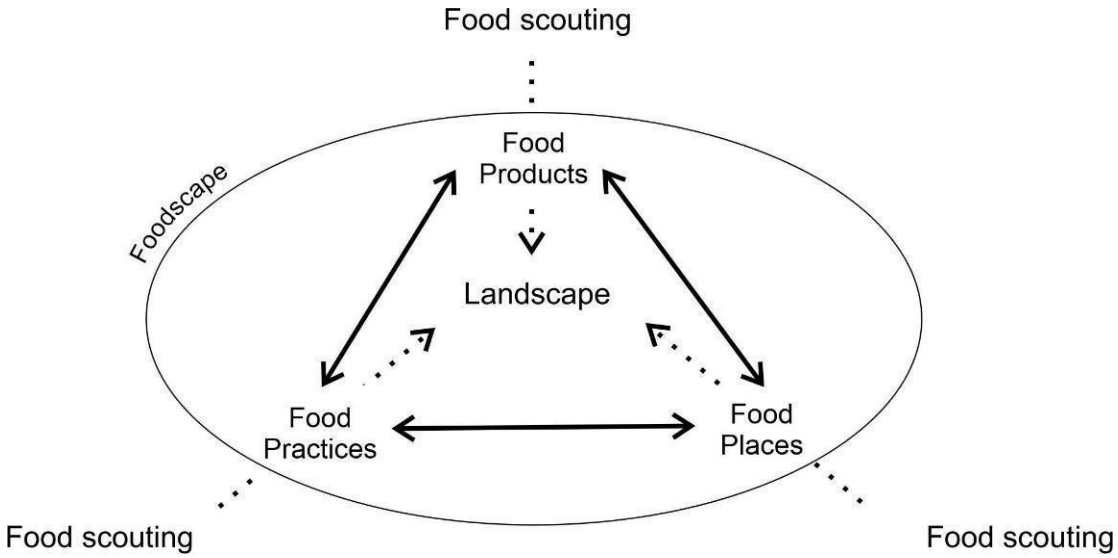

Figure 2. The heuristic model implied by the concept of foodscape (Credit: Michele F. Fontefrancesco).

In Kenya, fieldwork was conducted between August 2019 and January 2020 among Ogiek communities living in the Mariashoni district and neighbouring villages located in the eastern part of the Mau Forest Complex. This research explored the opportunities and challenges underpinning the safeguarding and valorisation of traditional forest beekeeping and the associated heritage. To this end, ethnographic and ethnobotanical data on beekeeping-related activities and practices were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews (30 local beekeepers and 10 additional stakeholders), guided field walks in apiaries and participant observation. Using beekeeping-associated ethnobotanical knowledge as a proxy, this study aimed to explore the extent to which the technological intensification of beekeeping (i.e., the introduction of modern hives and equipment) and the socio-economic and environmental changes that have occurred in the last few decades have shaped the spatial and social frame of beekeeping and, therefore, the relationship between the Ogiek beekeepers and the forest landscape and its associated resources [75].

In Italy, fieldwork was conducted between May and July 2021 in Carrega Ligure, located in the Borbera Valley in the south-eastern corner of Piedmont, approximately 70 km southeast of Alessandria, on the border with Liguria. Through a combination of ethnobotanical and historical ecological methods, this research aimed at understanding from a diachronic perspective how the socio-economic changes and landscape transformations have triggered a renegotiation of the relations between community dwellers and the local environment and have transformed their local ecological knowledge.

In this context, ethnographic and ethnobotanical surveys were conducted in the area through in-depth semi-structured interviews (34 local inhabitants with an average age of 65) and participant observation, especially with those elderly community members (e.g., farmers and housewives) who still have connections to an agro-pastoral way of life. The interviews were specifically aimed at exploring the current ethnobotanical knowledge related to the gathering and use of wild and semi-domesticated food and medicinal plants [76].

Before each interview conducted in the three areas, informed consent was obtained from each interviewee, as recommended by the code of ethics of the International Society of Ethnobiology, and the rationale, aims, methods and expected outputs of the project were explained to the interviewees in advance [77].

3. Results

3.1. North Albanian Pastoralism and Its Socioecosystem

In Upper Kelmendi, Northern Albania, transhumant pastoralism has been the core of the ecology, economy, food system and social life of local people for centuries. Until the early decades of the past century, locals used to bring their animals (cows and sheep) to the plain of Zadrima and Mati (in past centuries to the plain of current SE Montenegro as well) during the winter months, about 100–150 km southwest and, in summer, in the pastures of their Alps (Figure 3), normally a few hours' or one-day walk from the villages.

Figure 3. The Albanian Alps and their pastures (Photo: Andrea Pieroni).

During the Communist period (1946–1991), both the first and the second kinds of transhumance in Kelmendi were fully or partially disrupted, the former because the regime drastically limited the movements of its people within the country, and the latter because most of the Kelmendi summer pastures were simply too close to the border with the former Yugoslavia, which in the development of Enver Hoxha's paranoid terror state, especially from the 1970s onwards, was considered an enemy, as was basically every other country in the world (with the exception of China until 1978–1979). After the collapse of Communism in 1991, locals started to revitalise summer transhumance, re-animating summer shepherds' settlements called *stanë* (Figure 4), which had been the cornerstone of pastoralism in Northern Albania for centuries.

Stanë were traditionally built with stones and covered by beech branches and wood; they serve as shepherds' refuges, and around them, a complex mosaic of architectures, landscape manipulations and social lives is generated. Every family or extended family has its own *stanë*, near which other villagers' *stanë* co-exist. This entire socio-ecosystem, which lies at about 1400–1800 m.a.s.l., is highly managed by humans during the late spring and the summertime. It includes cultivated plots where rye (in the past used for baking bread, but nowadays only used as animal fodder) and/or potatoes are cultivated, in addition to beech branches or wood-based fences to protect the fields from the animals, additional "modern" wood huts, and semi-wild environments around them where "wild" vegetables are collected in the summer—most notably dock (*Rumex* spp.), nettles (*Urtica dioica*) and Good King Henry (*Chenopodium bonus-henricus*) (Figures 5 and 6). This complex, which locals also call *stanë*, is an extraordinary example of embeddedness among humans, animals,

managed landscapes, pastoralism and side activities, in addition to the food and sociability system.

Figure 4. Traditional *stanë* (Photo: Andrea Pieroni).

Until recently, these ecosystems were animated by many families (including their younger members) and their herds, who moved in summer to the *stanë* from their (lower) villages, but the number of families has dramatically decreased. This important change was mainly due to the fact that Kelmendi villages were depopulated by migration, mainly to the USA and Italy, which was massive in the 1990s and again became remarkable in recent years, when the first family migrants who moved to the USA had regularised their status there and were allowed to be joined by their relatives from home. Nowadays, a good half of Kelmendi villages are empty and revive only during a few summer weeks when migrants visit their (mainly elderly) resident family members.

However, a few years ago, a particular dairy product of Kelmendi Albanian pastoralism, exclusively consumed in the winter months, and locally called *mishavin*, has been firstly described by the last author [74] and later became the object of a series of revitalisation processes, culminating with the establishment of a Slow Food Presidium. *Mishavin* became Kelmendi's most typical food fingerprint; it belongs to the "cheese in a sack" family, which is found across the Balkan peninsula and Anatolia. It is produced in the late summer months when the animals graze freely on the slopes of the Kelmendi mountains. Once the curd is obtained from a mix of varying percentages of cow's and sheep's milk, it is cut into thick strips, wrapped in a cloth and lightly pressed to release the whey. The resulting cheese is cut into large pieces and left to dry outdoors, protected from the sun, for between seven and ten days; it is then crumbled finely by hand, salted and left to age in a mountain ash wood container with holes in the bottom, to allow more whey to drain off. The top of the container is sealed with a thick layer of melted butter, sometimes clarified. After around two months, the *mishavin* is ready to be consumed. Yellowish in colour, *mishavin* has a grainy structure, which becomes denser with age, and a buttery texture, with notes of forest and hay and a finish that becomes more pungent over time. *Mishavin* started to be a well-known brand, and this cheese is now widely sold in the best gastronomic arenas

and trendy restaurants of Shkodër and the capital Tirana. Unluckily, awareness of the importance locals and especially stakeholders and the local government place regarding the value chain of the *stanë* "system", from which *mishavin* originated, is basically non-existent. The web linking *stanë*, its socio-ecosystem, food system and *mishavin* is neither considered nor valorised.

Figure 5. The *stanë*-centred "system" (Photo: Andrea Pieroni).

Ecotourism, which was developed in the area two decades ago, tends to privilege classical mountain trekking and paths, especially those devoted to Swiss, Austrian and Eastern European tourists, and basically ignores the importance of the *stanë* systems, which are even perceived by the local authorities as a shaming sign of past poverty that needs to be removed. The paradox of the Kelmendi pastoralist foodscape is, therefore, that while

the valorisation of its key local dairy product received momentum, the socio-ecological system behind it is dramatically fading and disappearing.

Figure 6. Traditional food of the Kelmendi *stanë* in the summer: bread (*bukë*), butter (*burrofresko*), sour cream (*maza*), and white cheese served with fresh onions (*djath te bardhe me qepë*) (Photo: Andrea Pieroni).

This shows that a more holistic definition and articulation of the food relations within a given territory, its traditional architecture and land management is more urgent than ever, so as not to end up basically creating empty food marketing boxes and unsustainable promotion of vanished foodscapes. This is especially crucial in a transitional country such as Albania that, having missed a proper industrialisation, is shaping its future upon the tourism economy.

3.2. Forest Beekeeping as an Interface between the Ogiek and the Mau Forest, Kenya

The Mau Forest, a closed-canopy forest ecosystem in the Kenyan Rift Valley, is the largest indigenous montane forest in East Africa and one of the most relevant honey-producing areas at the national level. The area has traditionally been inhabited by the Ogiek, a hunter-gatherer group belonging to the Nilotic ethnic mosaic [78]. Ogiek communities were organised into groups made up of lineages (*kap*) that held customary rights on forest transects (*konoito*) comprising several ecological zones located at different altitudes ranging from 1800 to 3000 m.a.s.l. [79]. Each *konoito* was divided into smaller areas (*koret*) where family groups belonging to the same clan were allowed to carry out forest beekeeping and hunting.

To take advantage of the blooming season of bee forage species in the different ecological zones, the Ogiek have carried out extensive mobile beekeeping consisting of placing log hives high on specific trees that were spontaneously occupied by wild swarms of bees (*Apis mellifera cutellate* and *Apis mellifera monticola*). Honey harvesting has traditionally been carried out by men who climb trees where log hives are located and extract the combs from a hole (*susuot*) on the bottom of the hive (Figure 7). Before the harvest, the hives are

smoked with a mix of lichens (*kurongurik*) and pieces of *J. procera* bark (*sasiat*) to stun the bees (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Honey harvesting from a traditional log hive hung on a tree in the forest (Photo: Dauro Mattia Zocchi, 2020).

In the traditional setting, log hives were built by tying together two halves of the hollowed trunks of hardwood trees (especially *J. procera*) and, eventually, covering them with bark strips of *J. procera* trees (to increase the insulation capacity, thus, favouring bee occupation and persistence).

Beekeeping was the main interface between the Ogiek and the forest ecosystem. This activity shaped the forest landscape and biodiversity, modelled the perceived ecological and cultural values of forest-related resources and defined the customary norms that regulated the dwelling and management of the forest. The Mau Forest was the place where the cultural and religious practices (e.g., circumcision ceremonies, rites of passage) took place, as well as being a crucial place for the resilience of the Ogiek, especially during times of famine (honey was stored in the forest inside a hollowed log of *J. procera*, called *kisungut*).

The diversity of the honey harvested in the Mau Forest marked the food culture and identity of the Ogiek. Honey was a staple food for the Ogiek, and it was used for the preparation of honey mead (*rotinik*), as a natural preservative for bushmeat (*sirigoniot*) and as a folk medicine (e.g., honey from *Lobelia giberroa* and *Pittosporum viridiflorum*) [75]. However, starting from British colonial rule, with the declaration of the Mau Forest as part of the Crown Land (1932), and then as a natural reserve (1954), the Ogiek were progressively evicted from the forest. At the same time, the settlers started logging indigenous trees and replacing them with fast-growing, exotic tree plantations (pine, cypress and eucalyptus) [80]. In this context, they promoted the immigration of workers from other rural regions of Kenya, who were allowed to establish agroforestry systems (*shamba*) in those lands that, until then, were under clan occupation according to customary rights. After independence in 1963, the Kenyan government accused the Ogiek of being illegal squatters in the Mau Forest and prohibited hunting and honey gathering, thus, forcing them to intensify their reliance on agricultural activities. Following the political and ethnic clashes that occurred during the Arap Moi era in the early 1990s, the government allocated the land to people

coming from other regions of the Kenyan Rift Valley [81]. Confronting this situation, the Ogiek presented a constitutional case against the Kenyan government in June 1997 and eventually, in 2017, the African Court on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights recognised the Mau Forest as the ancestral home of the Ogiek community [82]. However, these social, economic and environmental transformations have dramatically shaped the local landscape and weakened the socio-ecological relations underlying the traditional forest beekeeping-related activities and associated foodscape.

(**a**)

(**b**)

Figure 8. (**a**) Preparation of the traditional equipment to smoke the hives, and (**b**) honeycombs harvested from a traditional log hive inside the forest and stored in a leather bag (*motoget*) (Photo: Dauro Mattia Zocchi, 2020).

In the eastern part of the Mau Forest Complex, especially in the Mariashoni district where some 4000 Ogiek currently live, anthropogenic activities have led to the reduction of over 40% of the primary forest cover in the last four decades (for a more detailed analysis of the transformation of the Mau Forest landscape, see the works of Were et al. [83] and Albertazzi et al. [84]). Deforestation and the introduction of exotic species have triggered changes in the floral diversity of the Mau Forest (i.e., the loss of indigenous melliferous plants, as well as trees and shrubs used to build hives and to smoke bees out when harvesting honey). Moreover, agricultural expansion and land privatisation have hindered the continuation of the *konoito* system (the collective management of the forest) and triggered the abandonment of the migratory beekeeping system. As a consequence, the Ogiek have been forced to redefine the socio-ecological relations in the forest environment and create new socio-economic networks beyond this ecosystem.

Although beekeepers are currently allowed to place log hives inside specific portions of the forest, the increased distance between the forest and the homesteads have limited the time the Ogiek spend on forest beekeeping. Currently, in the Mariashoni area, Ogiek communities rely on a system that is based on cash crop farming (maize, potatoes, peas and wheat) and livestock rearing, which is embedded into spaces far from the remaining primary forest (Figure 9).

Figure 9. The current landscape in the Mariashoni district in the lower part of the Mau Forest (Photo: Michele Filippo Fontefrancesco, 2020).

Since the early 2000s, some international NGOs and Kenyan governmental bodies, notably Necofa (Network for Ecofarming in Africa), Slow Food, Ifad (International Fund for Agricultural Development) and the Kenyan Ministry of Agriculture, have targeted honey as a product to foster rural development among the Ogiek communities and preserve the biocultural heritage tied to beekeeping. In this context, some 350 beekeepers were provided with modern beehives (Kenyan top-bar and Langstroth hives) and involved in training activities. These interventions were aimed at reintroducing beekeeping into the livelihoods of the Ogiek, thus, fostering a diversification of their sources of income (through the increase in the number of beehives and the introduction of more productive beekeeping equipment).

Using beekeeping-associated ethnobotanical knowledge as a proxy, landscape analysis showed how the introduction of modern beehives has led to the rise of a new beekeeping-related foodscape that coexists with the traditional one and intersects different spaces of the local environment [75]. In the primary forest (i.e., the upper part of the forest ecosystem), forest beekeeping is still practised with log hives and relies on the traditional ecological knowledge resulting from a complex adaptation of the Ogiek to the ecology of the Mau Forest. In the lower part of the ecosystem, where agricultural fields and exotic forest plantations currently prevail, the Ogiek have expanded the reach of beekeeping, using modern hives and relying primarily on exogenous knowledge acquired during training activities. Moreover, to embed beekeeping into the new spatial and socio-economic frame, beekeepers have also begun moving log hives from the primary forest to areas nearer the cultivated fields and homesteads (Figure 10).

(**a**)

(**b**)

Figure 10. Two key elements of the modern beekeeping-related foodscape: (**a**) modern beehives set up outside the primary forest, and (**b**) traditional log hives placed close to the homestead (Photo: Dauro Mattia Zocchi).

While the spatial reorganisation of beekeeping has fostered a better integration with the other activities underlying the Ogieks' present food system, this ongoing process has also accelerated the physical and symbolic disassociation of the Ogiek from the forest ecosystem. The dynamics at stake could weaken traditional beekeeping practices, erode the associated knowledge and further disrupt the socio-ecological and cultural relations that have been fundamental to the resilience and identity of the Ogiek, as well as the conservation of the forest. Moreover, such a process of valorisation may have unexpected and contradictory consequences, such as triggering the further commodification of honey and changing the values attributed to honey and beekeeping. Accordingly, as highlighted by the Ogiek beekeepers involved in this research, a tension seems to emerge between the role of honey and beekeeping as elements embedded in the forest landscape, and their incorporation into the frontier's livelihoods.

This analysis of the transformation of beekeeping through the foodscape lens highlighted the struggles to re-embed traditional food activities in a rapidly evolving landscape, given the complex interplay between endogenous and exogenous relations that have shaped the people–food–territory nexus. Interventions, even minimal ones, can alter social and ecological relations in unpredictable ways, running the risk of further weakening the material and cultural links that tie local communities to the environment and its conservation.

3.3. Architectonical Traces in the Upper Borbera Valley, Italy

The Borbera valley is a primarily mountainous territory (max 1700 m.a.s.l.). The habitat is typical of the Apennines, and chestnut woodlands dominate the landscape up to 1000 metres, while higher elevations (1100–1700 m.a.s.l.) are covered by coniferous forests and grasslands [85]. The upper valley, which has been a regional natural park since 2005, is covered by the municipality of Carrega Ligure that, in 2022, was occupied by 88 inhabitants (just fewer than 40 permanent residents) living in sparse hamlets located in the valley. The municipality includes over fifteen hamlets, but only five have permanent residents and some of them, such as Reneuzzi, which is located higher on the mountains, are permanently abandoned and lie in ruins.

The municipal area is crossed by provincial road 147, which connects Alessandria to Genoa, passing through the pass of the Capanne di Carrega (1415 m.a.s.l.). The road follows the route of the mediaeval "via Salaria" (salt route) that connected Genoa to Milan [86]. This road represents a crucial infrastructure development in NW Italy and located Carrega in a strategic position, making the village one of the most prosperous settlements in the region. This predominance is still testified by the ruins of the Malatesta Castle (Figure 11), which defended the village and the mountain pass, and the rich architecture in the hamlets (e.g., the Church of John the Baptist in Magioncalda or the one of Our Lady of the Assumption in Vegni). The village fell into economic decline in the nineteenth century following the construction of a new, faster route between the Ligurian Sea and the Po plain, the Strada dei Giovi, in 1821. The completion of the Genoa–Turin railway (in the 1850s) deeply changed the economic geography of the region, moving the main commerce routes from Val Borbera to Valle Scrivia. The process of economic marginalisation triggered mass emigration in the twentieth century, which culminated in the steep demographic decline in the 1970s that revolutionised the local landscape [87].

Still, in the 1950s, most of the territory was occupied by agriculture or forestry and the primary sector involved approximately 90% of the local population [56]. The landscape was dominated by the presence of terraces, cultivated with wheat, barley and small-scale gardening; the less fertile areas were covered with chestnut woods, where chestnuts, mushrooms and wild herbs (used both as food and medicine) were collected, while the high pastures were used for a thriving cattle breeding industry, which supported local dairy production and a consistent trade in livestock sold across Piedmont, Liguria and Lombardy. Through photos taken in the 1950s, Fontefrancesco et al. [76] have shown how the features of that landscape starkly contrast with the present features. Today, the landscape is dominated by the presence of wild woodlands, and agriculture is relegated

to the proximity of the hamlets, being mostly part of a household economy (Figure 12). The cultivation of cereals has been abandoned, and the collection of chestnuts is nowadays relegated to a leisure activity. Currently, the contemporary economy of Carrega relies mostly on pensions and remittances despite recent attempts to develop natural and cultural tourism activities.

Figure 11. The ruins of the Malatesta Castle (Photo: Michele F. Fontefrancesco, 2021).

Figure 12. The hamlet of Carrega and the last traces of the terraces (Photo: Michele F. Fontefrancesco, 2021).

Thus, the abandonment that occurred in the last forty years appears to have radically rewritten the landscape, making the features of the past seemingly illegible, and its memory seems to be relegated to a few photos, while its last witnesses become nonagenarians. Even if the memory is fading away, traces of the past can be made to re-emerge and be reactivated through a foodscape analysis focused on food places and buildings.

Terraces have been reclaimed by the forest that covers most of the municipality's territory [76]. Despite this absence, within the hamlets, there is clear evidence of past cereal agriculture activities, such as the presence of watermills, which are small (20–30 m^2 wide) stone buildings located near the course of a water stream. These buildings have largely been abandoned (as in the case of Mulino Gelato) or ruined (as in the case of Connio). However, in Magioncalda and Berga, some local mills have recently been restored (Figure 13). In the past, mills were based on water wheels and used for the production of flour made of cereals (corn, rye, oat and wheat) and chestnuts.

Figure 13. The water mill in Magioncalda (Photo: Luca Silvestri, 2022).

Chestnuts were a key food resource that complemented the daily diet of the community. Fruits were boiled or dried and turned into flour, which was commonly used to enrich the cereal flour at the disposal of the families rather than in purity. The traces of the importance of chestnuts are not limited to the presence of the chestnut woods, which are no longer managed. Rather, it is the presence of dryers in each hamlet that testifies to the relevance of chestnuts in the local food system; these are stone buildings with a single room inside which, at a height of 2–3 metres above the ground, containing a ceiling of wooden trellises on which chestnuts were spread. On the ground floor, a fire was lit and governed to maintain a stable temperature (25–30 °C) in the building during the drying process, which took 10–15 days according to the climatic condition (temperature, humidity, etc.) and the size of the fruits. None of the dryers is active anymore, but they are still present in the hamlets, although they are often used as warehouses (Figure 14).

Figure 14. In the foreground, an abandoned dryer on the outskirts of Vegni (Photo: Michele F. Fontefrancesco, 2021).

These pervasive architectural traces that speak of the local peasant history are a sign of a different relationship and a different use of the environment that previously characterised the life of the community. This emerging mesh [88] represents a substrate of the current cultural landscape (Figure 15). On it, new layers are sedimented, attaining a more recent

past. This is the case of the road signs and the names painted on buildings indicating the presence of food shops, bars and restaurants, of which the last one closed in 2020. These recent traces represent the most superficial stratum of the municipality's past—a recent past when Carrega was not a commercial desert [89].

Figure 15. The local touristic footpath and the role played by watermills in characterising the place (Photo: Michele F. Fontefrancesco, 2021).

Thus, the foodscape analysis recounts the transformation and erosion of the community. In doing so, while it raises questions about the possible future of Carrega, it indicates the resources from which a process of conservation and valorisation of the local cultural landscape can develop, as is starting to happen, beginning with the renovation of the local watermills, to tell the story of a peasant community that encountered modernisation and its contradictions, and from that, to develop tourism and local attractivity.

4. Discussion

As shown by the empirical evidence of our cases, the preservation of the cultural landscape requires first a deep understanding of the complex interrelations among the environmental, social and historical dynamics that underlie the reality of a place. As a matter of fact, where the ethnographic analysis is contingent to the present, both through in-depth interviews, environmental, historical and architectural analysis, it takes on historical depth, exploring different temporalities [90] closely attaining the development of the communities or the natural space. In so doing, historical primary sources can guide the analysis, indicating the nodes of the network of socio-environmental relations [91], but in the most marginal rural areas of the West, or in a large part of the continents outside Europe, the analysis must find other sources, tools and approaches within the ethnographic domain. Where both naturalistic and archaeological analyses have been used to reconstruct the sense of a place [92], these scarcely penetrate the intangible cultural substratum of the life of a community, especially under their current inextricable onus of balancing the diverse elements of the socio-ecological system. In this sense, the tool of the foodscape and the interaction with local communities together open up a possible path.

The analysed cases explored marginal realities in different geographical and socio-economic contexts. They shared the rapid transformation experienced by local communities that have upset a centuries-old territorial persistence. In all of these realities, the availability of written historical sources was limited, as in the case of Carrega Ligure, or almost absent, as in the other two examples. The focus on food and its materiality, or through the lens of production practice or infrastructure, makes it possible to move beyond the limits of oral history [93] and proposes a perspective that takes into consideration the socio-economic phenomena and socio-ecological changes, thus, developing history of *longue durée* [94].

The three case studies described rapidly evolving territories. Taking into account the endogenous and exogenous dynamics that have been triggering changes in the local landscape, the conceptual framework of the foodscape guided the landscape analysis in a diachronic reading that can describe the inception of a landscape through the transformation of the food system [35,38,95]. Specifically, the change can be linked with the economic and cultural transformations of a specific food product, as in the case of *mishavin*; the production practices, as shown for the case of beekeeping among the Ogiek of Mariashoni; or the overall socio-ecological and economic framework within which the community have traditionally based its life and environmental practices, as in the case of Carrega Ligure. In this respect, the concept of the foodscape provides a valuable tool for finding and unravelling the twisted bundle of relationships that produces, underpins and is encapsulated in a landscape [96,97]. Specifically, it traces the development of local food practices, thus, indicating the foundational elements of the local food heritage and their interconnection with the present and past elements of the physical environment. It may, thus, provide a lead in the revitalisation and promotion of food heritage-based resources that are embedded in particular places [98–101].

At the same time, foodscape analysis can shed light on the struggles and unintended side effects stemming from these processes. For example, the analysis of the Kelmendi Albanian pastoralist case through the foodscape lens showed how the initiatives and actors involved in the revitalisation of *mishavin* overlooked the complex and diverse relations that have traditionally tied this dairy product to the *stanë*-centred system and its underlying dynamics, thus, running the risk of generating very gracile externalities on the conservation of this cultural landscape. The analysis of the ongoing transformation of beekeeping practices among the Ogiek of Mariashoni highlighted a tension between innovation and conservation in the valorisation initiative, as well as the strong interdependence between changes in material (i.e., technological innovation), spatial (i.e., re-organisation of the production system) and immaterial elements (i.e., traditional knowledge and heritage) connected to the culture and livelihoods of Ogiek communities. By acknowledging the impacts of the overarching socio-economic, political and ecological changes on the way beekeepers live in the Mau Forest environment, this analysis suggested that the strategies adopted by the promoters of the valorisation project (i.e., the modernisation and adaptation of beekeeping to the Ogieks' present livelihood activities) might definitively dissociate honey and beekeeping from the forest and accelerate the engulfment of this activity into the agricultural frontier. This would, in turn, trigger the erosion of socio-ecological and cultural relations that are key to the identity of the Ogiek and crucial for the conservation and management of the cultural landscape embedded in the forest ecosystem. As already observed elsewhere [102,103], this circumstance also stemmed from the poor involvement and agency given to local communities throughout the development of the project (especially in this case regarding the introduction of modern beehives). The debate regarding the modernisation of beekeeping systems involved mostly external agents (e.g., NGO members, beekeeping experts, policymakers, development institutions) who supported, at different stages of the project, the innovation of the production system or a conservative approach to safeguarding the traditional knowledge embedded in the Ogiek culture. In this process, producers seem to have assumed a marginal position. Consequently, the perspective of local communities and the complex social and cultural values that link this product to the forest environment have been partially ignored. Specifically, scarce attention has been given to the role that beekeepers' knowledge and understanding of the local food environment might have played in tackling issues connected to the improvement of livelihoods and heritage conservation. In this respect, the focus of the field research on the cultural insiders' views (i.e., beekeepers) highlighted the potential agency of local actors in the recovery and promotion of traditional food and food production as holding strong cultural, social and ecological values. In fact, the active involvement of community members would have perhaps helped in finding endogenous elements for the design of innovations that were supportive of beekeepers' livelihoods, heritage and roles in forest

conservation. This would have also assisted in calibrating the interventions according to the specific dynamics connected to the local food system.

Where the analysis of the cultural landscape in its process identifies key places, symbols of local reality and actors through and from which to observe the landscape [104], the analysis of the foodscape can support and integrate this process. As all of the case studies have illustrated, the analysis of the processes underlying food and food-related activities helps to clarify the interconnection among the different constituents of a locale by identifying the key locations and resources underpinning the production chain, practices and their role. Moreover, it highlights their diachronic changes, indicating the causes and effects of the evolution of the relationship between food, the environment and the local communities. In doing so, it also points out the interconnection between context-based elements and socio-economic, cultural and political factors that occur at more-than-local scales. This is apparent for the impact of food commodification in the Kelmendi valley, the process of eviction and resettlement (a process that is still ongoing) of the Ogiek in the Mau Forest or the impact of industrialisation and modernisation in Carrega Ligure.

At the same time, the analysis found pivotal places of socio-ecological relations, whether these were of a persistent nature (e.g., the Kelmendi *stanë* or the mills and dryers in Borbera valley) or an ephemeral one (e.g., the log hives in the Mau Forest). Through the identification of these elements, it is then possible to recount the narratives that run through the landscape [105] and read the forests of symbols that populate it [106].

Overall, where food is the primary resource through which a local economy is established and, therefore, the life of a community and its interaction with and manipulation of the environment take place [107], the concept of the foodscape opens a heuristic path of interpretation of the landscape that binds in an indissoluble way its tangible and intangible elements. In fact, in the notion of the foodscape, the emerging reality of the landscape is enclosed within and expressed through a conceptual triad made of food products (ingredients, dishes and goods), food practices (in the dual sense of culinary practices linked with production, distribution and consumption) and food places (which are those spaces or architectures created in order to produce, distribute, consume and store food).

The case studies, explored through the same qualitative social methodology of food scouting, demonstrated how each of the terms of this triad corresponds to an entry point for the understanding and analysis of the landscape. Specifically, from the access point, the analysis can open up in-depth explorations of the other aspects of the triad and then embrace the entirety of the landscape.

5. Conclusions

Drawing from the results of this analysis of the selected case studies, it emerges that foodscapes, as objects and processes, may represent a heuristic, powerful and versatile key to be added to the tools of professionals working on the protection and recovery of cultural landscapes, especially in marginal areas. This tool is particularly promising because it can enhance the tangible and intangible aspects of a landscape by unravelling a narrative of the place that binds together humans and non-human aspects, as well as dynamics, in a unique inter-related account. This follows and responds to the lively discussion about the very nature of cultural landscapes [108], highlighting the inextricable interweaving between nature and culture and its continuous change.

In this regard, our research offers an initial contribution to the concept of the foodscape for conservation and landscape management. As shown in the three case studies, the foodscape lens outlines a process through which to read, analyse, interpret and return the complexity of the reality through a coherent model.

Hence, the foodscape concept expresses a second and equally fundamental contribution to the academic and institutional debate on the preservation of food and cultural landscapes. By identifying key elements and fundamental relationships to define the structure, evolution and transformation of a landscape, it can preliminarily suggest priorities for intervention in the field of conservation that are focused on tangible and intangible food-related

elements, such as the one explored in the previous paragraphs, whose importance has been recognised only in the recent past, and which would have been otherwise considered to have poor aesthetic value and obvious fragility [109]. Specifically, the foodscape-driven analysis shed light on some key elements that should be considered to foster the preservation of a dynamic relationship between communities and their surrounding environment, or culture and nature [110]. In doing so, the concept may help practitioners to avoid aestheticising (i.e., aiming at preserving only, paraphrasing Arnold [111], the best which has been produced in the world), eternalising (i.e., intending to conserve a particular aspect and landscape configuration considered valuable by neglecting the intrinsically dynamic nature of the landscape) or marginalising (i.e., completing the preservation through the creation of separations between communities and environments, or culture and nature) approaches. Moreover, it offers guidance in developing comprehensive cultural heritage-driven strategies of development, which are able to reconsider all of the tangible and intangible elements and processes of a food system. In so doing, it offers a contribution that could help communities and practitioners develop an integrated plan for food sovereignty, rural development and the conservation of local biocultural diversities, while avoiding the risks linked with the promotion and commodification of local food heritage. In this respect, while in their aftermath the processes of landscape preservation risk leading to a transformation of local economic structures, shifting their axis from primary and secondary forms of production to the satisfaction of incipient tourism [112–114], the centrality given to the recovery and maintenance of local food production and its underpinned socio-ecological system reduces this risk, although it does not completely avoid the danger of the commodification of local food heritage [8]. In this regard, the case studies this paper discussed demonstrate the extreme fragility of the socio-ecological mountain environments, raising awareness of the urgent need for comprehensive interventions in order to provide a sustainable and reasonable future to "peripheral" mountain territories.

Overall, although not exhaustive in nature, this article aimed to be food for thought for a larger community of researchers and professionals. The case studies, in the very arbitrariness of their selection [115], seek to initiate a discussion that is open to new experiences and experimentations. In doing so, this paper opens up opportunities for new research intended to define the limits of this heuristic instrument, where its most promising foodscape aspects have been sought. Overall, the discussion cannot escape comparison with the institutions and processes underlying the phenomena of landscape enhancement, supporting the inclusion of the foodscape lens among the different levels of landscape analysis to be considered in the processes involving the assessment, protection and enhancement of local specificities.

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