

The Italian Oliveteque, a dedication to the king of trees and to its oil

That is a project that will leave its mark. Pasquale di Lena presents here the idea to create a big park that transforms in a museum in the open air. Objective: to protect biodiversity

by Pasquale Di Lena



A big park made up of olive trees; an open air museum about olive trees and oils; a field-catalogue of all the Italian native olive varieties; an educational farm introducing the Italian olive tree products.

All the above are the meanings and the roles of the Italian Oliveteque. In this constituent stage, it arises from the agreement among the Farmers Italian Federation, the Oil Industrialists' Association (Assitol) and the National association of the Oil-cities.

This enterprise, bringing to life and presenting an unique heritage of biodiversity, opens new ways for the diffusion of the olive and oil culture, which is very important in creating a new communication and marketing era for olive oil. This is particularly true for the oil in this period of dop, igp and biological cultures, for Italy and for the Mediterranean.

As a matter of fact, the Mediterranean countries, cradles of olives and oil, which are the producers of the 90% of world olive oil and the consumers of the 85%, are the most interested in this project. Such countries have the intention to make this initiative the heart and the image of the modern oliveculture, in all its complexity.

As example of such a complexity, we can cite the present diffusion of the olive in areas out of the

millenarian origin zone, the Mediterranean sea, comprised between 30° and 45° North (and South) of equator. As a matter of fact, nowadays olive is a global, rather than local, tree.

This process, which started in the last years, is led by the growing interest of the scientific research for olive oil, recognized as a central ingredient for a balanced diet, which means wellbeing and health. In recent years it is becoming the base of the new Mediterranean-like worldwide diet pyramid.

Hence, the Oliveteque, with its meaning and its many initiatives, could be a new stimulus for this process, encouraging the use of vegetable oils, and especially olive oils, as diet fats. To date, animal fats constitute the 90% of alimentary fats.

As for Italy, the encouraging of this process is pivotal for the preservation of the leader role in many aspects of oliveculture. In particular, Italy is called to preserve its arboreal cultivations, which with over a million hectares surface, a same-number farms and over 5,800 oil mills, has an important role in the economy of many regions of the South and of the big islands (Sardinia and Sicily) of the country. Moreover, it has an important role also for internal regions where olive, together with a strong economic impact, is of primary importance for the preservation of the landscape, in its environmental, historical, folklore and culinary aspects.

On the over 12 billions of trees that create spectacular landscapes in our country, 224 millions are olive trees. The latter are composed by the incredible number of 400 native varieties, a huge biodiversity that is the basis of the Oliveteque project.

This is a unique heritage in the world, by considering that France has 53 native varieties, Portugal 24, Spain 20, Croatia 16, Greece 13, Maghreb (North Africa) 39, Asia 66 and America 4.

So, Italy has a double number of native varieties in respect of the total number all-over the world (233). Of the latter, 124 originate from Mediterranean countries and 109 from the rest of the world.

This is the origin of the 350 kinds of olive oils that our country offers to the high-quality olive oil market in the world and of our preeminence in the number of DOP and IGP that the EU recognizes (37 on 98).

Together with Italy, the Mediterranean region (with over than 500 native varieties) is the main basin of olive biodiversity. In this perspective, i.e. looking at the Mediterranean basin, the Italian Oliveteque project wants to lead the formation of an international network for the promotion and exploitation of such territories involved in the production of high-quality olive oils.

Therefore, the Oliveteque project knows that olive and oil means a high quality cooking, health, wellbeing, but also excellent landscapes, environments, culture and local memory. In brief, territory.

So, Oliveteque, for all of us that projected it and for all the partners that jointed us in the project, it is a dedication to the king of trees, to its oil and to all that people that, working at all the levels of the oil production, face these crisis periods with their love for this precious tree.

by Pasquale Di Lena
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