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## Introduction

- 1 The twofold requirement of quality and identity expressed by Levi Strauss (1964) - "*food must be good to eat and good to think about*" - has taken on particular importance nowadays. These two elements are inextricably linked in the products we eat, but they belong to different categories and require different analytical approaches.
- 2 The demand for identity reflects the upheaval of established identity references in a world that has been subjected to rapid changes. Thus, food acquires an essential role in each individual's search for personal identity, in the 'individuation' of people and societies. Traditional breads, farmhouse cheeses, local wines in France, Spain or Italy, village-made couscous in Algeria or Morocco, attiéké in Côte d'Ivoire or Pampas meat in Argentina are just a few examples. These acquire a new dimension and confirm that in France, "*wine is not just wine*" (Braudel, 1979) and that a version of this statement can be applied to all the different dietary cultures.
- 3 Our analysis is based on our field experience with "coalho" cheese in the northeast of Brazil. This pressed curd cheese made with non pasteurized milk, typical of this region, "is not just a cheese" for the local consumers. It represents their culture, their way of life and their way eating. But it often harbors contaminants and generally does not meet hygiene requirements. So the central issue arising from this is how can producers, in particular family farmers and little cheese factories, improve the quality of milk and "coalho" cheese, and how can they integrate the necessary changes in their practices and strategies?
- 4 To deal with this "field question" from a research point of view, we add a more "conceptual question": how do demands for food identity interact with hygiene and nutritional requirements? To address these questions, we shall present:
  - a conceptual approach to the relationship between food identity and food quality;

- an analysis of the processes of identification/qualification of food, based on field work: "queijo de coalho" (curd cheese) in the North-East of Brazil;
- the economic consequences for farmers' production.

The relationship between identity and quality: a conceptual approach  
Identity/quality: synergies and antagonisms

- 5 From a historical perspective, it stands out that the desire for a certain type of product has not always led to improved nutritional quality. For example, the color white has always been a symbol of purity. Wedding dresses, the white coats worn by doctors and nurses, and the Pope's clothes are white. White is also a symbol of purity in Chinese culture and in voodoo rites, the priestesses are dressed in white. A preference for white products has been a decisive criterion in food choices. But in certain societies at certain times, identifying the purity of a product, based on the symbolic value of the white colour has resulted in some "nutritional mistakes". For example white sugar, bread and rice were highly considered, but we know today that brown sugar, wholemeal bread and whole rice are healthier than their white equivalents.
- 6 Similarly, territories and "terroirs" are particularly attractive to consumers nowadays. But this does not mean that a "terroir" product, that carries a specific identity, is necessarily better in terms of food hygiene. In Southern countries, and even in Northern countries, the reverse is quite often true. Curd cheese, "queijo de coalho", from the North-East of Brazil is a typical example of this. It is known that it does not meet all the food hygiene standards: the producers refuse to pasteurize their milk as the monitoring bodies require, and in spite of this even veterinary service inspectors continue to buy this cheese from producers.
- 7 The regional reputation of some products can lead to the misuse of signs of identity. It therefore seems important to distinguish between the signs of identity and the signs of quality that are directed at the consumer. Furthermore, brands sometimes use traditional names, local languages or toponymic references to emphasize the identity of a product. Even if this can be absolutely legal if there is no protected geographical indication, it sometimes leads to misuse of these identity signs.  
Identity and identification processes: products, people and societies
- 8 Our first statement is that food does not have an intrinsic identity. It is individuals and society who choose what is eaten and identify what is edible. It is impossible to analyze changing food identities without placing them in the wider context of the changing society, because it is not the identities of the products themselves that are at the heart of the issue but the processes of identification and the references that people use to identify products. As will be developed in the second part of this paper, the consumer of "queijo de coalho" uses a set of identification references to choose a product.
- 9 Our second point concerns the complexity of the identification processes. Individual identity does not exist in isolation, either to be like or to differentiate from others, individual people always define themselves in respect to others. Even though identity can be considered as being a range of characteristics that combine to make a person known as who he or she is, without confusion with others, our concern is about the social construction of these identities.
- 10 It is important to clarify this idea:  
"...identification references [are] the perceptible and memorial basis on which we build our various ways of inhabiting the world, depending on the different ways we relate to ourselves and to others. Identification references are the indicators of two

sets of relationships: collective relationships concerned with belonging to a community, and individual relationships concerned with reciprocity in social exchange and communication. They symbolize two types of relationship: our integration in a community and how we differentiate ourselves from other individuals. The question can be analyzed at different levels, from cultural references such as name, language, nationality, to family-related references"<sup>1</sup> (Ortigue, 1989, p. 69).

- 11 The issue is therefore highly complex: identity phenomena require analysis of different categories and on different levels. Thus, each individual contains different levels of identity, which fit together like a set of Russian dolls. Everyone has a surname and a forename, belongs to a family or clan, can be simultaneously "Breton", "French" and "European" and have (or not have) a religious faith etc. Collective identities between individuals are formed at different levels, ranged from belonging to a profession or a local community (names often refer to a profession, such as butcher, baker, miller, or a place) to membership of an international community.
- 12 The third point deals with the evolution and the dynamics of identities. People are constantly faced with new products to be identified and assimilated. Here we touch on an essential point that concerns both food and wider social issues. Through lack of a deconstruction/reconstruction of their identity references under the influence of current trends, we are observing "ethnic withdrawals" in many parts of the world, which contradict the supposed existence of "globalization". Indeed, identities have to be taken in account, but these identities are dynamic. From an anthropological point of view, identity can be seen as *"the capacity of subjects to be aware of being creators and producers of values, to stand spatio-temporally and symbolically on a scale of positions without merging with others"*<sup>2</sup> (Affergan, 1997). We share with Affergan the approaches that explain borrowing and exchange in identity construction<sup>3</sup>. From this standpoint, the construction of a European identity is a fascinating challenge. To study the evolution of food identity, it is crucial to account for the intermixing of populations from an historical viewpoint as well as regarding the current processes of change as reflected by the evolution of the production and consumption of the "queijo de coalho" in the North East of Brazil.

Food: moving identities and qualities

- 13 We consider food as "a total social fact"<sup>4</sup>, which means that food involves all social relationships. We are witnessing a rapid change in identification references, because we are dealing with dynamic situations that are evolving fast. For a long time in European countries, white bread was synonymous with purity, but today there is a trend in preferences towards more colored bread, which evokes the countryside, even when there is very little about it that is rural. The fact that French wine has broken into the Japanese market is not unrelated to new symbolic constructions and social distinctions surrounding wine, and with which some Japanese consumers now identify<sup>5</sup>. In Latin America many products that used to be looked down on as "peasant" or "indigenous" commodities, are finding a market nowadays. "Frango caipira" (farmyard chicken) in Brazil and quinoa (*Chenopodium quinoa*) in Peru are just two examples of this<sup>6</sup>. In every era, people have had to face the identification of new products arriving in their plates. Processes of identification are not restricted to traditional products. There is no *"erosion of the link between the foodstuff and its identity"*<sup>7</sup>. New products (hamburgers, fizzy drinks, diet products and others) also require their identity relationship with consumers to be constructed.

### Quality and qualification of products: the links to the "local"

- 14 As for the identity of the product, quality is not intrinsic. Quality is defined "in relation with". It is the act of qualification that reveals the quality of the products through the interactions between the products and the criteria by which it is judged. It depends on what these criteria are, how they are chosen, which people are in charge of judging, and how to certify quality and to sanction those who do not meet the established criteria.
- 15 From this viewpoint, it is important not to consider "local" as a fixed attribute but as a moving reference. For many products, bioclimatic conditions constitute the main link to the local reference. But the role of specific know how associated to some actors, in some specific historical contexts, is to be acknowledged as a key factor of the localization. We also observe that the links to the place can change of nature with time. From a link strictly related to a geographical space and its bioclimatic conditions, we can move to a link built upon the image and reputation of the place such as for the famous "cassoulet" from Castelnaudary in France. Indeed some of the raw materials of this dish are no longer produced locally; the current link to the "terroir" is based on the reputation and image of the product and of its associated specific know how. Thus, what is worth focusing is the process of localization (or delocalization), by which the know-how in a given society and biophysical environment takes root (or is uprooted), in order to provide a better understanding of the diverse conditions in which these localized competences and territorialized productive traditions are constructed and mobilized<sup>8</sup>.
- 16 The mechanisms for labeling products are manifold (Protected Denomination of Origin, Protected Geographical Indication, collective trademarks...). In Southern countries, tacit labeling based on reputation and on the identity references associated with the products, as in the case of the queijo de coalho in the North East of Brazil, are often observed. The characterization and the codification of quality should enhance the valorization of these resources and of this patrimony. In the processes of "heritagization", a staple food that is consumed every day can become a product of special value, recognized and appreciated by a wider group or by people outside the community (Bérard and Marchenay, 1998). But in this respect, it is difficult to devise off the shelf solutions because qualification processes strongly rely on interactions between institutions and on the local networks of relations.

### Processes of identification and qualification of the "queijo de coalho" in the Northeast of Brazil

- 17 Our fieldwork was undertaken in a dairy region in the Northeast of Brazil in the State of Sergipe. Its development for dairy specialization results from convergent actions of several stakeholders and from the State, whose irregular interventions catalyzed the changes of the productive system. Our data were collected within the framework of an action-research project conducted by Brazilian and French research and development organizations during three years (1996-99). They arose from surveys with producers, retailers and consumers as well as from observations made by researchers during the action-research project operations.

### Northeast cheeses identity references and the tension with quality requirements

- 18 The Northeast region consists of a wet coast, with a high population density, concentrated in urban centers, and a semi-arid hinterland, with a small population. This hinterland, called "Sertão", has a special significance for Brazilians. There took

place some notable historical events<sup>9</sup>. It is also reputed for its ruthless climate with periodic droughts, which condemns the population to temporary migrations. Its historical characters and landscapes have inspired numerous artists, poets and writers, which contributes to the construction of its collective identity. For Brazilians, Northeast people are described as strong and brave, as it is sung by José Barrense Dias: *"Northeast is complicated, who is strong survives, who is weak leaves; heroic, brave people, who never flee before the struggle to survive"*<sup>10</sup>.

- 19 A strong cultural heritage grew up around the development of cattle-raising in this region that is still alive, with "vaquejadas" (horseback races) and cowboy masses organized periodically. The leather hat, boots and waistcoat are symbols for citizens of an explicit desire to display their regional adherence. Cheeses and sun-dried meat are an integral part of this heritage. Since the colonization of inland Northeast, cowherds milked cows and made cheese, which were quickly sun-dried, so that they could be stored. Unlike the leather hat, which has become an object of identity for festive or occasional use, traditional cheeses are still a day-to-day food<sup>11</sup>. "Queijo de coalho" (a pressed curd cheese) and "requeijão" (a cooked cheese produced by lactic acidification) are eaten uncooked, or melted on corn meal. "Queijo de coalho" is also used in a typical Northeast dish, "cartola", which consists of frying cheese on bananas with cinnamon and sugar.
- 20 Consumers developed different strategies to qualify these cheeses. They first use their previous sensory and memory cues and base their judgment on the visual aspect of the cheese (the presence of whey indicates the freshness of the product, the presence of a hard crust shows that it is an old cheese) and on its taste (some consumers eat a small piece of cheese to test its texture, salt content and freshness). Confronted with supply chains lengthening, consumers are facing increasing uncertainties around cheese quality. They ask more and more questions: Where does the product come from? Who processed it? Has the retailer tried to increase profits by adding water, salt, or preservatives? They look for identifying the retailer (who often comes from the same village or lives in the same district), the origin of the product and the place where it was made.
- 21 Cheese from the village of Gloria is well known on the regional market. Hence, retailers, selling cheeses in various cities within the Northeast region, put forward that origin as a guarantee of quality, which can mislead the consumers. Indeed, in addition to deceive consumers about the origin of products in some cases, retailers sell products of suspicious quality<sup>12</sup>. The image created around the origin, as shown in this case, facilitates the consumer's attraction to products that sometimes do not meet hygiene standards.
- 22 Furthermore, under the generic name "queijo de coalho", many variants in terms of manufacturing methods (cooked curd, semi-cooking, external salting, soaking the curd in brine) are sold in the urban markets throughout the Northeast region. Different formulations of the Gloria cheese have been devised to adapt to different markets: cheese for the Salvador market are much more salty and are cooked for longer than cheese for Paraíba. This system does not facilitate the codification of productions: *"production systems that are particularly well developed from a cultural point of view, and that include many variants associated with different places, therefore, are hard to place in protection systems"* (Casabianca, 2002).

- 23 It is worth stressing that the traditional nature of these products does not prevent producers from changing their manufacturing practices to meet new demands. Several producers from this region point out that, in the 1950s, "Sertão" cheese was very dry and salty and could be stored for more than a year. Nowadays, "queijo de coalho", on the contrary, is a pressed curd that is slightly salted and very wet to be popular on urban markets. The breed of an animal, a cultivated plant or a product such as a cured meat or a cheese, are the result of accumulated knowledge, practices, observations and adjustments. But they also have a limited lifespan<sup>13</sup>. The recent changes in Northeast cheeses poses new health risks. The significant increase in the volume of milk converted to cheese<sup>14</sup> mean that production systems have had to be modified. Milk collection takes longer (between 2.5 and 3 hours), and access to farms is becoming more difficult. The increased milk volume and the number of producers pose problems for the transport system, which affect the quality of the milk, and therefore, that of the cheese.

Product qualification processes: constructing a compromise

- 24 To address some of these problems, an action-research project has been set up in the region of Gloria to support the process of qualification for Gloria cheeses. It can be divided into two main steps (figure 1). First step aimed at improving the hygienic quality of the product (milk and cheese), and having illegal cheese dairies recognized by public institutions. It was introduced to deal with the extremely irregular hygienic quality of the product, which was linked to dubious manufacturing conditions in the cheese dairies that operated in an unregulated sector. The second step deals with the territorial qualification process itself.

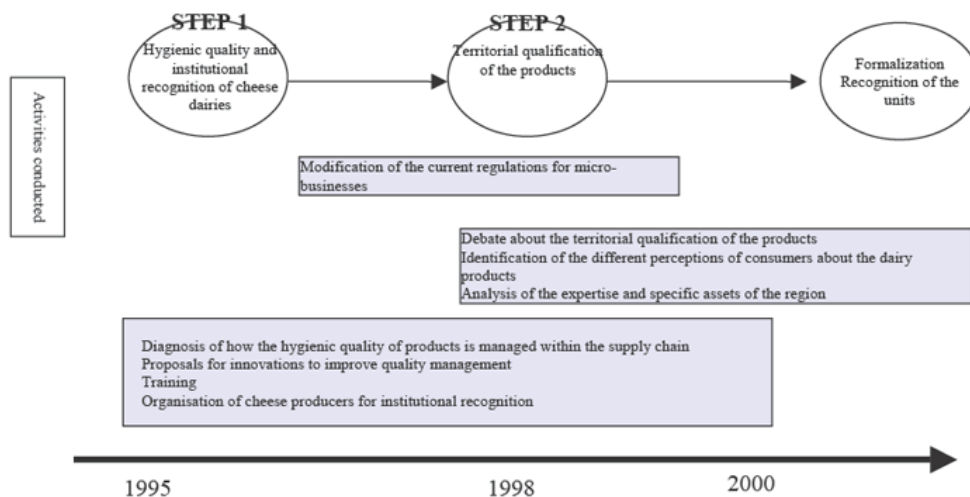


Figure 2. The main steps of the territorial qualification process for Gloria cheeses in Brazil/Les principales étapes du processus de qualification territoriale pour les fromages de Gloria au Brésil

- 25 Besides the technical actions and solutions, certain differences of opinion rapidly came to light. A first confrontation arose around the importance of family farming in local development, with on the one hand, supporters of family farming proud of its capacity to adapt to changing, and on the other hand, proponents of high-productivity farming calling for a social program to retrain the weakest or less productive producers. The conclusion of these debates is particularly important because it will influence the measures taken regarding the illegal cheese dairies. The second disagreement was related to differences in the perception of cheese quality, with two opposing views. One



aims for a completely safe product and puts the emphasis on consistency and hygienic quality. The other regards cheese as a symbol of rural society with its own identity, know-how and a strong relationship between the products, their production system and their "terroir".

- 26 The current qualification process is thus the result of a compromise between the various stakeholders and institutions, each of which holding different interests and positions. Laying aside these fundamental debates, manufacturers have agreed to improve the production conditions of the region cheeses and to address the issue of the hygienic quality of their products. Research has been carried out as part of this project, in partnership with the fraud squad. It resulted in the joint devise and creation of an educational small cheese-making unit, adapted to the small dairies conditions and needs. And it led to more flexibility in the regulations for these small businesses in the State of Sergipe and hence, to a better enforcement of the rules. Manufacturers have adopted various technical and organizational innovations. Some examples are the use of stainless steel equipment, washing with bleach, pasteurizing the curds, wearing boots and uniforms, building platforms at the entrance of the cheese dairy, and using mosquito nets<sup>15</sup>.
- 27 The project could have stopped at this stage, but a commercial strategy based only on the hygienic quality of the product seems limited and cannot differentiate this specific production given that the milk industry already easily fulfills hygienic requirements, and at a low cost. Other strategies to protect the market for rural cheese dairies have to be explored. This is the objective of the second step, which is still in progress and aims to answer the following questions: What should be specified? Which quality procedure should be implemented? Can territorial specificity be claimed for cheeses produced in the region of Gloria? The main issue that remains is how the existing signs of identity could become signs of quality. There is still a strong antagonism between both sides of the equation at present.

The economic consequences of the evolution in food identity and quality perception  
Product differentiation: an opportunity for family farms

- 28 Specific quality products with a strong identity may represent an alternative for family farms faced with the withdrawal or relocation of intermediaries such as multinationals and big agro-processing companies. In the case presented above, the prospects for the development of the curd cheese are clearly enhanced by the increasing demand for these typical products, which can be illustrated with the increasing attractiveness of the "missa do vaqueiro", the cowboy mass mentioned earlier. Each year the popularity of this 'typical' event increases, attracting more and more townspeople citizens<sup>16</sup>. These festivals are an occasion to transmit knowledge and traditions to the younger generations. They support the maintenance of the cowboys' identity and of their typical products.
- 29 The demand for typical products can make the search for a competitive advantage based on product's specificity a plausible strategy for family farmers. As pointed out by Cerdan and Sautier (2003), "*the specific expectations of consumers in terms of quality can help family farmers to position themselves in promising niches*"<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, those strategies favor better control of market supply and enhanced exchange co-ordination. Co-ordination is no longer dominated just by negotiation on price, but also on specific quality attributes, which generally help farmers to gain market power. Indeed, as



pointed out by Briand (1995), *"the search for a strong identity reduces substitutability by other products"*<sup>18</sup>.

- 30 During the qualification process, producers highlight the value of the specific production conditions that give the product its clear identity. This fosters the recognition of the technical and cultural heritage on which their production is based and it can contribute to a better distribution of profits along the supply chain and to the local development of the region from which the product originated.
- 31 Specific quality production, when associated with specific distribution channels (direct selling, local markets, specialized supply chains), can be a solution, especially in underprivileged countries, for small farmers excluded from supplying standardized generic products, increasingly channelled through and controlled by supermarkets. Indeed, small farmers have difficulties to meet the strong requirements regarding manufacturing quality, homogeneity and quantity generally imposed by supermarkets<sup>19</sup>.

The stakes around defining standards for typical products

- 32 Although having significant potential, the development of typical products is confronted with problems and contradictions, especially with regards to hygiene standards. Consumers' preferences for specific products do not exclude hygienic quality requirements. The search for a fresher and less salted cheese led "queijo de coalho" producers to redefine their processes of production, which poses new sanitary risks. Furthermore, given the lengthening of the supply-chain, the cheese quality attributes are no longer directly negotiated between the producer and the consumer, in a direct and trustworthy relationship. Therefore, the challenge for producers is not only to satisfy the demand in terms of production volume, but to set up standards and devices to define, ensure and guarantee the quality and origin of the product (traceability).
- 33 Different issues are then to be tackled. Making the product comply with standards may conflict with its specificity and authenticity. With the standardization, there is a risk of loss of the attributes that constitute the specificity of the product for the consumer, as is illustrated by the debate on the use of pasteurized or non pasteurized milk for cheese production. Moreover, standardization may involve a significant investment that small farmers cannot always recover. They are then excluded from production. Defining and implementing hygiene standards is not only an important aspect in building quality and (where necessary) in the trade-off between hygienic quality and cheese authenticity, but it also has economic and social implications for producers. According to Chabrol (2004, p. 3), *"Hygiene standards are supposed to protect the consumer, but their main effect is to favor industrial producers at the expense of farmers"*<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, in Europe and particularly in France, actors that deal with specific quality products such as PDO/PGI products, when negotiating with central buying departments, are confronted with constraints regarding consistency and homogeneity that can have huge repercussions on the organization of production, and its local embeddedness (Frayssignes, 2001).
- 34 Therefore, negotiation about codification of the manufacturing procedures with the aim of constructing a specific quality agreement must involve a compromise that takes into account the different views, while preserving the characteristics that underlie the product specificity. *"The quality of a traditional product with a strong identity necessarily*

*involves the construction of new compromises between territorial characteristics and the new demands of consumers and public institutions*"<sup>21</sup> (in Cerdan, 1999).

The skills of the consumers

- 35 One of the main aspects of the differentiation strategy of a product is that the consumer must develop the ability to identify the product. In most instances, consumers have an incomplete knowledge of how the product is made and of the signals sent out to them. This knowledge is highly dependent on the promotional campaigns that are used. It raises the issue of the information that is relevant to consumers, and therefore the cognitive processes in the construction of consumers' preference profiles. Hence, the strategies used by commercial brands that aim to benefit from the notoriety of certain regions or cultural phenomena can confuse the consumer's perception and compete with specific quality products. *"Despite the distinctive features of production systems that have a geographical indication, PDO products are increasingly confronted with competition from commercial brands (sometimes from distributors) that refer to their often rather vague origins."*<sup>22</sup> (Frayssignes, 2001, p. 13)
- 36 It is in the interest of the supply chains that deal in specific quality products to clearly distinguish themselves from conventional manufacturers, by adopting a promotional strategy for their products that allows them to be clearly identified and a transparent policy of guaranteeing the indicated quality. This is a necessary condition in order to ensure a sustainable higher price, and therefore a sufficient return on their efforts.
- 37 In order to ensure that products meet consumers' expectations, the construction of the quality of the products needs to be based increasingly on dialogue and negotiation between producers and consumers. This can take different forms, depending on the qualification strategies used (official quality markings, individual or collective brands, etc.). Various devices have been developed to ensure this balance. In the case of the "queijo de coalho", a cheese contest that was held in Gloria had an important role in the construction and recognition of territorial quality for the traditional cheese of Sergipe. Since 1998, this contest, which emphasizes the organoleptic quality of cheese, has been organized during the annual agricultural show of Gloria on the initiative of a group of researchers, cheese producers and technicians. The cheese is judged in a group tasting, followed by a public vote. By allowing institutional, professional and social recognition of traditional expertise in cheese making, this contest contributes to the regional notoriety of Gloria cheese and to building up the consumers' skills.
- 38 In other contexts, different initiatives have been taken. Some examples are cooking contests, festivals based around local products and the "taste workshops" organized by the "Slow Food" movement. During these 60 to 90 minutes workshops, the public taste different types of food (as chocolate, cheese, raw ham, olive oil, etc.), while specialists or producers make comments about the products. This approach is based on the idea that these products should be *"tasted, compared and memorized"*<sup>23</sup> (Briand, 1995). These workshops are designed as opportunities for taste education with the aim of helping to making consumers more *"wise, skilled, demanding"*<sup>24</sup> (Chabrol, 2004).
- 39 The sustainable development of specific quality products will only be possible if consumers recognize their specificities and appreciate them. It must therefore be based on communication strategies and on opportunities where producers, specific products and consumers can meet.

Conclusions

- 40 In a changing world, food plays an important role for individual and societies in the reconstruction of their identity references. Consumers will therefore seek out products that have a strong identity, either by giving extra value to well-known products, by reviving certain traditions or old new products such as buckwheat and black pigs, or by creating what may one day become a tradition. References to the place of origin, to specific languages, to old names for things etc. are signs that consumers look for in order to identify them. However, quality requirements for market access are becoming increasingly restrictive, particularly in Southern countries where typical products were usually unregulated, creating or enhancing tension between the identity and the quality of these foods. The equation, which includes compliance to standards, the authenticity of the products and the economic conditions of the producers, is not easily solved.
- 41 The symbolic values associated with food products are closely linked to consumers' willingness to pay, and then to prices. Identity "sells" well as the consumption of typical and authentic products gives a meaning to people who are thus more than just consumers. There is an opportunity here for family farmers to use the language of typical and authentic food to facilitate their recognition by consumers and to better market their product. This act of selling is not just an economic act, but also an act of creation and reconstruction of social bonds, with food acting as the mediator. The challenge is to redefine and give symbolic value back to these products, and to combine this qualification approach with compliance to sanitary and nutritional standards. This is an important issue to be dealt with through finalized research programs, which have to take both the social, cultural and biotechnical characteristics of the food into account, as demonstrated in the "coalho" cheese qualification process case.
- 42 Research-action projects, which deal with the social construction of typical products, have to establish agreements between a set of stakeholders gathered within the same territory: producers, consumers, traders and representatives of public sector. Hence, the quality of a typical product is not the business of a handful of people, but it must be negotiated in an open way by a network of diverse and fluctuating actors. It is important to highlight the mediating role research can play in this process by facilitating the articulation between the valorization of the specific assets of a territory (products, know-how, socio-technical network) and the institutional framework requirements. The use of several mediation tools, such as the conception of an educational cheese-making unit and the organization of a professional contest, can help to create spaces for negotiation among the different stakeholders.

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## NOTES

1. "...les repères identificatoires [sont] les bases sensibles et mémorielles sur lesquelles se construisent nos diverses façons d'habiter le monde suivant diverses "modalités" du rapport à soi et à autrui. Les repères identificatoires sont les indicateurs d'une double série de rapports : rapports collectifs d'appartenance à une communauté, rapports individuels de réciprocité dans l'échange ou la communication. Les repères

identificatoires symbolisent deux sortes de rapports : insertion dans une communauté, et singularisation relativement à d'autres individus. La question peut être prise à divers niveaux depuis les repères culturels tels que les noms propres, les langues, les nationalités, jusqu'aux repères liés à une histoire familiale."

2. *"la capacité des sujets à se savoir créateurs et producteurs de valeurs, à se situer spatio-temporellement et symboliquement sur une échelle de positions sans se confondre avec d'autres"*.

3. Glissant (2005) emphasizes this viewpoint by developing the notion of identity-relation and stating that *"we must change our viewpoint over identities, as well as over our relation to the other. We must build our personality at the crossroad of oneself and of oneself and others."*

4. See Mauss, 1980

5. A similar process was observed about the adoption of whisky by certain French consumers after the Second World War.

6. Muchnik, 2003

7. Saunier, 2004

8. Muchnik, 2002

9. One example is the war of "Canudos" (1893-1897), a revolution of farmers and freed slaves against the regime of the time. Another is "Lampião" and his "cangaceiros" (1920-1930), a group of armed men, who stole from rich farmers and weakened the government's authority. Itinerant, they roamed around "Sertão" inspiring fear and admiration, in the population of small farmers.

10. *"O Nordeste é complicado, Quem é forte sobrevive, quem é fraco, já se vai, Gente heroica corajosa pra valer que nunca foge da luta para poder sobreviver."*

11. In a consumers' survey in the Northeast city Aracaju, more than 75% of people stated that they consumed these traditional products; and 70% consumed them every day, usually for breakfast.

12. A study on quality of cheese of Gloria, showed that the milk that arrived at the cheese dairy was of poor quality. Tests performed on samples of the products, revealed that the levels of pathogenic flora in the milk were much higher than those allowed by food hygiene standards in the State of Sergipe. Several contamination problems were revealed during the manufacturing process. Sometimes, Salmonella was found in the cheese (Pinaud, 1997).

13. Bérard and Marchenay, 1998

14. According to our fieldwork in Gloria, between 1995 and 1998, the number of dairies increased from 17 to 31, and the volume of milk collected in the rainy period (August), from 20,000 to 60,000 liters/day.

15. However, one controversial subject has not been resolved: the use of unpasteurized milk for making cheese. Zoonoses, such as brucellosis, tuberculosis or foot-and-mouth disease are still very common in the region.

16. Testimonies of the tourism agency in the local newspapers affirm that Serrita, a small city of Sertão de Pernambuco (18.000 inhabitants), accommodates close to 20.000 visitors for this event of which only 500 are legitimate "vaqueiros". In 2004, this festival brought in more than 500 000 reais (approximately 150.000 euros) and this money was redistributed in the close territories (Empetur, 2004).

17. *"Les attentes spécifiques des consommateurs en termes de qualité peuvent permettre aux agriculteurs familiales de se positionner sur des créneaux porteurs."*

18. *"La recherche d'une forte identité réduit la substituabilité avec d'autres produits."*

19. Reardon et al., 2003

20. *"Les normes sanitaires sont censées protéger le consommateur, mais elles ont surtout pour effet de favoriser les producteurs industriels au dépens des producteurs fermiers."*

21. *"La qualité d'un produit traditionnel chargé d'identité passe nécessairement par la construction de nouveaux compromis entre les caractéristiques territoriales et les nouvelles exigences des consommateurs et des organismes publics".*

22. *"Malgré les particularités des systèmes productifs bénéficiant d'une appellation, les produits AOC sont de plus en plus confrontés à la concurrence de marques commerciales (de distributeur ou non) faisant référence à des origines plus ou moins vagues."*

23. *"se dégustent, se comparent, se mémorisent"*

24. *"avisés, compétents, exigeants"*

## ABSTRACTS

In this paper, we address two central issues for agri-food systems: how demands for food identity interact with hygiene and nutritional requirements, and how the producers, in particular family farmers, are taking these changes into account in their strategies. First we develop a conceptual approach within which we stress the changes, synergies and antagonisms that have taken place in the perception of food identity and quality. We then analyze the roles these two factors play in the development of a qualification process for cheeses in Brazil. Finally, we make a general study of the economic consequences of these social phenomena on the organization of food production and we discuss the conditions under which family agriculture can benefit from the synergies between identity and quality through the commercialization of specific productions.

Dans cet article, nous analysons deux questions centrales pour les systèmes agroalimentaires: comment les exigences identitaires interagissent avec les exigences sanitaires et nutritionnelles des produits alimentaires et comment les producteurs, en particulier les agricultures familiales, tiennent compte de ces évolutions dans leur stratégies. Nous développons tout d'abord une approche conceptuelle dans laquelle nous mettons en évidence les évolutions, synergies et antagonismes dans la perception de l'identité et de la qualité des aliments. Nous analysons ensuite le rôle de ces deux facteurs dans la construction d'une démarche de qualification de fromages au Brésil. Enfin, nous étudions plus généralement les conséquences économiques de ces phénomènes sociaux sur l'organisation de la production agroalimentaire.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** agriculture familiale, aliment identitaire, processus de qualification, produits locaux, qualité nutritionnelle et sanitaire

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