



Behind local cheese: comparing Slow Food Presidia and GIs governance systems

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Abstract – In this paper we compare two experiences of origin based labelling systems through the analysis of an iconic origin product, artisan cheese. We analyse one Geographical Indication (GI) (Chefchaouen goat cheese, Morocco), one Slow Food Presidium whose producers could also join a GI (Béarn mountain cheese and Ossau-Iraty, France), one GI that is also a Presidium (Piacentinu Ennese, Italy). This paper addresses how these GIs and Presidia have been constructed and are articulated. In particular, it explores how rules and codes of practices are negotiated. The paper considers that GI and Slow Food Presidia differ in the degree of participation and collaboration among stakeholders, and hence in the way production practices are negotiated.

Keywords – Geographical Indications, Slow Food, Artisan Cheese, Governance

INTRODUCTION

In a globalized food system, paradoxically narratives and defining labels aim to localize food. The unique quality of a product is considered to be determined by its geographical origin, with specific reference to local biological resources, history and know-how. This uniqueness can be formally recognized in order to guarantee the transparency of the food chain, the fair trade and to preserve its cultural biodiversity.

Two examples of labelling food according to its origin are Geographical Indications (GIs) and Slow Food Presidia. These collective initiatives marketing origin-based products have a specific type of governance and yet every project implies specific stakeholders (e.g. state, civil society organizations, trade associations), norms and negotiations. But which is the best origin based labelling strategy to preserve traditional practices?

Economists explored the possible synergies between labels, cultural biodiversity and local development. Some researches focused on innovative system management, exploring bottom-up models and experiences (i.e. involving all the stakeholders) or bottom-down (i.e. with institutional guidance), pointing factors of success (Barjolle & Thevenod-Mottet, 2004) and alternative supply configurations (Brunori, 2007). Social scientists questioned to which extent diversity is handled and rules are negotiated (Delfosse, 2008; Bowen & Zapata, 2009).

This paper compares the experience of three artisan labelled cheeses: one GI (Chefchaouen goat cheese, Morocco), one Presidia whose producers could also belong to a GI (Béarn mountain cheese and Ossau-Iraty GI, France), one GI that is also a Presidium (Piacentinu Ennese, Italy). We aim to address how these quality schemes have been constructed and we look at how the supply chains are internally articulated and interplay with external

stakeholders such as extension services, public bodies, civil society organizations and consumers. In particular, we address how rules and codes of practices are negotiated and established.

The paper considers that GIs and Slow Food Presidia differ for the degree of participation and collaboration among stakeholders, and hence in the way practices of production are negotiated and shared. With an anthropological aim, this paper contributes to assess the power relations behind the creation of these collective brands and their local impacts.

METHODS

The research was conducted in three countries: France, Italy and Morocco. In the first two countries the concept of GI has a long lasting history and plays a major marketing role, although with different frames and outputs. Morocco is experiencing a rapid increase of GIs and a growing exposure to the Slow Food movement activity.

The study is based on the collection of mainly ethnographic information. Fieldworks were conducted between March 2014 and June 2015 and empirical evidences collected by means of qualitative surveys as well as participatory methods, among producers, consumers and other local stakeholders of the three case studies (e.g. social movements and public actors). Case comparison is used to reveal the peculiarities of each experience.

RESULTS

Chefchaouen goat cheese

Chefchaouen goat cheese is a fresh cheese manufactured in Northern Morocco. Goats feed in natural pastures, rich in aromatic plants. From 1992, benefiting from the support of international stakeholders, e.g. the Belgian and French Embassies, the Majbane Chefchaouen dairy transforms the milk of mixed breed and Alpine goats into a French-style fresh lactic cheese. Milk is collected from forty local farmers at a higher price, it is pasteurized and lactic ferments and synthetic animal rennet are added.

Since 2011, Chefchaouen goat cheese is a PGI. The only producer of the PGI cheese is the Majbane Chefchaouen dairy, managed by the National Association of Sheep and Goats Breeders (ANOC), under the administrative supervision of Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. ANOC is the collective body asking for the GI and negotiating the code of practices. However, since the full traceability of the cheese-making process is not guaranteed, the PGI scheme is not operational yet.

Piacentinu Ennese

Piacentinu Ennese is an ancient sheep cheese flavoured with black pepper and locally grown saffron. It got the PDO in 2011 and the Slow Food Presidia in 2013. Production and maturing must occur within the area of 9 villages in province of Enna, in the centre of

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Sicily. It is a small and qualitative production: ten cheese-makers produce 35 tonnes of cheese per year; six belong to the PDO; three of them are dairies and three are Presidium producers, including also two dairies.

The PDO is managed by the Consorzio di Tutela, a governing body that defined a code of practices not responding to several needs of the producers, e.g. selling the cheese in portions. Shepherds supplying raw milk do not belong to the Consorzio which only includes cheese-makers who are rarely also shepherds. Slow Food is supporting a redefinition of the Consorzio legal framework and code of practices.

Béarn mountain cheese

In Béarn (French Pyrenees), Slow Food is developing a Presidium promoting the cheese produced on the mountains. In fact, sheep transhumance at the end of June from the valleys to pastures over 1500m. Shepherds of the three Béarn valleys are organized in an association and Slow Food is working to rediscover the ancient mountain cheese manufactured without adding lactic ferments.

The three Béarn valleys are within the area of production of the Ossau-Iraty PDO that is potentially available to all the shepherds involved in the Presidium. This PDO includes a wide variety of cheese-making styles (size, shape, maturing) and different stakeholders (transhumant shepherds, valley farmers, and industrial dairies).

DISCUSSION

We look at the motivation and the actor's involvement into the negotiation of the codes of practices.

In Morocco, the State is the initial and major player. Within the second pillar of the Green Morocco Plan, valuing emblematic local products (e.g. olive oil and goat cheese) is considered a way to preserve cultural and environmental heritage while generating local economic activities. Numbers of initiatives of labelling systems are hence promoted and the directors of the national association ANOC followed this national strategy. However, this institutional commitment to develop activities in disadvantaged rural areas within a quality label strategy doesn't seem to be appropriated by local actors (shepherds, Majbane Chefchaouen's staff, restaurants).

Differently, in the case of Piacentinu Ennese, a few cheese-makers started the quality labelling. Twenty years ago they wanted to make of this peculiar almost disappeared cheese a profitable fashionable traditional product with both PDO and Slow Food Presidia recognition. The Consorzio di Tutela created to launch the PDO is headed by these producers (including three dairies) and supported by local institutions, not without political disputes. Not all the producers belonging to the PDO are involved into the Slow Food Presidium despite the fact that they follow the same code of practices. The selection process is unclear to

the producers and reveals an issue of authority: what does imply that Slow Food, as an experts' movement, defines who might join a collective action?

The starting point of the Ossau-Iraty PDO was closely linked to the business of three dairy industrial groups who played a central role in the definition of the PDO governance system. The Presidium involves some producers that are in the PDO, but also many that are fully against this initiative that is generally perceived as working against the interests of small quality shepherds and cheese-makers, as banalising their product while appropriating the image of a traditional cheese.

The Ossau-Iraty PDO code of practices reflects the interests of the industrial dairies to have a standardized cheese to be easily produced and marketed. As a reaction, shepherds of Béarn joined to promote their shared vision of regional quality cheese. On the other hand, in Morocco, the State and ANOC are supporters of a modern and safe cheese. But the French-style lactic cheese described in the code of practices of the PGI is bio-culturally rooted in a territory or it is a standardized product answering the demand of a new niche market? Finally, in Sicily, the Consorzio di Tutela adopted a strict definition of the production area and preferred a territorial approach (saffron is grown locally and benefits shared). However, only the South of the Enna province is included. The highly demanding specifications create frustration among the excluded while the dairies can circumvent the rules.

We conclude that the context of creation of the origin-based labelling systems highly vary in the three case studies. The code of practices is more likely to be to embrace traditional production practices (rather than industrial standards) according to the heterogeneity of the actors' motivation and degree of their implication into the scheme.

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