

FAO & SINERGI MEETING

31 Jan. – 1 Feb. 2008; Rome

Discussants Comments – Rural and Sustainable Development Issues

Comments from Laurence Bérard, CNRS, France

Rural and sustainable development: the impacts of quality linked to Geographical origin schemes implementation

The presentations of this session have put forward a lot of interesting remarks and thought. I will comment and stress on some of them.

is one of The three pillars of sustainable development, economic, social and Environnemental (including biodiversity). Rural development is also part of sustainable development. Those concepts are very broad, there are a lot of different conceptions and interpretations of rural development around the word .

Environnement and preservation of biodiversity are not the main objectives of Geographical Indication but they can be a positive externality if the specifications are built taking into account this aspect. In France, some PDO clearly established the link; for instance the specification of Ardèche chestnuts PDO include 19 main local varieties and refuse to introduce hybrid varieties which would have moved chestnut grove from agroforestry to an intensive orchard system. The same remark can be made with the specifications of PDO Domfront perry (a cider made of pears) which strictly defines the traditional management of fruit trees and protects the local varieties of pears.

Mountain concentrates biodiversity and the promotion of specific quality products by GIs contributes to preserve mountain ecosystems and it has been shown that net income of GIs producers are comparable to farmers who live in the plains. We can talk about conservation of breeds when they are noted in the specification or of mountain pasture because it is still valuable to use it when the milk is valorised by a GI. Microbiodiversity linked to the cheese is an other important point to underline. In this case, the protection of geographical origin allows to preserve extensive schemes of agriculture which has something to do with sustainable development. But sometimes, the profitability of GIs associated with the strong image of the montain, attract opportunist agro-food industries which may have an effect on the supply chain. Image of origin-based products is often easy to manipulate, specifically for montain areas. And some actors of rural development work on a satisfactory use of this “status-enhancing mention”.

Generally speaking, geographical indications can be built in very different ways, depending on the motivations of the initiators and supporters, and specifications are the core of the GIs approach. Extremely strong economical links may entail a situation of monopoly in favor of the most powerful actor in the GI and exclude small scale producers and craftsmen, specifically when there are technical constraints associated to additionnal cost of certification. When specifications do not contain information which are really linked to the specificity of the product, the protection is weak and GIs have nothing to do with sustainable and rural development. In other cases, strong expectations exist, as for the hungarian paprika, with different kinds of issues. Most of the time, there are different scenarii to built specifications and the choices which are to be made bring about more or less exclusion. This is another big issue of the protection of geographical indications; which very often have something to do with culture, through knowledge and skills. But GIs can also lead to a virtuous circle, having a real impact on the rural development when the codification of the link between local resources and GI product is well done. In this case, GI is a good tool for rural development.

Public intervention, supporting collective building based on local resources, can be justified in the light of rural development, but taking those remarks into account, which values should orient the public action? Those interventions are expensive; are they conceivable for the developing countries? Protection can be a weapon in the hand of the most powerful actors. Successful implementations of GIs may become an economic mechanism which excludes the poorer producers, they can also lead to an homogeneity of products and processes and generate negative impacts on biodiversity. Challenges for GIs implementations in developing countries are greater than in developed countries. This concept is new in former, and the situation is evolving very fast due to globalisation in a very positive context. Finally, in Europe a GI is the result of local power games and lobbies, because the applicants are always the producers. But it does not always seem to be the case in developing countries, where the state can have this function. Moreover the nature itself of the productions is also important, who takes advantage of GIs on export products as complex as coffee or cocoa? All the countries are setting up their legal framework under our very eyes, as for Morocco where the distinctive seals of origin and quality have been approved by Parliament very recently.

But GIs are not the panacea, they are difficult to build, expensive, and other means to valorise localized products exist as Slow Food shows with the Presidia, and they must remain complementary to the GIs.

It has been spoken of "territorial esteem", along with self esteem of the producers through the focus of local resources. It is an important notion which has something to do with the preservation of way of living and rural population, products which make sense in a local culture and which are linked to local food habits.

To conclude, one must never forget that GIs are closely linked with local culture. It is for this reason that an anthropological approach is so important to understand the content of a link to a place and what kind of information must be taken into account. A well conceived GI, which really pays attention to the identity of the product, is an efficient tool for rural and sustainable development. GIs allow to think agriculture in a different way, which respect cultural biodiversity, but the compliance with the different international rules is very difficult to obtain - particularly sanitary requirements, food safety standards and the certifications which result in a lot of exclusion.

Bourg-en-Bresse, March 3rd 2008