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**LOCAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND FOODSTUFFS
IN SOUTHERN EUROPE.
ANTHROPOLOGICAL, SENSORIAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMICAL
CHARACTERIZATION OF THEIR TYPICALITY. VALUE-ADDING STRATEGIES**

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I - RESEARCH OUTLINE

The context and the problem parameters

For a number of years now, Europe, and the Southern European states in particular, have been showing a growing interest in traditional local foods and agricultural products. This phenomenon has grown tremendously since the implementation of the European Community Regulation (No 2081/92 and 2082/92) put into place to protect the names and guarantee the integrity of products whose existence and production methods have a link with a geographic area and/or a traditional method of production. These regulations have already had an effect at different levels by creating a feeling of excitement amongst producers, by drawing the attention of political circles and by attracting interest in economic quarters

Local agricultural products and foodstuffs¹ are found at the cusp of a number of preoccupations closely related to the current evolution of our society. These high value-added products occupy a unique place in the world of agricultural food production. Until very recently ignored by the world of agri-business and scarcely attracting any agronomical research funding, they are now the focus of unprecedented attention in a growing economy, which has become increasingly difficult to gauge and forecast by the agricultural community. In fact, these products respond particularly well to the impetus created by the European Community's Agricultural Policy since 1992, which encourages product diversification and the development of extensive systems. Broader still, they also have an impact on land use management, the micro-development of areas of low economic output and on landscape and environmental resources management.

Paradoxically, these products remain poorly understood. In a very competitive market in which every producer claims some kind of specific origin or uniqueness for his product - a claim supposed to add value and create a market advantage - it is important to develop a better understanding of these products. Such a statement implicitly acknowledges the self-evident fact that product valorisation can only be achieved through an extensive product knowledge.

This research program was established within the above context to reach a better understanding of what makes this particular group of products so characteristic and how such unique characters fit within a perspective of protection and valorisation.

While focussing on traditional local foods and agricultural products, the work placed a deliberate emphasis on Man and Society, through space, time, technical culture, organoleptic dimension, social and economic organisation. Initially defined in such a way, these different elements became the object of cross research facilitating a global view of the question, going well beyond crafts, geographical areas, product categorisation or product streams.

At the same time, an urgent need was also identified to devise evaluation and analytical methods leading to a better understanding of their existence - methods largely based on observations *in situ* where products are actually made, where they survive, evolve or disappear. The aim of this research was therefore to derive a rational equation from actual facts while taking into account its context and all the

¹ - generically called *produits de terroir* in French. The term is not translatable in English or other languages.

perceived issues at stake.

Beyond the emphasis placed on human and social sciences, the originality of the work lies in a multi-disciplinary approach calling on a broad spectrum of expertise from teams of different scientific horizons and technological background. It also rested on the integration of these teams with the aim of postulating new ideas, proposing different methodologies and research directions and formulating concrete proposals. This work took place between 1994 and 1997.

Research Objectives

Despite the extensive amount of research presently underway on this particular group of products, it was very quickly noticed that no connections had been made between broad cultural features, technical practices, sensory characteristics or socio-economic parameters. Therefore, an opportunity was perceived to develop a new approach by linking together the ethnological, sensorial and socio-economic characteristics of the local agricultural products and foodstuffs (products from the *terroir*) of Southern Europe as well as introducing a historical and environmental dimension to this work.

With this in mind, it became logical, for each field of expertise involved, to treat local traditional products as a common object of investigation and develop new ideas, themes and avenues founded on the multiple facets of their existence and on the stakes they raise. Relying on fieldwork, the idea was therefore to devise new concepts and create new tools to conduct a rational investigation going beyond the partial or limited analysis available from each individual field of expertise involved.

The specific objectives defined at the outset were as follows :

(i) In the regions selected by the partner countries, locate, identify, catalogue, and describe the resources available and their areas of distribution while formulating suitable methods of investigation adapted to the particular type of materials identified.

(ii) From such a survey, select representative products perceived to be most likely to provide answers to specific questions and carry out a limited number of case studies.

(iii) Isolate the factors responsible for their overall specificity and develop a method allowing these specific characters to be evaluated against determining criteria of protection operating under the European Community's regulations including *Protected Denomination of Origin* (PDO), *Protected Geographical Indication* (PGI) and *Certificate of Specific Character* (CSC).

(iv) Put forward strategies of valorisation bringing together socio-cultural heritage, knowledge and applied techniques, organoleptic properties, economic resources and environmental management.

In parallel with the establishment of a suitable research framework, another aim was to offer a number of conceptual ideas, methods and research tools to those who were interested :

Conceptual ideas - to help clarify the subject and break it down into discrete elements; to assist with the backward step necessary for a more objective analysis; to propose suitable approaches and to assess more accurately the pressures and

leanings involved and further identify the numerous interests at stake. *Methods and research tools* - to better characterise the products, to reach a greater understanding of their particular place in the broad world of food products, to learn how to capture their organoleptic properties and to suggest points of entry in order to facilitate their evaluation within a framework of protection and valorisation.

General methodology

Resting on a multi disciplinary approach, this work called on the adoption of a specific *modus operandi* resting on a number of research poles in the following fields:

- (i) Ethnology and History
- (ii) Sensorial analysis
- (iii) Socio-economy

Each pole called on its own specific expertise and methods while remaining aware of the other proficiencies. A number of phases were planned to meet the stated objectives.

The first one focussed on drawing up a census of local agricultural products and foodstuffs and their production methods in the selected regions of Emilia Romagna, Piemonte and Liguria in Italy, Catalonia in Spain, Tras-o-Montes in Portugal (pork products only) and Rhône-Alpes in France. This initial step helped to assess the complexity of this group of products and allowed basic analytical work to be carried out. It also gave a measure of the divergence existing between the research teams involved, and the options available to bring them closer together. At the end of this phase, 10 products were selected; five were later targeted for additional historical and anthropological investigations. In-depth work on the characterisation of product specificity was organised around these “core products”.

From this second phase, the longest, the work on protection and valorisation was pursued. Core products - identifiable with local agricultural products and foodstuffs in general - were selected for a number of reasons related to the project's phases and to the situation encountered in the field, taking into account the present European context. Their selection across a number of agri-food production sectors was left purposely broad and included low-volume products commanding a very small market - some of them even on the way to disappearing - and widespread ones, protected or not.

II - RESULTS

Characterisation

Characterisation is the process combining the identification and description of the components and factors which make up the product, create its distinguishing features and set its unique character. Relying initially on earlier census results and later on products monographs, a number of "characterising" data were isolated to evaluate and study the distinguishing features of products considered to be "local" and "traditional". The rationale behind this approach was to extract a set of data which not only fitted the original equation but was also common to all research fields and then develop a number of key points acting as linchpins between the products themselves and the individual disciplines involved. In this instance, the link between product and tradition or geographic origin - an attribute very much in vogue at the moment - seemed to be a potential source of matching data which finally proved too broad and lacking in focus.

Field observations brought to light a number of significant bridging themes. The combination between local knowledge and practices shared within a social group and location in space is responsible for the unique character of individual products. The way this knowledge and these practices are passed on is also to be taken into account. Downstream from the production process, consumption patterns are equally important and contribute fully to the process of characterisation. These patterns encompass food preparation and presentation. A further methodical investigation of organoleptic properties based on several examples brought to light characteristics unique to the world of senses. Sensorial research gauged the accuracy of various organoleptic descriptions and assessed the adequacy of the vocabulary used in studying their specific properties or their variability.

Variability is ever present and is not only part of the organoleptic domain. It is found in the field, across products, amongst players and at the level of production scales. It can also be identified in historical records and through product evolution.

A number of traditional production methods are linked to conditions which have specific environmental "qualities". Using appropriate methods, the analysis of landscape and environmental conditions and historical ecology allows to investigate the relationship between the product and its landscape, and to find out how the product "holds" its environment : its *terroir*. The results of work carried out on several core products confirm the interest and usefulness of such an approach. Human input into traditional production systems contributes to some extent to cultural and environmental biodiversity. In socio-economic terms, the environment affects the functional and structural resources available in the production process. The socio-economic research stream investigated the position these resources occupy in the organisation of the manufacturing process and the way in which operators use, manage and renew them. It also analysed the limits imposed by the environment on local production systems and the limits it sets on the improvement of production conditions.

At the level of local production systems, one observes a wide diversity of people with their own background, special interests and skills who interact. at different levels of the production chain. Public institutions and groups of producers also prove to be important elements within the systems. Players and their roles are here identified.

Beyond knowledge and practices, past their links with the natural environment and away from the consumption patterns they trigger and the variability they express, local products carry with them an identity and a heritage dimension, fundamental to their specificity. Such anthropological parameters refer to the very structure of the different cultural groups from which they and the status they are accorded. It is therefore relevant to talk of a "social construct". It is also very useful to spend time to analyse how they are perceived and what images and symbolic values they conjure to appreciate fully what makes these products so specific and unique. Exploring such an intangible dimension allows a better understanding of the importance they have and the role they play in the life of a local community in accordance with the status they have acquired - even if such a status is likely to change. Contrary to the accepted notion that produce of the *terroir* do not change, some of them show a surprising degree of dynamism which may even cause the eventual disappearance of their very identity.

Beyond History itself, the notion of time may acquire specific dimensions and "qualities" which reflect the various phases of manufacturing processes: the cyclical nature of seasons, long maturing and ageing time, festive and/or religious time and so on. Today, these "qualities" are no longer the same. Noticeable changes have occurred in manufacturing conditions : the seasonal has become annual and productions earlier associated to the festive or the religious have now turned into daily life, or the reverse. The focus is brought here on the status given to time, considered as a component of the specific character of the product.

On the subject of product denomination, one single name may cover several products; conversely, a single product may carry different names according to a number of variable criteria. The question is first treated descriptively with the support of a few examples. Later, in the context of protective measures, the question will be set again : which particular name should be selected and protected in preference to others describing the same product?

Based on the work carried out during this phase of the project, the socio-economic research team put forward a model, the integrated system of the local agricultural products and foodstuff (*système intégré du produit de terroir*). It demonstrates how local context, business activities and product evolution interact together.

All these selected parameters indeed confirm that the characterisation of this type of produce is the result of a mix and a cross of complementary descriptive characteristics related to space, time, knowledge, techniques, sensory perceptions and economic conditions. All the facts and analyses show that typicality is the expression of the link between specific characters and culture.

Protection

The selection of entries considered relevant in the characterisation of local and traditional products is very closely linked to questions arising from the disposition of measures designed to protect either origin or tradition. In fact, the interaction between characterisation and protection yields some very interesting data. Valuable conclusions can be drawn from the comparison between product characters and the criteria of protection used in existing regulations. Such conclusions have proved enlightening and may eventually help in refining the overall process of protection.

As a first step, the various protection measures operating in the countries concerned were surveyed. A close examination of the products listed under PDO (Protected Denomination of Origin), PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) and CSC (Certificate of Specific Character) regulations revealed that they imposed choices to be made. It also showed that the fine differences which exist between national regulations were the result of subtle nuances in their individual approach to implementation.

Amongst "sensitive" parameters, reputation, tradition and history are stumbling blocks common to a number of protection initiatives. History is mentioned here again, but only in order to examine how it has been solicited, used, adapted and even manipulated to legitimise a product and assess how much weight it carries. As a central element, time becomes a problem as soon as an attempt is made to understand the notion of reputation : how long does it take for reputation to become acknowledged or to be built? Tradition is also called upon as another sensitive parameter. As soon as it is mentioned in the process of description and product specification, tradition becomes "standardised" and "frozen" by the written word. Essentially oral for many products, tradition evolves naturally and cannot be easily confined to standards.

The definition of geographical zones areas is an essential step in setting up protection measures. The criteria applicable must include cultural elements, such as history and reputation, and cover technical criteria such as the geographical spread of practices and the size of the knowledge pool. They must also take into account the economic and political situation. Finally, they must take into account general environmental conditions and, more specifically, the ubiquitous *terroir*. The difficulty is to know how to weigh and harmonise so many factors, different both in their nature and in their objectives. Moreover, the process raises a debate about the original source of primary raw materials. And to complicate matters even further, the context changes, depending on whether one deals with an AOP-type or an IGP-type protection.

Knowledge and practical techniques are also key factors in the process of protection. On one hand, the incidence of changes in scales of production, process modifications, innovations or transfers of technology will have an impact on how to set the limits within which procedures, ingredients, components etc. are allowed to be changed without altering a unique product signature. Numerous cases illustrate the transition from a domestic to an industrial scale and, in such instances, what adjustments are acceptable without losing the notion of tradition?

On the other hand, protection itself has an impact on the status of knowledge and on the choice of applied techniques. How can technical and scientific knowledge co-exist with local and traditional knowledge and practices? This co-existence often becomes a problem in the process of formalising a detailed framework of protective measures. This brings out the question of the transition between knowledge and product specification, in other words, the formalisation of the method of obtaining the product. Beyond these two approaches emerges a more general question : how far can the "typical" be standardised, what limits can be imposed on the process and what is the nature of the inevitable compromise?

Further to the question of *terroir* or know-how but still dealing with protection, a number of appropriate examples illustrate that the link with the geographical environment or origin may stretch as far down as a local animal breed, a cultivated

variety, or even a mix of animal breeds or cultivated varieties. This emerges as an important point of eligibility for certain products. What weight is to be given to such attributes and what role do they play, if any, in a production system deemed to be "local", "traditional" or "typical"? Since the original conditions supporting these breeds and/or varieties no longer exist, do they still have a place in a system whose original parameters have been mostly or totally modified? Can these components still be deemed to be "of origin"? In the case of vegetal products, it is sometimes difficult to reconcile the idea of traditional variety with the requirements for the material to be identifiable, distinct, stable, homogeneous and healthy and meet with the demands imposed by the technical and economic realities of modern and agricultural systems. It is important to think about a way which continues to take into account long held practices of selection and the raising of varieties, group of cultivars or populations, when they form the basis of a system and guarantee its originality.

Paradoxically, while sensorial characteristics are constantly referred to, they hardly rate a mention in the regulations as an integral element of geographical protection. However, it is evident that behind a name lies a taste - a fundamental point of reference - and, more broadly, specific sensorial characteristics. Weaknesses were identified in this area and suggestions put forward to correct them.

The implementation of protective measures based on geographical limits or tradition brings to light a number of limitations. The choice of a *modus operandi* of protection may influence the identification of product characteristics to be protected. While CSC tends to attach a greater importance to the protection of the manufacturing processes, PGI regulations emphasise the protection of manufacturing zones. With specific regard to IGP measures, the ultimate protection benefit for some producers must be questioned. Reference is made here to the numerous ambiguities and/or difficulties experienced in a number of cases of IGP protection already in place or in a number of pending applications.

Furthermore, the reservation of a geographical name brought about under European Community regulations may lead to arguable cases of exclusion. The restricted use of a geographical name as a mean of protection may have perverse effects by marginalising numerous small producers and putting them at an unacceptable economical disadvantage. Such an outcome is rather paradoxical given the original thrust of these regulations.

The link between protection and the implementation of standards also invites a number of comments. Small producers experience technical and financial difficulties in complying with the standards associated to regulations. Hygiene standards are often only suitable for larger industrial concerns and are not compatible to smaller production units. This lack of adaptability has created acute problems, particularly in the countries of Southern Europe. Even if health standards are not an integral part of protection regulations, they remain a pre-requisite for protection. At a different level, one can also question the possibility of co-existence between regulations which freeze local customs and practices and a necessary adjustment to tradition. This is another important reason to ensure that product specification be set up to allow flexibility and provide manufacturers some leeway for adaptation and diversification.

Protection regulations do not affect all local agricultural products and foodstuffs. A threshold exists beyond which the process is no longer justifiable. Many small producers consider that specific regulations reflecting their own particular circumstances would be far more beneficial to them than the existing regime of

protection which they cannot or do not wish to implement.

The notion of a system of reference, a theme which concerns history, ethnology, socio-economy and sensorial analysis is most seductive. However, a closer discussion of the matter highlights the difficulties arising from the implementation of such a concept.

From all the evidence available, it is obvious that setting up a system of protection will generate - for many products - situations of conflict which can only be resolved by negotiation. Isolating the reasons behind such conflicts becomes essential to get a better understanding of the areas of antagonism. It also becomes necessary to investigate accurately what causes tension and to identify the protagonists and the role they play.

Valorization

Valorisation by socio-economic means and valorisation through heritage and environment were explored. First, a brief description and analysis of valorisation processes allows a rapid inventory of what is already being done in the area of local and traditional products today.

Starting from the notion of value in an economic sense, the socio-economic stream used a model to demonstrate where and when value-adding actually takes place and identifies the players who contributed to the process. The model also demonstrates why and how value-adding occurs at different stages of the cycle of offer and demand (consumption, production, relationships between the world of production and the economic environment) and provides the means to achieve this outcome. In order to improve the valorisation process, strategies and policies of consumer awareness were also put forward. Strategies of product differentiation for firms and business concern are also considered.

Any proposal of product valorisation at a consumer level implies that the profile of such a major player is already known since he is too often slotted into some generic category. The concept of the consumer as a user/connoisseur is put forward. Field studies indicate that traditional local products are of particular relevance to a specific group of familiar customers. In the prospected regions of Southern Europe, consumers have a cultural attachment to certain products because they are used to them and know them well. However, nothing should prevent the targeting of other, more adventurous, consumers living further afield. Having defined the target, it is now a case of implementing true customer education by expanding their product knowledge. This process will further enhance the product's reputation outside its own area of production and consumption. Cultural values are thus transformed into economic value adding and turn into a competitive advantage. Quality information targeting consumers is therefore essential. Several proposals are also put forward : dissemination of the culture of Denomination of origin, increasing product knowledge and its manufacturing process; tasting and taste education as well as integrating local products in rural tourism programs. The role of restaurateurs was also analysed and showed that this group of professionals must be carefully nurtured as they stand at the forefront of the discovery and promotion of local products. Regional restaurants become places where traditional cuisine, local produce and innovation converge, where the rustic and the ostentatious meet and where domestic know-how mixes with professional techniques.

From a consumer's point of view, the image associated with a product tends to have a valorising effect. This image seems to encourage the consumer to buy the product - and purchase it again. In some instances, it also triggers a sensorial response in individual tasters which had a reinforcing effect on a number of subjects interviewed. In other cases, the sensory response would lead to a negative appreciation. The organoleptic research stream devised a methodology capable of quantifying the effect of such an image on the perceived hedonistic senses of the consumer.

From a production perspective, a number of statements of facts are made and a number of strategic actions are proposed which touch on the availability and improvement of specific local resources, the mastery of the manufacturing process and the improvement of professional competency as well as an improvement in the structural conditions of production.

Finally the question of innovation and technical progress is crucial and meets up once again with the question of protection. In this instance, the relationship between modern scientific technology and traditional know-how already proven by concrete results become problematic. One of the approaches put forward to solve the problem focuses on the role of local knowledge as a vehicle for innovation within a traditional process. Other ideas are also put forward to assist producers with the easier identification of conditions which are conducive to innovation and product improvement, for example through the mastery of the process, without an alteration in the product's identity.

Further strategies and actions are also presented to encourage the creation of value through an improvement of relationships between the production and economic worlds, between producers and a very heterogenous market. Producers experience great difficulties in becoming known and in establishing contacts with middlemen able to contribute to the value-adding process. They need specific trade shows; they also need adapted networks to regulate their dealings with other players, to improve their own market knowledge and act together when they confront this market. Finally, distribution can be improved, by maximising the potential of closer markets through direct selling, by enhancing consumers' trust, by improving service and by setting up mail order consortiums. One particular approach proposes - through a change in usage - to treat the establishment of a link between the product and the land by re-qualifying a local product into a typical product. The change in status from a product of domestic consumption into a regional gastronomical food is described through the modalities of expansion in the customer base of farmers/producers manufacturing pork products, specifically pork sausages. It addresses the question of the conversion of a product's worth based on cultural values into a market based economic value. Local traditional agricultural produce need to acquire new attributes allowing them to move away from their place of origin without losing their local land roots. Specification of local resources, dissemination of knowledge within groups of producers and the re-establishment or re-introduction of past customs will also confer a value of economic dimension to cultural heritage.

From an anthropological perspective, several queries arise. They notably deal with the costs of the value-adding process to small producers, the problem of supply and demand, the impact of widespread distribution on products or the risk of proliferation of identity through local products.

The question of professional education is of strategic importance. Some leads

are offered to target different players in the market, distributors and restaurateurs in particular, and familiarise them with the preparation and presentation of this produce. The perennialisation of product knowledge and practical techniques will also increase the life expectancy of the product.

In parallel with these approaches, another line of thinking leads to the subject of geographical protection. What contribution does it make to value? In answer to this question, specific pieces of research were carried out on two parameters mentioned earlier: economy and the heritage. On one hand, an attempt was made to find out how the geographical protection of a product's name could bring about some economic advantage. The results demonstrate that protection through regulation (EC Regulation 2081/92, for example, or similar national mechanisms), has no significant long-term effect on profit, market dominance or added value. In contrast - mainly in areas of low economic output - geographical protection contributes in these regions to a higher value-added pricing structure achieved through the manufacturing process. Furthermore, it encourages the development of the strategic capacity of the production systems, which may then turn into a competitive market advantage.

On the other hand, the protection of a Denomination of origin as a beneficial mechanism in the process of valorising heritage is also questioned. Pursuing this line of investigation, but on a larger scale, the notion of heritage and cultural heritage enhancement (*patrimonialisation* in french) were also considered as generators of value. Local products are seen here as forming a cultural or agri-cultural heritage to be valorised. Based on a factual example, the transformation of a product into a cultural heritage through the mechanism of geographical protection is described as well as the interaction taking place between the players to increase its value.

The idea of a *Centre for the study and the enhancement of local products and their traditional knowledge* is advanced. Its objectives would be the preservation and extension of knowledge and traditional practical techniques which are at the base of local productions and the dissemination of such knowledge and techniques by offering teaching modules specifically geared towards professional people. The centre would also focus on the ways of integrating the typical characteristics and specific practices related to local products with the implementation of hygiene standards. This establishment would also have a specialised documentation unit with the specific task of distributing relevant information to all interested parties within a framework of product valorisation. At present, there is no such establishment in Europe. As part of the same set-up, a website would be created to integrate several different elements such as production, consumption, trade and general documentation. It would thus fulfill an emerging need for information, provide a forum specific to these products "*from the terroir*" and offer a virtual shopping centre.

Additionally, the creation of a *Permanent observatory for the local productions of animal and vegetal origins* is also proposed as another concept more orientated towards a historical perspective. Based on fieldwork at a micro level, the role of such an observatory would be to study how current and past production practices affect the environment and its evolution.

Finally, we examine how, and by what means, the "public policies", european and governmental, contribute to the maintenance of local productions and improve valorisation. A number of comments are offered on several measures and programs recently introduced to sustain the existence and further the development of local agricultural products and foodstuffs. These relate mainly to the implementation of

Regulation No 2078/92, to the introduction of programs based on structural funds (Leader 2, Interreg 2) and to agri-environmental measures put in place to sustain "local operations", to the extent that through these measures, a mindful eye should be kept on extensive systems leading to local productions linked to land conservation and sustainable agriculture. Along the same lines, the question of local productions linked to protected areas, mainly within the framework of regional or national parks, is also raised. In this instance, this particular link offers an interesting potential for valorisation.

At an other level, but still touching on public policy debate, the question of standards in general, and hygiene standards in particular, did emerge as a point of contention in the field. This was confirmed by the many discussions held with producers in all four countries involved in this study. Taking into account the specific circumstances, contexts and characters related to local products brought to light throughout this work, it would appear sensible to think about an adaptation of such standards.

III - CONCLUSION

Given the fact that local and traditional agricultural food products have become so widespread in our society, it is now quite essential to understand what one refers to when they are mentioned. Survey results confirm their extreme diversity on the basis of categories, manufacturing techniques, scales of production and organoleptic qualities; however what brings them together is the link they have with shared culture and the interactive influence of time and space.

In fact, the results show that it is more fruitful to investigate the complexity of the products "*of the terroir*" by devising appropriate means of investigation rather than attempting to define factors susceptible of proving their typical attributes. The question of quality was not specifically addressed because it is a continuous underlying theme throughout this work and it is synonymous to *typicity* in this particular category of products.

A number of key points emerge from this work around which important questions crystallise. The body of knowledge and practical techniques plays a vital role in all the concepts developed. Crucial in the characterisation phase, they are often very difficult to describe and define in the framing product specifications and are an essential step in the establishment of a protection framework. They are also the key elements in the process of conservation and the transmission of professional knowledge over time.

Organoleptic properties have a role to play in product awareness and knowledge, control processes, regulation of protection and valorisation. It is quite unfortunate that small scale producers hesitate to invest in such analysis of their products because of the costs involved.

Several environmental factors are also analysed : landscape conservation, animal breeds protection, maintenance of local cultivars and more broadly, the conservation of biodiversity. The systems of exploitation on which these productions are based and the cohesion they display make sense to the visitor. All these form a set of conditions favourable to a further valorisation parameter through the establishment of rural tourism. Last, the "heritage approach" represents a major

thread which is very useful for a better understanding of the social role and status of these products, in the context of intense “ re-activation ” they experience today.

Clear needs emerge from the various investigations carried out. A process of product initiation and education, targeting both consumers and professionals, needs to be undertaken. There is an urgent need to think about how to assist producers in overcoming costly structural and commercial hurdles which will give them the means of producing goods under stipulated hygiene and other standards in harmony with traditional know-how and manufacturing methods.

Even if the socio-economic analysis confirms that it is a suitable approach for rather well-known local products which have gained a loftier commercial status, a large majority, with small capacities of production, have achieved little or no market penetration and still depend heavily on informal methods of distribution to survive. In fact, all these local economic factors are also characteristics of their specificity. An enormous amount of work remains to be done in this area.

Protection regulations are important in maintaining the typical characters of these products and in encouraging their greater valorisation. Their implementation even is federative to producers and structurant for the systems of production. Without protection, these products would be even more vulnerable to general market forces. However, the protection of a name by legal means raises a number of problems related to tradition, geographic origin and control procedures linked to quality and hygiene standards, areas where the commercial clashes with the cultural. Because of the inextricable link that products “of the terroir” have with cultural values and the particular status they have within the concept of "cultural exception", they cannot be dealt with in the same way as mass productions from the agri-food industry and require specific measures.

Finally, their value in economic and heritage terms contributes to cultural interaction between the people of Europe. To encourage the discovery of these products and their production systems in the various countries of the Community is in fact engaging positively and effectively into the cultural construction of Europe which is at present so lacking.