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► **To cite this version:**

Nicolas Lacombe, Gianni Piredda, Patrizia Pitzalis, François Casabianca. Territorialisation of sociotechnical innovations for qualifying local products: The case of milk lamb in Corsica and Sardinia. 25. Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology, Jul 2013, Florence, Italy. 382 p. hal-01512102

HAL Id: hal-01512102

<https://hal.science/hal-01512102>

Submitted on 3 Jun 2020

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Territorialisation of sociotechnical innovations for qualifying local products: The case of milk lamb in Corsica and Sardinia

Nicolas Lacombe, Gianni Piredda, Patrizia Pitzalis and François Casabianca¹

Abstract — Relocalization of economy is a contemporary dynamic affecting agriculture. It questions the qualification schemes of origin with geographical indications (GI's), dedicated to distant markets. The renewal of the relationship between urban and rural areas, or issues related to heritage tourism are questioning the foundations of GI trade. The local product inscription in a close commercial sphere leads to modify the socio-technical systems initially built around a domestic model. Quality is revisited through innovations embedded in the local context and its specificities. Lock-in hinders the adoption of these innovations and different types of resources will be mobilized to build a new activity model.

INTRODUCTION

In Corsica and Sardinia, the fragility of dairy sheep farms, whose identity is built around the development of cheese, encourages the profession to enhance new resources (Gumuchian et al., 2007). The lamb, until now regarded as a byproduct of dairy farming, is part of a new path for recognition as a coproduct. In Corsica, collective organisations are involved today to apply for a GI. At present, it is a low-paid product, representing only 5 to 15% of income from livestock. In Sardinia, the benefit of the already registered GI has not allowed to generate a higher added value due to intermediaries costs for export, while in Corsica, the export of live animals to be slaughtered in Sardinia induces delocation of value.

New strategies based on innovations because of change from local/domestic market towards short supply-chains to both local citizens and tourists market. Four cases of innovations will be considered. The two firsts concern typicity of the product, they relate to the production of heavy lamb and secondly the farm slaughter. Others related to seasonality with both the issue of seasonal adjustment of the livestock and off season tourism. As these innovations are facing the constraints to adoption, new resources will be mobilized to allow these transitions. These resources concerning legal, technical, organization and marketing dimensions.

New dynamic players are introducing other modes of qualification products. AREO in Corsica and CONTAS in Sardinia are part of a process under certification GI's. However, lamb production has so far been oriented by the export market, while innovations today show re-inscription in local market. We need to consider the nature of these innovations, the ability of actors organized around the IG to appropriate them, and to analyze the obstacles that entails the expansion of the network of actors enrolled in alternative qualifications.

On a scientific point of view, we will rely on a specific field of economical sociology, dealing with social construction of markets. This point of view considers that quality is not necessarily shared, the product must be able to circulate in the market space from supply actors down to demand actors through all mediators contributing to such fit (Cochoy et al., 2000).

METHOD

Two studies areas were chosen to address this issue in the context of a comparative approach in order to highlight regional variability on the adoption of innovations. Our case studies are dairy sheep breeding systems in Corsica and Sardinia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 30 local actors. In Sardinia, sample is realised with AGRIS, agri-tourisms (2), Consorzio di Tutela dell'Agnello di Sardegna (CONTAS), Conf Commercio, farmers (3), wholesalers (2), slaughterhouses, distributors (3). In Corsica, interviews concerned: Casgiu Casanu (regional association for on-farm cheeses), veterinaries services, Touristical Agency of Corsica (ATC), AREO (regional association of sheep farmers), farmers (4), farm-houses (2), slaughterhouses, wholesalers (2), distributors (3).

We will mobilize the tools of the sociology of innovation. Innovations are considered here providing new forms of market mediations involved in the construction of socio-technical transitions (Geels et al., 2006). In order to understand the adoption of these innovations inducing certain constraints, locks-in need to be identified (Vanloqueren et al., 2011).

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RESULTS

Two markets now tend to dissociate themselves from the classical trade patterns. They promote innovation to increase product accessibility on this market. Retail and tourists consumption are questioning the place of lambs in the farmers' income.

Heritage tourism, the construction of the local by mobility. In Sardinia, the seasonal adjustment of the dairy flock allows the consumption of fresh cheese during the summer season at remunerative prices. This strategy is combined with the development of a lamb that would also be part of this market, with agritourism or restaurants. This adaptation relies on the benefit of grassed surfaces associated with irrigation during dry periods. Racial flexibility is seen as an animal resource mobilized for the construction of market. It can be associated to both the production of heavier lamb or freezing which allows a postponement of consumption. This strategy is presently mobilised by farmers producers who exercise multifunctional activity.

In Corsica, if this type of response is also possible particularly in plain, access to food during summer is particularly tough in mountain where transhumance is subject to technical constraints related to work, and the resulting progressive disintegration of such tradition. We have seen that the definition of another way is possible mainly through the off-season tourism. This way is mobilized by ATC, to promote an annual tourism centered around traditional seasonality of productions. This development strategy is part of a wish to explore the interior of the island, considered as the "Authentic Corsica," and to promote tourism development not based primarily on the seaside offers.

Urban inscription of markets and requalification of their social dimension.

Demographic renewal associated with a concentration of population in cities promotes urban inscription of markets. The supermarket is a structure widely present, however we note that the urban population will have new consumption skills involving a redefinition of characteristics of the products. Traditionally sold as whole carcasses, urban consumers obey to other forms of judgments related to their lifestyle. Disintegration of knowledge cutting and preparation, individualisation of meal, leads to experimentations on the production of heavy lambs issued from crossbreeding with meat specialized rams increasing the carcass yield in order to provide products cutting and packaging (AGRI-Sardinia). This segmentation of quality is provided in the specifications of the GI, but the small size of Corsican sheep makes difficulties to reproduce this experience in Corsica.

If the mass distribution is a privileged place for exchange today, we note that other forms of marketing emerge. Short circuits, direct sales represent alternatives for the rehabilitation of the traditional exchange. Transformation tools and

marketing are questioned. While the on-farm slaughter is officially banned in Corsica, Sardinia relied on the flexibility of the European legislation in order to enable this practice with the introduction of HACCP plans (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) on agrotourism farms. This permit to get better control of processing tools and higher incomes. Institutional innovation in Corsica, with the production of organizational learning within the professional unions (Confédération paysanne), allowed the formulation of new standards to replace an obligation of means by an obligation of result on risk management.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The social construction of quality represents an "intermediate object" invested by several scientific disciplines. Geographers, animal scientists have been interested in this field of research in terms of territorial anchoring of productions (race, skills, etc.) (Cañada et al., 2011). Meanwhile this same object was considered by the new economic sociology in terms of the issue of social embeddedness of the market (Granovetter, 1985). While the first lost interest in the question of the market, the latter have not invested the question of production. The relationships between production system and market offer keys to understanding the barriers to innovation. How to overcome such barriers and to ensure the local adaptability of innovations? We assume that the professional identities (Dubar, 2000), both on technical and organizational dimensions, are strong components in the mediation and the choice of innovations. The transition is not a finalized track, bifurcations are opening several possible ways of designing plural types of products qualifications.

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