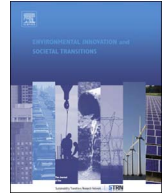


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# Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions

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Original Research Paper

## Contribution of the transition theory to the study of Geographical Indications

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### ABSTRACT

The green revolution and globalization have profoundly transformed agri-food systems, leading to standardized food products of diminished taste quality. Geographical Indications (GIs) have emerged as powerful regulatory tools for sustaining alternative quality models. In this paper, we analyze GIs as governance tools for “terroir niches”, viewed as sociotechnical systems whose functioning is influenced by specific resources. Building on this framework, we study the re-configuration of the Corsican clementine production area under a recent Geographical Indication. We show that the innovation trajectory was driven by specific resources (climate, with-leaf marketing), leading to the emergence of a niche that conflicted with the rules of the citrus regime. The implementation of a GI in the early 2000s strengthened this endogenous innovation pathway since it gave the niche renewed protection and prompted systemic changes. These results open prospects for cross-fertilization between GI studies and the Multi-Level Perspective on sustainability transitions.

### 1. Introduction

The green revolution and globalization have transformed agri-food systems, leading to standardized food products of diminished taste quality (Fischler, 2001). This trend has been particularly dramatic in the fresh fruit and vegetables sector (Bernard de Raymond, 2015), tomatoes being an exemplary case (Harvey et al., 2004; Raynaud, 2010). Despite increasing consumer concern about flavor, the problem remains unsolved in the main supply chains (Kader, 2008). Since the 1980s, however, in reaction to this global trend, actors from small agricultural areas have mobilized the specific resources of their “terroir” (biophysical environment, know-how, biodiversity etc.) to support endogenous innovation pathways. Terroirs have served as frameworks for building distinctive agri-food systems (Charters and Spielmann, 2014; Elaydi and McLaughlin, 2012). This led to a proliferation of high quality products based on original technical models (Muchnik and de Sainte Marie, 2010). Geographical Indications (PGI, PDO,<sup>1</sup> generically called “GIs”) are the main governance tools for structuring terroir strategies (Rangnekar, 2004). GIs are official quality labels protecting and emphasizing the origin of food products. They emerged in France and Italy in the early 20th century, and expanded around world in the 2000s (Allaire and Sylvander, 2011). The revival of locally specific products can no longer be seen as anecdotal. It points to a global shift in agri-food systems from a productivity-based approach towards a quality-based one (Addor and Grazioli, 2002; Allaire and Sylvander, 1997).

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E-mail address: [raphaelbelmin@gmail.com](mailto:raphaelbelmin@gmail.com) (R. Belmin).<sup>1</sup> In Europe, the two categories of Geographical Indications are the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI).<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2017.10.002>

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GIs are powerful governance tools, exerting significant but ambivalent influence over local innovation processes. In Europe, GIs operate through strict specifications that define the production area, quality criteria and production method. The specifications are drawn up collectively by local actors, in dialogue with a national body. In this way, GIs are fostering the emergence of multiple “production worlds” (Allaire and Sylvander, 1997), each one a locus of resistance to the standardization of practices and quality (Messely et al., 2010; Perrier-Cornet and Sylvander, 2000). In this way they offer a credible alternative to the dominant industrial agricultural model (Deverre and Lamine, 2010; Esnouf et al., 2011). In practice, however, GIs vary widely. Although some GIs protect endogenous innovation pathways, others play a driving role in the standardization of production methods and tastes (Vitrolles, 2011). This often happens when private interest groups distort GIs’ rules (Bowen, 2010; Linck et al., 2014).

This paper seeks to answer two questions that have been ignored by the literature on GIs: By what mechanisms can a Geographical Indication create a counterweight to the global trend towards standardization in agri-food systems? Under what conditions can a GI promote endogenous innovation and sustain the typicality of terroir products? Past studies have emphasized the mechanisms by which a GI can directly protect the quality of a terroir product (product specifications, added value, etc.). But none has fully grasped the interplay between local and global in the dynamics of innovation (Fournier and Touzard, 2013), or the particular role played by GIs.

The Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) on sociotechnical transitions (Geels, 2002; Geels and Schot, 2007; Rip and Kemp, 1998) offers new insight into the regulatory role of GIs in agricultural innovation. In this paper,

- We use the concept of a sociotechnical system (Rip and Kemp, 1998) to study innovation pathway in terroirs. We analyze a terroir as a sociotechnical system whose functioning is influenced by the biophysical environment and specific resources of a given place.
- We use the usual three levels of the MLP (Geels, 2002, 2004) to give a full account of the regulatory role of global rules in the local innovation pathway. We consider terroirs as sociotechnical niches structured at the local level, in dynamic interaction with the agro-industrial regime and the landscape.
- We build an analogy between GIs and Strategic Niche Management (Raven et al., 2010; Schot et al., 1994) so as to discuss the influence of GIs on niche dynamics.

To test this theoretical framework and answer our two questions, we took the case of Corsican Clementine, a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). It is an interesting case because Corsican Clementine challenges the competition rules of the citrus sector – it is a small fruit, uneven in color and with a tangy taste, in a global market focused on large size, uniform peel color and sweet taste.

Section 2 outlines the theoretical aspects of terroirs and GIs, and details how we have used the MLP in our work. In Section 3, we present the methodology of our study of the Corsican clementine production area. In Section 4 we show our results. Lastly (Section 5), we discuss the usefulness of the MLP to the study of innovation processes in GIs.

## 2. Theoretical aspects

### 2.1. The literature on terroirs and GIs provides insights into local innovation processes

#### 2.1.1. Terroirs protect endogenous innovation pathways

Although in the wine sector the word “terroir” generally relates only to soil and climate conditions (Asselin et al., 2011), many studies use the word more in connection with endogenous development (Bérard and Marchenay, 1995, 2007; Delfosse, 2011; Pecqueur, 2001). Casabianca et al. (2011) described a terroir as a limited geographical area where, over a long period, a human community generates a distinctive set of cultural features and a body of knowledge and practices based on interaction between biophysical and human factors. The combination of techniques involved in production displays originality, confers typicality on local products and leads to these products acquiring a high reputation. The vision behind this definition of a terroir is of a complex system (Morin, 1990) in which food product quality and related practices are emergent properties embedded in, and determined by, a heterogeneous set of factors forming a coherent whole: local agro-biodiversity, climate, soils, know-how, practices, technical culture, heritage, and products and their typicality.

The terroir studies do not simply postulate the existence of particular local agri-food systems. They also highlight the key processes by which they are constructed and maintained over time. Stemming from work by economic geographers on Industrial Districts (Marshall, 1898, 1919), Clusters (Porter, 1998) and local Productive Systems (Courlet, 2000, 2002), terroir researchers have demonstrated the key role of local resources in the emergence of distinctive innovation trajectories (Belletti et al., 2012). Under certain conditions, local actors can increase the economic proceeds from a product by linking it to a set of specific resources. Such resources can be material (soil, climate, local breed or seed variety etc.), intangible (e.g. know-how, cultural landscape), or temporal (a shared history spanning several generations of producers) (Kebir, 2010). To activate resources, local actors must coordinate among themselves. This is crucial, because a terroir product and its reputation are collective intellectual property (Vandecastelaere et al., 2009). A collective process is therefore needed, in which a variety of actors defend their own interests and visions.

A terroir is therefore by no means a static space, wrapped in a cotton wool and incapable of change. It is a dynamic, evolving space where organized actors can innovate by making use of the specific features of the biophysical environment and local resources. Such actions can drive an endogenous innovation process and lead to product characteristics and practices that stand apart from the agro-industrial model.

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