

How do Slow Food members perceive GI-regimes? Evidence from Germany, Italy and Brazil

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INTRODUCTION

Consumer food scares, rejection of product standardization and falling farm prices are but some of the reasons that have led to a high differentiation within food markets (Marsden et al., 2002, Winter 2005) as well as to a proliferation of food labels and accreditation schemes (LaAS) (Ilbery et al., 2005). From the marketing perspective, LaAS are necessary because information such as geographical origin and quality claims are credence attributes, so not verifiable by the end user (Nelson, 1970). Thus, distinctive labels assure product standards for food brands and avoid the problem of adverse selection, which can lead to market failure (Akerlof, 1970). Whilst safeguarding the credibility of the information given to consumers, the use of LaAS are also a means to create product distinctiveness (Ilbery et al., 2005) thus adding value to the agricultural sector (Marsden et al., 2002). Well established examples are geographical indications (GI) as well as NGO-led schemes such as Slow Food's 'Presidio', GEPA's 'Fair Trade', etc.

However, numerous scholars warn against the counter-productive effects of a proliferation of LaAS on both consumers and producers (Ilbery et al., 2005). A "label fatigue" (Goodman, 2004) describes a cognitive overload among consumers that leads to them ignoring information transmitted via labels (see the criticism of the European Court of Auditors on the efficacy of geographical indications: European Court of Auditors, 2011). Not only among consumers, but also among producers, the steady proliferation of LaAS might exacerbate the competition among farmers thus increasing the struggle for survival in the food "market arena" (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 1999) rather than boosting partnerships and rural development strategies (Marsden et al., 2002).

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Against this background, in the following we present the preliminary results of two explorative analyses of food specialties both inside Europe (Italy and Germany) and outside (Brazil), to test the potential conflicts of different LaAS. Specifically, we try to understand the perceptions of Slow Food members regarding GI, and which thinking patterns can be derived from the self-reflection of Slow Food members on their own association in different countries.

GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS

Geographical Indications (GI) are names of regions, specific places or, in exceptional cases, countries, used to describe an agricultural product or a foodstuff (EC 510/2006, Article 2). Originally developed by the French legal system, many European Regulations (2081/1992, 1107/1996, 510/2006, 509/2006, 628/2008, 110/2008, 1151/2012) have been discussed and established issues related to geographical indications. Essentially, GI schemes convey information about product attributes that are not directly identifiable by buyers and facilitate price premiums for producers. The main requirement for the entitlement to such a certification is the close link between the geographically and traditionally identified origin (terroir) and specific product characteristics (quality, production method, reputation, product particularities etc.). This enables a protected product to differentiate itself from products from other regions or countries. In addition, GI provide a high level of protection against imitation. The European Union has three instruments to obtain the above outlined goals: Protected Designations of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indications (PGI) and Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG).

GI have gained more attention from producers since their protection was ensured multilaterally under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (1994). According to TRIPS rules, also non-EU Member States are required to provide a legal and institutional framework to receive GI protection for their products (GROTE, 2009). The number of GI outside Europe is gradually increasing. In Brazil, for instance, the first registration process for a GI certification took place in Vale dos Vinhedos region with Wines and Sparkling Wine in 2002. In the same country, in 2012 already a total of 14 GI products in different regions were officially recognized by the Industrial Property Law 9, 279/1996.

“PRESIDIO SLOW FOOD®”

The ‘Presidio Slow Food®’ is the registered brand of the Slow Food non-profit, member-supported association. The association was founded in 1989 in Italy with several aims, including to provide opposition against fast food and fast life, to struggle against the disappearance of local food traditions and to raise awareness about food issues by creating interest in its origin, taste, and its impact on the economy of the world (www.slowfood.com). Over the years, the association has gathered momentum and nowadays it counts over 100,000 members and supporters from 150 countries. Parallel to the enlargement of the association, several tools have been created such as food communities, Terra Madre network, Earth Markets, Ark of Taste and Slow Food Presidia.

Especially the last two instruments, namely the Ark of Taste and Slow Food Presidia are considered tools for promoting and protecting typical foods (Buiatti, 2010). As stated in the Handbook of Presidia (Slow Food, n.d.), the Ark of Taste was created in 1996 and is “an online catalogue of traditional and artisanal quality food products at risk of extinction, selected from around the world” (Buiatti, 2010). Presidia, in contrast, are “projects that engage food communities in preserving native breeds, plant varieties and food products, with the objective to save traditional, artisanal and quality food, giving the focus to producers, with the aim to raise the geographic area profile, preserve traditional techniques and knowledge and promote sustainable production models, both in environmental and social sense”. The first Presidium was created in 1999.

The “Presidio Slow Food®” brand may be used by producers belonging to a Presidium, who are organized in an association that have officially agreed to respect Slow food regulations. The brand can be used also by processors of the Presidia’s products and by retailers under the condition that these comply with the specific regulations contained in the Handbook of Presidia, such as the use of artisanal methods for the processing of food or the conduction of track record of quality initiatives for retailers (Slow Food, n.d., p. 15 f.). The responsibility for the brand control lies with the national association, which can either demand external certification or opt for a self-assessment system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011, labels are “any tag, brand, mark, pictorial or other descriptive matter, written, printed, stenciled, marked, embossed or impressed on, or attached to

the packaging or container of food". Some labels such as 'organic' or GI are legally regulated within the EU (e.g., Council Regulation EU 834/2007, Commission Regulation EU 1151/2012, respectively) whereas others are voluntary quality labels such as IP-Suisse of the Swiss Association of Farmers or the above mentioned "Presidio Slow Food®".

Despite such differences, Ilbery et al. (2005) demonstrated that two main rationales underpin such schemes, namely "territorial development" and "critical" rationales. According to their study conducted on 50 LaAS, those belonging to the first group "concentrate on developing and defending profitable niche markets based upon regulated and authenticated links between product quality, local environmental distinctiveness, and locally embedded production skills" (p. 119). This group contains many state-led labels such as the Canadian "Buy British Columbia", or GI, etc. On the other side, the LaAS belonging to the "critical rationale" group are characterized by traits of resilience toward globalization (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 1999), moral/societal legitimacy and general opposition to the negative consequences of product standardization (Ilbery et al., 2005, p. 120). Organic production, Fair-Trade labels and a large number of NGO-led labels are placed within this group.

The ideological reasons underpinning the "critical" labeling schemes imply a (latent) agency of farmers against economic categories and norms (Winter, 2005, p.613), which is not so accentuated by the schemes of the first group. Based on these considerations, our study aims at examining the potential conflict among the two above mentioned categories and uses to this end the Europe-led GI label and the NGO-led "Presidio Slow Food®".

As depicted above, these two labeling schemes are formally and legally very different from each other although both aim at promoting quality specialties characterized by a high artisanal know-how embedded in (above all) rural areas. For these reasons, they have been often facilitated by governments as tools to promote rural development in underperforming regions. For instance, Italy has been actively supporting both schemes in manifold ways: the Ministry of Italian Scientific Research devotes a certain number of PhD scholarships every year to the study of GI as a tool to "promote Made in Italy in food and agricultural issues" (MIUR, 2011 p. 163). In contrast, the Italian government has also passively profited from the halo-effects of the reputation of Slow Food to promote Italian nationalism and improve local development around the concept of ecogastronomy (MacDonald, 2013). Despite this support, recently some events have occurred that suggest some emerging conflicts

between the two 'fronts'. For instance, the decision taken by Slow Food to showcase a Czech cheese at a traditional Slow Food festival has found the disapproval of many PDO cheese supporters.

Using the preliminary results of two studies in Europe (Study 1) and in Brazil (Study 2), our study aims at deciphering the potential conflict emerging between the front of GI supporters and Slow Food supporters. Specifically, our research focuses on the following research questions:

- What is the perception of Slow Food members towards GI?
- Is the state-support of GI legitimate in their opinion?
- Which thinking patterns can be derived from the self-reflection of Slow Food members concerning their own association?

STUDY 1

Methodology

In order to explore the perception of Slow Food members towards GI, a qualitative approach based upon semi-structured interviews was chosen (Mason, 2002). In total, five Slow Food members who worked on a voluntary basis in Slow Food Convivia were interviewed in Germany and in Italy between March-October 2012. In Italy, one of the interviewed members also runs an agricultural operation which belongs to a GI consortium specialized in a PDO cheese (Table 1).

Specifically, this Slow Food and GI member produces a PDO cheese linked to the milk of an endangered species of cattle. We decided to run the interviews in Italy and in Germany, the former country having many GI registered products, and the latter having few due to the fact that registration processes are still in an early stage of development. Possible distorting effects caused by the notoriety of the local PDO consortium on the opinion of Slow Food members were controlled by choosing in each country both a peripheral and a central region with a well-known and a less-known PDO cheese, respectively.

Opinion of Slow Food members about GI and self-reflection on the Slow Food association

This section presents the results of the interviews held in both Italy and Germany. Many consortia of GI products with a good reputation consist generally of small as well as large-sized operations. The latter can be historical focal enterprises originating from the GI-area that have grown over the course of the years. Sometimes, however, large companies originally located outside the area have later joi-

Table 1: Selected regions and products in Italy and Germany

	Germany		Italy	
Rural region	Peripheral region	Central region	Peripheral region	Central region
Slow Food members' opinion on a PDO cheese...	...produced by only one dairy farm	...produced by a consortium of several producers	...produced by only one dairy farm	...produced by a consortium of several producers
Number of Slow Food interviewees	1	1	1	2*

* One of the interviewed members is a farmer who belongs to the regional GI consortium that produces a PDO cheese.

ned the GI consortium, e.g. by incorporating a dismantling business operation in the GI area. In such cases, small members often perceive their large-sized counterparts as dominant, because they abuse their power to reach personal goals through their use of a common good, e.g. by reducing quality criteria towards a lower level (Bravo, 2003).

The external stance of our interviewees endorsed such considerations. One respondent felt that “GI are the expression of large-sized producers who use their power in order to change the specification sheet” and that “within consortia, the PDO is dictated by those who count (literally: those who have a weight)”. Similarly, the Slow Food-and-GI producer asserted that in the past, large-sized member-businesses in the PDO consortium had already imposed changes in the specifications of the PDO product, replacing restrictive criteria with more relaxed ones.

In contrast, concerning the internal organisation of Slow Food, one interviewee affirmed that it is “sometimes difficult to join a Slow food Presidium because the quality criteria are more restrictive than those of a GI consortium (...)”. Another respondent added that a GI consortium “has more extensive quality criteria in order to allow to everyone to join it”. All interviewees agreed that “GI are a means to protect large-scale productions” whereas “Slow Food protect very small-sized productions”. As a consequence, they assumed that within Slow Food, quality prevails over quantity, whereas for GI consortia the opposite holds true. Most interviewees, however, were not able to provide a definition of quality, thus confining it to “regional”. In Germany, for instance, a respondent referring to the eight Slow Food restaurant owners of the Odenwald region affirmed that “they are obliged to source 90% of their products from the region”. He admitted that the ambiguity of the term “region” sometimes places unfavourable restrictions on the production; nevertheless, he still viewed this as a “necessary” drawback. Only

the Italian Slow Food-and-GI producer equalled the higher quality of his cheese with the particular sort of forage that the dairy cows eat.

The levelling of internal quality differences within a common is the price to pay for joining the GI benefits; hence, it is not unusual that innovative operators are forced to quit the common (Bravo 2002). Although still a member of the consortium, the Slow Food-and-GI producer claimed to have been “mocked” by the other GI members for his decision to link the production of his cheese with the milk of an endangered cattle species. Contrary to this, among Slow Food members there is a greater differentiation of products according to their ‘scarcity’. Many Slow Food products are described as “placed in an area difficult to access”, “small-scale”, “strange”, “different”, “fighting against adverse conditions”. To summarise such characteristics, a respondent used the term “Slow Reality”. Producers or associations of producers whose products show such characteristics not only are suitable candidates to join the Slow Food Presidium, but also to receive some ‘extra’ or ‘unexpected’ benefits, as happened after the series of earthquakes that struck northern Italy in May 2012. One of the Italian interviewees explained that in order to decide which producers should benefit from the money collected by Slow Food “those (slow) realities were selected”.

Concerning export policies and international trade, the majority of interviewees considered this a suitable strategy for GI consortia since these are commercially focussed: one interviewee alluding to export turnovers claimed that for GI consortia “only figures matter”. Another saw in the export of GI products their ‘raison d’être’, since GI-producers are “export compatible”. An Italian Slow Food interviewee attached nationalistic benefits to the export of (Italian) GI products: “the PDO confers a flag to each product”. Unsurprisingly, for Slow Food producers a reverse image emerged. The interviewees defined Slow Food producers as “export incompatible” because of their reduced quantities. How-

Table 2: Perceptions of Slow Food members: Slow Food Presidium vs. GI regimes

Narratives	Feature	Slow Food	GI
Commons structure	Internal participation of members	Equal participation of members	Dominance of large-sized members
	Quality criteria that members have to fulfil	Restrictive	Flexible
	Standardization	Low	High
Sales and promotion	Trade	Autarchy	Export-Oriented
Mission	Biodiversity preservation	A priority	Not a priority
Self-reflection	Slow Food/GI	Past-oriented	Future-oriented

ver, the “small-scale” is not considered as an endogenous threat but rather as a necessity, in order not to get corrupted by the major representative of globalisation, namely the “food industry”. This is generally described in particularly negative language, such as death weapons (referring to artificial aromas), danger (referring to the food industry), etc.

Another common theme across the interviews regarded the preservation of biodiversity. Generally speaking, GI regimes are often presented as a panacea for the biodiversity of a region (Fonte (2005), Thual & Lossy (2011:51)). However, a review of the specification sheets of the majority of GI products shows that GI productions linked to an endangered species are more the exception than the rule (Arfini et al., 2010). This emerged also in our interviews. Most respondents asserted that whereas for Slow Food “the preservation of biodiversity is a priority, it is not for GI consortia”.

Finally, the interviewees were asked to reflect on their relationships with GI-producers in the long term. To this end, many interviewees used the consumer rhetoric to explain the mission of their association as well as of GI consortia. One interviewee tried to explain the complementary roles of both schemes asserting that labels such as PDO are conceived to protect the consumer from “a possible fraud”. Another interviewee interpreted the vision of GI consortia as future-oriented, affirming that “the GI system aims to conserve for the future”. The rationale attached to the Slow Food scheme is seen in a different way. For one interviewee “it serves to correct the negative consequences of globalization on consumers” who, according to him, “are already contaminated”. The Slow Food label in this way aimed at saving the past by “maintaining” it. One interview used the example of those GI consortia that have abandoned or ignored the husbandry of

local cattle breeds as a “rational manoeuvre”, which is opposed to the one of Slow Food. The latter voluntary encourages the protection of such species in a “cultural mission”. Table 2 summarizes the narratives expressed so far in the text by Slow Food members to explain both their image of the Slow Food scheme as well as of a GI.

Overall, the results give the impression of a latent conflict among the respondents’ when asked about their perception of the GI scheme. A rhetoric of morality is commonly used to prove the superiority of Slow Food toward the GI scheme such as democratic participation of Slow Food members in presidia (opposed to dominance of powerful members in GI consortia) or the priority of biodiversity preservation set by Slow Food (which is not set as such by GI consortia).

However, this potential conflict seems to be at an early stage, as when it comes to sales and export policies, our interviewees admit the inability of Slow Food products to compete against GI on the globalized marketplace. Thus, despite the fact that there have already been some open conflicts between the two parties, as in the anecdote mentioned before, it seems that both will continue to mutually promote their products, showcasing them jointly at national and international food-related fairs, touristic routes, sport-related events, etc. as a successful strategy of niche-market promotion.

STUDY 2

Methodology

With the large surface of Brazilian territory and the remarkable cultural and climatic differences, there are many products that characterize the different Brazilian regions with regards to Slow Food. All in all, there are 30 Convivia distributed in five Brazilian regions. Approximately, 33% of these are located

Table 3: Distribution of Conviva of Slow Food in Brazil, their municipalities and states

Region	Name of the Convivia	Municipalities	State
North	Aldeia dos Lagos	Sives	Amazonas
	Amazônia	Belém	Pará
	Filhos do Waraná	Parintins	Amazonas
	Floresta da Amazônia	Manaus	Amazonas
Northeast	Licuri	Capim Grosso	Bahia
	Arraial D'Ajuda	Arraial D'Ajuda	Bahia
	Potiguar	Natal	Rio Grande do Norte
	Umbu	Uauá	Bahia
	Salvador Bahia	Salvador	Bahia
	Recife	Recife	Pernambuco
	Brasília	Brasília	Distrito Federal
Centre-West	Cerrado	Brasília	Distrito Federal
	Pantanal Corumbaense	Corumbá	Mato Grosso do Sul
	Pirenópolis	Pirenópolis (GO)	Goiás
	Engenho de Farinha	Florianópolis	Santa Catarina
South	Pinhão da Serra Catarinense	Lajes e Urubici	Santa Catarina
	Povos, Produtos da Terra	Porto Alegre	Rio Grande do Sul
	Rio, Mata Atlântica	Blumenau	Santa Catarina
	Serra, Sul Porto Alegre	Porto Alegre e Auxiliadora	Rio Grande do Sul
	Província do Paraná	Curitiba	Paraná
	São Paulo	São Paulo	São Paulo
	Gastromotiva	São Paulo	São Paulo
Southeast	Campinas	Campinas	São Paulo
	Campo Lindo	Batatais	São Paulo
	Petrópolis	Itaipava e Petrópolis	Rio de Janeiro
	Nique	Belo Horizonte, Ipatinga e Entre Rios	Minas Gerais
	Pique, Piracicaba	Piracicaba	São Paulo
	Rio de Janeiro	Rio de Janeiro	Rio de Janeiro
	Visconde de Mauá	Visconde de Mauá	Rio de Janeiro
	Serra do Salitre	Serra do Salitre	Minas Gerais

Source: Data from Slow Food Brazil (2012).

in the Southeast region, while 20% in each of the Northeast and South regions and finally, 13,33% in the Centre-West and North regions (Table 3).

Due to financial and time constraints, the research in Brazil did not consist of in-depth interviews. Instead, an explorative Computer Assisted

Telephone Interviewing (CATI) survey was conducted in October 2012. The representatives of seven Convivia were interviewed by telephone and asked to express their opinion on the protection of typical products in Brazil (either by GI or Slow Food schemes) (Table 4).

Table 4: Selected Slow Food Convivia in Brazil

Region	Cities/State	Interviewees
South	Curitiba/Parana	1
South	Porto Alegre/Rio Grande do Sul	1
Southeast	Belo Horizonte/Minas Gerais	1
Northeast	Capim Grosso/Bahia	1
Southeast	Rio de Janeiro/Rio de Janeiro	1
Southeast	Itaipava, Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro/ Rio de Janeiro	1

Results of the interviews

Regarding the mission of Slow Food in Brazil, one representative said that the Slow Food association seeks to rescue and value the gastronomic traditions as well as to promote quality products. Since the Slow Food Presidio scheme is still in a developing stage in Brazil, respondents were asked to show the criteria that they used to protect regional food products or agricultural products. One interviewee indicated the program coordinated by the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, which aims to catalog, protect and rescue endangered products or ones that are part of the local gastronomic heritage. To this end, the interviewee listed some examples of food products as local gastronomic heritage such as in Paraná, yerba mate, in Minas Gerais, corn and in Bahia the licuri. In other Slow Food Convivia, the biodiversity criterion was attached to a production form, such as organic agriculture, rather than to single a type of product. This was the case of the Convivia of Rio Grande do Sul and of the one based in Petrópolis, in the region of Rio de Janeiro).

Other Convivia, such as the one in Campinas, São Paulo, provided the example of landrace seeds of corn, or uvaia and other fruits, and said that the protection of these products was required in accordance with the criteria of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity. However, they were not representative for that region since these products are spread in many territories of Brazil.

Generally speaking, most interviewees said that there is a greater awareness of typical food products among producers than among consumers. The former are small farmers that have an extensive knowledge related to traditional livestock and crop types and that prepare traditional food in ac-

cordance with artisanal and traditional methods. Unfortunately, there is still a lack of knowledge about indigenous products on the part of local consumers, especially the youngest ones, who often ignore the nutritional importance of traditional plants and the origins of many traditional dishes, etc.

Concerning the efficacy of the protection of such products, interviewees provided several examples. Some products such as licuri are protected by the Brazilian government (Law 12,651/2012). However, this protection is seen as insufficient, so that the Fortaleza Presidium of Slow Food of the Bahia state organized workshops in 2010 and 2011 in Brasília, Brazil, to increase awareness on the issue (i.e. extinction risk of licuri due to burning, deforestation, lack of plant replacement, urbanization). Booklets on the subject were also prepared and distributed. Another interviewee provided the example of the protection of another traditional product, the cabuci. Contrary to licuri, cabuci is not protected at all by national legislation, leaving Slow Food solely responsible for its protection.

When asked directly about their perception of the GI system, most interviewees reported to be acquainted it as they spoke about the importance of the link between a GI product and its place (region or country) of production as well as the economic benefit derived from GI protection

Instead of seeing it as a menace for Slow Food, most interviewees viewed both schemes as a double protection mechanism. Thus, they indicated a “complementarity” of both schemes. Concerning the mission of Slow Food, instead, the interviewees claimed that economic benefit is not a priority for Slow Food. Instead, the preservation of traditions was recognized as the trigger of Slow Food-led acti-

Table 5: Perception of the interviewees about Slow Food vs. GI

Slow food vs. GI	No rivalry; double protection
	No rivalry; double value added
	No rivalry; cooperation and mutual pride
Perception of Slow Food	Respect for, preservation and valorization of tradition
	Based on the concept of “good, clean and fair”
	Respect for nature and producers (fair income)
	Slow food products: noble, special, tasty, mostly produced in accordance with organic criteria
	Multifocal approach; local, socioeconomic, political and cultural concern about preservation
Perception of GI	Legal protection of an identified product from a certain region or country
	Market-oriented; product differentiation

vities. More than one respondent used the Slow Food slogan of “good, clean and fair” to endorse this view. So the role of Slow Food is to promote foods with these features, support family farms, protect endangered species and methods, promote development of small and local food chains and higher food awareness/education of individuals through good use of ingredients and food sustainability (Table 5).

In Brazil, the importance of preserving the local food relies on maintaining the balance of nature and the local culture and tradition, besides in many cases this is the only source of income and survival for small producers. Although many Convivia perceived GI as a market-oriented tool, GI and Slow Food are not considered as rival concepts, but as pursuing a double role of food protection and mutual cooperation.

Conclusion

In recent years, the number of LaAS has increased considerably. More and more countries worldwide are displaying interest in these distinctive instruments (Ilbery et al., 2005). The drawbacks in the proliferation of such schemes have been identified

above all related to consumer confusion. Only few studies, such as the one of Ilbery et al. (2005) have addressed the problem of an ideological clash between different LaAS such as state-led and NGO-led schemes. This paper contributes to the literature by empirically exploring the attitudes of Slow Food members towards GI in both Europe and outside, namely Brazil.

The results detect the existence of ideological differences. However, there seems to be no immediate risk of conflict between the two schemes. In fact, above all in Europe, it seems that both parties mutually profit from each other. The schemes can be considered as two faces of the same coin when it comes to cross-promotion of niche-market products. Whereas GI schemes follow above all an export-rationale, Slow Food addresses national gourmet niche markets. One of the main limitations of this study is the one-directional view of LaAS, which does not take account of opinions of GI producers/GI consortia members regarding Slow Food branding. Thus, this paper should serve as a basis for further research that, considering the diversity of actors involved, should be interdisciplinary.

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