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Commentary
Komentar

PRODUCTS OF ORIGIN: NORMS, STANDARDS AND ETHICS *

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ABSTRACTS

"Ten years already…It is in 1994 that the European Union countries started transferring to Brussels the list of products that they wished to protect as DOP's and IGP's. 1300 products were proposed in all, of which some 600 have been, to date, registered". The presentation discusses the origins of the DOP and IGP systems and their actual differentiation from mass production agricultural products. Tradition, definitions of specificity, usurpation and plagiarism are discussed as well as the role of modern biotechnology, environment, ecology, salubrity, traceability and genetic variability; the role of GMOs and ethics. The use of logos and the role of globalization and marketing mondialisation is described.

Key words: agriculture / products / origin / standards / ethics / EU

IZDELKI Z GEOGRAFSKIM POREKLOM: NORME, STANDARDI IN ETIKA

IZVLEČEK

"Že 10 let…Leta 1994 so začele države evropske unije v Bruselj pošiljati seznam izdelkov, ki so jih želeli zaščititi kot DOP izdelke (izdelki z zaščiteno označba geografskega porekla) in IGP (izdelki z zaščiteno geografsko označbo). Skupno je bilo predlaganih 1300 izdelkov, od katerih je bilo do sedaj registriranih 600. Prispevek govori o izvoru DOP in IGP sistemov in razlikah med njima in izdelki masovne proizvodnje. Poleg tega avtor razpravlja o tradiciji, definiciji specifičnosti, uzurpaciji in plagiatorstvo, kot tudi o vlogi moderne biotehnologije, okolja, ekologije, zdravstvene koristnosti, sledljivosti in genetske variabilnosti, genetsko spremenjenih organizmov in etike. Opisana je uporaba logotipov in vloga globalizacije ter svetovnega trženja.

Ključne besede: kmetijstvo / proizvodi / poreklo / standardi / etika / EU

INTRODUCTION

The considerations and opinions I express, result from my observations during these past 45 years regarding the systems of designation of origin and of geographical indications. These must be considered as factors that increase the value of quality products, a specificity resulting of the interaction between territory, autochthonous resources and local production systems, together with man's work. Presently, this approach should be linked to the context of a commercial reality, that has widened globally, but still is quite an European approach which has not yet led to clarity in the New World.

First of all must be remembered that generally in the western world, particularly in the Mediterranean, the use to link a specific product to a territory with the region's name of production, dates back to the origins of commercial exchanges. Afterwards, this notion of

[*] Some of the information in this article was originally presented in Caseus International, year 2(2002), issue 3, pages 4–7.

designation of origin has become more confused, above all with the development of the guildes in Northern Europe. Their local collective trademarks have quickly been confused with a kind of designation of single geographical origin: Bruges' laces, Brussels' tapestries, Delftware, etc.; this has evidently little to do with the true DOP* and IGP† in agricultural production.
In Europe, the protection of the designation of origin (DOP and IGP) has become a necessity for quality products of rural origin since the changes in socio-economical conditions, the disappearance of the guildes' local influence, the substitution of local collective trademarks with commercial trademarks (mainly the global ones), as well as the improvement in transportation conditions since the beginning of the XIX century. To sustain this principle, a number of international regulations were developed:

- the Convention of Paris, May 20, 1883;
- the Agreement of Madrid, April 14, 1891;
- the Agreement of Lisbon on the international definition of designation of origin and provenance, October 31, 1958;
- the 1992 EU regulations.

DEFINITION OF SPECIFICITY

As underlined by Jacques Audier – the actual president of the EC scientific Advisory Committee for DOP's and IGP's – in 1990, the "history of the designation of origin is, in itself, without any doubt the cause of the current difficulties". In ancient times, the geographical designation was a sort of certificate of origin in the way in which we intend it nowadays. The old Greco-Latin Europe of today is the heir of the tradition of products of origin (DOP), strengthened by the actual need to protect the consumer, over and above the evident commercial importance. It can immediately be noticed that countries with a more Germanic tradition have undergone a different evolution and even more so those with an Anglo-Saxon culture; IGP's being here nearer to the prevailing thinking. This evolution has resulted even more accentuated in the New World. Two different aims imposed the system of designation of origin: protect the producers that have obtained a product of great fame and protect the consumers against false indications, thus fraud. At this point we can observe considerable divergences between countries; even within the EU of 25.

TRADITION, USURPATION AND PLAGIARISM

The designation of origin for agricultural products has its origins in a much more ancient tradition than any kind of commercial trademark! The notion itself of designation of origin is meant to be connected to intrinsic quality, as well as to the idea that these products have always been associated to specific agro-ecological regions and to well-defined elaboration methods. They have thus gained a clear recognition, both universal and regional. Nowadays the temptation to plagiarise and usurp in the form of brand names is more and more present, even in the case of very traditional products; this is evidently a known temptation since many centuries! For example, Roger Dion recounts how a Tournus wine merchant was condemned in 1475 for trying to pass 60 barrels of Tournus wine as a Pommard. Thus the illicit appropriation of a designation of origin is not a phenomenon born with the twentieth century. Nevertheless, we have to underline that the usurpation of names of great fame, for wine, cheese, ham, olives, honey,

* DOP: Denomination of Origin Products
† IGP: Products of Geographic Indication

truffles, foie gras, oysters, eels, etc. has increased a lot more since the end of the Second World War, even between the most honest industrial groups and businessmen of the world!

There is probably sometimes, a will to misinform the uninformed consumer, and a tendency to perpetuate the purchaser's confusion using words that make an indirect and false reference to the true original product.

Contrary to what marketing professionals and slogan creators can say in favour of commercial range products, the protection of the designation of origin of agricultural products is a matter that favours both the consumers and the honest professionals. It is a question of a sincere, local and constant commercial approach. We must however admit that it introduces a long and difficult information process, not easy to succeed in a limited period of time.

BIOTECHNOLOGY AND QUALITY PRODUCTS: ENVIRONMENT, ECOLOGY, SALUBRITY AND GENETIC VARIABILITY

Quality must be considered here as an intrinsic characteristic of a product that originates from the interaction between environment (pedoclimatic and pluviometric characteristics etc.) and human cultural factors only the use of IGP and DOP allows easily for the clear definition and recognition of these specific production characteristics.

Let us take a single example that has been raging in the mass media these past few months; the GMO's.

For its survival, European agriculture, after having helped set free the western world from its nutritional needs, has to aim towards quality and respect of its culinary needs and wishes. Considering therefore inter-alia, that in Europe at least 70% of the population mistrusts the GMOs' presence in food, it is to this reality that our modern agriculture has to adjust and to know how to adapt to the market's requests or the moods of politicians and research administrators. In part the EU directives already provide for it, obliging the producers to declare on the label of products destined to human nutrition the presence of genetically modified organisms, but not for the products from animals fed with GMO feedstuffs; what a mercantile approach!.

On the other hand the same product (DOP, IGP, etc.) transferred – production wise – to another environmental situation, loses its specificity. In fact there is, as already indicated previously, a strict relation between environment and human activities, and this has already created the landscape, modeled many of the production systems, defined social behaviours, weaved relationships between individuals and defined local culture and traditions. All this forms the platforms on which the norms and standards of recognised well defined quality products (DOP, IGP) rest.

The modern production systems are replacing traditions, modifying human reality along with its social behaviour. An industrial product (as for example a greenhouse product should be considered) replaces old local environmentally adapted varieties, causing at the same time modifications in the traditions, usages and plant habits. Quality and standardisation of agricultural products caused mass-production, which links to the disappearance of varieties and germoplasm fit for the local reality, it diminishes the possibility to utilise these genes in subsequent livestock or crop improvement schedules. One of the priorities "to maintain" can be the need to restore the seasonality of production inline with nature, respecting production cycles. Without wanting to appear conservative and classified as *ludites*, it can be asserted that it cannot be expected to obtain any really good tomatoes in winter when nature has selected tomatoes to be produced and consumed in summer time. Evidently to fit the modern economic system, out-of-season production is now the in-thing, but does it coincide with true quality?

Thus transgenic products are nowadays replacing traditional cultivations as if this was a *panacea*; this has introduced dependency from multinationals, modification of human behaviour, ecosystem alterations, products standardisation, more energy inputs in production, increased human pressure on the territory and even increased use of herbicides (which was not possible before because of the presence of plants that did not resist to their use) and probable destruction of valid integrated instruments used in biological agriculture. The most "vocal" scientific institutions disagree, but why?. Evidently, if the use of transgenics becomes gneralised, there would be an easy development of some resistance against fungus, viral and bacterial pathogens towards which has been introduced a type of monogenic resistance, predictably surmountable by the plants' pathogens in a few cultivation cycles. *Vice-versa*, the situation is that DOP and IGP products are environmentally integrated and in line with the local culture, favouring the preservation of traditional and typical production methods and the maintenance of genetic variability.

ETHICS

Nobody can contest the necessity of using biotechnological research as a possible instrument to satisfy the global world population's future nutritional needs, but we should clearly distinguish this from the pretension that it can originate transgenic products able to substitute, at least in the European context, IGP and DOP products, which are *de facto* quality product trademarks.

The huge interests of the multinationals involved in the production of food for human consumption can not be underestimated, neither should we forget the trans-national interests of biotechnological companies; nevertheless these interests should not replace those more legitimate wishes of the enlightened consumers that more and more expect quality goods produced traditionally and involving full traceability.

Today, many are the scientists that fear that genes inserted in plants conferring them the capacity to produce their own plant protection means against pathogens, or the capacity to produce pharmaceutical products destined for animal and human consumption, could have as consequence that even the soil micro-organisms and the insects could be exposed to these chemical products with unpredictable consequences. Others conclude that a gene that confers resistance to insects or to hydric stress could be propagated to correlated species by means of casual crossings, introducing this over-resistance. There are also those who think that we must reduce ecological risks that derive from the introduction of genetically modified plants and microorganisms in the environment. Naturally this is contested by all parties interested in GMO food use generalisation …as some years ago they were for the free use of hormones in livestock farming.

Environmental preservation and the disputes on modern food salubrity are not the aim of this note, neither can we discuss in depth the ethical aspects connected with the development and propagation of transgenic products in the markets of tomorrow. Indeed, the historical quarrel on the control of genetic resources, a basic aspect of biotechnological development, overwhelms unfortunately the precise needs of the consumers that circumscribe the problematics relative to IGP and DOP.

CONCLUSION

Fundamentally, typical products of plant and animal origin represent a reflection of the local agricultural systems' evolution in history. Most of the times in the Mediterranean region they have been influenced by the use of a particular environment, *e.g.* the microflora of alpine zones,

highlands and hills, rural and agricultural traditions. There are commonly, three main natural production components: genetics, territory and human practises. In the case of transformed products, there is also technology. Nevertheless, this scheme is too reductive, even simplistic, because these products have strongly been forged by the way and rhythms of life along the seasons, by religious or family feasts and by traditional cooking. Besides, history demonstrates that the products that have reached our time are only those that have been able to evolve and fit into technical and socio-economical patterns through the ages. Unfortunately the actual situation of these products is at times difficult, if not precarious. They are today under intense pressure from advanced technology and modern commercial practises. They are sometimes made to give the impression of belonging to an obsolete culture, in opposition to the messages propagated for agro-industrial products that are meant to accustom the consumers to dominant influencing marketing values and product standardisation, constancy of tastes all along the year and the refusal of the typical, variable and strong tastes of traditional products. The industrial / economic weight gives the possibility to use at its best scientific progresses, to influence research policies and to apply some very effective commercial and marketing methods with a subtle negation of tradition. The birth of the biotechnologies and of transgenic products completely inserts itself in a strongly industrialised and standardised new taste reality, clearly opposed to production methods that foresee the use of local resources, of territorial respect and the sustaining of ecological and environmental principles. Typical products benefit of great fame and recognition by enlightened consumers that search for authenticity. Their notoriety evidently interests the big agro-industrial concerns that have tried to imitate them, to confuse or to modify production processes, and this, in a few cases, has been taken to the limits of falsification. The line of defence of these traditional quality products could be a last frontier of our quality food habits: vigilance is the only alternative.