

Project title:	Quality scheme for biodiversity and sustainable development: promoting innovation in producer/consumer interfaces
1st institution:	Umr Innovation Montpellier
2nd institution:	University of Catania
Associate institution:	University of Hassan II
Key words: biodiversity, quality labelling system, producers / consumers interfaces, GI, slow food movement	
<p>Project description:</p> <p>Problematic and objectives</p> <p>The present proposal aims at exploring product labelling systems that connect producers and consumers in order to link economic development and biodiversity management. Currently, part of the high value products sold in global and regional markets are based on traditional practices and specific local knowledge. These practices can be preserved and strengthened by actions of consumers well informed about the link between products and biodiversity. In these cases, quality schemes play an important role in the producer/consumer interfaces, providing them information and guarantees. These schemes are highlighted by public bodies and society as instruments for rural development and sustainability. However, few efforts have been devoted to accountability of the positive or negative impacts—concerning biodiversity—of high value productions by empirical and concrete studies.</p> <p>The present study aims at analyzing the relationships between producers and consumers, discourses and practices, and institutions and local communities. This research proposal will focus more particularly on two quality schemes: a) geographical indications (GI) and b) the original experience of the consumers movement “Slow Food”. These systems will be analyzed taking into account their origin and how they are constructed: GIs are generally more formal (related to trips agreement), unlike the Slow food presidia elaborated and applied by social movements and private organisations.</p> <p>According to Juliana Santilli (2011), biodiversity or biological diversity – the diversity of life forms – encompasses three levels of variability: species diversity, genetic diversity, and ecological diversity, which refers to the different ecosystems and landscapes. The present proposal considers the agro-biodiversity, which includes the diversity of species of cultivated plants, genetic diversity, and agricultural or cultivated ecosystem diversity (for example, traditional burn and fallow agricultural systems, agroforestry systems, terrace crops, etc.). The agro-ecosystems are areas of natural landscape transformed by man with the goal of producing food. One of the characteristics of agro-ecosystems is the predominance of species of human interest and a spatial organization that structures and facilitates the work of production (Santilli, 2011).</p> <p>Research hypothesis</p> <p>The first hypothesis considers that consumers’ demand associated with the dynamics of producers’ local communities can contribute to support practices and local know-how, which motivates a different management of biodiversity. It is also believed that the effectiveness of the producer/consumer interface is proportional to the information and knowledge they share about these ecosystems and their resources, and are know-how related.</p> <p>Consumers are not a homogeneous category. Whereas local consumers’ relationship to local</p>	

products may contribute directly to maintaining biodiversity, the more distant consumers (who live far from the production area) operate according to a different logic: they seek better information on products, their origins and impacts on biodiversity. In this case, communication is essential to give meaning to the consumed products, the environment, and the biodiversity which they represent. It could represent an interesting modality to (re)-activate producer/consumer relations around a single common issue: the sustainable development of ecosystems supporting domestic production of specific food.

The third hypothesis considers that the variable degree of formalism of these quality schemes could have different impacts on the conservation of biodiversity.

Theoretical framework and methodology

This proposal will continue in the line of several research programmes which have already identified and analyzed the following issues: the conditions for the emergence of GI across the world (SINERGI); the links between high value products valorisation and biodiversity (BIODIVALLOC); the interactions between human practices, evolution in plants and ecosystems and cultural representations (Femise/IG), and finally, the conditions of innovation diffusion in Local Agri-Food Systems (SYAL).

The project will propose a social and economic geographic approach, integrating some contributions from biotechnical sciences (agronomy, ecology). The proposed research will take three steps. Firstly, the candidate will make a consistent review of literature in order to elaborate a theoretical analysis grid and to analyse both quality schemes (GI system, SLOW FOOD Presidia) in their relation to biodiversity. The role and the sense (meaning) given to biodiversity will be specified for each of the labelling systems. This review of literature will be completed with interviews with persons involved in one of these, or in both, labelling systems. Secondly, the candidate will be focus on conducting three or four case studies in the different countries. Field studies will be based on empirical evidences (quantitative and qualitative surveys to stakeholders) and participatory methods (research-action). Finally, the candidate will propose conclusions regarding the potentiality and the constraints to the ability of labelling systems to achieve the aim of linking economic development and biodiversity management.

The proposed research will take place in southern Europe (France, Italy) and the south of Mediterranean sea (Morocco). During his PhD period, the candidate will be integrated into research teams recognized for their scientific contributions to better understanding added value strategies for agricultural products and territorial development.

Key research questions:

- How, and under which conditions, interfaces between producers and consumers could guarantee or reinforce an economic and social development and biodiversity management?
- What conditions should be present in order to insure the sustainability of these systems in a long term perspective?

Required competences:

Candidate with a Master in Human Sciences (geography, economics, sociology) related to food production, agricultural innovation or market innovation (labelling system, consumers), or biodiversity. Competences on institutional economy, or consumers' studies will be appreciated.