

Which place for sustainability commitments in marketing documents of grass-based quality food products from Auvergne?

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Abstract: *The content of grass-based quality food products' marketing documents was analyzed in the French Auvergne region. The aim was to study how sustainability commitments and new consumer's expectations are taken into account by the stakeholders. The landscapes (particularly meadows) play a key-role, as a link between the product and the territory which it originates. The product is the main element of the message and is often "oversized". The agricultural "footprint" of the product is not widely represented; farming practices are missing. There is still a gap between the farm realities and the marketing key-elements, leading to maintain the misunderstanding between consumers and farmers, the former expressing wishes and the latter feeling constraints.*

Keywords: *Grass, meadows, highland area, landscape, market chain, marketing, sustainability*

Introduction

Societal requests and consumer's expectation in terms of contribution of agriculture to sustainable development contribute to renew the directives and guidelines of the UE and French quality agricultural products policies. Initially dedicated to the protection of food names, then extended to favor rural development (CEE 2018/92), the official quality system for agricultural products is presently recommended as a suitable potential tool to promote sustainable agro-food systems - particularly by highlighting its potential contribution to the conservation of biodiversity and agrodiversity (Boisvert and Caron, 2007).

Meadows appear to be a major asset for sustainable development of the Auvergne region (area in the center of France, mainly dedicated to grass-based livestock systems). In this region, the permanent grass surface represents 64% of the farms' total area (2007). Local agro-food-chains and agro-food industries are the third regional employer. Moreover, meadows mainly contribute to the region's touristic attractiveness (emblematic highland landscapes) and they constitute sensible ecosystems that are protected through the "Habitat" European Directive (Natura 2000 network). Many quality food products (PDO – Protected Designation of Origin, PGI – Protected Geographical Indication, other quality labels, etc.) are produced in the Auvergne Region (38 in total). As they are linked to grass-based livestock farming systems, they are supposed to give an added value to this territorial resource (i.e. grass) and to take part in local development dynamics.

We present the results of a study focused on the valuation of environmental, socio economic and ethical attributes by the local economic actors, through an analysis of the text and the images content in promotional material of a sample of quality food products originating from the Auvergne region. According to the key role of meadows in the linkage between the considered grass-based products and agro-food systems' sustainability issues, we focused our analyses on the latter. Our main objective was to identify the importance and the place given to the meadows' diversity in the perceptions of the supply chains' stakeholders (Figure 1). We studied also the consistency between the practices, representations and discourses of the agricultural and non-agricultural actors involved in these products valorisation schemes. Our results give an insight into issues such as how

sustainability commitments and new consumer's expectations are or are not taken into account by the corresponding stakeholders.

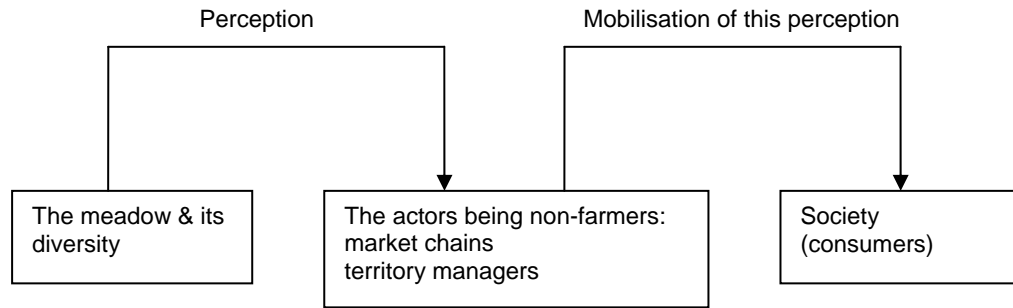


Figure 1. Framework used for the study.

Material and method

The content of 41 grass-based quality food products' marketing documents has been analysed¹. A lexicographic analysis of the text content in the collected material was carried out (Text mining-Welf Quad software). The iconographic analysis of the documents was based on the implementation of a specific method of “pictures reading” (Woehling, 2009). The latter was used to build qualitative variables gathered in a data base allowing statistical treatments (a multivariate analysis was carried out). A sample of 72 pictures (70 images containing landscapes) was reviewed. The implementation of this first method was completed by interviews conducted with the persons in charge of these marketing strategies. We assumed that such an analysis (Figure 2) allows to identify potential representation and interest conflicts as well, between the different stakeholders within the food-chain.

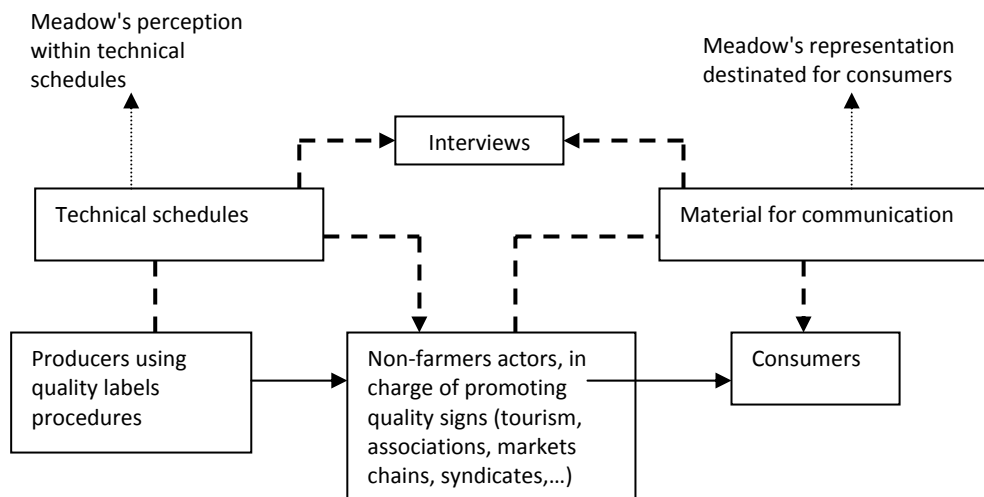


Figure 2. Scheme describing the steps of the method used

¹ The documents for communication of 9 regional grass-based products under quality and origin labels (PDO *Cantal* -cheese, PDO *Salers* -cheese, PDO *Fourme d'Ambert* –cheese, PDO *Saint-Nectaire* -cheese, PDO *Bleu d'Auvergne* cheese, PDO *Fin Gras du Mézenc* -meat, PGI *Agneau Laiton de l'Aveyron* –lamb, Red Label *Agneau Fermier des Pays d'Oc* –lamb, Regional Nature Park Trademark *Salers* meat) have been exploited. The initial study material has been completed with the documents from 5 regional public or private organizations (in charge of promoting quality and origin labels or local development): the *Association des Fromages d'Auvergne* (AFA), The *Chambre Régionale d'Agriculture d'Auvergne* (CAA), The *Confrérie du Grand Ordre des Gourmandins et Gourmandines des Fromages d'Auvergne*, The *Comité Régional de Développement Touristique d'Auvergne* (CRDTA), The Regional Nature Park of Auvergne Volcanoes (PNRVA).

Results

Lexicographic analysis: what kind of texts are found in the documents?

The results of the lexicographic analysis showed that the communication of the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) products and Protected Geographical Indication product (PGI) is mainly focused on the notion of « terroir ». In such quality and origin schemes, the linkage between the specificity and authenticity of the products on one hand and the area which it originates from on the other hand, was based on this notion. The latter encompasses both geographical features (soil or climate conditions) and cultural dimensions (notion of tradition, heritage, know-how). The cultural dimensions were strongly emphasized in all documents for communication. On the contrary, references to meadow biodiversity were weak. The written message was focused on the pasture description and the term “biodiversity” is only mentioned one time (with reference to the flora). The description of the potential positive impacts of the applied farming practices registered in the technical schedules on landscape conservation were also very weak. Conversely, most of the marketing documents of the products under quality and origin labels contain a pedagogic description of their own label or valorization schemes (generic information about the quality seal involved). The corresponding logo is affixed in 87 % of the cases.

Iconographic analysis: what kind of pictures are used in the documents?

The analysis of the iconographic content of the 41 documents was focused on pictures with landscape elements.

Global structure of the 41 communication supports

The heterogeneous communication media were leaflets, booklets, posters and web sites. They are represented fairly balanced in our sample of documents (Figure 3).

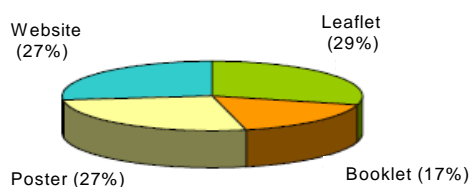


Figure 3. Types of documents analysed

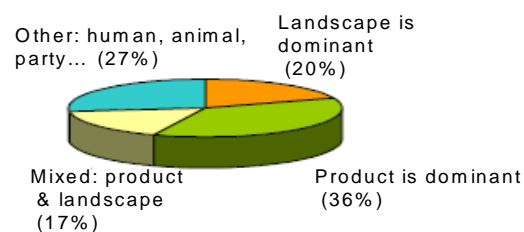


Figure 4: Main graphical element in the documents.

Half of the 41 documents reviewed (22) presented a balance between space dedicated to text and space dedicated to pictures, although this depends greatly on the nature of the document: posters are for example dominated by pictures. Concerning the subject of the analysed images (Figure 4), the product, raw or cooked, was usually presented alone. It dominates the entire document in 36% of the cases. The pictures showing animal, farmer or festive events related to the product were highlighted in 27% of the documents. The images of landscapes, at the core of our study, were in fact prevalent in the document only in 20% of cases. They were found associated and in a spatial equilibrium with the product in 17% of cases (Figure 5). Images of landscapes were not specifically highlighted in the global communication of the products studied: in half of the documents, they represented one image out of four.

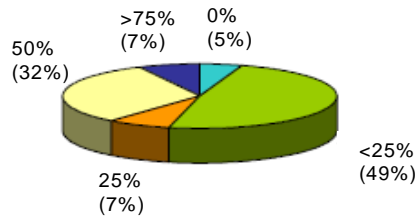


Figure 5. Area ratios of landscape pictures referred to the whole document.

The nature of the dominant iconographic elements within the whole document strongly depends on the type of document (Fig. 6). For booklets and leaflets, in most cases, the landscapes were absent. In the booklets, the product and the landscape were mixed and equally represented in 60% of the total number of images. In booklets, the product was dominant in 59% of the images. In 9% of the posters, more than 75% of the pictures showed landscapes.

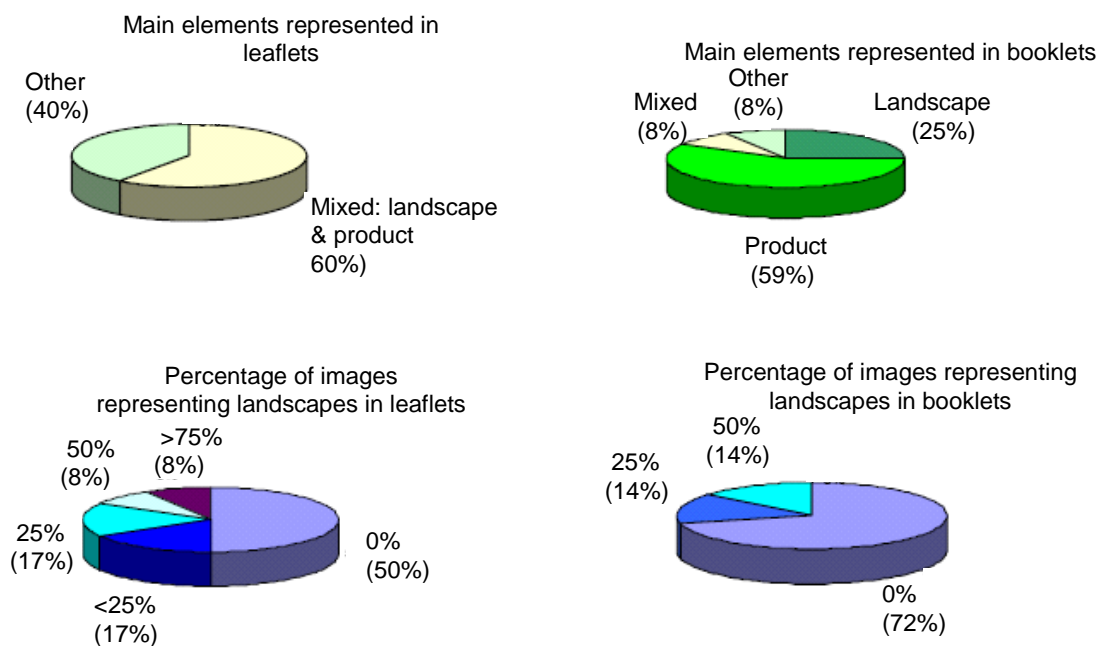


Figure 6. Area ratios of landscape pictures referred to the respective type of document.

The characteristics of the pictures representing landscapes

Landscapes were dominant in 55% of the pictures in which they are present (Figure 7). They are most often associated with other elements, such as people, animals, traditional mountain (dairy) huts ("Buron", "Jasseries" ...). Or the landscape pictures were associated with a specific event (32% of the cases), or with the corresponding product concerned by the document (7% of the cases). In 6% of the pictures, the landscape shared with the products the total space of the document.

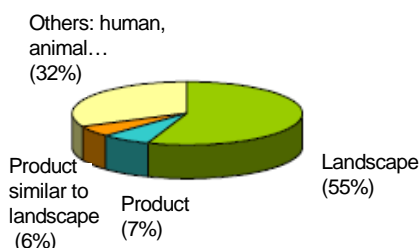


Figure 7. Main iconographic element within pictures in which landscapes are represented

The images of landscape in the communication documents were almost exclusively (96%) photographs (Fig. 8). In 81% of the cases, the photo is simple, not assembled, and the images are in most cases non-composites. Only very few organizations used other graphic supports, such as drawings or paintings in their communication.

The example of the AFA – a regional association in charge of the promotion of all the Auvergne PDO cheeses - whose logo is a drawing of a “coloured” cow was an exception.

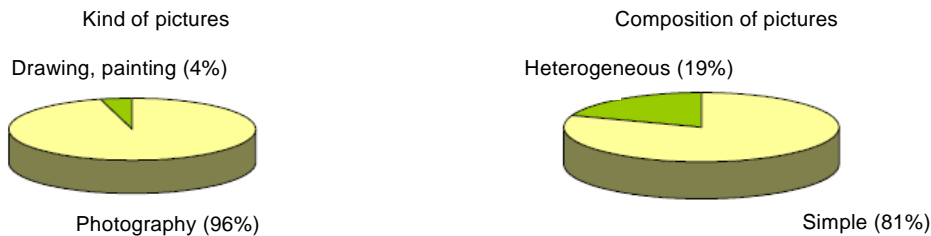


Figure 8. Images types used in the documents.

The landscapes, which dominated in the communication (Figure 9) were landscapes representing eroded mountains (42% of images), followed by scenic plains and plateaux (20% of images). It should be noted that these results depend very much on the number of items content in the corresponding picture. Sometimes, the backgrounds were not always accurately identified.

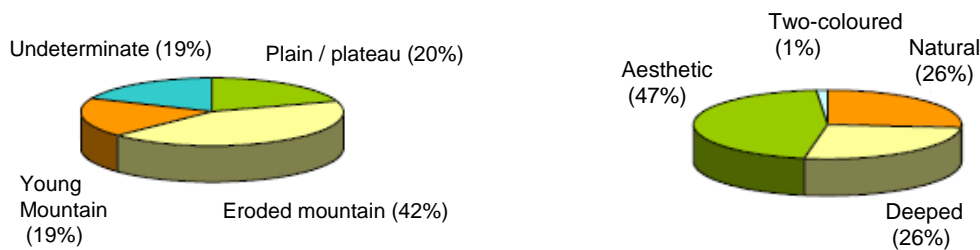


Figure 9. Kind of landscapes represented within the documents.

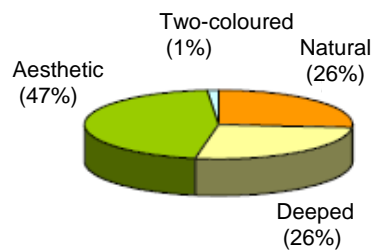


Figure 10. Main colours types used in the 70 pictures of the sample.

The dominant colours in our sample of 70 images representing landscapes were aesthetic nuances (shadows, blurs of colours; 47% of the images). Natural or exacerbated colours were used equally (26% for each), almost two times less than the aesthetic treatment of the colours (Figure 10).

Characteristics of the vegetation

Meadows constitute the dominant type of vegetation in the images of landscapes that have been analysed. It is an almost indispensable element of the landscape of the highland Auvergne region. A meadow was shown alone in 48% of the pictures (Figure 11) and combined with forests elements in 45% of the images. Meadows were present in 93% of the total images of landscapes reviewed.

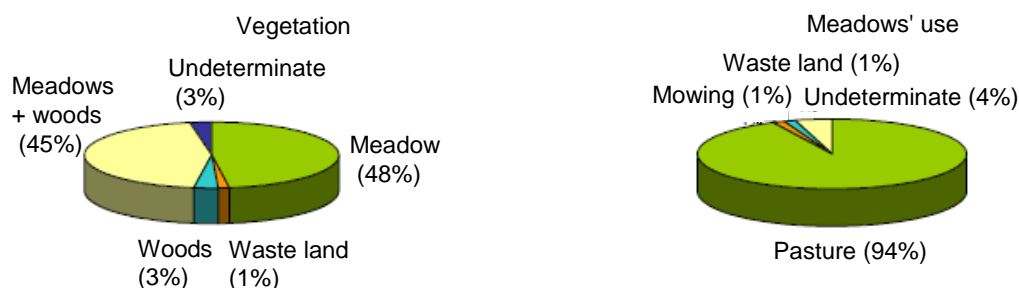


Figure 11. Characteristics of the vegetation represented in the 70 pictures of the sample.

Moreover, on a total of 70 images representing landscapes, pastures are represented in 64 cases. The remaining pictures (4%) are big shots in which the type of grass cannot be determined. The distinction between pictures of meadows devoted to hay and meadows devoted to grazing can be made only by agronomists according to the colour of the covered plant. In our study, we have favoured the point of view of what can be recognised and, what is identifiable by a consumer or another actor that does not necessarily possess specific knowledge in agronomy. Thus, for one picture, we defined a meadow devoted to hay by the presence of windrows or bales in the paddock and a meadow devoted to grazing by the absence of these elements (Woelhing, 2009).

In most of the cases pastures are represented surrounded by forest plots (47 images among 64). This suggests that landscapes "that are wanted to be seen" are quite well faithful to the characteristics of the production areas located at middle altitude of the Auvergne highlands. The 17 images showing no trees may come from pictures taken in areas at higher altitude located in the Cantal district for example. More than 50% of the images representing pastures contain no buildings. When represented, buildings are rather "traditional" ("*burons*" and "*jasseries*"), located on the mountain pastures (where cheeses are used to be produced during the summer period). We therefore found a good match between landscapes represented in the pictures and the characteristics of the "real" areas of production from where the corresponding products are coming from.

Which global strategies are used for quality labels in different market chains?

A multivariate analysis has been carried out in order to test the relationships between the different elements presented above. The question is: are there some specific combinations of these elements in the analyzed documents? If yes, what are these combinations? Can these combinations be considered as specific strategies to communicate about the product?

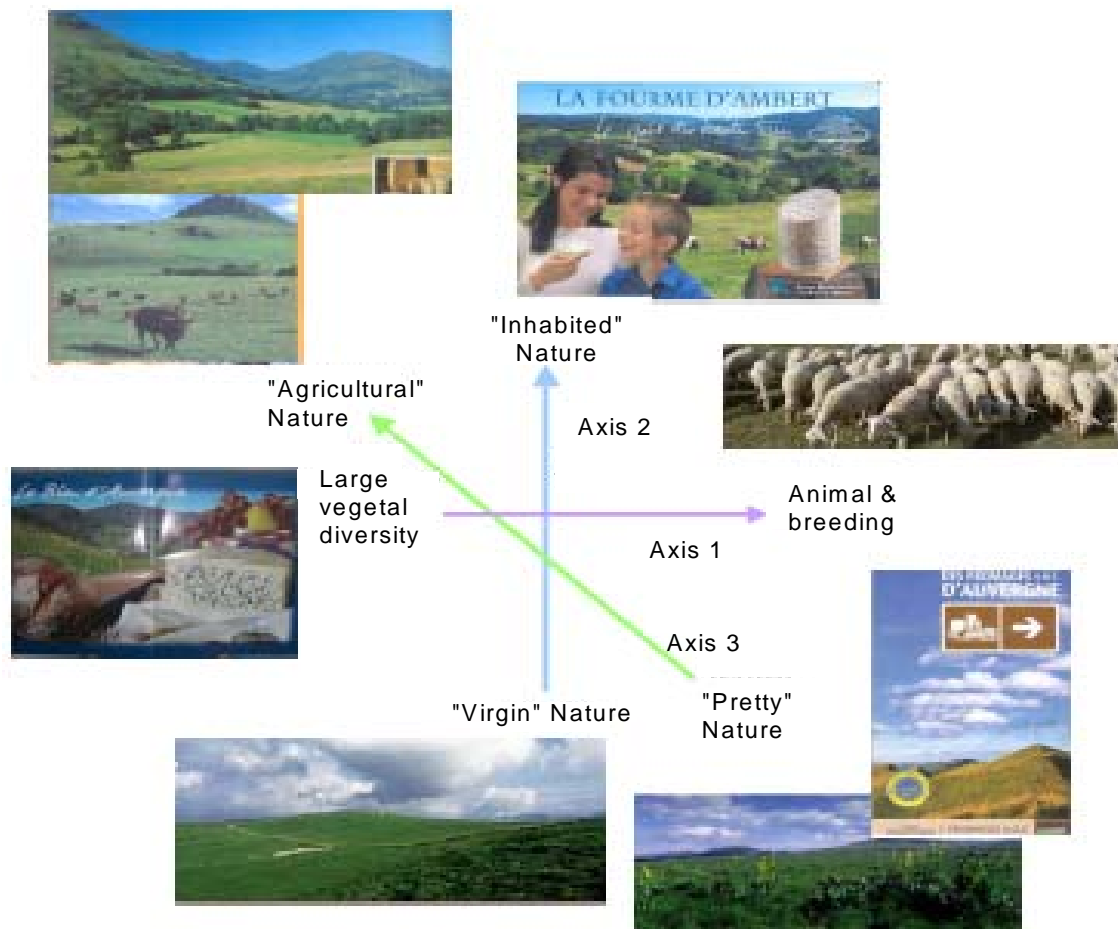


Figure 12. Main factorial axis (n=3) identified by performing a multivariate analysis.

Three main factorial axes (i.e. specific combinations of modalities of variables) can be identified: the first one (axis 1; Figure 12) discriminates documents according to the presence/absence of fauna and flora in the pictures; the second one (axis 2; Figure 12) discriminates the documents according to the presence/absence of human items in the pictures (either virgin nature on one side versus "anthropised" nature on the other side); the third one (axis 3; Figure 12), discriminates the documents according to the natural/artificial mode of representation of nature (either aesthetic or real).

The position of the different case-studies on the factorial plan, made of the 3 axes, shows that:

- The Inter-professional Committee of Cheese in charge of the two PDO Cantal and Salers, can be distinguished by their position in the negative side of the axis 2 (south part of figure 12: "virgin" Nature, opposed to anthropised Nature). The management organisation of these two PDO cheeses tends therefore to favour a perception of the landscape based on "wilderness" items.
- The National Regional Park of the Auvergne Volcanoes strongly focuses its communication on images showing a "beautiful nature" using exaggerated colours (south east part of Figure 12).
- Documents produced by the Inter-professional Syndicate of the PDO *Fourme d'Ambert* and by the Inter-professional Union of the PDO *Bleu d'Auvergne* were mainly concentrated on the positive side of the axis 2 (north part of figure 12): "Nature inhabited and managed by man". They are also together with the PDO meat "*Fin Gras du Mezenc*" on the negative side of the axis 1 (so, in the north-east part of figure 12). They more likely put the emphasis more on plant than animal biodiversity (animal or herd are not at the core of the pictures).
- The two sheep products (the PGI "*Agneau Fermier du Laiton*" and the Red Label "*Agneau fermiers des Pays d'Oc*") put animals and the herd at the centre of their iconographic message (pictures are located at the end of the positive side of the axis 1, east part of figure 12). According to the choice of large picture plans likely to show the traceable marking of the animals and their loops, emphasis seems to be put on the quality of the product traceability. The work and the breeders' skills are thus explicitly represented. The three pictures produced by the confrérie of "*Gourmandins and Gourmandines*" are also located in the same area. The corresponding pictures rarely show a mere landscape. According to the objectives of this organisation, the iconographic message focused on human and/or animals, the cultural dimension of the "*terroir*".
- The pictures conceived by the Association of Cheeses of Auvergne (AFA) are scattered between the 3 axes. This seems to be the result of various communication strategies. The visual communication was mainly based on the image of cheeseboard. If one looks at the evolution of the AFA's communication on the "Touristic Road Auvergne PDO cheeses" over the past three years, it is noticeable that the cheese that was at the centre of the message until 2008 was more discreet in the latest brochure. Indeed, the leaflet edited in 2008/2009 placed greater emphasis on tourism and the steps of the touristic road. In this latest version, the modern practices and facilities are also shown explicitly at the expense of the landscape pictures. The Inter-professional Syndicate of the *Saint-Nectaire* PDO, as the AFA in other dimension of its communication strategies, features on the cover of its leaflet a cheeseboard situated in a "setting" of mountain landscape highlighted in panoramic view.

Conclusion

The place dedicated to landscapes was relatively large in the iconographic messages, although the product is more often present. Even if the landscape is not the main element of the message, it is most often used as a symbol of the link between the product and its area of origin (this is a main aspect underlying the notion of "terroir"). Most of the landscapes used in visual communication represent highlands, sublimated by aesthetic colours with a strong presence of pastures (94% of the

images). So the landscapes that are shown to consumers in the studied marketing's documents are quite well faithful to the characteristics of the "real" production areas located in the Auvergne highlands. However, if the flora biodiversity of the meadows is highlighted in some texts, it does not characterize the pictures. So the environmental argument for the conservation of meadow biodiversity that may be associated with the quality and origin signs cannot be seen in the pictures. In some of the texts, "preserved" nature is a term also mentioned to characterise the landscapes of the area the quality products come from. The idea of a "virgin" Nature, without any human or animal presence, is suggested in 50% of the images of landscapes. Farming practices (illustrated by machinery, buildings, breeders...) that contribute to the production and the preservation of these landscapes dominated by grasslands are somewhat present in the pictures. That is to say that the agricultural "footprint" of the product is not widely represented. This result shows that there is still a gap between the farm realities and the marketing of key-elements, leading to maintain the misunderstandings between consumers and farmers.

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