

Territorial anchorage of French dairy ewes sectors: Historical analysis of interdependence between given localized agrifood systems

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Abstract: Nowadays, Roquefort (RF) Cheese is processed from milk produced by dairy ewes in Aveyron. However, from the late nineteenth century to the end of the seventies, the RF processors used to buy milk in other areas: Corsica Island (CS) and Pyrénées-Atlantiques (PA). In the seventies, the dairy production skyrocketed in Aveyron leading the RF processors to leave these additional areas to focus on Aveyron only. Dairy producers of PA and CS faced a crisis as the outlets were to re-build. In both territories, a new dynamic was set up: re-birth of on-farm processing (technical and cultural local memory) and implementation of other processors (local ones or multinational, cooperatives). SOCIETE DES CAVES, the main RF processor diversified its production remaining, even reduced, within each area of production. Furthermore, in the beginning of the eighties, local actors created PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) products: “Ossau Iraty” in PA and “Brocciu” in CS. These PDOs still show difficulties in building consensus within the local actors system. The history of each territory seems relevant as it influences their current situation. We assume that the common history of “Roquefort” implementation and the period that followed its withdrawal have conditioned the current situation of both PA and CS systems: these last 40 years have been a period of re-appropriation (more or less complete and successful) of their productive system by the local actors. To analyse this period and their current situation, we decided to use the concept of “territorial anchorage” with two main characteristics. First, a space and a system of actors have a dynamic way of interacting. In such perspective, a long-term analysis provides a relevant vision of the trajectory of local systems. Such analysis could make the current situation more understandable and shed some light on the way they could evolve. Secondly, this concept integrates all kinds of relationships a community can have with its space, at various scales. Tightening activities to the area supposes a set of links with various intensity and anteriority (social cohesion, economic added-value, “terroir”). As these links have been recently reactivated or re-invented, some elements are becoming territorial resources. These mechanisms are also under “new” external forces (hybridization of on-farm cheese processing, use of the territory’s image). This concept permits the comparison of two territories with similarities and divergences. Both cases can feed each other from a different trajectory or different links to the area. It might help us replacing the role of PDOs and understanding the levers used and constraints faced.

Keywords: SYAL, territorial anchorage, trajectory, interdependence, Roquefort, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Corsica Island

Introduction

A localized agrifood system (SYAL) is defined as “*production and service organizations (agricultural and agrifood units, marketing, services and gastronomic enterprises, etc.) linked by their characteristics and operational ways to a specific territory. The environment, products, people and their institutions, know-how, feeding behaviour and relationships networks get together within a territory to produce a type of agricultural and food organization in a given spatial scale*” (MUCHNIK, 2009: p1). We consider three different SYAL dedicated to the production of dairy-ewe cheeses: the Roquefort cheese production system, the Pyrénées-Atlantiques²²⁷(PA) and Corsica Island (CS).

Those three SYALs are interconnected. They have a history in common. Driven by an increasing need of milk, the Roquefort cheese system used to integrate the two other ones (from the late nineteenth century until 1980). They followed different trajectories afterwards leading to current divergent situations (CHAMPION et al., 2013). How can we explain their current successes and difficulties? How deeply their common history has influenced their current situation? To answer such questions, we have chosen territorial anchorage as a tool of analysis. Our goal is to trace their trajectories back to better understand:

- How those various SYALS, specifically CS and PA, have been constructed
- To what extent those historic elements are rooted in their present. More specifically, to what extent their interdependence, their common history, played a role in the construction of PA and CS’s SYALs’ trajectories.

We make the hypothesis that the Roquefort Cheese SYAL played a significant role in the construction of the two other ones, which have been considered as its “annexes”²²⁸ for a long time (DELFOSSÉ, 1992; 2007). To argue our position, we lay the foundation of this article, summing up the interdependent contemporary history of those three systems (1). We then expose the concept of territorial anchorage, before illustrating its interest through a historical study (2).

Trajectories of the localized agrifood systems

For a long time, the whole specificity of Roquefort cheese has been its maturing in the caves of Combalou, in Roquefort-sur-Soulzon (South-western France). Thus, the caves owners detained the specific character of Roquefort Cheese. In the nineteenth century, as the Roquefort cheese achieved a strong popularity and knew an increasing demand, the cave owners initiated the development of Roquefort cheese production. Quite rapidly, they took in charge the milk collection and processing, getting the quality of production under control. It led the collected farms to specialize in dairy production and to become integrated into the Roquefort cheese industry. In the same time, caves owners changed their trade organization, extending their cave and introducing new technology (RIEUTORT, 1995), which gave them access to export.

In the following parts, we will expose the different periods that Roquefort Industry and its production spaces went through: first the extension of the area of collection to Pyrénées-Atlantiques (PA) and Corsica Island (CS), led by the increasing need of milk in the late Nineteenth century, then the impulse given to dairy ewes production during the “silent revolution” after the WWII, leading to an issue of over-production and, therefore, to a re-organization of the Roquefort Cheese Industry as well as its collection areas.

²²⁷ Department in the South-West of France, divided in two strong cultural regions with no institutional acknowledgment, Béarn and Pays Basque

²²⁸ Annexes or « associats » in French (REYNAUD, 1981) are “*spaces tightly dependant or more precisely dominated by an external centre, but which don’t totally lose their personality et which borders are clearly established*” (DELFOSSÉ, 1992; p176).

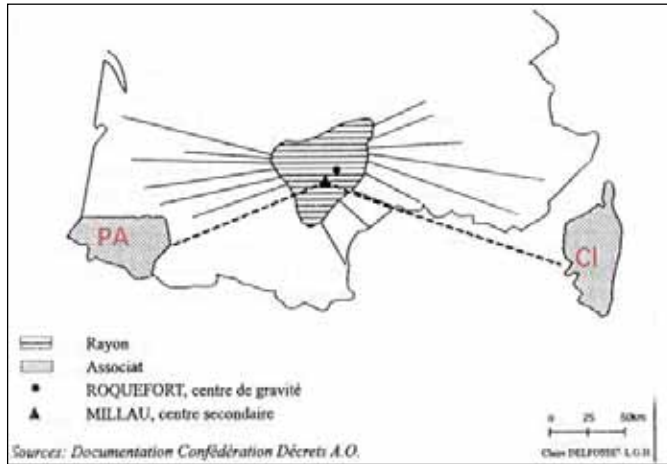
The “annexation” of Corsica and Pyrénées-Atlantiques

The Roquefort cheese demand was growing while the local dairy production was not increasing enough. The cave owners (become industrial entrepreneurs) decided to extend their area of milk collection to finally establish plants within CS in 1893 and within PA in 1904 (RIEUTORT, 1995). Their strategy was to have access to great milk reservoirs, and, for CS, to collect milk earlier in the season (October) permitting the lengthening of Roquefort cheese production.

The establishment of Roquefort plants within both PA and CS impacted the breeding systems and the local cheese market organization. It led to the specialization in few species within breeding farms (several domestic species used to cohabit), and to the dairy specialization of ewe breeding farms. These two regions were based on pastoral breeding, mainly on double transhumance: the herd used to follow the grass growing all year long, plain in winter, and mountain summer pastures in summer. Since Roquefort plants were set up in the winter spot, and were opened from October to March, breeders got the incentive to stay longer in plain and to climb later in the mountain (RENUCCI, 1970). Some breeders decided to settle down (plain or littoral). The persistence of ancestral practices is remarkable as transhumance had not disappeared, but it had evolved with the simplification of animals' movements, adapting to the new outlet (opening period of Roquefort plants). If the impact of Roquefort Industry has been so important at that time, this is because it was considered as an opportunity to many local breeders (RENUCCI, 1970). They had access to a greater and constant income, and they could give up a part of the massive work (on-farm cheese processing) in a context of lack of local working force. For those who maintained on-farm cheese processing, it had opened the local cheese market.

The impact of Roquefort Industry has not been the same within each area of production. The evolution of breeding system is correlated to the degree of influence of the Roquefort industry (ARNOS, 1934). For example, within PA, there is an opposition between Béarn Mountains where Roquefort impact has been weak, where ewe breeding and on-farm cheese production have been preserved and the Pays Basque where cheese tradition and other activities of production have been progressively reduced in favour of specialization in dairy ewe breeding for Roquefort industry. It is also the case in CS, where the breeders from areas that were not easy to reach kept more strongly their cheese-making tradition (RIEUTORT, 1995).

Figure 1: Map of the collect area of the Roquefort Industry which center is the rayon and annexes (sic. “associats”) are PA and CS (DELFOSSÉ, 1992).



After the First World War, the Roquefort Cheese production was threatened: the cut down on transportations gave opportunities to counterfeit copies and the farmers, who had been impoverished, seized fraud opportunities such as milk delaying. It resulted in the increase of defiance between the processors and the producers who feared that Roquefort enterprises would delocalize their activity. In order to ensure each group's interest and to protect the cheese specificity and popularity, it imported to relieve such climate: the various stake-holders decided to protect their cheese by law, therefore to protect the conditions of its production and processing. After years of negotiation, a law was voted to protect Roquefort cheese (1925). To implement the law and to avoid any drifting, a joint-trade organization was created: the “confédération of Roquefort” in 1930, gathering producers and processors. However, breeders from CS or PA were not represented in this organization; it only dealt with the “rayon²²⁹” producers (RIEUTORT, 1995). They were apart from the negotiation system. This way of functioning - PA and CS being “annexes” (figure1) - will be perpetuated until the end of the “Roquefort Era”.

The increase of dairy needs after WWII: creation and diffusion of the “Roquefort model”

The revolution occurring in the whole French agriculture has also happened in the dairy ewe sector (RIEUTORT, 1995). To enhance production, the “confédération” decided to set up a model: the “Roquefort model for dairy ewe production”. After a long period of study in the “rayon” (there were no references for dairy ewe breeding) (1950-1965), a performing model of intensive production was established (1965-1980). It has consisted in (DELFOSSÉ, 1992): i) Efficient selection of the ewe breed Lacaune (main breed in the “rayon”), ii) Forage Intensification with introduction of leys, iii) Improvement of sanitary management of flock and improvement of nutrition, iv) modernization of barns and generalization of milking machines. The model set up was a success in the “Rayon” area. The “confédération” played a role of catalyst in the diffusion of technical innovations (RICARD, 1997). It was particularly efficient since the breeders unions and the industries supported it: agricultural modernization is a potential way to increase the aura of the enterprises and to establish industrial monopole (RIEUTORT, 1995). Moreover, nothing would have been possible without the good will of breeders: they were sensitive to progress and opened to technicians and local elected representatives.

Considering PA and CS, the diffusion of such model has not been as fast and as equally established as in the “rayon”. As we observed earlier, summarily, there was a modernization gradient operating within both production areas. Within PA, even though the majority of milk delivering

²²⁹ “Rayon” is the original collect area of Roquefort Cheese enterprises. This space is articulated around the historical center of the Roquefort Cheese: the caves of Combalou (RICARD, 1997).

breeders had kept traditional structures (small farms, rustic breeds, high density of farms), even though they were more impervious to technical innovation than breeders from the “rayon” (survival of traditional model shows no need for innovation), even though traditional breeding system impeded modernization (transhumance versus reproduction control), modernization occurred. It took more time than in the “rayon” area (1970-1990). Step by step, extension services were created for technical improvement (Chamber of agriculture, a sheep-ranching centre, etc.). Within CS, the first real efforts on breed selection began much later, in the late eighties (RIEUTORT, 1995). The gap between the model diffusion and its establishment (time delay plus content), in PA and CS can be explained by the model’s lack of adaptation to rough mountainous conditions of farming and to persistence of pastoral breeding (RIEUTORT, 1995).

Milk Overproduction and Roquefort industries withdrawal: the end of the “Roquefort era”

After a time lapse for technical diffusion, the dairy production boomed within PA (from 7.3 Ml (1970) to 28.8Ml (1993)), above all in the hillside and the mountains of Pays Basque (RIEUTORT, 1995). Within CS, even though the local ewe breed has been known for its dairy capabilities, dairy production didn’t increase. Social factors can partially explain such delay and lack of efficiency: shepherd was not an attractive profession anymore and the number of breeders had decreased. Therefore, the production was hardly held by the increase of productivity of the remaining farms. Besides, the increase of productivity was not as important as in the other areas: there were no collective dynamics, and real estate was still insecure (VERCHERAND, 1989).

The delay occurring within the “annexes” has not impacted much the Roquefort Cheese Industry. The implementation of the “Roquefort model” led to the increase and the lengthening of production in the “rayon” between the sixties and the eighties. In the same time, the farms concentration occurred (split up by 4 between 1961 and 1993): the selection had been done on the need of investment (building and milking machines) and the need of increasing assets (real estate, flock). The smallest farms progressively disappeared and those remaining were the most effective, which strengthened the sector. By the mid seventies, the other production areas (PA and CS) were no longer necessary to Roquefort Cheese production. The Roquefort system was reconfigured: most of the Roquefort enterprises left these additional areas to focus on the “Rayon”, except Société des Caves (“Société”), the greatest Roquefort cheese processor that remained, even reduced, within PA and CS. However, this enterprise started a strategy of diversification of its production within the annexes, based on local recipes.

Corsican and Pyrenean breeders were facing a lack of outlet for a part of their production. They needed to find alternatives to the Roquefort cheese Industry. Cooperatives were created; on-farm processing was enhanced again. In order to protect their own heritage from the diversification strategy of Roquefort industries, CS’s and PA’s breeders created their own PDOs: Ossau-Iraty in PA (1980) and Brocciu in CS (1983). In parallel, (in the seventies in PA, the late eighties in CS) breeders started to integrate technical progress in their breeding practices (breed selection), evolution they had been impervious to before. This last period marked the end of the “Roquefort Era”, and the “re-birth” of territorial anchorage of PA and CS, the Roquefort Industries losing their prominent role of driver of their production system, and identified by the locals as a problem.

Choosing Territorial anchorage as a tool for analysis

Rewinding the history of those three productive systems would have no sense if we didn’t expect it to explain the current situation of Corsica Island (CS) and Pyrénées-Atlantiques (PA). To achieve such goal, we have based our analysis on territorial anchorage. We will expose its characteristics as an analytic tool (2.1) before illustrating its interest exploring the trajectory of Geographical Indications in PA and CS (2.2).

Theoretical keys

Territorial anchorage approach is an analysis tool of relationships between a sector and a territory, which permits to consider territory in its different dimensions and these relationships in all their reciprocity (FRAYSSIGNES, 2005). It explores the notion of territory underlining the historical process of co-construction of a sector and a territory.

A territory is “a developed space, socially constructed, culturally labelled and institutionally regulated” (MUCHNIK, 2009). As a construct, it is the result of “a historical process involving society acting on a given space, with its practices and representations;” (FRAYSSIGNES, 2005: p74). At a given date, a territory is a sensed space endorsing values, codes, norms (as a result of the history) and a result of the current human activity (economic, social and politic).

To several geographers, the construction of a space into a territory results from a phenomenon of appropriation (FRAYSSIGNES, 2001, 2005). It can be institutional, like organizations or norms existing on a given space. To DI MEO (1996, 2005), this is an identity appropriation: space is a part of someone’s background. Therefore, to various inhabitants of a given space, the territory becomes a shared reference which has been built and inherited. It is also an economic appropriation: a territory is a set of resources, generic and specific ones, on which human activity develops (FRAYSSIGNES, 2005). The approach generally chosen is to consider one of those aspects of appropriation, isolated from the others. However, this is their convergence that stabilizes the construction of a territory. Such observation underlines the interrelations existing between the different dimensions of a territory and its appropriation. It implies that they make a complete coherence of it.

Territorial anchorage is defined by economists as “a localized process of collective learning realized in order to generate resources” (ZIMMERMANN, 1998). With such definition, it is an intentional process driven by economics; it is a strategic choice for the firm (FRAYSSIGNES, 2001). It implies a limited vision of territory, as a simple set of resources; but a territory is a web that influences economic strategies, practices and representations of stake-holders (CREVOISIER, GIGON, 2000). A group of persons is impregnated by the space they occupy; in return, they influence it by constructing common rules to manage this space and, thus, activating the resources it bears. This is this constant interaction between a community and a territory that tightens their link, makes it irreversible and constitutes territorial anchorage (FRAYSSIGNES, 2005). FRAYSSIGNES (2001) argues, for instance, that Lactalis, international group which partly bought Société des Caves (“Société”), has been impregnated by the territory: Lactalis did not demand any change about the strategy of transportation or the processing system that had been implemented by Société des Caves. Indeed, the international group had to assure its legitimacy as a newly integrated factor and therefore to accept some compromises considering the history of the Roquefort cheese System and its way of functioning. Thereafter, lactalis representatives got enrolled in this game, applying to the system’s rules. FRAYSSIGNES (2001) bases this behavior on « exchanges under constraint of identity preference » (SAGLIO, 1991). However, territorial impregnation cannot be reduced to economical constraints. Lactalis has complied with a given territory, preserving the coherence of such system, that is to say, the external absence of contradictions, which lays on territorial elements (construction of common rules in one space of negotiation, the “Confédération”). Such coherence has assured the Roquefort System longevity and the conservation of a high-value product.

The second characteristic of the definition given by ZIMMERMANN (1998) is that it relies on the construction of localized collective rules, which is the construction of relative autonomy within a given space (FRAYSSIGNES, 2001). “A system is autonomous if it has the ability to govern itself according to its own principles” (FRAYSSIGNES, 2001: p93). Autonomy cannot be total; it is included in a larger context operating with more or less intense constraints. These constraints are mostly economic (international market, WTO) or institutional ones (public policy), « and op-

erate real framing on those sectors and represents factors more or less favorable to their anchorage” (FRAYSSIGNES, 2001: p100). Other factors might have to be taken into account: what about the historical interdependence of production areas governed by a strong industry and its impact on their proper territorial anchorage?

As a territory is a construct, the interactions operating between a space and society aren't linear. If territorialization occurs, the reverse can also happen. Therefore the interaction between a sector and a territory realizes a trajectory that is to determine. We illustrate now this point (2.2).

Trajectories of Protected Geographical Indications in Pyrénées-Atlantiques (PA) and Corsica Island (CS)

- **Choosing certification to protect stakeholders' heritage through local cheeses**

To solve overproduction issues, the major Roquefort cheese enterprise, Société des Caves (“Société”), chose to partially retire from CS and PA, and to initiate diversification in those territories (DELFOSSÉ, PROST, 1998). The local cheeses were at stake as the local know-how became interesting for this industry: «Société» tended to appropriate the local cheeses recipes; at least to reinvent it, introducing technology and appropriating the image of authenticity and typicality of regional cheeses. Within CS, «Société» notably decided to process Brocciu, a Corsican cheese made of whey, which has provoked tensions between locals and the industry (DELFOSSÉ, 2007). “*Considering the importance attached by the islanders to these cheese production and consumption, it was surely, not only an economic frustration, but also a cultural one, like a form of appropriation of what is considered as an element of the Corsican identity*” (DELFOSSÉ, PROST, 1998: p12). Within PA, the diversification strategy started earlier. In 1964, the society PYRENEFROM was created by «Société», in order to process local cheeses; most of them originate from Béarn (DEFLOSSE, 2007).

This situation induced the choice of a protected designation of Origin (PDO) in both territories, Ossau-Iraty in PA (1980), and Brocciu in CS (1983). It was initially born by on-farm processing farmers who decided to build the PDO's specifications in order to exclude industrial processing, to avoid industrial appropriation (RICARD, 1997). However, this was not the only possibility: the Corsican farmers had first attempted to integrate the “confédération” to keep control on what the industries would do within CS. As a “compromise”, “Société” had agreed to the creation of the “Société”'s delivery farmers corporation” which only had a consultative role at the “confederation”. When the Industry decided to valorize entirely the whey produced in the “rayon”, producing a copy of Brocciu, tensions were really expressed. It was about the embezzlement of traditional Brocciu (DELFOSSÉ, 1992; DELFOSSÉ, PROST, 1998).

Considering the PDOs dynamic, local stakeholders had a reference in mind: the Roquefort cheese stakeholders had gathered and generated an institutional protection notably leading to the exclusion of the breeders from CS and PA. “*The Pyrenees Producers have been able to make good use of the Roquefort lesson and obtained, in 1980, the protected denomination of origin for their dairy ewe cheese*” (DELFOSSÉ, 1992: p194).

Moreover, the diversification strategy of Roquefort Industries conditioned the choice of the product to certificate. In CS, various typical cheeses have coexisted. “Societe” had tried to adapt their recipe to technical process but failed (DEFLOSSE, 1992), that is the reason why Brocciu became the local object of diversification, and, thus certification. Other choices might have been under the influence of history and Roquefort cheese systems' dominance: the PDOs' area and the core of technical specifications in each PDO. Stakeholders of both territories decided to include all the ancient collection areas even though it could lead to incoherence or conflicts. Despite a traditional divergence in cheese making between Béarn and Pays Basque and a cultural opposition

between those two spaces, the stake-holders decided to gather each other around the same certification. The name of the PDO reflects such strategy: it has been completely made up, gathering the symbolic spaces of Pays Basque (Iraty Forest) and Béarn (Ossau Valley). Since the beginning, it has been controversial, as it couldn't reflect the local heritage to numerous farmers. Moreover, there are different types of cheeses depending on the origin of milk: pure ewe have been preferably located in Pays Basque while pure cow cheeses or mixed ones have been located in Béarn (CAZENAVE-PIARROT, 1985). The pure dairy ewe cheese was considered as top of the range, it was sold at a higher price. The Roquefort Cheese System monopole might have influenced the choice of Pure Ewe cheese in the Ossau-Iraty specifications. Cow milk became a "discount" product (CAZENAVE-PIARROT, 1985) leading to the production of distinct cheeses. In CS, the stake-holders made the choice to conserve ewes as well as goats in Brocciu specifications. More generally, the core of technical specifications has been highly focused on processing recipes. We can see two reasons: a direct one which is the hurry for on-farm processing farmers to protect their know-how from the industrial appropriation (SAINTE-MARIE et al., 1995); an indirect one which is the absence of need for breeding specification from Roquefort specifications and the industries demands during the "Roquefort era".

- **Did the stake-holders succeed in the re-appropriation of their own space through certification?**

In both cases, if the cheeses certifications were initially led by on-farm processing farmers and some cooperatives, their set up were not exclusively devoted to on-farm processing and their success was limited. Within both territories, even though "Société" was in a difficult position with farmers, regarding to its previous reorganization within PA and CS, the firm participated to both certifications. On the contrary, most of the set up industries have chosen a label strategy outside of the PDOs, based on the strong image born by CS ("Corsica", "Fium'orbu", etc.) and born by the Pays Basque within PA ("Etoriki", "Capitoul", "Petit Basque") (RICARD, 1997).

Moreover, some stake-holders have denounced the lack of specifications in the PDOs. To ROGHE (1994), the delimitation of the Ossau-Iraty's area was originally based on the presence of a dairy ewe cheese processing activity and the practice of transhumance by no-land shepherds. However, in the eighties, dairy ewe breeding has gone down the mountainous areas to plain. And in those cases, farmers have applied to the "Roquefort model": dairy ewes have been Lacaune breed and there has been no pasture included in the breeding. Currently, most of PDO-certified farms are located in Pays Basque, the Béarn farmers on whom Roquefort influence had been weaker and for whom such dynamic might not be the solution. Concerning CS, a co-work between Researchers and Professionals has taken 20 years to make evolve the Brocciu from inheritance to "*a process of social construction and the product of such process*" (SAINTE-MARIE et al., 1995: p10). Stake-holders had initially based their product qualification on their common identity: "*Being Corsican, they had recognized each other as co-owners of the Certification, without feeling the need to explicit what it meant in terms of accessibility to the added-value*" (SAINTE-MARIE et al, 1995: p5). It has been a work of construction of coherence around a representative product of different stake-holders, bearing different interests, but this has not been enough. The PDO have been weakened from both sides: the opportunistic ones who are avoiding constraining rules take advantage of the existence of a strong identity image, while the purists don't adhere to such PDO, in which they don't recognize their representation of territorial anchorage.

Discussion

Making the whole coherent

The choice of certification based on a unique product might have led to the polishing of a rich local heritage. While everyone has identified and acknowledged the existence of various types of

products, the reaction of stake-holders in hurry has conducted to the simplification of such panel into one dominant form of product for a while. Béarn has been diluted into Pays Basque through stake-holders strategy (PDO and labels), dairy Cow cheese has been put outside of the certification. This can lead to errors of representations as considering Ossau-Iraty originating from Pays Basque (FRAYSSIGNES, 2001). Similar polishing has occurred in CS. Focusing on Brocciu, every cheese could be processed as a “co-product” leading to the simplification of the range of typed cheeses. Moreover, not distinguishing goat Brocciu from ewe Brocciu led to hiding goat production under ewe production (greater volumes).

The choice of PDO within each territory has been scattered with tensions and conflicts. The decisions that were made regarding PDO’s areas and specifications were subsequently questioned. As stake-holders attempted to re-appropriate their own heritage, basing their action on Roquefort System references (legislative protection of Roquefort cheese and the “confederation”), they have made much time to make the whole sector and the different stake-holders strategies coherent, in a moving territorial context. The date of those PDO implementation states the early stages of their collective learning for renewing links to their territory.

As exposed above, the notion of territory is the result of different processes of appropriations. Beginning with the identity appropriation, we consented that this is the construction of common references for a given community living on a given space. Identity references are “*sensitive and memorial bases on which we build our varied ways to inhabit the world according to different relationships with ourselves and others*” (ORTIGUES, 1989). The identity appropriation not only results of interactions among stake-holders of a territory (construction of territorial reference - FRAYSSIGNES, 2001), but also of their representation of their “neighbourhood” and interactions with it. They defined “identity references” (MUCHNIK, 2009, p8) based on their representation of the Roquefort System and their own common identity (stage of reification). However, to regulate the development of their production system, they were led to construct their own standards and rules (TOUZARD, 2005), making coherence in their own territory.

Construction of autonomy

According to FRAYSSIGNES (2001), the construction of a territory is the result of evolving interactions between space and community, but it is also integrated in a greater environment: its construction is submitted to external forces, mostly economic and institutional factors that operate at a larger scale. If territorial anchorage is built under such constraint, it is also built in regard to other territories. Stake-holders of a given territory have to build their own rule, taking into account their dependence to other spaces.

French dairy ewe sector is a pertinent case of analysis for such demonstration. Historically, the Roquefort Cheese system based its dominance on the uniqueness of the Caves of Combalou and extended its milk collection area around this single place. The whole area of dairy production has become a space of diffusion of its own principles and rules. It seems to have shown a certain autonomy considering the national policy, building its own network within the State (more “equal-to-equal” relationship than “top-down” behaviour). Such configuration underlines the role of interdependences between territories, “apart from” the national institutional context. To make the strokes bolder, we could deal with a “Roquefort cheese microcosm”. As PA and CS used to be part of this microcosm, their SYAL’s trajectories include the building of their autonomy in regards to the Roquefort Empire. Still, the reminiscence of its authority is a fact.

We should not think of references external to the territories to be randomly chosen and incorporated by the stake holders, they are in fact emanating from an historical process and a selective memory. When stake-holders integrate the territory as a part of their identity, they operate a selection of its construction (DI MEO, 1996). They have judged this selection proper to strengthen

a socio-spatial unit, “*the past being rebuilt depending on the need of present*” (FRAYSSIGNES, 2005: p76). In the case of CS and PA in regard to Roquefort Cheese System, their common history created a triangle of references which reciprocity has to be defined. These three systems are currently interdependent and CS and PA use Roquefort Cheese System as part of their history, as a crucial element of their memory, and a current reference that has influenced stake holders’ choices and behaviours.

Conclusion

Literature argues that a SYAL analysis cannot be done without giving importance to the historical factors that led its construction (CAÑADA, MUCHNIK, 2011; FRAYSSIGNES, 2001). Our historical study of the French dairy ewe sector is giving a set of verification for the relevance of such interest. SYAL theorization needs to consider the dynamics of the system and to stimulate the approach of the long term processes at stake in order to better understand the current on-going phenomena.

However, under the influence of economics, this approach often favors the trends in consumption, and their role in the valorization of local production. Without denying the importance of such factors, it appears that this approach restrains the historical dimension of SYALs’ territorial anchorage. We demonstrated that, not directly determined by the market and the consumption trends, local actors arrangements are evolving under proper driving forces with representations, firm networks, professional identities, institution building. We emphasized the construction of territorial resources (such as cheese products in our example), territorial devices (such as PDO syndicates), that become forces able to help in structuring the territory and enhancing the territorial anchorage in a systemic view. The appropriation of these territorial specificities is at stake for strengthening an identity shared by the local actors.

Therefore, a food sector becomes SYAL when territorial elements make a system of it. “*All systems are unstable; their evolution (consolidation/disaggregation) depends on the interaction (force of cohesion or repulsion) between elements in the systems*” (MUCHNIK, 2009: p15). We assume that the interest of an analysis in terms of territorial anchorage considering such characteristics is to embed SYALs as objects in time, in their own trajectory and to embed SYALs in space, in their interdependences - beyond their borders - and in their search for relative autonomy.

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