

[Vaquero Piñeiro, Cristina]  
[[cristina.vaqueropineiro@uniroma3.it](mailto:cristina.vaqueropineiro@uniroma3.it)]  
[Department of Economics, Roma Tre University], [Italy]  
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## **[Spirit of innovation or historical tradition? The complex dilemma of EU policy for renowned products]**

The preservation of origin through the Geographical Indication (GI) scheme has evolved from an EU policy tool for high-quality agrifood products to an instrument of international governance, green transition, and property rights competition. The new 2024 EU Law of GIs aims to strengthen the historical value of such scheme and support its role in indirectly generating socio-economic spillovers at the territorial level. This article analyses the effects of GI EU policy on innovation in the agrifood technological fields at the municipality level over the 1991-2020 period in Italy. While the EU scheme is preserving the essence of tradition, it may impede the adoption of innovative practices, which, according to the EU Green Deal, are considered crucial for bolstering competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience. However, the linkage between products and the region of origin triggers a virtuous circle of informal inter-organizational collaborations and shared values that may spur innovations. Using Propensity Score Matching and Difference-in-Differences models from 1991 to 2020, we analyse how the acknowledgement of GIs impacts the agrifood innovation performance of Italian municipalities. The results show that GIs, overall, do not limit the innovation performance of territories, though there is no significant positive effect on it either. This helps avoid excessive scaremongering about the impact of quality schemes on innovation. Recalling that the primary objectives of the GI scheme focus on preserving traditional knowledge and production processes, rather than supporting innovation, the fact that this scheme did not significantly reduce or hinder innovation can be seen as a positive starting point. This mitigates concerns regarding the potential negative impact of such quality schemes on innovation. In this context, our findings confirm that the place-based and community-led nature of this policies contributes to facilitate development through different channels, even if they could seem contradictory in some cases (tradition vs innovation). The approach to tailor interventions to

territorial specificities may, in fact, led to place-sensitive measures that contribute to generate a fertile socio-economic context that goes beyond the specific aim of the policy.

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