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GI agrobiodiversity products valorization for food systems transition and territorial development

Exploring agrobiodiversity potential for food systems agro-ecological transition for an inclusive and sustainable territorial development is one of the focuses of the evolving international literature and institutional debate. Fostering the recovery, conservation and sustainable use of underutilized or neglected landraces (and related cultural heritage) is being considered as a fundamental element, favouring food systems adaption to: impelling climate and environmental change, social and cultural challenges, and more cohesive rural territories.

Nonetheless, major research efforts are needed to deepen the role of landrace-based GI products for endangered genetic and cultural resources preservation.

Our paper aims at understanding the role of GIs related quality signs and other collective/territorial marks for the recognition, protection, and collective management of GI agrobiodiversity products, and their potential in supporting the development of sustainable agrobiodiversity-oriented food systems (ABOFS).

On a theoretical basis, we build on the socio-ecological systems model for the analysis and characterization of ABOFS by Scaramuzzi et al (2021).

In terms of methodology, a comparative analysis of representative case studies was conducted, involving the localized agri-food systems of three threatened plant landraces cultivated in Tuscany (Italy): the Cherry of Lari, the Maize Formenton Ottofile of Garfagnana, and the Valtiberina Red Onion. A participatory action-research approach (PAR) was followed, involving both public and private stakeholders. Qualitative methods were adopted for the case study analysis, combining secondary data and literature with the results of in-depth interviews and focus groups.

Results show a comparative analysis of the opportunities and constraints that emerge when adopting PDO-PGIs, collective and other specific public marks for the recognition and protection of GI agrobiodiversity products. Specifically, the case study analysis shows how GI agrobiodiversity products can be successfully marketed on both small-scale landrace-based niches and large-scale integrated supply chains. To that regard, limitations in the use of PDO-PGIs are evidenced for low marketable GI agrobiodiversity products, together with the opportunity of creating participatory guarantee systems for small scale productions, or considering national specific public marks for the qualification and market remuneration of custodian farmers conservation activities, even for non-marketable landraces.

Conclusions highlight the essential role of tailored GI collective initiatives for agrobiodiversity enhancement and renewal, adopting different quality signs, territorial marks and other valorization tools in accordance with the level of GI agrobiodiversity products marketability and related ABOFS upscaling potential. At the same time, the possible combination of collective marketing strategies and multi-actoral territorial approaches is valued, in order to allow a fair representation and balanced satisfaction of all the interests at stake.

Our research is expected to corroborate the role of market valorization through GIs related quality signs and other collective tools in agrobiodiversity-oriented food systems transition and inclusive and sustainable territorial development. Significantly, we retain further public and private efforts are needed to sustain ABOFS conceptualization, processes of policy integration, the innovation of quality signs and valorization tools, and the empowerment of local and local stakeholders.

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