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Adapting collective rules of origin to evolving contexts: the role of participative evaluation

Product specifications for GI products (products with a Geographical indication) can be interpreted as an agreement between producers and consumers, where producers define some rules of production, the final product characteristics and the area of production, thus identifying the links between the GI product, the territory and local resources. The effects of the production and valorization of GI products on local economy, society and environment - and therefore the contribution of GI products to SDG goals - are strictly linked to the content of Product specifications.

Evolving socio-economic conditions and changes in the biophysical environment push producers to adapt their production practices and sometimes ask them to amend their Product specifications. Pressures for modifying the contents of PSs may come from the environmental constraints, evolution of markets and in general of the socio-economic context, advances in technological science, and changes in the legal and political framework. Producers can also modify their Product specifications in a more proactive way, in order to better positioning the product with reference to some market segments, introducing new production techniques to lower production costs or strengthening the link with local specific resources.

The evolution of Product specifications clearly affects not only the very identity of the product – therefore affecting trust of consumers in the GI - but also the effects GIs can have on sustainability. For this reason there is a need to elaborate appropriate governance arrangements able to orient the process of GI evolution to the public interest, and not only to short-term economic results. Besides appropriate legal frameworks, able to regulate the amendment process of GIs and give room of participation to different stakeholders, providing stakeholders with appropriate tools supporting participatory, informed and aware decision-making processes is of paramount importance.

This contribution, starting from a reflection on the issue of GI evolution in relation to provision of public goods and providing some exemplary case studies, presents a conceptual framework and a methodology elaborated by University of Firenze and FAO aiming at developing ex-ante evaluations able to support GI stakeholders in their decision-making processes.

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