



# Storytelling in applications for the EU quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs: place, origin and tradition

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## Abstract

**Aim of study:** How are successful applications for quality labels for food and agricultural products written? This research aims to answer this question through the study of the applications for three quality labels within the EU Scheme for Agricultural and Foodstuffs: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG). The research focuses in determining the topics and narratives that describe the link with the geographical area for the two former and the traditional character for the latter.

**Area of study:** Europe.

**Material and methods:** Using a Qualitative Data Analysis, the research analyses 132 products registered on the scheme between January 2016 and April 2019. The researcher categorized a total of 1,724 excerpts and studied the sections on the link with the geographical area for PDOs and PGIs, and the key elements establishing the product's traditional character for TSGs.

**Main results:** Main results offer quantitative and qualitative outputs. They indicate that cultural and social issues make up the half of the story arguing about the products, and natural, space/place and time/history make up the second half in proportions that depend on the type of scheme. Topic and storytelling analyses revealed particular understandings of place, origins and traditions in narratives developing on agriculture, history and knowledge transference between generations. The applicants used socio-economic particularities, regional history, and environmental uniqueness to justify the special character of products.

**Research highlights:** The results give practitioners, policymakers and institutions guidelines and recommendations about how to structure and write their applications for quality labels for food and agricultural products.

**Additional key words:** designations of origin; geographical indications; traditional specialities; food labels; food quality; agricultural products; socio-economic factors; policy making

**Abbreviations used:** EU (European Union); GI (Geographical Indication); PDO (Protected Designation of Origin); PGI (Protected Geographical Indication); QDA (Qualitative Data Analysis); TSG (Traditional Specialty Guaranteed)

**Authors' contributions:** This manuscript has one author who made the qualitative data analysis (QDA) and narrative analysis.

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## Introduction

The European Union (EU) is known as a global agent of food quality policies on Geographical Indications (GIs), the registration scheme that protects the use of specific foodstuff and agricultural product names. In 1992, the European Commission (EC, 2002) introduced Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialities Guaranteed (TSG), and in August 2002 launched a site to register these

labels. There are separate registration systems for foodstuffs, wines and spirits. This research focuses in particular on the first category for which at the start of data collection,<sup>1</sup> the EU had registered 1,448 products in the DOOR database (2019).<sup>2</sup>

The EU regulation states that a designation of origin identifies products that have their origin “in a specific place, region or, in exceptional cases, a country”. The quality of these products is “essentially or exclusively” due to a specific geographical environment with

<sup>1</sup> May 2019

<sup>2</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/door/list.html>, the database was archived in December 2019 and launched a new register called eAmbrosia.

“inherent natural and human factors”. For geographical indications, a product that originates from a specific geographical area, and its quality is also “attributable to its geographical origin”. Likewise, at least one step of the production process must take place in the area (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2012, p. L343/8). On the other hand, TSG is a specific label reserved for distinguishing “a mode of production, processing or composition corresponding to traditional practice” or a product based on “raw materials or ingredients that are those traditionally used” (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2012, p. L343/13). We can illustrate the definitions by considering that Granada Mollar de Elche is a Spanish pomegranate with PDO, Brillat-Savarin is a French cheese with PGI and Traditionally Reared Pedigree Welsh Pork is recognized as a British TSG.

The procedures for applying for a GI label are regulated, and registrations can only be made by “groups who work with the products”, and not by individuals. If the geographical area is contained in a specific country, it is mandatory to address the application to the authorities of the member state (EC, 2014; European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2012, Art. 49). For registration, each country has a list of authorized organizations (see EUIPO, 2017), and every application must use the forms provided. Once the application has been evaluated by the Commission, it can be accepted or not, and there are procedures to contest the decision. Comprehensive instructions about “How to register” are available on the EU public website (EC, 2020), which provides a guide for applicants (EC, 2012). Once accepted and published in the official list, the product name is protected against misuse or imitation within the EU and non-EU countries with agreements in force.

PDO and PGI are considered to be GIs which are largely protected for reasons of the connection between place and product; human factors, know-how and traditional methods; and cultural heritage. Several authors have noted the role of culture, traditions or history in the definitions of GIs (Raustiala & Munzer, 2007; Gangjee, 2012; Belletti *et al.*, 2017; May *et al.*, 2017). But with some exceptions (*e.g.* Marescotti & Belletti, 2016), there is scarce research specifically discussing how these narratives of culture and history are displayed in the definition of these protected figures.

Various approaches focus on EU quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs. A recent systematic literature review of over 501 articles finds that the scientific community has three major concerns: (1) the relationship between consumers and the PGI; (2) the certification of chemical compositions and the authentication of specific products (particularly olive oil and cultivars); and (3) the

relationship between the product and the animal production (specially cheese) (Dias & Mendes, 2018). Research on the EU scheme on GIs has shown that labelling has an impact on consumers and their decisions, and they are even willing to pay more for products under the quality schemes (Menapace *et al.*, 2011; Aprile *et al.*, 2012; Balogh *et al.*, 2016), which increase their trust in quality and procedures (Sepúlveda *et al.*, 2010). However, a cross-sectional analysis of a range of research makes it clear that there is still little evidence on consumer perceptions of labels. Research reinforces the idea of differences of awareness in different contexts (Grunert & Achmann, 2016). Higher levels of PDO awareness are recorded in those countries with more tradition of designation of origin labelling, like France and Italy, than in northern countries like Norway or Poland (Verbeke *et al.*, 2012). A major study argues that the EU certification scheme has many blind spots in terms of visibility, capacity to guarantee provenance and authenticity, and the reliability of inspection and verification (Gangjee, 2017). From this point of view, the certification would need a more technical description. However, this also requires broader collective action, not just that the product be better identified and that there be reduction in procedures and documentation. Likewise, informal institutions need to support and guarantee a more “egalitarian participation across the supply chain” (Gangjee, 2017, p. 21). The issue of reliability is also important in terms of consumer trust and perception of risk. For example, research on PDO Jamón de Teruel, in Spain, demonstrates that the quality label was correlated to the risk perceived by consumers (Fandos-Herrera, 2016).

Other reviews stressed that quality labelling has a positive impact on protection for farmers and consumers, marketing and agricultural development (Bowen, 2010; De Roest & Menghi, 2000; Lima *et al.*, 2016). However, technocratic understandings of PGI is also shown to be a weakness of the rural development goal (Conneely & Mahon, 2015), and intensive trade and international marketing can also produce undesired consequences for the communities (Bowen & Zapata, 2009), as well as producing a static and institutionalized vision of tradition and heritage (Bowen & De Master, 2011). Some of the legal foundations that justify the existence of these labels have been called into question (Hughes, 2006; Raustiala & Munzer, 2007), and it has been claimed that they are becoming mere “marketing tools” and that the future of the schemes relies on a strict “territorial linkage between the products and the terroir from which the products originate” (Calboli, 2015, p. 779).

On average, these GI labels are believed to increase the value of a comparable product 2.23-fold, although for food and agricultural products this increase would be only 1.55-fold (EU, 2017). GI policy also has a positive impact

on intra-EU and extra-EU product commercialization in terms of price and product promotion as has been analyzed for products in general (Raimondi *et al.*, 2019), and specialties like French cheese (Duvaleix-Treguer *et al.*, 2015). Prices associated with PGI labels are higher and more stable as has been noted for specific meat labels (Bardaji *et al.*, 2009b). Although it could be taken for granted that higher sale prices bring better conditions and commercialization, small, rural producers, farmers and producers do not find it easy to get included on the labels (Gaspar *et al.*, 2011; Hajdukiewicz, 2014; Bardone & Spalvėna, 2019). GI labelling can be an effective marketing tool and is appreciated by consumers, but this is no guarantee of a proper impact as a development policy for local and rural communities (Bardaji *et al.*, 2009a).

This article aims to make a highly specific contribution to the scientific literature on GIs by studying the storytelling used in successful applications that link products to their corresponding geographical areas, and describing the weight of individual topics in the overall story about the products. The approach adopted does not claim that behind GI products there is nothing but a story. Prior to every narration there are not just the physical conditions of nature and environment (soils, waters, climate), but also the people, infrastructures, procedures and organizational systems that are crucial to the quality of the products. Neither does the article deny the relevance of scientific studies of organoleptic characteristics or production conditions; they are necessary and all applications must provide the corresponding explanations, not studied here. What the article aims to show is that PDO, PGI and TSG are also organized around stories about culture and society, nature, space and places, and time and history. The main objective is to measure the weight of each topic and to shed light on the sorts of subtopic contained in the official documentation. The results will allow to offer some recommendations for future applicants.

## Material and methods

The method was implemented on a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) platform.<sup>3</sup> QDA permits coding texts and also offers some quantitative figures on the frequency of

the topics within the texts. But qualitative text analysis involves systematically reading, grouping and interpreting quantities of texts, and transcends the limits of a quantitative approach (Altheide, 1996). For the storytelling analysis, we focused on a theme analysis that reflect the complexities of the issue, combined with a narrative analysis (Czarniawska, 1998), that is expressed in a more interpretative section of the stories.

The EU Database for Agricultural and Food Products DOOR (2019) was the primary source for identifying the products and accessing the PDO, PGI and TSG descriptions published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* (OJEU). For operational purposes, the corpus was delimited to the products registered between 1 January 2016 and 30 April 2019.<sup>4</sup> A total of 132 different products were included in the study (87 PGI, 36 PDO, 9 TSG). The products were irregularly distributed among countries with France having the most registrations (23), and Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, Latvia and Sweden the least (only 1 each).<sup>5</sup>

The whole text of the application form was not relevant to the purposes of the study and the research focused on the sections that explain the link between the region and the product in each case. The application forms have room for a more scientific description of the product, which is crucial if the label is to be accepted. The PDO and PGI applications contain a section for “Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff”, where specific particularities of the product can be provided (dimensions, type of feed, sugars, fats, etc., depending on the product.). There is also a section entitled “Concise definition of the geographical area”, which gives details on administrative limits. For the PGI and PDO the focus was the 5th section of the applications, entitled “Link with the Geographical Area”. For the TSG, on the other hand, we focused on subsection 4.3, entitled “Description of the key elements establishing the product’s traditional character (Article 7(2) of this regulation)”.<sup>6</sup>

The unit of analysis was the paragraph, so each paragraph was an excerpt that had to be codified. This decision was taken because the text structure tends to agglutinate a limited list of topics in each paragraph. Therefore, the final corpus for the analysis consisted of 1,724 excerpts (or paragraphs). The excerpts could be coded more than once

<sup>3</sup> Dedoose: <https://www.dedoose.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> The publication date at OJEU may be prior to 1 January 2016. The reason of this range was delimited by the start of the corpus compilation (May 2019) and the capacity of data processing.

<sup>5</sup> That is why when aggregated by countries, we should take in account that the research for these are based in one single product, what can mean quite a number of excerpts but talking about a specific product.

<sup>6</sup> All the applications fulfilled the criteria except in two cases. For ‘Ziegen-Heumilch’ (AT/TSG/0007/02290) the application was jointly published with ‘Schaf-Heumilch’ (AT/TSG/0007/02289), and the second description was the same as the first. The analysis consistently used this second description (OJEU, 6.11.2018, C400/3-C400/10). The second case was ‘Suikerstroop’ (NL/TSG/0007/01203), which used a different structure and section 3.8 to explain “Traditional character of the agricultural product or foodstuff” (OJEU, 19.6.2014, C187/9-C187/13).

if presented several topics. Total number of code applications was 2,801 (1.6 codes per excerpt).

The TSG is a special label because it emphasizes time and history. There are few instructions, but the reference to Article 7(2) of the regulation states that the description of the product should not repeat the technical characteristics. Rather section 4, and particularly 4.3, should describe the key elements “proving the product’s traditional character”, including “elements that remained unchanged” (EC, 2014, p. 39). This regulation (668/2014, Article 3) contains a noteworthy indication that states that “‘traditional’ means proven usage on the domestic market for a period that allows transmission between generations; this period is to be at least 30 years” (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2012, p. L343/8).<sup>7</sup> Overall, this indications and the efforts from national agencies are the aid provided to fill the forms.

The excerpts were coded in the next four parent topic categories, which have the following sub-codes:

- Culture/Society: In this category they are coded all stories dealing with the cultural and social elements of agricultural and food production. The sub-codes were (in alphabetical order): Agriculture/Farming/Fishing, Cuisine/Gastronomy, Customs/Folklore, Economy/Consumption/Commercialization, Education/Science/Research, Language/Naming/Sayings, Laws/Rules/Norms, Media/Popular Culture/Literature, Processing/Handcrafting/Methods, Religion, and Tourism/Events/Fairs/Awards.
- Nature: Stories dealing with natural factors that produced the sub-codes Climate, Soil/Waters, Species/Varieties.
- Space/Place: Excerpts that displayed details on the location (in physical and symbolic terms) and included Geography, Region and Nation.
- Time/History: All the stories about time, history and the past. The sub-codes were 10th-15th Centuries, 16th-18th Centuries, 19th-20th Centuries, 21st Century, and Ages/Civilizations/Generations.

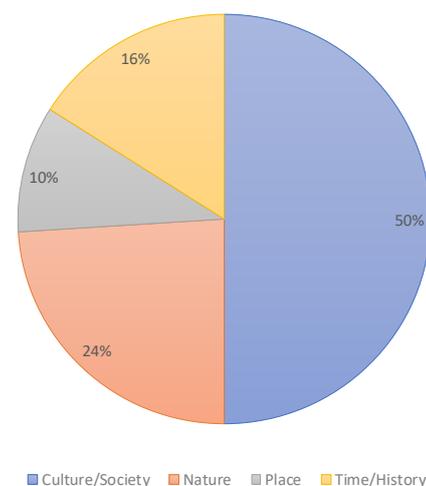
The labels were inferred from the analysis on the basis of grounded qualitative data processing. This means that categories flowed from the text themselves and not preliminary stated. Similar categories were grouped for operational reasons. Coding was successful, although some codes showed interpretative difficulties as discussed later (e.g. Region). After analyzing the corpus, the researcher used the same platform tool to conduct a reliability test of 258 excerpts (0.15 of the corpus), which was based on Cohen’s (1960) kappa coefficient method. The reliability was 0.72. The platform indicators and the literature on QDA suggest that values between 0.65 and 0.80 represent “good

agreement”. Given the aim of the research, the complexity of the code structure (4 codes, 22 sub-codes), the interpretative nature of the codes and the refinement of the boundaries between some of them, the results – particularly of the main four codes – have good reliability.

## Results

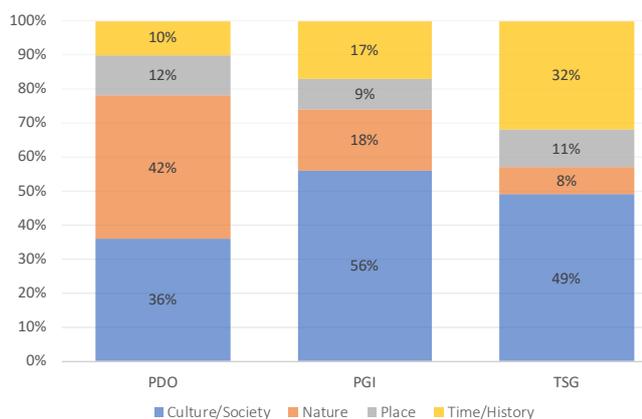
### Topics

Ideally, how should the topics in an application for a quality label from the EU be balanced? Overall, the four main ingredients should appear in a ratio of  $\frac{1}{2}$  for culture/society,  $\frac{1}{4}$  for nature and  $\frac{1}{4}$  for time/history and space/place (see Fig. 1). As explained in the method section, each of the 1,724 excerpts could be coded more than once, depending on the presence of topics, consequently the percentages express the weight over the final code application (2,801). The data evidences that anthropic aspects are majority in the stories, what is evident given the fact that the analyzed sections are devoted to explaining the arguments that ground the links between the products and the communities and regions where they are produced. Figure 2 shows that the weight of Culture/Society vs. Nature changes when the application is for a PDO or for a PGI. For PDO, stories about the specific characteristics of the geographical origin in terms of nature (climate, soils, orography, etc.) are crucial, because labels are given to products “that have the strongest links to the place in which they are made” (EC, 2019). Consistently, Nature weights 42% of the overall story for PDO, followed by Culture/Society



**Figure 1.** Overall weight of topic categories, % per topic (n=2,801)

<sup>7</sup> We should note that the previous regulation of TSG establishes: “‘traditional’ means proven usage of the Community market for a time period showing the transmission between generations; this time period should be the one generally adscribed to one human generation, at least 25 years” (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2006, p. 3).



**Figure 2.** Topic categories per type, % per type (n=2,801).

with 36%. This is also the reason why PDO applications also have the highest number of stories on Space/Place, where they are included also aspects related to geography, orography or landscape.

On the other hand, for PGI, which cover a broader type of product and focus on quality, reputation and other characteristics of the product and geographical origin, cultural and social stories are more important. Here, Culture/Society represents more than the half of the weight with a 56%, meanwhile Nature, with 18%, is almost at the same level than Time/History, with 17%. Curiously, story focused on Space/Place offers the lower weight for PGI with a 9%. A particular case is the TSG label, which highlights historical evidence of the existence of the product or the production process, and references to it in historical documents or media. Here, Culture/Society, with 49%, and Time/History, with 32%, are key elements for the type.

Given the fact that countries are represented differently within the corpus, we should take care interpreting the data in Fig. 3 for those countries with a single product registered within the analyzed range (Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, Latvia and Sweden). Some of them present a long text with many excerpts but the fact that it is only based on one product may question the validity of the data. Three products were ‘Multicountry’. Two are aggregated to the country that submitted the application (Spain and France). The third (‘Istra’, Multi/PDO/0005/01358) was double submitted/aggregated for Croatia and Slovenia. Spain and Germany both have the average presence of culture and society aspects for their products (50%). What is important about the graph is that well-established countries with a wide range of products such as France, UK, Germany, Italy and Spain are the ones whose categories tend to be closer to the average.

A closer look at the figure does not reveal a pattern governed by southern/northern or eastern/western axes. Importance is given not just to the type of GI, but specifically to the type of product. For example, the relevance

of Nature for Ireland and the lack of stories on Culture/Society is explained by the fact that very few excerpts describe just two Class 1.8 products (spices, salts, etc.): Oriel Sea Salt and Oriel Sea Minerals. Both presented almost identical storytelling that focused on water quality and mineral contents.

More meaningful here is the weight of Nature in cases like Croatia and Greece, who have a good number of products with a weight of 37% and 43%, respectively (the average being 24%). In the period 2016-2019, Croatia certificated up to four olive oils (PDO), as well as honey and cabbage, for which natural and environmental issues were stressed. Three of the five Greek products were labelled as Class 1.6 vegetables (artichokes, pulses and dried grapes), and despite being given a PGI they are explained by a long story about soil, climate and environmental factors. The weight of Culture/Society is also noteworthy in the cases of Poland and Portugal, with 65% and 66%, respectively (the average being 50%). In the case of Poland, four of the five products belong to Class 1.2. (cooked, salted or smoked meat) and Portugal was awarded four Class 2.4 labels (bread, pastry, cakes and biscuits, etc.) out of a total of five. All eight of these PGIs underline the exclusiveness of the products due to cultural and social aspects. Finally, we should point out the weight of Time/History narratives in the Austrian and German cases, with 33% and 22%, respectively (average 16%). In Austria, this weight is explained by the type of certification (two TSGs out of three), and although Germany is not so far above the average of 16%, the important presence of Class 1.2 (meat products) and Class 1.3 (cheeses) products tends to put the emphasis on narratives of tradition. We conducted a transversal analysis and a closer look would be needed to define specific strategies in each country.

## Plots

This quantitative picture of topics still needs deeper analysis, which is only possible by a focus on specific storytelling. There are innumerable narratives for each category and the following section tries to highlight the most important. This involves digging further into the sub-code level, and trying to make a comprehensible summary of the qualitative data obtained. We will also illustrate some of the cases with excerpts that are representative of broader stories.

### *Culture and society: a matter of know-how*

Stories articulating the cultural and social issues surrounding the products are dominant. These hegemonic stories are about “Agriculture/Farming/Fishing” (13%) and “Processing/Handcrafting/Method” (13%). The focus of the stories depends on the product type. For example, in

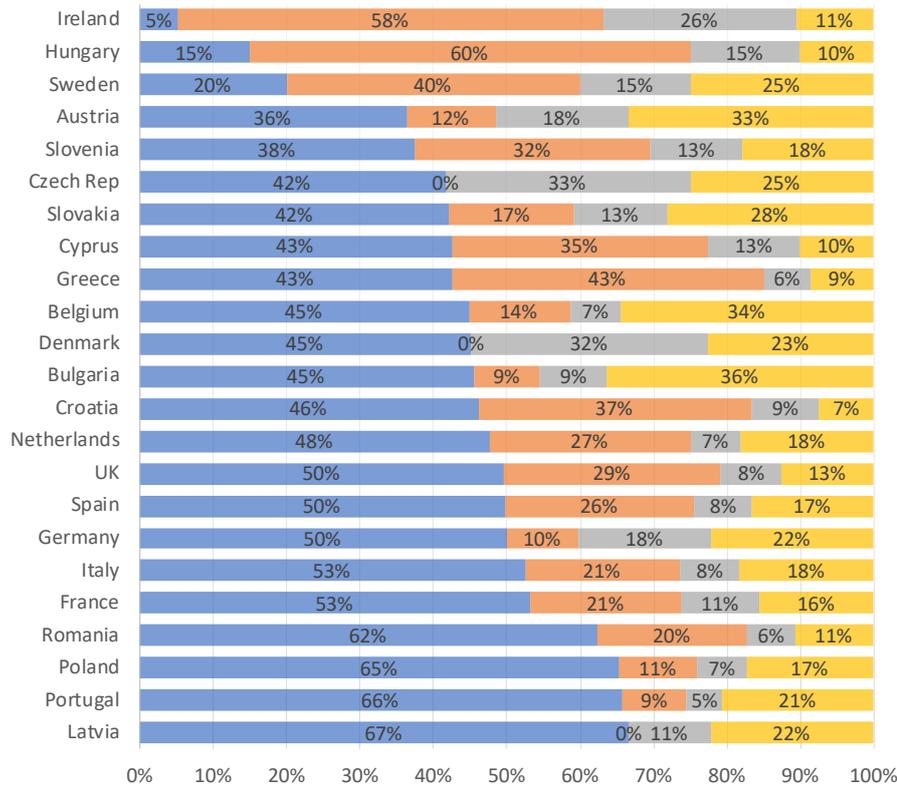


Figure 3. Topic categories per country, % per country (n=2,801)

fresh meat and offal (class 1.1); products of animal origin like eggs, honey and similar (class 1.4); fresh or processed fruits, vegetables and cereals (class 1.6); and fresh fish, mollusks and crustaceans (class 1.7), the stories discuss how animals are reared, specific feeding products or ways of growing, and different types of fishing or extraction are dominant. On the other hand, stories on processed products like salted, smoked or cooked meats (class 1.2); cheeses (class 1.3) and bread, pastries, cakes (class 2.4) or pasta (class 2.7) make constant references to “know-how” or to the traditional way of preparing, processing and obtaining the final product.

Knowledge has been passed down through generations and is sometimes adapted to the economic, social or environmental conditions. Know-how also generates specific language and lexis in the native language. A strong argument is used to highlight the singularity of the cultural, social or natural conditions, as illustrated in Excerpts 1 and 2.

EXCERPT 1. Lička Janjetina, HR/PGI/0005/02179. *The way sheep were raised in Lika differs significantly from the approach used in other similar areas, because in the mountainous areas of the region, under conditions of abundant pasture during the summer and meagre nutrition in the winter, Lika Curly sheep would spend the whole time in the same area* (OJEU, 2.5.2018, C153/12).

EXCERPT 2. Welsh Laverbread, UK-PDO-0005-01188. *‘Welsh Laverbread’ is a unique product made by collecting or ‘plucking’ the laver from the rocks along the coastline of Wales by hand and then cooking the laver with salt and water to make ‘Welsh Laverbread’* (excerpt continues) (OJEU, 17.1.2017, C15/8).

The second group of important topics in the macro category of culture and society focuses on the economy, consumption and commercialization; tourism, events and awards; and media, popular culture and literature, each one of which represents around 4% of the stories. The stories on the first of these topics are very wide-ranging and deal with specific sectors or give economic explanations about traditional products and their quality. They also explain how consumers assess the products, and how they are commercialized. Topics related in some way to the economy, consumerism or commercialization are found in 90 of the 132 products analyzed and they are usually interwoven with the historical development of the region. Excerpt 3 is a typical story expressing this sort of argumentation.

EXCERPT 3. Kiełbasa Piaszczańska, PL/PGI/0005/02154. *From 1825, Kijacy sold their widely-known ‘kielbasa piaszczańska’ at the ‘jarki dominikańskie’ market on*

*Szczepanski Square, and later in their own shops. During the Second World War, and then in the period of the People's Republic of Poland in the second half of the twentieth century, a centrally planned economic system operated in the country. As a result, it was not possible to uphold the traditions of the butchers and Kijacy, since there was no free market. In the last years of the twentieth century, the production of 'kielbasa piaszczańska' was limited to private domestic consumption. However, the recipe and unique taste had been preserved unchanged, and the sausages returned to the commercial market (OJEU, 29.6.2017, C205/72).*

The way in which the products have an impact on the communities is important, particularly in terms of tourism, regional fairs and events, and such cultural activities as traditional markets, competitions and exhibitions with a touristic appeal. The narrative tends to link these events with the popularity, the quality and the prestige of the products, and these events are listed along with prices, awards and international recognitions. Stories about the media, popular culture or literature are also common. Most of them refer to media outlets with the aim of certifying that the product has been in existence for decades, the procedures are age-old, and the name is well recognized and enjoys a well-earned reputation. Here, newspaper headlines are often quoted, sometimes from old issues, and usually from the regional press in order to certify the impact of the product. Media specializing in gastronomy, agriculture or food production are also cited, as are guides and manuals. Some of these references were multiple-coded and mention tourist guides or old literature and media. Of all, particularly engaging were the stories built around writers, television programs, music and, in one case, comics, which recalled popular culture like in Excerpt 4.

EXCERPT 4. Jambon d'Auvergne, FR/PGI/0005/01348. *On a different note, in the eleventh album of the Asterix the Gaul comic book series called 'Asterix and the Chief-tain's Shield', which was published in France in 1968, the authors René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo depicted cured hams hanging from the ceiling of an Auvergne inn to illustrate Auvergne and its speciality foods (OJEU, 8.10.2015, C331/11).*

Other stories on cultural and social issues include aspects related to many other minor, but by no means less relevant, issues. Of these we distinguish two groups: stories about customs and folklore, religion, language, naming and sayings; and stories about education, science, research, laws, norms and rules. Special days attached to religion (e.g. Easter, Christmas) and explanations about

where the name of the product or the region come from are also included. Some of these stories make references to family organization, like in Excerpt 5.

EXCERPT 5. Μελεκοῦνι/Melekouni, GR/PGI/0005/02208. *'The Rhodes Beekeeping Association's book makes extensive reference to 'Melekouni' stating, inter alia, that customs involving 'Melekouni' were a feature of the island's wedding customs. Specifically, in the Maritsá area, on the Friday evening – before the wedding – the parents of the bride and groom would go from house to house and invite relatives to come and help prepare the 'Melekouni', calling out 'come and make melekouni!'. The relatives would bring the ingredients (sesame, honey) and when they had prepared them (toasting, mixing together) they would cook the mixture with the help of a skilled artisan. They would then eat some of the 'Melekouni' they had made and keep the rest for the wedding. Other villages had this custom too (Damatria, Kremastí, Koskinou, etc.) (OJEU, 24.8.2017, C280/9).*

Religion is a minor topic and is only present when referring to religious celebrations. But language and naming can be of particular interest because the Commission, especially for TSG, assesses the evidence that the products are rooted in the local and regional culture. Therefore, there are various examples of applications storying about old names, sayings and even legends in which the product was involved.

The second group of stories on culture and society are much more technical and focus on education and science. As noted, the applications have a section (3. Description of the agricultural product or foodstuff) for technical data about the products (weight, aging, organoleptic characteristics, sugar or fat ranges, etc.), but when it involves added value, the applying organizations give information about educational activities, training and above all, scientific evidence on the quality and specificity of the products.

To sum up, the cultural and social narrative about the product and its link with the region or the local people represents the half of the weight within the stories as a whole. It is a narrative that tries to redound to the uniqueness and singularity in cultural and societal terms. The key stone here is the concept of the community's know-how, knowledge that is narrated as heritage and which is usually a matter of socio-economic adaptation to specific conditions. This sometimes leads to epic stories about the toughness of the communities and how they overcome difficult times (scarcities, harsh climate, orography). It should be pointed out that stories always highlight the qualities of the product or the method without detracting from

those of other regions, and they avoid formulas like “product *x* is better than product *y*”. Any attempt at comparison with other regions resorts to respectfully focusing on the difference (e.g. unlike other regions, in region *x* farming procedures...).

*Nature: uniqueness of an environment*

Nature is the key argument of every story that justifies the link between the products and the region. Some applications are structured in sub-sections and climate, soil and waters, or aspects related to varieties and the biodiversity of the area always precede the rest of the story. It is an structural strategy that can be induced by different guides provided by national bodies as is the case for the French, that recommends to include here aspects related to climate, microclimate, soil, and the like (INAO, 2017, p. 25). The general arguments here are that the natural environment makes the region different and unique. Good argumentations are backed up with data and specific ranges (temperatures, winds, salinity of the water, soil depths, etc.), but avoiding repetition with respect to previous sections. Here the applicants can use food data research, including information about proteins, carbohydrates, moistures, sugar and fat content is given for all the specific varieties of plants, fruits or animals. But data should not be alone, and strong applications are those that relate the data to a story of self-dependence: varieties depend on natural conditions and humans have the knowledge to organize the natural elements and create something unique, special, singular. Nature is on the root of even a singular language with not a translation in order to refer to a specific environment as is illustrated in Excerpt 6. The example evidences that adjectives that do not imply absolute objectivity (cold, strong, extended, main, etc.), are important too, and that a particular concept with a meaning difficult to translate into English (*dehesa*), plays a role.

EXCERPT 6. Carne de Salamanca', ES/PGI/0005/01174. *A continental climate, with long, cold winters and an extended period of frost, hot and dry summers, with strong fluctuations in temperature and rainfall seasonally during the autumn and winter, make the dehesa a species-rich community, characterised by the holm oaks with their leathery, evergreen leaves and bushy undergrowth. Mediterranean-type scrub associated with holm oak, such as cork-oak, oak, gall oaks, and other shrub species, mainly jara, broom, rockrose and gorse, also grow on the grasslands of the dehesa. There are also annual species of grasses and legumes. All this vegetation on the dehesa is the main supply*

*of natural resources for feeding the cattle* (OJEU, 24.12.2015, C435/14).

After Culture/Society, Nature is the most common topic in the stories but, unlike other macro-categories, these narratives are limited to a narrow range of subtopics (mostly Species/Varieties and Climate). The first of these subtopics is sometimes linked to human intervention and therefore double-coded (usually with Agriculture/Farming/Fishing) because the story includes breeding and how farmers select specific varieties. Here, nature and know-how are interwoven. In other cases, the uniqueness of the species or the breed is defined by the variety of the animal itself; a breed that is kept by local growers or that is endemic to the environment. This is the case for the fish Lough Neagh Pollan (UK/PDO/0005/02159), Hännlamb (SE/PDO/0005/01327) or the Basque Pig Kintoa (FR/PDO/0005/02165), among others. The greater the specificity of the variety or breed is, the stronger the narrative is in terms of arguments of uniqueness and speciality.

*Space and Place: geopolitical singularities*

The fact that Space/Place is the weakest category in the story about products is somewhat paradoxical. Part of the explanation is that PDO and PGI applications have a whole section for specifying the “Concise definition of the geographical area” (Section 4). It is in this section that the EC asks applicants to delimit the administrative boundaries where the product is grown, processed or made (cities, regions, provinces, municipalities) in order to avoid misunderstandings. But place and space are also part of the “Link with the geographical area” section, with stories about regions, cities and sometimes other geographical areas (rivers, valleys, coasts). The category was more problematic than others when subcategorized into regions (with stories about geographical areas, provinces, counties and cities) and geography, when the story highlights specificities of the geographical area, including orography, which sometimes required double coding along with Nature (if the narratives concerned climate, soils or waters). The reference to geography is meaningful when the story is about growing or making the product like in Excerpt 7.

EXCERPT 7. Chapon du Perigord, FR/PGI/0005/01377. *This area of Périgord is a large expanse of foothills, generally sloping in a north-east and south-west direction. The numerous water courses created a network of small valleys as, flowing through the area, they encountered obstacles in the form of rocks. These valleys vary in orientation and profile but they constitute one of the major structural elements of the Périgord landscape. Only the valleys,*

*which are alluvium-rich, provide the right conditions for growing cereals. The hillsides, which are often steep and wooded, tend to be used for livestock* (OJEU, 9.6.2016, C205/17).

Stories about region are sometimes interwoven with national references. Here, the sub-code Nation was considered under the umbrella Space/Place, although having other cultural dimensions. It was relevant when a mention of a nation-state centered parts of the excerpts. There is little presence of national issues, which means that PDO, PGI and TSG stories tend to avoid aspects that could activate a nationalist approach. Few of the stories had multiple codes linked to history, European wars, emerging states, border reconfigurations, or national references to varieties, places or products. But the fact that national references are so scarce does not mean that nation has no role. The presence of the nation is alive and banalized (Billig, 1995), taken for granted for well-established nation-states and made more explicit for new countries.

France or Germany are examples of the banalized presence of the nation. Here the simple mention of the department, region or city attach the product to a national imaginary (e.g. Charolais de Bourgogne, Raclette de Savoie, Frankfurter Grüne Sosse, Aachener Weihnachts-Leberwurst). In the UK and Spain, apart from the implicit Britishness and Spanishness embedded in some product names (e.g. London Cured Salmon or Carne de Salamanca), we find mentions of Welsh or Catalan products for Welsh Laverbread and Vedella dels Pirineus Catalans. Other cases are worth mentioning. For example, Istra olive oil was first registered by Croatia but after complaints from Slovenia, it was registered by both countries. Finally, any reference to nation is avoided within the section and the definitive logotype avoided the representation of a geographical map of the region. Previous sections specify that the product has a logotype with a simple change of acronyms for each nation: “There are two versions of the common symbol: a Croatian and a Slovenian one” (OJEU, 17.9.2018, C327/6). The nation is usually in the background in many stories and never explicitly discussed. This is the case of the Bratislavský rožok or Stupavské Zelé from the Slovak Republic, whose stories mention the former Czechoslovakia (OJEU, 19.1.2018 C19/34) and the Croatian “colonization” of Mást (OJEU, 7.1.2017 C5/8), respectively. This is also the case of Polish sausages: Kielbasa Piaszczańska’s story includes a passage about the People’s Republic of Poland (see Excerpt 3).

#### *Time and History: ancient stories*

Stories about time link the communities and regions to the production of foodstuffs. History is present in the

form of specific dates and centuries. To simplify them, they were ordered all codifications into five subcategories. Stories that quote explicit years were grouped in ranges of centuries 10th to 15th, 16th to 18th, 19th to 20th, and 21st. A fifth group was sub-coded for those stories that refer to “ages” (Medieval Age, Roman times, Greeks, etc.). Here, the strong argument is to certify that production and consumption of the protected foodstuff is, above all, ancient.

History and time are relevant for TSG applications in which the traditional character of the product must be argued in historical terms. Most of the stories are rooted in the 19th and 20th centuries, during the age of industrialization and when traditional ways of doing and producing, as well as extensive agriculture, were limited to specific regions, localities and places while industrial food production moved to urban areas and intensive farming developed in the surrounding areas. As seen in Excerpt 8, history is also about individuals or specific traders who were specialists in processing food, which was manufactured and commercialized in particular shops or workshops.

EXCERPT 8. Bratislavský rožok/Pozsonyi kifli, SK/TSG/0007/0056. *‘Bratislavský rožok’ was subsequently made by several bakers in Bratislava. One of the best known was Ágoston Schwappach, whose bakery was founded in 1834 and used to sell poppy seed and walnut horseshoes. Two of the successors to the ‘Bratislavský rožok’ producers Scheuermann and Lauda were the master baker Johann Korče (1851-1919), who was a knight of the Order of Franz Josef, and his son, the master baker Hans Korče. The Korče family was succeeded by Emil Kastner* (OJEU, 19.1.2018, C19/34).

But sometimes the stories go back to very old times. It is a common resource to refer to “ancient times” and other formulas to stress how old the methods, the names and the types of product are. The origins of the products are then rooted at the beginning of humanity, and the first communities to live in the area. There are numerous ways of making this sort of reference using concepts like “immemorial” (Novac afumat din Țara Bârsei, RO/PDO/0005/01183); “from the Middle Ages” (Capón de Vilalba, ES/PGI/0005/01355); “centuries-old tradition” (Fogaça da Feira, PT/PGI/0005/01342); “since ancient times” (Rucavas baltais sviests, LV/PGI/0005/02170); or referring to Roman times (Allgäuer Sennalpkäse, DE/PDO/0005/0897; Istra, Multi/PDO/0005/01358; Telemea de Ibănești, RO/PDO/0005/01182); Greek times (Μελεκούνη/Melekouni, GR/PGI/0005/02208; Korčulansko maslinovo ulje, HR/PDO/0005/01351), the Phoenicians and Tartessians (Mojama de Isla Cristina,

ES/PGI/0005/01211) and even the Bronze Age (Sel de Salies-de-Béarn, FR/PGI/0005/01311). These arguments go long further to the requirement of 25 or 30 years of the existence of products and practices to be considered “traditional”.

## Discussion

What can we learn from these successful applications in terms of storytelling? Before responding, we should point out some of the limitations of our research. The first is that a deeper analysis should be made about how these stories are produced at different levels (shared by farmers, applicants, officers, consumers, etc.), and by different sorts of outlet (tourist guides, on-line accounts, event organization documents, etc.). The second is the size of the corpus and the method. For operational purposes, 132 product descriptions were analyzed in 1,724 excerpts, but these are just a part of the list of products registered under the scheme. Registrations before 2016 may produce a different output in terms of topic weight. And third, the focus on the EU countries influences the understanding of what is considered to be origin, history and tradition, or even geographical area: extending the analyses to non-EU countries would enrich the discussion. Despite these limitations, there are some interesting findings for scholars and practitioners.

The first is the data. The specifications from the Commission say that the description should demonstrate “in what way the product’s characteristics are due to the geographical area and what the natural, human and other elements are which give its specificity” (EC, 2012). As well as describing the methods of production, applicants are asked to give examples of the use of the name “both in the past and in the present”. Finally, they must define the geographical or climatic features that have a direct influence on the characteristics and quality of the product. The subsection must describe the causal link or “how the specificities of the geographical area influence those of the product.” But in what proportion should these topics be included? And which of them are most salient? Our research reveals that half (50%) of the stories of the sections analyzed are devoted to cultural and social issues, while one quarter (24%) focused on nature, and another quarter on time and history (16%) and space and place (10%). This is an initial guide to how to structure these sections in GI applications although which topics are included and in what proportion may vary with the type of label and class of product.

If asked to summarize what the implications of our research are for practitioners, we should stress the following in regards to this section:

- When writing an application for PDO and PGI, bear in mind that culture and society often account for half of the stories on the link with the geographical area of quality label applications. The other half is accounted for by narratives on nature, space/place and history/time.
- PGIs emphasise cultural/social issues, while TSGs add more stories on traditions, history and the artisanal past. Nature is more important to PDOs.
- The type of product is relevant. For example, olive oils, vegetables and fruits stress stories on nature (soils, waters, climate), while processed products (meat, cheese or pastries) give more room to the discourse of tradition and even history.
- The section on the “Link with the geographical area” needs to be carefully structured. Data on nature and science provide a background for more interpretative and anthropic stories on food. The text should quote well established media or scientific publications, but also include the specificity of the human experience in the production and consumption of the products. The overall structure tends to follow guidelines provided to the applicants at European and national level (*e.g.* EC, 2012; INAO, 2017).
- The texts tend to avoid a parochial tone, and explicit national or geopolitical issues. History is a background or context for the traditional story; it is rarely discussed or developed as national or regional conflict. Direct comparisons with other national products are generally avoided.
- The scientific data contained in early sections should not be repeated, but a link with the origins established. The PDO and PGI document requires the section that concerns us to state “how the specificities of the geographical area influence those of the product (causal link)” (EC, 2012). This is where the focus should be, and the storytelling should not be too historical or too focused on landscape and location, or on descriptions of environmental issues.

These are the salient recommendations from the findings of our in-depth study of the most recent applications. Of course, context is always important and other factors may play a role in each country. In this research, we have provided some guidelines but also evidenced that storytelling and interpretative narrations require applicants to use certain well established techniques.

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