



# LABELLING MOUNTAIN FOOD PRODUCTS IN EUROPE

BEYOND THE SIMPLE QUALITY DISTINCTION, AN  
OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN FORCES AND BUILD RESILIENT FOOD  
SYSTEMS

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This thesis is an examination paper for the defence. Referring to this thesis is allowed in scientific publications after written consent from the supervisor, mentioned on the title page.

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# PREFACE

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Mountain regions in the common imaginary are wild and remote territories. Their inhabitants are still often forgotten, left behind and not taken sufficiently in consideration in decision-making processes. What outsiders of those regions do not always realise is the innovative spirit that mountain populations developed. They managed through the centuries to find harmonious solutions to the challenges brought by nature. Mountains as territories of innovation are unique and a source of inspiration for their capacity of resilience.

With this thesis, I wanted to explore how this novel spirit is present in mountain food systems. By looking at it through the angle of labelling initiatives, I tried to understand how the identity of mountains could be translated outside their territories. This thesis is not a recipe book for success but aims rather to inspire mountain food actors to develop initiatives in harmony with their territories. This process is not easy, and collaboration proved to be an indispensable tool for its realisation. Below you will find three texts inspired from my field work that will introduce you with the cases studied in this research:

*Pick one of the small mountainous countryside roads crossing forests and pastures in front of you. As you drive forward, you will see on the horizon herds of cows with red brown and white patches grazing peacefully. Go on until you arrive to the next village. There, look for the local fruitière or the local cheese shop. Ask to try their local cheese, the comté: young or matured, I am sure you will find one at your taste!*

*A mix of ocean, cities and green countryside – that is Euskadi! But of course, you cannot miss the mountains. Spangling the Basque territory, they are home of a myriad of tasty food products. Meat, vegetables, fruits and drinks, they are witnesses of the rich agricultural heritage of the region. Local producers brought them up-to-date and exhibit them with pride. In the local market, the supermarket or in a gastronomic restaurant, you can surely find them everywhere. So, there is only one thing left to be done: “ON EGIN”!*

*Nested in the mountains, there would have been all the reasons to believe that this mountainous country - trapped in between the two genuine cuisines of France and Italy - would not have anything to offer. But Switzerland is a country where local gastronomic specialities culminate as high as its alpine peaks. If not for the language, you'll find unity in the worship of the Swiss people for the delicacies that mountainous agriculture offers them.*

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# ABSTRACT

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Agriculture in European mountain areas plays a key role for society. Farming activities protect landscapes and provide society with vital ecosystem services and agriculture is an integrated part of the livelihood of mountain communities. However, mountain farming is not sufficiently competitive and resilient in the current socio-economic context. Mountain food actors need to bring additional values to their production. Territorial labelling is a strategy they developed in an attempt to overcome this issue. The thesis shows that territorial labelling has the potential to create synergies between mountain food actors and to help better organising food chains. However, if labels manage to convey the values of the products to distant consumers, it is translated differently in the configuration of the actors at territorial level. Thus, the impact of labelling strategies on rural development depends of the representativeness of actors in the initial process and in the decision making.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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AOC	Appellation d'origine controlée
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CEC	Business Chambers of the Emmental and the Comté
CEJA	European Council of Young Farmers
CIGC	Inter-Professional Committee of Management of the Comté
CNAOL	National Council of Dairy Geographical Indication
CNIEL	National Interprofessional Centre for Dairy Economy
COPA	Committee of Agricultural Organizations
EU	European Union
FDCL	Departmental Federations of Dairy Cooperative
FDSEA	Departmental Federation of Agricultural Holders' Unions
FNAOP	National Federation of the PDO
FNIL	National Dairy Industry Federation
FNSEA	National Federation of Agricultural Holders' Unions
GEM	Governance, Embedding and Marketing
GI	Geographical Indications
INAO	French National Institute of Appellation of Origin
JA	Young Farmers
oriGIn	Organization for an International Geographical Indications Network
PDO	Protected Designation of Origin
UAA	Utilised Agricultural Area

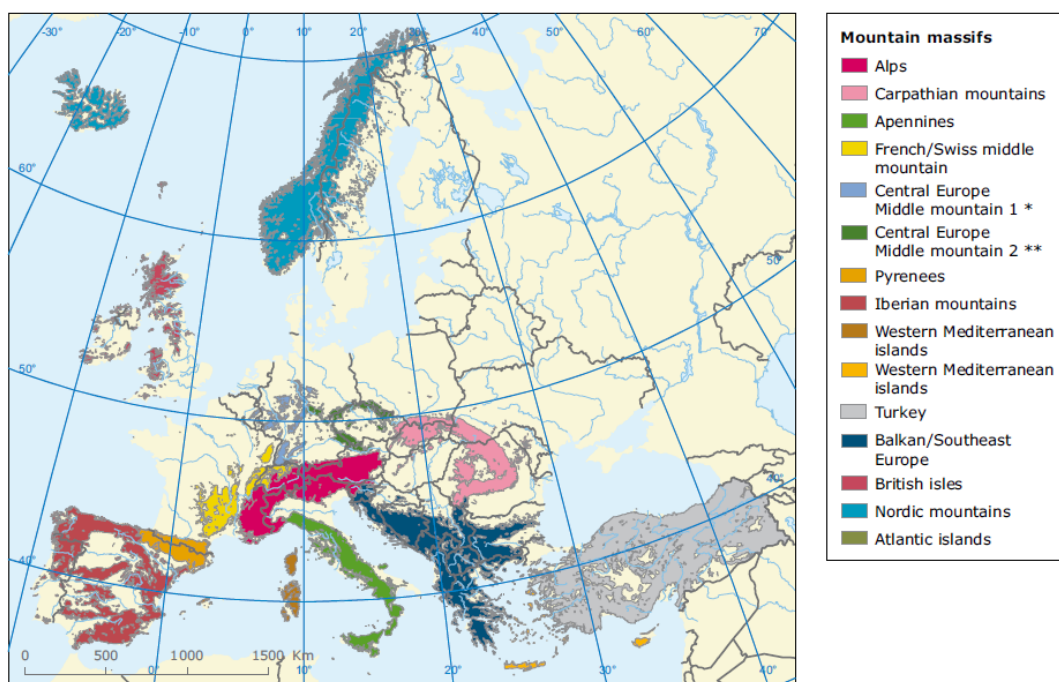
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# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Background

Mountain areas are embedded in European territories. The total area considered as mountains represents 40.6% of the European Union (EU) and the Norwegian and Swiss territories (Nordregio, 2004) and 29% of the EU-27 area (European Environment Agency, 2010). Europe counts several mountain massifs across its territory (see Figure 1). They share a unique environment, characterised by steep landscapes and/or high altitude (European Environment Agency, 2010). These natural constraints have a strong impact on agriculture.



**Note:** \* = Belgium and Germany; \*\* = the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany.

**Figure 1. European mountain massifs. Source: European Environment Agency (2010)**

The sustainable development of mountain areas and the livelihood of mountain communities are closely linked to agriculture. Mountain farming is characterised by a high adaptation to restrictive or localised conditions and by low-intensity farming practices with high environmental standards of productions (MacDonald et al., 2000). Covering a third of the EU-27 mountainous area, these extensive farming practices, known as High Nature Value farming, provide ecosystem services such as the conservation of semi-natural habitats rich in biodiversity (European Environment Agency, 2010). Mountains in Europe are not only providers of vital ecosystem services and public goods for society, they are home to 94.3 million of people (19,1% of the European population) (Nordregio, 2004) and 13% of the EU-27 (European Environment Agency, 2010). At the crossroad between the ecosystem and human beings, agriculture is part of the cultural and economic landscape, shaping the livelihood strategies and the identity of local communities (Mitchley, Price, & Tzanopoulos, 2006).

Yet, farmlands have strongly decreased in the past decades, and forests have taken over the pastures (Cocca, Sturaro, Gallo, & Ramanzin, 2012). The permanence of mountain communities is threatened by the lack of competitiveness of mountain farming (Mann, 2013). The remoteness, the lower productivity together with shorter growing seasons and higher production costs make it difficult for farms to be competitive despite targeted measures in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (European Commission, 2009; MacDonald et al., 2000). If natural and structural constraints preserved traditional practices to the benefit of the ecosystem, mountain farming is not well adapted to produce commodities for the global world. As Hopfkins stated: *“a difficult balance exists in protecting the valued aspects of traditional mountain farming with the needs to ensure long-term competitiveness and a lifestyle for farming families compatible with the 21st century”* (2011, p. 10).

To make mountain food systems more resilient, local actors developed quality-based strategies to bring added value to mountain food products. Generated from a wide range of farming practices across Europe, with a wealth of tradition and know-how, mountain products have been positively acknowledged by consumers (see Figure 2) and products benefit from a marketing advantage (European Commission, 2011). They are of very diverse nature. In the EU, animal products represent the biggest output from mountain areas with 29%<sup>1</sup> from the dairy sector (¾ from cow milk) and 22 % from meat sector (½ from bovine animals). Other products are cereals (9%), permanent crops such as olive groves (7.1 %), vineyard (6.9%), fruit (6.3%; apples, pears, stone fruit and nuts), honey production and various other products (Santini, Guri, & Gomez y Paloma, 2013).

In the beginning of the years 2000s, mountain actors across Europe gathered under EU projects on mountain food products. They first sought to characterise European mountain food products, to be then able to jointly protect and promote them together. The projects were coordinated by Euromontana, the European association of mountain areas, that acts as a lobby organisation and a network for European mountain actors. Mountain products were defined around their specific quality, strongly determined by their geographical origin, as “[...] either unique and non-reproducible products, due to specific breeds or varieties, and/or traditional know-how exclusive to a defined production area, or products with special characteristics solely due to the fact that they come from a mountain environment” (Euromontana, 2005).

In parallel, at policy level, legislations have been adopted to protect the use of the term “mountain” from misuse on the market. Based on Euromontana’s work, the EU introduced the optional quality term ‘mountain product’ in the Regulation No 1151/2012 and the Delegated Act (EU) No 665/2014. To



Figure 2. Diagram of the influence of mountain constraints on the agricultural production. Source: own depiction.

<sup>1</sup> % of total output in mountains areas

comply with the EU optional quality term regulation, mountain products must be produced in an area designed as 'mountain' in the national rural policy of the Member State. In Switzerland, the use of the mountain origin for marketing purpose is protected since 2006 (the Ordinance ODMA RO 2011 2375 is the legislation currently in application). The country went one step further than the EU and distinguishes products made in mountain areas (Swiss mountain product) and products made in the alpine pastures (Swiss alp product). The Swiss government also designed official logos for each term as an additional tool of promotion (Ordinance DEFR RS 910.193).

## 1.2 Problem statement

Despite those recent developments, European mountain farmers still face difficulties in unlocking the marketing advantage of their products. They struggle to get a fair price and to stay competitive (European Commission, 2009). If many development policies are specifically targeting mountain areas in their diversity, tailored and place-based approaches are further advocated to better articulate the implementation of the available policy instruments and to compensate fully for mountainous handicaps (European Commission, 2009; Price, Gløersen, Borec, Dax, & Giordano, 2016). In addition, mountain actors have stressed the need for greater collaboration to create long term synergies in mountain food value chains (EuroMARC, 2009; Euromontana, 2014; SAB, Swiss Centre for Mountain Regions, 2015). Few studies are available on this issue and the mechanisms governing rural and agricultural collaborative initiatives in mountain areas are still to be better understood (Streifeneder, 2015). This research looks at collaboration as a process of spatially bounded and multi-scale interactions that contributes to strengthening mountain food systems and to rural development. It investigates the issue by focusing on the role of territorial labelling in developing synergies between mountain food actors.

## 1.3 Research objectives

Mountain actors across Europe have used a variety of quality labels linked with mountain territories (McMorran et al., 2015). Territorial labelling, also known as place-based branding, serves as a marker of both product quality traits and cultural heritage (Feagan, 2007). It relates to competitiveness of farming enterprises and to the renewed attractiveness and identity of rural territories (Bessièrè, 1998). This thesis aims to get insights on the role labelling strategies play in valorising mountain products, in organising mountain food actors collectively, and at wider level on their contribution to rural development. To do so, the first objectives of the research are to define the research questions based on a literature review of studies related to labelling, quality and territorial embeddedness in agro-food systems. The next objectives are to identify and categorise the social mechanisms governing territorially embedded labelling initiatives in an in-depth case studies and to see how they are reflected in other cases. Drawing from the analysis, the conclusions help to assess the potential of territorial labelling in mountain food chains for rural development and give insights to Euromontana and mountain actors for the development of future actions of valorisation of European mountain products.

## 1.4 Thesis outline

Chapter 2 develops the concepts behind the development of synergies between actors in territorial food labelling. The theoretical framework builds upon both English and French-speaking literature and serves as basis to define the research questions and to further analyse and compare the selection of studied cases. Chapter 3 details the methodological approaches adopted for the research. Chapter 4 presents an in-depth analysis of a territorial labelling initiative. Building on the rich literature on this value chain and on collected data, the research looks both at the current configuration and at the interactive processes between actors involved in the initiative. Chapter 5 steps back to compare and put in perspective different labels in Europe built around mountain territories. Chapter 6 closes the thesis by discussing the data and concluding on the outcomes of the research.

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# CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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Drawing upon a literature review, this chapter introduces the theoretical concepts explaining the social processes at play in labelling initiatives, defines the research questions and presents the analytical framework that will be used for this research.

## 2.1 Theory

### *Quality-food systems, territorial labelling, and rural development*

Territorial labelling is a strategy for quality food systems to build market for their products outside conventional supply chains (Higgins, Dibden, & Cocklin, 2008). A variety of terms have been used to characterised quality food systems including short supply chains, alternative food networks, local farming systems and direct sales (Kneafsey et al., 2013). The literature contextualised the shift from productive to quality-driven systems (*turn to quality*) in the specific histories and networks of territories characterised as processes of re-localization (Murdoch, Marsden, & Banks, 2000; Renting, Marsden, & Banks, 2003; Watts, Ilbery, & Maye, 2005). This *alternative geography of food* has been theorised as the emergence of a new rural development paradigm in response to globalisation (Parrott, Wilson, & Murdoch, 2002).

By labelling their products, farmers reach consumers beyond the local level in what Marsden, Banks, & Bristow called *spatially extended* short food supply chains (i.e. “where value and meaning laden information about the place of production and those producing the food is translated to consumers who are outside of the region of production itself and who may have no personal experience of that region” (2000, p. 426)). As such, labels are tools for food actors to communicate to consumers a compliance to a set of criteria or standards. Together they form a sort of identity cards for the product and help consumers to assess its quality and make a better-informed purchase.

Standards may address different dimensions of quality such as food safety, product conformity, a provenance but also may ensure production methods that are fair or respectful of nature. Standards are of multiple forms depending of the compliance requirement and who is behind the labelling initiatives (see Figure 3). When the compliance is mandatory, it means that products to be marketed must meet the standards requirements. When voluntary, the standards are willingly added to the product as an additional sign of quality (Henson & Humphrey, 2009).

	Public	Private
Mandatory	Regulations	Legally-mandated private standards
Voluntary	Public voluntary standards	Private voluntary standards

Figure 3: Forms of standards. Source: Henson & Humphrey (2009, p. 5)

To ensure that standards are enforced, certification and labelling schemes are indispensable (Hatanaka & Busch, 2008). Standards constitute both a frame and an indicator of chain organisational mechanisms and market relations (Busch, 2000). In the process of qualification or quality certification of a product, actors define together the specification of production practices and/or product characteristics (Tregear, Arfini, Belletti, & Marescotti, 2007). As such quality is socially constructed and is constantly renegotiated to better reflect the relation between the various actors in each food chain (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 2000; T. K. Marsden & Arce, 1995).

The literature on qualification processes is grounded in actor-network and conventions theories. Actor-network theory stresses the role both natural and social entities play together in creating agency and collective capacity, while conventions theory perceives the establishment of quality as a system of negotiation between specific qualities (Murdoch et al., 2000). These theories were conceptualised in two notions: territorial embeddedness and regulatory space. In the two following parts, I introduce each of them and explain their relevance for the research.

### *Terroir and territorial embeddedness*

The concept of embeddedness originally appeared in economic sociology. It seeks to question the neoclassical economics assumption that markets are governed rationally by analysing the influence of the web of social relations on economic interactions (Hinrichs, 2000; Granovetter, 1985; Polanyi, 1957). Sonnino and Marsden (2006) conceptualised embeddedness in an analytical tool to study food networks through different scales. Beyond the social perspective, they considered the economic, environmental, cultural, and political dimensions of the quality food systems. Embeddedness is then considered at meso level:

- The *horizontal dimension* of embeddedness calls on the local conditions and agency of network actors, i.e. how social actors “actively create new platforms of action and actor-space through new discourses of competition and trust, negotiation and quality” (Sonnino, 2007, pp. 64–65)
- The *vertical dimension of embeddedness* reflects the “wider institutional and governance system in which food networks carve and maintain their space” (Sonnino, 2007, p. 64).

Embeddedness is a dynamic process and quality food systems are the result of “a complex interplay between embedding and dis-embedding forces” (Sonnino, 2007, p. 62).

Embeddedness echoes the concept of terroir, where the territory is then seen a construction stemming from a tight interaction between natural and social dimensions (Murdoch et al., 2000). The French concept terroir was used extensively in the French literature to analyse the link between agricultural systems and their relationship to a specific territory (Bowen & Mutersbaugh, 2014). It was also an important notion in the development of the French *appellation d’origine contrôlée* (AOC), which was later used as model of reference to design European Union labels of origin (Barham, 2003). It embraces

the notion of place in its whole, linking biophysical (local ecosystems and biodiversity) and cultural (specific know-how and social norms) elements to the making of typical food products (Bérard et al. as cited in Bowen & Mutersbaugh, 2014).

### *Regulatory spaces*

Territorial labelling goes beyond a marketing instrument, it can be viewed as a “regulatory mechanism animated by a complex governance in which a great variety of actors pursue diverse interests” (Mutersbaugh, Klooster, Renard, & Taylor, 2005, p. 1). Regulatory spaces or frameworks constitute the structure governing qualification processes and where food actors organize themselves together. It is composed of the supply chain, where production and trade take place and an institutional dimension, made of the rules governing the organisation (Allaire, 2002).

In territorial labelling, quality is negotiated in tension between the sector and the territory (Allaire, 2002). Qualification is a reflexive and continuous negotiation of quality between heritage and innovation (Allaire, Casabianca, & Thévenod-Mottet, 2011). It requires both a structural stability to build a collective reputation and a strategical flexibility to adapt to the evolution of the external context (public institutions and market) (Allaire & Sylvander, 1997).

The reputation of a product is owned collectively by the actors of the chain and managed around rules established within the regulatory space (Torre, 2006; Allaire, 2010). Standardisation, codification, and institutionalisation of the production system are formally negotiated between the actors of the production chains and with the external actors. However, it also comprises informal rules that frame the social organisation holding the chain together. They are based on shared knowledge, values and trust (Allaire,

Harvey, & McMeekin, 2004).

### *Interactive processes*

Each quality food system is unique by its degree and quality of embeddedness (Murdoch et al., 2000) and by its regulatory space (Allaire, 2002). However, a strong and efficient coordination between actors appears to be a common factor impacting on the success of the qualification initiative (Bowen, 2010). It constitutes both a condition for the success of the product qualification and a result of the process (Barjolle & Sylvander, 2002). Bahram (2003) explains that in the making of an economy of quality, qualification requires compromises and calls for the domestic and civic conventions, which stands for trust and collective interest.

Tregear & Cooper (2016) studied how actors collaborate within cooperatives and how they find compromises together. They analysed collaboration using both the concept of social capital (see Putnam and Fischer) - with the bounding (rich internal social relations) and bridging (multiplicity of connection with the exterior) processes - and embeddedness. They argued that cooperation is possible when the network of actors is not overly embedded at local level and when key actors facilitate collaboration by taking over the role of ‘boundary spanners’, in charge of making connections between internal and external networks (see Oreszczyn et al.).



## 2.2 Research questions

Based on the literature review, I could identify the following research questions to answer the objective of the study stated above (see Research objectives).

How do territorially embedded labelling initiatives in mountain food systems construct and renegotiate regulatory spaces across different scales?

- What are the territorial processes through which mountain food networks construct regulatory spaces?
- What are the regulatory processes within mountain food chains which construct regulatory spaces?
- What are the interactive processes which renegotiate regulatory spaces within mountain food systems?

## 2.3 Analytical framework

To unfold the mechanisms that come into play during processes of construction and renegotiation of regulatory spaces, I choose to use the Governance, Embedding and Marketing (GEM) Framework from Roep & Wiskerke (2012) that echoes the theoretical concepts described above.

The GEM-framework was inspired from the actor-network theory and was built as a reflexive tool to analyse critical moments in the construction and renegotiation of a food supply chain. Roep & Wiskerke (2012) argued that sustainability was rooted in strategic choices regarding governance, embedding and marketing and in the coordination of these three interrelated dimensions. Because of this inextricably interrelation, they need continuous rebalancing. The framework recognises that sustainability initiatives differed in many regards and that the initial support received by public and private actors impacts on the three interrelated dimensions.

Applied to our focus of study (i.e. territorial labelling), the interrelation between the GEM dimensions shapes the regulatory space where actors negotiate quality (see Figure 4). The governance dimension addresses both the structure and the process in which actors organised themselves and is similar to the vertical embeddedness of Sonnino & Marsden (2006). Whereas the embedding (i.e. the use of local resources, the involvement of local actors and the representation of those characteristics in the product specification) can be assimilated to the horizontal embeddedness (see part on Terroir and territorial embeddedness). The marketing dimension refers to the link with the consumers and addresses both strategic and operational aspects.

In the analysis, I chose to address the embedding dimension first and then to analyse how it is reflected in the governance. The marketing dimension only comes in a second time when looking at how different labelling initiatives of mountain food products co-exist on the market.

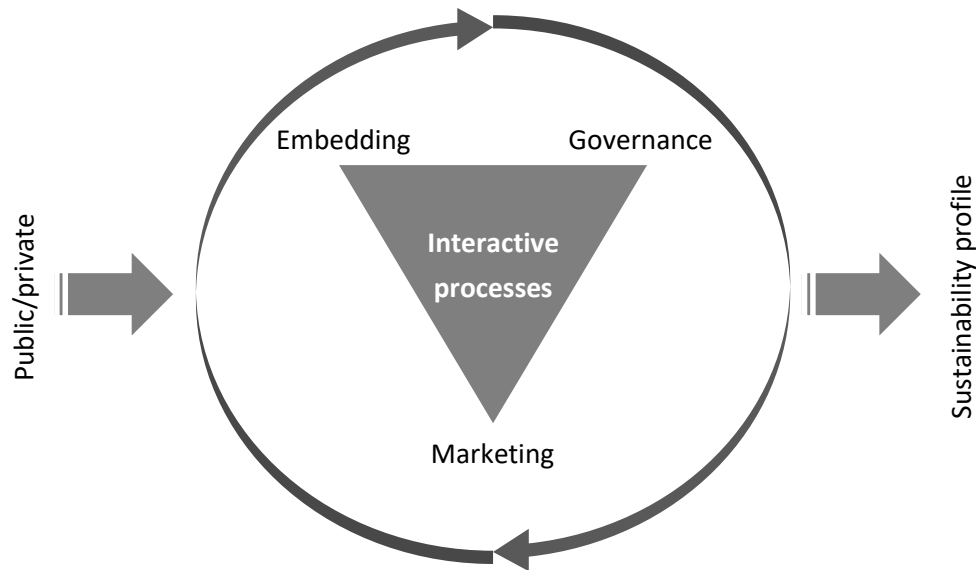


Figure 4. GEM Framework used as in the research. Source: adapted from Roep & Wiserke (2012).

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## CHAPTER 3. METHODS

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This chapter introduces the methods used for the study of territorial labelling in the specific histories of European mountain territories.

### 3.1 Case-study

Based on the theoretical framework, I choose to conduct a case study. The case study is explorative in the sense that it aims to identify and unfold processes and can be defined as *“an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units. A unit connotes a spatially bounded phenomenon.”* (Gerring, 2004, p. 342). In this research, the unit is the regulatory space constructed and renegotiated in tension between the territory and the food chain. The phenomenon is territorial labelling. Gerring stated that *“the in-depth analysis of a single unit is useful in elucidating causal mechanisms because its characteristic style of evidence-gathering – over-time and within-unit variation – is likely to provide clues into what connects a purported X to a particular Y”* (Gerring, 2004, p. 349). Therefore, for this research I chose to study the phenomenon of territorial labelling in two steps.

Firstly, I look in-depth at the regulatory space of the Comté PDO (Protected Designation of Origin), a historical labelling case of mountain food product (1958). After presenting the current configuration of the Comté chain regulatory space, the research documents within a ten-year period (from 2007 to 2016) interactive processes that shaped the regulatory space of the selected case. It looks at the variation of the regulatory space in *a single unit over time*. This first step allows us to gain an understanding of the mechanisms that came into play during key events and how those events influenced the regulatory space.

The analysis goes then one step back and compares the precedent initiative with two more recent labelling strategies, the Basque Eusko Label (1989) and the Swiss brand Pro Montagna (2007). Based on the analytical framework, the cross-case study consists in evaluating on what points the different regulatory spaces differs and then in unwrapping the role labelling strategies play in mountain food chain. Thus, to apply the GEM-framework, I chose to analyse as critical moments, the creation of the different labelling initiatives and/or to explore the current challenges they are facing. This *across-unit* study helps take some distance from the first case and resituates it within the overall European mountain territories. The choice of comparing cases provides a greater external validity and gives some broadness to the study.

## 3.2 Cases

### Case selection

I developed the study during my Master internship at Euromontana, which provided me with a direct access to current initiatives of mountain product valorisation. With the help of the members, I could identify the above-mentioned cases of territorial labelling within European mountains regions (see Figure 5). The main criteria of selection were to display a diversity of regulatory spaces. Because of the resources available for the study and considering the access to field, the research focuses on Western Europe. Therefore, the results of the analysis are not representative of the European mountain territories in their whole, which limits the scope of this explorative study.

### Case description

#### The comté PDO

The comté cheese from the Jura mountain range in the east of France received the French *appellation d'origine contrôlée* (AOC - now equivalent to PDO at EU level) in 1958. The label is managed by the Inter-Professional Committee of Management of the Comté (CIGC). The CIGC was created in 1963 but the origin of the comté chain can be traced back up to the Middle Age.

#### Eusko Label

Eusko Label is managed by the Basque foundation Hazi, which is the technical body of the regional government of the Basque Autonomous Community, a mountainous area in the northwest of Spain. The Eusko Label was created in 1989 by the Basque government. It protects 16 products produced, processed and/or prepared in the Basque country and recognised of superior quality.

#### Pro Montagna

The brand Pro Montagna of the Swiss cooperative retailer Coop was created in 2007. Coop, with a turnover of 26 932 million CHF (2015), is the second biggest retailer in Switzerland. Pro Montagna products must be produced and processed in the Swiss mountain areas and comply with the legislation relative to Swiss mountain terms. They are distinguished between mountain and alpine products. Pro Montagna product range counts currently about 240 products.



Figure 5. The labels and their territory. Source: own photographs.

### 3.3 Data collection

The qualitative analysis is based on the internal and external documents of the organisations governing the labels (official reports, working documents, PR, etc.), on key informant interviews and on participant observation. The interviewees were selected both through targeted and snowball sampling. This provided triangulation of the data through their source and their methods of collection.

In more details, for the comté PDO case, I went to France-Comté in June 2016 (from June 5<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>). There, I was received by a comté farmer, who was also at the time the FNSEA (National Federation of Agricultural Holders' Union) representative of Euromontana's board. In the first days of my research I stayed at the headquarters of the CIGC in Poligny where I had access to the minutes of the board meetings and general assemblies. I could also talk with the director. During this time, I was hosted by a young comté farmer in a neighbourhood village that introduced me with his personal farmer network. With those contacts, I could for the remaining days of my field work visit farmers, CIGC representatives and other key actors involved in the comté PDO. Because I could not meet everyone during my short time there, I also had phone conversations with some of them. In total, I had eleven in-depth interviews with actors of the comté PDO. To prepare my field trip, I read relevant literature studies on the social organisation of the comté PDO actors. Afterwards, based on the collected information I identified informative key events within the 10 last years as explained above. To triangulate my data, I studied the forty publications of the quarterly internal journal of the CIGC 'les Nouvelles du comté', where in each new publication the CIGC president addresses the current challenges. I carried further an in-depth literature review of the studies of the organisation of the comté PDO actors. The unique and novel organisation of the comté chain received a lot of attention from scholars in France and abroad. Sarah Bowen (2011) particularly paid a close look at the territorialisation of embeddedness (horizontal and vertical) in the chain. Using her study as baseline, the results build both on the previous knowledge and the data collected during the field trip to illustrate the current regulatory space of the comté PDO.

For the study of the Eusko Label, I was in the Basque Country (from June 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> 2016). HAZI, the organisation managing the label, is chairing Euromontana's board. This allowed me to have direct access to the field. During my field trip, I was received by the manager of the Sectoral engagement, marketing & promotion team (in Spanish *Área de Dinamización Sectorial, Comercialización y Promoción*), which interacts on a daily basis with the different actors involved in the Eusko Label. She organised for me the visit of seven food chains marketing different products certified under the Eusko Label. The field trip also gave me the opportunity to interview representatives of those chains and the five staff members of the team of Sectoral engagement, marketing & promotion. During my stay in the Basque country, HAZI also provided me with working documents and publications regarding the Eusko Label.

As for Pro Montagna, I established a first contact with Coop employees in charge of Pro Montagna marketing during a study day in November 2015. The symposium was organised by the Swiss Centre for Mountain Regions (SAB), a board member of Euromontana. and addressed the topic of valorisation of mountain products in Switzerland. However, Coop responded negatively to my demand to visit them for a field trip. Due to time and resource constraints, I was not able to make myself the steps to

approach directly food chains marketing their products through Pro Montagna. Thus, the data was only collected from the study day, external publications of Coop on Pro Montagna and literature reviews on studies of Swiss food chains marketing their products through Coop. Despite the lack of access to the field, the data still provided interesting information that could add a different perspective to the study. Yet, to mitigate the uneven data, the research design considered these limitations and the comté PDO was selected for the in-depth analysis considering the lifespan of the comté chain and the rich literature available on this case.

As for ethical considerations, consents from the organisations governing the labels and from the actors interviewed were expressively asked before conducting the data collection. The objectives and uses of the research were openly stated beforehand. Also, because of the access to potentially sensitive and confidential information, I signed a confidentiality agreement with the organisations that received me (see Annexe).

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# CHAPTER 4. IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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This chapter presents the results of the in-depth analysis of the comté case. First, it looks at the current embedding and governance dimensions in the chain using the GEM-framework and then it analyses key events that triggered interactive processes within the past 10 years using the AFSSA framework.

## 4.1 The comté (PDO)

The comté cheese originated from the Jura Mountains, a sub-alpine mountain range located in north of the Western Alps and straddling France and Switzerland. It is made from the milk of two regional breeds, the Montbéliarde and the French Simmental. The history of the chain can be traced back to the Middle Age. Some dairy farmers of remote mountainous hamlets organised themselves together to process the high quantity of summer milk into cheese and survive the winter (Fumey & Bérion, 2010; Mélo, 2015). The tradition remained until nowadays and the actors of the chain organised themselves to adapt to the evolution of society. In 1963, the CIGC (Inter-Professional Committee of Management of the Comté) was established as the official organisation in charge of protecting and marketing the comté PDO.

Today, the area of production expanded beyond the Jura Mountains. It includes the departments of the Doubs and the Jura situated in the traditional province of Franche-Comté and the north of the Ain department. It represents an important income source for this territory<sup>2</sup>. The comté is only partially sold in its territory of origin in local cheese shops. A large share is sold outside the region of production and 8% is sold in foreign countries. As such the comté has to compete with the rules of the global food market. In 1958, the comté cheese received the French quality label AOC (*appellation d'origine contrôlée*). With the evolution of the European regulations, it bears now the EU quality scheme PDO (protected designation of origin), which protects its specificity at European Union level. The label applies for more than 60,000 tons produced annually (64, 179 T in 2014<sup>3</sup>), the biggest tonnage for a PDO cheese.

To characterise the different aspects of their food systems, the comté actors created their very own terminology, which will be explained as they appear in the study.

### *Embedding*

Bowen characterized the comté chain by a “strong sense of collective engagement and a co-operative spirit among supply chain actors, which were invoked again and again as comté’s defining characteristics” (Bowen, 2011, p. 331). The CIGC, as interprofessional organization, is guardian of the cohesion between actors and “prioritise their common goals (the quality of the product, the link to terroir) over their individual interests” (Bowen, 2011, p. 332). The CIGC is chaired by four ‘collèges’ or groups of actors organised according to the function they hold in the chain. The dairy farmers are

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<sup>2</sup> For the numbers, see *Le Comté, l’emploi et l’espace rural, Les nouvelles du Comté - journal d’information du CIGC n°61, Hiver 2008* pp 2-6

<sup>3</sup> Data extracted from the CIGC website <http://www.comte.com/>

organised in 'fruitières', which are the farmer cooperatives where the milk is put in common and processed by their 'fromager' or cheese maker (3, 200 dairy farmers for 169 fruitières in 2011 (Bowen, 2011)). The traditional function of the 'affineurs' is to ripen and marketing the cheese. However, since the 90's some fruitières do not process their milk themselves and sell it directly to the 'affineurs' (Jeanneaux, Callois, & Wouts, 2009; Torre & Chia, 2001).

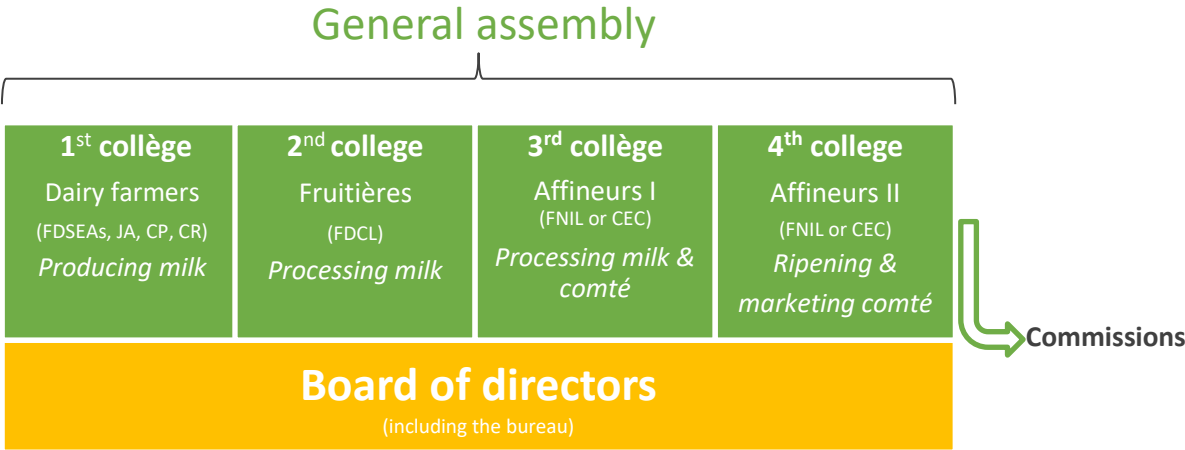


Figure 6. Configuration of the general assembly of the CIGC. Source: own depiction<sup>4</sup>

The CIGC's general assembly is constituted by the organisations representing the actors of the comté chain (see brackets in Figure 6). Representatives of the different collèges are the direct bridge between the CIGC and the category of actors they are representing. The collèges meet once a year during the general assembly. Their representatives also preside over the six commissions that corresponds to the priorities of the CIGC: advertisement, information, economy, technologies and research, quality control, export. Among the elected representatives of the colleges, the CIGC board of directors (16 members) is later electing. It includes the bureau (president, two vice-presidents and a secretary-treasurer). The board meets once a month to discuss the current evolutions and take all decisions after unanimous agreement between the four collèges.

If the CIGC is the official interprofessional organisation governing the comté PDO, the fruitières have remained from the Middle Age the cooperative core of the comté production. As it was referred in 'Les nouvelles du Comté' n°55:

*"the fruitière is the symbol but the cooperation stays the tool" (CIGC, 2006a, p. 3).*

One of the interviewed farmers explained that a particularity of the comté chain was the tight proximity between the farmers and their cooperative. The fruitières are formally established as cooperative and are organised around their board, elected among their farmers. The role of the fruitière' presidents is particularly valued for bringing farmers together. Another one portrayed the presidents as 'bon père de famille' (i.e. a good family's patriarch) and listed the leadership skills they must have: capacity to bring cohesion, sense of diplomacy, strategic and long-term vision, ability to

<sup>4</sup> Including the FDSEAs: Departmental Federations of Agricultural Holders' Unions, the JA: Young Farmers, the CP: Confédération Paysanne (Peasant Confederation), the CR: Coordination rurale (Rural coordination), the FDCLs: Departmental Federations of Dairy Cooperatives, the FNIL: National Dairy Industry Federation and the CEC (Business Chambers of the Emmental and the Comté).



reach compromises, feeling of the terroir. But this important role brings along additional responsibilities and workloads for the farmer taking over this function. The interviewed farmers recognised that the president’s role was undervalued and would deserve to be financially compensated (Author’s interviews, 2016). Farmers also stressed the important role played by the presidents of the FDCLs (departmental unions of the dairy cooperatives). Farmers valued their ability to bring farmers together beyond their political affiliation and safeguard their cooperative spirit of the comté chain, (Author’s interviews, 2016). When asking the presidents of the two FDCLs about their challenges, beyond the technical knowledge, they explained that it was a constant struggle to find the good balance between innovation and heritage and to communicate about the risks faced by the CIGC without the information to be misinterpreted (Author’s interviews, 2016).

In the 90’s, a phenomenon of concentration of the fruitières started and today the configuration of the fruitières varies significantly within the chain. According to a study of Jeanneaux, Callois, & Wouts (2009), one cooperative in three disappeared in 15 years (1990-2004). The authors established that to increase their competitiveness, the fruitières reduced their production costs by increasing the quantity of milk processed in ‘fromage en blanc’ (pre-ripened cheese) of 75%. They reached in 2004, an average of 3,2 million of milk litres from about fifteen dairy farmers. The concentration was facilitated by the lifting of the obligation to bring their milk twice a day to their fruitière during the ‘coulée’. A milk truck was henceforth collecting directly the milk on the farm which allowed the fruitières chose to extend their collection areas. However, farmers claimed that the coulée was an important moment of cohesion, which provided farmers with the occasion to meet, exchange the last news and control the milk quality (Author’s interview, 2016; Bowen, 2011). Nevertheless, farmers are still bound together by the historical tradition to mix milk from different herds and farms for the comté production. This works as an important incentive to maintain this cooperative organisational structure.

Jeanneaux et al. (2009) identified another substantial change that occurred in the past 25 years: the arrival of large national dairy groups (Entremont and Lactalis) in the comté chain through the purchase of fromageries (regional industrial dairy factories and family-own ripening workshops (see Figure 7)).

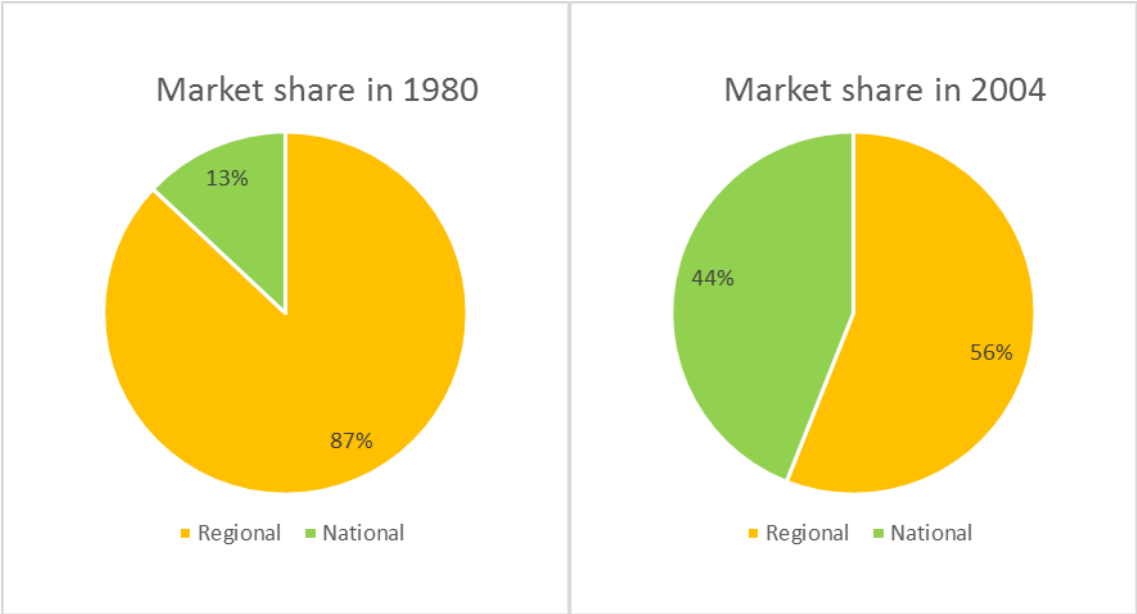


Figure 7. Evolution of market share from 1980 to 2004 according to Jeanneaux et al. (2009). Source: own depiction.

However, they established that in overall it did not harm the principle of coproduction, the distinct roles that each actor plays in the chain. Joining the comté PDO, the new comers accepted the 'industrial compromise' of buying to the fromagères the milk processed in fromage en blanc. Several scholars also established in previous studies that "because of their shared interests, relationships between the two groups have been remarkably stable, as exemplified by Jeanneaux, et al. (1999) finding that very few co-operatives changed affineurs from year to year" (Bowen, 2011, p. 335; see also Torre & Chia, 2001). Based on the mutual recognition of the coproduction, the comté chain shares collectively the added value obtained on the final product between production and market. This system of distribution of the economic rent granted farmers with a milk price up to 25% above the national average (Jeanneaux et al., 2009). In my interviews, farmers unanimously acknowledged the work of the affineurs explaining that the ripening stage was essential in revealing the wide range of aromas specific of the comté. In that respect, they were seen as the guardians of the differentiation and valorisation of the cheese and were granted with a pivotal role for connecting the chain with the outside (Author's interview, 2016).

The word terroir is central in the identity of the chain. It is frequently used by all actors to describe the link between the organoleptic qualities of the comté and the territory. From farmers to affineurs, all actors asserted the importance that cows have to be fed with grass for the comté aromas to reflect the biodiversity of the local pastures (Author's interview, 2016). Bowen further explained that the idea of terroir goes beyond biological elements to include culture practices and shared knowledge of the farmers (2011). This collective belief was particularly emphasised in one of her interviews with a fromager:

*The terroir – is what the cow eats. For example, summer cheese and winter cheese are different because of what the cows are eating. The colours of the pâte are different, because [there are] substances in the grass that produce the yellow colour to the fat content of the milk, so that it produces yellow butter, yellow cheese, etcetera. In the winter, when the cow is eating hay, you no longer have this [yellow] colour. And what is determinant for the taste is the terroir. Afterwards, all of the techniques involved with the production of the milk – from the producer to the fromagerie – [are important]. Certain villages have a way of feeding their cows and almost all of the producers in the village do it the same way, in a way that is different from the neighbouring village and it is this that determines the taste of the cheese (Bowen, 2011, pp. 336–337).*

The strong ties and collective engagement between actors are based on common values shared between the historical actors of the comté chain and adopted by the new comers. A young farmer that recently joined the comté chain communicated about how the comté collaborative philosophy was already transmitted to him during his education and that he wished in the near future to get involved in the chain beyond the milk production (Author's interview, 2016). Informal norms and shared beliefs keep actors together in what Bowen characterised as a strong degree of embeddedness (2011). Beyond the concept of embeddedness, scholars call on different theories to explain the strong cohesion of the comté chain. For Torre, the commitment to collaboration is closely connected with the degree of trust between the actors and the balance between the trust and the risk perception (2001; 2006). Torre called it organisational trust. He argues that it is the basis of collective action between the comté actors and that it existed prior to any formal systems (i.e. the CIGC). It is for him the condition that leads the actors to share between them the reputation of the comté as mutual benefit or club

good (Torre, 2002). The concept of organisational trust echoes to the linking dimension of social capital invoked by Rigolot and Jeanneaux (repectively 2016; 2009) in the studies of the resilience and adaptive capacity of the comté chain (see Figure 8) .

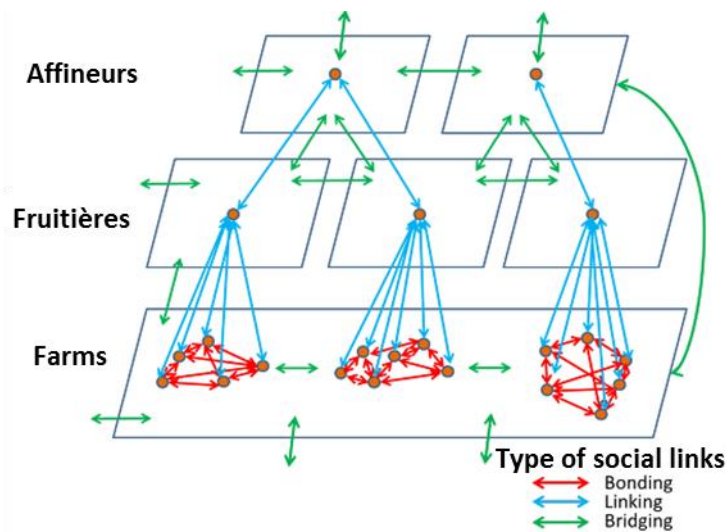


Figure 8. Distribution of the social capital in the comté cheese chain. Source: adapted from Rigolot (2016).

However, several interviewed actors insisted on a growing individualism within the actors and the search for profit maximisation is put before the respect of the chain spirit. A former comté fromager and current representative of the comté branch of a national dairy group explained that the current success of the comté PDO was not necessarily a positive thing. It tended to make the actors lose long term vision and the collective culture. He added that it was important to remember the history on which were grounded the spirit of the comté chain, in order to safeguard specificity and differentiation. One of the current concerns raised both by the director and elected representatives of the CIGC was the arrival of comté copies on the market. The representative of the national dairy group comté branch explained that some fruitières started to ripen and market themselves the cheese but did not have the expertise to reveal the aromas of the cheese. It threatened both the collective spirit of the chain and the reputation of the comté PDO. In their analysis of factors behind the concentration of the fruitières, Jeanneaux et al. (2009) further identified that the concentration of the fruitières and the arrival of the national groups in the 90s had still affected in some cases the social capital of farmers. Some fruitières decided to opt for an indirect governance by selling their milk to the cheese factories which then transformed and administered themselves the fruitière and the role of comté farmers. From members of cooperatives with decision making power, they were at risk to be then reduced to simple milk producers. Interestingly, the authors observed a tendency for the chain to relocate in altitude (average altitude rose from 650m to 740m in fifteen years). They argue that it is linked to the grazing diet of the comté cows that is constraining for the farmers located in the lowlands (altitude of 0 up to 600m) but adapted to mountain farming. They also identified that the social capital indicator of bonding had higher values in altitude and that the mountainous natural constrains could have exerted a pressure towards collective farming systems.

In parallel, the new market forces linked with the arrival of national dairy groups raised tensions between affineurs. In the n°56 of the *Nouvelles du Comté*, an affineur from a family-own fromagerie stated:

*It is true that the concentration that we are observing at all levels of our profession makes us worry, but it is inescapable; our work, to us small affineur, is one hand to continue to offer to our customers demanding of premium and fruity comtés with a broad range of aromas, and in the other hand to ensure the sustainability of all our small fruitières (CIGC, 2006b, p. 5).*

The representative of the national dairy group comté branch explained that national dairy groups were able to raise funds quicker to adapt their factories to retailer and consumer's demand for pre-cut and packaged products. It was not well seen by the other affineurs that considered this packaging "less noble" (Author's interview, 2016). In the other hand, it allowed the affineurs to adopt new technologies approved by CIGC (automatization of cheese handling) which increased the productivity gains and reduced the numbers of staff in fromageries. It also opened the sells to extra-territorial markets and mass retail (comté sold in mass retail shops: 56% in 1987 to 95% in 2004 (Jeanneaux et al., 2009)).

Relationships between actors are embedded in the history of the region and in a strong sense of mutual trust and collective engagement. The role of each actor is defined around the principle of co-production. Yet, the traditional configuration of the chain has been affected in the past 25 years with the arrival of national dairy groups and the growing individualism in the chain.

### *Governance*

We have seen that comté actors are organised in a network based on a strong territorial embeddedness, the following part seeks to understand the regulatory processes governing the comté actors as a chain.

The CIGC as governing body

To face these internal tensions, the CIGC implemented several regulating mechanisms. It acts as intermediary between the different actors by defining and representing the common interests of the actors articulated around the comté PDO.

In 1969, the CIGC created a standardised contract between fruitières and affineurs. It aims, among others, to help negotiations between affineurs and fruitières for the price of the 'fromage en blanc'. The CIGC established monthly 'a note de conjoncture', a sectoral report on the economic situation of the chain. It includes the MPN, the national weighted average, that represents the average monthly selling price of the comté received by the affineurs. The price is negotiated in each fruitière on the basis of established criteria. The introduction of contracts helped to build more transparent relationships within the chain, to reduce uncertainty and risks and to foster solidarity and a collective orientation within the chain (Torre, 2006, p. 201; Torre & Chia, 2001).

The CIGC also developed strict specifications in order to insure a specific quality that marks the strong connection between the cheese and its territory. The 'cahier des charges' (production specification) of the comté is the official document that protects the comté designation at European level. It defines

strict quality criteria for the cheese production (area of production, description of the product and its link with the area, production methods, and the organisation of the internal control body) defining the specificity of the cheese. Opinions on the current specifications are divided. Farmers belonging to the Confédération paysanne (affiliated to the Via Campesina) wished to stick as close as possible to the initial model, while the others were rather asking for more simplification and freedom of action (Author's interview, 2016). Bowen (2011) also noticed that the commitment to specification and quality control measures vary with the ideology of the farmers. To be amended, modifications must be approved by the National Institute of origin and quality (INAO), the French public institution responsible of controlling the indications of origin and the European Commission (EC). The INAO makes the first checks before they are submitted to the European Commission.

Since 1995, the CIGC has regulated with the 'plan de campagne' the production volume to balance supply and demand and maintain a value addition (Barjolle & Sylvander, 2005; 2002). A yearly plan de campagne sets a production target for the chain, and then translated to each fruitière and farms. The volume of production is calculated in function of several parameters including the surface of the farms in ha. When the fruitière produces more cheese than allowed, the CIGC impose a penalty to the cooperative by overcharging them the necessary 'plaque verte', the identity card of the comté cheese (CIGC, 2009a).

The CIGC makes the information flow to every single actor of the chain through different communication channels. Information from the CIGC is conveyed directly to every actor through the quarterly internal journal of the CIGC 'les Nouvelles du comté'. In each new publication, the CIGC president addresses in his column the interprofessional organisations over the current situation of the chain and over the importance of the collective spirit for the comté chain<sup>5</sup>. Finally, since 2010, the CIGC organises yearly five decentralised meetings ('réunions filière'), across the whole comté production area, where all actors are invited and can debate about the hot topics on the current agenda of the chain (CIGC, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013b, 2014, 2016b; CIGC & Vermot-Desroches, 2015).

The comté PDO and the public institutions

As the organisation managing the comté PDO, the CIGC is the entity making the bridge between the chain and public institutions. The president and director of the CIGC are responsible for representing the chain outside at market and institutional level (Author's interview, 2016). As the PDO certification is a public scheme, comté chain is not only protected by the public institutions but also controlled by them (as explained above).

Marie-Vivien, Bérard, Boutonnet, & Casabianca (2015) studied the impact of the entry into force of the regulation (EC) No 510/2006 and the regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 on the INAO (the French National Institute of Appellation of Origin) and the Geographical Indications (GI) in France. The French institute used to have the decision power over the GI. Through the years, it had adopted a public-private configuration facilitating the expansion and the involvement of local actors in the shaping of the schemes. However, since 2012, the INAO was granted the task to control nationally the EU Geographical Indications (GI). To comply with the new EU regulation, the INAO had reorganised itself

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<sup>5</sup> see opening columns of the Nouvelles du comté (CIGC, 2017).

and now control nationally the application of all EU certification schemes including the organic certification. The authors argued that the new regulation fundamentally weakened the role of the French institute, stating that: “In the past decade, the INAO has undergone transformations that threaten its identity. Although the general organization of official controls is still entrusted to INAO, control of the compliance of the product with the specification on the ground escapes local INAO experts, who are being marginalized by certification bodies, despite their invaluable expertise” (Marie-Vivien et al., 2015, p. 8).

In 2015, following the evolution of EU regulation, the CIGC had the possibility to grant itself more freedom from the INAO and revised its status (CIGC, 2015). However, since 2006, the CIGC has less power over the definition of the legislative frame regulating PDOs. Every substantial change of its cahier des charges has now to go through the EU. PDO organisations can lobby and impact on defined policies but are also very dependent on the political evolution. The CIGC is animating the National Federation of the PDO (FNAOP), that gathers seventeen PDO organisations. The FNAOP is also a member of the National Council of Dairy Geographical Indications (CNAOL), which is active at EU level through the Organization for an International Geographical Indications Network (oriGIn).

CIGC is not the only institution impacting on the network of actors. The majority of farmer, cooperative and industry unions representing the actors of the comté chain are present at several governance levels (departmental, regional, national, European and beyond). The national bodies of the FDSEAs and the JA are respectively linked to COPA (Committee of Agricultural Organizations) and the CEJA (European Council of Young Farmers) at EU level; while the Confédération Paysanne is related to Via Campesina. The Coordination Rurale is not, to our knowledge, connected at higher governance levels. Each organisation has different agendas and ideologies that are in various degrees reflected in the practices of the farmers. The dairy cooperative and industry unions, namely the FDCLs and the FNIL, and the CNAOL are all members of the CNIEL (National Interprofessional Centre for Dairy Economy). Interestingly, the mountain commissions of the FNSEA (national body of the FDSEAs) and the CNIEL are members of Euromontana, the European organisation of mountain areas that represent the interests of mountain communities at European level.

## 4.2 Interactive processes

Even if the comté chain has in overall a stable organisation, it is subject to many pressures and had to evolve regularly to safeguard the reputation of its products. The following part presents, in chronological order, a selection of key events that triggered interactive processes within the past 10 years and impacted on the organisation of the chain (see Figure 9).

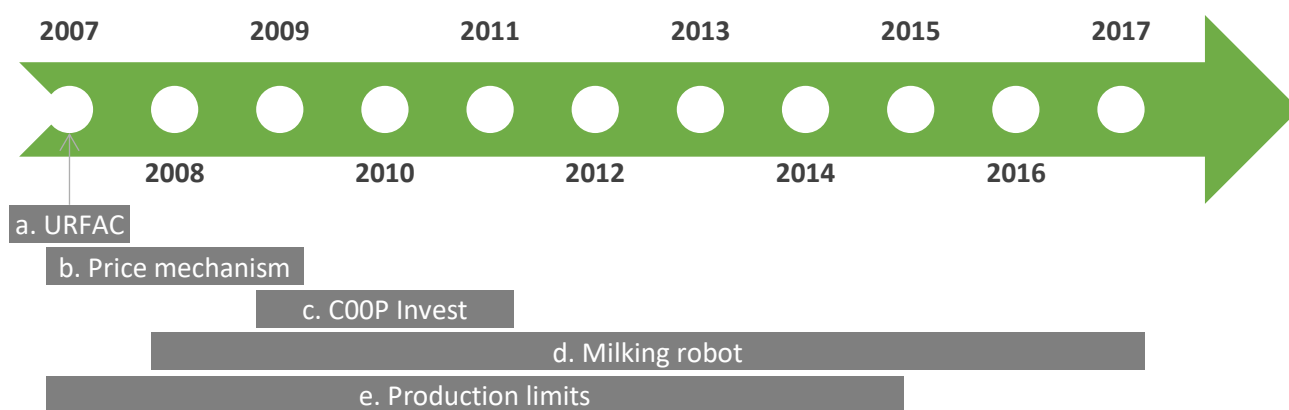


Figure 9. Diagram of the interactive processes. Source: own depiction.

### *a. The creation of the URFAC*

The regional union of the *comtois* cheeses of protected origin (URFAC) has been created in February 2007 by the CIGC together with other local PDOs organisations (Bleu de Gex, Mont d’Or and Morbier) to adapt with the new control requirements. With the regulation (EC) No 510/2006, the European Union homogenised the control of geographical indications across Europe. The compliance with the PDO cahier des charges had to be henceforth ensured through third party control bodies. The costs of such verification had to be borne by the operators of the PDO chains (CIGC, 2007).

The comté chain, on one hand, welcomed the reform: standardised controls mean that the PDOs across Europe would have to answer to the same criteria and so it would potentially increase the reputation of the EU labels of origin on the market. On the other hand, comté actors feared the negative repercussions linked with additional costs that such controls would represent and additional bureaucratic tasks. By putting the stress on controls, the new regulation encouraged farmers to focus rather on meeting the minimum requirements of the cahier des charges than on fostering the resilience of the PDOs (CIGC & Vermot-Desroches, 2007a).

The URFAC was created to anticipate negative repercussions of the legislation. The four cheeses PDOs organisations share the same cheese producers and fromageries. By choosing to pool resources together, they were able to manage collectively the external controls and thus to reduce the costs of them. Beyond that, the URFAC also developed an internal technical service to analyse the quality of the raw milk. Under the URFAC, the four organisations also realise together other activities such as joint communication campaigns (CIGC, 2013a).

As the director of the CIGC explained: by providing a common platform between the four PDOs, the URFAC helped smoothly to adapt the control system to answer the legislative changes. The creation of the URFAC also gave an official structure to foster the cooperation between the four organisations and to improve the resilience of the milk producers of the region (Author’s interview, 2016).

### *b. Renegotiation of the price mechanism*

In 2007, farmers started to face financial difficulty. In the autumn, a drought during the summer forced them to buy additional feed. In 2008, their milk production was under their quotas of production (still existing then). With the charges rising, farmers had difficulties to balance their cash-flow. At the same period, the price of the standard milk was very high on the world market due to the world food price

crisis but because of the internal price mechanisms of the comté chain this price increase was not reflected in the price paid by the affineurs to the farmers.

In the summer 2008, few farmers attended the *Grande coulée*, the celebration of the 50 years of the AOC (*appellation d'origine contrôlée*). The board of the CIGC noticed the tense situation but the call of the CIGC president to keep the chain together and to see the broader picture did not prevent the conflict to escalate (CIGC & Vermot-Desroches, 2008a). In September 2008, after several months of crisis, the discontent grew as such that farmers demonstrated in Poligny and occupied the headquarters of the CIGC. Representatives of each organisation decided then to sit together around a table in an attempt to find a common solution. Even if the room for manoeuvre was small - the affineurs and industrial groups being pressured in the other side by supermarkets to keep low prices – the CIGC board came up with an agreement and to secure a higher price to the farmers for their pre-matured cheese. In response to the event, the CIGC president called for solidarity and cohesion with the affineurs for the effort they provided and underlined the ability of the chain to reach consensus (CIGC & Vermot-Desroches, 2008b).

An indirect outcome of this crisis was the creation of annual decentralised meetings. It started in the winter 2009 between the CIGC and the fruitières and from 2010 every actor involved in the comté chain was welcome to join (CIGC, 2009b, 2010). This offered a new platform to bring closer farmers to the CIGC and to improve the difficulties faced by each actor. For example, the CIGC president explained that it allowed in 2015 to have a debate between the CIGC and the farmers to explain the reasons behind the reform of the cahier des charges:

*In a jumble, reactions for and against very quickly opposed and sometimes contestation emerge. We can understand the worries of some that so in this individual reference [the new reform], a limit to their freedom of entrepreneurship. But as clear explanations were made, each, evaluating its impact on his own farm and measuring the full value of the collective action, brought his support to this measure (CIGC & Vermot-Desroches, 2015, p. 1).*

### *c. The creation of Coop Invest in 2009<sup>6</sup>*

In 2009, the national dairy group Entremont faced financial difficulties and had to find a buyer to continue its activity. When agro-industrial groups showed interests in buying the company, the comté actors feared irreversible effects on the chain if the company was to be bought by a group not willing to adhere to the spirit of the comté chain. Indeed, Entremont owned the company Monts & Terroirs (then called Juragruyère) specialised in the production of PDO cheeses and which marketed around 30% of the Comté production.

To prevent the decision-making centre to leave the territory and to safeguard the spirit of the chain, the two departmental cooperative unions (the FDCLs) decided to create Coop Invest, an investment fund between fruitières. Set up by the two presidents of the FDCLs, the initiative received support from the regional bank le Crédit Agricole Franche-Comté, whom one of the vice presidents is a comté producer. When in 2011 the group Entremont Alliance was eventually taken over by the biggest

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<sup>6</sup> As reported separately by the presidents of the two FDCLs (Author's interview 2016)



national dairy cooperative Sodiaal, Coop Invest' joined a holding which owns today 34 % of Monts & Terroirs.

At first, the other affineurs did not well welcome the creation of Coop Invest. They felt betrayed by the FDCLs because they saw it as an attempt of the fruitières to bypass them. The fruitières argued, on the other hand, that by investing in the repining factories of the industrial group they could have more control over the future of the comté chain. They justified it stating that the survival of the fruitières depend of high prices and a fair distribution of the added value along the chain. By creating Coop Invest, they were able to anticipate the arrival of new players in the chain and to increase their bargaining power over the extra-territorial players of the chain.

Currently, Coop Invest still exists but does not have other projects at the agenda. However, the presidents of the FDCL would like to develop more its strategy and to put in place new activities in the future to anticipate similar episodes.

#### *d. The conflict over the milking robot*

In 2008, a comté farm invested into two milking robots and asked the CIGC to include automatic milking systems in the cahier des charges. The interprofessional organisation gave a definitive answer. It would not allow such a technology because of its foreseen impact on the quality of the cheese. It argued further that the use of a milking robot cannot respect the comté cahier des charges, which was put in place to preserve the organoleptic quality of the cheese. The cahier des charges defined that milking had to take place twice a day at fix time in the morning and in the afternoon. For the CIGC, this condition implies fact that automatic milking systems cannot be used (CIGC, 2008; 'Comté, pas de traite en libre service', 2008).

In consequence, the fruitière of the comté farm refused to accept its milk for the comté production. Opposing this interdiction, the farm sued the cooperative in 2013 ('Le robot de traite sur le banc des accusés', 2013). The court issued a decision in favour of the farm stating that the milking robot as such was not against the comté cahier des charges. Only the use of it could lead to practices not in line with the requirements of the PDO. Since January 2016, the milk of the farm is extracted with the two robots and brought to the cooperative. However, despite the court decision, the fruitière still refused to use the milk for the comté production and was obligated to compensate financially the farm (Barbier, 2016).

The fruitière received a warm support from the comté chain. An important number of farmers from all unions and of other comté actors rallied together for an action day to reaffirm the fundamentals of the comté chain and issuing a manifesto. The CIGC also decided to appeal the decision and the general assembly unanimously voted a modification of the cahier des charges expressively stating that because of the comté milking requirements, automatic milking systems could not be used (CIGC, 2016a).

The comté chain secured a consequent value addition for their cheese because of its reputation on the market. Beyond the taste of the cheese, the comté is associated to a certain image: pastures rich in biodiversity, cows grazing outside and farmers close to their herd. Therefore, as the CIGC director and the president of a FDCL explained, the respect of the cahier des charges and of the fundamentals principles of the comté production conditioned the future of the chain. Decisions upon adoption of

new technology usually go through the Technology and Research Commission of the CIGC. The commission studies the production requirements of the PDO and gives opinions to the CIGC on the introduction of new technologies and practices in the cahier des charges. It also follows the progress of the research programs commissioned by the CIGC (Author's interviews, 2006). By bypassing the institutional mechanisms of the CIGC, the conflict over the introduction of milking robots questioned the power of the CIGC.

#### *e. Introduction of measures to limit the production*

In 2007, started a long process of negotiations with the INAO and the European Commission to introduce in the comté cahier des charges a regulation controlling the comté production. In prevision of the end of the EU dairy quota system in 2013 and to regulate the intensification of production, the CIGC looked at possibilities to limit the milk production of the farm. The CIGC required this modification to ensure environmental sustainability by preserving the biodiversity of the pastures and by extension the specificity of the comté (CIGC & Vermot-Desroches, 2007b).

The negotiation lasted from 2007 to 2015. As one of the CIGC representatives explained the EC was reluctant to grant the permission to limit the production volume because of the on-going principle of free competition (Author's interview, 2016). The EC eventually acknowledged the link between productivity and specificity and granted the modification. The productivity was then limited to each farm by ha and by year based on historical references and with a maximum of 4600L (CIGC, 2015a).

In parallel, the comté chain regularly negotiated agreements with public institutions to receive the approval to regulate the cheese production within its plan de campagne. After a successful lobbying of origin, the European Union granted the possibility to PDO and other EU geographical indications to regulate their growth within the 2012 reform of the PAC ('Le paquet lait autorise la régulation des volumes de fromages', 2014). It led to two triannual agreements regulating production for the periods of 2012-2015 and of 2015-2018 (CIGC, 2015b).

#### *Analysis*

Based on the five events, I identified three types of processes renegotiating the comté regulatory frame in the past ten years (see Table 1): building of new partnerships outside the comté chain, reconfiguration of the relationships between the different actors and renegotiation of the production practices. Each process was triggered by internal and external forces acting on the regulatory space at different levels (market, economic, social, political, institutional and environmental pressures). Both embedding and governance dimensions were at play to rebalance the regulatory space. For the majority, the renegotiation of the regulatory space had a positive feedback and seems to mitigate the pressure on the regulatory space. However, in the milking robot case, the court decision called into question the interpretation of the product specification, which threatened the legitimacy of the CIGC over the chain.

Actors of the comté chain are at the same time key links in the comté production chain and players of the global agricultural market, whose external forces impact the organisation of the chain. If the farms are very specialised in producing milk for the comté production, world market prices still impact indirectly the comté chain as it was the case with the 2007-2008 world food crisis. From the input side,

new technologies introduced to the market can lead to the adoption of new practices by farmers, fruitières and affineurs. If they can potentially improve the quality of the cheese, they can also diminish the specificity of the cheese as it was blamed on the milking robot. Also, the value addition obtained from the comté production attracted national industrial dairy groups, opened new markets and helped optimising ripening technologies but in the same time constitutes a constant threat to the democratic organisation of the chain.

At the crossroad between embedding and governance, the CIGC developed a regulatory space supporting the comté PDO. This regulatory space safeguarded the comté specificity by keeping a strong collective engagement. Several measures were taken recently: limitation of the productivity by hectare, restriction on the use of milking technology, controlled increased of the volume of production. These evolutions do not only impact the production practices but also on the future organisation of the chain. For example, by limiting the production by ha, the CIGC aimed not only to protect the biodiversity of the pastures but also to restrain the intensification of the production and to maintain the traditional organisation of the chain.

The governance structure echoes both the current societal challenges faced by the agricultural sector and the cultural heritage of the chain. Each of the mechanisms implemented by the CIGC participated in maintaining the embedding of the comté chain in the territory but they did not drive the agency of this network of actors alone. At each level, some key actors (in particular the fruitière's presidents, FDCL president, CIGC representatives) insured the safeguard of a collective engagement. In parallel, some others taking up role outside the comté chain reinforced the embeddedness as it was the case with the creation of Coop Invest.

The comté chain proved its resilience through the centuries by adapting to contemporary challenges and is seen as a success story in the dairy sector. The respect of the principle of coproduction allowed the distribution of the economic rent between the different actors. However, the balance between heritage and innovation that comté actors managed to maintain is fragile. The EU political environment, the liberalised food market and the growing individualism in society are threats to the comté chain. To go through these societal changes, the regular reassertion of its fundamental values appears to be the key to safeguard the spirit of collective engagement of the comté chain and thus to ensure its resilience.

Table 1. Analysis of the interactive processes in the Comté PDO during the period 2007-2016. Source: own depiction.

Interactive processes	Pressure		Resources involved		Feedback on pressure	Categories
	Internal triggers	External triggers	Embedding	Governance		
The creation of the URFAC	–	<b>Institutional:</b> EU regulation evolution	–	Relation CIGC with other PDOs organisation	<b>Economical:</b> reduced costs for new regulation <b>Social:</b> stronger partnership with local PDOs organisations	<b>Building of new partnerships outside chain</b>
Renegotiation of the price mechanism	<b>Social:</b> trust loss between CIGC and farmers	<b>Market:</b> world food price crisis	- Strong ties between fruitières - Horizontal relations fruitières-affineurs	CIGC standardised contract	<b>Economical:</b> higher price for farmers <b>Institutional:</b> meetings bringing closer CIGC and farmers	<b>Reconfiguration of the relationships in the chain</b>
The creation of Coop Invest in 2009	<b>Economical:</b> financial difficulty of an affineur	<b>Market:</b> interest national agro-industrial groups for comté production	- Leadership FDCLs - Relation FDCL with other key actors	–	<b>Social:</b> more power fruitières over the end of the value chain	<b>Reconfiguration of the relationships in the chain</b>
The conflict over the milking robot	<b>Political:</b> different ideologies within comté farms (productive vs. traditional agriculture)	<b>Market:</b> introduction new technology <b>Institutional:</b> power national justice over CIGC cahier des charges	Strong ties fruitières	CIGC cahier des charges	<b>Institutional:</b> CIGC power questioned <b>Social:</b> CIGC actors reaffirmed fundamental of chain values	<b>Renegotiation of the production practices</b>
Introduction of measures to limit the production	<b>Economical:</b> intensification production	<b>Environmental:</b> loss of biodiversity <b>Institutional:</b> EU regulation evolution <b>Political:</b> political context at EU level	–	CIGC lobbying at EU level	<b>Environmental:</b> safeguard biodiversity <b>Economical:</b> better control supply & demand <b>Institutional/political:</b> recognition special economic status PDOs	<b>Renegotiation of the production practices</b>

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# CHAPTER 5. CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

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The previous chapter illustrates how embedding and governance are at play in regulatory space and how interactive processes are renegotiated in tension between the territory and the food chain. Chapter 6, after presenting the current configuration of the Eusko Label and Pro Montagna, draws on the GEM-framework to compare the three labelling initiatives studied in the thesis and analyse how the regulatory space is shaped for each strategy.

## 5.1 Current configuration of the cases

### *The Eusko Label*

The Basque Country is one of the seventeen autonomous regions of Spain. Situated in the northern Spain, it is part of the greater Basque region straddling Spain and France and home of the Basque people. Mountains occupy 70% of the territory. They form two parallel sub-ranges running from west to east, the inner one and the coastal one. The Basque massif is of moderate height with its highest peak, Aitxuri, 1551m high. The mountains have a strong influence on the climate. The North is milder and oceanic with green landscapes. South of the coastal range and in the inner range, the weather conditions are more extreme with cold and snowy winters and dry and hot summer. As for the South, it is rather Mediterranean ('Basque Country (autonomous community)', 2017).

Agriculture in the Basque Country is a small share of the agricultural industry of Spain. It represents less than 1% of the Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) and the average UAA by farm is 11,5 ha (Eurostat, 2009). Nonetheless, it has a strong influence on the cultural identity of the territory. The rich agricultural heritage of the region plays also an important role for the tourist attractiveness of the territory in terms of landscape and cuisine. The Basque cuisine is globally renowned for its great diversity of dishes reflecting the coastal and inland influences (Leizaola, 2006).

In 1986, Spain joined the European Union and agricultural sector opened to new food markets. Consumption patterns evolved to leave more space to mass retail. In the light of these changes, the Basque government started together with local food actors to develop a novel competitive strategy. The idea was to bring added value to the regional food products through a strategy of differentiation. Taking inspiration from the French Label Rouge, the Basque Label of Food Quality, known as Eusko Label, was created in 1989 upon adoption of the decree 198/1989. It is recognisable by its logo with a capital letter K symbolising quality – *Kalitea* in Basque. The first products were commercialised in 1993 (Author's interview, 2016).

Today, seventeen typical food products are concerned by the label from animal and vegetal origins (see Figure 10). Twenty-four years after its introduction, actors involved in the Eusko Label are satisfied with the successful creation of this niche market for their quality food products. The label is well established in the region (its regional notoriety was estimated at 95% in 2011 (HAZI's internal data, 2016)).



Figure 10. Food products certified by the Eusko label, arranged horizontally by year of introduction in ascending order.

Source: HAZI

When a producer or a group of producers want to have a specific product certified as Eusko Label, they must prove that they either comply with the product requirement if the product specification exists already or they must ask HAZI, the foundation of the Basque government for the development of the rural and marine environments and the agri-food sector, to start a new process of certification. To be certified as Eusko Label, the products must follow specific criteria defined by HAZI. The minimum requirements are:

- the Basque origin
- typicality or the traditional character of the product
- a high quality
- a minimum production volume
- to benefit a group of actors
- to set up an internal control system

Before agreeing on including a new product to the Eusko Label, HAZI undertakes a study analysing the typicality of the product (organoleptic characteristics, production practices, link with the territory) and its marketing potential (production capacity, marketing channels, consumer expectations). Afterwards, the organisation works on defining the product specification. This process is open to the whole sector concerned by the new certification, i.e. not only to the people requesting the certification. Together with those actors, they determined the specification of the product. Once, it is ready, HAZI audits the stakeholders that applied for the certification and launches a promotional campaign at regional level to inform consumers about the new product. After that regular audits are done by HAZI. Meetings with the stakeholders using the label, during technical round table, are also taking place to keep track of their needs (additional promotion activities, modification of the product specification, etc.). HAZI also takes care of facilitating the entry under the label of new actors (Author's interview, 2016).

The Eusko Label is part of the wider Basque policy to differentiate the local products through quality. The government also developed a label in 1994 to certified fruits and vegetables grown in the Basque Country and promoted the regional PDOs. In parallel with the Eusko Label, some actors also have for strategy to protect their product at European under the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). The PGI differs from the PDO in the way that the product must be only partially manufactured (prepared, processed or produced) within the specific region. The Eusko Label is often commercialised together with the brand of the producer or processor (Author's interview, 2016).

There is not a unique food chain behind the label but a multitude. All chains have their own governance. Some developed around the label while in other cases some were already existent and used it as a differentiation strategy. Figure 11 introduces a selection of Eusko Label-certified food chains to illustrate the diversity in their configurations within the Eusko Label.

#### UDAPA, A POTATOES COOPERATIVE

UDAPA is the only cooperative marketing potatoes of Álava under the Eusko Label. It was created in 1993 and the potatoes from the Basque province of Álava were among the first products to be granted the Eusko Label. The cooperative organised itself around quality products and developed beyond. Thus, the Eusko Label-certified potatoes represent only a segment of their market share. Nevertheless, quality and local products remains central for the image of the cooperative.

The cooperative is governed by a strong leadership. Udapa has 45 employees and count not only producers as members but also among others financials. The shares of the cooperative are capitalised and invested. Because of the restrictive production criteria of the potatoes of Álava only a small shared of producers have been selected to produce them. Among the challenges to scale up the production of the potatoes of Álava, were mentioned the ageing of the farmer population (in average 50 years old), the hard-working conditions linked to agriculture and the CAP giving incentives to convert to cereals productions (Author's interview, 2016).

#### EUSKABER, THE COMPANY COMMERCIALISING EUSKO LABEL-CERTIFIED EGGS

The limited partnership company Euskaber started under the impulse of one poultry farmer in 2004. He wished to bring about innovation to his family poultry business and to differentiate his production from his competitors by producing eggs recognised for their premium quality. Together with three other producers, he started to commercialise Eusko Label-certified eggs. Upon the success of the business model he developed, the company was able to grow. Today, 16 poultry farms are supplying Euskaber with Eusko Label-certified eggs.

Each farmer owns an equal share of the company but the leadership remains the work of the funder of Euskaber. Euskaber buys the production at a price considered as fair and is responsible for the commercialisation of the products. The company is also present in other market segment such as the organic sector.

In addition to CAP subsidies granted to the farmers, Euskaber benefitted for its development from the support of EU rural development programs and of the provincial government. Euskaber's funder is also involved in AviAlter, the Spanish organisation of the alternative poultry industry (Author's interview, 2016).

### THE GIPUZKOA ASSOCIATION OF NATURAL BASQUE CIDER PRODUCERS

The natural cider of the Basque country is a typical product of the region. In each family, you could count on a relative to produce a yearly cuvee of cider from the local apple variety. Throughout the years, the production became more professional and producers gathered in three associations – one for each Basque province.

After the government asked in 2003 if the cider producers were interested to market their cider under the Eusko Label, the associations started to organise meetings gathering the whole sector. This marked the start of a slow and difficult processes of 8 years. Producers had to get organised in order to comply with the specification of the Eusko Label. This hard effort required to improve practices and plant new varieties and demanded the establishment of a strong group dynamic.

It arrived only once the presidency of the producer association of Gipuzkoa - the province with the biggest production - changed. Previously outsider of the decision-making positions, she brought a new vision and leadership to the sector. She built an enabling environment to create a collective spirit by reorganising members around a core group of motivated actors. She set up working groups where the members learned and shared their ideas together and it created a new impulse in the association. In 2011, the Basque cider integrated the Eusko Label. Building on this success, the three associations of producers started a -ongoing- process to obtain the PGI indication for the Basque cider (Author's interview, 2016).

### THE CATTLE PRODUCER COOPERATIVE, HARAKAI - URKAIKO

The Harakai - Urkaiko cooperative gathers animal breeders from the three provinces of the Basque Country and more than 200 of them are cattle breeders. Until 1985, each Basque village of more than 3000 inhabitants had a butcher who was directly selling the meat of the local cattle farms. With the evolution of the hygiene rules, the cattle sector reorganised into cooperatives and local butchers disappeared. From 2000 on, cooperatives started to regroup and in 2012 the cooperatives Harakai and Urkaiko merged to form the biggest cooperative selling Eusko Label-certified meat. The cooperative works also closely with Urdetxe, a cooperative specialised in the production of meat from free-ranging pigs bred that are also marketing their meat as Eusko Label since 2013. Both cooperatives sell most of their production within the Basque Country. From the feeding to the breeds, quality is central in the Basque cattle sector.

In 2004, the Basque beef was registered as a PGI - under Vacuno del País Vasco/Euskal Okela - at the European Commission. Though, this was not without problem for the Basque beef sector. In 2011, the request to introduce new breeds in the product specification was refused by the European Commission. Thus, in 2012, Hazi included the PGI Euskal Okela together with Baserriko Harragia (literally *meat from the farm* in Basque) to the products certified under the Eusko Label. In 2016, Hazi developed a new label, the Basque label Harategiak, under politics impulse in parallel of the Eusko Label. This strategy of co-branding - less strict in term of the origin of the cows (a minimum of only 50% complying with the Eusko Label) was developed to open the market to more actors. The aim is at long term to increase slowly the requirements to bring the whole sector towards the requirements of the Eusko Label. The Harakai - Urkaiko cooperative, selling all their meat as Eusko Label, did not welcome well this new label as they feel that it would confuse consumers (Author's interview, 2016).

Figure 11. Examples of Eusko Label-certified food chains. Source: own depiction.



Hazi plays a hybrid role between the CIGC and the European Union. In one hand, the organisation promotes and protects the reputation of the label but, on the other hand, it is in charge of the specification and responsible for controlling the stakeholders. Hazi is also making the link between the Basque agricultural value chains and other institutions. Finally, Hazi is involved at European level and is the holder of Euromontana’s chair. Each role is divided in between distinct teams of the foundation to avoid conflicts of interests (i.e. Control & certification, Sectoral engagement, marketing & promotion and Foresight activities, networks & European projects).

The configuration of Hazi teams is subject to regular changes depending on the elections of the Basque government and the nomination of the director of the foundation. The elected government has a direct impact on Hazi’s strategies and budget and by extension on Eusko Label. Thus, the political environment has a bigger implication on the producers than in the comté chain.

*Pro Montagna*

Three distinct areas divide Switzerland: the plateau, 30% of the country, and its two mountainous ranges, the Alps and the Jura, that respectively represent 60% and 10% of the country. This is why mountains play a significant role in the Swiss agriculture as much in the cultural dimension that in the definition of the landscapes. As explained in the introduction, since 2006, Switzerland protects mountainous products through the mountain and alpine denominations.

With this new labelling policy, Swiss politic actors wanted to bring more visibility to mountains products in an attempt to bring an added value. This way, mountain farmers would not only rely on dedicated direct payments to compete with the other farmers but also have a tool to valorise the marketing potential linked to the mountain origin. Building on the recently adopted legislations, the retailer Coop created the brand Pro Montagna in 2007. Capitalizing on the place mountain represents in the Swiss collective imaginary, they launched under this brand a range of products distinguishable through their mountainous origin. As for today 240 products are sold under the Pro Montagna brand.



Figure 12. A selection of Pro Montagna products. Source: COOP

As stipulated on Coop’s Pro Montagna directive of May 2007, in addition to basic quality requirements, mountain producers must comply with Coop general delivery terms and must follow the origin requirements as specify in the Swiss legislations. Compliance with the Swiss legislation ODMA must be certified at least once and must be controlled at least once every two years by an accredited

certification body or a mandated inspection service. In addition, Coop reserves the right to conduct controls through surveys. Similarly to other quality labels, producers must keep track of the traceability of their production and pay for the audit and certification outside the ones realised by Coop.

The mountain labelling Pro Montagna follows the same logic as other quality schemes that reach the mass retail. Producers establish a contract with the retailer and must ensure a volume of production. Together, they agree on the price the retailer will grant to the producer. Coop specifies in the Pro Montagna directive that - in a long-term perspective - mountains producers must receive an adequate price for their product that allow them to continue sustainably their activity on the farm. However, no details were given of the specific price mechanisms between both parties. In addition, for each Pro Montagna product sold, a specified amount is paid out to the “Coop partnership for mountain regions”, a foundation created to support projects aiming to improve the economic situation of mountain people.

For value chains producing an important volume, Coop quality range an interesting marketing channel as for the mountain farmer cooperative Genossenschaft Gran Alpin and for the organic beef value chain NaturaBeef. If those value chains benefit from a premium and from the reputation of Coop, the dependence on a single retailer to market their products was seen as a risky strategy to negotiate prices and at wider level a threat to their resilience (Bardsley & Bardsley, 2014; Roep & Wiskerke, 2012).

## 5.2 Comparison of the cases

Although they all target food products from mountain areas, the three labelling initiatives differ in many regards. This part analyses the link between the regulatory space and the strategy (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of the regulatory space in the three cases. Source: own depiction

Dimensions		Comté PDO (FR)	Eusko Label (ES)	Pro Montagna (CH)
Creation	Anteriority	Middle age	Adhesion to EU	Introduction of the ODMA
	Year of creation	1958	1989	2007
	Initiators	Public/private	Public	Private
Governance	Ownership of the standards	Public	Public	Private
	Governance body	Chain actors	Public organisation	Retailer
	Relations to public institutions	Controlled, protected, promoted and lobbying	Direct	Not identified
Embedding	Involvement of local actors	Decision-making	Certification process	Commercial
	Territory of production	Jura Mountains and surroundings	Basque Country	Swiss Mountains
Marketing	Marketing orientation	Specialisation	Diversification	Diversification
	Product branding	PDO product	Regional products	Mountains products

Each labelling initiatives has a distinct regulatory space. The comté PDO has been built around one product and actors organised around this one value chain. The Eusko Label and Pro Montagna target a wider range of mountain food products in a strategy of diversification. Pro Montagna is the only initiative that was built exclusively around the mountain origin. For the other labels, mountains only are part of the territorial identity. In the comté-PDO and the Eusko Label, the product specifications were set such as to reflect quality attributes specific to the territory of production.

What is striking in the comté case is that from the start all actors were involved in the decision-making processes. When the comté has been PDO (then AOC)-certified, the whole chain supported the protection of the cheese under an official scheme. The Eusko Label and Pro Montagna cases have been established within the last 25 years and were respectively public and private-led initiatives. The initial context is reflected in the structure of the governance bodies behind the label. In the comté PDO, the representatives are elected among each group of actors. In the Eusko Label, actors are consulted during the development of the product specification but the last words belong to policy makers. Thus, in this case, the policy environment appears to have a strong impact on the shaping of the label (as seen with the creation of the Basque label Harategiak). As for the Pro Montagna case, relationships between Coop and the producers appeared to be essentially commercial.

As seen in the comté case, embedding and governance are at play in shaping a regulatory space that strikes the balance between heritage and innovation and safeguards common interests in a long-term perspective. Collective engagement and the principle of co-distribution were key values on which the comté chain was based. Though the Eusko Label requires that the certification does not benefit individuals but groups of actors, no strong incentives to trigger collaboration as the CIGC contracts have been identified. As seen in the presentation of different chains, certifying their products under the Eusko Label scheme responds to several needs from the Basque agricultural value chains. It has been used as a diversifying strategy, as a way to normalise practices within the food chains but also as an impulse to organise food actors. As for Pro Montagna, if Coop insures a fair price and a premium supporting the foundation for the development of Swiss mountain areas, no information found specified how producers were taken into account in this process.

The next chapter will link the results of the in-depth case study and the cross-case analysis to the research questions and discuss their relevance as strategy to strengthen mountain food systems.

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# CHAPTER 6. CLOSING

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## 6.1 Discussions

In territorial labelling, actors are organised within regulatory spaces that reflect the qualification, the social construction of the product quality. To unfold these social processes in mountain labelling initiatives, we looked at three types of processes that shape the regulatory space.

- What are the territorial processes through which mountain food networks construct regulatory spaces?

As network, actors are embedded in their territory. In the comté case, embeddedness was displayed through the strong ties between actors and their territory in term of cultural heritage and use of local resources that were reflected in their cheese. The embeddedness of comté actors was translated in shared values that formed the basis of the coproduction and the collective engagement and has been assimilated to a form of social capital. In the comté PDO, territorial embedding plays a key role in the construction of a collective interest within the regulatory space. For Eusko Label, although the certification is benefitting a group of actors, territorial embeddedness did not seem to play systematically a role in the qualification. A similar conclusion was made by Maye et al. (2016) when comparing PDO schemes in Switzerland and in the United Kingdom (UK). They established that the PDO scheme was understood differently in the two countries and that the cooperative spirit and its use as a tool to protect the rural economy was less evident in the UK. Thus, territorial embeddedness is not always at play in the construction of regulatory space.

- What are the regulatory processes within mountain food chains which construct regulatory spaces?

Secondly, when considering the food chain level, governance processes shape relationships between the different groups of actors. There are translated into formal and visible tools (product specification and other standard requirements) that frame the actors around a common production system. They guarantee the quality of the products and stable relationships between the actors. The structure of the governance influences the mechanisms present in the chain. In the comté chain, each group of actors was represented in the decision-making of the chain which was translated in a wide range regulatory processes ensuring stable relationships between actors and the reputation of the product. Regulatory mechanisms are negotiated within the wider frame of the public institutions, which have a bigger impact on the initiative when the label is publicly own.

- What are the interactive processes which renegotiate regulatory spaces within mountain food systems?

Interactive processes influence the regulatory space through the renegotiation of production practices or the shaping of new relationships in between actors and outside the chain. The regulatory space is the place where governance, embeddedness and marketing dimensions interact. It calls on

compromises and finding a balance between strategic flexibility and structural stability to safeguard the product specificity and reputation.

- How do territorially embedded labelling initiatives in mountain food systems construct and renegotiate regulatory spaces across different scales?

Regulatory spaces are constructed and renegotiated in tension the territory and the food chain. The outcomes of those processes depend greatly of the actor configuration within the mountain labelling initiatives. The comté case showed that territorial labelling of mountain products can provide an opportunity to build a strong organisation around a common regulatory space. If the comté case was not free from tensions, the collective engagement based on strong cultural heritage helped to resist growing individualism. The comté PDO managed to find a balance between strategic flexibility and structural stability and adapt to external and internal pressures. The framing of the CIGC as a collective PDO organisation helped to give a regulatory frame to the chain but the territorial embeddedness of the mountain food system was essential. It insures the representativeness of the actors in the decision-making processes and is reflected in the collective engagement of the actors in the chain. However, for Pro Montagna, in particular, it appears that the labelling initiative was rather designed as a market tool and did not shape a strong regulatory space.

McMorran et al. stated (2015, p. 13): “A mountain scheme or label alone is likely to be insufficient to deliver sustainable outcomes; however, as one element within a wider suite of tools aimed at embedding food and agriculture into regional development, including actor networks and diversified marketing, such schemes, where supported by adequate promotional efforts, offer considerable potential to contribute to the resilience of mountain agriculture and food supply chains and contribute to wider goals of sustainable mountain development.” According to our results, collective engagement, reflected for the comté PDO in the governance structure and on the distribution of the economic rent along the chain, seems at the heart of rural development strategies. It supports the reach of compromises beyond political ideology between actors.

To go one step further, it would be interesting to assess quantitatively how labelling strategies built on collective engagement are reflected in the risk mitigation and economic resilience of mountain food systems.

In this process, communication and dialogue seems to play an important role in reaffirming shared objectives. This could be seen in the comté PDO case with the establishment of decentralised meetings. In parallel, it appeared important endeavour for actors involved in labelling initiatives to make a reflexive work to reflect on the achievements in light with their initial goal. For this the GEM framework helps look back on what has been achieved.

## 6.2 Conclusions

In this study, the link between territorial labelling and rural development did not appear as immediate as it could have seemed at first glance. By choosing for a labelling strategy, the three initiatives aimed all to spatially extend the area where mountain farmers sold their products. If all labels managed to convey the values of the products to distant consumers, it was translated differently in the configuration of the actors at territorial level. Certification thus has multiple facets and labelling initiatives do not always trigger the development of synergies between mountain food actors. The impact of labelling strategies on rural development depends of the representativeness of actors in the initial process and in the decision making. To reach compromises and safeguard the reputation of the products, labelling initiatives must organise themselves around a governance body that is territorially embedded and representative of the collective interest.

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# ANNEXE

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WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY  
WAGENINGEN UR

*For quality of life*

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UNDERSIGNED PARTIES:**

From one hand,

**Ms Alice Dos Santos,**

Student in Master 'Development and Rural Innovation' at Wageningen University and Mountain Food Product Intern at Euromontana,  
Designated below as the "student",

And

**Mr Sietze Vellema,**

Associate professor of 'Knowledge, Technology and Innovation' Chair Group of Wageningen University,  
Designated below as the "thesis supervisor",

From the other hand,

**Mr Valery Elisseeff,** Director of the Comité Interprofessionnel de Gestion du Comté (CIGC),

Designated below as the "organisation",

THAT BEING SAID:

The organisation accepting to provide the information needed for the realisation of a thesis does so in full freedom. Doing so, it demonstrates great confidence that she has in the absolute discretion of the student and the thesis supervisor.

To avoid misunderstanding, it is recalled that the student and his/her thesis supervisor commit to maintain a strictly confidentiality of the information that will be transmitted to them in the frame of the data collection according to the following conditions:

- The student must comply with business secrecy; the information that will be transmitted to him/her, as well as all data concerning directly or indirectly the activity of the organisation, are considered as strictly confidentiality, unless expressly declared otherwise. The student commits to share the data collected only with his/her thesis supervisor.
- The text, produced from the research, must not circulate by any means without the express permission of the organisation. The organisation will be required to state its position regarding authorisation for issue of the master thesis by choosing one of the three options:
  - o The thesis can be published in its entirety
  - o Parts of the thesis can be published (to defined at the time of signature of the authorisation for issue of the master thesis)
  - o The thesis will remain confidential

In the case 'the thesis will remain confidential', the student and his/her thesis supervisor will be allowed to share the thesis with the two designated examiners for the evaluation of the work upon the prior signature of a confidentiality agreement.

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Date:

Place: Wageningen

---

**CONTACT DETAILS OF THE LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ORGANISATION:**

Last name:

First name:

Address:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Signature of the legal representative of the organisation:

Date:

Place:

