

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS): a tool to improve the effectiveness of Geographical Indications in short food supply chains; the case of Parma district.

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Abstract – In Short food supply chains (SFSC), the product quality is strictly connected to the quality of the control system. When consumers play an active role in controlling the quality of products, the elements characterizing the quality as a domestic convention further increase the reputation of the products. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the role of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) as quality control system in SFSC. Most research and investigation on PGS have been conducted and developed within the framework of organic agriculture practices. This paper aims to investigate if PGS can represent an opportunity for GIs, in terms of internal governance and as an opportunity to facilitate combinations with other geographically-linked labels. The research makes reference to the case of the area of Parma (Italy) and particularly to the PGS certification system developed by consumer groups jointly with producers. Applying the Social Network Analysis (SNA), the paper investigates values, motivations, limits and risks for producers joining the PGS.

Keywords – certification, PGS, participation .

INTRODUCTION

Short food supply chains (SFSC) are organizational models capable to simultaneously address the needs of various stakeholders: i) consumers accessing high quality local products; ii) local farmers gaining direct market access; iii) civil society, through sustainable rural development policies. SFSCs, developed in localized territories and based on proximity, have interesting implications in terms of governance of the food system. In Localized Agri-food Systems (LAFS) there are different types of food products such as Geographical Indications (GIs), organic, typical and locally recognized products. Those characteristics could be simultaneously present in the same product, or can also be spread among different products. The quality of the control system and the quality of the products are strictly interconnected in SFSC. When consumers play an active role in controlling the quality of prod-

ucts, this generally leads to an increase in the reputation of the products. There are several ways to incentivize the participation of consumers and one of the most recognized and studied instrument is the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) (Moura et al. 2019). PGS are second party certification systems based on an innovative holistic approach, combining several dimensions of sustainability (economic, social and environmental) with technical and traditional knowledge (Fonseca, 2004). PGS are particularly suitable for SFSCs as they are low-cost, local systems for product or value chain quality assurance, that strongly emphasize social control and knowledge-building. PGS are networks, created within local communities, that include producers, experts, public sector officials and consumers. All the stakeholders – particularly consumers - are encouraged to actively participate in the process, establishing the norms tailored to local conditions and socio-cultural context and playing a key-role in the control procedures. This active participation of the stakeholders enhances transparency, trust, social networks, knowledge exchange and a form of social control (FAO, 2016). Participation and horizontality are key aspects of PGS membership that promote producer self-awareness and self-confidence, while simultaneously benefiting consumers in terms of access to information and end-user guarantee. Moreover PGS play an important role in community building and empowerment, by demanding a high level of commitment and engagement by all actors involved.

METHODS

Most researches and investigations on PGS have been conducted and developed within the framework of organic agriculture practices (IFOAM, 2015). Nowadays, the PGS has expanded its boundaries and is perceived and adopted as a reliable and instrument to assess

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sustainability in agriculture across a wider spectrum of practices, beyond organic agriculture. PGS is considered to be a viable tool in some pilot initiatives connected to various sustainability standards and quality schemes. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the role of PGS as quality control system in SFSC, going beyond the area of interest of organic agriculture and exploring its possible interactions with the Geographical Indications (GIs). The paper aims to investigate: *i*) if PGS certification enhances or replaces the value of quality perceived by consumers; *ii*) if PGS increases the product value thanks to the trust relations established between producers and consumers; and *iii*) if PGS can represent an opportunity for GIs, in terms of internal governance and as an opportunity to facilitate combinations with other geographically-linked labels and with other labels. The paper makes reference to the case of the district of Parma and particularly to the PGS certification system developed by consumer groups jointly with producers of the Parma area (District of Solidarity Economy-DES). The research considers the following aspects: motivations for joining the PGS; perceived values of PGS (social embeddedness, ownership, transparency); participation (consumers and producers); limits and risks; added value of PGS (reputation, trust, reduced cost for small producers, etc.). The research applies the Social Network Analysis (SNA) through questionnaires targeting producers and stakeholders members of the PGS of the Parma DES.

RESULTS

After several preparatory meetings with the coordination committee of the Parma DES, the research is currently in its implementation phase. The SNA is being applied to over thirty producers and other stakeholders members of the Parma PGS DES.

Expected results: the preliminary results should be ready before the date of the conference (June 2022). According to literature, the SNA based on the graph theory is a valid methodology to identify the relationships among actors (Chiffolleau et al., 2014). This will allow the authors to understand the centrality of each actor, the main properties of the overall network and the role that PGS plays as control system of the network. More specifically the authors expect that results of the SNA will allow to assess the effectiveness of PGS for GIs certified producers.

Generalization of the results: the analysis refers to a specific case study but the authors believe that some indications could be used for similar contexts. The main objective is specifically to understand if PGS could represent a potential complementary instrument for GIs products, particularly for small GIs producers of SFSC, targeting local and regional markets.

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