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LABELLING, CERTIFICATION AND BRANDING OF CHEESES IN THE SOUTHEASTERN ALPS (ITALY, SLOVENIA): MONTASIO, BOVEC, TOLMINC AND MOHANT CHEESE

Špela Ledinek Lozej



ŠPELA LEDINEK LOZEJ

Exhibition of cheeses at the evaluation and auction, Sutrio.

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Špela Ledinek Lozej¹

Labelling, certification and branding of cheeses in the southeastern Alps (Italy, Slovenia): Montasio, Bovec, Tolminc and Mohant cheese

ABSTRACT: The paper presents various collective instruments used in the labelling, certification and branding of cheeses in the southeastern Alps of Slovenia and Italy. Based on long term ethnography it discusses four case studies of Montasio, Bovec, Tolminc, and Mohant cheeses, that were awarded protected designation of origin at European Union level. The impact of geographical indications on the local dairy chains is compared to other instruments, ranging from top-down European and national quality schemes and inventories of traditional agricultural products and heritage, to grass-root initiatives such as Slow Food instruments and local brands. The study finds substantial difference in the use and impact of geographical indications in Italy and Slovenia, as well as several ambiguous and dissonant effects in all the identified instruments.

KEY WORDS: cheese, geographical indications, quality schemes, collective trademarks and certificates, heritage registers, the southeastern Alps

Označevanje, certificiranje in znamčenje sirov v jugovzhodnih Alpah (Italija, Slovenija): montaž, bovški sir, tolminc in mohant

POVZETEK: V prispevku predstavljamo kolektivna orodja označevanja, certificiranja in znamčenja sirov na območju jugovzhodnih Alp Slovenije in Italije. Na podlagi etnografske raziskave smo obravnavali štiri primere sirov z zaščiteno označbo porekla na evropski ravni, to so montaž, bovški sir, tolminc in mohant. Učinke geografskih označb na mlečne verige primerjamo z učinki drugih instrumentov kvalificiranja, od evropskih shem kakovosti, nacionalnih registrov tradicionalnih izdelkov in dediščine do ljudskih pobud, kot so *Slow Food* in lokalne znamke. Ugotovili smo razliko med rabo, vplivom in učinki geografskih označb v Italiji in Sloveniji ter neskladja med učinki identificiranih orodij.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: sir, geografske označbe, sheme kakovosti, kolektivne znamke in certifikati, registri dediščine, jugovzhodne Alpe

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¹ Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Ljubljana, Slovenia
spela.ledinek@zrc-sazu.si (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0632-1414>)

1 Introduction

Changes in society and the economy have shifted the food system towards mass production, intensification and industrialisation, a process that began at the end of the 19th century and accelerated in the second half of the 20th century (Pratt 2007). «...food production, distribution and consumption have become increasingly entangled in global flows of goods, people, money, scientific and technological innovations, services and – last but not least – ideas and cultural trends, supported by ever faster media and communication technologies» (Parasecoli 2017, 13). These developments have given rise to a series of contestious and alternative movements focusing on five main issues: the environment, the future of small farmers, the direction of global trade relations, the rise of corporate power throughout the food chains; and food quality (Pratt 2007). The response of European Union (EU) was the »new rural paradigm« and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which promoted rural development as a multi-level, multi-actor and multi-faceted process, whose main characteristic was the synergy of agriculture and other activities (Ploeg et al. 2000; Ploeg and Roep 2003). This has sparked interest in the revival and qualification of local and traditional agricultural products. Several food product qualification instruments have emerged, ranging from top-down European quality schemes to bottom-up initiatives of territorial branding, oscillating between trademarks and heritage inventories, i.e. between the *properties of food* and *food property* (Mattioli 2013).

Researchers studying the impact of geographical indications, collective marks, certification marks, presidia, registers and other forms of branding have found that these tools may have positive effects on rural development as a whole (Bowen and Master 2011) helping to contribute to the preservation of rural communities in maintaining control over local production and creating opportunities for non-local markets. Nevertheless, their potential is often overestimated (Coombe, Ives and Huizenga 2014). Among the adverse effects mentioned were homogenisation, standardisation and other eventual changes in the production process due to increased production and shifting to non-local markets (Bowen and Master 2011; Parasecoli 2017). Among the ambiguous effects is also the changing role and meaning of labelled goods which, instead of satisfying personal calorific needs, connecting everyday practices and symbolising rituals, become qualified market goods (MacDonald 2013), appropriated by individual and/or external actors for non-local or niche markets (Leitch 2003) in the context of the broader process of turning rural areas into living museums for privileged urban visitors (Barham 2003). Many researchers find that geographical indications (GI), territorial brands, and collective trademarks (CT) do not reflect pre-existing differences, but instead establish and reify them (Coombe, Ives and Huizenga 2014; May et al. 2017). Such narratives show that we are consuming the product of a unique and traditional farming system. Still, the reality is far more complex, as Pratt (2007) found out that these specialty products were generated out of sustained commercial activity, state regulatory systems and international trade agreement. Crops, products, and produce are things that labelling transforms into (lower or) high-quality niche products. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the scales, power relations and interests behind initiatives that introduce new organisational forms, requirements and actors into the agro-food supply chains (Ledinek Lozej 2020).

This paper examines initiatives in relation to cheese. Cheese is a product that – comparable to wine – is simultaneously rooted in the discourse of *terroir* (and *terroir*-based geographical indications) and (traditional) skills, craftsmanship and artistry, and therefore has a latent potency in (re)introducing (re)localisation, reinvention, heritagisation and appropriation processes by various actors in the background of designation and brand labelling. And, above all, in the selected mountain regions of Italy and Slovenia, cheese was, and still is, one of the essential agricultural products, not only in the daily diet but, above all, also as a highly valued (artisanal or industrial) market product. In the words of Grasseni (2017, 4), »cheese is here the chosen pivot of broader epistemologies that are acted on the ground, mediating personal, local and scalar levels of agency.« Several authors have described contexts and outcomes of cheese designations, sometimes even »battles of cheeses« in »the heritage arena« (Grasseni 2017), as can be seen from the ethnographies in disputes over product appropriation at transnational, national and local level, between industrial and artisanal producers, and between private and community interests (Gorlach et al. 2006; Bowen and Master 2011; May 2013; Welz 2015; West 2016; May 2017; Welz 2017; Bardone and Spalvěna 2019), and especially from several in-depth ethnographies on the designation, reinvention and heritagisation of Alpine cheeses (e.g. Tschofen (2017) on the Austrian Vorlaberg Montafon sour cheese; Grasseni (2007, 2011, 2017) on the Italian Bergamasque Bitto, Formai de Mut, Branzi, Stracchino and Strachitunt cheeses;

Godina Golija (2012) on Mohant cheese; Ledinek Lozej (2020) on Tolminc cheese; Pascolini (2008) on alpine Friuli cheeses, and Čotar (1988) and Bovolenta and Romanzin (2014) on Montasio cheese).

While comparative perspectives on cheese labels in the southeastern Alps of Friuli and Slovenia have been partially addressed in the framework of the research on high mountain pastures in the Julian Alps (Ledinek Lozej 2017; Ledinek Lozej and Roškar 2018a; Ledinek Lozej and Roškar 2018b), the overall picture in the cross-border Alpine region of Slovenia and Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG, Italy) remains to be uncovered in this paper. The main research questions of our study is to explore the reasoning, the impact, and the differences between the effects of GI in Italy and Slovenia. Additionally, we have included assessment of several other collective qualification instruments, their use and their potential complementarity or eventual exclusivity with GI.

2 Methodology and research area

Having understood labelling, certification and branding as qualification instruments with differing impacts at a variety of levels, we have focused the study on presenting and comparing the four cheeses from the Friuli and Slovenian Alpine region with recognised GI at EU level – Italian Montasio cheese and Slovenian Bovec, Mohant and Tolminc cheese (see Figure 1).

In assessing the supplementary qualification tools, we only considered collective actions aimed at qualifying cheese on the basis of territoriality and/or (traditional) skills, for example, EU, national or regional quality schemes (e.g. mountain product, organic labels), territorial brands (i.e. collective trademarks), non-governmental initiatives (e.g. Slow Food), as well as heritage or traditional product inventories. Thus, in this assessment, we have disregarded private trademarks, brands and other commercial initiatives, that (might) use comparable narratives.

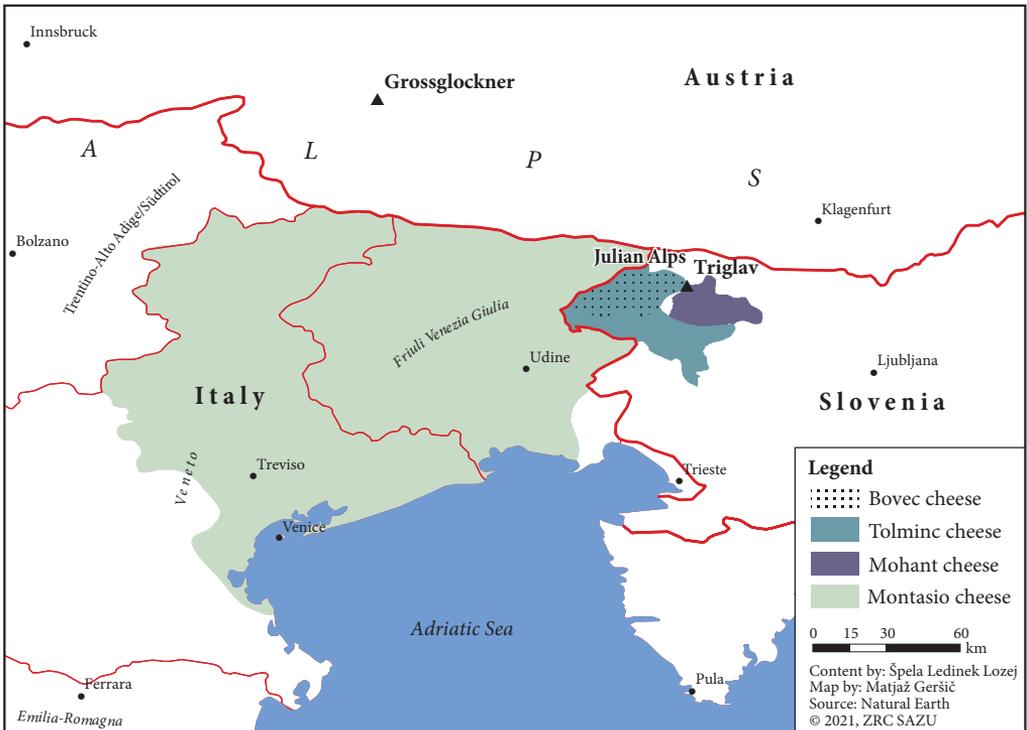


Figure 1: The production areas of Bovec, Tolminc, Mohant and Montasio cheese, as they are defined in the specifications (355/2011/EU; 187/2012/EU; 753/2012/EU; 1127/2013/EU; 1163/2013/EU).

The data was interpreted by using the qualitative case studies method, following on from Bowen and Master (2011, 75), which is particularly appropriate and useful in developing »an understanding of the contradictions or unexpected outcomes of particular processes« as they »lend themselves to emergent theories and interpretations« (Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg 1991, 277). The case study method »allows us to 'reconstruct' the existing body of literature on values-based food labels and territorially embedded agri-food systems – elaborating, correcting, and refining it – through showing how it does, or does not, account for the cases at hand« (Bowen and Master 2011, 75). Thus, the described case studies serve as a lens to analyse effects afforded by GIs and any eventual conjunctions, synergies, complementarities and exclusivities with other food qualification instruments.

The cases are drawn from the long-term ethnography of alpine pasture and alpine dairying practices in Slovenia and from the ethnography of the alpine pasture in Friuli between 2016 and 2017. Unstructured and non-formal interviews were conducted with cattle breeders (9), cheesemakers (15), shepherds (14), representatives of grazing communities (5), cooperatives (2), and regional consortia (1), managers of dairies (2), employees of regional development agencies (3) and chamber of agriculture (2), representatives of national and regional parks (2), regional museum (1), ecomuseum (2), and with a representative of Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food (1) (the interlocutors that have multiple roles are counted only once). The data was supplemented by observations with different degrees of participation, that ranged from mere observation at trade fairs, cheese exhibitions and auctions to help at varying chores in an alpine dairy or active presentation of research result at some events, where the issues of traditional food and cheesemaking were discussed.

The empirical data is complemented by interpretation and analysis of primary sources, such as laws, regulations, decrees, product specifications, statutes, programmes and comparable technical literature, available in the eAmbrosia: EU Geographical Indications Register (Internet 1), as well as on the websites and registers of other (inter)national and local actors engaged in food labelling and qualification.

In case of missing references, data has been taken from field notes or interviews.

3 Results

3.1 Cheese qualification instruments in the research area

Based on our research two main types of labelling practices can be identified: firstly, purely commercial labelling practices found in commerce (e.g. sales names, private and collective trademarks); and secondly, certification or designation labelling, which may provide information on the origin of production (e.g. geographical indications) and/or technology (e.g. organic quality schemes). Behind such labelling lie either instruments based on intellectual property rights (e.g. brands, (collective) trademarks), standardisation (e.g. quality schemes, different types of registers and certificates) or specific non-governmental certification. These qualifications usually refer to territoriality, i.e. they designate the origin (e.g. geographical indications), distinct (traditional) skills and knowledge (e.g. trademarks, heritage registers, presidia) or production technology (e.g. organic farming). Some qualifications meet the requirements of various references, e.g. Slow Food presidia are location-bound, emphasising traditional skills and production technologies at the same time.

Appreciation and valorisation of the link between food and specific places have been the basis of commercial and legal frameworks in Europe since the mid-19th century (Pratt 2007; Parasecoli 2017). Precursors to such geographical indications were developed and consolidated in France for wine labelling in connection with the notion of *terroir*. France was also the first to establish its administrative system for appellations of origin; for wines and spirits in 1935, that was extended to cheeses in 1955 (Thévenod-Mottet and Delphine 2011). This relationship between *terroir* and food has gradually been adopted by other countries but remains primarily a phenomenon of the European Mediterranean (Pratt 2007). In the international arena, bilateral agreements were initially established, and have been included within the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) since 1947. In 1951, the International Convention for the Use of Appellations of Origin and Denominations of Cheeses (so-called Stresa Convention) was drawn up, applying specifically to cheeses and to concerns about the use of the designation of origin and the names of cheeses, and was ratified by eight European countries in 1953, with Italy among them (O'Connor 2004). Italian

legislation (Tutela ... 1954) has distinguished Denominations of Origin and Denominations of Typicality since 1954. The characteristics of the former primarily derive from the production environment, while those of the latter result mostly from production methods and techniques (Grasseni 2017). In 1992 a regulatory framework was adopted by the European Economic Community to certify and authenticate products with a guaranteed or protected place of origin, and this subsumed and included national legislation (Barham 2003). Two categories have existed since then: that of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and that of Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) (2081/92/EEC). The PDO indicates that all stages of production and processing take place in the designated geographical area. In contrast, the PGI demonstrates that at least one step of the production and processing takes place in the area specified in the designation. A less strict category, the Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG), which does not refer to a product's specific area of origin but to its traditional composition and production methods, was added in 2006 (Grasseni 2017; Parasecoli 2017). In Slovenia, GIs were protected following the Industrial Property Act; EU regulations were only adopted by the Agriculture Act in 2000 (see also Table 1).

Of the 192 PDO cheeses listed in EU geographical indications register, 53 are from Italy and four from Slovenia. Despite the sizeable Italian number, there is only one cheese from FVG, namely Montasio cheese, while there are three PDO-recognized and produced cheeses from Slovenia – Bovec, Mohant and Tolminc cheese (Internet 1).

There are several other EU, national, regional and NGO collective instruments applied to cheese qualification, based either on certification or registration, that overlap, make additional differentiations or complement GIs. They indicate and promote organic production, short food supply chains, direct sales, mountain- or protected-areas, or local products and are presented in Table 1.

3.2 Case studies: Montasio cheese (Italy) and Bovec, Mohant and Tolminc cheese (Slovenia)

Montasio cheese, the only one PDO awarded cheese in FVG, owes its name to Mount Montasio, that lies in the Italian part of the Western Julian Alps. The Moggio Udinese Benedictine Abbey owned the mountain pastures below Mount Montasio, and it is said that the monks taught alpine herders the techniques and skills for processing a firm hard cheese suitable for maturing. The first documented mentions of »Montasio cheese« date back to 1773 and 1775 and were found on the price lists of San Daniele and of Udine township in Friuli. At the end of the following century, the dairy technique became remarkably widespread with cooperative dairies in the valleys across Carnia and on the Friuli plains (Čotar 1988; Pasut, Romanzin and Bovolenta 2016). Montasio cheese had been awarded Denomination of Typicality following the Italian legislation already in 1955 (Riconoscimento ... 1955). The Consortium for the Protection of Montasio Cheese was founded in 1984 with the aim of »protecting the production and trade of Montasio cheese, the use of its designation and the preservation of its typicality and particular characteristics« (Internet 2). Montasio achieved a stricter Denomination of Origin in 1986, while also benefitting from permission by decree to produce in other areas (Riconoscimento ... 1986). It was awarded PDO at European level in 1996, with the first round of registration of previously protected designations (1107/96/EC). Subsequently, several changes were made to the description, production methods and labelling (2010/C 212/07; 355/2011/EU; 1127/2013/EU; 2016/C 70/04; 2017/C 286/08).

The consortium has a twofold operation; in addition to monitoring production and trade, it is also the promoter. It lobbied for the cheese to be included in the Legends from Europe program (2011–2014), which informed consumers and professionals in the USA about the EU PDO system (Internet 3). With a production of 6104 tons in 2019, it ranks seventh in Italy among cow's milk cheeses (Internet 4). Its production is widespread in across almost all FVG and part of the Veneto region (Internet 5, see also Figure 1), and there are 28 Montasio producers in FVG (and another 15 in Veneto Region), as well as 17 ripening and maturing plants (Internet 6).

Despite high production figures and general recognition, it is – as we were told by some cheesemakers – no longer appreciated as an alpine and artisanal cheese; hence there was a need for differentiation, which has been bridged by several additional qualifications based on territory of production or production technology. These included attributes such as organic production, long-term maturing (over 100 days), using only milk of the Italian Simmental breed, and labelling as a 'mountain product' (Bovolenta and

Table 1: Overview of the main cheese qualifications instruments and regulations.

	International/European Agreements	Italy (FVG)	Slovenia
Geographical indications	International Convention for the Use of Appellations of Origin and Denominations of Cheeses (Stresa Convention 1951, cited in O'Connor 2004)	Ratified by Italy in 1953.	
		National Law (Tutela . . . 1954): • Denominations of Origin • Denominations of Typicity	Industrial Property Act (1992)
EU Quality Scheme	Council Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92 of 14 July 1992 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs (2081/92/EEC): • Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) • Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)		Agriculture Act (2000) (pre-accession adoption of EU regulations)
EU, national and regional quality scheme expanded - labelling of mountain and organic production		National Law (Disposizioni . . . 2002): • Produced in the mountains (a label for differentiation of EU PDO and PGI products) Regional Law FVG (Norme . . . 2002): • the regional quality scheme AQUA (Agriculture, Quality and Environment, It. <i>Agricoltura, Qualità e Ambiente</i>)	
	European charter for mountain quality food products (2005, updated in 2016) by Euromontana		
	Council regulation (EC) No 509/2006 of 20 March 2006 on agricultural products and foodstuffs as traditional specialities guaranteed (509/2006/EC): • Traditional specialities guaranteed (TSG)		
	Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 of 28 June 2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 (834/2007/EC)		
	Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 November 2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs (1151/2012/EU): • Mountain product	Decree of 20 July 2018, adopted with the reduction of distance (Linee . . . 2018)	Rules on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs (Rules . . . 2015b) (adopted without derogation)
	Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 (1305/2013/EU)		Act amending the Agriculture act (2014): • Selected Quality – Slovenia
Territorial brands: – Local certificates – Collective trademarks		Quality Certificate of the Julian Prealps Natural Park (Internet 15) Currently developing a common certificate – UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve Julian Alps	The Triglav National Park Quality Certificate (Internet 14)
			From Bohinj (Sl. <i>Bohinjsko</i>)
Governmental registers of traditional, local and/or heritage products		Register of Traditional Products (It. <i>Prodotto agroalimentare tradizionale</i> , PAT) (Internet 9) Small Local Production	Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (Internet 19)
			Intangible Search: Inventory of the Intangible Heritage of the Alpine Regions (Internet 11)
NGO instruments	Slow Food (Internet 20): • Arc of Taste • Presidia		

Romanzin 2014; Pasut, Romanzin and Bovolenta 2016). Probably, the most appreciated is matured cheese from the milk of the Italian Simmental cows and produced in the alpine pastures under Mount Montasio. That cheese has also been included on the Slow Food Ark of Taste (Internet 7) and is also labelled as a typical product of the Julian Prealps Nature Park but, interestingly, it is not part of the Moggio Udinese municipal designation. On the other hand, Montasio cheese from the Montasio alp is recognised by the Small-scale Local Production instrument implemented by Veneto and FVG regions and the Italian Health Authority and Research Organization for Animal Health and Food Safety, whose aim is helping small local producers reduce excessive administrative bureaucracy (Internet 8). Three dairies producing Montasio cheese are included in the regional quality scheme of FVG AQUA ('Agriculture, Quality and Environment') (Bianco, Pozzi and Tudorov 2015). In contrast, Montasio cheese is not listed in the Register of Traditional Products, even though there are 14 types of cheese from FVG (Internet 9). Neither Montasio cheese, nor any other Friuli food(-related) elements, are listed among the »intangible demo-ethno-anthropological assets« in national or regional heritage inventory (Internet 10), and also not in Intangible Search, an Inventory of the Intangible Heritage of the Alpine Regions (Internet 11). See Table 2 for different instruments on Montasio cheese.

Three cheeses have been awarded PDO in Slovenia: Bovec, Mohant and Tolminc cheese. Bovec cheese is a hard alpine cheese made from sheep's milk (and may contain a limited amount of goat's or cow's milk); Tolminc is also a hard cheese made from raw or thermalised cow's milk; Mohant is a piquant soft unmoulded cheese made from raw cow's milk. Bovec and Tolminc cheese were previously documented on the Udine price list of 1756 (Fischione 1998) and are produced in the Upper Soča Valley. Mohant cheese is made in the Bohinj area. It was also popular in other Alpine regions before the introduction of common cheese-making. Until the middle of the 20th century, all the previously mentioned cheeses were produced in alpine pasture dairies and, to a limited extent, also in the lowland cooperative dairies. Their production declined in the second half of the 20th century. The exception is Tolminc cheese, which has enjoyed industrial-scale output at the cooperative Kobarid Dairy since 1957 (Ledinek Lozej 2020). Their production was revived and »reinvented« (Grasseni 2017) in the new global heritage arena, with the help of GIs and other qualification instruments at the end of the 20th century.

The first attempts to designate these locally produced cheeses with a GI did not begin until the second half of the 1990s, as new-born Slovenia moved closer to the EU, and accession negotiations also included intellectual property rights and GIs. Tolminc cheese was registered by the Tolminc Cheesemaking Association as a designation of origin at the Slovenian Intellectual Property Office of the then Ministry of Economic Affairs in 1999 under the existing Industrial Property Act (1992). Due to harmonisation of national legislation with that of the EU, the PDO was to be reapplied at the Ministry of Agriculture following new EU regulations and procedures (Agriculture Act 2000, Rules ... 2003a). It was granted a PDO at national level in 2003 as one of the first food items in Slovenia (Rules ... 2003b) but was only registered at European level in 2012 (187/2012/EU). The delay was a result of the Tolmin Agricultural Cooperative (the owner of the Kobarid Planika Dairy) having applied for the registration of the collective trademark (CT) 'Cheese from alpine milk – Tolminc' at the Intellectual Property Office some years earlier (Internet 12). Since then there have been two recognised Tolminc cheeses: Tolminc PDO, produced following stricter PDO specifications by certified producers, and Tolminc CT cheese, produced following more relaxed regulations by only one producer – its own subsidiary cooperative, the Planika Dairy in Kobarid (Ledinek Lozej 2020). Following the Tolminc example, Bovec and Mohant cheeses received PDO recognition at national level in 2004 (Rules ... 2004a; Rules ... 2004b) and at European level in 2012 and 2013 (753/2012/EU; 1163/2013/EU).

In comparison with the 43 producers of Montasio cheese, there are only three producers of Tolminc PDO cheese, three producers of Mohant and five producers of Bovec PDO cheese (Internet 13). The ratio between the produced Montasio cheese and the Slovenian PDO cheese is even lower, as the quantity of all Slovenian PDO cheese (i.e. about 130 tons of Tolminc cheese, 13 tons of Bovec cheese and 1.5 tons of Mohant cheese per year (Ogorevc 2007)) is only 2.5% of the annual production of Montasio cheese. But these numbers do not reflect the actual situation, because, as we have seen, in addition to the Tolminc PDO, there is at least 1000 tons of Tolminc CT cheese produced by the Kobarid Planika Dairy.

Two producers of Mohant cheese and two of Tolminc cheese, members of the Association of Rural Cheesemakers (Internet 14), are also part of the 'Selected Quality – Slovenia' national quality scheme, which was introduced in 2014 for agricultural products with specific characteristics in regards to production, raw materials, processing and local production and processing (Act ... 2014; Odredba ... 2015; Rules ... 2015a; Rules ... 2015b; Specifikacija ... 2019) and is supported by an intensive media campaign (Internet 15).

Table 2. Montasio, Bovec, Tolminc and Mohant cheeses in relation to different food qualification instruments.

	Montasio	Bovec	Tolminc	Mohant
GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS				
Organisation in charge / original name (year of establishment, number of producers in 2020)	Consortium for the Protection of Montasio Cheese / <i>It. Conorzio per la tutela del formaggio Montasio</i> (1984, 43)	Bovec Association of Small Cattle Breeders / <i>Slo. Društvo rejcev drabnice Borske</i> (1998, 5)	Tolminc Cheesemaking Association / <i>Slo. Starsko društvo Tolminc</i> (1999, 3)	Bohinja Cheesemaking Association / <i>Slo. Starsko društvo Bohinj</i> (2000, 3)
National year of recognition	1955 (1986)	2004	1999 (2003)	2004
EU Quality Scheme year of recognition	1996 (2011, 2013)	2012	2012	2013
EXPANDED QUALITY SCHEME				
EU				
• Organic since 2007 (number of producers)	• Organic (4)	• Organic (5)	• Organic (1)	• Organic (1)
• Mountain product since 2005, updated in 2016 (number of producers)	• Mountain product (0)	• Mountain product (0)	• Mountain product (0)	• Mountain product (0)
National				
Name of directory or label / original name (year of establishment, number of producers)	Directory of Mountain Products / <i>Malbo dei prodotti di montagna</i> (since 2003): 'produced in the mountains' / <i>It. prodotto nella montagna</i> (8)		Selected Quality – Slovenia / <i>Slo. Izbrana Kakovost Slovenije</i> (since 2014, 2 members of the Association of Rural Cheesemakers / <i>Slo. Združenje kmečkih sirarjev</i>)	Selected Quality – Slovenia / <i>Slo. Izbrana Kakovost Slovenije</i> (since 2014, 2 members of the Association of Rural Cheesemakers / <i>Slo. Združenje kmečkih sirarjev</i>)
Regional				
Name/original name (number of producers)	AQUA certificate – Agriculture, Quality and Environment / <i>It. Agricoltura, Qualità e Ambiente</i> (3)			
Internal diversification of products				
Name/original name (number of producers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long term maturing (over 100 days) (1) Using only milk of the Italian Simmental breed / <i>It. Solo di Pezzata Rossa Italiana</i> (1) Montasio alp / <i>It. Malga Montasio</i> (1) 			
TERRITORIAL BRANDS				
Local certificates Name / original name (year of establishment, number of producers)	Quality Certificate of the Julian Prealps Natural Park / <i>It. Parco Naturale Prealpi Giulie Marchio di qualità</i> (since 2000, 1)	The Triglav National Park Quality Certificate / <i>Slo. Znak kakovosti Triglavskega narodnega parka</i> (since 2011, 2)	The Triglav National Park Quality Certificate / <i>Slo. Znak kakovosti Triglavskega narodnega parka</i> (since 2011, 1)	Municipality of Bohinj / <i>Slo. Občina Bohinj</i> (since 2015); From Bohinj / <i>Slo. Bohinjsko</i> (3)
Collective trademarks				
Organisation in charge / original name (year of establishment); trademark name / name in original (number of producers)			Tolmin Agricultural Cooperative / <i>Slo. Kmetijska zadruga Tolmin</i> (since 2002); Cheese from alpine milk – Tolminc / <i>Slo. Sir iz planinskega mleka tolminc</i> (1)	
GOVERNMENT REGISTERS OF TRADITIONAL, LOCAL AND/OR HERITAGE PRODUCTS				
Name of instrument / original name (year of establishment, number of producers/ bearers)	Small-scale Local Production / <i>It. Piccole Produzioni Locali</i> (1)		Intangible Search (since 2019, 4)	Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Slovenia / <i>Slo. Register nesnovne kulturne dediščine</i> (since 2013, 1) Intangible Search (since 2018, 3)
NGO INSTRUMENTS				
Name of instrument	Slow Food Ark of Taste (Montasio cheese from Montasio alp)	Slow Food Ark of Taste	Slow Food Ark of Taste	Slow Food Ark of Taste

All five producers of Bovec cheese, one producer of Mohant cheese, and one producer of Tolminc cheese are certified organic producers; and two producers of Bovec cheese and one producer of Tolminc cheese have received the Triglav National Park Quality Certificate (Internet 16; Internet 17). Three producers of Mohant cheese are also among certified suppliers of the recognised 'From Bohinj' brand (Internet 18). 'The Making Bohinj Mohant' is also one of the elements included in the Slovenian Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Internet 19). It is, together with 'Making of Tolminc cheese', listed on the Intangible Search inventory, coordinated by the Lombardy Region as a record of Alpine foodways (Internet 11). All Slovenian PDO cheeses are also listed on the Slow Food Ark of Taste (Internet 20). See Table 2 for different instruments on Bovec, Tolminc and Mohant Cheese.

4 Discussion

Our examination of the collective labelling practices for four mountain cheeses in Slovenia and FVG has revealed a proliferation of qualification tools based on territoriality and/or (traditional) production practices. However, there are also several differences among the cultural biographies of Friuli and Slovenian PDO awarded cheeses. Montasio cheese had outgrown its original slopes under the mountain chain of Montasio in the Julian Alps. It occurred due to being reliably solid (a characteristic legendarily ascribed to Moggio monks), expansion of cooperative dairies in the 19th century, and intensive state and regional support since 1930s, when the alps below Montasio were bought by the Consortium (later the Association) of Owners of Breeding Bulls from Udine, a key player in rebuilding livestock farming in Friuli after the WW I (Pasut, Romanzin and Bovolenta 2006; Ledinek Lozej and Roškar 2018a). It has been awarded denomination of typicity at national level since 1955. In the second half of the 20th century, it became the leading regional dairy brand, and not only a flagship cheese of the FVG and Veneto region but also – as the Legends from Europe program has shown – for the whole of Italy and even Europe. The expansion of the Montasio PDO production area was complemented by internal diversification: two versions of the »mountain product label« (the additional PDO designation under national law and the optional quality label under EU quality schemes), Montasio PDO from the milk of the Italian Simmental breed, organic production, and long-term maturing (see Table 2). Additionally, there are some private labels of the respective cheese dairies, of which the Montasio alp label is probably the most valuable, since it is the only one on both the Slow Food Ark of Taste and in the Small Local Production program. At the same time, Montasio cheese was reduced from a much appreciated alpine cheese to a casual dairy product, as an alpine dairy cheesemaker in the Julian Prealps described: »We produce alpine cheese. Montasio cheese you can get anywhere and anytime, whereas alpine cheese is produced only for three months on an alp; therefore, it has a higher value.« Comparable with other »battles of the cheeses« – the most notorious is undoubtedly the case of Bitto cheese in the Italian Alps (Grasseni 2017; Rinallo and Pitardi 2019) – this originally alpine cheese was appropriated by actors at regional and national level (Ministry of Agriculture, Consortium for the Protection of Montasio Cheese, ERSA, larger lowlands cooperative dairies) that also dictated, governed and popularised further expansion and, unlike the Bitto case, internal diversification. But the majority of smaller and seasonal alpine dairies – except for aforementioned Montasio alpine dairy – did not have such possibilities, or did not want to follow the industrialised pace of the Consortium, and continued to produce predominantly alpine cheeses, named *formaggio di malga*, *Çuç di Mont* or *Çuç* (that were recently listed in the Register of Traditional Products and also recognised by Slow Food).

Compared to Montasio production, Slovenian PDO cheeses are not just marketed, but they also literally are niche products – their production is limited to a narrow territory, the number of certified producers and the quantity of PDO products remains low. They were given PDO at national level in pre-accession adoption of EU regulations at the turn of the millennia, before finally being awarded at EU level in 2012 or 2013. GIs were used – comparably as in other new member states (Welz 2015; Bardone and Spalvěna 2019) – more as a tool for national emancipation by creating »European products« that are produced locally but in compliance with EU legislation, and are a proof of Europeanization and some kind of national property. In the eyes of local actors (predominantly cheese-making associations) GI was also seen as an instrument recognising local production and empowerment of the diverse modalities of the cheese production. This is evidenced by recognition of the Mohant production, but mostly of the diversification in Tolminc cheese's two modes of the production. While differentiation of Montasio cheese was internal, result-

ing in several subtypes of the Montasio PDO cheese, differentiation of Tolminc cheese was external, as there are two varieties of the Tolminc cheese production – the more artisan Tolminc PDO cheese, produced following stricter specifications, and the industrially produced Tolminc CT cheese. Such differentiation was not the case with the Bovec and Mohant cheeses, which were not industrially produced and were (far) less known outside the place of production before being awarded PDO. Despite the previously mentioned empowerment of local products, there are only a few of certified producers of Slovenian PDO awarded cheeses. However, there are many non-certified and non-registered producers of organoleptically and characteristically similar Bovec-, Tolmin-, and Mohant-like cheeses. Even though they cannot officially be sold under the designated name, they are nevertheless produced and consumed, as we were told by an alpine dairy cheesemaker in the Julian Alps: »We do not need to certify our cheese; it is the same as the Tolminc, we just don't have the right to sell it under that name. In any case, we eat it all or sell it at the same price.« And interestingly enough, it was neither PDO-certified nor CT Tolminc cheese, but the non-certified and non-registered variety of a Tolminc-like cheese that was subversive enough to be presented at the biennial Slow Food »Cheese!« event in Bra (Piedmont, Italy) (Topole and Pipan 2020).

There is a substantial difference in the impact of the long-term institutionalised endeavours for the protection of Montasio cheese in Italy and of being awarded an »European products« of Tolminc, Bovec, and Mohant cheese in Slovenia. Whereas the difference of the impact of GIs in Italy and Slovenia is substantial, the differences in application and impact of other EU quality schemes and qualification instruments are not so evident. The 'organic' label is used by certified producers and recognised by specific consumers either in Slovenia or in Friuli; the EU quality scheme »mountain product«, however, is unused by Slovenian and Friuli producers. The additional Slovenian 'Selected Quality - Slovenia' national quality scheme has been supported by an intensive media campaign, but it pertains only to the Planika Dairy and to small scale producers as members of larger networks (either as milk suppliers, members of cooperatives, or of the Association of Rural Cheesemakers). The Italian national quality scheme does not impact the dairy supply chain, while the AQUA regional quality scheme is – following a media-supported launch in 2017 – struggling for visibility and survival among producers and consumers. Producers' and consumers' recognition of the certifications proposed by the two protected parks is still being sought with the additional development of a common umbrella infrastructure in the pipeline. This umbrella infrastructure might also be beneficial in unifying the proliferated territorial brands in Slovenia. In Italy, cheeses, as well as other food and food-related traditional skills and knowledge are listed in the Register of Traditional Products, supervised by Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry, while in Slovenia these are listed in the Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, managed by Ministry of Culture.

Producers that adhere to the qualification instruments in question expect at least greater recognition of their products as well as other benefits, for example, reducing excessive administrative burdens for ensuring food safety, assistance with launching the products on the market, packaging, and promotion, and ultimately also higher prices. The described qualification instruments only partially guarantee it, and only to a limited extent. Sometimes labelling has also counter-effects, through additional costs and time-consuming administration, hence not all producers can meet the requirements and see it as a beneficial opportunity.

The empirical research showed that the impacts of labelling, certification and branding on the future of small farmers in the mountain region of the southeastern Alps in Slovenia and Friuli are ambiguous. Despite the general GIs' rhetoric, that fosters local production and short food chains, they remain part of the global flows of goods and ideas, anchored in the mass production and/or EU administration. The qualifications of cheeses have not had such an impact on a small scale farming, dairying, and preservation of local communities as it was envisaged by the new rural paradigm. Hence, it is not a surprise that in the recently published Farm to Fork Strategy (2020), EU announced to check the legislative framework on GI and labelling and launched the conference and consultation process on strengthening the GIs (Internet 21). The consultation process analysis shall help producers stay competitive in niche markets, provide consumers with better information, and boost regional economies. However, it shall be complemented by empirical research, for example on stakeholders' networks (see e.g. Šmid Hribar, Razpotnik Visković and Bole 2021). And, as Slovenia is the European Region of Gastronomy in 2021 (Internet 22) on the eventual overlapping with new emerging labelling (e. g. Slovenia Green) and with (food) heritagisation (Ledinek Lozej and Šrmpf Vendramin 2020).

5 Conclusion

Our comparison of the collective qualification practices in the southeastern Alps of Friuli (Italy) and Slovenia has shown differences in proliferation, range and size of production of PDO cheese and certified producers, as well as in the eventual selection of supplementing collective food qualification tools based on territoriality and/or (traditional) production practices.

The evidenced differences between Italy and Slovenia and among various complementary qualification tools support the introductory assumption of Coombe, Ives and Huizinga (2014) and of May et al. (2017) that GIs (and other collective certificates and trademarks) do not reflect differences, but they establish and reify them. The described labelling, certification and branding instruments are simultaneously instruments of qualification, differentiation and appropriation. In addition to the predominantly, but not restricted to, economic valuation of products, i.e. the creation of value defined and regulated by different actors to differentiate consumption, the intermediaries – usually decision-makers at multiple levels, but also associations such as Slow Food – emphasise the interaction between genre and territory or tradition. By doing that they essentialise the natural and cultural links between the product and the place of origin or production, thus strengthening the locality or even producing it, and establishing »value regimes« (Mattioli 2013). In these babel of labels, regulated and managed at different scales, we would appreciate some »uncontrolled denominations« (Contini 2014), aiming to deconstruct stereotyped representations, while creating new forms of conviviality.

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