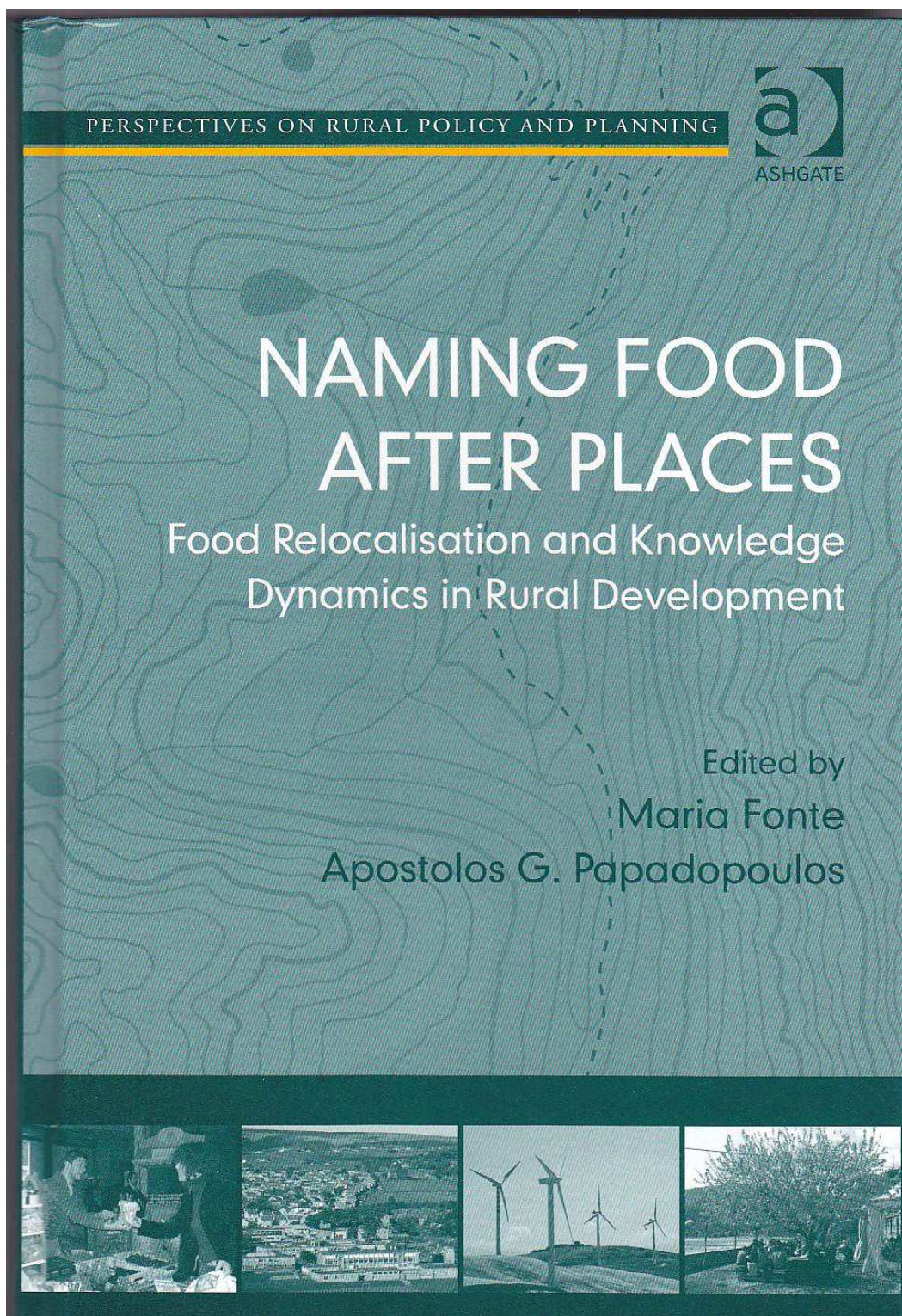


- 9 Traditional and Artisanal Versus Expert and Managerial Knowledge: Dissecting Two Local Food Networks in Valencia, Spain

*Almudena Buciega Arévalo, Javier Esparcia Pérez and Vicente Ferrer San Antonio*

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## Chapter 9

# Traditional and Artisanal Versus Expert and Managerial Knowledge: Dissecting Two Local Food Networks in Valencia, Spain

Almudena Buciega Arévalo, Javier Esparcia Pérez  
and Vicente Ferrer San Antonio

### Introduction

In the last two decades we have seen a significant growth in both the availability of and the demand for quality food. On the demand side, consumer interest is increasing and people are ready to pay more, not only for products of higher quality in terms of raw material, characteristics of the production process or exclusiveness, but also for products embedded in local traditional knowledge and connected to the territory. On the supply side, in the absence of other productive activities, some rural areas have been able to reconvert existing local know-how into marketable commodities able to create employment and generate wealth, while contributing, at the same time, to the preservation of cultural identity. In fact, local foods have been conceptualised by many authors as a form of cultural capital, with the potential to generate wider social and economic benefits for rural areas. Several empirical studies have indicated that regional foods can indeed play this role (Tregear et al. 2007).

Many rural areas have become involved in important processes of transformation in their traditional food production systems, articulated around a few key objectives, such as improving product quality, enhancing traditional production processes through adoption of innovations, expanding into external markets, marketing and publicity. Behind many successful experiences in the agro-food industry we find small family firms that have been in the business for many generations. It is in fact striking how, being the agro-industry the most important Spanish manufacturing sector, 82 per cent of the companies in 1999 were small companies employing less than 50 employees and thus constituting what is close to being the most fragmented industrial fabric in the European Union (EU), surpassed only by Italy with 88 per cent in the same typology of enterprise (FIAB 2004). One rather interesting way of counteracting the potential disadvantages of the small size of these firms has been to build alliances, partnerships and other relationships of cooperation which, under the umbrella of a territorial or quality label, serve to promote local agro-food products. These

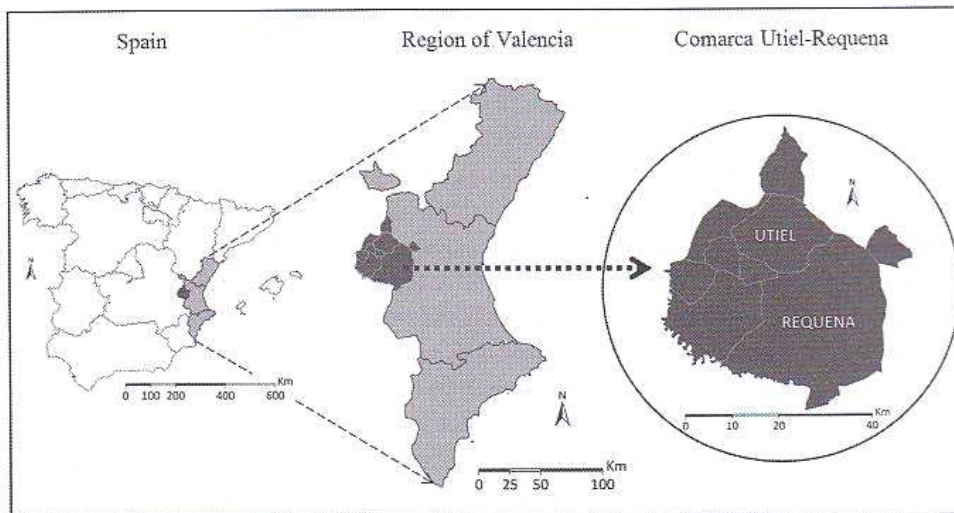
alliances usually have an institutionalised profile; since 1992 the EU, along with national and regional government, has been promoting the protection of agro-food products under different quality labels. EEC Regulation 2081/92 launched the *Protected Designation of Origin* (PDO) and the *Protected Geographic Indication* (PGI) labels, which in the Spanish context are the equivalent of the *Designation of Origin* (DO) and the *Designation of Specificity* (DE). To these two, Spanish legislation has also added the *Generic Designation* (DG). The PDO and PGI labels derive from a wine qualification system that dates back to the nineteenth century, when protocols were developed to protect producers in French wine-growing regions from fraud, following the phylloxera outbreak. These labels imply that the character of the qualified products is linked to physical (for example, soils, climate) and cultural features (for example, traditions of production and processing) of a territory (Tregear et al. 2007). According to Ilbery et al. (2005) there are many complex reasons for the proliferation of such schemes. They include the need to increase revenue; to protect and enhance the environment; to defend local traditional products and the social and economic structures that sustain them; to find alternative and more socially just means of producing food.

The potential that local or regional food systems may have for rural development can vary depending on the strategy that the relevant actors adopt when promoting them. Pacciani et al. (2001) distinguish two types of strategy: *the supply chain strategy*, which implies the building of a strong network of actors around the production and processing of a regional product. Under this approach, the regional product contributes to socio-economic well-being, increasing revenues and employment opportunities (Tregear et al. 2007). In the second type of strategy, based on *territorial quality*, actors see local food interlinked to other environmental, cultural and socioeconomic resources. Thus, regional foods are perceived as contributing, potentially, to a wide range of initiatives that encourage diverse activities and novel interactions between actors (for example, tourist trails, markets, festivals, educational initiatives, community events).

In this chapter we present two case studies, both located in the same geographical area, the Utiel-Requena *comarca*,<sup>1</sup> (see Figure 9.1) that highlight the two different strategies referred to above. One case study is related to the construction of the label of origin for the Utiel-Requena wine DO: that initiative corresponds to the supply chain strategy, though in the last years it has also been developing in the direction of the territorial approach. The other concerns the Requena's cold meat and might fit more appropriately into the second type of strategy, albeit not without a mixture of some features of the first. Both cases are interesting in the way they combine tacit and expert knowledge, not to mention the equally interesting networks of cooperation established around them.

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<sup>1</sup> A *comarca* is a physically and historically defined territory, grouping together a number of municipalities.



**Figure 9.1** Study area in the region of Valencia

### The context

The agro-food production system is of importance for the whole economy of the region of Valencia. In 2006, the agro-food industry accounted for 20.6 per cent of total Valencian exports, occupying a position in the ranking of export sectors second only to the automobile and automobile components (Conselleria de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación – Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Department, Regional Government – 2008). But these figures may serve to conceal the existing divide in the region between an intensive irrigated agriculture and a dry-crops agriculture which is not profitable, is highly subsidised, and is the predominant form of agriculture in the backward rural areas of the Valencia region. It is in these areas that strategies focused on the enhancement of product quality and establishment of linkages with specific localities have gained increasing importance as a way of adding value and differentiating products in a highly competitive market (Moreno Sánchez 2005).

Among the most important agro-food products manufactured in the Region of Valencia are olive oil and wine; products conspicuously present in the rural landscape, highly embedded in the culture and economy and traditionally an important source of income in the rural family economy. Other products (for example pastries) are widely diffused and produced in different types, each reflecting the differences in the know-how involved in producing them. Finally there are products whose identity is linked to specific places, where there are certain raw materials or physical conditions, around which a specific expertise has coalesced (for example, meat products, cheese, herbal products). In some cases these products have succeeded in overcoming the limitations of local markets, becoming differentiated products appreciated in wider markets.

In examining this process it is worth looking at the role played by institutions, including the existing context of qualification and labelling systems. The qualification process effectively transforms the local knowledge and the natural resources embodied in regional food (the basis of the added value) into the collective intellectual property of the relevant actors (Thiedig and Sylvander 2000). In the Region of Valencia's government, the *Conselleria de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación* (Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Department) is the key institution for its competencies in agro-food products. Situated within this department is the Valencian Institute for Agro-food, a body that promotes 16 different agro-food products under two main quality labels: *Origin Designation* (DO) and the *Protected Geographic Indication* (PGI). Each product has its own regulatory board, which is a partnership of stakeholders with an interest in the particular product.

In a manner that is both compatible with and complementary to these two existing labels, in 1998 the Regional Government created what was at first called *Calidad Valenciana* Valencian Quality label, and later became known as the *Certificación y Validación*, Certification and Validation label. These labels respond to the consumers' increased concern for quality and protect products from possible fraud and misunderstandings (Moreno 2005). To date, labels have been made available for olive oil, honey (rosemary and orange blossom) and some types of cold meat.

The next sections of this chapter deal with two study cases exemplifying possible alternative trajectories for the evolution and consolidation of local agro-foods. Both converge on the same point albeit via very different routes. Information gathered for the purpose of documenting these cases is derived, on the one hand from secondary sources and, on the other from in-depth interviews with 10 relevant stakeholders and experts.

### **Case study 1: The Utiel-Requena Label of Origin (Utiel-Requena DO) for wine**

#### *Context and background*

*La Plana de Utiel-Requena* is a *comarca* in the west of the region of Valencia. It includes nine municipalities, among them Requena and Utiel, the most important urban centres. In 2008 the area had a population of 39,970 people and contrary to what is typically the case in inland rural areas, the broad demographic trends for the whole *comarca* have been positive in the last 15 years. Nonetheless, population growth is mostly concentrated in the two main cities, Utiel and Requena with approximately 12,000 and 20,000 inhabitants respectively. Most of the other smaller municipalities have lost population in the last 10 years.

The Utiel-Requena Plain is a territory where viticulture is the main agrarian activity and indeed the base of the area's economy (Piqueras 1998). The service sector, the most important in terms of the number of jobs created, is very much



linked to the production and marketing of wine. This, in other words, is a traditional wine-producing region, with one of the largest, but at the same time most compact, vineyard areas in Spain. The production of wine here dates back to prehistoric times, but it is only in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a time of great expansion in the manufacturing of spirits, that it became a commercial activity. The year 1854 is of particular note, for it was then that Catalonians and French manifested a clear interest in the wine produced in this area, which was seen as ideal as a complementary ingredient to lend colour and strength to their own wines without altering the original flavour. The key element behind this attractive red colour was a variety of grape called *bobal*, an autochthonous variety extremely well adapted to the area's climate and soil. It is the most important type of grape in the area in terms of volume of production, followed by *tempranillo* and *garnacha*, introduced more recently.

At that time, the increase in the demand for this type of wine, known as 'doble pasta' – or double pomace, encouraged local investment in the planting of new vineyards, and the area became highly specialised in the production of this type of 'colouring wine'. It is important to note that the darkening produced through addition of *bobal* is very difficult to obtain using other varieties so this was, and still is, a much appreciated product in this particular market.

The commerce soon gave rise to the first growers' association: the Guild of Growers of Utiel (*Gremio de Cosecheros de Utiel*), founded in 1861. It brought together 35 large producers whose objectives were to improve cultivation and processing techniques while at the same time securing control over the local and foreign trade (Redacción 2008). Until 1977 farmers concentrated on the production of this type of wine, which was then sold in bulk to other parts of Spain and France. The priority was not quality, but quantity. The aim was to produce a large volume of wine of the darkest possible colour. No attention was paid to modern techniques or to oenologists' criteria for improving wine quality.

Priorities did not change until the 1980s, when there were two significant developments. On the one hand, agrarian overproduction encouraged changes in the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) orientation, overproduction affecting not only wine, but also other products. The EU policy that, between 1985 and 1996, encouraged the progressive abandonment of vineyards was not totally negative for the area, because it contributed to renewal of the existing vineyard areas, that were old and unproductive. Moreover, in the wine sector, there was a gradual but fundamental re-orientation towards the production of quality wines, implying an important upgrading of technical standards in the sector. Farmers carried out an important restructuring of vineyards, replacing old *bobal* plantations with other 'classic' varieties such as *tempranillo* and *garnacha*, in order to improve the quality of the wine. The 1990s saw introduction of other internationally recognised varieties, such as Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay.

Though even today wine in bulk for colouring or for cheap consumption accounts for a high proportion of the total wine produced in the area (more than two thirds of the total production), in recent years the Utiel-Requena area has

been gradually increasing the proportion of quality wines in its production. These quality wines are properly bottled and labelled; 60 per cent of them are exported and the rest is sold mostly within the region of Valencia. Various factors lie behind this shift: the need to adapt to market demands; requirements of the EU; the professionalisation of the sector, with an increasing presence of technicians and experts in the production of wine; the introduction of external capital; and the establishment of the label-of-origin system for wine made in the Utiel-Requena area (Utiel-Requena DO). However, contrary to what one might think, the last factor is regarded by experts as probably the least relevant in all this process of change.

*Relevant actors and their network: objectives and actions*

Viticulture and winemaking in Utiel-Requena involve a complex of interlinking networks including farmers, wine cellars, cooperatives, large and small firms, technicians, public administration, the DO Board, intermediaries, consumers and so on.

As far as local actors are concerned, it is possible to establish a time-chart showing how historically they have been intervening in the processes of wine production in the area. Prior to the First World War subsistence wine production predominated. Farmers used to cultivate vineyards and make wine that was later consumed within the families. At this stage, when farming was the most significant economic activity, crop cultivation was of more importance than winemaking. Later, when wine became a commercial product, (with the production of *doble pasta*) farming became something different from wine-making, which was subsequently undertaken by cellar-men. With the development of commercialisation, cellars, that originally had a common family profile, might become one of three different types: (i) There were still some family cellars which reproduced the old model, where farmer and winemaker coincided in the same person; (ii) There were commercial private cellars, some owned by foreign companies, which were attempting to control production *in situ* and to reduce costs; (iii) There were wine-cooperatives, large and small, grouping most farmers. These acquired considerable strength, and remain important to this day.

According to Piqueras (1998), in this area the most important 'actors' in setting the profile of today's wine production scene are: 1) the School of Wine-producers and Winemakers, established in the 1950s; 2) the School of Viticulture and Oenology, which, starting from 1961, became essentially a continuation of the aforementioned school; 3) the second-degree cooperative COVIÑAS, which in 1968 introduced onto the market the first quality wine produced in the area.

In the late 1970s a process of change in the direction of specialisation, greater reliance on technology and technical knowledge, and the search for quality was spearheaded by the Requena *School of Viticulture and Oenology*, and the Regulating Committee of the *Utiel-Requena Origin Designation (DO)*.

The 1980s saw the consolidation of commercialised wine production, with an increased importance of private firms. Wine cooperatives too began to adopt an entrepreneurial philosophy and practices, with a gradual increase in specialisation and a search for highly differentiated products (single-variety artisan wines, wines of complex structure and so on) for niche markets, where small and family-owned cellars could compete. The new structure consolidates the separation of functions between vineyard owner, farmer and winemaker. Farmers accordingly become grape producers while wine is produced by winemakers under the supervision of highly specialised technicians (oenologists, agricultural engineers and so on).

A number of different types of actors are involved in present-day wine production: big firms with foreign capital that have set up operations in the area in order to reduce costs (for example Murviedro or Hen); small family cellars; new cellars owned by entrepreneurs coming from other economic activities, attracted by this type of business. But agrarian cooperatives are still the most important and the most numerous structures in the Utiel-Requena viticulture sector. The area has one of the highest levels of participation in cooperatives by vineyard owners; 2,400 owners took part in the creation of the area's 36 cooperative cellars. By 1982 participants had risen to 10,000 (Redacción 2008). The cooperatives are associative structures involved in activities pertaining to production, commerce, provision of services and finances and aimed at improving conditions for farmers. Following Catholic Church '*one village, one cooperative*' doctrine on rural associationism, agrarian cooperatives used to be an inseparable element of life in rural areas. The Valencian agrarian cooperative movement originated as a protest movement historically linked to catholic institutions and political parties (Gómez 2004). Agrarian cooperatives were strongly embedded in the culture of every rural village and – because they used to include most of the important actors in rural political and cultural life – their importance went beyond the productive and economic functions. They were an instrument with the potential to generate social capital and a very specific form of local governance and democracy. In the Utiel-Requena area, cooperatives remain to this day key structures in the dynamics of the agrarian sector, and particularly in the production of wine.

#### *Professionalisation and co-existence of new and traditional structures*

In this area people have traditionally been dedicated to functions linked to the production of wine. Since the beginning of the twentieth century winemaking has been the most important economic activity. With wine production, however, contrary to what applies with other products also manufactured in the area, such as cold meat, traditional know-how acquired over years of experience has not been at the centre of the current production of quality wine. The reason for this is that the area has been highly specialised in producing *doble pasta* (that is, wine for adding colour to other wines), rather than in making quality wine for direct consumption. It has therefore been necessary for technical and specialised knowledge to be

introduced from outside, which has affected everything in the winemaking process, from cultivation and harvesting techniques to marketing and sales.

Even in the 1960s, before the creation of Label of Origin, professionalisation and technification of wine production was well advanced. One key factor in this development has been the presence of training structures imparting technical knowledge for the production of quality wine. The story starts in 1920, with the emergence of the *Estación Enológica de Requena* (Requena Oenology Institute). A pioneering institution, it made a great contribution to defining the economic strategy for wine production that should be implemented to support the local economy. The *Escuela de Capataces Bodegueros y Viticultores* (School of Wine-producers and Winemakers) started in 1961 and later became the *Escuela de Viticultura y Enología de Requena* (School of Viticulture and Oenology). The first-mentioned school employed local technicians who had been educated and trained in the old wine-producing regions of Spain and France. It remains a key point of reference in Spain and maintains the tradition of employing local technicians as teachers.

Very important in this process was the presence and demonstrative potential of small innovative cellars that have invested in quality and encouraged others to do so. Cooperatives have in fact jumped aboard this bandwagon since the 1980s, implementing modernisation and reorganisation of infrastructures, equipment and management. Spain's entry into the European Community in 1986 was marked by an expansion of second-degree cooperatives in response to the new framework of regulation, necessitating the creation of larger structures with greater technical, human and financial capacity and higher competitiveness. These processes of amalgamation have been encouraged by various sectors of government and, notwithstanding the criticism they have encountered from some producers, brought benefits to the sector including new organisational models more conducive to efficient management. One good example of restructuring and adaptation to market demands is the second-degree cooperative COVIÑAS. This cooperative has three directors (technical, commercial and financial) and a number of technicians (oenologist, agrarian engineer and so on) that make and guide decisions within the cooperative. Some interviewees recognise that this type of professionalisation is fundamental prerequisite for producing and marketing competitive quality products.

The case of COVIÑAS is a good one in the sense that it addresses one of the most important challenges facing the agricultural sector in general and the wine sector in particular, that is adaptation of traditional institutions such as the agrarian cooperatives – which in this region are so important – to the exigencies of the market economy and the entrepreneurial world. According to the interviewees there is no need of modernisation in terms of infrastructure and equipment, as important improvements have already been made in that respect, but first and foremost in terms of organisational structures and decision-making mechanisms. Decision-making processes in cooperatives were in the hands of the Directive Committee and in some cases even of the whole Assembly, the latter having evident

advantages in terms of democracy, networking and good governance generally. Admittedly, some have put forward the criticism that, considering the profiles of the participants, these decision-making structures may become static, reluctant to change and an impediment to strategic decisions and economic efficiency. It is undoubtedly true that personal issues (disputes, personal relations, rivalries and so on) and the specific situations of individual farmers can acquire unwarranted ascendancy over common interests. Some interviewees made the point that '*this is a very traditionalist model in a highly competitive world*'. One important consideration is that for most farmers agriculture is a part-time occupation, with the result that the intensity of their involvement and their capacity to assume risks is much lower than in the case of full-time farmers who have viticulture as the main source of income.

In the case of COVIÑAS one of the key elements in its success has probably been harmonic conjunction between the interests of the second-degree cooperative structure and those of the smaller cooperatives. COVIÑAS controls the part of the local cooperatives' wine production that is bottled and marketed by them, but it is up to each local cooperative to decide what to do with the other part of the production. It is usually sold in bulk and the result is that while the local cooperatives are subordinated to COVIÑAS, at the same time they still maintain a considerable autonomy.

In terms of knowledge integration, this type of cooperative combines the highly professional knowledge and expertise provided by the management structures with the traditional lay knowledge embedded in the local cooperatives. The expectation is that in practical terms most decisions will be informed by that technical knowledge. Therefore, as some of the interviewees put it, even when the Directive Committee has been taken over by the presidents of the local cooperatives with a risk that personal tensions and rivalries are brought into the Committee, agreements are reached as long as clear economic benefits are visible.

#### *The role of the Label of Origin system (DO)*

The Utiel-Requena DO, a broad formal network integrating all relevant actors linked to wine production in the Requena area, warrants a special section to itself. The Label of Origin was created in the 1970s in consequence of a national law prescribing that each wine-production area in Spain should have an Origin Designation Label (DO). Utiel-Requena DO became fully operative in the 1980s, so it is really quite a young DO compared to others in Spain, and especially to Rioja and Ribera del Duero, which were established long before the passage of the relevant law.

Utiel-Requena DO groups together the whole *comarca*; its current registered membership comprises 108 owners of lands totalling almost 39,000 ha, where different varieties of red and white grape are cultivated.

The Label of Origin has four main functions: (i) Control of quality through the different stages of production and commercialisation; (ii) Protection and promotion

of the varieties of grape that are grown in the area; (iii) Provision of informational and promotional material to farmers, wine producers, cellarman and so on, to enable them to achieve required standards of quality; (iv) Implementation and management of promotional actions. Label of Origin is managed by a *Regulatory Board* (DORC), an entity under the jurisdiction of the Regional Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The Board's directive committee currently includes 19 elected members who are stakeholders from all over the area's wine-producing sector: wine-producers, members of agrarian groups and cooperatives, delegates from private firms and the regional administration. Responsibility for wines tasting is in the hands of the *Tasting or Qualification Committee*, which is independent from the DORC and currently includes a group of 26 technicians. It is these technical experts who have the job of deciding whether wines are entitled to the DO label that testifies to their quality.

In order to be sold under the DO label, wine production must go through a series of technical control processes starting in the vineyards and ending at the marketing stage. According to the DO publicity committee, the most important function of the label system is technical, involving control not only over the quality of the wine, but also over the crops. A farmer registering his crops with the DO is required to comply with some technical specifications covering such matters as fertiliser use, density of cultivation and so on.

Almost all of the region's vineyard area is today included in the DO registration. But not all of the wine production from these hectares is bottled and sold under a commercial label. Cooperatives, in particular, and big enterprises, leave most of their production to be sold in bulk. Smaller firms and cellars concentrate on the production of bottled wine with a label. Producers who have registered part of their production under the DO can also process non-DO wine as long as the two production processes are kept entirely separate.

Through their insistence on a strong link to the ecology and culture of specific places, label-of-origin systems re-embed a product in the natural processes and social context of its territory. But it is interesting to analyse how social systems of organisational coordination institutionalise and legitimate a given interpretation of the product. To be effective this legitimating process must not only be carried out within the territory of production but must be nested within multiple levels of coordination from the local to the global (Barham 2003).

It would seem reasonable to assume that, apart from encouraging and ensuring the production of high-quality wine, the DO board should be responsible for promoting these linkages. But some stakeholders criticise DO management for not being able properly to market the linkages between wine and the local area, with consumers not perceiving the wine as a territorial product coming from an important wine production area, as one sees, for example, with Rioja or Ribera del Duero. One of the interviewees associated with the DO stated, surprisingly, that: 'The DO does not have to sell a territory, it must sell a product. Some consumers may like to know where the products come from, but others may be interested only in consuming a high-quality product. It doesn't matter where it comes from'.

Effective promotion should instead be based on a territorial strategy, promoting the autochthonous variety, that is *bobal*, and the production of wine typically produced with it. The overall objective should be to achieve a distinctive product and change negative consumer perceptions of this variety.

To cite another failure of the Label of Origin objectives, as identified by Barham (2003), inclusion under a common label has not succeeded in building cohesion among producers and municipalities. Historical rivalries between the two main cities in the area, Requena and Utiel, are not easily overcome. Localisms and individualisms overshadow common interests. For instance, as pointed out by one of the interviewees, '... when we go to fairs each has its own stand ... the DO has its own stand, but Requena (council) has also got one with Requena wines, and Utiel do the same, even when both villages are included in the DO'. The fact that the DO includes in the same forum a variety of very different producers (for example, big and small cooperatives, enterprises, limited companies, small artisan enterprises, family cellars and so on), with correspondingly varied strategies and objectives, adds further complications. Finally, we should bear in mind that the DO is not only a technical, but also a political structure, with power games between distinct types of actors within it. Decisions made by the DO are very much linked to political decisions, and this may translate into significant internal disputes.

In contrast to these criticisms, on the positive side, the DO structure has succeeded in moving beyond its merely formal functions to do with control and marketing of wine and, in collaboration with other public and private actors, has become involved in such actions as promotion of the Utiel-Requena DO Wine Route as a tourist product. An association was created to manage this initiative, including a variety of actors participating in the project. The Utiel-Requena DO Wine Route Association brings together a representative sample of the local agro-food system: 21 cellars/producers; one wine shop; four heritage assets (three museums and some historic old cellars); eight restaurants; six accommodation establishments; two artisan firms; along with some public and semi-public structures: the Utiel-Requena DO Regulatory Board, the Requena cold meat Protected Geographic Indication, Mancomunidad Lands of Wine, and the 'Utiel-Gastronomic' Quality Label. The initiative is of great interest owing to its capacity to generate synergies in the territory, strengthening the linkages between wine, place and local culture and involving a significant number of key protagonists. Despite all this, the initiative is not without its critics. Some think that not the DO but a different organisation should be leading it, providing the process with a more integrated profile. There does in fact appear to be a problem of legitimisation of the DO structure, some of the mistrust being political in character. The DO Regulatory Board is after all in the jurisdiction of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Department of the regional government and this is something that cannot be overlooked.

### Strategies

Scientific studies have proven the quality of the Requena's autochthonous grape (*bobal*) and its potential value in production of both young and matured wines. In their quest for differentiation some smaller cellars have started working on the production of good wines using this local type of grape. It is in fact acknowledged by a number of different producers, not only by small cellars but by larger cooperatives as well, that the production of *bobal* wine is probably the best way to find an outlet for a distinctive and recognisable product in a highly competitive market. In an area where quite a few new varieties have been introduced in response to market demands, to promote the manufacture and maturation of wines that use the local variety of grape can be a good course to follow. It is indeed the strategy that has recently been promoted by the DO. The objective is to have this variety of grape valued and known as linked to Utiel-Requena in the same way that *tempranillo* is linked to Rioja. It is a strategy in glaring contrast to DO's initial policy, which consisted in introduction of new varieties to the detriment of the local variety.

Agro-food firms choose one of two main options when designing their competitive strategies: they seek to achieve competitiveness either through cost leadership or through consumer value creation. While the former is to be found in commodities markets for undifferentiated agricultural products where price is the most important consideration for buyers, the latter is more appropriate where there is a differentiated final product with multiple attributes designed to cater for an increasingly segmented and personalised consumer demand (Sanz and Macías 2005).

The Utiel-Requena area seems to combine both strategies, with one prevailing at one time, the other at another. Indeed at the end of a long process during which numerous efforts have been made to ensure that the area becomes a landmark in the production of quality wines, a subterranean debate still continues on the expediency of this or that strategy. Some producers look back to past achievements in producing cheap wine (*dobla pasta*) sold in bulk. Others are more impressed by the idea of the area finding its niche market through specialisation in production of single-variety wines made from the native *bobal*. Reasonable doubts have been articulated in relation to this last strategy, the most important relating to over-production. Despite the elimination of a considerable proportion of the former vineyards, the area continues to produce much more than recommended by the EU, so that producers cannot escape from having to sell part of the production in bulk. Secondly, there is competition from other very efficient and more consolidated wine producing regions (for example Rioja or Ribera del Duero), and from regions producing with lower production costs (for example Chile). Thirdly, the high number of intermediaries in the commercialisation channel has the effect of increasing final prices. The fact is that the market externalisation strategies followed by most producers (60 per cent of the DO production is sold abroad) and the long production-consumption chains impact negatively on benefits both for farmers and producers. That is why some firms, family cellars and cooperatives try to control the distribution process by selling the products, for instance, directly to restaurants and specialised shops.



*Final remarks*

Whatever the virtues of existing ancient traditions in winemaking, it is indisputable that expert knowledge has a most important role to play in shaping the wine production system in the Utiel-Requena area. But there are different aspects to this type of expert knowledge. As noted by Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins (2004), empowerment is largely a matter of experts providing the training and the technical wherewithal for individuals to exercise personal responsibility within their own particular cultural communities of ethics and lifestyle. Is this the way knowledge and structures of expertise have functioned in the Utiel-Requena area? In this connection it is worth pointing out the positive role of institutions such as the School of Viticulture and Oenology, which educates and trains technicians who then work in the area's cooperatives and other firms. There is also a clear connection between expert knowledge and the success of cellars that have concentrated on a well-defined strategy for production of quality wine. There is also evidently a concentration of expert knowledge in specific structures with an acknowledged capacity to define general strategies for the sector. One important question is the extent to which these structures are efficiently and legitimately integrating the views of all those involved in the agro-food wine system. To the extent that they fail to do this, contradictory messages will be sent to local actors, who will not be able to exercise their responsibilities.

Some successful linkages have clearly been developed between old and new forms of knowledge, as may be seen if one examines this particular productive system. One example is the renewal of traditional agrarian cooperatives introducing specialised knowledge into the different areas of production, management and marketing. But some opportunities for greater enhancement of local knowledge have also been missed. For example, the predominant strategy that was followed for many years was one of introducing new varieties of grapes while downplaying the potential of the native variety of grape (*bobal*) for the production of distinctive quality wine. It has not been until recent years that a different strategy began to be promoted, involving small firms, big cooperatives and the Viticulture school, where research on the use of this type of grape has been taking place. As previously indicated, the viticulture agro-food system is a broad and complex entity, encompassing many different actors, from farmers to final consumers, participating in it in different ways and at different levels. If they are to be successful, agro-food strategies must take into account the knowledge and perceptions coming from the demand side. Some small firms, for instance, are producing 100 per cent *bobal* wine and the final product is very much in demand among highly specialised consumers. However, the market this product addresses is very small, because the *bobal* grape does not have in general a good reputation among consumers. So it is not only that more research and technical controls are necessary in the winemaking process; consumer perception of the product need also to be improved.

### Case study 2: Requena cold meat Protected Geographic Indication

The second case we would like to introduce is in relation to an initiative carried out in the same area, Utiel-Requena, and has been selected because it typifies an entirely separate dynamic, with an externalisation process and a pattern of interrelations between expert and local knowledge altogether different from the case presented above.

*La matanza* has been a traditional practice in the inland rural areas of Spain since medieval times, and still persist in some parts where climate conditions permit it (the climate must be very dry). It involves the killing of one or several pigs, on a certain day, in the course of which entire families of relatives come together to process the meat, preparing cold meat and other similar products to be stored and consumed during the course of the year. The practice was a key element in the rural family economy in the times when this was mainly a subsistence economy, but it had also important cultural and anthropological dimensions attached to it. The introduction of new legislation linked to sanitary controls and changes in personal habits and lifestyles have contributed to the contraction of this practice to the family context and, in some way, to its professionalisation.

The practice is at the origin of current production of different types of cold meat and other meat-based products manufactured in the village of Requena in the Utiel-Requena *comarca*. There is an authentic culture of meat consumption in the area and it may come as a surprise to find that in a village like Requena in the 1980s there were 40 butchers. Today the numbers are fewer, but still considerable. To illustrate the importance of butchers and of the meat-consumption tradition in the area, one interviewee spoke of how young children go into butcher shops and ask for small pieces of *fuet* (thin sausage), which they have become accustomed to getting for free and chewing as if it was toffee.

The evolution in recent years of artisan production of cold meat has been marked by three main events: (i) organisation of Requena's Cold Meat Fair; (ii) adoption of a label for the product, that is Embutido de Requena (Requena cold meat); and (iii) acquisition of a Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) quality distinction label. All these developments have involved mobilisation and a combination, to a greater or lesser degree, of traditional, experiential, and technical forms of knowledge.

The ideas of organising a fair and creating a label emerged at the same time in 1992, but it was easier to implement the first idea, while the creation of a label was a more protracted process that finally came to fruition in 1995. The quality distinction for the product was obtained from the regional government in 1999 and undoubtedly contributed to the success achieved by the annual Cold Meat Fair. The PGI label covers the process of manufacturing the product, but not the origin or characteristics of the raw material used, as happens with labels of origin (DO). The pigs used in making the cold meat do not need to be of a particular autochthonous breed, or indeed to be from the area at all. They need only meet the hygiene requirements prescribed by EU regulations.

*Knowledge in local food production*

As we have said, the point of departure is the existence of an artisan product highly embedded in the local gastronomic culture and which has also enjoyed some degree of popularity outside. People emigrating out of the area and the proximity to the city of Valencia have probably contributed the products' achieving such popularity as they have acquired. But it has been above all the marketing strategy linked to the organisation of the Fair that has given a tremendous boost to these products.

The producers have introduced a number of new practices, along with instruments that have enabled facilitation of the manufacturing process while ensuring compliance with the necessary standards of hygiene and health, but they also insist that the process should be kept strictly *artisan*. In fact this requirement limits producers' capacity to grow and to expand their markets, but this is something they have taken into account. The interviewees recognised that the key for success lies in the transmission of old recipes and manufacturing know-how from parents to children. The combination of spices and manipulation of the ingredients is one of the prime secrets that each family jealously guards as a precious treasure. These indeed are the features that distinguish one variety from another. As one of the interviewees put it:

For the product to be manufactured there has not been a need for any additional new knowledge. It is based on transmission of traditional knowledge that has been handed on from parents to children ... Within the association we have held courses on food processing and other related topics. But when it comes to making our products, no-one can give us any advice. We've been doing this for many years.

Tacit lay knowledge therefore constitutes producers' main asset for ensuring manufacture of a distinctive product in a competitive market. Producers follow a dual strategy, including this tacit knowledge as a key component. On the one hand, lay knowledge is involved in the manufacture of a product that to some extent has been codified with the introduction of the PGI regulation. One might imagine that this codification or regulation could limit the potential for introduction of personal knowledge by producers. But in the production process a small margin of variation in the use and combination of ingredients gives the product its distinctive characteristics, and it is this small variation that each family of butchers guards as a precious treasure. On the other hand, Requena cold meat is sold and promoted as an artisan product, manufactured using traditional methods, and this is an important factor motivating consumers to buy it. Producers utilise, and indeed benefit from, the positive perception in the collective imagination of notions such as 'artisan', 'traditional', 'natural', 'hand-made'. These notions are identified (overtly or subliminally) with 'tacit knowledge'. Consumers believe that some venerable, traditional, secret knowledge that has been handed down from one generation to the next lies behind the product that they are buying. This is unquestionably a

selling point for consumers: the uniqueness of a tacit knowledge embodied in a product which is based on a secret jealously guarded by each producer.

The granting of a formal label to a product implies that the product has satisfied the criteria established by the institution promoting the label. In the present case, the PGI for Requena cold meat is administered by the Institute of Agro-Food Quality, which is an agency of the regional government's Department of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. The products must be subjected to analysis by the Institute to determine their composition (proportion of fats, salts and so on) quality, and various taste characteristics.

Though producers may insist that it has not been necessary to acquire additional knowledge in order to improve products quality, since 1992, and with the adoption of the label, they have been gradually acquiring new (technical) knowledge related to handling of specific machinery and specific aliments. Managerial knowledge for better marketing and selling of their products has also been upgraded, with local producers attending international food fairs and there encountering new ideas that may be put into practice at the next Requena Fair. Each new fair launches new products, including new cold meat recipes and new ingredients. Producers clearly favour innovation and adaptation to consumer expectations of new taste experiences. Here too we catch a glimpse of the new knowledge that comes with introduction of variations into the sound foundations of tacit knowledge possessed by local producers.

#### *Social and ecological sustainability*

The idea of organising a Fair and creating a label for promoting Requena cold meat originated within a group of local producers who had become uneasy over the impending construction of a motorway in 1992. They had concluded that this new item of infrastructure might have unpredictable effects on their businesses, attracting competitors from the metropolitan area while at the same time discouraging would-be customers to come into the village as before. A group of 12 producers formed the association which then established the Fair. The first edition, held in 1993 attracted 20,000 people, and the number has been growing ever since. More than 100,000 people attended the most recent Fair in 2009. The Fair is well-known in Spain today as the first fair dedicated entirely to the promotion of cold meat.

At the public level, two institutions have been fundamental to the organisation and promotion of the Fair and the marketing campaign for it, and in the creation of the PGI quality label: namely the regional government's Agriculture Department and the Requena City Council. The emergence of the Fair also provides impressive evidence of the way the initiative and the social capital of individuals – in this case the former president of the Requena Cold Meat Association, who maintained very good relations with external political actors – can play a catalytic role in the implementation and the success of new ideas.

The adoption of a Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) for Requena's cold meat necessarily implied the creation of an PGI Regulatory Board, which, when established, brought together the 12 producers that had initiated the PGI, along with representatives of other bodies, such as the local council and the Autonomous Community Government. There are currently more than 20 butchers in Requena. Of these only 11 adhere to the PGI. In fact, no new members have come into the association since the Fair started. Qualification processes are not always either easy or homogeneous, as Tregear et al. (2007) recognise. In practice the qualification process may be dominated by a single set of actors pursuing a single set of interests, so skewing the distribution of rent within a supply chain and/or a territory. If other actors happen to contest the approach of the dominant actors, conflicts may well emerge. In the case of Requena there has not been contestation but passivity; some local butchers are not ready to embark on the readaptation involved in promoting the label because they already have their own specific market segment. The label is not important in the local market because local consumers have other information on the basis of which they can make their choice. But for consumers elsewhere the label is important. It is also important to stress that this is a local initiative, that does not include other municipalities in the area as in the case of wine. The reason put forward in explanation of this is that it is necessary to uphold the quality associated with Requena. Producers are clearly pursuing a strategy of preserving and enhancing local knowledge, something that appears to be of even greater value for as long as it can be linked exclusively to one place.

The fact that an initiative of this type has not managed to involve all the relevant actors, that is local producers, introduces an important public goods' dilemma that can be observed in the tense relations between PGI members and non-members. The latter benefit from the increasing popularity that the product has gained as a result of the marketing campaigns developed in the context of the PGI, while at the same time they are not making any contribution to the development and consolidation of the label. Moreover, there have also been some problems of unfair competition, pointing to an evident lack in this group of entrepreneurs of the kind of social capital that is perhaps necessary for achievement of an effective synthesis of common interests.

Leaving aside these problems, the Fair has nevertheless become an appropriate instrument for the generation of synergies in the local economy and the involvement of other local actors. This involvement has taken place at different levels; firstly, at the institutional level, as we have seen; secondly, other economic actors have participated and have benefited from popularity of the Fair, for example bars and restaurants, shops selling local products, wine cellars. Among these economic actors wine producers and wine cellars are particularly relevant because wine is a key product complementary to the consumption of cold meat and so is very much in evidence at the Fair. Finally, there is the involvement of the local inhabitants who are active participants in the Fair.

### *Strategy*

The typology of firms involved in this initiative – very small family enterprises – not to mention the strategy of preserving the artisan character of cold meat production, place limits on producers' capacity to grow and to reach new markets, and this is something they largely accept. It is, moreover, this objective of manufacturing quality products that makes it possible, in the opinion of the producers interviewed, for all these small businesses to survive. It is the focus on quality that distinguishes them from other industrial producers. People travel to Requena from the city of Valencia (about 70 km away) just to buy these products.

Another key feature of the initiative that also helps to explain some of its limitations are its endogamous and static character. This is attributable largely to structural conditionings. A large investment, for example, is necessary if the legal requirements covering hygiene that are a prerequisite for opening the business are to be fully complied with. There is also a very high element of risk. Competence is one relevant factor here, as are the difficulties in positioning when the market to be entered is a limited one.

With the expansion of the market to the metropolitan area of Valencia, with its 1.5 million potential consumers, some producers have introduced a corresponding shift in their marketing strategy. Currently three out of the 11 producers sell 90 per cent of their production outside the village, and specifically in the city of Valencia, at specialised delicatessens and in a big superstore. Producers not covered by the PGI follow a different strategy, selling their products in the local market, to locals and visitors. PGI producers employ a sales representative to distribute their products to their final sales points. For non-PGI producers the link between producer and consumers is direct. Two strategies thus converge: on the one hand the strategy of short food supply chains directly linking producers with local and external consumers; this strategy has been reinforced through institution such as the Cold Meat Fair, and by virtue of the increase in the numbers of visitors and tourists coming to the village. But on the other hand external food supply chains have also been promoted: producers dispose of their wares on external markets, now selling in shops located in the metropolitan area of Valencia; these products have a special characteristic: they are sold under a quality label that is clearly recognised by consumers.

Current objectives of PGI producers include securing of Designation of Origin (DO) status for Requena's cold meat and to this end the Association has accordingly initiated negotiations with local farmers with a view to tracing the origin of this meat.

### **Some issues for comparison**

The two cases we have presented above represent two different examples of agro-food systems: the first pertains to wine, where the local/global aspect is clearly

identified from the outset. The second involves cold meat, whose local/local profile in some cases expands to embrace an external market, but within clear limits established by the production capacity (in distinct contrast to the situation with wine, where there is overproduction).

The different cases also show how the 'quality' that is associated with some products can be differently understood, and how it can be created, transformed or commoditised by various actors. In the case of wine, the quality standards associated with the product seem to correspond to fairly homogeneous and generally-shared criteria operating at the international level, though often heavily influenced by the 'gurus' of wine, who have great influence on production parameters in the various wine production areas. There is a Designation of Origin (DO) Board that has traditionally established the parameters for wine production in accordance with more global trends. In the case of cold meat, the point of departure is the existence of some traditional products and a clear intention to preserve them. The producers' strategy involves enabling consumers to appreciate the singularity of the product, given that it has been manufactured in this specific area. It does not involve modifying the basic recipes so as to adapt the product to some particular demand, though some changes are in fact introduced when it comes to including new and innovative products. For that eventuality there is an organisation for implementation of standardised technical rules to cover product quality, first and foremost in relation to sanitation and safety, in effect codifying tacit knowledge already existing among local butchers.

Both products, wine and cold meat, originating in the same geographical area, share a common point of departure that is a long-standing local tradition in production. That said, the processes involved in the evolution of the wine sector are much more complex than for cold meat, as indeed are the implications for knowledge and its dynamics. We will try to summarise them.

In the case of wine, new knowledge has been gradually incorporated, transforming the traditional product in order to respond to the quality parameters imposed by external markets. Technical and managerial types of knowledge have been fundamental to the advances in quality achieved with wine, indeed to the overall evolution of the wine sector. With cold meat the point of departure was a traditional product embedded in the local food culture, which had already gained a high degree of acceptance in a certain sector of the market. In terms of the implication for knowledge forms and processes, two key features of this product's trajectory are worth emphasising: on the one hand the existence of a certain stock of traditional knowledge on the production of cold meat that has been transmitted from generation to generation as an important family secret; on the other the contribution of specialised marketing knowledge that has contributed to enormously increase the popularity of the product.

In the evolution of Utiel-Requena wine the input of technical knowledge has played a decisive part in effecting the transformation. But the technical knowledge was introduced in such a way as to preclude inter-communication between lay

traditional knowledge and technical knowledge. To quote Piqueras Haba (personal interview):

traditional knowledge in wine production disappeared when co-operatives were constituted and an oenologist was put in charge of the manufacturing process. Before that, old people used to make their own wine. For example, my father used to do it. But then the wine-growing process was separated totally from the manufacture of wine. Nowadays wine-growers know about vineyards but they do not know about winemaking. And wine-producers know how to make wine but they have no idea about vineyards.

In the second case study, technical knowledge was introduced in the form of new equipment that improved efficiency and hygiene in manufacturing and processing. But this innovation had no effect on the traditional knowledge that was at the basis of the products' success, for example traditional recipes, the use of natural tripe for preparing cold meat and so on. As far as preparations for the Cold Meat Fair are concerned, expert knowledge was contributed by technicians working on the local council, who played a facilitating role. There was also an input from a type of expert-experiential knowledge that has been acquired by organisers from the international and national food fairs that they attend.

Another important difference between the two products we have analysed has to do with the size and the characteristics of the networks involved in the related production and marketing processes. Requena cold meat originates with a very limited network of only 12 producers in the same village. Their marketing strategy consists in maintaining tradition and quality even when this means accepting a continued low market share rating. The network is quite homogeneous in terms of the characteristics of its members and in terms of its objectives. It collaborates closely with public institutions and other structures in the area such as the DO Regulatory Board for Utiel-Requena wine. It has not however managed to integrate the other half of the villages' butchers. With the wine the situation is totally different and much more complex: there are numerous different networks of actors linked to the product, because there are over 100 different enterprises in the area working in this field, and a diversity of product strategies. We have focused on the DO network because it includes most of the area's producers, embodying a formalised and standardised technical knowledge that is applied equally to all firms registered under the DO, the objective being to achieve a specific level of quality. Most interviewees agreed that the main obstacle to achieving a more efficient functioning of the DO is the heterogeneity of this group.

Wine production in the Utiel-Requena area is a clear example of a local agro-food local system that has shifted from being a family-based system to being a local-global system of local production and global consumption. Traditionally local wine was sold in bulk and there existed no strategy for the production of a clearly identified product, that is quality wine from Utiel-Requena. Current policy is for a dual local-global strategy, with benefits coming both from the selling of bulk wine



and from the manufacture of quality wine bottled and labelled under the DO. By contrast, the strategy being followed by the Requena cold meat producers could be characterised as the kind of defensive localisation that, as Hinrichs (2003: 37) puts it, 'tends to stress the homogeneity and coherence of the "local", in patriotic opposition to heterogeneous and destabilising outside forces, perhaps a global "other"'. This is because the 'tradition' involved in the elaboration of the products is carefully guarded and preserved. The products' qualities are exclusively linked to the village of Requena, and entry into the producers' network is closed to other villages' producers.

Considering the variety of strategies that have been applied and the current situation of both cases analysed, the conclusions could be drawn that wine has been affected by standardisation and only some small cellars and firms are now trying to produce distinctive quality products (for example 100 per cent *bobal* wine). There has been no comparable standardisation with cold meat. It is still a distinctive product whose singularity derives precisely from the preservation of tacit knowledge.

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