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# Marketing and promotion of quality. Geographical designations of origin in seafood products. The case of Spain

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**SUMMARY** – An introduction is made to the different current forms of specific quality in food products and their symbols of differentiation. The designations linked to a geographical area (Protected Designation of Origin and Protected Geographical Indication) are analysed and compared with other designations linked to production methods (Generic Designation and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed). Mention is made of other types of designation, promoted mainly by the Autonomous Communities (designations of quality and regional distinctive labels), as well as other possibilities of differentiating identification, such as collective brands and guarantee brands. An analysis is then made of the general adaptation of fish products to the distinctive symbols mentioned, emphasising the difficulties that arise in these products when conditions are applied to them that have been established for agricultural and livestock products. Spanish fishing sector products for which protection under the existing designations has been requested are mentioned, as well as capture fishing and aquaculture products that could possibly be included under these designations, analysing briefly their potential adaptation. Finally, reference is made to the envisaged evolution of these differentiating symbols towards more forms that are more appropriate for fish products.

**Key words:** Seafood, aquaculture, quality, public policy, geographical designations.

**RESUME** – "Marketing et promotion de la qualité. Appellations d'origine géographique pour les produits de la mer. Le cas de l'Espagne". Une introduction est présentée sur les différentes formes actuelles de qualité spécifique pour les produits de la mer et leurs symboles de différenciation. Les appellations liées à une zone géographique (Appellation d'Origine Protégée et Indication Géographique Protégée) sont analysées et comparées avec d'autres appellations liées aux méthodes de production (Appellation Générique et Spécialité Traditionnelle Garantie). Il est fait mention d'autres types d'appellations, promues principalement par les Gouvernements Autonomes (appellations de qualité et labels distinctifs régionaux) ainsi que d'autres possibilités d'identification différenciatrice, telles que les marques collectives et les labels de garantie. Une analyse est alors faite de l'adaptation générale des produits de la mer aux différents symboles mentionnés, en insistant sur les difficultés qui surgissent pour ces produits lorsqu'on leur applique des conditions initialement établies pour des produits agricoles et de l'élevage. Il est fait état des produits du secteur espagnol de la pêche pour lesquels une protection a été sollicitée selon les appellations existantes, et des produits de capture des pêcheries et produits de l'aquaculture qui pourraient éventuellement faire partie de ces appellations, en analysant brièvement leur adaptation potentielle. Finalement, il est fait référence à l'évolution envisagée pour ces symboles différenciateurs vers des formes qui seraient plus appropriées pour les produits de la mer.

**Mots-clés :** Produits de la mer, aquaculture, qualité, politique publique, appellations géographiques.

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## Symbols of differentiation

The differentiation of the product is a strategy widely used by agro-food firms. The term *marketing* should be understood as the actions undertaken in order for a product offered on the market to be differentiated from other similar products offered by the competition. This objective can be achieved in many different ways, the use of *trademarks* being by far the oldest and most common. There are legislations that permit their registration and protect the rights of their holders. Almost all marketing strategies oriented towards consumption (advertising, price, etc.) are based on the use of a brand.

In recent years, the issue of *quality* is the object of special interest as a means to differentiate a product. The *sanitary quality* of a product and certifications of quality concerning its production process (especially the ISO 9000 standards) are concepts that indicate the goodness or excellence of this product.

If we understand the concept of quality not as excellence but as a combination of specific, particular and differentiating features of a product, making it satisfy different consumer tastes or needs, we find ourselves before a new concept of *specific quality* together with its symbols of differentiation, very closely related with the concept previously mentioned, *marketing*. However, unlike the brand, the symbol of differentiation is very closely linked to the concept of quality. A food brand is mainly oriented towards differentiating a product from other similar products. A quality symbol refers to concepts of origin and/or production methods and is oriented towards identifying characteristics that confer it a specific and differentiating quality.

This is the case of the designations linked to a *geographical name: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)*, and the designations linked to a *mode of production: Generic Designation and Certification of Specific Character or Guaranteed Traditional Speciality (GTS)*. In Spain, there are also other designations of quality and regional symbols promoted by the autonomous communities, that may or may not be linked to the concept of geographical area.

The EC regulations clearly define the concepts, conditions and steps to be taken for the registration of these quality designations in agricultural and food products.

Regulation number 2081/92 of the European Council regulates designations linked to a geographical area (PDO and PGI). The Spanish legislation, previous to the European Community legislation, lies in accordance with the latter and has established a correspondence between both through the Order of the MAPA of 25<sup>th</sup> January 1994. The very recent Royal Decree 1643/1999, of 22 October, regulates the procedure to apply to register both designations.

Regulation No. 2082/92 regulates the certification of some specific features, depending on the traditional production process (TSG). The Order of 6 October 1993 establishes the procedure for the application to register.

Regulation No. 2092/91 regulates the use of the indication "organic agriculture", in accordance with the concept of Generic Designation of the Spanish normative (Royal Decree 1573/1985).

Without considering the Generic Designation (currently out of use, with the exception mentioned above), this legislation makes a distinction between:

(i) Protected Designation of Origin (PDO): name of the geographical area that serves to designate a food product originating from that place and whose differential features are fundamentally or exclusively due to the geographical area, its natural and human factors, and whose production, processing and preparation are carried out in the delimited geographical area.

(ii) Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) or Specific Designation: name of a geographical place that is used to designate a food product from such place, that has a given feature, a given reputation or other characteristic attributable to this geographical origin and whose production and/or processing is carried out in the delimited geographical area.

(iii) Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) or Certificate of Specific Character (CSC): designation for products with a non-geographic name, whose differentiating characteristics are due to a traditional composition or the use of raw materials or production methods and/or traditional processing methods.

As we can see, the fundamental difference between PDO and PGI lies in the greater or lesser requirement for a link with a geographical place. Given their respective definitions, it could be said that the difference lies between the "*and*" and the "*or*", that is, the first requirement is the fulfilment of the specificity of all aspects mentioned whereas in the latter not all features are required. In the Designation of Origin, all the differentiation is based on the place of origin. It is compulsory for the production, processing and preparation to take place in the geographical area whence it takes its name and specific characteristics that distinguish it from other products. The Geographical Indication is not so exigent and it is enough for the place or region whence it takes its name to be linked with one or more of the production, processing or preparation processes, when it has a characteristic, particular quality or reputation that depends on this geographical origin.

The responsibility of these designations lies with the Autonomous Communities, whenever the

whole territory named belongs to just one Community. The designations whose territory spreads over more than one Community depend directly on the Central Administration of the State. The inclusion in the respective registers of "protected designations of origin and protected geographical indications" and "certificates of specific characters" correspond to the European Commission.

Other distinctive symbols are those developed by the Autonomous Communities beyond the scope of the state and community regulation. The scope of the designations and regulation are exclusively regional and normally receive the name of *quality designations*. Within these we find diverse forms that may or may not be linked to particular places, such as "Denominació comarcal de productes alimentaris" (County designation of food products), of Catalonia, destined for local, specially prepared products or the "Certificate of Quality and Freshness for Fish" of the Basque Country, or the "Quality Brand", also Catalan, destined to products with special features, but that are not linked to a place. There is also another type of *regional distinction* promoted by the Autonomous Communities ("Food from Andalusia", "Traditional Foods from Castille and Leon", "Asturian Products", etc.) that normally has preference over other quality symbols and whose purpose is not so much to certify a differentiated quality but to promote and encourage the commercialisation of local products. However, the latter type of distinction encounters difficulties as it may clash with EC law, as it implies official aid to the products from given countries or regions in preference to others.

In order to complete the picture of all these types of differentiation, we will mention, finally, two types of brand that are not used for individual products, the *collective brands* and the *guarantee brands*, both regulated by the brand law 32/1988. The law interprets collective brands as "those promoted by associations of manufacturers, traders or service providers, that can request the registration of collective brands to differentiate, in the marketplace, its members' products or services from the products or services of those that do not belong to the association". The guarantee brand is defined as "the sign or means which certifies the common features, especially quality, the components and the origin of the products or services elaborated or distributed by authorised persons and controlled by the brand holder". An important aspect in relation to these collective and guarantee brands is that the Law grants them the faculty to register and therefore have exclusive use of the *geographical designations* (Art. 66.1).

In practical terms, the use of a collective brand, or a guarantee brand is administratively much simpler, with fewer requirements, than a designation of origin or geographical indication and could have the same effect for the consumer. However, the European Commission considers that the guarantee brands may clash with EC law for the same reason as mentioned in the case of certain distinctions of the Autonomous Communities: the discrimination against other firms that are not recognised in the guarantee brand. This has moved the Commission to request the member states to halt their concession.

## **Fish products and differentiation**

Regarding the issue of interest to us, the applications of these designations of geographical origin to the fish products encounter large-scope conceptual difficulties as they were created to be applied to the agricultural world. Agricultural production, or even livestock production is rooted into the ground or at least stand on the soil and even in those cases, there is a noteworthy influence of the geographical environment, with all the natural and human factors involved. This territorial factor has scarce representation in fish products. It is difficult to imagine that the sardine that is fished along the Mediterranean Coast of Spain has differential features, i.e. sardines from Palamós (North), Castellón (East) or Málaga (South). In fact, in the "Register of protected designations of origin and protected geographic indications" of the European Commission only one fish product is registered under PDO [Messolongi roe (Greece)], and three under PGI [Whitstable Oysters (United Kingdom), Schwarzwaldforelle (Germany) and Coquille Sant-Jaques des Côtes d'Amor (France)].

An initial aspect to be determined would be the hypothetical adaptation of the fish products to the requirement of a *link with a geographical area*. In this sense, three types of production can be distinguished: (i) not at all linked to the area; (ii) partially linked to the area; and (iii) totally linked to the area.

The first group would approximately include the pelagic species from extraction fishing (sardine,

anchovy, offshore jack mackerel, mackerel, white tuna, etc.). The second group would consist of most demersal and benthic species, linked to the sea bottom where they feed or live. The third group would include species from aquaculture.

However, even if the requirement of a link between the product and the geographical area is fulfilled, there would be a second requirement linking the geographical origin with the *specific qualities or characteristics* of the product. We must not forget that in order for these productions to have a geographical or territorial designation, they should have given features or qualities *derived from their geographical provenance*. In this sense, it may be difficult for the pelagic species to adapt to designations linked with a geographical area (PDO and PGO). Benthic products encounter fewer impediments but are not free from problems. If, for example we compare a hake fished with a hook from the Cantabrian Sea with the hake from the Gulf of Lion (Mediterranean Sea), we could consider them to be different as their development takes place in sea environments with differentiated environmental conditions but we would not be able to make a differentiation between hake fished in Santander and hake fished in Fuenterrabía (Basque Country). Of course, the products that are more likely to fulfil this requirement are those from aquaculture. These productions take place in a delimited geographical area and therefore their characteristics are due to the conjunction between species and geographical environment. The water quality and temperature, the presence of nutrients, the atmospheric conditions, sea currents, the capacity of eliminating waste products, the feed supplied etc, are all differentiating factors that affect the quality of the cultivated species.

The products registered under the designation Certificate of Specific Character (CSC), mentioned previously as Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG), whose denomination is not linked to their origin, need not make reference to the geographical origin, presented as a third form of designation to be applied to prepared fish products (canned and semi-preserved). In this case, the specific characteristics that distinguish their quality depend only and exclusively on the traditional mode of preparation, never on the geographical origin. However, there is at present no fish product, either Spanish or from the EU, included in the corresponding community register.

## The case of Spain

As seen previously, at present there is no Spanish fish product included in the "Register of Protected Geographical Designations and Protected Geographical Indications" of the European Union. However, some products with designations approved by their Autonomous Communities already exist and that have applied to register under the EU designations. See Table 1.

Table 1. Spanish seafood products that have applied to register under the EU designations

Product name	Geographical origin (Autonomous community)	Production method	Presentation
Mexillón de Galicia (DOP) <i>Mussel from Galicia</i>	Galicia	Cultivated	Fresh
Peix Blau de Tarragona (IGP) <i>Blue fish from Tarragona</i>	Catalonia	Fishery	Fresh
Musclos del Delta de l'Ebre (IGP) <i>Mussels from the Delta of the Ebro</i>	Catalonia	Cultivated	Canned
Anxova de l'Escala (IGP) <i>Anchovy from l'Escala</i>	Catalonia	Fishery	Canned
Caballa de Andalucía (IGP) <i>Mackerel from Andalucía</i>	Andalusia	Fishery	Canned
Melva de Andalucía (IGP) <i>Plain bonito from Andalucía</i>	Andalusia	Fishery	Canned
Chicharros Fritos Escabechados en Barril (ETG) <i>Fried offshore jack mackerel brined in barrel</i>	Galicia	Fishery	Canned

As can be observed, the recognition of a Protected Designation of Origin, five Protected Geographical Indications and a Traditional Speciality Guaranteed have been requested. Three of these products are mainly marketed fresh and two come from aquaculture; the rest are canned or semi-preserved and come from extraction fishing. There are three geographical origins, three from Catalonia, two from Andalusia and two from Galicia.

We will not make an analysis of how these products adapt to the designations requested, as the application is still being processed and it would be inappropriate for us to comment at this stage. However, the possibilities of other fish products facing similar difficulties can be analysed.

The first group could include the products of some species from *extraction fishing*, such as sardine (*Sardina pilchardus*), anchovy (*Engraulis encrasicolus*) and hake (*Merluccius merluccius*). As these are simply extraction products, it is difficult to find convincing arguments to apply for registration. However, as there is a distribution of stocks in different biotopes (mainly the Mediterranean and Cantabrian Seas), the specificity can be sought in aspects related with the biotope (different salinity, temperature and water mobility), as well as different feeding (phytoplankton and zooplankton). According to the present regulations, the name should refer to the fishing zone, which would oblige sharing a designation with other regions or even with other countries of the EU.

The second group would include production from traditional *fishing gear* or *traditional methods* conferring a marked specificity. An example of a species caught with traditional gear would be the hake fished with long-line fishing gear and whose quality is clearly different from the hake fished using other gear such as trawling nets. A widespread case in recent years is that of the white tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*) fished with live bait and troll lines, almost exclusive of the Spanish fleet of the Cantabrian Sea and which has led to the obtention of a much better quality fish than those caught with a pelagic trawler or drift net. The cod (*Gadus morhua*), present in deep waters of the North Atlantic, after drying and salting, is stored in the hull and transported for some days and could be an example of a traditional fishing *method*. The specificity here would lie in the oxidation process that takes place during the days of transport, processes which give clearly different organoleptic qualities from those of frozen or fresh cod. Products caught with traditional fishing gear could be included in the Protected Geographical Indications (PGI) or the Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG), depending on whether or not the gear is used in a given region or territory. The products caught and prepared using traditional methods could be included as Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG).

The third group would include all the products of *cultivated species*: sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*), gilthead sea bream (*Sparus aurata*), turbot (*Psetta maxima*) salmon (*Salmo salar*), prawn (*Palaemon serratus*), eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), common oyster (*Ostrea edulis*), etc. All these products in general fulfil the requirements established for the designations linked to geographical origin (PDO and PGI), since the production takes place in a geographically delimited area. Therefore, their characteristics are due to the conjunction species-geographical environment. In Spain, the aquaculture productions of sea bass and sea bream take place mainly in the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands; the salmon and turbot productions are almost exclusively Galician, although the turbot from Cantabria is also important; the production of the common oyster is mainly Galician, although there is production from Catalonia, the eel production is almost exclusively from Valencia and the prawns are produced almost exclusively in Andalusia. The geographical link of the products greatly contributes to the potential registration of these products under the designation of geographical origin.

Finally, based on the importance that Regulation 2081/92 confers to having a *reputation* that can be attributed to geographical origin, we could form a fourth group with products of renowned prestige linked to a geographical name: Clam from Carril, Striped Venus from Valencia, Scallop from Galicia, Goose barnacle from Galicia, Hanging-rope Mussels from Valencia, Shrimps from Sanlúcar, Shrimps from the Mar Menor, Octopus from Galicia, Sea bass from the Mar Menor, Red shrimp from Vilanova, etc. These products are not specially differentiated from others of the same species that can be found in other geographical places, nor do they have qualities or characteristics linked to their origin, but they do have a reputation linked to a geographical provenance and, with the appropriate management in the capture and harvest and posterior treatment before marketing, could be applicable for recognition as under a PGI.

## **Future of distinctive quality symbols in fish products**

It is clear that, with the exception of products coming from aquaculture, it is difficult to adapt fish products to the existing normative for designations linked to geographical origin. In the light of this situation there are only two possibilities: seek wherever possible an adaptation to the present normative or change this normative and make it more adaptable to fish products.

Both options are perfectly legitimate and we consider that we should work with both at the same time. The adaptation to the existing normative is a task that should be carried out by producers and processors in close collaboration. In order to do so there are tools that the Administration can provide, such as that of Interprofessional Agro-food Organisations, in order for the new Common Market Organisation (CMO) include the promotion and protection of quality symbols (PDO, PGI, TSG).

The modification of the normative is an arduous and timetaking task however, within the progressive development of the community regulation it is possible. The Central State Administration is currently working along these lines. In order to do so, this year, a firm has been commissioned to carry out a specific study on this topic. The study will include the writing of a draft community regulation for quality symbols in fish products. The purpose in this regulation is that a quality symbol should not only be linked with the provenance of the catch, but it should also present other criteria more in accordance with a product that is not rooted within a territory and where freshness is the most evident quality symbol. These could be external factors such as fishing methods and handling of fresh products, methods to conserve the freshness and packaging, etc.