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CHEESE, COMMONS AND
COMMERCE
On the Politics and Practices of
Branding Regional Food

by Sarah May

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by Sarah May
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CHEESE, COMMONS AND COMMERCE

On the Politics and Practices of Branding Regional Food

Sarah May

The protection of regional specialties by the EU-instrument of geographical indications fundamentally changes the status of food; formerly common products become newly appropriated ones. The processes of selecting specialties, and declaring them to be a kind of culinary heritage, shed light on the interplay between legal, political, and economic interests: the transformation of (assumed to be) commonly shared goods and knowledge into legal collective properties evokes state interest and creates new power relations. Two German cheeses, Odenwälder Frühstückskäse and Allgäuer Emmentaler, both labeled with the “protected designation of origin,” provide a framework for examining these processes of propertization and commercialization. In these examples it turns out that establishing, valorizing, regulating and commercializing regional food is based on cultural arguments.

Keywords: geographical indications, commons, culinary heritage, propertization, commercialization

The dairy association of the southern German state of Baden-Württemberg is housed in a modern industrial complex near the motorway and not far from the state capital Stuttgart. Nothing about the building evokes an image of the cultural heritage the association means to protect. Inside, the only indications of purpose are a series of posters depicting glasses of milk and cheese wedges. The otherwise anonymous office space is dotted with small, porcelain figurines of cows. The office manager, however, is less vague in his purpose. Referring to the Allgäuer Emmentaler cheese and the European legal instrument of geographical indication, he claims, “Without doubt to protect the product’s origin was the right course of action. Therefore, we applied for a geographical indication. What counted was to establish a shared right for that traditional product.”¹

Such geographical indications label and protect specialties that are proven to be traditionally anchored in a defined area, such as the Allgäuer Emmentaler. With this legal instrument, the European Union (EU) grants a collective right to a group of producers. Amidst the promise of certain advantages granted to the product’s producers, associations, and regions, the label allows the specialty to be named according to its geographical origin. “Allgäu,” for instance, refers to a specific region stretching through the south of Bavaria and southeastern Baden-Württemberg.

A good hundred kilometers to the southeast of the dairy association’s agency, the landscape begins to reflect the typical appearance associated with the picturesque Allgäu: woods, wide fields, and mead-

ows dominate the hilly countryside. In a small village, a whitewashed cheese dairy, which used to produce the Allgäuer Emmentaler, is located near the main street. Next to the dairy lies a wooden building. It houses a small shop, a restaurant, and a museum whose rustic furnishings and antique tools for dairy production fulfill visitors' nostalgic expectations. Yet, in a corridor distant from tourists and buyers, the dairy's owner makes no secret of his disappointment with the shared right to produce and name this cheese: "In that community everybody takes care of himself. Nobody takes care of the other dairies." His words reveal that this cheese protection community is far less communal than the name and the association's manager suggest.

As diverse as the surroundings, workplaces and jobs are, so are actors' understanding and usage of the European protection instrument. This paper aims to clarify this discrepancy by discussing the EU-instrument of geographical indications and its transfer in everyday practices. Rendering cheese a protected food involves legal requirements, cultural references, and economic interests, which I retrace from the perspectives of individuals involved in these processes. Thus, this paper focuses on actors, bringing to the foreground both practices and power relations, and the conflicts and competitions inherent in the following question: Which processes are revealed and which actors become relevant when specialty production becomes legally regulated, traditional practices become community law, culture becomes property, and tradition an instrument of commerce?

Food is an economic good. It is a commodity and thus an object of political and economic interest. As it is selected, highlighted, and turned into heritage, a product labeled by the EU with a "protected designation of origin" (PDO) evokes further interests. It gains additional emotional and economic worth through its very designation as PDO and makes regionality and tradition marketable commodities. Cheese specialties are well suited for an analysis of these processes as they are often seen in particularly close connection to special natural and cultural preconditions of a region (Tschofen 2007: 187). Thus,

the examination of cheese PDO will show that the foodway to an EU-protected specialty catalyzes discussions about cultural commoditization and heritage politics, cultural propertization, shared rights of tradition, as well as cultural in- and exclusion and their inherent structures of power. Five questions are posed in this article: Who pays special interest in the protection of regional food specialties? Which practices emerge in the context of selecting specialties for designation? What is the meaning of collective rights for a group of producers? When, if at all, are references to culture, region, and tradition exploited for legal and economic purposes? Who profits from labeling and protection?

Two cheese specialties, Odenwälder Frühstückskäse and Allgäuer Emmentaler, will provide the foundation for answering these questions. They differ in number of producers, amount of support they receive from governmental institutions and regional marketing, and international and national visibility. Despite these differences, they are both PDO labeled products and thus share the most esteemed and strictest label of geographical indications.² In connection with the EU protection, each cheese is situated in a complex, and multidimensional network of actors. This includes producers, suppliers, sellers, regional and national authorities in marketing and politics, EU-politicians, consumers, as well as individuals involved in local initiatives for food and sustainability. Much of this paper is based on observations, statements, and material gathered during interviews with these actors and visits to the Allgäu in the German states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg and Odenwald in Hesse, which took place between March 2012 and March 2013.

Subjective Interpretations and State Interests

The EU regulation is established by subjective interpretations based on specific knowledge and already existing networks: The processes of product selection, labeling, and heritage making can only take place when certain actors take interest in them. In a brochure titled "Potentials," the EU aims to explain and advertise the benefits of the designation protection program:

Many products could, given their admission to the EU-register, be much more successfully marketed than has thus far been the case. With their place on the register, products have the potential to augment the value of their region. Their admission makes these products one of a kind and enhances their national and international status. Especially small and mid-size businesses are strengthened by cooperation in a protection community.³

Besides, the brochure praises the benefits of protection from abuse and imitation of the cheese by unauthorized parties. Alongside images of rusticity, the prospectus extols the establishment of a common brand shared by producers, which in turn raises a product's visibility and recognition. What the brochure most notably fails to mention, however, is how the EU itself benefits from distinguishing products: In a unique way, regional specialties create local identity: Regions, countries, and even the EU define and present themselves according to their culinary variety. In this way, the EU advertises a product's protection with the following slogan: "Tell us about your product, so that we may tell everybody about it" (Lebrun undated: 1). Alongside advantages for producers, the EU presents itself with these stories of culinary diversity. The processes surrounding the establishment of Odenwälder Frühstückskäse (breakfast cheese of Odenwald) reveal how claims to geographical indications are, more often than not, federally initiated. Indeed, the distinctions awarded to traditionally crafted cheese mostly benefit governmental actors.

The central German region of Odenwald is characterized by its low-lying mountain ranges, thick forests, and hilly grassland – a "typical region for milk cattle."⁴ The largely agricultural region forms part of the federal state of Hesse and stretches within reach of financially, historically, and academically important cities on the Rhine River. Here, there is no lack of the aforementioned small and mid-size farms, cooperatives, and businesses. In one such small company, the Odenwälder Frühstückskäse is produced – a small, soft cheese in the size of the palm of a hand. In 1997, this cheese was provided with a PDO, which

was an unusual act since this dairy, located in the deep wedge of a vast valley, is the only producer of the cheese – normally, the EU reserves the PDO status for groups of producers. Equally unusual in this case was the catalyst for protection; a Hessian administrator, part of the Regional Council, founded the application initiative for the EU-labeled protection (May 2013: 279–280). While the dairy no doubt supported his initiative, it is important to note they did not instigate it.

For Odenwälder Frühstückskäse, however, the benefits advertised in the brochure "Potentials" have not been realized. The local dairy owner claims that they did not experience a newfound strength based on protection nor an increased production value as a result of the designation:

We had a good regional press when we received the certificate. We advertised the PDO sign a little. We talked about it, but the approval for this move was limited: I do not know if the customers really understood the meaning, because this sign is always in need of explanation. But there certainly is one positive aspect: the product is highlighted. I think the customers remember that it is a special product.

In the small store at the dairy, the Odenwälder Frühstückskäse lies alongside other cheeses in the display. It is marked with the PDO designation, but is not any more noticeable than the surrounding packages of soft cheeses. The EU distinction has not improved its sales.

In the case of Odenwälder Frühstückskäse, the dairy did not initiate the process nor benefit from the PDO protection. The Hessian state not only played a decisive role in the establishment of geographical indications, but was also one of its main beneficiaries. The responsible official from the Hessian Department of Quality Protection claimed, "For the dairy not that much changed. They use the sign on the leaflets and on the products without any additional economic value. Hesse, in contrast, is the obvious winner. The protected cheese is a flagship, we can present the product." By establishing and extolling products with geographical indications,

regional government officials may use the cheese of their region as a political marketing tool.

Furthermore, the EU profits from brands of local heritage. This is in large part due to the fact that geographical indications have helped establish a regulated system of selection and awards for culinary diversity. In January 2007, the EU Commission for Agriculture and Rural Development published a fact sheet, "European Policy for Quality Agricultural Products." The introduction refers to the representative benefit of the distinguished specialties:

Europe is known for the diversity of its agriculture and its food and drink products. These products [have been] developed over centuries of agricultural activity. Food and drink products, together with fine cooking, are a major part of the cultural identity of Europe's peoples and regions.⁵

The declaration and presentation of traditional food and food traditions are beneficial to the confederation. As Karin Salomonsson points out: "Food is used as a means to achieve the goal of a distinctive European character – particularly through the encouragement of culinary diversity" (2002: 125).

Claims to heritage can thus be understood as a "technology of governmentality" (Bendix & Hafstein 2009: 7); geographical indications evoke governmentally initiated and dominated practices. Indeed, drawing a manufacturer's attention to his product's outstanding characteristics often requires the intervention of such distanced actors: In addition to their ability to meet expenditures and provide the framework of an established bureaucracy, outside actors have a unique perspective on the distinctiveness of local practices. They are best equipped to maintain a certain overview, and provide advice for registering and commitment in maintaining a labeled product. Applied on a political European level and initiated by regional offices, the establishment of geographical indications is an essentially top-down undertaking. In the process, new power relations are created, as the effects of the designation on the producers, regions, and governments differ significantly. Indeed, labeling a specialty in the context of culinary

heritage is more beneficial to the regional or federal government than to its manufacturer.

Select and Distinguish

Processes of labeling are necessarily processes of selection. Not all foodstuffs will be distinguished, nor can all specialties be protected. Indeed, this is the very intent of geographical indications. They are meant to raise certain products above the masses and place them in a canon of products worthy of sustenance and protection. The "privileged parts" (Bendix 2007: 340) gain a new status and are therefore with ascribed value. Showcasing, alongside heritage making, changes the perception of the labeled product as well as the self-perceptions of the actors involved. To choose one product out of many and to label it as PDO must be regarded as a fundamentally subjective and intentional act.

As big as a wagon wheel, weighing between forty and sixty kilos, and known for its characteristic notched holes, the Allgäuer Emmentaler has enjoyed the PDO label since 1997. The selection of this particular cheese was largely due to the efforts of a Bavarian initiative, supported by Baden-Württemberg. Collaboration between the federal states is necessary, as the Allgäu, which is defined as a "landscape" (Abt 1991: 5), stretches from the pre-alpine lands up to the Alps, belonging mostly to Bavaria, with a smaller portion under Baden-Württemberg's jurisdiction. In Germany, the green hills and alpine scenery of the Allgäu make it a popular holiday destination well known also for its cheese. As early as 1927, the importance of Emmentaler to the Allgäu was recognized: "Without its milk economy, the Allgäu would be a poor and unknown area. The milk economy was so powerful that since 1800 it has taken the inhabitants of the Allgäu, a spare number of modest people, out of pitiable poverty to respectable culture" (Milchwirtschaftlicher Verein Allgäu-Schwaben e.V. 2008: 8). The Allgäu's cheese and tourism industries along with regional marketing have utilized the Emmentaler's role as a representative of the region to their benefit. The prominent position of the cheese in the region is reflected in a conversation with the chair of the responsible dairy association:

If there is a quintessential Allgäu product, it's cheese. For Bavaria, it's cheese, and maybe beer as well. But the typical product for Allgäu – that is cheese. The Allgäuer Emmentaler had a name even before the protected designation. Thus we were a suitable candidate for the Ministry of Agriculture to run through the application procedure in order to reveal how successful it could be.

In short, upgrading the status of this cheese was a pragmatic, top-down decision, as this product seemed especially well established as a recognized “king of cheese.”⁶ Today, Bavaria boasts thirty of these distinguished designations for a range of regional specialties, while Baden-Württemberg shows eighteen.⁷ Compared to other German federal states, these numbers are quite considerable. Both states have invested a great deal of effort in labeling their regional specialties. Nevertheless, if one considers the vast amount of food and local specialties produced in these two federal states, the numbers are low. This underlines the exclusivity of the small elite to which the EU-instrument grants privileges. Regina Bendix and Kilian Bizer highlight the problematic nature of selectively choosing any cultural elements out of the variety of culture's manifestations, which are connected to each other in a manner of constant creation, use, and modification (2010: 8). Alongside this critique is the fact that specialty protection is an act of selection which leaves other products by the wayside, unable to benefit from the influence of culinary heritage distinction.

The PDO product's position as an object of heritage is not legally recognized.⁸ Rather, its perception as “culinary heritage” results from practices, which actors involved perform on at least three levels. First, the production of the cheese itself must be viewed as a practice that has the specific potential to be taught, learned, forgotten, and handed on to future generations. This reflects the characteristics of knowledge, heritage and inheritability which are canonized within the Unesco-heritage system. In the Allgäu, a cheese specialist claims:

We are trying to carry on a tradition, not just of the importance of Allgäuer Emmentaler, but also a sense for cheese. Now there are four people in my family that have walked in these footsteps: my brother, my cousin, my son – even though I told him not to. I almost convinced him, but then he discovered a love of the job, a love of cheese.

The transfer from father to son, the familiar connection, shows practices of passing on.

Second, the acts of selecting and distinguishing certain products within the EU-system establish a connotation of heritage: Products gain the status of a heritage if actors attribute them with characteristics of singularity, and declare them worthy of continuation. There is no culinary heritage per se; rather, there are actors who create it. The agricultural marketing department of Baden-Württemberg exemplifies the nature of this process: It established a virtual “Gourmet Gallery,” in which each protected specialty is artfully depicted and displayed.⁹ Under the slogan “Taste the South” it systemizes and legitimates the specialties' singularity and tradition, and thus creates an awareness of culinary heritage in addition.

Third, the application for a PDO may be interpreted as a process of justification. Explaining why a product is worthy of maintenance legitimates the product's protection and brings it onto the path of heritage. The process is essentially based on an appeal to tradition, and draws on geopolitical and cultural arguments: In order to provide proof of a regional and traditional foundation, specific local, historical, empirical, technical, and cultural knowledge must be brought together and transformed into a legal context (May 2013; Hegnes 2010).

Along with changing a product's cultural position, the PDO alters cheesemakers' self-perception. Regional actors give the traditional an important role. On the one hand, they value their craft, more than they do the EU system. A farmer at a small cheese-producing cooperation in the Allgäu claims: “We produce the cheese traditionally. We don't follow the PDO criteria for production for their own sake; rather we produce this way because it's the tra-

ditional way.” On the other hand, especially regional representatives see the references to and the awareness of traditional production as a binding force. The chair of the Allgäu cheese association reveals:

In fact, we are the connection between modern and traditional. We will never forget our tradition. It is not by chance that this tradition exists. It always plays a significant role for our cheese and us. And, yes, the people in the Allgäu, they are very traditional. They know their products; they stand by their cheese and defend it without fail.

Valdimar Hafstein observed that heritage is a “category of things, an instrument for classifying the world” (2007: 75). This is especially applicable to the European system of origin protection. Order and classification serve both external and internal perceptions of the Allgäu. By electing, exposing, and ennobling a product as culinary heritage, the food’s origins and traditions are exploited in order to modify or strengthen identity, in order to achieve socio-cultural, political, or economic interests. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes this process as the establishment of a “metacultural relationship” with practices that were once just *habitus* (2006: 161).

In short, transforming food from a regular product to a heritage product fosters discussions on the politics of heritage. Food is an economic and highly economized good. With the label of culinary heritage, food gains an additional economic and idealistic value. Like other heritage systems, culinary heritage designation does not cover the culinary landscape in its entirety; instead, it favors some specialties and overlooks others. Thus, the PDO label functions as a symbol of election and exclusivity, and marks the brand of European culinary heritage as one based on subjective interests and practices.

Exclusive Commons – Extensive Benefits?

In contrast to regular product branding, the European protection does not designate a singular company or product. Names such as Allgäuer Emmentaler and Odenwälder Frühstückskäse do not refer to their producers or representative companies, but

rather to their area of origin. Indeed, while Harry G. West claims that “choosing a name for one’s cheese is a fundamental part of realizing oneself as a cheesemaker” (2012: 8), the EU protection creates a shared brand and a shared name. Such a shared name promises uniform characteristics of all cheeses with that name and serves to unify a group of producers from the outside. This means that the individual producer cannot sell his cheese according to his own profile, but must do so as a regional and collective brand.

The shared mark of the PDO obligates individual manufacturers to subordinate themselves within a collective of producers. Thus, cheese associations provide a platform for discussion on the politics of this commons. Some of the parameters, which regulate the commons of cheese PDO may be infinitely shared, such as regional culture and traditional knowledge. However, other parameters – dairies, farmland, and meadows – are restrictive factors in cheeses’ collective property potential: Only producers who manufacture within defined borders corresponding to special production methods and ingredients gain the collective right.¹⁰ Thus, geographical indications grant a “common” right only for a specific group, a phenomenon Carol Rose calls “limited common property” (1998: 132). Through legal restrictions, the EU arguably intends to reserve for a defined group a practice that had been previously understood to be open to everyone. In examining how commons create community and how such communities are organized and structured, a series of contradictions are revealed.

The first such contradiction appears in the case of Odenwälder Frühstückskäse. The cheese, which is protected as common property and is the product of shared tradition, is only produced by a single dairy. Originally, there were several dairies producing Odenwälder Frühstückskäse, but in the 1970s and 1980s, most of them formed cooperatives in order to cut costs: They modernized their product line and stopped the laborious production of traditional “Frühstückskäse” (May 2013: 285). The EU application process stipulates that cheesemakers must join as a group in order to apply for a PDO and must maintain this community in order to manage the

common right and property. Thus, the instrument aims to avoid a small group of producers holding a monopoly on the product (Welz 2007: 327). The Hessian ministerial official, who initiated the application in the late 1990s, remembers his strategy for this special case:

If you want to apply, you have to establish a protection association, which is later the responsible agency who administers the sign. But there was only one manufacturer, and there was no community at hand. So I fell back on already existing structures, and because it is a dairy product, I asked the Dairy Association of Hesse to act as applicant. If there were questions, the association forwarded them to us. Beyond that, they haven't had to work much with it.

While the establishment of a “dummy” applicant may have paid off in terms of a successful EU application, the dairy's reality highlights the limitations on “limited common property.” The dairy owner names just one of these restrictions: “There is no common feeling, we feel rather like a lone fighter.”

As a collective property and not a private brand, other regional dairies may legally produce Odenwälder Frühstückskäse, a fact of which the dairy owner is well aware. Nevertheless, he prefers not to share the so-called “common” methods for producing Frühstückskäse, claiming: “Yes, technically it was clear; those who are in the area may produce this cheese. Everybody knows that. But it wouldn't be nice if there was a direct competitor. Then we'd have a problem, because then our little segment of the market would be even smaller.” Here, rifts between the EU's anticipation of a voluntarily shared right and the existence of market competition emerge. A single producer under collective protection fundamentally distorts EU definitions of a traditional practice as something shared.

In the Allgäu, a second contradiction is revealed as the legal containment of an exclusive group of producers does not imply that the reputation created by this group is equally exclusive. Currently, thirteen cooperatives and companies share the right to

manufacture Allgäuer Emmentaler PDO in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg.¹¹ In the past, this number had been larger, but since the end of the 1970s, more and more regional dairies decided to produce the cheese without raw milk; an economic decision based on the ease of feeding cows with silage rather than allowing them to graze. While such cheese may still be called “Emmentaler,” and its origin may still be named as “Allgäu,” the geographic distinction may not be included in the name of the cheese. The head of the Baden-Württemberg side of the interstate association describes these developments as follows:

As I see it, the interests changed when a lot of bigger dairies made the switch from “Allgäuer Emmentaler” as raw-milk-Emmentaler, to just plain “Emmentaler” with silage milk. The originally small amount of Emmentaler became larger and in the end, there were only very small amounts of Allgäuer Emmentaler left. Well, that didn't happen all at once; that was a process which started somewhere at the end of the 1970s and led to today's structure.

Raw-milk-based cheese became protected and only those who obey the norms of feeding with grass and hay enjoy the right to a PDO label.¹² The creation of this restriction matches Carol Rose's definition of a limited common property which is “held as commons amongst the member of a group, but exclusively vis-à-vis the outside world” (1998: 132). Technically, and according to the EU-instrument, the use of a reputation based on tradition, region, and quality should be reserved for labeled goods only and its abuse is punishable (Ravindran & Mathew 2009: 58; Rangnekar 2009: 3). Nonetheless, the exclusivity that this distinction creates is permeable. Producers who quit the club still profit from the image of tradition that the producers of Allgäuer Emmentaler and the PDO cultivate. Yet the question remains as to whether the consumer really understands the narrow semantic difference between “Emmentaler” and “Allgäuer Emmentaler,” especially considering the two cheeses' similarity in marketing strategies and packaging. Both cheeses are advertised with depic-

tions of rural scenery and milk cows. Although he has no control on the imagery, the head of the Bavarian dairy association observes the cheeses' presentation attentively:

We have to accept the existence of both products, because there is a demand for both. If anybody wants to buy an Emmentaler with silage milk, he should buy it, we are liberal. But we check all Emmentaler's advertising and packaging, not only the Germans'. And if anybody imitates our protected cheese and if he illegally labels it as Allgäuer Emmentaler, then we react harshly. The PDO labels products that have to be preserved. And we, the protection association, do protect these cheeses worthy of protection. We take care that the essential cheese traditions remain.

The thirteen producers of Allgäuer Emmentaler act as a community of interest in order to differentiate their exclusive cheese from other cheeses, especially in regard to third parties. Max Weber describes these processes as "social enclosure." This enclosure is generated by the twin mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion; Weber claims that in aiming to preserve social and economic gains for a particular group of actors, the group draws dividing lines between themselves and others ([1922]2009: 4–5; cf. Stichweh 2005). In the case of Allgäuer Emmentaler, those processes are based on the regulative power of the group to deny outside access to the PDO label. Access to connotation, however, cannot be legally controlled.

In addition, an examination of the Allgäuer Emmentaler PDO community reveals a further contradiction: The cooperation is said to be close; exchange of shared technical consultants and the common use of an educational center serve as evidence for active engagement in connecting community members. In interviews, cheesemakers also emphasize the tight-knit nature of the community. Thus, a farmer in a small cooperative in the Allgäu mountains outlines reasons for this closeness: "There is no competition like there is in large-scale industry, because everybody sells all his cheese." A representative of a larger

logistics center agrees, claiming that "for me, the community is not a *must be*, but a *get to be*. I know no competition. The point is to make the best out of what we have. We now have a product, that has been protected, and now we make sure to do the best for the region." However, these idyllic concepts of community directly contradict statements made by the initially quoted cheesemaker who, although he produces his Emmentaler with raw milk, is not permitted to use the "Allgäuer Emmentaler" name. He is restricted because he left the producers community: "I left the protection association, because there is no community. Everybody does what he wants. (...) Nobody takes care of the others. That is the problem. There have been fierce battles here. There still are." In his view, the bigger companies failed in their responsibility. They should have established a marketing strategy that would raise consumer awareness of the Allgäuer Emmentaler as a traditionally produced and regionally anchored product. When questioned how members of the protection association reacted to his decision to leave, he utters, "They said nothing, because I was the smallest producer."

In examining the peculiarity of exclusive commons created by the EU-instrument, it becomes evident that the tone for the cooperation and commercialization of a cultural good is often set by the opinions of a group or individual actors. The EU directive of creating a community for exclusive commons is not always successful. Indeed, the cheese-"communities" are less communal than the term might imply. And at times the exclusivity of the limited common property is extended beyond the boundaries which the cheese-communities aimed to create.

Staging Stories in Spatial Scenery

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett distinguishes between two types of value-adding concepts: While "valorization" indicates an increase in emotional value, "valuation" refers to an increase of economic value (2006: 194–195). Both concepts are connected and mutually dependent upon one another and widely discussed in the contexts of heritage making and the culturalization of economic goods.

Food provides an ideal framework for a discussion of these concepts, as food in general and cheese in particular play a prominent role in the external and internal understandings of region. The PDO refers to a location of origin that shapes the product in a particular way, thus altering the cheese in such a way as to reflect the location. A dairy farmer and member of the Alpine Allgäuer Emmentaler's cooperative points out:

Nature, originality, geography – that is mountains, cows, green meadows, that's, in my eyes, what makes up the "Allgäuer" in the "Allgäuer Emmentaler." Here it's like that, we have these mountains, these green meadows, these cows. That's simply the interpretation of Allgäu, that is, of Allgäuer Emmentaler.

In short, geographical and product characteristics reciprocally create and depend on one another. While regionality is used for food marketing, food knowledge shapes regional identity. Ian Cook and Philip Crang claim: "Foods do not simply come from places, organically growing out of them, but also make places as symbolic constructs, being deployed in the discursive construction of various imaginative geographies" (1996: 140). A product's spatial position is thus particularly significant – and becomes exploited in the context of foods' protection and "heritagification"¹³.

In what ways do actors refer to tradition, culture, and region in marketing strategies? An answer lies in Munich, the capitol city of Bavaria, where the latest campaign for Allgäuer Emmentaler PDO was developed. The campaign forms part of an initiative called "Weltgenusserbe Bayern" (World Culinary Heritage of Bavaria). Semantically, the title of the initiative evokes connotations of the acclaimed "Unesco World Heritage" system where local and national significance is superseded by a global context of relevance (Roigé & Frigolé 2010: 9). Similarly, originally small-scaled, regional specialties are instrumentalized for large-scale purposes on state and federal levels. Thus, the Bavarian campaign was founded by the Bavarian Ministry of Food,

Agriculture, and Forestry in Munich and financed by the European Commission.¹⁴ In simplest terms, the campaign advertises those Bavarian specialties, which are labeled by geographical indications. The head of the responsible Bavarian ministry claims that the campaign is a vehicle for displaying product histories, faces, and stories. Furthermore, it is meant to be educational, spread information on application procedures and interpret the signs used to designate different foods for consumers' benefit; for example, referring to the PDO as "the red-yellow sun."¹⁵

The visual representation of the "Weltgenusserbe Bayern" campaign is a photomontage: On a lush meadow, covered in white flowers, lies a wooden serving platter laden with beer, cheese, horseradish, and sausages. All of the products are of Bavarian origin as wording on the crockery holding some of the goods and small flags planted in the products explain. The average observer is meant to recognize the typical Bavarian environment; the meadow is skirted with pines, behind which snow-capped mountains are visible. For those still unable to recognize the region, the blue sky fades into the blue and white checked Bavarian flag. Surrounding the platter are seven men and women, among them some are dressed as hikers, some as tourists. In proportion to the food, the people are tiny. They look admirably up at the oversized meal and approach it cheerfully.

In this picture, foodstuffs become monumental. The campaign equips its specialties, including Allgäuer Emmentaler PDO, with a "second life as an exhibition of itself" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 56). The scenery represents Astrid Swenson's observation that the act of declaring anything as heritage in public culture, means declaring it as inviolable (2007: 53). The monumentalization of the products places them in a particular temporal and historical context, which Andrew Hui describes as a "desire for immortality" (2009: 19). Thus, "Weltgenusserbe Bayern" may be understood as an allegorical representative of the European food protection system: Selected products are granted eternal life, and the corresponding regions award monumentality.

Arguably, the PDO requires such firm spatial and temporal contextualization, because of the highly



Ill. 1: With the campaign “Weltgenusserbe,” Bavaria raises its protected specialties to a status of monumentality and inviolability. By creating a narration for the food, the federal state pursues its own interests. (Source: © www.weltgenusserbe.de)

abstract nature of the label itself. Consequently, the Bavarian campaign provides its PDO specialties with a narrative by instrumentalizing chiefly the region’s symbolic power. Jonas Frykman cites the effects of such a spatial storytelling: “When regions take the stage, their character is thus as much a dreamed as a factual geographical unit. They have (...) personality, life, and ‘soul’” (2002: 48). The Bavarian Marketing and Sales Department instrumentalizes regional attributes and the symbolic effects of a depicted interplay between nature and food in its campaign. Consequently, each symbolic element in the visual story of “Weltgenusserbe Bayern,” humans, nature, and the central and majestically heightened regional specialties, seem to exist in natural harmony with one another. The depicted persons clad in hiking boots or carrying cameras, represent Bavarians and

tourists alike. They are, in short, the consumer who should understand Bavarian “specialties as accessory to holidays in Bavaria,” according to the head of the Bavarian Marketing and Sales Department. He claims that the campaign intends to “arrange a stage where our products can be enacted.” This vocabulary borrows from the theater and reflects Kaspar Maase’s critique of the reduction of “home as scenery” as a practice which serves the purposes of politics, bureaucracy, cultural production, and tourism (1998: 57; cf. Bausinger 1980: 17). With the intricate staging and narration of products turned heritage, the Bavarian campaign pursues its own interests more so than it does those of the products and producers themselves: Through the limited scope of my interviews, I have concluded that not every party in the campaign is equally impacted by it. Only the

big producers of Allgäuer Emmentaler were aware of the campaign, while smaller manufacturers were unfamiliar with this or any other advertising initiatives relating to their cheese. In unspoken terms, the Bavarian campaign advertises the federal state itself. This initiative, which is top-down in nature and the only large-scale/extensive marketing campaign for geographical indications in Germany, ascribes emotional (and ultimately, economic) value to food and region. Primarily, however, the value of Bavaria itself is upgraded.

Culture plays an important role in the economy of geographical indications, even though not *all* actors know how to use this tool. Indeed, in recent years Bavaria has built a complex network of influential institutions and actors to support its initiatives.¹⁶ Yet in many ways the Hessian Odenwälder Frühstückskäse is dwarfed in comparison to the broad and singular Bavarian campaign and its well-known Allgäuer Emmentaler. How do Hessian actors involved in similar political and cultural structures assess the Bavarian initiative from the outside?

Gradients in Power and Possibilities

Harald Lemke assumes that fundamental inequalities necessarily exist in a political economy which transforms knowledge and culture into commodity (2012: 19). These differences are largely found in the form of information, finances, and networking and are succinctly described by a Hessian ministry official as he compares his own region's initiatives to those of the Bavarians:

Well Bavaria is on top, they are really great with all these products that are already protected. Without doubt they have a better financial standing and then they founded that marketing association, allocated to the ministry, which invests great efforts in specialties' promotion. And they have very good experts, universities that do research in this direction and are represented in the ministry. Here we have nothing comparable; we're not as well equipped as the Bavarians or others. We had to leave all the projects because of a lack of money. They have another culture than the Hes-

sians, for example. From a historical standpoint, Hesse is patched together. It arose only after the Second World War. That needs time.

As early as 1994, Hermann Bausinger recognized that not all regions in the European Union automatically enjoy equal privilege; economically strong regions are further strengthened by politics of subsidization (1994: 126–127). As noted by the Hessian official, the situation remains unchanged: The two German federal states differ in terms of the structure of their organizations, their financial possibilities, and their historical development. European politics and federal states' implementation of these policies support strong and established regions with extensive networks and distinctive characteristics. Thus, geographical indications augment the pre-existing differences between states and regions.

That is not to say that Hesse has not shown initiative in commercializing its rural and natural distinctiveness. In order to support regional commerce, the "Regionalmarke Odenwald" (regional brand of Odenwald) was created. A local tourism corporation, the Odenwald Tourismus GmbH, gathered local specialties under the slogan "Odenwald – switch to nature."¹⁷

Similar to strategies implemented in the Allgäu, the Odenwald boasts of its natural beauty and is advertised as a perfect place for a rural getaway from nearby cities. Despite these strategic similarities, the Regionalmarke initiative has simply not been as effective as Bavaria's Weltgenusserbe. The proprietress of the Odenwälder Frühstückskäse dairy explains the situation:

It is a pity that the political interests, the heads of districts, and the relevant parties do not support the initiative. But otherwise it is a nice effort. We want the Odenwald to be projected as a positive region. Because we want to be involved in this process, it became our endeavor to contribute, in order to give the Odenwald a positive image, little by little.

While the lower profile of the Odenwald region as compared to the Allgäu may be a reason for this disparity, the two regions share similar natural charac-



Ill. 2: Under the Odenwald brand, regional actors in government, marketing, and tourism aim to raise the region's visibility. One part of this concept is the common presentation of local products. (Source: www.regionalmarke-odenwald.de)

teristics. This may indicate the importance of single actor initiatives and, more importantly, governmental structures in effectively managing such articles of culinary heritage.

The power of the state, augmented by networks, conventions, rules, and interpersonal relationships (Becker & Wassermair 2010), becomes conspicuous in the context of PDO product marketing. An examination of financial possibilities and agency networks reveals a gradient of influence among regions and federal states, a fact that is well known in Hesse. When asked whether she would like to join the "Weltgenusserbe" campaign, the aforementioned Hessian ministry official exclaimed: "We small ones? Look, we only have the Frühstückskäse. A lot has to happen here! We should have better possibilities to reach the producers." The subjective commitment influences the increase of emotional and economic value of region, tradition, and the protected food: These specific regional advantages, as well as culinary heritage itself, are only revealed when individual or government initiatives explain and stage them.

Conclusion

This paper has examined which actors are interested and involved, as well as which practices and peculiarities emerge in the branding of regional food. Producers, members of associations, actors on regional and supraregional levels, and those in European marketing and government, are included in the processes of initiating, selecting, justifying, negotiating, legally regulating, highlighting, and advertising specialties with a protected designation of origin. A comparison based on two PDO-labeled German cheese specialties illustrated how the European Union's instrument of geographic indications is realized differently, depending on the skills, potentials, and restrictions of actors and (federal) states. Thus, inequalities between actors and regions emerge when cheese production becomes legally regulated, when traditional practices become community law, when culture becomes property, and tradition an instrument of commerce. The case study presented has shown that the geographic indications contribute to increasing inequalities.

Who is interested in specialties' protection? Cheese-makers and dairy associations constitute the target group of the European instrument and rhetoric. However, it is the confederation itself along with regional governments that strive for and benefit the most from specialties' labeling. In tracing the initiators and profiteers of geographical indications on the level of regional and European government, the top-down nature of the instrument has been exposed. The analysis of selecting and decorating local specialties has revealed the extent of individual actors' influence. Much as in heritage making, the elevation of particular foods to PDO is a subjective, intentional act. In defining the meaning of a shared collective right on cheese PDO, the "cheese commons" emerged as limited common property for a group of producers. Only those who produce their cheese according to defined methods in a defined area may label it as PDO. These communities of producers are less common than the term might imply: on the contrary, while in the Odenwald common property is reserved for a single dairy, in the Allgäu the community of Allgäuer Emmentaler PDO is lacking in cohesion – and the product's reputation may finally not be reserved for group members only. Asking for the use of references to cultural, regional, and traditional arguments, the application for a PDO has to be mentioned as well as the advertisement of product and region must be taken into account. Food, especially regional food, creates identification and has an emotional value, which is tied to its region. Finally, by elaborating on the special spatial positioning of cheese PDO, actors' subjective transfer is made apparent: While some make use of the fact that food, especially regional food, creates identification and has an emotional value, which is tied to its region, other actors and regions may not – due to financial or personal reasons.

So, who profits from labeling and protection? The comparison of the two PDOs revealed a rift between the two cheeses and states, actors and initiatives. Certain (federal) states are able to use the protection instrument more effectively than others. Rather than compensating for these inequalities, the EU's instrument strengthens them. On the basis of food-

ways to cheese PDO, gradients in power and possibilities become visible – a visibility that may be quite literally illustrated by an incident that occurred as I researched Odenwälder Frühstückskäse: It was a warm autumn day when I set out for the Hessian Ministry for Environment, Energy, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection to conduct an interview. As I searched for the ministry, I kept an eye out for a regal and authoritative building reminiscent of my visits to the Bavarian ministry. I was so distracted by this preconceived notion of ministerial architecture that I walked right past my destination, not once, but twice. Finally, I located the address I had been searching for, which was, according to the building's signage, an insurance company. However, a closer look revealed a small sign hidden by foliage, "The Hessian Ministry for Environment, Energy, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection." I entered the mirrored building and met the ministry official for the interview. We discussed geographical indications and specialties' protection in Hesse. The official drew a parallel to Bavaria of her own accord when she – as quoted above – admiringly and only with a note of envy admitted that the Bavarian state worked under superior financial and personal conditions. After the interview, the ministry official accompanied me to the door. Finally, I asked why the ministry was located in the building of an insurance company. She laughed and confessed that this building could serve as an ideal illustration of the differences between Bavaria and Hesse, which we had discussed: "Not even for buildings we have enough money. We are simply not as well equipped as Bavaria," she said, and went on to explain that the Hessian state was forced to sell its property for financial reasons. The ministry was now housed in the insurance company's building on a rental basis – the very state of these offices provides an appropriate image for the distinctions in the handling of the European protection instrument, the implementation and valorization of cheese PDO.

Notes

- 1 All statements were gathered by the author, mainly in the German regions of the Allgäu and Odenwald during her fieldwork between March 2012 and March 2013, and have been translated by the author from German into English. The study is embedded in the interdisciplinary research project “The Constitution of Cultural Property,” founded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) for the period of June 2011 to June 2014. In this context the sub-project, led by Achim Spiller and Bernhard Tschofen, focuses on geographical indications: In order to widen the access to the subject, which was up to now mostly established in singular disciplines (Parasecoli & Tasaki 2011: 107), this study results from the close cooperation of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development, University of Göttingen, and the Institute for Empirical Cultural Science, University of Tübingen.
- 2 Rosemary J. Coombe denotes geographical indications as “applied forms” of intellectual property law (2010: 249). As such, they are organized into two EU-regulations. In 1992, the EU implemented an instrument “on the Protection of geographical indications and Designations of Origin for Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs,” which was revised in 2006. This instrument offers three labels, whereof the “protected designation of origin” (PDO) requires that all steps of production and processing, as well as the product’s ingredients and raw materials, take place in and originate in the specific area. Beneath the PDO are the protection levels of “protected geographical indication” (PGI) and the “traditional specialty guaranteed” (TSG), whose restrictions on geographical origin are less strict.
- 3 Cf. the brochure “Marketing-Instrumente der Agrarwirtschaft” (undated), which is published by the German Central Promotion Agency, and financed among others by the European Union.
- 4 Cornelius Mohr, “Spezialitäten aus dem Odenwald”, in *Landwirtschaftliches Wochenblatt*, see <http://www.lw-heute.de/?redid=30679>. Accessed January 17, 2013.
- 5 Edited by the European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, see http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/fact/quality/2007_en.pdf. Accessed January 17, 2013.
- 6 The vernacular attribution “king of cheeses” was strengthened by present marketing, for instance by Landesvereinigung der Bayrischen Milchwirtschaft: “Die schönsten Ecken Bayerns,” as well as diverse other advertising campaigns and copies, such as <http://www.stegmann-gmbh.de/?id=7def0e1b5ed4f6cb55f23c4be792635c>. Accessed January 15, 2013.
- 7 See <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/door/browse.html?display>. Accessed January 22, 2013.
- 8 The terminology “culinary heritage” refers to the Unesco system. Thus, the Unesco regime and intellectual property law may be viewed as parallel legal systems, both of which touch on similar topics, yet remain legally unconnected. I still use the term “heritage”, understood as “sociocultural practice” (Csáky & Sommer 2005), because of certain observable processes within the EU system of geographical indications. In Romanic languages, the term “patrimonialization” is used to describe the establishment of heritage processes. It also inherently criticizes “heritage fever” and “heritage inflation” (Roigé & Frigolé 2010: 13). For further differentiation of the terms “heritage,” “patrimoine,” “Kulturerbe,” see e.g. Astrid Swenson (2007).
- 9 See <http://www.schmeck-den-sueden.de/qualitaetszeichen/allgauer-emmentaler-g-u/>. Accessed January 21, 2013.
- 10 Commons are material or immaterial resources, which appear in two types: Either they may be freely used by anyone or their usage and property is limited, regulated, and controlled. This depends on whether the resources are finite or infinite. Cultural knowledge is an infinite source; cf. Stefan Groth who claims, “being essentially composed of information, cultural commons tend not to suffer from limited carrying capacity. Their carrying capacity, as public goods, is infinite: consuming culture does not reduce its total amount for others” (2013).
- 11 See <http://www.lfl.bayern.de/iem/herkunftsbezeichnungen/27852/>. Accessed January 9, 2013.
- 12 This raises the question of whether the change of ingredients necessarily leads to a change, or end, of traditional manufacturing. Valdimar Hafstein states that “tradition denotes and depends on collectivity and continuity” (2004: 306). In using Dorothy Noyes’ definition of tradition as “continual recycling” (2010: 2) one might ask whether the new interests in producing without raw milk could influence the former tradition or even create a new one. A regional actor’s view on this, however, becomes clear in the following: “Changes in production methods? This is a no-go! What should be changed there? We have been doing it like this for 200 years, it’s proven. You cannot change anything. The mere thought of it... you had better cross yourself”
- 13 The term “heritagification” emphasizes the process-based nature of heritage making (Hemme, Tauschek & Bendix 2007).
- 14 See <http://www.weltgenusserbe.de/>. Accessed January 30, 2013.
- 15 Press release of “Weltgenusserbe Bayern,” dated on December 3, 2012, see http://www.news4press.com/Allg%C3%A4uer-Milch-macht-K%C3%A4sespezi_702729.html. Accessed January 31, 2013.
- 16 The Bavarian Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry set up the Kompetenzzentrum für Ernährung in 2011, which aims to improve the flow of information

between science, production, and education. In Hesse such a center does not exist. See <http://www.kern.bayern.de/>. Accessed January 25, 2013.

17 See <http://www.regionalmarke-odenwald.de/>. Accessed January 30, 2013.

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