THE PROTECTION OF TYPICAL LOMBARDY CHEESES: PRACTICES AND RULES BETWEEN LARGE INDUSTRIES AND SMALL PRODUCERS (20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES)

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Abstract: *The article analyses the evolution of quality standards and their application in the dairy industry in the 20th and 21st centuries. The study focuses on cheeses in Lombardy and underlines the strategies and policies implemented by both large companies and small and medium-sized producers. It shows that until the end of the Second World War the dairy products' quality was essentially guaranteed by companies: cheese enterprises produced industrialised and standard goods, but according to traditional recipes. After the Second World War, however, there was a progressive intensification of rules and restrictions to protect the quality and territoriality of products at national and European level. In 1951, in the Stresa Conference, agreements were introduced at European level to protect national and traditional dairy productions. In Italy, designations of origin were introduced around 1955, followed by the birth of protection consortia. Finally, in 1996, Community regulations were adopted to regulate the protected designation of origin at European level.*

Keywords: *Italian dairy companies; Lombardy DO cheeses; 20th-21st centuries; Stresa Conference.*

Resumo: *O artigo analisa a evolução dos padrões de qualidade e a sua aplicação na indústria leiteira nos séculos XX e XXI. Centra-se nos queijos da Lombardia e sublinha as estratégias e políticas implementadas tanto pelas grandes empresas como pelos pequenos e médios produtores. Demonstra que até ao final da Segunda Guerra Mundial a qualidade dos produtos lácteos era essencialmente garantida pelas empresas: as empresas queijeiras apresentavam produtos industrializados e normalizados, mas de acordo com receitas tradicionais. Após a Segunda Guerra Mundial, contudo, houve uma progressiva intensificação das regras e restrições para proteger a qualidade e a territorialidade dos produtos a nível nacional e europeu. Em 1951, na Conferência de Stresa, foram introduzidos acordos a nível europeu para proteger as produções leiteiras nacionais e tradicionais. Em Itália, as denominações de origem foram introduzidas por volta de 1955, seguindo-se o nascimento de consórcios de proteção. Finalmente, em 1996, foram adotados regulamentos comunitários para regulamentar a denominação de origem protegida a nível europeu.*

Palavras-chave: *empresas leiteiras italianas; Denominação de Origem dos queijos da Lombardia; séculos XX e XXI; Conferência de Stresa.*

INTRODUCTION

The essay analyses the evolution of practices and rules for the protection of quality and the promotion of «territorial typicality» of Lombardy's cheese production in the 20th century and in the first two decades of the following century, using the experiences of some typical cheeses, including *gorgonzola* and *grana*. The study reviews the

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existing literature on the subject in order to offer a new interpretation that takes into account both the point of view of large companies and that of small and medium-sized producers. In particular, the research questions to be answered are: what have been and how have commercial strategies and regulations evolved below the so-called typicality of products? Which operators (among large and medium-small enterprises) have most influenced these approaches and in what way? Finally, the work attempts to investigate the relationship between products of the *terroir* and multinational companies with the intention of ascertaining whether local can survive and coexist in global dynamics.

The text is divided into four sections. The first three parts present a reconstruction of the economic-productive and commercial development of the Lombardy dairy sector since the end of the 19th century; while the last part focuses on Lombardy's cheeses, especially in the second half of the 20th century following the introduction of regulations and designations of origin. Finally, the conclusions summarise the process of analysis outlined and attempt to answer the initial questions.

1. PROMOTING QUALITY IN THE TRANSITION FROM TRADITIONAL CHEESE-MAKING TO INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Lombardy is considered the most industrialised region in Italy but, at the same time, it has maintained and developed a central role in the agricultural field, particularly in the livestock sector, to the extent that it produces over 30% of Italy's cow's milk. Between the 15th and 16th centuries, Lombard livestock farming specialised in dairy cattle, following the transformation of the agricultural systems of the region's irrigated plain and the subsequent decline of the city's wool mill, organised on the basis of the ancient corporate structure[1]. A similar process took place in the Grisons and the central Swiss cantons. From that time onwards, cheese production increased, especially in the case of two specific types: *grana*, a long matured hard cheese typical of the Lodigiano area, and *stracchino* (pl. *stracchini*), a short matured soft cheese typical of the Orobic Pre-Alps. Since the Middle Ages, *grana* has also been sold on markets outside the region, while *stracchini* were destined for local markets.

At this stage, the goodness of the product was guaranteed by the commercial reputation of the large merchants, specialised in maturing *grana* and selling it on local and distant markets. Milk processing, typical of the mountain and irrigated plain areas, was carried out by the farmers themselves. On the plain, butter, cheese and *stracchini* were produced on the farm until well into the 19th century. The refinement of the product was carried out by the large shopkeepers who bought the cheeses fresh or just matured and who brought the various dairy products to the right degree of maturity before putting them on

[1] ROVEDA, 2012.

the market[2]. Much sought after was the *grana stravecchio*, a cheese put on the market after four years of maturing provided it had preserved its best qualities; the *stravecchio* was not eaten as a dish, but as a condiment for food, as is the case with spices.

Even in the pre-industrial age, however, there was a need to qualify the product and the case of a special *stracchino,* named *gorgonzola*, can help to better understand the way quality was assured. In general, in Lombardy the production of *stracchini* increased between the 18th and 19th centuries and among these cheeses there also was *gorgonzola*, a cheese similar to the French *roquefort* with a paste made special by the presence of mould. This spicy cheese was produced in the villages of the Pre-Alps and in many places on the plain, but it was widely believed that the best product was the one produced in the large village of Gorgonzola, located about ten kilometres from Milan on the road leading from the regional capital to Bergamo[3]. The tradition was so deep-rooted that a source from the early 19th century (1840) recorded that *gorgonzola* wheels produced in various localities were transported to the maturing warehouses in Gorgonzola (the village) for a short stop, so that the shopkeepers were able to sell the product with a sort of denomination of origin[4].

In the second half of the 19th century, dairy activities intensified in general in the Po valley and in particular in Lombardy for a number of reasons[5]. The extension of meadowland made it possible to increase cattle breeding and Lombardy and Emilia Romagna specialised in dairy cow farming. The extension of the railway network, the opening of the Fréjus tunnel and the gradual establishment of transoceanic steam navigation made it easier to sell products on national and foreign markets. The first dairies with industrial production processes were set up in the towns of Lodi and Codogno (both located south of Milan), which began to use Danish and Swedish machinery, particularly for butter production. Also in Lodi, from the 1880s, the *Regia Stazione sperimentale di caseificio* (Royal Experimental Dairy Station), set up by the national government in the previous decade, was consolidated as a research and training centre, aiming to modernise butter and cheese production techniques.

Production grew and exports increased, but more slowly. The trade balance in the cheese industry remained in deficit until the end of the 19th century. The situation changed

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[2] While the production sites were scattered throughout the countryside, the maturing warehouses were concentrated in a few localities, where the shopkeepers had their warehouses (Milan, Lodi, Codogno, Gorgonzola, Rovato); BESANA, 2012: 73-86.

[3] The idea of the quality of the *stracchino* produced in Gorgonzola stems from the fact that this village was one of the main stops on the routes taken by the *bergamini*, the transhumant breeders from the Pre-Alps who came down from the mountains every year to winter on the plains. These breeders were very skilled at producing this type of cheese and, according to nineteenth-century sources, they made their techniques known to the cheese-makers of this town; MASSARA, 1877. On the construction of the typicality of Gorgonzola cheese, see BESANA, 2022.

[4] This document mentions that the excellent *stracchini* produced in Albairate, near Pavia, were shipped to Gorgonzola, to be resold as a local product; ASMI. *Fondo Commercio*, p.m., p. 16 and FACCINI, 1986.

[5] BESANA, 2012: 87-156.

radically at the beginning of the new century, when Italy became one of the world's largest exporters of cheese[6]. At that time, around 300,000 quintals of cheese were exported from Italy, mainly *grana*, *gorgonzola* and *pecorino*, and Lombardy made a fundamental contribution to foreign sales of *grana* and *gorgonzola*. With the increase in production and the need to place the product on international markets, the concern of the major producers was to guarantee products with homogeneous characteristics. It was no longer acceptable to have a country with «an endless number of small cheeses, with various and variable names, shapes, prices and qualities, which have a very limited sales market, are not of a standardised type and do not stand long well and can therefore never aspire to become export products»[7]. Technicians were asked to study the physical and chemical characteristics of the milk, to analyse the cheese-making processes to establish standardised procedures to obtain «acceptable» products, reducing waste to a minimum. At the same time, the maturing techniques were improved in order to obtain cheeses that would last for a long time, so that they could be easily sold in distant markets, particularly in North and South America[8].

In Lombardy, the maturation process of *gorgonzola* began a process of transformation: it was organised on a large scale and took on new forms. Following on from what had been done for *roquefort*, natural caves were used in a small valley in the Lecco mountains, the Valsassina. In this small valley in the Orobic Pre-Alps, which has special characteristics in the composition of the rocks in its mountains, warehouses were built against the mountain walls, taking advantage of natural ravines to ensure constant temperature and humidity. This created the conditions for optimal aging of the cheese for export. Hundreds of thousands of wheels were produced on the plains and transported to the mountains for maturing. This method was especially used by the major commercial enterprises in Lombardy, which, thanks to this particular trade, became leaders in the cheese sector in Italy. For example, Polenghi Lombardo, which had its main factories in the Lodigiano[9] area, and Locatelli, a company founded in the small town of Ballabio, near Lecco, and which very quickly managed to open its own warehouses abroad, first in London and Buenos Aires, and then in New York[10].

Despite these commercial successes, the main companies and, in general, all Lombardy operators in the sector did not feel the need to link their products to a specific territory, to qualify their cheeses by identifying them with a *terroir*[11]. Their goal was

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[6] BESANA, D'ERRICO, 2016: 542, tab. 1.

[7] MUSSO, 1878: 426-427.

[8] In these markets, Italian cheeses are in particular demand among our emigrants.

[9] On the history of this company, which for a long time was the most important enterprise in the Italian dairy sector, see FUMI, 2017: 337-362. On the origins and early development of Locatelli, see MESSINA, 2017: 321-335. For more on the origins of Locatelli and Galbani (1860-1914), see BESANA, D'ERRICO, 2016: 541-568.

[10] For more details on Locatelli, see MESSINA, 2017: 321-335.

[11] The case of Emilia is different. In this region, the production of *grana* cheese exploded at the end of the 19th century and the need was felt to find an initial form of protection of origin, since the adjective «Parmigiano» was used at that time to describe the *grana* cheeses produced north and south of the river Po. Conscious of having a product of superior

that of guaranteeing the customer a product with well-defined characteristics both in the consistency of the paste and in the taste. The main concern was, above all, to obtain the best economic result from the processing of milk, an operation that was not easy at the time, since they had to process a very particular raw material, unstable by nature, with technologies that were not yet fully refined. Technicians and major producers were convinced that with good quality milk and trained cheesemakers, a good cheese could be produced even far from its area of origin. It is no coincidence that, at this time, in Lombardy they were increasing the production of both Swiss cheeses, in particular *emmenthal*, and of some typical southern *pasta filata* cheeses, such as *provolone* and *caciocavallo*[12]. The State was only asked to intervene to prevent fraud, for example by regulating the use of vegetable margarine in the preparation of certain cheeses. If a producer wanted to stand out, the choice was to imitate the «French luxury cheeses». This was the approach adopted by Galbani, a small entrepreneur from Lecco who started his business by maturing *gorgonzola* for export and producing *stracchini* and *robiole*, cheeses typical of his land. However, when Galbani increased the size of his company by opening a plant in Melzo, a town on the plains near Milan, the strategy adopted was to broaden the range of his products, inventing a cheese for national consumption, named «Bel Paese» (Beautiful Country), and selling imitations of French products, considered at the time to be cheeses for the most refined palates.

With the appearance and the first affirmation of producers working on an industrial scale, the brand was entrusted with the task of guaranteeing the quality of the raw materials used and the goodness of the cheeses put on the market. The advertising on the packaging does not mention any link with specific land or territories, partly because the reputation of the producer was considered sufficient to ensure consumer loyalty. On the labels, in addition to the name of the company, which was always well highlighted and often accompanied by the mention of prizes won at national and international exhibitions, the authenticity of the cheeses was stressed by the name given to the product and by the images chosen, which recall mountain landscapes, uncontaminated places, where pretty peasant women devoted themselves to processing milk or giving their care to flourishing cows[13].

quality, as it was only made six months of the year, when the animals were fed with fresh fodder, the Emilian operators began to think about identifying their product as *reggiano* cheese or as real *parmesan* cheese with a yellow paste. For an example of this discussion at the end of the century, see RAVÀ, 1896: 17-18. See also MAGAGNOLI, 2017: 166.

[12] The production of Swiss cheeses is favoured by the arrival in northern Italy of operators from that country; likewise, the growth in the production of *pasta filata* cheeses in Lombardy is facilitated by the arrival in the region of experts from southern Italy, such as members of the Auricchio family; see FASCETTI, 1926. On the history of dairy farming in Italy, see L'Italia Agricola». 61:12 (1926) 580. Special issue: *Il latte e i suoi derivati*. The Auricchio family is still active in Lombardy; its plants, located in the Cremona area, are dedicated in particular to the production of *provolone valpadana* cheese, today with a controlled denomination of origin.

[13] SUFFIA, LOCATELLI, BESANA, 2018: 1227-1254.

2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE INTER-WAR PERIOD

After the difficulties of the war period, cheese production began to grow again in Italy, always with the fundamental contribution of Lombardy producers. Available data show a cheese production estimated at 1,800,000 quintals on the eve of the war, rising to around 2,000,000 quintals by the mid-1920s[14]. In 1937, when data was collected for a new industrial census of the Kingdom of Italy, cheese production was estimated at 2,229,000 quintals[15], a quota which placed Italy in third place among cheese producers in the world, behind the United States and Germany but ahead of France[16]. At that time, cow's milk cheese production was concentrated in northern Italy, with a fundamental contribution from Lombardy and Emilia; cow's milk cheese production was estimated at 1,750,000 quintals, with Lombardy producing 823,000 quintals and Emilia 382,000 quintals.

Exports also grew in the 1920s, reaching their highest point in 1931, when almost 404,000 quintals of cheese were shipped abroad[17]. The following year, the effects of the 1929 crisis and, in particular, protectionist policies began to show: exports fell to 300,000 quintals, reaching a level close to 230,000 quintals at the end of the 1930s. The major producers began to look mainly at the domestic market; a few companies, Polenghi in particular, set up production plants in the African colonies and Albania, in response to the fascist government's requests, but without great advantages.

The 1937 census also gave a picture of the companies operating in the dairy sector. The data showed the presence of a very high number of small production enterprises and even in Lombardy, the most advanced region in cheese production, there were several thousand firms producing cheese. Above all in the production of *grana*, the main Italian cheese, there are almost 2,700 production companies. The production of *gorgonzola* was slightly more concentrated, but even in this case there were more than 860 operators[18]. In this context, the problem of quality continued to be identified in the ability to process milk with rational methods, trying to have products with an acceptable degree of uniformity.

However, it is useful to underline that some changes were beginning to manifest themselves but, in this first stage, they did not concern Lombardy. In the 1920s, the Emilian *grana* producers looked carefully at what was happening in France, where the AOC (Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée) system was being adopted for wines and certain cheeses. In order to protect local production from the countless imitations,

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[14] FERRARI, 1971: 89.

[15] ISTAT, 1939: 102, tab. 61.

[16] SAVINI, 1946: 657, tab. CXLVIII.

[17] At that time Italy was in third place in the world as a cheese exporting country, surpassed only by Holland and New Zealand, and it exported, as at the beginning of the century, mainly *pecorino*, *gorgonzola* and the various types of *grana*, but also «Bel Paese» cheese; see SAVINI, 1933: 16-17.

[18] In 1937 the production of *grana* cheese, concentrated in Emilia and Lombardy, was estimated at about 585,000 quintals; that of *gorgonzola* at 183,500 quintals; BESANA, 2017: 71-81.

in 1928 the Reggio Emilia Chamber of Commerce created a voluntary consortium for the protection of *grana* «reggiano» (i.e., *grana* produced in Emilia), laying down the first rules for the preparation of this cheese. During the 1930s the consortium became interprovincial, involving producers from the provinces of Parma, Modena, Mantua and Bologna[19].

Protection initiatives were also launched by *pecorino* producers. In this case, there was an initial initiative to protect this cheese from competition from a similar product, named *vacchino*, a cheese made from cow's milk (instead of sheep's milk as for *pecorino*), in particular by Lombard companies such as Latteria Soresinese[20]. In 1931, a consortium of *pecorino* producers in Lazio was set up, but this was not recognised by the public authorities.

As mentioned, the dairy industry in Lombardy did not pay much attention to these initiatives. The major operators in the region did not appreciate them, which were seen as a limitation on their freedom of action. These entrepreneurs were essentially interested in guaranteeing the consumer the quality of the product, but they did not consider it essential to qualify the origin of the goods on sale. They wanted to be able to produce any type of cheese according to convenience, putting one type of cheese product or another on the market in accordance with consumer demand. United in the National Fascist Federation of the Dairy Industry, they aimed to sell on the market standardised quality goods, on which they put their brand as a form of guarantee. These companies put their cheeses on the market, giving them names that recall the idea of uncontaminated nature, which echoed alpine environments, but which rarely referred to specific territories. In the 1920s and 1930s, for example, the largest Italian company in the sector, the aforementioned Polenghi Lombardo based in Lodi, registered trademarks of this type: Fior d'Alpe, Laudensis, Primavera, Fior di Sole, Bel Fiore, Nuovofiore, Alpina, Silvana, Stracchino Milano doppia panna[21]. They looked with interest at what was being produced abroad, starting the first experiments for the production of processed cheese. They were opposed not only to the designation of origin, but also to the legally branding of cheeses[22]. They feared that the definition of precise rules on the use of milk, on the places where the products were produced and matured, could limit production.

This orientation was maintained even after the Second World War, when the major Lombardy firms continued, as we shall see, to focus on their own brand to guarantee the

[19] On these initiatives to protect the *grana* cheese produced south of the river Po, see MAGAGNOLI, 2016: 168-169.

[20] This action, started at the end of the 1920s, led to the approval of a law in 1933, which obliged producers of *vacchino* to declare on the wheels the raw material used to make their cheese; D'ERRICO, 2017: 213-214.

[21] FUMI, 2017: 361.

[22] In the interwar period, the idea of focusing on the quality of products was shared and people started to talk about typical products, but the big operators in the sector did not want limits to their possibility of preparing, in their plants, any kind of cheese according to the market demands. About the branding of typical cheeses, see «Latte e latticini», 1930: 179-182.

goodness and genuineness of their products. This choice was confirmed by the company policies of the largest Italian companies based in Lombardy, i.e., Galbani, Invernizzi, Locatelli and Polenghi Lombardo.

3. THE POST-WAR PERIOD AND THE SUCCESS OF PDOS

Dairy activities developed greatly in Italy after the Second World War. As far as cheese production was concerned, the early 1950s saw a return to the pre-war level. In those years, around 2.8 million quintals of product were sold on the market, rising to 4 million quintals at the beginning of the 1970s and reaching 11 million quintals today[23]. The increase in production concerned, in particular, cheeses with registered designation of origin and fresh products, which were increasingly appreciated by national and international consumers. This growth can be explained by the increase in the Italian population's standard of living and the consequent rise in the consumption of animal proteins. Finally, with the end of the 20th century and the advent of the new millennium, as we shall see, cheese-making activities were also supported by a very strong increase in exports.

Between 1960 and 1980, the increase in production was accompanied by a sharp rise in imports; purchases of dairy products from abroad rose in this phase, especially after the completion of the European market integration processes. Italy imported cheeses with a low unit price, mainly from Germany, produced in large industrial plants. Imports exceeded 900,000 quintals in 1970, approached 3 million quintals in 1990, and reached 4.8 million quintals in 2010. Exports, on the other hand, did not take off until the end of the 1970s. In 1980, Italy exported just over 320,000 quintals of cheese, which was less than in 1931. Over the next few decades, foreign sales grew very rapidly and in 2000 they amounted to 1.7 million quintals and reached almost 3 million quintals in 2012[24]. The growing success of Italian dairy products on international markets can be attributed by the progressive affirmation of Italian food in the world, but it was also the result of a strong improvement of the product and a qualification of national production with the increasing use of controlled designation of origin. In 2019, half of the cheese produced in Italy was put on the market with the brand that guarantees the origin, production processes and maturing phases. In Europe, again in 2019, there were 190 cheeses that could be sold with the PDO label, of which 50 were Italian and 45 French.

The decision to qualify production and set up protection consortia to market typical products from a specific area has become established over time and has

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[23] Authors' elaboration from BESANA, 2017: 86, tab. 8; Appendice statistica al rapporto Assolatte 2019, available at <https://report.assolatte.it/2019/>.

[24] After 2010, the Italian cheese trade balance is in deficit in terms of quantity, but in terms of value the balance is in surplus, since we buy cheeses from abroad with a low unit price, while we sell products with a much higher price per kilogram.

increasingly involved Lombardy's cheese producers. It was a compulsory choice, not least to protect local products from imitations and counterfeits, which grew in parallel with the liberalisation of the markets after the Second World War.

A first step in this direction was taken by the Italian government, which, in 1951, was among the promoters of the Stresa Convention[25]. In the town on Lake Maggiore, a number of European countries signed a first agreement to protect their typical cheese production. The agreement was supported by Italy and Austria, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland, all countries with a strong presence on the international dairy market. On the contrary, the governments of Sweden, Denmark and Norway participated in the conference but did not ratify the convention. In Italy, to implement these agreements, a law was passed in 1954, supplemented by a presidential decree in October 1955 (Presidential Decree n. 1269 of 30 October 1955). These measures defined the criteria for the protection of «denominations of origin» for six cheeses: *parmigiano reggiano*, *grana padano*, *pecorino romano*, *pecorino siciliano*, *gorgonzola* and *fontina*[26]. For eight other cheeses, the same decree establishes the «denominazione tipica» (typical denomination), i.e., the manufacturing procedures and characteristics that these products must have. The «typical denomination» is established for *taleggio*, *provolone*, *ragusano*, *asiago*, *montasio*, *caciocavallo*, *fiore sardo* and *pressato*[27].

The legal protection of these products began to defend these typical Italian cheeses from possible falsification. So, the next step was the creation of consortia to guarantee the quality of the cheeses to consumers. The task of the consortia is to define the territory in which the milk to prepare the cheeses can be produced, the rules for the production of the cheeses themselves, and the times and methods of the subsequent maturing.

The process of creating these protection bodies was rather slow and there was no lack of contrasts. The 1960s saw the creation of consortia for the protection of *pecorino romano*, *grana padano*, *parmigiano reggiano* and *fontina* (this last a cheese from Valle d'Aosta). The legal provisions and the rules laid down by the consortia did not meet with the approval of all operators, who all agreed on the need to sell genuine cheeses with certain characteristics. There was a growing conviction that it was necessary to defend and qualify traditional productions, specific to different territories, but there was no lack of differentiation in strategies. The major industrialists did not want rules that could limit production, while the small producers wanted stricter provisions to avoid a typical cheese from a certain area being imitated hundreds of kilometers away.

These differences reflected in the case of *gorgonzola* where two consortia were set up in the second half of the 1960s[28]. The first was based in Milan and was promoted by

[25] Stresa is the city where the meeting was held and it is located on the Lake Maggiore.
[26] These include *grana padano* and *gorgonzola*, two typical Lombard products.
[27] In this second group, another cheese from Lombardy, *taleggio*, appears.
[28] On the constitution of the Consortium of Gorgonzola producers, see POLLASTRO, 2017: 278-279.

the major industrialists in the sector, who controlled Assolatte, the association of industrialists in the dairy sector based in the Lombard capital. The second was founded in Novara by managers of small and medium-sized dairies, who wanted to reduce the geographical area in which this type of cheese could be packaged. In 1970, the two consortia were unified, but the different strategies of small and large companies continued to show.

In the following years, two other consortia were set up in Lombardy. The first was promoted by the producers of another typical Lombardy cheese: *taleggio*. This is a characteristic production of a mountain area between the provinces of Lecco and Bergamo. The production of this soft cheese grew during the twentieth century, since its production was not confined to the valleys of Lecco and Bergamo, but was also developed by many companies in the flat area of the region, particularly in the provinces of Bergamo and Cremona. The second was that of *provolone valpadana*. In this case it is a very particular «typicality», since, as we have already mentioned, *pasta filata* cheeses are typical of southern Italy. As mentioned above, in the second half of the nineteenth century some Neapolitan cheesemakers moved to Lombardy with the aim of working in a region rich in raw materials to overcome the limitations in the development of their activities in the south of the country. A production of the southern dairy thus moved to the north, taking root in the Lodigiano and Cremonese areas, and then affecting the nearby territory of Piacenza. The activity grew over time, finding its consecration after the Second World War with the creation of a consortium of producers.

A further step towards the affirmation of the idea of enhancing the value of cheeses by promoting and defending typicality occurred in 1992, when the Community institutions intervened in these processes[29]. In that year, in fact, the first law for the protection of collective brands was approved and the relative regulation was passed (EEC 2081/1992). This was an important development compared to the Stresa Convention, as the 1992 law was binding for all the countries of the European Union and no longer only for the five signatory countries of the convention. According to this legislation, there are three different levels of protection: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Protected Traditional Specialty (PTS). The distinction between PDO, PGI, TSP lies in the link with the territory. This relationship is stronger in the first group, since the production cycle of PDO products, from the harvesting of the raw material to the finished product, must be entirely located in a well-defined geographical area[30]. For PGI products, it is sufficient that at least one of the production phases is linked to a specific territory, while there are no particular limits for traditional protected specialties.

[29] BURIGANA, 2013: 248-261.

[30] This constraint was absent in the Italian legal provisions of the 1950s.

In 1992, 26 Italian cheeses had already been granted a registered designation of origin under the Stresa Convention since the mid-1950s, and these were subject to a simplified registration procedure. After 1992, a further 24 Italian cheeses were granted protected designation of origin at Community level; as said, Italy ranks first in Europe for the number of PDO cheeses.

4. LOMBARDY PDOS

Lombardy's cheese producers participated with growing interest in this process of qualifying cheese production, in these initiatives aimed at rediscovering the links between the goods on sale and the local area, in this discovery of typicality.

In this regard, it must be noted that the major companies in the area, in particular Galbani, Locatelli and Invernizzi, did not change their strategies in the decades immediately following the Second World War. They continued to focus on their branded goods[31]. Above all, they took over the production systems of the most advanced nations, improving milk processing techniques. Their focus was on fresh products, spreadable cheeses, packaged with industrial systems, such as pasteurisation of milk and the use of cultures. In order to sell their products, they focused on massive advertising campaigns, based on American models, and on the construction of an efficient sales network, in order to reach food shops, which are still very numerous in Italy. Their success was linked to products that have become icons of the sector, such as Galbanino, Santa Lucia (*mozzarella*), Invernizzina, Certosa Galbani, Formaggino Milione, or Formaggino Mio, the latter a product for infants made with added vitamins.

However, the rediscovery of typicality also began in Lombardy. The first step was taken in 1954 with the establishment of the Grana Padano Consortium, on the initiative of Ercole Locatelli, one of the owners of the Lecco-based company already mentioned, which was at that time head of Assolatte too. In this way, the producers of *grana* cheese in the north of the Po River qualified their product (becoming *grana padano*), differentiating from that produced in the south (becoming *parmigiano reggiano*), and starting a process that has been a great success over time. As said, between 1968 and 1970, the Consortium of Gorgonzola producers began to operate, another highly successful cheese, both in terms of production and sales abroad. In 2019, 5 million wheels of *gorgonzola* were produced, 1.5 million in Lombardy and 3.5 million in Piedmont. Production exceeded 600,000 quintals and exports accounted for around a third of national production of this particular cheese. It's important to remember that the creation of the consortium did not prevent a deep transformation of the product. In the last decades of the 20th century, *gorgonzola* went from being an almost dry, very piquant cheese to a soft, almost spreadable and increasingly sweet cheese.

[31] More details in SUFFIA, LOCATELLI, BESANA, 2018: 1227-1254.

These changes are the result of a new production technique. Traditional *gorgonzola* is a cheese made by combining two pastes, two curds, the cold evening curd and the warm morning curd. By combining layers of curds of different temperatures, gaps are created in which moulds develop, giving the cheese its particular colour and flavour. In the new process, the milk is pasteurised, processed into a single paste and spores are inserted to produce the classic mould formation. The result is a softer and less spicy product, which responds better to the tastes of both Italian and foreign consumers. In the 1980s, the promotion of typical products led to the creation of two more protection structures: in 1985 the consortium for the promotion of *formai de mut*, a cheese produced in small quantities in some municipalities of the Upper Brembana Valley, was founded and, in 1988, the producers of *taleggio*, a cheese most likely born in the Lecco and Bergamo valleys of the Orobic Pre-Alps and, subsequently, also packaged in the lowland areas of the region, particularly in the Lower Bergamo and Cremasque areas. After the launch of the European Community's regulations on PDOs, ten other centres for the protection of Lombardy's cheeses were set up, covering some important products, such as *quartirolo*, *casera* and *bitto*, and some other «niche» cheeses, meaning cheeses linked to a precise *terroir* and specific characteristics.

There are currently 14 PDO cheeses produced in Lombardy, 9 are produced exclusively in this region, while 5 are also produced in neighbouring regions. In particular, for the PDO cheeses produced exclusively in Lombardy, 8 are cheeses made from cow's milk and one from goat's milk[32]. *Formaggella del luinese*, produced in the mountains of the province of Varese, is the only cheese made exclusively from goat's milk.

It is clear from the data in Table 1, relating to 2017, that these are cheeses with very different characteristics. For example, the weight of the individual wheels can vary from one kilogram to 18 kg. The maturing times are also very different: just a few months, for soft cheeses such as *quartirolo* or *salva cremasco*, or 4-5 years, in the *bitto* case[33]. Obviously, this last aspect has a great influence on the final economic value of the cheese.

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[32] See table 1. Goat's milk can also be used in the production of *bitto*, a cheese made in Valtellina, but in this case it is mixed with cow's milk.

[33] For this particular Valtellina cheese, whose transformation into a PDO has given rise to conflicts between producers in the various valleys that have not yet subsided, there are also cheeses that are marketed after a ten-year maturation period.

Table 1. Lombardy PDO cheeses, produced exclusively in the region (2017)

Cheese	Enterprises and production data		
	Enterprises	Processed milk to PDO (t)	Certified cheese
Quartirolo Lombardo (weight of a wheel from 1.5 to 3.5 kg)	16 processors/ seasoners 11 pure seasoners	20,819	1,297,756 (2,985 t)
Valtellina Casera (weight of a wheel from 7 to 12 kg)	15 producers 3 pure seasoners	13,306	180,351
Bitto della Valtellina formaggio d'alpeggio (weight of a wheel from 8 to 12 kg)	64 producers 10 pure seasoners	2,966	19,580
Silter della Vallecamonica (weight of a wheel from 10 to 316 kg)	23 producers	1,637	9,461
Salva Cremasco (weight of a wheel from 1.3 to 5 kg)	9 processors/ seasoners	2,037	6,411 (21 t)
Nostrano Valtrompia (weight of a wheel from 8 to 18 kg)	4 producers/ seasoners	180	613 (7,2 t)
Formaggella del Luinese (weight of a wheel from 0.7 to 0.9 kg)	6 producers 2 processors/ seasoners	129	14.231 (11 t)
Formaggella del Luinese (weight of a wheel from 0.7 to 0.9 kg) Strachintunt della Valtaleggio (weight of a wheel from 4 to 6 kg)	2 producers 2 pure seasoners	149	3.070

ST = tonnes. Source: RAMA, 2019: 4-18

Nevertheless, as far as *quartirolo* and Valtellina *casera* are concerned, there are many companies involved and the quantities of cheese put on sale are significant; for the *quartirolo* we arrive at a production of almost three thousand tonnes. Others involve a small number of operators, and are concerned with the promotion of a typical product of a «real» *terroir* and the sale of cheeses made in particular areas of the Lombardy mountains. In this connection, mention should be made of the Formai de Mut Consortium, comprising 15 dairies in the Upper Brembana Valley, which annually affixes its mark to no more than 6,000 wheels. The size of the Strachintunt Consortium — another typical and «real» *terroir* cheese — is even smaller, with the participation of two producers and four maturers from Valtaleggio, a side valley of the Brembana Valley with a great cheese-making tradition that has given its name to the already referred to many times and well known *taleggio* Lombardy cheese. The genesis of *strachintunt* merits some remarks, which call into question the mechanisms by which the protected designation of origin operates. With the production of this cheese, these Bergamo-based operators returned to producing the traditional two-paste *gorgonzola* mentioned above.

In the presence of an already well established and strong consortium for the production of *gorgonzola*, which included industrial-sized companies, they were unable to use the name «true gorgonzola». Therefore, producers had to resort to the past and come up with a name based on tradition, in particular the traditional shape of the cheese. *Strachintunt* results from the fact that, for a long time, at local level this cheese was the *tunt* («round») *stracchino*, while *taleggio* was the «square» *stracchino*.

Then we have five PDO cheeses that are also produced in Lombardy in quantities that cannot be compared to the previous ones. The consortia of producers of these goods include dozens of producers, as well as industrial-sized companies and subsidiaries of multinationals, such as Galbani, Invernizzi, Locatelli and Cademartori, now brands of the French group Lactalis[34]. The largest PDO is *grana padano*, produced with milk collected in Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Trentino and Emilia by dairies that put almost 5 million wheels on the market every year (table 2).

Table 2. PDO cheeses produced in Lombardy and in other north Italian regions (2017)

Cheese	Enterprises and production data		
	Enterprises	**Processed milk to PDO (t)**	**Certified cheese (number of wheels)**
Grana Padano Produced in Lombardy		1.951.700	3.478.300
Total production (1 wheel weight from 24 to 40 kg)		2.652.300	4.732.000 (142.000 t ca)
Parmigiano Reggiano Produced in Lombardy		187.900	361.900
Total production (1 wheel weight from 17 to 24 kg)		1.907.200	3.679.800
Gorgonzola Produced in Lombardy		137.000	1.399.300
Total production (1 wheel weight from 9 to 13 kg)		442.000	4.649.900 (51.000 t ca)
Produced in Lombardy	26 producers 19 pure seasoners	65.099	4.326.000 (8.651 t)
Total production (1 wheel weight from 1,7 to 2,2 kg)	27 producers 20 pure seasoners	65.286	4.340.000 (8.680 t)
Provolone Valpadana Produced in Lombardy	7 companies	29.507	297.319
Total production (1 wheel weight from 0,5 a 100 kg)	11 companies	56.258	639.611

ST1 = Produced in the part of the province of Mantua south of the Po River
Source: RAMA, 2019: 4-18

[34] More details in BESANA, 2020: 556-560.

The figures in Table 2 show that almost all the PDO *taleggio* produced in Italy is packaged in Lombardy; the region contributes 10% of the total for the best-known national cheese, *parmigiano reggiano*. As for *gorgonzola*, traditionally a Lombardy cheese, the area of greatest production is now Novara, but even in this case the contribution of Lombardy producers is important, over 30%, a percentage that rises to 52.4% for *provolone valpadana*, which now has its heart of production in the Cremona area with the Auricchio company.

Grana padano is the most important Italian PDO and it is also the cheese with the highest production in Italy; in 2019 almost 2 million quintals of were produced. This product, consumed as a dish but also as a condiment, has grown in importance with the establishment of a characteristic product of Italian food now known and appreciated throughout the world, pasta. *Grana padano* is produced in Piedmont, Trentino, Veneto and Emilia (province of Piacenza); but the main producers are based in Lombardy and the head office of the consortium is now in San Martino della Battaglia, in the eastern part of the province of Brescia. At the origin of *grana padano* there is undoubtedly the *grana* cheese of Lodigiano; during the 20th century the production of this cheese moved to the eastern part of the region, in particular to Bresciano and Mantovano north of the Po; this explains the location of the consortium in a town near Lake Garda.

These five cheeses are clearly not goods that link their prestige to a specific geographical environment, since the milk needed for production is collected in different regions of northern Italy and the cheese factories operate on decidedly wide territories. For these cheeses, which are also increasingly appreciated on international markets, quality is defended by compliance with production specifications and a generic reference to the raw material as a product of the northern Italian countryside.

Some of Lombardy's niche PDOs can be considered «gastronomic gems» that are the result of artisanal processing, based on a special bond between the milk producers and the raw material processors. On the contrary, the manufacturing of *grana padano*, *gorgonzola* and even *taleggio* is an industrial process, using the most modern dairy techniques and the organisational forms of large companies. However, even in the latter case the peculiarity of the market imposes respect for traditional practices. The giant Lactalis, for example, makes its Cademartori-branded *taleggio* in its modern plant in Certosa di Pavia, pasteurising the milk and using ferments. Once the product has been prepared, the maturing process does not take place in modern cold rooms, as is the case with the company's other cheeses. Each *taleggio* is transported a hundred kilometers away and matured in an old cheese dairy in Valsassina and, following the tradition, in a building leaning against the rock, where humidity and temperature are natural processes. Finally, an industrial semi-finished product is brought to the right point of maturation by skilled hands, which assess the product and decide the maturing time according to rules codified by a centuries-old tradition.

CONCLUSIONS

The essay presents a long-term analysis of the economic-productive and commercial development of the Lombardy dairy industry, from the end of the 19th century to the present day. The analysis shows the existence of three main phases to which correspond three different levels of protection of product quality and local typicality. In particular, the analysis shows that the most dynamic period was the second post-war period, when there was a shift from standardised mass consumption to a reawakening of more sophisticated and conscious consumption.

At the end of the 19th century dairy activities were already highly developed in Lombardy and underwent a phase of technological modernisation with the birth of the first industrial dairies that last, at least, until the First World War. Dairy producers supported exports by putting cheeses of constant quality on the market, reducing processing waste to a minimum. The maturing of *gorgonzola* was organised more efficiently with the creation of specialised warehouses for this stage of processing in Valsassina, a small valley in the Orobic Pre-Alps with morphological characteristics that guarantee the appropriate conditions for maturing this cheese. In this period, the main objective was to produce the most popular cheeses on the market, without taking into account typical local products and their promotion. Very often, imitations of cheeses from other Italian regions but also from Switzerland and France were used. On the eve of the First World War, it was the brand name of the major companies that guaranteed the quality of the products. The situation did not change much in the period between the two wars and there were no significant changes even after 1929, when exports of cheeses, in particular of *gorgonzola*, fell sharply. In Emilia, *grana* producers began to qualify their cheese, creating a voluntary consortium of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese producers. On the contrary, the big Lombardy companies continued to look with distrust at the processes of identification of typical products, because they did not want limits to the possibility of producing any kind of cheese in their plants.

After the Second World War, there was an initial phase which lasted for more than thirty years, during which production increased while imports of cheese from EEC countries increased even more. Then, in the 1990s, there was an increase in exports which allowed Italy to return to a positive trade balance for cheese products in terms of value. The growing success of Italian cheeses on national and international markets was the result of a strong promotion of typical goods, the establishment of protection consortia that set precise rules for the collection of milk to be transformed into cheese and for the packaging and maturing of the product. The paper underlines that Lombardy was very successful in adopting this approach too. The fourth part of the essay demonstrates this change and shows that there are now 14 PDOs in Lombardy: some concern products sold in very large quantities, such as *grana padano* and *gorgonzola*, others concern niche products, linked to a precise terroir, created to support economic activities and tourism in particular areas of the Lombardy mountains. The study points out that, finally, even large companies in the cheese sector, such as the multinational Lactalis, have changed their production strategies, investing in the production of typical cheeses, packaged in full compliance with the rules established by the protection consortia. This remark answers, in particular, in the affirmative to the initial question of whether products of the *terroir* could coexist with the dynamics of large multinationals. It also suggests that quality and typicality seem to have become, especially in the last twenty years, the keys to success for all dairy companies (large, medium and small), as a response to the current era of increasingly conscious consumption, excellence and product variety.

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