

THE EVOLUTION STAGES OF A LOCAL AGRO-PRODUCTION: THE CASES OF CIDER AND SYRUP IN EAST BELGIUM

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Looking at the evolution of some traditional products, I realized some similitude between them and I have decided to search for a model of these evolutions. Of course, finding such a model is utopian not only because of the diversity of historical and geographical contexts, but also because of the difficulties of separating the facts and the myths (common in this domain). Developing such a model may be a way to achieve a better understanding and typology of trajectories of traditional products. It is indubitably important to know the origins (in the historical sense) of the product to accord a label of origin. However, it is also important to know what are the main trends in the creation and evolution of a “traditional” product.

I have personally studied the syrup of Liege, the kras ham of Slovenia and the tomatoes of Trevignano Romano. In the literature, there are many studies on wine, and cheese like “Emmental” or “Stilton”. Mainly, they are monographic studies without real comparisons. The Concerted Action Dolphins (Development of Origin Labelled Products: Humanity, Innovation and Sustainability) did some important work in this direction (ARFINI, 2003). For instance, Trager (2003) proposed an interesting typology for the typical product in the United Kingdom (Table 1).

This typology is focused on the United Kingdom. Is it possible to use it in Continental Europe? The typology underlines the historical aspects.

Table 1 - A CLASSIFICATION OF TYPICAL PRODUCTS IN THE UK BY ANGELA TRAGER (2003)

	Pre-industrial	Industrial	Post-industrial	
Classic	Documented history of existence reputation	Creation of producer association/ product specifications	Strong reputation/ renown, PDO eligible	eg. Stilton
Appropriation	Origins in widespread artisanal activity	Many small producers eclipsed by industrial activity; few persist through entrepreneurship	Remaining producers appropriate previously shared know-how	eg Craster Kippers
Re-invention	Origins in widespread artisanal activity	Practice dies out in face of industrialization	Practices revisited or invented in face of revitalization	eg. Cornish yarg, extra mature Welsh Beef
19th Century Specialities	Origins in artisanal activity	Branding of specific products to capture tourist/gift markets	Products retain strong speciality/gift symbolism	eg. Harrogate Toffee, Morecambe Bay Potted Shrimps
Industrial Other	Origins in medicinal/apothecary practices	Products gain renown through industrial scale manufacture	Products often have strong market close to local origins	eg. Vimto

Can it be linked to the spatial aspects of these local products? What are the supply areas? What are the market areas? In fact, what is "local" in a local product?

THE SYRUP OF LIÈGE AND THE CIDER FROM THE PAYS DE HERVE

We will focus on the study of a traditional product: the syrup of Liège (Table 2). It is a kind of "marmalade" made with pears and apples. One kilo of syrup requires eight kilos of fruit. In Belgium and the Netherlands, it is spread on bread and pancakes and used in the preparation of sauces for meat dishes. The pure traditional ones are suitable for diabetic diets because they do not contain saccharine.

The Pays de Herve is a field enclosure in the East of Belgium bounded by Liège, Verviers Aachen, and Maastricht. The soil, everywhere clayey

and impermeable, has favoured the development of rich pastures on which orchards were planted. This specialization began in the sixteenth century. Since the seventeenth century, farmers used the excess fruits (especially pears and apples) to make the "marmalade". This was the way to conserve fruits. This marmalade was mainly for self-consumption but was also sold at the same time as the other farm products.

The first signs of the industrialization of the making of syrup started to appear around 1880-1890, when steam cooking was first attempted and hydraulic presses began to appear. These two major innovations allowed for syrup making with larger quantities of fruit, and this is how the first syrup-making firms were born. Nevertheless, the arrival of the train cannot be neglected either. This permitted the spread of the production throughout Belgium. The railway also permitted the importation of raw material. Rapidly, because of the seasonal character of the activity, the "siroperie Meurens" began to press other fruits and especially dates for confectioners. This lies at the base of the explanation of the curious presence of dates, since the years 1920s, in the recipe of the "vrai sirop de liège" by "Meurens".

Improvement in transport increased the competition between regions, and the production of fruits in the Pays de Herve declined. Despite the increase in consumption of fruits, the population prefers good-looking apples and pears and consumes increasingly exotic fruits (bananas, oranges). In the sixties, with the development of orchards in 'fruit hedges' and the European politics of pulling up fruit trees, cultivated orchards disappear began to disappear. For climatic reasons (especially spring frosts), cultivation of fruit hedges are not possible on the Pays de Herve and tree farming cannot compete with the neighbouring low loess plateaux.

As a result, syrup makers had to buy fruit from other regions. These fruit are quite different from the local production. The syrup has 'slyly' changed its taste, and lost its local character.

Since the Second World War, the market for syrup has been a national market and the product has encountered many difficulties in conquering new markets because of a lack of marketing, because of the difficulties of entering the supermarkets, and because of the product itself – "a black caramelised molasses"! Only a few dietetic shops sell syrup abroad.

Today, two industries produce syrup: one has tried to remain traditional, the second is more market oriented. In the first one, "Lambert" claims the authenticity of the recipe, in the second one, "Meurens" improves new recipes. In the last few decades, to increase production,

"Meurens" introduced new products such as apricots or chocolate syrup, risking the loss of the traditional local identities. Four artisanal producers still exist. They may exist because of the local tradition but also because of the presence of the main industry supporting the image of the product.

A few metres higher in altitude, where apple trees replace pear trees, another local product exists: cider. However, the recipe for cider was imported from Normandy; people think it is a long tradition. Léon Stassen and Joseph Ruwet started in the last years of the nineteenth century toying with the idea of making an entirely new product for the region. In the twentieth century, because of the lack of apples from the region, they had to buy fruit from other regions. In the late eighties, the two companies, especially "Stassen", experienced exceptional growth thanks to the success of flavoured ciders. "Stassen" became the leader in the Belgian and Dutch cider markets. To ensure the supply of fruits, the company obtains fruits from their properties in Belgium, France and England. Now, "Stassen" is part of the international Brewery group "Scottish and Newcastle".

WHAT REMAINS LOCAL IN TRADITIONAL PRODUCT?

With these two cases studies from the Pays de Herve, we underline the vicissitudes of a local production. How does a local craft production system react to processes of industrialization, international competition, agronomic innovations, destruction of the main input (orchards in these cases), consumers' demand and norms of production. From Trager's typology, we can class the syrup of Liege into an appropriation process (Table 2). It is more difficult for the case of cider to find a convenient class, because it is not in fact a local product but a local production. What remains local in these traditional products? To propose a new typology of local production, we look at four topics: the origin of raw materials, the place of transformation, the knowledge and the market.

In the case of syrup, the raw material remains local for the small production units but for bigger production units, it is difficult to develop an industrial unit with the local production. The place of transformation is typical in this region if we exclude some rather pale Dutch imitations. The knowledge is purely local. The market is still contained at the national level. In the case of cider, the raw material comes now from different countries of Western Europe. The knowledge was imported but the region has a quite long experience and can also innovate. The place of transformation

Table 2 - STAGES IN THE EVOLUTION OF SYRUP AND CIDER FROM THE PAYS DE HERVE

Innovation	Raw materials	Products	Market	Landscape
XVII° Pasture based economy	Rich pastures supported Orchards (Local)	Handcraft Syrup (a method of conservation of pears)	Self-consumption Sell on town markets with other farm products (Local)	Field enclosure with Orchards
XIX° Steam-cooking, hydraulic presses. Railway	Mainly Local (possibilities to by in other regions) (Local & Region)	Industrial Syrup (need of diversification to use the press all the year) Cider (recipe from Normandy)	Surrounding towns (Aachen, Liege, Verviers, Maastricht) (Local & Region)	Increase and spread of Orchards
1950s Increase of competition between regions (exotic fruits) 1960' Orchard in fruit hedges	Low loess Plateau North of France (National & International)	The Syrup of Liege (new recipe)	Belgium (via marketing) (National)	Pulling up fruit trees (European policy, im possible to adopt fruit hedges...)
1990s Diversification (because of the difficulties to enlarge the market)	Mainly Limburg (B, NL) & Thierache (F). Local for the artisanal units (4) (International & Local)	Diversification (aromatised and non alcoholics ciders, syrup with apricot, with chocolate)	Supermarkets in Belgium. Delicatessen and diabetic shops abroad (National)	Urbanization

is still in the Pays de Herve as well because of the expertise and its favourable geographical situation in Western Europe. The Market is North Western Europe oriented.

These two local productions can expect to see their market enlarged. Because of the historical and geographical contexts of the Pays de Herve, compromises were made with the recipes and in particular with the origin of the raw materials. Nevertheless, the bases of these productions are still in the region and are quite important for the local economy and the identity of the region. (Meurens employs 30 persons, and Stassen employs 70 persons).

Which component should remain local in traditional products? In 1992, the European Union created systems known as Protected Designation of Origin, Protected Geographical Indication and Traditional Special-

ity Guaranteed labels to promote and protect food products. "A PDO covers the term used to describe foodstuffs which are produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area using recognised know-how. In the case of the PGI, the geographical link must occur in at least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation. Furthermore, the product can benefit from a good reputation". (European Union, 2005). These labels protect the name from a misuse by other companies and may furnish a guarantee to the consumer but they are too strict to define traditional local products. They also certify the methods of production, strengthening the identity of the product but impeding any adaptations.

The impact of local production on regional development varies from low to quite important (ARFINI, 2003). It depends on the strategy of actors and the degree of integration with local resources. Sometimes it depends also on the clever adaptation of the production to a new context. What cannot be underestimated is the role traditional local products play in local identity, and last, but not least, its support for agriculture and the maintenance of the landscape and the environment.

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