

Title: **Geographical Indications and Producer Cooperation: Evaluating the Impact of PDO and PGI in Slovenia**

The globalization of food production has weakened the connection between agricultural products and their geographical origins, leading to food homogenization and growing consumer distrust in food quality and safety. In Slovenia, where agriculture plays an important role in cultural identity and food security, these trends have intensified challenges such as the decline of traditional practices, rising unemployment, and shifting rural landscapes. To address these issues, the EU introduced quality schemes like the "Protected Designation of Origin" (PDO) and "Protected Geographical Indication" (PGI), designed to safeguard product authenticity and promote socio-economic benefits, including fostering cooperation among producers.

This presentation discusses key findings from a study on the impact of PDO and PGI schemes on producer cooperation in Slovenia. Through semi-structured interviews with producers and qualitative data analysis, we explored how these schemes influence collaboration, organization, and interaction among food producers.

Our findings indicate that PDO and PGI schemes can positively impact cooperation in regions with strong traditions of collective action, such as wine production. In these areas, producers benefit from shared marketing strategies, resource pooling, and increased innovation. However, the schemes encounter obstacles in regions where historical distrust of cooperatives, rooted in the socialist era, hinders collective efforts. Where cooperation is limited, producers struggle to fully capitalize on the schemes, leading to weaker market performance and restricted knowledge exchange.

A key issue identified is the fragmentation of governance structures. While the EU provides a regulatory framework, Slovenia lacks a centralized support system to assist producers with PDO and PGI governance, resulting in inefficiencies and missed opportunities for collective organization. The research emphasizes the need for a national coordinating body to guide producers through these quality schemes and foster a stronger cooperative culture. Educational initiatives to promote collaboration and trust among producers are also recommended.

The study also focused on the economic sustainability promoted by PDO and PGI schemes. By encouraging traditional production methods, these schemes not only enhance market competitiveness but also contribute to local socio-economic development and sustainable agricultural practices. However, the adoption of sustainable practices by producers remains a challenge, particularly in regions where immediate economic pressures take precedence.

The presentation will conclude with practical recommendations for improving the implementation of PDO and PGI schemes in Slovenia, particularly in fostering stronger cooperation among producers, strengthening governance structures, and promoting long-term sustainability. The research provides valuable insights into how these quality schemes can support rural development, enhance food security, and preserve cultural heritage. These findings are expected to inform ongoing revisions to EU and national policies on geographical indications, making them more responsive to producers' needs and more effective in supporting regional development.

This study makes a significant contribution to understanding the impact of PDO and PGI schemes on producer cooperation, offering policy-relevant insights that can drive sustainable rural development in Slovenia and beyond.