
The expansion of Geographical Indications on coffees: opportunities and challenges

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Résumé

Rationale:

Almost 30 years after the broad internationalization of the concept of geographical indications (GIs) that designate products having a given quality, characteristics or reputation from their place of origin (WTO Agreement on Intellectual Property Rights in 1995), it is striking that GIs have moved from concerning mostly wines and cheeses to coffees. Indeed, as for August 2023, more than 130 GIs on coffee have been registered worldwide, as listed by OriGIn (1). Even if the use in practice of GIs for coffee and their benefits are contrasted and still need to be much better documented, GIs are recognized for their role in contributing to the decommodification of coffee, next to Fair Trade and other environmental labels. Moreover GIs can be seen as an interesting tool to ensure traceability in front of the growing needs of proving the origin of agricultural products as not detrimental to forests, as recently decided by the EU Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 on the making available on the Union market and the export from the Union of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation.

Methods:

From the above list of GIs on coffee, a desk analysis of the specifications is being conducted to draw a typology in terms of: a) which kind of coffee products (steps localized in the geographical area), which size of the geographical area and which countries and b) which governance and right holders involved. This data is combined with a multidisciplinary literature review on GIs on coffee and field data from particular GIs on coffee surveyed by the authors.

Results:

1. GIs are mainly for intermediate products (green beans), with a critical step towards the final product (notably in terms of quality implications) occurring outside the geographical area of coffee growing. This reflects the global value chains with not all stakeholders localized in the same area, and the high power asymmetry between upstream players localized in the production countries and downstream ones, contrary to wine or cheese which have largely influenced GI institutional development.

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2. Coffee value chains, at the level of the producing countries are still State driven, which, in combination with GIs considered as a public policy tool in many countries, conducts to GIs on coffee often decided and managed by State authorities.

Conclusions & Perspectives:

For GIs to play a more significant role in decommodifying coffee and improving producing countries capacity to benefit from these, it is critical to better address the following questions:

1. What sense does a GI make for an intermediate product where part of the quality is built elsewhere and where the added value is captured outside the geographical area of origin?
2. How to better address the role of private stakeholders in GI establishment and management?

Mots-Clés: GI, coffee