

A multidisciplinary framework for analyzing the role of GI for biodiversity conservation: insights from the rooibos case

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Abstract. This paper builds upon a multidisciplinary research approach that encompasses economics, ecology, anthropology, landscape analysis and law to discuss the potential of GI labelling schemes for promoting local development and protecting cultural and biological diversity. To this end a common framework of analysis has been developed to study the process of elaboration and implementation of the GI labelling schemes. It considers three main components of analysis: 1) the adding value and labelling devices together with the supporting legal and institutional framework, 2) the different biodiversity dimensions (from genes to landscapes) and 3) the local production process including practices, know-how, specific quality attributes and dynamics. And it focuses on the interactions and feedback mechanisms between them to highlight the different processes at stakes that underlie the capacity of GI to act as a tool for biodiversity conservation.

We use this framework to analyse the GI process underway in the rooibos industry in South Africa. Rooibos is the fermented and dried leaves of the plant *Aspalathus linearis* that is mainly used as an herbal tea and is produced only in the South Western region of South Africa. GI development in the rooibos industry arose from the need to protect this localised production against name usurpation and delocalisation and to sustain its good reputation at international level against the risk of quality degradation. The local development dimension was raised latter.

Main insights from the analysis of the different interactions are the weak incorporation of biodiversity into rooibos production practices. Despite the high diversity among rooibos plants and their natural occurrence within different plant community types, biodiversity is not regarded as a resource in the rooibos cultivation process, and impacts on biodiversity do not form part of many farmers' concerns despite raising awareness of environmental risks (pest pressure, soil fertility). On the other hand, two development patterns are observed and contrasted by the actors, with the dependence on the fynbos (the rooibos natural biome) and the environment constraints being higher in the considered traditional area while more agricultural alternatives to rooibos production are available in the expansion area where rooibos production is more opportunistic and the know-how on rooibos plant requirements is weaker.

The industry choice of an inclusive definition of the GI with the focus on processing practices and the low restriction on farming practices in the GI specification tends to reinforce the weak linkages between rooibos production practices and biodiversity. It is in line with the rooibos industry strategy to avoid exclusion of local actors with regard to the reservation of the name 'rooibos' and with the focus on individual level of differentiation strategy : complementarity between the GI as a collective minimum quality ensuring sustained reputation of rooibos and more specific labelling and quality devices (trademarks, organic, fair trade).

However, through the recognition of the contribution of biodiversity to the image of rooibos (both positively as supporting the rooibos specificity and negatively through threats posed to biodiversity by the industry), biodiversity conservation has been explicitly integrated as a goal of action in the GI elaboration process. And we show that biodiversity has been evolving from an external normative benchmark (promoted by conservation actors) towards becoming an industry endogenous goal and a tool for collectively reasoning practices in the common negotiation space created by the GI development.