

A tale of three wines: which factors can influence the success of geographical indications for wine?

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper examines three wine geographical indications (GIs) across Europe in order to identify what are the main factors for which some designations achieve durable reputation and value while others underperform (or fail).

Design/methodology/approach – The study employs semi-structured interviews with local winemakers and institutional representatives. A qualitative approach using thematic analysis is conducted to identify key factors influencing the success or limitations of wine GIs in these areas.

Findings – Results indicate that the success or failure of a GI is closely tied to its geographical context and the community of stakeholders. In particular, in the two French regions considered, some producers perceive the GI as a constraint rather than an opportunity, as it has not met their expectations for economic development and business growth.

Research limitations/implications – This research has some limitations due to the chosen methodology, such as possible interpretative subjectivity or potential over-simplification. In particular, the absence of extensive, comparable socio-economic quantitative data constrains a deeper and more objective understanding of different local contexts, limiting corroboration of findings. Nonetheless, the cross-regional comparison across two countries strengthens the credibility of the analysis and could offer clearer guidance on strategies to support local production and development.

Originality/value – This study moves beyond trade data and single-case analyses by comparing smaller wine GIs in France and Italy through a qualitative lens. It shows how territorial context and stakeholder relations explain divergent outcomes, offering insights into why some GIs foster rural development while others struggle.

Keywords Geographical indications, Local development, Rural development, Thematic analysis, Wine, France, Italy

Paper type Research article



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Introduction

Geographical indications (GIs) are intellectual property tools designed to link the unique qualities, reputation or characteristics of a product to its specific geographic origin. The concept of GIs is closely related to the idea of *terroir*, according to which the special qualities of an agricultural product are determined by the strong interaction between the natural and human factors of its place of origin (Barham, 2003; Gade, 2004). Through a certification process, GIs grant the privilege of exclusive use to producers located within a defined geographical area, provided they adhere to the specified production standards (Bramley, 2011). Therefore, GIs have gained growing significance in safeguarding consumers (by reducing information asymmetries and ensuring quality), while also supporting producers (by preventing usurpation of the product's reputation and misappropriation of regional names) (Bramley, 2011; OECD, 2000). As a result, GIs help maintain the identity and reputation of specific regions, enhancing consumer trust and enabling producers to charge premium prices (Giovannucci *et al.*, 2010). The success of producers means that GIs have the potential to help the development of a region as well, with many cases of benefits to local economies (Cardoso *et al.*, 2022; Török *et al.*, 2020).

The European Union (EU) arguably has one of the most comprehensive GI frameworks, first introduced in 1992, encompassing schemes such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), as outlined in regulations 2024/1143 for food and agricultural products and 1308/2013 for wine. To better understand the economic significance of the EU quality schemes, as of September 2025, more than 3,600 GIs are registered in the EU [1]. In 2017, EU GIs generated an estimated sales value of EUR 74.8 billion, representing a 37% increase compared to 2010. Notably, wines accounted for 51% of total sales (EUR 39.42 billion), with a price premium rate of 2.85 relative to similar uncertified products (European Commission: Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, ECORYS, AND-International, 2021). These data illustrate how important are GI products for the EU, especially with respect to wines.

However, the success of a GI depends on several factors. First, there must be a strong link between the product and the region, where both natural and human factors contribute to the product's uniqueness. This includes not only environmental conditions but also local knowledge and traditional production methods (Belletti *et al.*, 2017b). If the output lacks distinguishing characteristics, GIs may fail to help lower-quality producers differentiate their products, which could negatively affect communities, traditions and the environment (Giovannucci *et al.*, 2009). Second, effective governance and management are essential for ensuring the long-term success of GIs. Strong legal frameworks are required to prevent misuse of the designation and to protect producers from unfair competition. Furthermore, collective action by producers plays a critical role in maintaining product quality and ensuring that all stakeholders benefit from the GI, including local population (Bowen and Zapata, 2009).

Research has highlighted institutional, socioeconomic and political conditions as important determinants of GI emergence and distribution (Huysmans and Swinnen, 2019; Meloni and Swinnen, 2018; Vaquero-Piñeiro, 2021). At the same time, the literature has documented positive ex-post impacts of GIs on trade, land rents and sustainability (Belletti *et al.*, 2017a, 2017b; Cross *et al.*, 2011; De Filippis *et al.*, 2022). Other contributions underline the role of local cooperation and governance (Bowen, 2010; Charters and Spielmann, 2014; Checchinato *et al.*, 2024; Grazia *et al.*, 2024; Wilkinson *et al.*, 2017). Yet much of the existing literature either focuses on flagship regions such as Champagne or Prosecco or relies on aggregate data that cannot capture how producers themselves perceive the drivers of success or failure. Comparative, cross-national qualitative analyses of less prominent wine GIs remain rare, leaving a gap in our understanding of why some designations are able to consolidate value while others stagnate.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the main factors that can influence the success or failure of European wine GIs. It does so through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 27 producers and regulatory officials across three designations: Montefalco

Sagrantino DOCG in Italy and AOC Fiefs Vendéens and AOC Coteaux du Quercy in France. These GIs, created in the last three decades, are broadly comparable in vineyard area and production volumes but differ in market visibility, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

Rather than relying on secondary data, this study foregrounds producer and regulator perspectives, providing insights into the perceived mechanisms of success and failure across cases and national contexts. It refines understanding of GI performance by linking producer-centred accounts to broader institutional and socioeconomic explanations, thereby generating mid-range propositions on governance, coordination and market positioning. Practically, the findings provide stakeholders and policymakers with evidence-based guidance on strategies to enhance the resilience, credibility and development impact of wine GIs beyond the most iconic examples.

The next section provides a review of the existing literature on GIs and socioeconomic development in rural areas. Subsequently, the methodology employed to collect and analyse the data is explained in detail, along with a brief description of the wine-producing areas involved in this research. The main findings are then presented, with an explanation of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis. Finally, the findings are discussed, followed by the conclusion.

Literature review

GIs have become central to the European wine sector as intellectual property instruments and territorial development strategies. By linking products to specific places, they promise to reduce information asymmetries, enhance competitiveness and support rural economies. Yet outcomes are far from uniform. Some designations achieve strong reputations and contribute to local prosperity, while others struggle with fragmentation, weak governance or limited consumer recognition.

Economic studies highlight the signalling role of GIs for wine. [Agostino and Trivieri \(2014\)](#), analysing export data for Italy, France and Spain, show that QWPSR (quality wines produced in specified regions) certification significantly increases the probability of entering new export markets, as the institutional label functions as a credible quality signal. Their results suggest that GIs are particularly valuable for smaller producers, who can adopt a strategy of lower volumes and higher prices. At the same time, the benefits are not evenly distributed among countries, with French producers capturing higher value premiums, due to a historically strong international reputation. At the territorial level, [Crescenzi et al. \(2022\)](#) find that municipalities with GIs experience stronger growth, but chiefly where favourable socioeconomic conditions already exist. Instead of transforming lagging regions, GIs often reinforce pre-existing advantages. [Ceï et al. \(2018\)](#), while identifying an overall positive effect of GI protection on agricultural value added in Italy, also note that the implementation of GI products does not automatically ensure positive rural development outcomes, since local, community and product-specific characteristics play a leading role in shaping such effects. Likewise, [Giua et al. \(2025\)](#), focusing on Italian wine municipalities, find that GIs positively affect export performance in terms of value, volume and unit value, while also showing that these effects remain shaped by territorial context rather than emerging uniformly across places. [Vergamini et al. \(2019\)](#) offer a different perspective from Tuscany, where the long-standing differentiation model has produced a fragmented supply structure. They show that while PDO/PGI and organic producers tend to diversify their distribution channels, others remain confined to fewer markets. At the same time, their analysis points to an emerging process of consolidation, as new networks and associations seek to counteract fragmentation and strengthen collective strategies ([Vergamini et al., 2019](#)).

Reputation management and differentiation strategies further condition the performance of GIs. [Costanigro et al. \(2019\)](#), examining the Chianti Consortium, show that introducing a higher-tier label (Gran Selezione) alters consumer perceptions: while it reduces the perceived

quality of other Chianti wines, competitor wines remain unaffected and the overall effect is positive thanks to the gains from vertical differentiation. In the case of Prosecco, [Galletto *et al.* \(2021\)](#) find that consumers consistently value the DOCG above the DOC, and that this premium widens when information about tradition and production rules is provided, underscoring the role of collective reputation in sustaining value. Yet, as [Checchinato *et al.* \(2024\)](#) argue, Prosecco also illustrates the dynamic nature of territorial brands: its success has fuelled tensions between DOC, DOCG and traditional producers, as collective identity, territory and branding do not always converge. These frictions, they suggest, highlight the need for integrated systems and clearer communication to preserve coherence across designations. [Bartoli *et al.* \(2022\)](#) extend this perspective by showing how digitalisation reshapes the marketing of GIs; indeed, digital technologies can enhance product innovation, integrate physical and virtual experiences, and act as strategic levers to convey territorial distinctiveness and strengthen consumer attachment to place and tradition. A related strand of work also suggests that the market value of GIs can be influenced by the wider informational environment in which consumers evaluate products. [Giacomarra *et al.* \(2020\)](#), for example, show that geographical cues remain relevant in consumers' buying decisions, although their role is shaped by wine knowledge, socio-ethno-demographic factors, consumption settings, labelling strategies and the use of medals and awards on labels. In a different but complementary way, [Stiletto *et al.* \(2024\)](#) show that front-of-pack nutritional labelling may reduce the price premium associated with some GI products, although this effect is weaker for more established and recognisable GIs. At the regulatory level, [Pomarici and Sardone \(2022\)](#) show that recent EU wine policy reforms give increasing importance to labelling rules and other regulatory measures, with potentially significant consequences for competitive scenarios, product innovation and the institutional setting of appellation wines.

Beyond reputation and communication, competitiveness within wine GIs also depends on the capacity to innovate and to remain open to external knowledge. [Török and Tóth \(2013\)](#) show that, in the wine sector, firms with limited internal resources need to maintain network connections and can benefit from greater mutuality in knowledge sharing, especially where innovation capabilities are constrained. [Sabbagh *et al.* \(2024\)](#) point in a similar direction: in their multiple case study of Italian wineries, innovation adoption (such as blockchain technology) is facilitated by dynamic capabilities, knowledge acquisition and assimilation, strategic partnerships and open interactions with external actors.

Governance also shapes how benefits are distributed. [López-Bayón *et al.* \(2020\)](#), analysing Spanish wine producers, show that while GIs generally raise quality compared to non-GI wineries, organisational features are decisive: stricter categories improve quality but with diminishing returns, too many affiliated producers reduce average standards, and GIs covering very large areas are less effective. [Vandecandelaere *et al.* \(2020\)](#), based on nine international case studies, find that GIs consistently generate price premia, redistribute value to producers and strengthen rural economies, but only when the interaction between products, producers and institutions is effectively managed. [Bowen and Zapata \(2009\)](#) highlight the risks when this link is broken: in the tequila sector, large distilleries and transnational firms have undermined terroir, sidelining small farmers and eroding authenticity, while weak state intervention has failed to prevent this degradation. By contrast, [Bowen \(2010\)](#) shows that the Comté cheese GI in France has preserved terroir through strict rules and collective governance, supporting inclusive rural development and sustaining both small and medium producers. Recent qualitative evidence from the wine sector points in the same direction. [Grazia *et al.* \(2024\)](#), in a study of Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG, show how identity-building, stakeholder collaboration and collective responsibility are central to the perceived developmental role of a wine GI. At the same time, their work is based on a single case, which leaves open the need for broader comparative qualitative evidence across wine designations.

Overall, existing studies show that GIs can enhance quality, market access and rural development, but their outcomes vary widely. Success depends largely on governance, collective organisation and the ability to communicate value effectively. At the same time, the

literature remains uneven in the type of evidence it provides. Much of the available research is either quantitative and aggregate, or centred on highly visible and successful cases. As a result, there is still limited comparative qualitative evidence on how producers and regulatory actors in less prominent European wine GIs perceive and explain the factors behind success, stagnation or limited recognition across different territorial and national contexts. It is this gap that motivates the present study.

Methodology and data

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach and, in particular, *thematic analysis* (TA). TA is a qualitative research methodology outlined by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#), designed to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within qualitative data, providing a rich and detailed account of a dataset. Braun and Clarke’s approach is particularly flexible and enables researchers to go beyond mere data summarisation, aiming instead to interpret deeper meanings and relationships within the data. The authors outlined a six-phase process for conducting TA (illustrated in [Figure 1](#)): familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the final report. This structured, yet adaptable, approach allows for systematic data analysis while accommodating the researcher’s reflexivity and insight. Key to TA is its accessibility for both novice and experienced researchers, as well as its independence from specific theoretical frameworks, making it suitable for a range of qualitative research objectives.

Moreover, [Byrne \(2022\)](#) highlights the importance of researcher reflexivity in TA, noting that the researcher’s interpretations are central to the creation of themes. TA is particularly effective for uncovering latent themes that may not be immediately apparent but are crucial for understanding participant experiences and social phenomena ([Byrne, 2022](#)). Thus, the flexibility and depth of TA render it a powerful tool especially in fields seeking to explore subjective perspectives and underlying patterns in human experiences.

Additionally, a multiple-case study design was employed, for which insights are likely to be considered stronger than single-case studies ([Yin, 2018](#)). In addition, different secondary data regarding producers, hectares and production volumes were collected from different sources, such as the *Conorzio Tutela Vini Montefalco*, the *INAO* and the *Syndicat de défense de l’appellation Fiefs Vendéens*, in order to ensure data triangulation ([Yin, 2018](#)).

Case study areas

When considering major wine-producing countries, Italy and France represent not only the largest producers globally ([OIV–International Organisation of Vine and Wine, 2024](#)) but also the EU countries with the most wine GIs (529 and 442 respectively, as of December 2024). Therefore, given the importance of wine production for these two countries, this study aims to identify the main factors that can influence the success or failure of wine GIs in different rural areas. In particular, the focus is on three wine GIs: Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita*) in Central Italy and AOC (*Appellation d’origine contrôlée*) Fiefs Vendéens and AOC Coteaux du Quercy in northwestern and southwestern France, respectively. All these three areas received quality certifications during the 1980s and 1990s (although the two French GIs were both later harmonised to AOC in 2011), they have comparable sizes with respect to hectares of vineyards and annual production

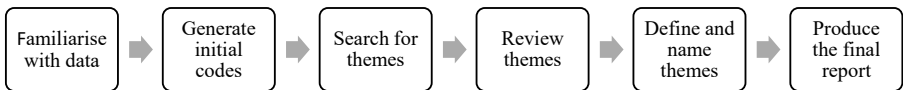


Figure 1. Phases of thematic analysis. Source: Authors’ elaboration based on [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#)

volumes and are less well-known or recognisable than more prominent GIs, such as Chianti in Italy or Bordeaux in France. Since these GIs were established relatively recently, most of the 27 stakeholders interviewed, including producers and regulatory officials, provided first-hand insights into the region's history and development following the GI designation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically to identify key patterns and themes.

AOC Fiefs Vendéens

The AOC Fiefs Vendéens is located in the Pays de la Loire region, in northwestern France, and it is composed by five sub-zones, which take their names from the municipalities in which they are located: Brem, Chantonay, Mareuil, Pissotte and Vix. In this area, viticulture has been present since the Roman Empire, but it is only after Second World War that it started to become properly cultivated. In 1974, Fiefs Vendéens was recognised as a “Vin de Pays”, and in 1984 it was elevated to an AOVDQS (*Appellation d’Origine Vin Délimité de Qualité Supérieure*). After the harmonisation of French indications to EU legislation, it was changed to AOC in 2011. In this area are produced red, white and rosé wines. As of 2022, the total area of vineyards in this AOC is roughly 347 hectares, with 13 winemakers; production in 2022 was around 1.7 million bottles.

AOC Coteaux du Quercy

The AOC Coteaux du Quercy is located in the Occitanie region, in southwestern France. Its territory includes 38 municipalities inside two different *départements*, Lot and Tarn-et-Garonne. The area was recognised for an AOVDQS in 1999, and then an AOC in 2011. This AOC covers around 187 hectares of vineyards, with 12 winemakers and one winemaking cooperative which includes 23 members. Production is around one million bottles per year, consisting of both red and rosé wines. Cabernet Franc is the main grape variety employed, included between 40% and 60% of the wine, with additional varieties allowed being Cot, Merlot, Tannat and Gamay.

DOCG Montefalco Sagrantino

The Sagrantino di Montefalco DOCG appellation encompasses five adjacent municipalities located in the Province of Perugia, in Central Italy. The municipalities are: Montefalco (its entire area), Bevagna, Castel Ritaldi, Giano dell’Umbria and Gualdo Cattaneo. This area in the Umbria region has been involved in viticulture for nearly a thousand years. Given the importance of Sagrantino wine for this territory, and thanks also to a shift in production from sweet to dry wines, Sagrantino obtained the DOC recognition in 1979. A few years later, in 1981, the local Consortium, “Consorzio Tutela Vini Montefalco”, was established with the aim of guaranteeing high production standards and promoting Sagrantino wine abroad. In 1992, Sagrantino wine gained the DOCG appellation, which represents the highest level of recognition for Italian GI wines. Currently, the Sagrantino di Montefalco DOCG covers an area of approximately 390 hectares, with more than 1 million bottles produced in 2021. Moreover, the area is cultivated by 118 winegrowers and hosts 76 wineries, of which 61 are members of the Consortium.

Table 1 sums the main characteristics of all areas considered regarding hectares and number of producers.

Table 1. Characteristics of areas selected

	Fiefs Vendéens	Coteaux du Quercy	Sagrantino DOCG
Hectares	355	187	380
N. of producers	13	41	118

Source(s): Syndicat de défense de l’appellation Fiefs Vendéens, INAO and Consorzio Tutela Vini Montefalco

Data collection and analysis

Data collection was based on primary data sources, through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, in-person or by phone. Semi-structured interviews make it possible to trace a direction on the potential topics of interest for the research purposes, but still allowing flexibility and adaptation. The interviews were scheduled in advance with the participants via email or phone. Each respondent was informed that the study aimed to collect data on wine and local development for research purposes and provided verbal consent before the interview commenced.

The study involved 27 semi-structured interviews, conducted both in person and by phone. The profiles included in our analysis consist of: 11 producers from Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG, 7 producers from Fiefs Vendéens AOC, 6 producers from Coteaux du Quercy AOC and 3 INAO representatives. Discussion lasted between 20 min and 1 h and a half, and in all instances were conducted and moderated by at least one of the co-authors, in both French and Italian. All interviews were audiotaped.

Subsequently, the six phases of thematic analysis were followed, as illustrated by Braun and Clarke (2006) and detailed by Byrne (2022). After listening to the recordings and transcribing the interviews (in French and Italian), the transcripts were repeatedly read to facilitate familiarity with the material. Coding was then undertaken as an iterative and reflexive process: descriptive or interpretative labels were assigned to relevant text segments, treating codes as the building blocks of themes (Byrne, 2022). Following Braun et al. (2019) coding was understood as flexible and organic, evolving as engagement with the data deepened. Through repeated cycles of refinement, related codes were grouped into broader categories, and then into coherent themes and sub-themes. This recursive process involved moving back and forth between data extracts, codes and emerging interpretations until themes were internally consistent, distinct from one another and clearly linked to our research questions.

Findings

The analysis of the information obtained through the responses of all the interviewees has allowed to create a thematic map, illustrated in Figure 2. Two main themes emerged, highlighting the main factors contributing to the successful (or unsuccessful) impact of a wine GI. These two themes relate to the “Location” factor and the “Community” factor and are each further composed of three sub-themes. Figure 1 illustrates the links between the themes and sub-themes found in the analysis.

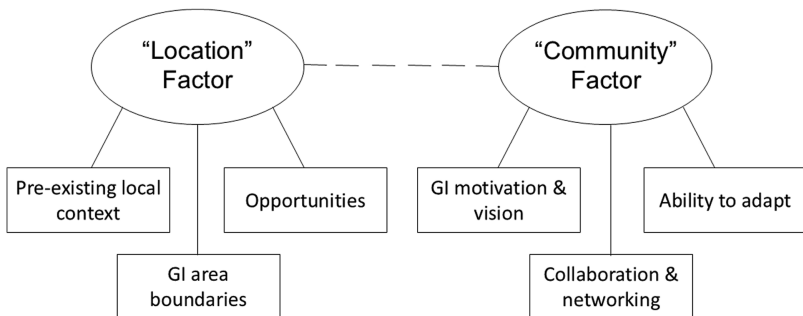


Figure 2. Thematic map illustrating themes and sub-themes. Source: Authors’ elaboration

Location factor

A common aspect that was present throughout most interviewees' responses was related to the geographical, historical and socioeconomic context that was present in that specific area, both before and at the time that the wine GI was established. These factors seem to have had lasting repercussions on the subsequent success (or lack of success) of the specific GI. In particular, three aspects were identified through which different local socioeconomic and geographical attributes affected each GI's outcome.

Pre-existing local context. When analysing the interviews from each of the three areas, respondents described distinct contexts in which the GIs were established. For example, in the AOC Coteaux du Quercy, polyculture has always been, and still is, the dominant agricultural activity, with producers cultivating a variety of crops. However, among these, grapes have never been the primary local production, even though viticulture has existed in the area for a long time.

Polyculture is essential. [...] It is true that we are not full-time winegrowers. [...] Not all producers' efforts are focused solely on promoting and cultivating vines because there are other agricultural activities alongside it. [Producer, Coteaux du Quercy]

As demonstrated in the case of Coteaux du Quercy AOC, the lack of historical wine production is also reflected in producers' choices, as they tend to prioritise maximising sales volumes rather than building a distinctive identity for their product. [Vaquero-Piñeiro \(2021\)](#) has shown that, in Italy, the most successful GIs are located in areas with specific socio-cultural contexts, such as a strong cultural tradition and local identity. Indeed, in the case of Montefalco DOCG, viticulture has been present since the Roman era, and Sagrantino is a historical product deeply embedded in local traditions.

Sagrantino is an indigenous variety, so one of its strengths is the ability to share the history of this grape [...]. It was cultivated in monasteries and castles, which have now been transformed into beautifully restored historic villages. Therefore, a key strength lies in recounting its history. [Producer, Montefalco DOCG]

GI area boundaries. Another important aspect that emerged from the interviews concerns the geographical boundaries of the GI. In our study, the three contexts considered are all different from each other, and, as highlighted, this results in varying impacts. In the case of Montefalco DOCG, the five municipalities within the GI are all close to one another, and the presence of numerous producers in the area (over 70 wineries) creates continuity and homogeneity across the territory, making it easy for consumers and tourists to move between towns and producers. This has helped create a small cluster that maximises not only the winemaking presence but also the local tourism and gastronomic attractions.

In contrast, in the case of Coteaux du Quercy, even if the AOC lies within an almost contiguous area, the low number of producers results in large distances between one winery and another. Considering the limited presence of towns and tourist attractions, it is not practical for visitors or consumers to travel across the entire AOC. This combination of factors has likely hindered the creation of an "ecosystem" capable of developing a strong, cohesive image of the AOC to present to consumers and tourists.

One major weakness is the distance between the winegrowers. We are very scattered. Some might see this as a strength, but I see it more as a weakness. There is no synergy to promote and develop wine tourism. Others might argue the opposite, that you can wander around and enjoy diverse landscapes, which is nice. But the problem is that someone wanting to explore wines from the Coteaux du Quercy and visit all the winegrowers would have to travel 90 km from north to south and 90 km from east to west, so the dispersion is significant. [Producer, Coteaux du Quercy]

Finally, regarding Fiefs AOC, the area is divided into five small, non-contiguous and distant sub-zones, each with their own specific name. In some of these sub-zones, there are only two, or even a single, producer. This situation makes it challenging to create a unified image in the minds of consumers and likely does not provide much incentive for the producers themselves to collaborate.

It is a bit complicated, having five different subzones, especially if some of them are only represented by one producer. [Producer, Fiefs Vendéens]

Livat *et al.* (2019) have also shown that a high number of sub-zones and increasingly smaller, more specific denominations can negatively impact the success of a GI. The risk is that GIs may become too numerous and complex, ultimately failing to provide consumers with helpful quality signals to guide them when choosing which wine to purchase.

It is a subject of debate. Some members of the INAO national committee are trying to slow down the movement, saying: 'We already have 400, 500 AOC products in France. There is no point in having a thousand. Consumers will not understand anything anymore in New York, Beijing, or Tokyo. So, it is not worth it.' [INAO representative]

Opportunities. The two previous sub-themes also have an effect that can be considered separately: the opportunities that geographical location offers to the GI. When examined individually, the three cases analysed provide different points for reflection. In the case of Montefalco DOCG, the presence of numerous historical and cultural attractions, a rich gastronomic culture and a vast natural environment allows the area to attract tourists who are not primarily interested in wine. Many Italians and international visitors travel to Montefalco for its history and natural beauty, and Umbria's proximity to Tuscany has contributed to a rise in tourism in recent decades. While this provides producers with an opportunity to promote their wines locally, Sagrantino has somehow become more familiar to wine lovers abroad than to Italians themselves. Foreign tourists who discover it during their stay often become ambassadors for the wine when they return home, helping to boost exports and expand international sales.

It is a bold, distinctive wine, full-bodied, high in alcohol, and intense. These characteristics define it. By now, the world knows it, to varying degrees. Ironically, we probably know it less in Italy. [...] If you go to the United States, everyone knows it. But here in Italy, there are still places where people do not even know what Sagrantino is. [...] That said, things are improving. There is now good consumption in Italy, and we are actually struggling to meet the demand from Italian consumers. [Producer, Montefalco DOCG]

Unlike Sagrantino, the two French GIs face greater challenges in expanding their market reach. In the case of Fiefs Vendéens, producers take advantage of the proximity to the coast to sell their wine locally to tourists who enjoy it during their vacations. This is their primary target market, with exports accounting for only a minor share of total sales. Conversely, Coteaux du Quercy primarily caters to the local population, as tourism is minimal. It relies on a "trusted" clientele who are familiar with the product and its producers because they are from the area. As a result, several producers in the Coteaux AOC have sought opportunities abroad. However, as suggested by the INAO inspector interviewed, the focus might be better placed on the local market, positioning the AOC label as a symbol of quality for local consumers rather than as a brand for international visibility. Indeed, prioritising exports means competing with more renowned and well-established French wines, which may not yield favourable results for these producers.

An AOC is strong if it has clear differentiating factors that help build recognition for the producers within the appellation. The fact is, [...] in Coteaux du Quercy and Fiefs Vendéens production is small, and it is reasonable to think that these smaller volumes can be sold locally without much difficulty. [...] That is simply how it works. They mostly sell within their own département. So why go to the other side of the world? [INAO representative]

Community factor

GI motivation and vision. One can observe significant differences in the approaches taken by winemakers towards the creation of a GI. Indeed, from the accounts of producers in the various areas considered, it becomes quite clear that, where there was a willingness to enhance a product historically rooted in the region, the GI was an opportunity to protect this heritage and serve as a tool not only for improving wine quality but also fostering a larger regional development; this seems to be the case especially for Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG.

Initially, we entered the wine sector, with a focus on Sagrantino because it was the most well-known grape variety in the Montefalco area, truly unique. The opportunity arose when we decided to establish a DOCG. From there, the idea emerged that it was a wine that could drive agriculture in Umbria. [Producer, Montefalco DOCG]

In contrast, for AOC Coteaux du Quercy, it seems that the designation was created mostly because, during that particular period in the 1980s and 1990s, producers saw an opportunity to save their farms from losses related to other agricultural productions, capitalising on wine's popularity in the market. But they did so without having developed a product strong and unique enough to remain competitive over time.

There were also, let us say, climatological factors that led to this. In our area, we experienced a very severe hailstorm in 1990 that killed the trees. In 1991, we had a severe frost. [...] Since wine had a very favourable context in terms of sales and prices, we leaned more towards that direction. Meanwhile, with meat production, prices were stagnating, or even decreasing, while costs were increasing [...]. So, at the time, there were many administrative as well as economic factors that steered production in this direction. [Producer, Coteaux du Quercy]

The farmers who established the appellation used to grow melons. They made money from melons, and then growing vines became something they wanted to do, so they went for it. But they are producers, not entrepreneurs in this kind of business. [...] The goal was simply to add value to their products through the appellation. [Producer, Coteaux du Quercy]

However, since GIs require many decades and a sustained commitment in order to thrive, with considerable operational and marketing costs, in areas whose output does not have distinguishing characteristics, GIs may end up not being a viable option (Giovannucci *et al.*, 2009). This lack of commitment can also be reflected in inadequate quality levels by many local producers, which can damage the reputation of the GI itself. Especially for agri-food products, including wine, where there is a great variety of products, having a good collective reputation is important to attract consumers that heavily rely on reputation for their purchases (Castrìota and Delmastro, 2015).

You can find significant price disparities between one winery and other producers. As a result, the appellation suffers from a lack of uniform quality and pricing. This inconsistency contributes to the problem, because this is also a young appellation that no one knows about. And on top of that, when consumers come across Coteaux du Quercy wines, the price and quality disparities are enormous. [Producer, Coteaux du Quercy]

Collaboration and networking. The importance of collaboration among producers emerged strongly in this study. Across the three cases analysed, it is evident that the presence or absence of collaboration had a direct impact on the GI's performance, despite all three areas being organised into producer consortia. In Montefalco, producers worked collectively to promote the image of Sagrantino not only within Italy but also internationally, through local events and participation in international fairs. However, some producers even hope for increased collaboration, particularly in technological advancements and climate change adaptation, as well as with other agri-food consortia in Umbria to enhance consumer outreach.

In my opinion, the real challenge is to promote the concept of ‘Umbria, land of wines’, highlighting the diverse interpretations of the territory through local grape varieties rather than international ones. Then, we need to create stronger synergies with other key sectors in the Umbrian agri-food system, including restaurants, accommodation, and the region’s natural and artistic heritage. [Producer, Montefalco DOCG]

In contrast, in the two French AOCs, there is an almost total lack of collaboration among producers, both in wine promotion and in technical aspects that strongly impact on performance. Despite each denomination having relatively few producers compared to other wine GIs, the absence of collaboration and a shared vision makes it difficult to adapt to new challenges and requirements. This includes modifying production regulations to provide greater flexibility for producers in meeting evolving consumer tastes.

If they [the producers] do not agree among themselves, the INAO inquiry commission will question everyone, so that the process will take more time. [INAO representative]

Even in the case of Montefalco DOCG, some issues remain from this perspective. Producers still tend not to collaborate on agronomic and technological aspects, such as resilience to climate change and the ability to collectively overcome future challenges. This could negatively impact the future competitiveness of the DOCG.

The issue of climate change [...] is the real challenge, not only for Montefalco but for all of Italy. The very fact that there are no strong collaborations with universities on such a crucial matter shows that something is not working. [...] The real issue is climate and the approach to agriculture. At the moment, [...] individual strategies may exist, but there is no shared one. Currently, funds are spent independently by wineries, and the discussions held within the Consortium remain very superficial. [Producer, Montefalco DOCG]

Consistently, research by [Maghssudipour et al. \(2020\)](#) has shown that knowledge exchange among Montefalco DOCG wineries is often driven by economic rather than personal or informal relationships. Local actors tend to form knowledge-sharing ties more easily when connected to external institutions rather than to local ones. Moreover, wine-related institutions do not appear to play a statistically significant role in facilitating knowledge exchange. These findings highlight the need for stronger, more structured collaboration frameworks, particularly through wine consortia, which are essential for fostering trust and formal relationships among producers ([Maghssudipour et al., 2020](#)).

Ability to adapt. Adaptation to an ever-evolving context also seems to play a key role in the success of the wine GIs considered. Indeed, the great expansion in recent decades of the wine market worldwide, with respect to the number of both consumers and producers, has meant more opportunities for producers, but also a stronger competition to remain relevant and profitable. In our case, adaptation can be analysed through different lenses. Firstly, it may consist in the adaptation of producers in order to reach new consumers that may have different preferences. This is the case, for example of Montefalco DOCG, where producers were able to refine a typical wine, famous for its strong tannins, a feature greatly appreciated during the 90s, making it more appealing for today’s consumers looking for a fresher and more balanced product. This was possible while still respecting the rules contained in the production disciplinary and without altering the unicity of Sagrantino wine.

For quite some time, our focus has been to produce wines that are not overly strong, aiming, instead, to create wines that are “drinkable” and enjoyable. While it is important for the wines to convey the distinctive characteristics of Sagrantino and exhibit its unique personality, we also strive to ensure that they are approachable and not challenging to be appreciated. [Producer, Montefalco DOCG]

However, a different story emerges from the producers in France. In both AOC Fiefs Vendéens and AOC Coteaux du Quercy, producers lament the fact that their production disciplinarys are too strict to meet new consumer demands, such as for less alcoholic wines or, in particular, “varietal wines” (that is, wines typically made from a single variety), which in Europe are

generally classified as non-GI (Alston and Gaeta, 2021). This has led some producers in both AOCs to either quit or consider quitting their AOC affiliation, opting instead to sell their wines under the more generic “Vin de France” label, whose only requirement is for the wine to be produced in France.

I helped build the AOC, but I completely stopped being part of the appellation. Because, within the appellation, it is not allowed to produce varietal wines. And all my vineyard plots—the best plots over the last 30 years—are unique parcels with a single grape variety. So, we left the appellation to make great wines. [Producer, Fiefs Vendéens]

Discussion

From the three areas analysed in this research, several factors emerge that can influence the success or failure of a wine GI. As previously explained, the objective of this study is to identify, analyse and describe common themes within the collected data. Specifically, two primary factors have been identified as having a significant impact on the success of a GI: the geographical “location” and the “community” of stakeholders within the area. Indeed, the success of a GI does not depend solely on factors under the direct control of producers and other local stakeholders. However, their willingness, collaboration and ability to leverage the specific characteristics of their territory remain essential for ensuring that a wine GI can generate opportunities and support rural development.

The first theme identified is related to the geographical *location*, which manifests in three interconnected sub-themes. The findings suggest that a successful wine GI can benefit from the presence of particular *pre-existing socioeconomic conditions*, for example in relation to the history of the area and the role that viticulture and wine have played over time for that specific region. These elements contribute to fostering a clear sense among the local population of what their product represents and the characteristics that can make it unique compared to other products. Furthermore, the *geographical boundaries* of a GI can have a significant positive or negative impact. As demonstrated by the two French AOCs, a very low density of winemakers relative to the area’s size, or alternatively, the presence of many small, divided and distant sub-zones, hinders the creation of a sense of community and shared vision among producers, which is essential for enhancing the value and identity of their wines. Additionally, such fragmentation makes it difficult for consumers and potential tourists to fully understand and appreciate the GI area, as it struggles to create and convey a cohesive and unique identity.

Finally, the “location” factor is also tied to the *opportunities* that the geographical area may or may not offer to local producers. For instance, in a highly touristic area like Montefalco, the growing presence of Italian and international tourists attracted by the region’s culture, history and nature represents a significant opportunity to further promote a product that remains relatively niche, primarily known among wine enthusiasts. Similarly, the numerous tourists visiting the Fiefs Vendéens region, thanks to its proximity to the coast and cities like Nantes, currently constitute the largest market for local producers, who can introduce their wines to visitors from outside the region. In contrast, for an area like Coteaux du Quercy, the lack of tourist attractions and the resulting low number of visitors – who tend to prefer other destinations in southwest France – means that the market is largely focused on the local population. This demographic is familiar with and appreciates the region’s wines, trusting the local producers as a reliable source of quality. These findings allow us to give a more nuanced perspective on the struggles faced by producers in less well-known GIs, considering that French producers have been found to benefit greatly from geographical designations when it comes to export values (Agostino and Trivieri, 2014).

The second theme concerns *community dynamics*. A first dimension is motivation: where GIs emerge from a deep-rooted connection between territory and viticulture, as in Montefalco, they appear more effective in supporting rural development; by contrast, in Coteaux du Quercy, created more as a response to temporary market conditions, producers still struggle to

define a distinctive identity. A second dimension is collaboration: strong networks among producers and with local institutions, as in Montefalco, reinforce both reputation and tourism, while fragmented efforts in Fiefs Vendéens and Coteaux du Quercy prevent a coherent strategy. These results mirror those of López-Bayón *et al.* (2020), who show that GI effectiveness declines when producer numbers are excessive or territories overly large, and Vergamini *et al.* (2019), who describe similar fragmentation in Tuscany but also note emerging consolidation through new associations. A third dimension is adaptability: the ability of producers to adjust their wines and strategies to changing consumer preferences or environmental conditions. Montefalco has shown some capacity for innovation, while the French AOCs appear more constrained.

These findings reinforce the view of GIs as socio-institutional arrangements rather than mere quality labels or market signals. The evidence suggests that territorial context matters, but that its effects are mediated by stakeholder coordination, shared vision and adaptive capacity. In this sense, the study complements existing quantitative and single-case research by showing, through a comparative qualitative approach, how producers and regulatory actors themselves interpret the conditions under which a GI is able, or unable, to generate lasting value.

Table 2 illustrates production quantities for the three GIs between 2012 and 2021. As confirmed by the data presented, despite big fluctuations in production for all three GIs considered, AOC Coteaux du Quercy seems to have entered a prolonged decline starting from 2016, with total wine production nearly halved as of 2021. On the other hand, the production of Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG, after reaching a peak in 2015, seems to have mostly stabilised in recent years. These data appear to confirm the information obtained through our interviews with local producers. It is important to note, however, that an increase in product quality appears to be a common outcome across all three GIs considered in this study. Moreover, adaptability is required not only from producers but also from other local stakeholders, who must guide the vision and investments of the territory to make it more competitive. On the one hand, the territory of Montefalco is reinventing itself as a destination for experiential tourism centred on art, wine, and nature. On the other hand, in the case of Fiefs Vendéens, local regulations still do not permit the construction or expansion of wineries, effectively limiting producers' ability to grow and innovate. Additionally, it is clear that adaptability will increasingly be tied to climate change and the ability of producers to continue crafting their wines in the future, given the negative effects already impacting grape production in all the territories analysed. This is especially important for European producers, and production rules for AOCs and DOCGs will probably have to start adapting to changing conditions, including varieties employed and production rules (Masset and Weisskopf, 2024). From this perspective,

Table 2. Production data 2012–2022 (hl)

Year	Fiefs Vendéens	Coteaux du Quercy	Sagrantino DOCG
2012	14,363	7,778	8,110
2013	21,421	5,619	8,032
2014	20,743	8,352	9,642
2015	21,033	8,436	10,123
2016	15,073	8,899	7,377
2017	19,206	7,959	9,077
2018	22,301	7,160	7,665
2019	10,954	7,049	8,477
2020	16,663	6,701	11,973
2021	14,582	5,356	11,571
2022	12,475	5,070	12,201

Source(s): Syndicat de défense de l'appellation Fiefs Vendéens, INAO and Consorzio Tutela Vini Montefalco

none of the regions studied seem to have developed a comprehensive plan for sharing risks and technologies to address these challenges.

These results also have practical implications. From a policy perspective, they suggest that GI recognition alone is not sufficient to ensure long-term competitiveness or local development, especially in fragmented or weakly coordinated territories. Public institutions and GI authorities may therefore need to support not only legal protection and promotion but also stronger collective governance, technical cooperation and adaptation strategies. From a managerial perspective, the findings indicate that producers and consortia should invest not only in product quality but also in coordinated communication, joint learning and shared responses to changing consumer preferences and climate-related challenges.

Conclusion and limitations

This study highlights that the success or failure of wine GIs depends not only on product characteristics but also on geographical context, historical identity and the capacity of local communities to collaborate and communicate value effectively. Theoretically, this reinforces the view of GIs as socio-institutional arrangements, where governance structures and stakeholder relations are no less important than terroir. Practically, the findings suggest that institutions and producer associations should foster cohesion, clear communication strategies and mechanisms for innovation and risk-sharing. In France, for example, the proliferation of small appellations risks fragmenting consumer perceptions, indicating the need to revisit minimum quality standards and strengthen collective promotion (Livat *et al.*, 2019).

The study is subject to certain limitations. First, the absence of extensive and comparable socioeconomic quantitative data restricts a fuller understanding of the territorial dynamics that may influence GI performance, such as the role of other industrial sectors or demographic trends in rural areas. Second, qualitative analysis, while valuable for capturing stakeholder perspectives, carries inherent risks of interpretative subjectivity, despite the systematic use of thematic analysis and the comparison of evidence across cases. Third, the findings are based on three specific wine GIs and are therefore not intended to be statistically generalisable to all European designations. Rather, their value lies in providing context-sensitive insights into the mechanisms through which territorial conditions, stakeholder relations and adaptive capacity may shape GI trajectories. Nonetheless, the consistency of these findings with previous literature (Charters and Spielmann, 2014; Checchinato *et al.*, 2024) supports the credibility of the analysis.

In conclusion, GIs should be understood not merely as marketing tools but as instruments of rural development, cultural preservation and environmental sustainability. To ensure their resilience in the face of global competition and climate change, national and European institutions may need to adapt existing frameworks to enhance inclusiveness, transparency and long-term effectiveness.

Notes

1. Updated list available at <https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eambrosia/geographical-indications-register/>

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