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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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The food territory: cultural identity as local facilitator in the gastronomy sector, the case of Lyon

Luca Tricarico* and Jean-Baptiste Geissler

Abstract

In times of increased territorial competition, processes of territorialization of food and gastronomy are often considered as key assets of regional economic performances. Yet, for they are by nature diffuse and intangible, it is often hard to understand precisely through what mechanism they are operating and what kind of effects they have. Building on the framework proposed by the regional development platform approach, the present article explores the case of Lyon, trying to unveil the main communication patterns between local identity and economic performances. While territorial identity seems to be a facilitator of exchanges between stakeholders, it can also appear sometimes as causing inertia and slowing down institutional innovation. Beyond the specific findings on the case studied, the objective of the article is to propose innovative reflections on the debate of local identity dynamics and territorial marketing for local food governance and policy making.

Keywords: Food governance, Territorial marketing, Gastronomy sector, Regional development platform, Lyon

Introduction

The agro-food industry represents a significant direct share of Lyon's employment,¹ and has been recognized as one of the axes of development by the metropolitan government (Bing and Hooge 2007). This point is important firstly as a qualitative factor in the pre-cited city competition, and secondly for local governance, as a way of mobilizing fragmented actors around common objectives. In terms of image, the city appears to have gained a global recognition as a gastronomy capital since a famous *critique* designated it as being the world gastronomy capital (in 1935, but its reputation of excellence seem to be lasting, see Grand Lyon 2007). Within Lyon's gastronomy sector, actors agree that Lyon is not (or no longer) the world's gastronomy capital (Anaf-Grisard and Borel 2010). Still, it is the third city worldwide when it comes to the number of Michelin Star restaurants.² Using a methodology based on Internet search engine occurrences, Bing and Hooge (2007) found that Lyon was almost

always ranked first when the term "gastronomy capital" was typed in. The city is besides hosting what has been recognized as the "culinary art Oscar" i.e. the "*Bocuse d'Or*" (Cooke 2011) and has a unique form of collaboration between the chefs (via the *Association des Toques Blanches Lyonnaises*). For the combination of recognized tradition and current economic relevance, the case of Lyon can be considered as particularly relevant in the debate on territorial food development drivers, unveiling key factors and limitations of these developments. Taking into account this background, this contribution aims to explore two questions:

First Why tradition and heritage are often cited as economic development enablers? There are only a few empirical contributions studying in detail through which mechanisms this theoretical relationship is actually operating. Inspired by the regional development platform

¹ 6% according to Bing and Hooge (2007).

² And if agglomeration factors such as population, GDP or number of tourists visiting that tremendously favors Tokyo (1st) and Paris (2nd), were taken into account, Lyon would play on the same league than these better ranked cities (Anaf-Grisard and Borel 2010).

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paradigm, the present work also aims at proposing some analytical insights for future studies.

Second Why does identity become so crucial for gastronomy sector at an intermediate step of development? It is therefore crucial to understand potentialities and barriers to development (Lazzeretti et al. 2010).

Our hypothesis, based on the discussion advanced in the “*Theoretical background*” section is that a territorialization process (made of identity and culture development) can prove to be facilitating relationships and fostering long-term innovative capabilities. Using the regional development platform as a tool (“*Analytical framework and methodology*”), we were able to test it in the case of Lyon, reaching conclusions that may be valid both for academia, policy makers and practitioners.

Theoretical background

In an evolutionary perspective, knowledge is no longer divided in tacit and codified but is seen as being more “open-ended”, “interactive” and strongly related to relational capital (Capello 1999; Capello and Faggian 2005; Cooke 2007). Aranguren et al. (2010) also highlight the importance of active learning process called “complicit knowledge” (ibid:49), revealing its uncodified nature and the proximity necessary to acquire it. In this perspective, the distinction between transmitter and receiver of information is blurred; agents are seen as “transceivers” (ibid), interactively participating to the knowledge creation process. Adopting this point of view, knowledge innovation is possible only by frequent and preferably rather informal interaction between agents in their “cognitive and social space” (Boschma 2005; Capello 2009; Tricarico et al. 2014). Cooke (2007) insisted that, even though “digital networks” (using ICTs) were important, they only were complementary to face-to-face contacts. The crucial role of the latter in the process of innovation and transmission of tacit knowledge has also been underlined by streams of literature (Storper and Venables 2004), mentioning that communication technologies could not fully replace these contacts as an essential phase to experiment and develop local networks of interactions. Diverging further from the linear approach of technology, Cooke (2007) develops the notion of “constructed advantage”, lying in the “relational embedding” of a particular region’s evolution (ibid: 191). According to the author, it is “based on the capabilities and potential of diverse actors interacting with the platform” (ibid:192). This renewed conception of innovation also calls for other organizational structures as a matter of fact, without a structural reorganization, it is unlikely that a “knowledge exploration system” will become a “knowledge exploitation system”, generating economically valuable innovation (Cooke 2011:156). Analysing the Chilean wine

industry, Vissier (2004) remarked that a profound reorganization of the sector’s governance was an essential precondition to its internationalization. The first stake to achieve is the creation of “effective arenas for dialogue” (Aranguren et al. 2010:48), matching the “networking capability” mentioned in the introduction. Given the importance of experimenting face-to-face contacts, one can understand the crucial role played by these bridges between related industries. However, the necessary openness of such networks can contradict other imperatives for successful development, namely leadership and vision sharing.³ Actually, an efficient network organization is necessarily horizontal, with no prominent member (Aranguren et al. 2010:57), potentially barring the emergence of a strong leadership. Cheshire and Gordon (1996) showed that the plurality of interests at the local level led in the majority of cases to inaction or the capture of public policies by small groups sharing a common (globally unrepresentative) interest. Other authors like Lazzeretti et al. (2010) also highlighted the fact that one of the first phases of a sustained territorial development was “shaping a shared vision, that is, a social capital, for the development network” (ibid:32). Following this idea, a certain sense of belonging to a common culture could help concealing the potentially contradictory necessities of open network and shared vision. Cooke (2007:187), recognized “community and culture” as being one of the four pillars of a constructed advantage.⁴ In 2010 article, Lazzeretti et al. emphasised the central role of the “Tuscan heritage”, around which is articulated an “Art and Food Platform” (35). This heritage enabled innovation in the gastronomy sector based on the tradition of quality of the region, created synergies with the Art sector and contributed to the emergence of innovative governance forms. French scholars have abundantly published about “Localized Agro-food Systems” articulating notions of spatial proximity and sector dynamics. This is to be compared to the “worlds of production” analysis mentioned by Cooke (2011) and the cluster approach of Lazzeretti (2003). In this stream of literature, Fourcade (2008) argues that, through a mix of proximities (spatial, sectoral, cultural), innovative organizational forms emerge based on the specific resources of the territory. Fourcade (2008:523) reckons that the consciousness of a common cultural heritage in a certain sector can lead agents to developing a real territorial project, very often including rural–urban

³ In planning theory literature, the creation of these two conditions has been considered a crucial challenge in policy making process (Mäntyselä et al. 2011; Geissler et al. 2017).

⁴ Even though several studies have highlighted the controversy of the use of these two buzzwords in urban studies (Tricarico 2016, 2017; Davoudi and Madanipour 2015).

integration dynamics (ibid:525). The influence of such organizational form on innovation has been analysed in the case of Languedoc's wine industry by Touzard (2008). That empirical study highlights a series of organizational innovations, like the creation of a cooperative or the gathering around a territorial label (*Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée*). In another study on the same topic, Touzard et al. (2008) emphasized that these innovations had been made possible by the development of social capital among wine producers, coming from a strong common sense of belonging to their territory. Actually, wine producers have been missioned by the French government to ensure environmental responsibilities, which embedded strongly their actions in the territory (Touzard et al. 2008:528). That embeddedness acts as social capital, favouring the emergence of product innovation by an increased differentiation. On the same vein, the example of Italian industrial districts shows how trust, relationships and social capital enhanced a form of cooperation-competition (Dei Ottati 2004), which represents a particularly efficient and innovative behavior of economic and institutional actors (Porter 1990). Another stream of French literature relevant to the present analysis is articulated around the idea of cultural heritage⁵ and its spatial implications. For the authors quoted in the following lines, cultural heritage provides a territory with an advantage comparable to a 'rent', allowing a product innovation thanks to an increased differentiation based on quality (Mollard et al. 2001) One can find in the concept of "rent" a generalization of the "symbolic capital" evoked by Lazzeretti (2003). Empirical studies have confirmed that the image of quality conveyed by a territory could allow its producer to generate extra profit. For instance, at an equal level of quality certification, consumers were willing to pay more for olive oil coming from a renowned region (Mollard 2001). It moreover appears that the quality attributes linked with a territory expand far beyond the product category it is renowned for. Developing what he calls the "bundle hypothesis" (*l'hypothèse du panier de biens*), Pecqueur (2001) showed with empirical studies that the additional willingness to pay by consumer was verified not only for the emblematic product of a region, but virtually for all the products coming from that region. This process of identification may facilitate collective action, as Pecqueur (2001:44) underlined: "the sense of belonging to a set of shared values enables the creation of clubs". "Clubs" being forms of collective action aiming at capturing the positive

externalities deriving from the image of the territory. Mollard (2001) also highlighted that the existence of a rent encouraged the development of "solidarity strategies" between producers working in related industries because the level of trust between the agents progressed in this configuration (45–46). The specific interest of certain agents may push for identifying particular pre-existing territorial assets, called 'patrimoine' by French scholars, adding a notion of 'patrimony', revealing that it is also a resource (François et al. 2006). In a second step, a common sense of belonging helps actors to get together and adopt cooperation-competition behaviors. The third step of this cooperation is the creation of new institutional and organizational forms,⁶ better able to coordinate the platform. Identity is therefore dynamic, deriving from a certain cultural heritage but appropriated and recomposed by actors throughout the process. The institutionalization of identity is of course not often a smooth one, as it generates tensions and even conflicts. On the same level, the emergence of cooperation among actors is frequently problematic, even when they share a common set of values as will be exemplified in the case study below. Finally, the risk of freeriding is high since territorial assets by definition have some public good characteristics (Lazzeretti et al. 2010).

Analytical framework and methodology

In the present article we refer to regional development platform as the main methodological reference⁷ of the analysis conducted. RDP tool aims to capture the complexity of regional growth at a systemic level by "engaging the relevant interests and institutions in a process of envisioning regional development platform policies" (Lazzeretti et al. 2010:21). The evolutionary nature of the tool has been emphasised by Harmaakorpi (2006:1089), that defines RDPs as "a regional resource configuration based on the past development trajectories but presenting the future potential to produce competitive advantage". Lazzeretti et al. (2010:31) define this competitive advantage enhancing capability by deconstructing it in four major capabilities that are to be developed in order to achieve a functioning RDP:

Learning capability, which can be defined as the systemic ability to produce and master knowledge in interactive, cumulative and collective learning processes, in

⁵ The term 'cultural heritage' is here used in a very broad sense, not restricted to its artistic connotation. The word 'tradition' will as well be employed in the following lines, both referring to the French notion of '*patrimoine*' that will be developed below.

⁶ The reorganization and innovation of local institutional arrangements to enhance the management performances of local tangible and intangible assets (i.e. contextual knowledge) has been also considered as a major issue in recent planning (Bailey 2012; Wills 2016) and decentralization debates (Tricarico 2015; Moroni and Tricarico 2017).

⁷ An in depth exploration of the RDP strict methodological analysis is given by Harmaakorpi and Pekkarinen (2003).

order to arrive at the definition of new resources, competences and skills;

networking capability, meant as the ability of interactive networks to develop a specific social capital able to set in motion those successful processes of re-patterning of the internal network resources;

leadership capability, that is the ability of putting into effect leadership actions that improves the existing resources and, at the same time, avoids the dangerous lock-ins phenomena;

visionary capability, which is the ability to describe achievable trajectories of development centered on the one hand on the already followed paths, and on the other hand on the exploitation of the opportunities emerging from the new socio-techno-economic paradigms.

One could add to this list a very important point mentioned by Cooke (2011), which could be called the ‘governance side’ of RDPs, that is their ability to generate deliberate collective action, to arbitrate conflicts and create a common sense of belonging. This aspect is crucial in the building of a regional competitive advantage since collective action has been identified as being one of the main obstacles encountered by local economic development policymakers (Cheshire and Gordon 1996). Insights from the cluster literature highlight that trust can help overcoming these difficulties by facilitating economic activity (Dei Ottati 2004). Cooke (2007) put forward that RDP analytical method was perfectly applicable to more ‘traditional’ sectors, such as the food industry (184). He chose that very industry in order to illustrate the functioning of RDPs in the cultural/creative industries (Cooke 2011). In the same article, the author explores one interesting example of RDPs organized around a strong territorial identity. The Rogaland-Stavanger Culinary Innovation Platform, which has managed to make a rather peripheral Norwegian region leader on a global market, thanks to a complex network of interactions organized around traditional agricultural production. Overall, Cooke pleads for a “reevaluation of the cultural-creative aspect in regard to the quality of life enjoyed by city populations that increasingly value authenticity over the generic and forge close relationships, especially around cuisine and the culinary arts, with neighboring rural areas” (ibid). Rural–urban relationships can offer innovative solutions adapted to global market requirements, since cultural heritage in the culinary sector mainly lies in rural settings.

The present work aims at enriching the existing literature, mainly based on descriptive examples of successful cases (see Cooke 2007, 2011; Lazzarotti et al. 2010), with some consistent empirical data. Consequently, this

paper has a more ‘interactionist’ approach, aiming at capturing the subjectivity of actors and the rationale of their actions. Actually, since RDP literature insists on the importance of *embeddedness*, exploring the sector from *within* makes more sense than describing it from *above*. In order to do so, qualitative methods are mainly used because they are more flexible and therefore more suitable to capture the complexity of the interactions occurring in the RDP’s network. The material for this study has been collected between June and July 2010. A review of literature specific to Lyon’s gastronomy sector (Bing and Hooge 2007; Grand Lyon 2007; Anaf-Grisard and Borel 2010), of relevant grey literature and websites has been carried out in order to get a precise picture of the sector and identify relevant stakeholders (summed up in “*Analytical framework and methodology*”). This analysis was refined by a first set of two interviews (interview 1 and 2) with local scholars who also helped us to frame the questionnaires. Once the relevant agents identified and selected, a second series of seven interviews with chefs (interviews 7, 8 and 9), managers (interview 5), members of institutions (interview 6), associations (interview 3) and consultancies (interview 4) were held. These exchanges were semi-guided, using the principal features of a RDP functioning mentioned above (learning, networking, leadership and visionary capabilities plus the governance aspect) as a backbone structure. The same hypothesis was used to frame the survey administered to fifteen chefs of Lyon, all members of the *Association des Toques Blanches*. Chefs were surveyed because they bear a leading role in the gastronomy sector, at the core of product and managerial innovations (Rao et al. 2003). The number of chefs studied ($n = 15$) can seem quite low. Nevertheless, it has to be considered in the context of a relatively small total population (of gastronomic chefs) and as a tool complementing the information gathered by the three in-depth interviews. The goal was to evaluate the influence of their commitment to a common cultural identity on their level of participation to the RDP. Given the importance of face to face contacts, the frequency of their interactions with peers and selected institution was analyzed, and the participants were also asked to evaluate subjectively the importance these meetings had for them.

Case study analysis

Stakeholder analysis

Besides the *Toques Blanches*, numerous institutional actors participate in the gastronomy RDP in Lyon. One of the most significant is undoubtedly the *Institut Paul Bocuse*, created by the world famous chef Paul Bocuse. This institute has a double objective: offering a curriculum competitive at the global level (especially vis-à-vis the almost neighbouring *Ecole de Lausanne*) in order to

provide Lyon and France with competent chefs, waiters and managers. The second mission revolves around a research centre situated on the same site of Ecully, within Lyon's metropolitan area. Its main activities include regular collaborations with local and national firms in order to perform research in agro-food related domains. Given the importance of Paul Bocuse for the city, his *Institut* is one of the central actors of the sector. It is to be noticed that the initial push to the creation of the *Institut* was given by then Culture Minister Jack Lang, with the claimed objective of playing on France's competitive advantage in gastronomy (interview 2).

At the administrative level, the metropolitan government (Grand Lyon) has certainly taken the lead in terms of initiatives and network building. It has launched the *Délice Network*, gathering fifteen cities all around the world (mainly Europeans) around gastronomy. This association organizes public events (like picnics in collaboration with chefs), chef meetings and student exchanges. The regional government (formerly *Rhône-Alpes*, now *Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes*) also tries to institutionalize some initiatives since it has competencies in both agricultural and economical domains. It is currently setting up meetings in order to organize actors together for the creation of a "gastronomy cluster" in the region, following the model of the national *Pôles de compétitivité*. However, this initiative is still a project with only limited chances to be completed (interviews 1 and 2). According to a majority of interviewed actors (interviews 2, 4, 6, 7, 8), the chamber of commerce has a very limited role in the gastronomy sector, in spite of its competencies in hosting and catering. It has nevertheless contributed to the creation of *R3AP*, an association gathering all the regional *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (a French quality label based on a geographical situation in the agro-food industry). The length of this list of institutional actors tells us the governance of Lyon's gastronomy sector is still far from being unified even though efforts in this sense are being made. At the individual level, some chefs and restaurant managers, because of their strong personalities and very influent businesses, are powerful actors of the sector. Paul Bocuse is of course the first of them, with his fifty million euro business including nine restaurants in Lyon and nine overseas (including seven in Japan).⁸ Following the leadership of Paul Bocuse, tripled starred Michelin chefs developed new sources of revenue for high cuisine. Even if this industry carries an image of prestigious and lucrative activity, the requirements imposed by the Michelin Guide in terms of service quality reduce the benefit of such restaurants to almost nothing (interview 5 and Nlemvo and Surlemont 2008).

Bocuse founded his first *brasserie* in Lyon in 1994 (*Le Nord*), which allowed him to decline his cuisine in a more affordable (for the clients) and more lucrative (for him) formula, operating a sort of 'democratisation' of his cuisine. This innovation was made possible by the existence of a good connection between Bocuse and local producers, enabling him to keep a high level of quality (the contrary would have been detrimental to his image of *grand chef*) but in the meantime lowering the costs by playing on the supply chain (interview 4). The most famous chef after Bocuse probably is Georges Blanc (six restaurants in the *Région Rhône-Alpes* besides his three Michelin Star place). The *Communauté du goût* ("taste community") has been created a few years ago with the explicit motivation of bringing producers in the city center to foster the territorial link existing between Lyon and its 'hinterland'.⁹

Territorial identity as a common playground: key factors

In the panel studied, 73% of the chefs shared a "very strong" or "strong" sense of belonging to Lyon's culinary tradition. Moreover, 67% of them considered that this cultural heritage facilitated their relationships with producers and enabled them to develop innovative solutions with them. This strong sense of belonging made possible the creation of the aforementioned *Association des Toques Blanches*, an extremely rare form of cooperation in the highly competitive of "*Grande Cuisine milieu*". In Lyon, over 130 chefs already are members and meet once a month to share recipes, experience and management techniques (interview 8). The association also connects chefs with producers (mainly local). Membership is open to all chefs of the Region Rhône-Alpes and the entrance is not conditioned to the practice of *Cuisine Lyonnaise*. Yet, "virtually every member has two or three local specialties on their menu" (*ibid*). This fact of the matter is also quite exceptional, knowing the aversion of *Grands Chefs* for traditional dishes in a context dominated by *nouvelle cuisine* since the 1970s (Rao et al. 2003). On a broader perspective, feeling of belonging to the *tradition lyonnaise* is high in the gastronomy sector, both for *Grande Cuisine* and more affordable ones (interview 3). This cultural background also acts as a common playground, which can in turn favour the integration of new chefs: "at first, I could only feel competition from my peers, but then I got to know some of them by meeting them in markets and developed strong ties with them. They really helped me out". This reveals the experience of a young chef of Lebanese origins, recently Michelin Star and member of the *Toques Blanches* (interview 9). Whereas chefs are linked with quality producers using non-intensive techniques,

⁸ *Le progrès*, 20/07/2010, p. 6.

⁹ <http://www.communautedugout.com/>.

they are not very keen on using industrial food or associating their image to its elaboration. 76% of the surveyed chefs confess having very rare or no interaction with the local food industry.

Traditional identity can be seen as a very fertile ground for the conceptualized one, fostering as well the “visionary capability”, one of the pillars of RDP development. For instance, 80% of the chefs surveyed show a “very strong” or “strong” interest in the development of the gastronomy sector as a whole. Consequently, even if a “shared vision” (Lazeretti et al. 2010) is not discussed, the preconditions for its development seem to be met. Another source of identity conceptualization is to be found outside Lyon, as it seems easier to achieve a coherent and homogenous conceptualized identity when dealing with external partners. “Whatever their differences here, chefs are always enthusiastic and united when they are in Lyon’s delegation with us abroad” stated an interviewed working for the *Delice Network* (interview 6). The *Toques Blanches du Monde*, connecting chefs from Lyon with French peers working all over the world plays a similar role, since “interacting with foreign based chefs makes local ones aware that what unites them overtakes what differentiates them” (interview 8).¹⁰ Following the same logic, activities external to gastronomy can foster the existing links and contribute to the gathering of chefs around a conceptualized identity. For example, when asked to describe what kind of activities they were doing with the *Toques Blanches*, three chefs mentioned “blood donation” and two of them “presentations in schools”. For instance, the original associational model proposed by the *Association des Toques Blanches* was extended to French chefs working abroad by chef Christophe Marguin, who created the *Toques Blanches du Monde* with success (interviews 5 and 8). The latter was created at the occasion of an event illustrating Lyon’s unusual ability to develop cooperation between institutions and actors of the gastronomy sector, and its high degree of expertise in putting together events, the *Sirah* (Anaf-Grisard and Borel 2010). This event is organized by the *Grand Lyon* every 2 years and it represents the world’s most important fair for the catering and hostelling industries. It gathers 10,000 chefs from all around the world and attracted in 2009 about 150,000 visitors.¹¹ Fully integrated in the exhibition, the attribution of the *Bocuse d’Or* is certainly the most important event of culinary life (Cooke 2011,

compared it with the Oscar ceremony). This kind of event is at the crossroads between two domains in which Lyon has a global reputation: *grande cuisine* and event setting (interview 3). Lyon is recognized to be a very dynamic city in terms of governance and policy innovation (interview 1), it has gained expertise in the organization of large events such as a worldwide renowned contemporary art fair (*Biennales de Lyon*) or transforming traditional celebrations in internationally attractive events (such as the *Fête des Lumières*). The meeting of these domains of competencies was probably made possible by the existence of a common cultural background. Firstly, because it helps to “bring together actors and set up a common language between them” (interview 1), but also because this territorial asset needs an advanced form of collective action to be taped and consequently gives a strong incentive to actors to cooperate.

Limitations

Most of the people working in the sector display a high level of consideration for Lyon’s culinary tradition. However, some consider it only as a branding tool. Managers of luxury hotels for instance seem to envision gastronomy just as being an extra item in the package they want to offer to their clients (interview 5 and survey). However, their discourse does not exactly match the reality. Actually, their performance is also linked to the territory’s, as they underline in the sentence “there are three things important in the *restauration* sector: the location, the location and... the location (*l’emplacement*)”.¹² These managers obviously refer in a first time to the ‘landscape’ quality of the site, yet this remark implies that their activities are strongly embedded in the territory. They probably are aware that they would benefit from the development of the sector as a whole but not willing to personally invest for it. This kind of freeriding approach can slow down the development of the RDP since it creates tensions between actors (interview 6), but it is not the main obstacle to its development. A common drawback of strong identities is the mechanical division appearing between insiders and outsiders. For instance, current difficulties of the regional government to create a gastronomy “cluster” could be rooted in the parallel evolution of multiple pre-existing networks: “All the actors are already intricately linked with each other, which makes it very difficult when it comes to creating new forms of cooperation” (interview 2). Actually, the cluster project gathers seventeen institutional and private actors that all have their internal logic. For instance, the

¹⁰ Boschma and Iammarino (2009) also noticed that, in order to make them economically valuable, it was required to “specify the nature” (305) of extraregional linkages, that is, putting them in a sort of framework, which is precisely the activity of the *Delice network* and the *Toques Blanches du Monde*.

¹¹ Data available on *Sirha* 2009 final report. The report is available from the authors upon request.

¹² Jean Fleury, director of *Brasseries Bocuse*, in *Le progrès*, see (Bing and Hooge 2007). This sentence seems to be a kind of motto for restaurant and hotel managers since the interview 5 used the exact same words during our meeting.

producers' association *R3AP* is not keen on exchanging knowledge with other partners (interview 5). Some of them put into question its very existence, wondering "where does the money go". The notion of time is besides central to the RDP analysis, since "A development platform is connected with the past trajectories, but the concept describes the future potential of the platform" (Harmaakorpi 2006:1090). In order to achieve the transition from these past trajectories to a functioning platform, a "conceptualisation" of the regional innovative system is necessary (ibid:1092). However, reaching this second step is far from being an easy task. The new identity has to meet a lot of potentially contradictory requirements. For instance, it has to be ambitious but not disconnected from reality; otherwise actors would describe it as being mere communication (Aranguren et al. 2010). In Lyon's case, attempts have been made to gather people around the identity of "gastronomy capital" (Grand Lyon 2007). However, adhesion to this image is not widespread. Students from the *Institut Paul Bocuse* recently wrote a bachelor dissertation based on interviews (Anaf-Grisard and Borel 2010) around the situation of Lyon in the global gastronomy market. The majority of the people they interviewed was very doubtful of Lyon's capacity to compete for the title of "gastronomy capital" with metropolis such as Paris, New York City or Tokyo, first because of agglomeration effects, and then because these cities have complex communication budgets. This observation was reinforced by the interviews carried out (interviews 3, 5 and 8) but also by the questionnaires. The panel of chefs seem far less attached to the 'conceptualized' identity (Lyon as a 'gastronomy capital') than to the traditional.

Conclusive remarks

The contribution to Lyon's constructed advantage from the gastronomy sector is double: first, it increases its international visibility and helps attract Foreign Direct Investments (interview 2), then, at a time where local governments are frenetically looking for innovative governance modes, this confers to Lyon a pioneer image in the domain (interview 6). This last point is of a crucial economic importance as well, since this kind of expertise can be used in consultancy works. For instance, through the *Délice Network*, other cities use Lyon's experience to build up their own chef contests inspired by the *Bocuse d'Or* or set up events using dynamics between local institutions and chefs (ibid). It is not a coincidence if Lyon has been designed as the leader of the network. Besides the positive image this position conveys and its beneficial effect on Lyon's consultancies attractiveness (interview 4), the city benefits from these exchanges by building what we could compare to "global pipelines" that is

translocal connections, which have been proved to play a crucial role in avoiding lock-ins and enriching the spectrum of activity by bringing more related variety (Bathelt et al. 2004). As an interviewee underlined, "a lot of them already have contacts with foreign chefs, but without us, they would not have such diverse interactions in the country they visit" (interview 6). This network reduces uncertainty for Lyon-based chefs, since they are used to collaborate with the *Grand Lyon*. Both the *Délice Network* and the *Toques Blanches du Monde* help reduce the risk for chefs and agro-food industry professionals to engage in more open and interactive collaboration with peers. Connections between producers and chefs on one side and chefs and institutions on the other already exist and are functioning efficiently, producing many innovations that help Lyon to stay globally competitive. These working networks could be further developed, for instance via a more systematic link between chefs and producers. One could for instance envision a real cooperation between the *Association des Toques Blanches* and *R3AP*, the producers' association. In order to achieve a good coordination, it is necessary that a strong leadership emerge in the domain. One could think of a multifocal leadership, building on existing legitimacies in order to be as inclusive as possible. Because it already has successfully proven its ability to achieve ambitious project involving very different actors, the metropolitan authority appears to be the more qualified for this task. The *Grand Lyon* could foster the emulation around gastronomy in Lyon and very positively contribute to the construction of Lyon's competitive advantage. Moreover, it is also in charge of the animation of the *Délice Network*, which constitutes both an opportunity to build global pipelines and a way to comfort the image of the city as a leader in gastronomy and its governance. Cultural heritage and identity are complex notions that encompass a wide plurality of realities. The examples provided by the literature and the case studied in this paper, make a strong case for arguing that territorial identity is an economically valuable territorial asset, especially when it is tightly linked not only with cultural industries, but also with creative ones (as it is the case for the culinary sector). This resource is intrinsic to each territory and this uniqueness makes it a solid base to build a constructed advantage on. French scholars' idea of "*patrimoine*" referring both to tradition and cultural heritage perfectly translates this idea. Moreover, this "symbolic capital" (Lazzeretti et al. 2010) acts as a form of territorial rent that not only benefits some emblematic regional production, but also spread its quality and authenticity image all over the territory (what Pecqueur 2001 called the "bundle hypothesis"). This constitutes a strong incentive for related industries to cooperate and exploit the potentialities of

the territory. Additionally, since they share a common cultural heritage, economic agents show a certain level of cognitive proximity that facilitates their relationships. In the study of Lyon's gastronomy sector, significant levels of correlation are visible between the important chefs attached to tradition and their level of participation within the identified RDP. Combined with geographical proximity, this leads them to have more frequent informal contacts with each other and exchange valuable tacit knowledge. Both of these factors explain the emergence of spontaneous networks in Lyon, organized firstly around particular professions (chefs, producers) but also between related sectors. These organizational forms have sometimes even triggered the formation of solid institutions (like the *Association des Toques Blanches*) leading to sustainable institutional innovation. What is more, by bringing together related sectors, they have enabled a series of product innovation, contributing to the affirmation of the city's competitive advantage. However, further developments of the RDP and the achievement of a sustainable constructed advantage require an advanced form of collective action. Observations based on Lyon's case and other empirical studies found in the literature have proved that this second phase of a RDP's building is far from being straightforward. Even if belonging to a certain tradition can bring actors around the same table and facilitate the emergence of spontaneous networks, a re-composition of the identity is always necessary in order to turn these networks into a more sustainable web of relationships. Then, the pre-existing links can constitute a base for the constructed advantage, but they can also slow down the process because of their inertia. On a broader perspective, RDP analysis technique is still in development but it constitutes a promising tool for policymakers and scholars and these preliminary results call for further empirical research. Qualitative techniques have been widely used in the literature, but mainly in a descriptive way. Therefore, this field would need to further explore actors' subjectivity and not neglect quantitative techniques.

Abbreviations

RDP: regional development platform; GDP: gross domestic product.

Authors' contributions

These paper is the result of a collective research activity undertaken by the two authors. The final written version of the first two sections can be attributed to LT, the third and the fourth to J-BG. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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