International Conference oriGIn / Origen España at the EUIPO headquarters
Development of Geographical Indications:
Review of 20 Years of Cooperation and Future Prospects.
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The conference highlighted a conviction that is now widely shared: **geographical indications (GIs) are no longer merely legal instruments for protecting product names, but genuine tools for economic, social, territorial and environmental development.** Bringing together more than 600 participants from all over the world, it underlined the decisive role of international cooperation in supporting the creation, management and promotion of GIs.

From the opening speeches, the Executive Director of the EUIPO, João Negrão, stressed the growing importance of GIs in the Office's activities. Since 2018, the Office has been working with the European Commission on the preliminary examination of applications for registration of agricultural, wine and spirit GIs and has already assessed more than 2,000 applications. The creation of the GI View database and the introduction of the European system for craft and industrial GIs, managed by the EUIPO, illustrate this growing role. Over a hundred applications have already been filed under this new scheme, a sign of increasing interest from producers and territories. Finally, in partnership with the Commission, the EUIPO works to promote and strengthen GI systems in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

One message came up repeatedly throughout the discussions: **registering a GI is only a starting point**. As oriGIn President Riccardo Deserti pointed out, a GI only has value if it is alive, credible and a driver of development. Control systems, collective governance and consumer trust are essential elements. Without them, a GI risks remaining a mere administrative recognition.

Several speakers emphasised the contribution of GIs to sustainability. In Spain, they are presented as a major tool for territorial cohesion in the face of rural depopulation. They help maintain jobs, enhance local know-how and preserve natural and cultural resources. Participants also stressed that tradition and innovation are not contradictory. A tradition is often the result of past innovations and must continue to evolve to meet market expectations, climate change and the needs of new generations.

The economic impacts of GIs were central to the debates. Paolo De Castro, former Italian Minister of Agriculture and former Member of the European Parliament, recalled their contribution to value creation and to rebalancing the value chain in favour of producers. In many regions of the world, GI products command higher prices than standard products. Several examples illustrated this capacity to generate value: Panama coffee, whose price paid to producers has increased sixteenfold, Kampot pepper in Cambodia, and many Brazilian coffees now recognised for their origin and quality.

The past twenty years have seen a spectacular expansion of the GI movement. The number of countries involved has grown from fewer than twenty to more than one hundred, and around 20,000 GIs are now registered worldwide. This progress is largely attributed to international cooperation. CIRAD, AFD, WIPO, the EUIPO, the European Commission, national intellectual property offices and producer organisations have all helped to spread the necessary skills, methods and funding.

The experience of many countries shows that the success of a GI project depends first and foremost on the mobilisation of producers. Whether it is the Steelpan of Trinidad and Tobago, olive oils from Montenegro, raspberries from Serbia or craft products from Mexico, the same success factors emerge: a structured producer group, a shared vision, local leadership and ownership of the project by the producers themselves. Speakers unanimously stressed that projects imposed from outside rarely work.

The quality of controls and traceability were also identified as priorities. Many countries are investing in certification and traceability systems to guarantee product compliance and strengthen consumer trust. Brazil, in particular, is experimenting with advanced digital tools, including blockchain, to track products from producer to market.

Another major theme was marketing. Many speakers pointed out that a GI does not automatically create value. **Once registered, it must be promoted, explained and sold**. Communication, marketing, packaging, tourism and links with gastronomy are key levers. The Thai examples show the importance of involving restaurants, cooking schools, chambers of commerce and large-scale retail in promoting GI products. In several countries, **rural tourism** or gastronomic tourism is now regarded as a natural partner of GIs.

Consumer awareness emerged as a universal challenge. Many speakers noted that the public does not always understand why a GI product is more expensive than a standard product. **It is therefore essential to tell the product's story, to explain its origin, its territorial roots, the know-how it draws on and the benefits it generates for local communities.**

The debates also addressed the limits and difficulties of the model. Climate change is already forcing several sectors to adapt their product specifications. The decline in official development assistance creates uncertainty about project funding. Several speakers also warned about the phenomenon of "dormant GIs": indications that are registered but little used, owing to a lack of governance, commercial strategy or producer involvement. The capture of value by a small number of actors and the risk of excluding certain producers were also identified as points of concern.

As regards craft and industrial GIs, the main challenge today appears to be awareness. In many countries, producers are still unaware of the system or do not see its benefits. The experiences of Laos, Chile, Spain, Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago show that preliminary work on awareness-raising, building producer groups and sometimes using collective marks is often necessary before a registration procedure can be initiated.

Finally, participants placed strong emphasis on the lessons learned from failures. **A common mistake is to prioritise the number of registered GIs over their economic viability**. Several speakers acknowledged that they had sometimes tried to move too fast. The consensus is clear: a GI should not be seen as an end in itself, but as **the beginning of a long-term process combining collective governance, credible controls, commercial strategy and transmission to younger generations.**

In conclusion, the conference confirmed a profound shift in how geographical indications are perceived. They now appear as comprehensive tools for territorial development, heritage preservation, value creation and international cooperation. Their success does not depend primarily on legal registration, but on their ability to sustainably improve producers' incomes, meet consumer expectations and bring together all the stakeholders of a territory around a collective project.

From this perspective, it is essential that GIs are able to cooperate with one another to share practical experience, particularly on product specifications and controls, but not only.

Annex: some examples cited during the two days

Thailand: A development model built on three pillars
Thailand has **269 registered products**, covering both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. The country has succeeded in turning intellectual property into a genuine tool for economic and commercial development, thanks to a structured strategy and the support of international cooperation.

- **The three-pillar strategy:** The Thai model is based on a comprehensive approach: rigorous product registration, strict quality control (including support for traceability to reassure consumers) and a strong focus on promotion and marketing.
- **Support for market access:** The Intellectual Property Office directly helps producers enter large-scale retail channels, which was not previously the case.
- **Raising awareness in the local ecosystem:** The country actively involves Chambers of Commerce and Industry to stimulate local development. In addition, targeted actions are carried out with culinary training centres and restaurants to integrate GI products into gastronomy.

Trinidad and Tobago: Structuring a non-agricultural GI (the Steelpan)
The Trinidad and Tobago initiative illustrates the diversification of GIs towards industrial and craft products through the example of the **Steelpan**, the only musical instrument invented in the 20th century, made from recycled oil drums.

- **The co-development method:** To professionalise its approach, the country benefited from strategic international collaboration, notably with the French Champagne sector. This partnership made it possible to formalise rigorous product specifications.
- **The challenge of bringing people together:** The main difficulty of this initiative lay in governance, namely succeeding in bringing together and uniting local artisans and producers around a common project and product.
- **Consumer impact:** The GI now provides a guarantee of quality and historical authenticity, turning traditional know-how into a commercial assurance for the buyer.

France: A network of inter-office experts and economic diplomacy
France, through the **INPI (French National Institute of Industrial Property)**, is deploying a bilateral and inter-office international cooperation strategy (notably with the EUIPO) to secure recognition of its products abroad.

- **Deploying experts internationally:** The INPI relies on a network of expert advisers based in strategic locations worldwide (Türkiye, Brazil, China, United States). They work in close synergy with local authorities and the agricultural attachés of embassies.
- **Targeted institutional partnerships:** France conducts joint actions (seminars, webinars) with the intellectual property offices of partner countries, such as Morocco. Cooperation projects involving INAO and the Ministry of Agriculture have also been developed with Mexico.
- **Integrating craft GIs:** Following changes in EU legislation, France has already submitted 25 non-food GI applications to the EUIPO, 23 of which have been registered.

Italy: GIs as a vehicle for international cooperation in Africa

The Italian government uses its long-standing expertise in geographical indications as a **lever for public policy and international cooperation**, with a particular focus on the African continent and the Mediterranean basin.

- **The Mediterranean project:** Italy is currently supporting 82 products awaiting recognition across the Mediterranean region.
- **The Tunisian example:** In Tunisia, the Italian approach stands out for its cross-cutting vision, in which tourism stakeholders are fully integrated into governance so that they become active promoters of GI products.
- **Creating rural value:** This initiative demonstrates that a GI not only protects the product but also rebalances the value chain directly in favour of rural communities.

Cambodia: Access to international markets through European funding

Cambodia has benefited from long-term cooperation to promote its local products, notably through the flagship example of **Kampot Pepper**.

- **The lever of external funding:** The French Development Agency (AFD) has become a central player, funding GI development efforts to the tune of €27 million per year.
- **International recognition:** This project was the first European Union funding to enable a local product to obtain official recognition on the European market.
- **Commercial impact:** This cooperation helped structure the sector and significantly increase Cambodia's exports and international market share.

Regional focus: Africa (ARIPO)

Although it operates on a continental scale, the action carried out with the **ARIPO (African Regional Intellectual Property Organization)** and funded by the European Commission deserves to be highlighted for its structural dimension:

- **Legal support:** The cooperation helped strengthen the legislative framework and assist in drafting regulations for member countries.
- **Strategic documents:** Two major advances were formalised: the *Africa GI Strategy* and the creation of a *free trade area* among ARIPO member countries, ensuring a harmonised and inclusive framework for producers.