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As emphasized by a number of anthropologists (Douglas, 1986, Bérard et Marchenay, 2004 Barham, 2003) and economic historians (Milgrom et al. 1990, Greif 1993, Stanziani, 2012), the reference to the geographical names and locations has always been since immemorial ancient time part of human heritage and a support for the development of impersonal trade worldwide. More recently, in the second part of the XXth century, the recognition of Geographical Indications as formal Intellectual Property Rights have been subject to a number of sharp economic and political debates and negotiations at the international level, especially between the US and the EU (Chen, 1997, Lorvellec, 1997, Josling, 2006, Barham and Sylvander, 2009, 2011). In an early contribution, Allaire (2013) was suggesting the role of European legislation on Geographical Indications as a mean to solve social dilemma associated to commons and as market institutional infrastructure.

In this communication, we extend the analysis, using the pioneering work of Hess & Ostrom (2003, 2006), to understand the institutional and political dynamics at stake that are currently involved for its entitlement as a Global Knowledge Commons. Knowledge is here defined as a shared resource. With the globalization of trade, the increasing “enclosure” of the global information commons has been observed and subject to severe critics. Multiple forces are vying for capture and restriction of traditionally available knowledge: corporation versus indigenous people, government versus citizens, among others (Hess and Ostrom, 2003, 2007). In the literature, a number of research have also emphasized role of contractual registries in the rise and protection of property rights (Arrunada 2012).

First created in a limited number of European countries, such as France or Italy, and extended later in the 1990s under the European regulatory regime (Reg 2081/92 et 2082/92), the recent rapid adoption of dedicated legislations on Geographical Indications by a growing number of countries in the South open new spaces for their recognition as Global Knowledge Commons (Vandecandelaere et al. 2009, Marie-Vivien 2012). An analysis of the recent discussions between the US and the EU surrounding the status of GI within the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP or TAFTA) provides some evidence about a possible shift in interpretation.

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After giving an overview of the different line of arguments in the past academic literature, and especially by contrasting three lines, one defining GI as part of the *public domain* (Josling, 2006), another defining GI as *public goods* (Barham and Sylvander, 2009), and the other defining GI as a *club good* (Torre, 2006), a fourth line of justification is proposed in this communication where geographical indications are defined as *knowledge commons* (Hess and Ostrom, 2003, 2007). Our analysis is based on a survey of the recent negotiations and discursive strategies surrounding GI's in the TTIP negotiations between the EU and the US, highlighting some of the economic and social dilemma at stake, and the key role of global polycentric governance, and especially the action of international inter-governmental organizations, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World intellectual property organization (WIPO), the United Nations (UN) and the FAO (Food and Agriculture organization) as institutional drivers of the diffusion of geographical indications worldwide during the last decade.

Three specific dimensions are emphasized here. First, the discussions surrounding the concept of *terroir*, linking geographical and human factors in the definition of dedicated quality attributes of food products and the need for science-based evidence as required by WTO rules which has stimulated the development of research in this area. A number of studies explored how geographical indications could be used to protect indigenous farmers and traditional knowledge (Downes, 2000), but also highlighted some possible negative side effects for small local communities when implemented at a very large scale (Belletti et al. 2015). The second key issue arose, in one hand, from the use or appropriation of geographical names with strong reputation among consumers by individual private firms (especially in the US), and on the other hand, the opposition between the use of regular trade mark law (used in the US) and the design and access to *sui generis* registration system, as proposed by the EU legislation (O'Connor, 2004). In the case of geographical indications, the design of *sui generis* registration system aims at facilitating mutual recognition and protection of registered geographical indication and reducing transaction costs. Last key issue is related to the following point. While legal rules for the recognition and protection of GI's are set at nation-state level, one of the key issues for the use of GI's as a support for local economic development is related to the local collective governance and capability building, in a similar was as the one described by Ostrom (1990) in the case of natural resource commons.