

Adapting GI regulation to the pluralistic interpretations of origin quality

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AOCs, a “heritage” protection

« According to M. Jenouvrier’s report, denominations of origin would be the collective property of the vintners of the denomination area. It is more accurate to say that they belong to national heritage. Therefore the State has the same rights and duties regarding them than regarding certain historical sites or monuments for instance, protected by a specific legislation. » (Capus, 1947) : 37

AOCs protect terroir quality as quality issuing from:

“a delimited geographical space in which a human community builds through time a collective understanding of production based on a system of interactions between a physical and biological environment and a set of human factors”. (UNESCO’s definition)

What kind of heritage good is a terroir quality product ?

A terroir crisis in French wine AOCs

- In the 2000's, AOC start to reject well-known, quality-dedicated vintners for « terroir non-typical production »
- Rejected vintners answer: « the agreement jury members have lost idea of terroir quality »

A divergence in terroir quality understanding

A terroir crisis in French wine AOCs

Side 1

- « Dangerous shifts » in terroir understanding : Terroir quality is becoming artificial
 - Technical shift: the use of new vine-growing and wine-making practices are concealing terroir expression
 - Commercial shift: Adaptation to « demand » is replacing terroir quality conceived as a human and nature notion built through time
 - Technico-commercial shift: In well-known AOCs high quality production is shifting to « wine-maker wines » thanks to technology, to please to the international critique, leaving aside any notion of « terroir »

→ Terroir has been lost ; we vintners need to search for it
- There is a need for a reform
 - Practices must be better controlled to ensure terroir expression
 - Typicity must be opened
- Attention:
 - Good terroir friendly practices can lead to oxidized wines
 - Sulfite less wines can referment... and loose the tiny fragile terroir expression

→ AOC typicity control must ensure terroir authenticity but in a very open manner. Only main defects must be checked out.

AOC need to come back to terroir authenticity

A terroir crisis in French wine AOCs

Side 2

- AOCs quality identity is endangered
 - AOCs production is adapting to a changing world
 - But this adaptation induces a loss of AOCs identity
- There is a need for a reform
 - To strengthen AOC identity
 - Innovation must be framed
 - Approval tasting is required to control and guarantee the AOC identity
 - Approval tasting has to be improved

AOPs need to better control their resultant quality

Two contrasting views on quality framing

- Side 1: terroir expression has to be reinforced
 - Practices need to respect terroir and terroir expression
 - The **typicity** control must be **vague enough** so as to allow for a rediscovery of the AOC terroir identity
- Side 2: typicity must be better controlled so as to ensure AOC's identity
 - Practices have to allow vintners to produce the expected quality
 - **Typicity** has to be **better defined** and **controlled** so as
 - to make wines **recognizable** by consumers
 - to allow for a precise **conformity test**

Two different viewpoints

on

AOC heritage

Side 1: Terroir and vintner as co-authors of wine quality

- AOC quality is the result achieved by a skilled vintner, aiming at fostering the vineyard field expression in the wine.
- Music analogy
 - Vineyard writes the terroir score → music composer
 - Vintner making terroir quality wine → performer playing the music score
 - Both contribute to music and its quality
 - The performer must respect the composer so as not to adulterate his musical composition.
- The vintner has to respect the vineyard so as not to adulterate its terroir expression
 - Good practices are terroir respectful practice such as environment-friendly practices
- The resulting wine is the result of the vineyard and vintner creativity
 - Both vineyard and vintner are the authors of the AOC quality

Side 2: The vintner as the reproducer of terroir quality

- AOC quality is the result of the good reproduction of a relatively predefined historically achieved quality
- Painting analogy
 - A copyist reproduces a master exemplar
 - The vintner dedicates itself to produce a good copy of the original terroir quality
 - The vineyard provides a specific raw material
 - The resulting quality can and has to be verified to make sure the copy is good enough.

AOC quality as « heritage »?

- Side 1: AOC quality heritage has to be **created**
 - The production quality depends on the quality of the interpretation of the physical terroir (vineyard) by the vintner performer
- ➔ AOC Intellectual property is that of the author over its creation
 - peculiarity: vintner share authorship with his vineyard
- Side 2: AOC quality heritage has to be **reproduced**
 - The quality of the reproduction depends on the similarity of the resulting wine with the original
- ➔ AOC Intellectual property: there is no author of terroir quality left
 - AOC vintners are awarded operating rights on the heritage
 - Vineyards are exclusive supplier of grapes

The 2008 AOP reform

Towards a “better” guarantee for terroir quality

1. Production unit accreditation to guarantee the terroir respectful practices
2. Description of the wines “link to terroir”: what makes the quality of the AOP wines specific
3. A list of criteria making typicity as explicit as possible
 - Allowing for a conformity test of the AOP wines quality

A difficult choice

- Side 2 AOP production as the reproduction of a masterpiece
 - AOP frames innovation and ensures stability
 - AOP may become too conservative and unable to adapt to a changing world
- Side 1 AOP production as a continued reinvention of terroir
 - Maintains capacity for adaptation and renewal
 - Fear of a scattering of the style of the AOP wines over an uncontrolled multitude of heterogeneous interpretations.

The two interpretations are contrasted but mutually supporting

Towards coexistence

- Side 2 reproduction of a masterpiece
 - Quality proof: conformity test performed by a tasting jury
- Side 1 and the continued search and reinvention of terroir
 - Quality proof: critical appreciation (literary price jury)
- coexistence of the 2 terroir quality proofs → Two incompatible tests
 - Coexistence implies adoption of a dual testing proof
 - Quality proof: conformity test
 - Quality proof: critical appreciation (literary price jury)

Both sides unsatisfied

- An accreditation instead of a list of practice specifications
 - Strengthening terroir friendly practices Side 2
 - Generates unnecessary costs for Side 1
- The test of the resultant quality
 - It guarantees terroir quality Side 2
 - *Obstacle* to terroir expression for side 1

Controversy is revived