Abstract

Land of wine tradition, France is the scene of recurrent law proposals suggesting to associate wine with the concept of cultural and gastronomic heritage. Such an institutional validation could have a direct consequence: wine would become a cultural good, probably submitted to “exception culturelle”. Several examples confirm relevance of that topic. Since 2003, a Spanish law states wine and vine are linked together with Spanish culture. So the question has been already decided in Spain: wine is a cultural good there. Further the “gastronomic meal of the French” was registered by the UNESCO in Nov. 2010 into the intangible cultural heritage list. The text dealing with the reasons of the registration underlines wine as a component of the French meal and sanctions explicitly the art of well-drinking and also the relevant marriage between meals and wines as decisive criteria. Moreover, the registration of vineyard landscapes to the same intangible cultural heritage list (e.g. Jurisdiction of Saint-Émilion (France), Alto Douro wine region (Portugal)) emphasises how wine and culture look embedded. Therefore exploring involvements of the recognition of the cultural dimension of wine is not devoid of interest.

If the idea contents immediate and future stakes, it nevertheless evocates a very old past: Noah, the famous patriarch, has legated to us not only the wine, but also a certain conception of heritage. In fact, the Ark event allows seeing heritage as a kind of testimony which the present generation tries to preserve and transmit to future ones. Therefore, after more than seven thousand years, we have to examine the link between wine and cultural heritage and to look for economical, sociological, legal and political stakes of such an association of ideas, in France indeed, but also around the world.

Consequently, determining and carrying out a cultural heritage around wine could be a means to resist to wine globalization by reinforcing identity and differentiation between products. Globalization, leading for some authors to “McDonaldisation”, “cocacolisation” and especially for wines to “parkerisation”, expresses a general trend entailing standardization of products and behaviours. In reaction to globalisation in 2006 French Parliament raised the foie gras to the range of cultural gastronomic French products. The law proposals concerning wine and cited above are based upon the same logic and corroborate -among other things- that today taste is no longer aside from “noble” senses as hearing or sight, but may join the cultural area.

What are the involvements of recognizing to wine a cultural dimension? Why such a statute should be given to wine? Should we assign this statute to all wines without making a distinction or should we institute discrimination between vine products and, in this case, what kind of distinctions would it be? Questions are numerous and domains involved are transverse.

This paper aims to show that the question is not only to honour wine as a cultural good, but to protect a certain kind of wines, say those endowed with a label of origin (appellation d’origine contrôlée). By giving them a cultural dimension, one attaches them to heritage and then protects them from standardized wines. As a matter of fact, business models organising the running of wine production and markets are schematically of two kinds. The first one focuses on wines determined by their type of vines (Cabernet, Merlot, etc.) and come almost indiscriminately from anywhere (California, Australia, Languedoc Region (France) and so on). These wines lack of differentiation. They are produced to a large extent for mass-markets and are available everywhere around the world at relatively low price. They are issued from big wineries targeting rent-seeking and running as industrial factories. Aside from this first model, the second one is based on differentiation both horizontal and vertical, on terroir, on savoir-faire, conveys
identity. Products are typically based on appellation d’origine contrôlée and are essentially issued from the old Europe region.

The stakes are crucial because the emergence and development of the first model is most of the time to the detriment of the second. Therefore attributing a cultural dimension to labelled wines appears as a means of protection and almost a means of survival for menaced species: quality wine.