



The greatest French AOC: A signal of quality for the best wines.

MENIVAL David, Université de REIMS
david.menival@univ-reims.fr

Abstract

The law of the 30th of July of 1935 has created a specific type of French wine: AOC wines. These wines use the notion of *terroir* due to distinguish from the other wines. A *terroir* leans on the natural and human factors and their specificities. This using provides an image of specific quality. Even though this specific quality has not the official aim to provide a higher intrinsic quality, it was created to make a vertical distinction between the AOC wines and the other wines, while it created a horizontal differentiation within the AOC.

In this sense, the AOC is use as signal of quality for the wines which want to maintain a highest quality in comparison with ordinary wines.

However, the question concerns the reality of this role for the best wines. Indeed, the horizontal differentiation prevents to make a hierarchy of quality between the AOC because leaning on the idea of homogenous AOC with only difference on the quantity of the same characteristics. But a vertical differentiation could be created according the notion of specificity coming from *terroir*. To detect those, two complementary steps are necessary. At first, human factors providing weak specificity are detected with a PCA (Principal Components Analysis) which focus on the conditions of production within the vineyard of Burgundy. From this PCA, three groups of AOC can be defined according to the degree of specificity. Secondly, natural factors providing weak specificity are listed through the possibility of fallback position. Finally, three groups of AOC, called weak specificity, standard specificity and high specificity within the AOC wines of burgundy.

Thus, the interest of this vertical differentiation is to detect its impact on the intrinsic quality measured. If the AOC are a good signal of quality, there must have a hierarchy of the intrinsic quality according to the degree of specificity.

To check it, the intrinsic quality of wines can be measured by both experts' rating of Parker and Gilbert & Gaillard after an evacuation of the climatic and the individual behaviours of growers' impacts. Then, the statistical test of Kruskal-Wallis can be used to detect the relation between the degree of specificity and grades of both experts.

The results partly confirm the expectation. There is a relation between the degree of specificity and the expert's ratings but the nature of this relationship is explained by the link between high specificity and the best wines, standard and weak specificity involving almost the same level of intrinsic quality.

Consequently, the AOC can be considered like a good signal of the best wines only when they have a *terroir* with high specificity.

Key word: AOC, Signal of quality, specificity, terroir.