

## **Geopark, a new UNESCO label for cultural landscapes? The example of Beaujolais vineyard.**

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### **Abstract**

The Geopark world network was officially associated with the UNESCO label as of the end of 2015. It highlights areas of exceptional geological heritage and allows us to become more familiar with and understand our worldwide natural heritage. Actions for appreciation, promotion and conservation are undertaken through educational and tourism programmes at the regional level that combine elements of natural and cultural heritage. This article examines the case of the candidacy of Beaujolais in France, a region that is known mainly for its history and its wine landscapes, since it appears to promote elements for the Geopark that are linked to cultural landscapes, above and beyond the merely geological heritage. It is compared with two other locations already recognised as Geoparks (Bauges in France and El Bages in Spain), in order to outline an answer to the question as to whether Geopark is a label that contributes to the recognition of cultural landscapes, and in particular wine landscapes, within the context of UNESCO.

**Keywords:** *Geopark, Vineyard, Cultural landscape, UNESCO, Territory, Tourism*

### **Introduction**

Since 2014 I have been carrying out a comparative study of the vineyards of Beaujolais in France and El Penedès in Spain, examining their respective relationships with the cities of Lyon and Barcelona and most specifically with regard to tourism. Within that framework I have looked into the different labels and initiatives allowing recognition of wine landscapes by the local population and outsiders and their promotion for tourism. In the case of Beaujolais, an initiative for registration under the Geopark label particularly caught my attention, since although the discourse focuses on the geological and therefore natural heritage, it includes a substantial component of legacies of cultural landscapes and pursues actions for recognition of vineyards as cultural landscape. This leads to certain questions: why was the choice made for registration under the Geopark label? How does that initiative

articulate locally the “natural” and “cultural” elements? Is this an initiative specific to this region, or do other Geoparks share this feature? Is this a trend that may spread?

Given my specialisation in the area of winegrowing as a doctoral candidate (since 2014) and as a landscape professional (since 2003), I will focus my study on the wine cultural landscape, which is type of cultural landscape that has long been recognised by UNESCO (ten sites have been entered since 1999 on the list of world heritage sites defined in whole or in part as wine landscapes).

### **Methodology**

Within the context of work on the doctorate, semi-structured interviews were made with professionals in the wine and tourist industries and with government officers in the Beaujolais region beginning in 2015. Those interviews supplied information on the history of the initiative for Geopark registration and on the local impact of that undertaking. In addition, careful examination of the list of existing Geoparks in France and Spain pinpointed several comparable examples of sites including vineyards. The Bauges Geopark, lying within the Bauges Nature Reserve, is located in the same French administrative region as Beaujolais (Rhône Alpes Auvergne), and its management team has exchanged information and advice with the Beaujolais team. A visit to the Bauges vineyards in Savoie and interviews with the Bauges Geopark facilitator and five other local players (wine industry, wine museum, landscape professional in charge of a local scheme) were carried out March-April 2016 to define the role of the wine industry in the communications and activities of the Geopark and the integration of the Geopark works in professional winegrowing activities and local initiatives for management of wine landscapes or their promotion for tourism.

Few Geopark sites around the world include vineyards. In Spain, the Central Catalonia Geopark is located in the Catalan region of Bages, known for its D.O. Bages designated origin. Its website includes a list of wineries and recommended itineraries for gastronomy and tourism. The winery offering the largest number of oeno-tourist possibilities was contacted by telephone and the full range of activities proposed by the Geopark was studied to detect the existence of shared interests. The discourse was compared with the discourse presented through the communications made by the Bauges and Beaujolais sites to discern their differences.

## Geoparks: A Brief Introduction

“Global Geoparks are territories with a geological heritage of international significance that implement strategies for holistic heritage management, promotion and sustainable development that are innovative, integrated, and respectful of local traditions and desires.”

“(…) demonstrating that geodiversity is the foundation of all ecosystems and the basis of human interaction with the landscape”

Stonehammer Declaration, Sept. 2014 ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org), 2014)

There are 120 Geoparks in 33 different countries. They are “unified” (but not necessarily contiguous) geographic spaces comprising sites that may be visited by the public (lookouts, grottos, cliffs ...). They are often natural monuments already known locally. The ensemble is an educational tool promoted by UNESCO’s Department of Life and Earth Sciences since 2001 (International Geoscience Programme), and the international network has existed since 2004. The UNESCO site label was officially added as of the end of 2015 and it confirms the quality of these spaces and their management. That management focuses mainly on distribution of access to visitable sites and the associated educational efforts. However, since geological heritage is essentially located underground, constraints for conservation are less demanding than those for a landscape, where harmony is subject to visual constraints that are more complicated to deal with. Through its official support, UNESCO confers a further dimension on these sites, as it states on its web page: “While a UNESCO Global Geopark must demonstrate geological heritage of international significance, the purpose of a UNESCO Global Geopark is to explore, develop and celebrate the links between that geological heritage and all other aspects of the area’s natural, cultural and intangible heritages.” ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org))

## Cultural Wine Landscapes

Cultural landscapes are defined and specified in Article 47 and Annex 3, Article 10, of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2005 version): “47. Cultural landscapes are cultural properties and represent the ‘combined works of nature and of man’ designated in Article 1 of the Convention. (...)”

The category of cultural landscapes was added to the list of world heritage sites in 1992. Starting in 2001, since 3 sites including wine landscapes were already registered, a focus group with the organisation ICOMOS studied the specific characteristics of such landscapes, which are “organically evolved”, falling within the second category of cultural landscapes. A thematic study was published in 2005. (Durighello R. & Tricaud JM., 2005) Yves Luginbühl, a respected expert on wine landscapes noted there that while food

production responds to basic necessities, vineyards are a matter of “human choice”. “Wine landscapes can therefore only be deeply cultural, in other words shaped by a culture of pleasure”, inherited from antiquity. Vineyards as a “landscape model” fall simultaneously within a context of growth of tourism and the industry’s need to “consolidate its reputation” and to “safeguard regional traditions” within an increasingly competitive and globalised commercial context.

The continuity of old winegrowing practices (gobelet pruning, dense planting on steep slopes, terraces and dry stone walls ...) allows the conservation of varied and diversified landscapes, but such practices involve a cost that in some cases cannot be passed on in the sale price of a bottle of wine. In Beaujolais, winegrowing with intensive production encouraged by the organisation of the wine industry dominated by business interests met with success under a marketing campaign for Beaujolais nouveau carried out worldwide during the 1970s and 1980s. The decline in quality that followed from increased production has discredited Beaujolais wine locally. The drop in consumption associated with a notable surge in demand for quality around the country since the 1990s has emphasised that phenomenon, leading a number of winegrowers to experience difficulties. That crisis is still being noted at present. Consumers associate images of industrial landscapes with Beaujolais that are far removed from the reality of the landscapes of hills covered in vineyards and dotted with small traditional villages that one finds on leaving Lyon behind. The steep slopes and dense planting, with very little mechanisation, represent a substantial cost only a small part of which is passed on in the sale price. Beaujolais is popular, inexpensive wine that is widely sold through supermarkets. The challenge of winning back consumers and capturing their imagination is important for re-establishing a balance between the resale price and the real cost of production. Domestic and international recognition of the landscapes may be a tool and it could allow disheartened winegrowers to regain confidence in their future. Ultimately, a framework is being established for development of oeno-tourism promoted domestically and around Europe, which is described as a possibility for obtaining a financial return on the efforts to maintain traditional winegrowing.

### **Vineyards, between Nature and Culture**

In speaking of wine we often speak of the *terroir*, a notion that oscillates between the myth of a historic encounter between a people and a land of high quality that can produce an exceptional *cru* (the Burgundy *climats* being a good example) and a set of precise and detailed scientific notions of climatology, pedology, geology and adapted agricultural techniques. Two ventures in Beaujolais show how these two factors served as an introduction to the Geopark initiative. In the northern part, the Brouilly and Côte de Brouilly *crus* joined together to undertake a labelling of the landscapes associated with

Mont Brouilly (a local symbol) within the framework of the Fontevraud Wine Landscapes International Charter (a member since 2011). This is a charter signed in 2003 to encourage recognition of wine landscapes following a conference attended by the managers of wine landscapes recognised by UNESCO and directed by the French Institute of Vineyards and Wine (IFV). At the same time, the ensemble of *crus* (numbering 10) wished to gain a better knowledge of their soils. An in-depth pedological study taking in the whole of the Beaujolais winegrowing area commenced in 2009 and still under way (a *crus* map was published in 2014) has confirmed the exceptional geological complexity of the subsoils and therefore the potential diversity of the *terroirs*. The same players have promoted these two initiatives, several of them with leading roles in winegrowing.

A large number of historic vineyards in Europe aspire to recognition by UNESCO as cultural landscapes and the Fontevraud Charter is seen by some as a substitute or perhaps a step in that direction. When the Geopark initiative was undertaken in Beaujolais, it was known that the UNESCO label would soon be associated with it. It is then not far-fetched to believe that some of the players in the winegrowing and tourist industries were motivated mostly by that factor to work for the candidacy, and that opinion was expressed in veiled terms or even outright by some. The notion of geology is likewise of interest to the world of wine, knowledge of soils and subsoils forms part of the discourse of oenologists, wine merchants and enlightened enthusiasts, and their variety underlies the complexity and choiceness of the product. It is an argument that can easily be taken up and certainly substantiated more easily than a description of the landscape. On the other hand, the landscape is visual and obvious to every visitor.

### **Examples of Geoparks**

Many elements in Beaujolais that illustrate its geological richness form part of the architectural (and therefore cultural) legacy: villages and castles using the special colour of the stone (villages of golden stone, including Oingt, known as a Most Beautiful Village in France). The *Espace des Pierres Folles*, a leading partner in the candidacy, was created in 1993 through conversion of a former quarry into an educational site, already recognising the great geological and paleontological value of the area (high density of fossils in sedimentary rocks laid down 180 million years ago and a remarkable geological fault). This site links its work to wine culture: a part of its exhibits presents geology as the origin of the soil that produces the wine, and it is defined on the local Internet tourism page as a “museum of the land and the *terroir*”.

The Geopark candidacy project places much emphasis on geology and on vineyards, but it is the Beaujolais regions as a whole that is involved (including the industrialised valley and the hills covered in woods and pastures). ([www.pays-beaujolais.com](http://www.pays-beaujolais.com)) The geographic

extent of the proposal, the complexity of the environments and issues, i.e. their contrasts, requires an explanatory discourse. Beaujolais does not appear a priori as a sort of geological monument to an outside visitor. What is more, the project is misunderstood by many of the people interviewed, whether they are involved or not. Of course, the candidacy is a recent one (approximately four years old) and the Geopark label has yet to demonstrate its capacity to create a widely attractive tourist destination in the same way as UNESCO cultural sites with the proper promotion. In the case of the Bauges massif, only a portion of the Nature Reserve is labelled a Geopark, and only a portion of the Geopark is planted with vineyards. (Massif des Bauges, 2004) The Bauges region is in the Alps and the visually ever present mountains are sufficient to make the Geopark classification seem consistent. Management of nature reserves in France already includes the promotion of the local foods and crafts, and wineries are therefore well represented in their communications on the Internet and their activities. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly how the Geopark has improved the visibility and comprehension of the cultural wine landscape. Nevertheless, there is a symbiosis in the discourse of winemakers: tours and documents offer explanations that combine geology, *terroir* and landscape. The Montmélian Grape and Wine Museum feels itself a part of life in the Geopark. The Savoie Wines Committee, however, does not encourage that sort of approach, since its winegrowing territory is scattered and the Bauges massif represents just a small part. Documents dealing with urban planning and municipal and inter-municipal organisation willingly include vineyards with the aim of favouring the viability of their landscapes, but they still struggle to include the dynamics of the Geopark. Failure to communicate, scheduling problems, the will seems to exist but it has not yet materialised. The facilitator of the Bauges Geopark defends the educational value of combining culture elements with the scientific explanation and that is a trend that may be found among those in charge of managing exceptional sites (Management forum organised by ICOMOS France and ATEN (Natural Spaces Technical Workshop): “Natural and Cultural Heritage: issues and strategies”, Paris, April 2016). (ICOMOS France, 2016)

### **Is labelling the wine cultural landscape a French obsession?**

These French examples show how winegrowers can be interested in regional strategy: creation of a network, promotion of the region, linking the *terroir* to the region, international labelling. (Herbin C., 2013) Those factors are similar to those found in the case of a candidacy for a UNESCO cultural landscape. However, this sort of candidacy appears increasingly unattainable: too many sites have already been recognised in France for it to be easy to justify a new proposal, dossiers take a long time to prepare and exigency levels are rising, particularly in connection with social involvement. What is more, the conservation of living landscapes is a much more complex subject than the conservation of the geological quality of subsoils. Geopark is a much less demanding label.

In Spain, no candidacy dossier for a UNESCO cultural wine landscape has yet been accepted. In the Central Catalonia Geopark, vineyards alternate with geological monuments: the Cardona Salt Mountain, Montserrat (also recognised as a UNESCO cultural heritage site) and the terrain of the Pyrenees foothills. The tourism promotional materials for the Geopark mention the wines within the context of the subject of “gastronomic” exploration, a subject that is becoming increasingly popular in the tourism promotion of rural areas of Spain. Its website includes a list of wineries ([www.geoparc.cat](http://www.geoparc.cat)) and the recommended activities include visits to wineries. Nevertheless, in several telephone conversations I was informed that no local geological element was mentioned in the course of those visits and that there was no specific visit linked to the Geopark. The recommended geological visits focus on the specific aspects of the terrain rather than on the vineyards or the concept of *terroir*. (Mata Perelló, Climent Costa, Sanz Balagué, 2013) The Geopark does not appear to foster the level of co-operation between scientists and winegrowers noted in the case of Beaujolais and Bauges. At the 4<sup>th</sup> Support Forum for the Beaujolais Geopark (March 23, 2016, Villefranche sur Saône), Margarete Patzak (officer for the Geopark label with the Earth Sciences division of UNESCO) was in attendance and I was able to ask her about the importance of the representation of wine landscapes within the context of a programme focussing on geology. She explained it in terms of the specific nature of French culture, where “wine is everywhere”.

Is this a specifically French factor, or an emerging trend? Beaujolais, with its strong cultural links between the land and wine production and between geology and the built heritage, has an atypical Geopark profile. If its candidacy is successful, it might be of interest to other winegrowing regions seeking heritage recognition at the world level, especially at a time when oeno-tourism is growing rapidly, allowing development of rural areas and strengthening regional identities. It is also up to the Geopark network to show that the juxtaposition of its label with that of UNESCO can generate the same degree of attraction for tourists as in the case of cultural assets. For the time being, the players consulted in the tourist industry perceive greater interest in the promotion of the Nature Reserve label targeting the general public and the eco-tourism public. There remains the trend, the desire on the part of scientists responsible for the natural heritage, who would like to raise awareness of the fragility of environments and encourage involvement by local populations. The current sense of ecological urgency is pushing them in that direction. Subjects such as biodiversity, geology and botany may all seem somewhat arduous if they are approached from a strictly scientific standpoint. Traditional or historic cultural connections allow us to spark the interest of local populations and outsiders. The success of specific place can also lead to assurance of further subsidies, which is a delicate issue within the context of the present difficult economic scenario.

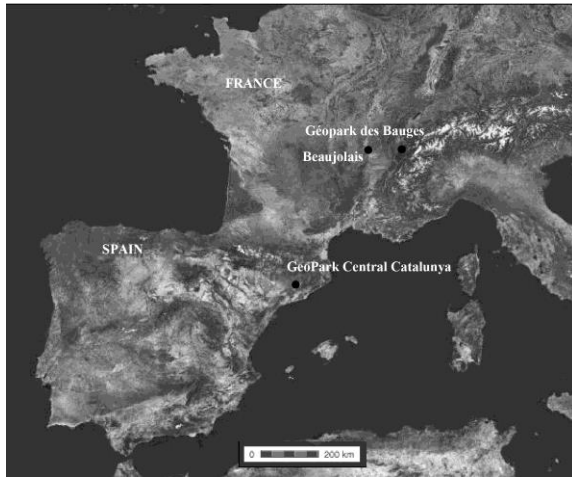


Figure 1: Locations of the 3 Geoparks

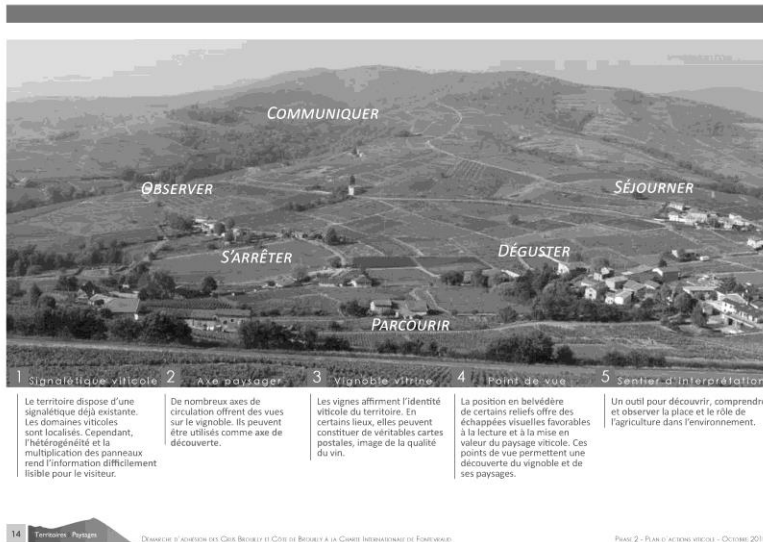


Figure 2: Excerpt of landscape study in Brouilly, Beaujolais. Territoires&Paysages, 2010.



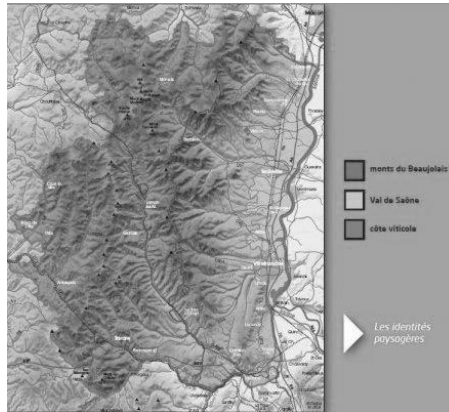


Figure 3 / Beaujolais : Boundaries of the future Geopark (Syndicat Mixte du Beaujolais)

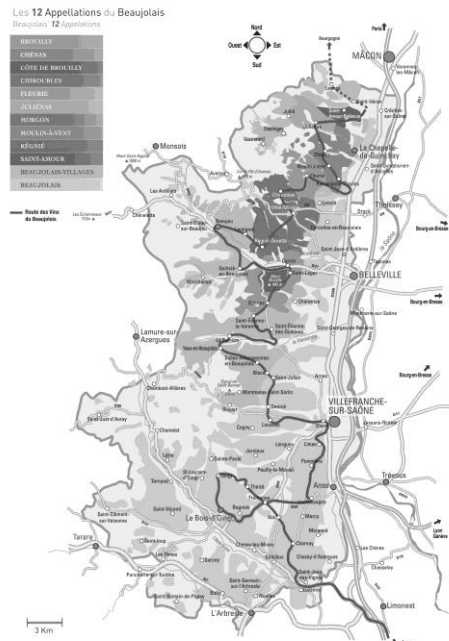


Figure 4 / Beaujolais : Boundaries of the vineyard (InterBeaujolais)

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