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Soil and culture viewed through the prism of viticultural terroir

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Soil is at the heart of 'terroir', a French word with no full equivalent in other languages, meaning delimited areas with homogeneous environmental features that are likely to confer typical wine qualities identified through collective memory and conveyed from generation to generation within a territory marked by social context and crop technical choices (Vaudour, 2002, 2003). The tradition of terroir wines has strong cultural connections, referring to tradition of drinking well, of farming and of producing typical wines that are rooted in a region or made from specific places with organoleptic features easily distinguishable from other wines from other regions. As an entity distributed over space and time, terroir has cultural aspects that have heritage, landscape and reputation value-added components that come from historical, empirically derived technical adjustments, the transmission of taste typicity over generations and strong gastronomical traditions. As such, terroir has long been a source of inspiration for poetry, literature, and art in overall. Its tradition is also marked by the inheritance of long-standing practices of soil conservation and soil management. The tradition of terroir wines is a living tradition with positive values for the conservation of both cultural and soil patrimonies, that is likely to be shared by several winegrowing or wine-drinking countries.