

# THE PYRAMIDAL ORGANIZATION OF AOC IN FRANCE: A PROCESS OF IDENTIFICATION AND VALORISATION OF TERROIRS.

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## **Abstract**

Résultat de leur histoire, certaines régions viticoles françaises comme la Bourgogne, le Bordelais ou l'Alsace, présentent aujourd'hui une organisation hiérarchisée de leurs AOC. AOC régionales, communales, premiers crus, grands crus, l'organisation est qualifiée de pyramidale. Cette organisation permet d'identifier à des échelles différentes les variations des éléments constitutifs d'un terroir. Des régions viticoles AOC avec une histoire plus récente, ont souhaité s'inspirer de ce modèle d'organisation pour essayer d'identifier et de faire reconnaître par l'INAO les variations de leur terroir, en respectant la réglementation européenne sur les indications géographiques. Les AOC Languedoc, Côtes de Provence, Touraine, Anjou, Muscadet Sèvre et Maine, mais également Côtes du Rhône se sont lancées dans des projets de hiérarchisation. Cette communication présentera quelques démarches engagées, les attentes et motivations des producteurs, l'instruction des demandes par l'INAO et les résultats de ces démarches. Si le modèle de départ est le même, chaque région viticole progresse à son rythme, avec au final des résultats différents.

Result of their history, some famous French wine countries such as Burgundy, Bordeaux or Alsace, have a hierarchical organization of their Appellations of Controlled Origin (AOC): AOC regional, communal, Premier Cru, Grand Cru. This organization is often called pyramidal organization. AOC wine regions with a more recent history, wanted to copy this organizational model to try to identify variations of their terroir and to make recognize them by INAO. AOC "Languedoc", "Côtes de Provence", "Touraine", "Anjou", "Muscadet Sevre et Maine", but also "Côtes du Rhône", are engaged in projects of pyramidal organization. This paper will present some projects undertaken, expectations and motivations of producers, the processing of applications by the INAO and the results of these projects. If the starting model is the same, we will see that every wine region progressing at its own pace, with the final different results.

**Keywords:** *Geographical indication, Terroir, pyramidal organization, complementary geographical denominations, Appellations of Controlled Origin (AOC)*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The practice of identifying a wine with the geographic origin of the grapes is an ancient and shared practice by winemakers worldwide. This allows producers to adapt their methods to their area, to differentiate the wine production, to offer a wide range and it therefore enables the producers to talk about their product. In Europe supervision of this practice contributed to the development of geographical Indications (GI). Today European regulations impose that the use of a geographical name for a wine is reserved to the GI. Among the oldest wine regions were recognized different scales of AOC. But, it is now more difficult to recognize new indications. Indeed, the notoriety of name and evidence of its use by growers, are major elements of the recognition procedure. How do we recognize the use of a geographical name if the use of names is limited? To answer this, INAO set up a procedure called "hiérarchisation", inspired by the existing system in Burgundy. The aim: to be able to identify at different levels the variations of the elements composing a terroir, identification by a name that tomorrow could be recognized by AOC.

## **2 EUROPEAN REGULATIONS AND PYRAMIDALE ORGANIZATION**

The European regulations limit the use of geographical names only for wines under GI (PDO and PGI). But, Article 67 of Regulation 607/2009 (regulations of the wine) states that the name of a geographical unit may appear on labels of wines with a PDO or PGI.

Today winegrowing regions with the oldest AOCs have a pyramidal-type organization. For example in Burgundy with the AOC "Bourgogne" (base of the pyramid) and its "communales" AOC (example "Aloxe Corton"), its wines "premier cru" and "grand cru"(top of the pyramid). Legacy of ancient history, this system contributed to the success of this wine region. The pyramidal organization model chosen by INAO was greatly inspired by that in Burgundy. This system allows the wine regions with less seniority to identify new terroirs. To organize these geographical indications, the INAO uses the possibility offered by Article 67: in addition to the name of the GI, the specifications of the AOC may authorize the use of complementary geographical denominations (CGD). For example, the AOC "Touraine" can be complete by the name "Chenonceau" for wines that respect the production requirements laid down in the specifications.

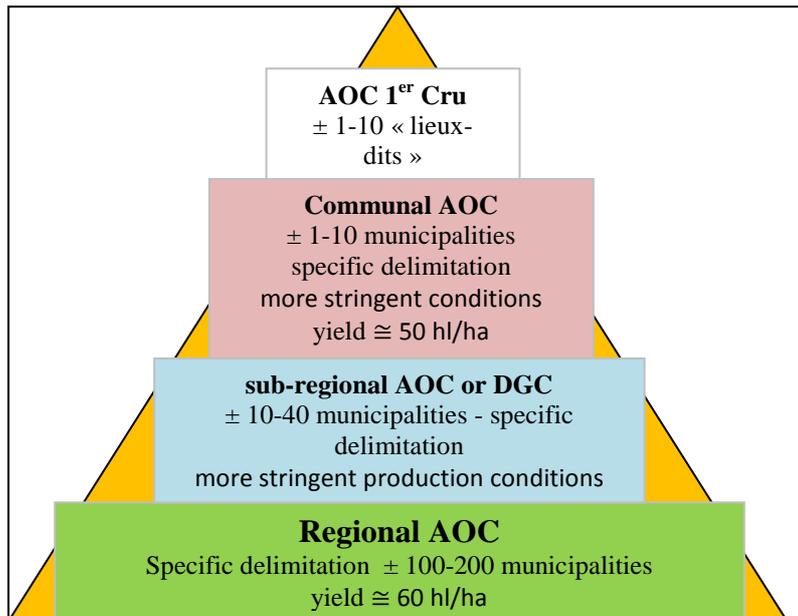
The INAO defines the pyramidal organization as follows: *hierarchical organization between AOC with interlocked production areas and the same type of products whose the distinction rests both on the boundaries more and more restricted and production conditions becoming more restrictive.*

Eventually, the pyramid organization aims to distinguish many AOCs defined by their own specifications, set within the same area.

For integrated the news DGC into the AOC's specifications, the following principles must be respected:

- Recognition of link between product and the geographical origin
- interlocked production Areas
- Similar nature of product (red wine, sweet wine...)
- Specific Demarcation
- Conditions of production significantly more restrictive.

The final objective may be to recognize news AOC within larger existing AOCs



**Figure 1: schema of pyramidal organization**

The final objective may be to recognize new AOC within an existing AOC. Appellations of a pyramidal organization present similar products. It isn't at all possible to have a different wine with nothing in common with the regional appellation. Their methods of obtaining and preparation being substantially the same; it's possible to establish a hierarchy according to the requirement level required. Different production conditions must therefore be defined for each AOC of the pyramidal organization. They are increasingly restrictive consistently with the surface more and more restricted of their production areas.

In 2016, several French wine regions had engaged a hierarchical approach using complementary geographical denominations. Muscadet Sevre et Maine (3 CGD), Saumur (1 CGD) Touraine (2 CGD ), Côtes d'Auvergne (5CGD); Côtes de Provence (4 CGD), Languedoc (8 CGD), Côtes du Roussillon (1 CGD)

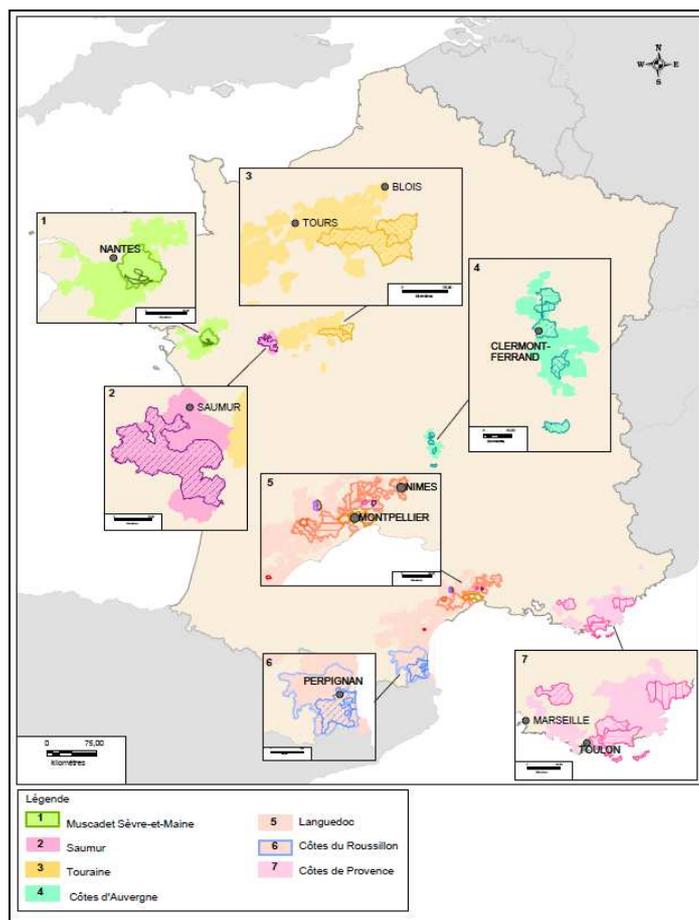


Figure 2: Map of French wine regions had engaged a hierarchical approach

### 3 EXAMPLES OF AOC «CÔTES DE PROVENCE» AND « LANGUEDOC »

Provence and Languedoc, even if they are very old French wine growing regions, were recognized as AOC late on (in 1977 and 1985). In fact, there are few or no GIs in level "sub-regional" or "communale" on this territory (except AOC "Saint Chinian" and "Faugère" in Languedoc). In the 90s, the two regions have engaged into a hierarchical organization project with winemakers to reveal some terroirs.

Common starting point: conducting a study to identify units of homogeneous territories.

#### 3.1 AOC «CÔTES DE PROVENCE» : AN ORGANIZATION AROUND ROSÉ

Geographical area of the AOC "Côtes de Provence" extends over three departments and includes 84 municipalities; production area covers more than 20 000 ha. Rosé wines represent 90% of production. (6.5% of Red, White 3.5%). The terroir of the Côtes de Provence appellation is formed by complex geological features. Two major geological formations coexist in the Côtes de Provence – limestone in the Northwest and crystalline in the Southeast. Due to the wide variety of soils and climatic conditions found in the region, there are nuances in the Cotes de Provence, each with its own geological makeup and climate. Appellation includes five major geographical areas (coastal regions, inland valleys, foothills of the high country, the Beausset Basin, and Sainte-Victoire Mountain).

After studying the characteristics of these natural areas and production areas; after climatic studies on the geographical area of the AOC "Côtes de Provence", a work on the characteristics of each vineyard, their grape varieties and types of wine products been realized. These studies have been able to highlight 11 terroirs with a potential for recognition for new denomination within the geographical area of the AOC "Côtes de Provence". 4 were recognized complementary geographical denomination: Sainte-Victoire, Frejus, La Londe and Pierrefeu. Each DGC has specific production conditions. This allows to differentiate them in relation to the AOC Cotes de Provence. The DGC is limited to the production of red and rosé. Seven unrecognized sectors identified are pending.

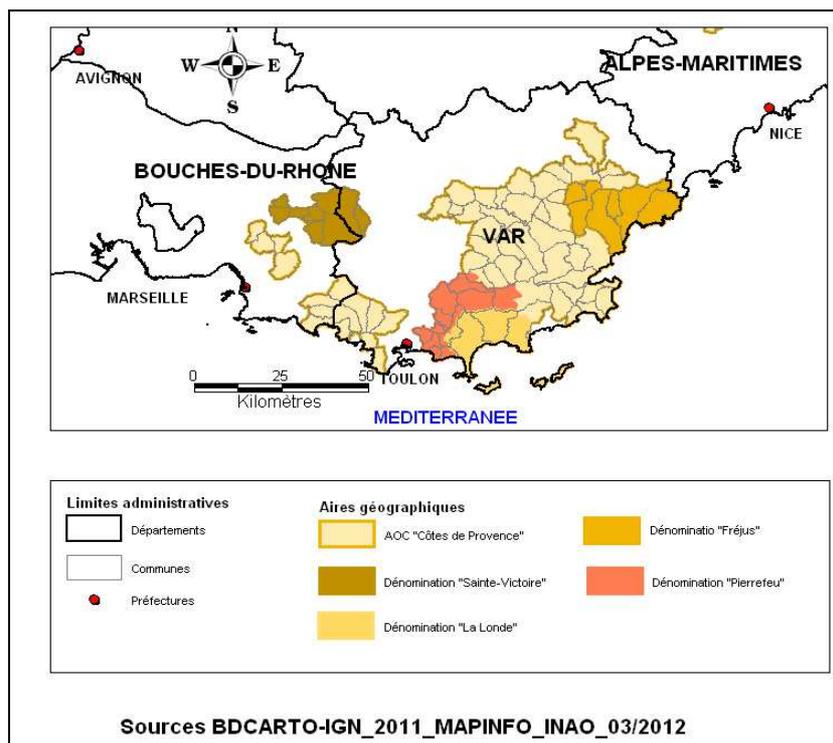


Figure 3: Map of complementary geographical denominations in “Cotes de Provence”

Table 1: Characteristics of CGD Côtes de Provence

	AOC Côtes de Provence	Lalonde	Fréjus	Pierrefeu	Sainte Victoire
<b>initial recognition</b>	1977	2008	2005	2013	2005
<b>wines</b>	3 colors	Red and Rosé	Red and Rosé	Red and Rosé	Red and Rosé
<b>Area (municipality)</b>	84	4	8	12	8
<b>Area (Planted, ha)</b>	20 000	400	280	1402	2643
<b>Yield (hl/ha)</b>	55	50	50	50	50
<b>Principal Grapes varieties (rosé)</b>	cinsaut N, grenache N, mourvèdre N, syrah N, tibouren N	cinsaut N, grenache N	grenache N, mourvèdre N, syrah N, tibouren N;	cinsaut N, grenache N, syrah N	cinsaut N, grenache N, syrah N ;
<b>sugar content of grapes (degree of maturity)</b>	178 (11%)	187 (11,5%)	187 (11,5%)	187 (11,5%)	187 (11,5%)
<b>trend</b>	↗	↗↗	↘	↗	↗↗

### 3.2 “LANGUEDOC”: AN ORGANISATION AROUND PHYSICAL FACTORS

In Languedoc, the geographical area extends over 535 municipalities of 4 departments. The production area covers more than 43 000 ha. The production of red wines represented 60% (30% rosé, 10% White). There’s a huge diversity of soils in the Languedoc: terraces of pebbles, sandstone and marl, limestone and schist, basalt ... They are what make each Languedoc terroir different from the next. The Languedoc, France’s southern-most region, the climate is predominantly Mediterranean. Summers are hot and dry, spring and autumn mild. Winters are mild too, sunny, with temperatures rarely falling below freezing. Rainfall is low whilst the omnipresent Tramontane wind helps prevent plant disease. In relation to a more complex story, hierarchization was organized around former VDQS (category IG disappeared today) and identified natural areas. And 12 former VDQS became DGC: The Clape, Pic Saint Loup, Picpoul de Pinet, Cabrières, Méjanelle, Montpeyroux, Quatourze, Saint Christol, Saint Georges of Orcs, Drézery saint, Saint Saturnine. A denomination was removed for lack of

use (Veragues). The climate and soil studies revealed four other denominations: Grès de Montpellier, Sommières, Pézenas, Terrasse Larzac. Every DGC corresponds to a combination of climate, soil type and grape varieties which enables the expression of different wines, but always in Languedoc's sensorial space. Without exception, these DGC are selected for the production of red wines only.

Figure 4: Map of complementary geographical denominations in “Languedoc”

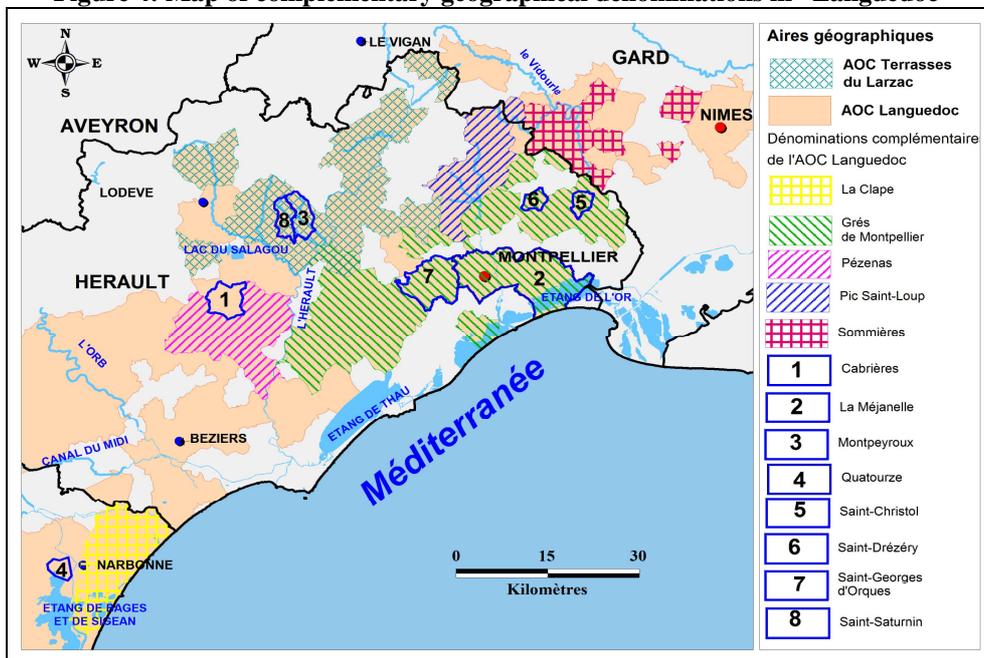


Table 2: Characteristics of CGD Languedoc

	AOC Languedoc	Grès de Montpellier	Terrasses du Larzac	Sommières	Pézenas
<b>initial recognition</b>	1977	2002	2004	2009	2006
<b>wines</b>	3 colors	red	red	red	red
<b>Area (municipality)</b>	536	46	32	18	15
<b>Area (Planted ha)</b>	200 000	1100	6200	236	580
<b>Yield (hl/ha)</b>	50	45	45	45	45
<b>Principal Grapes varieties</b>	grenache N, lledoner pelut N, mourvèdre N, syrah N	grenache N, mourvèdre N, syrah N ;	grenache N, mourvèdre N, syrah N ;	grenache N, mourvèdre N, syrah N	grenache N, mourvèdre N, syrah N ;
<b>sugar content of grapes (degree of maturity)</b>	198 (11,5%)	202 (12%)	202 (12%)	202 (12%)	207 (12,5%)
<b>trend</b>	↗	↔↗	↗↔	↔	↔

#### 4 RESULTS

From a global point of view the CGDs allow good valorization of production partly due to its high sales in bottle. For the regions these approaches are important communication tools. Then, the results are very variable of a geographical name to another. For example, in Languedoc, on four CGD only one was recognized AOC: Terrasses du Larzac. The new AOC is a success with consumers, with an average high price (16 €).

Grès de Montpellier, after a slow start, has an interesting development. This has resulted in an increase in production volumes but also increasing prices. The other two can be regarded as still being in a construction phase. Note that for other DGC from the former VDQS, 2 were recognized in AOC (AOC "La Clape" and "Picpoul de Pinet") and one is being recognized (Pic Saint Loup). In “Côtes de Provence” results are the same. The denomination Sainte Victoire is a great success and moves surely toward recognition in AOC. Lalonde,

despite small volumes, is very well valued. (+ 38% compared to “Côtes de Provence”) and knows some notoriety which results in a steady increase of the production area (12% in 4 years). The other two CGD of “Cotes de Provence” are still in a construction phase. In 2016, the managing organization of AOC “Côtes de Provence” thinks at continuity of this process: must continue to develop CGD or take a break?

Sometimes the differences in success between CGD are the result of ownership or not of the dynamic by local winemakers. Without this appropriation, the success of approach can be compromised. In some cases, AOC recognition isn't the objective. For growers concerned, the link with the regional AOC must be kept and the CGD status is sufficient.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

After nearly 20 years of implementing a hierarchical organization, results vary. The invested time and the motivation of the wine producers are very important factors in the success. The recognition of a new denomination within an existing AOC can only be considered that from moment that name has an established identity and has a sound economic situation. The pyramidal organization must not overcome the weaknesses of an appellation. It should not lead to a fragmentation that would weaken the existing GI. Today, some regions are contemplating the introduction of a pyramidal organization. Others are thinking of developing a different approach using labels that will highlight their wine without using a geographical name (for example "cru d'exception"). Others worry to lose and confuse consumers with a excessive development of DGC and AOC. If the process can evolve in the coming years, it remains a unifying approach for winemakers of a territory, to help them to reveal their terroir. It helps them highlight their product and their territory compared with others products on the market.

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