

## The quality of wine between innovation and tradition. A study of a changing ‘Mediterranean drinking culture’

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Wine consumption is affected by intertwined needs generated by factors such as production and marketing methods, as well as by the individual’s desire for social differentiation in a democratised mass drinking culture. Our study sought to determine whether consumption patterns have changed in the Italian province of Trentino and how such changes may have affected the meaning that wine drinkers living in this area assign to the concept of quality in wine. The paper presents a qualitative study (n=57 interviews) carried out in a wine producing region in north-east Italy. In addition to investigating the changes that have taken place in the area’s wine drinking culture, the study also focuses on how consumers perceive and define wine quality. The findings show that economic, political and social factors have brought major changes in drinking culture and consumption over the last 50 years. In addition, changes in the wine industry have had a significant impact on how consumers’ views on wine quality and its key features have evolved. Nevertheless, the study found that some traditional aspects persist in the drinking culture and still determine the perception of quality.

**Keywords:** drinking culture; Italy; drinking changes; qualitative research; consumption theories; wine.

### Introduction

This article focuses on the changes that have taken place in wine consumption and on how the quality of this traditional Italian product is perceived and defined. The study presented here was conducted in Trentino, a province in the north-east of Italy, over 80 per cent of which is mountainous. Due to its geography, the economy of Trentino is based in particular on tourism and on apple and grape growing. Consequently, large amounts of wine are produced in the area. Though some wine is produced by small family-owned and managed wineries that mainly sell their products locally, most of Trentino’s output is from growers belonging to large cooperatives whose wines are popular both in Italy and abroad.

Mediterranean countries, and Italy in particular, are an excellent vantage point for investigating wine culture. One of the main reasons is that wine production and consumption have ancient origins in this area (see e.g., Hames 2012; Unwin 2005). Over the last 50 years, moreover, wine consumption has changed substantially: from a drinking pattern linked mainly to nutritional

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requirements – known in the literature as the ‘Mediterranean drinking culture’ – to a more globalised type of consumption which includes elements of other drinking cultures (Allamani and Beccaria 2007; Beccaria 2010; Guarino 2010).

Italy had long been one of the countries with the highest rate of alcohol consumption – 20 litres of pure alcohol per capita in 1970, dropping to 7.1 litres in 2016. Though this decrease largely reflected lower wine consumption (WHO 2019), Italians have not abandoned the traditional Mediterranean drinking culture for the ‘Nordic drinking culture’. The former was characterised by high per capita consumption, daily wine consumption at mealtimes (when wine was regarded as nourishment), a preponderance of social drinking, little heavy intoxication, and high morbidity and mortality due to alcohol-related diseases. In the ‘Nordic drinking culture’, by contrast, fewer people drink but do so more heavily, generally not during meals but with the intention of getting drunk, and intoxication-related mortality is high (Room 1989). Italy is far from the Nordic drinking culture, which is traditionally a feature of Northern European and English-speaking countries, where cases of heavy intoxication and social problems related to alcohol consumption are still much more frequent (Allamani et al. 2014; Beccaria and Prina 1996). Nevertheless, Italy has seen a noteworthy shift in recent decades from a consumption pattern characterised, in particular, by wine drinking during meals, in the daily routine and/or in convivial situations, to a more complex pattern where – even though social drinking is still predominant – wine drinking during meals has decreased, consumption of beer (also during meals), aperitifs and cocktails has intensified, and there is greater attention to quality (Room 2010).

Italy’s significant decrease in wine consumption can be attributed to the gradual change in consumption styles, which are affected by the social and economic transformations that have taken place in the country over the last few decades, for example migration from the countryside to cities, an economy less dependent on agriculture and more on the secondary, and later the tertiary, sectors, and changes in diet and lifestyle. Under those circumstances, policies limiting alcohol consumption through restrictions on availability and control over drinking access were implemented late, though they played a substantial role in reinforcing and maintaining a trend that had already begun (Allamani and Beccaria 2007; Allamani et al. 2014; Beccaria and Rolando, 2015).

However, these factors have not affected several traditional features of the Mediterranean drinking culture’s socialisation processes, which have remained practically constant from generation to generation: in Italy, drinking alcohol is still a practice that begins in the family setting. Parents, grandparents and other adult relatives transmit – through narratives of memories and life experiences – informal drinking values and norms to the young, and guide them in their first sips. The only recent variation in this process concerns how alcohol is subsequently consumed: in the past, young people drank with the family, whereas now drinking is an experience that is more frequently shared with the peer group (Beccaria 2010; Rolando et al. 2012; Rolando and Katainen 2014).

A new trend is thus being established in the Mediterranean drinking culture: though it retains its convivial and socialising meanings, it not only involves consuming more heterogeneous variety of alcoholic drinks in smaller quantities and less frequently, but it also reinforces the protective elements of this culture, such as the gradual approach to drinking in the family setting, the internalisation of informal norms relating to the positive values of convivial drinking, and the stigmatisation of excessive drinking and drunkenness. Indeed, some studies show that having tasted alcoholic drinks at mealtimes in childhood has an influence on moderation in alcohol use in adulthood (Donovan and Molina 2008), and that having sipped alcoholic beverages in youth under parental supervision limits risky behaviours in later years (Bonino, Cattellino and

Ciairano 2005). The socialisation process which is part of the Mediterranean drinking culture also contributes to reducing this culture's risk factors, e.g. the daily consumption of large quantities of alcoholic drinks and, in particular, wine during meals (Beccaria 2010; Beccaria, Petrilli and Rolando 2015).

A study conducted in Piedmont – a region of north-western Italy with many areas dedicated to grape growing and production of internationally known wines – indicates that wine is increasingly regarded as a cultural product that calls for specific knowledge and skills in order to be consumed properly: the 'competent drinker' can recognise the properties of a wine, talk about them and, through limited and well-informed consumption, s/he stands out from the crowd and is a trendsetter, encouraging the spread of a consumption pattern oriented towards moderation. Similar findings about drinkers' knowledge have also emerged in areas without vineyards, but these skills originate and are fully expressed in wine-growing regions. Furthermore, the study shows that there are also people in their 20s among competent drinkers: young people educated in drinking by competent parents. Indeed, in the wine-producing areas, a sense of local rootedness and pride in the quality of the products of one's own land are traditionally transmitted to new generations. According to this study, wine quality has also improved markedly thanks to better production processes and increased know-how (Beccaria 2016; Beccaria and Rolando 2016).

For foods and beverages, the concept of quality is difficult to define, as it encompasses a range of objective, subjective and contextual dimensions. Some authors claim that 'quality should be treated as something made, not given, whereby there is a set of competing forces, emerging from the products themselves and from the social characteristics of the persons pronouncing judgments, from which a particular value called quality can be constructed' (Harvey, McMeekin and Warde 2010, 5). Mascarello et al. (2015) found that Italians judge the quality of food and wine products on the basis of features grouped in three clusters. The first cluster, the Organoleptic Sphere, includes properties like freshness, taste, appearance, seasonality; the second cluster, Production Site and Methods, is reflected by controlled origin and organic certification; the third, Brand and Price, means that the product is branded and costs more than others.

As regards wine, Olson and Jacoby (1972) affirmed that quality was linked both to intrinsic cues, such as the type of grape and the organoleptic composition of the product, and extrinsic ones, e.g. labelling. Other authors list a set of seven dimensions that contribute specifically to defining the quality of red wine: Origin, Image, Presentation, Ageing, Harvest, Sensitivity and Acuteness of Bouquet, which are broken down in turn into other more detailed items (Verdú Jover, Lloréns Montes and Fuentes Fuentes 2004).

It is important to remember that consumption in industrial and post-industrial society is strongly affected by social and relational networks, which include users of specific categories of goods in relation to a process of social distinction and differentiation (Bourdieu 1984). The consumed goods acquire a symbolic meaning which legitimates and distinguishes a certain social class or category. The mechanisms of imitation establish that socially accepted and desirable purchase and consumption are determined by the dominant class, i.e., the leisure class (Veblen 1924). Symbols of prosperity obviously change to reflect ages and trends, but they linger on in every capitalistic society and are an instrument for measuring the esteem that others have for you and consequently your self-esteem (Bagnasco, Barbagli and Cavalli 2007). Rössel and Pape (2016) note that for higher social classes the ability to correctly choose and consume quality wine in appropriate situations is part of a wine-identity that provides structure and reinforces a relational framework based on specific commodities. According to Demossier (2010, 219), 'wine consumption can also be interpreted as a cultural artefact as well as a commodity, through which [French] people engage with their past and construct their image of the present'.

Nowadays, consumption is affected by intertwined needs generated by factors such as production and marketing methods, as well as by the individual's desire for social differentiation in a democratised mass drinking culture.

Against this theoretical, social and consumption backdrop, the concept of quality plays an important role in the choice of foods and beverages. The study conducted in Trentino seeks to determine whether consumption patterns have changed in this wine-producing Italian province and how such changes may have affected the meaning that wine drinkers living in this area assign to the concept of quality in wine.

## Methods and sample

A total of 57 people born and residing in Trentino participated in our study. Participants were selected using a purposive snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is a technique used to generate a growing sample by relying on referrals from initial or potential participants (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Potential participants were contacted via email and/or telephone. In order to obtain a representative sample, we recruited 27 people in the urban area and another 30 in ten different rural areas with a strong wine-producing tradition. To attempt to understand the wine culture, its transmission and its transformations, we interviewed people in three different age groups (20 to 30, 40 to 50 and over 65 years old). The interviewees thus belonged to three different generations. The sample was also selected on the basis of gender, as it consisted of 29 males and 28 females.

The technique used in this study is the *récit de vie* (Bertaux 1998), a type of qualitative interview which, by taking the interviewees' biographical experience into account, makes it possible to understand how the reasoning for their actions has developed over the course of their lives. In each interview, the technique collects and examines general information on the contexts and elements that define the interviewees, their cultural backgrounds, and their relationships with significant others and the social worlds that define roles and positions (Pretto 2011a, 2013).

In this study, all interviews started with the question: 'Could you please talk about drinking in your area?' We decided to start with this very general input for two specific reasons:

- a) To avoid automatically guiding interviewees to the theme of drinking alcohol and prevent socially desirable answers;
- b) To give interviewees the chance to talk about a period of time of their own choosing, thus seeking to obtain as much information as possible about how their experience developed.

In addition to the types of drink produced and consumed in Trentino, the interviews investigated consumption opportunities, changes in consumption, the criteria and motivations applied to consumption choices, opinions about alcohol consumption and the different factors that influence drinking (family, friends, tradition, market, media, etc.).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to carry out a thematic analysis (Demazière and Dubar 1997; Pretto 2011b) of the patterns of meaning emerging from them. Data was analysed using Weft QDA software for identifying and reporting significant statements or quotes which helped to create a better description of the interviewees' experiences.

## Results

Analysis of the interviews shows that in this area, as elsewhere in Italy, the traditional consumption pattern was that of the Mediterranean drinking culture, in which wine was mainly drunk during meals for its nutritional value.

I33 (woman, 80 years old): I remember that once [...] they drank wine, eh ... here, wine is for us ... especially for the elderly ... a form of nourishment, isn't it? [...] That means that ... we didn't have much to eat, did we? And then, many times ... eh ... I don't know, particularly during winter, I remember those older people ... and we drank wine!

When wine's function was mainly to nourish, the concept of quality was simple and limited: there were two wine categories, the 'everyday' wine (lower alcohol content and less expensive grapes) and the 'good' wine. The former was for daily drinking, whereas the latter was reserved for convivial and social events (baptisms, weddings, Christmas, etc.) or was offered to sick people to help them recover.

I45 (man, 65 years old): They were not high-quality wines ... there was the good wine, I mean, it was the one reserved either for sick people or weddings.

According to older interviewees, the habit of drinking wine during meals persists. Notwithstanding this, and as found in other studies, (Collicelli 2010; Favretto and Sarzotti 1992; Rolando and Beccaria 2016), the interviewees' words confirm that consumption has also changed in Trentino, showing a new pattern in which wine drinking has gradually become less frequent during daily meals, and is more often related to special events and/or situations falling outside meals. Though social and traditional norms such as hospitality and conviviality surrounding drinking persist and wine continues to be drunk for its nutritional value, the latter is becoming less important and wine consumption is acquiring a role in socialising, where it serves recreational purposes (Baiocco, D'Alessio and Laghi 2008; Beccaria 2013, 2016). Indeed, middle-aged adults – unlike the older participants – do not drink daily and prefer to drink on social and/or special occasions. For the youngest participants, even if the primary socialisation to drinking in the family sphere is still functioning, findings show that they are more oriented towards recreational consumption aimed at recreation together with peers. In these cases, wine and alcohol are consumed in order to become tipsy or drunk, so quality is not a consideration (Baiocco, D'Alessio and Laghi 2008; Beccaria, Petrilli and Rolando 2015; Guarino 2010).

As was also found by a study carried out by Allamani and Beccaria (2007) on alcohol consumption in Italy, the interviews indicated that changes in work type and organisation have contributed significantly to making drinking's nutritional function marginal. Once, those who did hard physical labour could drink more wine at breakfast or lunch without impacting their work. It was a widespread practice, and wine was considered an important means of supplementing the diet. Such a drinking pattern is now at odds with the requirements of most jobs in the tertiary sector, which call in particular for mental alertness. Even in agriculture and factories, work rhythms and schedules are now less compatible with this sort of consumption, especially in view of the attention required when using complex machinery.

I26 (man, 48 years old): For us, drinking has historically been a physical need. [...] For builders or those who did ... those who worked in the fields or in the mine needed some ... some calories, to use physical strength. For them, drinking a glass of wine at lunch was an absolutely normal thing, because they needed calories and then wine gave them calories. [...] now, hard physical work does not exist and drinking habits have changed. [...] Now, someone who works in an office, if he drinks a ... a glass of wine at lunch, he doesn't process anything, rather he goes gaga, because wine affects the brain directly and you can't take advantage of your abilities.

Participants mentioned the decline of self-production as a further factor that has undoubtedly influenced the changes in wine consumption. According to one of the oldest interviewees, the wife of a retired wine producer, the dominant pattern since the 1940s in rural areas was one of self-production: farmers produced wine from the grapes harvested on their own property and consumed it mainly at home. The agricultural techniques used were very simple and few technologies were

available. Wine was food, not least because it was one of the few free products available to rural families. In addition to self-production, private wineries (such as the one owned by the interviewee's husband) produced wine for the market. The end product was made from a blend of different grapes, for reasons of cost and alcohol content. The wine was sold to taverns, shops and people who did not own a vineyard. Even at that time, wine was exported to other countries.

From about the 1930s to the 1960s, cooperatives took over the wine market, forcing most small private wineries out of business. Over the same period, wine types and cultivars also changed, adapting to international concepts of quality. Indeed, to boost the local economy, it was decided to characterise Trentino's viticulture by drastically reducing output from the 23 native grape varieties and replacing most of them with foreign varieties: Pinot Bianco, Pinot Grigio and Pinot Nero, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Riesling Renano, Traminer, Moscato Giallo and Silvaner (CVPT 1954). This move reflected that fact that wine had begun to be considered as a commercial product, and producers consequently opted to grow 'grapes with a high level of productivity per hectare and that created wine requested by the market' (Stefanini and Tomasi 2010, 10).

This first stage of industrialisation and the shift from low-volume output for home consumption to mass production for the market ended when a series of scandals drew attention to chemical adulteration, such as the methanol-tainted wine scandal in 1986. In the second stage, production gradually moved towards emphasising quality (variously defined), favoured quality over quantity, and was strengthened by the trends of postmodern society.

I56 (man, 47 years old): It was a huge change ... now I cannot remember how many years ago it happened, [when] a lot of people died because of, let's say, low quality wines, instead now people ... I mean, wineries, farmers, have a completely different vision ... a different way of thinking, acting, working. They work much more on quality than in the past, when the aim was great quantity production, and many wineries, let's say, made a lot of money with wine and sugar.

In this second stage, quality controls over wine production methods have been intensified: Trentino's implementation of these rules are considered to be among the strictest in the nation.

The shift from the first to the second stage of the industrialisation of wine production has resulted in a new idea of product quality which has also been assimilated by competent drinkers and wine-lovers. In a pattern in which drinking alcohol is less frequent and more associated with enjoyment, wine quality – understood also as a sign of refinement – becomes a central factor in choosing a product.

Regarding the clusters described by Mascarello et al. (2015), it was found that interviewees mainly define wine quality in terms of Brand and Price criteria. In particular, price is considered the key marker of quality, followed by the wine type.

I55 (man, 45 years old): Yes ... generally cheaper wines are also not as good, and conversely the more expensive ones are better. Or, at least, as far as I know ...

The Brand takes on a dual meaning, since consumers associate it not only with the winery in which the wine is produced but also with the wine type.

I5 (woman, 45 years old): ... about 20 years ago I began to taste wine and [...] maybe I like something particular ... I recall the Enantio, which is a little-known and unusual wine, and I find that wine good.

In the above quote, it should be noted that the concept of 'good wine' is linked to a specific feature: I5 explains (as did other participants) that an ancient heritage is considered synonymous with quality. Enantio, also known as Lambrusco *a foglia frastagliata*, is a red wine varietal of very ancient origins native to the Vallagarina, a valley in Trentino. Now protected by DOC (*Denominazione d'Origine Controllata*) certification, this grape variety yields a dry, tannic wine displaying a bright ruby colour and notes of spice. Many participants also emphasised

local production and organic growing methods when referring to quality. These aspects fall within the Production Site and Methods cluster.

I35 (woman, 48 years old): I know that if a white wine [...] gives you a headache ... then it is not a good wine because they use sulphites ... yes, you know, there is a story behind that, which someone taught me and now I can recognise it ...

In defining quality, only a few people referred to the Organoleptic Sphere cluster. Thus, personal tastes have only a marginal influence on perceived wine quality, whereas the decisive factors are price and wine type, followed by the production area and methods. This is especially true when the individual has little knowledge of the oenological world.

I7 (man, 42 years old): I think I've never drunk a bottle of wine that costs less than eight or ten euros ... and this just depends on ... on the fear of buying a cheap wine that I don't like and consequently have to throw away.

I13 (woman, 28 years old): ... I mean, I like going out with friends who know about it because I don't understand a lot but I like to drink good wine ... so I prefer to spend a couple of euros more for a good glass and I drink only that but it's good, you know? You are satisfied because you have been in good company and have drunk a good wine that someone who knows about it has recommended to you.

In these cases, consumers tend to define quality through extrinsic properties, often indicated by experts and/or competent drinkers. As Verdú Jover and colleagues (2004, 456) point out, 'when objective quality is difficult to evaluate or the knowledge needed to evaluate intrinsic cues is lacking, consumers will also use extrinsic cues [...] In the case of wines, extrinsic attributes are important in forming perceptions of quality, due to the fact that attributes of experience and credence are predominant to the non-expert general public'.

This study highlights a further characteristic that is not included in the three clusters outlined by Mascarello and colleagues (2015), but derives from traditions rooted in Italian culture: some interviewees associate the concept of quality wine to the concept of well-being and claim that moderate and quality drinking can improve physical well-being. In the Catholic tradition, wine has a highly symbolic connotation: it is used during Mass in the Eucharist and is called 'the Blood of Christ'. This liturgical use of wine has boosted viticulture in the bishoprics, monasteries and abbeys since the Early Middle Ages. The wine, spirits (grappa, in particular) and other products of these institutions, which were repositories of culture and knowledge, were recommended, distributed and/or sold for medical and therapeutic use (Griessmair 1989). To this day, traces of this belief in wine's nutritional and curative value can be found in common proverbs, such as '*il buon vino fa buon sangue*' (good wine makes good blood) (Buseghin 1992). As a consequence of this conceptualisation, quality is closely associated with the absence of negative effects on health.

I36 (man, 66 years old): In my experience, I saw that if you drink a beverage which has no quality, the day after ... I don't say that you are sick, but nearly. If you drink good things, high quality, you can also drink a bit more and the day after you feel fine, you wake up well and that depends on, on the fact that the wine was good ...

The interviews show that the having a wide range of products and levels of quality to choose from could be one of the many mechanisms whereby the leisure class can affirm its superior lifestyle and make it an aspirational model. Nevertheless, as Demossier (2010) noted for France, this function of wine drinking in Italy now seems to be driven by the middle class, bringing about a more widespread and, in a sense, more democratic quality drinking culture.

I44 (man, 66 years old): If wine is good, I like it when it becomes a sign of class ... because it seems that when I allow myself to drink that wine, the one that you can't afford, and I flaunt it, showing off the fact that I'm drinking the best there is [...] And now quality drinking is a mass culture thing.

While on the one hand there are people who pay particular attention to wine quality, there are also those who do so ostentatiously in order to demonstrate their standard of living. Some interviewees specified that knowing the quality of a good wine is not linked to education or economic status, but to people's general cultural level and their real interest in wine, confirming the findings of the study conducted in Piedmont (Beccaria 2016).

I26 (man, 48 years old): All this discourse depends on the person's cultural level, which not only corresponds to the level of education, it is not a discrimination, but there are people with no degree or who work in a factory and know wine, because they are interested in it.

Ostentatious consumption is linked to economic status and profession; some interviewees spoke of how these factors relate to different quality standards and types of consumption. They emphasised the sharp contrast between the economical wine drinking of people who 'struggle to make ends meet', and the consumption of quality wine and aperitifs by university students, white collar workers and professionals in the city centre bars and restaurants. In this context, quality increasingly attracts attention and wine is becoming a product that is also useful in displaying a certain lifestyle.

## Discussion

This study highlights a significant change in drinking styles in Trentino. Once, the main use-value of wine – typical of the Mediterranean drinking culture – was nourishment (Beccaria and Prina 1996) and, in terms of quality, a general combined and understandable concept prevailed: a simple, not too alcoholic, economical and natural wine. Despite the fact that for older interviewees this vision lingers to this day, drinking habits have changed in the last few decades and have become more complex: among middle-aged adults, a convivial and socialising style prevails, which is characterised by regular but not daily use – often not during meals – of drinks meeting higher and more sophisticated quality standards, in particular concerning wine. By contrast, many younger participants drink a wider range of alcoholic beverages until they are 20–24 years old: in this age range, wine occupies a secondary position, but gains more credibility later on (even if shared with other drinks, like beer and spirits). Among the youngest, the common element in choosing alcoholic beverages is the low price, to the detriment of quality. Poor-quality drinks are preferred not for their taste or for their quality, but for their alcohol content, given that the goal of drinking for this age group is euphoria, inebriation and even drunkenness (Baiocco, D'Alessio and Laghi 2008; Beccaria, Petrilli and Rolando 2015; Guarino 2010).

In line with theories on consumption (Illich 1978; Douglas 1987), this study shows that drinking patterns and habits also follow socioeconomic changes, as well as the changes that took place with the advent of wine production on an industrial scale. The orientation towards quality is also becoming a distinctive social factor, a marker of maturity that entails a growing emphasis on the symbolic values of consumption. This is a consumption pattern that, rather than seeking to meet a need for nutrition or quenching thirst, calls for a certain amount of knowledge and experience, like most cultural consumption (Beccaria 2010).

While consumption is affected by production and the social, cultural and economic context, opinions and judgements about what should be drunk are mainly constructed from indicators given by expert figures. The expert that emerges from this study is not the figure described by Illich (1978): Illich's expert has the knowledge and the decisional power to classify what is true and what is false, what kind of drinking is right and what kind is wrong, whereas individuals are unable to determine their own needs unaided. Here, by contrast, the expert seems to be the 'competent drinker', i.e., one who tastes rather than drinks, can recognise a wine's properties, is interested in knowing its history – from the vineyard to the wine-making process – and is able



to talk about it. Drinking thus becomes a cultural activity and wine is no longer used only to facilitate socialisation and conversation thanks to its disinhibiting properties, but becomes itself an important topic of conversation (Beccaria and Rolando 2016). To judge a wine's quality, personal taste is not sufficient, as it is necessary to consult competent people, who do not necessarily use weighty criteria or personify a specific category, since, as one interviewee noted, they can be also factory workers with a lower educational level.

In modern and post-modern society, consumption is generally influenced by relational networks which bring together users of a specific category of goods (Bourdieu 1984). Goods and products carry a symbolic meaning that legitimises and differentiates a certain social category: in this sense, a quality wine could represent a product – if not an elite product – for a particular category of people to which others could aspire to belong. Thanks to their virtuous behaviour in quality drinking, competent drinkers apparently represent this new category and initiate imitative processes in other types of drinker, starting from their own social sphere but also extending to others (Beccaria and Rolando 2016). Not by chance, Rössel and Pape (2016) emphasise that the ability to choose and drink the right wine for the right situation enables the classes with a high socioeconomic status to construct a wine-identity that provides structure and reinforces a relational framework based on specific products. Demossier (2010) argued that changes in French viticulture led to the rise of a more democratic wine culture, which has increased the middle class's interest in the quality of wine over the last 30 years, whereas the quantity has decreased markedly, a claim that seems to be applicable to the present Trentino wine culture.

It is essential to underscore that more attention to quality is also spreading in parallel with the reduction of quantity consumed per-capita in Italy, and alcohol-related morbidity and mortality are decreasing as a result (Allamani, Beccaria and Voller 2010; Allamani, Beccaria and Einstein 2017).

## Conclusion

The concept of wine quality has not remained static over time. A quality wine is not cheap, its brand and production area must serve as guarantees, and – equally important – it not only should not damage health but can also contribute to people's well-being. Consequently, this study casts light on a sort of reaffirmation and adaptation of tradition based on typical values of post-industrial and post-modern societies (Pollini, Pretto and Rovati 2012). In relation to the concept of wine quality, the study clearly demonstrates the importance assigned to education passed down from generation to generation, to the sharing of drinking knowledge, experience and competences, and to the value of organic products that have not been chemically altered. In spite of globalisation, all these aspects are evidence that some traditions not only have not been lost, but can also provide an impetus for new markets and economic strategies: Trentino is now rediscovering grape varieties of the past which the global market has almost obliterated but now are gaining prestige through limited and high-quality production.

Italian wine makers are retrieving ancient grape varieties in order to find innovative opportunities for expanding their range and reverse market trends toward uniformity. In recent decades, wine production has chiefly relied on a limited number of the so-called 'international' grape varieties. Attention is now turning to local varieties, typical of a particular province or a valley, whose features are difficult to replicate in other places, thus resulting in a unique product (Stefanini and Tomasi, 2010).

To paraphrase a celebrated line by the poet Giovanni Pascoli, we can say that there is something new in the quality of wine today, or rather something ancient.

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### Italian summary

All'interno dell'attuale cultura del bere, i consumi risentono dell'intreccio di bisogni generati da diversi fattori, quali le modalità di produzione e il marketing, nonché la necessità di differenziarsi socialmente anche in un contesto ormai caratterizzato da consumi di massa. La ricerca qui presentata intende verificare se, anche in Trentino – una provincia italiana situata nel nord-est del paese - siano cambiati i modelli di consumo e come questo cambiamento abbia influito sulla percezione della qualità di questo prodotto da parte dei consumatori. Lo studio è stato effettuato in un territorio dedito alla viticoltura e alla produzione vinicola nel quale sono state raccolte 57 interviste qualitative. Dopo aver verificato le trasformazioni avvenute nella cultura del bere, l'articolo si focalizza anche sulla definizione della qualità del vino nell'ottica dei partecipanti. I risultati indicano come la cultura del bere e i consumi siano cambiati notevolmente negli ultimi 50 anni a causa di fattori economici, politici e sociali. Inoltre, le modifiche legate alla produzione e all'industria del vino hanno influenzato in modo significativo l'evoluzione della definizione della qualità del vino e delle sue caratteristiche nella mente dei consumatori. Ciononostante, la ricerca rivela che alcuni aspetti tradizionali persistono nella cultura del bere e, ancora oggi, appaiono determinanti nella percezione della qualità.