

Convention and alterity in terroir: a regional perspective

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The concept of terroir operates as a compelling rhetorical basis for the geographical protection of food and drink in France and more widely in Europe. Products with character from specific territories are often considered as part of alternative food networks, but in this paper I wish to argue that there is much that is conventional in the provenance of some of the most successful produits de terroir. After reviewing the argument that local and ethical foods remain attractive alternatives to the foods of globalised and industrial production, I will explore how some autochthonous foods, which may be considered alternative from the point of view of contracts and distribution, actually form part of ecological, social and cultural networks which are long-established and relatively orthodox. From the scale of the producer to that of the region, I will argue that produits de terroir are geographical artefacts which represent the purposeful alignment of interests and coming together of actors in particular territories. Such coming together, or convention, may operate outwith the economic logic of many supposedly conventional foods, but can still find economic, and sometimes political, support for its apparent coherence of human and physical geographical facts.