

Drinking in France 1965-1979. An Analysis of Household Consumption Data

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Summary

Alcohol consumption has diminished in France for three decades. In this France is an exception to other industrialized countries. However, in one respect France conforms to a regularity found in longitudinal time-series studies comparing different countries: traditional beverages, in this case wine, have given place to new drinks—beer and imported spirits. In this sense, drinking patterns have become modernized and now resemble those found in other Western industrialized countries.

The article, based on a series of household consumption surveys that include purchases of alcoholic beverages by households, studies in what way this modernisation is taking place. A break-down of the data by socio-demographic groups shows that saturation as such does not explain the change. The groups that already have been at the lowest level of consumption—the middle classes—have diminished their consumption further and the other groups—the peasantry and the working class—have followed them. The same is true as regards drinking styles, as much as they are revealed by the beverage types. The already modern middle classes have continued to decrease their consumption of wine and the other groups have done likewise but later.

In contrast, the rural-urban dimension is and has been weakly related to alcohol use. The development has been parallel both in big cities and rural areas. The analysis by region reveals that in France the use of alcohol and especially wine is no longer related to alcohol production, the way it is in international comparisons—producing countries being also the heaviest consumers. On the other hand, consumption patterns, as reflected in the beverage composition, have not levelled out between regions.

One conclusion of the study is that the culturally dominating social dimension in France is that of class. In so far as the lower social groups continue to follow the dominating ones, the development can be expected to continue still for a long time.

Introduction

It has been known that France, the leading alcohol consumer in the world has had a declining consumption since the 1950's. In 1960 the per capita consumption of pure alcohol was 17.5 litres, approximately 5 litres more than Italy, the second country in the statistics at the time. In 1985 the French consumption level was only 13.3 litres, followed by Portugal and Luxembourg at 13.1 and 13.0 litres.

It is interesting that alcohol consumption decreased in France during the very period in which

most other countries increased their consumption, approximately from the middle of the 1960's to the late 1970's. Since then, the consumption increases have levelled off in many other countries as well and the decline in France has continued and even accelerated (Produktschap voor gedistilleerde dranken, 1986).

In an earlier article this exceptional development in France was analysed according to socio-economic groups (Sulkunen, 1986). The present article summarizes the earlier results, completes them through an analysis by degree of urbanization and by region,

and presents a synthetic—although hypothetical—interpretation of the whole phenomenon. (For a complete report of the full study see Sulkuinen, 1988.)

The data presented in this article is based on household consumption surveys conducted by INSEE, The Central Statistical Office of France, since 1965. The latest figures that were available when the analysis was performed was 1979. This makes it possible to study the 14-year period when alcohol consumption decreased from 17.3 litres per capita to 15.1 litres.

The data cover only consumption within—or to be precise, purchase by—the household, excluding consumption in cafés and restaurants. But it covers household consumption well: it has been estimated that the coverage for wine and strong drinks (apéritifs etc.) is about 75% and for beer maybe even greater (INSEE, 1967). This is a very high percentage, in comparison with special surveys on alcohol consumption (Pernanen, 1974).

The Exception and the Rule

France is not only an exception in international comparisons. She also conforms in two ways to a rule common to other countries. First, also other countries with high consumption levels in the 1960's have either remained at their original levels or decreased their consumption, while countries at a low level have increased theirs. Secondly, changes in consumption levels have been related to changes in drinking patterns, especially in beverage preferences. Consumers in other countries have not just begun to drink more, they have taken to drink different—new—kinds of alcohol. In traditional beer countries like England, the consumption of wine has increased the most. The countries that traditionally have used alcohol mostly in the form of spirits have increased the consumption of beer and wine (Sulkuinen, 1983).

Respectively, in France, a traditional wine country, consumers have not just decreased their consumption of alcohol, they have also changed the form in which they drink it, from wine to beer and to strong drinks, as is shown in Table 1.

It is tempting to interpret this kind of similar change in very different drinking cultures as 'modernization'. Life styles have become increasingly similar in different countries, and increasingly similar patterns of alcohol use could be explained as one indication of such homogenization or con-

Table 1. *Alcohol Consumption in France by Type of Beverage (in pure alcohol)*

	1965		1979	
	litres	%	litres	%
Wine	14.10	76.2	11.10	69.7
Strong drinks	2.41	13.0	2.53	15.9
Beer	2.00	10.8	2.30	14.4
TOTAL	18.51	100.0	15.93	100.0

Source: Produktschap voor gedistilleerde dranken 1986.

Note: Here as elsewhere in this article the average alcohol content of the beverages have been estimated at 11% (by volume) for wine, 4.5% for beer, 40% for strong drinks and 6% for cider. These are not accurate estimations but are sufficient for the level of precision needed here.

vergence towards a cosmopolitan, uniform way of life.

One essential aspect in this modernization is adoption of life styles and consumption patterns from other cultures. Another is the increasing importance of taste and style: rising living standards have not only made available increased *amounts* of consumer goods; they have also created a concern for what *kinds* of goods are consumed and how.

This seems to be the case in French drinking patterns as well. The consumption of alcoholic beverages has changed towards what the French themselves like to call 'quality beverages'. It is of course difficult to judge what 'quality' refers to, but one thing is certain: branded products have increased their popularity. Branded château-wines have replaced anonymous products such as 'table wine' or 'country wine'. The same is true of beer: export quality beer has increased its market share at the cost of ordinary beer. Strong drinks are always more or less branded products. Amongst them, rising 'quality' means that internationally famous mass products have conquered the market from local and traditional French drinks such as pastis or alcohols distilled from fruit (Haut Comité d'Etudes et d'Information sur l'Alcoolisme, 1981).

On the other hand, daily consumption of wine at home, the hallmark of the high French consumption level, has declined whereas the consumption in cafés and restaurants has increased. There is no direct information available in France on the consumption of alcohol outside the home. We can get a picture of consumption outside the home only by comparing the statistics on total consumption with the results of the household consumption surveys. This is done in Table 2.

Table 2. Total Consumption Minus Consumption Within Households in France in 1965 and 1979 (in pure alcohol)

	1965		1979	
	litres per capita	%	litres per capita	%
Wine	4.13	63.4	5.06	66.2
Strong drinks	1.33	20.4	1.03	13.5
Beer	1.05	16.1	1.55	20.3
TOTAL	6.51	99.9	7.64	100.0

Sources: Haut Comité d'Etudes et d'Information sur l'Alcoolisme; the household consumption surveys of I.N.-S.E.E. of 1965 and 1979.

Table 2 indicates that wine consumption in cafés and restaurants has in fact increased by almost one fourth and beer consumption by 50%, although the total consumption has declined. The overall alcohol consumption outside the home has consequently increased by almost 20%. Only in the case of apéritifs, etc. the opposite development has taken place, which indicates—weakly—that wine consumption at home has been replaced by strong drinks, apéritifs in cafés have been substituted for by beer and to a lesser extent by wine.

Living Conditions and the Functions of Alcohol

Two questions arise when trying to explain such changes towards 'modern' consumption patterns. One concerns the role of 'the hard facts of life'. How is alcohol use related to the kind of work we do, to the social class to which we belong, or to everything we could call the social environment: family structure, urbanization, social networks the use of time, leisure patterns, etc? Most of these facts presumably influence the way alcohol is used, and also the forms in which it is drunk. Such connections, if empirically valid, would result in *functional* explanations of changes in alcohol use.

The second question concerns the problem of functional equivalents. Are the increases in beer consumption in France and in Finland, and the increase in wine consumption in Germany actually the same thing? The functions and social meanings of each beverage may be very different in different cultures. On the other hand, similar functions can be served by very different objects of consumption. For example, in Finland milk has had much the same uses as wine in France: it has been an important source of energy, considered necessary for well-being, and now it is giving way to water as

the main drink with meals (Sulkunen, 1988, pp. 23-43).

Social Class

The Demographic Factor

France is a powerful case for looking at these questions. The developments in alcohol consumption have been by and large opposite to most other countries, but the changes in the living conditions have been largely parallel to similar changes in other industrialized western countries.

In an earlier article the French alcohol consumption statistics were analysed by social class (Sulkunen, 1986). The household consumption surveys by INSEE allow a classification of the population into six major socio-professional categories based on occupation:

- (i) Those who are occupied in agriculture either as farmers or as agricultural workers.
- (ii) Independent professionals such as doctors, lawyers, merchants, etc.
- (iii) Upper middle classes (teachers, university professors, managers, directors, engineers, etc.).
- (iv) Lower middle classes (primary school teachers, police and military officers, technicians, industrial supervisors, nurses, etc.).
- (v) Functionaries (office workers, sales clerks).
- (vi) Workers.

One—plausible—hypothesis to explain the decrease in alcohol consumption is the relatively rapid change in this occupational structure in France. The proportion of the population occupied in agriculture has been reduced to one half in 1979 as compared to 1965 (from 14% to 7% of the employed population, according to the household consumption surveys). As the consumption level of the agricultural population is much higher than average (in 1965 it was about 17.5 litres, the national average being a little less than 13 litres, according to the household consumption data), this demographic change alone has reduced the population average. However, this factor alone accounts for only a very small part (2.5%) of the real overall reduction in the total alcohol consumption level, which was 33% between 1965 and 1979. For the most part the decline in the overall consumption rate has been the result of changes *within* the socio-professional groups.

Hierarchical Diffusion

Now we might ask whether a similar homogenization of drinking patterns has occurred within France

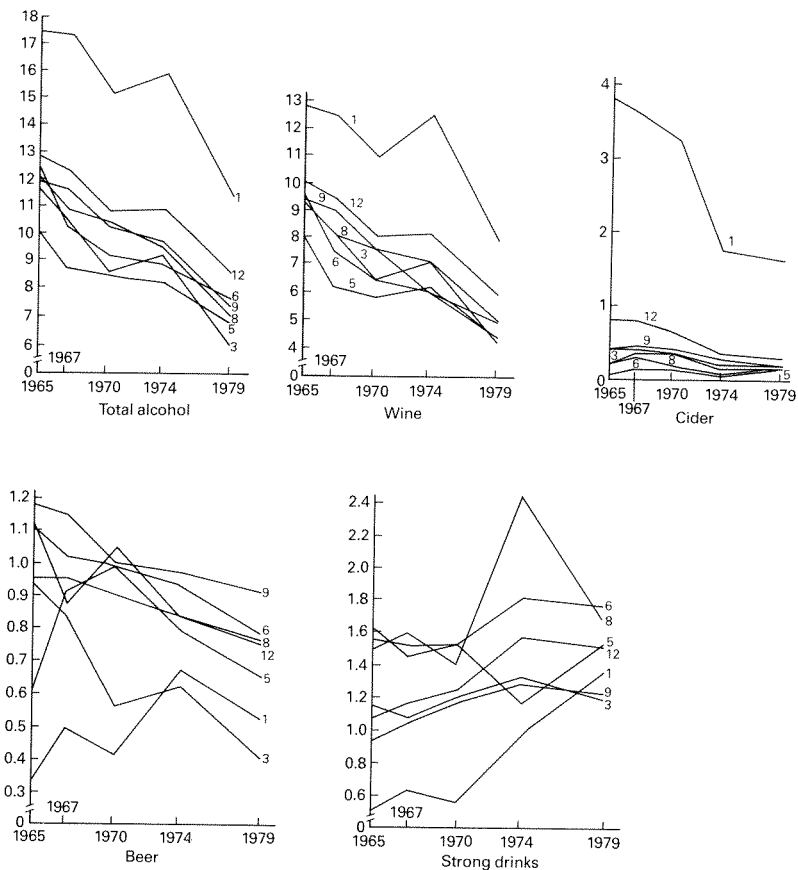


Figure 1. Consumption of alcoholic beverages in French households 1965-1979 by socio-professional categories (in pure alcohol).
 Key: 1. Farmers and farm workers; 3. Independent professions; 5. Upper middle classes; 6. Lower middle classes; 8. Functionaries; 9. Workers; 12. France.

as between countries. Such development, in the case of overall alcohol consumption, could be interpreted as a symptom of some kind of saturation: the heaviest consumer groups would have reduced their consumption at least relatively more than the population categories at a lower consumption level.

We can see in Fig. 1 that this is not the case. All population categories have cut back their consumption of alcohol, and a more detailed analysis would show that this holds particularly for wine and cider, the most 'rural' beverages, and consequently for the total consumption. A more detailed analysis would show that the differences between the socio-professional groups have in fact increased for total consumption and for wine. Only in the consumption of beer and strong drinks, etc. the socio-professional

categories have become relatively and absolutely more homogenized.

To get a better look at drinking patterns by beverage types, Fig. 2 gives the proportions of alcohol contributed to the total by beer, wine and strong drinks. The starting and end points of the arrows represent the distribution of total alcohol consumption between beer, spirits and wine (including cider) in 1965 and 1979 respectively. The percentage contributed by beer is shown horizontally on the right side, the percentage contributed by spirits is shown on the bottom side, reading down to the left in the direction of the left side of the triangle, and the percentage contributed by wine (and cider) is shown on the left side, reading in the direction of the right side of the triangle.

In Fig. 2 we can see that there is no convergence,

although the direction of change is the same for all groups. The functionaries and the middle class groups (5, 6 and 8) lead the change, followed by the others. However, the agricultural population has not by 1979 reached the point where the middle class groups were in 1965.

Both as regards the consumption level and the beverage preferences the change might be called *hierarchical diffusion*: the drinking patterns of the educated upper and middle classes are gradually adopted by the whole population, but the former groups go on changing their consumption style so that they will not be reached by the others.

Cultural Competition

These results resemble the analyses of the dynamics of taste and style by Pierre Bourdieu (1979). Consumption is, according to Bourdieu, a kind of social field, on which players struggle for symbolic power and status in order to distinguish themselves from the others. In the upper positions, people try to establish stylistic patterns that are legitimate, elegant and a sign of superior cultural competence. People in the lower positions—in terms of cultural capital—contest for this symbolic power by adopting the patterns of the elite, the result being that these patterns become banalized and lose their symbolic value. This game leads to a constant change in the system of distinctions between cultural objects, the full command of which is only possible to those who are capable to manipulate it and to express and to recognize different styles.

The use of alcoholic beverages may be one such cultural field. Wine has become a symbol of banality, unless it is surrounded by complicated codes that permit the expression of cultural competence. It has been partly replaced by other alcoholic beverages, but in fact abstaining from alcohol altogether—or using it in a very restricted manner—is also a legitimate sign of cultural superiority in France today. At least it is hard to interpret the development in terms of simple saturation: on one hand, the groups drinking least have cut back their consumption at least as much as the others. On the other hand, if the ‘modern’ way of life—with increasing demands on intellectual performance, for example—would in a functional sense require a reduction in alcohol use, it is difficult to understand why also those who work in the traditional professions have reduced their drinking and changed their beverage preferences to conform better to those of the middle classes.

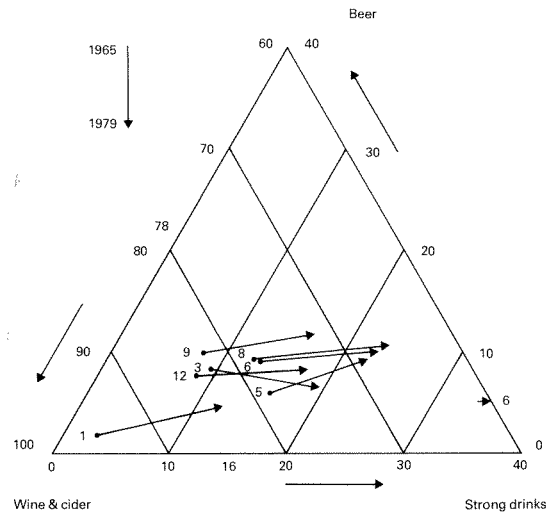


Figure 2. Distribution of alcohol consumption in French households between wine (including cider), beer and strong drinks by socio-professional categories.

Key: 1. Farmers and farm workers; 3. Independent professions; 5. Upper middle classes; 6. Lower middle classes; 8. Functionaries; 9. Workers; 12. France.

Urbanization

Availability and Forms of Interaction

Another dimension of living conditions that one could expect to be related to alcohol use, is the degree of urbanization. First of all, in viticultural countries like France, alcohol is more available in rural areas than in cities. Many rural habitants possess a fruit garden or even a vineyard even if they are not farmers by profession. In any case, cheap local wine is readily available to buy in viticultural villages. This could explain a higher consumption level in rural areas than in towns.

Secondly, alcohol use could be expected to acquire new functions in an urban environment, where social relationships become more segmented, depersonalized and instrumental. The family and the local community have a smaller role in social networks than workplace, leisure activities and other less stable collectivities. When interacting with people, getting friends, spouses or political comrades one always has to make a choice and present an effort. In such circumstances alcohol could be used as a social lubricant, but in this function it would probably be subject to an increasingly fine system of distinctions as to what kind of drinking implies what kinds of social relationships.

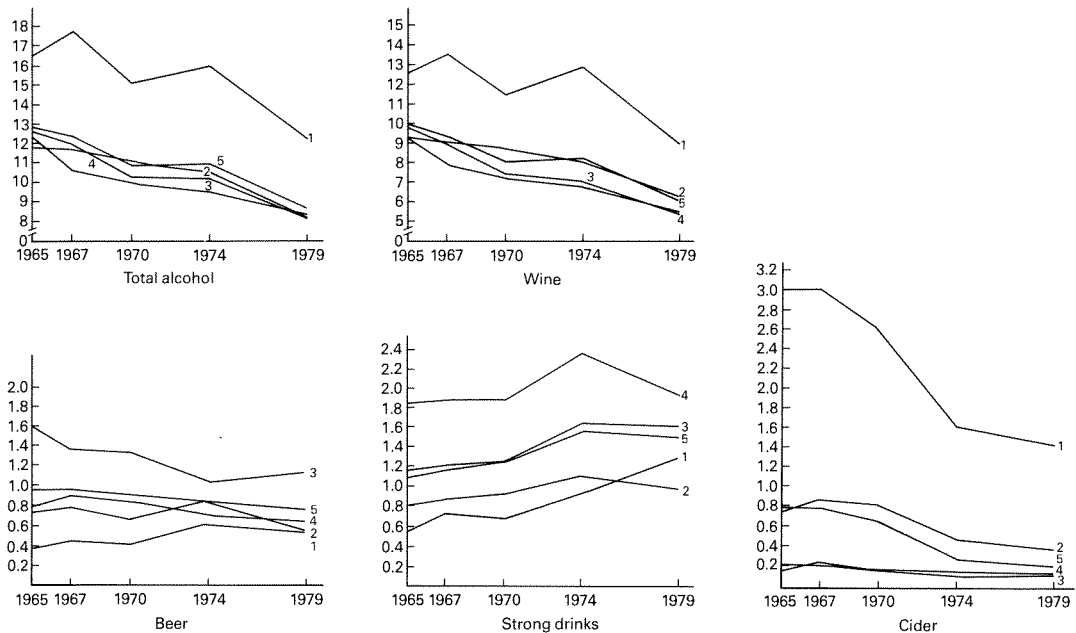


Figure 3. Consumption of alcoholic beverages in French households 1965–1979 by type of community (litres in pure alcohol).

Key: 1. Agricultural population (by profession); 2. Rural communities; 3. Towns over 100,000 inhabitants other than Paris; 4. Paris and suburbs; 5. France.

This is the way the old functionalist school of urban sociology (for example Wirth, 1938) saw urbanization and this also was the line of Selden Bacon's (1962) argument to the effect that alcohol use can be expected to be greater in modern urban and complex societies than in old rural and simple societies.

It is unfortunate that for France we do not have time-series data for consumption in cafés and restaurants, because the standard urbanization hypothesis would most likely relate to drinking in public places. Let us see, however, how the argument bears out for consumption at home.

The French household consumption surveys break down the population by type of community, separating—fortunately—the population occupied in agriculture from the rest. Here we shall keep the agricultural population in the diagrams and tables as one category. The other categories refer to non-agricultural populations living in:

(1) rural communities;

(2) communities with a population less than 20,000 (or in some years less than 10,000);

(3) communities with a population from 20,000 (10,000) to 100,000;

(4) communities with a population greater than 100,000, except Paris;

(5) Paris and the suburbs.

The technical differences in the definitions of these categories for some years disturb somewhat the interpretation of the results. To simplify things, only the categories 1, 4 and 5 will be used in some of the following diagrams. The agricultural population will be kept separate.

Fig. 3 shows much the same pattern for different categories of community as was shown in Fig. 1 for socio-professional groups. In all kinds of communities the consumption of wine and total consumption of alcohol have declined. In the case of beer, there is a slight tendency of the differences to disappear, but the overall trend is declining. For strong drinks, the differences largely remain and the curbs are by and large slightly rising.

The most clear difference with respect to socio-professional groups is that wine consumption and total alcohol consumption are almost indifferent to

the type of community during the whole period. For beer, the consumption level is becoming less dependent on the type of community over time.

Looking at beverage structure by type of community (Fig. 4), we get a very similar diagram as in the case of socio-professional groups (Fig. 2). People living in big cities have a more 'balanced' structure of beverage preferences than rural people, but all population categories have been moving in the same direction: less wine and more other drinks. The small-towners have indeed reached the parisiens, but people living in rural communities still remain in 1979 close to the point where they were in 1965. However, this slight difference is difficult to interpret, because of the changes in classification during the study period.

Neither of the factors in degree of urbanization that could produce differences between town and country seems to hold well in France: either the availability of wine is not in fact essentially greater in rural than in urban communities or this factor has no importance for the level of consumption. Nor does the urban way of life imply great differences in the home consumption of alcoholic beverages, except for strong drinks. For beer the differences have been already relatively small in 1965 and have become even smaller in 1979.

A standard theory in urban sociology is that cultural diffusion takes place from cities to towns and from towns to the country. In part, this seems to be the case here, too: the beverage structure is changing in this way. For the other part, total consumption and the consumption of wine seem to decrease in a parallel fashion: all the French, excluding those in agricultural jobs, agree that drinking wine at home is less and less the right thing to do. Thus we can conclude that with respect to the urban-rural dimension the changes in consumption level have followed a model of *parallel diffusion* and changes in beverage preferences are characterized either by parallel or hierarchical diffusion, depending on how much weight we give to the difference between small-towners and the rural population.

Region

The Logic of Resistance

What standard urban sociology has not been very interested in is that wherever cultural patterns are diffused or subpopulations are acculturated to the culture or dominant social groups, there will also be resistance to change. This resistance requires a social foundation: collective social relationships that

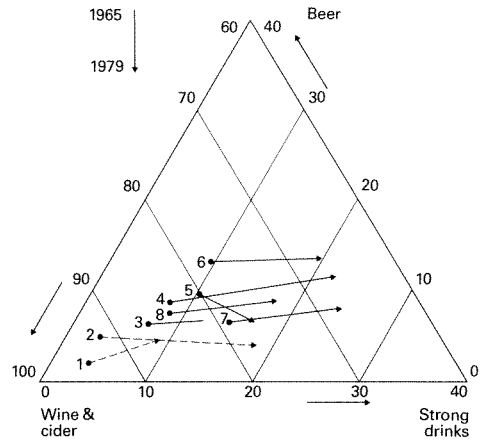


Figure 4. Distribution of alcohol consumption in French households between wine (including cider), beer and strong drinks by type of community.

Key: 1. Agricultural population (profession), rural communities; 2. Agricultural populations (profession), urban communities; 3. Rural communities; 4. Urban communities with less than 10,000 inhabitants; 5. Urban communities, 10,000-100,000 inhabitants; 6. Urban communities, more than 100,000 inhabitants; 7. Paris and the environment; 8. France.

are able to maintain a social identity among the members of the group.

From the preceding sections it is clear that class is less and less a potential social foundation for style, neither is rurality versus urbanization as such. Or they may be, but they are weak and easily influenced by the dominating groups.

This may be an indication of something more general in the symbolic and collective organization of modern industrial societies. In classical industrial societies like England the working class has long ago developed its own style, richly described for example by Hoggart (1957). In England, the working class has also been able to maintain and reproduce its autonomous stylistic patterns, as has been shown for example in the works of Paul Willis (1978).

Several social theorists now seem to think that the time is gone when the working class recognizes itself as a group and maintains its own style or its autonomous organizations. Not class in the traditional sense but a position in the division of labour (Gouldner's and Bell's new intellectuals), race, sex or ideological divisions (the greens) seem to form the foundations for new identity-groups and their organizations or style (Hirsch, 1980; Touraine, 1978, 1981).

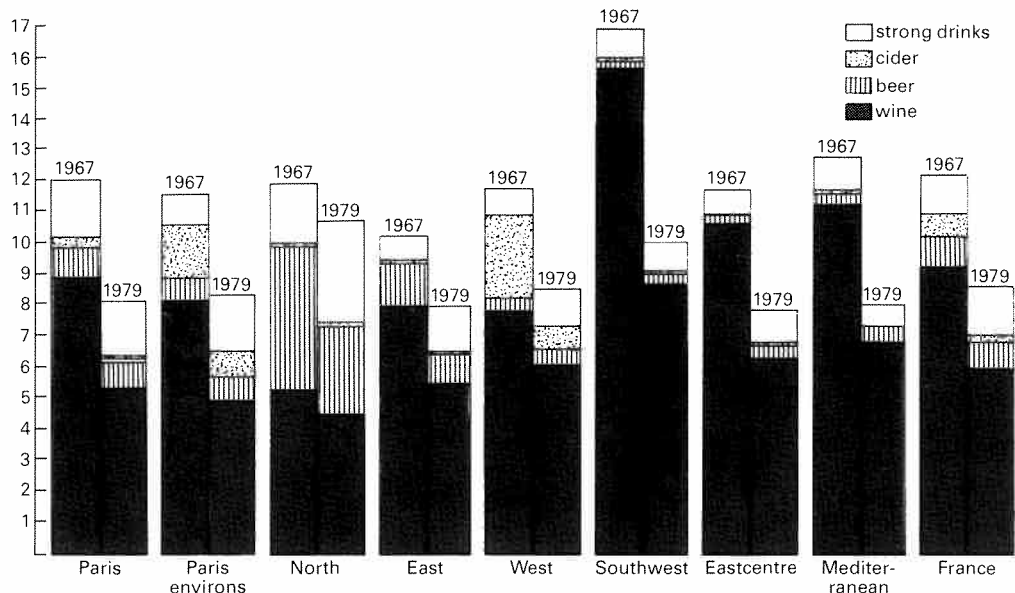


Figure 5. Consumption of alcohol in French households by beverage type and by region 1967 and 1979 (litres pure alcohol per capita)

Even more important emerging bases for social organization and style may be related to locality. In today's internationalizing world, it may be increasingly difficult to find oneself as a member of a class, while it is easy to identify oneself with a village or a region. From this perspective it is interesting to look how well the pattern of cultural diffusion from above to bottom—or rather from center to periphery applies to different regions in France in the cultural field of consumption.

Converging Level and Diverging Beverage Structure

Figure 5 presents household consumption data for the consumption of alcoholic beverages by region in France 1967–1979. The regional classification, ZEAT, divides France in eight geographical regions, each having a somewhat different cultural background.

It can be seen from Fig. 5 that France has four different types of regions with respect to alcohol consumption. First, the Region of Paris, consisting of Paris and the suburbs, as well as the East, the region adjacent to the German border, have a consumption level and consumption structure that are close to the national average. Around 70% to 80% of all alcohol drunk at home was from wine and the rest was beer and strong drinks.

Secondly, there are the viticultural areas South-

west, East central and the Mediterranean regions. There wine accounts for about 80% to 90% of total alcohol consumption.

Third, the 'Bassin parisien' (the large area around Paris) and the West, are two regions, where cider still played a significant role in 1967.

And fourth, the highly industrialized North has a significant consumption of beer, but also the consumption of strong drinks is at a higher level than in the rest of France.

This Figure also shows that consumption level is not consistently related to beverage structure, in a manner that it is between countries. In all regions the consumption level was about 12 litres absolute alcohol per capita in 1967, except in the Southwest (17 litres) and the East (10 litres). In 1969 this level had fallen to somewhere between 8 and 9 litres, and even the Southwest was at about 10 litres. The North stayed quite high, having had a reduction in the consumption of beer and wine, but increasing the consumption of strong drinks.

At the first look, the pattern of hierarchical diffusion—in this case from Paris to the periphery—seems to describe the changes. Alcohol consumption has become less wine-oriented and decreased, according to the model of Paris.

Table 3 gives the same information in more exact numeric form. There we can observe a convergence towards the mean in the region around Paris, the

East, the West and the South-west. On the other hand, the Mediterranean region has decreased its overall consumption level below the French average, whereas the North stays at a level relatively much higher (by about 25%) than the nation as a whole by average.

Table 4 summarizes the regional differences by beverage type in 1967 and 1979 by a measure that is the average deviance from the national mean over all regions. For wine, beer, cider and the total consumption the regions have become more similar, for strong drinks the average differences have grown, mainly due to the increase in the North.

In conclusion, we might say that in terms of consumption levels regional differences have tended to disappear as a result of decreasing consumption of alcohol in the home. The overall tendency of the viticultural and horticultural regions to have a higher consumption level than the others no longer holds for France. This indicates, again, that simple supply factors may not be crucial in determining the consumption level any more. On the contrary, the beer region of the North, where most alcohol is commercial, now leads the total consumption figures in the country.

Thus it seems that when the country is analysed by region, the *convergent* model applies to wine and to total consumption. Here the development is different from our earlier analyses of socio-professional groups, where the hierarchical diffusion model applies, and it does not conform to the analysis by types of community either, where the pattern was basically parallel diffusion.

However, when we look at beverage structures (Fig. 6), another major result appears. The pattern here is the same as in the case of socio-professional differences: the regions that already had a more balanced beverage structure in 1967 have advanced even further in this direction. Even in the North, the proportion of alcohol contributed by beer has decline in favour of strong drinks, thus conforming to the pattern found in international comparisons.

But what is even more interesting is that the traditional viticultural regions (West, Southwest, East central and Mediterranean) have been very slow in changing their characteristic drinking patterns as reflected in the choice of beverages. Although they have cut back their consumption quite radically, they have not followed the pattern towards a modern, cosmopolitan drinking style. As a consequence, the differences in beverage structure have attenuated and we can describe the changes as *divergent*. This gives further support to the hypo-

Table 3. Difference in the Consumption of Alcohol Between Each Region and France, by beverage type in 1967 and 1979

	1967	1979
<i>Total alcohol</i>		
Paris	-0.29	-0.44
Paris, environment	-0.60	-0.19
North	-0.43	2.16
East	-2.07	-0.62
West	-0.51	-0.08
Southwest	4.66	1.47
East center	-0.63	-0.76
Mediterranean	0.44	-0.49
France	(12.31)	(8.58)
<i>Wine</i>		
Paris	-0.46	-0.61
Paris, environment	-1.23	-1.02
North	-4.04	-1.50
East	-1.35	-0.46
West	-1.57	0.10
Southwest	6.30	2.69
East center	1.27	0.31
Mediterranean	1.91	0.91
France	(9.43)	(6.04)
<i>Strong drinks</i>		
Paris	0.63	0.45
Paris, environment	-0.10	0.28
North	0.70	1.80
East	-0.20	-0.18
West	-0.38	-0.34
Southwest	-0.24	-0.55
East center	-0.42	-0.51
Mediterranean	-0.12	-0.78
France	(1.16)	(1.5)
<i>Beer</i>		
Paris	-0.06	-0.1
Paris, environment	-0.21	0.0
North	3.63	2.04
East	0.23	0.26
West	-0.56	-0.26
Southwest	-0.70	-0.44
East center	-0.73	-0.34
Mediterranean	-0.62	-0.37
France	(0.95)	(0.75)
<i>Cider</i>		
Paris	-0.40	-0.18
Paris, environment	0.94	0.55
North	-0.72	-0.18
East	-0.75	-0.24
West	2.00	0.42
Southwest	-0.70	-0.23
East center	-0.75	-0.22
Mediterranean	-0.73	-0.25
France	(0.77)	(0.29)

thetical ideas presented above, according to which locality or regional identities may be or stronger in

Table 4. Relative Differences (δ) According to Region in the Consumption of Wine, Beer, Strong Drinks and Total Alcohol in French Households in 1967 and 1979

	1967	1979
Wine	0.85	0.57
Beer	4.08	2.91
Cider	3.61	3.02
Strong drinks	0.99	1.47
Total alcohol	0.43	0.34

Note: The relative differences (δ) have been calculated according to the following formula:

$$\delta = \frac{\sqrt{\sum_i (c_i - c)^2}}{c}$$

where c_i represents the consumption per capita in each region ($i=1 \dots 8$) and c represents the national consumption per capita in France.

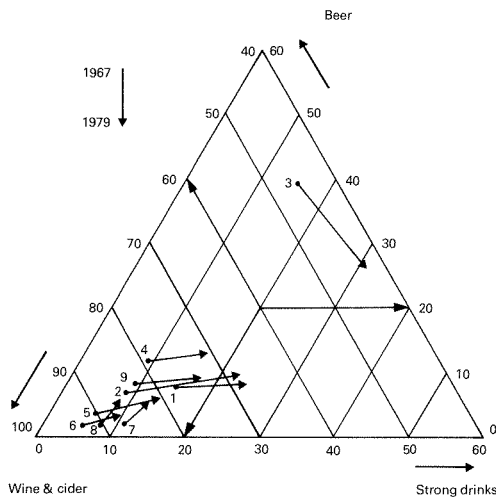


Figure 6. Distribution of alcohol consumption in French households between wine (including cider), beer and strong drinks by region in 1967 and 1979.

Key: 1. Paris; 2. Paris, environment; 3. North; 4. East; 5. West; 6. Southwest; 7. East center; 8. Mediterranean; 9. France.

contemporary industrial and internationalized societies than identities based on class or on the basic hard facts of life such as the urban-rural social environment.

Discussion

Let us first summarize the changes as analysed by socio-professional groups, the urban-rural dimension and by region. Four kinds of relative changes have taken place: (a) hierarchical diffusion; (b) parallel diffusion; (c) convergence and (d) divergence. These models describe the results obtained above in the following way:

	Socio-professional categories	Urban-rural dimension	Region
level	hierarchical diffusion	parallel diffusion	convergence
beverage structure	hierarchical diffusion	parallel/hierarchical diffusion	divergence

Two developments seem to be at work somewhat independently. First, the French are reducing their alcohol intake quite unanimously. This holds for all segments of the population; even in those parts of the country and in those socio-demographic groups where the consumption of beer or strong drinks have been increasing, this has not compensated totally for the decrease in wine drinking, in terms of total alcohol consumption.

Secondly, beverage preferences have changed, but not always hand in hand with a decline in total alcohol intake. In rural France, and especially in the viticultural regions, total consumption has declined but the dominant role of wine has remained very strong.

This raises an interesting question of substitution. Obviously, some wine drinking at home has been replaced by other alcoholic drinks, but there is an element in wine consumption that has not and maybe cannot be replaced by other alcoholic beverages. Survey research (Boulet & Laporte 1985, p. 506) indicates that this element is drinking wine with meals. Although the French have reduced their use of wine with ordinary everyday meals, they still believe that wine is essential with special meals. On the other hand, there is another element in wine drinking that has been replaced by beer and strong drinks: whenever drinking is a separate activity, other beverages than wine are increasingly used. The reason why in the viticultural regions such substitution may be less important can be that in these regions wine drinking outside of meals is less common than in the non-viticultural regions (Boulet *et al.*, 1981, Table 37, p. 135).

In any case, alcohol consumption as a whole is decreasing everywhere. Is this to be described as

some kind of saturation? Maybe new concerns for health, youth and beauty make people more conscious of the risks involved in alcohol use and therefore persuade them to drink less?

In part this is true. In surveys, one of the most frequently given reason for not drinking or drinking less than before is a concern for health (Boulet & Laporte, 1985, p. 508; BVA, 1984, p. 17). Even in areas where wine has not been replaced by other alcoholic beverages, total consumption has declined so that even if drinking patterns—as reflected in beverage preferences—have not become modernized, they have become more moderate and restrictive. The change is a reaction to alcohol as such, not to living conditions or even to the symbolic functions and social meanings of drinking. In general, the French seem to be very well aware of the alcohol content of beer and wine and do consider them as alcoholic—and therefore potentially harmful products (BVA, 1984).

Two modifications or objections to this interpretation must be made, however. First, surveys indicate that people do devalue wine for reasons of 'taste' and style (Boulet & Laporte, 1985, p. 508). Secondly, if it were simply a matter of saturation, the decline in total alcohol intake should be expected to decline most rapidly in those population segments that are at the highest consumption level, and there should be a clear convergence or homogenization of the population. This is not the case, and particularly when the population is broken down by socio-professional categories, the differences are even increasing with respect to the total consumption level and the consumption of wine.

Thus it seems that the hierarchical diffusion model best describes the development and the exceptions should be interpreted in terms of the differences in the 'independent variables'. Urbanization is not as such very strongly related to alcohol use at all, and therefore it is quite logical that with respect to this factor the changes are by and large parallel. Region, on the other hand, refers to a collectivity that much more than social class is able to retain and preserve local traditions in drinking patterns even if alcohol as such is increasingly feared and rejected.

In conclusion, those who are worried about the health risks involved in modern cosmopolitan life styles, the French example may offer a sign of relief. A society where alcohol is and has for generations been present in all circumstances and where it has had the respect reserved for food, is becoming very strongly aware that it is alcohol, a drug, that is drunk

in wine and beer—not just water, taste, energy and refreshment. Furthermore, this awareness is spreading from the centre of the society to the periphery, thus gaining in legitimacy and force. The consequent reduction in total alcohol intake affects most strongly what is probably the most tabooed and intimate drinking situation in French culture: wine with ordinary family meals. And, if the hierarchical diffusion model developed in this article is valid, the trend will continue still for a long time. The groups in French society that are most retarded in this change are still far behind the pattern and the consumption level of the urban middle classes that are leading the modernization process. Maybe France will not remain alone a society where alcohol is progressively banalized and drinking for intoxication is becoming vulgar, if not totally rejected behaviour.

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