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UNESCO Receives Nomination for Valpolicella Grape-Drying Ritual as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Italy seeks global recognition for centuries-old winemaking tradition that shapes Valpolicella’s identity and supports local communities.

Friday, March 20, 2026



The ritual of resting Valpolicella grapes, a centuries-old winemaking tradition from northern Italy, has been officially nominated as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO. The Italian National Commission for UNESCO, following a proposal from the

Ministry of Culture, submitted the candidacy based on what it describes as “winemaking wisdom as cultural heritage.” The nomination highlights the deep connection between the grape-drying process, local communities, the landscape, and the region’s productive culture.

This ritual, known locally as “messa a riposo,” involves carefully laying out harvested grapes on racks called “arele” in special drying lofts known as “fruttai.” The process is essential for producing Amarone and Recioto wines, which are internationally recognized for their unique character. According to Christian Marchesini, president of the Valpolicella Wine Consortium, this savoir faire has shaped not only the region’s wine but also its culture, landscape, and identity. Marchesini emphasized that this is the first time a winemaking technique has been put forward for UNESCO recognition and called it a historic milestone for Valpolicella.

The decision from UNESCO is expected in 2027. If successful, the recognition would reinforce efforts to protect and pass down this tradition to future generations. Marchesini thanked Gianmarco Mazzi, Undersecretary for Culture, along with the scientific committee and local community for their support throughout the candidacy process. He noted that this achievement increases awareness of the ritual’s value and underlines the cultural and collective significance of Amarone and Recioto wines.

The candidacy process began more than 13 years ago and was led by the Valpolicella Wine Consortium. The effort involved collaboration with the Confraternity of the Sovereign Most Noble Order of Amarone and Recioto (Snodar), academic experts, and residents across all 19 municipalities in the Valpolicella denomination area. The scientific committee—composed of oenologists, legal scholars, and anthropologists—identified four key pillars supporting Valpolicella’s case: educational value, environmental impact, social inclusion, and enological importance. The dossier submitted to UNESCO states that without this technique, Valpolicella’s signature wines would not exist.

The grape-drying ritual is practiced by about 8,000 people in Valpolicella. This group includes men and women of all ages and backgrounds—Italians and foreigners—who are fully integrated into local life. The widespread participation across generations is

seen as a strength of the tradition. Supporters argue that recognizing this practice would help preserve not only a unique winemaking method but also a way of life that has defined Valpolicella for centuries.

The nomination comes at a time when global interest in traditional foodways is growing. Advocates hope that UNESCO status will bring international attention to Valpolicella’s heritage and encourage sustainable tourism in the region. For now, producers and residents await UNESCO’s decision while continuing to uphold a ritual that remains central to their identity and economy.