

ABSTRACT
Living in Stuttgart's Wine Culture
An American Experience

Motivation

America is a multi-plural and multicultural society. It is one of the largest economies in the world operating a free market economy driven by consumer demand for a huge range of goods and services. Interestingly alcohol, spirits, beer and wine are not freely available throughout the US. State laws govern how, where and which alcoholic beverages are available. America is now the largest wine consumer in the world. There is viticulture in all 50 states and a burgeoning wine culture. These are exciting times for the US wine industry offering great opportunities as wineries and wine retailers rush to meet increasing demand.

In Europe wine is readily available and is part of everyday lifestyle. Stuttgart has an active wine culture that members of the US Department of Defence community participate in. Members of this community come from all parts of the US making it a "snapshot" of American society. Organisations "on base" offer wine related activities also. This study investigates how living in a wine culture such as Stuttgart has affected a group of American wine enthusiasts. This community purchase wine from many retailers. A key retail venue is the Aafes retail system "on base". Working for an American wine company that supplied wine to Aafes allowed me to interact with the community and to observe these consumers as they explored the wine culture in Stuttgart and further afield. The majority of this community will return to live the US. What will this community want when they return to the US? Are there opportunities for the wine industry? For wine producers, wine vendors and wine retailers?

Methodology

A review of current literature in wine trade magazines, government publications, academic writings and Internet sources was undertaken to examine the role of alcohol in society throughout history and today. Attitudes, norms and expectations regarding alcohol across cultures were researched. This revealed two different cultural approaches to alcohol the "open" integrated culture and the more "closed" ambivalent culture. How alcohol is sold and consumed in Europe and America was compared. The three-tier system for the distribution and sale of alcohol in the US and its role in the costs of wine and reduced choice for US consumers was explained. Examples of how wine culture is manifested in different societies were examined focusing on the wine culture of Stuttgart.

A survey was conducted to investigate the experience of community members relative to wine whilst they are living in Stuttgart. Interviews with Vinottimo and Aafes store management were conducted. Vinottimo is a key Aafes vendor who provides quality European wine to Aafes overseas. Questions were emailed to wine producers who supply wines to Aafes in Europe and the US. The aim of the interviews and emails was to provide information and an overview of the Aafes retail environment for wine in Europe.

Content

Information obtained from literature review was used as the framework for the survey questionnaire. The survey also attempted to provide some basic information by which to group the respondents into wine consumer groups. Questions included information about the type of events respondents attended while in Europe, their purchasing habits and their expectations relative to wine on their return to the US.

The findings from the survey were analyzed. The study revealed how these American wine lovers have been changed by their experience living in the wine culture of Stuttgart. On their return the respondents want to be able to buy a wide variety of wines and go to local wine events in which wine is a part of regular everyday lifestyle. Based on the survey results opportunities and problems in the retail environment have been identified. For European wine producers the possibility of making these customers their wine Ambassadors on their return to the US has been discussed in the recommendations section.

The study revealed dissatisfaction with Aafes in the variety and price points of their European wines. This will not encourage this community to shop at Aafes stores in the US on their return. The wine market in the US is highly competitive, Aafes must act or risk losing these and more returning consumers.

Conclusion

Living in the wine culture of Stuttgart has obviously been a very positive experience. Respondent's participation in Stuttgart's wine culture has allowed them to interact with and get to know the local community. It has enhanced their wine familiarity and wine knowledge.

Although statistically a small study it may be that that the experience of this group reflects the future behaviour and expectations of wine drinkers in the US. The demand for better quality and good value wine reflect the increased wine experience of this community. This is echoed in particular by the behaviour of young millennial American wine drinkers as they participate more and more in the emerging US wine culture. A further study focusing on the young Millenials of the Department of Defense community overseas may provide useful information about this important group for the US wine industry.