

Wine & Psychiatry –
The Perception of Quality Wine as a Premium Lifestyle Element by
Psychiatrists in Slovenia

Abstract

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MOTIVATION FOR CHOOSING THE TOPIC

After 11 years of working in psychiatry I met the world of WSET in 2010, enrolling to WSET level 2. Since I live in the Slovenian part of Styria, which has a considerable winegrowing tradition, up to that time I was one of many self-appointed “Styrian experts” in wine. My WSET level 2 education has shown me how weak my knowledge about wine and the wine world effectively was (as well as that of many other self-appointed “expert” from inside the Slovenian wine trade). I proceeded to WSET level 3 and in the following years gradually became a free-time wine writer. Apart from that I started to make my colleagues from the psychiatric and broader medical community enthusiastic about quality wine. Many of them were thrilled by the theoretical background I could tell about a bottle of wine and they started to buy ever more premium priced wines because they “acquired the taste” for fine wine. And so it happened from time to time in the last years that I attended a medical conference as a lecturer, but instead of giving a daytime medical lecture I held an evening wine tasting. All of this joyful development was nevertheless easier among non-psychiatrists. In an important part of my professional group the public consumption of wine was always sort of disputable. This phenomenon makes sense giving the fact that psychiatric facilities of all kind are the main institutions where alcohol abuse and dependency is being treated in Slovenia. And there is a lot of alcohol abuse in the country. It was my interest to find out to what extend these conditions influence the wine consuming habits of my fellow colleagues and whether or not wine actually has any importance in their lifestyle.

OBJECTIVE

The thesis gives the reader a basic insight into the Slovenian winegrowing tradition, shows the importance of wine for Slovenian people and examines their alcohol consuming habits with the emphasis on Slovenia being a so-called “wet culture”. Furthermore it briefly describes medical conditions that arise from alcohol abuse, those conditions representing one of the mainstays of psychiatric professional activity. It then deals with the Slovenian lifestyle trends and the position of psychiatrists in the society, being in a way split into two directions when it comes to their wine consuming habits. Finally the thesis examines the attitude of Slovenian psychiatrists towards wine, especially quality wine. What percentage of Slovenian psychiatrists are regular wine buyers/consumers, how much money are they willing to spend on a bottle of wine? Do they perceive wine as part of their lifestyle? How do they combine

their wine-consuming habits with their professional life, where they are confronted with alcohol misuse, abuse and/or dependence in a significant percentage of their patients?

METHODOLOGY

I did a thorough research about Slovenia as a wine producing country: the wine production, its wine market and how wine is positioned in the everyday life of Slovenian people. I also researched different kind of literature to gain insight into the alcohol consumption habits in Slovenia, into alcohol-related health and social problems and the possible reasons for alcohol (and correspondingly wine) abuse. At the latter topics I tried not to go too far into any kind of medical detail as that would detach the context from the main objective of the thesis. Then I tried to lay down a few short paragraphs about the Slovenian lifestyle and the role of psychiatrists in the society in relation to wine consumption. Laying down these paragraphs was not easy as the topics carry with them a substantial amount of philosophical context and consequently the word count was rising dramatically. Finally I carried out an online survey among all Slovenian psychiatrists regarding their wine-consuming habits. It was a rather short questionnaire, containing 12 questions that took the respondents max. 5 minutes to fill it out. I didn't want to "a priori" turn off my colleagues from filling it out with a long questionnaire. The survey was ongoing for 13 days and out of 213 active psychiatrists 117 filled it out.

CONTENT

The paper is divided into several sections. After the introduction, sections 2 to 6 cover the results of the theoretical research, outlined in the methodology: statistical data about Slovenia as a wine producing country and about its wine market, a discussion about the Slovenian society being a "wet culture", then a review of the national alcohol consumption habits from the mental health perspective. A short discussion about the Slovenian lifestyle and the position of psychiatrists then follows. The theoretical part aims at presenting the reader with the state of mind in the Slovenian society in which psychiatrists have to face a special kind of challenge as wine consumers. In section 7 the results of the survey described above are presented. The last section covers the bibliography.

CONCLUSION

Despite the rather positive position about quality wine in general that can be seen from the results of the survey (psychiatrists choose their wine quite carefully, they are willing to pay medium, high and premium prices for the quality and style they expect and they are keen on exploring foreign wines) the notion can nevertheless not be made that quality wine is being perceived as a premium lifestyle element for Slovenian psychiatrists. Slovenian psychiatrists are not regular wine consumers and they don't show much enthusiasm about even basic wine education. It is furthermore undeniable that the overall alcohol consuming situation in Slovenia has an influence on the quality wine perception of psychiatrists. In relation to this it would be interesting to draw a comparison with other groups of medical specialists or professional groups outside medicine sharing similar life standard and lifestyle. In this regard there is still room for future studies of this topic.