

# **Abstract for Weinakademiker Thesis (D7): The future of Slovenia wine sector**

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## **Motivation for choosing this topic**

Slovenia is a small Central European country bordering Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Italy and it has a long winemaking tradition. Idea for this dissertation naturally came to me when I was talking to Jonas Tofterup, who passed the Master of wine exam in 2019 and mentioned that Slovenia was not in the theoretical syllabus of the course. Meaning, that Slovenia as a wine country is too insignificant for the global wine market.

## **Objectives and of methods used**

The objective of this research is to explore and analyse Slovenian wine sector and draw a blueprint for possible development in order to put Slovenia on the global wine map.

For the purpose of this research I conducted thirty two interviews with the main protagonists of Slovenian wine sector. In order to get as broad of a picture as possible I have interviewed wine professionals from various fields within the wine sector: wine producers from different wine regions, university professors, researchers, wine journalists, wine educators, wine traders, restaurant and wine bar owners and an official opinion from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of Republic of Slovenia. Vast majority of interviewees are from Slovenia, but I have also interviewed wine professionals who have a deeper knowledge about the Slovene wine sector from Austria, France, Russia and United Kingdom. Twenty seven interviews were conducted in person, three over the phone and two through email. All personal quotes in this research are based on conducted interviews. The same three questions were posed to all participants: 1. Name three strengths/positive sides of Slovenian wine sector; 2. Name three weaknesses/negative sides of Slovenian wine sector; 3. Name three things which should be the first on TODO list for the better future of Slovenian wine sector.

## **Content**

Slovenia is a small central European country geographically positioned between four distinct geographic entities: the Alps, the Adriatic Sea, Pannonian plain and Dinaric mountain range. On officially registered 15.920 hectares of vineyards around 70 million litres of wine is on average produced per year, which is less than 0.3% of global wine production. Unofficial overall production as well as vineyard area is between 20 – 30 % higher, since many of Slovenian 30.000 wine growers possess vineyards smaller than 0.05 hectares and they do not have to declare or register wine production.

According to the research the top five positive sides of Slovenian wine sector are: diversity of terroir and grape varieties (which was mentioned 17 times), outstanding potential of the terroir (11), entrepreneurial and dynamic winemakers (7), rise of quality and progress in the last twenty years (6), tradition and wine culture (6) and indigenous and regional grape varieties (6).

But to really evolve a country as a wine region you must not only acknowledge the positives but also identify, recognise and try to fix the negative sides of Slovenian wine sector. According to the times mentioned top five weaknesses of Slovenian wine sector are: lack of cooperation and trust among the winemakers (16 times); no wine marketing board – wines of Slovenia (9); lack of strategy and vision for the wine sector (7); outdated legislation (quality assessment/natural wine/no real data on production/non-loyal competition/marketing) (7) and insufficient knowledge of winemakers (7).

After identifying the positive and negative aspects the question remains what should Slovenia do in terms of its wine sector. Top five on TO DO list for Slovenian wine sector are: wine marketing board – wines of Slovenia (21 times); reform the outdated legislation – professionalization/quality assessment/natural wine/focus on origin not on the brand (17); more cooperation among the winemakers (8); appellation/classification of vineyards (7); short and long-term strategy (7).

## **Conclusion**

The progress of the sector is slower as it could be due to no cooperation and lack of trust among the winemakers. With lack of strategy and common vision for the wine sector one is not surprised that generic marketing body – a wine marketing board has not yet been established. Wine legislation made sense in the 90s, but it is outdated and it needs a serious reformation in order to enable new quality standards, start building the top of quality pyramid and put more focus on terroir and origin. Furthermore, to differentiate between wine professionals and part-time hobby program, and professionalize the whole sector.

Slovenia with less than 16.000 hectares of vineyards will never be competitive enough for bulk wine production, since 90% of the vineyards are on slopes and machinery cannot be used. The future lies in focusing on smaller and niche production, selling wines for higher price, based on sustainable winemaking and educated winemakers. Without a vision and a holistic short-term and long-term strategy Slovenian wine sector will not flourish as it could and should. Establishment of the wine marketing board – wines of Slovenia, and reformation of outdated legislation are the highest priorities. Leadership and working together for a common goal is deeply needed.