

Abstract

Thesis - The Past, Present and Future of Winemaking in Prague (Czechia)

I decided to choose the topic - The Past, Present and Future of Winemaking in Prague (Czechia). And why? I moved to Prague from the Northern Moravia region in 1996. Later, I identified wine as my hobby and passion. But not only simple drinking, I wanted to learn more about the overall topic, starting with history, business relations, marketing, different tasting methods and approaches, wine production and growing.

During that time, I met many interesting people from the wine industry, amongst those the most important to me - Prof. Dr. Vilém Kraus, who was a great patriot of Bohemian wines and author of many books, a wine grower and producer and wine cultivator. He influenced me a lot and I had the privilege of attending some of his master classes. He inspired me to study wine, and in 2014 I applied for WSET Diploma Study.

Before WSET studies I joined Royal Wine Club in Prague, this association focuses mainly on wine tastings but also on travelling to different wine destinations and meeting important wine growers and producers.

My interest was also in wine growing, so I often visited Moravian winemakers and learned how to make good wine. My role model in this respect was Mr. Jaroslav Springer (Stapleton&Springer winery) who focuses only on 2 varieties, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. So, we had the same passion, Burgundian wine style. I was more and more looking at some wine growing opportunities in Prague, but the opportunities were very limited. I was lucky and got the chance to take over for 3 years the small “garden” vineyard at historical vineyard in Modřany. As it was limited in time, I was looking for other places to grow the vines.

After several years of searching for wine production site, we succeeded in Troja district where most Prague vineyards are located. With the friend we founded Trojský Vinařský Spolek (Troian Wine Society) and working on the vineyard called Hrachovka. This vineyard was created from scratch as the last vines there were pulled off more than a hundred years ago.

So, the above describes my interest in the Prague wine region and the path I went through in the last 25 years.

I did research into whether it is possible and feasible to grow the winemaking industry in Prague even though the pressure from different sources is very heavy and other uses of land sites might be more profitable.

I looked at this topic from different angles, as a grower, winemaker, investor, owner of the land, proprietor of restaurant/bar or merchant. I explored potential obstacles of winemaking in Prague, also looked at opportunities which might not be visible at first sight.

The aim was to get the findings which might lead to the re-establishment of the famous wine past of Prague and to show the reasons why to invest in such industry as winemaking. I compared the historical facts about winemaking and the actual situation. I mapped the overall potential, considering future trends, demand and growth.

And what is the conclusion of my thesis?

Prague is a historical place where the wine was planted from Middle Ages, with King Charles IV. playing a significant role in its development. He issued a decree in the 14th century mandating the planting of vineyards on suitable slopes in Prague and surroundings.

Prague's vineyards benefit from varied soil conditions, which play a crucial role in shaping the distinctive qualities of the local wines. Also, the proximity to the river and hilly profile of the city contribute significantly to the quality and character of the wines produced here.

Although the size of the vineyards is approximately 15 hectares only, some great quality wine examples could be found there. The sizes of the vineyards are rather small, biggest is approximately 4.5 hectare only, but new vineyards are still planted. This is driven by private individuals mainly who want to follow the tradition and revive the famous past. Winemakers such as Mr. Zilvar or Mrs. Vydra are great examples of such enthusiasm.

If the activities will be supported by the municipality, the overall size of the vineyards could be easily doubled. Most of suitable land sites is in the possession of the state or city. The vineyards are also competing with other development activities such as residential or office developments. The prices, even for sites with agricultural zoning, are very high and subject to speculations. Co-operative farming on rented plots or long-term leases could be great solution for future winemaking, especially for state or municipality so they are in control of the land and could stop any speculations.

However, in some districts like Troja, Modřany or Dejvice, the potential is great and demand for different use of the greenery is unstoppable. Based on several discussion, some satellite districts, on the edge of Prague, started to be active in new plantings.

Prague wine market is renowned for its beer, winegrowing tradition is slowly coming back. Wines produced in Prague are becoming more often seen in the best restaurants and wine bars. Their pricing is way above average. Prague wines would never be massively produced but could compete with quality and create nice addition to the wines from other regions or from abroad.

Prague could use Vienna's experience and learn how to upgrade current situation to next level. In Prague, some of potential sites are located within city centre, in walking distance from major cultural and historical monuments. This could help to even better marketing of wines produced here.

As in Vienna, Prague should also unify more in varieties planted and create some unique feature, like Wiener Gemischter Satz DAC. The key varieties could be Riesling, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, as the historical reminiscence and to highlight the best terroir opportunities.

In this respect, Vienna could be seen as an ideal example of winegrowing in the capital city. And Prague should follow this trend.

Based on the research done, I believe there is a solid opportunity for Prague winemaking activities for the future. Combination of history, still available land sites, enthusiastic people, commercial demand and popularity of winemaking as a trend how to utilise unused and neglected land sites could take the status quo to next level. More push is now needed on districts and municipalities to make it happen as they have a key to further growth.