

Abstract

This thesis explores the development of a wine brand for the Zadar Wine Region in Croatia, a territory with unique viticultural characteristics, rich cultural heritage, and increasing relevance in organic viticulture.

The motivation for this study stems from the region's untapped branding potential, shaped by a fragmented production structure, boutique-scale output, and limited international visibility despite favorable terroir, indigenous grape varieties, and an established tourism base.

The objective was to design a region-specific branding strategy that harmonizes authenticity, sustainability, and modern market expectations.

The research combined literature review, climate data analysis, case studies, and expert interviews to build a comprehensive picture of Zadar's viticultural identity and branding opportunities.

Key challenges were identified, including climate change, low production volumes, and structural disintegration among producers. However, opportunities arise from organic leadership, consumer shifts toward lower-alcohol and terroir-driven wines, and rising demand for boutique Mediterranean styles.

Through detailed analysis of terroir zones—*Ravni Kotari*, *Bukovica*, and the coastal belt—the thesis highlights their diversity in soils, climate, and varietal expression, providing strong grounds for micro-regional branding.

Organic certification plays a dual role as a marker of sustainability and authenticity, aligning with consumer expectations in eco-conscious markets.

A comprehensive SWOT analysis identifies internal strengths such as terroir diversity, organic leadership, and viticultural heritage, as well as external opportunities in wine

tourism, export markets, and sustainability-focused consumer segments. Weaknesses—including fragmented ownership, small production volumes, and lack of aged red wine programs—are addressed through actionable strategies like cooperative branding, cellar investment, and knowledge transfer. Threats such as labor shortages, climate volatility, and limited global recognition are acknowledged as critical barriers to growth.

Methodologically, the thesis integrates qualitative and quantitative insights, balancing primary sources (interviews, case studies) with data from national registers and climate institutions. Case studies of Škaulj and Bora wineries illustrate practical approaches to brand building, emphasizing terroir, innovation, and experiential marketing. Proposed strategies include the introduction of an internal appellation system, as these systems are designed to foster brand cohesion, highlight terroir specificity, and elevate the region's profile both domestically and internationally.

The findings affirm Zadar's potential to emerge as a boutique, sustainable wine region rooted in tradition yet responsive to global trends. With coordinated investment, clear storytelling, and strategic differentiation, the Zadar Wine Region can position itself as a modern Mediterranean producer with strong environmental and cultural credentials. Future research should explore consumer willingness to pay, long-term climate modeling, and the integration of sustainable packaging into branding narratives.

Manuela Plohl, MA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Manuela Plohl', written in a cursive style.