

## **Indigenous and local grape varieties and their role in shaping the unique identity of modern Bulgarian wine**

### **Abstract Weinakademiker Thesis (D7)**

#### **Motivation for choosing this topic**

This topic reflects my personal interest for wines from indigenous and local varieties in general. It also presents a challenge, as modern Bulgarian wine is a nouvelle, relatively unknown on the international market and still has to build its reputation of high quality product.

#### **Thesis objective**

The objective of this thesis is to explore the range of main indigenous and local grape varieties in Bulgaria and evaluate their potential in shaping the unique identity of the country's modern wine production. Can local grapes and wines, produced from them help Bulgaria build a new image of high quality producing country and pave the road for new products to the market?

#### **Methodology**

To give answer to the question above and support the accuracy of its statements, this thesis is based on original research, as well as on scientific literature, recent statistic data and online publication of local and international authors. Information on the current development of the industry is based on given opinions of wine producers, wine marketing experts and representatives of the hospitality and trade sector. Their view, recommendations and concerns were shared during online and telephone interviews, and as an answer of online inquiry. In total 18 people from different sectors of the wine business participated in the research.

#### **Content**

This thesis is separated in five chapters and contains full bibliography and appendix with tables and maps. The Introduction chapter states the objective of the research and outlines the background and historic context of modern Bulgarian wine, as well as the significance of local varieties during different periods of time. Chapter II. takes into consideration the regional and production aspect of wines, created from native grapes. It provides overview of their growing area and specific growing conditions and discusses on the evolution of style during the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> C. Chapter III. is dedicated to the marketing aspect and the current status of the wine sector in Bulgaria. It deals with contemporary issues, which have impact on the industry and gives possible scenarios for its future development concerning common marketing strategy, price, export and wine tourism. This chapter is very much based on interviews with wine makers and experts. The opinion of local stakeholders on which native varieties have the potential to be Bulgarian flagship grapes is stated accordingly. Chapter III. also defines relevant target groups and points of sale for niche products from local grapes and gives examples for their unique assets. Chapter IV. presents a short resume of the most important concerns of local producers, based on their given opinion. Chapter V. summarises what vital changes are needed within the wine sector in order to explore the true potential of local varieties in shaping the unique identity of modern Bulgarian wine. The most important local white and red grapes, their origin, varietal specifics and most typical wine styles produced from them are inserted in table in the Appendix.

## **Conclusion**

Interviews with Bulgarian wine professionals show how complex the current situation within the sector is. There is a shared opinion that urgent revision of the Bulgarian regional designation system and common marketing strategy are needed for the sustainable development of the wine producing country. Regionalisation can positively influence the creation of stronger structures in various producing areas, reduce depopulation and generate awareness among growers and consumers for the unique assets of each region. Collaboration and better communication between the responsible institutions and producers, as well as between individual producers is crucial to define relevant common actions, and to ensure fair competition and equal chances for different size of businesses to reach their customers on both domestic and international market. In the context of these changes and with growing interest towards indigenous and local grapes and wines produced from them on the global market, native varieties can play an essential role in shaping the new identity of modern Bulgarian wine.