Abstract for Weinakademiker Thesis (D7)

Latvia – one of the northern wine regions

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Motivation

The wine industry is undergoing significant transformation as climate change alters the geographical boundaries of viticulture. Rising temperatures and extended growing seasons have created new opportunities for grape cultivation in regions previously considered unsuitable for commercial wine production. Latvia, traditionally associated with fruit and berry wine production, has recently emerged as a potential northern wine region. However, limited academic research has been conducted on the country's viticultural potential, grape-growing practices, winemaking methods, and consumer perceptions of Latvian wines. This study was therefore undertaken to evaluate Latvia's potential as an emerging northern wine region and to identify both the opportunities and challenges associated with the development of commercial grape growing and winemaking.

Objective

The primary objective of this thesis was to examine the natural and human factors influencing wine production in Latvia, to investigate the grape varieties and alternative fruit wines currently produced, and to assess consumer awareness, quality perception, and willingness to purchase Latvian wines. Particular attention was given to understanding how Latvia's climatic conditions influence viticulture and winemaking practices and whether consumer attitudes support further development of the sector.

Methodology

The research employed a mixed-methods approach combining a review of scientific literature, industry publications, personal communications, and original market research. Secondary research included academic sources relating to climate change, cool-climate viticulture, grape variety adaptation, and northern wine regions. Due to the limited availability of published research on Latvian viticulture, primary data collection formed an important component of the study. Interviews were conducted with leading representatives of the Latvian wine industry, including winemakers, and representatives of the Latvian Association of Winegrowers and Winemakers. These interviews provided practical insights into vineyard management, grape variety selection, winemaking practices, production challenges, and market development.

The practical research component analysed data collected during the Latvian Winemakers Festival held at Rundāle Palace on 30 May 2026. The festival brought together twelve Latvian wineries and approximately 300 visitors. A consumer survey involving 150 respondents was

conducted to evaluate familiarity with Latvian wines, perceptions of wine quality, purchase intention, preferred wine styles, and willingness to recommend Latvian wines to others. The findings provided valuable information regarding current consumer attitudes and the market potential of Latvian wines.

Content

The study demonstrates that Latvia possesses several characteristics that support the development of viticulture despite its marginal climate. Rising temperatures, longer growing seasons, and the availability of cold-hardy hybrid grape varieties have improved the feasibility of grape cultivation. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain, including winter and late spring frost risk, high annual precipitation and elevated groundwater levels.

The research also highlights the importance of fruit and berry wines within the Latvian wine sector. Interviews with producers revealed that fruit wines may provide Latvia with a distinctive market position and a competitive advantage compared with traditional wine-producing countries.

The investigation of contemporary winemaking practices showed that Latvian producers increasingly employ techniques commonly used in established cool-climate wine regions. Stainless-steel fermentation vessels, cultured yeasts, malolactic fermentation, lees ageing, oak maturation, and sparkling wine production are now widely used among commercial wineries.

The consumer survey indicated encouraging levels of market acceptance. Most respondents evaluated the quality of Latvian wines positively, expressed willingness to recommend them to others, and demonstrated at least some degree of willingness to purchase Latvian wines in the future. These findings suggest that consumer awareness and confidence in Latvian wines are continuing to develop and may support future growth of the sector.

Conclusion

Overall, the study concludes that Latvia possesses potential to develop as an emerging northern wine region. Although climatic limitations continue to constrain production, ongoing climate change, improvements in viticultural knowledge, increasing producer experience, and positive consumer perceptions are creating favourable conditions for the expansion of grape growing and winemaking. The future development of the sector will depend on continued investment in vineyard management, grape variety selection, producer collaboration, quality improvement, and market promotion.