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International standardization versus national institutionalization: A comparative study of sommelier education in Poland and Norway and its impact on professional capital and career mobility.

INSPIRATION

Sommelier education is a relatively new topic in the wine industry, which is increasingly growing and where professional qualifications contribute to career development. Wine education was traditionally informal, with little exposure to traditional wine education, whereas the requirements as sommeliers today are a more specialized knowledge, tasting education and credentialing required. At the same time, a new array of teaching schemes has developed. Some countries continue to pursue internationally-oriented certification-based structures like the WSET (Wine & Spirit Education Trust) and CMS (the Court of Master Sommeliers), while many are establishing established (not just national but national institutionalized) pathways for professional learning. I personally selected this topic due to my professional practice in Poland and Norway, as well as a lack of academically conducted studies which compare the two approaches to sommelier education.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of the thesis is to compare internationally standardized and nationally institutionalized sommelier education as well as its effect on the variables of professional capital, labour market recognition and social mobility. The research aims to determine if one system yields higher professional advantages than the other and what the value of being educated depends on context. A comparison of Poland and Norway is made based on the fact that they belong to two different educational traditions. Poland has a world-class certification system while Norway has a significant national institutional framework with recognized sommelier schools.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical foundations come from Human Capital Theory, Pierre Bourdieu's capital theory, and Institutional Theory. These perspectives allow the analysis of education, by means of a holistic perspective – not only to examine it as a means of acquiring knowledge but also as a source of symbolic value, legitimacy, and professional opportunity. Human Capital Theory facilitates the understanding of education as an investment, Bourdieu's theory shows how symbolic and linguistic capital contribute to the development of education, and Institutional Theory suggests that recognition and legitimacy among individuals in different labour markets play a crucial role in the value of institutionalized capital.

A mixed-method approach was used for the research. The empirical data include semi-structured interviews with practitioners in the hospitality sector, educators, and sommeliers in Poland and Norway and an online survey by 102 respondents. Educational motivation, career recognition, pricing and accessibility of programs, and perceptions of various certification systems were included in the survey. The results were discussed with the chosen theoretical framework and compared with interviews and secondary literature findings.

CONTENT

The results clearly indicate differences between the two education models. Professional mobility, global recognition, and flexible careers were positively related to international certifications like WSET and CMS. The respondents frequently cited global recognition as their primary motivator for obtaining these qualifications. National education, however, had a much stronger association with local labor market recognition and employer trust. Norwegian sommelier schools had a strong sense of legitimacy within the local hospitality industry and were perceived as strongly aligned with the industry practice. The results also showed that the access to education depends on financial and linguistic aspects. International certifications (at least of this sort) typically require relatively heavy financial investments, and English-language expertise, while national programs may provide greater accessibility through public support systems and instruction in a local language.

CONCLUSION

Neither educational model is clearly superior to the other, the study concludes. Instead, each one generates new types of professional capital. International certification enhances global visibility and career mobility, while national, institutional-level education increases local legitimacy and job security. Perhaps the most important fact is that the value of sommelier education is a function of context. “A qualification that’s useful in one market may be worthless in another. Accordingly, to the thesis, the most robust educational approach might be a hybrid model that marries international certifications to nationally embedded educational trajectories. Overall, sommelier education relies on the intersection of international certification systems and national institutional structures.