ABSTRACT

Motivation

I first came into contact with Swiss indigenous grape varieties when I moved from Sweden to Valais. I found it fascinating that such a small wine-producing country could present such a wide range of native grape varieties. Petite Arvine soon became one of my favorite white wines, and later, after moving to central Switzerland, I discovered Completer, another distinctive variety that sparked my curiosity. These experiences inspired the present study and a desire to better understand the role of indigenous grape varieties in preserving Swiss wine culture and heritage.

The motivation for choosing this topic comes firstly from when I realized the scarcity of the wines from certain producers, that I wanted to buy for the gastronomy sector. I also saw a growing concern about the loss of indigenous grape varieties, which are increasingly being replaced by more internationally recognized varieties, and from the need to preserve cultural heritage within the Swiss wine industry. This study focuses on the indigenous grape varieties Petite Arvine and Completer, which represent important elements of Swiss wine culture and regional identity. The main objective of the research is to examine the historical significance, cultivation practices, and cultural value of these traditional grape varieties, as well as their role in preserving biodiversity and local winemaking traditions. Is it possible to increase plantings? If yes, is there a risk that consumers lose interest in these varieties, if they are less rare? Can it affect quality?

Problem/objective

This research investigates the challenges faced by indigenous Swiss grape varieties in a globalized wine market dominated by international grape cultivars. The study aims to explore how Petite Arvine and Completer contribute to Swiss cultural heritage, the biodiversity, and regional wine identity, while also examining the risks associated with declining cultivation and changing consumer preferences.

Methodology

To research this topic, I studied historical analyses and statistics, reviewed academic literature, and conducted online research. To gain a deeper understanding of the subject, sources include academic literature, Agroscope and Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG) statistics, semi-structured interviews with producers, a retailer, an ampelographer, and a representative of the Federal Office for Agriculture, as well as a blind tasting of commercially available wines.

The blind tasting of 12 commercially available wines was conducted with a panel of 6 trained tasters. The tasting used a short descriptive and ranking method to evaluate the wines. The research further explores the origins and characteristics of Petite Arvine and Completer, their adaptation to Swiss climatic conditions, and their contribution to the uniqueness of Swiss wines in both local and international markets.

Content

The research consists of five chapters. The first chapter serves as an introduction, covering the relevance of indigenous grape varieties in Swiss wine culture, as well as the growing interest in rare and heritage grape varieties. The second chapter examines the historical heritage of these varieties, including planting material and the challenges associated in viticulture. The third section presents case studies of Petite Arvine and Completer, focusing on their origins, characteristics, and role within Swiss viticulture. The fourth chapter explores findings related to typical commercial wine styles, quality standards, and certification systems connected to these grape varieties. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses consumer and industry perceptions of Petite Arvine and Completer, including summaries and analysis of the conducted interviews.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that preserving indigenous grape varieties is essential not only for maintaining cultural identity and traditional knowledge but also for supporting sustainable viticulture and biodiversity. The fact that the varieties are rare, and almost only available in Switzerland, makes them stand out.

The findings show that both varieties have experienced growth in vineyard area over recent decades, although at very different scales. Petite Arvine has become one of Switzerland's leading indigenous white grape varieties, while Completer has recovered from near extinction and is increasingly recognized as a premium niche wine. Interviews highlighted the importance of heritage, authenticity, and regional identity, while also identifying viticultural challenges and limited availability of suitable vineyard sites as barriers to further expansion.

The study concludes that both varieties have strong potential for continued preservation within Swiss viticulture. Their rarity, distinctive sensory profiles, and strong connection to place contribute significantly to their value. While widespread expansion appears unlikely, continued conservation efforts, consumer awareness, and support for local winegrowers will be essential to ensure that Petite Arvine and Completer remain important elements of Swiss wine culture in the future.