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thesis abstract

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vino de pasto – the future of Jerez?

Motivation for choosing this topic

My fascination with the wines of the Marco de Jerez began during the WSET Diploma Course, where I wrote a case study on the rise and fall of Sherry. That assignment led me to the region in 2018, and I have returned frequently since. Over the years, I feel like having a front-row seat to a remarkable shift. A new generation of producers is reviving terroir-driven viticulture, embracing historic practices, and challenging the constraints of the traditional fortified model. Much has changed, particularly in recent years. In 2021, the region saw the most significant regulatory changes in over 50 years, opening the door to new styles and expressions. It's an exciting moment for Jerez, and within that revival, one category stands out: *vino de pasto* - *or however these wines will eventually be named* - unfortified white wines usually made from Palomino grapes on albariza soils. These wines are expressive, approachable, and have the potential to reshape the perception of the region.

Problem/objective

The central question this thesis seeks to answer is: *How can vino de pasto provide a sustainable path for the future of Jerez, enhancing both the commercial success of unfortified wines and the regional identity?* Despite recent regulatory changes, there remains a lack of clarity around classification, labeling, and communication. The term "vino de pasto" itself is not universally accepted and poses marketing challenges. A more structured framework is needed to align producers, guide consumer perception, and position these wines globally.

Methodology

To investigate this question, I employed a mixed-method approach. Primary research included interviews with key stakeholders, such as César Saldaña (the president of the Consejo Regulador), Armando de Guerra (Barbadillo), and Joaquín Gómez Beser (Meridiano Perdido). These interviews were conducted in person and / or via e-mail. Secondary research included a review of regulatory texts, academic literature, and trade media, with comparative analysis of other regions, such as Douro/Porto, Champagne and Montilla-Moriles, that have implemented terroir-led or dual-appellation systems. Additionally, observational insights were gathered during visits to key producers and through tastings, contributing valuable contextual understanding to the study.

Content

The thesis begins with a historical and legal overview of *vino de pasto*, outlining its long-standing presence in the region and its marginalisation during the rise of fortified wine. Recent regulatory changes in 2021 and 2024, such as removing the mandatory fortification rule and potentially lowering the minimum ABV, signal growing institutional openness to redefine the region's identity. These changes form the foundation for the development of a new D.O. dedicated to unfortified white wines.

As of 2025, discussions are underway to establish a new Denomination of Origin (D.O.) specifically for unfortified white wines from the Marco de Jerez. While these wines are often referred to as *vino de pasto*, it is unlikely that this historical term will become the official name of the new appellation.

Interviews with key stakeholders reveal that alternative naming options are being considered, some referencing the region's distinctive soil, others emphasizing geographical identity or neutrality. The term *vino de pasto* may still be permitted on labels as a stylistic reference, but its longstanding association with bulk or generic table wines makes it an unlikely candidate for official designation.

The president of the Consejo Regulador confirmed that while the final name remains under legal and diplomatic review, it is essential that the new terminology reflects both terroir and the region's ambition to reposition itself on the global stage. Several producers emphasized the importance of a name that communicates origin and quality without alienating parts of the region or invoking outdated perceptions.

Beyond naming, the structure of the D.O. is a key focus. The current draft framework prioritizes site-specific wines from individual pagos. While this aligns with high-end terroir logic, comparable to Burgundy's climats, it risks limiting participation to producers with access to iconic vineyard parcels. In doing so, it may restrict commercial scalability and consumer understanding. Many stakeholders, including both small and large producers, advocate for a broader classification model that introduces regional and village tiers alongside parcel-level designations. This would not only support inclusivity but also offer more accessible entry points for consumers and allow the wines to scale internationally without compromising identity.

Conclusion

This thesis concludes that the creation of a new D.O. for unfortified white wines in the Marco de Jerez is not an endpoint, but a crucial step in a larger transformation. A structured classification system, progressing from regional to village, pago, and parcel levels, could bring much-needed clarity, increase transparency for consumers, and align Jerez with the world's most respected wine regions. Crucially, such a framework could help bridge the commercial divide between fortified and unfortified wines, allowing both styles to thrive under a unified, terroir-driven hierarchy and identity.

If implemented with care, this system has the potential to reframe how Jerez is perceived: not merely as a producer of traditional fortified wines, but as one of Spain's most innovative regions for expressive, site-specific whites. To support this transition, further research is needed in several key areas:

1. **Consumer perception and label terminology**

Quantitative and qualitative studies across key export markets should examine how proposed terms, such as *vino de pasto*, *vinos blancos del Marco*, etc. are understood and received. These insights are essential to shaping effective communication strategies and ensuring the successful positioning of the new category.

2. **International trade and market communication**

Interviews with sommeliers, importers, educators, and buyers can help determine the most resonant narratives and marketing tools. To build awareness and credibility, these wines should also be formally integrated into established educational and promotional platforms, such as Copa Jerez and the Sherry Educator Course.

3. **Cross-regional knowledge exchange**

Jerez stands to benefit from structured dialogue with regions that have already implemented dual D.O. systems. Organising an international congress, bringing together key stakeholders from Jerez (e.g. the big bodegas), the Douro Valley, and beyond, could offer strategic insights into governance, branding, and market diversification. While isolated collaborations (e.g. Dirk Niepoort's involvement) have taken place, a more formal initiative could catalyse shared learning and long-term cooperation.