From Classroom to Export Markets: Certification Courses and Ambassador Programs as Tools to Enhance the Export of Emerging Wine-Producing Regions

A Case Study of Certification and Ambassador Programs for Turkish Wines

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Thesis Abstract

Motivation for choosing this topic

It was not Bordeaux or Burgundy, but Türkiye (its wines and the people behind them) that inspired me to gain an international wine qualification. I had been organising food and wine tours to Türkiye and hosting tastings of local wines for tourists, yet I felt capable of contributing more to the promotion and support of Turkish wine. My background is in journalism and public relations, but for more than ten years all alcohol-related content has been heavily restricted in domestic media in Türkiye. At the same time, promoting Turkish products, including wine, abroad is permitted and in some cases encouraged.

My first step was to study for a WSET diploma, only to discover that it did not contain even a single page on Turkish wines. This omission helped shape the idea that I should contribute to the creation of educational material on Türkiye as a wine-producing country. I see this as my professional contribution to producers who work hard to access export markets, often relying solely on their own initiative in the absence of an official promotional body. During my diploma journey, I was fortunate to meet inspiring wine professionals from around the world and came to understand that a niche product such as Turkish wine can succeed in export markets only with the support of professionals like sommeliers and specialist retail staff. However, these professionals need access to structured, reliable information about Türkiye and its wines.

The WSET Diploma does not allow candidates to select and research their own topics, but the WeinAkademiker thesis provided this opportunity. It enabled me to analyse developments, gather theoretical and practical insights, and systematise information that now forms the basis of a certification course dedicated to Türkiye and its wines, designed specifically for export markets and wine professionals. I also believe that this thesis and following course creation can be beneficial examples for the rest of emerging wine producing regions/countries as well.

Problem/objective

This thesis explores how certification courses and ambassador programmes can be used to strengthen the export performance of emerging wine-producing regions, with Turkish wines as the central case study. Countries like Türkiye, despite deep viticultural heritage and distinctive assets, lack the long-established reputational capital and education structures enjoyed by classic wine regions, making it harder to gain visibility and therefore market share abroad.

The main problem addressed is how emerging regions can build a recognisable, quality-focused export identity through education-led initiatives; the main objective is to assess the role of certification and ambassador programmes in soft brand development and to create a framework for Turkish wines.

Methodology

This research is based on a comparative case-study approach. It collects academic literature, industry reports, official educational programme materials and verbal conversations with industry insiders and compares certification and ambassador initiatives dedicated to established regions and wine styles (Rioja, Napa Valley, California and Cava) and to emerging wine producing counties (Georgia, Greece). Particular attention is given to the format, target audiences, educational design, alignment with export objectives and short- versus long-term impacts.

Content

The content is organised into four chapters. **Chapter 1** develops the conceptual link between wine education, soft branding and export development, distinguishing B2B and B2C certification and examining ambassador programmes as cultural diplomacy. **Chapter 2** analyses international case studies to identify successful practices and transferable elements, especially in narrative creation and programme structure. **Chapter 3** offers a review of Türkiye's wine sector, outlining its production profile, unique selling points, existing promotional efforts and structural barriers such as limited awareness, fragmented communication and lack of educational support. **Chapter 4** unites these insights into a theoretical base for a proposed Turkish wine certification course and ambassador programme, detailing programme principles, tiered course content, ambassador selection and roles, implementation strategy and anticipated impact.

Conclusion

The thesis concludes that well-designed certification and ambassador programmes applied as a part of export oriented activities therefore can contribute as effective tools for export support as they restore information balance, increase knowledge and therefore confidence among professionals and consumers and create networks of informed advocates who strengthen a region's soft brand over time. For Türkiye, the proposed framework provides the conceptual foundation for the development and pilot implementation of a Turkish Wine Specialist course with practical application that allows for converting under-recognised strengths (such as indigenous grape varieties) into a clearer international identity and contribute to more resilient export presence of Turkish wine producers.