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QUALITY WINE PRODUCTION IN POLAND – IS IT POSSIBLE?

MOTIVATION FOR CHOOSING THIS TOPIC.

As a Pole, I want to believe that quality wine production in my country is possible. Nevertheless, as a WSET Diploma student I need to be realistic, meaning – I understand that I should and will use the knowledge acquired at Weinakademie in order to analyse the possibilities for quality wine production in Poland. I hope that by analysing the topic and by draw the appropriate conclusions I will be able to contribute to improve the quality of our wines.

PROBLEMS/OBJECTIVE

Because of Poland's area classification (zone “A” – the coolest), the country is perceived as a place where no quality wine production is possible, especially based on *vitis vinifera*. The problem is quite complex – it's not only about climate, we need to take into consideration whether Polish wine makers use the right locations for vineyards (soil, exposition, microclimate, possible threats like too high humidity or susceptibility to natural diseases). At the same time, I had to analyse external factors like winemaker's know how and equipment, especially with the juxtaposition of wine styles they might achieve. The objective of my paper was to analyse various factors influencing quality wine production and to assess whether it is possible to produce quality wine in Polish conditions.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology was based on collecting the information from the available sources: official materials from government bodies, online resources that are focussed on the topic of Polish wines, books about the Polish wine scene, blind tastings with sommeliers and wine experts, interviews with winery owners, winemakers. Especially important was the interview with Piotr Stopczyński, Polish leading enologist.

CONTENT / STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.

SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

According to the official EU instruction number 479/2008, Poland has been registered as a climatic zone A, the coolest area, similar to Denmark, Great Britain, and Luxembourg to name a few. Does this mean that there are no possibilities to produce good quality wine in Poland? I deeply believe that this is not the case. Of course it isn't only a matter of climate, but also terroir, site location, soil, equipment, vinification, and wine making knowledge and experience. All these factors influence reality, which in this case means that quality wine production in Poland is realisable. Most importantly, my goal is to prove my thesis not only in theory, by writing this paper, but as the final result, during defence at Rust, I'll provide my best wine samples to support my beliefs and assumptions.

SECTION 2 – POLISH WINE GROWING HISTORY AND IMPACT ON THE MARKET

Short overview of the Polish wine growing history and rebirth of Polish winemaking industry.

SECTION 3 – CLIMATE CONDITIONS AND SOILS IN POLAND.

Analysis of the Polish climatic conditions and soils overview. Additionally, at this point I compared the Polish macroclimate factors: thermal growing season and the cumulative amount of heat during the growing season, with well-known wine growing regions like: Champagne, Baden, Burgundy and Bordeaux.

SECTION 4 – GRAPE VARIETIES & VITICULTURE

In this section, I presented grape varieties used in Polish vineyards and methods for training and taking care of vines. I also mentioned the criteria that Polish winemaker should take into consideration when selecting varieties and clones of vines.

SECTION 5 – WINE MAKING – VINIFICATION, STYLES & EQUIPMENT

The aim of this chapter was to explain how we approach wine making – what current knowledge is, what kind of styles we can produce, and what kind of equipment we use – in the winery and in the vineyards as well. The most important aspect in this part was to draw conclusions as to whether the Polish wine making scene is going in the right direction.

SECTION 6 – WINE REGIONS

Short overview of Polish wine growing regions marked on the map of Poland. In addition, I presented official statistics from the agricultural market agency, in order to compare the sizes of our vineyards year-by-year and show how the industry is developing.

SECTION 7 – CHALLENGES

As an emerging market, Poland has big challenges and numerous possible obstacles to overcome. I analysed areas that might be crucial for further development like: collaboration between wineries and wine regions to set up standards, investment needed to develop the market, knowledge and know-how of winemakers.

CONCLUSION

Yes, Poland has the ability to produce quality wine but at the moment only on a very small scale. We still have lack of experience in wine production, a lack of knowledge, and too few experienced enologists and winemakers. There are no clear indications for the best terroir and ultimately the best fit for grape varieties, clones, and rootstocks. Moreover, at present the vast majority of crops are hybrids, which significantly limits the quality of wines produced from them. Also, what we need is more resources for investment in professional equipment required for high-quality vinification. And finally, to enhance production standards, wine law should be properly established, regulated and respected. I would also suggest starting experiments with traditional method sparkling wine production, quality sweet wine (icewine and late harvest) and also rose wines, which we already produce, but on a very small scale.