

Renaissance of the Balaton – Sue Tolson

Abstract

Motivation

Hungarian wine in general suffers from a cohesive image as do many of its regions. The Balaton in particular suffers from this given it is divided into several smaller regions and thus is unable to market itself effectively as a region. Moreover, the Balaton is also a touristic destination and years of mass tourism as well as the legacy of the communist regime have had a negative effect on the quality of wine and gastronomy in the region. Furthermore, the appeal of tourism in the area has led to property development and speculation which is continuing to erode the vineyard area, including historic grand cru areas; this has also led to spiralling land prices, therefore making land unaffordable for most grape growers and wineries.

There are now many initiatives around the lake aiming to deal with the above problems and I believe it is of interest to look what each of these organisations is doing and how they are working together to counter the challenges Lake Balaton and its wine region currently faces.

Objective

To analyse what voluntary organisations there are around the Balaton connected with viticulture and wine and what kind of initiatives they have been undertaking to counter the challenges that the region faces relating to regional image, quality of wine and food around the lake, wine tourism and the erosion of the vineyard area due to property development and speculation. It aims to consider the potential effect of these initiatives on the future development around the lake and to draw conclusions relating to important considerations such as intra and inter-regional cooperation, the development of a clear USP and the need to see both the negative and positive side of tourism on a local area.

Methodology

Little published material exists on the above with the exception of media articles and the organisation's own websites. Thus, research focussed on any recent media articles relating to the Balaton, the organisations' own websites and informal interviews and questionnaires with some of the key people involved with these initiatives.

Content

The thesis makes a brief introduction to the region, including some information on location, grape varieties and wine styles, and a brief historical background, focussing particularly on the more recent post World War II history. It then gives an outline of the current situation of the Balaton region, paying particular heed to the challenges relating to tourism and seasonality, property speculation and the lack of a clear Balaton brand for wine.

The main content of the thesis presents key organisations around the lake and the initiatives they are undertaking in connection with the development and assurance of quality wine tourism, the decision to focus on Olaszrizling and how various organisations are trying to improve and guarantee its quality and build a brand image, and the fight against property speculation to preserve the vineyards. It considers organisations such as Balatoni Kör, Dél Balatoni Borút, Egyesület, Gastro Map Lake Balaton and touches on smaller community initiatives in the context of wine tourism. Relating to Olaszrizling, the thesis presents Rizling Generáció and Csopaki Kódex in addition to Balatoni Kör and emphasises in particular the Vinea Balaton, or BalatonBor, initiative and its importance in raising the profile of the lake's most widely planted grape variety and the attempt to build a super-regional brand image. Then the work discusses the precarious situation of the vineyards, particularly on the northern shore of the Balaton and various attempts to ameliorate this, in particular the most recent movement of Balaton Konzilium.

Finally, Somló, the only region not directly on the shores of the Balaton, is given special consideration along with the idea of focussing on local varieties in individual regions.

Conclusion

The thesis concludes by discussing the future and various likely outcomes of the discussed initiatives and some of the organisations' plans for the future.

Conclusions are then drawn regarding the importance of cooperation within a wine region for it to be successful and the fact that a wine region, and indeed a country, needs a USP to attract the attention of consumers. Cooperation, in association with the local and national government is also highlighted in order to prevent the vineyard area from being further degraded and to ensure that any tourism takes into account the viticultural history and cultural identity in order to be sustainable in the long term.