

Abstract: Back to school?

Researching the possibilities for creating an educator course on the wines of Limburg

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Motivation

As a former high school teacher and a current wine educator I am very interested in educator courses related to wine and wine regions. As I was born and continue to live in Limburg, the biggest and oldest wine region in the Netherlands, I would like to develop such a course on the wines of Limburg that especially focuses on the PDO wines.

Another reason to focus on the wines of Limburg is my work in the wine trade, selling wines of Limburg together with Mario Tertschnig. Conducting this research and writing this thesis gives me a good opportunity to augment my knowledge about the wines, the region, the winemakers and (potential) customers.

Methodology and goal

The starting point for my research are the existing educator courses. I have conducted an extensive number of interviews with former participants and organisers of existing educator courses to collect their experiences. My goal was to achieve a solid view of the most common practises. Step two was analysing all the information that is already available about the wines of Limburg. The last step was interviewing the local winemakers and other people involved in wine, hospitality and wine education in Limburg and the Netherlands to get a better view on their desires and requirements for a course on the wines of Limburg. I wanted to investigate if winemakers would support this idea and if sommeliers benefit from such a course.

Content

In the first chapter the following existing educator courses in Europe are explored: Certified Sherry Educator, Madeira Wine Educator, Certified Port Educator, VDP Ambassador, Rioja Wine Certified Educator, Italian Wine Ambassador and Wines of Portugal Academy. After a short introduction to all the courses, I present relevant course information split into the following topics: the goals, the target group, the financial aspects and the certification. This section ends with best practises and recommendations about some general issues, the preparation, the duration, the program and the post-certification.

The second chapter consists of a short introduction to the Limburg wine region and its three PDOs: Maasvallei, Mergelland and Vijlen. To concentrate on my main topic I will refer for background information to other sources and list all producers in the Appendix.

Chapter three is the main part of this thesis and explores the expectations and requirements for an educator course on the wines of Limburg. Through interviews with all stakeholders I have collected information about the goals, the target group, the financial aspects and the important issue on how to design the course with regards to the content, the duration and location, the educators, the certification and the post-certification.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of my thesis confirm my question on the need and support for an educator course on the wines of Limburg. Of course there are some objections that should be taken into account but the majority of stakeholders supports the idea.

The promotion and awareness of the wines of Limburg, the existing PDOs and the quality (related to the price) will be the most important learning goals of the course.

A critical success factor for this kind of course is the availability of wine professionals with a wide scope who can act as ambassadors. In response to all the inspiring stories I have heard in the interviews, it is clear that sommeliers are the best target group.

The biggest challenge of this course is the financial part. At the moment the PDOs rarely have allocated any budget for promotional activities like this. In general all winemakers make clear they do not want to pay for the course. Therefore the biggest amount should be paid by the participants supported through sponsorship and subsidies.

Preferences and needs with regards to duration and location of the course are quite contrary but most interviewees would like to be at the wineries in Limburg during this course. It will be important to find a practical compromise between the ideal location and the time availability of the participants.

An in-depth, practical, interactive and appealing program that covers the most important subjects with a focus on recent developments should be designed and taught with passion, knowledge and experience. Key is that factual and fair information is provided permitting different opinions and visions.

The certification of the course (exam and / or certificate) still requires further discussion. I think this will become clear as soon as the duration and the level of the course will be determined.

Recommendations

The most important recommendations are summarized below.

Further research is needed for the financial part. Possibilities for sponsorships and subsidies should be investigated. The contribution of the winemakers / PDOs should be part of this research.

It is important to find the right balance between duration and location to provide a valuable course that is both attractive and feasible for potential participants.

An assessment is needed to decide which regions / PDOs / winemakers should be taken into account for this course.

More research is needed with regards to examination, certification and its value for the participants. A discussion on the best way forward on how to organise the post-certification should also be part of this.

It is suggested to design an appropriate name for the course and the 'result'. (Educator / Ambassador ?).

Designing the course viable for the future is important and should focus on sustainability. Aspects to consider are financial aspects, collaboration between winemakers and other people involved and attractiveness of the course.

For all courses I analysed as part of this thesis, a strong organisation exists that supports and organises these courses. Therefore a discussion is required whether a new general organisation for the wines of Limburg will be valuable and effective.