

# **Taste of Terroir: Are Local Varieties Pillars of Turkish Wine Tourism**

## **Motivation**

Turkey has a rich history with Anatolia witnessing almost all history of winemaking. However, due to politics, wars and religion, winemaking almost diminished in the area and local varieties was on the verge of extinction. As a winemaker at a relatively new winery in one of the oldest wine regions in the Mediterranean, I am amazed by the possibilities. During my WSET studies, I noticed all the old-world countries are using their own local varieties and attract many enthusiasts from all over the world. However, majority of Turkish wineries continue to use popular international varieties. Since marketing of alcoholic beverages are restricted in Turkey, wineries tend to practice oenotourism to increase revenue and promote their tourism activities to attract wine consumers. However, it is still extremely local and does not attract international wine enthusiasts. I wanted to explore how to attract foreign tourists to Turkish wine and using local varieties can create the necessary uniqueness.

## **Objective**

Main objective of this thesis was to identify why majority of Turkish wineries still choose international varieties over local varieties and to find out if this can be altered by creating awareness. Another objective was to find out if foreign consumers are more attracted to uniqueness or familiarity.

## **Method**

First, I conducted research on current state of wine industry, such as how many wineries have oenotourism practices and also indigenous varieties of Turkey. It is essential to know the varieties used for winemaking and who uses which. For the brevity, popular varieties selected as some are still in research process and has not turned into commercial wines yet.

To understand the wineries' reasoning, face to face interviews and online surveys with the same question set was conducted with owners or managers. A sample set was selected such that it can encompass wider region. Main criterion was that participating wineries should be involved with at least one aspect of wine tourism. In addition, some wineries should not use local varieties at all to understand the reason behind that.

Secondly, I have conducted a survey to consumers to understand what attracts them. (i.e. why did they visit the winery?) Only criterion was they should be foreigners but could be either visiting or residents in Turkey.

Lastly, I conducted two interviews with wine professionals. First one was with Levon Bağış who owns a wine bar solely serving wines from indigenous varieties. He is also part of Yaban Kolektif which makes wines from almost extinct varieties and as a part of Heritage Vines of Turkey, he is trying to save old vines. Second interview was with Seray Kocaemre. She oversees marketing of Çal Vineyard Route, one of four trails dedicated to oenotourism.

## **Content**

This thesis starts with a brief introduction of Turkish wine industry. It gives a history and development with current status. Later a definition of indigenous varieties used in winemaking with their characteristics are explained. For this section, a short list of 10 variety selected based on their commercial availability and popularity.

Next section covers the oenotourism practices of Turkey. Existing wine routes are briefly explained with their locations. Also, the first practice of oenotourism in Bozcaada and reasons behind its declined popularity explained. In this section answers to questionnaires from both wineries and consumers are also summarized. Questionnaire was conducted with 14 wineries and 30 consumers. Reasons behind not using local varieties for 2 wineries are briefly explained with other's opinions on how to use local varieties for promoting oenotourism. Lastly, interviews with two wine professionals working actively in oenotourism summarized.

In the conclusion section, I gave personal opinions on how to improve wine tourism and how to promote local grapes. From business point of view, I gave possible improvements in hospitality sector which is the welcoming point for Turkish wine.

## **Conclusion**

Due to current legislations, wine industry struggles to reach out to consumers both in local and foreign markets. Due to this difficulty, large scale wineries opt for easy to sell wines. Furthermore, staff inexperience also results in easy to sell, mass produced wines in restaurants. However, visitors look for unique experience and mostly choose local wines and local cuisine. Wineries or winery associations should train staff members for restaurants who can explain local varieties to customers. Moreover, they should be able to promote their wines in local and foreign markets. Unfortunately, wine fairs are quite expensive for small wineries and winery associations should be of help. Some wineries form vineyard routes to promote their wines and regions collectively which also promotes the local varieties of that specific region as well as other Turkish varieties. Those routes are specifically for wine tourism. With the current involvement of Michelin Guide as well as Gault Millau, Turkey is on radar for people seeking local cuisine with local wines.