

The levers of the champagne industry to fight its challenges and live its vision of sustainability

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Mag^a. phil. Clara Radunsky M.Sc., DipWSET®

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Abstract

This work examines the champagne industry's transformation towards sustainability, guided by its ambitious decade plan targeting Net Zero Carbon emissions by 2050. It evaluates the industry's maturity across ecological, social, and financial dimensions, analyzing key levers such as policies, education, motivation, and leadership. Through qualitative interviews and literature reviews, the work identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats proposing strategies for sustainable growth and long-term adaptability while highlighting opportunities for further research and innovation.

The main part of this work explores the levers, key players, and measures driving the Champagne industry's transformation toward sustainability. It analyzes how policies, motivation, education, and leadership interact to enable change. Policies like *Viticulture Durable en Champagne* certifications (VDC) and adapted regulations lay the foundation for consistent sustainability practices, while motivation initiatives emphasize the importance of aligning stakeholders' values and emotions with transformation goals. Education plays a critical role, equipping stakeholders with the technical and emotional skills needed to adopt sustainable practices. Institutions such as the CIVC and major champagne houses are at the forefront, offering programs ranging from standardized trainings with global reach to immersive visitor centers and museums like Pressoria, which combine education with interactive experiences.

Leadership and culture are equally vital. Examples include Telmont's *In the Name of Mother Nature* campaign, Bollinger's entrepreneurial approach, and Piper-Heidsieck's bold strategies represented by its globally experienced cellar master. These leaders foster innovation, inclusivity, and resilience within their organizations, shaping a culture that supports transformation. The chapter also examines the roles and contributions of the industry's key players: the Comité Champagne (CIVC), which coordinates the efforts across the sector; champagne houses, which set benchmarks for sustainability practices; cooperatives, which support growers and foster knowledge-sharing; and growers and small producers, who contribute significantly to the industry's heritage owning 90% of Champagne's area. It highlights challenges, such as labor shortages and fragmented messaging, alongside opportunities for greater alignment, innovation, and collaboration.

The champagne industry's sustainability transformation significantly influences its business performance, presenting both opportunities and challenges across ecological, social, and financial dimensions.

The industry's strengths, including its innovative spirit and economic power, bolster its global competitiveness. Annual sales exceeding €6 billion, with two-thirds from exports, provide the financial capacity to invest in research, sustainability initiatives, and premium branding.

Collaborative efforts among stakeholders and a rich heritage reinforce consumer trust and loyalty, ensuring continued demand for Champagne's luxury product despite market fluctuations. The use of reserve wines safeguards product consistency, and even further strengthening its brand reputation.

However, weaknesses such as rigid traditions, high production costs, and fragmented vineyard ownership threaten financial sustainability. Long training periods for key roles delay talent renewal, and domestic market pressures exacerbate profitability challenges. Fragmented messaging and inconsistent stakeholder priorities dilute sustainability efforts, creating inefficiencies that hinder business growth.

Opportunities lie in leveraging storytelling and innovation to enhance consumer engagement and market differentiation. Emphasizing sustainable practices as part of Champagne's luxury appeal could attract conscious consumers and justify premium pricing.

The most critical threat is climate change, jeopardizing grape quality and Champagne's signature style. Coupled with labor shortages and changing consumer preferences toward value-driven purchases, these risks could erode profitability. Successfully addressing these challenges requires strategic innovation and cohesive stakeholder action to align sustainability goals with business objectives, ensuring long-term adaptability, resilience, and growth.

The sustainability transformation of the Champagne industry highlights progress across ecological, social, and financial dimensions while revealing areas for improvement. Ecologically, initiatives like the 2003 carbon footprint assessment and resistant grape varieties demonstrate visionary leadership, but strict regulations limit experimentation needed to address climate change. Socially, strong leadership and collaboration drive efforts, but challenges such as inconsistent stakeholder engagement and labor shortages hinder sustainability integration. Financially, Champagne's economic strength supports investments, yet competition and shifting consumer preferences threaten profitability.

This work explores the industry's internal sustainability transformation. Future research could analyze diverse sustainability strategies across Champagne producers and examine the balance between tradition and innovation as well as and raises compare its approach to other regions and methodologies.

To accelerate transformation, bold measures are for sure essential. Policies should enable experimentation, storytelling should emotionally engage all stakeholders, and education programs should evolve to attract talent. By embedding sustainability at its core, Champagne can reinforce its luxury appeal and maintain its global reputation.