

Abstract for Weinakademiker Thesis (D7): The future of Alicante Wine and its potential for the Dutch market

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MOTIVATION FOR CHOOSING THIS TOPIC

I've been visiting the province of Alicante for the last 30 years as my family lives in Pedreguer which is in the heart of La Marina Alta. Recently I've noticed a change in the scenery. More vines seem to be planted throughout the province, new wineries have been emerging and the local wines are showing up as an option in the restaurants. As I'm curious what is happening and whether this could offer a business opportunity in the Netherlands this became the subject of research for this thesis.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS USED

The objective of this thesis is to research the wine industry in Alicante, to evaluate its future potential and to assess what strategies can be used, if any, to successfully bring wine from Alicante to the Dutch Market.

For the purpose of this research I've started with desk research collating all information I could find, summarizing relevant information, and analysing this information with the aim of identifying relevant questions and drawing up hypotheses which I've tried to test in interviews. I've conducted interviews with a representative of the Protected Denominated Origin of Alicante, with Frank Smulders, Master of Wine and expert on Spanish wine and with Dennis Wiersema who is owner of the successful specialist retailer 'de Wijnschuur'. I've also applied for interviews with some of the producers of the regions, but unfortunately they did not react to my request. I mainly attribute this to the language barrier and a lot of the Spanish producers only speaking Spanish. Luckily the PDO was able to speak in behalf of the producers. Last but not least, as I was investigating the potential of wine from Alicante, I have also tasted some of the wines to assess their quality level and to assure that the desk research is aligned with actual tastings.

CONTENT

Alicante is a small PDO, it only counts 42 certified wineries, located in eastern Spain bordered by the DO's of Jumilla, Yecla, Valencia and Utiel Requena. Currently the area under vine is 10.389 hectares producing 34.022 hectolitres for the export market and 122.853 hectolitres of wine in total.

Alicante can broadly be divided into La Marina, situated at the coastline and Vinalopó situated 40 km inland of Alicante. La Marina has a Mediterranean climate with limestone and clay soil and has Moscatel de Alejandria as its main grape variety producing dry and sweet white, fortified and sparkling wine. Vinalopó is progressively more continental, with vines planted on an average altitude of 400-500 metres giving it a clear diurnal range. It has Monastrell, internationally known as Mourvèdre, as its main grape variety, which occupies almost 60% of all vineyards. Monastrell is also used to make the historic Fondillón, a semi-sweet still wine, with a natural high alcohol percentage of 16% and aged in a sherry like solera system.

Research and analysis has pointed out that Alicante wine stands out for its history (especially Fondillón), its grape varieties that can clearly be linked and identified with the region, its modernised industry in combination with the use of traditional methods and its favourable growing environment especially suitable for certified organic winemaking. These strengths are hampered by Alicante's past

of bulk production and a low price level, insufficient local and international marketing and the negative effect of the European vine pulling scheme after Spain entered the European Union.

Research and interviews lead to the identification of opportunities that could benefit the Alicante wine industry. The continuous rise of tourism and second home owners provide Alicante the means to get international recognition. Also the worldwide demand for authenticity favours Alicante as it has some clearly identifiable grapes varieties and wine styles. Finally also COVID-19 has made Alicante approachable and interesting due to the possibilities of digitization and consumer preference shifting towards better and more special wine at home.

It is also shown that Alicante is potentially threatened by climate change, with other more profitable crops taking over, urban development especially in the tourist area threatening the existence of vineyards, Spain's overall reputation for producing good wines at low price levels and sweet wines running out of fashion, while their historic key products are of a sweet style.

CONCLUSION

Alicante has had difficult years and still has a long way to go to become once more a profitable business. The question at hand is how to use Alicante's strengths and the opportunities while taking measures to mitigate Alicante's weaknesses and deal with the threats at hand in making Alicante's wine production profitable again. An important key to success is linking the touristic potential of the region to the wine it produces, and make it work for the wine industry, but even more important make the wine industry work for the tourist industry.

A second question, which could contribute to Alicante's profitability, is how to bring wine from Alicante to the Dutch market. Based on the research, interviews and conclusions deducted, Alicante should focus on its own grape varieties and use Fondillón as a signboard for Alicante wine. As Alicante is a small area with small producers its D.O. needs to find a strategic alliance with Dutch influencers like Perswijn and Proefschrift. Individual producers can try to find exclusive cooperation with specialist retailers as the segment targeted by these retailers is interesting for what Alicante has to offer. This combined with the possibilities digitization has to offer and online education and tasting can bring Alicante to the homes of the Dutch consumer. Especially for this last part an ambassador in the Netherlands for the region of Alicante can play an important role.