

Denial of the viticultural landscape

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this presentation is to analysis the impact of the viticultural landscape in communication on labels of wine produced in heroic viticulture areas. To verify whether the "viticultural landscape" tool has been used to arouse emotions and stimuli in the consumer, a study was carried out on the front and back labels of wines from heroic viticulture areas belonging to the Cervim which competed in the traditional annual mountain wine challenge.

The immediate aim was to analyse the frequency of use of the message "heroic viticulture", the form it was used in and the relative importance attributed to the message among the other information contained on the label, taking into account the geographical origin of the wines and the type of producer (private, winegrowers' association).

The analysis showed that the viticultural landscape was used only for few wines and in different forms, favouring definitions rather than images.

It was possible to find the reasons behind the producers' choices and for non-use (lack of available space, effective terminology and forms of communication, as well as the need for regulations on wine-labelling).

The analysis concluded that consumers and the distribution chain perceive communication of the viticultural landscape, especially heroic viticulture, as being positive for choosing and assessing the quality of a wine, while producers are still bound to traditional communication that has found neither the form nor the place for using the relationship between landscape and wine to advantage.

To sum up, it seems that mountain wine and heroic viticulture wineries still deny the validity of the message "viticultural landscape-heroic viticulture".

KEYWORDS

Heroic viticulture Landscape Message Communication Wine value

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1. INTRODUCTION

The viticultural landscape is considered by all to be an essential part of the territory for wine-drinkers.

Experts and specialists see the landscape made up of vineyards as the result of adaptations of the production design to influences of the climate, soil, vine and their interactions.

Consumers consider the viticultural landscape as an indistinguishable blend and as the starting point of the wine production process.

Wine producers see the landscape through the eyes of experts and very often forget those of the consumers.

In communication about wine, instead of giving information on the viticultural landscape there is praise of the beauty and attraction of historical and artistic sites located in the area.

This omission and oversight seem even more conspicuous in the case of stupendous, unrepeatable landscapes, whose intrinsic value far outweighs any of the historical and artistic sites found there, such as, for example, heroic viticultural areas.

This work is aimed at showing the origin of consumer stimuli and associations with landscapes and highlighting the analysis of a sample of wines from heroic viticulture to assess how the landscape is used in direct communication, as well as identifying possible causes for the systematic failure to appreciate landscape on labels.

2. THE VITICULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND THE VALUE OF WINE

Driving change in the food system

The whole food system is facing the need to change due to the irrepressible burgeoning of consumer power over producers.

Virtually all consumers in developed countries can afford to go beyond traditional food consumption needs (automatic choice, daily, repetitive, driven by the best price) and to go for conscious (guided by information on the dietary, health and social value of food) and emotional consumption (guided by the pleasure of buying as a pastime)³

Therefore the information on hygiene, health and social properties of food and the associated feelings become the most important stimuli for the modern consumer.

Among other different goods once considered food, also wine has for some time become an item warranting conscious and emotional consumption.

³ In developed societies individuals have growing spaces and resources to dedicate time to shopping as an activity to be shared in the company of others, equating the moment of purchasing to enjoyment (Sicca 1990, Codeluppi 2001). All this has been added to the consolidated statement that the place and environment increase the sensation of the purchasing experience (Holbrook and Hirshmann 1982, Baker, Grewal and Levy 1992, Castaldo and Botti 1999). Considering also the reasons for travelling, it has been concluded that shopping is an activity able to influence or become itself a reason for choosing consumption or a destination.

Frames of mind in the choice of consumption

The choice to consume is guided by the consumer's deepest frames of mind toward the product: *fear* and *feelings*.

Fears

Fear of the effects of alcohol and uncertainty about the lack of transparency of the product have a decisive influence on the consumer.

Fear of alcohol is the consequence of many decades of social communication *concerning the harm of alcohol abuse*, which in today's inexact way of communicating has come to mean *the harm of alcohol*.

For most consumers, this harm is presented as damage to health in the future, and as social damage in the present caused by accidents and losing one's driving licence. (cf. Sorbini, 2008; Sorbini et al 2010)

The deep *frame of mind* is influenced also by other unconscious fears (cf. Eurobarometro 2006)

In particular, fears seem to arise from the feeling of *lack of transparency* due to having only descriptive labels aimed at ensuring *the asymmetric information* to the disadvantage of consumers. (cf. Veseth, 2008)

For the modern consumer other concerns are related to the instinctive uneasiness towards wine-making techniques, additives and other practices for *adjusting* wine. (cf. Sorbini et al. 2009)

Finally, there are misgivings as to the probity of wineries from distant areas that are not well known.

These fears bring to light the *need to regain confidence in the product*.

Conscious consumers choose in accordance with specific criteria seeking reassuring features.

The fear of *alcohol* and *too many chemicals* makes people search for *naturalness*.

The fear of extreme technology makes people appreciate *artisanalship*.

The fear of *faraway, unknown producers* makes the *origin* become more important in deciding.

Feelings

Feelings arise from the memory of tasting and the memory of the landscape associated with the wine.

While the memory of tasting is the prerogative of expert wine-drinkers, that associated with the landscape involves nearly all consumers (cf. Aragrande et al 2008; Sorbini et al 2010 b).

The viticultural landscape embodies the *perceptive and instinctive* information used by the customer to make choices..

The initial impact is given by the *pleasantness and harmony* communicated and instinctively felt without any further processing.

The balance between vineyards and other crops brings out the perception of the *artisanal structure* of vineyard as against industrial single cropping.

The presence of hedges, trees and meadows gives the feeling of *naturalness* of the environment in which the vineyards are located.

Some extreme vineyard landscapes such as those of mountain *heroic viticulture* produce an initial impact of the winemaker's strong sense of commitment, which is a further guarantee of artisanalship and honesty towards consumers.(cf. Sorbini et al 2010,a)

Knowledge and information on consumption

It has been known for some time that specific knowledge of a food constitutes an effective antidote against fear and that technical information about processes help to create knowledge and therefore build confidence.

Originally, information on techniques and contents had the basic function of ensuring the producer complied with hygiene and health laws and of clearly specifying the contents of the transformed product.

Over time, and as the culture of hygiene has spread, this information has come to be seen by conscious consumers as the basis for making an informed judgement on the contents^{4, 5}.

The aims of information

The quality and quantity of information on each wine shows the winemaker's *propensity toward transparency* and his *probity* towards the consumer. The description of production phases over time provides reassurance as to the company's commitment in harmony with *wine-producing territories and traditions*.

Even just "reading" the viticultural landscape, either through the media or by seeing it directly, brings out many of the feelings that contribute to generating the degree of confidence in the product required by these consumers. (cf. Aragrande et al 2008 b)

For the *conscious, informed wine-drinker* (about half of all wine-drinkers) "reading" the landscape encourages the search for all the other relevant details about the vineyard, especially *technical* details.⁶ For this type of consumer, understanding the viticultural landscape means having further information to accompany the pictures seen or the place visited.

The value conveyed by the landscape

Looking at the vineyard landscape on a map or in real life allows an instinctive estimation of whether there is the "right" amount of naturalness and artisanalship to meet the consumer's choice criteria.

⁴ The description of the contents has become a strong point for winemakers since it is seen as an obligation that is turned into an opportunity to give information and, in particular, to be able to provide information not only useful to the sensitive consumer but legally mandatory, with the same rigour and the same value of reassurance.

⁵ The conscious wine-drinker can find many sorts of information useful. In fact, in order to highlight *natural features*, information should be given on vineyard management, the type and aims of the main technological phases on ageing techniques and bottling. For the *artisanal features* details are required on commitment to the work, on the origin of production projects, on the reasons, not only financial, behind the company, in order to allow wine-drinkers to see or *imagine* the real *creator* of that wine and the company's story. To highlight the *origin* it seems necessary to emphasize the *continuity of wine-making in traditional areas* and the *special relationship* between the *land and typical vines*. (cf. Sorbini, 2008)

⁶ In this case the study involves assessing the slopes, the distance between rows of vines, irrigation systems, techniques used for training vines. Overall, it will be aimed at assessing *dynamicity* by comparing the vineyards planted over time and *continuity* of the vine-growers' commitment.

The “normal” landscape arouses feelings, while “extreme” landscapes, such as in the case of heroic viticulture, are simply amazing, making it difficult to forget such emotions (cf. Sorbini et al 2010 a).

The combination of wine and landscape is thus enhanced by the *beauty of the viticultural landscape*, and by the information that increases specific knowledge, all of which ends up by establishing *rational fidelisation* to the wine of that landscape with such strong distinctive features.⁷

3. STUDY ON HEROIC VITICULTURE AND ITS WINE LABELS

The study aimed to point out those “specific” features of labels on mountain and heroic viticulture wines.

The study involved all the bottles of wine entered in the 2008 mountain wine challenge.

Methodology

All the bottles were recorded and all the features of the label to be assessed were examined, as well as the label itself.

Since the aim of the study involved comparing “presentation systems” of heroic wines with those of all other wines, each feature was recorded for comparison with wines entered in another international competition.

The features analysed in the study included the bottle (shape, size, colour of glass and weight) the closure (type and quality of corks), the front and back label (shape, size, material, writing and background colour).

For each feature, all aspects of presentation and display of contents were then analysed

The contents taken into account, apart from legally mandatory information, basically concerned all aspects used to identify the wine according to the *reading hierarchy* of modern consumers – characteristics of the area of origin, name of the vine, wine character, year of production, quantity produced, type of winery, production technology, presence of allergens and maximum content of sulphites.

The items taken into consideration for the form were the colour, type of character, overall shape of the label and *immediate natural legibility*- character size.

Over 800 bottles were evaluated and although some of them belonged to categories of wine not included in the reference competition they were not excluded.

The comparison with wines from a parallel international competition is still ongoing and here it seems appropriate to limit the analysis only to heroic wines and exclusively to those features in keeping with the topic of this conference.

In particular, attention can be focused on *references to the landscape* and on *reassuring communication* (quantity produced-type of winery, technology, residues and allergens) in line with social communication to the consumer.(cf. Sorbini et al 2010b)

Reassuring communication

There are many different types of information considered to be reassuring for the conscious consumer. The study covers aspects connected with producer traceability, specification of the wine and year of production, ageing techniques and other comforting details including the level of allergens (cf. tab 1)

⁷ The commitment to take care of, preserve and reconstruct all the environmental features of the landscape is translated into consolidation of the value of wines associated with that vineyard landscape. It can be said that in all likelihood, investment in “nature” of the vineyard is always repaid directly.

Table 1 “Reassuring” information (as % of total wines considered)

1. name of winery with full address	2%
2. website and vintage	1%
3. type of winery (individual, cooperative, family)	1%
4. year of production and quantity bottled	3%
5. period of ageing, if any	5%
6. outline of harvesting and processing	3%
7. level of sulphites	0%

The data shown are quite clear: few producers consider it useful to provide the full address of their winery.

Very few of them specify their company website, and none of them think it is useful to state what type of company they are

Given these figures it could be deduced that the wineries are not interested in communicating who they are and what they are like, and in any case many of them have no interest whatsoever in people contacting them.

It is no surprise that the limited number of wineries that show their company website belong exclusively to “large” enterprises, since web communication is still considered “a major commitment”.

It seems that there is a widespread lack of interest in consumers once they have made their purchase.

Since the conscious consumer considers information on the winery a decisive factor to the extent of becoming a choice criterion (*artisanalship, origin*), the low number of wineries that take the trouble to communicate this leads us to suppose that producers underestimate consumer needs and that the consumers will probably have a negative opinion of those producers and wines that do not “*make themselves known*”.

Information on the vintage is given by just few wineries, and only in three cases is the quantity bottled specified. This is another underestimation of useful information given that conscious consumers feel the effect of climate phenomena and expect to find differences in wines of different years (cf. Sorbini et al 2010b)

Stating the quantity produced, apart from potentially allowing a check on the consistency between the area of the vineyard, its production capacity and wine yield, means that the consumer can be reassured that it is an *artisanal winery* for that wine.

As regards ageing, no clear, understandable explanation is given about the methods or their effects. Once again, this means lack of respect for the consumer since for quite some time now wine-drinkers have been aware of the concept of improving the quality of wine by ageing, and the practice of mentioning ageing in barriques to testify to the overall quality of all wines has become widespread. Since the consumer is starting to consider the excessive and generalised use of wood as a form of “pollution” of the original wine (cf. Sorbini et al 2005), stating the methods and results achieved for that particular wine would be in line with the philosophy of *informing to reassure*.

The same is true for the level of sulphites.

As far as the latter is concerned, it is hard to understand why this information is not used in a more productive way.

The compulsory declaration of sulphites in itself causes alarm in conscious wine-drinkers and it would be logical for the winery to state the level of sulphites in the wine, both to point out the fact that legal limits are being respected and to draw attention to the company uses this figure as one of the most important pieces of reassuring information (cf. Sorbini et al 2010b)

References to the landscape

Reference to the landscape was assessed only in the form of a *written phrase* on the label stating the origin of the wine from heroic viticulture vineyards.

For the purposes of the study, it is assumed implicitly that all heroic viticulture vineyards are a *valuable viticultural landscape* and that this gives the wine *added value* in the eyes of the conscious consumer.

Consequently, it is considered that coming “from heroic viticulture vineyards” is in itself the feature that producers in this *inimitable condition* wish to communicate and underline in consumer information.

The results of the analysis shown in the table below are evident: only about 1% of the wine labels bore the phrase “*mountain wine*” or “*from heroic viticulture areas*” or even “*heroic wine*”.

Table 2 Indications of qualitative and geographical features of wines (as % of wines considered)

- IGT, DOC	80%
-geographical area	85%
-mountain wine	2%
-heroic viticulture area	1%
-heroic wine	1%

In fact, all the informative labels showed the geographical area of production.

This somehow seems to be taken by producers as being an alternative to the heroic viticulture statement.

In other words, it could be deduced that the producers assume that consumers have good knowledge of wine-growing geography and heroic viticulture.

However, it is widely recognised that knowledge of geography today is less and less precise and therefore it cannot be taken for granted that consumers are familiar with that specific vineyard landscape.

Thus it seems that it is wine producers with outstanding viticultural landscapes who are the first to be *unaware* of their implicit value.

Given that virtually all heroic viticulture wine-makers forget to mention this feature, it can be assumed that they still do not realise the value of the viticultural landscape.

4. CONCLUSIONS Landscape denial

The figures analysed could be considered only a marginal phenomenon of the wine system (small, limited mountain wine-growing area) with unusual products that are insignificant for the wine market (“drops” in the production ocean, just for wine buffs).

Not using the terms “wine from heroic viticulture” and so on cannot be attributed to a lack of specific regulations leading to uncertainty as to the legitimacy of such a mention, since *optional mentions* including “heroic viticulture” have for some time recognised the qualification and boundaries of heroic viticulture vineyards described by the Cervim and thus the existence of an objective discriminatory criterion.

It seems much more probable that wine producers in heroic viticulture areas do not understand the interaction between the viticultural landscape and the conscious consumer’s value system.

In the frame of using the relations between territory and wine to advantage, great efforts have been made in scientific research. Methodological and operational consequences such as “*zoning*” have produced real knowledge, also important for wine-growers’ choices and communication about wines.

However it seems that the basic features of the rapport between *terroir* and viticultural landscape have not been turned into a *reading scheme* in order to be able to communicate effectively to the consumer.

If such a scheme existed, also heroic viticulture wine producers would probably realise the worth of mentioning “wine from heroic viticulture” on their label.

Without the possibility of communicating the value of wine produced by a certain landscape simply and directly, the present situation of “landscape denial” will continue in time and instead we will have a mixture of adjectives with no logical added value for the consumer.

Although this situation is especially evident in the case of heroic viticulture wines, it is also common in other outstanding viticultural landscapes.

To sum up, the producers’ *denial of the vineyard landscape* emerges as the “fault” of technicians who have not yet been able to translate their knowledge into basic attributes so as to be able to communicate simply and effectively to consumers.

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