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Comparative analysis on the perception of sustainable viticulture in France & Spain

MONTHLY REPORT NO. 1

WORLDWINE WOMEN





INTRODUCTION

The WorldWine Women is a French association of women committed to a transition towards "sustainable viticulture". According to the theorised definition of sustainable development, it corresponds to the growing of grapes, the production and marketing of wine that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This "sustainable" viticulture should therefore be based on three pillars : the environment, the economy and society. However, although the notion is not new, the term "sustainable" is in vogue and can sometimes be overused.

The objective of WorldWine Women is therefore to confront the definitions of winegrowers from all over the world, starting with Europe, and to question the ways of meeting the challenges of the sector. This first report corresponds to the first two stages of this adventure in France and Spain in September 2020. Based on interviews with winegrowers, we will try to compare the approach to sustainable viticulture in each country.

It is therefore an analysis based on our feelings and in no way a rigorous scientific investigation. Although they contain many biases, particularly in terms of sample size and diversity, these analyses have the advantage of corresponding to an experience lived in immersion in the world of wine.

LOCATION



Bordeaux

Vignobles Marie-Laure Lurton
Château Corbin
Château Pape Clément

Languedoc

Château Auzias
Maison Ventenac
Domaine de Cabrol
Famille Fabre
Château Vaissière
Domaine des Mille Vignes

Bourgogne

Les Champs de Thémis
Domaine Bernard Millot

Côtes-du-Rhône

Domaine George Vernay

Rioja

Bodega Orjuel
Bodega Valdelana

Ribera del Duero

La Loba
Dehesa de los Canónigos
Ferratus

Toro

Bodega Numanthia

Penedés

Jardi dels Sentits

Priorat - Montsant

Mas Martinet
Clos Mogador
Bodega Hericamps



MAJOR IMPRESSIONS

PERCEPTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is a phenomenon that is gaining attention around the world thanks to conferences such as COP21 where states have committed to take action to reduce global warming.

However, climate change, although it is not denied, seems more debated among winegrowers in France than in Spain. French try to convince themselves of the phenomenon by comparing average temperatures from one year to another and they always qualify it by referring to rainfall and drought waves. In Spain, however, climate change seems to be completely integrated into the mentality. "Do you perceive the effects of climate change?" is not a question but stating the obvious.

ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Beyond the perception of climate change, we felt a significant difference in the ecological consciousness of the winegrowers. Indeed, the actions in favour of the environment of Spanish winegrowers seem to come from strong and real convictions.

In France, on the contrary, the market and in particular consumer demand for products that are more respectful of their health and the environment are much more evoked when we look at the transition to ecological practices. The winegrowers' own conviction obviously motivates their choices to limit the impact of their activity on the environment and protect biodiversity, but this is often a secondary factor.

This observation should be put into perspective with the ecological actions of governments in general. In discussions with the winegrowers, we had the impression that France was committed to taking more ecological measures, notably in supermarket packaging, whereas in Spain this was a less important issue.



MAJOR IMPRESSIONS

A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Finally, having grown up in France, we were used to hearing about wine as a cultural product, full of history and symbolism. However, we were surprised and even marked by the relationship that Spanish winemakers have with wine. Indeed, the growing of the grapes, the elaboration of the wine and its tasting appear to them to be a real philosophy of life that can sometimes seem mystical to the unconverted. Wine is above all a social product par excellence, it brings together all the stages of its elaboration: from harvest to tasting. More than the French myth, it seems to bring spirituality and wisdom to Spanish winemakers.

SIMILARITIES AND NUANCES

THE TERROIR

The French vineyard is considered throughout the world as the inventor of the concept of terroir, which allows to link a particular soil with a particular climate and savoir-faire. The appellations are responsible for protecting this trio so that the wines they produce remain the perfect expression of it.

And yet, in Spain we can observe a very strong development of this notion - without always putting the name to it, the phrase "embotellar los paisajes" is often used. In the vast majority of the vineyards visited, each plot has its own specificity and we enjoyed tasting wines in the very plot of the grapes that were used to make them.

WOMEN

In France as in Spain, two Western countries, we had the impression that the place of women was growing and well accepted. In the end, the difficulties of integration lay more in being "the daughter of" or young. Nevertheless, there were nuances between the two countries, and we felt the place of women seemed to be more controversial in France than in Spain. French women winegrowers appeared more excluded from the world of wine as they grew up and there were testimonies of machismo from Spanish women who had studied in France.

EXCHANGING BETWEEN WINEGROWERS

Finally, we noticed that in these two countries, exchanges between winegrowers, from the same region but also from further away, were numerous and appreciable. However, the culture, structure and role of trade unions and institutions in Spain are not as important as in France.

EXPLANATORY FACTORS

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE CLIMATE, SOIL AND HISTORY

First of all, the challenges of Spanish and French winemaking cannot be compared without taking into account climate, soil and history. It is easier and, above all, more profitable to produce organic wines in dry, hot and windy climates because they are less conducive to the development of pathogens, and thus correspond more to what is found in Spain than in humid and cold, rather French, climates. Moreover, in the 1960s in France, at the height of the use of phytosanitary products, it was customary to use them and to treat the vines if one had the financial means to do so. Today, it is therefore easier to have a strong ecological conscience and a very respectful attitude towards the land when there is no transition to be made.

THE RURAL WORLD, ANOTHER CONTACT WITH NATURE

We were also very impressed by the extreme rurality of the Spanish landscape, which we are not used to in France. Going from the enveloping mountains of Priorat to the hills of Condrieu overlooking an industrial centre reflects this gap between French and Spanish territories.

It seems once again more understandable to maintain a very close and respectful link with Nature when one is really close to it than when one is constantly reminded of the pyramidal relation that places ingenious human beings as masters and possessors of it.

THE AGE OF THE VINEYARD

This deeper and more respectful relationship with Nature can also be explained by the older age of the Spanish vineyard. Decimated by phylloxera, the French vineyard is relatively recent and, due to the favourable economic situation, vines are regularly uprooted and replanted in many regions. In Spain, on the other hand, vines dating from the pre-phylloxera era are regularly found and the notion of old vines appears quite relative. There is a willingness to look after ancestral vines by caring for them, as one would look after grandparents, and not by trying to make them produce more grapes, since quality seems to take precedence over yield.

DIFFERENT LIFESTYLES AND CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

The question of ancestors and grandparents is, in our opinion, an explanatory factor. In Spanish villages, we find a way of life that is rare in France nowadays, with a strong link between generations and where the tradition of oral transmission still exists.

DIFFERENT LIFESTYLES AND CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

And while differences exist in rural lifestyles, they are even more marked in consumption patterns. First of all, food culture is much more deeply rooted than in France: in some villages, each family still owns its own "bodega" and makes wine for its own consumption to "be drunk within the year". However, although wine is a very social product in some circles, it is less cultural than in France and Spanish people prefer beer.

It has also been noticed that wine was considered more as a food item among our neighbours, whereas viticulture has long been distinguished from agriculture in our country. This distinction has many implications for winegrowers as they care a lot about what they eat.

Finally, the major discrepancy, related to these consumption habits, is that it is not part of the culture to buy a wine to keep it and taste it at the right time in Spain. It is therefore the responsibility of the wineries to keep the wine for laying down. There are many "ready-to-drink" wines in carbonic maceration in particular, but above all there are impressively large cellars, which make one reflect on the energy cost of such practices and structures.

CONCLUSION

Looking back on all these impressions, and bearing in mind the "logical" definition of sustainable viticulture, we realise that in Spain it is based almost entirely on the pillar of the Environment and even seems to be deeply embedded in the customs. In France, on the other hand, the first thing that comes to mind is economic viability, to speak of a vineyard that could be passed on to future generations. However, we notice that the development of ecological awareness is ambivalent: it can represent a brake because it involves large investments and the prospect of lower yields, but also an opportunity thanks to the opening to a new market, organic. Finally, little is heard about the social importance in the concept of sustainable viticulture in these two countries. However, there is recognition of the social role of wine and the willingness of the most committed vineyards to care for the well-being of their employees and to involve them in all stages of the winemaking process. This notion is more apparent in the vineyards run by women, who seem to be the first to raise the issue of reconciling work and family life.

"YOU MUST ALWAYS TAKE INTO ACCOUNT EACH OF THE PILLARS. EVEN IF THE SOCIAL ASPECT SEEMS LESS IMPORTANT TO YOU ONE YEAR, YOU MUST TAKE CARE OF IT BECAUSE IT WILL PAY BACK LATER".

WORLDWINE WOMEN



**NEXT DESTINATION : ITALY
5 - 17 OCTOBER**