

## **CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIC WINE\***

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The paper develops a study on the Romanians' attitudes towards the organic wines. The analysis has been done in two stages – at a quantitative level and a qualitative one.

The quantitative study has been done on a sample of 122 respondents – consumers and non-consumers in low percentage. The questionnaire investigated the general perception of wines, and included a dedicated section for the organic wines, addressed to the respondents aware of this product.

The qualitative stage has been realized through a sensorial analysis, where three white wines and two red wines have been tasted by trained tasters. Among the five wines, one white – Chardonnay was organic wine.

Both studies proved that the organic wine has a potential in Romania due to the sensorial qualities and people's perception. However, the development of organic wine market won't be a quick process and it will require first of all improving Romanians' 'organic' culture.

*Keywords:* organic wines, consumers, Chardonnay, sensory analysis.

### **1. Introduction**

#### ***What is organic wine?***

As with all other organic products, organic wine does not use a new method of production. It is just a decisive reaction to return to natural agricultural methods as an alternative to using chemicals and pesticides.

During the 1970s an increasing number of winegrowers were attracted by the idea of 'clean winegrowing', however it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that organic methodologies for wine production started to make an impact on the world market. The first successful projects were developed by wine experts in France, Switzerland, Germany, Italy and Hungary. (<http://www.organicwine.com/>)

Nowadays some of the most developed organic wine markets can be found in France, Spain, Germany, Italy, USA, Chile and South Africa.

In Romania, small steps are being made to develop the market further but there has yet to be any firm regulation to govern this.

For two decades, different organizations have attempted to define and implement unique laws and certification criteria at a worldwide level, but the standards of organic wine currently differ from one country to another (Găină, 2002).

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The European Union have developed some standards for organic wine production as covered within settlement CCE 2092/91 regarding the processing of organic vegetal and animal products. This law details that a conversion period to non-organic agriculture should be implemented for at least 3 years prior to approval. The uses of chemicals or genetically modified organisms during this period are strictly forbidden.

The main two characteristics of organic wine are:

1. That it has to be obtained from organic grapes cultivated without the use of pesticides and chemical substances.
2. The wine should be processed at a minimum level, with very low quantities of SO<sub>2</sub> (max 100 ppm).

Both conditions need to be respected to be considered as organic wine. If the second characteristic exceeds the maximum SO<sub>2</sub> levels, then the wine can not be labelled as organic wine, but only as wine made from organically grown grapes (Costin, 2008)

### ***What's new?***

Within the last decade, Western European countries have reviewed wine production on a different level, assessing the impact towards third world countries through 'Fair trade'.

The idea of fair trade is to support communities in third world countries by offering producers a fair price for their work. The concept originated in America in the early 1950s and by the end of the decade spread to Europe when the charity Oxfam UK began selling crafts made by Chinese refugees in Oxfam shops.

It was not until the late 1990s that fair trade wine started to appear in Western Europe countries. Producers of fair trade wines include growers and small associations of growers from the New World including countries like South Africa, Chile, and Argentina.

The fair trade wines are both organic and non-organic, but due to the fact that they are produced in poor countries with local methods, they are mostly organic. Each Fair trade wine tells a story; about struggling communities revived and renewed, about schools built, clean water supplied and hope restored.

British supermarket chain 'The Co-operative' has summarized the concept of fair trade wine very well in the slogan: *crushing the grapes, not the grower!* (<http://www.wfto.com/>)

In Romania the concept of fair-trade has yet to be introduced. If this were to be applied, Fair trade wines may struggle to be successful if entering as a niche product sold at a higher price than readily available local wines.

### ***General background of the wine market in Romania***

Romania has a tradition of vineyard growing and wine making going back many centuries. Even the famous French Emperor Napoleon was said to have been a big fan of the wine obtained from the Cotnari vineyards.

In 2006 Romania had the fifth largest area to grow grapes in the European Union trailing Spain, Italy, France and Portugal. In terms of the worldwide market, Romania ranks in roughly ninth.

Since entering the European Union, the structure of the Romanian wine market has been requested to change in order to reflect a stronger emphasis on quality. For example, by the end of 2014 all hybrid vines have to be replaced by noble vines.

According to a study in 2007 run by The National Vineyard Growers and Wine Producers Association from Romania, the profile of wine drinkers in urban areas (>50.000 inhabitants) is 63% men and 37% women. Of these people 29% are consuming at least a bottle of wine per week. However wine is still only the second most popular drink after beer.

The vast majority of respondents to the study (89%) consume more than one type of wine (white/red/rose), however overall white wine is the preferred choice. The most common place where people are consuming wine is at home and with friends. Supermarkets and convenience stores are the most common location of purchase.

The National Vineyard Growers also quote that the wine market has four segments of consumers:

1. *The frequent, refined, young consumers (41%)* – they are active people under 35 years old, who give a great importance to their image and drink wine regularly.
2. *Mature and aged consumers (20%)* – they have a lower income, which does not allow them to be regular wine consumers but only occasional users.
3. *Traditional consumers (22%)* – they are middle-aged to senior people who are drinking wine regularly and are considering that wine is not a product for young people.
4. *Random young people (17%)* – they are generally people under 35 years of age and who, unlike the first category, are consuming wine occasionally.

The organic wine segment in Romania is poorly represented and promoted. The overall production is quite low (10.000 litres in 2006), and the profitability not very high due to the high costs involved and the long transition period to organic vineyard.

The organic grapes involve great efforts to maintain and this is why for the moment few producers are going with organic wine production only. For the moment, there are only a few companies who are timidly testing the organic wine market.

The main players in the wine market are seeing the future potential of the organic wines, but for the time being they are not seeing this as a profitable business mainly due to the lack of ‘organic culture’ of Romanians. Also the high price of this type of wine is not encouraging the Romanians to purchase them.

In the next pages we will see what Romanians actually think about organic wines.

## 2. Materials and methods

We have conducted primary research via two stages: a consumer perception quantitative study and a wine testing exercise aiming to define the sensorial difference between classic and organic wines.

### a. Quantitative study

A convenience sample was formed from 122 respondents, split by consumers and non-consumers of wine. The non-consumers represented a low percentage, only 6%, but we wanted to find out if a person who is not consuming wine would be motivated to drink this if it was available organically.

The questionnaire investigated both general wine perception and knowledge about organic wines, with a dedicated section for people aware of organic wine.

The questionnaire has three main parts.

- Part A is regarding THE WINE CONSUMPTION (how often and which type of wine, when and where the respondents buy the wine, which are the most important factors in wine choosing, the price accepted usually by the buyers and how they consider that European Union and the European common market influences the wine market in Romania);
- Part B of the questionnaire is dedicated to ORGANIC WINES and only to those respondents who said that their knowledge regarding organic wines with a value less than 5 on a scale from 0 to 10 (which is the source some respondents have about organic wine from, if promotion of the wine is granted and they are available in Romania, if consumers drink organic wine and which are the most important advantages respectively disadvantages of organic wines).
- Part C is dedicated to DEMOGRAPHIC information (education, employment status, material status, number of persons in the household).

The study was run mainly amongst the urban population, the profile of the sample being 71% under 35 year olds and 39% over 36 year olds and 57% females and 43% males.

We would have liked to have an ideal control over the samples representing similar proportions for the Romanian wine consumption market profile as documented earlier in this report, however due to a short time frame and low budget this was not possible on this occasion.

For data analysis was used SPSS software. Therefore, the results should be viewed as an indicator of preferences rather than statistically robust data.

### b. Sensorial analysis

The sensorial analysis has been done with a panel of seven tasters from “Dunarea de Jos” University. The tasters were selected according to ISO 3972/2007 and trained for the analysis. The tasters were aged between 21 and 24 years old. The score sheet evaluated three attributes: **appearance** (clarity and colour), **odour** (intensity, authenticity and quality) and **taste** (intensity, authenticity, quality and after taste). A well-balanced point scale was used for each attribute and evaluation (excellent, very good, good, satisfying, and unsatisfying). It has also been included as an overall impression of the wine, indicating the general perception over the sensorial qualities of the wine.

Three white wines were analyzed: Chardonnay – organic, a blend Feteasca Regala and Riesling and the third one Muscat; along with two red wines: a blend Feteasca Neagra and Merlot and secondly a Merlot – Baric.

The experimental data were subjected to an analysis of variance ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## 3. Results and discussions

From the 122 respondents at the quantitative stage, 34% knew what organic wine was (Figure 1), with a profile of 45% males and 55% females. When asked about where they first found out about organic wine, first place is shared among stores, family and friends, while mass media (the most influential communication method) appeared in last place with 11%.

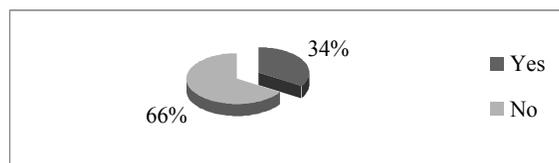


Figure 1. Respondents aware of organic wines

This might represent one of the reasons why a larger percentage of the population are not aware of organic wines. Of the respondents who were aware of organic wine, they stated that it is not advertised enough in Romania. Further more when all 122 respondents were asked their interest in this subject 84% would have liked to find out more information about organic wine (Figure 2), with women particularly showing more interest than men.

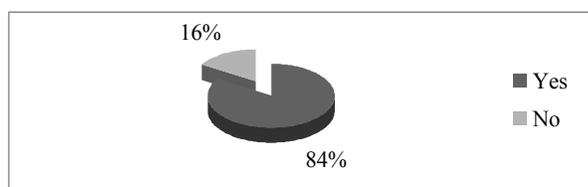


Figure 2. Respondents who would like to find out more about organic wines.

80% of respondents are aware that organic wines are available in Romania however among these only 42% could name an organic wine brand.

Asked what are the main advantages/ disadvantages of organic wine, the highest percentage was ‘a healthier wine’ at advantages but ‘price’ as a disadvantage.

With Romania a recent joiner of the European Union, we have analyzed the forecast on the organic wine market from 5 points of view: people’s attitude, price, accessibility, diversity, and quantity (Figure 3).

The respondents are mainly optimistic on the influence for most of the criteria, beside price, where only 40% consider that EU will have predominantly a positive effect.

For the sensory analysis exercise, the appearance of the wine was evaluated separately for white and red wines. For the white wines, the Chardonnay obtained a better score than the blend Feteasca Regala

and Riesling, respectively Muscat (figure 4). With regards to the red wines, Merlot Baric had a significantly superior score than the blend Feteasca Neagra and Merlot (figure 5).

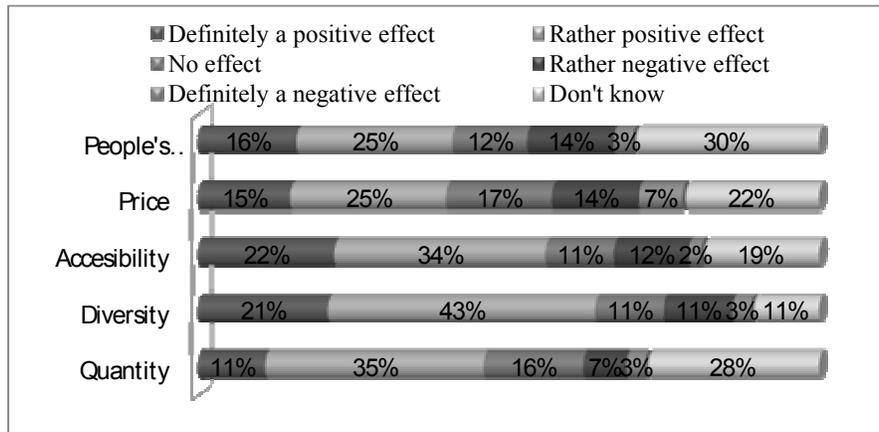


Figure 3. Consumers' perception of the European Union's impact on the Romanian organic wine market

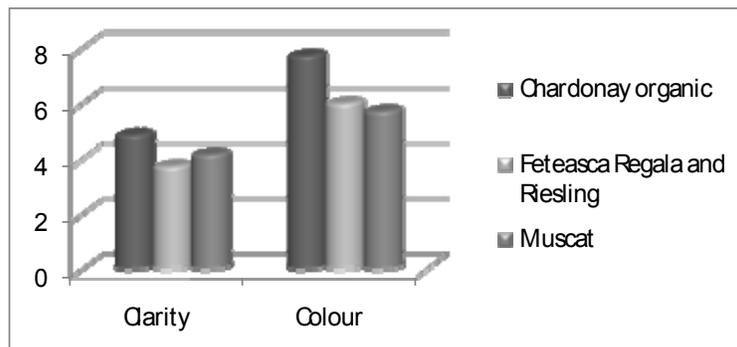


Figure 4. The appearance of white wines

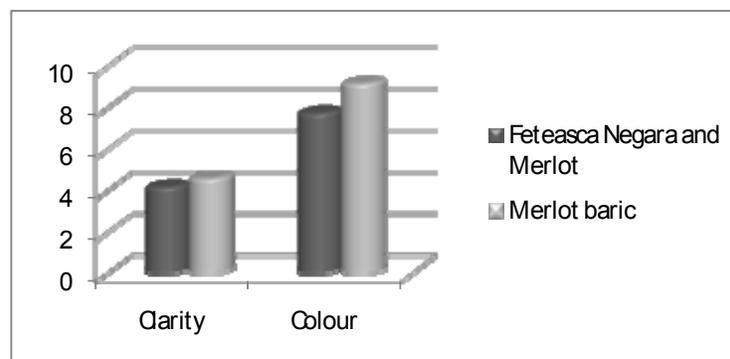


Figure 5. The appearance of red wines

The odour attributes and its intensity, authenticity and quality brought a high score for the organic Chardonnay, respectively Merlot baric (figure 6).

The overall impression has classified the organic Chardonnay in first place, followed by Merlot Baric, Muscat, the blend Feteasca Regala and Riesling, and the blend Feteasca Neagra and Merlot.

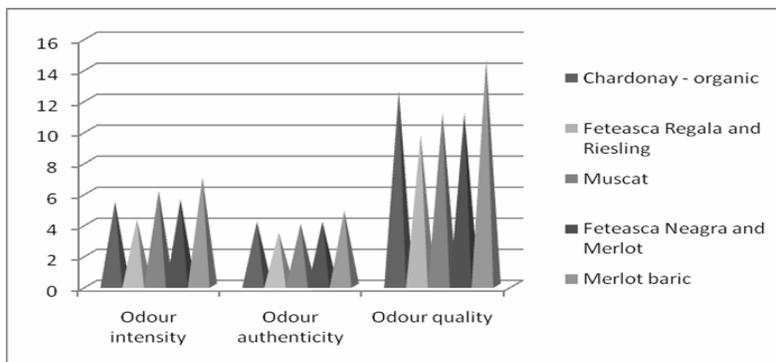


Figure 6. The odour evaluation

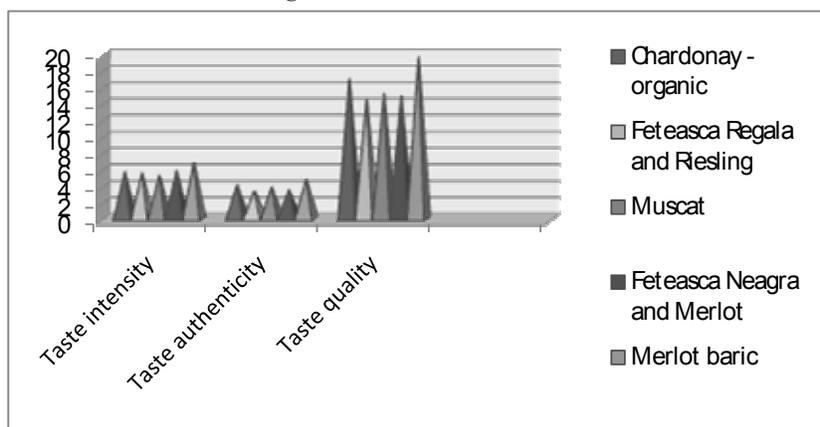


Figure 7. Taste evaluation

#### 4. Conclusions

Organic wines will probably always be a niche product, but their market has not yet been exploited at its full potential in Romania.

Romanian consumers will need to develop a more ‘green’ culture and further steps should be done to promote organic wine. This should be done especially by the use of the main mass-media tools, like print publications and television. From the 122 respondents at the quantitative stage, 34% knew what organic wine is, with a profile of 45% males and 55% females. This might represent one of the reasons why a larger percentage of the population are not aware of organic wines.

Asked what are the main advantages/ disadvantages of organic wine, the highest percentage was ‘a healthier wine’ at advantages but ‘price’ as a disadvantage.

The sensorial analysis has put the organic Chardonnay on the first place in comparison with the other evaluated wines and this fact emphasises the quality of organic wines.

#### Acknowledgments

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To the team of tasters, who have understood the wine and its message, regardless of the type (red or white, dry or sweet).

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