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Policy Brief

SPANISH PYRENEES MOUNTAIN | Intense and special wines production

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Spanish Pyrenees: Intense and special wines production

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Summary

Wine is an intrinsic part of culture and gastronomy in Aragon (Spain), historically characterising the socio-territorial area of the pre-Pyrenees. Wine, olive oil, almonds, cereals and pastures for sheep have coexisted for centuries. They are natural resources interwoven with local cultural traditions and linked to an area used as a transit region from the high Pyrenees to Zaragoza and the desert of Monegros in central Aragon.

The evolution of the region is expressed in the quality of the wines. Innovations have impacted winemaking, the choice and use of local varieties, and marketing strategies (e.g. new packaging, use of social networks). Obtained new wines managed to enter high-value market segments such as high-quality restaurants and the slow-sustainable tourism sector, linked to the Slow Food movement. For this reason, the VC case is worthy to be analysed as representative of the Mountain Reference Region (MRR).

Know more about the Spanish Pyrenees Reference Region, its selected value chain and the regional multi-actor platform (MAP), here.

Key policy messages

- Cultural and traditional values
- Depopulation and social crisis
- Strong community interactions
- Typical food and recognised high quality standards increase the touristic appeal of the area
- Lower tax burdens and improve digital and physical infrastructures
- Uptake of economic diversification opportunities

1. The Mountain Reference Region (MRR)

The “Somontano” or the pre-Pyrenees are the mountains closest to the Pyrenees, composed of two sub chains: external sierra and inner sierra. The analysed Spanish Pyrenees Mountain Wine Value Chain (VC) is in the pre-Pyrenees Mountain Reference Region (MRR) (around Huesca) in a separate branch of the high Pyrenees. Edaphically and topographically the pre-Pyrenees are a highly distinctive orographic complex, with deep valleys rich in water. Adventure sports, such as canyoning, are practised in Sierra de Guara, in Riglos and in Murillo de Gállego. Among the cultural attractions, Loarre Castle dating from the 11th century is the best conserved Romanic castle in Europe.

The MRR has been known since Roman times for the extraction of copper and the Ebro River, which flows into the Gállego River, coming from Sabiñánigo in the high Pyrenees. The mountain chain is unique, and an extraordinary region of natural and cultural heritage in the Mediterranean basin, with many geological and biological features of national and international interest, rich in landscapes, environments, and naturalistic elements. This holds true not only for flora and fauna, which are rich in endemic species, but also for rocks, minerals, fossils, tectonic structures, superficial and hypogeal morphologies, which provide unusual, varied and widespread elements of environmental value. One of the main problems of the region is depopulation. The area has a high level of vulnerability caused by the land abandonment, emigration, and climate change.

2. Wine between tradition and innovation

The vineyards for winemaking have been cultivated for centuries for their economic importance, and for self-consumption, as wine is part of the Mediterranean diet and culture. The vineyards of the region are included in the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) Ribera del Gállego/cincoVillas, occupying around the 4% of the Aragon vineyards, which total over 30 000 ha. Aragon owns a rich source of vine germplasm, and plants of different varieties have a very old cultivation tradition. Winemaking follows tradition, but in the past thirty years some innovations have been applied in vineyards and wine processing, marketing strategies (e.g. new packaging, use of social media), and in the value chain’s governance. The community interaction is one of the main aspects that characterises the value chain.

3. Value chain contribution to sustainability and resilience of the Mountain Reference Region: barriers and opportunities

Wine production in pre-mountain areas is a traditional activity developed over centuries. It established a sustainable relationship between natural resources exploitation and the needs of human communities and their culture. Hoya de Huesca, the door from Pyrenees, since Romans time, have therefore contributed to the management of forests and water basins essential for

downstream activities and ecosystem services. Depopulation during the 20th century (1950-1980), due to emigration to industrialised areas, has disrupted the balance, with a consequent worsening of the relationship between man and nature in the rural environment. Vineyards are a clear example where traditional productions innovated for facing contemporary market, so allowing local population to stay in places where it is possible to develop a virtuous relationship between nature and man, with both local and systemic economic and environmental advantages. It allowed the development of resilience initiatives, fit to face contemporary challenges (environmental, economic, etc.). The use of national and European funds offers an opportunity to develop and support such initiatives and to replicate best practices. At the same time, the complex procedures for accessing European funding and the need to identify elements of innovation in response to contemporary challenges are limiting factors, requiring skills that are often not present among the actors in the area. Local wines, and foods with a traditional character or image, are often perceived by consumers as of higher quality. This region has maintained ancient genotypes and traditional recipes of typical food specialities.

Nowadays, the combination of geographical origin and typical food is a useful tool to increase the touristic appeal of the area, if supported by acknowledged high quality standards. Information on the origin, intrinsic properties (e.g. nutritional value) and sensory traits can be conveniently explored as tools to be combined for communicating typical food quality. The value chain is a good example of the combination of traditional and innovative production for the contemporary market, allowing the population to integrate agricultural incomes with other economics activities.

4. Policy relevant considerations

The valorisation and preservation of special varieties of grapes crosses the interests on different scales: at local level, it contributes to reducing negative trends (e.g. depopulation and loss of historical and cultural heritage); at regional and interregional level, the development and innovation of dairy and livestock farming practices can activate positive economic circuits (above all, farm experiential tourism). They involve several actors, terroirs, and sectors (such as rural and sustainable tourism linked to enological routes). Understanding the virtuous relationship between economic activities and the socio-ecological system is relevant for resilience and sustainability strategies at a broader level.

Policies should support territories that present the elements mentioned above. They can reduce negative trends (depopulation, ageing, degradation due to the lack of care for the forest, historical and cultural heritage, etc.) and support current (social and technological) innovation processes. A lower tax burden for the residents and improved infrastructure, such as access to digital (broadband, 5G) and physical (roads, railways) infrastructures are essential aspects to be considered together with access to services (health, education, etc.). The analysis of the value chain provides an understanding of how socio-cultural and environmental elements can be used

to improve the sustainability and resilience of human communities in the face of challenges like climate change. Policies should also improve the innovation processes of winegrowers by fostering the uptake of technical innovations and economic diversification opportunities such as enotourism, rural tourism, energy production, and ecosystem services. According to the outcomes of a focus group with local policymakers, population ageing, social and economic needs, and land fragmentation were regarded as the most important negative driving forces for the conservation of the environment landscape.

Reference

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