MOVING
MOuntain Valorisation through INterconnectedness and Green growth

Policy Brief

MACIÇO NOROESTE | Alto Douro Vinhateiro wines

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Maçico Noroeste: Alto Douro Vinhateiro wines

Summary

Wine has been produced by traditional landholders in the Alto Douro region for 2,000 years. Since the 18th century, its main product, port wine, has been world famous for its quality. This long tradition of viticulture has produced a cultural landscape strongly linked to the wine value chain, acknowledge by UNESCO.

The steep slopes that characterize the valleys and where grape is grown in terraces or vertical rows are part of a mosaic with woodland, olives, almonds and other fruit trees. In such a rich environment wine production is intertwined with tourism.

Demographic changes are hampering the rural vitality of the area and the switch in grape production from family activity (in cooperatives) to large companies does not contribute to create qualified jobs. As a consequence, qualified youth move out and migrants or commuters, cannot mitigate the loss of rural vitality.

Key Policy Messages

- ☞ Integration of policies among sectors and geographic scale is needed to reach inclusivity, resilience and sustainability;
- ☞ material and immaterial infrastructures are need in order to allow young families to remain;
- ☞ balance of power in using common goods should be assured;
- ☞ investment in knowledge are essential to reach resilience and sustainability

1. *Alto Douro Vinhateiro wines and landscape*

The study area is the Alto Douro Vinhateiro and the value chain (VC) is wine of the Douro Demarcated Region (Alto Douro is part of), the eldest demarcated region in the world, since 1756. Alto Douro is also acknowledged by UNESCO as "World Heritage of Humanity" for Cultural, Evolutive and Living Landscape since 2001, together with another UNESCO World Heritage, linked to the cave engravings of Vila Nova de Foz Côa. It shows how relevant wine production is and used to be for the region, as the landscape has been moulded by vine growers. On the other hand, is also shows the potential for synergies between wine production and cultural tourism, as well as the growing outdoor sport and leisure tourism, that can well be harmonised with agriculture and the eno-gastronomic offer. The Alto Douro Vinhateiro Region includes about 10,000ha of vineyards, part of them still traditionally grown on steeply sloping terraces, large enough for one or two rows of grapes, buttressed by walls of schistous stone. Most recent vineyards are grown in larger but steeper terraces or in vertical rows (up to 35%) that allow a certain degree on mechanization. In the valleys' landscape vineyards (about 40% of the total surface) are part of a mosaic together with woodland, olive groves, spontaneous vegetation,

almond and other fruit trees. Biodiversity is of particular value in the region, with several endemic species. The grape varieties grown are often autochthonous, with a share of international varieties. The farms are traditionally very small, but in last years while small family scale vine growers stopped their activity, large companies from the lower part of the Demarcated Region took over, buying large surfaces and creating large wine estates. The grape is processed into wines of acknowledged PDOs: Porto wine and Douro wine. The processing takes place in few cooperative cellars (few compared to the past), some private medium scale cellars, but the majority goes to large scale companies' cellars often outside the Alto Douro. Wines are marketed internationally.

2. The contribution of the wine value chain to Resilience and Sustainability

Alto Douro Vinhateiro wine production is strongly linked to natural resources (soil, water) and climate, as well as to the ecological infrastructure that enhancing biodiversity facilitates grape production. The increase and a relative intensification of vineyards on one hand causes concern for air and water pollution, due to pesticides and fertilisers used, on the other hand it is a tool to preserve terraces and vineyards landscape, even if different from the traditional one. To mitigate environmental impact, several vine growers started to apply agro-ecological measures, with the aim to preserve functional biodiversity within and around the farm, decreasing the use of chemicals. Larger farms are investing also in precision management tools. Organic viticulture is growing.

Much more difficult is to face the demographic changes that are rapidly leading to fewer residents and the massive migration of youth, especially of young professionals who hardly find a qualified job in the region. Wine production is not offering many opportunities for local qualified professionals, as large companies make use of their own competencies (from the lower Douro area where the companies have their headquarters), while small companies or cooperatives have limited possibility to invest in qualified personnel. For medium and low qualified jobs in the vineyards, large companies employ seasonal commuters and/or migrants (often from Portuguese speaking countries) who live in the Region only during the growing season. On the other hand, in small scale grape production, profitability is limited and does not allow to create jobs. In both cases, manpower availability is already a problem that risks increasing in the coming years.

The fact that part of the value chain, especially in the case of large companies, takes place outside the region means that also large part of the added value goes outside the region, with a very limited sharing of economic benefits within local communities. It, at turn, depauperates local communities of basic services and further increases the move of educated young families in other regions/cities. The interaction between wine production and tourism may offer new perspectives to young professionals.

3. Policy experiences

Despite the demographic trends are clear since years, it seems that no large area territorial policies to react was put into place. There have been some private initiatives, from wine companies, to facilitate the integration of migrants into the rural villages, often renovating traditional houses to host them. Nevertheless, the initiatives were not so successful as migrants, on average, moved out after few years, due to the lack of social services and the difficulties to integrate whole families.

As a reaction companies invested on commuters, providing transportation services and short-term accommodation. But also, in this case residents are not increased and, as a consequence, rural vitality continues to fade.

On the environmental perspective, the main policies impacting the area are the EU CAP, especially the Rural Development Programme measures to support low impact management. Training and advisory is mainly provided by private initiatives, often implemented collectively by large companies.

4. Recommendations

The following points were identified as relevant for further policy development:

- Integration of policies considering agriculture together with tourism and other sectors and also integrating the National, Regional and local scales;
- Improve material (schools, hospitals...) and immaterial (internet) infrastructures, to allow young families to remain;
- Strengthen the role of collective actions, through consortia, cooperatives or other forms of collaboration within and between sectors;
- Stronger support to ecological systems with funds but also with knowledge;
- Create a system to balance powers in the use of land and water;
- Secure investments in (environmental) education, research and innovation with a global approach.

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References: *see the complete documents on the Maçico Noroeste wine value chain at https://www.moving-h2020.eu/*

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