

THE WINES OF MURCIA: CONTRIBUTION FROM JOSE LUIS ANDRÉS SARASA

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For more than three years, José Luis Andrés Sarasa and his team of researchers from the University of Murcia (Spain) have conducted an intensive task of inquire, research and analysis of the wine production sector in the region of Murcia in the framework of the project «*Filières innovantes, savoir-faire locaux et partenariat euroméditerranéen*», financed by the Programme Euromed Heritage II, of the European Union. The outcome of this technical and scientific effort is contained in the text entitled «*Análisis estructural de la producción de vino en la region de Murcia (España)*» (Structural analysis of wine production in the region of Murcia (Spain)).

Some years before we'd work together in the activities of the «*Filières Innovantes*» project, I met Prof. Andrés Sarasa in other scientific events carried out by both the STRADEMED and DynMed networks, in the middle of the 90's. We both shared a passion for the co-operation process in the Mediterranean region.

The project «*Filières Innovantes*» had started to be prepared in 1991 following the UNESCO's Programme «*Futures of the Culture*», when Augusto Perelli, from the Politecnico di Milano and Abdelkader Sid Ahmed, from Université Paris - Sorbonne, associated to themselves a large number of academics and researchers from both sides of the Mediterranean to study the subject of the know – how (*savoir-faire*) related to the culture and heritage aspects.

In February 2002 the project «*Filières Innovantes*» finally started to run and at that time we were twenty three partners working together on nine areas of study and research established according to the Industrial Economics notion of *filière*. Prof. Andrés Sarasa chose to join the working group for the wine *filière* that I was coordinating and this way we could share experiences, competences and friendship along more than three years on a regular basis.

During those months of intensive work and several meetings, the working group of fifteen partners was able to produce a verifiable result consisting in a proposal for a pilot project focused on nine actions, where the most ambitious is the creation and implementation of the «*Centre des Savoir-faire de la Méditerranée*», located at Bonifacio (Corse).

Unfortunately the abrupt end of the activities of the project in consequence of the misunderstandings between the coordinators and the refuse of the Aidco Office to grant the third year allowance of the budget caused the immediate conclusion of the program and the unfinished work in the wine co-operation process that we've started.

In what concerns the wine sector of Murcia, Prof. Andrés Sarasa and his team could conclude from their research that for the existing three D.O. in the region – Bullas, Jumilla et Yecla – after the recently update of wine processing technologies the wineries are now introducing new features like: temperature control, stainless steel, ..., which aim is rather to achieve quality than quantity in wine production. The producers and the winemakers are the owners of the know-how that has been acquired trough the vocational training, family tradition or even the academic or professional education. Finally, the regular relationship between the wine industry and the local actors covers aspects very relevant, such as: information, control, promotion, financing, marketing, education and training, technical assistance, etc.

But in a much wider text published in the book «*I piccoli vini del Mediterraneo, grandi vini di domani: studi, analisi e strategie*» (Editions Publisud, Paris, 2008), Andrés Sarasa and his colleague Dolores Ponce Sánchez describe the situation and the perception of the wine sector agents towards the European agricultural policy for wine, the market perspectives, as well as a detailed description of the production structures aiming to show their problems and reveal their perspectives.

Ecology, reduction in the number of farms and conversation of vineyards seems to be the principal tendencies observed among the producers of grapes that are after processed into wine mainly by three types of enterprises: the large corporations, the co-operatives and the SMEs. The work of Andrés Sarasa and D. Ponce Sánchez is in a great extent dedicated to the study, observation and characterization of those three types of wine producers, as we can appreciate in the above mentioned text.

The others topics studied and inserted in the text are: 1. the «Monastrell» variety of grape that mixed with the grapes from the «Merlot» and «Syrah» varieties are responsible for the typical wines of excellence, made in the region of Murcia; 2. the large number of existing labels inside the three DOs of the region, which is a considerable obstacle for better marketing results and can be viewed as a overproduction situation; 3. the R&D effort conducted by the large corporations and some of the local actors plays a crucial role supporting the modernization of both the processing and marketing areas.

In a short visit that we made in March 2004 to the region, we could observe that wine tourism was trying to establish and some initiatives were already on the run as, for instance, the Museum of Wine at Bullas and the plans to create the Wine Road of Bullas (*Ruta del Vino Bullas*).

Enotourism or Wine Tourism is a growing economic activity that combines the two sectors, wine and tourism, in an attractive sector both for tourism agents and wine producers. Celebrated events with a wide visibility like the «European Year of Wine Tourism», the «European Day of Enotourism» or agencies working in the subject like the RECEVIN – European Network of Wine Cities, are examples of good opportunities and positive expectations for the future. Networking of wine tourism regions and wine tourism operators are another process, trough cooperation and exchange actions, to promote wine

and territories. Tourists are welcomed to wine tourism activities and if they are pleased with the things that they are able to appreciate they surely will turn into the best promoters of the wine and the touristy environment of the region.

We've used the example of the wine tourism in Alentejo (Portugal) to illustrate what we've been doing in this field to promote our wines, our territory and our culture with a sound result so far although there's a lot still to be done or accomplished.

Along with the tourists that come to visit our regions there are also a lot of people and economic agents that will not come and they are also concerned with our strategy to promote our wines. For those persons, trade fairs and international salons are a very adequate mean to reach them and show and promote the wines of the region. Murcia and the Alentejo regions could try to share initiatives of this kind especially if they intend to internationalize their wines in far distant markets.

