



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Rural Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud

The 'terroirist' social movement: The reawakening of wine culture in Spain

Pablo Alonso González^{a,*}, Eva Parga Dans^b

^a University of Cambridge, Division of Archaeology, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3DZ, United Kingdom

^b Group of Territorial Studies (GET), Sociology Faculty, University of A Coruña, Campus de Elviña, 15071, A Coruña, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Terroir
Wine
Denomination of origin system
Spain
Authenticity
Controversy

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the emergence of the *terroirist* social movement in Spain and the controversies arising from it. We assess its role in transforming the Spanish wine scene and wine regions from the combined perspective of rural and social movement studies. Spain boasts the largest surface area of vineyards and the largest volume of wine exports of any country, yet it also sells the cheapest wine and lacks wine zoning policies, which makes Spain unique among traditional wine-producing countries. Considering this situation, a group of *terroir*-driven winemakers are challenging the Spanish industrial wine establishment. They have built networks in rural areas throughout the country and are actively involved in local grassroots movements, aiming to produce quality wines with added value, recover neglected wine regions and grape varieties, and reinstate traditional wine culture. While the movement displays certain elite and populist tendencies, it remains radical in its attempt to challenge a deep-seated economic model dominated by large companies with a powerful lobby that influences the government.

1. Introduction: the Spanish exception

Víctor de la Serna, arguably the most famous Spanish wine journalist, explained what he calls the “Spanish exception” with the following vignette:

About 50 years ago, a journalist and diplomat who was passionate about wine negotiated a majority shareholding in a classic *Rioja* winery. “So and so's vineyard ..., such and such a mountainside ... -Do these two makes of wine refer to defined vineyards?” he asked. “Yes, of course”, they replied. “And why don't we start making each wine with grapes from each vineyard in question?” They looked at him with condescending sympathy, “They do that in Burgundy, but not here” (de la Serna 14 February 2014).

A similar situation took place in 2016 during a roundtable framed within the Diam congress, entitled “Classifications of quality wines: future challenge or a mirage for Rioja?”. In it, the Riojan Association of Family Cellars defended the need to implement zoning policies according to *terroir*. A similar approach was advocated by Rioja'n'Roll, a group of radical *terroirist* winemakers. Against their views was *Grupo Rioja*, an association of 50 cellars comprising more than two thirds of all sales in DO Rioja. The roundtable ended with the words of Íñigo Torres, a representative from the DO, who emphasized the need to bet on the traditional Riojan distinctiveness based on wine aging (*crianza*, *reserva* and *gran reserva*) rather than on *terroir*. His last words are again revealing: 'No matter how much we want to be Burgundy, we are not'.

These two vignettes illustrate the “Spanish exception”, which, in a nutshell, refers to the fact that the country has so far avoided classifying exceptional vineyards according to *terroir*. While *Burgundy* in France or *Porto* in Portugal did so centuries ago, the prestigious Spanish regions of *Cava-Penedés*, *Jerez* (Sherry) and *Rioja* are still dominated by large companies and cooperatives producing millions of bottles yearly. Vineyards that were famous in the 19th century are now brands that no longer correspond to actual places. Furthermore, the regulatory boards of Spanish Denominations of Origin (DOs) are sceptical of any attempt to overturn a status quo that benefits large private firms and perpetuates their power. They growingly tend to invest in marketing rather than quality control or promotion. As a result, in a well-known wine DO such as *Rías Baixas* in Galicia, the share of the budget devoted to quality control decreased from 26% in 2014 to 20% in 2017, while investment in marketing rocketed from 35% to 70% in the same years. This is also manifested in the continuing emphasis by most DOs on encouraging high grape yields and low-quality wines. Again in *Rías Baixas*, a region with a strong smallholding tradition where almost every family produced its own wine, the number of viticulturists has dropped sharply in recent years, from 6677 in 2013 to 5787 in 2015, with 2000 of them not selling wine to any cellar and producing their homemade wine and selling it informally (Alonso González and Parga-Dans, 2017; DO *Rías Baixas*, 2015), vineyard properties are falling into the hands of just a few owners, and the reputation and prices of wines are falling. Moreover, not only *Rías Baixas*, but also another three of the five wine DOs

* Corresponding author. IPNA-CSIC, Av. Astrofísico Francisco Sánchez, 3, 38206, San Cristóbal de La Laguna, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain.
E-mail addresses: pabloag1@hotmail.com, Pa332@cam.ac.uk (P. Alonso González), Eva.parga.dans@udc.es (E. Parga Dans).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2018.04.014>

Received 26 October 2017; Received in revised form 15 April 2018; Accepted 30 April 2018
0743-0167/ © 2018 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

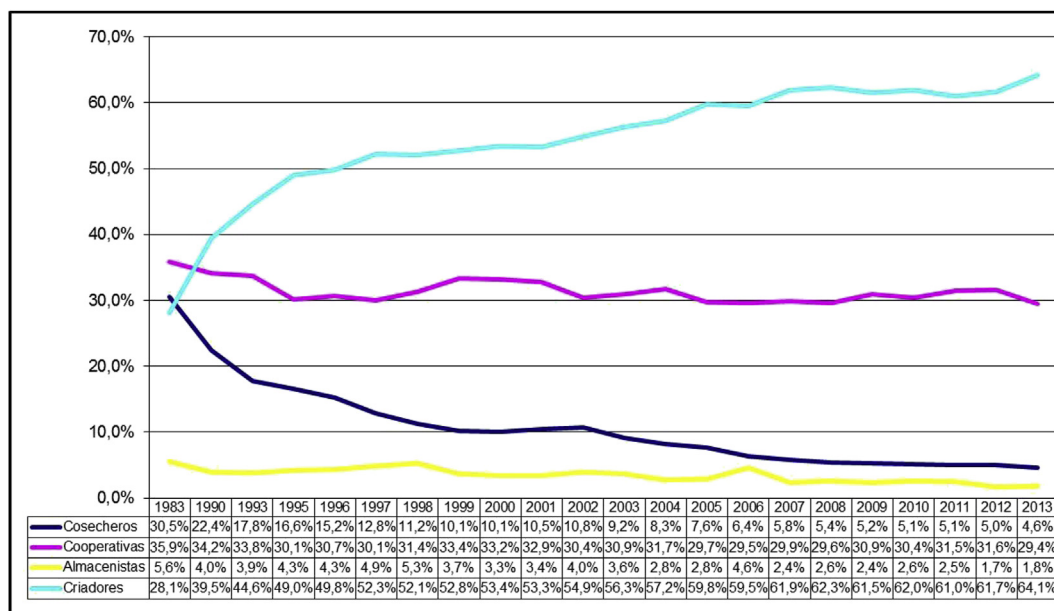


Fig. 1. Productive structure of Rioja DOC and key economic actors (1983–2013). The figure shows the rapid decrease of *cosecheros* ("vintners" making young wines and selling in bulk to wine companies) and the growth of *criadores* ("breeders", wine cellars that adopted the model from Bordeaux after the second half of the nineteenth century and started to age and oak wines), a stable number of cooperatives and the almost disappearance of *almacenistas* (wine dealers and stockholders who buy bulk wine directly from the producer and sell it on to bottlers or shippers). Source: Barco Royo (2015).

comprised in our research context in Galicia are conflict-ridden, including *Valdeorras*, *Ribeira Sacra* and *Ribeiro*. Many other Spanish DOs present similar trends (Alonso Santos, 2012). This includes the oldest and largest one, Rioja, ridden by inner conflicts and undergoing a rapid process of property concentration and falling grape prices (see Fig. 1).

The aim of this paper is to address the controversy elicited by the emergence of the *terroir*-oriented or *terroirist* phenomenon in Spain as a recurrent social foodstuff-based movement (Haydu and Skotnicki, 2016), which questions the current state of affairs briefly sketched above. The broader implications of the movement include a shift in our understanding of resistance and protest in rural areas of developed countries, and its potential for restructuring space and political relations in the countryside (Teil, 2017; Woods, 2003). In exploring these dimensions, we contribute to the literature at the frontier between social movement studies and rural studies (Woods, 2008), and the particular traits of this process in Spain (Di Masso et al., 2014). Rural sociology has explored specific events and scandals in the wine sector to explain institutional change and adaptation to new socio-economic environments (Barbera and Audifredi, 2012). However, alternative food networks have rarely been considered or addressed as rural social movements in Spain and abroad.

Nonetheless, the *terroirist* movement certainly shares most defining traits of classic social movements: the use of conflicting unconventional means to achieve their aims, a network structure, and a shared framework of beliefs and solidarity among its members (Starr, 2010). But it also converges with new social movements, which can be understood, following Diani (1992, 5), as 'a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in political or cultural conflict on the basis of a shared collective identity'. Indeed, the *terroirist* movement represents a shift envisaged in other contemporary rural conflicts, from rigid structures to a more fluid and polycentric organisation based on direct action and a post-materialist identity politics (Woods, 2003).

The movement's slogan, rationale and understanding of *terroir* are expressed in their manifesto, called *Manifiesto Matador*:

All the great wines of the world reflect exceptional vineyards. That is why the most prestigious wine areas have always begun their legislation from these extraordinary vineyards, in order to defend and

protect them ... Consequently, we ask the Regulatory Councils [of DOs] to be sensitive to the new wine reality emerging in Spain, and to help show the differences among each DO in our country. Because we know that this differentiation is the basis of exceptionality and uniqueness, because the *terroir* wine movement is unstoppable and moreover, and is also emerging as the best way to make Spanish wine better than ever and more appreciated (Club Matador, 2015).

We are interested in this largely unexplored Spanish wine movement not only because it is radical within the wine industry and challenges the existing power structure, but also because it aligns with wider consumer global trends and food-based social movements (Wekerle, 2004). This realignment of winemaking with novel consumer trends contesting industrial standardisation has meant the recovery of neglected winemaking traditions, varieties and regions in risk of disappearance, like *Priorat* or *Gredos*. For these reasons, we have chosen to describe this movement as a reawakening rather than a revolution, the label many in Spain these days prefer to use.

2. Materials and methods

This paper is part of a broader project mapping a regional example in Galicia of a nationwide "war" under way mainly in two of Spain's most renowned wine regions, *Rioja* and *Penedés*. It revolves around the controversial notion of *terroir*, the taste of wine and its organoleptic properties, and ultimately the territorial, political and economic model upon which the wine world is based. We draw on a cross-disciplinary two-year ethnographical study involving a sociologist and an anthropologist. The project employs a qualitative approach. We first carried out a literature review and a qualitative comparative analysis of food and wine social movements. Our aim was to obtain first-hand data from deliberately chosen case studies of conflicts between Spanish *vignerons* and the wine establishment (mostly the DOs system), as well as the social construction of *terroir* by a broad community of stakeholders in the wine field. After the literature review, we surveyed twenty experts who listed the most significant cases of conflict between DOs and *vignerons*. This resulted in a list of almost a hundred conflicts, whose reliability was checked by comparing results from the survey with archival work and a digital ethnography in which we have followed-up

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6545248>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6545248>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)