

Exporting a “sense of place”: The exportation of a regional gastronomic identity beyond national borders

Many countries carry within their particular gastronomic DNA, elements of their past and present beverage culture that are uniquely identified with that nation. In Ireland, we have examples such as Guinness, Irish Whiskey and the Irish Pub. The German nation has strong associations with beer and beer gardens. Scotland has established associations with whisky, haggis, shortbread and salmon. (Jones and Jenkins, 2002, p.125). But of all modern cultures France is most typically portrayed as having the strongest gastronomic identity based around the very French concept of “terroir”, and it is wine that most readily springs to mind when we discuss the beverage culture of France.

This paper explores innovative ways in which France might export its oenological “sense of place” beyond its national boundaries. It examines the important role that story can play in developing positive relationships with geographically delimited wine products. If successful, the reification and exportation of such a regional gastronomic identity can represent a form of what McGovern refers to as “Tourism without Travel” (McGovern, 2002, p.94) and can enhance the relationship between wine consumers and the wine’s regional identity outside its own natural borders. Munoz and Wood (2007) suggested that themed locations act as “cultural ambassadors” outside their home countries. Similar theming of points of interaction between the consumers and the product offers the potential to experience both the story and the sense of place associated with a specific region’s wine, which may then form a beneficial emotional bond between the participant and the defined region.

Wine as “Story”

Wine means different things to different audiences. Some are interested purely in the drink itself, as a soothing agent of relaxation, a social product that performs the same role as any other libation. Others view the taste of the drink itself as just one aspect of a complex gastronomic experience. For the latter consumer it is the story of the wine that allows the complexity of its enjoyment to be experienced. The story of the wine can include many things, the place it comes from, the people who made it, the weather conditions of the harvest that year, the history of the wine itself, the packaging of the bottle, the adherence to specific regional legislation, the events of the time the wine was produced and sealed. In his book *Liquid Memory*, acclaimed film maker Jonathan Nossiter (2009, p.13) suggests that “wine is among the most singular repositories of memory known to man”. The author

compares this repository to things like museums, and novels and how they capture and share specific memories and moments in time. However, according to Nossiter, ‘wine is unique because it is the only animate vessel of both personal memory- that of the drinker (or maker) and the subjectivity of his experience and the memory of that subjectivity - and communal memory. That is, it is communal to the extent that a wine is also the memory of the “terroir” (Nossiter, 2009, pp.13-14). A specific wine is an unusual product in that it has within it the power to both tell the story of a particular place and to be the story of that particular “place”. One can liken it to a “book” that might describe a place, experience or period in time. Having offered the reader an insight into what that place, experience or period entailed, the book could now be consumed. Through its consumption the story of that “place” is enhanced. If we continue the analogy the book offers the reader the added benefit of having been written, published, printed and then sealed at the very time period being described in that particular “place” and you the drinker are the only one privileged enough to break that time seal, open that “book” and consume the story of that place as intended by the original ‘wine- author’.

There are many other similar examples of the above that make a wine unique in the beverage world but one thing many of them share is the ability to portray the wine as an almost animate object that can somehow be compared to human existence. Paul Pontallier, director and winemaker at the world famous Château Margaux, suggests in a recent BBC documentary that ‘wine is not just fermented juice , it can be philosophical, it is so close to ourselves, its life expectancy is more or less ours’ (‘Wine - The Faith’, 2009). The suggestion is that wine has the power to hold within the confines of its bottle, memories, feelings and emotions that reflect its surrounding natural environment. Roger Scruton’s description of Burgundy brings to life a particularly eloquent description of this unique animation.

To appreciate Burgundy as it really is you must leave it to mature for at least five years, after which time a strange transformation occurs in the bottle. The grape gradually retreats, leaving first the village, then the vineyard and finally the soil itself in the foreground. Historical associations come alive as tastes and scents, ancestral traits appear like submerged family features and that peculiar Burgundy nose, as distinctive as the nose of Cleopatra, sits at the rim of the glass like a presiding god (Scruton, 2009, p. 37).

It is important to state from the outset that for the purposes of this paper the wines I am referring to exclude much of the modern branded wine that has little or no reflection of “terroir” in its makeup, and even though many of them purport to tell a story of sorts, they are a poor representation of the type of wine alluded to above.

Wine is a product, more than any other, that reflects its association with a particular place through the expression of a number of factors: the grape variety, the soil, the vineyard aspect, the climate, the weather conditions and of course the winemaker. The “place story” encompasses not only the factors already mentioned, which are in essence internal to the wine, but also factors that are external to the product, while maintaining for many a part of its “sense of place”. Here we can include things such as the history of the vineyards, the vignerons’ own story and other elements that we may associate with the actual wine such as traditionally associated foods, practices and events. It is the communication of all of these aspects that allows the story of the wine’s place to be told. Among many consumers, particularly at the quality level of the market, there is a desire to hear that story of the wine’s place and it is the communication and ultimate exportation of that sense of place that poses particular challenges for winemakers. Having outlined the main elements that are kernel to developing a wine’s identity, I will now begin to point to innovative ways in which France might export that oenological “sense of place” beyond its national boundaries and the important role that story can play in developing positive relationships with geographically delimited wine products . However, before we can begin to understand the French approach, there are one or two lessons that we can learn from New World wine producers and how they have gone about their own exportation of an oenological sense of place.

The New World has for some time now been using the story of tradition to imply a long wine heritage in continuity with the past and in some case even implying associations with the traditions of historic wine nations like France. Included in the New World’s “story of place” is a cultural dimension that has been very evident in the promotion of their wines, particularly in recent years. There is evidence that using the story of wine, and the cultural economy that forms part of that story, can encourage real connections between consumers of wine and the product itself.

Beginning in the 1980s, the Australian wine industry grew from relatively modest levels to become the 4th largest exporter in the world of wine (Aylward, 2008, p.373). Up until relatively recently, they have heavily marketed their wines based on a low price point that

delivered fruit-driven value-for-money wines that operated very much at the mass branding level. Brands such as Jacobs Creek and Thomas Hardy became very popular, especially in Irish markets. However, there came recognition towards the end of the noughties that world markets were becoming less satisfied with these particular wines and in many markets a sophisticated consumer was emerging who was demanding a more complex product that offered more than a varietally labelled fruit drink in a glass. The origin of this demand stems from a period in which the consumer has become more educated through media channels such as food programmes, magazine articles and other influences such as foreign travel, wine clubs, enhanced opportunities for dining out, etc. Aylward (2008, p.374) suggests that consumers are now developing 'a quest for product story, a wine experience and an appreciation of its cultural qualities'. The Australian reaction to these new consumption demands has taken many forms including the development of a new general strategy entitled "Directions to 2025" which introduced new categories of Australian wines, which some might suggest mirror the categorisation that the French already possess in their appellation contrôlée laws. Wine Australia has also developed a number of promotional initiatives that possibly allow it to develop a relationship between it and consumers on a cultural level. Aylward (2008 p.373) describes this as the 'way in which wine's cultural and economic qualities can be woven into a much more enriched fabric'. Recent examples of how Wine Australia has attempted this interweaving between a wine and the cultural sphere include their obvious association with organising and publicising of events such as The Wine Australia University Wine Championships (McKenna, G. 2012) and the Young wine writer of the year competition (<http://www.youngwinewriter.com>). Wine Australia has also shown a lot of recent interest in international rugby by organising wine themed rugby events to co-inside with international matches (Smullen, 2011). Individual wine brands have also shown themselves keen to associate their wines with cultural events. Jacobs Creek's series of outdoor Hollywood movies shown on their vineyard/visitor centre lawns provides a recent example (<http://www.barossa.com>). One might also note their promotional involvement with the Hollywood movie *Australia*. These examples show that the new world wine sector values the importance of having a cultural economy attached to their wine. This approach is not unique to wine products in the beverage sector: Neville, in her exploration of the commodification of Irish culture, suggests that Guinness has used a similar approach in French advertisements by linking stout to Ireland's leading literary figures in advertisement campaigns, thus inferring that in some way the product has cultural parity with great Irish writers. She uses the following example of a French advertisement for Guinness to illustrate:

Dublin. Lieu idyllique pour vous initier à Joyce, Yeats, Becket, Shaw, et Behan.

Dublin. Lieu historique de la production de la Guinness. Seamus Heaney, Roddy Doyle, Paul Durcan, vous avez l'embarras du choix. Et pour être honnête si vous êtes venu en simple visiteur pour le weekend, vous pourriez manquer de temps pour les apprécier tous à leur juste valeur. Alors pourquoi ne pas les associer:

Heaney, Yeats, Guinness, Beckett, Joyce.

Dublin, an idyllic city in which to absorb writers like Joyce, Yeats, Beckett, Shaw and Behan. Dublin, the historical home of Guinness. Seamus Heaney, Roddy Doyle, Paul Durcan, you have such an embarrassment of choice. And to be honest, if you arrived in the city as an ordinary weekend tourist, you might well not have sufficient time to appreciate all these riches properly. So why not just lump them all together:

Heaney, Yeats, Guinness, Beckett, Joyce (Neville, 2007, pp.151-152).

The above are successful examples of the beverage world's active involvement in developing their product's cultural economy. But this is only part of their strategy. The true essence of a wine's sense of place lies in its story and the communication of this story as described above is what Aylward ultimately refers to as: 'the fabric of culture that is attached not to buildings, icons or performances, but to community interaction, collective and individual belief systems, a products anthropological value, or the sense of place and purpose that becomes inherently bound within that products development' (Alyward, 2001, p. 380).

It can prove more difficult to export this sense of place but again the new world has made a number of efforts in this regard. There have been attempts through a variety of programmes to bring the sense of place associated in particular with Australia's better wines into contact with various export markets. Examples include Wine Australia's Regional Heroes Series, their Wine Ambassadors Initiative and their Ambassador's Shop Programme. By developing a number of strategies that seek to expose potential markets to the story of the wine's place, they are attempting to achieve to some degree what McGovern refers to as "tourism without travel" (McGovern, 2003, p.91). That is to say, they are exposing the consumer to the "story of the place" without the necessity for being physically present. Although McGovern is

referring to the influence of the Irish Theme Pub in an emerging global culture, comparisons can be drawn with Wine Australia's attempt to use the story of place to influence that same global market. McGovern also suggests in a separate article that one of the characteristics of late capitalism is that commodities possess an exchange value that is based on their cultural associations (McGovern, 2002, p.80) and it seems clear that by telling the story of a wine's place Wine Australia allows this cultural association to be re-ified and thus become an important part of the commodities make up. It therefore helps differentiate it from products that may not possess that same cultural capital.

Just as the New World has drawn greatly from the old world in terms of its wine-making origins, perhaps the old world has something to learn from countries like Australia when it comes to commodifying gastronomic culture to help compete in a highly globalised market. There is little doubt that countries like France are paying catch-up in this regard but there are a number of innovative examples that show how the French wine industry is starting to valorise the story of place that can be associated in a very real way with its wine products.

McGovern's concept of 'Tourism without travel', mentioned above, suggest there are opportunities for consumers to experience a place through means other than physically visiting the actual place. These means can include things like stories and associations that help commodify the wine's culture and allow it to travel and be experienced. Munoz and Wood suggested that themed locations act as 'cultural ambassadors' outside their home countries (2007, pp.242-245). In their study, they explored the influence of themed restaurants on a host nation's cultural perception of the themed country. The following examples show how particular French wine stories can indeed travel into communities outside the wine region itself and themselves act to some degree as ambassadors of cultural associations.

Cahors Malbec: Out of the vineyard and into the town

Cahors is described by Larousse as one of the finer red wines of South West France coming from vineyards mainly to the west of the ancient town of Cahors (Larousse, 2001, p.301). The region has a long wine history and in the early 19th century, according to the Robinson (1994, p.174), the area was famed for the "Black wines of Cahors". In recent years Cahors has done a lot to develop and promote its own story. This has been, no doubt, in part a response to the

Argentinean association with Cahor's original malbec grape and its relatively recent success in key markets such as the UK and the US. The main strategist behind the Cahors marketing campaign since 2006 is UIVC Marketing Director Jérémy Arnaud (Fiorina, 2010). A conference was held in 2007 entitled "Black Paradox" where the colour influence of the wine's association with the colour black was discussed not only by wine experts but also by a sociology Professor from the Sorbonne and a writer accomplished in exploring emotional responses to colour. From that first conference has stemmed the development of a number of key initiatives that anchor the wine to its oenological sense of place. The Cahors strategy appears to very much reflect the commodification of the culture and story surrounding their wine as much as the quality of the product itself. It includes things like the launching of the Cahors blog: [www. blackisphere. fr](http://www.blackisphere.fr) with its striking presentation and layout which is heavily themed to reflect the wine's historical association with the colour black. The blog provides a forum for the communication of events and topics of interest that relate to the wines of Cahors. (<http://www.blackisphere.fr/>). Cahors also developed [CahorsMalbec.com](http://www.cahorsmalbec.com), an English Language website directly targets the US and UK market while at the same time re-enforcing the message that Cahors is the true home of malbec and the history of the place and that grape are very much intertwined. (<http://www.cahorsmalbec.com/>)

One innovative approach to exporting the story of Cahors wines involved the development of the Cahors wine glass. An original glass design was commissioned and is now being promoted in the hope that people will associate that glass with the story of Cahors. The glass design is particularly interesting in terms of commodifying and exporting an oenological sense of place in that it allows the story of Cahors malbec to be physically transported outside the region itself by visitors to that region. The design itself has a role to play in exporting the story of Cahors, as it will lead to that story being told in places other than the region itself. One final initiative involved the development of the Cahors Malbec Lounge, in the heart of Cahors town itself, which has been opened in the revamped Maison du Vin. The design of the lounge is very reflective of the deep malbec grape colour and the distinctive Cahors glass. Of particular interest is the fact that the Malbec lounge not only caters for tastings, tours etc it also opens itself to a range of cultural/community events such as music concerts and events themed with Cahors tastings and the wine itself such as the recent "Malbec In Love" soirée which included a "Speed Wine Dating" event, and an event entitled "Malbec Black Jack" (*French Wine News*, 2011). One might argue that there is a comparison to be drawn here between events such as these and previous Australian examples in attempting to develop the

wine's cultural economy. Cahors has successfully begun exporting the story of its wine, so rich in history and tradition, beyond the vineyard, beyond the town and beyond the South West region itself. Through its story, its glass, its blog, its website and the Cahors Malbec Lounge people can now experience Cahor's sense of place well beyond the vineyard.

Muscadet Zenith: Out of the vineyard and into the city

Cahors is not alone in its efforts to commodify and export elements of its gastronomic culture outside its regional borders. The development of the Bar Muscadet au Zenith at the Zenith Nantes Metropole Concert hall provides a very good example of both the exportation of 'sense of place' and the enhancement of 'cultural capital' that one might associate with a particular wine. That product is Muscadet, the flagship wine from the Loire region. In 2011 this particular project was initiated by the trade organisation Interprofession des Vins de Loire. The initiative involves exposing up to 80,000 concert goers to a number of ambassador vintners who operate the Bar Muscadet au Zenith during a range of cultural events. So far attendees at events as diverse as Motorhead, James Blunt and Lenny Kravitz concerts have been exposed to the vintner ambassadors of the Loire. According to *French Wine News* (2011):

...this initiative represents an unprecedented example of a communication and wine-tasting campaign which is aimed at promoting the rediscovery of the wines of Nantes and its flagship appellation, Muscadet, by associating its image with major cultural events that are both high-quality and innovative.

What makes this an example of exporting a sense of place as opposed to simply a wine promotion is the involvement of the ambassadors from the Loire regions and the use of very specific wines in the exercise. The sixteen ambassadors act not only as sales representatives but also as relationship formers between event goers and the physical place that is the Loire Muscadet region. To date, this approach appears to have proven quite successful and it's hard to see why such an approach wouldn't work outside the Loire region altogether. Two distinct outcomes are being achieved. Firstly the story of the wine's sense of place is being told to a wide variety of audiences, and secondly the wine is benefiting in terms of its cultural economy, in that it is being associated in the mind of consumers with a particular range of

cultural events. The thirty events that make up the 2012 contract include not only concerts but also musicals, modern circus acts, and even political debates.

Inter-Rhone: Out of the vineyard and into other countries

Inter-Rhone is the organisation that represents all wine merchants and growers in the Rhone valley. It has responsibility for promotional, economic and technical needs regarding the wines of the region. (<http://www.vins-rhone.com>). Inter-Rhone offers us two key examples of how it can export its regional gastronomic identity beyond national borders firstly through its Wine Educators Annual Programme and secondly through its use of its own brand ambassadors. Each year Inter-Rhone invites a number of what one might refer to as key influencers to a 4/5 day educational trip in the Rhone valley. Usually this involves three or four people each from a number of different countries who are involved in the wine trade. These people may work as wine educators, journalists, sommeliers, promoters etc. This trip not only offers these influencers an opportunity to taste wines but I would argue it instils in them a “sense of place” associated with the region itself. As well as the more obvious exposure to tastings, the influencers have the opportunity to meet with the vignerons themselves, to interact with their communities and families and to walk the actual vineyards in their company and being exposed to the typography, the people, the soil and the stories of the very vines themselves. Inter-Rhone’s hope is that these influencers will then go on to spread the “gospel of the Rhone” among their own communities thus exporting that sense of place outside the region and outside of France.

In addition to the educational programme Inter-Rhone operates a team of brand ambassadors that visit key market countries offering free educational talks and tastings on the Rhone Valley wines. A recent example of this saw Linda Field one of Inter-Rhone’s ambassadors spending 10 days in Ireland travelling the country delivering lectures and tastings to students of hospitality management programmes at a variety of third level centres through out the country. It could be argued that this is a form of McGovern’s theory of “Tourism without Travel” already mentioned. Participants are being allowed to experience the “place” that is the Rhone wine region without actually travelling there.

The Beaujolais Nouveau Story: Out of the vineyard and into the rest of the world

One of the most successful examples of exporting an oenological “sense of place” beyond national boundaries is the world wide success that has been Beaujolais Nouveau Day. Beaujolais is a wine region in the South of Burgundy. Though it produces a range of excellent wines principally from the Gamay grape it is best known worldwide because of the success over the years of its Beaujolais Nouveau wine. Originally this wine started out as a *vin de primeur*, that is, a wine drunk in the year it was made. It was sold in towns near the Beaujolais region and brought in much needed cash funds thus allowing the vignerons to concentrate on their more complex wine production. In 1951, Beaujolais was officially recognised through a set of regulations enforced by the Union Interprofessionnelle des Vins du Beaujolais (UIVB). Its official release date was set on November 15. Over time this local tradition of drinking the first Beaujolais of the season made its way to Paris and fans of Beaujolais began competing to be the first to bring the Beaujolais Nouveau to town following its annual official release at a minute past midnight on the 15th November. This date was officially changed to the third Thursday in November in 1985, thus maximising the winemaker’s sales by guaranteeing the race for Beaujolais Nouveau always began in the run up to a week end (Intowine.com)

The Beaujolais Nouveau story offers us a final clear example of how the tradition and heritage associated with a particular place can be used to export that sense of place and indeed its story throughout the world. Last year the tradition of Beaujolais Nouveau celebrated its 60th year and, though recently less popular in some markets, it still accounts for around 50 million bottles being distributed. Of these, only around half are destined for the French market, while the rest will be exported. The Japanese are now the world's biggest fans of the wine, ahead of the US and Germany. (Willsher, 2011)

While the above French examples show the benefits of exporting a regional gastronomic identity, we should note that there are also some examples where attempts to associate products with “a sense of place” in order to increase their attractiveness can go spectacularly wrong. Nike’s recent St Patrick’s Day branding of a style of running shoe is a case in point. As a tribute to a supposedly well-known Irish beverage, Nike branded their new trainers as “Black and Tans”. They were correct in assuming that a “Black and Tan” was indeed a drink made from mixing Guinness and ale but they failed to notice that many young modern Irish would not be familiar with this so called traditional Irish drink and more importantly that the Black and Tans was the nickname given to unruly British units made up of convicts who were sent to Ireland to viciously suppress revolts in the 1920s. The nickname has been

immortalised in Irish folklore through its use in various anti-British songs such as *Come out ye Black and Tans*.

The use of this term for a brand of trainer caused a media uproar and led to quite a negative press for Nike (Moran, 2012). They attempted to link their product to Ireland by using a traditional drink identified with that particular 'place'. Unfortunately, as the media at the time put it, not only was the link tenuous in that the Black and Tan drink is not popular in Ireland but also the story associated with the history of that drink is a very negative one and Nike paid a high price for their mistake.

Conclusion

In the introduction we suggested that that exportation of a regional gastronomic identity can represent a form of what McGovern referred to as "Tourism without Travel" and can enhance the relationship between wine consumers and the wine's regional identity outside its own natural borders. Bruwer and Alant (2009, p.236) cite Bruwer and Reilly (2006) suggesting that an important outcome of the tourism experience can, among other things, be a greater consumer affinity with the wine product. Although Brewer and Alant are referring to actual travel to achieve this affinity, McGovern is not and this suggests that as long as it is enshrined in the story of place, the wine itself may in some way act as the cultural envoy and has the power to enhance the relationship between the consumer and the wine's delimited place of origin. To that end the consumer's wine drinking experience is every bit as important in creating that affinity between wine and consumer, something that McGovern's Irish Pub abroad achieves by creating its own affinity between the consumer and Irish culture. There has been a lot of research in recent years around the importance and value of the tasting room experience when it comes to developing such an affinity between wine and the consumer. Because wine is a product that is so tied to a particular place, it is the story of that place that cements the emotional bond between the product and the consumer. Fountain et al (2008, p.9) cite Thatch et al (2007) who refer to a report by the Wine Institute in 2006 which says that: "Winery visits are amongst the most significant sources of brand awareness and wine purchase decisions, due to the connection made by the visitor to a winery's brand story". The authors also state that the connection between winery and visitor will be most successful if it is not only based on concrete links, but when there is also an emotional dimension to this connection (Fountain, 2008, p.8). In the examples mentioned throughout this paper we

explored innovative ways that countries might employ to export their oenological “sense of place”. We offered French examples where the exportation of that sense of place moved progressively away from the vineyard, firstly to the local town of Cahors, by way of the Cahors Malbec Lounge, secondly from the vineyard to the city in the form of the Muscadet bar at the Zenith Nantes Metropole, thirdly from vineyard to another country through the Inter-Rhone Wine Educators and Brand Ambassadors Programme, and finally from the vineyard to the rest of the world through the historic success of Beaujolais Nouveau day. The question we perhaps need to ask therefore is can that wine’s story and its associated commodified culture be removed from the vineyard and placed somewhere else? The examples in this paper would seem to indicate that the answer is yes. In addition to the advent of new communication technologies that might prove useful in an ever-shrinking globalised economy would appear to make this approach all the more feasible. A recent *New York Times* article entitled ‘Tasting Rooms, far away’ says that in New York there are now 54 satellite stores/tasting rooms attached to wineries state-wide carrying only New York wines made from the State’s own grapes (Goldberg, 2011). This would suggest that there is potential for further development in this area and that there might now be an opportunity for the regional French wine sector to steal a march on the New World by exporting its oenological sense of place outside its own borders thus using the wine’s entire story to build an emotional affinity between new consumers and its wine, based not only on the quality of the wine itself but also on its inherent gastronomic identity and all the story, place and cultural aspects that such an identity entails.

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