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Characteristics of Vinotheks as Special Form of Wine Shops in Germany - A Typological Approach

Axel DREYER, Kristin SCHIRRMEISTER, Juliane RATZ

HS Harz, University of Applied Sciences - DE

adreyer@hs-harz.de; u26151@hs-harz.de; jratz@hs-harz.de

The distribution channels for wine are manifold and depending on company size, business strategy, the region, and various other factors. For winemakers direct sales or so-called cellar door sales have an especially high priority, in particular for small-scale wine producers. The advantages of this distribution channel have repeatedly been examined and analysed. Unlike small wine maker businesses, especially large-scale wine producers (mainly in the new world of wine and viticulture) predominantly depend on retail and wholesale trade for wine marketing and thus mainly prefer an indirect sales structure.

One important channel for selling wine is a wine-shop, especially the in Germany so called vinothek as a form of direct sales. Unfortunately, the characteristics of wine-shops or vinotheks vary considerably and thus even experts have no clear definition for this term or concept. Many experts' explanations exist but none are clearly defined. Not even literature offers a clear dividing concept and gives only scarce explanatory approaches. Whilst in the old world of wine the term vinothek (formerly considered as sales directly at the place of production or so-called "farm-gate-sales") was frequently used to describe the sales form, this expression (vinothek or vinotheque) is now seldom to be found in the new world of wine. Many aspects are currently conceptually subsumed in the expression "cellar door sales" but without any in-depth substantive dialogue on the issue.

Objectives of Research

The research objective is to develop a system for defining characteristic forms of vinotheks and thus to be able to contribute to a consistent and for all understandable definition of the term „vinothek“. For this purpose various different characteristic features will be described by taking into account predetermined criteria.

The main questions are: What is a vinothek? Which characteristics describe a vinothek (wine shop)? Do various types of vinotheks (wine shops) exist? And finally is it possible to identify common features amongst the various types of existing vinotheks (wine shops), which to a certain extent could be considered as typical?

Methods

Research work based on various methodical approaches. To fix a frame for the research work experts were interviewed and answered questions concerning definitions and the design and different appearance forms of vinotheks. Their answers led to a very heterogeneous picture. The methodical core of the resulting necessity for systematization is a typological approach (Algermissen 1976; Arnold 2014). Based on a systematic literature research, criteria were defined, which should exactly describe a vinothek (i.e. product range, product presentation, offer of wine tasting events, price policy). In this case, literature of a neighboring discipline concerning retail management was consulted, because vinotheks (wine shops) in principle are retailers of wine.

Based on the developed set of criteria all aspects mentioned by experts and the existing sale forms will finally be explained in detail. The intended result is a clear statement concerning definable existing types. In a further step possible representatives of existing types will be investigated in an observational study. For this reason approximately 10-12 vintotheks will be visited. Pictures will complement the written information.

Results

Currently this is a work-in-progress project and research work is still ongoing when submitting this article. Therefore, actually it is only possible to forward expected results. The various different types of existing vintotheks (wine shops) in Germany (research area) are clearly vintotheks run by winegrowers, vintotheks in adjacent local villages, and those in the region i.e. regional vintotheks. According to first findings these groups largely differ with respect to product range and location (i. e. at the vintner, downtown, along a highway). Further differences are noticeable, for instance with reference to room (store) design/ interior decoration (i. e. modern or rustic) or organization of wine tastings and the number of staff involved at these tastings. It still has to be cleared if other types of business (vintothek concepts) can be derived there from.

Keywords: wine, cellar door sales, distribution, typology

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