1. INTRODUCTION

In Portugal, as well as in most European producing countries, wine production has been consistently higher than consumption (INE, 2011). Simultaneously, the wines of the “New World” have significantly increased their presence at European markets, contributing to the imbalance between Portugal’s demand and supply of wine.

In this unfavorable context, it is very important to understand how consumers select and choose a bottle of wine. Indeed, regarding the high number of regions and brands, choosing and buying wine can be a complicated task for an average consumer. Lockshin (2005) states that in any other categories of products of mass consumption we can see a supermarket corridor with over 300 brands exhibited, as it is in the case of wines. Knowing the criteria and understanding the evaluation process made by consumers is therefore very important for producers to develop strategies for market orientation.

The quality of wine is unknown until the bottle is opened and the wine is tasted. Before this happens, at the moment that the consumer has to make a decision, in the absence of information about the product, the extrinsic attributes are often used as heuristic cues to evaluate the quality of the wines and facilitate decision-making (Speed, 1998).

Lockshin & Hall (2003) define extrinsic attributes, such as price, brand, packaging and shelf location, as the ones that can be modified without changing the quality of the product. The intrinsic attributes are directly related to the product, such as the grapes variety, alcohol content and wine style.

The intrinsic quality of a wine is an attribute which is difficult both to define and to communicate. The sensory analysis of the wine is sometimes subjective and difficult to measure and the quality level can vary depending on a set of circumstances, such as the consumption occasion (Oczkowski, 2001). This adds complexity and risk to the process of purchasing decision.

The wine quality must be understood in perspective of perceived quality, which includes both the intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of the wine. According to Lockshin & Rhodus (1993), perceptions about its quality are based on the combined evaluation of intrinsic attributes, such as the grape variety, alcohol content, wine style, winemaker, and extrinsic attributes, such as price, bottle, labels and brand.

Wine label is a very important communication link between the wine and the consumer and can be a powerful tool of attraction and seduction. Therefore, it is very important that the features on the front and back label are visually attractive, in order to highlight the product on the shelf (Chaney, 2000; Jennings & Wood, 1984; Olthen et al., 2003; Thomas & Pickering, 2003).

The brand is also an important clue, as it can substitute for a set of attributes, including quality, thus functioning as a shortcut that simplifies the consumer’s decision making process (Lockshin et al., 2000).

Halstead (2002) argues that price is one of the most important attributes in deciding about purchase and it is often the main determinant in the process of choosing a wine. Dodds & Monroe (1985) argue that in the absence of information, price is a very important clue and as Spawton emphasizes (1991), may even help consumers to overcome the risk associated with choosing a wine.
The origin of the wine region is one of the most important extrinsic attributes in the process of choosing a wine, as it is one of the major factors used by consumers in their purchasing process and is often the first criterion to be evaluated (Halstead, 2002, Duhan et al., 1999, Ball & Dean, 2000, Keow & Casey 1995).

According to Spawton (1991), beneficial characteristics of the product may be communicated to the consumer through tangible and intangible factors. Due to tangible factors, the most important signals to consumers are packing (quality and materials used), the bottle and the label (as it is a conduit of information about wine, especially regarding information about brand, region, variety and winemaker, among others). The intangible factors are price (as it is an important heuristic feature for the consumer with regard to product quality), the point of sale, the winery, the winemaker and the communication mix used.

According to Halstead (2002) the information about the variety of grape, the country of origin, label design and the bottle shape are the most relevant attributes in the process of choosing a wine. The level of consumers' knowledge and involvement with the product are also important factors to consider in order to understand the decision process of buying wine. In fact, they count to different intensities in the evaluation of the considered attributes. Consumers, who have a high degree of involvement with the product use more complex data collection system than low-involvement consumers. The latter use simple strategies to reduce risk, such as choice of previously experienced or known brands, the recommendation of friends and wine journalists, advices of retail sales associates and bottle labels analysis (Barber et al., 2008; Chaney, 2009).

Regarding the intrinsic attributes, Keow & Casey (1995), Thompson & Vourvachis (1995) and Mitchell & Greatorex (1998) argue that flavor is the most valued attribute in wine choice. Ako, Ribeiro & Santos (2008) reported that the taste of wine is a major risk factor perceived by consumers, as one of the mostly concerned attributes when choosing a wine. To Lockshin & Rhodus (1993) varieties, the alcohol content and style of wine are also highly valued intrinsic attributes.

Charles & Pettigrew (2007) describe five dimensions to define the intrinsic quality of a wine:

1. pleasure;
2. appearance;
3. gustatory factors - taste, smoothness, drinkability, balance, concentration, complexity and interest;
4. paradigmatic factors - origin, variety and typicality; and
5. potential.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for collecting information used in this study (Focus Groups) is the most appropriate in the investigation of attitudes, values, perceptions and motivations. The invitation of a group of 6 to 10, with pre-defined characteristics, to discuss ideas on the subject of research is recommended. The moderator encourages a discussion in order to increase reflections of the group through interaction, always focusing the discussion on the pre-defined objectives. Comments are registered to be studied later (Kolger and Armstrong, 2002).

This methodology has been used by several authors in consumer behavior's research and in studies of quality perceptions (Chartiers & Pettigrew, 2006a; Chartiers & Pettigrew, 2006b; Ritchie, 2007; Veale et al., 2006).

We analyzed 30 Focus Groups, attended by 171 consumers and studied five Portuguese wine region of origin: Vinhos Verdes, Douro, Dão, Setúbal and Lisbon. Regarding Vinhos Verdes Region, we decided to isolate the sub-region of Alvalinho, because, despite belonging to the Vinho Verde Region, it is associated with better quality wines than the generality of Vinhos Verdes, and consequently, usually obtaining superior prices.

Data was collected during two editions of a post graduated course in Wine Marketing, performed by the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo, between the years of 2008 and 2010. The Focus Groups were moderated by a three person team: there was a major moderator, present in all groups, plus two moderators. Each moderation team was responsible for three meetings. Although the interviewer's team was not the same in all the Focus Groups, the interview guide was the same. There was a previous standardization of procedures and every moderation team had the same information about the requested tasks.

The meetings of the Focus Groups took place in the installations of the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo, assuring the same physical conditions to all the interviews.

The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed to a text processor. The data analysis was made in the original language (Portuguese) and the results were further translated into English.

The recruitment of the consumers was made through institutional dissemination, through the web page of the post graduation course of the Institute and using the networks of students and teachers. Later, we asked the potential participants to submit a questionnaire, regarding personal information (gender, age, address, qualifications and profession) and consumption information (consumption regularity, wine knowledge, and wine sector interest). Following this information, the participants were grouped according to their degree of involvement with the product. Three sets were obtained: 58 occasional consumers (10 Focus Groups), 56 regular consumers (10 Focus groups) and 57 expert consumers (10 Focus Groups).

We defined "occasional consumers" as those who do not drink wine on a regular basis - drink wine only at social events and special occasions - and show little interest about the wine sector. Although these consumers have a low involvement with the wine, they are important for the study, as they are often...
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first thematic unit is related to the extrinsic attributes and was called "Image of Wine". In this category we defined nine semantic units, described in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic category</th>
<th>Semantic unit</th>
<th>Definition dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wine Image</td>
<td>Bottle</td>
<td>Color and shape; cork / screw cap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand</td>
<td>Name of the wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Value of transaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Front Label / Back label</td>
<td>Label appearance and graphic information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Origin region</td>
<td>Location of production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grape Variety</td>
<td>Indication of the grapes variety used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reference to</td>
<td>Name of the responsible person for the wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Producers / Winemaker</td>
<td>Production / Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medals / Awards</td>
<td>Awards won in contests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the previously considered semantic units were mentioned spontaneously by consumers, but not in all Regions of Origin. Although Portugal is a small country, it has a huge variety of wine-producing regions.

This fact justifies a separate analysis, according to region of origin of wine, in order to interpret differently the attributes associated with each region.

Regarding extrinsic attributes, we analyzed nine semantic units. The analysis of the importance of these attributes allowed us to join them into three groups, according to their importance in the process of choosing wine.

The most valued extrinsic attribute is the Region of Origin. This attribute stands out clearly from the analysis of the other attributes. If we analyze data according to the level of involvement of consumers, the lower the degree of consumers’ involvement is, the more relevant this attribute will be. Indeed, in Discussion Groups with occasional consumers, this attribute was unanimously referred as the main attribute in the process of choosing a wine, while the specialists, although this factor is considered to be very important, it is not the main concern for the majority. This fact can be explained by the increased risk that occasional consumers feel about the less-known regions. For these consumers, the Region acts as an indicator of wine quality. This attribute was referred as the most important in all studied regions, which means that the region of origin is the first decision criteria used by consumers when choosing wine.
"A wine from the Alentejo or from Douro is, for sure, a good wine." (Consumer #RD3_#Occasional)

After choosing the region, consumers need to use other attributes to proceed with the process of their choice. In the second group of extrinsic attributes, we can find the label/back label, the price, the bottle, the brand, and the indication of grape variety. These attributes were mentioned spontaneously in all Discussion Groups.

The label and back label are relevant attributes to the majority of the interviewed consumers, and there are no differences between the different Discussion Groups regarding either the degree of involvement or the Region of Origin. However, depending on the degree of involvement, the information sought is distinct. Consumers with greater knowledge seek for information about the winemaking process, while occasional users prefer more immediate information, as concerning food-pairing.

"When I buy wine, I like to know a little of its history, the producer’s history, the composition of wine in terms of casts and their ratio, the method of wine making process, the winemaker who participated in its preparation, and give less importance to the temperature of consumption, the way of conservation, but I agree that kind of information should be there." (Consumer #RD2_#Expert)

"Nowadays there are wines with fancy labels, very striking. I do not like it. I only would buy it if I had a guarantee that it was very good wine. Still, I would use a decanter." (Consumer #RS1_#Regular)

"I often look at the back labels, in search of the kind of ingredients that the wine is combined of." (Consumer #RD2_#Regular)

The valorization of the price attribute for choosing wine is different, depending on the degree of involvement of consumers. For occasional users, price functions as an important indicator of quality and low price may function as a barrier to the purchase decision, which does not happen with experts. This attribute was highly valued in the wines from Alvarinho and Dão.

"I have some difficulty choosing wine for a dinner with friends, but generally I look for a high price one." (Consumer #RD3_#Occasional)

The bottle (shape and color) is a major attribute, irrespective of the degree of involvement of consumers. It is interesting to note that this attribute, along with the Region of Origin, is the most valued for the wines from Alvarinho. This can be explained by the classical and traditional usage of the bottle Reno, brownish in color. This widespread use does not have a statutory requirement, but its use is very common, functioning as an identifier of the origin of wines from the region. Recently, there have been some brands, making trials with bottles of different colors and shapes. Consumers have shown some resistance to change and it was pointed out that some of these bottles with different color or form would constitute a barrier to the purchase.

"I would never buy this wine, it seems a white drink." (Consumer #RA1_#Regular)

Regarding the use of screw cap, “Vinho Verde” Region is the only region that seems to have less resistance to its use.

"For me it is indifferent whether the wine has the screw cap or the cork screw, because the “Vinhos Verdes” wines are light, fresh and young. But for other Regions, it is important to have the cork." (Consumer #RVV_4#Regular)

"I am unable to buy a wine without a cork, with those capsules. And I do not like when I open the bottle and see that there is no cork stopper. It breaks down and always spoils the wine. I will not come back to buy it." (Consumer #RD1_#Regular)

The brand, as well as the price, is a valued attribute, especially by the occasional consumers, who use it as a factor for reducing the purchasing risk.

"I only buy wines I have tasted, so I do not buy unknown wine brands." (Consumer #RD1_#Regular)

Rather, the varieties are primarily valued by experts and regular consumers. Occasional consumers expressed high ignorance, having difficulty in enumerating the names of the more common varieties.

"The varieties define the nature and profile of each wine." (Consumer #RD2_12#Expert)

"I only know the name of two varieties. Touriga Nacional (cv) and Alvarinho (cv). But I am not really sure if Alvarinho is a variety or a "type" of wine." (Consumer #RD3_#Occasional)

Concerning the Regions of Origin, the variety is a highly valued attribute for the "Alvarinho" region, not for wines from "Douro", "Dão" and "Vinho verde" and it is depreciated in "Lisbon" and "Setúbal" Regions. In the last attributes group, we can find the indication of the winemaker/producer, the medals/awards and the overall picture/design of the wine. In what concerns to the indication of the winemaker/producer, this attribute is more valued by the regular and expert consumers.

"As a wine connoisseur, I like to offer my guests wines that are new, if possible from fashionable producers." (Consumer #RD2_#Expert)
"I know nothing of wine, but I think the name of the winemaker is important only for connoisseurs." (Consumer #03_6\#Occasional)

The medals/awards are especially valued by occasional consumers; however these do not demonstrate knowledge of the importance and recognition of the contests. Regular users and experts show a higher knowledge of the competitions, highlighting only a few medals/awards, but giving little importance to this attribute in their process of choosing wine.

"As I don’t know much about wines, I like to see if the wine was awarded." (Consumer #03_6\#Occasional)

The overall picture/packaging design can act as a barrier to choice. If the factor is negative, it especially affects the occasional consumers. The Region of origin is the most valued attribute in the region of "Vinho Verde".

![Figure 1 - Valorization of Extrinsic attributes](image)

Table 2 – Units of Semantic Category “Features of the Wine Product”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Category</th>
<th>Semantic Unit</th>
<th>Dimensions of the Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aroma</td>
<td>Smell of aromas in wine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>Taste, mouth aroma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshness</td>
<td>Flavors with freshness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acidity</td>
<td>Acidity level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features of the Wine &quot;product&quot;</td>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>Alcohol content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Color intensity, transparency/opacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Body</td>
<td>Density</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>Good balance relation of parts/overall quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>Gas intensity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this thematic category, the attributes were also mentioned spontaneously by the consumers, however, as in the extrinsic attributes, some attributes were not reported in all regions. After the evaluation of their importance, we could define four groups of intrinsic attributes.

In the first group, we can find the most valued attributes: flavor and aroma, which have been reported in all regions as the most important factor in wine evaluation regardless to the consumer’s level of involvement.

"For me good wine, wine with quality, has to have a good aroma and flavor." (Consumer #03_6\#Occasional)

Wine balance is the second attribute most valued by consumers. The analyses of this attribute were the most varied, because they depended on the level of consumer involvement. Indeed, the definition of balance of wine is not the same for all consumers. In Focus Groups with experts, an objective terminology, with technical terms to explain what is valued in balanced wine. For occasional users, balance tends to boil down to a general and generic assessment on the wine quality. This attribute is valued in wines from all studied regions, with the exception of the "Vinho Verde" region, where it was one of the attributes which was less valued.

Freshness, acidity, color and body make up the third group of attributes. Freshness attribute was spontaneously mentioned only in groups of "Vinho Verde" and "Alvarinho" regions. In other Discussion Groups, even when referred later, this attribute was not valued by consumers. This can be explained by the specificity of the intrinsic characteristics of the wines from "Vinho Verde" and "Alvarinho" regions, which are perceived as very different from the wines of the other regions under study.
Rather, the attributes of color and body were spontaneously reported in all regions, except in the "Vinho Verde" and "Alvarinho" regions. Although not a highly valued attribute, it is more important to expert consumers.

"The color of wine is not of great importance when I choose it." (Consumer #01, Regular)

"The wine color gives information about its evolution." (Consumer #02, Expert)

The attribute acidity was referred spontaneously in all Focus Groups, and although it is more important in the "Vinhos Verde" region, in general it is not a highly valued attribute.

Alcohol content and gas are the less valued attributes. Alcohol content was mentioned spontaneously only in the Discussion Groups of "Dão" region and the gas in the "Vinho Verde" and "Alvarinho" regions.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Being aware of the relevant attributes for the process of choosing a wine by consumers is a key factor for producers and winemakers to enhance their wines, turn them competitive, consumer-focused and more market-oriented.

The Region of Origin is the attribute that triggers the process of choosing a wine. This attribute is the most important in all the studied Regions of Origin and is cross-sectional regarding the consumers' awareness level about wine. This fact confirms the previous studies by Halstead (2002), Duhan (1995), Bait & Dean (2000) and Know & Casey (1999). The involvement of consumers and the Region of Origin are inversely correlated, this last attribute being a diminishing purchasing risk factor. In fact, for consumers with a low level of expertise, some wine Regions are synonyms of higher quality.

After selecting the wine Region of Origin, the consumer continues its evaluation process, using clues provided by the label/back label, the price, the bottle, the brand, and the wine varieties. Label and back label are highly valued regardless of Region of Origin and the consumers’ wine awareness. However, the valuable information differs according to the degree of the consumers’ involvement. Expert and regular consumers seek complex information, valuing "wine history", while occasional consumers look for more practical information, such as food-pairing. The price is an important heuristic to gauge the quality of wine, especially for low-involved consumers, which is confirmed by Spawton (1991), Halstead (2002) and Dodds & Monroe (1995). Regarding the Region, this attribute is particularly important for wines from Dão and Alvarinho Regions. The wine bottle (shape and color) is a valued attribute, regardless to the consumers’ degree of involvement and may function as a decisive factor to avoid wine’s choice, especially in Alvarinho’s wines. Brand, as well as price, is valued attributes for occasional consumers, who use it as a factor to reduce purchasing risk. Rather, varieties are primarily valued by experts and regular consumers.

In fact, occasional consumers showed difficulties in spontaneously mentioning the main varietals. A third group of attributes, less relevant to the purchase decision, include: winemaker/producer information; medals/awards, and overall image/package design. The importance of these attributes varies with the degree of consumers’ involvement. While winemaker/producer reference is valued by experts and regular consumers, occasional consumers do not consider this information relevant, hence they reveal little/no knowledge about the wine sector. Regarding medals/awards and overall image/package design, the situation reverses itself, for these attributes are the most important to consumers with low involvement. While medals are used as quality-guarantee for occasional consumers, regardless to origin, experts only value the ones, obtained in certain specific contests & awards. The overall design is also especially important for occasional consumers, being an attribute valued particularly in Vinhos Verdes Region.

Regarding intrinsic attributes of the wine, flavor and aroma are the most valued by consumers, having been reported in all regions as the most important in wine evaluation, regardless to the involvement level.

Consumers valued the balance of the wine as the second most important attribute. The analysis of this attribute showed most diversity, depending on the level of consumers’ involvement. In fact, the higher the

Figure 2 – Valorization of the Intrinsic Attributes

Aroma
Taste
Balance
Freshness
Body
Acidity
Color
Alcohol

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degree of the involvement is, the greater is the precision in the definition, understanding and valorization of this attribute. For occasional consumers, the wine balance is confused with a broader interpretation of wine quality, which is hard to define and measure. The freshness, acidity, color and body compose a third group of attributes. Some of these attributes have little importance in the overall evaluation because they are associated with specific Regions of Origin. Finally, the alcohol content and gas are the least valued attributes, regardless to the consumers’ level of involvement.

Thus, more than understanding the attributes valued by consumers in choosing wine, it is important to realize that there are variables such as level of involvement or region of origin, which can optimize the fully comprehension of this complex process, contributing to an accurately market-orientation perspective. Authors are deeply persuaded to go on with this research, making it extensible to all Portuguese wine Regions of Origin.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
We would like to thank the students from the Wine Marketing Post-Graduate Course at Escola Superior Agrária – Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo, who helped in the collection of the main data.

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