The history of wine consortia from "Arte del Vinattieri" to current legislation

Davide GRETA, Jon H.HANF\(^1\), Paola CORSINOVI\(^2\)

\(^1\)University of Verona (Italy), \(^2\)Hochschule Geisenheim University (Germany)

Davide.Gaeta@univr.it; Jon.Hanf@hs-gm.de; Paola.Corsinovi@hs-gm.de

The Consortium represents a voluntary association, regulated by Article 2602 of the Italian Civil Code and promoted by the economic actors involved in individual sectors with the specific function of protecting the agricultural PDO and PGI production (PDO, Product Denomination of Origin and PGI, Product Geographical Indication). The Italian wine consortia are Inter-Professional organisations, designated to represent the three categories of the wine industry: growers, vintners, and bottlers of each specific Denomination of Origin. According to the recent European (EU) wine legislation, Common Market Organisation (CMO) Reg. 1308/2013, Consortia can enables to manage the supply in order to safeguard and protect the quantity and quality of wine production. Consortia are internally organised into different departments to perform its official tasks: safeguarding the denomination, providing a variety of services to its members, explore potential export markets, and valorising the brand and the place of origin (Gori & Alampi Sottini, 2014). The Italian Legislative Decree no. 61/2010 replace the old n. 164/1992 law and gives the guidelines for the quality wine production and regulates the aim and rules of the consortium. Tutelary consortia representing at least 66% of the denomination and 40% of its wineries are therefore permitted to manage all oversight, protection and valorisation of the place of origin and their collective brand. Wine consortia are among the beneficiaries of the EU finance for the promotion of quality wines in third countries (Gaeta and Corsinovi, 2014) and their activities focusing on the development promotional campaigns, trade fairs as a club-based organization with a strong internal governance structure.

Most of the Italian Consortia are characterised by formal institutions, contracts, branch agreements and regulations. The governance depends on repeated, frequent and uninterrupted negotiations between categories of ‘players ‘(producers) with partially convergent interests despite their very considerable economic and social differences. Their effectiveness is the result of a succession of steps towards the construction of complex systems to allow the negotiation of multilateral agreements that regulate the internal mechanisms of Denomination (like to supply control instruments or/advertising choices).

However, the history of the Italian wine Inter-Professional organisation has very ancient origins from Middle Ages to the well known edicts of Cosimo III De’
Medici. Here, we want to mention these two examples because they have many similarities (in terms of organizational system and purposes) with the current structures and legislation. This historical overview is used with the aim to understand why these organizations were born, their objectives and their main issues and criticisms.

One of the first corporation that grouped together the wine actors (from producers, to traders and sellers) is represented by the “Arte dei Vinattieri” or “Wine Merchants Guilds”- one of the “Minor Arts” of the Florence town in the Middle Ages). The Arts in Florence began to establish itself as the arts and crafts guilds between the XII and XIII centuries. The corporation “Arte dei Vinattieri” was founded in 1282. During this time, Tuscany wine was sold and commercialized at “Mercato Vecchio (Old Market) in Florence”. Members of this Art, were represented by all those who were involved in the wine trade – merchants, retailers, innkeepers, middlemen and landlords – were obliged to join the guild and swear their loyalty. All those managing cellars and taverns (called “osterie”) were obliged to contributing to the payment of an annual fee, proportional to their income. The guild itself established which pitchers, measurements and glasses that could be used for the sale of the wine and specific quantity of barrels, whose price and quality were contracted directly by the consuls. The “Arte dei Vinettieri” was identify by a red goblet on a white ground. As a consequence of the prestige of belonging to the art, many of the members added the name of the membership corporation to their family names. Among the member of the Vinattieri, starting from 1395 we can find Giovanni di Piero Antinori (ancestor of the Antinori’s winemaking family) and Nicolò Machiavelli (the philosopher and politics of Florence). The role of the guilds were gradually reduced until the creation of the new “Chamber of Commerce” in 1770 by the Lorraine Grand-dukes.

The request for a higher quality products and very similar to the France wines, more remunerative and traded in Britain, was the stimulus for Cosimo III de’Medici Grand Duke of Tuscany who incentivized the high standard of wines. He married Marguerite Louise d’Orléans, a cousin of Louis XIV, an important marriage for the economic and financial relationship of the city. During his reign, Cosimo III introduced a series of ultra-reactionary laws, although he was criticized for the many constraints created and for their private interests. The Medici family has always paid great attention to support the agricultural production and the viticulture, probably because they were directly involved as owners of many farms located in the countryside. In the meantime that the main discoveries in the wine sector was undertaken in France, most of the Tuscany wines exported in Britain were falsified (Ciuffoletti, 2016; Ludington 2013). Cosimo III driven by the need to ensure his commercial and private interests and his notoriety issued the two
edicts on 18th July “Sopra il Commercio del Vino” (“Over the Wine Trade”) and 24th September “Sopra la dichiarazione di confini delle quattro Regioni Chianti, Pomino, Carmignano e Val d’Arno di Sopra” (“Above the Declaration of Boundaries of the Four regions Chianti, Pomino, Carmignano and Val d’Arno di Sopra”) with the aims to relaunch the Tuscany wines in the EU markets. These edicts issued by the Grand Duke represents a milestone in the history of Tuscan winemaking. With the edict of “Sopra il Commercio del Vino” Cosimo III established a congregation with the aim to evaluate the wines more suitable to travel by sea such as Carmignano, Pomino e Rufina, Chianti and Valdarno di Sopra. The Congregation was to ensure the quality standard and avoid any form of falsification during the trade. Those wines, was considered by Cosimo III an important tool for the reputation of the Nation (“Decoro della Nazione”). The edict instituted bodies representing the direct historical antecedents of the Consortia: these congregations had specifically intended to guarantee the high quality standard of production. A few months later, the edict “Sopra la dichiarazione di confini delle quattro Regioni Chianti, Pomino, Carmignano e val d’Arno di Sopra”, signed the first example of boundaries of production. This two examples: the “Art of Vinattieri” as a congregation among different players and the decrees issued by Cosimo III, could be considered the first examples of the regulation of the Italian wines. However, on one side the criticisms emerged from “Arte dei Vinattieri” was linked to the low quality of the wine traded, sometimes blended with the water, and destined for the lower classes of society (Ciuffoletti, 2016). On the other side, most of interventions introduced by Cosimo III were made for his private interest with the aim to achieve his own selfish goals. Despite the criticism emerged from the two examples, the first Inter-Professional organisation was founded in Tuscany on May 14, 1924, when a group of producers gathered to create a consortium to “protect wine” and its “trademark of origin”. It was the Chianti wine. The same one mentioned by Cosimo III, the same wine that he wanted to guarantee, protect and promote.

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References


