

ABSTRACT

Romania's integration into the European Union requires, among other things, considerable restructuring in the agri-food sector, because Romanian products compete with the similar ones in the Member States on a common market. Changes also apply to agri-food chains, which must be designed on the basis of competitiveness.

The habilitation thesis is structured on three sections, preceded by the introduction and followed by conclusions.

In Section I, "ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ACTIVITY", I presented my scientific contributions achieved from enrollment to PhD to the present. The research of the competitiveness of the wine chain started in the doctoral studies, namely October 2008 - September 2011, with the theme "Competitiveness on the wine chain in Romania". Subsequently, after completing the doctoral studies, I continued to investigate the aspects related to the competitiveness of wine in Romania and from June 2014 to September 2015 I followed the postdoctoral training program entitled "Strategic directions for increasing competitiveness on the wine chain in Romania" , within the project "Performance and Excellence in Doctoral and Postdoctoral Research in Economic Sciences in Romania" financed by the European Social Fund through the Sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013, project number POSDRU/159/5/S/134197. Since I enrolled to PhD, I have been concerned with the dissemination of research results by participating in national and international conferences, and by publishing articles in indexed journals in recognized international databases and ISI Web of Knowledge.

Section II, „RESEARCH ON STRENGTHENING FOOD CHAINS IN ROMANIA. CASE STUDY: WINE CHAIN" is structured in two chapters, namely:

- Chapter 1 - "Conceptual Approaches regarding the Food Circuit", which presents the theoretical aspects concerning the agri-food chain and traceability of food products. The food sector, especially the food industry, is still very much oriented towards the different categories of products (meat, dairy, fruit, vegetables, cereals, beer, wine etc.).

Globalization and a growing world population also have a major impact on supply sustainability, especially in the food industry. Thus, the way food is produced, processed, transported and consumed has a significant impact on sustainable development and, implicitly, on the organization of agri-food chains. In addition, agricultural products have reduced tendency to come naturally to consumers, which leads to a change in perception of agricultural producers, in the sense that they are no longer regarded as raw material suppliers but as link of a chain, as a component of a complex circuit, called the agri-food chain.

The context of rising demand for high-quality food has led to the development of rigid regulations for authenticity certification and fraud protection, and traceability is one of the tools that can be used in this respect.

- Chapter 2 - "Research on Wine Chain in Romania", where is made a presentation of the wine sector in Romania and the wine market.

Romania is an important European country from the wine-growing point of view, the various wines it produces are distinguished by their quality. Having an area of approx. 180,000 ha cultivated with vines, which - in 2016 - represented 1.42% of the agricultural area and 2.28% of the arable land, Romania ranks 5th in the European Union after Spain, Italy, France and Portugal.

In addition, the Romanian wine sector benefited from special funds allocated at Community level (National Support Program 2007-2013, Romanian National Support Program in the wine sector 2014-2018) through which significant investments were made in modernizing the plantations (approximately 376.093 thousand euro during the period 2009-2018) for the replacement of unproductive vineyards and changing the varieties for the adaptation to the requirements of the international market.

Since 2007, the Romanian wine chain has benefited from organizational and control structures linked to the requirements of the European Union, capable of ensuring good wine market surveillance by applying the regulations stipulated in the Law on Wine and Wine.

In this context, the National Office of Wine Origin Denominations (ONDOV), which later became the ONVPV, was established in 2007 within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. This structure, with representatives in all vineyards of the country, has the role of supervising the way of obtaining wines with a Registered Designation of Origin (DOC) and wines with Geographical Indication (IG). Thus, the conditions under which a wine-growing area, according to the grape variety, offers and produces a maximum quality are imposed and respected.

It should be noted that each grape variety achieves a maximum quality potential at a given maximum yield per hectare (eg Carbernet Sauvignon - 8 tonnes/ha, Merlot - 14 tonnes/ha), productions which must be achieved without being forced with chemical fertilizers or excess irrigation. Thus, a Romanian vineyard map could be created in which the areas with a DOC quality potential can be precisely delimited, the representatives of the (ONVPV) NOVPV having the obligation to follow the scriptic and sensorial fulfillment of the conditions stipulated by the Law of the vineyard and wine. The most relevant example is Busuioaca de Bohotin, which, through the force of the brand, has led many producers to substitute the name of their own varieties, invading the market with non-compliant products. Applying the wine market surveillance rules has led to the eradication of these phenomena, thus giving consumers confidence in the products they buy.

As far as the wine production in Romania is concerned, it is found that it is derived in a relatively equal way from noble grapes, fiscalized production, and from hybrid grapes, self-consumption wine. Annual crops, which, depending on climatic conditions, have supplied quantities between 4 and 6 million hl, can be considered as a benchmark for wine consumption per capita, which is about. 21-23 liters/year. Unlike other countries (France), wine consumption in Romania has remained constant, it has been forced in the unfavorable years to witness consistent wine imports. They were mainly found in the form of bulk wine, especially of origin from France, Italy or the Republic of Moldova, which was stabilized and bottled in Romania. The advantage was the fact that sufficient quantities were provided for the absorption power on the market, but the disadvantage was the discouragement of the small Romanian producers due to price scissors. Thus imported bulk wines obtained from plantations with yields of over 30 tons of grapes per hectare had purchase prices that even dropped to 12-14 cents/liter in some years. This wine price pressure has financially disturbed the small producers, who were in a position to be able to harvest wine grapes at prices below 0.5 lei/kg. The conditions for the abandonment of the small plots occupied with vine were created, a danger which could expand and lead to a drastic reduction of the Romanian vineyards.

Here it was found the role of wine chain, which was able to break this financial contradiction by pressure at ministerial level, leading to the setting of minimum prices for kilogram of grapes to ensure both production costs and a profit share. Parallel imports of bottled wines have also taken place in order to provide traders with the most diversified offer and to offer consumers a wide range of wines. From the study conducted on the ratio of sales of Romanian wines versus

imported wine, there is a constant consumption of Romanian wine of approx. 90%, despite the supply of wine imported over 20%. These figures demonstrate the quality of the Romanian consumer to prove a good local patriotism, as is the case in all major wine producing countries.

- Chapter 3 - "Proposals for consolidation of the wine chain in Romania", which takes into account four directions, namely: promotion of wine in the large distribution, updating of the assortment structure in the wine vineyard culture, implementation of computerization of wine traceability and extension of the concept regarding developing own wine brands. On the basis of the analysis carried out, the proposals for consolidation of the wine sector in Romania aim at:

- *promotion of wine in the great distribution.* Wine as a food has certain peculiarities that differentiate it from other foods, which requires a specific approach to promotion. Even if it is found in the vast majority of merchant points, the tendency to concentrate purchases is seen in two large segments: large distribution grids and stores specialized in the retail sale of wines and beverages.

The reasons for this polarization are the results of growing consumer education in this field, on the one hand, and the specialization of the major distribution departments on the other hand. The increase of the living standards parallel to the increase of the diversity and quality of the wines due to the internal competition and the imported wines, combined with the accession of our country to the European Union, are favoring factors in obtaining a new product, a wine with modern, fresh, floral aroma and taste.

- *the updating of the assortment structure in the vineyard culture intended for winemaking.* Considering the wine consumption trend in countries where this product is preferred in relation to wine-based products or beer, such as wine, stricto-senso, a comparative analysis should be made on the structure of grape varieties, the proportions of wines meal and quality, as well as the relationship between red and white wines, and this should be the starting point for the long-term wine promotion approach.

Being a culture that has been in operation for decades, the choice of the vineyard structure should be the result of a forward-looking study that takes into account the whole set of socio-economic factors, summed up on a global scale, parallel to the overall strategy for promotion, accepted relatively united by all the world's leading wine producers. In this regard, it is necessary to revise the list of approved and recommended varieties in Romania on different areas so that this

list will be linked to international trends. Therefore, with regard to the zoning of Romanian viticulture, which includes a series of varieties, vineyards and wine-growing centers, great work and professionalism, including years of study and research, a careful selection of the recommended varieties is necessary.

- *implementation of computerization of wine traceability.* One of the major problems affecting the good functioning of agri-food chains is the lack of computerization of traceability. This deficiency in the transmission of data in addition to affecting the proper functioning of the food chain also occurs as a deficiency in the data transmission system at the European Union level, which has been established as binding in trade relations and European statistics. Since a project on the computerization of wine traceability has been finalized within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, a project to which I have also been involved, it is necessary at this stage to move to the implementation of this system.

- *extending the concept of developing own wine brands.* The increase in the consumption of agro-food products in general and that of wine in particular, creates prerequisites for the development of trade with own brands. The main advantage of own-brand products, which based their launch and development worldwide, is the lower price compared to the manufacturer-branded products. I believe that private wine labels will be successful if they succeed in bringing product innovations and differentiating them from producer brands to meet customer needs at the same level but with a slightly lower price. For own brand products/ private label products, I think there are great chances of developing the premium segment with higher quality products and higher prices. In emerging markets, as is the case with our country, own brand products have a great potential for development, as modernization and strengthening of retail trade.

Section III, "THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN", covers general and personal aspects of the career concept and the main directions of university career development in terms of teaching and scientific research. In order to develop my university career I will consider several aspects such as:

- improving the state of knowledge by developing new teaching materials: books, course support, application collections, case studies, analytical programs and seminar plans;

- application and coordination of research projects gained through participation in national and/or international competitions;
- linking to mainstream publications by disseminating information in prestigious specialist publications from the country and abroad;
- publishing at least one ISI article per year starting with the academic year 2018-2019;
- participation in national and international conferences;
- conducting mobility internships at other universities, especially from the EU (with economic profile).