

Sustaining a market in the face of change: Bordeaux classified growth wines market

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper examines the classified growth wines market in Bordeaux that has emerged over centuries. In this system specific to Bordeaux, Châteaux do not sell directly to final consumers or to distributors but to négociants. Having a strong knowledge of international markets, the latter negotiate “allocations” with châteaux owners with the help of wine experts called courtiers. The system is based on the so-called “en primeur” sales, a system where wines are sold when they are still in barrels. With a growing international demand for Bordeaux wine, we question why this complex and original system persists given internal and external changes.

Design/Methodology: Semi-structured interviews with key actors in the Bordeaux wine market

Findings: Wineries continue to adhere to this established marketplace for the sale of their wine even though they are losing some margins that their current status and reputation might afford them with less reliance upon intermediaries. Reasons for this appear to be fear of the unknown plus institutionalised acceptance of the cultural legitimacy of the Place de Bordeaux and its apparent longstanding efficiency.

Key words: Bordeaux – markets – institutions - history – social relations.