

Success must be fought for...

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The hills around Alba, on both sides of the Tanaro, are enjoying a period of positivity and are home to some of Italy's most advanced economic developments. The wine sector accompanies the growing tourism industry and industrial structure is extremely sound. It is thanks to the synergy between employment within the industry and efforts within the smaller agricultural companies, that it has been possible to come through some difficult decades, those in which our country went from 50% agricultural employment to today's 5%.

All of this was made possible by the hard work and capability of many men who led the way to what we have today and thanks to the support offered by people who intelligently held institutional positions and intuitively perceived new directions.

How can we not recognize that within the wine world, it is the oenologists, restaurateurs, journalists, artists - even gurus - who have pushed towards success! This is a land of strong individuality but it is also lucky to have such unusual and inimitable natural conditions.

Nothing in life is static but when there is development there is also a higher risk of distorting the very values that have brought success. Now the whole picture is at risk; the scenery and along with it the lifestyles and tastes of the people within it. Or rather: one's choices towards one's own destiny. If we can't create a project to include high quality artisanal areas and move warehouses and factories into more suitable areas, then we risk drifting into a situation where one model of development could suffocate another.

These matters make us realize how necessary it is to learn to move together, as a group, to reach a higher awareness of the community to which we belong. A community that is strong, open to comparison and united in reaching collective goals.

The proposal to apply to be included in the Unesco's 'tentative list' of protected areas has been a point of discussion for many months but having seen how things are moving, I dare say, I am skeptical about the real possibility of reaching a final result. If, however, the initiative were enough to push start the provincial Territorial Plans that have been at a standstill for years, we would already have reached a great outcome, and I believe that it is for this precise reason that the Region is insisting with this first step.

Assessor Conti has very clear ideas and often reminds us that the solution to the problem is within the mechanism of the *ICI* tax (Italian property tax), but getting from words to actual territorial planning is not simple. A strong signal could be enough: such as forbidding the construction of new buildings within a town where there are still other buildings up for sale or rent. Come on Assessor: Make yourself heard!

The Barolo area, also as a result of being within the more extensive area of the 'Alba Hills', has become a brand, a name of prestige, but there are wines and areas that are less fortunate, that need to rely upon communal efforts to break free from the enormous loss of vineyards that Piedmont has experienced over the last few decades.

It is the assessor for Agriculture in Piedmont himself, who has, on behalf of the Ministry, created and coordinated the Control Plans for the whole of Italy. Supporting these plans will mean that within a few months we will have numbered tags for all wines. Attempts

to protect the weaker wines and areas are also being defined; it is yet to be determined whether we will achieve the results we hope for within the next 2 years. There are still numerous speculations that take advantage of the prestige that our vines and area represent, and only with the certification and traceability that the Control Plans will bring about, can we begin to defend ourselves.

In the meantime, discussions about so called 'subzones', that have fuelled debate for some time, have also reached a conclusion: we have finally obtained permission from the Ministry to regulate our 'cru' as 'geographical recognitions' which will enable us, therefore, to keep all our wines' historical names, even for the smallest of areas. This has already been done for Barbaresco and we are working on Barolo; by spring we should be in a position to request that the disciplinary be modified and the new prestigious 'positions' (What other word can be used to substitute the word cru?) be taken into account.

Other denominations have to strengthen and clarify their positions in order to save such prestigious names, as *Langhe* and *Piemonte* from being lost in the nondescript fog of 'anything is possible'. Extensive lists of grape varieties, belonging to the aforementioned general denominations, are being put forward, but I ask myself whether this is the best way to proceed. It is true that in our area the *IGTs* (Indicazione Geografica Tipica) were not wanted; but if we then produce *doc* (denominazione origine controllata) wines where everything is allowed, we risk losing the best of both worlds. I would prefer it if no more thinking were done on the matter; not at this moment in time, when the wine OCM reform is being discussed, which could shortly propose table wines being labelled with their grape variety and vintage, but without any particular safeguard. It is time to stand tall, be heard and at the same time humbly reconsider our strategies and courageously verify them.

I also have no hesitation in saying that in order to be heard, in discussions that are now global, the *Langa* and *Roero* need to group together, we need to consider ourselves part of the more effectively sized *Piemonte*. We should reclaim our capabilities and our success; put ourselves forward as a 'locomotive', but imagine a system that it is not limited by size.

For more than three decades we have invested in Barbera, which has seemingly only raised its head but still remains behind its more successful competitors and fails to be perceived as a high quality choice. Despite this, its extent within Piedmont is enough to be competitive in global politics.

The Region has established a new institution for Internationalisation in which the food and wine sectors could have an important role, however, it remains a mystery as to how the chambers of commerce think they can perform this role without close contact and full cooperation with the wine companies - who, especially within consortia, have their interdisciplinary bodies. This is a critical point, which cannot be silenced, and should be announced positively.

I reiterate the proposal to have a committee in which the wine companies who know what it means to sell abroad, can offer their contribution and indicate the markets they consider more interesting, for further research and actions. The Alliance between consortia and chambers of commerce is a strategy that cannot be omitted and I shall work towards it with persuasion and determination.

If it is true that we share the same goal, namely, giving the world of Piedmontese wines a future, then all entities should be 'allies'. This synergy should also find an outlet with regards trade fairs, which are always on the agenda when we talk about making a good impression at Vinitaly, or wherever else in the world and above all it is necessary to

make some vital unforgiving analyses as to why every wine trade fair held consecutively in Turin over the last twenty years has failed. The time has come to change direction and choose a territory in which to host foreign tourists who want to come and visit us, promoting the hills that are amongst some of the most beautiful in the world, the network of castles, some of the most significant public wine cellars that exist and the desire that hundreds of companies share, to welcome visitors. Let us share this project with the tourism boards and give life to a fair that could stretch across the whole of the Langhe, Roero and Monferrato with central meeting points in Alba and Asti (even Turin could be considered an important 'base'). Like the Merano wine event? Yes, but not only: we can do more, we have far more. This time we need to have the most prestigious names with us too, no one excluded!

Creating a link between advertising, communications and the local territory, going further than companies usually do, was a decision that the consortium of Alba made when they formed the association 'Le Colline di Qualità' (The Hills of Quality). It was founded with the aim of creating an efficient central press office, to deal with newspapers, television, radio and trade magazines around the world. It's early days yet, but it has already been decided that the association should be open to the whole of Piedmont and organisations out of the Alba area can also participate. It is a very important challenge, which will require full public support during its initial launch. Equally important is the belief that it will succeed, and there will come a point when the companies taking part will have to show their support by offering their resources. We'll see, there will be plenty of work for everyone involved.

Regional wine policy is providing new balance, and whilst revising wine districts or committees, one needn't be reminded that the new OCM will bring about significant challenges to promotion and will allow us to move without delay towards renewing the national law 164; already a strong need for change is felt. The French - who are ahead, as is often the case - have recently made these changes by modifying their interprofessional Committees. It may not be an elegant thing to say, but we need to learn how to 'lobby' more successfully, which within today's parliamentary mechanisms means creating unity between the people involved, and could mean avoiding mistakes, such as allowing wine to be labelled merely an alcoholic drink and being chastised. This is what it has been like lately and it is the reason for our 'yes' to Grinzane Cavour Castle's proposal to found a 'Wine and Health' research centre.

And let us mention once more, the topic of culture. The 'Grinzane Cavour Prize' has been loaned the Conte Vineyard and is helped every year by the local wine-makers who take turns in producing 5,000 bottles a year of the appropriately named 'Literary Barolo'. What will happen to these bottles? Why not take advantage of them to create a project together with the Italian Embassies and Consulates around the world? Why not take advantage of them for an institutional promotion, which could make a huge impact and remind the people in our own country where they came from and who their forefathers were?

As I try to point out the wine world's most important needs, I'm sure that I am forgetting something, but this 'thought' for Barolo & Co wasn't supposed to be complete.

I hope that I have managed to show that Alba wine producers don't want to close themselves in their own towers, and I couldn't finish without returning once more to a topic that isn't currently 'fashionable' and is often forgotten, but is something I feel very strongly about and believe we should all group our energies towards tackling: Education and Research.

Alba is home to one of the most significant oenological institutes, which unfortunately no longer shines as it should. Their research is split between two different sites, the

Tenuta Cannona and the institute of Asti, which are both behind with respect the progress of other national and international *avant-garde* institutes (from the University of Davis, to the Institute of San Michele in Alto Adige). The University of Turin has valid people that are not always adequately supported. After the Region's justified efforts and investments in the University of Gastronomical Sciences, the time has come to give a coat of gloss and vigour to the 'old glories' that accompanied generations of oenologists as they grew and made Piedmont a leading region within Italy and the rest of the world.

So many things to do, so much effort required... it is essential that we keep our vines first and foremost in our minds, that we take our secateurs and enjoy the joy of cutting and pruning in the cool early morning whilst the fog plays with the sun over the backdrop of the Monte Viso... it is this inner peace that has always been the source of strength in every *vigneron* and man with the desire to go far.