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*SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISES' CHOICES IN THE
WINE INDUSTRY: A CASE-STUDY IN THE ITALIAN CONTEXT*

An emerging interest in sustainability in the wine industry is demonstrated by at least 3 patterns: a) a growing body of academic literature on this research issue, b) the rise of new academic journals and scientific communities in social science fields, c) the birth of many university research centres and institutes for a joint evaluation of costs and benefits, especially in the so-called New World wine countries. Thus, winery owners and managers are considering the effectiveness of sustainable practices and if it is worth the time and resources to be sustainable oriented. Talking about sustainability opens up a multitude of research issues, especially in wine, where being sustainable is often misunderstood for being organic or biodynamic. From the literature, it emerges that one of the key questions research should address is: "Under what conditions does sustainability happen?" This is strongly related to the awareness and the attitudes towards environment and sustainable development by the most attentive managers in the wine chains. The wine industry is particularly suitable for research on this issue, and the stream of research about firms' internal and external dimensions of sustainability needs to be explored in depth. In particular, this paper will focus on the intersections among structural aspects (external drivers), cultural aspects (internal drivers) and the agency (enterprise choices) involved in enterprises' strategies of action.

The aim of this paper is to investigate managerial customs and attitudes toward sustainability in a group of Italian «green» wineries. In accordance with the Theory of Reasoned Action and the concept of «agency» a semi-structured questionnaire has been developed and in-depth interviews have been carried out with 8 wine entrepreneurs and managers. Results show the possibility of a responsive set of choices by managers, mainly determined by cultural values of the company, and of the social context as well.

Прояв інтересу до сталості у виноробній індустрії ілюструється як мінімум трьома ознаками: а) збільшення академічної літератури з дослідженнями з цих питань, б) поява нових академічних видань та формування спільноти науковців, які займаються цими питаннями, у області соціальних наук, с) народження багатьох університетських дослідних центрів та інститутів для спільної оцінки за та проти, особливо у так званих виноробних країнах Нового Світу. Таким чином, власники та менеджери виноробень розмірковують над ефективністю сталої практики та й наскільки орієнтація на сталість варта часу та ресурсів. Обговорення сталості відкриває багато дослідних проблем, особливо у винній справі, де сталість дуже часто неправильно розуміється як органічність або біодинамічність. Літературні джерела свідчать, що одне з ключових дослідних питань звучить: «За яких умов стається сталість?». А це тісно пов'язано з обізнаністю та ставлення до навколишнього середовища та сталого розвитку з боку найбільш уважних менеджерів у виноробних ланцюгах. Виноробна індустрія дуже слушний об'єкт таких досліджень, і на глибоке вивчення заслуговує великий обсяг праць з внутрішніх та зовнішніх вимірів сталості для фірм. Зокрема, ця стаття зосередиться на перетинах між структурними (зовнішні двигуни), культурними (внутрішні двигуни) аспектами та агентами (вибір підприємств), які задіяні у виробничі стратегії дій.

Метою даної статті є з'ясування управлінської практики та ставлення до сталості у групі італійських «зелених» виноробень. У відповідності до теорії обґрунтованих дій та концепції «агентства», було розроблено на-пів структуровану анкету та проведено глибоке опитування 8 підприємців та менеджерів винної індустрії. Результати демонструють можливість відповідного набору вибору менеджерів, в основному визначених культурними цінностями компанії, а також соціальним контекстом.

1. Introduction. Nowadays, sustainability issues can be considered the biggest challenges facing governments, businesses, and consumers (Belz and Peattie, 2009).

Attitudes and subjective norms play a key role in assessing a firm's orientation towards sustainability. In the research field of sustainability a lot has been done to highlight the main forces which are shaping a firm's sustainable orientation (Dillon and Fischer, 1992; Lawrence and Morell, 1995; Winn, 1995; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Davidson and Worrell, 2001; Marshall et al., 2005; Gabzdylova et al., 2009); many scholars have underlined the linkages between profitability and environmental attitudes (Hart, 1996), but little has been done to investigate the reasons behind an entrepreneurial commitment towards sustainability (Cordano, 2000).

The orientation that companies show towards sustainability varies: several studies highlight the differences in environmental management strategies (Hass, 1996), whilst other research has classified sustainable firms according to the role that a firm's green vision has had in the life stage of a company (Isaak, 2002).

Winery owners and managers are considering the effectiveness of sustainable practices and if it is worth the time and resources to be sustainable oriented. Talking about sustainability opens up a multitude of research issues, especially in wine, where being sustainable is often misunderstood for being organic or biodynamic. From the literature, it emerges that one of the key questions research should address is: «Under what conditions does sustainability

happen?» This is strongly related to the awareness and the attitudes towards environment and sustainable development by the most attentive managers in the wine chains. The wine industry is particularly suitable for research on this issue, and the stream of research about firms' internal and external dimensions of sustainability needs to be explored in depth. In particular, this paper will focus on the intersections among structural aspects (external drivers), cultural aspects (internal drivers) and the agency (enterprise choices) involved in enterprises' strategies of action.

The aim of this paper is to investigate managerial customs and attitudes toward sustainability in a group of Italian "green" wineries. In accordance with the Theory of Reasoned Action and the concept of "agency," a semi-structured questionnaire has been developed and in-depth interviews have been carried out with 8 wine entrepreneurs and managers. Results show the possibility of a responsive set of choices by managers, mainly determined by cultural values of the company, and of the social context as well.

The paper is structured as follows: the next paragraph outlines the importance of sustainability in the wine industry emerging from a growing body of the academic literature and from both academic and professional journals. The third paragraph deals with the topic of an emerging field of studies: the Ecopreneurship. Then, materials and methods are described followed by the main results. Finally, conclusions and discussions are depicted.

2. *Sustainability and Wine Industry.* An emerging interest in sustainability in the wine industry is demonstrated by at least 3 patterns: a) a growing body of academic literature on this research issue, b) the rise of new academic journals and scientific communities in social science fields, c) the birth of many university research centres and institutes for a joint evaluation of costs and benefits, especially in the so-called New World wine countries. In this paragraph, we will briefly outline some of the main traits of each of the three points above listed.

a) *The academic literature:* Scholars are showing a renewed interest towards sustainability. The growing body of research on sustainability is fostered by two reasons: first, academy answers to a rising demand coming from the industry and society for increased knowledge in sustainability. Second, many academics are motivated to give their contribution to a growth in social awareness towards sustainability (Santini & Cavicchi, 2011): it has been demonstrated how academic research has played a key role in the diffusion of sustainable practices in the wine industry (Guthey and Whiteman, 2010). However, as Santini and Cavicchi (2011) show, most of the research on sustainability in the wine industry is diffused among an informal network or released under the label «working paper», but very little has been published on referred journals.

b) *The rise of new academic journals and scientific communities:* Many journals at the international level such as *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *E:Co Emergence: Complexity And Organization*, *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World*

Ecology devote specific attention to sustainability and its various facets. In the field of Business and Management the role played by *Business Strategy and the Environment* should be mentioned. Some publishing companies have also specialised in organic and sustainability: *GreenLeaf publication*, for example, releases books of international coverage and publishes documents addressed to scholars who are specialising in this research issue. The latest Congress organized by the Academy of Wine Business Research has had a primary focus on sustainability in wine, and a special issue of the *Journal of Wine Business Research* that focuses on sustainability will be soon released.

c) *University programmes and research centres*: New programmes are developed by Universities that focus on sustainability. The San Francisco State University proposes sustainable courses in Business, both at an undergraduate and graduate level. There is no doubt that a lot of research has been carried out in order to understand how to adapt teaching methods to sustainable issues in order to be as effective as possible for educating on sustainability (Shephard, 2008). The growing availability of online resources and materials for academics who want to integrate the topic of sustainability in their lessons has facilitated professors to introduce the theme in their classrooms.

3. *Ecopreneurship*. There is no doubt that entrepreneurial commitment to environmentalism influences entrepreneurial orientation: Keogh and Polonsky (1998) show how environmental commitment shapes entrepreneurial behaviour and strategy formulation.

There is a growing body of research investigating the relationships between environmental and sustainable issues and entrepreneurship. Neologisms have been introduced to identify these fields of research: words like *ecopreneurship* or *enviropreneurship* are currently widely used by scholars and publishers to identify specific and focused research fields.

There are several definitions of *ecopreneurs* and each underlines a different feature of the research object: Anderson and Leal's definition (1997) focuses on entrepreneurial commitment to preserve resources and to improve environmental quality; Schuyler (1998) underlines ethical motivations of *ecopreneurs* in contraposition to the profit-making vision of businesses. The most diffused definition of *ecopreneurship*, because of its generality, is the one by Shaltegger (2002) who joins the concept of ecological concern and entrepreneurship by simply stating that «*Ecopreneurship can thus be roughly defined as entrepreneurship through an environmental lens*» (p.47).

Enviropreneurial strategy (or *environmental entrepreneurial strategy*) consists of the integration of environmental issues in entrepreneurial strategies, and can take the form of a strategic, tactical or quasi-strategic action, according to the degree of shift within the organization required by its implementation (Menon and Menon, 1997). The work by Shaltegger (2002) outlines the role that personal values and green orientation have on *ecopreneurs* in defining green products or introducing environmental innovations. A company's vision is shaped by the entrepreneur's values, commitment and personal goals (Keogh

and Polonsky 1998; Stevenson and Gumpert 1998), and this is particularly true in ecopreneurship (Shaltegger, 2002).

The literature on ecopreneurship can be divided into two main streams (Shaltegger, 2002): the first «wave» of literature in the beginning of the 1990s deals with general issues, such as environmental commitment, sustainable orientation, natural resource preservation, corporate social responsibility; since the late 1990s to early 2000 the attention has progressively focused on entrepreneurs.

Some authors analyse and classify the ecopreneurial and enviropreneurial behaviors in detail: the rapid growth of the number of models susceptible to classify ecopreneurship and environmental management is explained by the familiarity of the conceptual process of classification (Hass, 1996) (Hass (1996) observes: «Developing and using classification systems’ are familiar conceptual processes. Ordering concepts, objects or entities into groups or classes on the basis of their similarities enables us to increase our understanding of observed complexity and to communicate our observations more easily» (p.59)). Figure 1 illustrates four of the most diffused classification of ecopreneurs.

Authors	Variables examined	Classification Proposed
		Alternative actors;
Shaltegger and Petersen, 2001	Priority as a Business Goal & Market effect of Business	Bioneers;Ecopreneurs; Environmental Administrator
Pastakia, 1998	Objectives	Social; Commercial
Taylor and Walley, 2004	Motivations	Innovative opportunists, visionary champions, ethical mavericks and accidental enviropreneurs
Linnanen, 2002	Desire to change the world & Desire to Make money	Non profit business; Succesfull idealist; Self Employer; Opportunist

Fig.1, Ecopreneurs Typologies

The growing body of academic literature on econpreneurship, environmental and sustainable entrepreneurship is a signal of the increasing awareness that entrepreneurs show towards these issues. Volery (2002) analyses the motivations behind the rise of enterpreneurs’ sustainability and green commitment: push factors such as consumer demand, market failures, and the scarcity of resources and other push factors such as regulations (Porter and Van del Linde, 1995) have attributed to a rise in companies’ interest towards the environment they are settled in and have promoted the adoption of sustainable practices. A firm’s sustainable orientation is driven by internal and external issues. In addition to personal values and motivations, external factors are key drivers of entrepreneurial behaviour: there is no doubt that entrepreneurship is embedded in a social context (Aldrich and Zimmer, 1986).

4. Materials and Methods. In order to investigate the conditions under which sustainability happens, a semi-structured questionnaire has been developed. The data were collected during the Spring of 2011 in Marche Region. Eight wine entrepreneurs and managers were contacted in advance for an appointment, and interviews lasted 20 to 30 minutes in face-to-face modality.

The questionnaire was built in accordance with a previous work of Marshall et al. (2005) in which a model on individual and institutional level drivers of environmental stewardship was developed to understand the proactive environmental behavior in the US wine industry. Their paper was structured bringing together the theory of reasoned action «TRA» (Ajzen and Fishbein,) and the Institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Scott, 1995). On one side, within TRA, attitudes toward a behavior arise from a person's beliefs about the consequences resulting from its performance and the person's affective response to those consequences. Subjective norms, instead, introduce a social component, and they are a function of a person's perception of important referents' evaluation of a behavior and the person's motivation to conform to those evaluations. In both cases, when the evaluation of those constructs becomes favorable, the person's intention to perform a behavior increases. On the other side, Institutional theory focuses on how organizational and societal players can build forms of agreement around the meaning of some concepts like «sustainable behaviour» and how these behaviors can be developed and diffused (Marshall, 2005).

Thus, firstly, we asked for the respondent's name, company, role in the company, and number of years experience in the wine business. Next, the respondents were asked about their opinions on sustainability and the sustainable practices adopted in their wineries. The second part of the questionnaire, according to the theory of reasoned action, was addressed to investigate the managerial attitudes, i.e. the main reasons that motivate sustainable behaviour, and subjective norms, namely «people who are important to me (employees, co-owners, members of family, etc.), think that I should carry on sustainable behaviour». The third part was dedicated to the investigation of external (or institutional) drivers. This part was divided in two subsections: one related to local institutional networks in order to understand the competitive environment; the other related to compliance with current regulations, pre-emption of future regulations and public incentives to adopt sustainable practices. The interviews are still in progress and the results thus far are presented in this work as two mini-case studies.

5. *Data Analysis.* In this section two case studies will be presented (Winery A and Winery B). The respondents are, in both cases, owners of the winery. Both the companies are settled in the Piceno Area, and are small wineries (the overall production is less than 11,500 cases of wine per year). The product offering shows a strong preference towards typical grape varieties and a deep linkage with the terroir. The two companies can be considered as family firms due to the strong presence of family members on the board and covering managerial positions.

Winery A. The manager interviewed is one of the founders of the winery. The company was founded in 1979 and it has an agriturismo facility for hosting guests interested in a rural tourism experience.

The concept of sustainability & sustainable practices: Winery A is a clear example of green-green business as it has been conceived as a green company

since its start up phase (Isaak, 2008): they conceive sustainability as a way of living, a principle that inspires and regulates all the aspects of life and also embraces business. Being sustainable means being aware of natural resources and landscape as well as planning production without the use of soil-damaging chemicals, which for the manager interviewed means achieving natural products. The company adopts sustainable practices at several levels of the productive chain. First of all, as they are organic-certified, they must respect the production standards – in terms of pesticides, water and chemicals usage – settled by institutions: the company adopts organic grape growing practices. Also, the packaging has been conceived in an effort to limit waste disposal and the company is striving to achieve a 100% recyclable package. The company pays attention to limit the impact that disposal operations can have on the external environment: it has adopted a system of phyto-remediation for the management of water and waste disposal. The company aims to use 100% green energy, has installed a solar power plant, and has implemented some solutions in the agriturismo facility for eliminating any energy waste and reducing environmental impact. From the interview, it also emerges that being green is very difficult when you can't find adequate resources (in terms of inputs of raw materials) within the business network you belong to.

Internal Drivers: Managerial Attitude & Shareholders: The internal motivation that has inspired a green choice is the strong managerial commitment to achieve a better life and to preserve natural resources; the main goal was to obtain a healthy product both for consumers and for the environment in which the company operates. This green vision is shared among the members of the board: being a family winery has facilitated in enhancing an alignment of values and vision among the members of the company. The strong commitment of the management has helped in overcoming the obstacle represented by a lower level of profitability at the initial stages of the winery's life: according to the respondent, the choice of going green has been motivated by ethical issues, rather than by the chance of obtaining higher margins.

External Drivers: Institutions: Among the external drivers, institutions play a key role. European Community has supported the conversion towards organic agriculture through a funding policy that has had the merit to promote organic viticulture and sustainable practices. According to the respondent, it is quite difficult to say if the emergence of an interest towards organic among producers – and a growth of the organic niche market – is motivated by a social concern or if it is simply related to some financial supporting policies planned by institutions. The perception of the role that local institutions have is totally different: from the interview, it is apparent that institutions seem interested in promoting and supporting organic viticulture, but more often than not, this interest remains vague and doesn't develop into specific actions.

Market: From the interviews it emerges that there is a sort of uncertainty regarding the role of market demand in the development process of the organic market. Price acts as an inhibitor of organic purchase, due to the relevant gap existing between conventional and organic products.

Producers Associations: When the company started up its activity, it was one of the pioneers in introducing organic viticulture in the area. Today, almost all the surrounding vineyards are organic, and this means that it is easier obtaining certifications or cooperating with other producers. In any case, within the area there are not formal producer associations that are recognised as having a role in the development and promotion of organic practices in viticulture. Relationships among producers mainly happen through informal networks.

Consumers: Consumers seem to be particularly interested in organic products. The company has decided to put the organic certified logo on the wine label, but most of the clients do not buy the wine because it is organic, but because of its inner quality and features. Once the consumer has found that the wine is a green product, the overall satisfaction is much more.

Winery B. The manager interviewed is the co-owner of the winery that is totally managed by his family. The company was founded in 1999 and from the beginning their objective has been to produce in accordance with organic standards. The organic certification, established by European parameters, was received in 2008 for the entire production, whilst a considerable part is also certified for the American market.

The concept of sustainability & sustainable practices: In this case, sustainability is seen as an organic process and the reason for adopting it lies in the opportunity to obtain higher quality standards. This leads to higher economic sustainability for a small-scale winery.

Sustainable practices start in the vineyards and comprise all the steps of the chain. Through organic production, the grape follows a natural balance and then it becomes a quality index. Every year they work alternate rows to avoid the erosion of soil and, generally, they try to adopt all the techniques to invigorate the ground. Moreover, this firm also has a high orientation towards adopting sustainable solutions for packaging. On one side, the cellar-door sales allow for loyal consumer to bring their empty bottles to fill with wine, and in this way saving costs and environmental impact; on the other side, they try to commercialise most of their production through the 3 litre bag-in-box that allows for 100% recycling of plastic and paper.

Internal Drivers: Managerial Attitude & Shareholders: The most important factor that lead to the adoption of organic processes in the past has been the chance to get a premium price otherwise impossible to achieve on the wholesale market. There is also another issue that is worth mentioning related to the health of employees. The entrepreneurs observe that for those farmers who use conventional methods of production in the vineyard over a long period of time, there is a higher probability for the insurgence of illness linked with the chemical products utilized. Thus, the healthiness of employees is another important key driver.

If one looks at subjective norms, on one side all the members of the family agree about this strategic option and the health related motivations lead the way of their behaviour; on the other side the strong relationship with loyal customers and the engagement towards education which started with the

participation in organic food festivals and organic *food miles* initiatives have increased the commitment to carry out such a strategy.

External Drivers: Institutions: According to the owner, the European Union has been crucial in its supporting role support in the start-up phase. In fact, since the first year they have received funds for organic production through the regional rural development programme. The respondent underlines the efficacy of the control system developed by the EU, given the fact that at least once per year they receive a visit to verify adopted processes and quality of products. Nevertheless, there remains a lack of legislation to follow in order to be given the organic logo. Currently, it is only possible to specify on the label that the wine is produced with organic grapes. In fact, there is only a code of process for the cultivation of grapes and nothing related to the winemaking itself.

Market and consumers: The dynamism of the consumer is also another important factor to develop the organic market, although it is necessary to constantly explore the behaviour of consumers. There are consumers with a strong willingness to behave in a sustainable way and those who are particularly devoted to green processes, while others are simply sympathetic towards organic wine though they are not loyal and may shift to other choices of quality wine, such as PDO wines.

Producers Associations: The owner is sceptical of his past experiences with association memberships. The main trouble is related to bureaucratic and efficiency problems in the management of such associations. Sometimes the politicians are not prepared to keep up with entrepreneurial activities aimed at developing niche sectors, such that of organic wine. Currently, according to the respondent, it seems that future incentives will be given only to producers' associations, and thus, efforts for getting through obstacles and working for a better management remains a "must".

6. *Discussion and conclusion.* The entrepreneurs interviewed have implemented sustainable practices since the start-up phase. The concept of sustainability in both cases is not uniquely referred to organic viticulture, but entrepreneurial efforts are also oriented towards broader practices like sustainable packaging (such as Bag-in-Box) or energy efficient administration.

Notwithstanding the hard work required, both the entrepreneurs prefer the organic production for its capacity to give higher quality results, in terms of sensory attributes and taste evaluation from the side of the consumer, for a better environment, and even for healthier employees.

Stakeholders considered in this research, such as entrepreneur associations, suppliers and consumers, seem,involved according to the interviewees, and they agree about the management of production adopting sustainable practices. Moreover, the area in which the wineries are located has seen a marked growth of green entrepreneurs during recent years.

As expected, regulations and economic incentives played a major role in the decision to initiate their entrepreneurial activity and really pushed the start-up of their businesses. Nevertheless, the incentives alone could not be sufficient

to carry on a sustainable winery. For instance, currently the interviewed entrepreneurs suffer from a lack of regulation in organic wine certification, but this limit does not affect their motivations.

Local institutions, even those that declare a strong commitment towards entrepreneurs' effort, do not seem to have the competences or true willingness to support sustainable activities in the wine sector. Thus, there is a lack of alignment between institutional policies released at the EU level versus the local government. It is clear that the former are more likely to support (by regulation and funds) a sustainable entrepreneurial orientation, while the latter suffers from a lack of empowerment which resulting in the perception that local institutions are very distanced from entrepreneurs' interests.

It emerges that the role of institution is not to create a kind of consensus about an issue that is commonly perceived as good, but rather to effectively support firms' initiatives.

Moreover, from this explorative study it seems that «being green» for the entrepreneurs interviewed is a “strategy” that pays in terms of personal fulfilment and not necessarily in terms of a firm's profitability.

A generational problem in these family firms could arise if there is not a perfect alignment of vision and interest among the first and second generation.

For what concerns a financial evaluation of sustainable orientation, entrepreneurs told us that the performances of their companies are satisfactory; unfortunately, the lack of availability of financial data leaves us incapable of calculating any economic performance index and, thus, making a comparison with conventional wineries.

This explorative study confirms in some way the results of Marshall's study and introduces a further element: subjective norms should be considered under the light of the type of firm. It can be said that the influence of subjective norms depends on the features of the firms, whether or not they are large corporations or SMEs or, as in this specific case, Family Firms. Further studies will hopefully be carried out in order to investigate the relationship between a firm's characteristics and the influence of subjective norms.

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