

## **Wine Industry in Prekmurje and Zala County and Its Connection to Rural Development**

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### ***Summary***

Vine growing and viticulture play a prominent role both in agriculture and rural development. The present research comprises Zala county and Prekmurje<sup>1</sup>, Slovenia, vine growing has had a great significance and tradition in the two regions, both of which were once located in the historic Zala comitat. Vine growing and viticulture determine the structure of the economy, the development and developedness of the rural areas in both regions. There is a significant number of wineries both in Prekmurje and in the wine-district in Zala, these wineries greatly define the local tourism and rural development. The aim of the present essay is to examine and compare the characteristics of the wineries and vine growing. In addition, it is also an important aspect to investigate how these estates contribute to the development of the area and the rural development opportunities.

**Keywords:** Prekmurje, Zala county, wine industry, rural development

### ***Introduction***

Vine growing and viticulture play a significant role both in Zala county and in Prekmurje, Slovenia. The sector is outstandingly important in the agriculture and rural development of the mentioned regions. Several smaller and larger wineries can be found in both areas due to their favorable geographic features. The research comprises two neighboring wine regions, Zala Wine Region and Prekmurje Wine Region. Vine growing and viticulture determine the structure of agriculture and rural tourism, the situation, developedness and development of rural areas in both regions.

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<sup>1</sup> Premurje is a nomenclature in Slovenia which means 'Muravidék' in Hungarian. It defines the western part of Hungary and the eastern part of Slovenia, situated the Mur River. It is geographically, linguistically, culturally and ethnically defined region settled by Slovenes and a Hungarian minority.

The aim of the present essay is to examine and compare the characteristics of the wineries and vine growing. The other main purpose of the research is to investigate how these factors – the situation of vine growing and viticulture – contribute to rural development.

The main aim of the present study is to compare the two wine regions in accordance with predetermined criteria. Their effects on agriculture and rural development are taken into account in the first place.

### ***Material and Method***

During the study, we mainly used the results of the questionnaires and secondary sources, as well. We studied the available technical literature and analysed the results of the questionnaires.

Altogether 26 questionnaires were filled in, eleven of which from Prekmurje and fifteen from Zala county, we evaluated the answers received. During the evaluation, we analysed the information on the given region we received for each question. Every question was evaluated separately using additional information and sources, as well. In addition to the questionnaires, we carried out surveys making interviews in person and via telephone, the results of which were worked out while evaluating the questionnaires.

While preparing the present essay, we studied several sources, and also evaluated the results of the researches in the sources, then we took them into consideration when evaluating my own questionnaire research. These sources include the available technical literature, various scientific works, publications, periodicals. We also used several internet sources on the subject of the essay.

### ***Results and Evaluation***

It is important to examine the estate structure of the regions. Both examined areas (Zala Wine District and Prekmurje) are extremely fragmented with mainly small village structures. The conditions of vine growing are largely determined by the surrounding hills, mountains. The questionnaire survey confirmed that the wineries run on less than five hectares in most cases. There was a producer whose vineyard area is smaller than one hectare, the other respondents work on an average of one hectare. These data prove the fragmented estate structure of the region, the statement is true that so-called 'strip plots' can be found in this countryside.

During the questionnaire survey, similar results were found in the other area of the research, in the Zala Wine District. However, it can be said that the farmers work on a bit larger areas in this region. As it turned out, an estate size of two to five hectares is typical among some

of the respondents, at the same time – similar to the data found in Prekmurje – most of the farmers work on very small estates of 0.5 hectare.

The purpose of the study is to find an answer to how to connect vine growing and viticulture to rural development and how they affect the rural area. To get an answer to this, it is important to examine the development possibilities of businesses. During the questionnaire survey, there was a question about developments asking about the possible future development plans of the businesses. Based on the evaluated results, it can be said that all the businesses surveyed are planning some form of development in the future.

In both of the examined regions the vast majority of businesses work on small areas, therefore a large number of respondents want to increase their cultivated area as part of their development. During the survey, the respondents mentioned technological developments in the highest proportion. In addition, investment and plantation of new varieties, marketing and sales are also important development aspects.

As the two examined areas are neighboring each other, but they are administratively in different countries, it is important to examine possible cross-border relations. The questions in the questionnaire survey also cover these relations. As a result, based on the evaluated results it can be said that most of the responding companies have cross-border relations. Only 20% of the examined companies responded negatively to this question. Based on the results, 58% of the respondents in Zala county have Slovenian cross-border relations, there were also references to Croatian, Italian and Austrian connections. These data demonstrate that such relations can be observed in higher proportions between neighboring countries. Similar values were found in the other examined area, Prekmurje. Each of the respondents has foreign cross-border relations and it can be said that in most cases they have Hungarian, or more precisely Zala county relations.

Regarding cross-border relations, it is important to note what kind of relations they are. The majority of this knowledge appears in a professional and cultural context, but we also have to mention project and market relations.

The research also revealed the situation of different organizations based on the answers provided by farmers. As it turned out, 80% of the respondents are members of some organizations, which is a very good result. Comparing the two regions, it can be said that this factor has a significant proportion in both regions. 71% of the farmers in Prekmurje and 84% of the farmers in Zala are members of a (civil) organization. The largest proportion of membership can be observed with various associations, as well as wine orders. In both regions these two

organizational forms prevail most. Wine route and wine making association memberships are also typical in Zala county.

Research has also been made on other services provided by winegrowing companies. As both areas to be compared are rural areas, it is important to examine them from the viewpoint of rural development and tourism, as well. The research also covers the hospitality habits of the local farmers. Most of the respondents are engaged in village hospitality, catering and accommodation service. It can be said that in Prekmurje accommodation service and catering are the most typical, these two types of services are less typical in the wineries in Zala county. In Zala county wine retail is outstanding, while in the Slovenian area this value is much less.

Regarding the link to rural development in this agricultural sector, it is essential to mention events related to the grape and wine sector in the given region. The research revealed that most of the respondents participate in local events, wine competitions and wine festivals. It can be said that most organizations appear at events on a regional level, which is particularly true for the farmers in Prekmurje, a small part of the winemakers in Zala are also represented at events on a national level. As it turned out, most of the winemakers in Zala are members of a wine order, Da Bibere Wine Order of Zala, and therefore it can be stated that these organizations also take part in events organized by the Order.

It is important to examine the grape products of the farmers both from agricultural and economic viewpoints. Based on these results, we can get a comprehensive picture of the situation in the regions. Based on the questionnaire, it can be stated that in both of the examined regions the most important products are wines. While the farmers in Prekmurje – according to their account – produce only wine from the grapes, in Zala several other products are made, as well. Among them are concentrated alcohol (pálinka), grape seed grist, must and dessert grape production. Nowadays it is becoming increasingly fashionable and popular to produce various oils and vinegars from grapes. This is also evidenced by the fact that some of the respondents have also taken up producing grape seed oil and balsamic vinegar. As we mentioned above, the questionnaire survey revealed that there are one or two major wineries in Zala county – their size compared to the average of the county – where they deal with the production of semi-sparkling wines that are increasingly popular and sought after.

### ***Conclusions***

The research revealed the characteristics of the two regions related to vine growing and viticulture and their relation to rural development. The examination of the areas and the questionnaire surveys show that Prekmurje and Zala county have many common features.

Common features are visible both from the point of view of agriculture and rural development. The agricultural characteristics show the similarity of the estate structure, the significant sameness of the varieties produced and the products made from grapes. The same can be stated about the characteristics of rural development. Similar results were found in terms of employment, corporate forms, future development possibilities, cross-border relations, hospitality and participation in events.

Thus, the results of the research demonstrate the great similarity between the two regions, apart from some larger or smaller differences. These differences may arise due to the economic and cultural situation of each region, but they are not significant. Nevertheless, it is important to further investigate the area in the future, as these common properties may change due to various external factors over the years.

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