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Keywords
grape-growers, Champagne region, institutions, generational evolution

Research Question
What are the characteristics of grape-growers in the Champagne region today?
What influences their choices regarding their grapes and estate (sub-regions, age, education, etc.)?

Methods
We use a combination of both a qualitative and quantitative approach: we first used semi-directive interviews which will be completed by a questionnaire applied at the beginning of 2017.

Results
To be known at the beginning of 2017.

Abstract
This research work is a part of a much larger interdisciplinary research project called « Univigne », hosted by the University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne, Reims’ school of management Neoma, and the Villa Bissinger. Univigne is financed by the Champagne-Ardenne Region. It gathers historians, economists, sociologists, psychologists and ethnographers, who work together to improve the knowledge and understanding of Champagne’s grape-growers. The emergence of new questions in the wine industry about Champagne and its growers is indeed connected with the questions raised by local searchers specialized in human and social sciences. We all make the same statement: the actors, the institutions, the rules and the practices of the Champagne industry have gone through some major changes since 1945, to the extent that the picture for the growers has been transformed and the regional landscape modified.

The purpose of my work is to present the Champagne growers and their diversity: growers who sell grapes by the kilo, growers who produce champagne (RM), growers who are members of a cooperative (RC). My research began with an initial phase of exploration with semi-directive interviews, the results of which will be completed by a questionnaire presented to all the Champagne growers. The ultimate goal is to be able to draw a map of the growers in Champagne and thus ideally highlight main categories, and possibly also study the impact of the growers’ locations on the development of the different categories.

Therefore, we will more specifically look at how the wine-growing regions and sub-regions in Champagne influence the choices made by the growers regarding their grapes and estate. Other aspects can also be considered for the analysis, such as the size of the estate, its history, the main type of estate to be found around the actual estate, whether the grower has another professional activity or not, etc.

A generational approach will complete this analysis, which should enable us to identify and most importantly to quantify new or existing tendencies, which are the development of Champagne production for a certain category of growers, and on the contrary the disengagement from winemaking and even sometimes also from viticulture for other growers. We will look at the emergence of a new style of Champagne growers, that is to say the entrepreneur growers who are as efficient in sales and marketing as they are in their vineyards and winery, a grower who, just like every agriculturist, now also has to deal with all the new concerns related to the preservation of the heritage, the protection of the environment and touristic attractiveness. That is anyhow the picture that the growers’ general syndicate (SGV) is trying to present. We will try to determine whether this picture is true or not.
Finally, we will look at how the growers perceive the major institutions that regulate and control the production of champagne, such as the controlled appellation of origin (AOC), the Champagne Committee (CIVC), the growers’ general syndicate (SGV) or the Union of the Champagne Houses (UMC). This question will be central in the analysis as these institutions have shaped the champagne industry, as a result of the initiative of the growers and industry professionals. But the context is now very different from when the institutions were born (in the first half of the 20th century), thus raising the question of their current purpose and utility which we will evaluate thorough the view of the growers themselves. For our PhD thesis (Deluze, 2010) we studied the impact of these institutions on the economic performance of the Champagne industry, revealing that (1) the French regional wine industries all have very different levels of economic performance, the Champagne industry presenting by far the best performance; (2) the institutions have an impact on the economic performance of the French regional wine industries; (3) the institutions of the Champagne industry are particularly efficient in establishing the right conditions for a superior economic performance. A major element guiding our collective research will be the actual interaction between the institutional organization and the growers. While our colleague-historians and sociologists taking part in this project are working on the impact of the institutional organization on the emergence of new categories of growers and on the conditions of their profession, our study should enable us to define a clear and precise picture of these important evolutions.

In a nutshell, the results of our study will be of key importance for the Champagne industry at a time when it is facing major long-term challenges such as the very strong development of the consumption of other sparkling wines in France and around the world, which is inevitably impacting the global consumption of Champagne. Besides, the Champagne industry has also recently finalized an important collective strategic plan which aims to increase the value and reinforce the premium position of Champagne (Champagne 2030).

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Characteristics and specificities of grape-growers in Champagne

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