

## GLOBAL WINE SUPERPOWERS: AN ENDLESS BATTLE

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### **Abstract**

*The origin of wine is inextricably linked with the appearance of ancient civilizations. The Neolithic period witnessed the emergence of wine production in Iran but the wild Eurasian grapevine was first turned into wine in the period 8500 BC-4000 BC. As the fermented juice of fresh grapes, wine is produced worldwide in various styles. Its composition and quality are influenced by a plethora of intrinsic and extrinsic variables. With their long history in wine making, Italy, France and Spain have always been main producers and competitors within the global wine market. The aim of this paper is to bring an insight about the evolution of the global wine superpowers by analysing their wine production in the period 2018-2024. To reach the goal of the study, the author employed a qualitative research method. In this respect, he carried on a comprehensive literature review. In the period 2018-2024, the global wine industry faced multiple and difficult challenges, such as adverse climatic conditions, COVID-19 pandemic, decreasing vineyard surfaces, and lower wine productions. However, several wine global producers demonstrated their resilience despite these obstacles. The findings show that Italy, France and Spain dominated the top of the global wine producers in the above-mentioned period.*

**Keywords:** *wine, wine production, wine industry, wine market, Italy, ranking*

**Classification JEL:** *Q02, Q19*

### **1. Introduction and context of the study**

Wine has always offered fascinating experiences during its long history. The origin of wine is inextricably connected with the appearance of ancient civilizations. The Neolithic period (ca 5400-5000 BC) witnessed the emergence of wine production in Iran (McGovern et al, 1996). However, it is said that „*Vitis vinifera*, the wild Eurasian grapevine, was first turned into wine at some time between about 8500 BC at the earliest, and 4000 BC at the latest” (Varriano, 2010, p. 11). Its cultivation started in the South Caucasus region (McGovern, 2009) and spread to the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea around 2500 BC (Anderson and Pinilla, 2021). The archaeological evidence of its cultivation was found in Georgia (Grainger and Tattersall, 2016).

As the fermented juice of fresh grapes, wine is produced worldwide in various styles. Its composition and quality are influenced by a plethora of intrinsic and extrinsic variables (e.g., vineyard soil, climate, weather, storage), mostly microbiologically mediated. Without any doubt wine has „a mystique like no other drink” (Goodall and Eyres, 2018, p. 5). Wine drinking is not only a tasting experience but also an aesthetic one (Lehrer, 1975) as wine has „its mysterious, romantic, artistic and religious facets” (Kunkee, 2017, p. 417).

With their long history in wine making, Italy, France and Spain have always been main producers and competitors within the global wine market. While the process of globalization has expanded worldwide (Cornescu et al, 2004; Toma, 2005; Marinescu and Toma, 2015a), its influence over the last three decades has significantly increased in the wine industry (Anderson et al, 2020). Wines such as Chianti, Bordeaux, Chablis, Barolo and Rioja are renowned and bought all over the world.

The aim of this paper is to bring an insight about the evolution of the global wine superpowers by analysing their wine production in the period 2018-2024. The structure of this research is the following: the literature review is presented in the second section. The third section displays the research methodology. The results of the paper are illustrated in the fourth section. The research ends with conclusions.

## 2. Literature review

The subject of wine constitutes a topic of interest for researchers and practitioners all over the world. Wine is defined in various modalities, such as:

- „the juice or must of the grape after it has undergone the process of fermentation” (Grazzi-Soncini, 1892, p. 6).
- „alcoholic drink made by fermenting the juice of fruit or berries” (Robinson, 1999, p. 775).
- „the fermented juice of the grape” (George, 2003, p. 1).
- „the juice of grapes fermented by wine yeast and appropriately (and legally) finished into an alcoholic beverage” (Butzke and Singleton, 2007, p. 295).
- „a mildly acidic (pH3–4) hydroalcoholic solution. The two major wine components are water and ethanol, typically accounting for about 97% on a weight-for-weight (w/w) basis” (Waterhouse et al, 2016, p. xvii).
- „an archetypal traditional fermented beverage with strong territorial and socio-cultural connotations” (Pretorius, 2020, p. 1).
- „an alcoholic drink that is usually made from grapes, but can also be made from other fruits or flowers” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025, p. 1).
- „the alcoholic fermented juice of fresh grapes used as a beverage” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2025, p. 1).

Therefore, wine is a beverage obtained from grapes through the process of fermentation. The wine industry involves numerous stakeholders like wineries, shareholders, employees, suppliers, sommeliers and consumers (Isani, 2017).

There are thousands of grape varieties that were developed in the long history of wine. Several characteristics, such as size, colour, flavour, disease resistance, differ from one variety to another.

Wine is produced all over the world. Significant quantities of wine are yearly produced in Italy, France and Spain, a triumvirate of European wine superpowers (Richter, 2023). Their impressive achievements were obtained due to the existence of big wine companies such as:

- Fratelli Martini, Gruppo Caviro and Cantine Riunite & CIV in Italy,
- Castel Group, LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, and Pernod Ricard in France,
- Freixenet Group, J. García Carrión and Bodegas Torres in Spain.

These successful wine companies are acting in a highly volatile business environment (Toma, 2006a; Toma, 2013; Toma and Marinescu, 2015a) and are characterized by several key features like visionary leadership (Marinescu and Toma, 2015b; Toma et al, 2020a; Toma et al, 2020b; Toma, 2024a), strong management (Toma, 2008a; Toma et al, 2014; Toma and Marinescu, 2015b; Grădinaru et al, 2020), effective strategic thinking (Toma et al, 2016a; Toma, 2024b) and planning (Toma et al, 2016b), competitive business and corporate strategies (Toma and Marinescu, 2013; Toma and Grădinaru, 2016; Toma, 2023a; Toma, 2023b), enduring business models (Toma and Marinescu, 2012; Toma and Tohănean, 2018; Tohănean and Toma, 2018; Toma and Tohănean, 2019; Tohănean and Toma, 2024a), clear entrepreneurial orientation (Toma et al, 2017; Toma, 2019; Catană et al, 2020; Zăinea et al, 2020; Toma, 2023c), socially responsible behavior (Toma, 2008b; Marinescu et al, 2010a; Toma et al, 2011a; Toma et al, 2011b; Toma, 2012), sound quality (Toma, 2006b; Toma and Naruo, 2009; Toma et al, 2012) and lean management (Naruo et al, 2007; Marinescu and Toma, 2008; Toma et al, 2022) approach, innovation and creativity (Toma et al, 2013; Marinescu et al, 2016; Toma et al, 2016c; Marinescu and Toma, 2017; Tohănean and Toma, 2024b). Also, they are constantly applying various methods and techniques such as organizational learning and training (Toma, 2011; Marinescu and Toma, 2013; Toma and Hudea, 2024), agile principles (Toma, 2023d), Six Sigma (Toma, 2008c), Balanced Scorecard (Toma et al, 2010), teleworking (Catană et al, 2021), customer experience (Toma and Catană, 2021a; Toma and

Catană, 2021b) and marketing mix (Marinescu et al, 2010b; Grădinaru and Toma, 2017; Catană and Toma, 2021).

In the period 2018-2024, the global wine industry faced multiple and difficult challenges, such as adverse climatic conditions, COVID-19 pandemic, decreasing vineyard surfaces, and lower wine productions. That is why the fourth part of this study focuses on the evolution of the global wine superpowers in the period 2018-2024.

### 3. Methodology

In order to achieve the objective of the paper, the author used a scientific methodology based on a qualitative research method. In the beginning, he began to search for the main sources of data through desk research. Then, the author gathered the relevant information mostly from articles, reports and books. After reviewing the scientific literature, he analysed and synthesized the data. In the end, the author elaborated the study.

### 4. Results and discussion

In this section of the study the author briefly analyses the way the ten global wine superpowers evolved in the period 2018-2024, based on their wine production. The global wine production considerably decreased from 296,238,000 hectolitres (hl) in 2018 to 225,805,000 hl in 2024 (International Organisation of Vine and Wine, 2025). Some of the causes were the continuous decrease of the global wine surface and of the global wine consumption, the climate changes, and the COVID-19 pandemic (International Organisation of Vine and Wine, 2023; International Organisation of Vine and Wine, 2024). The hierarchy of the ten biggest global wine producers didn't suffer significant changes in the period 2018-2024 (Tables no. 1, 2, 3 and 4).

**Table no. 1. The ten biggest global wine producers in the period 2018-2019**

Year					
2018			2019		
No.	Country	Production (1,000 hl)	No.	Country	Production (1,000 hl)
1.	Italy	54,783	1.	Italy	47,533
2.	France	49,186	2.	France	42,193
3.	Spain	44,933	3.	Spain	33,676
4.	United States of America	27,378	4.	United States of America	26,840
5.	Argentina	14,522	5.	Argentina	13,019
6.	Chile	12,898	6.	Australia	11,970
7.	Australia	12,740	7.	Chile	11,939
8.	Germany	10,268	8.	South Africa	9,705
9.	South Africa	9,503	9.	Germany	8,218
10.	People's Republic of China	9,269	10.	People's Republic of China	7,824

Source: International Organisation of Vine and Wine, 2025

**Table no. 2. The ten biggest global wine producers in the period 2020-2021**

Year					
2020			2021		
No.	Country	Production (1,000 hl)	No.	Country	Production (1,000 hl)
1.	Italy	49,066	1.	Italy	50,232
2.	France	46,673	2.	France	37,643

3.	Spain	40,949	3.	Spain	35,471
4.	United States of America	23,888	4.	United States of America	25,274
5.	Australia	10,900	5.	Australia	14,820
6.	Argentina	10,796	6.	Argentina	12,482
7.	South Africa	10,385	7.	South Africa	10,826
8.	Chile	10,337	8.	Chile	13,437
9.	Germany	8,405	9.	Germany	8,448
10.	People’s Republic of China	6,587	10.	Portugal	7,359

Source: International Organisation of Vine and Wine, 2025

**Table no. 3. The ten biggest global wine producers in the period 2022-2023**

Year					
2022			2023		
No.	Country	Production (1,000 hl)	No.	Country	Production (1,000 hl)
1.	Italy	49,843	1.	France	47,153
2.	France	45,998	2.	Italy	38,290
3.	Spain	35,986	3.	Spain	28,384
4.	United States of America	23,504	4.	United States of America	25,502
5.	Australia	13,070	5.	Chile	11,030
6.	Chile	12,443	6.	Australia	9,640
7.	Argentina	11,451	7.	South Africa	9,315
8.	South Africa	10,337	8.	Argentina	8,813
9.	Germany	8,940	9.	Germany	8,593
10.	Portugal	6,848	10.	Portugal	7,542

Source: International Organisation of Vine and Wine, 2025

**Table no. 4. The ten biggest global wine producers in 2024**

No.	Country	Production (1,000 hl)
1.	Italy	44,066
2.	France	36,052
3.	Spain	31,026
4.	United States of America	21,124
5.	Argentina	10,869
6.	Australia	10,152
7.	Chile	9,306
8.	South Africa	8,839
9.	Germany	7,751
10.	Portugal	6,924

Source: International Organisation of Vine and Wine, 2025

All these findings allow to conclude the following issues:

- The pre-pandemic period was clearly dominated by Italy, the largest wine producer at global level. Italy kept its leading position also in the pandemic period excepted the year 2023 when France replaced it. The beginning of the post-pandemic period witnessed the regaining by Italy of the first place in the hierarchy.

- The whole period was dominated by the European trio composed from Italy, France and Spain. They were followed by the United States of America.
- The percentage of the European countries slightly increased from 40 % to 50 % due to the appearance of Portugal.
- There were the same 11 countries in the top during the period 2018-2024.
- Since 2020, the People’s Republic of China has lost its position among the first ten biggest global wine producers. It was replaced by Portugal.

## 5. Conclusions

The research displays and analyses the evolution of the global wine superpowers in the pre-pandemic, pandemic and post-pandemic periods, starting from their wine production. In spite of the existence of an unfavourable context in the period 2018-2024, the main global wine superpowers demonstrated their resilience.

The findings show that Italy, France and Spain dominated the top of the global wine producers in the period 2018-2024. With one exception, Italy was by far the leading wine producer at global level in that period. The other competitors, such as the United States of America, Argentina, Australia and Chile, obtained lower wine productions.

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