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## Alto Adige prepares for climate change

At the Aldo Adige Wine Summit, dealing with climate change and invasive pests was on the agenda. Michèle Shah reports.

The majestic Dolomite mountains of north-eastern Italy boast some of Europe's highest mountain peaks, rising to a majestic 3,000 metres. They are the backdrop to the Alto Adige/South Tirol region, a place that features vertical walls, sheer cliffs and a high density of narrow, deep and long valleys.

This is where Ötzi the ice man crossed the Giogo di Tisa in the Val Senales Valley, Alto Adige, where he was murdered. He remained under ice, intact for



Bozen, Italy/Photo by Antonio Sessa on Unsplash

thousands of years, protected from the destructive movements of the glacier by a hollow in the rocks, until accidentally discovered by hikers in 1991.

In September this year, more than 5,300 years later, a group of wine experts gathered in Bolzano for the Alto Adige Wine Summit 2019, to listen to a panel of authorities discussing the region's unique geology and how to safeguard the region's viticulture against climate change and invasive pests.

## Threatened by climate change

Alto Adige winemaking takes place in the heart of the Alpine arc, where alpine currents meet with Mediterranean influences. According to Georg Niedrist, senior researcher at the Institute for Alpine Environment in Bolzano, Alto Adige viticulture is favoured by a temperate continental climate, with marked seasonal characteristics and temperature ranges. The areas of production, between 200 and

1,330 metres altitude, have diverse geological and microclimate features, while annual rainfall is between 500 and 800 mm, resulting in well irrigated vineyards.

These factors allow the wine sector to be relatively well-prepared to face the global temperature rise.

Despite this positive picture both Niedrist and geologist Carlo Ferretti expressed concern about the rise in temperature.

"In the last 25 years I have measured a regular and constant temperature increase of up to 4 degrees

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that this terroir offers," continued Ferretti, going on to say that Alto Adige has about 40 different grape varieties of which 20 are more commonly used. "The region's complex panorama of grape varieties positively promotes biodiversity and a high quality of local wines and we are already experimenting with new and more resistant varieties here in Alto Adige which we are cultivating at the highest altitudes in Europe."

Martin Foradori, vice-president of the Alto Adige wine consortium and owner of the Hofstatter estate in the area of Tramin is convinced that Alto Adige's varieties have a great future. "In Alto Adige we adopt the so-called 'agronomic' formula of micro-zoning, which with a certainty of 99.99% can indicate where we should plant vines that will give great wines," he says.

## Invasive pests

Foradori said that while climate change is a fact that cannot be denied, "what worries me more, due to the phenomenon of globalization, is the insects, mostly of Asian origin, that are invading our agricultural crops." The Southeast Asian *Drosophila suzukii* fly has been present for some years, attacking both red fruits and red grape varieties. "This gnat makes micro-cuts in the grape skins and then deposits its eggs. The larvae then feed on the pulp and the grapes are unusable," explains Foradori. Another Asian bug, the *Halyomorpha halys*, is also found occasionally in vineyards, though it mostly targets apples. Also known as the stink bug, it gives off compounds that can negatively affect grapes and grape must.

Foradori says that while *D. suzukii* can be controlled relatively well with targeted treatments, there are currently no remedies for *H. halys*.

The Alto Adige Wine Summit is held every two years. This year, 59 wine producers showed more than 200 wines to wine experts from a total of 16 countries including 10 MWs. Eduard Bernhart, director of the Consortium of Alto Adige Wine, emphasized that the

Alto Adige Wine Summit has become an important part of the internationalization of the Alto Adige wine industry.

## Michèle Shah

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