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Wine as a Cultural Product

Symbolic Capital and Price Formation
in the Wine Field

Jens Beckert, Jörg Rössel and Patrick Schenk



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Abstract

Understanding the valuation of goods in markets has become one of the key topics in economic sociology in recent years. Especially in markets for goods that are valued for their aesthetic qualities, the ascription of value appears to be a complex social process because product quality is highly uncertain. The wine market is an extraordinary example because most consumers and even experts are not able to differentiate between wines based on objective sensory characteristics and cannot rank wines in blind tastings according to their price. Our premise is that assessed quality differences cannot be explained by the sensual qualities of the wine. Instead, we explain variations in valuation by social processes in which quality is constructed and contested. To do so we make use of Bourdieu's field theoretical perspective, which is strongly supported in our empirical analysis of the German wine field. It shows that his model of the structure of fields has considerable power in explaining price differentiation between wineries and that the orientation of consumers towards different segments of the field is based on class hierarchy.

Zusammenfassung

Die Untersuchung der Grundlagen des Werts von Gütern ist gegenwärtig eines der zentralen Themen der Wirtschaftssoziologie. Besonders in Märkten für Güter, deren Nutzen vornehmlich in ästhetischen Qualitäten besteht, ist die Konstruktion von Wert ein komplexer sozialer Prozess, da Produktqualität hochgradig ungewiss ist. Der Weinmarkt ist hierfür ein besonders gutes Beispiel. Die meisten Konsumenten und sogar Experten sind nicht in der Lage, Wein an seinen sensorischen Qualitäten zu unterscheiden, und können einen Wein in Blindverkostungen auch nicht in eine Preisskala einordnen. Unser Ausgangspunkt ist die Annahme, dass wahrgenommene Qualitätsunterschiede nicht durch die sensorischen Qualitäten des Weins erklärt werden können. Stattdessen erklären wir Wertunterschiede durch soziale Prozesse, in denen Qualität konstruiert und kontrovers diskutiert wird. Dafür nutzen wir Bourdieus Feldtheorie, die in der empirischen Analyse des deutschen Weinfeldes starke Unterstützung findet. Es zeigt sich, dass sein Modell der Struktur des Weinfeldes erhebliche Erklärungskraft bei der Erklärung von Preisunterschieden zwischen Weingütern hat und dass die Orientierung der Konsumenten auf je unterschiedliche Segmente des Feldes in Klassenhierarchien begründet liegt.

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Wine as a Cultural Product: Symbolic Capital and Price Formation in the Wine Field

1 Introduction

Understanding the valuation of goods in markets has become one of the key topics in economic sociology in recent years (Beckert/Aspers 2011; Beckert/Musselin 2013; Beckert/Rössel 2013; Callon/Méadel/Rabeharisoa 2002; Hutter/Throsby 2008; Karpik 2010; Rössel 2007; Stark 2009; Uzzi/Lancaster 2004). Especially in markets for goods that are valued for their aesthetic qualities, the ascription of value and the distinction between product qualities appears to be a complex social process. In one of the most insightful treatments of the subject, Lucien Karpik (2010) analyzes the valuation of aesthetic goods in a framework he calls the “economics of singularities.” How are products or services evaluated, classified and – ultimately – priced whose qualities are unique, incommensurable, and uncertain?

The problem of assessing the quality of goods goes far beyond the description of quality uncertainty analyzed famously by George Akerlof (1970) in his model for “The Market for Lemons.” Akerlof saw quality uncertainty as an information problem. The potential buyer of the product is uninformed about some of its qualities. Asymmetric distribution of information on quality can lead, as Akerlof demonstrated, to market failure. In many markets, however, quality uncertainty is not an information problem. When the buyer of a painting by a contemporary artist looks at the painting he wishes to acquire he can see all the properties of the painting: its size, the materials used, the shapes and possible damage. And the gallery owner will willingly provide all the information she has on the artist and the painting. But why does the painting cost, let’s say, 3000 euros? And why does the painting by another artist, offered in the gallery next door, which looks pretty similar and has roughly the same size, cost only 800 euros? Whatever the answer to this question, it is clear that price differences and underlying perceived quality differences are not caused by the objective features of the product and asymmetrically distributed information.

The wine market is an extraordinary example of a market for singularities. Though chemically largely the same, a bottle of wine can cost 1.99 euros or 300 euros. These price differences are justified by alleged quality differences between the wines. However, upon closer inspection it turns out that the price differences are largely unrelated to different production costs and to the sensual experience wine connoisseurs report when tasting the wine in a blind tasting. According to statements of insiders in the wine field even very expensive wines don’t have production costs above 10 euros per bottle. Many experimental studies have shown that even experts are at loss when it comes to describing and comparing different wines simply from the taste. Most consumers

and even experts are not able to differentiate between wines based on objective sensory characteristics and cannot rank wines according to their price (for an overview see Rössel/Beckert 2013). What constitutes the complexity in quality assessment in the wine market is not only that there are several thousand producers each producing several different wines but also that the taste of the products changes with each new vintage. This naturally caused newness creates recurrent additional uncertainty. How can we explain price differences for different wines if these cannot be attributed to the sensual preferences of the consumer? How do actors form assessments of the quality of wine from specific wineries despite the newness stemming from ever-changing vintages? Through what processes are the products “qualified”?

These questions are relevant in almost all consumer markets. The perceived quality of wine, perfume, art, music, food, computer technology, and even cars is only partially derived from their material characteristics. Their value stems largely from symbolic qualities ascribed to the products based on interpretation. In affluent consumer societies, in which functional needs are mostly satisfied, the value produced in the economy resembles increasingly the type of valuation we can observe in the art market or in the wine market (Beckert 2011).¹ Studying markets such as the wine market thus helps us to develop analytical tools to understand much wider aspects of the contemporary economy.

In this paper we address the question of the qualification of goods through an investigation of the German wine market. We want to explain price differences in this market based on the underlying differences in the valuation of quality characteristics of wine. Our premise is that assessed quality differences cannot be explained by the sensual qualities of the wine but are also not random. Instead we explain variations in valuation by social processes in which quality is constructed and contested. To do so we make use of Bourdieu’s field theoretical perspective. Bourdieu’s theory of fields analyzes the process of cultural consecration of specific goods in differentiated societal fields and relates these symbolic valuations to the economic and social status of producers and consumers. The valuation of products is thus related to social context and not left unexplained

1 Ideal-typically one can distinguish between two types of markets. First, markets in which the quality of products can be measured based on their material characteristics. Even if the criteria and techniques for measuring quality are not “natural” but social artifacts, they are so much taken for granted that they appear to actors as “natural” and become uncontested reference points for their quality judgments. This is mostly the case in markets in which the quality of the product is assessed based on “functional performance” that can be measured objectively. An example is commodity markets, for example, the oil market. These markets can be called standard markets (Aspers 2009). The second type of market contains products that are at least partly assessed based on symbolic qualities, which can be aesthetic, moral, or status-bestowing. Markets for symbolic qualities have criteria for judging product quality that are independent from socially ascribed value assessments. In consequence, the attributes of quality are often contested, change over time, and differ between social groups. Assessed product qualities remain contingent and contestable because the symbolic qualities are not defined as fixed material properties. Wine, the subject of this paper, is predominantly an aesthetic product (Charters/Pettigrew 2005).

simply as an individual taste. Bourdieu shows how symbolic values (symbolic capital) are formed in differentiated social fields and how these values affect price formation (Bourdieu 1996). His theory offers a general model of processes of symbolic valuation and price formation that takes into account dissonances of valuation. These differences reflect status differences among producers and consumers and are thus socially constituted. Moments of valuation, as we show based on Bourdieu's theory, are always socially preconfigured. We take Bourdieu's theory to explain, on one hand, the formation of symbolic value in the wine field and its impact on prices in the wine market and to explain, on the other, the preferences and orientation of consumers.

Making use of Bourdieu's theory of fields in an analysis of the wine market adds to a growing literature in economic sociology that analyzes economic structures as fields and take up Bourdieu's theoretical perspective on questions of economic sociology (Beckert 2010; Hanappi 2011; Swedberg 2011; Fligstein/McAdam 2012). This perspective figures prominently in the analysis of markets (Fligstein 2001), but also in the investigation of organizations (DiMaggio/Powell 1983). In a field perspective, markets are seen as being composed of a set of actors, among them producers and sellers, experts, journalists, industry associations, marketing specialists, regulatory agencies, and consumers (Bourdieu 1996; Dubuisson-Quellier 2013; Eymard-Duvernay 2002; Karpik 2010; Schenk/Rössel 2012). These actors are positioned in relation to each other. They all participate in the construction of the qualities of the products sold in the market.

In the first section of the article we first outline Bourdieu's theory of fields as used for the analysis of product qualification. In the second part of the article we test the implications of Bourdieu's theory with data on the German wine field. We collected price information on wines from more than one hundred wineries from two German wine regions: the Rheingau and Rheinhessen. Through a content analysis of the websites of these wineries, we also gathered data on their symbolic positions in the wine field. Based on these data we can statistically analyze the relation between symbolic capital and prices for the sample of wineries and wines. In a second step we add data from a survey on wine consumption in four German cities (Hamburg, Cologne, Wiesbaden, Mainz; Pape 2012). This allows us to analyze the relationship between symbolic positions of wines and wineries and the valuation of wines of consumers in connection with their position in the class hierarchy. By studying a societal field both from the perspective of producers and the perspective of consumers, the paper provides insights into the interface between supply and demand on a market characterized by the importance of symbolic product qualities.

2 Symbolic capital and price formation in the wine field

Pierre Bourdieu developed a comprehensive theory of social fields. It is an attempt to explain the behavior of actors in market-like situations not from an economic point of view, but from an encompassing sociological perspective. A field is a network of objective relations between positions (Bourdieu 1996: 231; Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992: 97). In contrast to interactionist approaches (Becker 1982; White 1981) Bourdieu focuses on objective positions and objective relations between these positions. Positions in a field are defined by a certain endowment with different forms of capital. Thus they exist independently of their incumbents (Bourdieu 1993: 72). Two main groups of capital are relevant for the definition of objective positions within fields. There are universal forms of capital, such as economic and cultural capital, which are important in all areas of the social space. And there are specific forms of capital, which are valuable only in the context of a certain field (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992: 107–108; Bourdieu 1993: 72–73). In the field of wine such specific forms of capital may be the technology of the production process (industrial versus crafts production), the size and the location of vineyard plots, and of course the symbolic recognition (that is, symbolic capital) gained in the field of wine (Diaz-Bone 2005; Schenk/Rössel 2012).

The relations between positions are relations of power. The objective network of relations between such positions explains the strategies that actors use and thus the interactions between them (Bourdieu 1985: 17). Strategies aim at safeguarding a position in the field or to gain a better position. Actors invest their different forms of capital to obtain different forms of profit. To do so, they need to develop specific strategies that are based on their capital endowment. To carve out a distinctive and profitable niche for themselves producers must develop distinct strategies (Bourdieu 1996: 249–250). However, in contrast to economic approaches, Bourdieu's theory assumes that in most fields actors do not directly aim for economic gains. Instead they aim at symbolic profits, which may be transformed into economic profits (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992: 97–98; Bourdieu 1996: 148). Each field is based on a set of common assumptions, which are taken for granted by the actors (*nomos*, *doxa*) and on the strong motivations of the actors to invest in the field and a belief in the symbolic profits to be gained in the field (*illusio*) (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992: 98; Bourdieu 1996: 227–229). Therefore, a wine-maker may mention as his prime motivation the love of wine and the urge to create a unique and fascinating wine, but not the intention to first of all make money from producing wine (Schenk/Rössel 2012; Scott-Morton/Podolny 2002). Thus the product becomes differently evaluated not only by consumers and producers but also by the different producers and consumer groups. The specific valuation is explained by the position of the respective actor in the field and is thus socially contextualized.

The degree to which symbolic profits play a role depends on the relationship between the respective field and the field of power. The field of power may be described as a kind of meta-field, in which the dominant social groups struggle over the importance and exchange rates of different kinds of capital. The greater the distance between a certain

field and the field of power, the higher the autonomy of this field and the more important the internal, field-specific criteria for evaluating its products. In strictly economic fields actors may strive directly for economic profits. In fields with a larger autonomy and an emphasis on cultural production, producers may first invest in symbolic capital, which is then quickly transformed into economic profits. In highly autonomous fields, such as visual arts or contemporary music, there is a substantial time lag between the acquisition of symbolic capital and its eventual transformation into economic capital (see for example Galenson 2001, as well as Accominotti 2009; Ginsburgh/Weyers 2006).

The autonomy of fields and thus the relationship between economic criteria of evaluation and symbolic criteria varies not only between different fields, but between the same field in different countries and within the same field over time. Verboord (2011) has shown for the literary field that in the past forty years economic criteria of evaluation have gained prominence. The precursor of this development is the literary field in the United States. In contrast, for the field of wine, there is evidence of a growing importance of symbolic criteria of evaluation. One indicator for this is the increase in wine reporting. The number of specialized wine magazines has grown and important popular journals have extended the number of articles on wine. Furthermore, in the news coverage of wine, there is an increasing emphasis on questions of taste and aesthetics and a declining relevance of economic issues (Diaz-Bone 2005; Rössel/Eppler/Schenk 2011). These developments suggest an increase in the public discourse about the aesthetic qualities of wine which can be taken as indicating an evolution of the wine field that strengthens the relevance of symbolic quality criteria.

Not only do fields differ in their degree of autonomy, but so do the subfields existing within fields. Bourdieu has shown that fields usually have a chiastic structure. In one subfield actors are more oriented towards external criteria, for example, sales and economic profits, while in the other subfield actors have a stronger orientation towards internal criteria of evaluation (Bourdieu 1996: 114–115). The first type of subfield constitutes the heteronomous pole of the field, since the actors here are less driven by field-internal criteria, whereas the second subfield is more autonomous from external criteria (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992: 103). On the heteronomous pole producers are oriented towards the pre-existing demand, therefore tending towards standardized mass production. At the autonomous pole producers are usually oriented towards a narrow group of field-internal experts and institutions with a high endowment of symbolic capital, thus producing for a restricted market (Bourdieu 1996: 142–143).

This chiastic structure of fields of production is also visible in the fields of distribution and in public discourses about products. Certain types of market intermediaries such as critics, journalists, and sellers cater more to the restricted subfield and others more to the market oriented subfield. Thus there is a homology between the fields of production and the field of distribution and discourse. On the autonomous pole of a field we usually expect to find intermediaries driven by field-internal criteria of evaluation. Among them one may count critics, intellectuals, avant-garde art galleries, and journalists from

quality newspapers. By contrast, on the heteronomous pole one finds actors oriented towards economic criteria, such as marketing specialists, big art stores or book stores, journalists from tabloids, and bestseller lists. This bifurcation of fields is also visible in the wine field: on the autonomous pole we find actors such as wine critics, quality journals, specialist stores, direct purchasing from the winemaker. On the heteronomous pole we find an absence of independent critics and quality journals, whereas we see discount supermarket chains and supermarkets as major forms of distribution and selling (Diaz-Bone 2005).

This model assumes that the production of a certain good or service is not just an act of material production, but also a symbolic act (Bourdieu 1996: 170). Therefore, the value of works of art is created not solely by the artists, but both the value of works and of artists are created by the multiplicity of actors in the field, such as critics, curators, journalists, and gallery owners, which “transubstantiate” persons into artists and objects into art works (Bourdieu 1996: 229). Thus, the discourse about art or other cultural products is part of the production process itself.

It [the science of cultural products] must therefore take into account not only the direct producers of the work in its materiality (artist, writer, etc.), but also the ensemble of agents and institutions which participate in the production of the value of the work via the production of the belief in the value of art in general and in the distinctive value of this or that work of art. We may include critics, art historians, publishers, gallery directors, dealers, museum curators, patrons, collectors ... (Bourdieu 1996: 229)

As outlined above, this process is of greater importance in more autonomous fields, such as visual arts or contemporary music, but the process is even visible in many economic subfields. Bourdieu has shown, for instance, that in the field of real estate of producers may invest in symbolic profits to enhance their economic profits (Bourdieu 1985: 20, 2005: 67–69, 1996: 148–149). Similar to the way artists in the restricted subfield distance themselves from public demands and external criteria, producers in less autonomous fields gain symbolic profit by positioning themselves as luxurious, craft-oriented, authentic, and local (Bourdieu 1993: 133, 2005: 57–59). Some producers may even relate themselves to artists by emphasizing the fine materials used or the uniqueness of their products (Bourdieu 2005: 62–64) in order to distance themselves from standardized, mass produced goods and a short-term sales orientation. The fashion and car industries are examples of this.

We find similar strategies of symbolic positioning in the wine field. In the subfield of restricted production, the autonomous pole, the winemakers distance themselves from industrial methods of production, emphasizing the importance of craft production and of the natural conditions of their vineyard. Often they distance themselves from the general public, too, by emphasizing that it is difficult to “comprehend” their wine and that it takes time to understand them. Thereby, they distance themselves from a purely economic focus on sales (Schenk/Rössel 2012). This differentiation also takes place on the consumer side of markets. Some winemakers even suggest a certain similarity

between wine making and art. In general, there is the underlying idea, that a certain wine has an authentic quality to it (Beverland 2005; Gade 2004; Schenk/Rössel 2012). Johnston and Baumann (2007) have demonstrated that high-status consumers in contemporary food markets, of which the wine market is one segment, tend to distinguish themselves from lower-class consumers by looking for authentic and exotic food. Food is not a simple material product, but a product with symbolic qualities (Pratt 2008).

Bourdieu situates producers in cultural production. He explains their different strategies by the governing assumptions and motivations in the respective field and the respective position of the producer in the field. In contrast to economic perspectives he further assumes that the relevance of a given sort of capital is not simply given, but is the object of struggles in the field. To put it differently: what is at stake in the wine field is the definition of the quality of wine itself. Therefore, field-specific assessments of quality may change because of changes in the power structures of the field or due to changes in the relationship to the field of power (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992: 101; Bourdieu 1996: 142, 225). In contrast to theories of functional differentiation (Luhmann 1997), Bourdieu's theory of fields is able to explain changes in social fields because it does not assume that its autonomy is a given.

3 Linking producers with consumers

Bourdieu's field theory contains not only a sociological analysis of producers. His model is more comprehensive, linking producers to consumers. The crucial assumption is again that of a homology. Of course producers and consumers differ in that the first is interested in profits and the second is interested in a product that fits their lifestyle. At the same time, there is a homology between the symbolic hierarchy of producers in a field and the social status hierarchy of consumers (Bourdieu 1996: 115). This stands close to the discussion of status markets in economic sociology (Aspers 2009). Producers in the more autonomous subfields of a certain field usually cater to an audience with a more ample endowment of capital. It holds for cultural products in particular that consumers differ in their ability to understand and consume certain products.

Usually, all consumers are able to understand and consume goods and services that are standardized and mass produced (Bourdieu 1996: 147). However, products and services from the subfield of restricted production usually reflect the history of the field and thus are replete with preconditions for understanding. Only consumers who are familiar with the history and preconditions of the subfield are able to understand and enjoy its products. The ability to understand and enjoy a product is based on the consumer's *habitus*. Following Bourdieu, *habitus* is the system of perceiving and classifying the world, as well as the systematic dispositions for behavior (Bourdieu 1984: 170–171). In the case of cultural products, *habitus* also contains the consumer's taste, which is cru-

cial for the choices being made between products from the different subfields (Bourdieu 1984: 174, 2005: 54). The *habitus* itself is shaped by the social conditions of a person, especially her class location. This is why Bourdieu asserts that consumers from different class backgrounds differ in their tastes for music, art, food, wine, and so on (Bourdieu 1984: 170, 2005: 211). More precisely, consumers diverge not only in terms of what they consume, but also in the way they consume it and in the quality of the experience that is linked with the act of consumption (Rössel 2011).

The social differentiation of the assessment of wine quality shows itself today, for instance, in the different preferences for sweet and dry wines. It is mainly the inexperienced consumer, often young and of low social status, who will favor sweet wines, whereas the experienced wine consumer, especially if she has higher social status, will favor dry wines. A recent study of the German wine market shows that wine consumption in all its different facets (consumption frequency, expenditure, taste preferences) is strongly shaped along a vertical social axis differentiated by income and education (Pape 2012).

The *habitus* generates a coherent and systematic way of evaluating the symbolic qualities of wine that adds up to an identifiable lifestyle. Since the *habitus* is linked to the social position of the consumer, other actors can infer the lifestyle of a person and his position in the social space by observing his consumption behavior. In this sense, the consumption of wine is a signifier for the lifestyle and class position of an individual (Bourdieu 1984: 175). Since cultural products are produced according to a competitive logic, resulting in distinctive positions and niches for different products and artists, they are well suited for the expression of social distinctions.

By also locating consumer taste in terms of class position and individual biographies, Bourdieu analyses consumption practices as the result of two concurrent processes: the genesis of consumers with certain tastes, based on certain presuppositions and classifications, and of producers and products, based on the same presuppositions and classifications (Bourdieu 1996: 256, 321). In this way Bourdieu locates both production and consumption in a social context.

4 Data and methods

In order to analyze the price of wine in its relationship to field differentiation we assembled information on a set of wineries from the two German wine regions of Rheingau and Rheinhessen. The set consists of the wineries from these two regions that were included in the Gault Millau wine guide for 2007 and of the wineries that were included in the wine guide published by the Deutsche Landwirtschaftsgesellschaft in 2007. Additionally, we included the wines from these two regions that were listed by nine different

supermarket chains. The wineries were chosen in order to include most types of winery in the field, which ranged from vast wine cellars to small family wineries (see: Schenk/Rössel 2012).

Our sample includes 1,071 wines from 110 wineries located in the appellations of Rheingau and Rheinhessen. Methodologically, this implies that the analysis of individual wines had a multilevel data structure that had to be taken into account (Snijders/Bosker 1999). We used a multilevel model with random intercepts for the data analysis. We proceeded in an exploratory manner by gradually eliminating insignificant variables for the symbolic positions.

Our hypothesis, based on Bourdieu's theory, is that wines that stem from producers closer to the autonomous pole of the field have higher prices. Consumers with higher cultural and economic capital value wines with the corresponding symbolic quality attributes more highly and thus are willing to spend more on such wines. To operationalize the symbolic positions of the different wineries, we conducted a content analysis of the wine producers' websites. We used the following eight variables to capture the symbolic positions.²

On the autonomous side of the field we first included a variable that reflects the artistic orientation of the winemaker ("art"). Winemakers distinguish themselves by relating their work to the world of art, thereby framing the good as a cultural product and distancing it from the profane world of economic production (Johnston/Baumann 2007). This entails that the production of wine is claimed to be pursued for its own sake – a stance that is analogous to the statement of "*l'art pour l'art*" within the field of art (Bourdieu 1996: 216). Furthermore this variable is a strong indicator of the aestheticization that takes place in certain parts of the field of wine (Schulze 1992; Rössel/Eppler/Schenk 2012; Rössel 2007).

Second, we included a variable that represents the notion of "*terroir*." *Terroir* is a complex concept that developed historically within the French field of wine, which has global importance for wine discourse. Therefore, we can interpret it as an archetype of a field-specific quality criterion. Basically the notion of *terroir* posits that the quality of the wine stems from the complex interaction between the natural properties of the vineyard and the artisan work of the winemaker, which is informed by the specific tradition of the region. Therefore, the concept of *terroir* stresses the distinctiveness and authenticity of the individual wine (Karpik 2010).

The last two measures for the symbolic positions at the autonomous pole are "delimited wine-growing area" and "regional tradition." The former was coded when a classified vineyard was mentioned or a detailed description of the vineyard was given and the lat-

2 Each category was measured by its relative frequency based on the total amount of codes per website.

Table 1 Symbolic positions within the wine field

Variable Name	Description
Art	By relating wine production to the world of art wine is framed as a cultural product high in aesthetic value.
<i>Terroir</i>	A field-specific notion of quality that stresses the significance of the specific vineyard and the artisan work of the winemaker.
Delimited wine-growing area	Descriptions of the specified, small wine-growing area, including denomination, topography or specific soils.
Regional tradition	Wine production is related to a region's history, including traditional grapes or production methods.
Economic orientation	Economic considerations such as market trends, prices, costs or profit are mentioned.
Mass production	Representation of the winemaker as a large-scale producer supplying a standardized good for the mass market.
Modern production methods	Use of modern production methods, such as artificial heist, full automatic harvesters or steel tanks is mentioned.
Consumer taste	The wine is produced according to the consumer's taste.

ter when the production of wine was linked to the region's history including traditional production methods or grapes. As vineyards and regions enjoy different reputations these variables are related primarily to the producers' symbolic capital (Benjamin/Podolny 1999; Gade 2004).

Turning to the symbolic positions that are associated with the heteronomous pole of the field, we included a variable that measures the "economic orientation" of the producer and a variable capturing an orientation towards "mass production." While the former reflects the consideration of economic necessities dictated by the market, the latter symbolically represents a strategy of large-scale production (Diaz-Bone 2005). Furthermore, we added a variable that measures the mentioning of "modern production methods," such as the use of artificial yeast during the fermentation process. Lastly we included a variable that reflects the producer's "orientation towards the consumers' taste." The positions at the heteronomous pole reflect an orientation towards "worldly" success (namely the accumulation of economic capital) and its representation as a virtue rather than a vice. The alignment of production with consumer demand is characteristic of the heteronomy of a field and encounters negative sanctions by producers with an autonomous orientation (Bourdieu 1996; Johnston/Baumann 2007).

Apart from these variables that indicate symbolic positions, we included a series of variables in our models that could be assumed to influence the perception of the quality of a wine and therefore its price (Landon/Smith 1997; Schamel 2003; Frick 2004, 2010). First, we included bottle size. In the German wine market one-liter bottles are used as well as 0.75-liter bottles. The wine bottled in one-liter bottles is usually perceived as being of lower quality. Second, we included a variable for different grape varieties. Riesling and Pinot are the most important and most prestigious grape varieties in the two regions studied, so we included two dummy variables indicating whether a certain wine

contained mainly one of those two grape varieties. The reference category included all other grape varieties. Third, we differentiated between red wines and white and rosé wines.³ Fourth, we took in one variable indicating the wines' age in 2007, assuming that older wines would be more expensive (the latter are categorized in one category). Fifth, German wines are produced in different categories of sweetness. We included a dummy variable for sweet wine and one for semi-dry wines; the reference category contained dry wines. Finally, we added a set of dummy variables for the different categories of quality wine according to the wine law from 1971 (*Kabinett*, *Spätlese*, *Auslese*, *Beerenauslese*, *Trockenbeerenauslese*, and *Eiswein*); the reference category was a quality wine without a descriptor.

In addition to this information on the producer side, we collected data on the consumer side of the field. We analyzed the consumption of wine by conducting a standardized mail survey in four German cities: Mainz, Wiesbaden, Hamburg, and Cologne (Pape 2012). The population consists of all residents aged 18 years or older and with German citizenship. Taking neutral sampling failures into account, we attained an adjusted response rate of 27 percent. For the data analysis we used a series of OLS-regressions. To enhance comparability we kept the number of cases constant across all models, which yielded 617 cases for the analysis.

The dependent variables encompass several measures that reflect distinct aspects of wine consumption. First, we looked at the price that respondents are willing to pay for a bottle of wine. We computed an additive index based on questions concerning the average amount and the maximum amount people spend on wine (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.875$). Second, we computed an additive index that represents the respondents' taste for dry wines based on three indicators, one for white, one for red, and one for rosé wine (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.865$). Higher values indicate a preference for dry wines, which are especially favored at the autonomous pole of the field. Our third measure, "specialized press," reflects the extent to which consumers gather information about quality assessments by field-specific intermediaries, which are usually oriented towards the autonomous pole of the field. Respondents were able to indicate how often they turn to wine critics or how often they collect information in wine guides or books devoted to wine (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.709$). The fourth dependent variable concerns the use of a field-specific distribution channel, namely the frequency with which consumers purchase the product directly from the winemaker. This signals the circumvention of more commercial sales venues, such as chain supermarkets or discount stores. The fifth dependent measure is an additive index that summarizes the importance of different quality criteria, which are specific mainly for the autonomous pole of the field of wine (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.878$). These include the region, the vineyard, the producer, the production method and the

3 We did not include a separate category for rosé wine because previous studies did not show a significant difference between white and rosé wines (Schamel 2003) and, furthermore, the number of rosé wines in our sample is fairly small.

year of production.⁴ The last measure draws on Bourdieu's (1984) idea that a person's taste functions as a signifier for his lifestyle and social position: respondents indicated whether they think that wine consumption permits an inference about the person and thus has a distinctive value.⁵

Considering the independent variables, we included the respondent's age measured in years, the respondent's gender (with males coded as one and females coded as zero), the household equivalence income (for example, economic capital) and the respondent's education measured in years of schooling (for example, cultural capital). Income and education are measures of economic and cultural capital and therefore indicate the class position of our respondents. In order to take the importance of early formation of the *habitus* within the family into account (Bourdieu 1984: 111), we included a variable that reflects a wine-specific socialization of the respondent. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statement: "The consumption of wine was common in my parental home." Lastly, we included three dummy variables for the cities Hamburg, Mainz, and Wiesbaden with Cologne as the reference category.

5 Results

Production data

Model 1, the so-called empty model, which includes no explanatory variables, shows quite clearly that we had to conduct a multilevel analysis, since nearly half of the variance of the dependent variable is accounted for by the clustering of individual wines in wineries. In the next step (Model 2), we included the whole set of control variables that should be taken into account in the explanation of price formation in the wine market. The results confirm the results of previous studies of the wine market (Cardebat/Figuet 2004; Combris/Lecocq/Visser 2000; Landon/Smith 1997; Schamel 2003; Zhao 2008; Rössel/Beckert 2013): the larger the bottle, the lower the price per liter; wines made of high-status grape varieties (Riesling, Pinot) are usually more expensive; dry wine is more expensive than sweet and semi-dry wine; and red wine is more expensive than white and rosé wines. Finally, older wine is usually more expensive than wine of a younger age. Furthermore, prices follow the logic of the German wine classification. Interestingly, in comparison with the reference category (quality wine without descriptor) the category *Kabinett* attains lower price levels and even wines of the renowned category *Spätlese* have only a slightly higher price. This effect is explained by the fact that

4 Indeed, this construct corresponds semantically to the notion of *terroir* in the production side analysis.

5 Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the following statement: "The wine that a person brings with him enables an inference about the person itself."

Table 2 The impact of symbolic positions on prices

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Art			4.111** (2.55)	2.901** (2.08)
<i>Terroir</i>			6.886* (1.92)	4.514 (1.42)
Delimited wine-growing area			2.317*** (3.48)	2.104*** (3.58)
Regional tradition			5.406** (2.17)	4.566** (2.07)
Economic orientation			-11.202*** (-3.07)	-10.267*** (-3.19)
Mass production			-18.558*** (-3.92)	-13.968 *** (-3.31)
Modern production methods			-4.706* (-1.91)	-4.765 ** (-2.21)
Consumer taste			-3.343* (-1.85)	-3.604 ** (-2.26)
Bottle size		-2.278*** (-16.04)		-2.27 *** (-16.08)
Pinot		0.131*** (3.47)		0.123 *** (3.29)
<i>Riesling</i>		0.184*** (6.22)		0.181 *** (6.18)
Red wine ^a		0.170*** (4.98)		0.179 *** (5.31)
Age		0.125*** (8.04)		0.120 *** (7.82)
Sweet		-0.213*** (-4.85)		-0.205 *** (-4.69)
Semi-dry		-0.170*** (-4.67)		-0.159 *** (-4.39)
<i>Kabinett</i>		-0.234*** (-5.86)		-0.241 *** (-6.07)
<i>Spätlese</i>		0.080** (2.40)		0.072 ** (2.20)
<i>Auslese</i>		0.308*** (4.83)		0.314*** (4.95)
<i>Beerenauslese etc.</i>		0.614*** (6.34)		0.633*** (6.65)
Intercept	2.268 *** (50.68)	3.597*** (28.74)	2.202*** (34.87)	3.566*** (27.06)
Variance u	0.432	0.382	0.310	0.287
Variance e	0.472	0.327	0.472	0.327
Rho	0.455	0.577	0.302	0.436
R ² within	0.000	0.519	0.002	0.521
R ² between	0	0.216	0.484	0.558
R ² overall	0	0.381	0.221	0.538
N level 1	1071	1071	1071	1071
N level 2	110	110	110	110

Presented are unstandardized regression coefficients and z-values in parentheses.

a Reference category: white and rosé.

* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%.

a number of very prestigious wineries in Germany do not use the official classification system and use only the lowest category for quality wines for their wines, even if they could classify them in a higher category (Rössel/Beckert 2013).

All these effects of the control variables are stable in all models. Interestingly, these variables are better suited to explaining the price differences of wines from the same winery (R^2 of 0.52) than to explaining the price differences between wineries (R^2 of 0.22). In model 3 we entered only the symbolic strategies of the wineries. A look at the R^2 shows that these variables are not at all able to explain the price differences between wines from the same winery; they can be explained only by wine-specific variables, such as style (sweet, dry) or color. However, the symbolic strategies have a strong influence on the price differences between wineries (R^2 of 0.48). This shows clearly that the symbolic positions of winemakers in the field of wine have a strong impact on their ability to obtain economic profits. This empirical result confirms the main claim of Bourdieu's field theory.

However, the eight variables we have included do not seriously test the theory because we worked in an exploratory way to find out the most important symbolic positions. Nevertheless, these eight symbolic positions are clearly in agreement with Bourdieu's description of the two poles of chiasmic cultural production fields. An orientation towards predefined consumer demand, towards the economic field, based on mass production and modern industrial technology clearly lowers the mean price per bottle of wine. And on the other hand, a comparison of wine making to art, a focus on restricted and authentic production (*terroir*, delimited wine-growing area, regional tradition) increases the mean price of a bottle from a particular winery. As one can see from model 4, when nearly all effects are stable, controlling for all the variables from model 2. Only "*terroir*" loses its statistical significance. This is a fairly new term in German wine discourse, used so far by only some wineries (Rössel/Schenk/Eppler 2011).

The homology between the symbolic positions taken by the wineries and their impact on price levels, on one hand, and Bourdieu's description of symbolic positions on the two poles of fields of cultural production, on the other, is striking. Our results substantiate the idea that one way of gaining economic revenues in economic markets is via an indirect strategy of first gaining and accumulating symbolic capital in cultural production fields and subsequently transforming this symbolic capital into economic returns. There is of course a second strategy of catering to predefined consumer demands by mass-producing standardized and inexpensive wines. This strategy leads only to economic profits and not to a leading symbolic position in the wine field.

Consumption data

One of the main ideas of Bourdieu's field theory is the assumption of a homology between the structure of production and consumption. If this holds true, one should expect high status consumers with above average income and education to focus on criteria and actors that belong to the autonomous pole of the field, to pay higher prices for wine, and to see wine consumption as an activity allowing social distinction. In the interpretation of our empirical analysis we focus mainly on the results of class-related variables, such as income, education, and wine socialization, whereas we tend to neglect control variables such as age, gender, and city of residence. Our main goal is to show the relationship between wine consumption and class and not a comprehensive explanation of wine consumption.

Looking first at the willingness to pay a higher price for wine, we find that all three class-related variables have a significant positive impact on the dependent variable. Higher class consumers are more willing to pay a higher price for wine. This of course is not a surprising result. More interesting are the other results. Our next dependent variable measures the preference for dry wines, which is a typical taste at the autonomous pole of the wine field. Here we find the same result as for willingness to pay. All three class-related variables have a positive influence on the preference for dry wines among consumers. This shows that class position not only shapes the resources for wine consumption, but also the taste, as Bourdieu's *habitus* theory assumes.

The next dependent variable focuses on the use of field-specific sources of information and evaluation of wine. Here, we find a somewhat different result, as only income and wine socialization have a positive effect on the dependent variable, whereas education turns out not to be significant. We have a similar result for the dependent variable that measures the frequency of buying directly from the winemaker, which is a practice strongly related to the autonomous pole of the field because the distribution and sale does not involve commercial outlets such as supermarket or discounters. However, this practice is of course also strongly shaped by place of residence. Respondents from Mainz and Wiesbaden, which are both located close to wine regions, buy much more frequently directly from the winemaker than interviewees from Hamburg or Cologne.

The following dependent variable includes measures of the symbolic positions that are typical of the autonomous pole of the field, such as a preference for artisanal production, small vineyards, and individual winemakers. Here we find, again, that income and wine socialization have a significant positive effect, whereas education is not significantly related to the dependent variable. Finally, we look at wine as a means of distinction (wine consumption as signifier), which implies the valuation of persons from different social classes based on their aesthetic taste. Here, all three class-related variables again have a positive impact on the dependent variable, which means that persons with high income, high education, and a stronger wine socialization tend to think that the choice of a wine allows inference about the social position of the person.

Table 3 The impact of cultural and economic capital on consumption practices

	Price	Taste	Specialized press	Point of purchase: winemaker	Field-specific quality criteria	Wine consumption as signifier
Age	-0.005** (-0.090)	0.006*** (0.151)	0.008*** (0.180)	0.022*** (0.264)	0.020*** (0.334)	0.006** (0.093)
Gender	0.033 (0.019)	-0.063 (-0.047)	0.053 (0.036)	-0.012 (-0.004)	-0.006 (-0.003)	-0.093 (-0.046)
Income (in 1,000 euros)	0.108*** (0.193)	0.088*** (0.205)	0.062*** (0.130)	0.128*** (0.140)	0.073*** (0.115)	0.082*** (0.126)
Education	0.039*** (0.174)	0.023*** (0.132)	0.006 (0.031)	-0.010 (-0.028)	-0.001 (-0.002)	0.029*** (0.110)
Wine-specific socialization	0.072*** (0.112)	0.044** (0.090)	0.088*** (0.161)	0.128*** (0.122)	0.124*** (0.171)	0.202*** (0.270)
City: Hamburg ^a	-0.141 (-0.064)	-0.113 (-0.067)	-0.199** (-0.106)	-0.384** (-0.108)	-0.188* (-0.076)	-0.009 (-0.004)
City: Mainz ^a	-0.308*** (-0.162)	-0.091*** (-0.063)	-0.063 (-0.039)	0.871*** (0.282)	0.137 (0.064)	-0.142 (-0.064)
City: Wiesbaden ^a	0.147 (0.074)	-0.024 (-0.016)	-0.007 (-0.004)	0.987*** (0.308)	0.378*** (0.170)	0.184* (0.080)
Intercept	2.450***	1.522***	0.698***	0.637**	1.367***	1.589***
Adjusted R ²	0.140	0.109	0.079	0.253	0.187	0.125
N	617	617	617	617	617	617

Presented are unstandardized regression coefficients and standardized regression coefficients in parentheses.

a Reference: Cologne.

* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%.

In summary, the results of the six regressions overwhelmingly support the main idea of Bourdieu's homology thesis. Middle and upper-class persons with a higher income, a higher level of education, and a pronounced wine socialization tend to be oriented towards wine from the autonomous pole of the wine field, insofar as they are more willing to pay, have a preference for dry wine, gather information and evaluations from the internal experts of the wine field based on field-internal quality criteria, and furthermore tend to buy wine directly from the winemaker. Finally, they perceive wine to be a good that allows one to make inferences about the person who has chosen a wine and thus is a marker of social distinction.

6 Summary and discussion

The assessment of wine quality is not simply a question of information. Instead, the quality of wine is determined in a social process that takes place in a field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1996). Actors with a high endowment of cultural capital assess wine quality differently from consumers with low cultural capital. Consumers are willing to pay higher prices for wine if the symbolic position of the wine allows their social

distinction. Therefore, one major strategy for wine producers is to first gain symbolic capital in the field of wine, which can afterwards be transformed into economic profit through higher prices for their produce.

In our empirical study we analyzed data for 110 wineries and 1,071 wines, as well as data on wine consumers in four German cities. The symbolic positions of the wineries were gathered by a content analysis of their homepages. Information on consumers derives from a survey.

Our empirical analysis of the production side has shown that the symbolic positions of wineries have a strong explanatory impact on the price differences between wineries. Winemakers with symbolic positions typical of the autonomous pole of cultural production fields obtain significantly higher prices on the wine market compared with other wineries. Producers using these symbolic positions make use of symbolic capital and transform it into higher market prices. The symbolic capital accrues especially to wine producers who conceal their economic aims and produce wines that are “difficult” to drink, because the consumer must first “learn” to appreciate them and therefore must “work” on developing taste. This symbolic capital can be transformed into economic capital on the market (Schenk/Rössel 2012). However, this indirect strategy of first gaining symbolic capital, which is then transformed into economic profit, is of course only one of two alternative economic strategies for wineries. The other strategy is the heteronomous orientation towards direct economic gains and a strict orientation towards the pre-existing demand on the market.

Regarding the consumer side, we have argued that wine quality is interpreted differently according to a person’s *habitus*. The perception of symbolic capital is shaped by the class positions of consumers (Rössel 2011). In the case of upper- and middle-class consumers with high economic and cultural capital, symbolic positions from the autonomous pole of cultural production fields enjoy high legitimacy.

Our analysis has shown that Bourdieu’s model of the chiasmic structure of fields has considerable power in explaining price differentiation between wineries and differences in the valuation of wine by consumers. Furthermore, our empirical analysis of the consumption side of the market clearly indicates that middle and upper class consumers with higher income, education, and a strong familiarity with and knowledge about the wine field due to their socialization are not only more oriented towards the autonomous pole of the field in terms of sources of information, quality criteria, taste, and distribution channels, but are furthermore also prepared to pay higher prices for a bottle of wine. Finally, they also have a stronger disposition to view wine consumption as a practice that allows for social distinction.

Bourdieu’s theory of fields allowed us to disentangle the workings of symbolic and economic capital that are crucial for the process of product qualification. This demonstrates that the quality uncertainty in markets for products valued for their symbolic qualities,

of which the wine market is one example, is of a different kind than the asymmetric information problem discussed by Akerlof (1970). Price differences stem from differences within the symbolic hierarchy in the field. Furthermore, his idea of a homology between production and consumption is clearly visible in the wine field. Bourdieu's theory of production fields is a comprehensive approach to theorize production, consumption, and price formation in one analytical framework and thus helps in understanding the processes of value creation in the economy, which stand at the center of much current research in economic sociology.

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