Sustainability: a tool for governing wine production in New Zealand?

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Abstract
Governance mechanisms facilitate sustainability transitions by ensuring that people are engaging in socially and environmentally sound practice. This paper analyses the history of the New Zealand wine industry over the past twenty years to trace how agricultural actors handle regulatory and voluntary modes of environmental governance and navigate between them. The empirical basis for the paper comprises 22 semi-structured interviews with industry actors addressing the 'Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand' programme. This qualitative methodology facilitated the collection of historical data as well as the interrogation of the meanings interviewees attributed to particular events, practices or behaviours. A narrative analysis examined how interviewees situated themselves in relation with the sustainability programme and their wider environment. The research identifies the key moments that lead the industry to ground its environmentalism in markets, and to coordinate wine production practice through associated auditing. The historical development of the programme suggests that this was achieved through the industry's wholesale adoption of what had been a voluntary programme. The analysis also reveals that diverse actors involved in New Zealand wine production refer to similar intertwining narratives about the programme that demonstrate a shift from a voluntary to a de facto compulsory scheme. We argue that actors have acquiesced to the expansion of the programme, allowing it to shape wine production in New Zealand. In this context, winegrowers and winemakers relate to the sustainability programme as simultaneously a regulatory and a market-motivated form of governance. The findings provide insight to how collective market strategies paired with sustainability assessments can create a new kind of governance mechanism that bridges economic and social spheres.

Keywords: environmental governance; narratives; private certification; regulation; sustainable agriculture; voluntary programme

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