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Italy’s wine leaders confront a generational decline

Researchers and producers say younger drinkers are turning away, forcing the industry to rethink how it speaks to them

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Wine industry leaders, researchers and young students gathered in Conegliano last week to confront a problem that has become harder to ignore in Italy: wine consumption has fallen across generations, and the losses among younger drinkers have not been made up by those who came after them. The discussion took place at the 79th Assoenologi Congress in the hills of Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco

Superiore Docg, where speakers said the sector needs a new way to speak to people under 30 and under 45 if it wants to keep wine relevant in daily life.

The warning came from Wine Monitor, the research unit of Nomisma, which said its projections show a steady decline in wine consumption as older generations age out and younger ones do not replace them at the same pace. That trend, speakers said, is forcing producers, communicators and trade groups to rethink not only how they market wine but also how they explain it. The old language of tasting notes, technical terms and formal rituals can feel distant to younger consumers, several participants said, especially at a time when many are looking for experiences that feel more direct and less coded.

Paolo de Castro, president of Nomisma and a former Italian agriculture minister and member of the European Parliament, said younger people will be the consumers of tomorrow and that companies need to understand their habits and cultural references before trying to reach them. Marianna Neri of Casanova di Neri, one of the best-known Brunello di Montalcino producers, said young consumers are often intimidated by wine because it is presented as something complicated and reserved for insiders. She described her own role as that of a friendly ambassador for wine and territory, arguing that producers who are closer in age to their audience can help lower barriers.

The issue is not only commercial but cultural, speakers said. Carlo Cambi, a veteran food and wine journalist who moderated part of the discussion, placed wine in a broader frame that included literature, history and philosophy. He also pointed to Pope Leo XIV’s recent encyclical, which compares artificial intelligence to the Tower of Babel and warns against a digital language that becomes uniform and detached from human experience. Cambi used that reference to argue that wine communication has also become too standardized, with critics and communicators relying on technical jargon that can obscure rather than clarify what is in the glass.

Nomisma and Tenute del Leone Alato, the wine holding company of Generali Group, have launched a joint project called “Vino & Giovani” to study those shifts more closely. Igor Boccardo, chief executive of the group, said companies can no longer treat consumer research as optional if they want to preserve continuity across Italy’s wine

supply chain. Denis Pantini, who leads Wine Monitor at Nomisma, said consumption has become increasingly concentrated among older generations while falling among people under 45. Without generational renewal, he said, overall consumption will continue to decline.

The project will unfold in two phases. The first will survey 1,500 people under 30 to map attitudes toward wine. The second will use focus groups and blind tastings to explore taste preferences and perceptions more deeply. Pantini said the goal is to move beyond a simple snapshot of change and build a practical guide for navigating it.

A separate effort already underway in Sardinia offered one example of how that might work. The project “CannoNow: Il vino giovane,” backed by Sardegna Ricerche with the University of Cagliari, IED Cagliari and Assoenologi under the leadership of Riccardo Cotarella, has involved more than 1,000 students in developing new ways to talk about wine. On stage at the congress, students Beatrice Lai and Leo Gambacorta described how their generation sees wine as something often associated with grandparents or with experts who speak in specialized terms.

They said their work aimed to “profanare” wine in the sense of making it less formal and more approachable, not disrespecting it but placing it inside young people’s everyday experiences. The campaign used social media, web content and public events built around a red thread as a symbol linking people to wine and land. The idea drew on the work of Maria Lai, the Sardinian artist known for using thread as a poetic device.

In Cagliari, students said they placed red threads in public spaces as part of a guerrilla marketing effort meant to spark curiosity about responsible drinking. Posters then directed passersby to social media pages where memes, short posts and digital storytelling connected students with wineries on the island. One poster asked in blunt language what tannins and polyphenols actually are before directing viewers to an Instagram page for the project.

The congress also touched on another route for reaching younger audiences: sport. Joanna Wołosz, captain of Imoco Volley Conegliano, whose team is sponsored by Prosecco Doc, told attendees that raising a glass after a hard-fought win or after training can fit within a responsible approach to drinking when it is tied to moderation

and context.