

The great flight from leadership

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 19 Ottobre 2026



I will say it right away, so there is no misunderstanding. **I think one of the most serious risks Italian wine faces today is the renunciation of leadership by those who have exercised it for years.** And I think this risk is greatly underestimated.

I have been reflecting on this for some time, observing two important cooperatives of two important denominations in the same province. I will not name names, because I am not interested in pointing fingers, I am interested in the phenomenon. For many years these two entities were the reference point of their territories. **Today they give the impression of having decided to be so no longer.**

Before going further, however, a clarification is needed. Leadership does not mean being the first or the best. It is

not a matter of rankings, turnover or scores. **Leadership means exposing oneself, agreeing to be a guide, taking responsibility for indicating a direction for others too.** It is a demanding role, one that nobody forces you to take on, but that someone has to fill.

What happened to these two cooperatives? **The causes are various and all understandable.** Market difficulties, first of all. Then the turnover of internal skills, with new managers who had to get their bearings. The renewal of governance, with new presidents and new boards of directors. And finally a growing difficulty in engaging with their own territorial context.

The result is that they have closed in on themselves. **They have focused on their own problems and have stopped guiding the evolution of their denomination.** They are no longer protagonists in the protection consortia and in the other representative institutions. They invest less in communicating their own brand and even less in communicating the values of the territory to which they belong.

It reminds me a lot of what happens in society when the great political and economic crises arrive. Many people take refuge in what is known as "private life". It is a legitimate choice, mind you. **But it forgets a simple thing, namely that the health of each of us also depends on the health of the society in which we live, on political choices, on general economic conditions.** We can shut ourselves in at home, but outside the world continues to decide for us as well.

In wine, exactly the same thing happens. When a leader excludes itself from its own role, the damage affects not only its brand. It also affects, and perhaps even more, the territorial brand. **A denomination that loses its leading companies loses vision, loses voice, loses the ability to make itself heard on the markets.**

This is clearly visible in the struggle of many protection consortia. They struggle to obtain a real contribution from companies, and I am not talking about membership fees. I am talking about ideas, visions, strategies, participation in the decisions that determine the future of a denomination. **If the more structured companies pull back, who is supposed to do it in their place?**

There is also a basic illusion in this retreat into corporate individualism. The illusion that in such a complex phase one can save oneself alone. That is not the case. **Today no wine business, not even the most solid, has the strength to hold up without a healthy production system and denomination behind it.**

And finally there is an aspect that directly concerns reputation. Taking on a guiding role is not only a service rendered to others. It is also one of the strongest factors of recognizability, authority and credibility for a business. **Those who give up leadership give up this asset too, and rebuilding it takes many more years than it takes to lose it.**

I understand well that in difficult times the temptation is to lower one's head and think about one's own accounts. But it is precisely now that companies willing to expose themselves are needed. **Denominations do not guide themselves, and leadership vacuums, in wine as elsewhere, never stay empty for long.** They are usually filled by those with the fewest credentials to do so.

Key points

1. **Leadership means taking responsibility** for guiding others and indicating a direction.

2. **Withdrawal by leading cooperatives** leaves denominations and consortia without vision, voice and strategic contributions.
3. **Corporate individualism is an illusion:** no wine business can hold up without a healthy denomination behind it.
4. **Leadership protects reputation:** authority and credibility take years to rebuild once lost.
5. **Leadership vacuums get filled** quickly, usually by those with the fewest credentials.