



Consumer's role in ecotourism development in the Republic of Moldova

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To cite this article: Mardare, A. (2015). Consumer's role in ecotourism development in the Republic of Moldova. *Lucrările Seminarului Geografic Dimitrie Cantemir*, Vol. 40, pp. 131-142. DOI: 10.15551/lsgdc.v40i0.12

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15551/lsgdc.v40i0.12>





CONSUMER'S ROLE IN ENOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Aliona Mardare¹

Abstract. The increased demand for enotourism can be explained by the growing interest of consumers in culturally orientated activities: holidays become an opportunity for them to get trained, to develop their knowledge in several areas. The heritage, whether material (architecture) or intangible (customs, traditions), has an increasingly important role in the choice of touristic destinations and activities. The Republic of Moldova tends to become an enotourism destination and in order to have a marketing oriented on winery products promotion and sales, it is necessary to know the consumer's expectations and behavior.

Keywords: enotourism, demand, enotourism offer, enotourists, wine.

1. Introduction

For a marketing oriented on winery products promotion and sales, it is necessary to know the consumer's expectations and behavior.

After Casting, a basic variable of buying behavior is the customer's need or necessity, which is defined as a *psychological emptiness stage* which the consumer is trying to fill, expectations being closely related to needs (Castaing, Y., 2007).

Knowing the customer's needs and expectations allows us to adjust winery products for the final consumer's satisfaction. This is important because the quality perceived by the consumer will mostly be defined as a response to his needs and expectations.

One of the enotourism basics is to understand that the consumer doesn't travel only for buying wine, but primarily to discover a universe. Hence the winegrower/winemaker focuses on enotourism development in order to increase his direct sales, namely his wine sales (a material product). The customer, on the contrary, does not come to the winegrower/winemaker to buy wine, but to exploit a universe, to find out more about the winemaker's lifestyle and to visit farms. So, the consumer needs a service (a tourism service, which is an immaterial product). This is one of the enotourism complexities. The winemaker/winegrower essentially sells physical products. And so as to sell products to the consumers, he will have to offer a service (an immaterial product) that he doesn't have control on.

Thus, to know the consumer, the winegrower/winemaker should take the client's role and ask those in his environment what expectations they have from a visit to a winery. The

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winegrower must exchange views with his visitors, asking which services attract them and which do not meet their needs or ask for suggestions on ways to improve the enotourism offer. This is to improve the offer for potential visitors.

This article aims at highlighting the consumer's profile in Moldova for the development of the enotourism offer in this country. There were used several methods: the questionnaire, analysis and comparative ones, to identify the enotourist portrait and the types of tourists, and to assess their perceptions of enotourism as well as their motivation and behavior.

2. Types of consumers/enotourists

Enotourism is a broad concept, there is no single consumer profile, there are several, and it is important to note that different types of customers will have different behavior and requirements. There should be distinguished different categories of consumers. Thus there have been made many studies in order to classify the consumers of enotourism products.

AFIT (French Agency for Tourism Engineering, which became ODIT France - Tourist Observation, Development and Engineering) distinguishes 4 categories of enotourists in French wine regions, classified based on their motivation, different profiles and consumer habits.

✓ **Vineyard-lovers (*amateurs*)**, which represent about 20% of enotourists, they are people with a good knowledge of wines, and in particular of vineyards, they regularly visit the region for wine tasting and enjoy "noncommercial" accommodation (their second home, trailer, family camper), they spend most of the time among wines, they come particularly to taste and buy wines;

✓ **Wine-lovers (*amateurs*)** whose main motivation is the wine but also the wine tourism attractions (landscapes, architecture, etc.), represent 22% of customers, they include more foreigners compared to other groups, they are usually for the first time in the wine region, they visit it to improve their wine knowledge and to purchase wines;

✓ **Region-lovers** proportion is the same as of the wine-lovers (20%), they have little knowledge of wine, generally they come quite regularly to the wine region for sightseeing, for the vineyard area and they spend sufficient time on wine tasting and getting to know the wine;

✓ **Tourist-lovers** represent 38% of enotourists, they are mostly foreigners and young people, they are eager to explore the whole region in terms of cultural tourism, with activities focused on wine and vineyards, given the importance they have in the region. They buy quite a few wines, but they are willing to pay for the tour and wine tasting.

Excursionists are a separate category of tourists that can be added to the ones mentioned above. Excursionists are "local visitors who make a round trip during the day". They have wine and vineyard related activities and are generally youngsters.

Another classification of enotourists is done in Australia by Charters and Ali-Knight (2002). They have determined 4 categories of tourists who like wines and vineyards.

- **"Wine lovers"** – persons who show great interest and extensive understanding in wine pedagogy. Their motivation is very clear: they are open to buy wines, learn about wines and do wine tasting in wineries.
- **"The connoisseurs"** are "wine lovers" who have a thirst for knowledge. They are very interested in obtaining information about the whole winemaking process. So the "experts" focus mainly on the level of education when visiting a wine region.
- **"Wine interested"** are those persons willing to taste the wine before visiting the winery. They are interested in learning about wine storage and winemaking process as much as "wine lovers", but they are less interested in food and wine pairing.

- **"Wine novice"** are curious tourists. Because of their lack of knowledge about these vineyards, they are reserved in their desire to visit vineyards, but they are interested in wine tasting and going on a winery tour.

Therefore, there have been examined several classifications of enotourists in France, an Old World state and in Australia, a New World wine and winemaking state. If we compare these categories of enotourists, it can be seen that European enotourists focus on wine culture considering it a lifestyle, while enotourists of the New World are focused on winegrowing and winemaking knowledge.

Through these types of tourists it can be inferred that a tourist whose motivation is to visit a wine region based on an enotourism offer is called **enotourist**.

3. Tourists' arrivals

Through tourist arrivals it can be assessed the attractiveness of the region, since arrivals determine the success of a tourist destination. In the last 10 years, the development of tourist traffic in the Republic of Moldova shows a relatively decreasing trend in the number of visitors, as a result of the negative impact of the socio-economic and political situation of the country. The graph shows that by the dynamics of the number of tourists recorded by travel agencies, Moldova is a successful tourist destination. And it still has the potential to become successful, especially taking into consideration the current growing European trend compared to the old Soviet one.

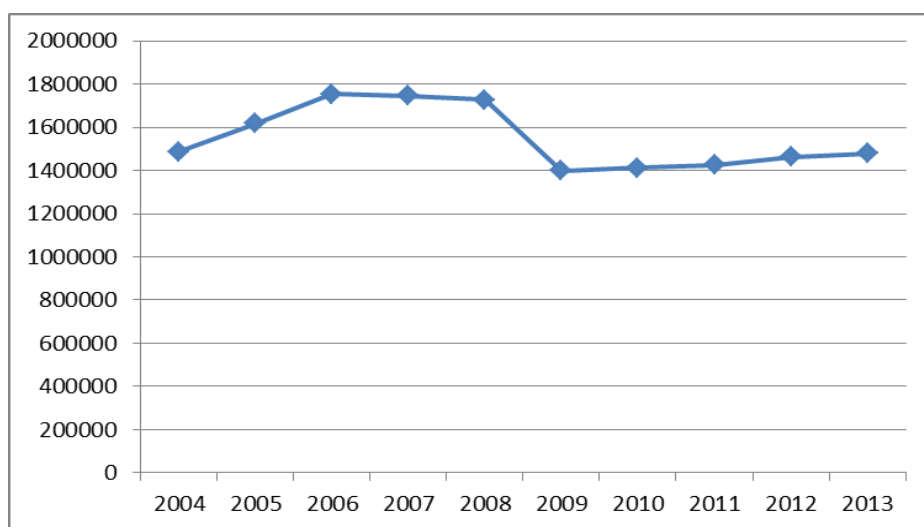


Figure 1: Evolution of tourists' arrivals in the Republic of Moldova

Source: www.statistica.md

In the Republic of Moldova, tourists can't be differentiated from enotourists, since there is no institution that would collect such data, but according to the survey data taken from several travel agencies, it results that about 70-80% of tourists choose to visit a winery or to go to a wine event (figure 2 and 3). Chateau Vartely is a starting winery which annually receives more than 10 thousand tourists, of which 35% are foreigners fig.2. The ExpoWine Moldova event is an international wine exhibition which gathers more than 10 thousand tourists annually (figure 3).

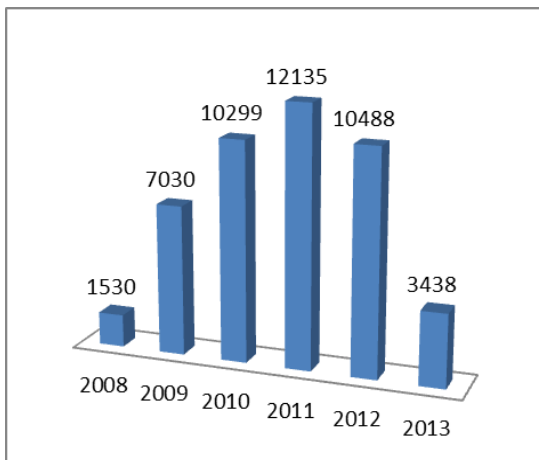


Fig. 2: Evolution of tourists' arrivals at Chateau Vartely

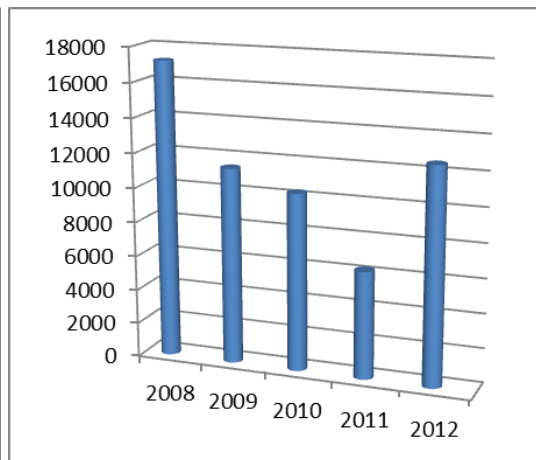


Fig. 3: Evolution of tourists' arrivals at wine exhibition ExpoWine Moldova

Data source: Chateau Vartely and Travel Agency of Moldova

The wine crisis that has begun in 2013, generated by the Russian embargo, made many wineries refocus on tourists so as to create conditions for direct sales of wines. Thus, enotourism is perceived as a crisis rescue method.

It is difficult to analyze tourists' arrivals after the wine crisis in Moldova, given that only a year has passed. But once the enotourism offer is continuously growing, the number of enotourists is increasing. It can be proved from the answers given by the respondent winegrowers/winemakers, who have recently started to focus on the tourism branch and are already visited by an increasing number of tourists and excursionists.

It is more and more solicited the tourism focused on the needs and expectations of European tourists, given the actual economic and political attitude of the Russian Federation (which until recently was the main source of tourists to our state).

According to figure 4 in 2013, Moldova was mostly visited by Romanian tourists, more than 2,000 Romanians visit our country annually.

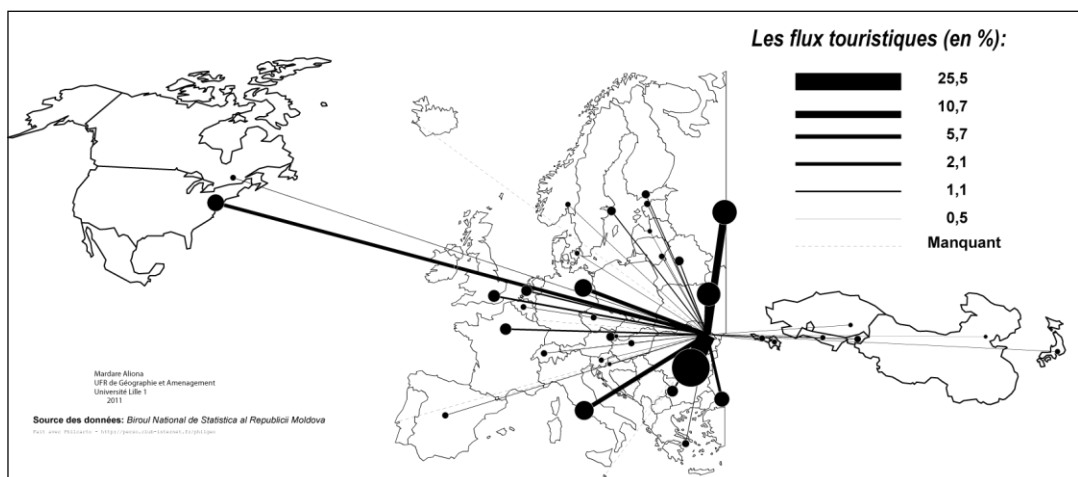


Figure 4: Flow of tourists from Moldova

Data source: Travel Agency of Moldova

More than 1000 tourists come from the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Annually there is an increase of the number of tourists coming from the EU developed countries, such as Italy (more than 600 tourists), Poland (more than 800 tourists), Germany (more than 700 tourists), France (more than 300 tourists) etc.

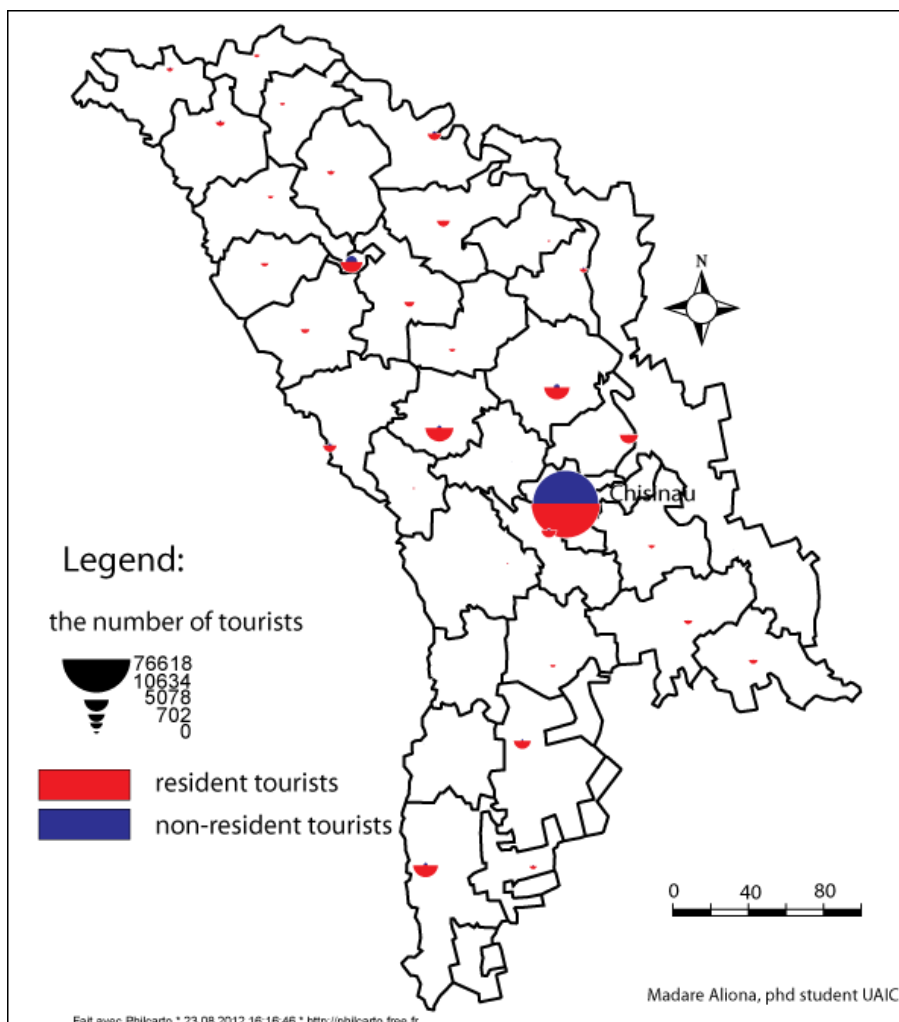


Figure 5: Tourist arrivals by districts of Republic of Moldova (2013)

Data source: www.statistica.md

We chose a cartographic representation of tourists' arrivals in a territorial administrative unit in the country for the year of 2012, the last year for which there are statistics in this area (fig.5). In this diagram it can be seen that the situation of tourists' arrivals per rayon is close to the rayon accommodation capacity. 90% of tourists' arrivals are in Chisinau municipality, where there is an accommodation and transportation infrastructure that meets the requirements of all types of tourists.

Enotourism is done most often around the capital city. Most wineries with a large number of tourists are located close to the capital. Here it can be given the example of the wine cellars, Cojușna, Mileștii Mici, which every year receive more than 20 thousand tourists.

Orhei region is visited by a large number of tourists because of the tourist area Old Orhei National Park and thus the nearby wine cellars benefit from this valuable heritage. Chateau Vartely and Branesti cellars are situated in Orhei and receive over 10,000 tourists annually (figure 5).

In other administrative-territorial units tourists' arrivals are recorded only in rayonal centres where there is also an accommodation infrastructure.

4. The enotourist's profile

Based on the surveys done on a number of 500 tourists from Moldova and 100 tourists from Burgundy region, we have made a comparative analysis of enotourists to establish some elements, such as:

- Typology of tourists;
 - Evaluation of tourists' perception of enotourism;
 - Assessment of the tourists' motivation in choosing Moldova
- Questionnaires were done on tourists who visited wineries and wine festivals.

5. The enotourist's portrait

According to the study conducted by ATOUT France, the general portrait of an enotourist is the following:

- mostly male;
- about 46 years old;
- visits with pleasure the vineyards in couple, with friends or family;
- from higher social and occupational categories;
- often has quite high revenues;
- regularly consumes wine;
- relatively often visits wine regions;
- in most cases uses the car to go to vineyards.

After analyzing all the results of the questionnaire on the tourists' portrait, it can be identified an ***enotourist's profile in Moldova***. It has the following characteristics:

- resident of the Republic of Moldova (65%);
- mostly male (60%);
- visits wine regions together with friends(45%);
- quite young, about 35 years old;
- a normal employee (40%).

6. Tourists' perception of enotourism

Tourists' perceptions of enotourism are divided. Most tourists were not aware of the term "enotourism" , for this reason many of them preferred to respond negatively when they were asked whether they considered themselves enotourists. Only 18% of consumers of enotourism products in Moldova consider themselves enotourists (fig.6), this number is twice lower than in the Burgundy region. The reason is that in Moldova the enotourism is poorly promoted, thus people do not have where to get this knowledge from. A minority of respondents understand well the meaning of the term *enotourism*, but they prefer to be called ordinary tourists.

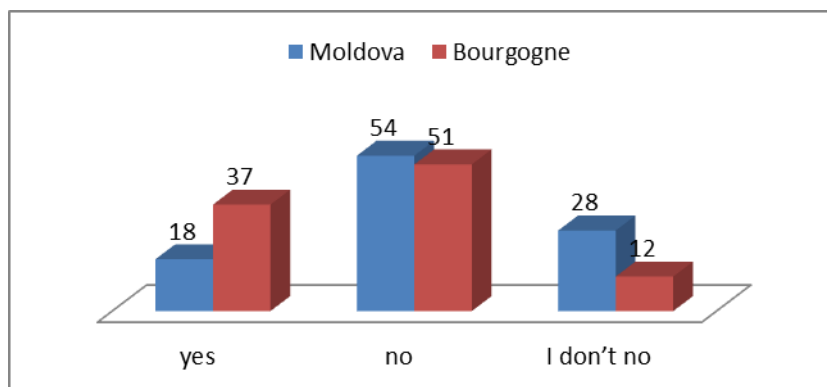


Figure 6: You are enotourist?

Burgundy region has all the advantages to be a developed wine region. More than 90% of respondents believe that Burgundy is a great wine region, especially that it is to be entered in the UNESCO world heritage due to the climate specificity. 80% of respondents believe that Burgundy is a great touristic and enotouristic region (fig.6). In Moldova, on the contrary, more than 80% of respondents believe that it isn't a touristic and enotouristic region. Approximately 50% of respondents consider that Moldova is, however, a wine region (fig.5).

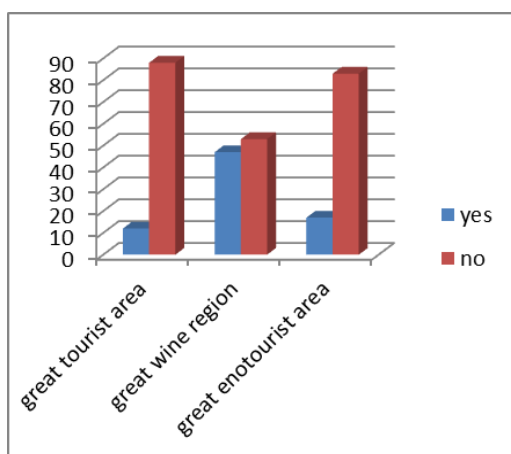


Figure 5: Moldova is...

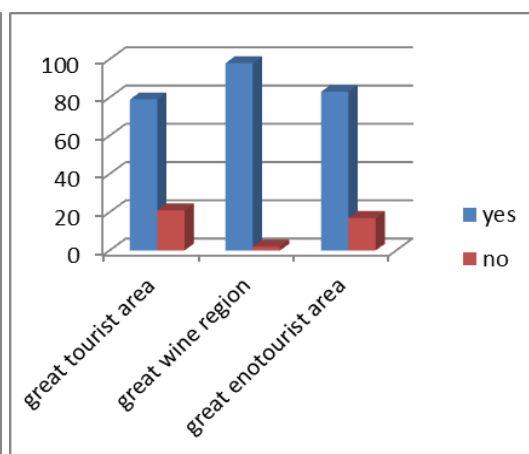


Figure 6: Burgundy is...

As pointed out above, Burgundy as of 60% of respondents is a big enotouristic region and therefore has a very rich enotourism offer, 29% of respondents believe that it is rich enough, and 8% - that it is rich. No enotourist said that Burgundy would have a poor enotourism offer. Enotourists from Moldova are not sure that this country would have a rich enotourism offer, on the contrary, 20% of them consider the offer to be poor and very poor. Only 15% of respondents answered that the enotourism offer of Moldova is very rich and were impressed by the country. But this percentage is quite high given the tourism development level in Moldova (eg the lack of accommodation structures). Most tourists think that this offer is rich enough (30%) and rich (8%) (figure 7).

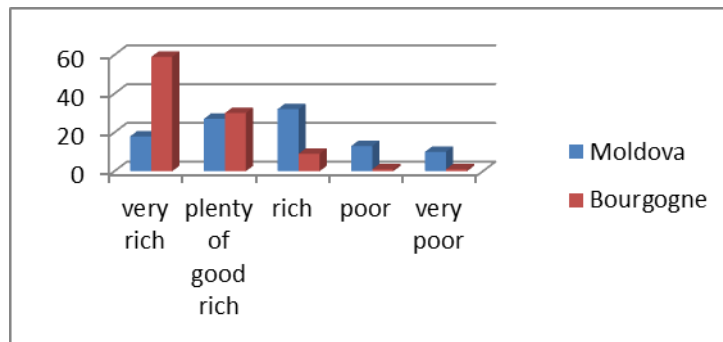


Figure 7: Moldovan tourism offer is...

Very few were those willing to answer open questions. Especially tourists visiting Burgundy region avoided the open questions, there are only 9 individuals who answered the question: Why? (they have rated the question Enotourism Offer is ...?). 6 of 9 consider the enotourism offer rich and explained that by the following statements:

- "Quality wines"
- "Beautiful vineyards as a result of the specific climate"
- "Many wine cellars where various wines can be tasted"
- "Picturesque vineyard landscape"
- "Beautiful architecture of the wine villages"
- "The best wines in the world"

All these answers are, in fact, the arguments why Burgundy region is famous: quality wine, picturesque vineyard landscape, beautiful vineyards, numerous wine cellars open for wine tasting.

The same question was answered by 19 tourists from Moldova. The most common statements were:

- "Sumptuous wine events"
- "Quality wines"
- "Beautiful, huge wine cellars"
- "Nicely decorated tasting rooms with tables full of food and cheerful music"
- "Great wine potential"

In Burgundy, 3 of 9 respondents answering to this question gave arguments why the enotourism offer is poor. The respondents mentioned the lack of close communication between stakeholders and wine producers: "the reluctant producers", "the lack of promotion of small producers", "the enotourism offer isn't diverse enough". And in this sense, in the Republic of Moldova the respondents reveal the following arguments: the lack of accommodation and transport infrastructure and poor accessibility.

7. Enotourists' motivation

Wine is an important motivation for tourists to visit Burgundy wine region. According to the results of the questionnaire, in this region 35% of respondents state that the discovery of wines and vineyards is their main motivation to visit this region, 26% say that wine and vineyards are one of the decisive reasons for staying in this region, and only 16% say that wine plays no role that would motivate their arrival in this wine region (fig.8).

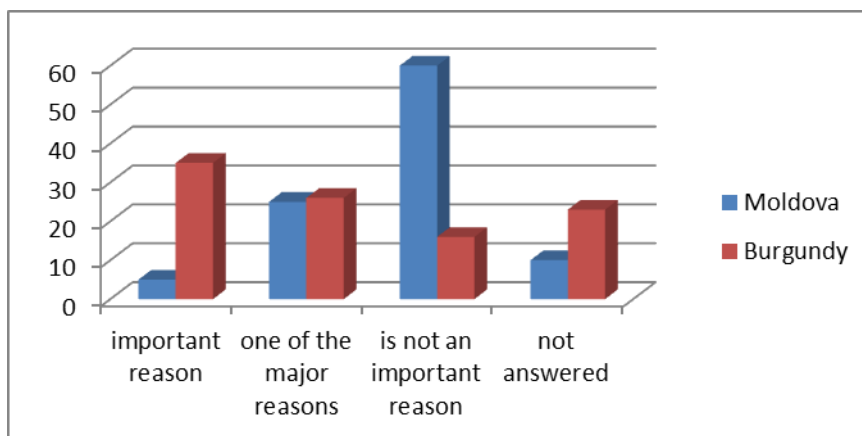


Figure 8: Wine and vineyards are an important reason for tourists coming to Moldova / Burgundy?

Compared to Burgundy region, Moldova is the opposite. The Republic of Moldova is not seen yet as a wine touristic destination, because wine isn't in tourists' point of view an important reason for them to visit this country. The number of people claiming that the Moldavian wine and vineyards have no significance in terms of visiting this country is going up to 60% and only 5% believe that Moldovan wine and vineyards are a basic reason to spend time here. 25% of respondents believe that wine and vineyards are one of the important reasons for visiting this state. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova, 36% of tourists come to Moldova on business, 30% come here for resting, recreation and leisure, and 28% - for treatment. The results of the questionnaire to the question about the foreign tourists' motivation in choosing to visit Moldova will prove what NBS results. 65% of tourists coming from other states say that they visit Moldova on business. And another 7% come to Moldova to visit relatives or friends, 2% - for amusement and 1% - for recreation (fig.9).

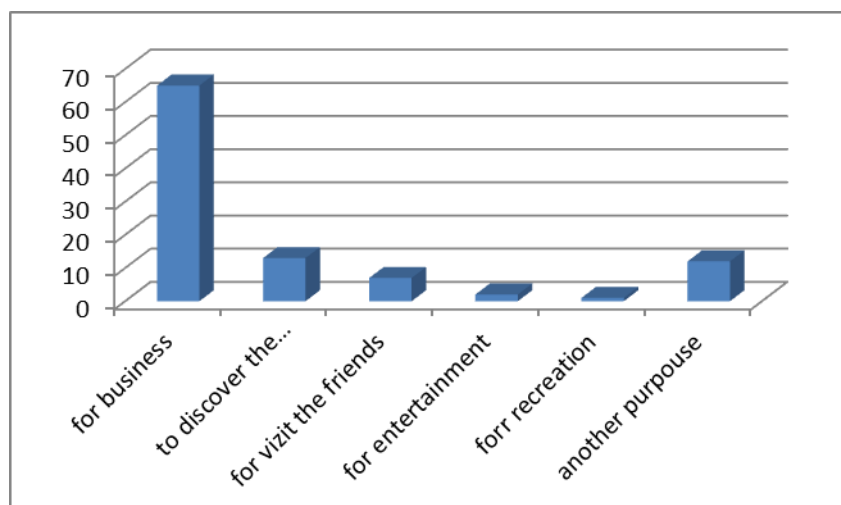


Figure 9: For what purpose you visit Moldova?

Only 13% say they came to Moldova to discover this country in terms of culture: "for curiosity about the culture of another country";

"for history and culture";
 "for the Cultural Event "Wine Day";
 "For the exhibition ExpoWine Moldova";
 "for the winecellars notoriety for having the largest collection of wines";
 "for the wine culture";
 "for the quality wines";
 "for cultural experience";
 "for visiting towns and villages to discover the Moldovan lifestyle"
 "for tasting Moldovan wine in its origin country" etc.

More than 10% of respondents chose not to answer this question.

Enotourism practice shows that most tourists come to Burgundy region on the following purpose: to taste and buy wines (48%). The second identified reason is related to the desire to visit wine cellars and "chateaux" sites (21%). Then, it follows the motivation to discover the landscape, architecture and wine cities / villages on the Wine Route (15%). Also, the local gastronomy is an important reason to visit this region (14%). And 2% of surveyed tourists are willing to visit museums and, especially, the Hospices de Beaune museum.

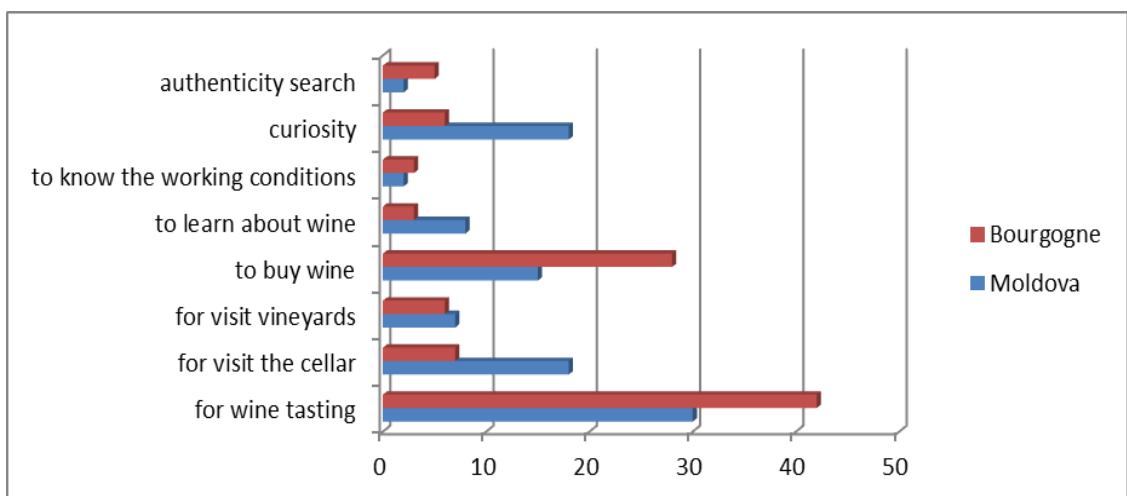


Figure 10: You visit the wineries for....

The main reason for tourist to visit a particular winery is wine tasting (fig.10). Both in Moldova (30%) and in Burgundy (42%), this motivation was mentioned by most respondents to the questionnaire. For Burgundy region wine tasting comes together with the wine purchasing (28%), while in Moldova it is preferred a winery tour (18%) to enrich the tourists' knowledge of wine (8%) or to satisfy their curiosity (18%).

Conclusions

The enotourism development, like any other form of tourism, depends on consumer's aspirations, needs and demands. Currently in Moldova, there is no focus on studying the consumer, the method being "less important in the development of enotourism" (as stated by winegrowers / winemakers), which is explained by the lack of fierce competition in this sector.

The questionnaire method enabled customers' segmentation and highlighted enotourism products and the customers' motivation and behavior in order to develop a new method for

enotourism development in the Republic of Moldova. Thus, the Moldovan enotourism offer should mostly correspond to a very young customer who resides there and has an average wage in the country's economy. It is therefore necessary to adjust the offered prices to this type of consumers, given the high prices specified in the travel packages.

It was shown that enotourists' perception of enotourism is very vague, which explains the need for a strong promotion of this domain among Moldavians, by any means and through any available materials and countryside people, e.g.:

- Advertising on TV channels with a wider country coverage,
- Many wine events held all over the country, not only in the city,
- Gastronomic exhibitions in localities,
- Free posters and leaflets distributed by local state-owned post-offices etc.

If we consider the classification done by Charters S. (2002), it could be concluded that in Moldova, enotourists are generally of two categories: *beginners*, curious tourists who are interested in wine tasting and "*wine interested*", who are interested in getting information on the whole winemaking process. Thus, for this type of consumers the offer should be as attractive as possible and contain surprising elements to positively impress the customers and determine them to certainly continue to promote the offer.

The comparison of enotourists in Moldova with those from the Burgundy region offered the possibility of determining the development stage of this domain, having as reference a highly developed wine state. In conclusion, this stage of the Republic of Moldova is far from a developed enotourism (compared to the French one), but development can be achieved in short term due to the rich potential Moldova has.

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