

## WINE TOURISM DEMAND - A CHALLENGE FOR ROMANIAN WINE TOURISM CASE STUDY – WESTERN MOLDAVIA REGION

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**Abstract:** Wine tourism is a new form of tourism, which is based on an important vineyard and winemaking potential. Romania holds a remarkable vineyard potential, but its recovery from the tourism point of view is in an early stage. However, the number of people interested in practicing this form of tourism is growing from year to year. Because the offer largely depends on the demand, this article aims at emphasizing some traits of tourists surveyed within Moldavia wine region, in order to get to know in this way the development of wine tourism in Romania, specifically in the region of Moldavia. We applied a total of 100 questionnaires on tourists at wineries, during tasting or wine festivals. Moldavia region has been chosen because it has the largest vineyard area, the largest wine production and thus the greatest number of wine producers.

**Keywords:** *wine tourism, wine tourist, vineyard, Western Moldavia, wine.*

### 1. What is wine tourism?

Wine tourism is one of the first methods of valuating wine by facilitating the meeting between the producer and the consumer who, being on holiday, is first curious, available and receptive, then initiated, becoming the best ambassador of the vine (Roumegoux report, 2008).

The VINTUR European wine tourism space gives a very vague definition regarding this form of tourism as well: "the wine product is the integration under the same thematic concept of the resources and services of interest, existing or potential, in a wine-growing area". Therefore the definition is quite general, there is a lack of details as regards the resources, the interest tourist services or the motivations of the people interested in this form of tourism. This high degree of generality in the definition could be due to a lack of rigorous practical work and of some surveys made on those who practice this type of tourism.

Dubrule (2007) defines the wine tourism as the set of services related to the stays of tourists in the wine-growing regions: visits of cellars, tasting, accommodation, catering and activities related to the wine, to local products and regional traditions. This definition brings a list of wine-related products. However, the vineyard landscape and the intangible values are left aside. A more comprehensive definition of wine tourism is that this form of tourism is based on four main factors represented by (a) producers (who want the product – wine - to be of quality and to include all the characteristics of the *terroir*), they have to rely on marketing opportunities; (b) the tourist actors - the travel agencies that have the role in the promotion of the culture of the wine; (c) the consumers who are the wine tourists and who are characterized by behaviours and motivations; (d) the image of the region on which depends the choice of consumers for a wine-growing region.

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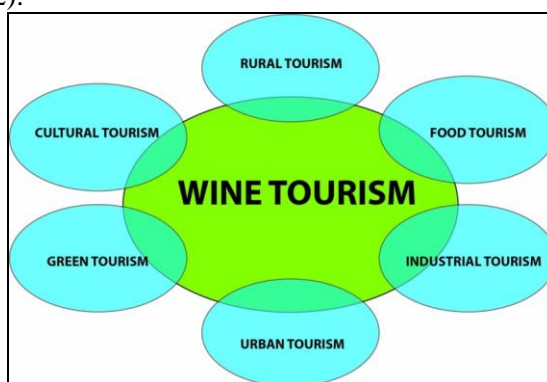
Born in a difficult economic context, wine tourism has become a form of tourism that still evolves (Hall et al. 2000). Unfortunately, wine tourism and its links with other forms of tourism have received little attention in the literature. In South Africa, Preston - White (2000) indicated that if the tasting of wine could be the reason of the existence of wine roads, only tasting did not make the success of wine tourism; the exploration of the landscape, of the regional cuisine, history and architecture of the place are also crucial. Sparks (2007) identified two key attributes of the tourism experience in the vineyards beyond the experience of the wine itself: the experience of the destination, on the one hand, and the personal development on the other. Finally, if the diversification of the offer allows to enrich the experience, the intrinsic quality of this experience also involves the quality of the other services offered, especially in terms of design: physical spaces, central and peripheral products, merchandising (hospitality, help to the visit, commercial aspects). Gombault (2011) notes that wine tourism is only one form among other tourism forms, in general, and cultural tourism in particular. Considering the wine tourism not as a specific tourism form but rather as a generic form of cultural tourism (heritage and creative) allows its integration in the tourist offer of the territory, avoiding to make it appear as an "oenoland" cut of the territory, a kind of enclave that would only interest wine loving consumers.

We can also consider that wine tourism is at the crossroads of other forms of tourism (Merlin, 2006) such as heritage tourism, industrial tourism (Debos 2008), green tourism and cultural tourism.

Sophie Lignon-Darmailac (2009) explains precisely that "wine tourism is a particular form of rural tourism through its vineyards, a tourism of leisure in the vineyards along the wine trails, cultural tourism that values heritage, caves, cellars, wine museums, gastronomic tourism punctuated by tastings and the discovery of the food associated to the visited wine", (or as it is called by Deyreux, 2011 - "locavore" gastronomy or "terroiriste"). We may add an urban tourism, during major winemakers celebrations or other urban contexts, as it happens in Hong Kong, where there is an active wine tourism hospitality whose tender is based on independent wine bars (Tasting, Sparkz), large hotels, or business clubs (China Club, Jockey Club), wine and food restaurant (Spoon, Oyster and Wine bar, wine bar and Grill) and events around wine (Walke Wine, Wine and Dine Festival) (Gombault, 2011). In respect of the interference between wine and rural tourism, there are regions where wine tourism is closely integrated in the rural tourism and heritage of rural areas, as for example in Calabria, Italy.

Wine tourism is also an economic discovery tourism, by paying visits to providers, big houses or companies (France ATOUT, 2010).

It is rarely a discrete activity, but it can be done in combination with eco-cultural tourism or adventure tourism and participants are unlikely to separate these forms and types of tourism (Charters, 2002).



*Figure 1 Wine tourism - at the crossroads of other types and forms of tourism*

At the border of all these forms and types of tourism (Fig.1), wine tourism occupies a unique position in terms of the representation of the local heritage, which can be complex, fragile and with an undefined outline.

## 2. Wine tourism demand

The simple difference between a tourist and a wine tourist is that the "tourist is a visitor who spends a night outside his home; a wine tourist spends it in a wine region"(Bloch, 2011). So "wine tourists" are consumers of wine products who spend at least one night in a wine region.

## 3. The segmentation of tourists - a qualitative analysis

"The wine and food can be and are often the main reasons for travelling to a region, and not only a secondary activity. Many tourists consider that the sun, the sea and the sand are of much greater importance than food and wine, which are means of subsistence, but this concept comes as a welcome step for the gourmets of us, who have always considered good food and wine as one of the most important aspects of a holiday"(Morrison, Cai, 2002).

Thus, starting from the wine tourists' motivations, several studies have been conducted, trying to identify the segments of consumers. A first example is the study made by ATOUT France, which designated two broad categories of wine tourists, according to two axes: (Lespinasse, 2011): (a) Axis 1: the sense (the felt versus knowledge) - this axis is fundamental insofar as it highlights the importance of emotions, senses, aesthetic pleasures in addition to the mere knowledge or science of wine; (b) Axis 2: wine as an asset, element of a tourism ecosystem and heritage. This axis clearly identifies the audience for which wine is an asset with its own codes, its own know-how, and inseparable of a more global way of life.

Four categories of wine tourist emerge: Epicureans, Classics, Explorers and Experts.

**The Epicureans** (wine, exaltation of the senses) are those who feel the wine as an exaltation of the senses. In practice, they are looking for a cocktail of sensations that surpasses the importance of aesthetics (the beauty of the landscapes, colours, odours...) and gastronomy discovered by flavours (pleasure, well-being). This customer is sensitive to the vineyard landscapes, nature, he seeks sensory entertainment. He is interested in technology and knows the least. He is fond of all kinds of activities.

**Classics** (wine heritage) consider wine as the heart of a heritage, hence an approach of association between wine and the environment that surrounds it: history, culture, architecture and gastronomy. There's no wine without culture. As Lignon-Darmaillac says (2010), they are interested most in wine as a cultural marker.

**Explorers (the alchemy wine)** feel wine as a work of art, (magic of transformation, mystery wine). Sensitive to share secrets, food and wine pairing (gastronomy and *terroir*), they favour conviviality and exchange.

**Experts** (wine science) consider wine as a science, a product of a know-how, technical expertise and a social construction, a world of masters with its codes, its hierarchies, its territories, and its experts.

Another classification of tourists who prefer this form of tourism was undertaken by Charters S. and Ali - Knight (2002), in Australia, by setting the tourists who love wine (the wine lovers), those with a great knowledge of wine (the *connaisseurs*), those interested (wine interested), and novice (novice wine tourists). This categorisation of tourists came as a completion of the study which had previously identified three categories: "wine lovers", "wine interested" and "curious tourists" (Hall and Macionis, 1998). Therefore, this segmentation was a starting point for further studies.

The "**wine lover**" is defined as a person who has a great interest and extended understanding of the wine sector. Their motivation is very clear. They are open to buy wine, learn about wine and to taste wine in cellars.

*Connaisseurs* are "wine lovers" but they have a great thirst for knowledge. They are very interested in information on the entire process of winemaking. Therefore the *connaisseurs* focus especially on the educational level when they visit a winegrowing region.

"**Wine interested**" is quite likely to have attended a tasting before his visit to the cave. He is interested in learning about the storage and aging of wine as the "**wine lovers**" but he is less concerned with the agreement food and wine.

The "**novice**" is the tourist, the "**curious tourist**" as Hall (1998) called him. Because of their lack of knowledge in wine production aspects, they are reluctant to visit vineyards, but they are more interested in tasting and making a tour of the cellar.

We have presented an example of segmentation made in Australia, a New World country and an example made in France, a country of Old World wine. A cautious conclusion must be drawn on the differences and similarities between the two visions. Wine tourists are, firstly, visitors of a territory, and if the vineyard is not the main reason for the visit, the existence of wine offers could be greatly involved in the choice of a destination.

Moreover, European wine tourists are more focused on wine culture, its integration as a way of life, compared to the New World wine tourists who tend to focus on the knowledge of the vine, wine and winemaking process. Here is how the wine culture is steeped in the consciousness of the European tourists. Later, Ramirez (2002) provides a more precise classification, distinguishing exactly the holiday motivations:

- (a) Lovers of the vineyard - perform for long stays in non-commercial accommodation, outside buying and wine tasting, their stay is devoted to family or friends;
- (b) Wine lovers - carry out short stays in commercial accommodation;
- (c) Lovers of the region - this clientele is distinguished by the achievement of her stays, rather in commercial accommodation, and motivations of visits less associated with the purchase of wine. The attractiveness of the region lies in the natural and cultural environment;
- (d) Lovers of the tourism offer - wine and vineyard are one of the elements of the attractiveness of the region, but they first want to know the cultural and heritage offer, that of towns and villages. They buy less wine than the average.

#### **4. The wine tourist's profile**

According to the same French example, the study made by ATOUT France, the average portrait of the wine tourist looks as follows:

- the wine tourist is predominantly male;
- the average age is 46 years old;
- he visits the vineyards within a couple, with friends or family;
- he belongs to a CSP + (upper socioprofessional category);
- average household income is quite high;
- he regularly consumes wine;
- he relatively often visits wineproducing regions;
- he frequently uses a car for his trips through the vineyards

Women's perception of wine and wine tourism differs from that of men, as they more easily combine a cultural and sensory dimension. The visit usually takes place within a couple or with friends and family. Among wine consumers, some are casual consumers (1-2 times per week), others are regular users (every day). The vast majority of wine tourist clients conduct their visit without resorting to tourism intermediaries.

## 5. The Romanian wine tourist's profile

Based on questionnaires applied to a number of 100 tourists in Western Moldavia, we analysed wine tourist customers in order to:

- establish the typology of tourists
- assess the tourists' perception on wine
- assess tourists' motivations for choosing this region
- assess the knowledge of tourists on Romanian wines
- prioritize the importance of information sources

Questionnaires were applied to the tourists in Moldavia region (the most important and the largest wine region) who were found in the cellars, tasting wine, or at wine festivals. The questionnaire consists of 34 questions, out of which the first six are meant to identify the profile of the wine tourist, by means of socio-demographic data; seven questions are meant to help forming a perception on wine tourism, twelve to investigate the motivation of tourists in choosing the region, while one question is intended to shape the vision of the tourists on the region and one question aims at highlighting the importance of the sources of information. From the same point of view there are 11 dichotomous questions (with two answer alternatives), 9 multiple choice (more than one or all may be chosen), 5 open questions and 9 questions with several alternatives of answer but with only one possible choice.

### A. *Tourists' type*

The first questions referred to the socio-professional situation in order to be able to make a typology of tourists who like this form of tourism.

Among all participants, men (64%) were more numerous than women. The data show that, for Moldavia region, the new consumers are young people, aged between 26 and 35 years. It can be said that Moldavia is a destination which can help educate the taste of consumers and raise the awareness on the importance of quality wine.

The socio-professional category reveals that in Moldavia almost everyone wanted to show the importance of his social position. The fact that they have higher education thus belongs to the desire of young people to assert themselves in any field. What is important is that they are open to all that is "fashionable" and they want to experience the new. We need therefore educated tourists to understand the differences between quality wine and table wine, who can appreciate the meticulous work of a wine-grower who annually makes wine cultivation his work. On the second place we find the employees and in a smaller number the other socio-professional categories.

Concerning the origin of the tourists, most came from Romania (74%), 8% from France, 16% from Poland and 2% from Germany.

### B. *Tourists' perception on wine tourism.*

The questionnaire included questions that helped drawing a conclusion on the vision of the tourists on this form of tourism.

Thus, at the question "Are you wine tourists?" the percentage was large enough: 32% admitted being wine tourists, 59% gave negative responses and only 9% did not know whether or not they were wine tourists. While the majority of the subjects understood the purpose of the questionnaire, most of them preferred to consider themselves mere tourists than wine-tourists.

For the question «How do you find the Moldavian wine tourism offer? the responses were various. Tourists are not well decided on the Moldavian wine tourism offer; some who had also seen other wine-producing regions were able to make comparisons, others who were for the first time in a cellar and who did not consider themselves as wine tourists appreciated the regions' initiatives to develop in this direction. For example, 26% considered the Moldavian wine tourism offer as being rich (this is a quite high percentage considering the

issues related to tourist facilities: the lack of accommodation facilities in the vineyards). The answers are balanced, 27% said that the Moldavian offer is quite rich, 23% moderately rich and 20% rich enough. Only 4% of the answers are really negative, considering the Moldavian offer being not rich at all.

The negative aspects were better highlighted by the following question: "In your opinion, what does the Moldavian wine tourism offer lack? "

The answers were really rich in details:

- promotion – 39% of the respondents claimed that it lacks promotion, marketing;
- diversity and wine tourism offer in the online environment
- producers are waiting for customers to come, but without efforts
- authorities' help
- offers from tourism agencies and/or cellars
- premium wines
- collection wines
- tourism accommodation
- more fairs, especially equipped places from where you can buy wine
- collaborations between producers

Tourists are therefore aware of the value of the wine region of Moldavia, but they are also aware of all the weak points that this region holds. 32% consider it is a major tourist area, 68% think it is a great wine region, while 58% consider it is a great wine tourism region.

#### *C. Tourists' motivations for choosing the region.*

In terms of the responses to the question "Why did you come to Moldavia?", we received balanced answers, but the first position is occupied by the interest of tourists in coming to parties, shows and exhibitions (20%), the second is the intention of seeing friends, family (19%), while the vineyard received the same number of answers as the interest in visiting towns or villages (16%), several times, both answers being related. The main reason why tourists were found in farms was tasting (36% of tourists). In Moldavia we deal, as we said, with a taste education tourism that is why the second response that was received from tourists is learning about wine, then a visit to the vineyard (14%), curiosity (12%), and desire to learn (11%). To the open question "Why did you choose to visit Moldavia wine region?" the responses were:

- curiosity - 15 replies
- making a comparative analysis
- easily accessible
- tradition,
- pleasure - 5 responses
- experience - 3 responses
- notoriety
- professional interest - 4 responses
- tasting - 3 responses
- the quality of wine and its history

Moldavian wine is specifically sought out of curiosity, for documentation, for experience, but also for fun or for tasting. , Moreover, the tourists coming in a cellar persevere and seek to see other caves, too. So, to the question "Have you visited or are you going to visit other wineries?" 68% said yes, while the rest said no.

In respect of buying wine in Moldavia, 52% used to buy wine, 39% did not do it at all and 9% did not want to pronounce themselves. Most of them had also visited other places of wine and participated in other events associated to wine (for example, 48% of those who gave a positive answer had visited other caves, 23% - exhibitions, 11% - museums).

#### *D. Tourists' knowledge of Moldavian wines.*

Tourists' knowledge of wine is strong enough in this sense, the respondents answering that they were aware of the Moldavian wine, having often consumed wines and loving the local food. 95% of the interviewees from Moldavia said that they used to often drink wine. Wines are always renewed, the annual production can be better or worse, so 93% of the respondents from Moldavia confirmed they had found wines that they had not known about.

#### *E. The region image and the importance of the information sources.*

To analyse the image of the region as seen by the tourists we used the following question: "When coming to Moldavia, what are the three words you associate with this region?" the first word was "wine". Moldavia is seen as a region full of spirituality and culture; they also chose "monasteries" (the importance of the UNESCO monuments in the departments of Suceava), "culture", "traditions", "religion" and "history". The cultural personalities who were born or lived in the region were also mentioned (such as Eminescu, a very well-known Romanian poet, or Stephen the Great, who built an impressive number of churches, monasteries, and helped shape the culture of wine as we know today). There is a triad in the thoughts of the tourists: it's the strong link between food (culinary specialities: *placinte, sarmale, tochtura*), wine and the spirituality given by religion, monasteries, history. Few respondents (8%) also provided the name of the wine Cotnari, which appears to be the emblem of the region.

We observed the weight of the perception of tourists. It is more important to analyse a perception from the outside to the inside. The conclusion is that the image of a wine region is formed from / by a few elements:

- historical background
- quality of wines
- diversity of grape varieties
- existence of a traditional market

To create an image of identification with a region it is useful to use one symbol and to promote elements of tourist motivation — those that determine tourists to buy tourist products at the destination. The symbol of the grape, that of a bottle of wine or a barrel works very well to highlight the specificity of Moldavia. The fact that wine and religion go together, makes Moldavia a spiritual area, where belief governs inhabitants.

Concerning the promotion, the information sources are very important in the choice of a destination because it can help detail a service, a product or the region as a whole. Today, the most desired form of marketing is the Internet. Internet has become the first link between destination and people, especially young people.

We have noticed that wine lovers from Moldavia were generally young people and the most important information source was the Internet (52%), followed by agencies (29%). Internet is a safer and more useful marketing tool because it is open to everyone. Friends and other peoples' opinions was the third option for tourists. This form of advertising is very important in the wine tourism sector. If someone is happy with the quality of the services received, he will normally transmit the information to his relatives, friends and even return in groups. The customer satisfaction is therefore always the best way to communicate an offer.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, if we take into consideration the classification undertaken by Charters S. and Ali - Knight (2002) the evidence from this study suggests that in Moldavia wine tourists are generally divided into two categories: novices (curious tourists who are more

interested in tasting) and *connaisseurs* (who are very interested in obtaining information on the entire winemaking process).

The profile of the Moldavian wine tourist is the following:

- masculine gender
- travels alone or in a couple
- young, aged between 26 and 35 years
- upper socio-professional category
- chooses the region due to curiosity and desire to exploit tastes

We consider that it is very important to get to know the profile of a wine tourist because it helps a lot to the development of the perception of wine producers on how to promote their products. It also helps authorities to know how to support this form of tourism and how to contribute to the achievement of a reliable development strategy.

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