

## WINE TOURISM – A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH WITH APPLICATION TO VRANCEA COUNTY

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**Abstract.** Wine tourism is an emerging form of tourism who took birth in crisis due to the development of wine-growing sector in the countries of the New World (New Zealand, Australia, USA). It appeared as a means to revitalize and preserve the wine industry. The difficulties encountered are the existence of a very complex offer but less legible on wine product and tourism. In Romania, the Vrancea County is a national leader in terms of both area of cultivation of vines and in the production of grapes. Vrancea is called the Country of the *Vine and Wine* due to the famous vineyards that still keep this title (Panciu, Odobești and Cotești). High quality wine, wine-growing landscape of the County, the reputation gained by national and international competitions facilitate the development of the wine tourism based on a local scale on a complex and competitive offer with other wine-growing regions of the country.

**Keywords:** *wine tourism, vineyard, viticulture, Vrancea county*

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. What is wine tourism?

*Wine tourism* is a significant component of both the wine and tourism industries. Wine and tourism have been intimately connected for many years, but it is only recently that this relationship has come to be explicitly recognized by governments, researchers and by the industries themselves. For the tourism industry, wine is an important component of the attractiveness of a destination and can be a major motivating factor for visitors. For the wine industry, wine tourism is a very important way to build up relationships with customers who can experience first-hand the romance of the grape, while for many smaller wineries direct selling to visitors at the cellar door is often essential to their business success (Hall et.al., 2006).

Definition and conceptualization of the wine tourism from the perspective of marketing industry is based in particular on the tourist experience and motivation. Thus, wine tourism can be defined as: visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and experiencing attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors (Hall, 1996; Macionis, 1996). Macionis (1996) proposed a model of wine tourism based around a special interest in wine motivated by the destination (wine region), the activity (wine tasting) or both. From the perspective of his research,

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Johnson (1998) defined wine tourism as “visitation vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for the purpose of recreation”. This definition excludes work-related visitation and emphasizes that the activity is recreational. Getz (2000) quoted in (Getz, Brown, 2006) states that there are three major perspectives in defining this concept, namely: wine producers, travel agencies and consumers. He argues that wine tourism is a form of behaviour, a strategy by which destinations develop and sell their wine region image and also a marketing opportunity for wine producers to educate and sell their products directly to consumers. Charters (2002) considers the wine tourism products by the following statements: organisation and animation activities for tourists in wine-growing regions, like wine-tasting, cellar visits, accommodations, activities related about wine, wine and regional traditions. The wine tourism products have been ranked into several categories (table 1), according to a report published in 2001, French Tourist Engineering Agency (Benesteau, quoted in Raynaly, 2010):

Table 1: The typology of wine tourism products

<b>The wine tourism products</b>	<b>What are these products</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wine Road</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Marked itineraries in wine-growing regions for the discovery of the vineyards, wine, cellar;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hiking in the vineyards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Marked itineraries enabling discovery of the vineyards in a ride;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized Tours and stays in the vineyards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Packages including accommodation, catering and transport, with a variable duration, in which they are proposed activities of the discovery of the vineyards in one or more components (oenological, gastronomic, cultural, technical, formal dinner);</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oenology internships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Courses more or less detailed allowing for a better knowledge of the product marketing and all that is reported (culture, tradition, technical production etc.);</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wine cellar visits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Visiting the cellars; wine producers are known their wine cellars;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Museums of the wines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Places of culture with the goal of presenting the world wine and transmitting a “savoir-faire” and ancestral traditions;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holidays and festivals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Events aimed at keeping local traditions, encourage the promotion of wine and animate the territory;</li> </ul> <p>Ex: at European level, The Days of Wine Tourism; at the local level, the International Festival of Vine and Wine Bacchus, in Focșani;</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional salons, local fairs, wine actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ These groupings have as their purpose the presentation of products in a strictly commercial.</li> </ul> <p>Ex: International Salon of Vinvest Wines.</p>

*Source of data: Benesteau quoted in Raynaly, 2010*

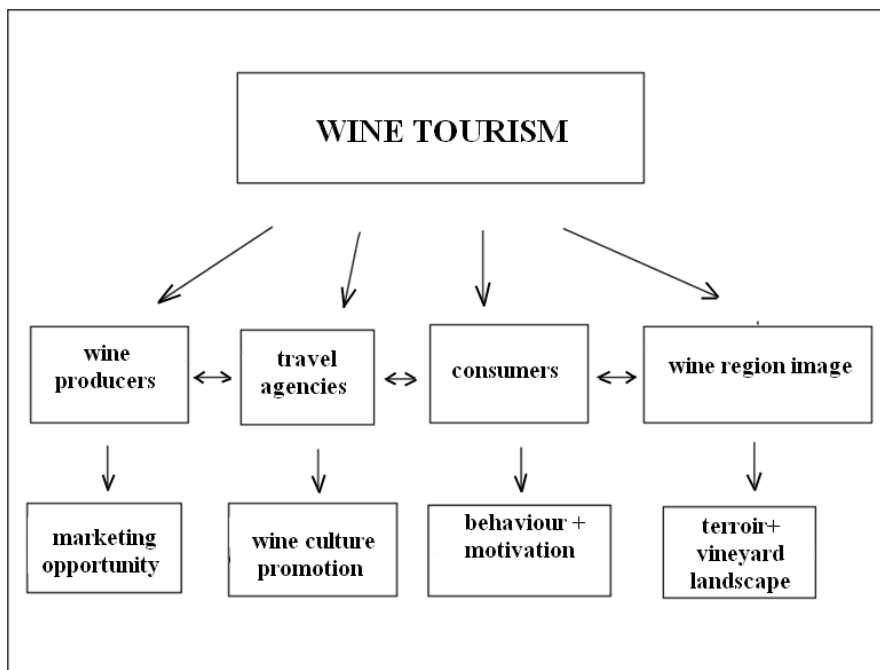
Wine tourism can be defined as an art of living, a satisfaction and pleasure; an integrated approach combining wine with all other products resulting from the association of those two sectors – tourism and viticulture, a requirement of quality; an integration of landscape which is an asset to the wine-growing tourism. Wine tourism also contributes to the reputation of a service for the wine-growing region. It is based on a list of verbs that make it easy for definition: discover, explore, visit, learn, browse, enjoy, buy, talk about, return - these are the steps taken for such an activity.

Geographers are the ones who also introduced the size of the landscape in the definition of wine tourism. The territory plays a very important role, being defined as a basis or benchmark for the wine tourism development tenders. Territory with its intimate characteristics or “*le terroir*”, as is greatly defined by the French, is the basis for the development of wine culture. Quality wine and therefore attracting tourists cannot be achieved without the quality of the land where the culture of the vine develops.

Thus, wine tourism one of the first methods for the accomplishment of the wine, thus facilitating the meeting between producer and consumer in holiday; the latter becomes curious, available and responsive, then initiated in order to become the best ambassador of the vineyard (Roumegoux report, 2008).

Concluding on data definitions, wine-growing tourism is thus a vector for the discovery of wine-growing landscapes, of the manufacture, of wine tasting and wine culture. Born out of a difficult economic environment, wine tourism has become a form of practice which is still held.

In order to easily understand the concept of wine tourism, it was chosen a schematic representation, which concludes the definitions described above (figure 1).



*Figure 1: The components of the wine tourism and their derivatives*

## 1.2. Framing the Vrancea county nationally

Vrancea county vineyards are part of the Moldovan Hills wine region, a region of the first rank in regards to the vineyard and wine quality. Cotnari, Husi, Odobești vineyards reputation exceeded the borders of the country, the proofs are the competitions earned with wines produced from these vineyards. Nationwide, Vrancea County distinguishes very clearly in terms of area occupied by vineyards, 12% of the total surface devoted to national vineyard, can be found in Vrancea (figure 2). High concentration of vineyards in Vrancea county area is due to a "homogeneity of viticulture ecological conditions, the highest yield per hectare and the highest percentage of use of agricultural and wine (over 50%, with variation between 25% and 75%). For this reason the County can be considered as the most typical wine-growing landscape in the country " (Cotea, 2003).

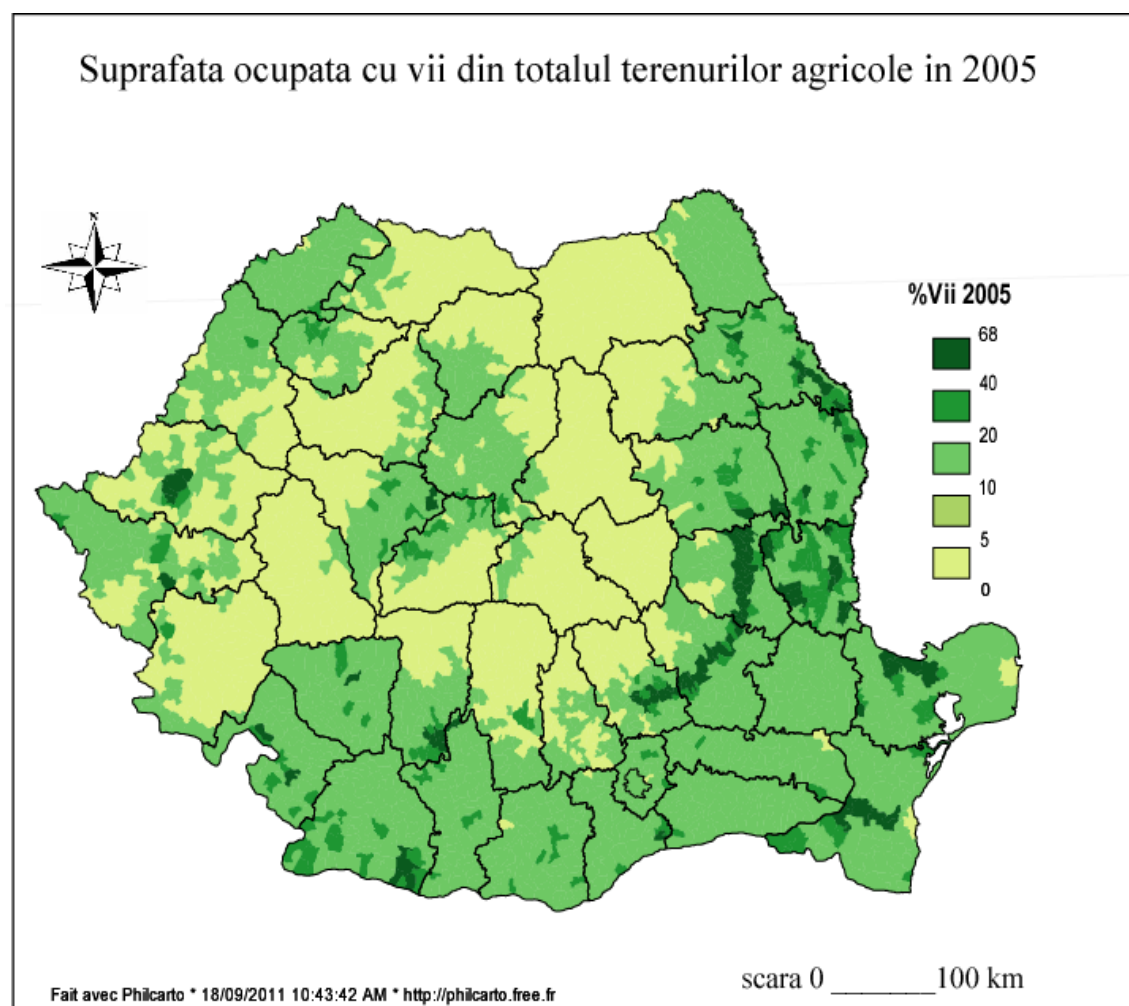


Figure 2: The occupied area by the vineyards of the total agricultural land

Source of data: INSSE

## 2. Wine-growing potential of Vrancea county

### 2.1. The vineyard of Vrancea county

Vrancea vineyards know a great spreading, unlike the other counties of Romania. Due to the favourable conditions of the territory, the vines have an ancient tradition, being practiced here in very distant times. Phylloxera invasion between 1882 and 1884 stopped the development of this culture of high economic efficiency and the restoration was quite difficult. During the socialist period, the vineyards were replanted by a vast program, through which was intended both to increase cultivated areas and increase production per hectare. In this respect, aging and unproductive vineyards have been removed and new plantations for both table grapes and wine have been created. Today, the vineyard of Vrancea County has a surface of 27,639 ha, of which the State holds only 5,181 ha, and the private sector 22,458 ha. Vrancea is the national leader both in surface and production of grapes.

The vineyards are distributed in three main regions: Panciu, Odobesti and Cotesti (figure 3).

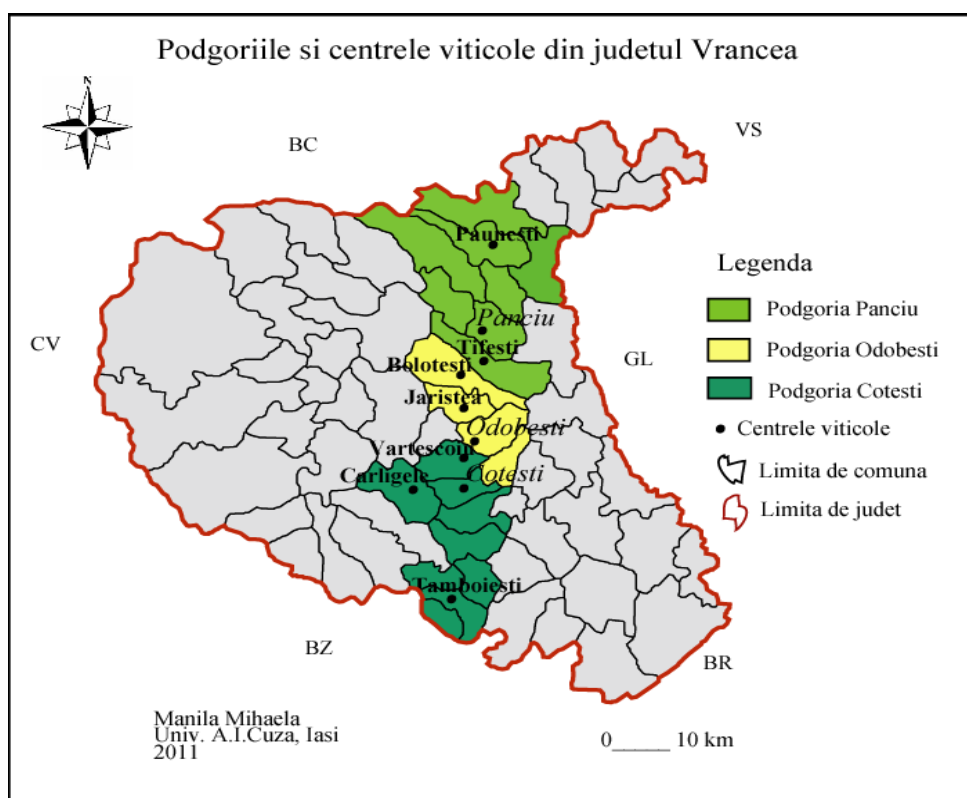


Figure 3: Vineyards and wine centers in Vrancea County

Source of data: Cotea, 2003

Panciu vineyard lies on a north to south strip, 30 km long and 7.5 km wide, organic vineyards holding 20 to 60% of agricultural area (Cotea, 2003). Panciu vineyard covers an area of approximately 10,000 ha and includes the following three wine centres: Panciu, Tifesti

and Păunești. The wine is produced in over 20 wineries located in the centre of the area. The vineyard benefits of a moderate and humid climate and due to its topography, altitude and other climatic conditions in this area is getting special wines, both white and red.

Odobăști vineyard, with an area of about 7,000 ha is the oldest vineyard of our country, being regarded as a Dacian vineyard. This vineyard occupies the central area of the county and is composed of the major centers Bolotești, Odobăști, Jariștea, the wine being done in more than 35 wineries located in the centre of this area. The exhibition and the average altitude of the land to which the plantations are exposed, offer the advantage of achieving the full maturity of grapes.

Cotești vineyard is a continuation of the Odobăști vineyard, benefiting from higher heliothermal resources and includes four wine centers wine: Cotești, Tâmbioești, Cârligele and Vârteșcoiu.

## 2.2. The grape production

Grape production accomplished in the three vineyards is the most important in terms of value, in the whole country. Grape production swings from year to year, depending on the characteristics of the oenoclimat, being closely related to weather conditions. Thus, when analysing the chart below (figure 4), it is noted that the production of grape has had a strong oscillation from 1998 to 2010. The lowest value of the production was recorded in 2005, namely 57,525 t when, because of the heavy shower, extremely abundant rain and storms, the production of wine centres Cotești and Jariștea was compromised, reaching the maximum of 20-30% of the entire potential of the area. The year 2009 was the most productive, the production reaching 252,067 t of grapes, this fact inducing favourable consequences for the whole wine economy of the county. In the context of the current economic environment, the production of grapes is expected to drop over the next years, a fact explained by the tendency of the surfaces occupied by the vines to collapse, especially in the households where it is considered to be more expensive to maintain and with pretty low outputs.

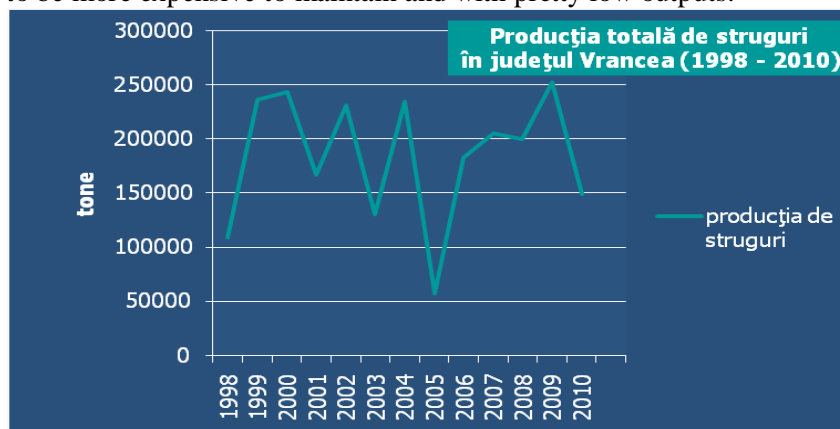


Figure 4: The total production of grapes in Vrancea county

Source of data: Department of Agriculture Vrancea

## 2.3. The wine varieties

Vrancea vineyards allow cultivation of different varieties of grapes valued by obtaining high quality wines. Quality wines are based directly on the quality of the grapes provided by the cultivated varieties and on the conditions of the harvest (Macici, 1996).

Therefore, for the year 2011, the area occupied by the grapes of high quality was reduced, due to the lack of state subsidies for wine producers and their lack of interest to invest in such an activity (figure 5).

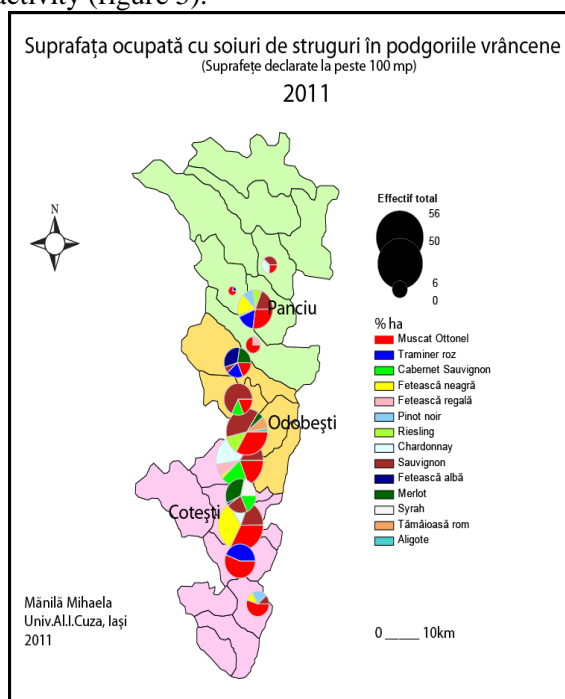


Figure 5: The surface occupied with grape varieties (2011)  
(declared surfaces to over 100 sqm)

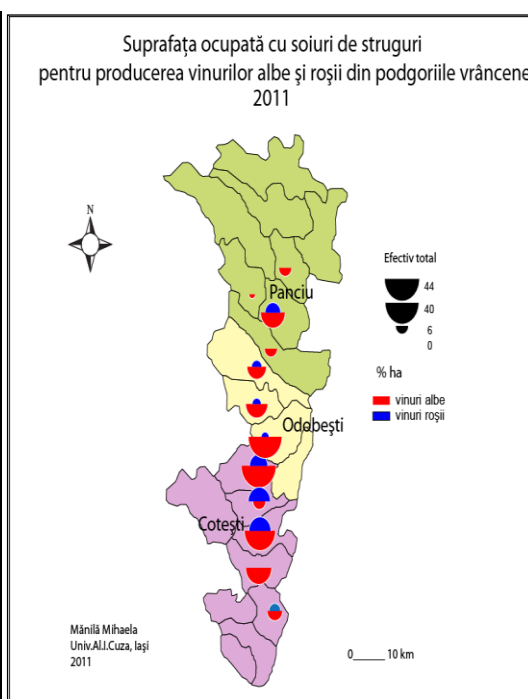


Figure 6: The surface occupied with varieties grapes for white and red wines (2011)  
Source of data: Department of Agriculture Vrancea

In terms of assortment, Odobești vineyard proves to be the most traditional Romanian wine space as it holds six Romanian varieties: Galbenă de Odobești, Plăvaie, Fetească regală, Fetească albă (white) for white wines, Fetească neagră (black), Băbească neagră (black) for red wines. High quality white wines are obtained from varieties like Fetească albă, Italian Riesling, Sauvignon and Muscat Ottonel and superior red wines from varieties like Fetească neagră, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.

White wines for everyday consumption are produced in Panciu, from varieties like Plăvaie, Fetească regală and Aligote, but also red wines from Băbească neagră. The sparkling wines produced in the Ștefan cel Mare's winery have a national and international importance.

Higher quality wines than those produced in neighbouring areas are obtained in Cotești, especially those from the varieties like Fetească neagră, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot for red wines (figure 6). This is due to higher heliothermal resources, Cotești vineyard being situated in the southern part of the Vrancea area.

After the law that went into effect in 2003, law No. 244/2002, the National Office for Designations of Origin for Wines (ONDOV) was founded and in 2006 issued a series of decisions by which it was governed the right to produce wines with a designation of origin in wine-growing zone of Vrancea county. The following varieties are with Designation of Controlled Origin (D.O.C):

**PANCIU (designation of controlled origin)**

Fetească albă	dry/semidry
Fetească regală	dry
Muscat Ottonel	dry/semi-dry/semi-sweet
Pinot gris	dry/semi-dry

**White wines**

Plăvaie	dry
Riesling italian	dry
Sauvignon	dry/semi-dry/semi-sweet
Chardonnay	dry/semi-dry/semi-sweet
Aligote	dry/semi-dry/semi-sweet

**Red wines**

Fetească neagră	dry/semi-dry
Merlot	dry
Pinot noir	dry/semi-dry
Cabernet Sauvignon	dry/semi-dry

**Red wines****ODOBEȘTI (designation of controlled origin)**

Fetească albă	dry/semi-dry
Fetească regală	dry
Galbenă de Odobești	dry
Plăvaie	dry

**White wines**

Riesling italian	dry
Sauvignon	dry/semi-dry
Șarbă	dry/semi-dry
Pinot gri	dry/semi-dry
Aligote	dry/semi-dry/semi-sweet
Muscat Ottonel	semi-sweet

Babească neagră	dry
Fetească neagră	dry/semi-dry

Merlot	dry
Cabernet Sauvignon	dry/semi-dry
Pinot noir	dry/semi-dry

**COTEȘTI (designation of controlled origin)**

	Fetească albă	dry/semi-dry
	Fetească regală	dry
	Riesling italian	dry
<b>White wines</b>	Sauvignon	dry/semi-dry
	Pinot gris	dry/semi-dry
	Șarbă	dry/semi-dry
	Muscat Ottonel	dry/semi-dry/semi-sweet
	Aligote	dry/semi-dry/semi-sweet
	Cabernet Sauvignon	dry
<b>Red wines</b>	Fetească neagră	dry/semi-dry
	Merlot	dry
	Pinot noir	dry/semi-dry
	Babească neagră	dry

*Source of data: Vrancea Vine and Wine Office*

### 3. Tourism potential of Vrancea vineyards

#### 3.1. The wine road

Vrancea County has a tourism potential, harmoniously distributed throughout the county area, from the west where the human and natural attractions are sheltered by Vrancea Mountains and



*Figure 7: Panciu Wine road*



to the east where it can be discovered the tourist value of Vrancea vineyards. The best way to harness the tourism potential of Vrancea vineyards is the so-called "Wine Road" which represents a marked itinerary along a delimited space, inviting tourists to discover the wines produced in this space and activities that can be practiced here.

Vrancea County has the necessary conditions to develop such routes that are able to highlight the attractions of the localities included in the three vineyards (figure 7).

Thus, wine tourism attractions are grouped along the County Road DJ 205B, parallel to the European route E85, with the advantage of quick access to the three great vineyards. Not by chance, tourists who want to know the beauties, the riches and the remnants of these places go through this road of wine from the South to the North of the county, from Slobozia Bradului and up to Adjud (figure 8). The wineries can be visited, and the most important are the Girboiu wine cellar from Cotești, Beciul Domnesc wine cellar from Odobești, Natura in Țițești, Nobless wine cellar in Păunești; besides these wineries many wine stations of companies can be visited such as SC Veritas Panciu SA, SC Vincon Vrancea, combined winery with wine tasting centres like SC Dyonisos, SC Vitism, SC Vinexport SRL, Research and Development Station for viticulture and winemaking Odobești. It should be noted that the cellars of Odobești were included in the UNESCO heritage. Dating, like those of Panciu, since the time of Ștefan cel Mare (15<sup>th</sup> Century) and being the only in country excavated in pumice, at a depth of 13 meters, the cellars were renovated by the stonemasons in the time of the reign of the Sturdza family. Inside, they keep 100,000 bottles in a wine cellar professional, wines maturing in barrels, before reaching the glass.

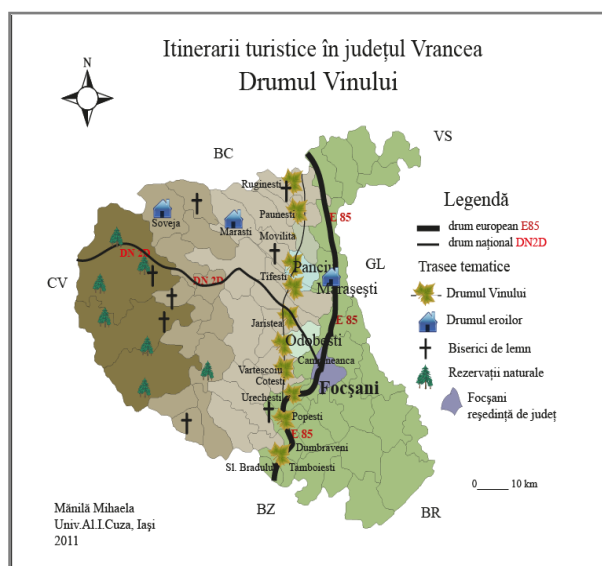


Figure 8: Wine road in Vrancea attractions

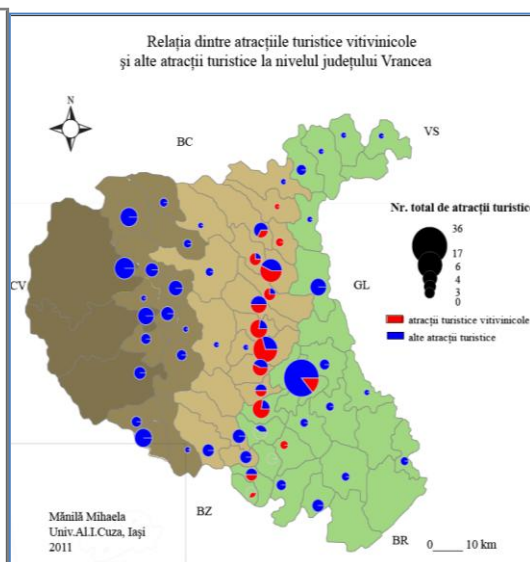


Figure 9: The relation between wine and other tourists resources in Vrancea

Source of data: the official websites of localities' Town-Halls

The winery in Panciu was dug in the year 1494 and has a length of three kilometres. Some people say they have more, but some wineries would be so well hidden that were not found never entirely. In 1949, the hiding spaces were turned into places for keeping wine. Besides the tourist offer, which includes the visit of wineries of Panciu vineyard, of wines

collection and dinner at the restaurant, the tourists can receive sparkling wine with custom label.

Vrancea County offers the possibility to practice other tourist itineraries which combined with the wine road, give a complete package and meet the desires of the most demanding tourists. Thus, can be made also "The Glory Road of Heroes" that includes the mausoleums in Focșani, Mărăști, Mărășești and Soveja, wooden churches can be visited in the Land of Vrancea or natural reserves included in Putna-Vrancea Natural Park. In Vrancea there are over 20 wooden churches that impress not only by their unique architecture but also by their extraordinary paintings and embroideries (Cherciu, 2004).

Throughout the Vrancea area there is a balance of tourist resources, the wine attractions being located normally on the famous wine road (figure 9), memorial houses, historical monuments, monasteries being represented in almost every locality of the county. Tourists arriving in this land are either fond of Bacchus liquor or attracted to other forms of tourism (ecotourism, rural tourism, agritourism) and can spend their stay with a wide and varied offer.

### **3.2. Bacchus International Festival of Vine and Wine**

For wine-loving tourists, the city of Focșani organizes every year in October, the "Bacchus International Festival of Vine and Wine". It is one of the events that promote wine products, in addition to the specific local culture and values, ranging from the traditions, customs, crafts to gastronomy. During this event, Vrancea County Council together with Cultural Institutions in the County organizes The Festival of Craftsmen, workshops with international participation, activities of tasting traditional food products (exhibition of traditional gourmet products of South-East Region), cultural-artistic manifestations.

### **3.3. Accommodation offer**

Vrancea County has an offer of accommodation developed more in the mountainous area due to high natural potential because of flows of tourists eager to leave urban congestion and to flee on weekends especially in the tourist villages. It is noted in the map below (figure 10) the fact that Tulnici locality concentrate the greatest number of accommodation units, but the number of beds is higher in the city of Focșani, due to the existence of big 3 – star hotels. There is a strong relation between the share of tourist attractions and accommodations building. Thus localities with a high number of tourist attractions have invested in accommodation infrastructure. This is especially gratifying for localities included in the program Wine Route because, in this way, the wine tourism fit on a line-up of development, thus promising to attract new flows of tourists. In villages located in Vrancean vineyards, guesthouses ("pensiune") appeared in the last 3-4 years due to awareness of the local population and authorities on important available wine tourism potential. So, in addition to the numerous wine cellars that offer wine tastings, vineyard walks, information about how wine is made, have been developed accommodations as well, some wineries holding guesthouses but also restaurants to offer complete packages to tourists. "Natura" wine cellar of Țifești locality, in addition to existing accommodation (16 beds), builds in proximity a hotel which will host a significant number of tourists both domestic and foreign. The fact that the town of Panciu has no accommodation is a particular weakness for the local wine tourism as wine lovers wishing

to visit the vineyards around the city, are forced to accommodate either in Focșani or in neighbouring villages.

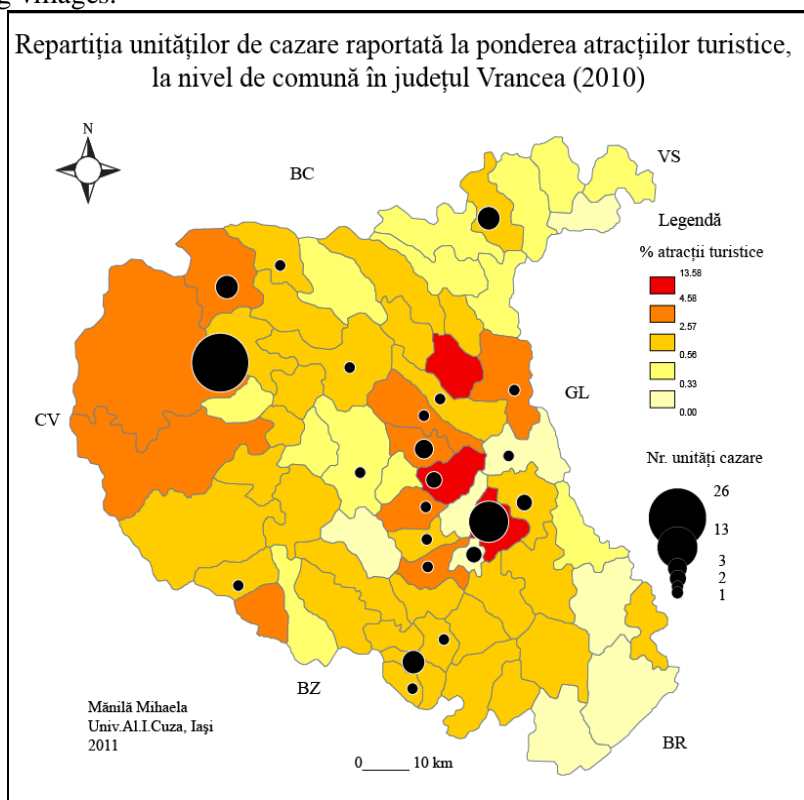


Figure 10: Distribution of the accommodation units related to the share of tourism attractions in Vrancea

Source of data: the sites of localities halls

For such a form of tourism, the tourist demand is made more of the foreign tourists, Ukrainian, Japanese, Israeli and less from domestic demand, which demonstrates that Romanian tourists have not yet developed a culture of wine discovery, wine tourism being more addressed to a higher class of tourists. By interviewing the owners of cellars about tourism demand, it was confirmed that tourists interested in wine tourism come especially in groups of 20-30 people, per season achieving a number of 300-400 tourists.

#### 4. Conclusions

Vrancea is the most important wine-growing area of the country, with traditional wine cellars that deserve to be integrated in tourist circuits. To maintain its position among both the wine industry and wine tourism, it is important that the wine producers keep the authenticity of the grapes, knowing that the best-selling wines in the Vrancea are obtained from varieties like Galbenă de Odobești, Plăvaie, Fetească albă, neagră or Șarbă. The interest of local authorities to develop local wine tourism is shown by the projects such as Vrancea – The Land of Vine and Wine, Wine Road or Vineyards Road, or by proposing the re-establishment of Vine and Wine Museum in the city of Panciu which would contribute to the Wine Routes

around Moldova (Museum in Panciu, Huși and Hârlău). Fleshing out a road of wine can bring only benefits, being a good means of promoting wine tourism product.

Wine tourism that can be practiced in these vineyards is more a form of itinerant tourism, the tourist infrastructure is not yet so well developed as in other countries known for this form of tourism. However there is a potential for the development of wine tourism, knowing that Vrancea County placed under the grape sign, this representing the local brand. The proof is demonstrated by the presence of the grape and the barrel of wine since the Putna County banner in the inter-war period, and then to the present Vrancea county.

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