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Prospects of Wine Tourism Development in Drăgăşani Region, Romania

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to reveal the current case of wine tourism in Romania, one of the biggest wine suppliers in Europe and other parts of the world and to propose a number of measures that will enhance the experience of tourists during their visit. According to the International Organisation of Wine and Vine, the Romanian wine production in 2015 was 4.069 million hl, thus being the 13th largest wine producer in the world and the 5th on the European market¹. The study is focused on a region that has a great tradition in wine production, Drăgăşani, situated in Vâlcea County, Romania, which sadly lost its charm after the fall of the communist regime. New stakeholders, including important officials from the Romanian government, have invested a lot of money in the area, but things do not go well, and hence there is plenty of room for improvement.

Keywords: enotourism, wine tourism, sustainable tourism, enoheritage, Romania, Drăgăşani,

1. Introduction

Wine related tourism has been around since the ancient times of Greece and Rome, but it took a while until wine began to appear as a specific tourism interest. A few factors played an important role. The first factor was the transport revolution, which contributed to the development of railways and allowed easier access to different parts of the world. Another factor was the development of a new middle class that began to seek quality wine along with the aristocracy. “The publication of *Classification of the wines of the Gironde* in 1855 gave wine and wine regions a destination identity for the first time” (Hall et al., 1998). Since the 1920s, wine trails have been a considerable part of the German tourism industry (Hall et al., 1998). After the fall of the Communist Bloc in 1989, Central European countries like Hungary, newly independent Croatia and even Poland, despite more severe climatic conditions (Charzyński et al., 2013), have established wine trails to attract tourists.

Also Romania in 2000, in order to adapt to the latest trends, began to develop a wine trail called *Drumul Vinului* that is supposed to bring together vineries from 11 counties, each of them displaying different traditions and local customs and most importantly, each of them bringing up front its particular taste and flavours of the wines produced and the local food. At the moment, the only functioning trail is situated along the Prahova Valley (Fig. 1) with a total length of 58 km, comprising several vineyards and also other touristic attractions (www.vinland.ro/prin-lumea-vinurilor/drumurile-vinului/). The wine roads in Alba County are approximately 200 km long and passes through vineyards of Aiud, Alba, Sebeş-Apold and Târnavă (Ungureanu, 2015). The Iaşi county is one of the most recognizable areas connected with winemaking, because one of the most popular wine brands in the country, Cotnari, has its origins there (Mănilă and Bărhălescu, 2013). The Moldova district

¹ <http://www.agerpres.ro/economie/2015/10/28/oiv-romania-pe-locul-13-in-topul-celor-mai-mari-producatori-mondiali-de-vin-productia-s-a-majorat-cu-9-in-2015-16-07-49>

is far from the Romanian capital and has poor road connections. There are only some signs for few wineries around Cotnari, Dealu Mare and Murfatlar. This region is considered to be the best for wine tourism in Romania (Hudelson, 2014). The potential and limitations of this area were analysed by M.O. Ciopi (2010). Also Banat has a reputation as a wine-producing region and a touristic destination (Costencu et al., 2008). I. Soare et al. (2010) remarked that the Romanian wine heritage is rich, but wine tourism is still undeveloped in comparison to many other European countries and proposed some measures for promotion of enotourism in the country.

2. History of winemaking in Romania

Romania has a long history of producing wine that dates back to ancient times, i.e. more than 4000 years ago. In Dacia, the former name of the actual territory of Romania, agriculture and especially vine growing were among the most popular activities. Dionysus, the god of grape harvest, winemaking and wine, was also worshiped in the territory of Dacia. According to A. Nedelcu (2014), ‘Testimonies like material traces found in the Dobrogea region and written evidence left by Ovidiu, the Roman poet whose lyrics present aspects of vines, which attests the age of this culture practice since two millennia and a half ago’.

According to the legend, the good quality of soils provided for such a large production of wine that it began to have a negative effect on daily life of citizens. Also the wine produced in Dacia was considered to be the reason for some wars – as Homer recalls in Hellada, the Greeks went to Dacia in search of their wines. In order to put an end to this, Burebista, the king of the Dacians together with the great priest Deceneu, ordered all the vines to be burned. Another archaeological discovery that proves the long history of winemaking in the territory of Romania is the coin stamped by the Romans after the war in 106 BC when the Romans succeeded in occupying Dacia and converted it into a Roman province called Dacia Felix. On one side of the coin there is the inscription Dacia Provincia and the image

The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of wine tourism as a form of cultural tourism, closely linked to ecotourism and sustainable tourism, and as a factor that stimulates the economic growth and revitalizes the urban landscape of the Drăgășani region. Furthermore, by conducting a SWOT analysis, it could be easily observed that this region is the place where wine tourism could flourish if certain steps are followed. Last but not least, apart from being a niche tourism, enotourism is definitely an experiential tourism and the experience should be the core motivation to travel.

of two children offering a woman bunches of grapes (www.wineromania.com/files/docs/romania_RO.pdf).

Over time, the wine production in Romania has gone through many stages, each of them leaving a specific mark on this industry and the way it is presented today. As a result, the 19th and 20th century was the time when professional relations with France were established and this cooperation brought about the flourishing recovery of the wine industry in Romania, which was critically affected by the phylloxera epidemic burst that took place during the last two decades of the 19th century. In the interwar period, the cooperation with Germany and Austria became more significant and it is believed that this is the time when “șpriț” (a drink made by mixing the wine with sparkling water) gained more and more popularity. It is considered that the communist era, i.e. between 1948 and 1989, had a positive impact on the wine-growing and wine-making sectors as this was the time when the research institutes for wine and vines were established and research work was conducted in this field. All the vineyards belonged to the state and the cooperative work was ubiquitous. During this period, some of the Romanian wines were awarded medals and distinctions at international competitions despite the fact that at the national level, the request for quantity often would overcome the necessity for quality.



Figure 1. Prahova Valley Wine Trail: A – Road sign indicating the beginning of the Wine Trail (Drumul Vinului); B – Press conference announcement regarding Drumul Vinului in Prahova County. European Union Regio Program sign can also be observed on the billboard with advertisement; C – Map of the Wine Trail in Prahova County; D – Road sign and map of the Wine Trail.
 (Sources: www.cjph.ro/; <http://theonarmedcrab.com/26-prahova-valley/>, www.vinland.ro/prin-lumea-vinurilor/drumurile-vinului/)



Figure 2. Wine Regions in Romania
 Source: © Quentin Sadler; <http://senatorwine.com/images/map.jpg>

The fall of the communist regime has brought a number of changes in the wine sector in Romania. Former owners recovered many of the vineyards where they continued to work in a traditional way. Modern legislation and some of the provisions implemented by the European Union were designed to produce good quality wines with a worldwide recognition. As a result, according to Order No. 247 of 20 November 2012 regarding the list of DOC wines (Denumirile de Origine Controlata pentru vinuri din Romania, 2008), a total of 34 wines from different wine regions in Romania (Fig. 2) are entitled to the DOC quality label, provided certain conditions are met. Drăgășani wines also benefit from the DOC label (National Office of Vine and Wine Product – http://www.onvvpv.ro/sites/default/files/20150720_om_247_2012.pdf).

The wine regions in Romania exhibit distinctive features depending on their location in the country. Due to the fact that the territory of Romania stretches along 9 meridians from west to east and 5 parallels from south to north, the differences in the climate are significant and reflected in the viticulture, especially in the ripening process of wine grapes. Therefore, the central and northern as well as north-eastern parts of the country have a larger production of white wines, while the southern part, especially the Black Sea region excels in red wine production, which is a consequence of the landscape and altitude, winds, climate influence and solar radiation throughout the year.

Consequently, while visiting Drăgășani you should definitely taste Crâmpoșie Seleționată, which could be considered a trademark of this wine region: “Whenever we say Crâmpoșie, we think about Drăgășani. Whenever we say Drăgășani, we think about Crâmpoșie. as N. Dumitru and O. Bauer from Știrbey Vinery would say. Crâmpoșie Seleționată (Fig. 3) is one of the few Dacian varieties that have survived for centuries. Crâmpoșie Seleționată is a dry, light wine that can be served as an appetizer, during or after a meal, or to maintain a good mood. It could be served with fish, chicken with sauce or some cheese varieties such as matured cheese or goat cheese”.

3. Description of the area and methodology

Drăgășani is a city located on the southern border of the Vâlcea county, on the right-bank terraces of the Olt River (Fig. 2). Since ancient times, the main preoccupation of the locals was the cultivation of vines. Wine trading brought significant income to the locals, which was appreciated by other wine growers from Europe. Today, the Drăgășani vineyard covers an area of over 16,000 ha.

With the development and discoveries of new types of wine, the vineyard of Drăgășani has become the most prestigious vineyard in Romania. More than 60 types of local and foreign types of wine have been cultivated here. Among the varieties of grapes cultivated in Drăgășani, there are some representative names that are worth mentioning.

The local types of wine that are produced in Drăgășani are as follows: Crâmpoșia Seleționată, Fetească Regală, Negru de Drăgășani, Tămâioasă Românească. The last one mentioned is a particular type of wine created in Drăgășani. There are also some of the international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Gris, Merlot, but the local varieties are much more appreciated for their originality and the perfect blend with the terroir. In Oltenia Region, the wine production in 2002 was estimated at 492200 hl (www.wineromania.com/files/docs/romania_RO.pdf).

Crâmpoșie Seleționată



Figure 3. Crâmpoșie Seleționată variety

(Source: www.revino.ro/upload/files/20037748813_474338f57f_k_1024x684.jpg)

Another important variety of grapes cultivated here is Tămăioasă Românească. Tămăioasă Românească was part of the old Drăgășani vineyard assortment, along with the following Romanian varieties such as Crămpoșie, Braghina and Gordan. Negru de Drăgășani is a dark red, dry wine that goes perfectly with lamb. Fetească Regală is one of the most popular wine grape varieties in Romania. It was born in Transylvania about eight decades ago, and it is a hybrid between Fetească Albă and Grasă de Cotnari. This wine can be served basically with any type of food you like and it goes perfectly even with the traditional sarmale (sour cabbage rolls stuffed with minced meat and rice, flavoured with smoked ham).

Wine tourism represents a type of tourism that takes places in wine regions and involves a number of activities by participants. These activities consist of a wine cellar tour, wine tasting, vineyard accommodation and specific leisure activities.

The methodology used to conduct this research was the direct observation that took place in the summer of 2013, the interview with Gheorghe Iordache, the owner of Iordache Winery, the analysis of statistical data on the number of touristic overnight stays, the average length of a touristic stay in Drăgășani and the cycle of high and low seasons. The research was based on data gathered by the National Institute of Statistics (www.insse.ro), available on the Institute's website. The analysis revealed that the average duration of a tourist stay in Drăgășani is 3 days, with two picks of the high season in June and July as well as in November and December. This shows a clear seasonality, generated primarily by the natural sequence of seasons in the temperate climate zone, but also by specific times of the year, like summer and fall holidays, associated both with the vineyard activities and the Christmas Holidays, i.e. a period when people are looking for places where traditions are still well preserved and observed, like in Drăgășani.

The wine tourism takes place in areas where the wine growing is the main occupation of people. It also relies on the previous existence of elements of touristic values. These are the elements that provide the foundation for wine tourism:

- **Vineyard** – a basic element of wine tourism; a place where tourists can take a guided tour with the aim of relaxing, meditating and connecting with nature. This activity finds its target group among tourists who want to escape from the concrete environment of big cities and enjoy the peaceful sensation offered by this type of visit. The vineyard also plays an educational role, attracting tourists as a perfect place where you can learn about the process of wine making.
- **Wine making process** – after learning some basic information regarding the wine, the tourists can learn more about other aspects of wine making.
- **Wine cellar** – It offers visitors the experience of a finished product. Wine cellars differ in their architecture, historical background and age but the fact that they are places where wine is stored makes them a special stage along wine tours. The wine cellar is a wine tourism attraction due to the wine tasting process. This process takes place in an organized manner, under the guidance of a specialized guide who offers detailed information on each type of wine tasted, the complementary food that must be served with a particular type of wine and the history and unicity behind every wine.
- **Souvenir shop** – where tourists can buy and take home some of the wines they tasted, personalized souvenirs like glasses, magnets and other objects carrying the logo of the vineyard, which makes the connection with the visit more lasting.
- **Wine festival** – probably the most entertaining element of wine tourism. Wine festivals are places where you can actually connect with the local spirit and culture; you can mix with the locals, try some traditional food and wine, support small, local producers and enjoy the folk music and dance.
- **Wine Museum** – It plays an important role in wine tourism. You can learn there more about the lifestyle of the local people, the wine and vines. In addition, due to the fact that wine museums are not common, their presence makes a given place more important.

4. Enotourism in Drăgășani

There are 7 large wineries in Drăgășani, in addition to other small family businesses (Fig. 4).

Avincis Winery is one of the most modern wine cellars in Drăgășani. The owners, i.e. the Stoica family, has restored the Dobrușa manor inherited from their grandfather. It is an impressive 19th century building constructed in the Brâncovenesc style, a traditional Romanian style characterised by the presence of natural elements and traditional Romanian patterns such as the rope of infinity carved on the façade like flowers, and by the presence of a porch. Today, the building hosts multiple events such as guided tours and wine tastings, classical concerts and tours on request, i.e. tailor-made tours including accommodation, catering and other activities. The prices for a wine tasting start from 10 EUR per person for a 3-wine range and go up to 15 EUR per person for 5 varieties of wine.

Avincis Winery (www.avincis.ro) focuses on the production of white wines such as Crămposie Seleționată, Cuvée Petit Sauvignon Blanc, Fetească Regală and Pinot Gris, Muscat Ottonel and

Sauvignon Blanc. There is one type of rosé wine and a number of red wines, including: Cuvée Grandiflora Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, Cuvée Andrei Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon. The premium segment is represented by Domnul De Rouă that comes in two varieties, red and white.

Casa Isărescu (www.casaisarescu.ro) is a winery owned by the Governor of the National Bank of Romania, Mugur Isărescu. The wine cellar was restored in the summer of 2013, but wines could be bought at the winery's souvenir shop located in the city centre of Drăgășani.

Casa Isărescu produces the following wines: Crămposie, Fetească Regală, Sauvignon Blanc, Tămâioasă Românească, Rosé, Cabernet Sauvignon Rubin, Purpuriu, Cabernet Sauvignon. In 2016, their website seems to be still under construction but a guesthouse, Casa Isărescu, was open to the public and it comprises 6 double rooms.

Casa de Vinuri Iordache (Fig. 5A-D) is owned by the Iordache family (www.cvi-dragasani.ro). It was founded over 200 years ago and



Figure 4. Vineyards in Oltenia Region

(Source: www.crameromania.ro/images/oltenia-mare.jpg, modified)



Figure 5. Casa de Vinuri Iordache Winery: A – Entrance sign; B – Vineyard landscape from Casa de Vinuri Iordache; C, D – Interior of the Casa de Vinuri Iordache Winery; E – Wine Museum in Drăgășani (photos by E. Drăghiceanu)

passed down from generation to generation. Casa de Vinuri Iordache owns a wine cellar where guided tours and wine tastings are organized. During the interview conducted on the 17th August 2013, Mr. Gheorghe Iordache (the owner of the winery) mentioned that a personal, family museum was planned. All the objects intended for the museum are part of the family heritage and they have been preserved in the family for generations, including e.g. traditional costumes (more than 100 pieces), hand-made carpets (more than 60 pieces), a collection of coins and other objects representative of the viticulture traditions in Drăgășani. However, according to the information gathered in August 2016, the opening was delayed until European funding could be accessed.

However, a small art gallery was opened in June 2016, where artists from the Artists' Union have the opportunity to display their work. The exhibition changes every three months. The art gallery is open only for visits booked in advance and is also included in the winery tour.

At Casa de Vinuri Iordache Winery, guided tours are organized generally with small groups of up to 15 people, which is the optimum number of participants according to the experience gained by the owner over the years. The groups of tourists visiting this winery generally come from countries like Germany, Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries. The prices vary between 8 and 10 EUR per person and include the tasting of 5 types of wine. On request, a dinner or lunch can be also organized with traditional food paired with the right wines. The following wines are produced at Casa de Vinuri Iordache: Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Gris, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Crămposie Selecționată and Merlot Rusi Rose. Casa de Vinuri Iordache also owns a souvenir shop where tourists can buy different types of wine or different hand-made art objects crafted by the local artists.

Agricola Știrbey, owned by the Kripp family (www.stirbey.com), has a tradition of over 300 years. This winery can also be visited by groups

of 5 to 15 people with the prices varying from 12 EUR per person for the wine tasting only to 40 EUR per person for a full regional culinary delight and 5 types of wine, red and/or white depending on the preferences.

The white wines produced at Agricola Știrbey are semisweet Crâmpoșie Seleccionată, Fetească Regală, Sauvignon Blanc Vitis Vetus, Tămâioasă Românească, dry Tămâioasă Românească. Red wines are also produced: Novac, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon. There

is also a premium line of wines that is called Genius Loci which consists of Fetească Regală Genius Loci and Cuvée Genius Loci. Last but not least there is a line of sparkling wines like Rose Sparkling wine and White Sparkling wine.

Other wineries in Drăgășani are **Via Sandu-Ecoterra**, **Casa de Vinuri Negrini** (www.negrini.ro) and **Spârteni** (www.sparleni.ro), but they are not yet open to public visits. They sell their wines in their own specialized shops and through the distribution network.

5. Analysis and results

The natural beauty of the landscape surrounding the Drăgășani area is not to be neglected. Due to the fact that the city is situated on the terraces of the Olt River, the view unveiled here could compete with the famous vineyards of Tuscany.

In terms of cultural attractions and monuments, Drăgășani was deprived of its unicity under the communist regime but there are certain aspects that attract enotourists who are usually interested in the local heritage as well. The first and most important element are the ruins of the former Roman camp, Rusidava, which proves that Drăgășani is an old town, with a history dating back to the Roman and Dacian times. Rusidava was a camp of the Roman defence trail called Limes Alutanus, mentioned in *Tabula Peutingeriana* (VII, 4) on the way between Acidava and Pons Aluti (www.istorielocala.ro/).

Drăgășani was also the hometown of the renamed Romanian writer, Gib Mihăescu, where you can visit his memorial house that keeps personal objects and manuscripts belonging to the writer. There are also several orthodox churches that can be visited, all of them dating back to the early 19th century. The most important of them is Biserica Târgului, which can be translated into Borough's Church. It was initially a fortified church, designed to protect the local community in case of attacks. Some fragments of the wall surrounding the church are still preserved to this day. This church is especially important because it played the role of a protector and a base in 1821 for the Romanian troops of "panduri" (local army gathered in order to defend their land against the Tur-

kish invasions that were very frequent at that time). It was destroyed during WWI and later rebuilt at the initial location as a cathedral.

Other churches that can be visited here include: Saint Ilie Church, rebuilt for the third time in 1834, the Church of Mother Mary, listed as a historical monument from 1824 and Saint Nicholas Church.

And last but not least, Drăgășani is also home to a wine museum (Fig. 5E). The collection of the currently exhibited objects started in early 1952 by the clergymen Dumitru Bălașa and Alexandru Lița. It was opened in 1974 and comprises 3 sections: wine, art and archaeology. The Museum is located in a building characterised by the neo-Romanian style, built in 1920 by Dumitru C. Popescu, a wealthy merchant from Drăgășani. It is now part of the National Patrimony and its complete restoration was carried out in the summer of 2013 (www.muzeuldragasani.ro).

Every year a wine festival is held in Drăgășani, which gathers people from the local community but also from the surrounding areas. The festival could be of great interest for enotourists, but unfortunately each year it loses its authenticity and traditional character, becoming more of a kitsch.

The infrastructure that plays an important part in tourism is present here and is capable of sustaining the tourist activities. Statistics show that the target group of this type of niche tourism consists of people with a high level of education and income. Most of the tourists coming to Drăgășani are from developed countries, especially from the U.K., Germany and the Nordic countries, as mentioned by Gheorghe Iordache

during his interview. However, there are some restrictive aspects that could play a negative role in the development of tourism, including the attitude of the locals as they are not yet fully aware of the benefits that this type of sustainable tourism could bring to their local community. This problem could be easily solved by organizing action groups and open debates that could target small producers, local artists and small family businesses, involving them in tourist activities to preserve the authenticity of the place and to solve the problem of unemployment. There is still a lot of room for improvement in terms of accommodation, food and beverage as well as leisure sectors. The accommodation options in Drăgășani are as follows: two hotels of 2* and 3*, three guesthouses awarded 3* and a motel. However, some other entities specialized in wine tourism and wine tours would be more than welcome as tourism could increase the reputation of this place. Unfortunately, it seems to have been forgotten due to the fact that there is no proper planning for the future.

The wines produced here are of great quality and they have been awarded numerous national and international prizes and distinctions such as the one in 1900 at the Universal Exhibition of Paris, where medals have been awarded for Tămâioasă white wines and red wines. In Budapest in 1958, a gold medal was handed to the Research and Development Center in Drăgășani (www.scdvv-dragasani.ro/) as part of Concours International Du Vin competition.

Taking into consideration all the above issues, it can be concluded that Drăgășani could

be turned into a prosperous wine tourism destination through active involvement of all stakeholders in the region, proper training provided to the locals, which would help them to find a job in the field of tourism, as well as through preservation and restoration of traditions that contribute to the authenticity of the place.

In order to improve the actual situation, some actions would be required:

- better advertisement, both at the national and international level, by creating the identity of the Drăgășani area and by proper destination branding. In addition, it would be a good idea to take part in domestic and international tourism fairs and exhibitions as this would increase its popularity. A TV commercial and a multilingual website of Drăgășani presenting all the necessary information would also be of great help,
- collaboration with travel agencies would bring not only the popularity to the area, but would also facilitate the access of tourists to the destination and create more effectively organized tours,
- creation of a tourist information centre would be useful for those looking for information or advice,
- placing Drăgășani on the map of the Wine Trail of Romania,
- an improved program of the wine festival held annually in the city, where more local artists could perform, more hand-made products from the local community could be sold and the authenticity would replace the kitsch presented today.

6. Conclusions

Wine tourism is a type of sustainable tourism that should be actively supported as it could help to solve the unemployment problems in this area without harming the environment and preserving the traditions. In this sense, a public-private partnership would be very helpful, as it would put together the efforts of the most important stakeholders to work for the same cause. As a result, the public sector could contribute by providing legislative and fiscal support. On the other hand, the private sector could attract European funds by conducting the feasibility studies and statistics

that could prove their necessity. Furthermore, by reinvesting the current profits, the owners of wineries could help their business grow and by expanding them, they could provide better services and offer more jobs to the locals as well as more specialized training for employees. It could also improve the image of the city as well as the image of Romania and the wines produced here would gain more recognition both at the national and international level.

Judging by the predictions provided by the Future Foundation – Amadeus, in the report

Future Traveller Tribes 2030: Understanding tomorrow's traveller, we could understand that the important groups of tourists would be the *Cultural Purist* and the *Ethical Traveller*, where the cultural purist is the one who uses the travel to meet new cultures, goes off the beaten track and depends on the realism of experience, while the ethical traveller is very concerned

about the fair trade, eco-friendly, ethical and environmental issues.

Last but not least, by improving the quality and raising the standards of the tourist products offered in Drăgășani, the visitors would have better experience and this would have a knock-on impact on the region and the country, boosting the economy and leading to the improved quality of life also for the locals.

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