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WINE TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Wine tourism has become a major driver of sustainable rural development, promoting economic growth, preserving cultural heritage, and supporting environmental protection in wine-growing regions worldwide. This paper explores the interface between wine tourism and sustainable rural development, highlighting the multiple benefits and challenges associated with this dynamic relationship. Through a review of existing literature and case studies, the various strategies employed by wine regions to utilize tourism as a tool for socio-economic progress while protecting natural resources and community well-being are examined. The findings show that the successful integration of wine tourism into rural development requires careful planning, collaboration with stakeholders and a commitment to balancing economic prosperity, environmental protection, and social inclusion. By outlining key principles and best practices, this paper offers insights for policymakers, practitioners and researchers seeking to maximize the potential of wine tourism as a catalyst for sustainable rural development.

Key Words: *wine tourism, sustainable rural development, Mediterranean*
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Introduction

Wine tourism represents a compelling link between economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental protection, offering wine-growing regions around the world a path to sustainable rural revitalization. In recent decades, more and more wine regions have recognized the potential of wine tourism as a catalyst for socio-economic growth, resulting in innovative strategies. The growing fascination with wine and the desire for unique travel experiences make wine tourism a magnet for lovers of traditional wine regions such as France, Italy and Spain, but also for emerging wine destinations. Wine tourism offerings include wine tours, tastings, festivals, and educational workshops that cater to a wide range of interests and preferences (Future Market Insights, 2023). This paper explores the synergy between wine tourism and sustainable rural development, focusing on case studies that illustrate the successful integration of tourism initiatives into broader rural development agendas. By examining these case studies, well-known wine regions in the Mediterranean (Italy and France), the study aims to shed light on the different approaches and outcomes related to the integration of wine tourism into rural development.

Literature review

The planting of vines and the establishment of vineyards and the subsequent processing of grapes into wine in wineries are key socio-economic factors in some regions of the world (Fernández Portela & Vidal Domínguez, 2020). Wine is one of the key elements for the development and promotion of tourism in many rural areas (López-Guzmán et al., 2011; Nicolosi et al., 2016). According to Hall et al. (2000), wine tourism includes „visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals, and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors” (p. 3). Wine tourists visit wine destinations because they want to taste wines (Wen & Leung, 2021), learn about the culture, history and tradition of wine, how wine is made, how wine and food are combined, and to enjoy beautiful natural landscapes (Stojković & Milićević, 2020). In general, wine tourism appeals to the senses and emotions, including enjoyment in an idyllic rural setting (Brochado et al., 2021). Of particular interest to some tourists is that, in addition to tasting different types of wine, they also have the opportunity to learn how to pair wines with local gastronomic specialties (Gómez-

Carmona et al., 2023). Wine tourists sometimes actively participate in agricultural work in the vineyards, such as the grape harvest (Dorofeeva et al., 2019). In addition, wine tourism allows tourists to learn about the local culture and the way of life of the rural population (Guzel & Gromova, 2016). In this way, wine becomes a traditional resource that contributes to creating the authenticity of a destination, which has an impact on the branding of the tourist wine region and its positioning on the tourism market, such as in the regions of Tuscany, Bordeaux or Burgundy (Radović & Milićević, 2020).

Wine tourism has become one of the most important drivers of sustainable rural development. Tassiopoulos and Haydam (2006) emphasize that wine tourism contributes significantly to the development of a healthy rural economy. It is increasingly seen as a key element contributing to the generation of additional income and employment in rural areas (López-Guzmán et al., 2011), i.e. as a means to combat the effects of rural restructuring (Hall & Mitchell, 2000). Wine tourism is particularly important for small wineries as it allows them to sell wines to tourists (Milićević & Štetić, 2021). Wine tourism not only contributes directly to the better functioning of wineries, but also indirectly benefits the rural community (Amarando et al., 2019). Rural residents can earn income through complementary service activities such as selling wine, renting accommodation to tourists or working in local restaurants (Williams et al., 2006). Wine tourism also helps to protect the cultural identity of the rural community (Guzel & Gromova, 2016).

Examples of good practices of wine tourism in the Mediterranean

Wine has a very long tradition in the Mediterranean countries (Hall & Mitchell, 2000). In many Mediterranean countries, it is part of the lifestyle and a key element in the presentation and promotion of the gastronomy of these countries. The three largest wine regions in the world are France, Italy, and Spain, which produce almost half of the world's total wine (Guzel & Gromova, 2016).

One of the most famous wine destinations in the world is Italy. Wine is produced throughout Italy, and each region has its own unique economic, historical, social and cultural significance (Santeramo et al., 2017). The Wine Routes are supported by a national law that defines them as „itineraries that include visits to geographical areas where quality wines are produced. The law aims to exploit wine-growing areas and wineries

for tourism purposes, including cultural and natural resources, to attract as many tourists as possible to visit them (Asero & Patti, 2009, p. 10). Some of the best-known wine tourism regions in Italy are Tuscany, Veneto, Piedmont, Emilia Romagna, Sicily, Sardinia, Puglia, Abruzzo, Trentino-Alto Adige, etc. Recently, Italian wineries have increasingly applied the concept of sustainability in their operations, contributing to economic development while improving the quality of life of employees and their families as well as the entire local community (Schimmenti et al., 2016). According to Santeramo et al. (2017), viticulture plays a major role not only in wine production but also in the preservation of numerous well-known landscapes. Among the best known are the wine-growing landscapes of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato in the Piedmont region, which are on the UNESCO World Heritage List (p. 72). This picturesque area includes five different wine-growing regions known for their remarkable landscapes, as well as the Castle of Cavour, which is important both for the development of viticulture and for Italian history. It encompasses the entirety of the complicated technical and economic processes of viticulture and winemaking that have characterised the region for centuries (UNESCO, 2014).

The wine region of Tuscany offers a blend of natural beauty, Mediterranean climate, rich cultural and historical heritage, and the extraordinary commitment of local winemakers. Today, Tuscan wineries are enriched by restaurants, taverns, wine museums and educational centers (Manola & Koltzikoglou, 2020). Tourists can visit vineyards and wineries, learn about different grape varieties and winemaking techniques, taste wine, attend cooking classes or participate in local festivals dedicated to the region's wine culture. They can also enjoy exquisite culinary experiences by tasting local specialties paired with the best wines. In this region there are renowned wineries with a long tradition, such as Salcheto, Antinori nel Chianti Classico, a'Marcanda, Máté, etc.

Salcheto is a sustainable winery located in the heart of Tuscany. The winery offers organic and natural wines. It is open to visitors every day. In addition to visiting the winery and wine tasting, tourists can stay overnight at this winery in a renovated 13th century farmhouse, taste specialties of the local cuisine or take part in cooking classes. The winery's most important corporate goals are the continuous improvement of ecological, social, and economic sustainability. Each year, a strategic plan for sustainable operations is implemented based on the EQUALITAS

standard management system, with a focus on environmental sustainability:

- The winery operates a cellar system that is independent of traditional energy sources and relies mainly on savings as its main source of energy.
- The vineyards and wines are certified according to European organic standards.
- They produce their own fertilizers through composting and improve their soils with 500 biodynamic preparations.
- They use wood that comes from responsibly managed forests and controlled sources (FSC and PEFC).
- They ensure the purification and recycling of 100% of their wastewater, including wastewater from the cleaning of spraying machines.
- Their waste management system allows them to sort over 98% of their waste internally.

In addition, it was the first winery in the world to certify the carbon footprint of a bottle of wine according to the ISO 14064 standard in 2010. It was also the first Italian winery to implement a Welfare Plan for its employees (Salcheto, 2024).

Another winery where tradition and innovation intertwine is the uniquely designed Antinori nel Chianti Classico winery. Owned by the Antinori family, who have been making wine since 1385, it is considered one of the most beautiful and best wineries in the world, setting high standards for modern winemaking. Tourists can admire the unconventional architecture and beautiful vineyards on the roof of the winery, tour the state-of-the-art wine production facilities, taste and purchase some of the world's most prestigious wines and indulge in gastronomic specialties expertly paired with the cellar's wines. Visitors can also visit the museum, which houses the family's art collection, or take part in seminars and exhibitions on Tuscan culture organized at the winery. The winery was built entirely with natural materials from the region, while respecting the environment and the Tuscan landscape. It is designed to have the least possible impact on the environment and maximize energy savings. In 2022, the winery secured first place in the prestigious World's Best Vineyards ranking. This global ranking recognizes the most exceptional wine tourism destinations as determined by a panel of over 500 prominent wine and tourism experts (Antinori, 2024).

France is the world's leading wine producer (Guzel & Gromova, 2016). The wine regions of France are known worldwide, such as Alsace, Champagne, Bordeaux, Burgundy, the Loire Valley, Cognac, Provence, etc. They are characterized by picturesque villages and numerous historical sites, including medieval churches and castles, but above all by picturesque vineyards, wineries, and wine cellars. Tourists can explore the vineyards on foot, cycle along designated cycle paths or take a ride in a hot air balloon. They can also take part in numerous wine festivals or visit the wine routes accompanied by professional guides.

The Bordeaux wine region is one of the oldest wine-growing regions in the world. Bordeaux has almost 6,000 wineries and around 110,075 hectares of vineyards. The oldest winery in Bordeaux is over 700 years old (Château Pape Clément) (Wine Folly, 2024). This wine region includes 6,000 medieval castles, numerous churches, archeological sites, historic villages and towns. The wine estates offer wine tastings, wine courses, local gastronomic specialties, and numerous cultural activities. The vineyards of Bordeaux are the largest wine-growing areas in the world (Visit French Wine, 2024). In recent decades the Bordeaux wine region has invested heavily in improving its cultivation techniques to increase biodiversity and product standards. Over 65% of the vineyards have a recognized organic certification. The aim is for all wineries to have this certification by 2025 (Bordeaux Wine Trip, 2024).

Bordeaux is known for its unique wine museum „La Cité du Vin”, which hosts tasting workshops, exhibitions, performances, film screenings, and wine seminars where visitors can learn about the history, culture, and tradition of different wines from around the world. The museum offers (Bordeaux Tourisme Congrès, 2024):

- A 35-meter-high viewing platform that offers a unique opportunity to taste wine with a panoramic view of Bordeaux and its surroundings.
- A 250-seat room for concerts, screenings, conferences, and debates.
- Three tasting areas, including a multi-sensory room.
- Educational workshops for younger visitors.
- A reading room with a wide range of wine-related publications.
- A 250 m² gift store offering books, limited edition products, gifts, and wine-related souvenirs.
- Three different restaurants.
- An information point on wine routes where visitors can book visits to wineries in Bordeaux or other regions.

In the north-western part of the Bordeaux region lies one of the most famous wine estates in the world, renowned for its exceptional red wines. Château Lafite Rothschild is a wine estate that has been owned by the Rothschild family since 1868. The first written records of this winery date back to the 13th century. Château Lafite belongs to a group of five leading wine producers and is the dream of all wine lovers and collectors. The estate encompasses 113 hectares of picturesque vineyards located in a protected ecosystem. The winery is determined to adapt its viticultural methods and is actively converting to organic farming methods. Visitors can tour the vineyards, winery, and wine cellar, as well as the 16th century castle that serves as the center of the winery (Grand Vin de Lafite, 2024).

Conclusion

Wine tourism plays a central role in promoting sustainable rural development as it offers a multi-faceted approach that combines economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental protection. Through the examination of various case studies and literature reviews, it is clear that wine tourism is an effective tool for promoting socio-economic progress in wine-growing regions worldwide.

The relationship between wine tourism and sustainable rural development is underlined by the numerous benefits it brings to both local communities and the environment. Wine tourism not only creates additional income and employment opportunities in rural areas, but also promotes cultural identity and the preservation of cultural heritage. It also serves as a means of promoting environmental protection, as evidenced by the introduction of sustainable practices in wineries such as Salcheto and Château Lafite Rothschild.

Limitations of the study include potential difficulties in the broad application of the findings and challenges in accessing data. Future research should track the long-term impacts of wine tourism, comparative analyses of different strategies, stakeholder engagement, and development of sustainable wine tourism models.

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