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WINE TOURISM AS A MECHANISM FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF GEORGIA

ABSTRACT

Wine tourism involves close cooperation between two sectors – tourism and viticulture. It is a part of agri-tourism and a collateral activity to the wine industry which leads to regional development. Georgia is a Cradle of Wine with a great historical past and rich cultural traditions. Georgia has the 6 most main winemaking in different regions, and so the wines are also different. 20 aboriginal wines (origin-named) are registered here. Each region is engaged in wine tourism. National tourism administration since 2012 has started project “wine route” which is an opportunity for rural development. Ancient Georgian traditional Kvevri wine-making method is on the UNESCO intangible heritage list (05/12/2013) and it strongly encourages a new thematic and fastest-growing direction of the tourism industry – wine tourism. The article gives a SWOT analysis of Georgian wine tourism and a clear picture of wine routes and winemakers from different rural areas which have more important experience in wine tourism.

Key words: Georgian winemaking regions, wine tourism, Kvevri wine-making method, wine routes, rural development.

JEL Classification: Q190 Agriculture: Other.

1. INTRODUCTION

Wine is a global phenomenon, impossible to ignore. It is culture, and this is its modernity and its actuality: a fascination that rests on his being on the landscapes, the diversity, the heritage and the environment that we need to be able to tell and share. Georgian wine and current events that surrounded it, show that a viticulture and winemaking industry contributing to the development of the country and its regions. Ancient Georgian traditional Kvevri wine-making method – the UNESCO intangible heritage – strongly encourages a new direction of the world tourism industry – wine tourism, as a part of agritourism. It offers

extraordinary diversity to the consumer as well as business opportunities to producers. Georgia has 6 most main winemaking regions; the wines are also different. 20 aboriginal wines (origin-named) are registered here. Each region is engaged in wine tourism. And NTA of Georgia since 2012 has started the project “Wine Route” which is an opportunity for rural development, so to analyze the wine tourism business, show a clear picture of wine routes and winemakers from different rural areas and evaluate the impacts of agritourism on the local economy level is very important for understand of winemaking and regional problems.

2. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

On the 24th of January, 2020 in Madrid the heads of the UNWTO and the OIV have reached a Memorandum of Understanding to promote wine tourism as a rural development tool in line with the new Strategic Plan 2020–2024; “this joint work will make it possible to carry out the axes of the Strategic Plan of the OIV and its goals, and at the same time achieve 13 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations” (<http://www.oiv.int/en/oiv-life/the-oiv-and-unwto-join-forces-for-the-promotion-of-wine-tourism>)

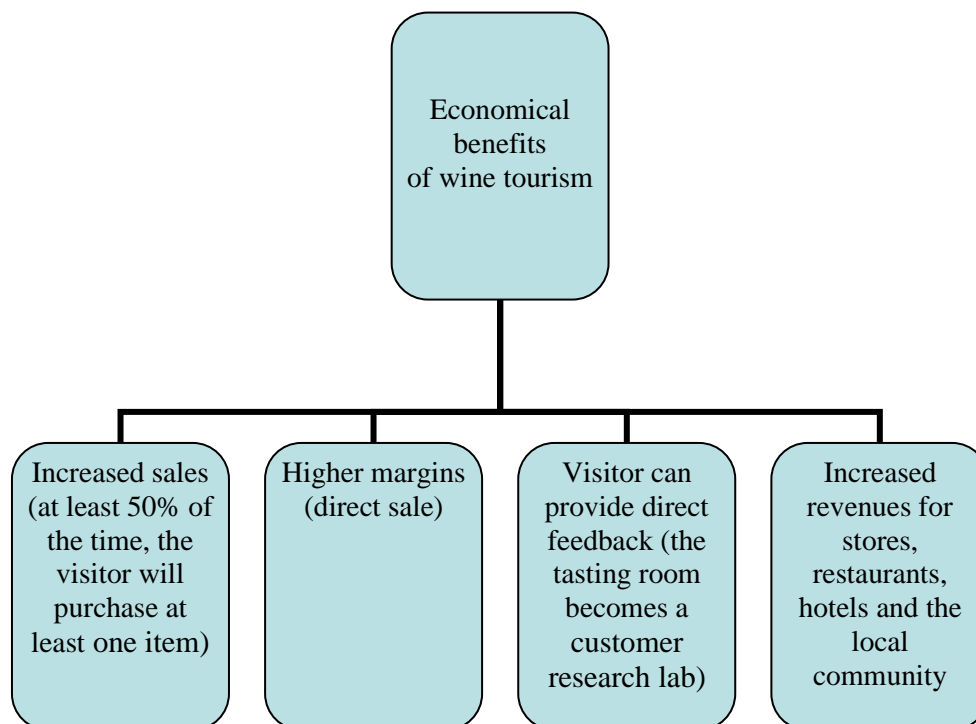
At the global level, the phenomenon of wine tourism is growing and is considered to be a driver for the economic and social development of many rural areas (Presenza, *et al.*, 2010). In the past few decades wine has become much more than a drink embodying values and meanings going beyond its functional nature. In addition to sensorial pleasure, linked to the organoleptic features of wine, embodied symbolic values and psychological attributes of the products have become the main determinants of consumption. The wine industry lends itself to a union with tourism, and causes as a result of tourist experience in history, in a combination of culture wine, food, lifestyle and territory. Wine tourism is “touring vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine exhibitions, where wine-tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of the wine regions are the principal factors of motivation for the visitors” (Hall *et al.*, 2000).

Wine tourism involves close cooperation between the two sectors – tourism and viticulture. It is a part of agri-tourism and a collateral activity to the wine industry which leads to regional development Wine Tourism System consists of 3 different actors: Consumers/travelers, destination organizations (DMO) and suppliers. Wine tourism is a strategy by which territories develop and market wine-related attractions and imagery, a marketing opportunity for wineries to educate and sell their products directly to consumers (Getz and Brown, 2006).

Wine tourism brings benefits to the wine industry, to destinations and to host communities (Martin, 2004). Benefits to the wine industry are: increased wine

sales, educate visitors and foster brand loyalty, attract new market segments, higher profits from winery sales, improved links with the wine trade, new partnerships (e.g., with other attractions), test new products. Benefits to destinations are: generate increased visitors and spending, attract new and repeat visitors; also, it develops a unique, positive destination image and causes overcome slow demand periods. Benefits to host communities are: attract new investment, develop new facilities and amenities (e.g., restaurants and attractions), foster community pride, and create successful events for residents and visitors. Economical benefits of wine tourism are illustrated by the Fig.1.

The wine tourism products have been ranked into several categories (Manila 2013) (Table 1). Wine tourism product development involves within the framework of a strategy win-win at the level of macro-economic (national and regional) and also in the context of local partnerships. The wine tourism supply has three basic dimensions: landscape size, patrimonial size and wine road size.



Source: Emanuela Panke. Introduction to wine tourism. PowerPoint Presentation, Baku, 26-27th 2020, "Iter Vitis Caucasus" 1st General Assembly

Figure 1. Economical benefits of wine tourism

Table 1

The typology of wine tourism products

The wine tourism products	What are these products
Wine Road	Marked itineraries in wine-growing regions for the discovery of the vineyards, wine, cellar;
Hiking in the vineyards	Marked itineraries enabling discovery of the vineyards in a ride;
Organized tours and stays in the vineyards	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, gastronomical, cultural, technical, formal dinner);
Oenology internships	Courses more or less detailed allowing for a better knowledge of the product marketing and all that is reported (culture, tradition, technical production, etc);
Wine cellar visits	Visiting the cellars; wine producers are known their wine cellars;
Museums of wines	Places of culture with the goal of presenting the world wine and transmitting a "savoir-faire" and ancestral traditions;
Holidays and festivals	Events aimed at keeping local traditions, encourage the promotion of wine and animate the territory; E.g., at European level, The Days of Wine Tourism; at the local level, the Bacchus International Festival of Vine and Wine, in Focşani;
Professional salons, local fairs, wine actions	These groupings have as their purpose the presentation of products in a strictly commercial. E.g., International Salon of Vinvest Wines.

Source: Mihaela Manila, Wine tourism – a great tourism offer face to new challenges

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

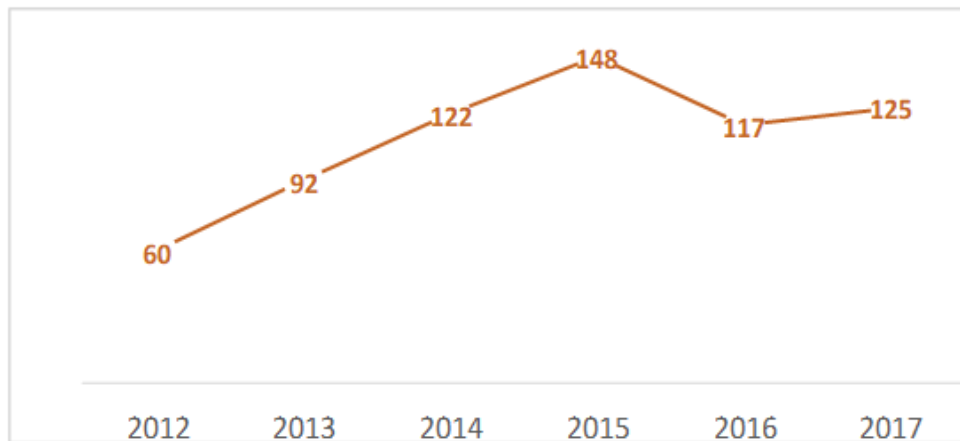
In our work we use statistical, analytical, synthetically methods and methods of survey and interview. The research analyzed the wine production (world and Georgia – comparative analysis), Georgian wine regions, diversity of Georgian wine and the structure of wine tourism businesses; was evaluated the impacts of wine tourism and its Unique traditions on the local economy level in several regions in Georgia. In the article we used interviews (from wine da wine tourism business: wineries, family cellars owners, workers of some municipality tourism development agencies, tourist companies) about problems, market niche, also was as analyzed the evolution of the project “Wine route”. The main question is; Does tourism increase the potential of rural areas?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. WINE PRODUCTION

The archaeological findings (McGovern *et al.*, 2017) at the site called Shulaveri Gora witness the fact that in VI millennium BC, the locals knew how to cultivate grapes and turn them into a magical drink. The humans of the Neolithic period that lived at the modern territory of Georgia, already had specific tools for working at the vineyards, and special vessels for drinking wine! Kvevri is a large earthenware vessels used for the fermentation, storage and aging of traditional Georgian wine. Kvevri winemaking method is unique and part of the national identity, and therefore attracts wine tourists.

Georgia's viticulture is distinguished by its diversity; Here are 525 endemic grape varieties, 437 of which are kept in collections, Approximately 30 grape varieties are in use commercially nowadays. Basic grape varieties – Rkatsiteli for white and Saperavi for red, with 50% and 40% respectively (Chkhartishvili, 2020)



Source: <http://georgianwine.gov.ge/>

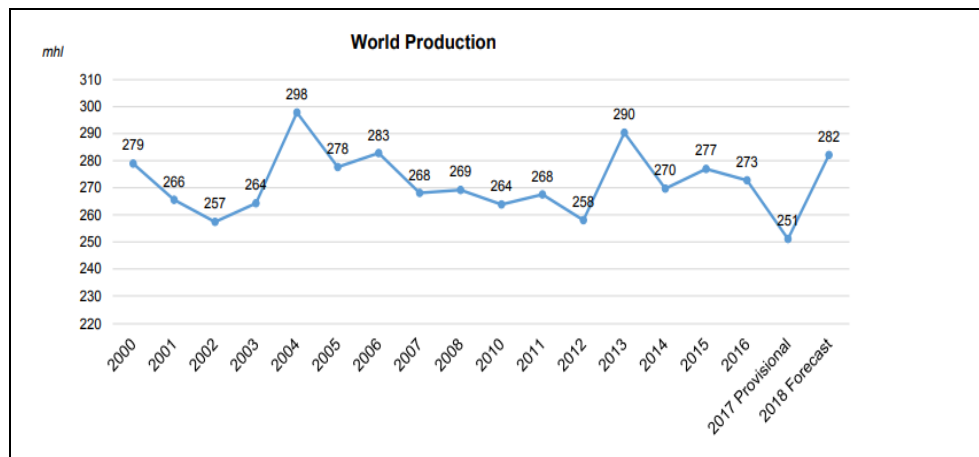
Figure 1. Wine production in Georgia (thousands of tons)

There is 48017 ha of vineyards in Georgia. The country has 6 most main winemaking regions: 1) Kakheti is the most important winemaking region – of 20 aboriginal wines registered in Georgia 15 belong to Kakheti. Kakheti has always been the flagship and so is the new one: 58% of the total area – 32823 hectares, comes to Kakheti 2) Kartli has 4177 ha (9%), Kartli is known for its classic European style and high-quality sparkling wines. Aboriginal wines are Atenuri and Bolnisi. 3) Imereti; 8584 ha (18%); Imereti is the most diverse regions of Georgian wine-making, climatic conditions and soil composition are very different, and so the wines are also different every.

The place of origin wines – Svir. 4) In Racha-Lechkhumi 1348 ha (30%), Racha – Lechkhumi is distinguished other regions by the scarcity of vineyards and rare grape varieties. The place of origin-named wines are Khvanchkara and Tvishi. 5) Black Sea coastal area – Guria (268 ha – 1%), Samegrelo (775 ha – 2%); Abkhazeti and Adjara (42 ha). – the vineyards are at 2–4 m above sea level. The region is one of the oldest centers of winemaking in Georgia (antique sources about Colchis).

The current winemaking history of these two districts is linked with Scottish Jacob Mar in Guria, and with French Achille Murat in Samegrelo. 6) In the oldest part of viticulture and winemaking, Meskheta has 7,0 hectares of vineyard area. Meskheta is probably the highest mountain viticulture region not only in Georgia, but throughout the world. The vine is found here at 900-1700 meters above sea level. The Meskhetian Viticulture primarily means gardens and vineyards on terraces.

The wine & spirits business is one of the most profitable sectors in Georgia. In 2017, the sector's net profit margin stood at 26.0%. Wine is Georgia's 4th-largest export product with 5.9% (in 2018–2019) of the total, respectively. Wine and spirits exports from Georgia increased at 6.0% to US\$ 305.3mn over 2013-18; 65mn liters of wine was exported in 2018. Georgia exports wine to 53 different countries now (Bochorishvili 2019). World wine production is shown in Figure 2.



Source: <http://www.oiv.int/public/medias/6307/oiv-press-release-global-economic-vitiviniculture-data-octob.pdf>

Figure 2. Trends in world wine production

Table 2 give us comparative analysis of wine production in the world and Georgia. Viticulture is very fragmented in Georgia as the vast majority of vineyards are owned by households using technologically unsophisticated production methods. This is the main reason why yield in Georgia at 3.8 ton/ha is

2.1x lower as compared to productivity in European countries and 2.6x lower than the world average, showing considerable room for improvement in the sector (Bochorishvili 2019).

Table 2

Wine production (excluding juice and musts) in the World and in Georgia in the period 2014–2017

Unit: mhl	2014	2015	2016	2017 provisional	2018 forecast	2018/2017 Variation in volume	2018/2017 Variation in %
World Total	270	277	273	251	282	31	12
Georgia	1,2	1,5	1,2	1.3	2.0	0.7	57

Source: Author's calculations using data from the OIV

Table 3 shows how the importance of wine production has increased in recent years.

Table 3

Evolution of Georgian trade and wine trade in the period 2014–2019 (million USD)

Year	External Trade Turnover	Export	Import	Wine exports
2014	11,462.9	2,861.0	8,601.8	180.7
2015	9,504.3	2,204.2	7,300.2	95.8
2016	9,407.0	2,113.0	7,293.9	113.8
2017	10,678.9	2,735.8	7,943.1	170.0
2018	12,492.7	3,355.7	9,136.5	203.0
2019	12,834.7	3,771.5	9,063.2	-

Source: Author's calculations using data from the www.geostat.ge

4.2. WINE TOURISM IN GEORGIA AND PROJECT “WINE ROUTE”

In many countries wine tourism is already considered as a powerful lever for the development of rural and national viticulture and winemaking. The 8000-year-old wine tradition widely opens the way for wine tourism.

Today, many foreign magazines and newspapers write about Georgian wine tourism: Washington Post, Bloomberg Business National Geographic. Georgia ranks amongst the best wine destinations in the world; The country implements various projects, for instance, under the auspices of the United Nations World Tourism Organization there was held the 6th International Wine Tourism Conference in March 2014 and the first International Wine Tourism Conference in September 2016; The General Strategy for the development of Wine Tourism was established in 2015; In 2016 the country gifted a model of Georgian clay vessel (Kvevri) presented with English-Georgian inscriptions to UN Geneva Office, the vessel was placed in the courtyard of the building. Hereby, it is worth pointing out wine campaign #WelcometoGeorgia and wine gifting to all foreign

guests entering Georgia through international airports; Participating in large-scale international wine exhibitions and wine awards; Organizing wine festivals, competitions, etc.

The project called *Wine Road* project has been launched since 2012 in the framework of which up to 50 cellars were recommended for further expansion forecasts. The mentioned project was expanded with 32 more units in 2015 and with 46 more in 2019. Nowadays, throughout the country 211 wine cellars are involved in the project majority of which 122 – are located in Kakheti region.

All above-mentioned activities contribute to the promotion of Georgian cultural heritage and Georgian wine and wine tourism; It has a positive effect on the certain regions economy and rural areas of the country.

It is also worth saying that the development of wine tourism is always accompanied by innovative concepts and new attractive segments of the market. For example, chateaux that are aimed to the premium-segment (the very first one of them was Chateau Mukhrani), wine bars and restaurants (8000 VINTAGES), wine hotels (VINOTEL, e.g., Vino City Wine Hotel), wine resorts (AKHASHENI WINE RESORT) and wine museums.

At the first stage, we conducted a small research of economic entities involved in wine tourism – wine companies and owners of family wine cellars – which included several important questions related to the development of winemaking and wine tourism; The survey found that the vast majority of economic entities are newly founded ones under the age of 5 (58%) with a small family history (89%) and are located in rural areas (93%). 78% of respondents were involved in the project “Wine Road”. For 67%, wine tourism is an additional source of income (for 21% it is a mean of raising awareness). All respondents are going to make new investments.

45% of the entities annually employ up to 20 people (for permanent and seasonal work) while 2% employ more than 50 people. Due to its high demand 97% produce Kvevri (clay vessel) wine. 99% of producers use social media along with other communication facilities, 12% of them use only social media. The mentioned figures show that winemaking is a mainly small business and wine tourism is a fast-growing field.

Offered services is another matter of discussion. All entities involved in the survey offer wine tasting to the guests, cellar tours and catering services (based on pre-order); 32% offer overnight; 25% - participating in vintages, 17% – taking part in Chacha making process, 16% – participating in Churchkhela (the variate of Georgian sweets) making process. Here should be pointed out that the Wine Road brochure also mentions other activities – Kvevri opening, bread baking master class, folk show, wine bottling and labeling – that will undoubtedly increase winemaker income and bring more stability to the local community.

The main problem of the respondents is lack of finances which prevents them from activity promotion, upgrading equipment and product selling.

At the second stage of the study, we conducted an in-depth interview with viticulture and winemaking experts and tourism representatives, using both face-to-face and telephone interviews. The talks were focused on winemaking and wine tourism development, consumer markets, the economic importance of the sector, challenges; Interviewers also answered questions about what kind of assistance they would like to receive from the state.

Based on the information received from the respondents, it can be concluded that the Russian embargo in 2006 severely affected wine business and caused great damage to the country's economy. As a result, Georgian wine businesses began to rapidly diversify their export countries. Entering new markets was challenging, but it resulted in improved quality of wine and gradually developed viticulture and winemaking. It has been about 10 years since the winemaking industry began to flourish first in eastern Georgia – in Kakheti and then in almost all areas of the country, where historically vines and wine have been the most important fields of agriculture. The development of winemaking resulted in the development of wine tourism as well. This has been particularly noticeable since 2013, when the technology of putting wine in “Kvevri” was included in the list of non-material monuments of UNESCO. The number of wineries has increased, most of which are also involved in wine tourism, which represents various services.

The main export markets for Georgian wine are post-Soviet countries: Russia, Ukraine, the Baltics, Kazakhstan; The interest of wine lovers in Central and Western Europe is also noteworthy. Wine tours are designed both for the middle class and for high-income tourists; The main motivator here is the diversity of our culture, the variety of wine and the ancient technology of putting wine in “Kvevri”. In recent years, there has also been increased interest in the Asian countries. Today, the development of wine tourism is in an active phase, with ongoing infrastructural projects: cellars are being built and restored.

According to the experts, the success of this sector has great economic importance for the country and especially for the development of the agrarian sector. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the total area of vineyards, wine production and exports, the number of employees, the number of wine cellars and wine tourism generally. This creates additional revenue in regions and rural areas, and strengthens them in terms of sustainability. It provides foreign currency revenues across the country and improves tourism statistics. Furthermore, exporting quality wine has a positive impact on the country's reputation. Additionally, wine production is vital for the population in the regions, as evidenced by the latest trend – the return of the population to the regions and the continuation of winemaking traditions.

Based on the in-depth interviews, it can be inferred that today the main challenge in the field remains the production of certified seedlings, the quality of grapes and wine; It is also important for the industry to control the use of chemical

substances; Another challenge is a lack of technology and innovation – very little knowledge of new technologies and methods.

It is essential to take care of the growth of ecologically clean products and to set certain standards, more effectively support start-ups and small entrepreneurs in terms of access to financial resources and retraining. It is advisable to make recommendations for small wine cellars about wine exports. The state should raise the awareness of quality wines. It is also important to develop professional and short-term educational programs in the modern concepts of winemaking, wine tourism and quality of services. The country should be popularized more as the homeland of wine; intensive trainings should be carried out in order to improve the quality of wine tourism products and services. Cheap loans should be provided for small and medium-sized enterprises that create rural infrastructure for the development of family hotels and catering establishments. Also training courses should be provided for them. At the last stage of the research, we have interviewed the head of the Tourism Development Department of Baghdati Municipality.

The picture of wine tourism in the municipality is as follows:

1. Increase the number of the registered cellar from 5 (2014) to 45 (2019)
2. Annual participation of winemakers and family wineries in national and international wine and tourism exhibitions (Tbilisi, Gurjaani, Telavi, Spain-Malaga, Berlin, Prague)
3. A wine guild has been established
4. A precedent of Baia wine and a young woman winemaker
5. Trainings and master classes in wine and wine tourism
6. Tasting of Baghdati wines
7. A visit of wine master Lisa Granick
8. Baghdati Wine Festival was organized

Table 4

SWOT analysis of wine tourism in Georgia

Strengths	Weakness
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Good wine product and accompanying products “chacha” and “churchkhela” 2. Good hospitality of residents 3. The rich history and authentic vine and wine culture 4. Variety of vine varieties 5. Variety of terroirs 6. Unique technology – Kveri wine making method that is included in the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage 7. Satisfied and loyal customers – Wine lovers 8. Involvement experience 9. Promotion and communication of wine tourism 10. Organic wines 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rural Infrastructure, 2. Lack of touristic information of the suppliers, 3. Lack of knowledge of new technologies and innovations in the field of wine technology 4. Lack of knowledge of winemakers in the field of wine tourism and in degustation 5. Lack of control over the use of poisonous substances 6. Lack of diversification and monotony of wine tourism products

Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Availability of young and knowledgeable workforce 2. Position of Georgia as Cradle of Wine; 3. Kvevri wine making method as a UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage 4. History and rich culture of Georgia 5. Government support in promotion, international interest 6. Increasing inbound tourism number 7. Increasing number of the family cellar 8. Increasing the interest of entrepreneurs 9. Increasing wine production and wine export 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increasing competition 2. Worsening of wine quality due to increased commercialization and / or excessive use of chemicals 3. Other destination 4. Other types of tourism 5. Climate change and global warming 6. Lack of financial resources of wine makers

Source: Author's research

5. CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of wine tourism is growing and is considered to be a driver for the economic and social development of many rural areas in Georgia. Georgia has a great opportunity to develop a wine tourism.

Georgia – homeland of wine. In VIth millennium, BC, the locals – humans of the Neolithic period, which lived in the modern territory of Georgia, already had specific tools for working at the vineyards, and special vessels for drinking wine! Qvevri are large earthenware vessels used for the fermentation, storage and aging of traditional Georgian wine. Here are 525 endemic grape varieties, 437 of which are kept in collections; Approximately 30 grape varieties are in use commercially nowadays. Wine & spirits business is one of the most profitable sectors in Georgia.

Wine production has been growing in Georgia for the last 10 years, which is accompanied by the development of wine tourism. The project “Wine Road” has been successfully implemented since 2012; Across the country at the end of 2019, 211 wine companies / family wineries / were involved in the project and most of them, 122 facilities, are located in the main wine region – Kakheti.

Our research assured us that:

1. Winemaking and wine tourism are mainly growing small businesses.
2. Wine tourism has great socio-economic importance, which is clearly confirmed by the latest trend - the return of the population to the regions and the continuation of winemaking traditions.
3. In wine tourism, along with tasting and visiting the cellar, the services offered (meals, hosting with local products, overnight) are increasing, many of which are authentic, attractive and unforgettable experiences for tourists: vintage,

distilling chacha, making churchkheli. However not everyone has such a variety of services as qvevri opening, bread baking master class, folk show, wine bottling and labeling.

Problems identified:

1. Poor finances, which prevents winemakers from promoting their activities, upgrading equipment and selling their products,
2. Lack of control over the use of poisonous substances; Quality of grapes and wine, lack of control over preparations and chemicals used in viticulture,
3. Little knowledge of new technologies and methods. And lack of knowledge of winemakers in the field of wine tourism and in degustation,
4. Poor rural infrastructure,
5. Lack of touristic information of the suppliers,
6. Lack of diversification and monotony of wine tourism products.

Recommended:

1. Controlling the quality of preparations used in wine production and grapes and setting certain standards for wine quality;
2. Promoting start-ups and small entrepreneurs involved in winemaking and wine tourism in terms of increasing access to and training of financial resources;
3. Strengthening the care for raising the awareness of Georgian wines and popularizing the country as a homeland of wine;
4. Development of professional and short-term educational programs in modern concepts of winemaking, wine tourism, quality of service;
5. Carry out intensive trainings to improve the variety of wine tourism products and service quality.

The development of wine tourism in Baghdati Municipality might be considered a good example and generalized across the country.

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