

Original scientific article

Received: May 15 2023;
Received in revised form: May 25 2023;
Accepted: Jun 01 2023;
Available online: July 13 2023.

UDC: 338.48(497.113)

doi: 10.5937/zrgfub2371153P

WINE ROUTES IN THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS AND WINE TOURISM OF SERBIA: A CASE STUDY OF FRUŠKA GORA

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Abstract: In the last two decades, wine tourism has become increasingly important in the development plans for tourism in the Republic of Serbia, especially considering that it is very profitable. Among the key subjects of wine tourism, wine producers in the regions of Srem, Aleksandrovačka Župa and Šumadija stand out. The tourist products also become recognizable products of the wine-growing regions, as the wineries have tasting rooms where wine and homemade food are combined for visitors. In this way, the identity of the geographic region is defined through the promotion of wine. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, several hundred busses came every year to the wineries in the above-mentioned regions of Serbia, so that almost 40% of the wine production was sold practically on the doorstep during weekends and holidays. The work analyzes in particular the wine roads of Fruška Gora, which have always had great potential and an important role in Serbian viticulture. The research focused on the complementarity of wine and religious tourism, with special attention to the production of monastery wines in own economy.

Keywords: wineries, viticulture, monasteries, wine routes, wine and religious tourism

Introduction

Wine tourism, as one of the types of thematic tourism, has experienced significant growth worldwide in the last two decades (Jovanović, 2015; Dogulas et al., 2015). Until recently, there have been relatively few systematic studies in the literature on wine tourism, i.e., on how its development and marketing are managed,

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and on the people who visit wine regions and want to experience the wine tourism product (Carseln, 2004). Contemporary research has confirmed that the foundation of wine tourism is the visitor experience (Alant & Bruwer, 2010; Cho et al., 2014), hedonic needs for pleasure and leisure (Bruwer et al., 2018), from which it follows that quality winery managers must have accurate knowledge of the motivations of potential tourists, as well as information about their lifestyles, attitudes, and shared values (Grybovych et al., 2013).

It is developing most intensively in the famous wine-growing regions of Europe (Joksimović, 2022). Wine tourism continues to grow rapidly worldwide (Muntean & Nistor, 2017), with the top eight wine-producing countries reporting more than 40 million wine tourists (Mintel Group, 2017). Wineries report that, on average globally, 19.5% of their revenue comes from wine tourism (Remenova et al., 2019). The beginnings of wine tourism development can be found in Germany in the late 1920s, when the construction of modern roads and the development of the automotive industry intensified (Deutsches Weininstitut, 2019). The formal beginnings of the development of wine tourism are in the 1950s and 1960s and were characterized by the construction of wine roads and the marking of trails in vineyards. All over the world, interest in wine began to grow, thanks to its popularization through thematic programs on radio and television (UNWTO, 2016; Gomez, Prat & Molina, 2018). At the beginning of this century, wine tourism became a global trend (Sun & Drakeman, 2020). In addition to the very favorable conditions for viticulture, wine production in Serbia is significantly lower than in countries with similar natural conditions (Sekulić et al., 2016). Wine production in our country varies from year to year depending on climatic conditions. For example, in 2022, 30 million liters of wine were imported, while exports amounted to 12 million liters. The data of wine producers registered in the wine register show a lower production, as a certain amount of wine is reserved for own consumption. There are 430 registered wine producers in Serbia, which are market-oriented. Serbia has very favorable natural and other resources to achieve a much larger, more stable, higher quality, structurally more appropriate and more suitable for the market wine production (Petrović et al., 2015).

Wine tourism can be defined from different aspects, with most definitions referring to motivation and experience. According to (Getz & Brown, 2006), wine tourism is defined as a journey associated with the attractions of wineries and wine growing areas through various types of marketing to the wine industry. Hall et al. (2002) define wine tourism as visiting vineyards, wineries, and wine festivals where experiencing the characteristics of the vine is the main motive for visitors. According to O'Neill & Palmer, "wine tourism has evolved over time into a form of special importance to world tourism and is now considered a very important component of the tourism product in many wine-producing countries" (2004, 270). Manila (2012)

defines wine tourism as all activities for tourists in wine producing areas: Visiting wineries, accommodation, restaurants, and activities related to the wine products of the “terroir” and local traditions. In our literature, wine tourism could be defined as a tourist trip that includes visits to vineyards, wineries, wine events and wine exhibitions, with the main motive of wine tasting, experiencing the wine growing region and enjoying the locally produced food and specialties of the region (Pivac, 2012).

As wine tours are combined with the cultural and historical sites of the region, wine tourism and religious tourism complement each other (Alant & Bruwer, 2010). In contrast to the numerous definitions for wine tourism, there is no clearly defined definition for religious tourism in the scientific literature (Radović, 2017). From several interpretations and explanations of this term (Stamenković, 2006; Šećibović, 1995), it appears that religious tourism is one of the oldest forms of travel by people, with the aim of visiting a specific shrine, for the purpose of pilgrimage. According to Krstić, the main segment of religious tourism consists of the faithful who, while travelling to monasteries, “live a completely Christian life for those few days and consider this as a compensation for all the faults in the other days of their daily life” (2012, 170). In the 18 destinations defined in the Strategy for the Development of Tourism in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2026, monasteries as the backbone of religious tourism development are mentioned only in a small number of the listed attractions for each of the destinations (MTTT RS, 2016). In most cases, after visiting monasteries, tourists leave without staying long, precisely because of the lack of accompanying facilities. The fact is that these accompanying costs should be in contradiction with the modern life in the cities (Ćirić, 2010).

Viticulture has a long tradition on the territory of Serbia (Sekulić et al., 2016). The roots of viticulture date back to the Roman Emperor Probus, who in 232 allowed viticulture outside the territory of present-day Italy (Marco-Navaro, Pedraja-Iglesias, 2010). Since vineyards are a feature of the rural environment, this would be an ideal opportunity for complementary development of wine and religious tourism (Simišić, 2021). According to Joksimović (2022), winegrowers in rural areas are among the most important subjects of wine tourism. Apart from them, monasteries have always been great producers, but also consumers of wine. Great importance was attached to this beverage in both spiritual and secular life. The inseparable connection between viticulture and monasteries in Serbia is also shown by the fact that in the areas where most monasteries were present, there are also the largest and best vineyards, i.e. wine-growing areas. This is the case with the Fruška Gora wine-growing region, which is also the subject of study in this paper. The Fruška Gora wine region dates back to the time of Marcus Aurelius Probus, who planted the first vines in this area (Rabotić, 2012). Over the centuries, monks from Champagne came to this region and brought their own varieties. The period of Turkish rule is characterized by stagnation in the

development of viticulture and wine production (Terzić & Spahić, 2021). The aim of the paper is to present, through comparative analysis and research, the possibilities and prospects of the combined development of wine and religious tourism using the example of the Fruška Gora wine region.

Material and methods

Study area

On the territory of Serbia, according to the data from 2022, there are 18 wine regions (<https://www.vino.rs/vinarije.html>). The wineries of Fruška Gora are located in the Srem wine region, which covers an area of 86,715 ha. In terms of the number of registered wineries, this is the largest wine region in Serbia. According to the Tourism Organization of Serbia from 2021, there were over 100 wineries here. The vineyards of the Srem region are located on the slopes of Fruška Gora, bordering the Danube to the north and the Sava River to the south. The wineries of the Srem region are located in rural areas and the production is mainly focused on white wines. Wine growing was already practiced by the Romans on the gentle slopes of Fruška Gora. During the reign of Emperor Probus, vineyards were allowed to be planted in the Roman provinces. In the 18th century, the Renaissance personality Zaharija Orfelin, author of specialized literature on viticulture, claimed that the wines of Fruška Gora were not inferior in quality to the best Italian wines (Pivac, 2008). With the development of vineyards, grape varieties were also improved, modern wine cellars were built and experts were trained to produce quality wines. Among the best wines of Fruška Gora are Karlovac and monastery wines. Sremski Karlovci is considered the center of wine production in Fruška Gora. One of the oldest and most famous wine cellars in Serbia is located in this climate, namely Mozer's Cellar from 1848 (Josipović et al., 2020).

Sacral buildings, especially monasteries, were important for the development of viticulture in the Fruška Gora region. Most of them are concentrated in one place here in Serbia, which is why Fruška Gora is popularly called the "little Serbian Holy Mountain" Since this area is well connected by transport, it is ideal for combining wine and religious tourism (Živković et al., 2022). Visitors are offered the opportunity to combine a visit to wineries with a tour of the complex of Orthodox monasteries, churches and other famous buildings. The monasteries Kovilj, Novo Hopovo and Vrdnik (Ravanica) are located near the wine house "Kovačević" in Irig. The wine house "Deurić" is located near the monastery Mala Remeta. The monasteries Šišatovac, Petkovića and Divča are located near the wineries "Banoštor" and

“Erdevik”. The monastery wines are mostly produced in a traditional way, without excessive use of chemical means in the cultivation of vines and without technological processing in the wine production, which is why they carry a wild note of strong and lively wines. These wines serve the economic independence of the monastery and, in addition to commercial sales to tourists, are used mainly for communion and liturgy. It is paradoxical but true that the highest quality monastic wine of the Fruška Gora vineyard, produced in the Fenek monastery, is called “Metohija wine barik”. The fact that the labels of the wines with Fruška Gora origin are of exceptional quality was also proven by the prestigious award that came from Italy last year. At the Emozioni dal Mondo competition, held in the city of Bergamo on October 16, 2022, with the participation of wineries from 30 countries around the world, the Srem winery “Probus” won the double gold medal for the wine Magis 2017 in an extremely strong competition. This wine, by the way, is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Vranac, which has already won a significant medal at the Asia Wine Trophy 2019 (www.vino.rs).

Methodology

The main research tool in this work is the interview method conducted by the authors of this work among the participants of the first major wine route realized on July 18, 2022 on Fruška Gora. The host of this event was the young family winery “Verkat” from Čerević, founded in 2018, and the organizer of this event is the association of wine lovers “Dionysus Experience” from Belgrade. Their mission is to gather in the so-called “divine adventure” all wine and hiking lovers, offering them a hike in the wine-growing areas of Serbia, combined with wine tasting and getting to know the natural and cultural features of the area, a lot of fun outside the neighborhoods (<https://dionysusexperience.com/>). The research involved 40 people, 36 of whom were participants of the wine route, while four respondents are owners of the most famous wineries in Fruška Gora. The questionnaire consists of three parts:

- the first one, related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the Wine Route participants (Table 1);
- the second part contained several questions also addressed to the tourists, concerning their views on the offer of the wineries in the Srem region, the reasons for deciding to participate in the Wine Route, the type of information about the Wine Route, the importance of the wineries’ offer segments for the overall local experience, and the visitors’ interest in participating in the next Wine Routes in Serbia. One question related to the study of the views of the participants of the Wine Route on whether their stay in Srem includes only a visit to the winery and wine tasting with entertainment with other participants of the event, or whether

it also includes a visit to the sacred objects of Fruška Gora, then the number of days of stay, the type of accommodation they choose when they stay overnight, the company with which they visit the wineries and the means of transportation they use for the trip.

- the third, which refers to questions intended for the owners of the wineries, namely their views on the importance of certain product characteristics for the image and reputation of the wineries, on the importance of the wine routes for the promotion of wine and the increase of sales, on the existence of catering and accommodation facilities in the wineries, on the most consumed types of wine by color and quality.

When studying the importance of wine tourism for the overall development of tourism in Serbia and especially in the Fruška Gora region, the approach of comparative analysis was used. That is, the individual segments of wine tourism offer and marketing activities for the visitors of the wineries and participants of the first realized wine route on the one hand and the winery owners and wine producers on the other hand are presented. The methodological approach in this work consists primarily in determining the characteristics and peculiarities of wine tourism, analyzing the offer of wineries in the Fruška Gora region and the importance of marketing for the development of this type of tourism, as well as defining its advantages and disadvantages in the form of an SWOT analysis (Table 2).

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of the interviews from the area of the first mass wine route on Fruška Gora, obtained from interviews with winery owners, i.e. promoters of the development of wine tourism, three levels of facilities can be distinguished:

- the first level are private, family wineries that offer wine for tasting or in smaller quantities bottled for sale;
- the second level are private wineries that offer the same, but in addition to tasting, can offer tourists smaller accommodation (bed & breakfast);
- the third level are the federations, i.e. the associations of wine producers. Their activities include joint promotion and joint projects, with which they apply to development funds to obtain certain benefits for their work. One of their current initiatives is the organization of wine routes, which are discussed in this paper. This networking of wine producers is necessary for a joint appearance on the tourist market, the introduction of new technologies and the orientation of the tourist offer.

The experience of the wine producers shows that the tourists who are most interested in the wine and food of the region they visit participate the most in the cultural program of the route, which certainly multiplies consumption. In their opinion, the profile of the modern wine tourist is such that he usually needs accommodation with breakfast, a restaurant with local cuisine, a resort and a terrace overlooking the vineyard. These accompanying services are certainly a way to generate additional revenue for the winery hosting the route, which certainly gives it significant market advantages over the competition.

Since the tourist's income is one of the decisive factors for wine consumption, the offer is therefore mainly aimed at wine tourists with high incomes (Joksimović, 2022). They require a high level of gastronomic services and well-designed wine routes with oenologically trained tourism and hospitality staff (Dodd & Beverland, 2001). These conditions do not leave room for strategic planning of wine tourism in Serbia, considering that our wineries are still in the pioneering stage of their development and that their visitors are mainly domestic tourists. Today's challenges in the tourism market have ushered in a new era, with numerous changes in supply and demand, both on a global and national level.



Figure 1. The vineyards of the “Verkat” (left) and part of participants of the first wine route on Fruška Gora, June 2022 (photo: D. Nedić - organizer)

The survey was conducted in July 2022. Of the total number of respondents, the percentage of men (52.8%) is slightly higher than that of women (47.2%).

Looking at the age structure, the largest share of respondents is between 25 and 44 years old (66.3%), followed by respondents between 45 and 55 years old (22.2%). The smallest percentage is accounted for by people older than 55 and younger than 25 (5.6%). In terms of educational structure, the largest number of respondents has a college degree (52.8%), while those with a high school diploma account for 27.8% and those with a secondary school diploma account for 19.4% of the sample (Table 1).

As the main motive of the trip, they mention visiting wineries (38.9%), tasting wine and learning about the process of wine production, packaging and storage, and buying wine directly from the producer (27.8%). In addition to enjoying wine, wine route enthusiasts also emphasize the educational aspect of the trip as a secondary motive. This means, first of all, a quality time spent in the natural environment, with getting to know the cultural and religious objects of the visited region (5.6%), through rest and relaxation (19.4%). The shortcoming mentioned is the lack of a sufficient number of accommodations that could host such major wine tours, that is why not at night (75%).

When analysing the answers to the question of how they found out about the Wine Route, it turned out that it was the recommendation of a friend to spend the weekend in a natural environment (55.6%), and that they received the information about the Wine Route through the existing social networks (30.6%). In a conversation about the interest of visitors to participate in wine routes in other regions of Serbia, we received a positive assessment. In this context, only three months after the Fruška Gora wine route, at the beginning of October of the current year, the same association "Dionysus Experience" introduced participants to the still undiscovered wine region of Central Serbia. Namely, about a hundred participants, after a three-hour hike in the mountainous regions of the Venčac Mountains, enjoyed the vineyards of the winery "Tarpoš" near Orašac with a Dionysian tasting and entertainment.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants of the Fruška Gora wine route

		□	%
Gender	Male	19	52,8
	Female	17	47,2
Age	<25	2	5,6
	25-34	11	30,6
	35-44	13	36,1
	45-55	8	22,2
	>55	2	5,6
Education	Secondary school	7	19,4
	High school	10	27,8
	University degree	19	52,8
Revenues	<50.000	0	0,0
	50.000-100.000	7	19,4
	100.000-150.000	14	38,9
	>150.000	15	41,7
Reason for visit	Visit wineries	14	38,9
	Tasting and buying wine	10	27,8
	Recreation and relaxation	7	19,4
	Visit to sacred object	2	5,6
	Tasting local food	2	5,6
	Family time	1	2,8
Duration of visit	No overnight stay	27	75,0
	1-3 days	9	25,0
	>3 days	0	0,0
Way of informing	Recommendation	20	55,6
	Facebook, Instagram	11	30,6
	Website of wineries	5	13,9
	Youtube	0	0,0
Type of accommodation	Hotel	10	27,8
	Apartment	24	66,7
	At cousin	2	5,6
Type of transportation	Bus	6	16,7
	Car	19	52,8
	Motorcycle	11	30,6

Source: Authors research

Table 2. SWOT of wine tourism in Srem wine region

S (Strengths)	W (Weaknesses)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Favorable traffic position - Rich cultural and historical heritage of immediate environment - Proximity to big cities - Traditional and gastronomic specialties - Close to the Danube - Indigenous grape varieties - A lot of number manifestations dedicated to wine - Indications of geographic origin of wineries - Hospitality of the service provider 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not interested travel agencies in the development of wine tourism - Insufficient promotion of wine tourism in the Srem region - Not uniform offer in wineries - Unrealistic high prices for wines - Orientation to the domestic market
O (Opportunities)	T (Threats)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connecting wine and religious tourism at Fruška Gora - New development plans at the national level - Greater openness and presence on the foreign wine market - Investment in promotion - Cooperations with travel agencies - Educations of winemakers of marketing field - Connecting wine and river tourism using the Danube - Wine sales through foreign tourists who visit wineries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pandemic COVID-19 - Economic crisis - Competention from neighboring countries (Hungary, Croatia) - Weak investment in the road infrastructure (bad local roads toc wineares) - Orientation to travel agencies on more profitable types of tourism (e.g. city tourism)

From all this we can conclude that wine tourism in Serbia is much more than visiting wineries and wine cellars. This form of tourism allows the participants of the wine routes to get acquainted with the culture and traditions of the visited wine region, in addition to wine tasting. Winery owners are advised to adjust their accommodation capacities to their business objectives. This opportunity could also be used for other additional facilities, such as tasting rooms for organized wine routes. The alignment of the offer with the standards existing in the European Union market is a priority direction for the development and improvement of wine tourism in our country.

Conclusion

One of the conclusions of this research is that wine tourism, as a relatively young branch of the tourist offer, has excellent potential for improving the overall tourist offer in Serbia. The limiting factor for its development has turned out to be

the fact that marketing opportunities are not yet sufficiently used by winery owners. This can become a threat to the survival and development of a form of tourism that is still pioneering in our country. For this reason, one of the priority directions for improving wine tourism in Serbia, including in the Srem wine region, should be proper training of personnel. This means a higher level of training for guiding wine routes and their connection with monastery visits. This requires a better knowledge of the structure of wine tourists, which would certainly help to achieve the desired position in the tourism market. The elaboration of a unique marketing plan by the wineries and other subjects involved in wine tourism is one of the first steps to improve the development of this type of tourism in Srem. Since the travel agencies are one of the most important links between the consumers (tourists) and the producers (winegrowers), they must be additionally motivated to properly promote wine tourism.

From the research results it can be concluded that the area of Fruška Gora is very rich both in terms of wine and religion. In a relatively small area, there are over 100 family wineries and wine cellars, which, together with the 16 preserved monasteries, represent a good potential for the complementary development of wine and religious tourism. The selected grape varieties grown here provide the raw material for the production of all types of wine. The quality of Fruška Gora wines has been confirmed by numerous awards received by local winemakers at prestigious wine fairs. Another advantage is the fact that this region is very easily accessible from all directions, as international road and rail connections of international importance pass through its borders. This was also a decisive factor in offering potential tourists several wine routes, where they can combine visits to wineries and sacred buildings. It is a fact that monastery complexes are increasingly used for tourist purposes mainly because of their beauty and artistic value. Since wine tourism in Serbia is still in the initial stage of development, it is necessary to use the positive experience of neighbouring countries in some further strategies, but also to additionally motivate tourism agencies to include a combination of wine and religious tourism in their programs.

In today's world, where digital technologies have developed significantly, it has been shown that the activities carried out by consumers of tourist services after the trip, such as the use of social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to share photos and videos with friends, have a decisive impact on the visit to these places. Based on the finding of the importance of promotion for the development of wine tourism, one of the recommendations for winemakers and other establishments is to improve promotion through social networks. The research has shown that wine tourists make extensive use of smart devices and applications, as well as the opinions of bloggers (wine gurus), when identifying and selecting new wine routes.

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