

WINE AND GASTRONOMIC CULTURAL ROUTES IN ITALY AND COVID 19

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Abstract

This study aims at wine tourism as a new and constantly evolving form of alternative tourism which is directly related to the gastronomy and the culture of the destination, in this case Italy. Its main purpose is to investigate the importance and factors that help in the development of wine tourism and its contribution to the economy and the promotion of Italy as a tourist attraction. The interaction of wine tourism with gastronomic tourism is also examined, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on wine tourism, according to a research.

Keywords: *culture, Italy, gastronomic, wine, covid-19.*

1. Origin of Wine Tourism

In modern times, the development of alternative forms of tourism is increasing. One such form is wine tourism, which is a modern touristic trend, with more and more travelers showing particular interest. This form of tourism includes visits to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals, performances, wine tastings and many other experiential experiences such as participating in the harvesting process, so that tourists, who are interested at the wine's production process, can get a complete picture of it. So, the main feature of wine tourism is the cultural routes of wine, focusing on the contact with the wine but also with the customs of the place that produces it. Italy has come first in the production of quality wine for five years, with northern Italy having the absolute lead in good wines compared to the south, where we find different varieties. It is typically stated that in Italy there are more than a thousand species of grapes.

Based on the International Organization of Vine and Wine OIV 1976 and the International Association of Oenologists UIOE, oenology is defined as the science which studies wine and other wine products, from vintage to bottling. It is important to mention that oenology simultaneously combines existing knowledge of chemistry with biochemistry, biotechnology, microbiology, biology, physics, but also engineering. So, given the effect of wine on the mind and behavior of people, we could characterize oenology as an art. The history of this art had its roots for many years before, since the vineyard existed years prior to the appearance of glaciers in the polar and northern countries of Europe, but also in countries

of northern and western Asia. After the onset of the glaciers, unfortunately, several vineyards were reduced and many varieties have disappeared.

The first wine substance was found in a barrel in a small Chinese village and seems to date back 10,000 years. Another wine discovery before the above was somewhere in Iran and the next one was in the exact same place a little later, since a substance in question was discovered, dating back 6,000 years. (Manola & Koltsikoglou 2020)

But beyond the definition of wine tourism as an "art", it should be made clear that it is also a form of consumer behavior, which promotes the economy of many rural areas that do not have the economic power of large cities. (Getz, et al., 1999)

2. Factors of development of wine tourism in Italy

2.1 Wine Festival and Organizations

A key role in the development of wine tourism was played by the wine festival "Cantine Aperte" (Open cellars), in which, initially only 20 winemakers from all over Italy participated, but then, on May 9, 1993, 100 winemakers from Tuscany accepted to participate, attracting tourists, TV channels and newspapers. The "Cantine Aperte" continued to be successful in the following years, first in seven regions of Northern Italy, and then throughout the country. The participation of wine producers exceeded all expectations and their number today amounts to twenty-one thousand. Along with the aforementioned wine festival, others were created, such as the San Lorenzo festival, harvest festivals and other Christmas festivities. Respectively, an attempt was made to internationalize these festivals, but it was not crowned with the same success.

The two major national organizations for wine tourism are the "Movimento del Turismo del Vino" which consists of a thousand winemakers and the "Associazione Nazionale Citta' del Vino" which refers to the municipalities that have vineyards and produce wine. The Italian Government's website for wine tourism "italia.it" contains information about these two organizations. (Colombini, 2015)

At European Union level, there is the "Leader" action plan, which aims to promote the development of local producers through financial support. At the same time, other agricultural bodies, public or private, have the opportunity to be financed, if their activities are related to the respective local rural development plan. In this case, LEADER provided rural development funds for several European wine regions, as in Italy. (Hall, Mitchell, 2000)

In Italy, a coordinated action plan for the development of wine tourism was followed. The development strategy was twofold: on the one hand, policies for product diversification and development of the Italian wine industry were implemented, and on the other hand, the dynamics of Italian gastronomy were mobilized. (Alonso et al, 2015)

2.2 The categories of Tourists

Forty-six million tourists visiting Italy, motivated by wine tourism, are unfortunately not enough to make up for the decline in domestic tourism in Italy. At the same time, the tourists who visit vineyards are mostly men between thirty and fifty years old, who travel with their partner or friends. They could be classified into three categories: tourists who may accidentally turn into wine tourists, devoted wine lovers and lovers of luxury. Initially, there are tourists who accidentally participate in wine tourism events and do not have any special knowledge about wines, but also have a low budget. However, if they have some knowledge, they are limited to very basic wine labels that can be easily and economically found in relevant stores in their country of origin. "Random wine tourists" prefer to try the simple typical Italian food, rather than delve into the piece of wine that is completely unknown or little known to them.

Following are the devoted wine lovers who make up the bulk of the winery's visitors, and who number one and a half to two million a year. For tourists in this category, how well-known and widespread a winery seems to be, is a prerequisite. Their interest revolves around rare and new wines, while they are willing to spend generous sums, while not limiting their budget to specific activities.

They prefer to travel with people of the same interest and level and not on joint group trips and want to meet and chat with the winemakers. Many times they attend sommelier lessons during their holidays in Italy, in order to immerse themselves more in the winery. In this category belong the professionals of the wine industry, traders of wines and other products, restaurants, sommelier as well as importers. A subcategory of these tourists is also formed by the "foodies": These are tourists who love to taste all the local products of excellent quality and used to visit award-winning restaurants several times. Closing with the specific categories, we proceed to the luxury tourists. These people have the financial comfort and buy a quality wine, visit a first class winery but, most likely, they will not understand almost any details due to the fact that they do not have the necessary knowledge. Nevertheless, this group of tourists is very important for wineries. The particularly rich spend a lot of money on high quality and expensive wines. They are not interested in participating in group tours but focus on innovation, vintage products and personal communication with winemakers and property owners. (Colombini, 2015)

2.3 The companies involved with wine tourism

Another important aspect of the rise of wine tourism in Italy is the involvement of other businesses besides wine museums and tours of the vineyards, such as the participation of hotels, restaurants and other services. For example, there are wine tourism destinations where weddings and various receptions can be arranged.

Another new trend includes wellness holidays. Wine therapy, outdoor hiking, spa treatments with wine products, thermal baths and bicycle tours are just some of the aspects of this trend. But the biggest innovation in attracting tourists to the wine industry has been achieved with the development of culinary schools, many of which are housed in wineries and enable wine lovers to acquire knowledge and taste varieties.

The variety of festivals and wine lovers has led Italy to become one of the most important wine tourism destinations, a fact that has been certified by the Traveler's Choice Award 2012, the Wayn Award 2013 and by many social media platforms. (Colombini, 2015)

2.4 Culture & Wine Tourism

Consumption of local wine of an Italian place helps the tourist-taster to better understand the local customs and cultural elements. (Manola and Koltsikoglou, 2020)

Wine is an expression of a country's culture and its traditions. In Italy, as a country with a long tradition in wines, the legislation favored the creation and promotion of wine production and gastronomy. With the help of the Council of Europe and in the framework of the "cultural routes" - cultural themes tourism destinations have been created, alongside with the protection of cultural heritage, such as oenological tourism. At the same time, the relationship with the cultural heritage is even stronger as the wines and other local gastronomic products are presented with labels and brands, which prove their origin. Therefore, through the possibility of developing wine tourism, Italy has the opportunity to promote its cultural and natural beauty. It is worth mentioning that the promotion of Italian culture, through wine tourism, has beneficial effects on the economies of local communities. From 2000 to 2009 the wineries increased from 1903 to 3909.

Tuscany prevailed with 749 wineries, followed by Piedmont with 605 and Veneto with 467. According to the Italian Statistical Society, the total area of land on which grapes are grown is 789,272 hectares. (Vicenzo and Sebastiano, 2009)

2.5 The quality of the vines and innovative techniques

A very basic reason for the flourishing of Italian wine tourism is the very good quality of the grapes but also the very good techniques in the production process. (Vicenzo, A & Sebastiano, P 2009)

As a result, many innovative production techniques are used, to which the excellent quality of the wines is attributed. Characteristically, some experiments were carried out that contributed to the improvement of the taste of the wine: the pre-fermentation and the cold dissolution of the grapes through cryogenics showed a significant improvement of the quality of the wine, which was found by chemical analysis but also by taste test. (Parenti, Spugnoli, Petall, 2004)

3. The dynamics of Gastronomic Tourism alongside with wine tourism-benefits & disadvantages

3.1 The role of Gastronomic Tourism

The encyclopedia Britannica defines gastronomy as the art of choosing, preparing, serving and enjoying good food. According to the classical definition, gastronomy is the study of good nutrition. In addition, the Italian word "Culinaria" is synonymous to gastronomy and describes the recipes and delicacies of a country or region as well as the various techniques of their preparation. As a result, many countries or regions become famous for their unique cuisine and gastronomy and attract many tourists. (Kivela & Crotts, 2005)

In Italy, in the context of "cultural routes" and with the aim of promoting oenological tourism, the famous "wineroutes" were developed, in which the local gastronomic products of each region were introduced, resulting in the creation of "Wine and Food routes". (Vicenzo, & Sebastiano, 2009) After all, tasting a fine wine on its own would be of no value without the participation of a nice "gourmet" meal. Therefore, gastronomy played a very important role in the development and upgrading of the oenological tourism.

Tourism as a phenomenon incorporates professional activities that interact with each other and complement each other. Among these activities, Italian gastronomy is included, as a field that attracts many tourists, who are looking for interesting tasting experiences, while immersing themselves in the culture of each destination they visit. Gastronomic tourism could be likened to a mirror, through which the tourist can see the history, the people, the local culture and the gastronomic destination of each region. As stated by the World Tourism Organization, the increasing trend for gastronomic tourism is not only a result of the need to satisfy the tourists' food, but it is an integral part of the tourist's contact with the cultural heritage of each place.

As in the case of oenological tourism, lovers of Italian gastronomy, visit festivals, producers, local markets, attend cooking classes, shop "gourmet" products and enjoy various restaurant recipes. According to a survey by the World Food Travel Association in 2015, 93% of tourists were considered gastronomic tourists, provided, however, that for the past twelve months they preferred to take part in gastronomic experiences rather than just going out to eat at the destination of their choice. The above categorization of tourists also gave them the status of "explorer". From the above, it is evident that gastronomic tourism contributes to the local and to the general economic development of a country. In addition, the contribution of ancient Greek writers to gastronomy is valuable, as in many books; there are the first references to the art of gastronomy. (Manola & Koufadakis, 2020)

As mentioned above, oenological tourism is inextricably linked to gastronomic tourism, while both of these forms of tourism have one thing in common: the love for the culture of a country and in this case, that of Italy. By the term culture of a country, we mean, the set of philosophical, musical, literary or artistic creations of a country.

In this light, Manola & Palanta (2020), tried to delve into the less obvious reasons why gastronomy is associated with opera as an art form, as many lyric works included scenes related to preparation, consumption and the results of the consumption of a drink or gastronomic preparation. The composers of the opera's lyric works, through their works, praised the art of the "chefs" but also of the confectioners.

3.2 Benefits of wine tourism and gastronomic tourism

From the above, we can draw some conclusions about the benefits of wine tourism and gastronomic tourism. It is clear that they promote the development of agriculture, strengthen cultural exchanges and cultural bonds between people, while they put up resistance to the concept of individualism, globalization and standardization that characterize the modern era. As a result, tourists develop a constant interest in other countries cultures, as they come closer to them, while travelling. At the same time they get satisfaction while tasting varieties of wines and different meals. Through all these experiential experiences during their journey, they achieve the escape from everyday life, but also the expansion of their horizons (Boniface, 2003). Regarding Italy and based on a survey conducted for the main purpose of the tourist visit, it was found that Italy was selected as a destination for both general tourism and wine tourism. (Brown, Getz, 2005)

3.3 Disadvantages in the development of wine tourism in Italy

A major disadvantage in the development of wine tourism in Italy is the fact that there is no Ministry of Tourism and as a consequence, wine tourism is regulated by the regions and difficulties are created in its management. (Colombini 2015)

Due to the above problem, other side effects are caused, such as the fact that on account of the strict regulations at the airports, the amount of wines that tourists can transport from Italy is greatly reduced. As a result, they are limited to tasting wines in wineries or buying one or two bottles.

At the same time, shipping costs are very high, in case some people want to order them, for this reason tourists can only make purchases from duty free shops, since the transfer of liquids to the plane is not allowed. It turns out that wrong government policies are burdening the wine tourism sector and there is an urgent need for reforms and implementation of alternative measures, regarding the simplification of wine marketing procedures. (Alonso, 2015)

4. Impact of Covid-19 on Wine Tourism in Italy

It is an indisputable fact that the coronavirus has greatly affected every aspect of people's daily lives on a global scale. Tourism in all its forms was affected by the pandemic. Especially wine tourism which is, as mentioned above, an alternative form of tourism and is considered a branch of agritourism.

University professor Roberta Garibaldi presented the results of a study on the impact of COVID-19 on wine tourism. Garibaldi is also a board member of the World Food Travel Association, the board of the World Gastronomy Institute, the Tourism Science Council of the Italian Society (SISTUR) and the president of the Italian Gastronomy Tourism Association. This research was conducted by the International Wine Tourism Think Tank with the main purpose of assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on wine tourism. The survey was

conducted electronically and disseminated among members of national wineries. It started in July and has not been completed yet. Nevertheless, important data that can be discussed so far have been gathered.

To begin with, guided tours in wineries are at -17% compared to before the coronavirus, in particular, from 91% it fell to 74% in total in all domestic wineries. Also, there was a big drop in the tastings inside wineries (-16%) which from 89% after the coronavirus are with 73%. In the same fall position after the coronavirus are found with -16% the weddings and generally such events that took place in vineyards and wineries (from 39% before COVID-19 to 23%). The activities and guided tours of the wineries for children are essentially fourth in a declining course. With a percentage of -12% (from 22% to 10%).

However, the outbreak of the coronavirus in Italy, gave the opportunity to other activities provided by the wineries to benefit and increase their preference rate for wine tourists. With + 9% in the first place are the picnics in vineyards in and around the wineries with an increase from 20% to 29% and with an increase of + 6% the tastings in vineyards which from 28% after COVID-19 is with 34%.

In general, in terms of economic losses in percentages, from wine tourism activities in Italy, from January to July 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, the loss is clearly higher as 35% of those surveyed stated more than 70% loss.

In order to compensate for their loss due to the coronavirus pandemic, many wineries have adopted some new tactics that they did not use before. The most popular were: 66% of wineries focused on online sales and 57% started distributing home-made wines. Then but clearly less, they used the gift cards for future visits to the wineries (31%), the virtual wine tastings (22%) and with 9% the digital tours to the wineries. Only 9% of Italian wineries did not follow any of the above tactics.

Regarding the return to the real flow of everyday life, the participants from the Italian wineries in a multiple choice question said that they will need actions and investments so that the wine tourism activity is initially maintained and then returns to normal (59%), while 58% stated that after the end of the coronavirus crisis, everything will easily return to their normal flow. 46% expect improvement over a period of more than six months to a year.

In conclusion, the research asked a question related to the innovations that would be useful to apply to wine tourism during its recovery in order to improve the Italian economy in general.

With 81% the offer of activities that integrate the local culture is in first place, followed by 78% the diversification and evolution of the already provided experiences and the third option with a percentage of 76% the offer of sustainable experiences. (Garibaldi, 2020)

OFFERED ACTIVITIES	BEFORE COVID-19	AFTER COVID-19
Guided tours inside the winery	91%	74%
Wine tastings inside the winery	89%	73%
Sale of products in winery' store	84%	88%
Guided tours at the vineyards	64%	65%
Special events (ex. weddings)	39%	23%
Tours without guide inside the winery	30%	24%
Wine tastings at the vineyards	28%	34%
Lunch or dinner at the vineyards	26%	22%
Tours without guide at the vineyards	23%	24%
Harvest for tourists	23%	13%
Tours and activities for children	22%	20%

Picnic at the vineyards	20%	29%
Wine club	19%	23%
Guided tours at the winery' museum	19%	16%
Tours by bike	18%	13%
Accommodation	17%	17%
Hiking or other sports at the vineyards	13%	12%
Artistic activities at the vineyards	11%	4%
Yoga, Pilates and related activities at the vineyards	9%	6%
Balloon fights at the vineyards	3%	1%
Spa treatments with wine products	3%	6%

Table 1. - Activities - source: Research of the International Wine Tourism

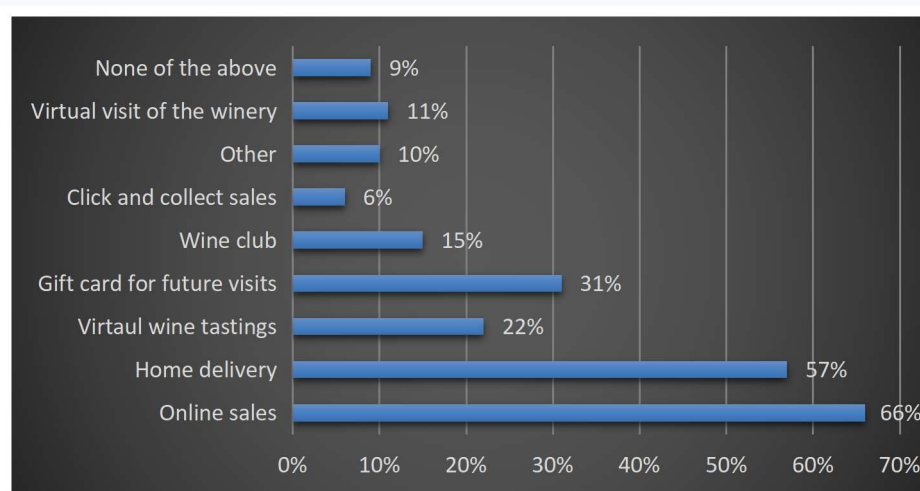


Table 2. -New tactics of wineries - source: Research of the Int. Wine Tourism

5. Conclusions

It is a fact that people nowadays are looking for new forms of tourism to enrich their holidays. Wine tourism, as an alternative form of tourism is developing rapidly and is a modern tourist trend. On this assumption, arguments were put forward for the reasons of wine tourism development: the wine festivals that take place, the characteristics of the wine tourists, the very good quality of the wine, the excellent production process, the excellent technical processing of the grapes and the introduction of innovative techniques.

At the same time, the undeniably strong interaction of wine tourism with gastronomy and the entire Italian culture was discussed. During a wine-gastronomic travel to Italy, tourists enjoy fine Italian wines, combining them with authentic Italian flavors and, as a result, they gain their acquaintance with the Italian culture. This fact gives them the characteristic of explorers, beyond the role of the ordinary tourist. On the other hand, the main problem in the development of wine tourism in Italy is the lack of a corresponding ministry, resulting in difficulties managing the problems that arise.

In addition, in relation to the present time period, the effects of the COCID-19 on the Italian peninsula were discussed, which affected the tourism sector and especially wine tourism as almost all the activities provided by the Italian wineries, except for a few, presented a great fall.

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