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VITICULTURAL REGIONS IN FUNCTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF WINE TOURISM

Meri Nickova¹

Abstract

During the last decade, wine tourism has been intensively developed through small wineries in several viticultural regions in the Republic of North Macedonia. Wine tourism has an important role in creating tourism development policies in the country. Wine tourism is a tourist form that is characterized by attractive attributes through which it encourages domestic and foreign tourists to visit the destination. In addition to visiting the wine cellars, wine tourism includes additional tourist activities such as the process of grape production, the process of wine production, gastronomic offer, sightseeing of the viticultural region. The main for the existence of wineries as a leading factor of wine tourism are the viticultural regions together with the tradition of growing grapes. Viticultural regions define the spatial distribution of wineries and define wine routes. Therefore, in this paper the author aims to present the main viticultural regions in the country which are the spatial basis and prerequisite for the development of wine tourism.

Keywords: wine routes, tourism offers, vineyards, development, wine regions

JEL Classification: L83; Z32; I15; O18

INTRODUCTION

Food and wine tourism has grown rapidly in scope and popularity in the past 20 years. Tourism in many economies plays a key role in the process of economic development, especially the development of the local economy. Enotourism has emerged as a promising, sustainable type of tourism that can provide many benefits for local, regional, and national economies (Figuroa B., and Rotarou. 2018.). As a result, very specific forms of tourism have been developed in order to provide maximum benefits to a particular region. One of those forms is wine tourism. Macedonia is a small country by area, but it has a huge potential for the development of wine tourism, because the viticultural regions are well known globally for the quality of their grapes and their wines. The concept of terroir is used widely to describe, delimit and promote favored

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wine regions (Overton, 2019.). Wine and gastronomic specialties of Macedonia offer something specific only for this area, a unique combination of country, climate and qualified vineyards. Viticulture and winemaking are a basic precondition for the development of successful wine tourism. Viticulture is a perennial agricultural system that is rooted in tradition but must also adapt to change (e.g. climate change, authorized rate of pesticide uses in the European Union). Viticulture includes a variety of practices whose objective is to produce wine grapes (Thiollet-Scholtus, Arceño, Valduga and Sarrazin, 2020.) Wine tourism is an increasingly attractive type of vacation that combines wine tasting, a specific wine region, a tour of natural beauty as well as getting acquainted with the customs and cultural-historical monuments of the area.

In Macedonia, in the last decade, wine tourism has been intensively developed with small wineries that take you back to the past and the tradition of enjoying the wine story through an original atmosphere. It is usually associated with the appeal of wineries and the wine country as a whole, and is seen as a form of niche marketing and destination development, on the one hand, and an opportunity to increase sales and revenues on the part of the wine industry on the other (Terziyska, 2018.). The development of wine tourism depends on the adoption and observance of high criteria, which the wine producer must meet in order to have the right to be characterized as a wine region. The tourist attraction in wine tourism does not start and end in the wine cellar where visitors can taste and buy wine, but includes an offer for tourist, catering and agricultural products from the wine region. To increase value of their product, grape and wine producers seek to tap into discourses of ‘heritage’ that are understood locally and shaped by globalized discourses of authenticity and quality (Skinner, 2019.).

There are no universal definitions of wine tourism in the literature. Some authors have called this type of tourism enotourism. Enotourism, ie wine tourism is a set of interactive processes, phenomena and relationships that arise from the interest of visitors for the production or consumption of wine, as a style, lifestyle, culture, tradition of a particular wine region. According to tourists, wine tourism is a visit to wine regions, vineyards, tastings, wineries, wine festivals and exhibitions that are organized for relaxation. There are three main carriers of wine tourism: the wine producer, the tourist-consumer and the travel agency that promotes the destination.

The wine tourist offer is a combination of wineries, wine trails, the destination as an attraction, its image. However, in order to complete the offer, only one product-wine is not enough, but other forms are needed, such as rural tourism, religious tourism, cultural tourism. The wine tourist product should contain elements from various carriers and only as such can it be placed on the market as a success tourist story.

Many destinations are now competing in the promotion of food and wine tourism, some for the first time, and with tourism identified as a key driver of economic growth this is an area of growing interest (Cleave, 2011). Wine tourism is developing in vineyards around the world with activities increasingly based on experience. These activities are designed for all consumers including business tourists, a category with high potential for wine tourism development (Ben Tahar, Haller and Massa. 2021).

1. METODOLOGY

The basic theoretical assumption in the paper is that main factor for wine tourism development in the Republic of North Macedonia are the main viticultural regions. The methodology used during the valorization is especially important to get as much as possible objectivity in evaluating the resources. While preparing the paper and the data processing several different scientific research methods were used for research in tourism: a method of analysis by which the collected data was analyzed, a comparative method for comparing data, statistical method for presenting statistical data, inventory of tourism resources that are subject to the valorization etc. So, secondary data is collected or it is a secondary data that is available and is official data in the State Statistical Office, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the Republic of Macedonia, the Action plans for tourism development in the area of the municipalities located in the viticultural regions and so on.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The rich tradition of viticulture and wine production in the Republic of Northern Macedonia began in ancient times, as evidenced by the numerous artifacts found in this area. The tradition from the ancient period continued in the Roman period when Macedonia was one of the most important wine regions, and that tradition had continuity after the arrival of the Slavs, and developed until the fourteenth century. Today, viticulture is one of the leading branches in the total agricultural production, it is the most important strategic industry in the Republic of North Macedonia, if we take into account that together with wine production it contributes about 17% -20% of agricultural GDP. Wine ranks first in the country's beverage exports. The vineyards today cover about 24,000 hectares. In 2020, the total wine production in the country was 781,292 hectoliters of wine. The average annual wine production is about 800,000 hectoliters. Today there are over 60 wineries located in the main viticultural regions. Most of these wineries are small and medium with a capacity of up to 10,000 hectoliters.

2.1. VITICULTURAL REGIONS IN MACEDONIA

There are three viticultural regions in Macedonia:

- Central viticultural region - Povardarie;
- Western viticultural region (Pelagonija-Polog) and
- Eastern viticultural region (Pchinja-Osogovo).

These regions are divided into 16 vineyards.

The central viticultural region includes the following vineyards:

- Skopje vineyard,
- Veles vineyard
- Tikvesh vineyard,
- Gevgelija-Valandovo vineyard,
- Strumica-Radovis vineyard.

The Central Viticultural Region (Povardarie) is the largest and most famous wine region in Macedonia where about 83% of Macedonian wine is produced. The vineyards

are located at 500-600 meters above sea level, and stretch along the Vardar Valley and between the high mountain massifs that rise to the east and west. The climate is Mediterranean to continental, with mild winters and hot summers. Over 124 days a year have a temperature above 25°C. Vineyards are grown on different soil types, of which the most common is diluvial soil (flat terrain).

The Skopje vineyard covers the northern part of the Povardarie, surrounded by high mountains. This Macedonian vineyard is influenced by the Mediterranean and continental climate. The Mediterranean climate is present only along the valley of the river Vardar, while the influence of the continental climate is felt in the north and northeast. Summers are very hot and winters are moderately cold, rarely very cold. The soil configuration is wavy and coastal, with slight slopes. Altitude ranges from 250-600 meters. Vineyards are usually grown on orchards, cinnamon soil and resins, which are very suitable for successful cultivation of vines.

Veles vineyard covers almost the entire area of the municipality of Veles. This vineyard is influenced by the Mediterranean climate from the south, and the influence of the continental climate is felt from the north-northeast. The vineyards are located at an altitude of 200-450 meters.

The Tikvesh vineyard is located at the same longitude as Tuscany in Italy, Bordeaux in France and the Napa Valley in the United States. According to the area, it is one of the largest regions in Macedonia, located at 41-42° latitude. It covers the area of the municipalities of Kavadarci, Negotino and Demir Kapija, as well as part of the municipalities of Prilep and Veles. The climate is Continental-Mediterranean, in the south of the Tikvesh vineyard the Mediterranean climate prevails with long and hot summers. The continental climate prevails in the north with mild and rainy winters. The average annual temperature is 13.3°C, while in the vegetation period it is 18°C. During the summer, temperatures can reach over 40°C. The average value of precipitation during the vegetation period is 300-500 mm. The Tikvesh region is "protected" on three sides by mountains that prevent north winds from penetrating the vineyards. The following soil types predominate in the Tikvesh region: deluvial, alluvial and terra rosa. The main grape varieties grown in the region are Vranec, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Kavdarka, White Chardonnay, Belan, Muscat, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Semilon, Smederevka, Rkaceteli, Muscat Otonel, Temjanika.

Gevgelija-Valandovo vineyard covers the area with vineyards in the southern part of Macedonia, along the river Vardar and the surroundings of Lake Dojran. It includes vineyards from the municipalities of Gevgelija and Valandovo. This vineyard is greatly influenced by the Mediterranean climate, and in the winter in the valley of Vardar is present the influence of the continental climate.

Strumica-Radovish vineyard covers the area of the valley of the river Struma and Strumeshnica with Mediterranean climate influences from the south, while from the north and northeast the influence of the continental air masses is felt. It represents the vineyards on the surface of the southeastern part of Macedonia, ie the area of the municipalities of Strumica and Radovish. Part of the vineyard is covered by an irrigation system. Most of the plantations are on soil with slight slopes and plain. The altitude in the Strumica-Radovish vineyard ranges from 224-380 meters, the most common is the deluvial soil.

The Western viticultural region is divided into the following vineyards:

- Prilep vineyard;

- Bitola vineyard;
- Prespa vineyard;
- Ohrid Vineyard;
- Kichevo vineyard
- Tetovo vineyard.

In this region, the vineyards are located at an altitude of 600-680 meters above sea level, and are planted on terrain with medium-sloping slopes with southern exposure. The mountain climate prevails, which is characterized by wet and cold winters and dry and hot summers. Over 87 days a year have a temperature above 25 degrees. Precipitation averages 57 l/m². Vineyards are grown on different types of soils, the most common of which is brown soil. This region produces about 13% of the total wine production in Macedonia.

The Bitola vineyard is located in the Pelagonija-Polog region in Macedonia. This wine region is characterized by high temperature differences. The highest temperatures are up to 41.2°C, and the minimum down to -30.4°C. The average amount of rain is about 602 mm per square meter and is abundant with long sunny periods. The most common red wine varieties in this region are: Cabernet Sauvignon, Gamay, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Prokupec and Vranec. The most common white varieties are: Riesling, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Žilavka and Smederevka.

The Kichevo vineyard is located in the Pelagonija-Polog region in Macedonia. This vineyard is characterized by high temperature differences. The highest temperatures are up to 40.5°C, while the minimum are down to -23.6°C. The average amount of rain is about 802 mm per square meter and is abundant with sunny periods. The most common red wine varieties in this region are: Cabernet Sauvignon, Gamay, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Prokupec and Vranec. The most common white varieties are: Riesling, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Žilavka and Smederevka.

The Eastern viticultural region is divided into the following vineyards:

- Kumanovo vineyard;
- Kratovo vineyard;
- Pijanec vineyard;
- Ovche Pole vineyard;
- Kocani-Vinica vineyard.

The vineyards in the Eastern region are located at 200-850 meters above sea level, and are planted on terrains with medium-sloping slopes with all exposure. The climate is temperate-continental with strong gusts of north winds. Over 110 days a year have a temperature above 25°C. Precipitation averages 50 l/m², and during the vegetation often dry periods occur. Vineyards are grown on different types of soil, the most common of which is deluvial, cinnamon and brown soil on limestone.

Ovche Pole vineyard covers the area of the municipalities of Sveti Nikole, Stip, Probistip and part of the municipality of Kocani. This vineyard from the southwest is influenced by the Mediterranean climate, and from the north is influenced by the cold air masses of the continental climate. It is characterized by hot summers and long cold winters, and during the summer there may be dry periods.

Kocani-Vinica vineyard covers the area of the municipalities of Vinica, Kocani and Probistip. This vineyard from the southwest along the river Bregalnica is under the influence of the Mediterranean climate, while along the valleys of Kochanska river,

Zrnovska river and river Osojnica the influence of the mountain climate is present. The annual rainfall is 45 l/m².

CONCLUSION

The importance of tourism is recognized by many developed and developing countries as a priority activity for economic development. In Macedonia, special attention is paid to the development of tourism in order to achieve economic development. Tourism has many types that adapt to local and regional characteristics. Wine tourism is one of the types of tourism especially attractive for the territory of Macedonia, due to which the first steps have been taken towards its development and promotion. In order for Northern Macedonia to reach the level of development of wine tourism as well as other countries in the region, it should primarily adopt and implement clearly defined strategies.

Wine production in the Republic of Northern Macedonia has a long tradition and history. For foreign tourists to be aware that in Macedonia they can taste quality wines, for that we need promotional material that will highlight the features of Macedonian wine and the beauties of Macedonia as a tourist destination. All wineries invest in all aspects of the marketing mix and together with the Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia try to promote Macedonian wine. Macedonia is a country with great potential for development of this tourism. Some of the Macedonian wineries have a rich and long history. At that moment, you can really experience something different than the already routine vacation that includes a beach and a lake or sea. Based on the fact that we have an ideal climate and soil conditions, vineyards in excellent condition that produce high quality grapes and have investments and private initiative, we believe that Macedonian wine will become recognized and demanded by wine consumers around the world.

As a good starting point for further improvement of the destination in a tourist way, several elements can be considered, prioritizing their importance for the tourists who visit the destination. So, natural beauties, cultural events and traditional food are revealed as objects to improve the current supply of tourism in the wine region.

It is necessary to identify the measures and activities that will contribute to the creation of a more competitive tourism sector, as well as to enable systematic changes in terms of improving the tourism services offered in the wine regions. Namely, there is a need to promote the "wine tourism product" and the region in general, for specific groups of visitors (wine lovers, adventure tourists and others). The solution can be found in the creation of sophisticated software modules for the promotion of wine tourism. Furthermore, market players need to contribute much more in terms of coordinating wine tourism activities. In this regard, improving the competitiveness of tourism can be found in strengthening coordination with local government, cooperation with foreign partners, the presence of political will, as well as raising awareness of local residents about the positive effects of the development of wine tourism.

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