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## Article

# Re-visiting the concept of winescape through netnography: "A tale of two cities"

Wine Economics and Policy

## Provided in Cooperation with:

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University of Florence

*Suggested Citation:* Terziyska, Ilinka (2022) : Re-visiting the concept of winescape through netnography: "A tale of two cities", Wine Economics and Policy, ISSN 2212-9774, Firenze University Press, Florence, Vol. 11, Iss. 2, pp. 19-29,  
<https://doi.org/10.36253/wep-12806>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/284531>

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**Citation:** Ilinka Terziyska (2022). Re-visiting the concept of winescape through netnography: “A tale of two cities”. *Wine Economics and Policy* 11(2): 19-29. doi: 10.36253/wep-12806

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

## Re-visiting the concept of winescape through netnography: “A tale of two cities”

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**Abstract.** Winescape is a central concept in wine tourism studies but is still under-researched, especially when package tours are concerned. This study has a two-fold objective: 1) to identify the winescape attributes of an emergent wine destination (Bulgaria) as perceived by organized wine tourists and compare them to a well-established Old-World wine region (Italy), and 2) to unveil the links between winescape attributes and servicescape dimensions. To this end, we employed a netnographic approach through the application of content analysis of TripAdvisor reviews and a combination of closed and open coding. Seven categories of winescape were identified, which almost completely coincide with the results of previous research. At the same time, some differences were found, mainly in the salience of the individual elements, which suggests a different composition of the winescape depending on several factors, among which the characteristics of the destination and the specifics of the tour operator. The study complements existing knowledge by validating a previously proposed model, and at the same time showcasing the context-dependent differences in attribute salience for two different types of destinations. In addition, it is the first to identify the links between the traditional supply-driven winescape models and the more holistic concept of experiscape.

**Keywords:** winescape, wine tours, qualitative research, netnography, Bulgaria.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Wine tourism is often defined as a sub-type of gastronomy tourism ‘whose purpose is visiting vineyards, wineries, tasting, consuming and/or purchasing wine, often at or near the source’ [1, p. 44]. Consuming a product at the place it was produced enables the visitor to connect to the territory and its culture. The complex blend of a destination’s landscapes, culture, food and wine products, and the techniques employed for producing them shape its identity and are perceived as ‘the foundation of the DNA of the tourism experience’ [2, p. 9]. It is therefore no surprise that wine tourism is seen not merely as a wine-related activity, but an immersion into the winescape [3].

The concept of winescape is gaining increasing attention in the field of wine tourism. There are several reasons for this - on the one hand, it is broad enough to cover almost all aspects of this type of tourism product, and on

the other - it is often used as a basis for analyzing the image of wine tourism destinations [4], wine tourism experiences [5], or customer satisfaction [6]. At the same time, its conceptualization is still considered to be in its nascent stage [7].

In purely technical terms, wine tourism is usually perceived as a visit to wineries and vineyards, but in fact its scope is far wider. In recent years, visits to wine bars and tastings in major urban centres have become increasingly popular, as well as the participation in various wine-related events - wine exhibitions, wine festivals etc. Apart from that, wine tourism can be practiced both individually and in the form of an organized trip. Research on winescape has been mainly focused on the micro (winery) and macro (wine region) level, while studies on wine tours and wine events remain scarce [8].

Servicescape is perceived as the major source for constructing personally significant experiences [9]. Thus, it is directly linked to customer satisfaction [10] and perceived service quality [11]. Being a particular case of servicescape, winescape is sometimes defined as the environment where wine tourism experiences occur [7], [8] and the numerous institutional arrangements and values in this context play a significant role in deriving the benefits wine tourists pursue [5]. With this in mind, knowledge of the winescape attributes and how they are perceived and appreciated by tourists is essential for the successful operation of the winery and the wine destination. In this respect, the following three trends have been observed in recent years - 1) a holistic approach, including analysis of as many stakeholders as possible [12]; 2) an emic rather than an etic approach, where the study does not employ ready-made, predefined models, but is informed by consumer-driven data [4]; 3) an increasing variety of methods used to collect and process information [7], [9]. In line with the above trends, this article focuses on a hitherto neglected stakeholder in wine tourism - wine tour providers. Despite using a previously proposed model, the approach is predominantly emic - in addition to validating the model for a different context, the study is open to updating and supplementing it based on consumer perceptions.

The winescape reflects the objective resources and features of a given wine establishment or a wine region and it can be therefore presumed that different contexts will present varying configurations at least in the salience of individual attributes. There has been a call for studies on the way tourists assess winescape attributes in a specific wine region, which can also be done from the perspective of package tours [13]. This study provides insight on the way winescape is perceived by organized wine tourists in Bulgaria - a wine region, which is worth

studying because of its interesting pattern of development as a wine producer and because of the fact that it is exemplary for an emergent wine destination from an understudied region - South-Eastern Europe. Once among the top wine exporters in the world, the country had to totally rearrange its viticultural sector and start its development from a very unfavourable base [14]. Taking Bulgaria as a basis for analysis, this study aims to: 1) identify the winescape attributes of an emergent wine destination as perceived by organized wine tourists and compare them to a well-established Old-World wine region, and 2) provide some insight on the links between winescape attributes and experiencescape dimensions. To this end, the netnographic approach was taken, through thematic analysis of TripAdvisor reviews.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The winescape appeared as a concept in the scientific literature in the 1970s, when Peters [15] defined it as a specific form of an agricultural landscape consisting of three main elements: the grapes, their environment, and the vintners in the context of the cultural practices related to wine. This first perspective was mostly geographical in nature and placed winescape into the broader framework of cultural landscapes; later on, the concept evolved to adopt a more marketing-oriented focus.

In its present use, the winescape is actually more related to the broader term of servicescape, than to the notion of cultural landscape [16]. The concept of servicescape was initially used in the field of marketing of service organizations and denotes the built environment that affects both employees and customers and whose dimensions can be controlled by the firm [17]. This model describes the servicescape in three key dimensions: (1) ambient conditions; (2) spatial layout and functionality; and (3) signs, symbols and artifacts, and excludes the social and natural dimensions. These were later added by Rosenbaum and Massiah [18], who claimed that a servicescape was formed not only by factors that can be controlled by the company, but also by immeasurable, and often managerially unmanageable social, symbolic and natural stimuli.

In a similar vein, Arnould et al. [19] defined two main attributes pertinent to the servicescape: the substantive staging and the communicative staging. The former refers to the physical staging of environment, while the latter is connected with its interpretation and transmits meanings from the provider to the customer.

The winescape models for the macro (destination) and the micro (winery) level do not exhibit any signifi-

cant differences. Scenery setting, the wine product, people and hospitality, ambience of the region, wineries and wine estates are among the main attributes at the wine destination level [4]. The micro level framework presents winescape as consisting of almost the same supply-related elements: setting, atmospherics, wine quality, wine value, wine complementary product, signage, and wine service staff [16]. The only difference is seen in the model of the wine tour servicescape, where tour planning and logistics is one of the most salient attributes [8].

So far, there has been only one study on winescape from the perspective of package tours [8]. It offered a model consisting of six winescape attributes: tour guiding, core wine product, tour planning and logistics, complementary activities, food and dining, and nature and scenery. These were validated by a consequent study on wine tour success factors [13], which was performed for the same destination, but used totally different research methods (multidimensional scaling method, cluster analysis, and sentiment analysis).

Along with the obvious similarities, there are also some noticeable differences in the above models, which mainly refer to the stated significance of individual attributes. At the destination/wine region level, the nature was reported as the most prominent attribute (Bruwer, et al., 2016). In contrast, staff was identified to exert much more influence at the micro (winery) level [16] and in the case of organized travel, where it was operationalized as ‘tour guiding service’ [8], [13].

Despite these differences, there are enough similarities to suggest a generic winescape framework that encompasses the findings of various studies for the three levels – the micro, the macro and the intermediary one, consisting of six attributes: destination features, wine, people, wineries, food and dining, and signs and symbols [20]. Composed of clearly identifiable attributes, it is supply-related in its structure and content, but when assessed, the approach is usually demand-oriented, taking the customer perspective by employing either structured surveys [6] or free text analysis [21].

There is one more approach in conceptualizing winescape that differs from the attribute-based models presented above – the wine-experiencescape [10]. It is premised on the theory of experiencescape, which is defined as the stimuli in a service environment (along with a hospitality culture) that shape tourist experiences and affect customer reaction towards the product [12]. There are five types of stimuli: sensory, functional, social, natural, and cultural. In the case of wine tourism, experiencescape has been operationalized in the following way [10]:

- Sensory dimension: wine tasting, winemaking.

- Functional dimension: attributes of utilitarian value such as layout, architectural design and equipment of the winery, layout, signage, quality of the accommodation, and value for money.
- Natural dimension: landscape, scenery, vineyards.
- Social dimension: interaction with fellow travellers in the winery, communication with winery staff.
- Culture and hospitality dimension: heritage, attitude, and behavior of the employees and staff toward the customers.

The model is entirely based on literature review and there has not been any empirical study to test how the dimensions are linked to attributes identified in previous research. The present study will attempt to fill this gap by constructing a model, which takes into account both the supply-related attributes of traditional winescape frameworks, and the more demand-oriented dimensions of Pizam and Tasci’s and Gunasekar et al’s concepts. The two research questions are:

RQ1: Are there any differences in winescape attributes’ perceptions for a well-established Old-World wine destination (Tuscany) and an emergent destination from South-Eastern Europe (Bulgaria)?

RQ2: How are supply-driven winescape attributes and the experiencescape dimensions linked?

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

#### 3.1. Study area

The study is focused on a specific country – Bulgaria, which can be used as exemplary for an emergent wine destination with an interesting history as far as wine production is concerned. For more than 20 years (1961-1985) the country almost consistently ranked among the world top 5 wine exporters [22, pp. 176, 196]. Gorbachev’s anti-alcohol campaign in the mid-1980’s ended this positive trend, resulted in the loss of a major market and gradual decline of both production and export [23, p. 265]. The decade after 1989 was marked by a dramatic restructuring of the sector and signs of slow recovery were only seen after 2000. In recent years, the country is slowly regaining positions on the world market but by 2021 it ranks only 34th in world wine exports [24]. There is a positive trend of reorientation from quantity to quality, which is especially important for wine tourism. An increasing number of wineries open their doors to tourists, although unfortunately there are no official data on their total number. According to a study conducted in 2020, Bulgaria is in the second stage of the wine destination life cycle [25], visitor numbers

are still small, but with a positive increase rate, horizontal and vertical networks are insufficient, and there are initial steps in the launch of wine routes and joint wine events [14]. There are only a few specialized tour operators offering mainly inbound tour packages. Most of them are small, family owned businesses emphasizing on private and small group tours.

### 3.2. Data collected

The main goal of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the winescape, which is best achieved through analyzing qualitative information. One of the relatively new methodologies in this regard is netnography - an interpretive method that adapts ethnography to the study of online societies [26] and is very suitable for 'generating rich, thick description through grounded interpretations' [27]. In tourism studies, the main sources for accessing the needed type of qualitative data are platforms providing user-generated content such as TripAdvisor, Instagram, AirBnB or Flickr. In this particular case, the most appropriate choice was found to be TripAdvisor, because of its high degree of reliability [28], [29] and broad popularity worldwide, which brings in a sufficient number of consumer reviews. One of the few Bulgarian tour operators specializing exclusively in wine tourism was selected as the object of the study - it was also the one with the greatest number of customer reviews on TripAdvisor. The reviews referred to several tours offered by the company, ranging from one-day to multi-day ones. A total of 80 reviews (79 in English and 1 in French), posted from November 2015 to November 2021 were subjected to thematic analysis. The analysis is based only on the body text of reviews, while the title was omitted, because it would often contain information present in the body text, thus leading to distortion of results. The company and its tours have an outstand-

ing traveller rating on TripAdvisor - 77 reviewers have rated them as excellent and 3 - as very good, using the TripAdvisor 5-point rating system, ranging from 1 bubble=terrible to 5 bubbles=excellent. The majority of reviewers were foreign tourists coming from Germany, UK, the USA, Australia, etc., with only 9% of all reviewers being domestic ones (Figure 1).

### 3.3. Methodology

The identification of winescape attributes was premised on the notion of salience - the quality of some attitudes and beliefs to be more prominent, to enter a person's mind more readily and as a consequence be more frequently verbalized [30, p. 163]. Thus, following the identification of categories and codes, the initial dataset (traveller reviews) were coded manually and the results were quantified in terms of category and code frequency of mentions. The definition of categories and codes was partially informed by previous research - the winescape model of Terziyska and Damyanova [8], but also keeping the *in vivo* element - new categories and codes were added if identified, which was done through thematic analysis, one of the most popular methods for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' [31]. Reviews were then qualitatively analysed to get additional insight on individual codes and identify possible links between winescape attributes (named categories in the analysis) and the dimensions of the wine experiencescape model. Finally, the results were compared to a similar study, conducted earlier in a different context - a well-recognized Old-World destination (Italy). Thus, the research went through seven stages, starting from choosing the dataset and ending with comparison with findings from previous research (Figure 2).

The advent of qualitative analysis software has enabled the use of mixed methods and the processing of large datasets of unstructured text through automatic coding. A lot of recent studies in wine tourism using a

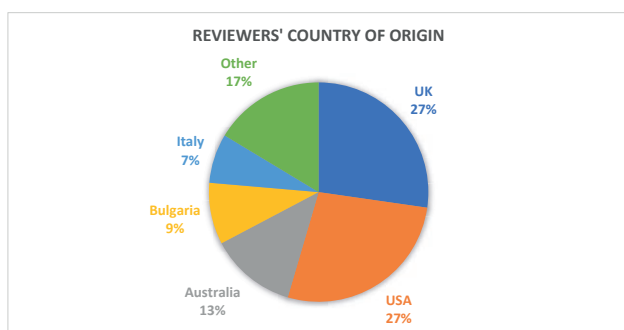


Figure 1. Distribution of reviewers by country of origin.

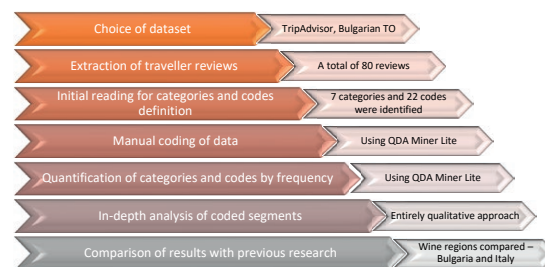


Figure 2. Research stages.



qualitative approach have taken benefit of this opportunity [10], [13], [32]. At the same time, some authors claim that this may lead to a loss of ‘valuable, often nuanced, information’ and recommend a more in-depth, traditional qualitative analysis of at least some part of the data [33, p. 649]. To answer this concern, the present study is based predominantly on pure qualitative analysis, though some quantification is also included, using QDA Miner Lite – qualitative data analysis software for coding, retrieving and analyzing texts or images.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1. Winescape attributes for package tours: the case of Bulgaria

The initial category and code definition resulted in the identification of 7 categories (winescape attributes), and 22 codes pertaining to them. Of these, the most salient was the core wine product, which was mentioned in 84 % of cases (traveller’s reviews), followed by the tour guide – 83 % (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Frequency distribution of categories and codes.

Category	% Cases	Code	% Cases
core wine product	84%	wineries	57,5%
		wine-based activities	25,0%
		wine	56,3%
		knowledgeable	62,5%
		accommodating	20,0%
tour guide	83%	friendly	21,3%
		passionate	13,8%
		general/unspecified	12,5%
		fun	5,0%
		English fluency	2,5%
planning and logistics	45%	general planning and coordination	33,8%
		booking	7,5%
		vehicle/driving	6,3%
		pick-up	6,3%
		choice of activities	2,5%
destination appeal	41%	nature and scenery	5,0%
		cultural attractions	36,3%
food and dining	35%	food	27,5%
		dining place	8,8%
complementary activities	5%	passive involvement	5,0%
		active involvement	0,0%
accommodation	5%	hotels	5,0%

##### Core wine product

The core wine product is composed of three sub-categories (described as codes) – wine, wineries, and wine-based activities. Of these, wineries and wines are the most salient, mentioned in 58% and 56% of reviews respectively. This finding was quite expected, as wine tourism revolves around wine, and the places and experiences related to it. At the same time, this is the first study reporting the core product category as the most salient as far as winescape attributes are concerned.

There are three types of reviews on wineries:

- (1) Posts that just include the word winery or wine cellar, but do not provide additional information. These were only used for measuring the saliency of the attribute.
- (2) Posts that describe wineries using only a few adjectives. The most common words used are *quality*, *stunning*, *beautiful inside*, *small*, *authentic*, *organic*.
- (3) Posts where the reviewers explain more elaborately what impressed them about their visit. These are the segments that will be analyzed in depth to gain more insight and identify possible links to wine-experienscape dimensions.

Apart from the obvious references to wineries’ design, the other two prominent features that stood out during the qualitative analysis were the attitude of wine staff/winery owners and the educational aspect. A number of reviewers discuss the warmth and passion of the employees who welcomed them on site: ‘*At both locations we were shown round by very passionate vintners*’ (Fiona D, UK, July 2021), ‘*the wineries we visited had the most informative staff*’. The above reviews point to a significant overlap of the role and desired features of the tour guide and the winery staff.

Diversity is also a feature that seems to be highly appreciated by reviewers: ‘We visited several different and contrasting vineyards’ (Kevmcc655, UK, January 2017), ‘Two very different wineries, a great range of very good and very interesting wines. Fully recommended!’ (twoa2017, Germany, 2017).

Wines are described as great and delicious. There is also an emphasis on the opportunity to taste traditional local varieties: ‘We enjoyed our day tour from Plovdiv and had a great experience tasting wines from traditional Bulgarian grapes, as well as other varieties.’ (EBHart, USA, July 2019).

Wine tasting and winery tours are the most common wine-based activities mentioned by reviewers.

I have been to a fair share of wine tours and what made this trip even more unique is at the end of the trip we learnt how to blend our very own wine with the enologist

which we bottled and brought home with us. (Mila, Croatia, August 2016)

However, what seems to be most valued is the opportunity to talk to the winemakers / winery owners:

We visited 11 wineries and received a very warm welcome from every one of them. The passionate winemakers gave informative tours and we tasted almost 60 wines, some of which we could not resist taking home in our overloaded suitcases. (Westbourne W, June 2019)

Ultimately though it was Vasil and the winery owners' kindness and warmth that made this a really wonderful experience, and we would recommend anyone to try such a tour! (Johanmyst, The Netherlands, September 2021)

The core wine product has obvious links to at least three of the experiencescape dimensions – the functional one (references to the design and character of the wine cellars and vineyards – small, different, fantastic, beautiful), the social one (communication with winemakers, focus on warmth, passion and informativeness), and the sensory one (wines, tastings). The cultural dimension can also be seen through the mentions of traditional local wines.

### *Tour guide*

Despite being ranked as second in terms of salience, in reviews the tour guide is often pointed as the main reason for an unforgettable and meaningful experience:

Vasil, who drove us around and acted as our guide and interpreter when needed, was very knowledgeable about the ancient and recent history of Bulgaria. This background made our experience much more meaningful. (Darby H, UK, June 2017)

Of all the features that were mentioned, knowledgeable stands out as the most prominent one, seen in 62% of all posts. Apart from knowledge in history and culture of the destination (see above review), the other most discussed aspect is expertise in wines and winemaking and the ability to communicate it to an audience with varying degrees of proficiency:

Our tour guide Nicollet has a true passion for wines and Bulgarian culture and history. Her enthusiasm was contagious as we soon felt like we were touring with old friends. (Pablo J, USA, June 2017).

*Friendly* and *accommodating* are the two features that follow next in terms of saliency with almost equal

frequency of mentions: 21 and 20 percent respectively. In some of them the guide's kindness and responsiveness are directly linked to tourist satisfaction: '*our guide Nicolay was so kind and so good and helpful, that we enjoyed this tour in this beautiful country*' (yiota123, Cyprus, May 2018), '*First of all, the driver was one of the owners and it was a pleasure to spend the day with him. He was friendly, knowledgeable and fun.*' (Celisa B, USA, September 2018).

The tour guide's passion and enthusiasm for their job are mentioned in only 13 percent of reviews but are always linked to a highly positive impression / experience: '*The hosts were fantastic-- they know a ton about wine and you can't help but get swept away by their enthusiasm.*' (Pablo J, USA, June 2017), '*He clearly had a huge passion for Bulgarian wine which shone through throughout the tour*' (Pat M, August 2018).

*Fun* is another quality of the tour guide, which has been articulated in 5 % of reviews. It is strongly connected with the social dimension of the experiencescape and the entertainment aspect of the experience model of Pine and Gilmore [34].

Fluency in English was appreciated by 2 of reviewers, one of whom emphasizes how important this is if you do not know the local language and the guide actually acts as a translator in contacts with locals.

Tour guiding has a pronounced relation with the functional, social and cultural dimensions of the wine-experiencescape dimensions defined by Pizam and Tasci [12] and Gunesakar et al. [10]. In line with previous research [35], the tour guides transcend their role as a one-way communicator, and act as experience brokers who, in addition to conveying information (functional dimension), engage their audience in emotional experiences through friendliness, enthusiasm and sharing, and connect tourists (through interpretation) with the destination history and culture.

### *Planning and logistics*

This category is unique to the wine tour servicescape and for obvious reasons is not present in the micro (winery) or macro (wine region) levels. With a share of 45% of mentions, it is the third most important in terms of salience. Apart from that, there are also clear verbal references to its significance for the overall tourist experience.

The arrangements after the tour were also done very competently and appropriately, with good hotels and transport arrangements, and excellent suggestions for things to do. The whole experience couldn't really have been better. (Kevmcc655, UK, January 2017)

In addition to the flawless arrangements of the tour, attention to detail and the excellent choice of non-mainstream wineries are highly valued: *‘The tour was an outstanding success largely due their efficient organisation and attention to detail coupled with a flair for finding smaller more interesting vineyards’* (Martin H, UK, June 2017).

Similar to the findings of Terziyska and Damyanova (2020), the pace of travel and the included activities are also an important factor: *‘We packed a tremendous amount into the three days without it feeling exhausting.’* (Lucy L, March 2020).

The booking process has been mentioned in a relatively small number of reviews (7,5 % of all posts). Timely reply, responsiveness to individual preferences and suggestions/information on what can be seen at the destination are appreciated. Convenient pick-up arrangements and safe and comfortable driving are the least salient, with only 6,3% of mentions each.

Choice of activities is the least mentioned subcategory and comments mainly refer to diversity and combining wine tastings with visits to historical sights: *‘Each wine stop along the way was slightly different making the tour all the more interesting.’* (Liseylou82, Australia, March 2016).

The Planning and Logistics category does not have a clear link to any of the dimensions of the experiencescape defined by Pizam and Tasci (2019). The most logical reference is the functional dimension, as it refers to practical arrangements, which facilitate the creation of a satisfying experience.

### *Destination appeal*

This category refers to the macro environment, or in other words – the appeal of the broader destinations and the specific attractions included in the tour. There are clear cues to the importance of this attribute for a more enjoyable trip and a way to get a more in-depth understanding of the destination:

The countryside near the Greek border is really quite beautiful and the walking tour of the old town of Plovdiv with its cobbled streets and Roman Theatre made a delightful start to our first day. (Westbourne W, June 2019)

The day was also broken up with a visit to the red church, which was a great way to experience a little bit of the region’s history, while sobering up so we could enjoy the wines at the next stop. (Liseylou82, Australia, March 2016)

The three day tour is an excellent way to get a feel of Bulgaria in a very short time. (Lucy L, March 2020)

### *Food and dining*

Food and dining have been mentioned in more than one-third of reviews and are thus ranked fifth of all attributes. Special attention is paid to the opportunity to taste local produce: *‘We had lunch at the second vineyard which was delicious and comprised mainly locally sourced produce including goat - which I can recommend!’* (Fiona D, UK, July 2021), and traditional Bulgarian cuisine: *‘We had a delicious, traditional Bulgarian lunch thanks to him’*. As stated in Gunasekar et al. (2021), this attribute has an obvious sensory experiencescape dimension, coupled with a cultural one. Although there are no cues linking it to the social dimension in this dataset, a previous study [8] points to the existence of such a relation too.

The dining place is usually described as nice and traditional / local and has a slight reference to the cultural dimension expressed through descriptions of style and setting *‘The tasting was in a beautiful old town restaurant’* (R8574VYpauls, January 2018).

### *Complementary activities*

This category entails activities that are not related to the core product (wine) and exclude visits to cultural attractions, which are under the Destination appeal category. Of the two subcategories – active and passive involvement, only four mentions of passive involvement were found, referring to a visit to a folk festival, craft beer brewery, spa, and a meeting with a rose oil producer. Most of these could be linked to the cultural dimension of the experiencescape.

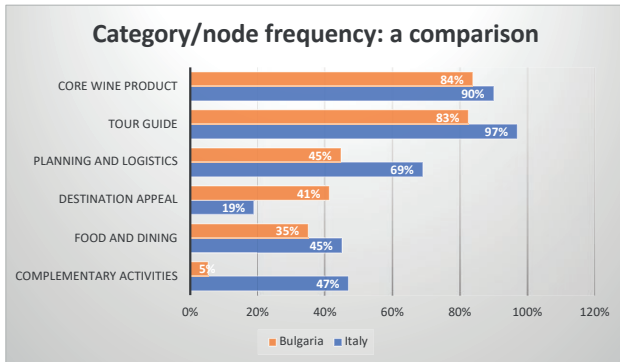
#### *Accommodation*

Together with Complementary Activities, this is the least salient category (mentioned in only 5% of all reviews). It is specific to the multi-day wine tours and is clearly linked to the functional dimension of the experiencescape. Seen in 5% of reviews, it is verbalized exclusively through comments on the quality of hotels – *excellent, wonderful, good, far better than most I have experienced.*

### *4.2. Two types of destination – similarities and differences in the perceived winescape*

The present study has followed the same methodology as a previous one [8], which enables a direct comparison of results. As the wine regions are very different in nature – the former one is a well-established Old-World wine destination and a leading wine producer





**Figure 3.** Winescape attributes' salience in Italy and Bulgaria: a comparison.

(Italy), and the latter is a post-socialist country (Bulgaria), which is striving to regain its position on the world wine market, and can be seen as an emergent wine destination, still in its early steps of development [14]. The two companies under study are of the same type – family wine tour operators, offering private and small group packages.

There is an almost complete correspondence between the winescape attributes identified in the two studies, the only difference being Accommodation, which is not present in the study of Terziyska and Damyanova [8], due to the fact that only one-day tours were analyzed.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The winescape attributes identified in this study almost fully coincide with the model of Terziyska and Damyanova [8], and the success factors presented by Barbierato et al. [13], the only difference being the “Accommodation” attribute, which is present only in this study. “Destination appeal” to a great extent corresponds to “Nature and scenery”, but has been extended to include cultural attractions.

This conformity validates the winescape model, but at the same time, there are some significant differences in the salience of individual attributes (Figure 4) that can probably be explained by the different nature and stage of development of the two destinations.

The most obvious differences (more than 20 percentage points) are seen in the following three attributes – planning and logistics, attractiveness of the destination and complementary activities, with the latter exhibiting a difference of more than 40 percentage points.

In previous studies based on sentiment analysis, the *logistical aspect* has been associated more with negative experiences and evaluation [13]. However, in the two

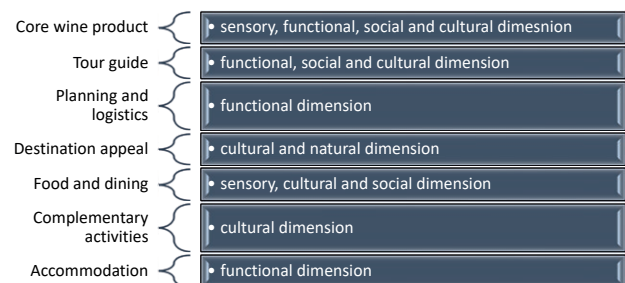
studies discussed here, negative ratings are virtually non-existent, and since this is an attribute that applies exclusively to the specific tour company, the difference is probably due to the individual specifics of the two tour operators. In any case, the conclusion that can be drawn is that a higher degree of salience is caused not only by the low perceived quality of this attribute, but also by positive impressions.

In the case of the *destination appeal*, expressed through the natural and cultural attractions, the probable explanation lies in the different phases of wine tourism development in the two destinations. Bulgaria is a relatively new player on the wine tourism scene, with a wine culture still under development. In this case, the increased presence of cultural tourism elements in wine tours compensates for the shortcomings in the winery offerings. This observation is also confirmed by a supply-based study [14], which shows a significant share of the wine&culture type of tours in Bulgaria. In this type of tours, a significant part of the programme is dedicated to cultural/heritage attractions, sometimes at the expense of the number of wine tastings.

The great discrepancy in the salience of *complementary activities* can be attributed to the more general nature of tourism supply in Bulgaria, which is still focused on non-participatory activities and is dominated by visits to natural and cultural attractions.

The lower salience of *food and dining* in Bulgaria is destination-specific – while Italy is a world leader in gastronomy, in Bulgaria this is still a problem area.

As for the two most important attributes – *tour guide* and *core wine product*, the score is higher in the Italian study, but the difference is not so significant. Though not so well-known, Bulgarian wines have a noticeable rise in quality in recent years, attested by a number of international awards [36] and attract with their novelty. At the same time, as evidenced by the rating in TripAdvisor, the specialized wine tour operators in the country offer products of extremely high quality.



**Figure 4.** Associations between winescape attributes and experience dimensions.

As far as the relation between the winescape attributes and the experiencescape dimensions is concerned, the most obvious finding is that one and the same attribute can have several experiencescape dimensions (Figure 4). Having sensory, functional, social and cultural dimensions, the core wine products is most complex one, followed by tour guiding and food and dining.

In this study, the categories of “Accommodation” and “Planning and logistics” were found to be related only to the functional dimension of the experiencescape, and “Complementary activities” – to the cultural dimension, but other settings or cases (destinations and individual operators) could produce different results, especially as far as “Complementary activities” are concerned.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The results presented in this paper validate the winescape model of Terziyska and Damyanova [8] and the success factors of Barbierato et al. [13]. The leading role of the tour guiding service, which dominates as an element of the winescape and is probably the most important factor for success, is fully confirmed. Of no less importance is the core wine product, consisting of wine, wineries and wine-related activities. These are the two attributes with the most references to experiencescape dimensions. The core wine product is the most complex attribute, combining almost all dimensions: sensory, functional, social and cultural. The social dimension of the tour guide is exhibited through their role in involving tourists into an enriching and relaxing experience, providing both knowledge and entertainment. A warm and friendly attitude and passion for their job are the most emphasized facilitators to achieving a satisfying interaction and memorable experiences. Tour guides also act as cultural ambassadors of the destination and ensure a deeper insight into its culture and history.

Although the set of attributes is nearly the same in the two studies, which validates the general framework of the model, there are significant differences in the salience of individual attributes. The main reasons for this are the specifics of the firm under study (the wine tour provider), the stage of development and the features of the wine destination (the structure and nature of the viticultural sector and the tourist products offered by wine cellars) and the general trends in tourism development in the broader destination. Providers in Bulgaria, which is an emergent wine destination, seem to rely more heavily on attractions other than wine and this is reflected in the perceived winescape. The resources of the destina-

tion also have their impact – in Italy, the food and dining aspect is much more pronounced. It was interesting to find out that wine popularity did not exert significant influence – in the case of Bulgaria it was compensated by novelty, quality and local character (the opportunity to taste local varieties).

As winescape attributes are easily translated into success factors [13], the above findings can be very useful for wine tourism practitioners (both wineries and tour operators) in analyzing their products and adjusting them to customer needs. The model can also be used as a basis for measuring tourist satisfaction for wine tours, because of the association between salient product attributes and customer satisfaction and tourist experience [33], [37]. Last but not least, the results can be used for future comparative studies to identify context-specific patterns for different types of wine destinations.

The main limitation of the study is the fact that was conducted for a specific destination – Bulgaria, which hampers generalizability of results. However, most probably findings will also be valid for other destinations of the same type – newcomers on the scene of wine tourism.

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