

THE MAIN TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WINE TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract: This scientific work analyzes the main trends in the development of wine tourism in the Republic of Moldova. In the analyzed country, viticulture and wine tourism are perspective and profitable areas of development. Viticulture is of great importance for the local agricultural sector. The Republic of Moldova has a great potential for the development of wine tourism - the country has a rich history associated with wine and winemaking. Wine industry in Moldova is about 147000 hectares of land occupied by vineyards, of which 102500 hectares are used for commercial purposes. Wine tourism for the Republic of Moldova is a developing segment, which is constantly progressing. The analysis of this research based on information from national and international scientific research, data from the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, data from national and international Reports. The following research methods were used in the presented work: economic analysis, logical, monographic, synthesis, comparative, etc.

Keywords: tourism, wine industry, wine tourism, national program, wine routes, Republic of Moldova

Introduction. Wine tourism is a motivational form of tourism practised by tourists to visit wineries and wine regions in order to combine the pleasure of tasting the wine products with the opportunity to get to know the local lifestyle, countryside and cultural activities. Wine tourism attracts the interest of visitors to various areas, especially those producing wine, with facilities for wine and grape tasting and treatments. Wine tourism is also called oenotourism. The main types of wine tourism are: excursions following the stages through which the grapes pass to become wine; recreational excursions among the vineyards; introductory courses in wine science; visits and other activities in the vineyards; wine parties and festivals; wine fairs and exhibitions.

The wine sector is considered a strategic pillar of the national economy. This is due not only to the considerable contribution made by the sale of alcoholic beverages to the budget and the substantial share of exports, but also, to a large extent, to the rational use of the republic's soil and climate conditions.

Country analysis. The Republic of Moldova remains the country with the highest density of vineyards in the world. In 2021 the total area planted with technical varieties reached by 118 000 thousand hectares (Figure 1). From the analysis which we carried out it is observed that the area of plantations and the overall harvest is influenced by several factors and by this reason is unstable.

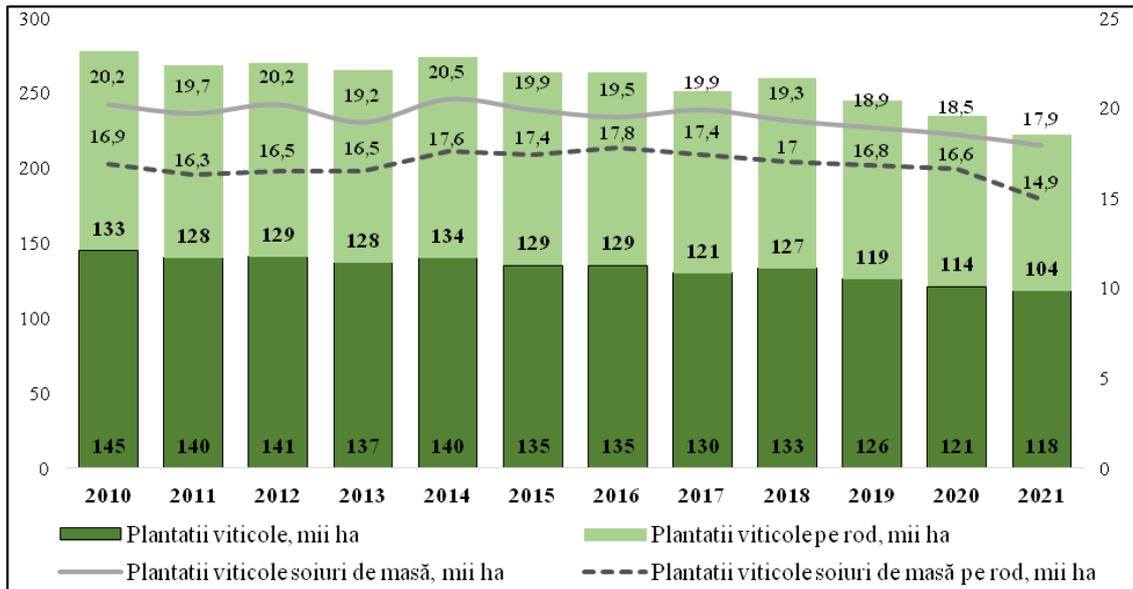


Figure 1. Moldovan wine sector trends, 2010 -2021, thousand ha

Source: elaborated by the authors

The wine-growing area of the Republic of Moldova is made up of 4 wine-growing regions with PGI (Protected Geographical Indication for food and wine), recognized (registered) at EU level, such as: PGI region „Codru”, located in the centre of the country, known for the production of white wines, PGI region „Stefan Voda”, located in the south-east of the country, known for its red wines - varietal and cupaj, PGI region „Valul lui Traian”, located in the south-west of the country, known for the production of liqueur wines and red wines of superior quality and PGI region „Divin”, known for the production of distilled wine brandies, matured in oak barrels.

During the 2021 wine year, the areas of vineyards planted with technical varieties with Protected Geographical Indication increased from 2.4% to 9937 ha. At the same time, the number of winemakers producing PGI wines increased to 89 producers or by 6%, with the highest number registered in the PGI „Valul lui Traian” Region (36%), see Figure 2.

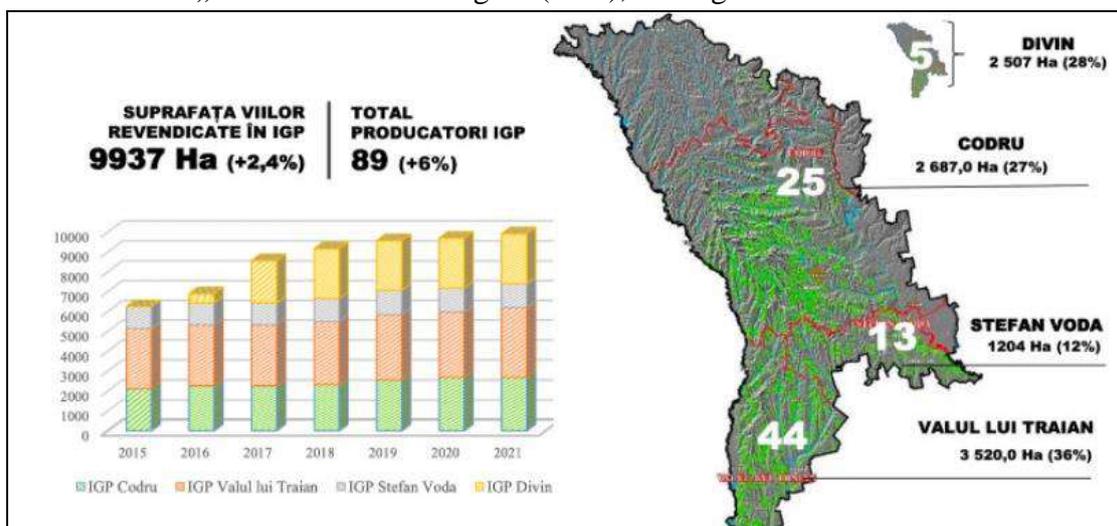


Figure 2. Moldovan production potential of the wine sector, 2021

Sursa: ONVV

Today, the wine sector provides the image of the Republic of Moldova abroad, but also provides a number of benefits to those employed in this field. In 2020, Moldovan wines won 956 medals at 32 international wine competitions, the highest number of awards to this day. Despite the impediments and restrictions caused by the global epidemiological situation, the country's winemakers have managed to face the challenges and enter their home-produced bottled wines in the world's most outstanding wine events. Of the total number of medals, most of them, 417 in number, are gold medals, the ranking is continued with 277 silver medals and 169 bronze awards. For the appreciation and recognition of quality, 65 wine companies from the country sent their samples of wines, sparkling wines and divines and received excellent ratings from foreign juries. Moldovan wine won the most medals at the Decanter World Wine Awards (DWWA) - 124 awards, International Wine Challenge - 77 awards and Galicja Vitis - 73 awards. The winery is well-known worldwide for the length of its galleries and unique wine collections. The Republic of Moldova has been included in the Guinness Book of Records as the holder of the largest wine collection in the world, which is a strong point for attracting foreign tourists.

Having an advantageous geographical location, attractive natural-climatic and cultural-historical components, the Republic of Moldova has all the prerequisites for the organization and development of wine tourism. Tourism ensures people's access to society's treasure trove of civilisation and beauty, facilitates the exchange of opinions, ideas and thoughts, and contributes equally to the intellectual training of individuals and the formation of inter-state relations. Many wineries in Moldova offer facilities for welcoming visitors. Here tourists can receive experience and learn about the complex production process, be present at the bottling process and, of course, taste the final product. As a wine producing country, the Republic of Moldova offers visitors the possibility to choose their preferred visiting routes: underground cellars and cellars, wine storage rooms, wine processing factories, to witness the process of producing sparkling wine, divin, heres, balsam, etc.

Since 2002, the „National Wine Day” has been celebrated in the country. This wine festival has become one of the best known wine festivals in the world, with wine companies taking part every year. Several programmes have been developed to promote wine tourism and wine products. The National Programme „The Wine Road in Moldova” establishes a regulatory framework for wine tourism activities, promotes tourist routes through all wine regions of the country. The National Programme „Wine Road in Moldova” was approved by Government Decree No 554 of 24 May 2004. This Programme aimed to stimulate the development of wine tourism and its integration into the international wine tourism network. The wine industry and the tourism industry help to attract as many consumers of wine products as possible, further promoting all those existing in the Republic of Moldova, see Figure 3.

The wine route „Wine Road of Moldova” became the first tourist route of the Republic of Moldova, registered as a cultural route in the „ITER VITIS - Les Chemins de la vigne”, certified by the Council of Europe. The success of the wine and tourism industry in the Republic of Moldova is the joining of the „Wine Road” to the European network of cultural routes. The diversity of winemaking traditions, the uniqueness of underground galleries and the authenticity of wines are the strengths of this tourist product of the Republic of Moldova, which through the IterVitis network will be promoted as part of the European cultural heritage. At the same time, the national brand of Moldovan wines „Wine of Moldova” was launched, which will ensure the increase of quality, but also of wine consumption domestically and export to foreign markets.



Figure 3. Wine Road Map

Sursa: ONVV

Thus, the wine and tourism industry contributes to attracting a larger number of consumers of wine tourism production, additionally promoting all the existing tourist facilities in the Republic of Moldova.

In 2021 travel agencies and tour operators provided tourist services to 320.9 thousand tourists and excursionists or 2.6 times more than in 2020, against the background of the reduction of the indicator in question in 2020 compared to 2019 by 252.1 thousand tourists or 3.0 times.

The absolute majority of tourists coming from abroad chose Moldova for recreation and entertainment - 32 thousand (+48,9%). The number of foreigners who visited Moldova on business increased by 64,6%, although their number remains insignificant - about 1 thousand. Only 300 people from abroad visited Moldova for sanatorium treatment.

The increase in the number of tourists and excursionists in the surveyed period is due to the increase in the number of participants in outbound tourism by 143.0 thousand persons or 2.9 times, domestic tourism - by 36.3 thousand persons or 1.8 times and inbound tourism - by 17.1 thousand persons or 3.5 times Table 1.

Of the total number of tourists and excursionists in 2021, outbound and domestic tourism had the largest share, respectively 67.8% and 24.7%, and inbound tourism - 7.5%.

Table 1. The number of tourists and excursionists participating in organised tourism by travel agencies and tour operators, by purpose of visit in 2021

	2021		2021/2020, %	
	Tourists and excursionists, thousands	Tourists days, thousands	Tourists and excursionists, thousands	Tourists days, thousands
Turism receptor	24.0	12.5	345.4	327.5
Turism sender	217.7	1487.2	291.4	298.2
Turism internal	79.2	224.9	184.8	225.7
Total	320.9	1724.6	257.7	286.4

Source: data from NBS RM

According to data from National Bureau of Statistics of Republic of Moldova (NBS RM), tourist accommodation establishments accommodated about 178.2 thousand tourists or 2.0 times more than in the previous year, against the background of a decrease in this indicator in 2020 compared to 2019 by about 284.4 thousand tourists or 4.1 times. Of the total number of tourists, 109.3 thousand (61.4%) were resident tourists and 68.9 thousand (38.6%) - non-resident tourists Figure 4.

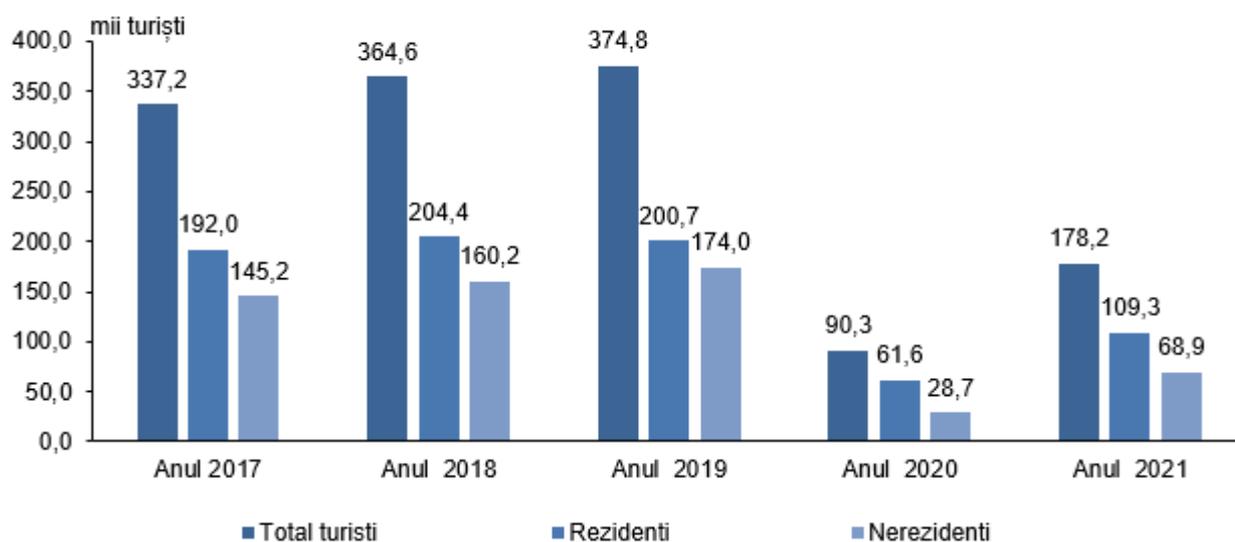


Figure 4. Tourists accommodated in collective tourist accommodation, thousands of persons

Source: according to data from NBS RM

The analysis shows a decrease in the number of tourists staying, with 47.2% less than in 2017. Of the total number of tourists staying, the share of tourists who preferred mun. Chisinau accounted for 59.1%, the Centre region 23.9%, the South 8.2% and the North Zone 7.3%, UTA Gagauzia 1.5%. Out of the total number of tourists, about 21.4 thousand tourists preferred tourist

and agro-touristic pensions, 21.6 thousand tourists preferred boarding facilities and 29.8 thousand tourists chose tourist villas, holiday villages and other accommodation facilities.

If we analyze the origin of non-resident tourists who visited our country, we see that tourists from Romania accounted for 27.6%, tourists from the Russian Federation for 12.3%, tourists from Ukraine for 11.9%, United States of America 7.2%, Turkey 4.4%, Germany 4.1%, Italy 3.7%, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 3.4%, Poland 2.7%, Israel 2.6%) France 2.0%, Netherlands 1.2%, Canada 1.1%, Bulgaria 1.0%, Czech Republic, Spain, Belgium and Austria 0.9% each.

Travel agencies also provide tastings at Moldovan wineries for foreign tourists. Tourists have the opportunity to study wine production technology, watch bottling and taste the finished product. At present these routes are present in the tourist offers in partial and separate form. Through travel agencies, the Tourism Agency has organized tourist itineraries to wine cellars, where tours with tastings at the cellars Chateau Vartely, Brănești, Cojușna (Migdal-P) Mileștii Mici, Purcari and Cricova are available.

In **conclusion** we can mention that the Republic of Moldova has a great potential for the development of wine tourism - the country has a rich history associated with wine and winemaking. Wine tourism for the Republic of Moldova is a developing segment, which implies the promotion of initiatives of active actors of gastronomic tourism: wineries, micro and home wineries, interested in the development of wine tourism.

Tourism is a form of marketing of viticulture and wine production, which can be combined with all activities from grape growing, promotion of raw material (grapes) and wine production from farmers and wineries to final consumers. The development of wine tourism will put this type of tourism of the Republic of Moldova back on the international tourist circuit.

The wine industry and tourism industry contribute to attracting a large number of consumers of wine tourism production, to the improvement and modernization of the territory, to the promotion of existing tourist facilities in Moldova.

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