

## EMERGENCE OF WINE TOURISM AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN UKRAINIAN TRANSCARPATHIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Virtually all tourism experts concur that there is no region in Ukraine that could boast a diversity of grape varieties to match that of the Ukrainian Transcarpathia. The unique terrain with a special climate that has evolved there is unique in the country. Mineral springs, rapid rivers, mountain ranges, and rare flora and fauna species represent only a handful of the region's riches. The geography of the Ukrainian Transcarpathia is also unique in that it borders four countries simultaneously, which also contributes to the region's economic and tourist development prospects. The growth of tourist traffic in the Ukrainian Transcarpathia in recent years has generated demand for local foodstuffs, including wine. It is safe to say that tourism has a direct impact on the development of the wine industry and supports the renewal of the cultural and culinary traditions of specific areas. This is especially true of the five administrative districts of Transcarpathian Region: Berehove, Irshava, Mukachevo, Vynohradiv, and Uzhhorod, where small commodity producers are predominant. These areas are pushing for the development of the local economy, and their goal is the preservation of the local traditions and culture associated with wine production rather than competition on a global scale. In this research, the authors offer a comprehensive review of geographical, tourist and recreational, industrial and economic conditions affecting the social and economic situation in Ukrainian Transcarpathia with a focus on the development of wine tourism (enotourism) to provide an evaluation of the potential of wine tourism in specific destinations and a rationale for the modalities of its effective operation. The authors propose a breakdown of enotourism market into segments and identify factors that encourage or discourage the participants of the tourist traffic to visit wine tourism operators.*

**Keywords:** *wine tourism, wine, enotourists*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to present the potential of the wine-growing and wine-making industry in the Ukrainian Transcarpathia in terms of the development prospects of wine tourism and to evaluate the demand for its products. Research Methodology: In the course of research, the dialectical method of inquiry was used to evaluate scholarly works dedicated to the development problems of the wine industry in Ukraine in general and in Transcarpathian (Zakarpattia) Region in particular. The method of empirical research was used to analyse the current state of development of the wine tourism offer. To determine the demand for enotourism services, a direct survey of a cohort of 126 select guests of wine festivals in the studied area was conducted.

### 2. WINE TOURISM: DEFINITIONS AND STRUCTURE OF MARKET ACTORS

The review of available scholarly literature shows that the majority of researchers in this tourist market concur that wine tourism is a new branch of the tourism industry [1, p. 138], which

stands out as one of top priority development areas in wine-growing regions of Ukraine with developed tourism infrastructure, availability of tourism properties, and rich historic and cultural heritage. It should be noted that, in Ukrainian tourism studies, there is no uniform terminological definition of this type of tourism; the terms “wine tourism,” “enotourism,” “wine-making tourism,” “wine-and food tourism,” and “enogastronomic tourism” are used interchangeably. Occasionally, the concept of “alcotourism,” referring to a trip to temporary accommodations for the purposes of consumption of alcoholic beverages, is used.

Notably, wine tourism covers a fairly extensive range of tourism activities [2], including:

- vineyard visits, tasting of local grape varieties;
- insights into the technology used in the production of various types of alcoholic beverages on production sites;
- exposure to the history of wine-making, visits to industry museums and exhibitions, festivals;
- visits to tasting rooms and wine cellars;
- visits to restaurants offering wine tasting sessions and sommelier workshops;
- participation in wine festivals and themed events;
- attendance and participation in industry-related exhibitions, forums, conferences, contests, auctions.

In L.O. Gorshkova’s opinion, wine tourism is a specialised type of the tourism industry, which involves exposure to the history, technology and culture of wine consumption in a specific region and wine tasting events immediately on the producer’s site [3, p.69]. Amid existing economic developments, wine tourism is experiencing an intensive development in different wine-growing regions across the world. Since it can be paired with all other types of tourism or serve as a complement of tourist programs and routes, it may generate substantial profits. In addition, the industry’s importance is also enhanced by its cultural and gastronomic values. Given that wine-making is an ancient business and ethnic tradition, each country can promote its culture, customs, national business practices, and imports interests through wine tourism. It also stimulates the development of backward agricultural areas and generates cash flow to local budgets, which is highly relevant for some Ukrainian regions, including Transcarpathian Region. In their publications, T.I. Bozhuk and L.A. Prokopchuk define wine tourism as “a specialised type of tourism associated with tasting, consumption and purchase of wine directly from the producer” [4, p.174]. A number of available publications offer a slightly different interpretation of wine tourism as an activity that has a significant impact on the development of a specific region. In many wine-making regions, a close relationship between wine tourism revenues and the growth of profits in other business areas has been demonstrated. Profit growth is directly linked to an increase in the number of tourists interested in wine [5, p. 8]. Thus, it can be stated that the core of wine tourism as a product is not so much wine itself, but also other components of the tourist offer, such as regional cuisine, material and spiritual culture, which overlap to shape a special culture of living, which wine tourists strive to experience. Wine tourism includes travels of a tourist nature motivated by the desire to learn about the history and traditions of localities associated with the cultivation of grapes and the production of wine, a chance to taste and purchase local wines directly from winemakers, participation in cultural activities, and an immersion experience in a special environment, peculiar to territories with a rich tourist and recreational infrastructure.

Irrespective of the above definitions, wine tourism has the below attributes:

- it constitutes a tangible component of material and spiritual culture,
- it enables an immersion experience of a specific lifestyle,
- it is factored in both the offer (owners of wine cellars, tourist businesses, etc.) and factors of demand (consumer behaviours),

- it constitutes an element of the region's tourist offer (most often combined with culinary heritage, culture, arts, and folk crafts),
- it serves as a marketing tool for the promotion of the region and wine producers,
- it enhances economic, cultural and social benefits for the region,
- it may be part of the national and international image of the region.

With due account for the above attributes and with reference to the arguments of a number of Polish scientists [6; 7, p.265], it is possible to argue that wine tourism is a related variety of cultural and food tourism, as can be seen from local folklore or names. For example, one of the largest cities in Transcarpathia is called Vynohradiv, while the commercial designations of many wines derive from their place of origin (Serednyanske, Berehivske, Irshavske, Troyanda Zakarpattia [Rose of the Transcarpathia], etc.). Since wine-making is an integral part of the socio-cultural heritage of each nation and an original asset of a specific ethnic group, the objectives and methods of wine tourism fully align with the social and humanitarian mission of tourism as the key driver in the dialogue between cultures, respect for universal cultural values, tolerance for lifestyles, mind-set and traditions of other peoples [8, p. 60]. The rapid development of wine tourism can be noted in the regions with favourable conditions for the cultivation of grapes, such as the Ukrainian Transcarpathia. The appeal of this type of tourism is down to a number of reasons, including interest in culture, history, architecture and lifestyle of the local population. Wine is perceived as a product associated with the cultural and culinary traditions of the areas inhabited by Ukrainian, Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak or other minority communities. Tourists who take interest in viticulture and wine consumption often discover this beverage in tasting rooms or cellars, at cultural events, festivals, fairs or improvised local events, as well as restaurants. Oftentimes, wine tourists prefer purchasing wine directly from producers, in a place with a unique atmosphere, a relevant infrastructure, and the opportunity to learn more about the product. Consequently, the development of wine tourism is enabled by a number of reasons. First, Transcarpathia is the leading region in terms of the number of visiting tourists: it is here that a vast number of cultural and historic landmarks are concentrated, while the services industry is experiencing a dynamic development. Secondly, historically, due to convergent geographical, climatic, environmental, cultural and socio-political reasons, Transcarpathia is one of Ukraine's largest producers and exporters of high-quality fine wines. Tourists are drawn to the region not only by national cuisine, but also by a selection of local wines, as well as many festivals and national holidays associated with grape harvesting and the maturation of wine as a beverage. Many Transcarpathian wines may be available for tasting only directly from winemakers nurturing a distinct wine culture with its peculiarities and consumption rituals. Tourism professionals and statistical data collected by tourism businesses confirm that the development trend of wine tourism in Transcarpathia is experiencing growth, while remaining a stable and highly promising business area. Wine tourism can generate substantial revenues at local and regional levels. The industry displays a strong potential, which makes it possible to secure competitive advantages for the region that is home to wine businesses and private wine cellars of local Transcarpathian wine-growers. Wine tourism holds a lot of economic appeal not only in terms of supply prospects, but also for companies and organisations involved in the provision of services associated with tourist traffic. In connection with this, many business owners began to engage in wine-making as their core business activity. The development of small-scale wine-making businesses based on farmer properties or private peasant farms can generate synergies in the form of an increase in tourist traffic and scope of services provided to tourists. Such prospects may reverse adverse trends in the local labour market and contribute to an increase in financial revenues to the local budget, which, in turn, will improve the living standards of local communities. Many examples can be identified globally, where the development of wine tourism is included in strategic planning policy

documents. In Austria and Spain, funds are allocated from local budgets for the construction of wine centres under a dedicated expenditure item, and favourable conditions are created for the promotion of internal and external investment in the development of tourist infrastructure (accommodations, catering, development of routes, information centres) [9, p.639]. Wine connoisseurs see wine tours as a chance to come into contact with the traditions and art of wine-making and immerse themselves into a special context of communication about the taste and smell of wine. However, tourists are also encouraged to sample other products, for example, they may choose to be entertained at a thematic Transcarpathian banquet, featuring national cuisine and exclusive dishes, attend festivals, celebrations, academic and business forums, register for workshops and, of course, take a tour of local natural and cultural landmarks. Summing up, wine tourism is an important element of two industries – wine-growing and wine-making, on the one hand, and tourism, on the other hand. According to the authors of the textbook *Wine Tourism for tourist industry professionals*, wine is an essential factor in the appeal of a tour, a reason to take a special trip, and an element of dining, treatment and entertainment [10, pp.107-108]. For wineries, wine tourism is one way to raise the profile of their brand, secure long-term purchaser commitment among consumers who discovered the proposed range of wines, and increase direct sales in tasting rooms and cellars.

### **3. PERCEPTION OF WINE TOURISM AS A FORM OF EXPOSURE TO LOCAL CULTURAL AND CULINARY HERITAGE**

The methodology behind the design of our market research of the wine tourism market is based on the categorisation of factors impacting actual and potential consumers, specifically, external stimulating factors, personal factors, and classical approaches to the segmentation of the tourist market. Our target surveyed group was selected among the guests of wine festivals, as, according to the Transcarpathia Tourist Information Office, about 150,000 tourists come to local wine festivals annually [11]. 82 wine questionnaires were collected at Chervene Vyno (Red Wine) Festival in Mukachevo, while 44 respondents took part in the survey during the Bile Vyno (White Wine) Festival in Berehove. In addition to these two select events, it is necessary to mention two more festivals hosted by the region, specifically, Sonyachny Napiy (Sunny Drink) in Uzhhorod, and Zakarpatske Beaujolais and Ugochanska Loza (Ugocsa Vine) in Berehove, which promote tourism and constitute a tourism product of national importance. Based on the processed materials of the marketing research, we made an attempt to segment surveyed consumers by specific attributes and determine the profile of the rank and file wine tourist. Thus, it was possible to identify three segments of consumers who have already participated in wine festivals or tours or are merely interested in such kind of leisure time. Consequently, Segment 1 comprises actual consumers who have repeatedly participated in organised wine tourism activities. Segment 2 represents wine tourists with little experience and some exposure who have not yet participated in regular wine tours. Segment III are potential tourists who do not yet have the experience of participation in a wine tour and similar events, but are willing to have such an experience in the future. A detailed description of the resultant segments is provided in Table. 1 below. Based on the data shown in Table 1, it may be concluded that Segment 1 is the largest, indicating that most respondents were interested in travelling to wine tourism destinations and learning about wine consumption culture and tend to get involved in a variety of wine-related activities if they have available options. These are mostly middle-aged people, with a university degree and an appropriate income level. Having a prior experience of participation in various wine tasting events and festivals, they are highly motivated to take such trips. A fairly sizeable Segment 2 indicates that the wine tourism industry has quite a few potential consumers who, granted a sufficient purchasing capacity level, will be able to engage in wine-related trips. The backbone of this segment is comprised of people of all age groups, by and large, with a university degree or a university level educational

background. In terms of professional distribution, it should be noted that the respondents employed in the service sector (28.5%) or operating private businesses (19%) were interested in wine tourism the most. A sufficient number of potential and actual consumers of wine tourism products were represented by civil servants, educators and academia members.

*Table 1: Segmentation of Wine Tourism Actors by Demographic Descriptors*

Demographic descriptors	Number of responses per segment, units			Total responses, units
	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3	
Gender: male	21	33	18	72
female	17	24	13	54
Place of residence: city	43	31	17	91
rural community	17	11	7	35
Age: 18 – 25	13	3	9	25
26 – 35	9	4	5	18
36 – 45	20	9	6	35
46 – 60	31	8	5	44
over 61	3	1	-	4
Education: university degree	42	34	6	82
university-level courses	11	6	3	20
vocational training	15	4	5	24
Employed in:				
– public service	8	2	2	12
– private business	12	9	3	24
– education or science	4	2	-	6
– construction	2	4	4	10
– service industry	21	10	5	36
– industrial operations	4	5	2	11
– agriculture	6	2	-	8
– military	2	-	-	2
– other	9	4	3	16

*Source: Independent research*

The vast majority of Segment 1 respondents who took advantage of the offer of wine tourism actors said they were satisfied with such offer (57% strongly satisfied and 41% rather satisfied). Only 3% had no opinion on the subject, and 1% expressed their dissatisfaction with such offer. More interestingly, more than 95% of the respondents were in favour of repeated visits to the sites they visited and ordering relevant services, which suggests a positive customer response to the recreational activities offered by the wine tourism industry. In response to the question about the respondents' awareness of the wine-making areas of Transcarpathian Region, they most often mentioned Vynohradiv and Berehove Districts (73%). However, recalling the names of the wineries they preferred proved more difficult for tourists. Most often mentioned were the wine cellars in the village of Serechnye, owned by the well-known agro-industrial company Leanka, producing ten varieties of wines of different flavours. The main reason behind such popularity with visitors is the very infrastructure of the facility with its 4.5 km length of wine cellars, which are recognised as one of the most valuable in Europe and are protected by UNESCO [12]. Second behind Leanka cellars, respondents indicated the winery Chateau Chizay near Berehove. The site may serve as a model wine tourism business and has developed a wealth of innovative offers covering all segments of tourism service consumers, including children, who are offered an animated tour program and a grape juice tasting session. The company is committed to a professional promotion of wine consumption culture and showcases its high-quality products in a newly renovated tasting room with a capacity for more than 50 guests, including a kosher offer [13]. To determine the ratio between the actual and potential markets for wine tourism, it was important to find out to what extent consumers were acquainted

with this type of tourism and whether they had relevant experience and motivation for such trips. Respondents had the opportunity to indicate several reasons, which, in their opinion, motivated them to visit wine tourism sites (Table 2).

*Table 2: Wine Tourism Motivators*

Tourist motivations	Number of responses, units	Share of responses, %
Discovery of wine varieties, tasting options	36	28.5
Option to buy wine directly from producers	32	25.3
Exposure to the properties of wine and the culture of its consumption	27	21.4
Awareness of local culinary heritage and traditions	28	22.2
Trips on wine routes	8	6.3
Desire to meet and communicate with winegrowers, visit grape plantations	12	9.5
New experiences and organised recreational activities (attendance of the wine and food festivals)	21	16.6

*Source: Independent research*

Essentially, motivations for involvement in wine tourism are down to options for the consumption of this beverage immediately on production sites. Normally, after tasting sessions, tourists are willing to purchase specific varieties of wine, insofar as it is largely impossible to purchase such products in retail outlets due to the fact that winemakers often do not hold relevant licenses. The smallest percentage of 6.3% was accounted for by the wish to take a trip on wine routes, which indicates low awareness of this opportunity, and an underdeveloped infrastructure and the number of additional travel services on existing routes. All in all, the results of the study of motivations behind wine tourism trips correlated quite closely with the outcomes obtained during a research conducted by scholars from the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów. In their publication, the authors point out that the key motivators for wine tourists are participation in tasting events and the desire to discover new varieties of wines – 21.2%, visits to wineries and wine cellars – 14.2%, and exposure to the traditions associated with wine consumption culture – 26.5%. According to the researchers, a chance to broaden personal knowledge in matters related to the production of wine and its products is also highly important for the development of wine tourism, which was indicated by 23.9% of respondents as a major motivation [7, p.261]. To achieve better efficiency in planning tourist services, it is important to take into account the behavioural patterns of target audiences and consumer preferences in terms of contents of tour programs and come up with products that generate greatest interest among wine tourists. Therefore, different forms of wine tourism were offered to survey participants with an option to opt for the activities that were most appealing to them at their discretion. The collated data based on respondents' choices are shown in Table 3 below.

*Table 3: Distribution of Respondents' Answers on Forms of Wine Tourism*

Wine tourism form	Frequency	Percentage,%
Tours of vineyards and wineries	11	9,3
Wine tasting event with a presentation by a professional sommelier	63	50,0
Enogastronomic dinner	9	6,8
Visits to wine festivals and exhibitions	27	21,4
Total	126	100

*Source: Independent research*

During the survey, it was established that the most appealing form of wine tourism is the presentation of the tasting program by experienced wine professionals and experts.

This is why a scheduled, often staged tasting session remains a staple offered to wine tourists by both large- and small-scale wine producers. Most businesses have appropriately equipped tasting rooms, designed to welcome organised tourist groups. Tasting events may be offered as a standalone product or as part of tourist package offers. It should be noted that prices for such services are high, and the wine tourism offer may be considered upscale as compared to gastronomic or rural tourism products. After segmenting the existing market and identifying core motivations for wine tours, we can compile the average profile and outline a number of attributes prevalent among wine tourists. These are as follows:

- young people in their productive prime aged between 25 and 45 (a trend is underway towards a decrease of the age group of young people who take interest in wine tourism);
- mostly people with a university degree and a higher than average income;
- persons employed in in-demand professions, qualified professionals (service sector, entrepreneurs, employees of public institutions);
- groups of young people or young couples looking for non-routine leisure experiences.
- The common needs of wine tourists that they seek to cater to during the trip include:
- they prefer shorter trips or plan stays in several locations where their interest items are concentrated;
- throughout the year, they choose and get actively involved in number of scheduled events;
- they prefer private accommodation services or high standard guest houses;
- they take interest in the culture and traditions of the local community and local cuisine;
- they willingly buy wine tourism products and other local products (grape juice, grape seed oil, cheeses, sweets, honey);
- most often, they use available Internet resources to plan their trip.

Marketing studies have shown a low awareness of existing tourist routes or wine-related routes and other regional products, such as plum *lekvar* or cheeses (*vrda* and *budz*), among wine tourism consumers. Most of the surveyed tourists (68%) have never heard of the existence of such food-themed routes as the Cheese and Wine Tour of Transcarpathia, the Sweet Way, the Transcarpathian Road of Wines and Flavours, and the Transcarpathian Wine Tourist Route, the latter combining 12 wine cellars and tasting rooms of top winemakers to welcome visitors and promote Transcarpathian wines. Each location offers between 6 and 12 varieties of “the drink of the gods,” including famous vintage wines (such as Troyanda Zakarpattia [Rose of Transcarpathia]) and newer varieties that were developed by wine-making professionals recently. Based on the results of the survey, it was established that the respondents could not name any organisation in charge of the promotion of the development of wine tourism, for example, the Regional Association of the Union of Private Grape Producers and Winemakers of Transcarpathia (set up in 2007) or the Transcarpathian Tourist Information Centre. The respondents were asked a question designed to find out their opinion on the comprehensive nature of the services offered by businesses of different organisational and legal forms. Smaller private wineries, which can be described as agritourist and wine tourist operators, showed most flexibility in terms of additional services offer. The flexibility of such operators can be explained by a more personalised approach to their guests. Based on the results of the survey, such in-demand additional services included: an option to sample traditional Transcarpathian meals prepared over open fire (62.8%), transportation services (34.7%), because driving after use of alcoholic beverages may result into legal prosecution for tourists who often travel by car, and availability of accommodation options with their hosts (22.6%). In the course of the survey of festival guests, we found out that about 22% of the respondents did not indicate a wish to continue their trip associated with wine tourism after getting acquainted with the offer of specific sites during the event. We have summarised the rationale for our position in Table 4 below.

*Table 4: Reasons for Low Interest in Wine Tourism among Tourists*

Factors	Number of responses	Frequency, %
Low awareness of the wine tourism offer in society in general	11	42.8
Absent tradition and culture of wine consumption	17	62.4
High price of services	19	71.2
Low quality of wine	13	46.4
Insufficient number of wine cellars in the region	3	12.4
Lack of cultural immersion program during tours of wine tourism sites	7	24.3
Poor quality of the tasting room infrastructure	5	17.8
Uninteresting tasting (entertainment) program	8	31.2

*Source: Independent research*

Respondents indicated a number of reasons of objective and subjective nature, which underlay such responses. Wine tourism is perceived by society in ambiguous terms, because awareness of its role and importance as one of the key forms of tourism in Transcarpathia remains insufficient. Furthermore, the culture of wine consumption is based on specific tenets: drinking should be associated with pleasure, occur in a proper context and remain reasonably measured. As pointed out by the respondents, after tasting events, many visitors tended to forget that wine is not only an alcoholic beverage, but also a kind of cultural consumption phenomenon similar to other creative products, such as pictures or books. Meanwhile, as it turned out during the survey, high prices remain a major issue that impedes the development of wine tourism. Therefore, pricing policies and marketing management of businesses and farms offering wine tourism services should meet the hopes and expectations of the guests visiting the Transcarpathia for tourist purposes. Respondents also expressed their dissatisfaction with the low quality of wine and unappealing tasting programs offered by small-scale winemakers. Almost half of the interviewed respondents (47%) expressed the opinion that wine tourism contributes to the development of local and regional culture, while 43% noted a richer and more varied gastronomic offer, while one in ten festival guests saw positive developments in terms of accommodation, and 8% mentioned the availability of sports and recreational infrastructure. Other benefits resulting from this form of tourism include new jobs and growth in the living standards of local residents. Quite a lot of respondents (28%) believe that wine tourism has no impact on local development and only serves the private interests of winemakers. The majority of surveyed respondents (82%) believed that the local government and government policies do not contribute to the development of wine-making and viticulture in the country and wine tourism specifically, while 12% had no opinion on this issue. One in three study participants noted that information on wine tourism can be obtained from mass media (websites, press, television, radio) or directly from winemakers, travel agencies and wine amateurs. Wine tourism in the Ukrainian Transcarpathia has a significant impact on the development of areas of grape and wine production. It creates new profit opportunities for winemakers and other tourism market actors operating in the service sector. From year to year, winemakers strive to improve the quality of services provided through upgrades to the infrastructure of businesses and improvement and expansion of their additional service package. Implementation of relevant steps takes considerable efforts and investment. It is rather safe to argue that small-scale wine-making businesses support and develop the cultural component of wine tourism, which is valuable for participants of this market and constitutes an in-demand product for modern tourists.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

- 1) Wine tourism in the Ukrainian Transcarpathia has a significant potential for development due to natural and climatic conditions, rich historic and cultural heritage, favourable geographical location, and reasonably developed tourist infrastructure and constitutes a



special interest item for tourists, which is indispensable for the discovery of wine and exposure to the culture of grape cultivation and wine consumption.

- 2) The development of wine tourism contributes to the creation of new jobs, resurgence of old professions, folk crafts, preservation of cultural traditions and daily practices, which suggests a potential to improve the living standards of local residents.
- 3) Marketing studies have shown that wine tourism, similarly to other types of tourism in the region, is not promoted to a sufficient extent.
- 4) One way for local winemakers to succeed in the wine tourism industry should be through concerted actions and close cooperation with local and regional authorities, travel agencies, industry institutions and non-governmental organisations in order to develop new wine routes, training and entertainment programs, organise large-scale cultural events, and work towards joint promotion of wine tourism products.
- 5) The quality of services provided should be improved through professional training of staff, hands-on experience and knowledge using a competence-based approach to the training of winemakers.
- 6) In order to achieve solid results in the wine industry, including in terms of development of wine tourism to the standard of developed European countries, it is necessary to build on the historical and cultural experience of the past and use the state-of-the-art technology of the present, while taking care to preserve the centuries-old tradition of growing grapes and making wine in the region.

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