

## TRENDS REGARDING DEVELOPMENT THE SUSTAINABLE WINE TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Viorica GUȚAN, Constanta Laura ZUGRAVU,  
Maria Magdalena TUREK RAHOVEANU, Gheorghe Adrian ZUGRAVU

“Dunărea de Jos” University of Galați, 47, Domneasca Street, Galati, Romania,  
E-mails: viorica.gutan@mail.ru, zugravulaura@yahoo.com, mturek2003@yahoo.com,  
zugravuadrian@yahoo.com

**Corresponding author:** zugravulaura@yahoo.com

### Abstract

*The country's winegrower entrepreneurs have discovered a new opportunity to expand their core business by serving tourists. The tourists of wine businesses have changed. Nowadays visitors to wineries are not only wine experts. This refers to consumers attracted by new activities, such as discovering new scenic spots, sporting and cultural activities. These changes bring an increase in the number of tourists to wine producing regions around the world. In this context, the purpose of the paper is to identify and analyze the current trends and developments in the wine tourism sector in Moldova, focusing on sustainable practices. We use academic articles, industry reports, and case studies to gain insights into international trends in sustainable wine tourism and compare them with Moldova's current situation. Tourists' appreciation of wine tourism is also shaped by sociological surveys. Enhanced marketing strategies in wine tourism enable wineries to strengthen their communication and increase their global visibility.*

**Key words:** wine, tourism, wineries, winemaking, Republic of Moldova

### INTRODUCTION

Wine tourism in the Republic of Moldova, while still a developing economic sector, has emerged as a competitive and vibrant industry that attracts significant interest from tourists and effectively showcases the country's rich heritage. However, its growth hinges on addressing certain limiting factors [6, 30, 7]. Currently, one in four active citizens—approximately 150,000 people—are directly or indirectly involved in the wine industry, which contributes 3% to the nation's GDP and accounts for 8% of its exports [10]. Moldova ranks 16th globally in vineyard area and stands as the largest foreign vineyard in Eastern Europe, outside the EU [6, 25, 11, 9].

Winemakers from the Republic of Moldova have created and produce over three thousand names of wine products, among the most varied, from aperitifs, national strength, vodka, liqueurs to divine, sparkling, still white, red, rosé, dry and dessert wines, ice wine, and even whiskey, gin, rum and other exotic drinks. The wines, the sparkling wines, the divine wines of local producers have obtained hundreds of the

most prestigious awards at most of the international exhibitions and competitions where they have been presented, and are in great demand by more than 55 countries [4, 26, 16, 23].

Since 2002, under the initiative and patronage of the President of the Republic of Moldova, the National Wine Festival has been organized, featuring around 80 wineries and catering companies. The event attracts not only locals but also foreign tourists from various countries participate in the celebration, including: Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Romania, France, Italy, USA, Turkey, Czech Republic and others. The maximum number of foreign countries present at the National Wine Day was 67 countries. The festival program includes the holding of various competitions.

The Republic of Moldova is renowned for its exceptional cellars, wineries, and underground cities. Among the most celebrated Moldovan wineries that captivate tourists is Mimi Castle, established in 1893, which is widely regarded as one of the most stunning and beautiful historical buildings in Moldova, and international specialists have included it in the

top 15 architectural masterpieces in the world of wine (Photo 1).



Photo 1. MIMI Castle  
Source: MIMI Castle history,  
<https://www.epcsummit2023.md/mimi-castle>, Accessed on August 5, 2024 [15].

*Mircești Winery*, founded in 2011, but its architecture is reminiscent of manorial mansions. The winery has its own guesthouse and offers international and domestic varieties for tasting (Photo 2).



Photo 2. Mircești winery  
Source: Crama Mircesti,  
<https://www.google.com/search?q=Crama+Mircesti+site&oq=Crama+Mircesti+site&aqs=chrome..69i57j33i10i160l2.4285j1j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#lpg=ik:CAoSLEFGMVFPcFBMMW92X1ZONVR6bWpWODA4cGJOal8yN2lJeWF1OTNieW9xd2tB>, Accessed on August 5, 2024 [5].

*Chateau Purcari*. This winery has an important role in the history of Moldovan wine, because it offered the first international award-winning local wine in 1878. Purcari is a true oasis of beauty and tranquility, offering a unique wine tourism experience (Photo 3).



Photo 3. Chateau Purcari  
Source. Chateau Purcari,  
<https://www.facebook.com/chateau.purcari/>, Accessed on August 5, 2024 [29].

*Cricova Winery*. A real underground city, Cricova totals 180 km of galleries, and access is also done here by small trains. Many types of wines, including award-winning sparkling wines, can be tasted in underground rooms. There is even a small cinema in the winery, to the delight of tourists (Photo 4).



Photo 4. Cricova S.A. Wine Combine  
Source: Europafm.ro, Republica Moldova-Cricova-unlabirint subteran al vinului, galerie foto,  
<https://www.europafm.ro/republica-moldova-cricova-un-labirint-subteran-al-vinului-galerie-foto/>, Accessed on August 5, 2024 [8].

Winery Cricova S.A has also an extensive network of underground tunnels stretching for 120 km. The tasting complex includes five large, spacious and imposing halls: European Hall, Fundul Marii, Presidential Hall, Fireplace Hall, Great House, in which elements of classical architecture are interwoven with plastic details of modern invoice, decorative

elements of great sophistication, works of art and valuable furniture. These halls serve as the venue for various national and international tastings, as well as for the highest level meetings.

*Milestii Mici* winery has the largest collection of wines in the world, according to the Guinness Book (Photo 5).



Photo 5. CVC ÎS Mileștii Mici wine collection

Source: Wikipedia, Milestii Mici (Vinarie), [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mile%C8%99tii\\_Mici\\_\(vin%C4%83rie\)](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mile%C8%99tii_Mici_(vin%C4%83rie)), Accessed on August 5, 2024 [28].

The Mileștii Mici Quality Wines Complex boasts a remarkable collection of nearly 2 million bottles, housed within a sprawling 250 km of underground tunnels, of which only 120 km are currently in use. The wines stored here are 70% red wines, with only 20% white wines and 10% dessert wines. The most valuable wine bottle in the collection was produced in 1973-1974 and is worth €480 [14, 21].

Due to their quality, many of the wines produced in the Republic of Moldova enjoy a good reputation internationally. Proof of this fact are the medals won at prestigious international competitions such as: Decanter World Wine Awards, Mundus Vini, Concours Mondial du Bruxelles, International Wine Challenge, etc.

Thus, during the period 2013-2023, Moldovan wines brought home over 6,000 medals, of which 50% are gold medals. For example, in 2020, Moldovan wines won 956 medals (417 gold, 277 silver and 169 bronze awards) at 32 international competitions. 624 of these medals were won by local winemakers whose presence at the competitions was supported by ONVV. Thus, in 2020, 65 wine companies from the

country participated in the international contests with samples of wines, sparkling wines and spirits and received excellent qualifications from the foreign jurors. The leader of the ranking was the winery Fautor with a record number of medals, the top being completed by the winery Purcari Winery. Cricova, Chateau Vartely and MIMI are the wineries that continue to maintain their positions in the ranking, and Novak Winery DK Intertrade and Gitana Winery are the surprise appearances in the 2020 top [13, 19]. In this context, the purpose of the paper is to analyze sustainability initiatives adopted by Moldovan wine producers and tourism operators, such as ecological production techniques, organic vineyards, resource conservation, waste reduction and promotion of local culture and heritage.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To examine the trends related to the development of sustainable wine tourism in the Republic of Moldova we use a well-structured research methodology and materials.

Databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and industry-specific reports (Global Wine Tourism Organization) provide us valuable information.

In this research we have selected 5 wineries in Moldova known for implementing sustainable practices, such as Cricova, Purcari, and we analyzed their tourism activities, sustainability measures, and marketing strategies.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was used to map wine regions in Moldova and their environmental impacts. Data can be collected from Moldova's National Bureau of Statistics and environmental agencies will investigate areas vulnerable to environmental degradation and regions that are actively embracing eco-friendly farming practices. This paper's methodological framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the trends in sustainable wine tourism development in the Republic of Moldova. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, analyzing both stakeholder opinions and practical case studies, the research we offer insights into how the Moldovan wine industry can grow

sustainably while maintaining its rich cultural heritage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of a study following the methodology of the World Tourism Organization and commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova with strategic support, in collaboration with the National Association of Inbound Tourism, shed light on this matter. The study features a comparative analysis of surveys assessing tourists' perceptions of Moldova as a tourist destination in 2012, 2016, 2018 and 2023 [13, 19]. Respondents were asked what they knew about Moldova before visiting it, without being given any answer options. The top 3 things respondents in 2023 knew about Moldova are: good wine is produced in Moldova (18%), Moldova has a rich history and culture (11%) and Moldova has a historical connection with Romania and is a neighbour with it (8 %). Depending on the collection point, the tourists surveyed at Beciurile Cricova are the ones who most often mentioned good wines/cellars (31%), followed by tourists from the Airport (21%), Piata Marii Adunări Naționale (PMAN) (15%) and the Romanian crossing point (10 %). Among the factors that motivate visiting Moldova in 2023 are personal recommendations from family, friends or acquaintances (41%), followed by the accessibility of travel to Moldova (27%) and the desire to taste Moldovan wine (25%). The fact that Moldova is a wine country remains a significant influence and motivator for tourists, with 49% citing it as a reason for their visit. As for the motivations behind participating in National Wine Day, 64% mentioned the tasting of Moldovan wine, followed by visiting the stands/terraces set up by the wine producers (34%), the special events/tastings organized within the festival (34%) and buying wine (33%). In the current survey, respondents expressed a high level of satisfaction with all the mentioned aspects, the top five areas being the hospitality and kindness of the locals (91%), traditional Moldovan food (90%), the quality of food in local restaurants (89%), wines (86%) and

natural landscapes (85%). Respondents were able to think of a word or phrase that came to mind when they heard tourism in Moldova. Most of the surveyed tourists, namely 42%, associated tourism in Moldova with wine. About half of the respondents state that Moldova is a country of wine that influenced their decision to visit the country to a great extent or to some extent (49%). This share increased by 6 percentage points compared to 2018 (43%) and by 3 percentage points compared to 2016 (46%). Among tourists, 51% were influenced to a great extent or to some extent to visit Moldova because it is a wine country. In contrast, the Moldovan diaspora, while still appreciating Moldova's wine identity (25% very influenced, 19% to some extent), recorded a higher percentage of those who indicated that the reputation of Moldovan wine had no influence on their decision to visit it (56%). Among respondents from events in PMAN (65%) and Beciurile Cricova (68%), the reputation of Moldovan wine had a significant influence on their decision to visit the country. Conversely, respondents at the Romanian checkpoint and at the airport were not significantly influenced by this factor (39% each).

Wine tourism has a positive impact on wine businesses, on the regions where they are located, as well as on the Republic of Moldova by contributing to:

- 1) valorization of rural space by ensuring recreation and tourism activity;
- 2) increasing the gross domestic product
- 3) increasing state budget revenues through tax collection;
- 4) increasing the incomes and respectively the profits of wine enterprises and tourism agencies;
- 5) employment in the region;
- 6) improving the infrastructure and the quality of life for citizens in rural areas;
- 7) attracting investments in the respective tourist towns.

Based on the research into the potential for developing wine tourism in the Republic of Moldova, we can conclude that:

1. The Republic of Moldova has an area of 112 thousand ha of vines, and in the household sector approx. 44 thousand ha of vine

plantations. More than 600 thousand tons of grapes are harvested annually in Moldova, including 100 thousand tons of table varieties. 220-280 thousand tons of technical varieties are processed at wine enterprises. According to the Wine Registry, the Republic of Moldova is home to 76,205 vineyards and 309 wineries. In the Republic of Moldova, 3 types of vines are grown: European, Caucasian, native.

2. The quality of Moldovan wines is well-known and appreciated at various competitions of the world's winemakers. The distinctions and medals obtained by the winemakers are a source of pride for practically every third winemaking company in Moldova. Over the past decade, Moldovan wineries have earned 600 medals at international competitions, with half of them being gold.

3. Additionally, one in every four active citizens (150,000 people) in the Republic of Moldova is involved, either directly or indirectly, in the wine industry. Winemaking contributes 3% to the national GDP and accounts for 8% of the country's exports. In 2023 [17, 22, 20].

4. Moldova produced approximately 1.8 million hectoliters of wine, placing it 18th among the world's top wine producers.

The Republic of Moldova is ranked 16th in the world and 9th in Europe in terms of wine exports. France is the leader in the value of exports, Italy - the leader in volumes. Over 80% of the wine produced in the Republic of Moldova is exported. The main export markets are: Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic, the USA and China. The largest volumes of Moldovan wine products in 2023 were delivered to European countries 58.08%, CIS countries 29.1%, America 6.49%, Asia 6.33% [18, 1, 12].

5. In the last 20 years wine companies (about 309 enterprises) produce high quality wines, wines with geographical indication, which are in demand on the EU market, which ensures a sustainable development of both the wine sector and wine tourism. According to the Wine Tourism Guide of the Republic of Moldova, about 33 wine enterprises, representing 10.68% of all wineries, engage in wine tourism. However, the sector is

experiencing growth in tourism activities [20, 24, 27].

6. The development of wine tourism brings positive economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits to both the regions where wineries are located and the country as a whole. Guide associations in Moldova identify wineries as the leading tourist attractions, followed by historical monuments and churches. Wine tourism is highly popular, with 42% of surveyed tourists associating Moldova with its wine, and 60% of visitors to the country engaging in wine-related tourism visited at least one winery, and 49% of respondents participating in the survey state that Moldova is a country of wine which influenced their decision to visit to a great extent or to some extent country. This share increased by 6 percentage points compared to 2018 (43%) and by 3 percentage points compared to 2016 (46%) [31, 3, 2].

7. The main organizations that promote wine tourism are ONVV and ANTRIM. On February 15, 2022, ANTRIM and ONVV signed a Collaboration Agreement, which aims to: - the development of common promotional materials: maps, wine tourism guides and informative leaflets – Wine Routes of Moldova; - organization of online and offline training sessions with local and international experts, trainings for wine tourism guides, info-tours for guides at existing wineries and those to be opened for tourists; - development of an action plan for the development of Wine Tourism; - organization of press tours for media representatives from the target markets;

8. Moldova's wine tourism has registered a positive upward trend in the last 10 years: - In 2018, the 3rd Global Conference of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) on wine tourism was organized in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova; - In 2021, the Moldovan winery Château Vartely was declared the winner of the category the most original practice of wine tourism at the international competition organized by ITER VITIS and Phoenician Routes, part of the European Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe meeting held at Palazzo Pannitteri in Sambuca di Sicilia, Italy; - The Winerist.com publication ranked the Republic of Moldova among the top

10 wine tourism destinations in 2020; - Cultural events such as National Wine Day and the Tree of Life cultural-tourist agenda. the Be Our Guest promotion campaigns, Come to my home, they promoted wine tourism. 9. On October 17-19, 2024, the Republic of Moldova will become the European capital of wine tourism and will host the "ITER VITIS - Les Chemins de la vigne" General Assembly, where local producers and producers from 24 European countries will be present.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the information presented, we can conclude with certainty that wine tourism has all the prerequisites to develop and expand further in the Republic of Moldova. Wineries, as a whole, present an essential motivation to visit the Republic of Moldova.

The tourism industry is more accessible to everyone, tour packages include different prices, types of travel, mode of travel and so on, which allow people who want new experiences to travel to their country or other countries, regardless of their budget. Due to the fact that the wine industry is more visible and transparent, wine products and wine tourism offers are widely publicized. This is one of the explanations why hikers are more attracted to wine tourism. Wine tourists are focused on different types of activities besides visiting wineries. Whether it is visiting tourist attractions, cycling, boating, hot air ballooning, attending Festivals around vineyards or wineries, etc. Currently, the development of social networks allows maintaining contact with people and promoting activities through free media. Everyone can share their experiences on the different social networks used by the winery. Visual means are necessary for a business to attract people, the best example is the power of Instagram. In the wine shops, the traditional national costumes of the natives are presented, which attracts tourists. This is essential for the wine and wine tourism industry to use marketing in their strategy, it took time to implement but it is going some way to revolutionizing this fascinating industry. Wine tourism allows the promotion of local products of the wine region

and local heritage. In fact, producer countries have understood this and implemented labels and symbols of origin to develop wine tourism. In a wine region, you can find guesthouses and other accommodations, restaurants that suggest wine pairings or local products, and even wine tourism activities.

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