

Motivations for participating in Wine Tourism Activities- the case of Tourists on the Thrace Wine Route in Turkey

GÜRKAN AKDAĞ * [gurkanakdag@mersin.edu.tr]

SEDA OYAN ** [sedaoyan@gmail.com]

ELISABETH KASTENHOLZ *** [elisabethk@ua.pt]

Keywords | Wine tourism, wine tourists, Turkey, thrace wine route, survey

Objectives | Wine tourism is developing in parallel with the increasing number of individuals who take part in alternative tourism and is frequently approached within specialty tourism in the academic literature, being growing worldwide. While countries like Portugal, Spain, and particularly Italy and France, are already recognized wine tourism destinations, in recent years, countries like Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey have also increasingly invested in this specialty tourism form. One crucial factor of success of wine tourism is the development of wine routes presenting appealing and diversified experiences around the theme of wine production and culture. Co-creation of these experiences is also an important topic, since the active participation of wine tourists has been suggested as highly involving and memorable for these thematic and local-resource-based rural tourism experiences (Kastenholz, Carneiro & Marques, 2012). Especially, activities that permit interested tourists to taste different sorts of wine, even engage with the wine harvesting and/ or production process and wine routes that provide outstanding tourist attractions catch the attraction of wine enthusiasts all over the world. Today, the growing number and diversity of wine routes, especially those in the Eastern Europe, is attracting many individuals who want to engage in a variety of wine tourism experiences. Wine tourism development that especially targets tourists with high disposable income and willingness to spend on special wine tourism experiences and on wine purchase is considered a most interesting strategy, enhancing the region's economic development stimulating both the tourism and wine production sector.

The purpose of this study was, in this context, to analyze the market of wine tourists who visit the Thrace Wine Route, the first wine route of Turkey, particularly regarding their motivations for engaging in the Route's wine tourism experiences, their profile, behaviors and views on wine tourism. This information is regarded critical for enhancing the region's capacity of attracting and satisfying an economically most important tourist market through improved co-creation of wine tourism experiences.

* **Phd in Tourism Management** at the Mersin University and **Invited Assistant Professor**

** **Master student** at the Institute of Social Sciences, Gastronomy and Culinary Arts Graduate Program, Mersin University and **Exchange student** at the University of Aveiro

*** **PhD in Tourism** from the University of Aveiro and **Associate Professor** at the University of Aveiro. **Member** of GOVCOPP research unit

Methodology | The present research is a case study approach focusing the Thrace Wine Route, Turkey's first wine route project (trakyabagrotasi.com). The Thrace Wine Route was established through the Thrace Tourism Operators Organization (TTİD) and with the support of the Thrace Development Agency and 12 boutique wine producers, targeting both one-day tours and tourists that may stay in accommodation alternatives on the Route. The Thrace Wine Route is located in the north-western part of Turkey comprising four different wine routes. Some of the vineyards within the Thrace Wine Route serve as boutique hotels and provide thus wine tourists with an accommodation opportunity. Also enhancing public awareness of the Route and its wines is a project goal.

This study aims at assessing the profile of wine tourists, their motivations, some travel behaviors and knowledge of wine tourism in the region. Data was collected, between 1 August 2016 and 1 November 2016, via survey of 149 tourists who followed the Thrace Wine Route and identified themselves as wine tourists. The questionnaire was developed with items taken from studies Charters and Ali-Knight (2002), Carmichael (2005), Getz and Brown (2006), Dawson et al. (2011), Guzman et al (2014), and Akdağ and Yağcı (2015). It included three sections, namely items assessing: 1) demographics, 2) the respondents' familiarity with wine tourism, 3) priorities in their visits of the Thrace Wine Route. The survey was applied after participation in the Route's wine tourism experiences.

Main Results and Contributions | It was concluded that the young wine tourists were not of a high-income group, and when their general profile features were investigated it was concluded that they were wealthy, well educated individuals. Wine tourists attended wine tourism activities mainly because they sought wine experiencing or wanted to have a nice day out. These findings support results from other studies (e.g. Charters & Ali-Knight (2002), Carmichael (2005), Getz & Brown (2006), Dawson (2011), Guzman et al (2014), Pratt (2014), and Akdağ & Yağcı, 2015).

Limitations | This study was centered on the national wine tourism demand, while in future studies, it would be extremely important to analyse and compare visitors from different countries, while also a comparison with visitor studies from other countries, naturally conditioned by distinct destination and wine route contexts, should help better understand the core of wine tourist's motivations and co-creation experiences. Last but not least, an analysis of variety in the market regarding both motivations and experiences may yield important insights into the potential of successfully developing differentiated wine destination marketing approaches.

Conclusions | Wine tourism could be an interesting development tool for some regions, if based on interesting themed, resource-based co-creation opportunities (Kastenholz, Carneiro & Marques, 2012) presented in an articulated and appealing format in Wine Routes (Carmichael, 2005). Also the Thrace Wine Route was established with that purpose, requiring however a sound knowledge of the market so as to successfully cater to segments that are both interested in the wine experiences and in wine purchase. Results from the present study confirm other studies in showing both an interest in wine tourism activities and general interest in a nice day out, in a new, distinct setting, which the Route may contribute to with diverse, more or less specialized offerings. Also heterogeneity in demand and distinct economic potentialities may be relevant for determining most important target markets and corresponding positioning and product development. Ongoing research should help better target the diverse market groups

eventually seeking distinct co-creation opportunities, also in a more international context, with additional qualitative data possibly adding to the understanding of the optimal wine tourism co-creation experience

References |

- Akdağ, G., & Yağcı, K. (2015). Tourism, Environment and Sustainability (Ed. Prof. Dr. Cevdet Avcikurt, Prof. Dr. Mihaela S. Dinu, Prof. Dr. Necdet Hacıoğlu, Prof. Dr. Recep Efe, Prof. Dr. Abdullah Soykan) in "General Profiles and Reasons to Visit Wine Regions of Wine Tourists: A Comparison of Bozcaada, Elazığ and Cappadocia Regions" St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, Sofia, Bulgaria.
- Carmichael, B. A., 2005, Understanding the Wine Tourism Experience For Winery Visitors in the Niagara Region, Ontario, Canada, *Tourism Geographies*, 7 (2), 185-204
- Charters, S., & Ali-Knight, J., 2002, Who is the Wine Tourist? *Tourism Management*, 23,311-319.
- Dawson, H., Homes, M., Jacob, H., & Wade, R. I., 2011, Wine Tourism: Winery Visitation in the Wine Appellations of Ontario, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 17 (3), 237-246.
- Getz, D., & Brown, G., 2006, Critical Success Factors for Wine Tourism Regions: A Demand Analysis, *Tourism Management*, 27, 146-158.
- Guzman, T.L., Rodriguez, A. V. & ve Garcia, J. R. (2014). Profile and Motivations of European Tourists on the Sherry Wine Route of Spain, *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 11, 63-68.
- Kastenholz, E., Carneiro, M. J. & Marques, C., 2012, "Marketing the rural tourism experience", in Tsiotsou & Goldsmith (eds.), *Strategic Marketing in Tourism Services: Emerald*. pp. 247-264
- Pratt, M., 2014, Four Wine Tourist Profiles, *Academy of Wine Business Research, 8th International Conference*, 28-30 June Geisenheim, Germany.