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# РАЗВИТИЕ НА ТУРИСТИЧЕСКАТА ДЕСТИНАЦИЯ ЧРЕЗ СЪЖИВЯВАНЕ И ПОПУЛЯРИЗИРАНЕ НА МЕСТНАТА ИДЕНТИЧНОСТ TOURIST DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT THROUGH REVIVING AND PROMOTION THE LOCAL IDENTITY

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#### Abstract

Local identity is an integral concept, which comprises landscape, culture, traditions, and inhabitants on a distinguished place. It serves as a strategic tool for the development of local territories and communities. In the context of the tourist product, local identity plays a key role for shaping and imposing the tourist appearance of a certain tourist destination. Under Dionysos project, within V-A Interreg Greece-Bulgaria 2017-2020 a series of studies were conducted, which aim at revealing the typical features, composing/performing the local identity of the Sakar-East Rhodopi region. To achieve this purpose, a complex methodology was applied, including the following methods: in-depth interview, questionnaire research and observation. Based on the gained results from the analysis, concrete suggestions, related to the development and imposing of the local identity of the region, are derived. The provided information could serve the business organizations in the tourist sector, as well as the local government and non-government institutions. The proposed tools correspond to the up-to-date trends in the consumer demand of tourist product. They are a prerequisite for the sustainable development of the region within its economic, social, and cultural dimensions.

Key words: local identity, tourist destination, development

### Резюме

Местната идентичност е интегрална концепция, която включва ландшафт, култура, традиции и местните жители. Тя служи като стратегически инструмент за развитие на местните територии и общности. В контекста на туристическия продукт, местната идентичност играе ключова роля за оформяне и налагане на туристическия облик на дадена туристическа дестинация. По проект Dionysos, в рамките на V-A Interreg Гърция-България 2017-2020 г., бяха проведени поредица от проучвания, които имат за цел да разкрият типичните черти, съставляващи / осъществяващи местната идентичност на региона Сакар-Източни Родопи. За постигането на тази цел беше приложена комплексна методология, включваща следните методи: дълбочинно интервю, анкетно изследване и наблюдение. Въз основа на получените резултати от анализа се извеждат конкретни предложения, свързани с развитието и налагането на местната идентичност на региона. Предоставената информация може да послужи на бизнес организациите в туристическия сектор, както и на местните държавни и неправителствени институции. Предложените инструменти отговарят на съвременните тенденции в потребителското търсене на туристическия продукт. Те са предпоставка за устойчивото развитие на региона в неговите икономически, социални и културни измерения.

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Landscape

It is important to note here that the diversity of the wine-growing landscape is recognized as a natural resource that must be preserved and protected from "massification". Authenticity and diversity are what visitors and consumers of local products seek and demand.

The European Landscape Convention, adopted in Florence in October 2000 by the European Parliament, recognizes that landscape is a key feature of the human environment that contributes to the shaping of local cultures and is a key element of the European environmental and cultural heritage contributing to the well-being of people and to the consolidation of the European identity. It covers all kinds of landscapes, natural, rural, suburban, and urban which determine the quality of the human living environment. UNESCO classifies vinevards that meet specific characteristics in the category 'Cultural landscapes'. The term "Cultural Landscapes" includes a variety of interactions between humanity and the natural environment. "Cultural Landscapes" show the evolution of the human society and of the settlements over the years under the influence of various constraints or opportunities that are received by exogenous and endogenous factors. Cultural landscapes should be chosen for their value as well as whether and how they represent a defined geographical area and their ability to promote the essential and specific characteristics of the area. Finally, they often reflect concrete sustainable land-use techniques, considering the characteristics and the boundaries of the natural environment in which they are located.

In the sense of wine tourism, experiences together with the cultural landscape tourism, it contributes to the revival of environment, traditions, food, and wine. This is a quality tourism, that differs from mass tourism because it is not supported by any appropriate network of facilities required by the latter, also because of the remarkable landscape [1].

## Cultural and historical heritage

Another important factor and prerequisite for the tourism development is the availability of cultural and historical heritage, as it increases the value and therefore, the potential of the region. Gulnara, Safiullin and Gafurov [2] states that: (1) it is a strongest incentive tourist motive; (2) significantly influence the economic development; (3) it is leveling seasonal fluctuations and evenly distributing tourist streams on the territory; (4) it creates favorable image of the region, "branding" of historical and cultural heritage which is used as the effective tool of the adoption of leadership on the tourist arena. When the area is rich in such sources, as Sakar and East Rhodopi is, here comes the question how they are exposed and communicated to the visitors, are they efficiently implemented in the overall tourist product, regardless of its form, type, and version.

#### Wine Tourism

The social group targeted by this action is the group of **wine-tourists**. In this sense, therefore, it is important to have a common approach of both the wine tourism and the wine visitor - wine tourist. The term of the wine-tourist is then approached by the quoting of some bibliography approaches.

The first surveys on wine tourism, which grew rapidly in the 1990s, began with a view to emphasizing descriptive and comparative studies to justify and explore the dimensions of this new subsector of tourism [3]. The growth and attractiveness of wine-tourism areas has become an important strategic issue because the volume of wine tourism is gradually increasing, and more and more areas are developing competitive marketing strategies to attract tourists who are lovers of wine and nature. Wine tourism comprises a wide range of activities [4,5] such as:

- Economic purchase of wine and local products.
- Cultural visits to museums, interpretive centers of wine and vine culture, tastings wine and local produce in the wineries.
- Tourism participation in wine fairs and festivals, visits to wineries, cellars, vineyards, monuments, and natural heritage.
- Social visitors 'contact with the experiences and local traditions, and local crafts.
- Sports horse riding, cycling, extreme sports, etc.
- Health and well-being usage of grapes and wine for therapeutic purposes as a component of wellness and spa centers.
- Educational- visitors have the opportunity to learn.

The definition of the wine tourism does not have a specific form and can be considered as multidimensional. When considered on the marketing side, special emphasis is placed on identifying the experiences that wine-tourists seek. It is true that most definitions of wine tourism are linked to the traveler's motivation. For example, Hall et al. (2000) characterized wine tourism as "a visit to vineyards, wineries, festivals and wine fairs, where wine testing and contact with the unique characteristics of the wine area are the primary incentives for the visitors." Nevertheless, Getz (2000) in his research pointed out that there are at least three major prospects on the subject of wine tourism: wine producers, tourist agencies (representing wine tourism destinations) and consumers. Wine tourism is at the same time a form of consumer behavior, a strategy according to which the wine-

tourism areas develop and promote the specific characteristics of their area, but also an opportunity for the wineries to train their staff and sell their products.

## The Wine Tourist's Profile

An important parameter is to clarify the social group to which the wine tourism product is going to be communicated – how to promote the vineyard and the area to reach out to their expectations. It is appropriate to approach the "wine tourist" as a user and consumer of the wine tourism product. Most of the studies on wine tourists mainly concern visitors of wineries and not consumers of wine in general. Consequently, there is insufficient awareness of the wine-tourism potential between consumers and wine-tourists. According to some studies, visitors of wineries have high education, high income and to some extent they are familiar and know enough about wine. Other studies have concluded that wine tourists want a travel experience. Several travelers have found great importance in choosing destinations that have offered them the opportunity to visit picturesque and mountainous areas, to meet friendly and hospitable people, to visit family areas as well as to see and do a wide range of things. In 2001 Williams and Kelly concluded that wine tourists are generally more active and more dedicated than other tourists, and that a percentage of wine tourists could be described as "cultural wine tourists".

## The Delimitation of the Area and the Wine Trail

The following rules of thumb may assist in the choice of destination boundaries:

The destination approach is widely spread, when exploring the regional assets, to gain a comprehensive tool for managing the area in a sustainable way, and to communicate it to the visitors in the most attractive and abounding way.

Thus, to delimitate the destination boundaries, some rules might be applied [6]:

a) Include key sites and assets. The boundaries should wherever possible surround all the key assets of the destination.

b) Try to match existing boundaries. Where feasible, political boundaries should be followed. Can the destination boundaries be matched to the boundaries of existing data units such as census areas, municipal boundaries, or management districts for which data is likely to exist?

c) Reflect natural or ecological areas. Wherever possible, boundaries should be selected reflecting physical or ecological boundaries.

d) Consider subdividing the destination. In some cases, it may be useful to subdivide the destination into parts for separate analysis, particularly where there are significant differences between parts of the destination such as a core area where most of the activity occurs and a peripheral area which is also clearly impacted or involved.

e) Consider specific sub-areas for special consideration. Within each destination there may be areas of concentrated activity or "hot spots" (e.g., the beach, a specific ecological asset), which will not be adequately addressed by indicators that refer to the overall destination. Such areas should receive special treatment as a subset of the overall destination.

Regarding the wine areas, the destination delimitations will allow to shape it boundaries and to impose it in the most efficient way and reach the proper target

audiences. The promotion tools should address those visitors who are interested in the wine production and the wine product of the area, but at the same time to those visitors - tourists, interested in the area in general, its cultural, historical, gastronomic characteristics, etc.

The above, however, presupposes, on the one hand, that the area has the proper configuration and organization, so that it can be "communicated" as such (as wine tourism destination), and on the other hand that it is able to provide the aforementioned information, of course in the sense of the composition and the provision of the appropriate experience to the visitor - tourist, considering that the whole effort is carried out in the context of the development of wine tourism activity.

In this context and bearing in mind that the areas referred to study, are not areas with a wine tourism tradition, interventions will have to be made to create the basic parameters that will allow this "communication" between the area and the visitor and that will eventually shape the local wine tourism product and the tourist experience.

These interventions are in principle the formation of the local vineyard, in the logic of its presentation to the visitor, and then its enrichment with information, data and activities that will make up the local wine tourism experience.

It has been mentioned previously that the studied area does not have a winetourism tradition. In other words, while the areas have a wine-producing activity and tradition, there is a great lack of that element and the process that will allow them to communicate with the visitor in order to offer him the wine-tourism experience.

So, the vineyard – wine making activity- does not automatically mean that the conditions for the offering of wine tourism are met.

The first such condition is the "creation" of the local vineyard. That means, an area, a space, that will cover the requirements of visiting and will be somewhat representative of local wine growing and wine production. It will contain vineyards and wineries, taking into account local varieties, since it is them that render the local wine-growing activity, as well as other related activities and points, to the extent that this is feasible.

Needless to say, this approach should be fully compatible with the logic of the landscape - viniculture landscape.

Since, as already mentioned, the observed areas may not have a single spatial unit that can be described as the local vineyard, but have scattered winegrowing holdings, it is necessary to be studied spatially, as well as morphologically. In particular, the wine-growing holdings should be examined and linked to each other in a coherent, as possible, unity with common features, viticulture, wine production and / or other related wine tourism activities. And, of course, in the sense of the above definition of the wine-growing landscape, so that these elements which give to the area the characterization of the wine-tourism area, will be appropriately promoted.

Thus, technically, spatial wine-growing zones will be investigated and also it has to be examined whether these areas can create, either autonomously or in conjunction with each other, a sufficient area in surface and in tourism interest, then the morphological characteristics of this area have to be examined – the landscape,

the viewpoints, the accessibility etc. - and the most suitable area will be selected for its designation as the "local vineyard".

A key element, of course, in this process is the accessibility of the area, in the logic of its distance from the settlement of reference and in the logic of the visit with a selected means of transportation (car, bicycle, walking) to compose one / or more in terms of time complete trail. This means, one route that will allow the visitor, in a period (one morning, one day, several days), to start his visit from the settlement of reference, to continue visiting the local vineyard with its particular elements and activities and to return, at the end of this time- period, to the starting point.

The wine-tourism trail is considered a suitable and widely applied method of developing the wine tourism experience. The route, which will have to pass through the most important wine-tourism items of the area, will have also to pass through the most valuable points of the vineyard (viewpoints to the landscape, landmarks of interest, remarkable estates, wineries etc.) and should create a complete "product" of a defined duration and minimum activities (visiting wineries, wine tasting, etc.).

However, given that the interests and expectations of the wine-tourist do not focus solely on wine, it is advisable that this route should be also linked to other relevant sights and activities of the area as mentioned in the description of the profile of the wine-tourist. Regarding the interests and expectations of the visitors' target group of their area, the data displayed through the route have to be adapted and specified accordingly.

The route should be designed appropriately to drive visitors through the most interesting points of the local wine-growing zone, giving them the opportunity to:

- visit selected estates (vineyards) cultivating local varieties of the area;
- visit selected wineries that meet specific standards, guarantee quality levels of production and offer hosting and support to visitors;
- enjoy landscapes and places of archaeological, folklore, environmental and cultural interest;
- participate in activities and events.

The provided information on the wine tourist route should indicate all points of oenological, cultural and tourist interest, such as vineyards, wineries, archaeological and historical sites, spots of natural beauty and recommending traditional hotels, restaurants, local products, and outdoor activities on each wine route.

The main motives for visiting the wine estates are usually the following: meeting the winemaker, wine tasting and purchasing, learning about wine making, and learning about new varieties and methods, as they differ in their ranking in the different countries.

# Local Identity and tourist destination

Local identity is a vital component in urban development and acts as an important aspect to the quality of functionality in landscape. A good local identity is a major attraction for people and businesses as well as supporting cities in engineering social and economic transformation of the local site. The landscape is an important contributor to the quality of life for people, especially in local areas. A key aspect in building the distinctiveness with each area is to provide a better sense of identity and to help in the understanding of the identity of such a place. However, such identity has been lost due to the urban development process, and the loss of uniqueness has become a common problem that fast-changing environment are facing.

Identity of a place is also viewed in relation to the historical heritage and the traditional characteristics of the region. Therefore, the local identity should provide continuity for development, preserving the traditions of local communities as the city changes over time; most importantly it provides possibilities for urban rehabilitation to develop a sense of home, security, and community for the residents. Various types of identity have been classified throughout time such as place, urban, regional, national, cultural, personal, community and landscape etc.

Tourist destination is interlinked with the local identity. The tourist destinations as a concept complete with a definition, which is, destinations are places that have constructed an amalgam of tourist products and services whose consumption is under the brand name of the destination. The destinations are well defined geographically and understood by the tourists as unique entities and exhibit several core provisions. These provisions are accessibility, attractions, package activities, and auxiliary services. According to WTO, a destination is a unique place where a visitor spends at least one night and exhibit tourism products such as attractions, support services, and tourism resources complete with defined management, physical and administrative boundaries, and a well-known image.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the study is to develop a coherent wine identity of the Sakar-East Rhodopi region, based on the local assets, and to use this identity both as a tool and resource for the tourism development of the area, to preserve and protect the local authenticity and uniqueness, and to contribute to the sustainable development of the region.

The analysis is focused on the local vines, vineyards, cellars, wine trails, as well as all interesting places of visit (protected territories, eco paths, unique nature sites, historical and cultural sites, etc.) favoring the wine tourism development in the region.

The methodology approach comprises three steps: (1) in-depth interviews were carried out; (2) questionnaire research was conducted; and (3) observation of the area, e.g., nature, history-cultural monuments, wine cellars, etc.

The data registered, describes the area as a whole and the area in relation to the wine and the wine tourism activity. On this basis 5 wine-trails are elaborated, linking the visitor's tour with the vineyard and the area's image, and coherent links between winegrowers and visitors, and between visitors and the area in general will be established.

Through this article we emphasize on the collection and research of data, considering the locations and an appropriate time interval for visits. The main stages of empirical research are the following:

• Registration and analysis of information about the Sakar-East Rhodopi region.

- On-site visit and acquaintance with the current condition of some of the attractive sites.
- Preparation of proposals for wine trials connecting viticulture and winemaking in the region and local cultural, historical, and natural landmarks.
- Synthesis of proposals for interventions to strengthen the cultural identity of the region.

The interest is focused not only on local vines, vineyards, and wine trials, but also on all interesting places (protected areas, eco-trails, places of special natural beauty, places of cultural or historical significance, etc.), assisting in tourism in region.

# **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Authenticity and uniqueness are core units for studying and promoting the viniculture landscape, and the region, and to use this identity both for the preservation and protection of the local biodiversity and as a resource for the economic development of the areas. In this sense, the intended effect of this activity is to create a geographic and informative space in the area, which will present the local vineyard and will be representative of the varieties grown there - notably the local ones, and more general will represent the area itself with regard to its natural characteristics and its activities.

The results obtained from the empirical study can be presented in the following areas:

1) Data for 16 wine cellars in the studied region are registered and considered. Survey have been conducted among the managers of the wine cellars to summarize proposals for appropriate interventions in the region to strengthen and emphasize the local wine-tourist identity. Many of the wineries offer various events such as: tastings; sightseeing tours and talks; walks in the vineyards to the cellars; presentations; participation in wine tours and other events to attract the interest of tourists and customers. The development of these important and accompanying the main activity of the wine activities not only improves the efficiency and competitiveness of wine producers, but also increases the attractiveness of the region as a tourist destination in the context of emphasizing its identity and specificity.

2) Information on specific events in the region related to viticulture and wine production - festivals and other holidays is also received. Ten significant events have been identified that would be of great interest to fans of wine tourism in the region.

3) Information is classified for a large number and various significant public buildings, directly and indirectly related to the traditional for the region viticulture and wine production - city buildings, schools, community centers, libraries, and buildings in which the district and municipal administration is positioned. The results also contain brief historical references, GPS coordinates, address data, opening hours and photos of the buildings.

4) Information about associations, cooperatives and other important branch associations related to the development of viticulture and wine production in the region is systematized.

5) The information about other places and buildings of special importance for the development of the region as an attractive tourist destination - monasteries and other cultural and historical landmarks is collected and presented.

6) A significant number of accommodation and catering establishments in the region have been collected and researched. The information presented would be useful for tourists. Adding suggestions and promoting traditionally sought-after or unique local dishes and drinks would have a synergistic effect on the integration of wine and culinary tourism.

7) In connection with the strengthening of the cultural identity of the region, several proposals have been made for interventions related to raising the awareness of potential visitors and promoting the region. The proposals for awareness raising activities are presented in the following three groups: (1) Training – awareness of tourism actors; (2) Establishing visiting wineries; (3) Promotion of information through various information products –specialized books, presentations, films, and other advertising materials.

The presence of cultural and historical landmarks, combined with favorable climatic conditions, create excellent conditions for the development of wine tourism in the area. In addition, the area is accessible and has good transport security. The border situation of Sakar-East Rhodopi region is potentially favorable for economic and social development in general. The location determines the possibility of the area for cross-border cooperation, which is expressed not only in the development of tourism, but also in trade and implementation of joint business projects in the wine sector.

In order to create and sustain the link between the wine producers and the visitors, and through promoting cellar's unique image, various facilities could be offered, and amongst the most demanded are vineyard walking, wine tasting and sales, winery organized tour, museum exhibitions, craft shop, thematic events (wine festivals, exhibitions, workshops, educational seminars, etc.).

A second issue is the way in which the vineyard is promoted, and, alongside this issue, it arises the question "to whom".

After reviewing the historical and cultural characteristics of Sakar-East Rhodopi region, it can be concluded that the region has all the prerequisites for linking the locations with the visitor. On the one hand, emphasizing elements of the rich cultural history, which reflects the way of life and traditions of the region, will increase the attractiveness of the region, and will build a local identity focused on tourism. On the other hand, climatic conditions, soils, and waters create preconditions for increasing the share of arable land with vineyards, which will lead to the development of the wine sector.

Having studied the history and the urban characteristics of the settlement and having collected information on its historical, cultural, and wine-tourism resources, in conjunction with the spatial data of these resources, it is suggested to select and link a number of those elements in the logic of promoting them to the visitor through a guided tour of wine-tourism content.

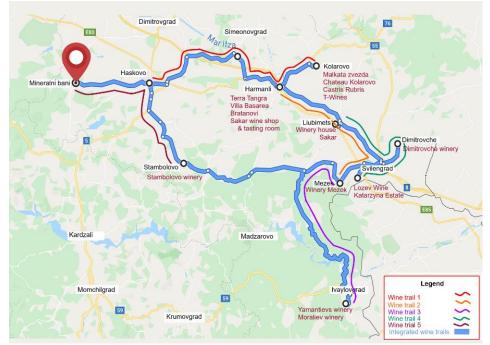


Fig. 1 Developed wine trials in the Sakar-East Rhodopi region Source: author's interpretation.

Developed 5 wine-trails (Fig.1) combines a visit to wineries or cellars, to a wine museum or wine tasting places along with visiting cultural sites, with a walk in a historical and commercial center, etc. It should also encompass one or more dining options with local cuisine and local wine or a wine bar as well as retail shops selling local wines and traditional products, in order for the visitor to taste local wines and products.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results outlined the connection between the cultural and historical features of the region, natural landmarks, events on the one hand and the traditions of the local wine industry on the other. The effect of the activities for deepening these connections is two-way - popularizing the region and attracting new visitors of wine tourism. A favorable precondition for success in this direction is the good level of infrastructure in both areas. All this gives reason to expect that the proposed interventions will emphasize the local wine identity and will contribute to the sustainable development of wine tourism in the region.

- The terroir of Haskovo district is very favorable for high-quality vine growing and wine making. It is well-known with traditional grape varieties used for the production of traditional wines.
- Due to the specific natural-climatic conditions, as well as the social-cultural characteristics, and the well-preserved production traditions in the region,

there is a big number of wine cellars, mainly concentrated in Harmanly municipality, in a close distance from the vineyards.

- The scale-oriented wine producers' differentiation allows them to use specific positioning strategies, and thus to achieve their efficiency in the market place – the big wineries could compete with big quantities in constant quality, placing the produce on the big markets, incl. international markets. Oppositely, the family wine cellars possess competitive advantages in taking niche markets, as they are mostly oriented to use the traditional and unique prerequisites of the region.
- Based on the destination approach, the designed wine trails will enhance the "communication" process - visitor's tour will be linked with the vineyard and the area's image. In this regard the elements included in the winegrowing area will shape its wine landscape, and will impose the uniqueness of the local varieties, production traditions, boutique local wines, and the cellar in-door itself. Through this consumer demand driven approach this small-scale wine producer will reach the expectations of visitors in their area
- In the promotion and information set of marketing tools, it might be included the synthesis of the wine-growing landscape of the area in relation with its particular local wine varieties, shaping the complex wine tourist product.
- Through the established digital system with an open access to the information pull, it will be possible for the potential visitors to plan smoothly their visit tours and activities, to inform themselves for the places of sightseeing, their location and accessibility, and all other issues required for their tourist visit.
- The elaborated information system will facilitate the local communities to set up the wine-growing landscape of the areas, to promote the wine identity, to create the information that will support the QRC system, so as to enable the visitor to live the experience of a wine tourism. Moreover, to render a more inclusive and comprehensive image of the project areas, while covering more effectively the visitors' needs and their requirements on information, providing amongst others the possibility of guiding their tour, by better highlighting the area and its resources and thus enhancing the experience of the wine tourist.
- The development of wine tourism in the region will contribute to the local economic development and will stimulate the establishment of links between wine-growers and visitors, and between visitors and the area in general.

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