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## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN “SIRET–PRUT–NISTRU” EUROREGION

***Abstract:** The wine tourism, as part of cultural tourism, directly contributes to the development of world tourism. The development of a sustainable tourism which harmoniously combines the natural tourism potential with the anthropic tourism, may be, under bio-eco-economic conditions, an opportunity to Romanian-Moldavian cross-border cooperation. The study aimed to identify the heritage of wine tourism in the two countries, with the main aim of elaborating development strategies for the wine tourism potential in order to intensify cross-border cooperation and ensuring a sustainable development of “Siret-Prut-Nistru” Euroregion tourism.*

***Key words:** wine tourism, sustainable development, bio-eco-economy, smart sustainable development, touristic patrimony*

***JEL:** Z32, Q56.*

### 1. Introduction

Addressing such a topic comes at a time in which appears the increasingly obvious need to diversify tourism products, offered to a category of tourists who want more than just a leisure trip. Tourists' preferences have diversified and wine tourism is a niche for both Romania and Moldova, in the context of sustainable development.

**Cultural tourism is an important sector in the development of global tourism, and wine tourism segment is a small, but important part of this type of tourism. Wine tourism is the one that covers all viticultural activities.**

An important aspect of viticultural tourism is the winery's “cellar” door service and the effect of this work on the consumer's expectations, brand loyalty and long-term cooperation intention. Attention to this issue has created a great responsibility among producers and consumers interested in the quality of kind of service. If the success of a winery was once determined only by the quality of the wine, the development and the importance of a “cellar door” service now also means the quality of service received during a visit to the winery in question, which is as important as the wine itself, for future sales.

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Worldwide, viticultural tourism is a form of special interest tourism, with a growing role, an important component of tourism for many wine producing regions. The top 10 countries with the highest wine production currently known for the quality of their products but also for its versatility of worldwide exported wines includes France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Portugal (Europe); California (United States); Argentina, Chile (Latin America); Australia; South Africa (Africa).

The purpose of this paper is to determine the potential of viticultural tourism to the Siret-Prut-Dniester and set a strategy to capitalize it.

## **2. Viticultural tourism in specialized literature**

Viticultural tourism, also known under the names of oenological tourism, enoturism or wine tourism is more than simply visiting a winery; it means the wine's process from grapes in the vineyard to when it is poured into the glass, presenting technological processes, secrets behind a high quality wine, guided wine tastings. It is a state of mind, it is happiness, work, success.

The wine tourism has seen a continuous development since its emergence, which is why, today, in specialized literature, can be found several definitions related to it. One of the most accepted definitions, by the international scientific world, assigns *viticultural tourism the purpose of visiting the vineyards, the plantations, the wineries and the cellars and also participating in festivals and events, with the main purpose to experience specific attributes of a wine region*. A second definition, reveals that *viticultural tourism is a form of niche tourism based on the desire to visit wine-producing regions or where the tourists are determined to visit the wine-producing regions, especially wine cellars and wineries, while traveling for other reasons*.

The Australian Oenological Institute, in the viticultural tourism National Strategy, since 1998, defines oenological tourism as *visiting wine cellars, wineries and wine regions to experience the unique qualities of Australian contemporary lifestyle, associated with wine tasting at provenance source, including enjoying the wine, the food, the landscapes and all the cultural activities*.

Currently, specialty literature seeks to solve the problem of global viticultural tourism capitalization.

## **3. The viticultural tourist potential of the Region of Moldova–Romania**

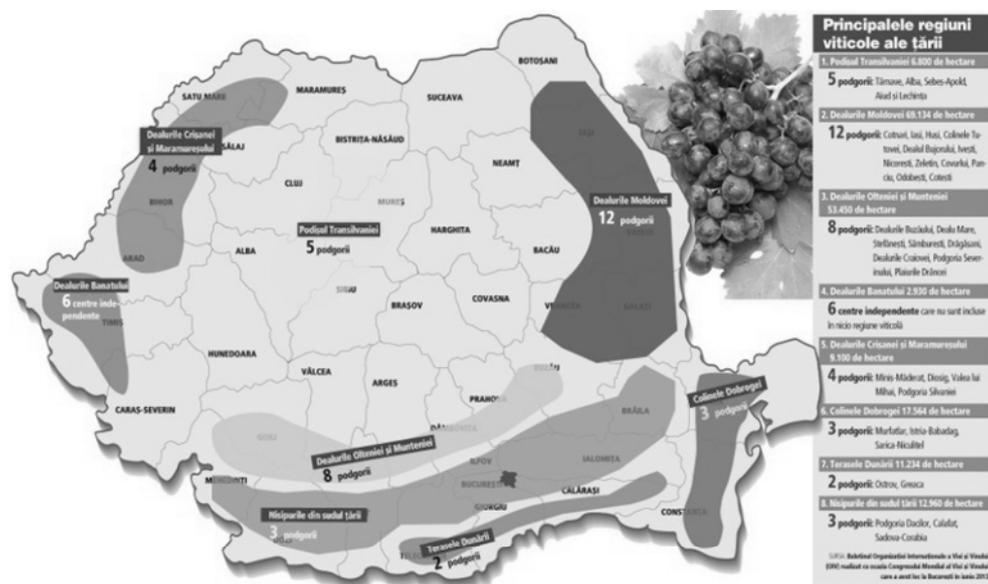
Romania has been for centuries one of the major viticultural countries. Eight wine regions, 37 vineyards and more than 200,000 hectares of vineyards, Romania ranks 13th among the largest wine producers in the world and sixth in Europe, according to preliminary data recently published by the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (IOV). Altogether Romania registered more than 250 wineries,

of which only 140 producing and selling bottled wine, and of these about a quarter can support wine tourism.

The charm of Romanian vineyards gives it native varieties: Grasa de Cotnari, Busuioaca de Bohotin, Zghihara de Huși, Braghina, Tămâioasa românească, Galbena de Odobești.

The viticultural region of Moldavian Hills is the most famous wine region, with the highest production of wine and comprises about one third of the total area of vines cultivated in Romania.

It includes numerous plantations predominantly hilly area, between Moldavian Subcarpathians, Curvature Carpathians, Prut river and the inferior Siret river valley.



Source: [1].

Figure. 1. The main wine regions in Romania.

Wine region of Moldavian Hills comprises a total of 12 vineyards namely: Cotnari Vineyard, Iasi Vineyard, Napa Vineyard, Tutova Hills Vineyard, Peony Hill Vineyard, Nicorești Vineyard, Ivesti Vineyard, Covurlui Vineyard, Zeletin Vineyard, Panciu vineyard, Odobești Vineyard and Cotesti vineyard.

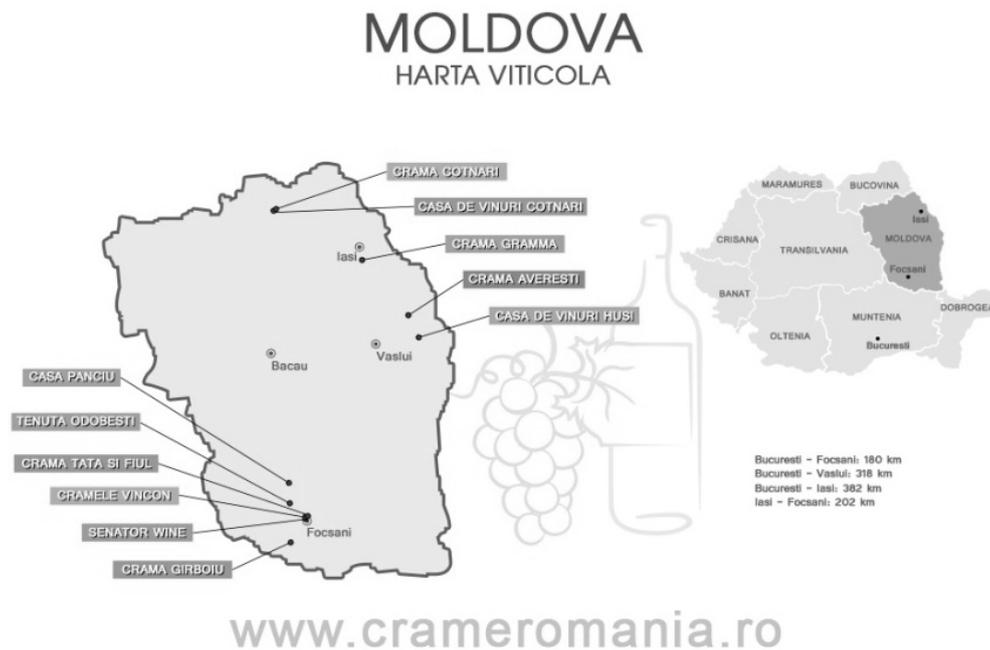
Framed in these vineyards are a number of 44 wine centers and 8 independent centers: Hlipiceni, Plugari and Probotă in the north, Vaslui in the center, Namolova and Grivita in the south, Bozieni and Racaciuni in the western region. The region is specialized in the production of wines and, to a lesser extent, of table grapes. The wines, mostly white, are in a wide range, from the everyday consumer to the high quality, naturally sweet, which can stand alongside the best wines in the world (Sauternes, Tear Cristi) [2].

In this regard it should be noted that the Cotnari wine is entered in the catalog of the best wines in the world and is one of the most sold potions of Bacchus and the secret lies in the special varieties that are grown in the vineyard near Iasi. The famous epigram, and oenologist, pastor Teodoreanu best praised the Cotnari wine:

*“If the water in my well  
Would turn into Cotnari wine,  
I would leave romanian language  
And become a well-sinker”*

Dry wines are mainly made in the Odobești, Cotești and Panciu vineyards. The red wine production has insularity.

The national statistics in September 2015, show that Vrancea county has the largest vine area and also with most people employed in this area. There are 22,000 cultivated hectares with noble vines, which means more than 10% of the vineyard area of the country, 80,000 of the Vrancea sectory people working here. The only problem that vineyard have is that they have no marketplace as they are working on small, grinded areas. [3].



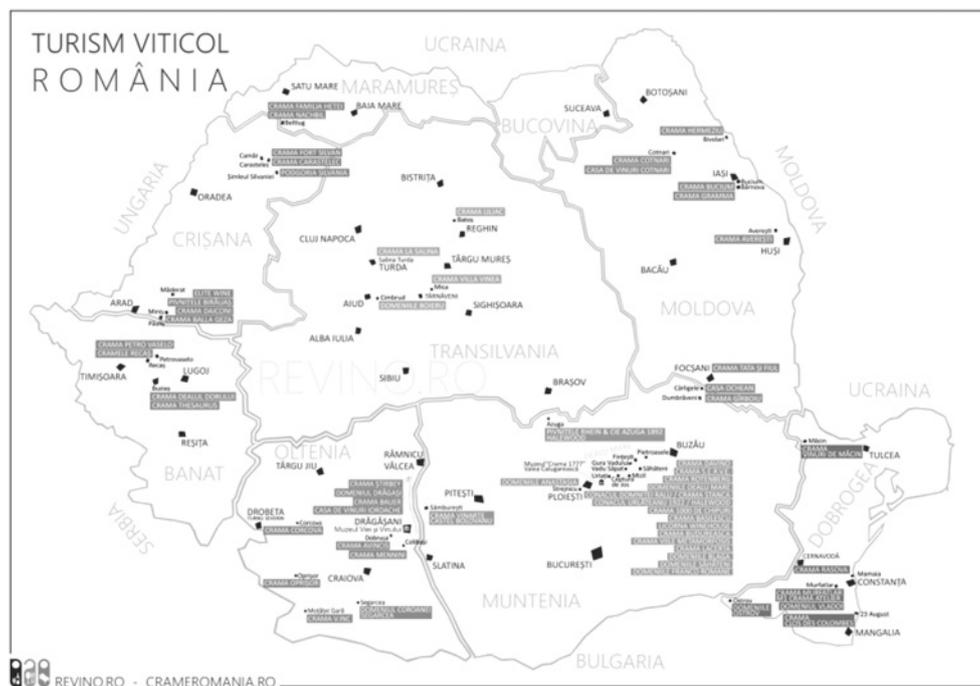
Source: [4].

Figure. 2. Viticultural map of Moldavia Region.

The vineyards in Moldova enjoy great landscapes and the wines produced here express the particularities of the places through flavors, colors and personality.

In Romania, viticultural tourism has a significant development, helped by investments made by wineries and the demand from customers for this type of personalized travel, geared to new experiences, the wine lovers being attracted by the visits to vineyards and wineries, the attendance to harvesting grapes and the wine-making process, the discussions with winemakers, acquiring more knowledge about wine etc., night stays at wineries or old mansions, near vineyards that have been refurbished and converted into accommodation that attract tourists with their stories.

Idyllic rural and cultural experience and contact with another lifestyle, traditions, customs and history of the places are a good opportunity for escape and relaxation. Geographical location, diversity of landscapes, native grape varieties and traditional local cuisine are clear advantages for owners of wineries which they can use to attract Romanian and foreign tourists in the nearby vineyards. Cellars can be visited all year round, but the most attractive landscapes can be seen in the period from April to October.



Source: [5].

Figure 3. Wine tourism in Romania.

In this way, wine and gastronomic tourism attraction can find potential customers, especially among foreign tourists but also among Romanian tourists who want to know the benefits of Bacchus drink in Romania and to associate Romanian

traditional food with famous wines of the region. The price that a tourist must pay for a weekend, tasting of 3-7 wines, their meals and accommodation is approximately 100 euros plus shipping costs.

Studies on how people spend their leisure time and recreate suggest by extension, that those who are involved in aspects of wine, who consider that wine even occupies a central part in their way of living, behave as such: they join specialized clubs, they produce wine (as a hobby), they read about it, they collect and store their favorite wines. According to this research, few of the consumers remain tied to one brand of wine, but they like to try new brands, unknown for them, but from known regions [6].



Source: [4].

Figure. 4. Viticultural tourism in Moldova Region.

Visiting wine festivals is an important component for promoting “wine tourism”. What might motivate participants to visit such events has become of major importance for the destinations where the wine is produced, as winemakers tried to use festivals to promote wine cellars and wine regions.

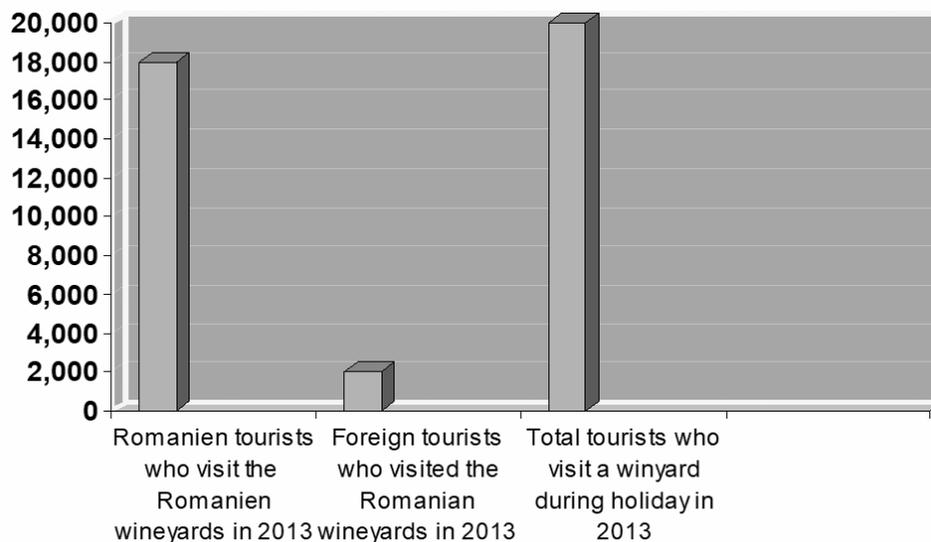
Therefore, supporting and investing in the sector called “wine tourism” is now regarded as an essential regional economic development strategy by the government and the wine and tourism industries.

To promote wine tourism in Romania there have been developed CrameRomania.ro projects (the only bilingual database – Romanian and English –

of the wineries of Romania), Revino.ro (Trip Advisor aggregator of wine cellars and wine specialized shops, wineries and restaurants Romania) and Return Show – Discover wines of Romania.

Wine tourism development, its integration into the structure of modern economies, the the sphere of needs, is reflected in a continuous enrichment of its content and the diversification of forms of expression. Also, participation in tourism movement of increasingly larger social groups, associated with the variety of motives of application, have favoured the appearance and development of this type of tourism.

Diversification and development of tourist traffic have resulted in more viticultural tourists who also to visit Romanian vineyards which is a large number of Romanians and foreign tourists. In this regard, in 2013 a number of 20,000 Romanians and foreign tourists visited the Romanian vineyards.



Source: Annual report of ANTREC

Figure 5. Romanian and foreign tourists who visited the Romanian vineyards in 2013.

Cellars in Vrancea annually attract nearly 10,000 visitors, which is up to 80% foreign tourists, generally wine knowing, most of them learning about the manufacturer's offer s from international tourism operators. These wineries offer tasting packages, visits to vineyards, food and folklore performances and the tasting offers various types of wine. Those who come on pilgrimage to the Romanian wineries often stay overnight in the county seats where the visited vineyards are located, because the cellar do not have enough rooms.

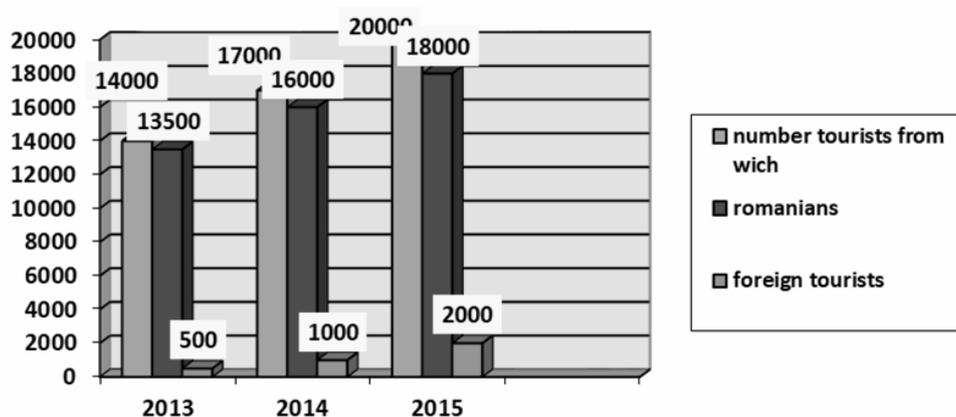
According to a study by market research MEMRB, the varietal wine market was dominated in 2013 by semisweet wines (41% of the market, growth) followed

by semidry (21% growth), dry wines (19% decrease), the sweet wines (14%, decrease) and liqueur wines (1.1% increase). Although a slight decrease, white wines continue to hold supremacy in the market, nearly 70%, the rest of 30% being held by red wines.

The viticultural tourism has been growing in recent years. In 2013 the total number of tourists who practiced win tourism was 14,000, and most of the tourists were registered in 2015 (20,000 tourists), 3000 more tourists than in 2014 due to the growth, in the first place, of the number of accommodation spaces and, secondly, of the increase of tourists interest for the travel program “wine Route”. It can be seen that most tourists were Romanian, respecting the growth of total number of tourists.

The service quality has increased, so that foreign tourists were more numerous, from 500 in 2013, their number increased to 1,000 in 2014 and to 2,000 in 2015.

Regarding the number of days-tourist, the share of Romanian tourists is much higher than that of foreign tourists in 2015 Romanian tourists accounting 19,500 days compared to that of foreign tourists, which was 2,500 days.



Source: INSSE processing.

Figure 5. Evolution of the index “number of tourists” in 2013-2015.

#### 4. Moldova’s viticultural tourism potential

Viticulture has been and will remain the business card of Moldova. Moldova is conventionally divided into 4 natural agricultural areas: North – Balti, Center – Forest Area, South – Cahul and South-East – Nisreana or Purcari. In all these areas, except North, the viticulture and winemaking have industrial importance. Currently, Moldova has 19 wine centers, of which the most famous are: Cahul, Taraclia, Cricova, Comrat, Codru, Romanesti, Ciumai, Purcari, Hancesti etc. [7].

Moldova is at the northern border of viticulture industry, but the conditions of its climate are similar to the best wine regions of France, which influences the quality and assortment of its wines (light table wines, wines with consistent color, dessert and sparkling wines). Moldova's climate and its hilly relief creates perfect conditions for the cultivating vines in the so-called buckets, ground depressions, oriented towards the sun. The buckets accumulate the heat and protect the vines against cold winds and hot rays, helping the vines to become mature.

Moldova as a tourist destination, with all its parts, has a rich natural and human potential, traditions, history and culture, activities and services that form the essential component of the country's tourism image in domestic and international market.

Every year, thousands of tourists visit Moldova to get acquainted with the legendary wine cellars. Cellars of Cricova, The Mileștii Mici, Branesti and the 142 wineries including the following Purcari, Asconi, Ciumai, Cojusna, Romanesti, have a special significance in the development of wine tourism in Moldova.

Moldova is a true “Mecca” on the world's wine map, for it has the largest area of vineyards, 112,000 ha, reported to the country's surface and four wine regions with 180 wineries:

- Southern: Purcari, Etcetera and Mezalimpe;
- Center: Cricova and the Small Milesti, then Asconi and Poiana;
- Northern: White Stork (distilled drinks);
- Chișinău, Carpe Diem – an authentic wine bar.

Viticulture and winemaking in Moldova recorded history of many centuries and is an inseparable part of life and culture of the people. Climatic conditions, topography and soil structure allow people to cultivate the different varieties of vines and produce table wines in the richest assortment.

Currently, winemaking is one of the most relevant sectors of national economy. It represents about 9% of the agricultural production structure recorded in 2013, with a variation from 12.8% in 2005 with a trend of decreasing until 2011, when it reaches the minimum threshold in the last 20 years – 6.1% – thereafter, returning with a dramatic increase in 2012 of 10.4%. Every tenth employee in national economy is engaged in winemaking. About 30% of the income from exports is due to wine production; 90% of wines and 75% of sparkling wines are exported [8].

Viticultural tourism in Moldova has been growing steadily in recent years, which represents a development opportunity for the country. The way in which the tourism in the wine-growing areas of the country works is actually the Moldavian hospitality. Here, tourists can experience and learn about wine production, bottling track and of course, taste the final product. Moldova, as a wine-growing country, offers its visitors the chance to choose their preferred routes: underground cellars and towns, wineries, wine primary processing companies, producing sparkling wine etc. But the number of visitors is relatively small compared to the capacity of the wineries [9].

Wineries, overall, with their vineyards, that are part of the tourist route “*Wine Road in Moldova*” are a crucial motivation to visit the country. They are a good way of promoting the best tourism product.

Quality Wines “Mileștii Mici” cellar is one of the biggest tourist attractions in Moldova since it entered the Guinness Book of Records as the largest cellar in the world. First documentary attestation year – 1655. Located at 20 km south of Chișinău, Mileștii Mici underground galleries have emerged due to the limestone exploitation. They are located at a depth of 40-85 meters and a length of about 200 km. Tourist visits inside are made using auto transport. The wines which are kept here are from the harvests made between 1968 to 1991. The temperature is constant at 12-14°C, as well as humidity, both optimal for long-term storage and preservation of the various wines. Mileștii Mici cellars are stocked with wines from all over Moldova. The “Golden Collection” includes about two million bottles: Pinot, Traminer, Muscat, Riesling, Feteasca, Dnestrovscoie, Milestsoie, Codru, Black Purcari, Moldova Rose, Golden, Cahor-Ciumai. Tourists have excellent wine tasting rooms and the “Winery” restaurant. Wines bearing the trademark “Mileștii Mici” were honored over the years with dozens of international medals.

The “Cricova” winery was founded in 1952 and is an analogue, smaller in size, of the Mileștii Mici. Cricova was famous in the party elite in Moscow, and not only for old wines of exceptional quality kept here, but also for its vast underground galleries with a length of over 60 km. Located at 10 km north of Chișinău, Cricova is a true underground city with streets and avenues bearing the names of wines: Cabernet, Pinot, Feteasca, Aligoté etc. Its deposits contain about 30 million liters of red and white wines of quality, including 15 brands of champagne and sparkling wines. The winery has over one million bottles of various wines. Here is also preserved the heritage collection of Moldova consisting of French, Italian, Spanish wines. The oldest are from 1902. The factory of Cricova produces French champagne by the classical method of fermentation, with maturity of up to three years. Since 2003 Cricova winery was legally declared as an object of Moldova’s national cultural heritage.

The wines from the famous Purcari area is the most striking insight into Moldova. Purcari winery was founded in 1827 and has continued to develop until today. French acknowledged the splendor and quality of the local wines Purcari at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1878 and have awarded it the gold medal; Russian Tsar family bought them for consumption; already in the twentieth century, they were delivered to the English royal court.

Moldavian wines not only are not inferior to famous wines of Bordeaux, but they are also distinguished by their originality. In the 1960-1980’s, the Purcari Winery was the only factory in the Soviet Union which labeled bottles with labels printed in English for “Black Purcari” for Britain’s royal court. In the cellar of Purcari there have preserved several collection bottles for this purpose. The biggest tourist attraction is the old mansion of the factory.

Cojusna winery has a history of almost a hundred years, and in recent years, there have been built underground cellars, the winemaking sections were repaired, which introduced the winery into the tourist circuit.

In 2004 the “The Wine Road in Moldova” National Program has been approved in tourism in order to internationally promote Moldova as a viticultural and wine tourist destination, to establish the link between tourism and the wine sector, to enhance economic potential and harness the human potential in rural areas and to protect, preserve and develop the heritage tourism value and harness the competitive level [10].

Under this program we have developed 7 trails, 4 of which are the most requested, namely:

- Route I “Open sky museums. Museums – in the underground”,
- Route II “A divine divine” in the north,
- Route III “The dew of Moldova’s forests” and
- Route IV “Grain Gold” in the south.

All routes start from the capital, Chişinău, and include approx. 20% of wineries, 6.8% of protected natural areas, 25% of monasteries and 15.9% of museums in Moldova.

The four representative routes within the “Wine Road in Moldova” offer both sightseeing in the famous wine-growing touristic objectives in the country and visiting other sights of the national heritage.

Today, these routes are included in the tourism offerd in partial form and separately, depending on customer preferences [12].



Figure 6. Route 1.

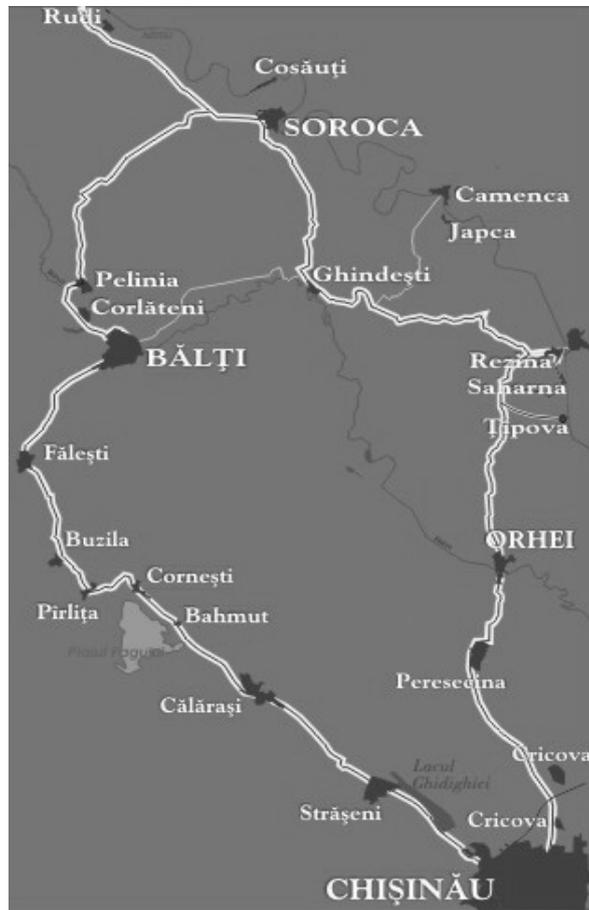


Figure 7. Route 2.



Figure 8. Route 3.



Figure 9. Route 4.

Across the whole program “Wine Road in Moldova”, the route structure is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Route structure in the “Wine Road in Moldova” Program

| Route            | Wineries | Protected natural areas | Monasteries | Handicraft Museums Strongholds, historical monuments | Handicraft centers | Asphalt road % | Season days |
|------------------|----------|-------------------------|-------------|--|--------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Orheiul Vechi    | 5        | 1                       | 10          | 11   | –                  | 100            | 365         |
| Codrii Moldivei  | 5        | 5                       | 7           | 1  | 3                  | 90             | 200         |
| Lăpușna          | 5        | 2                       | 4           | 5  | –                  | 90             | 200         |
| Ștepa Bugeacului | 6        | 3                       | 6           | 6  | –                  | 90             | 200         |
| Purcari          | 6        | 1                       | 6           | 8  | 1                  | 95             | 365         |
| Chișinău-Bălți   | 5        | 8                       | 8           | 7  | 2                  | 100            | 365         |
| Dunărea de Jos   | 5        | 2                       | 4           | 4  | 2                  | 90             | 200         |
| Total            | 36       | 21                      | 37          | 40   | 8                  | –              | –           |

Source: [12].

According to the information taken from wineries in Moldova on wine tourism, the income is dynamic, but disproportionate, which requires achieving a more effective strategy for harnessing this particularly valuable potential.

To be mentioned that there is no statistical basis of official data regarding the indicators of tourist traffic: Moldavian and foreign tourists who practice wine tourism and days-tourist number.

It has highlighted the role that the travel agencies have on promoting wine tourism, which are those that provide approx. 18% of tourists. Most tourists practice wine tourism for the tastings in wine cellars, so that in 2015, 19.7% of the total foreign tourists visiting Moldova were there for tasting.

## 5. Harnessing strategies for the wine tourist potential of Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion

In Romania, respectively Moldova’s wine area, even if there are wine producing units with stretched vineyards, harnessing this wealth in terms of tourism, is poor. Most often, individual tours are made for specialists, avoiding the development of a specialized segment on wine tourism.

The functionality of the “Wine Route” has not reached the desires for which it was created up until now. Unfortunately, there are still timid steps in this regard, small wineries belonging to small producers, trying to boost this type of tourism.

Nowadays, at the level of wine tourism in Moldova, there is a number of shortcomings, materialized in the lack of logistics needed for the management of the “Wine Road in Moldova” program, the lack of legislative consistency regarding the implementation and execution of this program, lack of vision and clear strategy to attract national and international tourism flows, reduced flexibility, scheduling tastings to wineries, failing to put in circuit of farms which produce grapes, which have great tourism potential, abandoning the “City of wine” and, not least, the low qualification tourism personnel.

It is necessary to create a database of statistical data regarding Moldavian and foreign tourists flows in Moldova, tourists that practice wine tourism and days-tourist number.

All these shortcomings lead us to believe that it is absolutely necessary to establish a viable common strategy to exploit the tourism potential.

Simple outline of a strategy is not sufficient and requires the active involvement of all wineries in the Euroregion, local and national administration and also small producers’s involvement.

The need for the development of active partnerships, aiming from ensuring the logistics needed for developing a performant wine tourism, to providing training for the tourism personnel in this segment, is a priority.

Also – promoting the Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion as a viticultural tourist destination and ensuring adequate informational support will directly contribute to viticultural tourism development.

## **6. Conclusions**

Viticultural tourism has a great potential in Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion, which ensures the development of the region and the sustainable cross-border tourism.

The infrastructure development in the Siret-Prut-Dniester Euroregion will ensure the attraction of tourists from Europe, America, Asia because there is a growing demand for wine tourism and the prices for travel packages are accessible, the offer is diverse and of high quality.

Implementing a real strategy to harness the wine tourism potential will open a viable development of the Siret-Prut-Nistru Euroregion.

Public-private partnerships come as a solution to these strategies and the creation of a common wine road which create a link between the two countries.

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