

THE ENOTOURISTIC OFFER IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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***Abstract:** Enotourism has the main purpose to improve the viticultural potential, but also to promote a certain region/county through its wine quality. Therefore, it creates new relationships among state and private actors and helps developing touristic facilities. Attracting enotourists in the Republic of Moldova is mainly based on the existence of several wineries that are meant to reveal tourists the culture and quality of Moldovan wines. Such enotourist projects are developed by six companies that are to be presented in the current article. The events carried out on a national level represent the most effective method of promoting tourism worldwide and the most important event of this type organized in the Republic of Moldova is The Wine Day. The present article aims at presenting and promoting the enotourist offer from the Pruth to the Dniester River.*

***Keywords:** enotourism, enotourist offer, visit, wine tasting, winery*

Introduction

Wine tourism makes to reference to places, sceneries, terroir and vineyards presented in a professional manner, a heritage that recultivates tradition, authenticity and the cultural value of a specific enotourist product. The first wine routes were found in France. “La route de grands crus” was initiated in Bourgogne, in 1934. In 1935, in Deutsche Weinstrasse, the first wine route was initiated in order to help the wine growers from the region of Palatinate. Only in 1953 are created the first wine routes in the region of Champagne and Alsace (Lignon-Darmaillac, 2011). Despite the fact that the European people are responsible for the development of the wine sector in the New World, the first ones to properly exploit enotourism were the people from California. They built and also enhanced wine routes as complete tourist itineraries.

Enotourism represents the relationship between the wine and tourism sector. The enotourist objects can be included in a table similar to the one from Figure 1, where one can notice the close relationship

among the constituent parts of these two domains. Enotourism is a result of the producer’s efforts to satisfy the tourist’s need through accommodation, food and other cultural and wine-related activities created in order to sell the product and promote his estate.

Figure 1. The correlation between the wine and the tourism sector as found in Lignon-Darmaillac, S. 2011

OENO...	...TOURISM
Vineyards; Wineries, castles, trading houses; Winemaking centers, research stations.	Accommodation in vineyards; Food, wine tasting, wine and food matching; Wine museums; Cultural activities, enotherapy, enoparks.

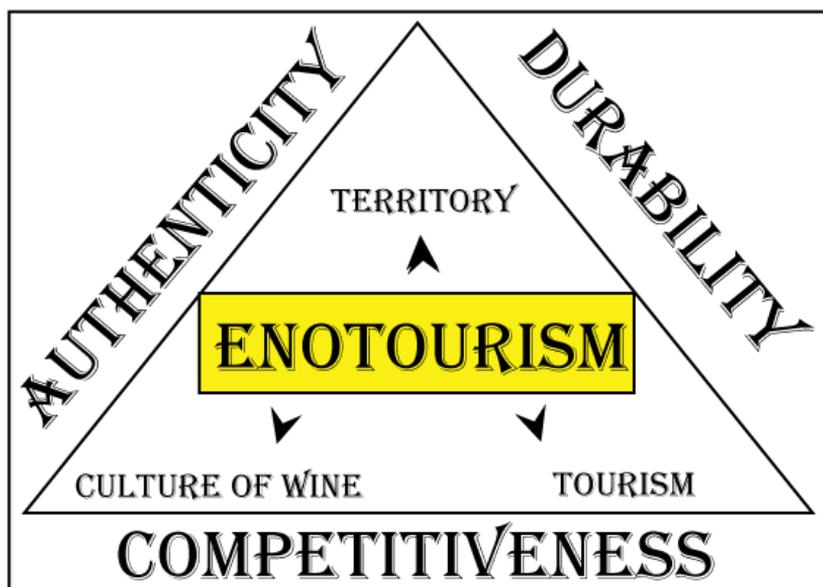
A more thorough approach regarding this type of tourism can be found in the study written in 2007 by the French author, Paul Dubrule. Wine tourism, as it is seen in this study, focuses on discovering the wine-growing regions and their products and covers multiple activities created in order to discover the delight of wine, of vineyards, of the cultivation and winemaking technique, the scenic, the historical and the cultural heritage, as well as local cuisine.

In the definition provided, Dubrule (2007) makes reference to a number of products that have an enotourist character, emphasizing the idea that enotourism is “the set of activities performed by tourists in wine-growing regions” which consists in:

- Vineyard visits;
- Wine tasting;
- Accommodation;
- Food;
- Other activities related to wine, to “terroire” products and to local customs.

The enotourist system is shaped by Vintur and it represents a project that was designed to reach an agreement between the towns and the European wine-growing regions regarding a new enotourist offer, by paying special attention to quality product, to sustainable development and to protecting the culture of wine and the natural environment of each region. The enotourist system consists of three main elements: the culture of wine, the area and the tourism based on authenticity, on durability and on competitiveness.

Fig. 2 *The pillars of wine tourism in Europe are defined according to the following chart:*



Source: Vintur project, Europe, page 4.

Enotourism is based on four main elements which are based on the producer’s marketing opportunities (from the point of view of direct sales), on the customers’ motivations and experiences (amateur tourists who choose to visit wine-growing areas/regions), the scenery or the “terroir” (discovering the wine-growing region both from a cultural and from a technological, pedoclimatic, perspective etc.) and on the image of the wine-growing region (as promoted by the enotourist actors) (Getz, 1998, and Charters and Ali-Khnight, 2002).

The Evolution of Enotourism in the Republic of Moldova

In the Republic of Moldova the idea of developing enotourism or wine tourism (a phrase that is more frequently used in the Republic of Moldova) appeared in 1996, when the Republic of Moldova was included into the ECOS-OUVERTURE program (through the Ruraltur project that aims at “integrating the Republic of Moldova into the cultural tourism network regarding rural areas from European wine-growing regions”) (N. Platon, 2007) which fosters interregional cooperation among the EU, the central European countries, the CIS and the countries of the Mediterranean Basin. The project was rather unsuccessful due to the visa

granting conditions of the western European countries. Several years later, with the main purpose of promoting the Republic of Moldova on an international level, the “*Moldova-Vin*” *Agro-industrial Department*, *The “MoldExpo” Exposition Center*, organizes the *Wine Festival* – an event that took place in the fall of 2002. The festival has created favorable conditions for the development of wine tourism and, as a consequence, the government of the Republic of Moldova adopted the resolution called *The Wine Route in Moldova*. After creating numerous drafts, The Tourism Agency of the Republic of Moldova published in a tourist guide seven wine routes that emphasized the country’s most important vineyards and wine centers.

The enotourist offer available in the wineries of the Republic of Moldova

Only few of wine-related enterprises from the Republic of Moldova are able to provide tourists with an enotourist offer. From the total number of enterprises, only ten can welcome tourists at the moment. The model of enotourist development adopted by these enterprises differs from one enterprise to another. The majority of wine-related enterprises that are focused on developing the sector concerning wine tourism in the Republic of Moldova follow the Californian model for developing enotourism. This model is based on an enotourist complex which comprises all basic elements that an enotourist might need. The packages include accommodation offers, food, wine tastings, and other recreational activities designed to help tourists discover the local culture of the wine.

There are two renowned enotourist centers in the Republic of Moldova: *The Purcari Winery* and *Chateau Vartely*. The Purcari Winery is the oldest wine-related enterprise of the Republic of Moldova, while Chateau Vartely is one of the newest.

The enotourist offer is only addressed to groups and it consists of five packages: a guide assisted visit (that will help tourists become more familiarized with the history of the enterprise, the winemaking technique and the wine collections available in the winery) with prices ranging from 11 to 18 euro (gift free) or from 18 to 25 euro (gift included). Tourist packages differ depending on the number of wines available for tasting which ranges from 3 to 10 types of wines.

The tourists that are accommodated in the Purcari hotel can benefit from several free services:

- billiards;

- fishing;
- walks in the vineyard (by bike or by foot);
- sports games (tennis, volleyball etc.);
- playgrounds for children.

The hotel has eight rooms with prices ranging from 25 to 50 euro and the restaurant provides the tourists with both traditional dishes (stew and home-made soup) and with dishes prepared after European recipes, especially after the French ones.

Another enotourist offer, as appealing as the one from the Purcari Winery, can be found at *Chateau Vartely*. *Chateau Vartely* is a wine-related enterprise, recently opened, that can be found in the city of Orhei. The most attractive points of the enotourist offer are a visit of the winery and the tasting the wines available in the winery. The winery functions as a tourist agency that informs and welcomes tourists and organizes visits. The price of the traditional enotourist offer (visit + wine tasting) ranges from 75 to 600 Moldovan lei (Table 1).

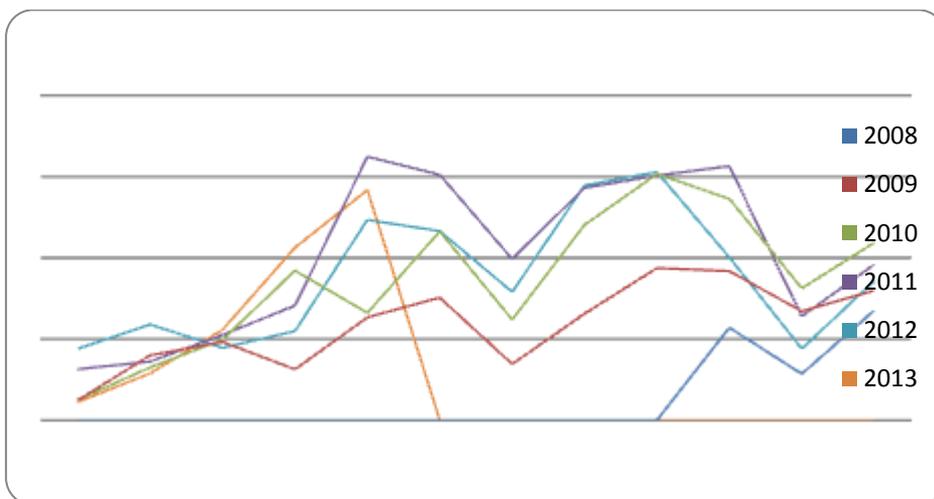
Table 1. The enotourist offer at Chateau Vartely
Guide assisted visits inside the winery
Wine tastings (assisted by an expert)
Rooms specially designed for wine tasting
Visits outside the winery created in order to discover the wine culture of the region
An event hall
Functions as a tourist agency
Has its own two-storey restaurant where tourists can taste both the traditional cuisine and the European one
Has three small boarding houses for accommodating the tourists
Has playgrounds for children
Has a sauna, a basin and a billiard room

Source: www.chateauvartely.md

Chateau Vartely divides its offer into six tourist packages, depending on the number of wine types available for tasting, in order to cover a wide range of tourists.

Chateau Vartely is visited each year by 10,000 tourists. According to Fig. 3, the number of tourists choosing to visit the winery has tripled in the 2008-2013 period. This proves the fact that the enotourist offer of Moldova is rather appealing and has solid opportunities for development.

Fig. 3 *The evolution of the tourist number at the Chateau Vartely winery (2008-2013)*



Source: Chateau Vartely, marketing and tourism department

The glory of Moldova is represented by the wineries from Cricova and MilestiiMici, which are considered to be the biggest wineries in the world. These wine-related enterprises have a rather appealing enotourist offer, even though they cannot offer accommodation to tourists.

In the building process of this winery were used rock extracting drifts. For this reason, enterprises like these are now considered as being a part of the cultural and national heritage.

The oenotourist offer presented by these wineries comprises six packages for Cricova and 15 packages for MilestiiMici, which consist of visits, wine tastings and dish serving, depending on the chosen package. The package prices range from 13 and 85 euro for Cricova and from 12 to 80 euro for MilestiiMici.

Table 2. *The enotourist offer of the wineries of the Republic of Moldova*

Enterprise	Offer
<i>Cricova</i>	Guide assisted visit Visit + wine tasting (4 types) Visit + wine tasting (from 6 to 9 types) + traditional dishes
<i>Milestii Mici</i>	Visit + Wine tasting (4 types) Visit + wine tasting (from 2 to 7 types) + traditional dishes
<i>Chateau Vartely</i>	Guide assisted visit Guide assisted visit + wine tasting

	<p>Guide assisted visit + wine tasting + gift wines</p> <p>Food</p> <p>Accommodation</p> <p>Sauna</p> <p>Events</p> <p>Transportation</p>
<i>Purcari Winery</i>	<p>Guide assisted visit</p> <p>Guide assisted visit + wine tasting</p> <p>Accommodation (it also includes billiards, fishing, walks in the vineyards, by bike or by foot); sports: tennis, volleyball etc.; playgrounds for children</p> <p>Food (free choice menus)</p> <p>Receptions/ seminars/ events</p>
<i>The Branesti Wine Cellars</i>	<p>Guide assisted visit + wine tasting + traditional dishes (3 free choice menus)</p>
<i>Chateau Cojușna</i>	<p>Guide assisted visit + wine tasting (from 4 to 8 wines) + snack</p>

In Table 2, it can be noticed that the enotourist offer lays emphasis on the guided trip and the wine tasting, often accompanied by snacks or cooked dishes. The number of wines available for tasting is different from one cellar to another and it depends on the package chosen by the visitor. If this offer were to be compared with a similar one from France, one would notice the absence of vineyard visits, on which the French people focus on. Only the Purcari Winery can offer this touristic product due to its location in the middle of the vineyard it exploits. The other enterprises are located at great distances from vineyards, which makes it very difficult to expand such offers. The majority of the wine-related enterprises in the Republic of Moldova are located in district centers, far from vineyards, this being a consequence of the Soviet period.

Cultural enotourism in the Republic of Moldova

The wine world maintains a strong connection with what culture means. Discovering the craft of winemaking and viticulture is a cultural activity that tourists are interested in discovering. Wine is a cultural element with a history that gave birth to a scenic and architectural heritage. The winemaking process is often considered an artistic process.

The cultural enotourist offer proposed by the Republic of Moldova is the Wine Day Festival, the ExpoVin Moldova exhibition and one museum from the entire country which represents the evolution of the wine culture in the Republic from ancient times: *the Museum of Viticulture and Winemaking from Stauceni*.

The Wine Day in Modova has appeared due to the accession and development of enotourism throughout the entire country. "The National Wine Day" was established by the Parliament on December 26, 1990, and it has been celebrated yearly since 2002 on the second Saturday and Sunday of October at a national level, in the capital city and in some regional centers of the Republic. Beginning with 2012, the National Wine Day is to be celebrated on the first Saturday and Sunday of October.

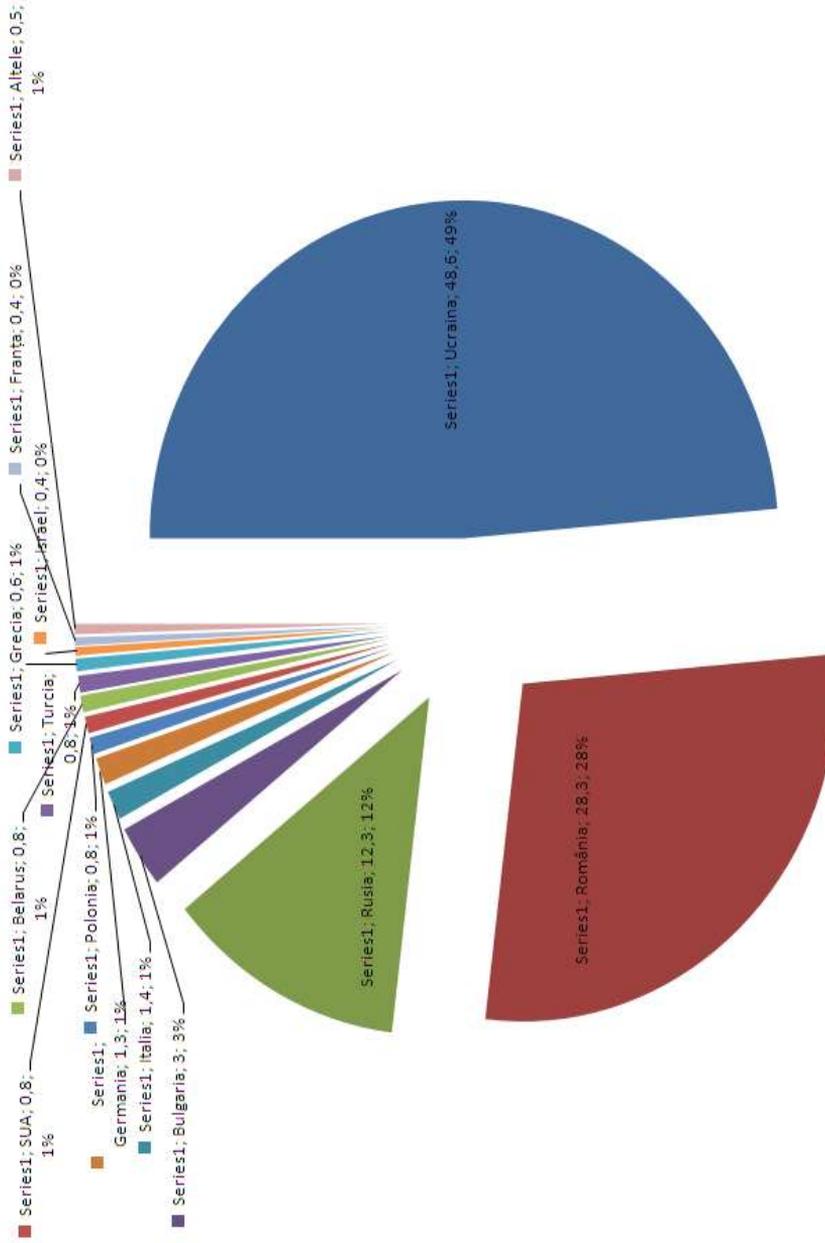
Starting from 2013, the Wine Day benefits from a new organizational concept. The organizers aim at promoting healthy and moderate wine consumption, bringing audiences closer to wine producers through professional tastings, visits of the vineyards and special moments dedicated to the culture of wine, art and gastronomy. The 12th edition of the National Wine Day is organized under the motto "Respect for traditions, courage in innovation." The Grand Gathering National Square is divided into four wine regions: Codru (Center), Valul lui Traian (Traian's Wall), Stefan Voda, Divin. Each region is represented by its wines, but also by traditional costumes, crafts and gourmet products specific to each area.

Fig. 4. *Images from the National Wine Day in Moldova, 2013*



Source: autor's fotos

Fig. 5. Tourists arrivals at Wine Day in Moldova



Source: Departamentul de Poliție de Frontieră din cadrul Ministerului Afacerilor Interne al Republicii Moldova

The participants at the feast are traditional craftsmen and folk groups coming from different regions of the country. Many wineries offer discounts and special programs. On this day, exclusivist restaurants serve Moldovan dishes and partner travel companies offer visitors (in The Grand Gathering National Square) short tours across the country. A few-hour trip of this type includes visiting a vineyard, a wine-related enterprise, a winery etc., in order help people become more familiarized with the entire chain of quality wine production and to see colorful landscapes.

Around 150 thousand people attend yearly this event and around 10,000 of them are foreigners (according to Moldova Tourism Agency reports). According to the data received from the Department of the Customs Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in 2013 our country was visited by 41,364 tourists. Most people who have visited our country are mainly from neighboring countries, most of them being from Ukraine, Romania, Russia and Bulgaria (Fig. 5).

Tourist receptions in Chisinau have welcomed over 4,200 tourists. The Tourism Agency organized, for the first time and in collaboration with six travel agencies, tourist itineraries for six wine cellars. Visitors had the opportunity to taste wines from the cellars of Chateau Vartely, Branesti, Cojusna (Migdal-P), Milestii Mici, Purcari and Cricova at special prices starting from 115 to 160 Moldovan lei. 520 visitors have been served throughout these visits.

The annual international exhibition "ExpoVin Moldova" is one of the most significant events in the Moldovan wine industry agenda which aims at promoting the Moldovan wines. The exhibition is held each in Chisinau, in February, in the premises of CIE "MoldExpo". The exhibition presents: grape wines, strong alcoholic drinks, equipment and accessories needed in the wine industry, vine cuttings and specialized editions and services.

The participants at the 2013 and 2014 exhibitions are of Moldovan origin and provide visitors with free wine tastings and wines at promotional pricing. During the event various contests were organized for winemakers, plus free wine tasting classes and an exhibition of tools used in the wine industry brought from the Museum of Viticulture and Winemaking of the Republic of Moldova, which has its headquarters in Stauceni.

Fig. 6 *Images from the ExpoVin Moldova event*



Source: autor's fotos

From 2004 until 2008, the number of visitors coming at the exhibition has grown significantly, in comparison with the 2009-2014 period when the exposition started to lose popularity, according to the oenologist Emil Rusu.

Conclusions

In the Republic of Moldova, enotourism can be practiced only by wineries or by wine-related enterprises. The wine route in the Republic of Moldova is not exploited by public actors. The enotourist offer provided by tourist agencies consists of visits to certain wineries. While tourist agencies include several landmarks in the Republic, the great majority are focused on a single winery. The wineries do not interact with each other. Therefore, all enotourist activity is completed within the vinicultural enterprise.

The vinicultural demonstrations and holidays are extremely important for such a country where wine production and viticulture play an important role for the economy. The Republic of Moldova asks for intensive promoting by using various marketing strategies in order to lay emphasis on the vinicultural resources.

Strong investments are needed for the development of enotourism in the Republic of Moldova, especially in the field of food and transportation, but also in viticultural scenery. Making a touristic wine route official is not sufficient for developing enotourism. In order to make the offer more appealing, a certain diversification of the activities conducted in a vineyard is need. Improving enotourist products requires an intense cooperation among the protagonists of the two sectors: tourism and viticulture in a “win-win” strategy.

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Raportul *Capacitatea de cazare* a Agentia de Turism din Moldova

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www.purcari.md

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