



DOI: 10.22620/agrisci.2016.20.030

**ВИНЕНИЯТ ТУРИЗЪМ КАТО ЧАСТ ОТ АГРОТУРИСТИЧЕСКИЯ ПРОДУКТ
WINE TOURISM AS PART OF THE AGRITOURISM PRODUCT****Ivan Kilimperov**

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E-mail: kilimerov@abv.bg**Abstract**

Bulgaria offers excellent conditions for the development of viticulture which is the basis of wine-making and wine tourism. Over the past 20 years this type of tourism has marked significant growth in Bulgaria and up to the present moment there is hardly a winery or a wine cellar that does not offer tourism services as well.

In addition to its independent form wine tourism can also be seen through the prism of agricultural tourism and the development of agriculture and rural areas. The key objective of this presentation is to establish the relationship between wine and agricultural tourism and their ability to increase the efficiency of small-scale producers of grapes and wine.

In this context, we will consider the possibilities for combining tourism services and supplying an overall tourism product based on wine, traditions and customs connected with wine-making, agricultural practices and the specific agritourism animation in vineyards and wineries.

The emphasis should be on agritourism activities. In this case small-scale producers may “aim at” those tourists who consider the entire wine-making process important and not just the wine as a drink or the experience in the wine cellar.

Key words: agricultural tourism, rural tourism, wine tourism, connections, agritourism product.

**NATURE OF AGRICULTURAL TOURISM
WINE TOURISM**

On the other hand - rural tourism is a traditional element of the tourist image of the country. Agricultural tourism is an inseparable part of it. Unfortunately, the services in the sphere of rural tourism in our country are of low quality in terms of the basic philosophy of rural tourism due to a number of objective and subjective reasons. The problem is not in the standardization of the product or service quality, but rather in the correct selection of services provided, as well as the way they are offered.

At the same time, the services offered in the sphere of the agricultural tourism are rarely in demand in Bulgaria. Therefore, it is necessary to combine the services of agricultural tourism with other specialized types of tourism that are already well-established on the Bulgarian tourist market. In this way, the aim is to promote agricultural tourism from the point of view both of tourists and tourist services providers.

The choice for combining agriculture with wine tourism is not random. Viticulture as well as related wine-making are traditionally well developing industries in our country. According to some publications of the Ministry of agriculture and food there is a tendency towards increase of the average yield per decare in wine grape varieties. On the other

hand - there is hardly a wine cellar in the country that does not offer wine tasting. To a large extent this suggests development of wine tourism, as well as its recognition among the leading tourist services in the country. At the same time wine tourism is envisaged to be the main specialization in some future tourist regions in the country.

On the other hand, agricultural tourism is one of the basic forms of rural tourism (Foiera, 1993). Although they are often seen together, there is a significant difference in the philosophy of the product offered and the basic reasons for its consumption.

The basic philosophy of rural tourism consists in providing opportunities for relaxation through experiencing other people's lives – their holidays, rites and customs, economic activity (agricultural production), standards of communication, cultural achievements, architecture, clothing, etc. All these take place in a rural area, within a rural environment – an environment filled with humanism, natural elements and unbreakable connection between land and people.

A great variety of goods and services can be included in the product. The characteristic element, however, is the impossibility to separate the main service from the additional ones. Due to the complexity of rural tourism product, such a

separation would take away a part of the “exotic nature” of the experience. Most of the services are in demand precisely because of the atmosphere that the experience creates, which is at the base of the rural tourism product formation. Therefore, the separation of animation as a completely self-contained unit here is undesirable and would lead to a decline in demand.

For example, in feeding, being a major tourist service, the form in which this need is satisfied is of a crucial importance for the contentment from a holiday. A great number of traditional dishes that are offered in rural tourism are well-known and are associated with certain expectations especially because of the manner in which they are prepared. If there is no opportunity for the guests to participate in these processes, or if it is separated in an independent service – this will inevitably affect the demand for this service. The motive here is not the meal itself or the feeding as a process of satisfying physiological needs, but the experiences related to the guests’ participation in the preparation of food. It is precisely what is cherished and it is exactly that quality characteristic of rural tourism product that matters for tourists and therefore has a high economic efficiency.

Agricultural tourism is also a part of rural tourist services – it is one of the main forms of rural tourism. Its product can also comprise a variety of services. At the base here, however, is not the lifestyle of people but agricultural production and its products.

Therefore, agricultural tourism is also a part of the rural tourist services. But the significant difference between agricultural and rural tourism lies in the fact that the first focuses mainly on agricultural production while the other elements of rural identity and lifestyle are laid aside. Moreover, in most of the cases when practicing agricultural tourism the complete relaxation is not among the main reasons for taking the trips.

In this connection - the main reasons for offering or seeking agritourism services are as follows:

- supply of fresh food products of agricultural origin – the service is typical mainly for the cities of Western Europe, located near agricultural farms; the motive is that the products are of superior quality and ecological characteristics;
- tracing the traditions in a certain production (professional agricultural tours) – as a rule, these trips are usually outside the border in countries known for their development of certain production; often, these trips are accompanied with a cultural program, which makes their relationship with rural tourism extremely close, and the differentiation of the services offered – too difficult;

- creating and establishing the brand of products of a given farm - since in Bulgaria it is a rare practice for specialized shops for goods of agricultural origin to work with certain farms and to offer their products, this service is not characteristic of Bulgaria as well, except in rare cases where a closed cycle of production is established, the so-called: company stores;

- educational role of agricultural tourism – visits of farms by families with young children in order to create opportunities for the children to learn about farm life and to obtain a clear idea of the origin of agricultural products - again, the service is not characteristic of our country, although in conversations with parents they have shown certain interest in the service;

- the so called “change of wallpapers” – short-term experiences in a farm (services such as “to the village/farm for a day”, are often in demand as weekend packages) with the purpose of relaxation - various studies in time have proven the effectiveness of agricultural labor as a means for relaxation from everyday problems; the reasons for its effectiveness, on one hand, lies in the immediate contact with nature – people fall into their natural environment for life and, on the other hand, this effectiveness is due to the high degree of difference offered in comparison with everyday life. Again the service is typical for Bulgaria.

In addition there are also a number of other services. The problem is that these services are not a characteristic element of the supply and demand of tourism market in our country. Often the services of rural and agricultural tourism are offered together. This, in turn, is the main reason why many authors consider rural and agrarian tourism as identical forms of specialized tourism.

On the other hand, wine tourism can be defined by means of different approaches and in different ways. It (wine tourism) can be defined in terms of tourists’ experience — in this case the focus is on tourist facility as a center of events and services offered in it. The main reasons for the trip are also important. When defining wine tourism in terms of the visited site, the opportunities that it reveals as a business initiative are in the core of attention. The ultimate goal is to achieve high economic efficiency of primary production through its diversification and stimulation of sales. The expected effect is an affirmation of a recognizable brand name, a consequence of what is expected and a shift of the demand curve to the right and up (other things being equal) – Figure 1.

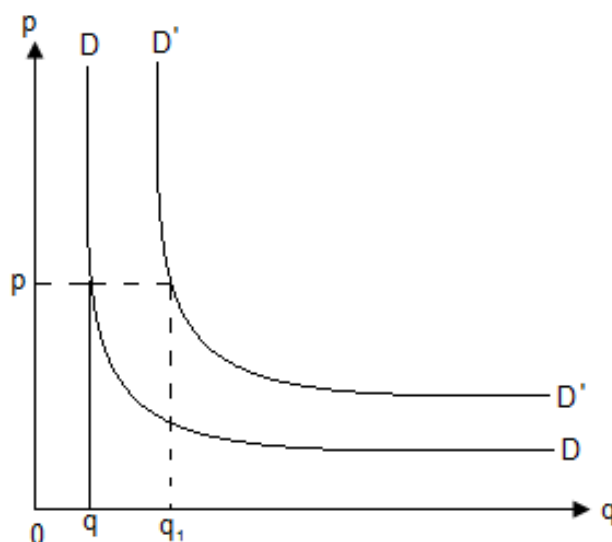


Fig. 1. Shift of the demand curve of wine tourism product to the right and up

In any case it is always associated with wine. Wine tourism involves the whole process of wine production – the elements of viticulture, wine-making, wine festivals, culinary, culture and traditions in the visited area, etc.

Based on existing definitions of wine tourism, irrespective of the used approach, its major tourist services can be brought out, many of which may also be provided in a combination with agricultural and rural tourism:

- traditions and practices in the production of grapes – this service is aimed precisely at agricultural practices, its specificity, however, requires it to be directed to a specific group of tourists with specific needs and specific knowledge in the field of wine and grape production;

- grape picking and rites associated to it – service, which again can be redirected to agricultural tourism, the focus here, on one hand, is on the culture and folklore and, on the other hand, the possibility for a unique and different experience, relaxation from problems and boredom of urban lifestyle;

- traditions and technologies for wine-making - Having in mind the fact that European traditions in wine-production and romance of the aesthetic atmosphere it offers are the basics of wine tourism, and on the other hand, Bulgaria is a country with experience and traditions in grape production, and it has plenty of unique combinations between natural and anthropogenic resources, it can be argued that, to a large extent, our country possesses certain competitive advantages in the sphere of wine tourism;

- wine cellars and the stories related to them as a center of the events;

- customs and stages of wine-drinking - an essential element of rural tourism product is the local traditions, customs and rituals performed, which makes the combination between wine and rural tourism unique in itself;

- the atmosphere created and the contact with the producers of the “drink of the Gods”;

- combination of food and wine;

- wine holidays and exhibitions, as well as all the events that are connected to wine and viticulture in one way or another.

CONNECTION BETWEEN AGRICULTURAL AND WINE TOURISM. SIGNIFICANCE OF AGRICULTURAL TOURISM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF VITICULTURE AND RURAL AREAS

The connection between wine and agricultural tourism can be sought in several directions. For the purpose of this presentation the focus is on the production of the main raw material – grapes. Depending on each particular case tourist services can be united – agricultural activities and local traditions connected with grape production can be associated to agricultural tourism, while the supply of wine and related tourist services – to wine tourism.

Such a combination is more characteristic for small wineries that do not have sufficient volume of production to ensure a constant market share, as well as for small-scale registered vine-growers and wine-makers. The basic idea is that small-scale

producers do not have enough production to ensure sufficient and permanent marketing of their products. On this basis they are forced either to produce for larger companies or to sell their production to distribution networks.

Thus, the structure and the absolute value of the profit from the activity get worsened on one hand and on the other - even if they enter the market, they do not have a recognizable brand. To overcome this problem the instruments of agricultural tourism can be used together with the elements of wine tourism.

The emphasis should be on agritourism activities since such small-scale producers would not be able to independently organize and serve tourists in the field of wine tourism due to a number of reasons. In this case small-scale producers may “aim at” those tourists who consider the entire wine-making process important and not just the wine as a drink or the experience in the wine cellar.

The natural question that arises is: “What will be the economic impact of the introduction of a number of agritourism services with elements of wine tourism included in them?”. The aim is to form a much-sought tourist service which will help:

- to improve the efficiency, liquidity and vitality of the vine-farm;
- to supply finished products directly to consumers;
- „to establish clearly recognizable brand and loyalty through” (Toneva, 2009) the direct contact carried out between the consumers and producers;
- to provide market share for the ready products (grapes and wine) - once again the producers can rely on the direct contact with customers and the establishment of durable good relationships;
- continuous flow of feedback from consumers, etc.

TOURIST SERVICE – GOOD PRACTICES AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The other natural question that comes to mind is: “What can be offered to the potential holidaymakers?”. The answer to this question is also of a great importance for rural tourism which includes elements of wine tourism. When it comes to large-scale producers whose brands are well-established and a synonym to quality - this problem does not sound so “acute”.

But when small-scale producers are concerned, as it is mentioned above, the initial focus should be on agritourism services. The main objective is to create and establish the brand of the future products produced by a certain vine-growing

farm (or winery/wine cellar). Involvement of tourists in agricultural activities can be considered as a tourist service as well – growing grape cuttings, planting vineyards, pruning, harvesting, participation in the process of wine-making and the opportunity to create one’s own selection of wine by coupage of varieties chosen by the tourist.

When it comes to search of unconventional ways for “subsidizing” the producers on behalf of the consumers, foreign experience can also be applied. A good practice in this regard is to sell the ownership right of a part of the vineyard. A tourist purchases the ownership right of a part of the vineyard, thus receiving the right to visit it at any time, to participate in the various activities, to harvest the ready production. For this purpose, however, in addition to the payment for the ownership right the tourist has to pay the maintenance cost pertaining to the property.

A good opportunity is to apply the French experience here – the famous Chateau Chateaufort – du – Pape (<http://www.chateaufort.com>). Considering that, small-scale producers from a given region can unite together in order to open specialized shops for grapes and wine made of certain varieties typical for the region, they may also open a wine museum that keeps and passes on to the next generations the history, traditions and culture in producing grapes and wine as well as its consumption.

Another possibility which such a union offers is the joint construction of a hall for tasting local wines, combined with dishes and appetizers from the traditional cuisine typical for the area and the village. In this way other industries that serve agricultural and wine tourism will be stimulated as well. A “school” for tourists may be established, where they will receive information on wine festivals celebrated in the area and the village, traditions and customs in production of grapes and wine, the grape varieties typical for the area, different types of vine shapes, etc. Subsequently, everything that has been learned can be applied in practice – in the vineyards and wineries.

In addition to everything stated above, such joint actions can stimulate mutual assistance as well — for example discounts in family hotels and restaurants for those tourists who have visited and “subsidized” in some way the vineyards in the region, a glass of wine free of charge at certain restaurants or as a Welcome Gift in some hotels or guest houses. Joint actions between vintners and wine-makers are also possible.

Organizing “Vine and Wine Safari” represents great opportunities as well. Vineyard tours on a fancy wagon accompanied with tasting of wine, grape varieties and food typical for the region is also a great option.



All this aims at transforming individual producers into an informal (and why not formal) cluster which main purpose will be to turn a given village into the perfect destination for agricultural and wine tourism without the presence of “a serious agent”. For this purpose, however, a number of conditions should be provided or fulfilled.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

To fulfill the above-mentioned objectives, several conditions should be met. The unification of small-scale producers from a given region lies in the base of the above-mentioned ideas. Therefore, the starting points are the social capital and the actions of informal institutions in agricultural tourism – basically, moral and mutual assistance - without them joint activities are impossible.

Another important condition is the availability of adequate information about the services provided and well-operating channels for their realization. In this connection, not only specialized tour operators can be used, such as travel companies and agencies, but also informal institutions that work in the sphere of agricultural and wine tourism. What is crucial here is the use of the services provided by the national network of tourist information centers. Thus, the information will be available to a much wider range of consumers and the possibility to make the right and accurate selection of the so-called “target groups” increases significantly.

Prior to the formation of product base, selection of target groups and announcement of the information available, it is necessary to perform a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the available tourist resources and the possibilities for their turning into a regional tourist package.

Excellent organization during welcoming and servicing tourists is a must - to a great extent this is exactly what influences tourists' satisfaction from a holiday and subsequently is the reason for a repetition of the visit. To be competitive, “the destinations must provide a wonderful experience and benefits for visitors” (Aleksandrov, 2014). What is important here are the inherent and professional qualities of the “service staff” and the right selection of the people who will attend the tourists. Again, the place and role of the social capital and informal institutions are crucial for agricultural tourism.

For the fulfillment of the above-mentioned ideas the role of the institutional agencies - different state institutions, is hardly beside the point.

Last but not least – **funding opportunities**. Assistance may be sought from the existing local initiative groups or such may be created, or a whole structure for implementing the above-mentioned ideas may be established. The possibilities of the future programming period and the establishment of clusters can be used in this case as an approach and funding source.

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