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WINE TOURISM - A CONCEPTUAL APROACH WITH APLICATION TO ALBA COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract: This study tackles a relatively recently developed concept between the tourism industry and the wine industry, named wine tourism. The main aim of the study is to highlight the wine potential of Alba County and the way it can be harnessed. Alba County has a rich wine heritage, a fact which is due to the longstanding tradition of wine-growing on these lands, since the Dacian epoch, as well as to the characteristics of the natural factors, favourable for obtaining high-quality wines, the reputation of which has been acquired at national and international competitions. The cultural and natural heritage associated to the vinevard and to the wine is an expression of the continuity of this activity over time and is emphasized by the variety and density of the tourist attractions spread in the four vineyards of Alba County, namely: Aiud, Alba Iulia, Sebeş and Târnave. The high-quality wine, the winescape of the county, the old cellars bearing the stamp of wine-growing and winemaking traditions in this area, the cultural-historical monuments (castles, Dacian and medieval fortresses etc), natural reserves and monuments situated within the vinevards etc., are elements of tourist attractiveness which facilitate the development of wine-tourism by the creation of a complex tourist offer, able to satisfy a varied range of tourist motivations and to compete successfully with the offer existing in other wine-growing regions of the country and not only.

Key words: wine tourism, wine road, vineyard, Alba County

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INTRODUCERE

Wine tourism - a conceptual approach

The most attempts to define and conceptualize wine tourism come from the researchers in the field of tourism marketing and are especially based on the tourists' motivations to visit a wine-growing region and their experiences in that place. The first definition of wine tourism belongs to Hall (1996) and Macionis (1996): "visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors" (Hall et al., 2000, p.3). This definition is restrictive as far as the tourists' motivations are concerned, as there are other factors as well which can attract tourists to a wine-growing region, such as: the culture, the landscape, sport, the traditional

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gastronomy etc. No reference is made to the length of stay, as wine tourism implies oneday trips, as well as several-days visits. Another approach, based on the tourists' experiences is illustrated in the definition given by The Australian National Wine Tourism Strategy (1998), taken by Getz (2000, p. 3 and Alant & Bruwer (2004, p. 27-28): "visitation to wineries and wine region to experience the unique qualities of contemporary Australian lifestyle associated with the enjoyment of wine at its source - including wine and food, landscape and cultural activities".

On this ground, Getz (2000) states that there are three major perspectives in defining this concept, namely: wine producers, tourism agencies and consumers. Incorporating all three major perspectives, wine tourism can be defined as: "travel related to the appeal of wineries and wine country, a form of niche marketing and destination development, and an opportunity for direct sales and marketing on the part of the wine industry" (Getz, 2000, p.4). Out of this definition we can notice the important elements in the delineation of wine tourism from the marketing point of view: the consumers with their motivations and experiences, the image of the wine-growing region and the producers' strategy to sell the product directly. Another definition, a much more complex one, given in the light of the tourists' experiences, is offered by Geibler (2007, p. 29), who states that "wine tourism includes a wide range of experiences built on the occasion of visits that tourists make to the wine producers, in the wine-growing regions or while participating to wine-related events and shows – including wine tastings, wine associated to food products, the pleasure of discovering the surroundings of the region, one-day trips or longer leisure trips and the experience of a range of lifestyles and cultural activities".

In the report brought forward to the French Ministry of Agriculture, entitled "Strategic Plan for the Exploitation of French Wine Industry by 2020", M. Roumegoux (2008, p. 52) stated that "wine tourism is one of the first methods for the accomplishment of the wine, thus facilitating the meeting between producer and consumer in holiday; the latter becomes curious, available and responsive, that initiated in order to become the best ambassador of the vineyard". The geographers are those who have introduced the idea of landscape in the definition of wine tourism, as well as the concept of "terroir", or "winescape", so much discussed about in the vineyards all over the world. The territory plays a very important role, being defined as a basis or benchmark for the wine tourism development tenders. Territory with its intimate characteristics or "le terroir", as it is greatly defined by the French, is the basis for the development of wine culture. The quality of wine and therefore attracting tourists cannot be achieved without the quality of the land where the culture of wine is developed (Mănilă, 2012).

The concept of "winescape" was introduced for the first time by Peters (1997) and it generally refers to the attributes of a wine-growing region (vineyards, cellars, wines). Afterwards, the concept was widely used in the specialized literature concerning oenotourism or wine tourism (Wilson, 1998; Getz, 2000; Hall et al., 2000; Sparks, 2007). According to Johnson & Bruwer (2007, p. 277), the winescape includes "vineyards, cellars and other physical structures, wines, natural landscapes, people, heritage, settlements and their architecture". Hall et al., (2000) and Carlsen (2006) conclude in their studies that winescape is what first of all motivates the tourists and determines their behaviour. Bruwer (2002) considers that in order to define the concept of wine tourism, we first have to find out the real reasons which make the tourists decide to visit a winemaking unit. The identification of motivations is essential, because this should support the creation of some promotion strategies meant to attract more tourists.

According to Bruwer (2002), the main reasons for tourists to visit the wine roads in a certain wine-growing region are the following: buy wines, taste wines, the winescape of the region, wine-growing and winemaking tours, acquire knowledge about wine and vinification, meet the winemaker, socialize with family and friends, take part in wine-related festivals and events, the possibility of having a meal within the winery and entertainment opportunities. Dubrule (2007, p. 6), the owner of a vineyard in the south-east of France, the ex-president of the Council of Wine Tourism in France considers that wine tourism or oenotourism can be defined as: "the whole range of services offered to the tourists during their visit in wine-growing regions: visits of cellars, tasting, accommodation, catering and activities related to the wine, to local products and regional traditions". This definition offers a list of wine-related products. Nevertheless, the winescape and its intangible values are left aside. Sophie - Lignon Darmaillac (2009) considers that wine tourism is based of the attractiveness of the heritage built in the rural communities specialized in wine-growing. She defines wine tourism as "the whole range of tourist activities, of leisure and free time, dedicated to the cultural and oenophile discovery of the wine, the vineyard and its terroir" (Darmaillac, 2009, quoted by Anger, 2011, p. 14). Concluding on data definitions, we can say that the wine tourism is a vector for the discovery of "wine culture", with all its attributes: experiencing a certain lifestyle, an educational constituent, contacts with art, wine and gastronomy, an integrated tourist destination and a marketing opportunity for a region to develop its economic, social and cultural values.

DATA AND METHODS

In order to write this paper, we have used the classical research methodology, that is we have consulted the specialist bibliography related to tourism, from the international literature as well as the Romanian one, regarding wine tourism; we have studied as well the specialist bibliography having as subject the geography and wine-growing in the research area. The data base has been completed with the information acquired from the fieldwork. The tourist prospection stage was followed by the stage of work in the laboratory, during which the aspects that had been identified, localized, analyzed and described on the ground have been transposed into a final text. The spatial representation of some analyzed elements has been made by using a specialized software, named ArcGIS.

WINE - GROWING POTENTIAL OF ALBA COUNTY The vineyards of Alba County

The vineyards of Alba County are part of the wine-growing region of the Transylvania Plateau, which includes the grape plantations from the basin of Târnave, Sebeş and Mureş, with five vineyards: Aiud, Alba Iulia, Sebeş-Apold, Lechința and Târnave. The grape plantations of Alba County are included in four of the five vineyards of the region, namely: Aiud, Alba Iulia, Sebeş - Apold and Târnave (Figure 1).

Aiud vineyard is located in the west of Transylvania Plateau (Figure 2), north of Alba-Iulia vineyard, the grape plantations being scattered on the hills from both sides of the corridors of lower Mureş and lower Arieş rivers (Teodorescu et al., 1987; Macici, 1996). The main winemaker of the vineyard is SC Domeniile Boieru SRL, a medium-sized producer who has been operating on the market since 2005. The vineyard has a large number of cellars (over 20) that are owned by small producers, the majority of whom are located in the grape plains of Ciumbrud and Aiud. The ecological conditions are favourable for obtaining high quality white wines, most of them bearing a designation of origin. *Alba Iulia vineyard*, one of the oldest in Romania, being regarded as a Dacian vineyard, is located on the hills at the eastern foot of the Apuseni Mountains, which spread on the right border of Mureş, between Geoagiu and Ampoi water streams (Martin, 1966; Popa, 2010); to the east, on the sunny slopes of Secaşelor Hills (Macici, 1996).

The vineyard includes the wine centre of Alba Iulia, encompassing some famous grape plains: Ighiu, Cricău, Şard, Țelna, Craiva, Bucerdea Vinoasă and Sântimbru. The ecological conditions are favourable for obtaining dry, semi-dry and semi-sweet white wines, table wines or bearing a designation of origin, as well as those wines which constitute the raw material for the Alba Iulia sparkling wine (Oşlobeanu et al., 1991; Cotea & Andreescu, 2008).

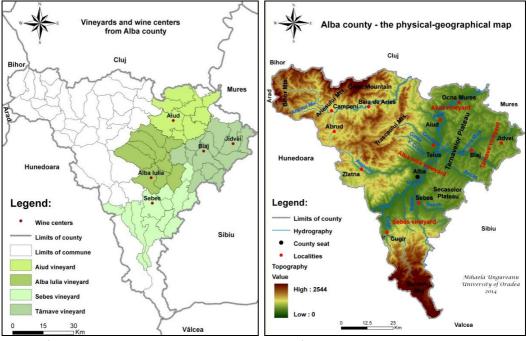


Figure 1. The vineyards and wine centers from Alba County

Figure 2. The physical - geographical map of Alba County

Sebeş – Apold vineyard, more precisely, the sector located within Alba County, is situated in the south-west of Transylvania Plateau. The grape plantations are spread on the northern extensions of Gârbova Hills, at the foot of Şureanu and Cândrel Mountains and on the southern extensions of the hills on the Secașelor Plateau (Cotea & Andreescu, 2008). The wine centre Sebeş includes 11 grape plains, out of which we mention: Câlnic, Gârbova, Vingard, Spring, Daia Romană and Cut. The vineyard is the source of white wines, table wines or bearing a designation of origin, the main winemaker being SC Viticola Gârbova. Târnave vineyard is the largest and the most famous of Transylvania Plateau wine-growing region. The grape plantations, belonging to small groups, are situated in the hydrographic basin of Târnava Mare and Târnava Mică (Martin, 1966). Târnave vineyard spreads on the surface of three counties: Alba, Mureş and Sibiu and includes six wine centres: Mediaş, Zagăr, Târnăveni, Valea Nirajului, Jidvei and Blaj, the last two being situated in Alba County (Cotea & Andreescu, 2008).

In the wine centre Jidvei lies one of the first Romanian wine producers, also one of the most famous Romanian wine brands: SC Jidvei SRL. In the wine centre Blaj operate the Reasearch Station of Viticulture and Enology Blaj, as well as Târnave-Blaj Cellar. On the whole, the ecological conditions of Târnave vineyard are favourable for obtaining dry white wines, different varieties of sparkling wines bearing a designation of origin (Târnave-Blaj, Târnave-Jidvei), as well as semi-dry or sweet white wines, liqueur and aromatic wines, which are obtained when the conditions for the development of the noble rot are met (Macici, 1996; Oşlobeanu et al., 1991).

The grape surface, production and varieties

In 2013, the total wine-growing surface (vineyards and grape nurseries) of Alba County was 4 656 ha, representing 45,8% of Transylvania Plateau grape surface and 2,2% of the Romanian grape surface. Concerning the surface of fruitful vines, Alba County owns 71% (3 860 ha) of the Transylvania Plateau wine region (5 390 ha). Out of the surface planted with fruitful vines, 3 348 ha are grafted vines and only 512 ha are hybrid vines. Regarding the annual grape production, it recorded strong fluctuations from one year to another, mainly due to the values of the climate elements in certain vegetation periods, as well as to the production of certain extreme meteorological phenomena. As we can notice in graph of Figure 3, the year 2014 was the most productive, the production reaching 32 557 tons of grapes (http://www.insse.ro/).

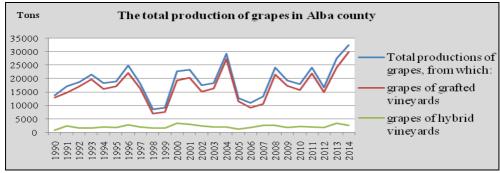


Figure 3. The total production of grapes in Alba County (Source: http://www.insse.ro/).

In the four vineyards prevail the grape varieties for high-quality white wines, the majority of which bear a designation of origin, namely: Fetească regală, Fetească albă, Traminer roz, Riesling italian, Pinot gris, Chardonnay, Furmint and Sauvignon blanc, but also the variety for Muscat Ottonel aromatic wines. As for the wine varieties and their sugar content, the wines which come from the vineyards of Alba County can be: dry, semi-dry, semi-sweet and sweet (Cotea & Andreescu, 2008).

Together with these wines, we must highlight the sparkling wines from Târnave vineyards (Jidvei), Alba Iulia and Sebeş-Apold, considered to be some of the best of our country, a fact which justifies their ranking among the sparkling wines bearing a designation of origin (Macici, 1996). The Alba sparkling wine has been produced since 1969, and is obtained, in most of the cases, out of Pinot gris and Fetească regală. During the last years, in Târnave vineyard grape varieties for red wines (Pinot noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Fetească neagră, Merlot and Syrah) were cultivated too, a fact which was made possible by the climate conditions of this area, which are favourable to the production of red wines.

WINE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF ALBA COUNTY

Alba County has a tourist potential harmoniously distributed on all its surface (Ilieş et al., 2014); to the west, in the mountain area, the natural tourist attractions prevail (Gozner & Avram, 2010; Avram & Gozner, 2012; Gozner & Zarrilli, 2012; Gozner, 2014, 2015), followed by the cultural-historical and religious ones, and in the east-central part,

the largest share belongs to anthropic tourist attractions, but also to wine-growing attractions (cellars, winemaking units, wine collections, castles etc.), (Figure 4). Regarding wine-tourism attractions, in Alba County there is an impressive number of cellars belonging, most of them, to small producers (Figure 5). To all this is added the wine-making SC Jidvei SRL - one of the main wine producers in Romania.

Futhermore, two wine-tourist attractions which cannot be omitted are the Reasearch Station of Viticulture and Enology Blaj, as well as Târnave-Blaj Cellar. As for the wine-related anthropic attractions, the castles have a special importance, due to their historical and architectural value. Some of them are already open for tourist purposes or there are on-going projects to achieve this. A good example is the Bethlen – Haller Castle of Cetatea de Baltă that represent the image of Jidvei Company.

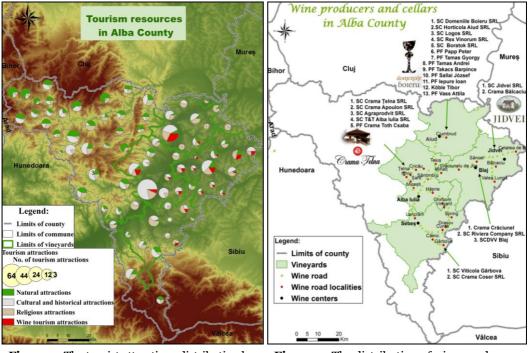


Figure 4. The tourist attractions distribution by categories, at the level of the communes in Alba County (Source: the official websites of localities' Town-Hall; field investigation, 2014)

Figure 5. The distribution of wine-producers in the vineyards in Alba County (Source: data collected during the field survey, 2014)

Another category of tourist attractions located in vineyards, which could be harnessed by means of wine tourism are the natural reserves and monuments. The main protected areas which might be included in the tourist route "Wine road" are: the natural reserve "Pădurea Sloboda" (Aiud), the botanical reserve "Pădurea de stejar pufos" (Quercus pubescens) of Mirăslău, the botanical reserve "Pădurea Cărbunarea" (Blaj), "Teiul lui Eminescu" of Blaj, declared a natural monument, "Stejarul lui Avram Iancu" of Blaj, also declared a natural monument etc. At present, the majority of the wine tourism attractions of Alba County are harnessed by means of a tourist itinerary "Wine road".

Wine road in Alba County

The most efficient means to harness the tourist potential in the vineyards of Alba County is the "Wine road" - a marked itinerary along a delimited area, inviting tourists to discover the wines produced in this area and the activities that can be practiced there. The tourist itinerary "Wine road" (Figure 6) includes the most important wine centres of Alba County. The trail passes through scenic, historic and cultural interest areas, covering a distance of more than 200 kilometers.

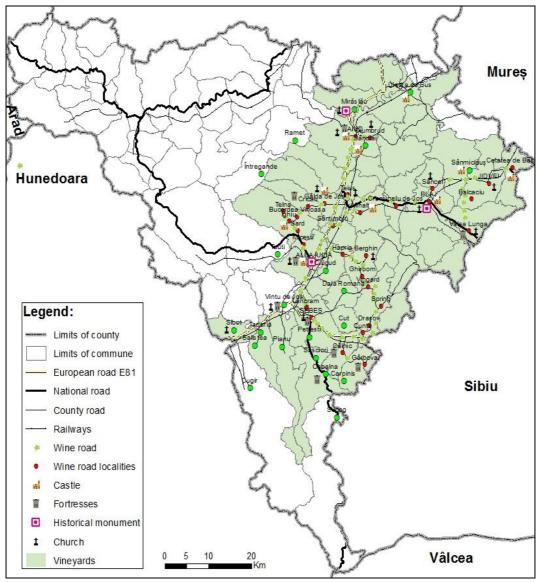


Figure 6. "Wine road" în Alba County

The wine tourism attraction are grouped along the National Road DN 1 (E 81), having the advantage of a quick access to the four vineyards of Alba County . Thus, from the National Road DN 1, which passes from north to south the vineyards Aiud, Alba Iulia and Sebeş, the National Road DN 14 B (Teiuş - Blaj – Valea Lungă) starts, allowing the access to Târnave vineyard, towards the wine center Blaj, then towards Jidvei, on the county road DJ

107 (Blaj – Jidvei - Cetatea de Baltă). At Blaj, the tourists can visit the Reasearch Station of Viticulture and Enology Blaj, Târnave - Blaj Cellar, but also many other cultural and anthropic tourist attractions. From Blaj, the wine itinerary heads towards the fascinating vineyards of Jidvei. The tourist can visit the winemaking department of the Jidvei company, one of the most famous and appreciated Romanian wine brands. The Jidvei company owns 4 cellars: Jidvei, Bălcaciu (the first industrial-type cellar of Romania, built in 1958), the Bethlen Haller Castle Cellar, in Cetatea de Baltă, built in the 15th century in Renaissance style (Sebestyén & Sebestyén, 1963) and the Tăuni Cellar (built in 2014). In Alba Iulia vineyard, the tourists can visit the cellars, as well as other tourist attractions from Ighiu, Ţelna, Bucerdea Vinoasă, Craiva, Cricău and Gâlda de Jos.

The wine road in Sebeş vineyard goes along the European Road E81, which links the wine centers Sebeş and Apold (Sibiu county); the County Road 106F splits from E81, allowing the acces to the cellars and to the other tourist attractions in Câlnic and Gârbova. In Câlnic, the tourists can visit the fortress included in UNESCO World Heritage. The most southern point on the "Wine road" is Gârbova, where one can visit the Viticola Gârbova Cellar, and also one of the oldest historical monuments of secular architecture in the country (13th century) – Greavilor Fortress (http://patrimoniu.gov.ro/).

Nr. crt.	Wineries / Cellars	Wine tasting	Cellar tour	Meeting winemaker	Cellar door selling	Restaurant	Acommodation	Vineyard tour	Vineyard bike tour	Vineyard tour on horseback	Grape harvesting	Landscape	Historical buildings
1.	Jidvei	Х	Х	Х	-	-	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х
2.	Domeniile Boieru	Х	Х	Х	Х	-	-	-	-	-	-	Х	-
3.	Apoulon Cellar	х	Х	х	Х	-	-	Х	-	-	-	-	Х
4.	Târnave-Blaj Cellar												
5.	Gârbova Cellar	х	х	х	х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6.	Crăciunel Cellar	х	х	Х	х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7.	Ţelna Cellar	х	Х	Х	х	-	-	х	-	-	-	-	Х
8.	Logos Cellar	х	х	х	х	х	х	-	-	-	-	-	Х
9.	Takacs Borpince	х	х	Х	х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
10.	Rex Vinorum	х	Х	-	Х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11.	Papp Péter Cellar	х	Х	х	х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12.	Tamas Gyorgy Cellar	х	Х	Х	Х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13.	Tamas Andras Cellar	х	Х	Х	х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
14.	Toth Csaba Cellar	х	Х	Х	х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
15.	Sallai József Cellar	Х	Х	Х	Х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
16.	Iepure Ioan Cellar	х	х	Х	Х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
17.	Köble Tibor Cellar	х	Х	Х	Х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
18.	Vass Attila Cellar	х	Х	Х	Х	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 1. Services offered to the tourists by the winemakers included in the "Wine Road" (Source: field survey, September, 2014)

Aiud vineyard represents the maximum concentration point of wine tourism attractions: six cellars in Aiud and seven cellars in Ciumbrud, plus a winemaking company - Domeniile Boieru. In Aiud, the tourist can visit one of the oldest urban fortresses in Transylvania (13th-16th centuries), and the Bethlen Castle within, which hosts the History Museum (http://patrimoniu.gov.ro/). In Alba County, out of the 18 winemaking units

which opened the door of their cellar to the visitors, only five offer a larger range of tourist services, namely: Jidvei, Domeniile Boieru, Apoulon, Țelna and Logos (Table 1). Jidvei company is the only winemaker which has developed a concrete tourist offer, sold by means of travel agencies. The winemaking "Domeniile Boieru" was established in 2005 and it is a medium-sized wine-producer, but having real prospects of development. In order to develop the tourist segment, Domeniile Boieru society intends to build a pension within the vineyard and a restaurant having a seating capacity of 120 seats. The other cellars belong to the small producers.

They offer wine tastings directly in the cellar, and this is the moment when the tourist can meet the wine-producer and the whole history of the cellar and also the history of the wine, which can be purchased directly from the source. Alba County offers the possibility of other tourist itineraries, which, combined to the "Wine Road", can create a complete tourist package which may satisfy the most complex demands of the tourists. Thus, the tourists can combine the "Fortresses Circuit" with a historical circuit, including the monuments dedicated to the heros of the two World Wars (Câmpia Libertății from Blaj); also, tours can be organized to include the places of worship or the natural reserves situated in the vineyards of Alba County.

Wine-related cultural events

For the wine-lover tourists, there are two wine and vineyard-related cultural events which are organized on a yearly basis in Alba County , namely: "The Wine and Twin Cities Festival" (Aiud) and "The Golden Grape" contest-festival (Alba Iulia). These events promote the wine products and the local culture, represented by traditions, customs, handicrafts, gastronomy etc. The Wine and Twin Cities Festival is organized in Aiud at the end of the summer, or after the grape harvesting.

The events are attended by representatives of the twin cities of Aiud, namely: Cusset (France), Ponte de Sor (Portugal), Dingelstadt (Germany), Siklos (Hungary) and Cerepovet (Russia). On this occasion, the participants have the opportunity of tatsting the wines of other vineyards in order to compare them with the wines they have back home. The programme of the festival includes symposiums having as subject the wine-growing and wine-making traditions in Aiud vineyard. Also, the objectives and the prospects of the tourist programme "Wine road" are presented and the traditions and the customs of this area are highlighted in certain ethnocultural programs (http://www.taravinului.ro/).

The Golden Grape contest-festival is organized between the 11th and the 14th of September in Alba Iulia. This festival was created in 2001 by SC Jidvei SRL, having as a main purpose the preservation and the promotion of the Romanian traditional cultural heritage. One of the most important cultural-historical events organized in Alba County is the "Dacian Fortresses Festival". The event is organized in late June, having as a main aim the promotion of the historical heritage represented by the Dacian fortresses of Cricău, Cetatea de Baltă, Cugir, Ighiel, Săsciori, Căpâlna (UNESCO Heritage). The programme of the festival includes cultural events, but also wine tasting sessions organized under the aegis "the Dacian wine" (http://www.antrecalba.ro/).

Besides these festivals, several fairs are organized every year in Alba County, having as purpose the promotion of traditional culinary products, including the wines produced in the vineyards of Alba County. Among the best known fairs, we mention: "Gustos de Alba", "Apulum Agraria" and "Cununa Graiului" (http://www.taravinului.ro).

CONCLUSIONS

In Alba County lie four of the oldest and most famous vineyards of the country, where there are traditional cellars, renowned for the quality of their wines. The winetourism attractions, represented by: cellars, winemaking units, castles, fortresses, historical monuments, places of worship etc., are placed along the famous Wine Road. The wine tourists can take part in wine tastings, visiting the cellars and the winemaking units in order to learn the wine-making process. The variety of tourist resources in Alba County offers the possibility of experiencing other forms or types of tourism (cultural tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism, agrotourism), which can be combined with wine tourism. To conclude, wine-tourism can be experienced in the vineyards of Alba County more as a form of itinerant tourism. In the rural localities situated in the vineyards, the tourist infrastructure is not so well developed yet as in other countries, famous for this form of tourism. Nevertheless, there are real prospects for the development of wine-tourism in the future.

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