

# WINE TOURISM: GLOBAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES IN KVEMO KARTLI

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**ABSTRACT.** Wine tourism is a growing sector with great opportunities to diversify demand. In the case of Kvemo Kartli, this potential is even more special. The main topic of the article is the study of wine cellars in the region of Kvemo Kartli. The article discusses the resources and facilities important for the development of wine and agro-tourism, the main developing force of this kind of tourism in Kvemo Kartli. This work will study the contributions of the family wineries to the development of the touristic sector. It also serves to popularize Kvemo Kartli as a wine region and a way to form a wine culture.

The study will also present the contributions of the Germans colonists in the development of winemaking and preservation of traditions in the Kvemo Kartli region. Qualitative research methods were used in the research process. The survey revealed the positive role of small wineries in the development of tourism in the Kvemo Kartli region, highlighted the current problems of small wineries (which relate to the factors affecting development), the economic benefits of small entrepreneurs, improper representation of wine tourism products on the market and other challenges. Recommendations were formulated in order to eliminate the problems identified. Also, we discussed the government's action plan for the future development of wine tourism in Georgia.

**KEYWORDS:** FAMILY CELLARS, KVEMO KARTLI, WINE ROAD, WINE TOURISM.

## INTRODUCTION

The history of wine tourism dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century, when visiting the vineyards of local residents became part of the trips. At the end of the nineteenth century, wine became an attractive factor in the development of tourist packages for cities such as: Tuscany (Italy), Alsace, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne (France), Rhine Valley (Germany) and Douro Valley (Portugal) (Trišić et al., 2019).

The term "Winescape", which was first used by Peters in 1997, defines "Winescape" as "attributes to a

wine region", though, in 2011, Alebak and Lakovidou presented another definition of it as "the entire region and its attributes", and in 2005, the researcher Patrini-kin presented an even more extensive definition "spatial area in which viticulture and wine tourism are integrated within the framework of viticulture". A wine region is a destination for wine tourists, and the "Winescape" is a chain of beliefs, impressions and ideas of the tourist (Bruwer & Lesschaeve, 2012).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization held the first global wine tourism conference in Georgia. "Georgia is the homeland of wine, according to the

Late Stone Age's Neolithic data, the culture of wine is established in the cultural and economic life of mankind precisely from Georgia. The country, with its natural and climatic diversity, creates the best environment for viticulture and winemaking; it is the homeland of grapes and has great resources and traditions for the development of wine tourism. Accordingly, there is a great interest from the side of the tourists as well, since they must travel to the country where wine is considered to be the homeland. Added to this is the fact that at the 8th session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the ancient Georgian traditional method of making Kvevri wine was granted the status of a monument of cultural heritage, and the method of making Kvevri wine was included in the representative list of UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage (<http://unesco.ge>).

It is known that more than 500 grape varieties are registered in Georgia (Kobaidze, 2014). Which points to the fact that the country has a centuries-old experience in making wine, and, on top of it, there's a list of dishes that go well with Georgian wine that also plays an important role in this. In recent years, the Kvemo Kartli region has become more active, and it attracts attention not only with the abundance of cultural monuments, but also with its small family wineries and Bolnisi wine. Here they make a wine typical of the climate of the region, which is also distinguished by its aroma. Kvemo Kartli region has all the resources to develop wine tourism and export wine.

### AIM OF RESEARCH

The main goal of the paper is to investigate small family wineries as from a touristic perspective and at the same time determine their contributions to the touristic sector. The purpose of the research was to find out whether the activities of winemakers in Kvemo Kartli were related to the tourism industry, whether tourists were provided with accommodation and similar means, what is the readiness/desire for the development of wine tourism in the region, what was the impact of the pandemic on the development, etc. Sh. In order to achieve this main goal, it was necessary to study the following factors: the relevance of wine tourism, an analysis of the development of wine tourism in Georgia (based on the example of Kvemo Kartli) and identifying problems in family wineries.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The presented research is based on qualitative research methods. This article provides an analysis of the articles written as scientific literature and the analysis of documents and manuals developed by the governmental structures. The research included: questionnaire surveys, structured interviews and focus groups. Also, desk research (documents, publications, strategies). Formulation of conclusions and strategic recommendations. During the research, public information was requested from the National Wine Agency and the National Statistics Service. Researchers N. Ketskhoveli, M. Ramishvili, D. Tabidze, N. Kvaratskeli, G. Jankhoteli, E. Xaraishvili and other scientists. We have studied the research conducted by Georgian and foreign researchers about the tourism industry, the formation of international tourist flows, globalization and Europeanization, and discussed their opinions, approaches and conclusions.

### DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The development of wine tourism should become part of the country's touristic development and rural tourism development. Wine tourism is a regional development tool, where local people are given the opportunity to engage and benefit from the entire value chain of the development of tourism. According to the statements of Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization, "the complexity of wine tourism development and the diversity of interested parties require innovative models of cooperation. We need to break down walls and promote new clusters" (Wine Tourism as an Approach to Sustainable Rural Development, 2019).

In 2019, a wine road guide was developed, which reviews: the history of winemaking in Georgia, wine glasses, tableware and popular Georgian grape varieties. There is also a grape picking dictionary and information about wine cellars (National Tourism Administration, 2019), and the Georgian Ecotourism Association has also developed wine maps (Georgian Ecotourism Association, 2018).

Since 2012, the Georgian Tourism Administration has started the "Wine Road" project, within the framework of which existing wineries throughout Georgia are identified, evaluated and photographed, the purpose of which is to: add new objects to the electronic database

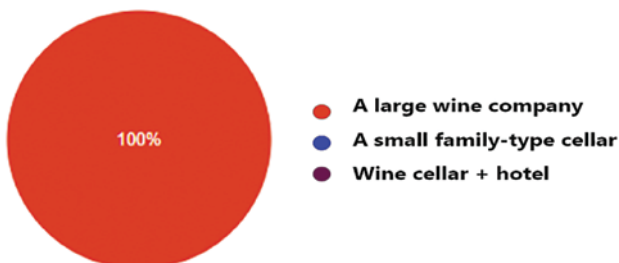
of wine tourism objects, making direction signs and nameplates for recommended wineries, conducting trainings for family wineries on various topics, including history of Georgian wine, art of wine tasting, finance/accounting, basic foreign language, Production of informative advertising materials (like the aforementioned wine maps and guide), where information about recommended wineries will be included and will be distributed free of charge through the administration's internet platform and tourism information centers, placement of signs indicating micro-zones (wines of local origin) on main highways, placement of information boards at the entrance of the municipalities with a map of wineries and wines produced in the municipality (Wine Road).

In order to better clarify the perspective of wine tourism development, we conducted a questionnaire survey of small and medium-sized wineries in the Kvemo Kartli region. These are enterprises that produce wine but are also interested in receiving visitors. We identified a focus group, conducted telephone interviews and used questionnaire research using social networks and e-mails.

From the results of the research, we determined whether the activities of winemakers in Kvemo Kartli were related to the tourism industry, whether tourists were provided with accommodation and similar means,, what is the readiness/desire for the development of wine tourism in the region, what was the impact of the pandemic on the development and etc.

Contact information of about 40 wineries was searched, most of which are members of the "Gvino Bolnisi" association. 25 respondents participated in the survey. Wineries are divided into the following categories in Kvemo Kartli (**Diagram 1**).

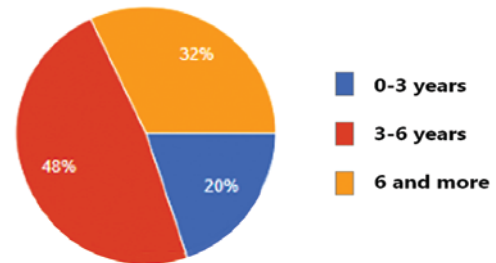
Diagram 1. Which category of wine industry do you belong to:



According to the research, most of the owners of wineries have 3-6 years of experience in wine tourism, they noted that this direction of tourism is gradually becoming popular in our country. Kvemo Kartli wine-

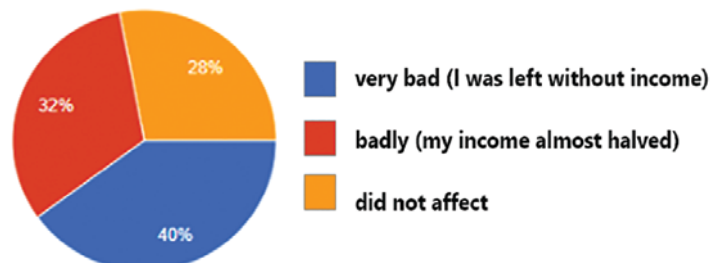
making is also involved in wine tourism, like the Kakheti region (**Diagram 2**).

Diagram 2. How many years have you been working in the wine tourism market?



The results of the study reveal that the period of the Covid pandemic brought negative consequences to wine cellars on their activities. Almost all of them mentioned that the pandemic prevented their development, therefore they are in the stage of recovery. It is also worth noting that the family wineries that are now taking steps in the wine market and developing have survived the negative impact of the pandemic (**Diagram 3**).

Diagram 3. How the situatuon created by the pandemic has affected your business:

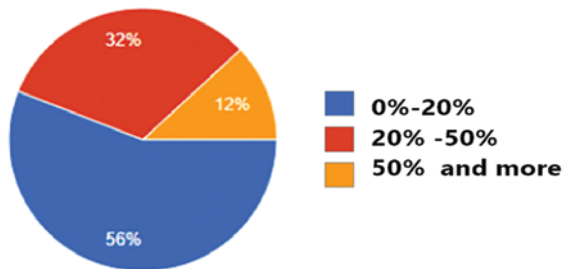


The majority of interviewed winemakers have grown several types of vines, among which the Rkatsiteli variety stands out. It should be noted that several of them also have organic wine or buy grapes grown with organic fertilizers and then produce the wines themselves. About 65% of winemakers have a Kvevri in their cellar. Winemakers use oak barrels for aging the wines. They drew attention to the lack of resources needed for winemaking and the lack of funding from the state in this regard. The majority of winemakers make wine using the Georgian method. A very small part is involved in the "Wine Road" project and they expressed their desire to be part of this project. According to the results of the research, the Vlinds believe that Kvemo Kartli has a great potential for the development of agrotourism.

It should be noted that, in addition to viticulture and winemaking, they are also interested in the cultivation of grain crops, gardening, beekeeping and animal husbandry. In order to promote their own wine, small entrepreneurs actively participate in wine festivals held in different regions of Georgia. Almost 60% of respondents participated in the "Wine Days in Georgia" event held this year. The results of the research revealed that winemakers sell wine in approximately three ways:

1. Locally – which constitutes about 20% of production sold. Buyers are wine tourism participants or private stakeholders and companies. They also sell the grapes (Diagram 4).

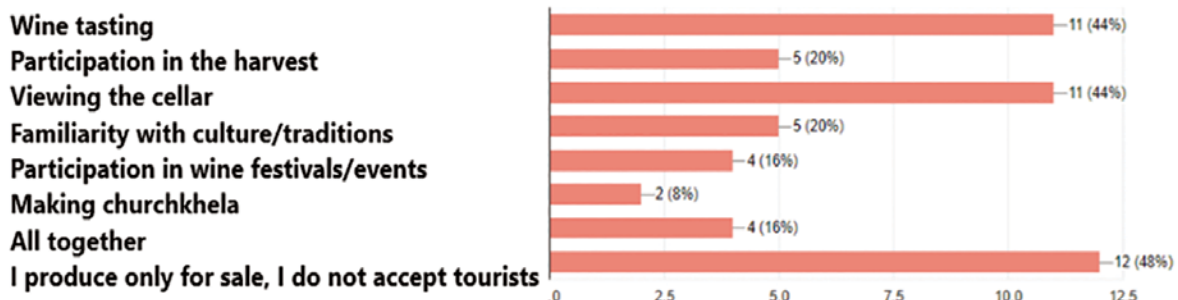
Diagram 4. What is the number of bottles sold in your winery territory:



2. Export – wine from the Kvemo Kartli region is exported to the following countries: Australia, China, Belgium, America, Italy, Poland. Some of the surveyed wineries are currently negotiating for export.
3. Sale of wine in the capital city – achieved through hotels and markets.

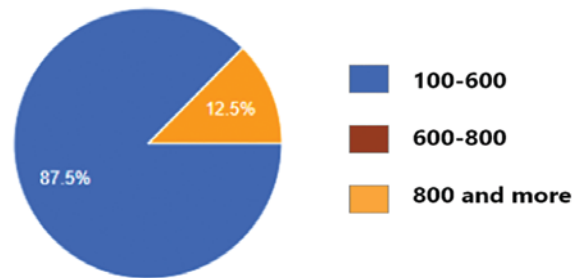
Diagram 6.

### What events do you offer to tourists participating in wine tourism



Wine tourism has been successfully established in the Kvemo Kartli region, but most of the winemakers say that they cannot provide accommodations for the visitors. The wineries we researched can receive about 100 to 600 tourists per year (Diagram 5).

Diagram 5. Approximately how many tourists visit you per year:



The old German quarter in the municipality of Bolnisi is distinguished by its hospitality of German visitors, the number of tourists here exceeds 800 annually. Winemakers actively cooperate with Georgian tourist agencies, the average daily cost of a tour is 150 GEL. In the German cellar, you can taste more than three types of local wines, and they also offer chacha. Some of the winemakers are interested in the satisfaction of tourists and have developed special customer surveys. In addition to wine tasting, the services for tourists include breakfast and dinner, participation in the harvest, visiting the cellar and getting to know the traditions. (Diagram 6).

Diagram 7.

**in what direction should the state support for wine tourism be activated:**

**By developing infrastructure in rural areas  
providing long-term and low-interest loans  
with staff training**

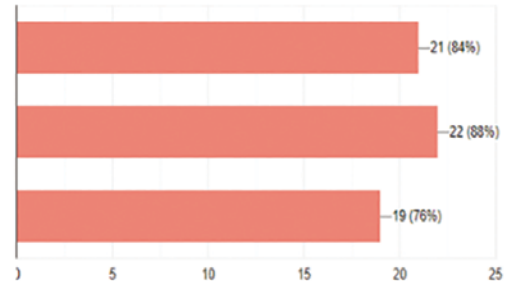
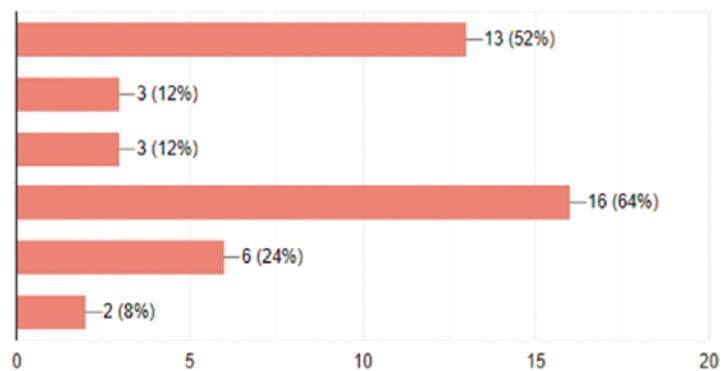


Diagram 8.

**What means do you use for PR of your enterprise:**

**Social networks  
advertisement  
conferences  
Participation in wine events  
all together  
no one**

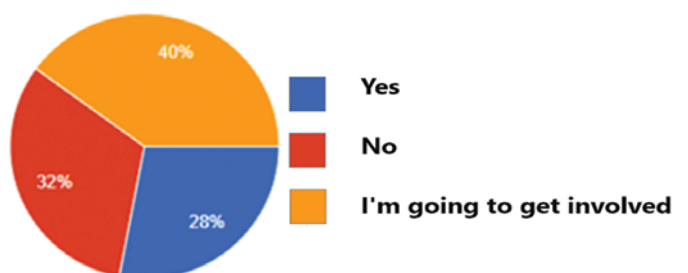


Wine tourism is developing in the country, wine tours are carried out with the participation of professional wine guides and sommeliers, but 84% of family wineries owners try to provide wine tours themselves with the help of their family members. When asked in which direction the state support for wine tourism should be activated, the majority of respondents favor the direction of long-term and low-interest loans, since many financial problems were revealed during the interview (Diagram 7).

Research shows that the best way for winery owners to promote their businesses and products is to participate in wine festivals, followed by advertising on social networks. It should be noted that it was quite difficult to find wineries using social networks, some of them do not have their own page or, if they do, do not share new informations regularly (Diagram 8).

Regarding the "Wine Road" project, it was determined that "in March 2020, the project includes 211 objects – family wineries and enterprises, where there are certain wine-related services for tourists. As for the involvement of wineries in the region, this is the situation in this project (Diagram 9).

Diagram 9. Are you involved in the "Wine Road" project.



As for the awareness of tourism opportunities in rural areas, the representatives of small family wine cellars in the Kvemo Kartli region have the same opinion, the awareness is very low, according to them, this is due to the fact that information about the region is not disseminated, and many people do not even know that excellent quality wine is produced in Kvemo Kartli with other products. In terms of employment, there is a great opportunity for employment in the field of agro-tourism, everyone agrees, they employ people interested in this business.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we note that the role of the small family wineries in the development of wine tourism is growing quite a bit. It was revealed that the cost of the tours ranges from 50 to 100 GEL, which is quite affordable for foreign tourists. The wine tour offered by the local winemakers is quite informative and a good way to get to know the culture/traditions of the country. Family wineries strive to offer quality and diverse services to visitors. Most of them add services such as: overnight stay, sightseeing in Kvemo Kartli, participation in the harvest and others. Small wineries will help raise awareness of wine tourism in the region. It will increase employment opportunities for locals, which will also lead to the development of the touristic infrastructure. Also, in accordance with the need, the shortage of qualified personnel will be eliminated on the spot and winemakers will have the opportunity to hire professional guides/sommeliers to conduct quality wine tours and also solve the problem of communication with foreign tourists so that they will be much more competitive in the international market of wine tourism. Wine tourism in the services and products of fundamental research will help the wine tourism of private business owners to better explore the market, to see what risks are associated.

From the side of the state, it is important to develop an ad-hoc strategy for to manage wine tourism. Wine tourism needs to be considered as a part of the national tourism and to be taken into account in the rural development policy. The state's participation in the development of domestic wine tourism can be expressed as follows:

- Small wineries should be assisted in obtaining low-interest loans.

- They should help export wine abroad.
- The infrastructure should be organized both in the region as a whole and in private family wineries.
- Cellars should be supplied with necessary the necessary resources.
- It is necessary to join the majority of wineries in the "Wine Road" project, as the membership of this project will bring many benefits to the wineries.
- It is necessary to retrain local personnel. Specifically, training the local population in the direction of service, sales and hospitality.
- A vocational college should be built where agricultural activities and viticulture will be studied.
- Attracting high-income tourists and producing the highest quality wine. People in the modern world pay special attention to ecologically clean wine.
- Encouraging small entrepreneurs, if we look at the tourism market today, it can be seen that large wine companies are trying to buy vineyards themselves, develop farms, have accommodation and offer services to tourists in full consideration of all packages, which on the other hand has a negative impact on small entrepreneurs and unique wineries currently operating in all regions of Georgia.

The conceptual framework of wine tourism includes the history of the homeland of wine, the pitcher, both large and small wineries, vineyards, cultural heritage and traditions, as well as those involved in wine tourism, local people, touristic companies and others. Wine tourism is a complex direction, modern challenges should be taken into account in its development without forgetting that the development of small wineries in the regions should be promoted alongside it. The development of wine tourism is a way to save small wineries and, accordingly, preserve the variety of Georgian wines. Wine tourism is an effective means of demonstrating one's own culture. Wine tourism itself includes knowledge of local culture. It is a multiplier of national income growth, employment, local infrastructure and people's standard of living.

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