

History of Wine Tourism in Serbia

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Abstract

With regard to the history of wine tourism, all recent literature has presented it as a young branch of tourism that has been developing intensively at the end of the 20th century. It is believed that the roots of wine tourism originate from France, while the first commercial wine tours were organized in California. When it comes to Serbia, few researches point out that wine tourism has been developing since the 1990s, and that the pioneers of that endeavour are two wineries in Šumadija: Aleksandrović and Radovanović. However, historical facts show otherwise. Wine tourism has existed in Serbia for more than 120 years, while its beginnings go back more than 155 years. This paper, created by researching the path of the Constantinople Wine Route, is an overview of currently available historical material that aims to prove the above mentioned and it is the first of its kind in Serbia. More precisely, this paper presents the first written overview of wine tourism history in Serbia.

Keywords: *History of wine tourism in Serbia, Constantinople Wine Route, Serbian Wine Tourism Day*

Introduction

Exploring the path of the Constantinople Wine Route, its wine history, grape varieties and significance for Serbian viticulture, very interesting discovery was made (Maksimović et al., 2019). Wine tourism, in accordance with all its postulates and definitions, has existed in Serbia for 120 years and even more. Having in mind all political and war events that have affected Serbia since time immemorial, it is clear that nothing, not even wine tourism could have had continuity. For this reason, this (and not only this) branch of tourism has developed periodically from the beginning. However, although we can talk about the elements of wine tourism in years that preceded 1899, we can say with certainty that wine tourism in a form acceptable by absolutely all definitions, has existed in Serbia for more than 120 years.

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Wine tourism is mostly mentioned as a young branch of tourism that has been developing intensively in the last decades of the 20th century. If wine professionals as a small but very important category of tourists are neglected, the thesis that wine tourism belongs to a newer branch of tourism may be considered correct. This attitude, however, raises a number of questions, among which the first and most important is: can professionals be neglected as tourists? Of course not, because, just like in other branches of tourism, there are special categories of tourists in wine tourism, some of them are top professionals, the others are people who follow trends or passers-by. The high degree of growth of interest in wine tourism in recent years makes this branch of tourism very attractive and above all profitable. Therefore, countries such as Italy, France, Spain, New Zealand, America, Australia and the like, which are being recognized in the global market as countries with a highly developed wine sector, take this segment of tourism seriously, which is proved by numerous laws governing this area, development strategies, infrastructure projects, etc. On July 22, 2019, the Association of Winemakers and Winegrowers of Serbia was registered in Belgrade, which, among other things, aims to develop Program for the development of the wine sector for next ten years, and within that the Program for the Development of Wine Tourism in Serbia (www.savezvinara.rs/dokumenti). The professionals have really high expectations from this program and how realistic it is going to remain to be seen.

Starting from the fact that history is a teacher of life, and present and future are based on its experiences and knowledge, and that by the nature of things it is especially important when talking about tourism, as logical, the question arises: how much is actually known about history of wine tourism in Serbia? Wine tourism is generally observed as a young branch of tourism, whose beginnings are mostly related to the second half or even the very end of the 20th century. The exception is possibly wine tourism in France, which is believed to have started to develop long before the 20th century (Westering, Niel, 2003). However, all these allegations have one thing in common; the lack of clear, precise and directly cited sources (Colombini, 2015; Jević et al., 2020; Gmelch, 2011; Hita, Swartz, 2014; Tasić, 2016; Terziyska, Georgiev, 2014; Jević, 2019; Joksimović, 2012). For this reason, after a detailed review of all available sources, this paper sets a precedent in the current interpretation of historical facts, and presents a chronological overview of the most important events in the field of wine tourism in Serbia, in the period from 1864 to this day, in which the first indications of the wine tourism in Serbia could be recognized.

Wine tourism and wine tourists - definitions

In many definitions of wine tourism, the simplest and most complete was given by Hall and associates within the study "Wine tourism in the World", which explains: "Wine tourism represents a visit to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine exhibitions, where wine tasting and/or the experience of the wine-growing region is the primary motive for the trip" (Hall et al., 2009). According to the definition of the South Australian Tourism Commission, "wine tourism is any experience related to wineries or wine production in which the visitor participates during a one-day visit or longer stay (Sharma, 2005). Further, Getz, one of the most respected theorists of wine tourism, defines it as "a journey associated with the attractiveness of wineries and wine-growing areas, destination development, direct sales opportunities and marketing for the wine industry (Getz, Brown, 2006).

Also, there are many definitions and divisions of wine tourists that indicate who wine tourists really are and what constitutes their primary motive for the travel when it comes to the

wine tourism segment. Some of them are very creative, but one thing is for sure, wine tourists are visitors to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and other similar events, who have different motives for that. Exactly these motives place them in one of the three simplest explained categories (Pivac, 2012):

1. Casual or curious wine tourists – who embark on a wine tourism venture without any expectations and prior knowledge, and with the desire to experience something new. Such wine tourists are often part of a group, so they come to the winery more out of the need not to disturb the plan and wishes of the majority.
2. Interested wine tourists – their main motive for travelling is to learn more about the winery/region, purchase some bottles that cannot be found in shops in their area and have one more experience. These are people who occasionally enjoy a glass or two of wine, so a visit to the winery/region is an opportunity to learn more about their favourite label, type or style of wine.
3. Devotees, i.e. professionals – wine tourists who quite consciously embark on the search for new knowledge. This category of wine tourists understands visiting wineries as part of their job and continuous work on themselves. They visit wineries at least once a year with the idea and need to get to know new vintages, production technology, specifics of the year, terroir and similar.

In any case, wine tourism is important for wineries because it enables higher sales “on the doorstep”, direct communication with consumers, consumer education, a way to test new products, facilitates the creation of a brand strategy and similar. When it comes to the development of the destination, a larger number of visitors also means higher consumption, contributes to the creation of a good image in the public, and prolongs the tourist season. For the local community, wine tourism means a larger volume of investments, primarily in transport infrastructure, initiates new service accommodation, cultural and entertainment facilities, and the feeling of local pride that reduces the depopulation of rural areas is not negligible.

Data collection

This paper presents an overview of all documents, newspaper articles and other archival materials found so far, available in the Archives of Serbia, depots of the University Library “Svetozar Marković” in Belgrade and the Museum in Smederevo. Much of the material has been digitalized and could be accessed through the web platform of the mentioned library. Most sources on the history of wine tourism in Serbia were found on the pages of the illustrated paper for the land economy “Težak”, which was published continuously from 1869 to 1941 by the Society for the land economy from Belgrade. An important part of the data was also found on the pages of the newspaper “Novinesrbske”, its first issue was published in Kragujevac in 1834 edited by Dimitrije Davidović, one of the most educated Serbs of the time. A year later, from 1835, the newspaper was published in Belgrade, in 1845 it changed its name to “Serbske novine”, while from 1869 it was published under the name “Srpske novine”. Digitalized, the newspaper can still be read today on the website of the University Library “Svetozar Marković” in Belgrade. Editions of the newspaper “Politika” from its founding in 1904 to 1941 have also been used for the purposes of writing this paper, but they can only be used in the reading rooms of the National Library of Serbia and are not available online.

The first written traces of wine tourism of Serbia

People are familiar with the long history of viticulture in Serbia. However, when we talk about wine tourism, the information found in previous research is extremely incomplete. For example, the common view is that “wine tourism is relatively new form of tourism in Serbia, considering the fact that it has begun to develop more intensively in the last decade” (Jević, 2019). Also, attitudes such as this one is common, according to which “wineries and private cellars have started to engage in wine tourism in an organized way in the late 1990s” (Joksimović, 2012). However, situation seems to be completely different. The beginnings of wine tourism happened much earlier and there is solid evidence for this claim.

In fact, the pioneering steps in the development of wine tourism in Serbia were made by the ruling prince Mihailo Obrenović himself. It was recorded that on October 1, 1864, on his return from Kragujevac he arrived in Smederevo “where he spent the night, and then the next day went to harvest his vineyard, which was attended by all the gentlemen counselors and other ministers”, and that “they spent the whole day in greatest joy and fun” (Srbskenovine, 1864). The following autumn, “Prince Mihailo, with his ministers and other invited guests, went to Smederevo to harvest his vineyards.” According to the newspaper “Vidovdan”, number 171, dated September 28, 1866, during the autumn of the same year “Prince Mihailo prepared lunch for several guests in his Smederevo vineyard and spent a few days there” (Cvetković, 2012).

The next information about the guests in the vineyard of Obrenović can be found in the form of a list of guests who were invited to Smederevo to harvest grapes. The list was compiled by the representative of the court marshal, Major Dragutin Fransović, on September 15, 1882, on the initiative of the Queen Natalija Obrenović (Cvetković, 2012).

In the same year 1882, the first appearance of phylloxera was registered in Serbia, in Smederevo vineyards, and the Smederevo winegrowers were among the first to start to fight against the disease (Miletić, 2009). In order to help renew the vineyards, the state established the first vine nursery in Smederevo.

The fact that “The first national public meeting of winemakers in Serbia”, which was held in Niš on St. Trifun and Sretenje, on February 1 and 2, 1889 (at that time, the Julian calendar was still used), was quite pompously announced at that time and testifies that viticulture was considered a serious branch of economy. At the meeting it was discussed how to increase revenues from sale of wine, the new vine grafted on American rootstock thanks to which Serbia was slowly recovering from phylloxera, the export of wine to foreign markets, ways of associating winemakers and many other problems that affected the grape growers and winemakers of the time (Težak, 1889).

Agricultural exhibitions were an integral part of the economic life in Serbia at that time, and they also had the support of the authorities and state institutions. Thus, the “First Smederevo Grape Exhibition” was organized in Smederevo from September 26 to 29, 1899 (Srpskenovine, 1899; Težak, 1899). The initiative for the exhibition was given by the manager of the Smederevine nursery, and it was supported by Smederevo winegrowers and the Ministry of National Economy (Miletić, 2009). The reason and motive for organizing this exhibition was to show the results achieved by Smederevo winegrowers in the restoration of vineyards on an American rootstock, after the devastation with phylloxera. According to the journalists who announced the event as “arranging restored vineyards, they are really a practical school for all those who want to start renovating vineyards (Težak, 1899). A gathering of winegrowers was organized so that other winegrowers could see the results and hear at first-hand about new knowledge

regarding the renewal of vineyards. On the second day of the Exhibition, about 200 winegrowers attended the mentioned gathering. After the meeting, there was a trip to the vineyard of King Aleksandar Obrenović, which was 45 minutes walk away from the city centre. Guests were welcomed by the administrator of Krunska dobra (Crown goods), Joca Pavlović, and the winegrower Todor Nikolić, who showed them the vineyards and the cellar and demonstrated the work of the new grape press. In the end, the guests tasted the wines (Težak, 1899). According to the same source, the next day, on September 28, 1899, visits were made to smaller producers of grapes and wine.

It was noted that the first exhibition was well attended, and that there were many residents of the area around Smederevo, but also from Belgrade. After this one, according to the similar scenario, exhibitions were organized periodically in 1901, 1910, 1929, 1930, 1932, and in 1936. According to reports in the daily and periodical press, each of the following exhibitions was more successful in terms of the number of visitors, but also in terms of organizational issues (Miletić, 2009).

From the above mentioned, it can be concluded that Smederevo was in a way the capital of wine tourism in Serbia, but it was not the only place that wine enthusiasts visited. Namely, in 1903, in the village Banja, not far from Arandjelovac, the Venčac Viticulture Cooperative was founded, which was the first viticulture cooperative in Serbia. Well organized from the start, the cooperative achieved numerous successes in terms of business organization, assort-

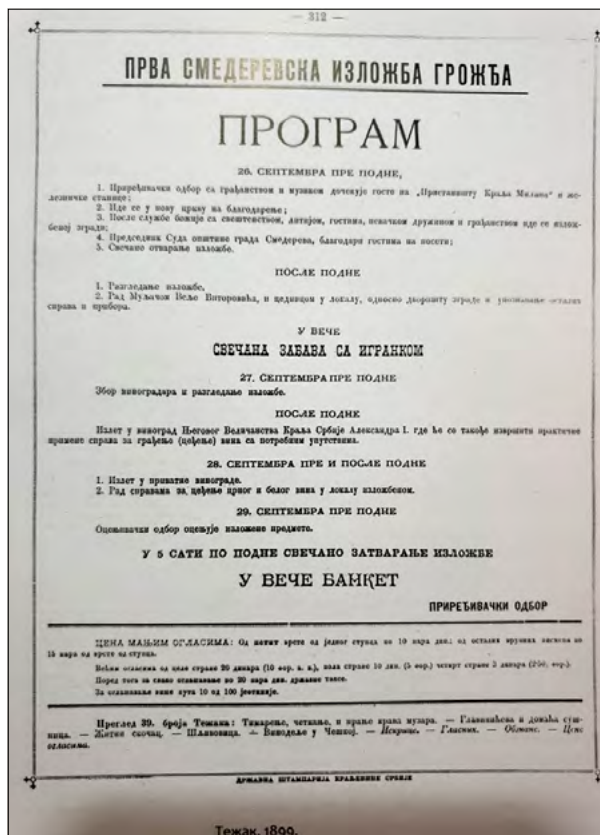


Figure 1. Program of the First Smederevo Grape Exhibition

Source: Tezak, No. 39, 1899.

ment and quality of wine, but also in many other things. However, in terms of wine tourism, the first group of visitors was received by the Venčac viticulture cooperative in the autumn of 1908. They were participants in the first wine course for winemakers, held in the premises of the cooperative cellar in the period from September 15 to November 15, 1908 (Mitrović, 2006).

Further information about the wine tourism in Serbia can be recognized in the writings of "Politika" (1910), which reported that "the Smederevo grape exhibition, in 1910, was visited by King Petar I Karadjordjević with prince Djordje. They were accompanied by Nikola Pašić and other ministers."

In August 1926, the All-Slavic Agricultural Assembly was held in Banja, near Arandjelovac. This meeting was attended by several delegates from Slavic countries: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and others, and there were dozens of domestic guests. As the newspaper "Selo" reported, on that occasion, more than a hundred guests visited the Venčac Viticulture Cooperative (Mitrović, 2006).

After the First World War, the Smederevo exhibition of grapes and wine was organized in October 1929, and "Politika" reported that "Smederevo grapes is the best and most famous table grapes in our country, and especially this year it is exported a lot (Politika, 1929).

The following year, on October 5 and 6, 1930, on the occasion of marking the 500th anniversary of the Smederevo Fortress, a large agricultural exhibition was organized, which included an exhibition of grapes, wine and fruit (Miletić, 2009). According to "Politika" the exhibition attracted a lot of attention, and over 100 winegrowers, mostly members of the Smederevo Viticulture Cooperative exhibited their products (Politika, 1930).

Two years later, on September 25 to 18, 1932, the Serbian Agricultural Society from Belgrade joined the organization of the Exhibition, with the aim of showing visitors a great variety of wine and table grape varieties grown in Smederevo. On the same exhibition "National Conference on Grapes was held with the participation of experts from various wine-growing regions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia" (Miletić, 2009). The exhibition consisted of three parts: grapes, fruit, wine and brandy. According to newspaper reports, the exhibition held in 1932 was the most visited until then and had more than 10.000 visitors.

Three years later, on November 7, 1935, "Politika" reported that about 50.000 people visited Venčac Cooperative during that year (Mitrović, 2006).

When it comes to Smederevo and the Smederevo exhibition of grapes and wine, all those years guests arrived in Smederevo by boat, on foot, by train and carriage. It was also noted that the passengers from Banat came to the bank of the Danube, from where a specially organized steamer transported them across the river. For the first time, in 1936, visitors arrived in Smederevo using the services of the tourist association "Putnik", which organized a one-day trip from Novi Sad and Belgrade. Also, for the first time, in addition to government representatives, the exhibition was visited by French parliamentarians who were received and hosted by the major of the municipality dr Živadin Stefanović Somborac. The guests arrived in Smederevo on a separate ship "King Aleksandar", and returned to Belgrade the same evening. It is interesting to point out that, according to available data, the entrance to the Exhibition Pavilion was charged for the first time that year, and the ticket price was 2 dinars (Miletić, 2009).

As it was mentioned earlier in this paper, Venčac viticultural cooperative was the first viticulture cooperative in Serbia and was founded in 1903. Six years later, as the second in a row, on May 20, 1909, the Smederevo Viticultural Cooperative was registered. Both viticultural cooperatives were an important factor in the development of tourism, and their cellars were inevitably visited by all visitors to Smederevo and Arandjelovac. This attitude was also supported by the text in "Glas podunavlja" (1928) in which the journalist singles out the Cellar of

the Smederevo Viticultural Cooperative and the Smederevo Fortress as two key tourist attractions in that city. In the report for the year 1938 it was stated that the Smederevo Viticultural Cooperative was visited that year by professors and students of the college from Cluj in Romania, as well as several tourists from Germany and Hungary.

In July 1940, the Venčac Viticultural Cooperative was visited by the USSR envoy Plodnikov. On that occasion, the president of the Cooperative, Mihailo Stojić, introduced the guest to the number of winegrowers, the areas under the vineyards, the yield and assortment of grapes, but also the successes and achievement of the cooperative. The newspaper “Zemljoradnička zadruža” dedicated two pages to this event, and it was noted that the guests visited the plants, as well as that they were treated to wine and snacks (Mitrović, 2006).

The period of the Second World War was one of those difficult and bad turning points for Serbian viticulture. Unlike the consequences that Serbia suffered after the liberation from the Turks, the Balkan War, and then the First World War, after that last great war, it was difficult for Serbian viticulture to recover. The legal regulations were such that the winegrowers gave up that branch of agriculture, plucked the vineyards and looked for more profitable solutions. National Wine Cellar – NAVIP was founded, with the idea of mass purchase of grapes and wine production. Mass production led to the detriment of quality, so there was a long period of stagnation in Serbian viticulture. Political changes and the re-establishment of the private economic sector have brought changes in the entire economy. Vineyards have been replanted, old family productions have been revived and new modern wineries have been built. Wine tourism have been re-established in the last years of the 20th century and especially at the beginning of the 21st century, when two wineries: “Aleksandrović” in the village Vinča near Oplenac and “Radovanović” from the village Krnjevo not far from Smederevska Palanka, opened their cellars to tourists. In 2010, following the example of the world, Serbia got its first wine routes. At the initiative of the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development of the Republic of Serbia, nine wine roads of Serbia were established and marked with vertical road signs (www.vin-skiputevisrbije.rs/projekti). In 2015, two international wine routes were certified by Council of Europe: “Roman Emperors” and “Danube Wine Route”, which put Serbia on the international maps of wine tourism (www.romanemperorsroute.org). In 2018, at the initiative of small wineries from the south of Serbia, the Association of Women and Wine proposed a new wine route called simply “Constantinople Wine Route” (www.zeneivino.com/kolumne/vinske-staze/constantinople-wine-route). The Constantinople Wine Route (CWR) relies on its incomparably older predecessor, the Constantinople Road, in name and historical significance. Originally built by the Romans, in the year 33 AD, in the Middle Ages it became an important trade road that connected two continents, Asia and Europe. In recent history, this route has been known to the general public as Corridor 10. It begins at Belgrade and ends at today’s Istanbul (Constantinople in the past). Wine, gastronomy, and all other tourist facilities have been added to the old Constantinople Road, making it an attractive tourist route.

It is noticeable that the paper lacks data related to two Serbian autonomous provinces: Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija. The reasons can be found in the lack of data in the archives reviewed so far, which also opens up new fields of research. It is similar with two wine regions, which are very important for Serbia: Negotin and Župa. Unlike the provinces, Negotin and Župa, although they certainly have a long viticulture tradition, primarily due to their geographical position and distance from the main roads, most likely did not have a developed wine tourism in the past.

Conclusion

By logical thinking and comparison of problems of Serbian viticulture and winemaking, in the past and now, it can be concluded that for over 120 years, since the wine tourism was founded in Serbia, things have not changed seriously. Although organizationally registered differently, winemakers still deal with the same topics as those at the “First National Public Assembly of Winemakers in Serbia” held in 1889 in Niš. The problems caused by the presence of phylloxera in Europe have been solved by grafting grapevines to resistant rootstock, but modern winemakers are facing more and more pronounced climate changes and problems in the vineyard that they bring. Among other things, climate changes are increasingly influencing decisions regarding the choice of assortment, technology and even the ratio of blending. For the same reason, traditionally good areas for growing white grapes (which is conditioned by a slightly colder climate) today, testify the importance and nature of climate change for the quality of wine. For example, the traditionally colder Fruška gora, once famous for its numerous indigenous varieties of white grapes and quality white wines, today also produces top-quality red wines that prove their quality by winning numerous awards around the world.

Furthermore, glass bottles are today a standard that is simply taken for granted, but solutions are still being sought for the continuous growth of wine quality, better individual and collective placement of Serbian wines both in the country and abroad. As one of the most important conclusions of the mentioned cooperatives from 1889, there was a recommendation for the association of winemakers in cooperatives. History has shown that this way of associating gave significant results, and it remains unclear to common sense why it was allowed for cooperatives to be almost completely devalued at the end of the 20th century. Fortunately, recognizing the need and advantages of association, and collective performance in foreign markets, with the systematic and legislative support of the state, winegrowers and winemakers are being reunited. To be frank, there are still few cooperatives, but that is why today in wine-growing Serbia, regional associations occupy a significant place. These associations are founded on the initiative of the state, primarily for the protection of geographical origin, but also for resolving other systematic issues. At the moment, there are 12 regional associations of winemakers and winegrowers in Serbia.

When it comes to wine tourism, things are significantly better. In Serbia today, there are a lot of wineries that have the capacity for the development of wine tourism. The Smederevo grape exhibition is still held every autumn, while Smederevo and Venčac cooperatives, as pioneers of wine tourism, are practically non-existent. On the other hand, Serbia can be proud to have numerous events dedicated to wine (and significantly less to viticulture), which still attract a large number of visitors. The structure of wine tourists has changed significantly from the past one (Tomić et al., 2017). While 100 or more years ago they were mostly professionals and significantly less curious people, in recent times the situation has been almost completely reversed. Wineries, wine events and manifestations today are mostly visited by wine lovers, while professionals are present in much smaller numbers. Although far from perfect, the road infrastructure is significantly better, so the wineries can be more easily accessed regardless of the distance from major city centres. Today, it is easy to organize visits to wineries for closed groups and individual visitors with their own transport. However, wineries which are located in rural areas remain difficult to access for tourists using exclusively public transport.

The research of wine tourism in Serbia and the path of the Constantinople Wine Route, as well as its wine past (Maksimović et al., 2019; Pivac, 2012; Cvetković, 2012; Miletić, 2009; Mitrović, 2006; Težak, 1869-1941; Srbske novine, 1834-1919; Politika, 1904-1941), led to histor-

ical facts which were unknown, but are significant to professional and scientific public. This paper is the result of these discoveries and it for the first time presents the facts about the centuries-old existence of wine tourism in Serbia. It is the fact that the first elements of wine tourism are found in 1864, when Prince Mihailo Obrenović invited guests to harvest in his vineyard in Smederevo. Following the same model, exclusively at the invitation of the prince, the harvests were solemnly visited and celebrated in years to come, as well as during the reign of his ruling heirs. On the other hand, the first real forms of wine tourism, which correspond to all definitions of wine tourism and have continuity and the principle of an open invitation for visit for all interested groups and individuals, can be precisely dated to September 28, 1899, when there was organized a first joint visit to the vineyards and the cellar of Villa Obrenović, at the time the summer castle of King Aleksandar Obrenović. Since then, visits to vineyards and wine cellars became common both during the manifestations and independently of them. With the founding of the Venčac Viticultural Cooperative in 1903 and six years later the Smederevo Viticultural Cooperative, wine tourism gained special importance and showed a growth trend until the beginning of the Second World War. The war-torn country, the reduced number of working-age population and the worst policies led to the almost complete devastation of the Serbian wine sector. In the last decade of the 20th century, political changes in the country once again made private initiative possible, and Serbian viticulture, winemaking and wine tourism are experiencing a renaissance. Today, Serbia is becoming an increasingly visible and recognizable wine region in the world, primarily thanks to top quality wines (www.themanual.com/food-and-drink/serbian-wine-guide). One proof of this is the first ever platinum medal for a Serbian wine (Omnibus Lector 2015, Erdevik winery) at Decanter World Wine Competition, a major international wine competition, awarded in 2020 (www.decanter.com/decanter-world-wine-awards/dwwa-2020-platinum-wines-the-97-point-medal-winners-444802)

Wine tourism is developing, following trends and becoming one of the most attractive branches of tourism which, in addition to wine, promotes the culture and tradition of Serbs and other nations living in this area (Jević et al., 2020; Sekulić et al., 2016; Maksimović et al., 2019; Kosić et al., 2017; Ivkov-Dzigurski, 2010). With the establishment of the Association of Winegrowers and Winemakers of Serbia, starts the work on creating the first Program for the development of the wine sector, which should include wine tourism. Inspired by the knowledge presented in this paper, the Association of Women and Wine, at its regular annual session held at the beginning of 2020, made a decision to declare the last Saturday of September, the Day of Wine Tourism of Serbia, which would further promote this branch of tourism in years to come (www.zeneivino.com/u-fokusu/vesti/120-godina-vinskog-turizma-u-srbiji).

The lack of the paper is recognized only in the existence of an abundance of archival material that has not been reviewed yet. On the other hand, the same imperfection leaves room for further research that will certainly be triggered by this paper.

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