Preconditions of Wine Tourism Development in Slovenia and the Czech Republic – Selected Aspects

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Abstract: Wine tourism is considered to be niche tourism. The synergy of tourism and viticulture, which has become a significant phenomenon, is the focus of interest not only in European countries but also in other parts of the world. Old World wine regions have been inspired by the recognized and remarkable practices of New World wine producers. Two small wine producing countries, Slovenia and the Czech Republic were chosen for a study of tourism concerning grape growing and wine production. The countries appear to be very similar and share many similarities, for instance, in wine tourism development, and wine production tradition but also with the size of the vineyard area. However, these two countries are not renowned as leading wine producers. This, therefore, is a problem when endeavoring to attract potential visitors, customers, and the public in general. This paper focuses on introducing the above countries as wine destinations and illustrating their common characteristics. Methods such as description and comparison are presented to show the trends and strategies used to sustain wine tourism in small wine countries. Slovenia and the Czech Republic are countries with a long winemaking tradition. Drinking wine or wine tasting is seen by wine visitors as a social activity, often accompanied by authentic local food amid rural surroundings and natural landscapes. Above all, this paper draws attention to two small wine-producing countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

Wine production, culture and traditions are deeply entrenched not only in well-known and large wine countries such as Italy, France, and Spain but also in smaller countries, especially in the wine regions of the Old World, where vineyards and wine settlements were established as the first wine-growing areas. They founded most of the common practices and conventions related to winemaking. Although the local tradition of winemaking has a long history, this does not mean that the level and development of other concurrent and complementary sectors are the same today. Wine processing, distribution and sales, complementary services and products, hospitality, collaboration, sustainability and respect for nature are aspects that every winery has had to deal with to some extent so far. In a broader sense, these aspects can be called a form of heritage. As described by Ramírez-Guerrero et al. (2021), the concept of heritage is a human construction that can change depending on the historical and social context. They divide this concept into three dimensions: culture, history, and nature. Heritage is often associated with history, tradition, identity, or authenticity and delineates an area where its use is meaningful. Therefore, it is also used to refer to a wine region or country. However, heritage is also associated with other areas such as tourism, geography, communication or marketing. Thus wine tourism can be presented as products, services and activities related to viticulture and wine production in a delimited area such as a wine region. Wine, tourism and related activities have been integrated into the wine business and

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Keywords: Wine tourism development; Old World wine regions; Wine destination; Heritage; Traditions
marketing in several wine destinations (Jurinčič & Bojnec, 2009; Kubát, 2021; Veselá & Malacka, 2015). Tourism is generally considered a tool for enhancing and preserving cultural assets and the territory for tourism and social development (Ramírez-Guerrero et al., 2021). Accordingly, wine tourism contributes to the preservation of wine culture and its tradition in the region by offering wine products and services and educating visitors.

The purpose of this paper is to present the state of the art of wine tourism in two Old World wine regions. The Czech Republic and Slovenia are presented with their un/common characteristics and turn out to be regions where wine has a long-standing tradition in society. These two countries were chosen because of their similarities in the development of wine culture and other aspects of wine, such as tourism, as will be shown. This case study presents aspects of wine tourism which, for the sake of clarity, are presented in a table for comparison. It also examines the trends and strategies used to support wine tourism in small wine countries. As Gačnik (2017) mentions, the wine culture and tourism visibility of a geographically small country, but abundant in heritage and traditions, should not depend on the quantity of wine sold on the market but should focus on the communication and experiences that a (wine) destination can offer.

2. THE CASE OF SLOVENIA

Viticulture has existed in Slovenia since the time of the Celts and Illyrian tribes (about 2,400 years ago), long before the Romans introduced viticulture to France and Spain. Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD), for example, mentions viticulture in Slovenia in Roman times. In the Middle Ages wine production was predominantly controlled by the Church through the monasteries. Under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, privately owned viticulture flourished. After the fall of the Empire and the establishment of Yugoslavia, there was a rapid decline (Sedlo, 2020). This was also due to the phylloxera insect epidemic which caused great damage to the vineyards elsewhere in Europe (National Wine Center, 2020). After the Second World War, vineyards were mainly concentrated in agricultural cooperatives focused on mass production, although there were also some private wine farms (Sedlo, 2020). In the socialist era, most private grape growers sold their grapes to their cooperative, which produced wine. The decisive year was 1991, which marked the transition from socialism to a market economy and in which Slovenia also became an independent country. Thus, there was a rapid development of private wineries. The relatively open cross-border situation between Slovenia and Italy (i.e., the neighboring Collio wine region) contributed significantly to technology transfer and market innovations (Jurinčič & Bojnec, 2009). In this context, certain wine districts such as Goriška Brda developed very quickly compared to other wine districts in the country (Gačnik, 2017). Since that time, the Slovenian wine industry has been the most advanced and developed of the former Yugoslav republics (Sedlo, 2020). When Slovenia gained its independence, a strong interest in local traditions and the development of tourism began in the countryside. The basis for this is the rich local heritage and culture, including wine culture (Gačnik, 2017).

Viticulture is divided into three wine-growing regions (vinorodne dežele) – in the northeast of the country the Drava Valley (Podravje/Land of the Drava), in the southeast the Lower Sava Valley (Posavje/Land of the Sava) and in the southwest the Primorska (The Littoral/Coastland). These three regions are divided into districts (see Table 1.), sub-districts, and wine villages (Evinice, 2022; Slovenia Estates, 2022). The Primorska wine-growing region has the warmest

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3 A trans-border appellation of origin between these neighboring wine regions (Collio-Brda) has begun in recent years.
climate of all the Slovenian wine-growing regions. It is the largest region accounting for almost 50% of total wine production. These selected aspects are further enhanced by the common border with Italy (Slovenia Estates, 2022). Wine categories are divided according to the sugar content of the must, similar to the Czech classification. In terms of wine legislation, Slovenia has a total of PDO\(^4\) wines and PGI\(^5\) wines. Slovenia is a member of the OIV\(^6\) and has a wine-growing area of 15.2 thousand hectares (in 2020, see Table 1), slightly smaller than the Czech Republic. The under-vine area has decreased by 32% in the last 24 years (Sedlo, 2020). Slovenian viticulture is unique in growing many old local varieties. Maribor is home to the oldest still-bearing grapevine in the world (Evinice, 2022), which is over 400 years old and therefore is recorded in the Guinness Book of Records (Žibert et al., 2020). The mayor of Maribor uses this wine obtained from the grape plant for protocol gifts (Kerma & Gačnik, 2015). In recent years, several attempts have been made to include it in the World Heritage List (Gačnik, 2017). In the EU, the Slovenian wine region of Primorska is classified into wine-growing zone C, while the regions of Posavje and Podravje are classified into wine-growing zone B (Sedlo, 2020).

Slovenian wines are of high quality, which is due to a large number of small Slovenian wine-makers (Evinice, 2022). Given the small population, wine consumption per person per year (age over 15 years) is relatively high, about 45 liters in recent years, but twenty years ago it was over 60 liters (Evinice, 2022; Sedlo, 2020). Compared to another source, an average Slovenian drank 35 liters of wine (or 46 bottles of wine) in the 2020-2021 marketing year, which is almost three liters per month (THE Slovenia, 2022). Almost all of the wine produced is also consumed in Slovenia (Sedlo, 2020). As mentioned in the Slovenia Wine guide (THE Slovenia, 2021), “There is one vineyard or winery for every 70 inhabitants in Slovenia.” Slovenians also use wine for other products such as wine vinegar, creams, soaps, liqueurs and spirits. In some parts of the country, viticulture and winemaking are part of daily life, for example, in the northeast of the country in the Štajerska region and the southeast in the Dolenjska region (Žibert et al., 2020). The most important markets for Slovenian wine is Germany, the US, Croatia, the Netherlands, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in recent years also the Czech Republic (GOV.SI, 2021). The average last five-year wine production (629 thousand hectoliters) is comparable to the Czech Republic (Sedlo, 2020).

Wine tourism in Slovenia has recently increased significantly (Jurinčič & Bojnec, 2009; Kerma & Gačnik, 2015). However, systematic development began as early as 1993 (Gačnik, 2017). One of the key development incentives was the establishment of wine tourist routes (WTR), at least in the infrastructural sense (Kerma, 2018). The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food introduced wine tourist routes to preserve not only wine production but also wine culture. Until 2000, development was moderate and fragmented, with different dynamics in different wine regions, but also with substantial differences in development within these regions in the wine districts (Gačnik, 2017). According to Žibert et al. (2020), wine is a component of many tourist activities in most municipalities of Slovenian wine regions. In many municipalities, there are documents related to development strategies for tourism. Mayors’ views on the use of wine for tourism promotion can show the importance of wine and tourism development. However, at the national level and in strategy documents, wine, winemaking and viticulture do not play a major role, despite the relative importance of the industry and the rich winemaking tradition.

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\(^{4}\) PDO (Protected Designation of Origin), in Slovenia denoted as ZOP (Zaščitena Označba Porekla), stands for a wine from which the grapes have to be 100% from one of the nine designated Slovenian districts.

\(^{5}\) For wine to be PGI designated (Protected Geographical Indication), in Slovenia it is denoted as PGP (Priznano Geografsko Poreklo), at least 85% has to come from one of the three Slovenian wine regions.

\(^{6}\) International Organization of Vine and Wine.
Slovenia is the only European country that combines the Alps, the Mediterranean, the Karst and the Pannonian Plain. Slovenia, as a green, active and healthy country, relies on its gastronomy, which is inseparable from its culture (IGCAT, 2019). This is one of the reasons why Slovenia was awarded the title of European Region of Gastronomy 2021 in 2018 (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2022). In this context, Kerma (2014) indicates that food and wine are complementary forms of tourism that lead to a related segment of the tourism market. Therefore, tourism can be considered a tool that connects tourists and countrymen with their cultures and traditions (Žibert et al., 2020).

The development of tourism in the villages of the Slovenian countryside sees this opportunity and the potential that arises from the richness of local traditions and customs. It is impossible to talk about Slovenian identity, culture and national consciousness without mentioning wine (Gačnik, 2017). The rather rigid situation in the global wine market dictates the integration or the intertwining of the activities of wine and tourism making them one common economy. Often and increasingly so, the mentioned sectors complement each other, resulting in the synergistic effects seen in the flourishing development of wine tourism regions. The development of wine tourism – even if it takes place in cities, as well as outside wine-growing areas – is in any case directly linked to rural development (Kerma, 2018).

3. THE CASE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The earliest archeological evidence of viticulture in the region dates back to Roman times when Emperor Marcus Aurelius Probus allowed the planting of vineyards north of the Alps. A wine knife was found in the now flooded village of Mušov below the Pálava Hills in the Moravian wine region (National Wine Center, 2020). Probably the oldest vineyards in the area were planted there. At the time of the Great Moravian Empire (9th century), many findings already indicate a well-developed wine industry. According to legend, in 892 the Great Moravian prince Svatopluk sent a barrel of Moravian wine to Czech prince Bořivoj, who then supported the first planting of vineyards in Bohemia (today a smaller Czech wine region). There are written records of the establishment of vineyards in Bohemia and Moravia dating from the 11th century. These are mostly deeds of donation and the foundation of monasteries. In the Middle Ages ownership of vineyards gradually passed from the church to the nobility and later to the burghers. From the 14th century onwards mountain laws were enacted to regulate the cultivation of vineyards in individual towns and villages. Vineyards are long-term crops that require a high initial investment and intensive annual maintenance, so their mortal enemy is war and economic crises. Therefore, periods of prosperity for viticulture have alternated with periods of misery. But the introduction of new diseases and pests at the beginning of the 20th century was no less negative. In particular, phylloxera destroyed most of the vineyards, but the First World War also had its impact. It took more than half a century for vineyards to recover from this, due in part to the changes in ownership associated with the advent of socialism after World War II (Sedlo, 2020). Great changes arose with the Wine Act of 1995 and its later harmonization with the legislation of the European Union upon our accession to the EU in 2004 (National Wine Center, 2020).

Viticulture is a traditional part of Czech agriculture. Although vineyards account for only one percent of cultivated agricultural land, wine-growing areas contribute significantly to shaping the typical character of the landscape (Lhotská, 2021). Viticulture is divided into two wine-growing regions (vinařské oblasti) – in the northwest of the country the Bohemian region and the southeast the Moravian region. These two wine regions are subsequently divided into six sub-regions (see Table 1.) and also into wine villages. Due to its landlocked position
in central Europe, the Czech Republic has a marginal and continental climate. The Moravian wine-growing region is the dominant and leading area of wine production in the country. It has also the warmest climate due to its southern location and it covers 96% of domestic wine production (National Wine Center, 2020). These aspects are further emphasized by the common border with Austria and its cross-border wine-growing region Lower Austria (Niederösterreich), specifically Weinviertel (Flamik, 2020). The Czech Republic is a member of the OIV and has a wine-growing area of 17.9 thousand hectares (in 2020, see Table 1) (Králíková et al., 2021), slightly bigger than Slovenia. Regarding the wine classification, the Czech Republic has the wine of origin (PDO, PGI) just like Slovenia (National Wine Center, 2020). Furthermore, Wines of Original Certification (WOC) was developed as a quality approval that reflects the region where the grapes come from and thus the evaluation of wines is carried out by the winemakers themselves as members of the relevant WOC association (Kubát, 2021). In the EU, the Czech wine region of Moravia is classified into wine-growing zone B, while the region of Bohemia is classified into wine-growing zone A (Sedlo, 2020).

Wine consumption in the Czech Republic is reported differently by different institutions. For example, the OIV gives a figure of 637 thousand hectoliters and 7.56 l/person/year for 1995, while the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) gives 15.4 l/person/year for the same year, which is more likely. The wine balance (production + imports - exports) shows an annual consumption in recent years of over 2 million hectoliters, which is over 20 l per person per year. This is also consistent with the figures given by the OIV and the MoA after 2007. The Czech Statistical Office works with a figure of 18.9 l/person/year for 2015. The OIV estimates consumption for the Czech Republic at 2.1-2.2 million hectoliters for the years 2015 to 2019, which is over 20 l/person/year (age over 15 years). This ranks the Czech Republic in 24th place in the world for wine consumption in 2019 (consumes less than 1% of the world’s wines), behind Austria and ahead of Greece. Within the 27 EU member states, it ranks 12th with 18.2 thousand hectoliters of vineyards in 2019, behind Croatia and ahead of Slovenia; see Table 1. The Czech Republic now has a ten-year average of 600 thousand hectoliters, placing it 13th in the EU countries for wine production in 2019 with 568 thousand hectoliters, behind Slovenia and ahead of Slovakia (Sedlo, 2020). Therefore, domestic wine production is insufficient to meet domestic demand for wine. Naturally, Czechs are inclined to travel rather within Europe and visit the wineries and vineyards of Germany, Italy and France as well as others thus stimulating wine consumption in these wine-growing regions (CBI, 2016).

The whole area of the Moravian wine-growing region represents vast and miscellaneous activities, attractions, and experiences not all directly bound up with wine but also with other forms of active tourism (Kubát, 2021). Wine tourism in the Czech Republic began to develop approximately 20 years ago while the crucial project was the establishment of wine (cycling) routes in 1999-2003 coordinated by the Partnership Foundation (Nadace Partnerství) and their ongoing development. This unique 1,200 km long network of marked cycling routes interweaves four Moravian wine sub-regions and involves 230 wine villages and towns. It consists of ten separate trails interconnected with the spinal eleventh Moravian Wine Trail (National Wine Center, 2020). To guarantee a high-quality service in the wine region regarding cycling routes a certificated system of service facilities has been implemented – cycling certification Cyclists Welcome (Cyklisté vítáni) (Kubát, 2021). The current situation and further expansion of wine

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7 Wines of Original Certification, in the Czech Republic are denoted as VOC (Vína Originální Certifikace).
8 In 2019, 128 million hectoliters of wine was consumed in the EU, representing 53% of global wine consumption.
tourism conditions go hand in hand with the development and growth of the wine trade (National Wine Center, 2020). Flamik (2020) infers that the common denominator of all the successes and strengths of viticulture, winemaking, and tourism in the region of Moravia is the fact that Moravian winemakers and entrepreneurs in tourism started on their own.

4. COMPARISON OF WINE TOURISM PRECONDITIONS

The preceding text highlights the development of wine tourism, thus showing the preconditions for the development of this form of tourism in selected wine-producing countries. These countries, due to their invariable characteristics, are not oriented towards greater wine production or a high influx of foreign tourists. Quite the contrary. Their strength lies in their smallness, although they also draw inspiration from the great wine-producing regions, so their adaptation must consider the local culture, history and tradition, but above all the vision of the future direction.

As Table 1 shows, the Czech Republic is larger in terms of vineyard area. However, wine production is larger in Slovenia. In 2019, the Czech Republic recorded about 37.2 million international arrivals, including same-day visitors and overnight tourists. In Slovenia, the number is much lower at 4.7 million. The year 2019 was deliberately chosen before the start of COVID-19 to avoid a drop in tourist flows in subsequent years. This fact also relates to the number of beds available in the whole country at any one time, given that the Czech Republic offers more than three times as many beds for accommodation compared with Slovenia.

Table 1. Selected wine and tourism aspects in the Czech Republic and Slovenia, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Czech republic</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vineyards (ha)</td>
<td>17.925</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.261</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wine production (hl)</td>
<td>584.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>725.000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vine-growers/wineries</td>
<td>14.640/app. 1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>app. 28.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>(registered)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wine regions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bohemia,</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Podravska, Posavska, Primorska</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moravia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wine sub-regions/districts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Litoměřice,</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Prekmurje, Štajerska Slovenia, Bizeljsko-Sremič, Dolensjska, Bela krajina, Slovenska Istra, Kras, Vipavska dolina, Goriška Brda</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Mělník,</td>
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<td>Mikulov,</td>
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<td>Velké Pavlovice,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Slovácko</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodation establishments</td>
<td>592.314</td>
<td></td>
<td>182.827</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>capacity (number of beds)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Food and beverage serving</td>
<td>app. 40.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.648</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>establishments (2019)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign tourists’ arrivals</td>
<td>37.202.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.701.880</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2019)</td>
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</table>


Another similarity between the two wine countries is the way they comprehend wine and wine tourism. Wine is not only consumed. It is a means of getting to know the country of origin and the people who grow it. Nowadays, tourists taste wine and traditional dishes and explore all that wine regions have to offer, including their culture, landscape and nature. They are co-creators of their experience and part of the so-called winescape.
5. **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

As Gačnik (2017) mentions, even in traditional wine destinations the focus is no longer on developing wine routes, but on developing gastronomy routes. The same could happen in Slovenia after the adoption of the Slovenian Gastronomy Strategy in 2006, which lists no less than 24 gastronomic regions, and in the Czech Republic, where there is no gastronomy strategy. Nevertheless, there is a lack of synergies between wine and gastronomy at the national or regional level. Both the improvement of digitalization in this sector and detailed statistics on wine visitors and their (profile) classification in wine regions are key issues that need to be addressed.

6. **CONCLUSION**

Wine tourism and its development have a fundamental understanding, involvement and demand in the destination within its general growth. This area, with its characteristics and players, contributes towards attracting visitors and creating new opportunities or turning them away. In this paper two wine countries, Slovenia and the Czech Republic were chosen because of their similarity in the development of wine tourism and other aspects of wine tourism mentioned in the paper. This case study presents the aspects of wine tourism and its development preconditions up to the present day. Slovenia and the Czech Republic are countries with a long winemaking tradition. When trying to identify the policies or strategies of tourist promotion in the context of wine tourism development in the Slovenian and Czech wine regions, there is a constant reiteration that wine tourism in development plans is (still) not given the attention it deserves. Even though almost all documents, at least in writing, emphasize its importance for local and regional development. Many winemakers participate in both local and international competitions and events. As a result, they gain international recognition, which is not based on the quantity of wine or the influx of tourists, but on the quality of the wine, aspects such as nature and hospitality, as well as wine culture, tradition and narratives. Drinking wine or wine tasting is seen by wine visitors as a social activity, often accompanied by authentic local food in rural settings and natural landscapes.

The rather rigid situation in the global wine market dictates the integration or the intertwining of the activities of wine and tourism making them one common economy. Often and increasingly so, the mentioned sectors complement each other, resulting in the synergistic effects seen in the flourishing development of wine tourism regions. Both countries have developed simultaneously in the field of viticulture and wine production. Wine consumption per person per year is an uncertain fact in both countries where different bodies present distinct numbers. This paper also shows that both wine countries and their wine tourism development were established mainly on the infrastructural aspect as the formation of wine routes in a particular wine-growing region. The existence of other wine regions behind the borders of Slovenia (Italian and Austrian wine regions) and the Czech Republic (Austrian wine regions) was beneficial and a driving force for the beginning of the development of wine tourism. With some exaggeration, it can be said that the Czech wine region of Moravia and the Slovenian wine region of Počljavje are connected by an imaginary line through the Austrian wine regions, which runs through the eastern part of this country. Thus, future cooperation in the field of wine and wine tourism, e.g., by connecting wine and cycling routes through this area, would bring a crucial international wine area and cooperation. Some of the aspects mentioned in this paper can support and further develop this idea.

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