

WINE TOURISM: AN OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE A TOURIST OFFER IN ISTRIAN COUNTY

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Abstract

Purpose – The production of wines has a long tradition of thousands of years in Istria. In the last two decades, it has been made significant in Istria a step in improving the quality of wine and there are many high quality wines on the market, with which wine cellars enrich the tourist offer. These activities include wine tasting in wine cellars through the wine routes, sale of wine in specialized wine shops, wine festivals and sport activities accompanied by wine tasting. This paper primarily includes the state and developmental possibilities of Wine tourism in the Istrian County.

Methodology – The authors have conducted an analysis of the scientific literature, as well as the available secondary data.

Findings – The research proves the potential economic benefits of Wine tourism for the Istrian County. Istria, as well as other European regions, must, in the context of economic and tourist development, adapt tourist offer to European and global trends, and create a great opportunities to position himself in a tempting wine region. Finally, the research indicates that Istrian region can become an original wine tourism destination and offering something new to the global wine tourism market.

Contribution – Despite being late in understanding the potential of wine tourism, the pioneer efforts in developing wine tourism, created a solid base for further development that will enable Istrian County to catching up with other wine tourism destinations.

Keywords wine tourism, wine route, wine cellars, tourist offer, regional development

INTRODUCTION

According to United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2015) the international tourist arrivals are forecasted to reach 1.8 billion by 2030, increasing by an average 3.3% a year. In this context it is necessary to position wine tourism which has grown considerably in recent years, reaching significant tourist market shares. Wine tourism is a type of special interest tourism (SIT) which is conducted in wine district where vineyards and wine cellars abound. Wine tourism is a global phenomenon that becomes increasingly popular every day and which is gaining growing economic importance. For the tourism industry, wine is an important component of the attractiveness of a destination and can be a major motivating factor for visitors. For the wine industry, wine tourism is a very important way to build up relationship with customer who can experience first hand the romance of the grape, while for many smaller wineries direct selling to visitors at the cellar door is often essential to their business success (Hall *et al.*, 2000). According to Costa and Kastenholtz (2010) wine tourism is a segment of the tourism activity, which allows publicizing the potential of a wine region, and even may be responsible for creating a sustainable competitive advantage to strengthen tourist services, such as accommodation, catering, the dissemination of

cultural heritage and landscape. This can be achieved through visits to vineyards, wine cellars, museums, participation in festivals and other cultural events related to wine.

Participating in wine tourism activity in a district intimately connected to the product itself constitutes a part of the wine consumer's general lifestyle (Shor and Mansfeld, 2009). Wine tourism has for instance grown "on the ground" as different wine regions have begun to embrace this activity as a way to improve, that is, in commercial terms, the local wine industry or even the rural region (Alonso and O'Neill, 2009). According to Getz (2000), for newly emerging tourism destinations blessed with wine country it can be a catalyst of the regional economic development while, for the more established ones, a tool for improve the destination image and diversify into new market segment. Istria county, like other wine's emerging countries, try to found a typical best process for developing its wine industry. This development is visible in several ways: a considerable increase in wine cellars, specialized wine shops, a preference by visitors for quality wines of the territory, the planting of new vineyards with typical native grape varieties, the formation of wine roads and events linked to wine. Wine is an industry with tremendous economic potential and wine tourism represents an entry into that world (Hall *et al.*, 2002). There are many examples of wine regions in the world that have developed a successful wine tourism. From this point of view, many authors and researchers worldwide have done research on wine tourism, Canada, Poitras and Getz (2006), New Zealand, Mitchell & Hall (2003), Mexico, Ruiz (2017), Spain, Alonso, O'Neill (2009), Portugal, Marques (2006), Italy, Carrà *et al.*, (2016), Australia, Somogyi *et al.*, (2010), France, Charters, Menival, (2010). The Istrian county is an emerging region in wine tourism, but with an ancient culture of wine which, in recent years, has undertaken a strong investment for the development of wine tourism.

The following work is divided into seven parts. The first is the introduction. In the second, theoretical background, the authors have made a revision regarding the research done on wine tourism. In the third part, the research methodology. The fourth part refers to wine tourism in the Istrian County, with particular reference to the production of wines and winemakers. In the fifth part, the wine events were elaborated, with particular reference to the most important wine events. The sixth part is dedicated to the wine routes. In the seventh, the conclusion.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In recent two decades, the literature about wine tourism, has devoted many attention because it is one of new form of tourism mainly for two reasons; the first is for a territory that is developing new forms of tourism with a competitive offer able to leave a significant footprint on the market, while the second concerns the continuous increase for a wine tourism able to satisfy the needs of a tourist market continuously increasing. Numerous authors have treated the phenomenon of wine tourism over the years, but a universal definition has not yet been established. Each author adds diversified nuances in relation to studies and experiences conducted over the years in the field. Wine tourism has long been widely recognised as a potential source of income, with researchers pointing to the benefits (such as increased wine sales) that the wine industry could derive from a

positive, mutually beneficial relationship with the tourism industry (Strydom *et al.*, 2013).

In according to Hall *et al.* (2000) wine tourism has been defined as 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. Getz and Brown (2006) gave a two-way definition, and found that the wine tourism is like a special interest travel based on the desire to visit wine producing regions, or in which travelers are induced to visit wine producing regions, and wineries in particular, while traveling for other reasons, and according to this definition, wine tourism activity can constitute part of a trip or of tourism activity with a different aim and does not have to comprise an exclusive aim. Therefore, from this affirmation, we can perceive, on the one hand, the existence of a targeted and planned tourism about wine, and on the other side an occasional wine tourism complementary to a planned holiday for other reasons.

Wine tourism is certainly connected to a lifestyle of tourists, who even outside their homes prefer to enjoy the taste and tasting the quality of the wines of the area they visit and that remain imprinted as a positive experience and reach desired values and eventually return to visit the destination again. A study, conducted by Thach and Olsen (2004), examining the connection between wine and lifestyle found five main states connecting the two (tranquility, dining atmosphere, fun and entertainment, social aspiration and tourism) and illustrating how well a food product, in this case wine, can help individuals to attain values by changing its manner of use and the situation in which the product is used, and thus, for the consumer, purchasing and consuming wine constitutes the opportunity to obtain a new cultural identity or to enforce existing one (Ravenscroft and Van Westering, 2001). Consequently, wine tourism can be interpreted as a form of consumer behaviour which motivates wine lovers and those interested in wine regions to travel to preferred destinations of wine production (Tassiopoulos *et al.*, 2004). A sublime and interesting definition, as regards wine tourism, was given by Bruwer (2003) and says that the relationship between wine and tourism results from the nature of wine as a drink associated with tranquility, social gatherings, food consumption, new experiences and hospitality. In other words, wine in many cases is associated with the same types of experiences that tourist seek.

It is also worth noting, as some research has given the importance of wine tourism and the conservation of vineyards. In this line of research (Elias, 2008) states that the scenic value that vineyards provide in many rural areas and their significance in helping preserve the cultural patrimony of the region, to the point of being considered patrimony of humanity in some cases, and further emphasise the importance of preserving vineyards and the critical role wine tourism could play in such preservation efforts.

A considerable contribution to wine tourism is given by the regional formation of wine routes. They increase the possibility of wine cellars to sell their product and to give the producer a better identity. In this case each wine route therefore seeks to articulate a set of attributes that endows it with a distinctive trademark or brand identity, and the tourist will recognise and value the difference in landscape and winescape when moving between wine routes, therefore the concept of a wine route also incorporates images that

sustain the notion of exploration and discovery (Bruwer, 2003). The realization of the Wine Road can not be simply a dream or a desire of a municipal council, but it must be a real path studied, meditated and constantly monitored in such a way as to arrive at a result worthy of presentation to the whole community beyond what a destination for the pleasures of all those who are interested in getting in touch with the world of wine. According to Telfer (2000) wine route is defined as basically a tourist route that connects several wine estates and wineries in a given area. This route is characterised by natural attractions (mountains and other scenery), physical attractions (facilities such as wineries on wine estates), vineyards, and roads and markers (signposts) directing the tourist to the individual wine route estate enterprises. So also Bras *et al.* (2010) damage a definition about wine routes, and state that wine routes as a network of agents in a wine region, whose purpose is to promote regional development by employing strategies that lead to the development of an inclusive regional network which encompasses public and private agents from both sectors of activity, and furthermore wine routes should not be viewed as static entities but rather dynamic ones in which visitors can actively choose their own itineraries by selecting the resources that they are more interested in.

2. METODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to present the characteristics and strengths of wine tourism in the Istrian County. The focus of this paper was primarily wine tourism, and secondarily, the wine events and wine routes, without which wine tourism would not be able to provide a significant strength on the tourism market. The main objective of this paper is to analyze if wine tourism presents an opportunity for Istrian County to increase international awareness towards the region as tourism destination. In order to achieve the objectives, the data collection selective research was used, offering the recipients of the research the opportunity to identify the strengths of wine tourism in the Istrian Region. The methodological approach that was used is based on the selection of theory and practice of wine tourism, the analysis and interpretation of historical sources and literature.

3. WINE TOURISM IN ISTRIA COUNTY

Wine tourism, today, enhances the importance of regional development, especially in rural areas, but also in urban areas, which have the potential to bring out wine producers and wineries. As a result, viticulture is highlighted, which is at the basis of wine tourism, first of all for new vine plants, and secondly the renewal of abandoned plants, thus increasing the value of land and landscape. Many wine regions and tourism destinations have realized that the benefits of wine tourism extend well beyond the cellar door to virtually all areas of the regional economy and into the urban areas that generate the majority of wine tourists. Wine, food, tourism and the arts collectively comprise the core elements of the wine tourism product and provide the lifestyle package that wine tourists aspire to and seek to experience (Carlsen and Charters, 2006).

The production of wine grapes and wine has thousand years of tradition in Istria. In the last two decades it has been made significant in Istria a step in improving the quality of wine and many high-quality wines are on the market. The consequence of this is the development of wine cellars for better product placement on wine tourists. Wine tourism in Istria is based on quality wines with a protected designation of origin, and the visibility of Istria is a recognized tourist destination. The international recognition of Istria is largely dependent on the creative and timely understanding of the identity of the Malvazija Istrian. The historical legacy of wine culture represents a development platform for the creation of innovative wine tourism that valorizes the development of wine-growing, wine-sales, wine and wine region promotion, gastronomy, local and regional planning and the overall integral development of tourism in Istria (Ilak *et al.*, 2011). Wine tourists are seeking a complete experience and are not just focused on wine. Under the experience is the hosting of the host, but also the presentation of the wine cellars, the natural environment and the esthetic dimension of the property. Wine tourists are not only looking for a wine experience but are also interested in other activities related to heritage, environment, history, art and more (Carlsen, 2004).

Istria has always been recognized as the home of good wine. What once were small wine cellars to round off the family salary with a small wine production, have turned the modern family-run wineries, with their own brand of quality, able to meet the demands of the market and offer a more and more competitive product for quality and price, alongside the European wine regions (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal). The wine cellars in Istria offer potential buyers the typical wines of the region. The producers are able to offer quality wines able to meet the needs of an expanding tourist market.

Given the structure of the grape variety, Istrian Malvasia prevails in Istria it accounts for 59% of all vines, followed by Merlot with 12%, Teran 8%, Cabernet sauvignon 4%, Chardonnay 3%, Ugni blanc 2%, and on other varieties 10%. Prevail old plants since 54% of vineyards older than 35 years and 22% of vineyards is between 25 and 35 years (Strategic Rural Development Program of the County of Istria, 2008-2013, www.istra-istria.hr)

In Istria there are 106 wine producers. According to the records of the Vineyard Register, Istrian wine producers (in total 731) produced in the year 2016 16.015,89 t of grapes and 104.961,11 hl of wine. The data refer to the total number of wine producers, but 106 of them directly sell wine to the market. According to the same data in the Istrian County there were 3.038,42 (ha) hectares of vineyards, 12.095.440 pieces of vines and 6.315 number of vineyards. The following table (table 1) report the production of grape, wine, surface, vines and vineyard for 2016.

Table 1: Reported production of grapes, wine, surface, vines and vineyards for the wine year 2016.

County	Grapes (t)	Wine (hl)	Surface (ha)	Vines (pieces)	Vineyards (number)
Istrian County	16.015,89	104.961,11	3.038,42	12.095.440	6.315
Other County	77.091,78	508.340,48	16.950,75	86.620.705	71.827
Total	93.107,67	613.301,59	19.989,17	98.716.145	78.142
Total share	17,2%	17,1%	15,2%	12,3%	8%

Source: Vineyard register of the Republic of Croatia for 2016, available on <http://www.apprrr.hr/vinogradarski-registar-1128.aspx>

As we can see, the Istrian County has a large share of grape and wine production (a high 17%) compared to other counties. This data demonstrates how viticulture is widespread in the Istrian County, in an economic but also cultural terms. All this allows wine producers a tangible offer on a tourist market, in this case the wine tourism, which is constantly expanding.

The table 2 shows the production of wine in Croatia and Italy. We have taken Italy as a reference because it occupies the first place in the world for wine production and is the closest to Croatia (www.inumeridelvino.it)

Table 2: Reported production of wine in Croatia and Italy 2008-2015 (in 000 hl)

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Croatia	1.278	1.424	1.433	1.409	1.293	1.249	842	992
Italy	43.946	43.424	44.703	40.632	38.265	45.044	39.741	47.659

Source: The Open Data Portal of the Republic of Croatia, available on <https://data.gov.hr>, Statistical annuity for wine 2016, National Institute of Statistics (istat), the wine numbers, available on <http://www.inumeridelvino.it>

An interesting data regarding the consumption of wine for 2015 was presented by the Wine Institute of California (www.wineinstitute.org), according to which in Croatia consumption per capita is 48 liters and 0.81% of world consumption, which ranks Croatia in first place for wine consumption, followed by Slovenia with 43 liters and 0.36% of world consumption and by France with 41 liters and 11% of world consumption. Further, according to a statistics compiled by the 2010 Eurobarometer (<http://ec.europa.eu>), 76% of the interviewees in the European country, admitted to consume alcoholic beverages during the year.

In order to achieve further development of wine tourism in Istrian County, it is necessary to determine current state of its offer, and based on that, propose suitable strategic developmental guidelines. Following, the authors will present SWOT matrix (table 3) of wine tourism in Istrian County.

Table 3: SWOT analysis of the wine sector in the Istrian County

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuously high quality wines • a long tradition of production • modern winemaking facilities and equipment • high representation of young vineyards • the use of modern technology • a wide range of products • the winery manager belongs to the younger generation winemakers • observed results at exhibitions and fairs wine • recognizability of the visual identity of the product • the possibility of independent organization and tasting • Continuous education • inclusion in wine roads and direct sales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insufficiently emphasized promotion that is not adapted to production expansion economy • they do not have the employees they work for specialist marketing and promotion • high credit indebtedness because they are all the economy has recently undergone an initial phase intensive growth and development of production • high sales prices of wine • insufficient information on products • Product inaccessibility potential customers
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • favorable agroecological conditions for production quality raw materials • development of specific technologies for • producing wines of autochthonous grape varieties • state and regional agricultural measures policies • have led to a strong development of this sector and created a positive social atmosphere • Developed tourism market in the area region • conservation of space and possibility of ecological production • recognizability in domestic tourism the market • facilitates the emergence of foreign markets • the association of winemakers in the sales segment and expanding the network of direct retailers • a joint appearance on the market • the use of social networks in promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital intensive production and high capital market dependency • Slow reversal of resources • Wine prices in catering facilities are not accessible to a wide range of citizens • decline in purchasing power both domestically and as a result foreign market • Large manufacturers who have more than one capital and have better marketing access • international competition with the better infrastructural and institutional support

Source: Authors' interpretation according to Brščić *et al.*, 2010.

From the accompanying analysis, we can conclude that Istrian winemakers undertook certain activities that ultimately contribute to more efficient product placement on the tourist market. Continuous high quality wine quality, with a long tradition and modern wine cellar, made possible the production of quality wine. The state and regional agricultural policy measures (€ 57 million provided by the National Program for the

Sector of Wine 2014-2018,(<http://www.mps.hr>), certainly with EU funds, have led to a strong development of the wine sector. The association of winemakers in the Vinistra association and the wine routes project successfully positioned the Istrian winemakers on the market. It should be emphasized that the Istrian region has a developed tourism market, which enables safe placement of products. On the other hand, the primary weakness lies in the fact that wineries do not invest enough in promotion and marketing. The reason for this is the high level of credit indebtedness that has been achieved in the development phase, primarily in the construction of wine cellars and new grapevine plantations, which resulted in a high sales price of wine. Additional threats adversely affecting winemakers are strong international competition and the decline in purchasing power of the domestic population and foreign tourists.

In order to attract wine in the tourist market, it is necessary to find suitable channels for sale. In Europe, many events are being used in order to offer a wine tourism product. These are village celebrations, often associated with local saints, various wine-related festivals. As a special wine event, there are well-known festivals, serving consumers, gathering and including important art events related to a particular winery, such as a number of concerts traditionally organized, among others, Robert Mondavi Wines in Napa Valley or Villa Maria in New In order to allow tastes of different types of wine to the wine fans (Carlsen and Getz, 2006).

In Istria, as part of wine tourism, many events have been organized. The most famous is Vinistra, followed by the days of wine, the Istria Wine and Walk and the Istrian Wine Run. Recently, the winery Agrolaguna Poreč organizes the enological adventure on the Festigia wine route where guests can taste the best wines, Istrian delicacies, homemade music and beautiful views of the Agrolaguna vineyards (<https://vinalaguna.hr>). Tourist agency Sentire-Istria Wine Tours, which is present on the tourist market since 2015, organizes visits to the best winemakers in Istria. The agency is welcoming guests at the airport with accommodation at the hotel. Most guests come from USA, followed by Canada, EU, China, Japan, India, Australia, Russia. Most often there are 2 to 4 people. In 2017, the agency hosted 200 people and a total of 60 visits to wineries. There are five programs, with the ability to customize programs according to the needs of guests. The price includes a tasting, minimum five wines, which costs 20-35 € per person. Guests have 2-3 tastings and everything is at the highest level. Guests mostly come by plane, and buy up to two bottles of wine.

An innovative and cutting-edge project will be used in 2019. The project, called "Hotel Roxanich Motovun", includes the renovation of an old wine cellar and the construction of a hotel in the city of Motovun. The selection of the old motovun basement as a specific venue for the construction of a new wine center aims at expanding the activities on tourism, culture and organization of various thematic events related to the wine philosophy. The wine cellar and hotel Roxanich in Motovun is a symbiosis of a specific way of thinking of wine, culture of tourism and gastronomic heritage of this region. From the agricultural land and vineyards, the wine-making and wine-growing area, the wine archives, the tasters and exhibition space, the leisure area, the pool and the wellness area, to the restaurants, hotel bar, wine bars, polyvalent halls, gathering squares, and room located within the corpus of the old basement building, will create a unique project in the region. The total amount of the project is 10,600,000 €, of which 2,600,000 € has been

co-financed by the European Union through the National Wine Assistance Program 2014-2018 and the European and Structural and Investment Funds for 2014-2020 (www.roxanich.hr).

Naturally, it is obvious that speaking of wine tourism, it is the wine and the types of wine that support the main offer of the tourist destination. Every region, regardless of culture, tradition, produces various types of wine, which are ambassadors of the regional tradition. The following table (table 4) shows the data concerning the main types of wine produced in the Istrian County with the relative percentage of production.

Table 4: **Production and wine offer in Istria**

White wine	Black wine
Istrian Malvasia 55,6%	Teran 10,6%
Chardonnay 5,7%	Cabernet Sauvignon 11,3%
White Muscat 1%	Merlot 11,5%
Yellow Muscat 1%	Burgundy 1,3%
Grey Pinot 0,6%	Poreč Rose Muscat 0,5%
White Pinot 0,4%	Syraha 0,5%

Source: (Ilak *et al.*, 2015)

The table shows that in Istrian wine cellars, the highest percentage of wine produced refers to the production of Malvazija istarska (55,6%), followed by Merlot (11,5), Cabernet Sauvignon (11,3%), Teran (10,6%), Chardonnaya (5,7%).

It is worth mentioning a project named IQ-Istrian quality, which has been active since 2005. IQ - Istrian quality is primarily intended for high quality wines produced from grape varieties of Malvasia Istrian and Teran and encouraging the development of these autochthonous wines, raising their quality and production technologies and promoting and selling on the domestic and world markets. The IQ label allows the consumer to recognize those Istrian wines whose quality is higher than the quality prescribed by the law on quality wines of geographic origin, and higher than the one normally required and expected by the customer. In accordance with IQ quality, for 2017, 5 winemakers received the maximum rating (exquisite winemakers) and 10 winemakers received denomination excellent winemakers (www.istria-gourmet.com)

4. WINE EVENTS: AN EXCELLENT TOURIST PRODUCT FOR THE PROMOTION OF WINE

Wine events are an excellent tool for promoting wine and bringing tourists closer to wine. According to Szabo *et al.*, (2014) wine tourism and wine events are one of the most important ways to introduce wines to the consumers. It is an effective method to improve the wine culture. The region can promote its territory as a tourist destination thanks not only to cultural and environmental heritage, but also through events of excellence. With the wine events, the region can bring the tourist closer to an international wine dimension. The objective of the events is not only addressed to travelers but also to all enthusiasts or simply to those who want to approach the fascinating world of wine to live

an interesting experience. According to the Institute for Tourism (<http://www.iztztg.hr>), in the 2007 survey, 20% of respondents declared gastronomy as the primary motive for coming to Croatia, and for 2014, 26% of respondents declared gastronomy as the primary motive for their arrival. There are many wine events in Istria, but four are the most important and they are widely recognized and appreciated by tourists.

Vinistra. According to the data reported (Vinistra, 2018), Vinistra is an association of wine producers in the Istrian County with 125 members. Vinistra is a regional and international exhibition of Istrian wines and equipment for wine growing and wine making. The longest exhibition of this type is traditionally held in Poreč and every year with increasing interest confirms its significance. The goal of Vinistra is to increase the quality of Istrian wines, the promotion of wine culture and the affirmation of wines in Istria and much wider. Vinistra was first held in 1994. About twenty exhibitors participated in the first wine show and 124 samples of wine were submitted to the evaluation. In the 2017 edition there were 78 participants with 254 wine samples.

Wine day. Every year, in May, the Day of Open Wine Cellars is held, popularly called Wine Day. According to the Report on the Role of the Management Department for Tourism and Trade in Istrian County in 2004 (www.istra-istria.hr), the project started in 1999 and in the first edition of this event 37 winemakers attended by about 800 guests and sold 600 wine bottles. In the last event, according to the Tourist Union of the Istrian County in the year 2017, 58 wine makers participated in the project attended by about 19.000 guests and sold 16.000 wine bottles. The project is improved and refined every year, and it can be argued that the last Sunday in May has traditionally become recognizable by the wine and winemakers presenting its offer on that day, thus contributing to creating the image of Istria as a recognizable wine region. On Open Day, guests can visit modern wineries, tasting room and family farms, from 10 am to 7 pm, where friendly hosts are welcome. It is an opportunity for tasting and enjoyable wine talks with the hosts, as well as buying top-quality wine bottles. Top quality Istrian wines are the achievements of the last fifteen years of intensive development of wine growing and viticulture in Istria.

Istria wine & walk. According to the data reported (www.istriaexperience.com), Istria Wine & Walk is an enogastronomic walking trail in the northwestern Istrian, with 11 km long track, which includes the visit of 9 top Istrian winemakers. Tasting of top quality wines, guests can taste typical Istrian specialties. Before departure, guests receive a tasting glass, a path map and of course the desire to walk. The project is designed in such a way that every 2 km guests visit a wine cellar, along with the winemakers, tasting fine wines and delicious dishes.

Istrian Wine Run. According to the data reported, Istrian Wine Run (www.istrianwinerun.hr) is intended for professional athletes but also for amateurs who for the first time want to try something similar. The race puts a special emphasis on fun and entertainment of competitors but at the same time it wants to tell more about enological and gastronomical offer of rural Istria. While running along the route competitors come across several wine cellars and a number of refreshing points where they are able to taste great wines of Istrian winemakers. At the starting and finishing point as well as at certain points along the route, runners will be animated by different

musical entertainers. The event includes three races: a marathon of 42 km (27 participants), a half marathon of 21 km (132 participants) and a 3x7 km relay race (63 participants) in total 222 participants. In the marathon the participants have available 17 refreshment station (15 wine station), in the half marathon 9 refreshment station (8 wine station) and in the relay race 9 refreshment station (8 wine station).

The Istrian Region has a wide range of events for the promotion of wine. In fact, these events are intended to promote local and regional wines and wine producers. But above all, the intention is to promote the culture of wine that is deeply rooted in Istria, but not just in the sense of drinking wine, but to taste its flavor. In this way, tourists can approach the local population in a different way.

It should be noted that the Istrian Region, as a destination for wine, has recently been present in many specialized magazines for wine tourism. Thus the Istria and its wines and gastronomy appeared in an article in the Food, Wine & Travel magazine (FWT) of 5 February 2018 (<http://fwtmagazine.com>). The first 6 places in the restaurant guide in Croatia 2017/2018 Jeunes Restaurateurs (JRE) they occupy Istrian restaurants (www.jre.eu). In the Michelin Restaurant Guide for 2018 (www.viamichelin.com), 13 restaurants are recommended in Istria (in Croatia total 34, in Europe total 16.411). In a New York Times article of 4 January 2017 (www.nytimes.com), among the 52 recommended places to visit in the world there is also Istria for its wines. The European Best Destination (www.europeanbestdestinations.com), the Bruxelles organization for the promotion of European culture and tourism, in 2016 has included Istria among the 10 best wine destinations of the old continent, in the elite society of the French regions of Bordeaux, Champagne and the Rhone valley, Italian Tuscan and Piedmont, Catalonia, the Greek island of Santorini and the Portuguese wine regions Alentejo and the Douro River valleys. In 2017, Munskänkarna, one of the largest, non-profit, wine associations in the world with more than 25.000 members and 170 sections throughout Sweden and the world, selected Istria as its wine region in 2017. Earlier years, wine regions were proclaimed as Lower Austria, Montsant and Priorat in Spain, Napa and Sonoma in the United States (www.poslovni.hr). As reported by an article in the journal 5portal (www.5portal.hr), Istrian region in 2014 is visited annually by 150.000 tourists who love good wine. If we compare the total arrivals to the Istrian County, which amount 3.272.280, wine tourists account for 4.6%.

5. WINE ROUTES: A KEY SUCCESS FACTOR TO BRING CONSUMERS CLOSER TO WINEMAKERS

The Wine Routes are born to highlight the product and the territory in which they are developed. Wine and, in some cases, the food and wine products are the main focus of the Wine Routes. Of particular importance is the territory, which expresses a set of cultural, historical and traditional values that make the discovery through the visit important. It is important to remember that not only the historical and cultural aspects are of great importance, but the physical factors are one of the main engines for the birth of a road. Wine routes are therefore the roadways to the core attractions in wine tourism, the wines and the winery, and they consist of a designated itinerary (or several) through the wine region which is thematically signposted as well as being interpreted via a free

leaflet and map, which notes the different vineyards and winemakers and provides information on sites of historical and other interest (Bruwer, 2003). A wine routes contributes both to the development and promotion of regional wine tourism, and increasing the reputation and image of wine regions and their wines (Cambourne *et al.*, 2000). Further, the wine routes involve wineries that differ in dimension and interest, but produce goods grounded on local culture and traditional knowledge. It is known that wine represents an experience good and also a cultural good for which its production is indissolubly linked to a territory, to a community and its history (Patti, 2013).

During the last decade in Istrian County there has been a growing awareness on the importance of valorising and promoting the territory through the creation of wine routes that can be considered as tourist packages. In fact, the wine roads were created with the main purpose to promote rural areas as tourist destinations. As a result, with the creation of this project, the region has merged two important production sectors: vine cultivation and the tourism sector. The tourists, through the wine offer, can discover the rural landscape of the Istrian hinterland, and secondly, winemakers have the opportunity to sell their best wines to a large clientele, and create an image in able to promote the territory.

The construction of a wine route implies determining and marking its route, editing space for guest receptions, definition and designing a tourist offer at each winemaker. The wine routes are conceived in such a way that visitors do not have a chance to travel but systematically discover the vineyards and wine cellars, natural values and cultural heritage of a region. The wine roads are conceived in such a way that visitors do not have a chance to travel but systematically discover the vineyards and wineries, natural values and cultural heritage of a region (Brščić *et al.*, 2010).

The Istrian Wine Routes was created in 1994 by Tourist Union of the Istrian County and local winerelated actors with the purpose of promoting the region's wine products, creating a regional structure and offering an innovative tourism product, related to the wine production traditions of Istrian region.

The Istrian wine routes are divided into three areas: Western Istria, Central Istria and Eastern Istria. All three areas have a total of 104 winemakers involved in the wine routes project. The Western is the most developed with 79 winemakers, Central Istria 17 and Eastern Istria 8 winemakers. In total the Istrian wine routes have 31 itinerary. The following table (table 5) shows the contents of Istrian Wine routes and winemakers.

Table 5: The Istrian wine routes and winemakers

Areas	Winemakers	Wine routes
Western Istria: Bujština (Umag, Novigrad, Buje, Brtonigla), Poreč, Vrsar/Funtana, Rovinj, Vodnjan/Pula	79	31
Central Istria: Pazin	17	
Eastern Istria: Labin/Rabac	8	

Source: Fabijanić, 2017, Brochure Istra Gourmet 2017/2018

It is known that Istrian Malvasia is the most famous Istrian wine (55,6% of total wine production). In 2014, an IPA / EFR¹ agreement was signed on cooperation between the Slovenian Governmental Service for Development and European Cohesion Policy and the Institute for Agriculture and Tourism in Poreč to promote Istrian Malvasia. The project, called The road of Istrian Malvasia, includes a total of 52 renowned winemakers (32 Croats and 20 Slovenian producers) with 66 samples of Malvazija istria wines (44 from Croatian producers, 22 from Slovenian). The project has designed 4 itineraries aimed at promoting malvasia. The following table (table 6) shows the contents of malvasia Roads.

Table 6: **Project on Malvasia Roads**

Itinerary	Route	Name of route
1st itinerary	8	Overflowing refreshment
2nd itinerary	3	Complete eno-gastronomic experience
3rd itinerary	1	Tradition in a new style
4th itinerary	1	A sweet wine mosaic

Source: www.malvasia-touristra.eu

The goal of the project is the integration of Malvazija Istrian wine into a common cross-border tourism product, with the aim of contributing to the strategies of common promoting Istria within the specific cross-border tourist destination. The project aims to improve the recognition of Istria, strengthen the influence of tourism in less frequent parts of the cross-border area, promote cross-border business cooperation at the level of strengthening cooperation between research organizations and joint knowledge transfer, and establish a cross-border network of multi-level co-operation (Malvasia wines producers, tourism offers, research organizations), contributes to the establishment and even development of a unique space as well as to the common promotion of Istria in the EU market.

CONCLUSION

This work can contribute to the development of wine tourism in the Istrian Region, but above all to the development of wine cellars, the cultivation of vines, the affirmation of wine producers, the rural landscape and cultural heritage. This paper emphasizes how quality wines can help to valorise and promote the regional territories throughout the creation of wine routes and wine events, which together can bring tourists, who love good wine, to producer, and ultimately, it has the ability to offer to the local tourist market a product that exalts what the region can offer. However, this research can help the winecellars to ensure and to maintain quality experience for the visitors in competitive markets both in Istria and in the neighboring regions, and around the world. In all of these cases, it is important to balance policies that support agricultural land

¹ IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance) consists of 5 components: capacity building and institution building, cross-border cooperation, regional development, human resources development, rural development. EFRR (Europski Fond za Regionalni Razvoj/ European Regional Development Fund)

conservation with those that meet the needs of winery, tourism and local community stakeholders.

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