

Article

Are Winegrowers Tourism Promoters?

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Abstract: Winegrowers are significantly shaping the landscapes of wine regions around the world. These landscapes are often the most important reason why tourists decide to visit. Although it could be concluded that winegrowers play a central role in attracting tourists, the question of whether they can be considered tourism promoters remains unanswered. This paper aims to develop a theoretical framework to better understand the function of winegrowers in relation to tourism promotion. In doing so, the different disciplines of wine production, tourism, and landscape research are brought together. The created framework shows a variety of positive touristic influences that can be attributed to winegrowers, such as developing cultural landscapes, promoting regional identity, and furthering intersectoral cooperation. More importantly, it allows for a holistic assessment of a relatively unexplored research field. This is vital to understanding the impact that winegrowers have on the touristic success of wine regions. Based on careful consideration of individual factors, compensating winemakers for their yet little-recognized function as landscape stewards could be appropriate. In this context, the concept of ecosystem services may be helpful to monetize services for public goods.

Keywords: wine; landscape; tourism; tourism promotion; landscape



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1. Introduction

Winegrowers, just like any agriculturists in rural areas, fulfill several functions. Their obvious task is to produce healthy grapes that are suitable to be processed into wine. At the same time, winegrowing has thousands of years of tradition behind it [1]. It is evident that historically, wine has significantly shaped the culture and identity of many regions. These traditions include the wine, but also the food and especially the winegrowing landscape [2]. The landscape is especially important when it comes to the identity formation of the local population [3–6]. Hence, winegrowing has become a unifying force for the community. All these functions indicate that winegrowers are central stakeholders when it comes to regional traditions, as they significantly affect regional culture and lifestyle and therefore shape the identity and cultural heritage of winegrowing regions [7]. The traditional cultural landscapes that give a region its scenic appearance are a central part of this heritage. This appearance has often been identified as the main motivating factor for tourists to visit wine regions. Winegrowers cultivate these landscapes and are thus important for tourist attraction. On the other hand, tourism is of high importance when it comes to sustaining regional culture and traditions.

Despite the extensive history of winegrowing, the touristic aspect of wine regions has been long neglected. Over the last 25 years, however, research interests in wine tourism have significantly increased and the topic has gained more public and political interest [8]. Wine tourism is important when it comes to strengthening predominantly rural wine regions as well as their traditions [9]. While wine is receiving increased attention

in the tourism field, more and more winegrowers are becoming increasingly reliant on tourists visiting their companies [10]. The wine and tourism industries are mutually beneficial [11]. Even if numerous studies have been conducted from the winery perspective, the bigger picture of what role winegrowers play for the tourism development of wine regions has yet to be looked at in depth. This paper aims to provide a theoretical framework to improve understanding of the winegrowers' role in tourism development and show the multifunctionality that winegrowers have when it comes to intersections with the tourism industry.

Therefore, a literature review was conducted with emphasis on the topics of winegrowing, landscapes, tourism, and ecosystem services. Accordingly, this paper contributes to the research on tourism in wine regions and can be helpful for practitioners, such as winegrowers, landscape planners, regional politicians, and public authorities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Winegrowing Areas and Production

The world's total surface area planted with vines is 7.4 million hectares (see Figure 1 as an example of Central, Southeast, and Eastern Europe). This number includes the production of wine grapes, table grapes, and dried grapes. Unfortunately, the surface area cannot be divided into these three categories exactly. What can be divided, however, is the production volume of grapes. The total amount of produced grapes is 77.8 million tons, of which 57% are used for wine production [12]. The world's grapevines "are cultivated on six out of seven continents, between latitudes 4° and 51° in the Northern Hemisphere and between latitudes 6° and 45° in the Southern Hemisphere across a large diversity of climates" [13]. Due to climate change conditions, vineyard areas around the world are slowly shifting toward the respective poles. However, the mentioned latitudes can be suitable for gaining insight into the production of wine-producing regions [13].

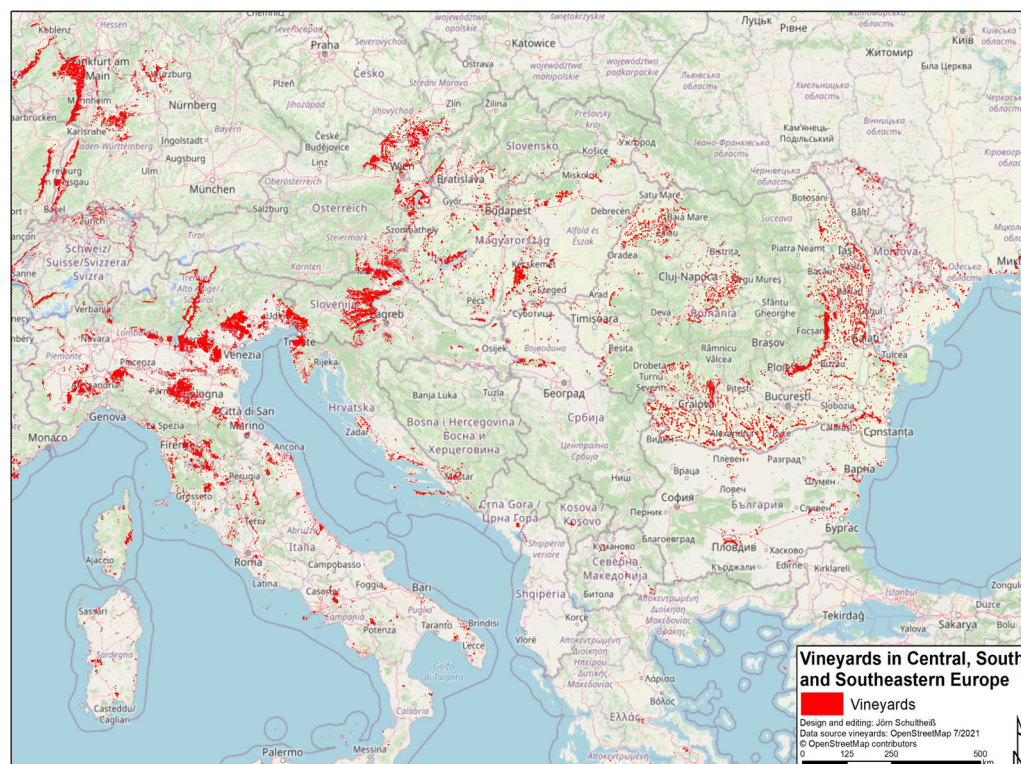


Figure 1. Vineyards in Central, Southeast, and Eastern Europe (according to OpenStreetMap, status: 7/2021; map and data: © OpenStreetMap contributors).

World wine production can generally be separated into Old and New World countries. The Old World refers to traditional European winegrowing countries such as France or Italy

as well as other very old wine-producing regions, such as Georgia or Armenia. Although there are exceptions, the majority of the Old World wine producers grow their own grapes, process them into wine, and sell the final product to their customers. In New World wine-producing countries, prominent examples being the United States, Australia or South Africa, there is a higher degree of division of labor: grapes are produced and sold to large wineries and bottling companies, which then produce large quantities of wine and oftentimes sell to large retailers [14]. This differentiation is crucial when talking about winegrowing and its relation to the landscape, because in this regard, only the grape-growing part of the process is relevant. It appears that winegrowers are also taking on landscape conservation activities. This is supported by recent study results from the Mosel Valley in Germany, which show that 96% of all winegrowers there also see themselves as landscape conservers [15]. This underlines the need for research on how winegrowers interact with the landscape.

2.2. Winegrowing Landscapes

Winegrowing involves an intensive cultivation system that impacts affected areas in their structural composition and also their ecosystem processes. It leads to the development of landscapes with very unique characteristics that fundamentally differ from cultural landscapes resulting from other agricultural cultivation methods [16].

The growing of grapes in Central and Southern Europe began in pre-Roman and Roman times, more than 2000 years ago [17,18]. It requires very specific environmental conditions, which leads to comparatively limited spatial expansion. The result is a very long continuity of use for many winegrowing areas (including periods without winegrowing, especially during crisis times such as wars) [19,20]. In Central Europe, areas planted with vines have decreased for over 100 years. This has mainly affected sites that are hard to cultivate. These sites require a higher price per bottle that customers are oftentimes not willing to pay. If there is no subsequent agricultural use in these areas, they are often developed from vineyards to scrub to woodland [21–23].

Another reason for the decrease in vineyards is the vast increase in settlement areas. In addition, vineyards undergo a structural change during winegrowing. Initially, there were different cultivation methods on small spaces, which led to very fractured landscapes with a high structural diversity. In the 19th century, land consolidation in European countries was conducted on a large scale to increase the profitability of winegrowing: new farming methods and improvement in the profitability of winegrowing led to continuous land restructuring, which resulted in a strong structural homogenization of cultural landscapes [24–26].

Because of their uniqueness, wine-growing regions are often scenic areas that receive special attention. The Romans already saw them as picturesque and considered them as a fundamental part of their cultural heritage. This is shown by the poem *Mosella* [27], written by Decimius Magnus Ausonius in 371 AD, in which Ausonius describes his journey from Mogontiacum (today Mainz) to Augusta Treverorum (today Trier). He first had to cross the wild plateaus of the Hunsrück until he finally reached the scenic Mosel River landscape next to Noviomagus Treverorum (today Neumagen-Dhron) with its vineyards [28]. Both in recent centuries and today, wine-growing landscapes play an important role in art and are highly significant for the intangible and tangible cultural heritage of the region.

2.3. Tourism in Wine Regions

Tourism in wine regions has become an up-and-coming topic in the last decades. The term “wine tourism” has experienced especially big interest from both the academic [8] and the economic perspective [29]. Wine regions around the world have discovered the market’s potential, not only for wineries, but for the sustainable development of whole wine regions [9]. New World countries such as Australia and New Zealand focused on this niche market early on and developed wine tourism strategies with government assistance decades ago [30].

Wine tourism addresses the overlap between winemaking and the travel and tourism sector [8]. It can be defined as “travel related to the appeal of wineries and wine countries, a form of niche marketing and destination development, and an opportunity for direct sales and marketing on the part of the wine industry” [31]. Whereas wine production aims at selling a product, wine tourism focuses on visitor attraction. When it comes to the creation of jobs, wine tourism can be more significant than wine production itself [29]. It is a specialized market that offers multiple advantages that are important for wine producers and policymakers to recognize [32].

It is important to understand that not all visitors to wine regions should be called wine tourists [33]. It can be assumed that wine landscapes are more relevant to wine tourists. At the same time, whereas wine is the most important travel motivator for wine tourists, to non-wine tourists, it is the landscape [34]. This is supported by [33], who argue that the scenic beauty of a region might be quite unrelated to wine consumption. It can therefore be assumed that the ways in which winegrowers shape the landscapes have broader implications than for wine tourism only. It is clear that winegrowers provide various ecosystem services, which are discussed in the following section.

2.4. Ecosystem Services in Winegrowing

The concept of ecosystem services has been developed to characterize and assess the consequences of change in our ecosystems, both natural and human-made ecosystems, such as cities, farmland, or forests [35]. Ecosystem services describe the multiple interactions between ecosystems and human well-being; for example, ecosystem services characterize services provided by nature and used by humans [36]. The concept of ecosystem services thus provides an important link between the functioning of ecosystems and their role and value to society [37]. The term “landscape services” was introduced from landscape ecology and landscape planning in order to better evaluate spatial references of ecosystem services [38].

To date, the concept of ecosystem services has not been widely used in winegrowing research, although there have been studies on individual services that have not been addressed in the context of the typically formulated nomenclature of ecosystem services [39]. Oftentimes, ecosystem services for viticulture refer to soil characteristics, such as physical properties and water budget, chemical fertility, biodiversity, and biological activity. Further examples are regulation of fungal diseases, pests and natural enemies, weed control, mitigation of water pollution, carbon sequestration, mitigation of climate change, and conservation of above-ground biodiversity. More importantly for our research focus, winegrowing affects landscape aesthetics [40]. Cultural landscapes shaped by viticulture are pivotal for tourism because of the specific landscape scenery, which is characterized by vineyards, wineries, and other destinations related to winegrowing infrastructures, such as wine bars (vinotheques), wine adventure paths, or guided tours by winegrowers [41].

Winegrowing cultural landscapes promote the delivery of cultural ecosystem services, such as spiritual, religious, aesthetic and cultural heritage values, human health and well-being, recreation, and tourism as non-material benefits that people obtain from such agricultural-based ecosystems [35]. However, many of these services can only be provided if people visit winegrowing regions through tourism opportunities [42]. Cultural ecosystem services and psychological well-being thus play an important role in tourist motivation and satisfaction [43].

After discussing the topics of winegrowing, landscape, tourism, and ecosystem services, they will be brought together in the following chapter to develop a holistic theoretical framework.

3. Theoretical Framework Development

Winegrowing is often seen as an extremely important contributor to rural regional development [44], in particular through maintaining rural lifestyle (see Figure 2B). The agricultural sector is the basic sector of the world of wine and the “mirror” of the success

of wine regions. The desire to achieve positive economic returns while planning the development of wine regions often leads to the neglect of specific characteristics of agricultural heritage [45].

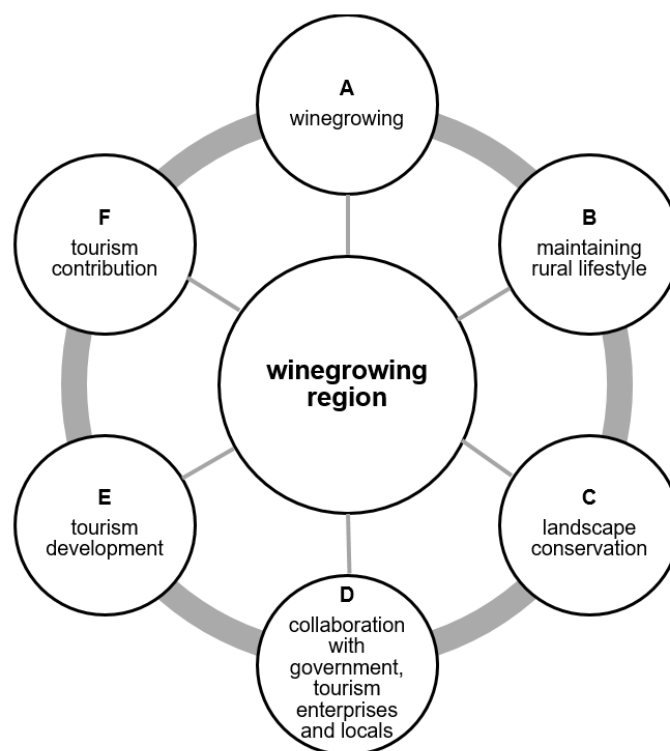


Figure 2. Contribution of winegrowers to tourism development.

Even though wine, as well as wine regions and businesses, is often promoted in terms of its environmental attributes, winegrowing, as an industrial process, uses resources and produces waste [46]. Issues in terms of land management have come to the fore in recent years due to the rapid expansion of winegrowing regions. The main problems concern the contamination, pollution, and perceived changes to existing environments [47]. It has been regarded as important that “wine organizations are able to tangibly demonstrate their commitment to environmental sustainability and preserving the local landscape” [48], as these problems also have the potential to damage relations with local communities (see Figure 2C). This underlines the importance of not just considering sustainable land usage solely from the point of view of individual wine producers, but taking community interests into account as well [49].

Supporting economically sustainable production of good-quality wine that benefits small growers can also benefit a region’s wine reputation. Mostly, small wine growers are struggling to be as competitive as large growers in their production. To do so, they often reduce costs by cutting out practices that ensure wine health and progressively decreasing grape quality; this causes the value of the wine to decrease even further. Any changes that affect the wine industry will have a great impact on a large portion of the families in this sector [50]. A way out of this situation can be a partnership with tourism enterprises (tour operators, accommodation providers, etc.) localized in the winegrowing region (see Figure 2D). If relationships with tourism companies are cultivated, they may lead to hosting facilities for meals and constructing tasting rooms that service large groups (i.e., bus tours) as well as individual travel groups at many wineries [51]. So, such collaboration contributes to the development of tourism in a winegrowing region (see Figure 2E).

Wine tourism has long been a source of added value for many vineyards and winegrowers as it increases sales of wine at the cellar door [31] (see Figure 2F). It can help extend the range of reasons for visiting a destination, extend the length of stay, and increase visitor

expenditure on local products [52]. Although winery visits are often the primary attraction, visitors combine wine tours with restaurant meals, shop purchases, gallery and museum visits, event attendance, and overnight stays [53]. Therefore, rural regions in areas that are suitable for winegrowing often encourage the development of wine tourism and related activities, such as food and cultural tourism [52]. Generating visitors through wine tourism is critical for small wineries in emerging areas due to their high per-bottle production costs and limited access to the market. Many wineries have realized that their production levels are too low to entertain movement into the mass export market and strategically entered into the tourism market [54].

4. Discussion

In this work, a theoretical framework was developed and proposed using an evidence-based literature review that investigates the question of whether winemakers can be considered tourism promoters. It can be said with certainty that by conserving cultural landscapes, winemakers are at least central contributors to visitor attraction. In addition, they help to preserve traditions and therefore sustain the local population's regional identity. This longevity of identity allows visitors to witness traditional rural lifestyle, thus providing authentic experiences that tourists long for. Strong ties between wine and food culture are favorable because of the increased demand for food-related tourism experiences. In summary, winegrowers help preserve cultural heritage and sustain regional identity. By maintaining cultural landscapes and promoting regional lifestyle, they are central to the provision of authentic, sensory experiences that are increasingly demanded by visitors. All this leads to the conclusion that winegrowers are central contributors to tourism promotion, and that their function as such is likely to become more and more important.

4.1. Key Arguments of the Developed Theoretical Framework

Landscapes in wine regions are central for tourist attraction [2]. There are, however, different types of wine landscapes that are of different value for visitors. It has been found in the literature that traditional landscapes have the greatest appeal to tourists [55]. These landscapes are not only characterized by vineyards, but also by a high complexity, including elements such as meadows, orchards, and trees. Due to having greater exposure, they often provide the most scenic lookout points. More importantly, they are eye-catchers that can be seen from far away. On the other hand, these vineyards are hard to cultivate with machines. This leads to manual labor, resulting in higher production costs. Unfortunately, consumers are not willing to pay the higher price of these grapes and/or wines, which has caused a decrease in the number of traditional vineyards in many places [56]. In the end, this lowers the attractiveness of the landscape and, more broadly, the region for potential visitors. Wineries keeping these scenic vineyards "alive" are often small, traditional, family businesses that are less focused on production costs and labor productivity than carrying on their forefathers' traditions. This leads to an important conclusion: small, traditional, family-run vineyards play an important part in our hypothesis that winegrowers are tourism promoters.

Following up on the last argument, we support the view that having a higher number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) leads to a higher regional attractiveness for tourists. A more diverse human setting not only helps sustain the complexity of the traditional regional heritage, but also a higher level of landscape complexity, which has a greater recreational effect for visitors [57]. This landscape complexity is formed by different unproductive areas, such as orchards or hedges. More importantly, it is characterized by a range of more diverse vineyard management techniques, giving the productive fields a different kind of complexity. In the end, this landscape complexity leads to a range of far-reaching ecologic and socio-economic benefits: It fosters biodiversity in vineyard landscapes, which not only furthers a harmonic environment for all different kinds of living organisms, but also provides for several ecosystem services. These services can be viewed from different angles. From a grape producer's point of view, an example might be

the balance between beneficial insects and pests leading to a higher degree of biological pest control and therefore to a reduced need for pesticides. The most important point, however, is that a higher biodiversity makes people happier [58], meaning it provides a higher quality of life for producers and consumers, and for tourists and inhabitants.

SMEs have another important function that promotes the development of tourism: to compete with large companies, they are more reliant and therefore in favor of promoting interregional collaboration among all kinds of regional stakeholders. Since tourism is a field that is characterized by the interplay of many different sectors (healthcare, logistics, etc.), high levels of cooperation are favorable for solid tourism development. We therefore conclude that a greater diversity of small grape producers in a wine region promotes inter-regional cooperation and thus regional tourism promotion as a whole. This collaboration can be with other regional (food) producers, such as bakeries, cheese factories, service and accommodation providers, and even regional institutions. These institutions are, in our case, usually winegrowers' associations and tourist boards that are increasingly merging into one entity. This can be seen as an indicator of the interdependence of the wine and tourism sectors in wine regions. In summary, SMEs favor a small, structured region, leading to a higher need for collaboration, especially among sectors, which again can lead to the fusion of institutions. All in all, the regional collaboration is maximized, and sustainable tourism development can be better achieved.

This work supports the view that winegrowers mainly promote tourism indirectly through various services, especially at the landscape scale. There is, however, also a direct link to the wine tourism market. Wineries, in many parts of the world, not only sell and produce wine, but also provide touristic services, such as gastronomic features and accommodation possibilities. In the last years, wineries have become increasingly reliant on this revenue stream [10]. As mentioned above, only a small proportion of tourists to wine regions are wine tourists. Not all visitors to wineries are even necessarily wine tourists, but about half are. This small segment of visitors is, however, highly lucrative. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, they have a relatively high income [59], and second, as special interest tourists [32], they are willing to spend more money for the experience they are looking for. Promoting wine tourism is not only good for the wine sector, but also gives entire regions a specialized marketing opportunity that distinguishes them from non-wine regions. It can therefore be considered an effective, long-lasting promotional differentiation tool. The focus of the advertising should be on the landscape, coupled with enjoyment and recreation [60].

4.2. Limitations

This work proposes a new theoretical framework that captures the role of winegrowers in tourism promotion from different perspectives (wine production, tourism, and landscape research). It can therefore be seen as an important stimulus for new research. At the same time, there are several limitations that should be mentioned. The first limitation is the focus of this work. Since a mainly landscape perspective has been applied, other important aspects such as the relationship with the gastronomy sector are not fully included in the framework. It would also be appropriate to incorporate sustainability aspects in greater depth (e.g., [61]). The framework therefore cannot be considered complete. Since a new view on the role of winegrowers in relation to tourism promotion has been provided, the content should be viewed and used with care. To verify and further develop the framework, empirical evidence is necessary, e.g., by surveying wineries. Attention should be paid to different company types, structures, and sizes. Different regional contexts, namely Old and New World wineries, should also be included.

5. Conclusions

Winegrowers play a key role in the tourism development of wine regions, mainly because of their conservation of traditional landscapes that are particularly attractive to tourists and provision of cultural ecosystem services, but also because of their preservation

of regional identity and traditions. By cooperating with local authorities and tourism businesses, winegrowers promote tourism, which ultimately has several positive effects not only for themselves, but for the entire region. So, in this indirect way, winegrowers are tourism promoters. The theoretical framework, based on the model of the life cycle of a wine region, shows the possible advantages for winegrowers who position themselves as maintainers of the landscape who develop tourism at the same time. In fact, there are no clear criteria for winegrowers as landscape conservators and their awareness of the importance of conserving local landscapes. In further research, it would be appropriate to develop such criteria; in particular, based on the ecosystem services approach. It is worth noting that the effectiveness of this model depends on many external factors (political, economic, social, technological, environmental, etc.) that need to be analyzed at each stage in winemaking.

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