The role of wine tourism in the development of agro-tourism market of Georgia

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Abstract.
The development of rural and agrotourism at the local, national and international levels serves to promote small and medium-sized businesses in rural areas, product diversification and identity promotion. Agritourism in the rural tourism value chain is a sub-sector of multifunctional agriculture. All countries of the world are trying to create their own national model of rural tourism development. There is a great effort to introduce and develop agrotourism in Georgia, although this type of tourism is in the initial stage throughout the country. Especially in the regions, significant potential for the development of tourism is not used to the maximum extent. A popular tourist destination - Imereti is a potential tourist region in Georgia, both for the development of the local and international agro-tourism market. In the paper, we discussed wine tourism in the unified concept of agrotourism. On the basis of the comparative analysis of statistical material, we determined the involvement of wine tourism, which is part of rural life, in today's tourism activity and development perspective. Within the developed research design, based on a complex approach, empirical research methods and secondary information analysis were used. Namely, in order to obtain complete information about the agrotourism market, interviews were conducted. Systematic analysis of existing literary and relevant field materials.

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Introduction. Agritourism is recreation in a non-urban environment when tourism offers (hospitality, agro-education, recreation, entertainment, product purchase) are linked to agricultural activities and agriculture [1]. Agrotourism as a form of tourism is becoming more and more popular. Tired of the difficult work rhythm, people often take refuge in nature, engage in agricultural activities and are interested in the traditions and culture of these villages. Around 700 million people travel around the world every day, of which 12-30% are agro-tourists. The active development of agrotourism in Europe starts from the second half of the last century. In this direction, the leading countries were identified, among which are Italy, Switzerland, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece and others. According to the European Agritourism Federation (EuroGites), there are more than 100,000 tourist facilities in 27 European countries. Around 60% of UK farmers' main income is from agritourism. In the United States of America and Poland, 13% of farmers live by this business.

Rural Tourism is by comparison widespread across Europe, and is a very much larger activity in terms of turnover and employment. It is composed of a very large number of micro-businesses. Like industrial heritage tourism, it suffers from fragmentation, little cooperation or coordination and increasing competition internally and externally. Unlike industrial heritage tourism, it is essentially private sector, and primarily driven by economic goals and employment creation, often by developing part-time jobs. It is important in terms of rural income and employment, typically providing between 10 and 20% of rural income and employment, twice tourism's income and employment levels averaged across Europe [2].

The reason for the rapid development of rural tourism is the crisis in the agricultural sector and the increase in organic capital building in agriculture, which leads to a decrease in jobs and unemployment in rural areas. In the conditions of market globalization, for most regions of Europe, agriculture is no longer an important form of land use. Another motivating factor is the increase in real estate prices in the given tourism sector to attract potential owners. Quality real estate in a beautiful area is not only
a comfortable place to live, but also a way to double personal and family capital. At the same time, the system of preferential credits organized by the state gives a cumulative effect. Rural tourism is closely related to other types of tourism. All this allows the inclusion of combined tours in rural tourism, which doubles the demand for the traditional tourist product.

Tourism is one of the leading and fastest growing industries of the Georgian economy, which generates income and contributes to the compensation of the country's trade deficit. Alternative tourism - rural, agro, wine, community-based tourism has become a topical issue for the country in the last decade. Accordingly, agrotourism, as a direction promoting the diverse economy of the region and the multifunctional development of the village, has become a constituent part of the rural development strategy. According to the directives of the World Tourism Organization, 2024 should become the year of development of rural tourism in Georgia [3].

**Aim of research.** The aim of the paper is to determine the role of wine tourism in the development of agrotourism in Imereti. Imereti is distinguished by its rich traditions, which gives an opportunity to organize wine tours in the region, in this regard the villages of Terjoli, Van and Baghdati are very interesting, here tourists have the opportunity to learn about local culture and traditions. Rest in the villages and can participate in grape picking and pressing. It is possible to taste the local cuisine and participate in the preparation of local dishes if desired.

**Methodology.** The work is done using field research (directly on research objects), geo-information systems, historical, comparative, analytical, mathematical, cartographic and other methods.

**Literature review.** The theoretical basis of the paper is the research of local and foreign experts interested in wine tourism and agrotourism. Namely: G. Beridze, sh. Vashadze, I. Zakarashvili's researches on the types of Georgian wines, the traditional technologies of setting and their export potential [4]. Colente Navarre and François Langlade - general characterization of wine components. Jimsher Rekhviashvili's
studies - "Wine tourism in the homeland of wine". Baia Gulordava's research on the first steps of wine tourism on the "Georgian Wine Road". National Wine Agency and National Statistical Service of Georgia is used in the paper [5]. Also interviews with local winemakers: Baia Abuladze, Gayoz Sopromadze and the Kupatadze brothers. While working on the paper, we used the interview of Tinatin Gvenetadze, an expert of GIZ tourism programs of the German International Cooperation Society, wine and tourism expert.

Discussion and Results. Winemaking is the oldest and most important branch of Georgia's agriculture and is considered the center of production of high-quality wines in the world, which is proven by the variety of wild and aboriginal grape varieties and various scientific studies. A new stage in the development of viticulture and winemaking began in Georgia in the 30s of the last century. Planting of new vineyards began, winemaking became industrial, and extensive scientific-practical work created the basis for further revival and development of the industry. Agrotourism is distinguished by the fact that recreation can be done at a relatively low cost. A tourist can live in an old country house and be entertained by a hostess instead of waiters. Guests enjoy local natural products: fruits and vegetables, homemade cheese, homemade wine, meat and meat products. Rural tours are also interesting for children. They observe pets, ride horses, learn various activities, e.g. making cheese or baking bread. Agritourism is also interesting and profitable in that it is not hindered by the change of seasons.

Imereti represents one of the most colorful sides of Georgian wine in Georgia, different soil composition and climatic conditions can be found here, that is why the wines differ from each other. Common grape varieties in Imereti region are: Tsitska, Tsolikauri, Dzelshavi, Krakhuna, Aladasturi, Kvikhshuri, Bazaleturi, Donglabi, Otskhanuri Safere, Kundza, Vanis Chkhaveri, Bazaleturi, Rko, Argveturi Safere, Black Donglabi, Kundza, Bzvanura, etc. In Imereti, as in other regions of Georgia, traditional wine making is connected with the pitcher. Unlike the traditional Kakhuri wine, in Imereti, a small amount of chacha is added to sweeten it. After fermentation, the wine is left in the vats for two
months, and then it is removed from the vats, transferred to barrels and processed. Imeri wine has a beautiful yellow color, it is harmonious, joyful, meaningful and complete. Imereti is famous for the following wines: Obchuri Tseliakuri, Kvalituri Tsitskati and Sviruli Krakhunat. Local wine "Svir" is produced in Imereti. And since wine production is related to the village, it is the most important factor for the development of tourism in wine-producing villages. The Imeri wine road follows the valleys of the stone villages, on both sides of which you can see forest landscapes, sometimes open fields of Kolkheti, and sometimes mountainous [6].

From the ethnological point of view, wooden presses were typical for Western Georgia. For its preparation, lime was considered the best tree. The old Imeris used to select the wood for pressing in advance, cut down the winter ones and leave them on the ground for up to a year. Then they would chop it with an axe, remove the heart and take it home for final processing. There are many places in the region where it is possible to taste Imeri wine, but if you want to taste brandy along with wine, attend chain shirt weaving and taste traditional delicious dishes, you should definitely visit the house of the famous Georgian writer Otia Ioseliani in Tskaltubo, where you will learn unknown and interesting details about the writer. And if your goal is to talk about Imerian wine, you are interested in the rules of vine care and winemaking traditions, you can visit the Baia vineyards in Baghdati. Here you will see how the new generation of winemakers work and you will be able to taste Imerian wine. Baya Abuladze's family lives in the village of Obcha, Baghdati region, and making wine is a continuation of their father's work [7].

Other sources also tell us about the excellence of Imereti wines, however, in the 80s of the 19th century, various diseases spread in the vineyards of Imereti. The newspapers of that time often wrote about the plight of Imeri growers, in some regions they were unable to harvest at all due to damage, due to the destruction of Imeri varieties, some growers planted Isabella or Kakhur varieties. Imereti wines are still struggling, if not for real winemakers and a few small entrepreneurs, Imereti region would have a very unfavorable picture.
In terms of grape production in the regions of Georgia, the Imereti region occupies the 2nd place after Kakheti. This is confirmed by the National Statistics Service of Georgia (pic.1).

![Dynamics of grape production in the regions of Georgia (2016-2022)](https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/93/regionuli-statistika)

As can be seen from the table, in 2016-2022, the maximum of grape production in all regions was recorded in 2020. There has been growth since 2016, which was interrupted by the pandemic. At present, winemaking is developing rapidly in our region. We were able to see and interview some of the winemakers in person. The development of agrotourism will contribute to the improvement of rural infrastructure, attracting tourists to rural areas and creating new jobs, which is a source of additional income for the rural population. The National Tourism Administration says that agrotourism is one of the priority tourist destinations for them, and this is reflected in the country's tourism.
In 2015, the state adopted a new law on highland regions. which further increased the incentive to return the population that emigrated from the study region. The purpose of the mentioned law is to "determine benefits that ensure the well-being of people living in mountainous regions, raising the standard of living, promoting employment, improving social and economic conditions"[9]. The law exempts the entrepreneurial entity of the Maghamtani settlement from income and property taxes, reimburses 50% of the monthly electricity consumption, and gives 20% as a pension supplement. The law contributes to the improvement of the demographic situation, in particular, 100 GEL is given monthly for the first and second child for 1 year, and 200 GEL for the third and fourth child.

The infrastructural works started in the region contributed to the employment of the local population. In 2018, the infrastructural arrangement of access roads to Kinchkhi waterfalls was completed, and in 2019 it was visited by more than 22,000 local and foreign visitors. Some visitors stay for several days. A chain of family hotels was created. There was a demand for local milk and other products. Equestrian tours were created. The local population started to breed and rent horses.

The presence of numerous historical and cultural monuments in the study region creates great prospects for the development of various types of tourism. Many new paleontological materials have been found in the research area, which makes its study even more interesting and presents development perspectives. In the territory of the village of Gordi, there are many waterholes and outlets for drinking water. The mentioned Vaucluses are used by the population as drinking water, these waters are cold like spring water, rich in minerals and iodine. Many ice-cold and Ankara springs flow out on Turchu Mountain, which are distinguished by their taste and are highly appreciated by tourists. No one has yet conducted research on these springs, but there is a great chance that you will find special mineral properties in them.

It would be good for Georgia to imitate the experience of Cyprus in the development of rural tourism, where the identity
of local villages is preserved, a special program for the development of agrotourism is implemented, rural houses are restored and their national style is preserved. Such a program will contribute to the restoration of the historical form of Imerian odes. It is desirable to develop rural tourism near cultural monuments in the region. All conditions exist for this in Imereti: there are hundreds of cadastral caves, most of them are of subhorizontal distribution; The region presents all types of vertical zonation landscape, except for the Nivaluri; Imereti is rich in historical monuments and healing springs; Its borders include all types of protected areas – starting with natural monuments and ending with a national park. The mentioned factor was well used in the village. In Gord, where tourists rest in a healing climate, they participate in the daily life of the local population, at the same time, they will visit the natural monument – Okatse Canyon, and if they wish, they will organize a horse trek to the Kinchkhi waterfalls.

The development of rural tourism in Tskaltubo municipality will be supported by the complex nature reserve of Sataflia and the village of "Prometheus Cave" in Kumistavi. village In Shroska, known for its rich tradition of local pottery making, tourists are given the opportunity to participate in pottery making.

It is literally impossible to obtain the statistical material of rural tourism. In the research conducted by the National Statistics Service, rural tourism does not appear. But with the statistical material of foreign visitors involved in agricultural activities, it is possible to form at least a small idea about agritourism (pic.2).

It is clear from the presented statistical materials that a total of 259,570 visitors were involved in agricultural activities in 2015-2020, the highest number of visitors was recorded in 2015, namely 89,862, in 2016-2017 there was a significant decrease, and in 2018. -In 2019 there was growth, the forecast was for further growth, but due to the well-known pandemic, the picture changed significantly and only 973 visitors were recorded in the first quarter of 2020. If we compare the data of the first quarter of the research years, it is only higher. According to data from 2015, an
increase was observed in the post-pandemic period, namely, the number of visitors reached 16,776 in 2023, although it will be far behind in 2019 [10].

![Picture 2](https://gnta.ge/ge/)

**Picture 2**

**Participation of foreign visitors in agricultural activities (2015-2020)**

*Source: National Statistics Service https://gnta.ge/ge/*

Since 2019, the Parliament of Georgia has started working on the draft law on agrotourism, the goal of the project is to strengthen the capabilities of the rural population of Georgia, promote employment and increase the income of the rural population. According to the information of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, today 16 farms offer overnight accommodation to tourists, where they can take part in harvesting, picking grapes, making cheese or pressing grapes. In addition, there are 130 enterprises that are interested in offering agro-tourism services to vacationers. 22% (29) of them are located in Imereti, 15% (19) in Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti, 13% (17) in Guria, etc. (See pic. 3) [11].

There are many well-known and good winemakers in the Imereti region, who sell their wine both in Georgia and abroad. Most of the winemakers who produce wine of good quality and good taste are mainly organic winemakers, the number of which is quite small in Imereti. Organic winemakers have received
certificates granted by various organizations (Caucasus Center, ISO Center). The certification problem is acute in Georgia. Firstly, because its acquisition is associated with high costs, and secondly, because good quality wine is made by peasants who know how to make good wine, although there are few people around (even in family farms and wineries) who know business management, Foreign languages, marketing activities, where to seek certification for their wine, how to pass the necessary conditions for certification. Information related to these issues is quite scarce among winemakers, which leads to a serious knowledge problem.

The competitiveness of winemakers in the market is determined by the high quality of wine. Most of them have almost no equipment and services for tourists. Although most of these wineries do not have organic winemaking certificates, they produce natural wines. The Natural Wine Organization was founded with funding from the German state. This organization has an inspection system through which it inspects its member winemakers every two years accompanied by an appropriate audit. Most natural winemakers (about 90%) export their wine. The wine obtained without fertilizer is relatively less, but its quality is very high. There is a special demand for such
products from European countries, so many exporters come to Georgia for wine festivals and choose the wine they want. Winemakers of the region, who produce organic wine, welcome tourists to their facilities, wine cellars and offer various activities along with wine tasting, be it tasting of traditional Georgian dishes, participation in wine pressing, etc. Sales of winemakers are 5000-6000 bottles per year. This year's data shows that there is a great demand for similar facilities, as both Chateau Vartsikhe and Sazano Wine have started to expand this year, although other winemakers and wineries refrain from creating similar multifunctional facilities. Since bio wine is produced in small quantities [12].

Almost all winemakers participate in local wine festivals, this allows them to introduce their products to potential customers and connect with new partners. Many different wine festivals are held throughout the year. However, it is problematic to include all winemakers in international exhibitions, as their participation is associated with large sums of money. Last year, 20 winemakers went to 6 international exhibitions with the funding of GIZ organization.

It should be noted that the famous historian and geographer Vakhushti Batonishvili mentioned Imerian wines as early as the 1700s, praising the wines of Svir in particular. Today, Imeri wines occupy the second place of honor after Kakhuri wine. Along with traditional winemaking, they started making wine for the first time in Imereti, Georgia, in the "White Cave" (constant temperature 140 C). Visitors to the cave can taste local wines while exploring the cave formations. This factor became an additional incentive to increase the number of visitors [13].

**Conclusion and recommendations.** Lack of funds is not the only reason why wine tourism in Georgia cannot develop properly. An important problem is the low qualification of the guides. This problem is acute in wine tourism, which is now taking off, and knowledge in this direction is very low. However, compared to other guides, more knowledge is needed in wine tourism. The guide must have a good command of special terminology, foreign languages. It is true that steps are
being taken, certain standards are being established, but nothing will come of it if the wine companies themselves do not take care of their own guides and their training.

Only archeological artifacts and the ancient tradition and culture of viticulture and winemaking are not enough, it is necessary for the visitor to Georgia to find something that distinguishes this country from others in terms of wine culture. Although the exceptional diversity and quality of Georgian grape varieties do not cause disputes anywhere in the world, only a few varieties are used for industrial purposes. Also, despite the fact that each Lam family has the potential to produce wine, the domestic market of the country is completely saturated with the products of large productions, it is practically impossible to buy quality bottled wine in the cities, and as for the product type and variety of family or author's wines, this is almost an incredible dream [14].

The revitalization of wine tourism in the Imereti region, which previously existed and is currently renewed, will contribute to the development of agrotourism in the region, and for this it is necessary to:

To develop appropriate recommendations that will lay the foundation for the development of wine tourism in the villages of those municipalities of the region where climatic conditions are very favorable for viticulture.

To increase the number of objects used in wine tourism, which will interest not only local, but also foreign visitors, which will contribute to the growth of economic income in the region, employment of the local population and reduction of migrations.

Study of agro-tourism farms and market operating in Georgia, determination of its development potential, and identification of strategic directions. The source of inspiration for a potential guest is, in most cases, the websites of tourist facilities. The more sophisticated and comfortable this media is, the easier it is to make a decision. Here, of course, we mean everything - from design to convenient booking mechanisms.

The real basis for the development of agro-tourism in
Georgia is the centuries-old tradition of hospitality and Georgian hospitality. However, the study of the European tourist market shows that the interest in agrotourism is growing every year. Its international character is expanding more and more, which reflects the hope that the Georgian village, with its unique features, architecture, hospitality and customs, will occupy an appropriate place in the world agro-tourism market [15].

As world experience shows, the benefits of agro-tourism in agriculture are quite large. Everything depends on how the farmer uses the resources available to him (capital, labor time, inventory, skills, agricultural equipment). The main thing, as in all things, in this business is determination, accuracy and quality-oriented work. New startups have the opportunity to develop their own farm and promote their product or region.

References:
[10] National Tourism Administration https://gnta.ge/ge/