

Motivations and Preferences of Domestic Wine Tourism Participants in Slovakia

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Abstract: Wine tourism represents a specific form of tourism combining wine consumption, experiential activities and direct contact with wine-producing regions. The aim of this paper is to identify the motives and preferences of domestic participants in wine tourism and to propose recommendations for the further development of wine tourism in Slovakia. The primary research was conducted by a structured questionnaire survey administered electronically to 128 respondents from Slovakia. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and cluster analysis. The results show that the most preferred wine tourism activities are wine tastings, visits to wineries, open cellar events and wine routes. The strongest motivations for participation are social interaction, wine tasting, relaxation and recreation, while educational motivations play a less important role. The Cluster analysis identified four segments of wine tourism participants: uninterested wine consumers, beginners, wine enthusiasts and professionals. The findings suggest that wine tourism in Slovakia has considerable potential for development, especially through experiential products emphasising direct contact with wineries, social interaction and wine tasting experiences. The study also indicates that geographical distance does not represent a major barrier to participation in wine tourism in Slovakia. The results provide useful implications for the development and marketing of wine tourism products tailored to different visitor segments.

Keywords: motives, preferences, product of wine tourism, tourism participant, wine tourism, wine tourist.

JEL classification: L83

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Introduction

Tourism represents an integral part of the economy of most countries worldwide. It generates a significant number of jobs in various sectors such as accommodation, catering, transport, operation of tourist attractions, management of cultural monuments, museums and galleries, sports facilities, information services, and car rental. The development of tourism in a particular region or country depends not only on the attractiveness of the destination and its tourism potential, but also on the level of support provided by local authorities, tourism organisations and the cooperation between public and private stakeholders operating in the tourism sector.

Wine tourism, also known as enotourism, represents a specific form of tourism associated with wine tasting, consumption or purchase, often directly at the place of production. This form of tourism includes visits to wineries and wine cellars, wine routes, participation in harvest festivals, wine festivals, wine tastings, and other events connected with wine culture and traditions. Participants in wine tourism can choose from a wide range of events and activities with different themes and objectives. Therefore, each wine-related event attracts a specific target group of visitors. To satisfy the needs of potential visitors and increase their interest in wine tourism products, it is necessary to understand the behaviour of these target groups, their motivations and their preferences when participating in wine tourism activities.

The aim of this paper is to identify the motivations and preferences of domestic participants in wine tourism based on primary research and to propose recommendations that could contribute to the development of wine tourism in Slovakia. The paper first presents the theoretical background of wine tourism and tourism motivation. The methodology and results of the first research are then presented, followed by recommendations for the further development of wine tourism.

1 Literature Review

Wine tourism

Wine tourism, also known as enotourism, represents a specific form of tourism connected with wine tasting, consumption and purchase, usually directly in wine-producing regions. It includes visits to wineries and vineyards, participation in wine festivals, wine tastings, and other wine-related activities (Hall et al. 2019). Wine tourism is commonly considered a subcategory of gastronomic tourism and plays an important role in the development of rural areas and wine-producing regions. In addition to its tourist function, wine tourism also represents an additional economic activity for wineries, helping to diversify their sources of income and strengthen their market position (Martinho 2021). The relationship between the wine industry and wine tourism is therefore often described as symbiotic, as the development of wine production increases the attraction of tourism and at the same time supports the sale of wine and tourism simultaneously supports wine sales and regional branding (Santos et al. 2021, Andra-Elena 2021).

Wine tourism participants and motivation

Understanding wine tourism participants is essential to the development of wine tourism products. Wine tourists often differ in their level of interest in wine, knowledge of wine and expectations of the overall experience.

Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) classify wine tourists into four groups according to their interest in wine: wine lovers, interested visitors, wine novices and tourists with little interest in wine. Other studies also segment wine tourists according to their involvement, lifestyle or socio-demographic characteristics (Nella & Christou 2014, Pomarici et al. 2017). Motivation plays a key role in wine tourism participation. Typical motivations include wine tasting, learning about wine production, enjoying rural landscapes, socialising with friends, and relaxation (Pivac 2012). These motivations can also be explained using the push–pull framework, where tourists are pushed by internal motivations and pulled by the attractiveness of wine destinations (Prayag & Ryan 2011).

Wine tourism products

Wine tourism products can be understood as a combination of services and experiences offered by wine regions and tourism stakeholders. These products include winery visits, wine routes, wine festivals, tastings and educational activities. Wang et al. (2018) classify wine tourism products according to the dominant type of experience (Table 1).

Table 1: Categorisation of wine tourism products

Product of wine tourism		
Cultural experience product	Natural landscape product	Leisure and holiday product
- Wine tastings	- Vineyard visits	- Rural holidays
- Wine education	- Vineyard tourism	- Festival holidays
- Wine museums	- Experience with wine	- Wellness and fitness holidays
- Winery tours	production	- Mountain holidays

Source: authors' processing based on Wang et al. (2018)

Another classification of wine tourism products was proposed by Sekulić et al. (2016), who focus on specific product formats offered to visitors (Table 2).

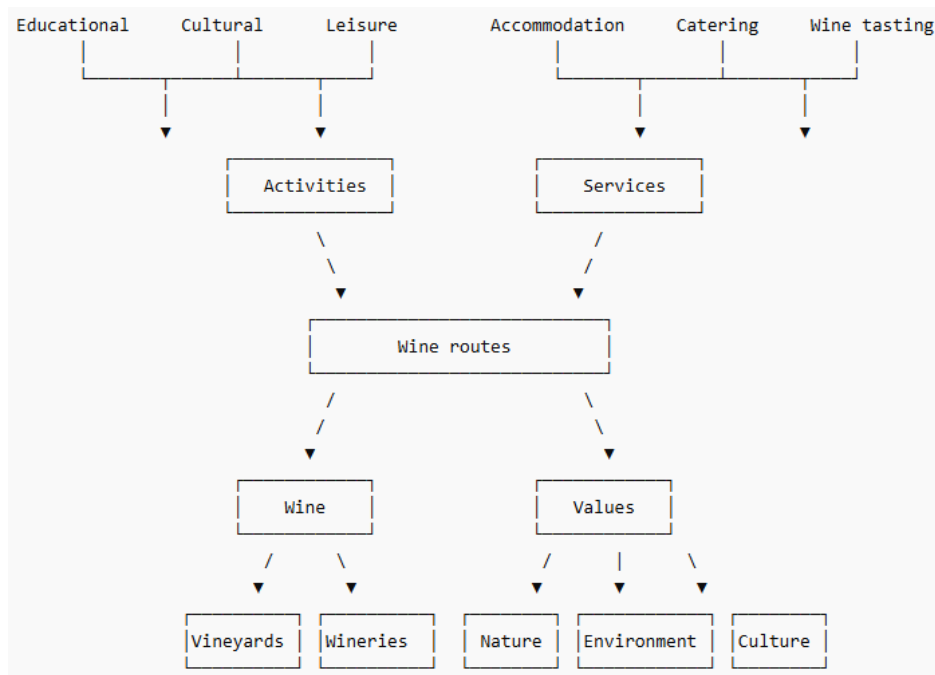
Table 2: Categorisation of wine tourism products

<i>Product</i>	<i>Description</i>
Wine routes	Marked routes in wine regions connecting wineries and vineyards
Vineyard tourism	Routes allowing visitors to explore vineyards by walking or cycling
Organised vineyard tours	Travel packages including accommodation, gastronomy, and wine activities
Oenological courses	Courses focused on wine knowledge, production, and wine culture
Wine cellar visits	Visits to wine cellars and wineries
Wine museums	Cultural institutions presenting wine history and traditions
Wine festivals	Events promoting wine and local traditions
Wine fairs and events	Events presenting wine products and producers

Source: authors' processing based on Sekulić et al. (2016)

A key product in wine tourism is the wine route, which connects wineries, vineyards, and tourism services within a specific region. Wine routes combine wine, gastronomy, culture, and landscape into a single tourism experience.

The structure of wine routes and their relationship with tourism services are shown in Figure 1, which shows how wine routes connect activities, services, and regional resources. The model illustrates that wine routes are created through the interaction of several elements: tourism activities, services such as accommodation and gastronomy, and regional resources, including vineyards, wineries, culture and the natural environment (Festa et al. 2020). These elements together create a complex tourism product that shapes visitor experiences and influences participation in wine tourism.

Figure 1: Theoretical and practical framework for the institutional description of a wine route

Source: authors' processing based on Festa et al. (2020).

2 Methodology

The aim of this paper is to identify the motives and preferences of domestic participants in wine tourism and to propose recommendations for the development of wine tourism in Slovakia.

The primary research was conducted using a structured questionnaire survey consisting of 19 questions focused mainly on motivations and preferences related to wine tourism participation. The questionnaire was distributed electronically using Google Forms.

The data collection took place between 3 April and 10 April 2023, and a total of 128 respondents from Slovakia participated in the survey. The sample consisted of 128 respondents from Slovakia. Men represented 62.7% of the sample and women 37.3%. The largest age group was 30–45 years (64.8%), followed by respondents aged 19–29 years (19.5%). In terms of education, respondents with secondary education completed with a school-leaving examination represented the largest group (42.2%), while 50.0% of respondents had completed university education. Respondents originated from all regions of Slovakia, with the highest representation from the Bratislava Region (37.5%). The questionnaire was distributed electronically through Facebook groups focused on wine and wine tourism, as well as through personal contacts with wine producers and wine enthusiasts. A convenience sampling approach was applied, and participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous.

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics and cluster analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the main participation patterns and preferences of respondents related to wine tourism activities.

To identify different types of wine tourism participants, cluster analysis based on motivational variables was applied. Cluster analysis is a multivariate statistical method used to group respondents into homogeneous segments according to similarities in their responses.

The clustering procedure is based on measuring the distance between observations. In this study, the similarity between respondents was evaluated using the Euclidean distance calculated as follows:

$$d_{ij} = \sqrt{\sum_{k=1}^p (x_{ik} - x_{jk})^2} \quad (1)$$

where:

- d_{ij} represents the distance between observations i and j ,
- x_{ik} and x_{jk} represent the values of the k -th variable for observations i and j ,
- p represents the number of variables included in the analysis.

Based on the calculated distances, the respondents were grouped into clusters representing segments of wine tourism participants with similar motivational profiles. The identification of these segments enables a deeper understanding of visitor behaviour and provides useful implications for the development and marketing of wine tourism products.

The cluster analysis was based on motivational variables related to wine tasting, social interaction, relaxation and recreation, winery visits, wine purchasing, cultural programmes, and learning about wine. The resulting clusters were subsequently interpreted according to respondents' level of involvement in wine-related activities and their interest in wine tourism. This procedure enabled the identification of homogeneous groups of participants with similar motivational profiles.

3 Results and discussion

Of the total sample of 128 respondents, 68 respondents declared their willingness to travel to wine tourism events and were therefore considered participants in wine tourism. These respondents formed the basis for further analysis.

The results indicate that experiential wine tourism products represent the most attractive forms of wine tourism participation. The most preferred activities were wine tastings (80.9%), visits to wineries (69.1%), open cellar events (66.2%), and wine routes (61.8%). Conversely, more passive forms of wine tourism such as wine museums (8.8%) and wine fairs (14.7%) were significantly less attractive.

Wine tourism participation occurs mainly in the domestic environment, although a considerable proportion of respondents also participate in wine tourism activities abroad. More than a third of respondents reported visiting wine events more than twice a year, indicating that the distance is not considered to be an important obstacle to relatively high level of repeat participation.

The willingness to travel for wine tourism activities is also relatively high. More than 51.5% of respondents are willing to travel more than 100 km to participate in wine tourism events, suggesting that distance is not perceived as a major barrier in the Slovak wine tourism market.

To evaluate motivations for participation in wine tourism activities, respondents assessed several motivational factors using a three-point scale. The results show that social and experiential motivations dominate.

The results indicate that the strongest motivations for participation in wine tourism are meeting friends and acquaintances, wine tasting, and relaxation and recreation. In contrast, educational motivations, represented by learning about wine, as well as participation in cultural programmes, were perceived as less important. Winery tours and wine purchasing occupied an intermediate position among the identified motivational factors. These findings suggest that Slovak wine tourism participants are primarily motivated by social interaction and experiential aspects rather than educational objectives. Similar conclusions were reported by Pivac (2012) and Byrd et al. (2016), who identified wine tasting, social interaction, and leisure experiences as key drivers of wine tourism participation.

Table 3: Main motivations for participation in wine tourism

Motivation factor	Strong motivation (%)	Moderate motivation (%)	No motivation (%)
Meeting friends and acquaintances	69.1	23.5	7.4
Wine tasting	67.6	20.6	11.8
Relaxation and recreation	63.2	25.0	11.8
Winery tours	35.3	44.1	20.6
Wine purchase	36.8	41.2	22.0
Cultural programme	21.0	48.2	30.8
Learning about wine	25.0	44.1	30.9

Source: authors' processing

To identify different types of wine tourism participants, a cluster analysis based on motivational variables was applied. The clustering procedure grouped respondents with similar motivational profiles into homogeneous segments.

The analysis resulted in four clusters representing different types of wine tourism participants.

The largest cluster consists of beginners, representing 58.8% of respondents. These participants possess basic wine knowledge and only occasional involvement in wine tourism activities. The second largest segment comprises wine enthusiasts (20.6%), who actively seek wine-related experiences and regularly participate in wine events. Professionals represent a smaller segment (10.3%) characterised by extensive wine knowledge and a high level of involvement in wine culture. The smallest group consists of uninterested wine consumers (10.3%), who consume wine but show little interest in wine-related knowledge or tourism activities.

The identified segmentation corresponds to previous studies by Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) and Galloway et al. (2008), who also classified wine tourists according to their level of involvement, knowledge, and interest in wine-related experiences. The predominance of the beginner segment suggests that wine tourism products in Slovakia should not focus exclusively on experienced wine consumers but should also address visitors with limited wine knowledge through accessible and experience-oriented products.

Table 4: Cluster segmentation of wine tourism participants

Cluster	Description	Number of respondents	Share (%)
Uninterested wine consumers	Wine consumers with minimal interest in wine knowledge or tourism activities	7	10.3
Beginners	Respondents with basic knowledge of wine and occasional participation	40	58.8
Wine enthusiasts	Respondents actively interested in wine and regularly attending wine events	14	20.6
Professionals	Respondents with extensive wine knowledge and high involvement	7	10.3

Source: authors' processing

The results indicate that wine tourism in Slovakia is strongly oriented towards experience-based and social activities, particularly wine tastings and winery visits. The relatively high willingness of the respondents to travel longer distances indicates favourable conditions for the development of domestic wine tourism products.

Compared with studies conducted in geographically larger wine-producing countries where distance may limit participation (Bruwer 2003, Hojman & Hunter-Jones 2012), Slovakia's smaller geographical scale appears to support easier access to wine regions.

The preference for experiential wine tourism products identified in this study is consistent with previous research emphasising the importance of authentic experiences, direct interaction with producers, and participation in wine-related activities (Hall et al. 2019, Getz & Brown 2006). Similar findings were reported by Byrd et al. (2016), who concluded that experiential components represent one of the most important determinants of wine tourism participation and visitor satisfaction. The results therefore confirm that the experiential dimension remains a key factor influencing wine tourism demand.

Overall, the findings indicate strong potential for the development of wine tourism in Slovakia, particularly through products that emphasise social interaction, wine tasting experiences, and direct contact with wineries. This finding is consistent with recent research suggesting that positive wine tourism experiences contribute significantly to visitor satisfaction and destination loyalty, highlighting the importance of experience-based tourism products for the long-term competitiveness of wine destinations (Gómez-Carmona et al. 2026).

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to identify the motives and preferences of domestic participants in wine tourism in Slovakia based on primary research and to propose recommendations for the development of wine tourism in the country. The empirical research has confirmed that wine tourism represents an attractive leisure activity for domestic visitors and that participation is primarily driven by experiential and social motivations. The results indicate that wine tastings, visits to wineries, open cellar events, and wine routes represent the most preferred wine tourism products among respondents. These activities allow direct interaction with wine producers and offer experiential value, which appears to be a key factor influencing participation in wine tourism activities.

The analysis of motivational factors showed that social interaction, wine tasting, and relaxation are the strongest motivations for participating in wine tourism. In contrast, educational

motivations or cultural programmes play a less important role for most respondents. This suggests that wine tourism is primarily perceived as a leisure and social activity rather than an educational experience focused on acquiring wine knowledge. These findings are consistent with previous studies on wine tourism behaviour, which also emphasise the importance of experiential and social aspects in wine tourism participation.

Cluster analysis further revealed four segments of wine tourism participants reflecting different levels of interest and involvement in wine: uninterested wine consumers, beginners, wine enthusiasts, and professionals. The largest segment consists of beginners with basic knowledge of wine and occasional participation in wine tourism activities. A smaller but important segment of wine enthusiasts actively seeks wine-related experiences and knowledge, while professionals represent a niche group with a high level of involvement in wine culture. The identified segmentation confirms the relevance of participation-based classifications of wine tourists proposed in previous research.

The findings of the study also indicate that geographical distance does not represent a significant barrier to participation in wine tourism in Slovakia. A considerable proportion of respondents declared their willingness to travel longer distances to participate in wine tourism events, which can be explained by the relatively small geographical size of the country and the accessibility of wine regions. These conditions create favourable opportunities for the further development of domestic wine tourism.

From a practical point of view, the results suggest that wine tourism development in Slovakia should focus primarily on experiential products that emphasise wine tasting, direct contact with wineries, and social interaction. This recommendation is consistent with contemporary approaches to wine tourism development, which emphasise the creation of sustainable and experience-oriented tourism products that combine authenticity, visitor engagement, and cooperation among local stakeholders (Filopoulos & Frittella 2019). At the same time, the segmentation of visitors indicates that differentiated tourism products can be beneficial, as different visitor segments have varying levels of involvement and interest in wine. The strengthening of experiential formats for wine tourism events and improving the promotion of wine regions can therefore contribute to increasing the attractiveness and competitiveness of wine tourism in Slovakia.

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The research was based on a convenience sample of respondents and therefore the findings cannot be generalised to the entire population of Slovak wine tourists. In addition, the analysis focused exclusively on domestic participants and was based on self-reported responses. Future research could involve a larger and more diverse sample, include international wine tourists, and examine behavioural differences among specific visitor segments in greater detail.

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