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OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE WINE TOURISM IN TIKVESH REGION, R. MACEDONIA - ON THE WAY TO THE WINE

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we will see the potentials for tourism development in the Tikvesh region in Macedonia. Special attention will be given to the opportunities for development of wine tourism, as well as the ways in which the local self-government and the whole local community can be involved in the development of this branch.

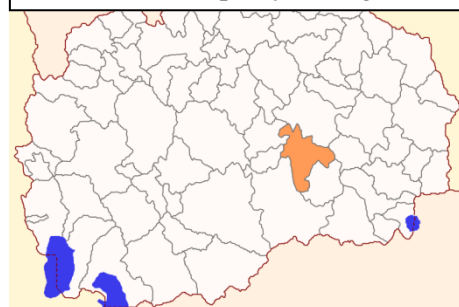
The Tikvesh region has excellent potentials for the development of wine tourism. The exceptional location, the pleasant climate, the existence of cultural and historical landmarks and traditional manifestations, the abundance of local food products of high quality, the long-standing tradition in catering expressed in a number of well-arranged and equipped catering facilities, and certainly the production of many varieties of wine with exceptional quality are excellent preconditions for the development of wine tourism.

Key words: Tourist destination, tourism, wine, wine tours, wineries.

Introduction

The Municipality of Negotino is located in the central part of Republic of Macedonia, in the area of the middle Povardarie. It belongs to the Vardar region, and as a special natural environment belongs to the Tikvesh-Vardar region. It covers the

Photo 1. Municipality of Negotino



eastern part of the Tikvesh valley, on both sides of the river Vardar. The favorable geographical position, as well as the pleasant climatic conditions in most of the year, make the Municipality of Negotino particularly suitable for the development of transit tourism and weekend tourism.

The developed agricultural production, especially emphasizing the production of many types of garden products, developed animal husbandry, hunting and fishing, and of course the tradition of producing quality grape and wine types, make the Negotino Municipality a very suitable location for development of gastronomic and wine tourism. When to all these, we add the existence of the large number of cultural and historical monuments in the immediate surroundings, as well as the existence of traditional cultural manifestations, we can perceive the potentials for tourism development in the Municipality of Negotino, especially for development of wine tourism as a specific form characteristic for viticulture and wine regions. It should be kept in mind that most of the areas are represented by the grape vine. The municipality of Negotino has an annual production of 25 million kilograms of grapes.

Production of wine and alcohol beverages

The tradition of wine production in Macedonia and Tikvesh region is centuries old. From the times of the Roman Empire, it is written that miraculously powerful wines with the smell of the south, taste of the song and smiles of the people living in these areas are produced in Macedonia.

In creating this long wine tradition in our country, there are included countless valuable and skilled winegrowers and winemakers from the past to the present. Large share in the producing, nurturing and promotion of that tradition in the country and around the world belongs exactly to the winegrowers and winemakers from the Municipality of Negotino, as an integral part of the Tikvesh region. The top wines that are produced today are the result of the perfect blend of the earth, the sky, the sun, the best grapes from the Tikvesh region and the cutting-edge technology and knowledge of wine masters.

In the period from the end of XIX and the beginning of XX century, the entrepreneurial spirit of individuals and respectable families in the region, who perceive the potential for development and commercialization that are offered, they begin to create wine cellars. In these wine cellars, quality bottled wines are begin to be produced on whose labels the geographical origin of the wine is clearly highlighted. With this, the centuries-old tradition of wine production for the first time receives a name that generically connects with the region in which it originates, and that is the Tikvesh region.

The first mention of wine from Tikvesh region is in a written document from 1885, which is also considered as the year when the organized production and sale of wine in Macedonia started for the first time. The appearance of the phylloxera disease in 1914 almost completely destroys the authentic grape varieties such as Zilavka, Stanushina, Mustenik, Plovdina, Belcherche and Sivyak, hitting the vineyards in the wider region. But Tikvesh's winegrowers and winemakers united and were carrying the US hybrid grape varieties, for viticulture and wine production in Tikvesh to shine again.

A period between the two world wars is a time when the wine production in Tikvesh region gets intensity. The wine becomes recognizable in the Balkans and beyond. With the passing of the Law for nationalization of private property from 1946-1948, in order to increase the production of grapes, wine and brandy (rakija), the state formed enterprises that include all nationalized properties, vineyards and wine cellars owned by well-known winegrowing families. Sometime later, the construction of modern wine cellars increased with multiple capacities.

Wineries in the region of Negotino

1. Winery "Povardarie"

The winery "Povardarie" was founded in 1963. Like all other state wineries in Macedonia in that time, it was established for the production of bottled wine. In 1990, the winery was privatized, and in 2008, the Serbian wine and juice producer "Wine Zupa" took over the management of the winery, buying more than 90% of the shares. The capacity of Povardarie is 30 million liters, while the current production is about 20 million liters. Unfortunately, more than 90% of the production is exported as bottled wine, and only a small part of the wines are bottled.

Povardarie produces wines from several different grape varieties. The white wines are produced by Chardonnay, Riesling, Smederevka, Temjanika, Traminac and Muscat. The red wines are produced by Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Vranec, Kadarka and Plavac Mali. Not all of these wines are sold in the Macedonian market.

The winery does not own its own vineyards, therefore the entire required amount of grapes is purchased each year from the subcontractors. They also produce brandy "Lozova zolta" and the same type of brandy, but ripened in barrel is called "Old Lozova Zolta".

2. Winery "Venec"

The winery "Venec" is part of an agricultural company called "Venec", which was established in 1956. It owns 600 hectares of land, of which 300 hectares are under vineyards, and the rest with a variety of agricultural products. In 1995, the agricultural company was privatized and transformed into a joint stock company. In that year also, the quality of the wine is being improved. They were used to produce wine only from the variety Kratosija, and today they also produce wine from the varieties of Vranec, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. About 70% of the wine production in this winery is red, but "Venec" produces also white wines from the varieties Chardonnay and Smederevka. The capacity of the winery is 135,000 liters, and the current production is between 80,000 and 100,000 liters.

Their Kratoshiya drink, which has 16% alcohol, and which can be bought only in the winery, is perhaps one of the best Kratoshiya in the Country. The vineyards of the winery "Venec" are mostly located in the triangle between the villages Dolni Disan, Gorni Disan and Vesje, where the microclimate and the territory give the best grapes in

the country, and are located at an altitude of 250 to 500 meters and are not mostly irrigated. "Venec" produces much more grapes than is needed for their wine production.

Their wines cannot be found in the shops, but only in certain restaurants across the country, and most of them are being sold in the winery. During the last 15 years, in the traditional wine-growing region of Negotino, several smaller wineries have been established, which emphasize the production of high quality wines, as well as the development of wine tourism. These wineries do not have accommodation facilities yet, but there are already adequately equipped facilities for tasting quality wines and traditional dishes in this region.

3. Winery "Bovin"

The winery "Bovin" was founded in 1998 and is the first private winery in Republic of Macedonia. Beginning with a modest capacity of 120,000 liters of exceptional quality wine, in 1999 they were selling their first wine for six times of the price of "T'ga za jug", the leading wine at the time.

From there begins the story of producing quality bottled wine, which was followed by almost all private wineries in the Country. Today this winery has a capacity of one million liters, and production equals the capacity. "Bovin" today owns about 65 hectares of own vineyards whose average age is 12 years. The vineyards are planted with the following wine varieties: Chardonnay, Muscat Incense, Sauvignon Blanc, Traminac and Smederevka of white wine varieties, as well as Cabernet Sauvignon, Vranec, Merlot, Tempranilo, Cabernet Franc, Sangovese, Sira, Pinot Noir and Petit Verde of the red wine sorts.

The remaining required grapes are purchased from checked subcontractors with whom they cooperate for years. Bovin currently offers as many as 34 different wines divided into 4 segments: Quality, Superior, Barrique and Dessert, and in their range of products they offer 3 types of vine brandy, as well as brandy cherry.

The "Bovin" winery has an elegantly arranged space for tasting their high-quality wines with a capacity of 30 guests, also a restaurant and several apartments are under construction overlooking the already built pool and vineyards in the background.

4. Winery "Dudin"

The winery "Dudin" is located on a magnificent property in the village Krivolak, near Negotino. Starts working in 2004, and produces only quality bottled wine. The capacity of the winery is 500,000 liters. They produce white wines from the varieties of Riesling, Chardonnay and Sauvignon blanc, and from the red wines Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, while their Rose is made 100% of the Cabernet Sauvignon variety. Besides these varieties of wine, they also have three excellent baroque wines, Aktrato Barik Chardone, Aktrato Barik Merlot and Aktrato Barik Cabernet Sauvignon.

The winery does not have accommodation facilities, but it has an attractive space for tasting their wines with top quality, arranged in a traditional style.

5. Winery "Pivka"

The winery "Pivka" is a family winery, and was founded in 2002. One third of the wines of "Pivka" are produced from their own grapes, and the rest of the grapes are bought from agricultural cooperatives, therefore the main oenologist is working together with the growers of these cooperatives to produce the best grapes.

Winery "Pivka" has a capacity of 300,000 liters, and currently produces 7 varieties of red wine: Vranec, Merlot, Cabernesovonjon, Kadarka, Pinot Noir, Vranec Barik, Vranec Premium and Cabernet Sauvignon Premium, while the white wines produce varieties: Rhine Riesling , Chardonnay, Traminec and Zilavka, also produces Rosa which is obtained from the Pinot Noir variety.

The winery does not have accommodation facilities, but has a nicely decorated space for tasting their wines with top quality.

Gallery museum of the wine

What is particularly interesting from the aspect of our subject of processing is the fact that the Museum of Negotino in its competence includes a Museum - wine gallery, which is located in the rooms of the monastery "St. George". The main purpose of the Museum - wine gallery is the protection of artifacts related to viticulture and wine production in the region of Negotino, so it contains numerous archeological findings and ethnological objects from these areas.

1. Museum of wine - Demir Kapija

The Museum of wine in Demir Kapija was opened in 2010. It has a rich collection of artifacts that are related to the production of grapes and wine in these areas, which has a millennium tradition. The museum contains three sections: an archaeological department, a wine cellar and a gallery for exhibitions and presentations.

The numerous exhibits in the Museum of wine speak for the rich tradition of the wine culture in this region, recorded through the numerous displays of the god Dionysus - the god of wine and bahanli, various wine drinking cups, antique wine mixing vessels originating from this region, tools for processing the land, etc.



Photo 2. Gallery - museum of wine

Traditional manifestation - The wine week

The wine week is held in the second week of February, in honor of St. Trifun, which is considered as a protector of the vine-growers. During the Wine week, several activities are organized, such as the Wine Fair and alcoholic beverages (from a

competitive character), expert seminars and presentations, sales exhibitions of old crafts, and a rich folklore program with the participation of local and international ensembles .

The main event of the Week of Wine is held on February 14th, the day of St. Trifun, when the traditional vineyard cutting is made in presence of priests and distinguished guests. The cutting is followed by a rich cultural and artistic program and tasting of the young wine of all producers from the territory of the Municipality of Negotino by the present citizens and visitors.

For this occasion, the bakers from the Municipality of Negotino are preparing the traditional "Negotinska pita", with a record set in 2011 of "Negotinska pita" of 20 meters in length and 40 centimeters wide.

Wine tour

When organizing the wine tours, the excellent geographical position of the Municipality of Negotino should be kept in mind. Located in the central part of the Republic of Macedonia, on the highway M-1, the regional road M-7 and the railway line Tabanovce-Skopje-Veles-Gevgelija, as well as the relatively small distance from two airports. The municipality of Negotino is easily accessible for potential visitors.

The new section of the Demir Kapija - Smokvica highway has made the Municipality of Negotino fast and easily accessible for the visitors coming from Thessaloniki region, or who those who use the international airport, which is only 140 km away. The low price of airline tickets from the low-cost airlines that travel to Skopje and Thessaloniki airports can be one of the most important factors during the promotion of wine weekend tours in the region of Negotino for the potential visitors from foreign tourist markets.

Although the accommodation capacities in the Municipality of Negotino are still not satisfied from the aspect of the available number of beds, the increase in the quality of accommodation is noticeable, through investments in modern arrangement of hotel and motel rooms, by introducing wi-fi and digital TV, as well as by building additional contents like swimming pools and gymnasiums, which contribute for the comfort of the guests.

Although, the increased number of guests through these wine weekend tours will increase the interest of the owners of wineries for their own investments in accommodation facilities. As noted above, some of the wineries have already started investments of this type, through the construction of apartments, restaurants and swimming pools within their complexes.

Another important factor, of course, is the increased interest of the wineries for engaging professional staff in the field of tourism and catering, in order to avoid improvisations and to raise the quality of the services in the tasting and presentation of their production.

The wine tasting should not be limited to the wineries and their tasting salons. It is desirable to be organized some visits to the vineyards, combined with picnics at local picnic locations, where tasting of local wines and local traditional foods, preferably prepared on the spot in a traditional way, will be organized in a pleasant ambience for the

visitors, including the symbolic participation of the guests in its preparation. It can be as a preparing a barbecue, a lamb on heat, a stew in a boiler, and like that.

Also, the wine tasting should be organized in the local catering facilities, especially in traditional-style restaurants, necessarily followed by tasting the local traditional dishes, and possibly followed by live music from old Macedonian style. It will only enrich the impression of the guests, and will enable them to fully enjoy the beauties of our country. Although, the ultimate goal of all this is the idea of the guests to wish to repeat this experience, but also to share their impressions to the people they communicate in their environments, and to expand the circle of potential new guests.

The wine tour should not be reduced to a continuous tasting of local wines and local cuisine. Apart from being unhealthy, it can cause monotony among the guests, and that is certainly not good for the overall impression. Therefore, additional activities should be organized for the guests, such as visiting the archeological site "Stobi", or visiting local museums, especially for those which are related to viticulture and wine production.

Especially interesting for the guests can be visits the workshops for old crafts, which have permanent sales exhibitions, such as woodcarving workshops, or workshops for making embroidery. Here, the guests can get in know with the old crafts that are being restored in the Municipality of Negotino, and also to buy souvenirs with motives from viticulture and wine production, as authentic and valuable memories of their visit. It will not only pleasure to the guests, but will also have a positive financial effect for these workshops for old crafts.

Also, the guests should be able to get in touch with the locals in order to get in know with our lifestyle and habits. For this purpose, in the evenings, can be organized some coffee drinking in the Old Bazaar, which from April to October is the favorite youth gathering place for going out and entertainment. In the Old Bazaar, it is usual in the days of the weekend to have live music, which in its side creates a relaxed atmosphere for socializing and relaxation.

This kind of friendship will help the guests to develop the feeling that they are accepted and welcomed in the local environment, which will additionally improve their general impression on the wine tour.

Conclusion

From all of the above, it can be concluded that the Municipality of Negotino has excellent potentials for development of wine tourism. The exceptional location, the pleasant climate, the existence of cultural and historical landmarks and traditional manifestations, the abundance of local food products of high quality, the long-standing tradition in the hospitality expressed in a number of well-arranged and equipped hospitality facilities, and certainly the production of many varieties of wine with exceptional quality are excellent preconditions for the development of wine tourism.

Although, there are disadvantages, such as the insufficient number of beds in the accommodation facilities, or the insufficient arrangement of the picnic sites, and these are certainly areas where should be paid more attention in the upcoming period. What is missing is the more serious level of organization and coordinated activity of all entities

that should be involved in the tourism development in the Municipality of Negotino, and especially in the development of wine tourism.

The local self-government makes efforts to raise the awareness of the entities that should be involved in this development in a more serious way, and on its side they regulate the development of tourism in the Municipality of Negotino at the normative-legal level through the adoption of Strategies and Action Plans for local economic development that treat the development of tourism with seriousness.

Also, in the past few years, the local self-government, through active participation in regional projects such as "Tikves Wine Road" and "Wine Cluster", financed by foreign donations, tried to give impetus to the development of wine tourism within its competencies. However, cannot be avoided the impression that such Strategies, Action Plans and internationally funded projects, does not matter how they have been expertly developed and implemented, they cannot fully attract the attention of the private economic entities to which they relate. This is due to the fact that private business entities always have the profit as the first motive, and do not always have an understanding of terms such as "general good" or "better future".

In order to bridge this hurdle, it is necessary, before the private entrepreneurs to present a strategy that will address them in their language, actually, a strategy that will make a serious "cost/benefit" analysis and which will explain in detail the possible benefits of organized and coordinated performance in the development of wine tourism on the level of Municipality of Negotino.

Such an approach will alleviate the rivalries between private economic entities in the same area of action that are present, and will enable the creation of a recognizable and well-thought tourism product that has the potential to bring significant financial gains, as for economic entities that which are directly included in it, as well as for the entire local community.

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