

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF WINE TOURISM IN THE DOURO RIVER REGION

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Abstract

Portugal is one of the largest producers of wine in Europe and the world. This is a good prerequisite for the development of wine tourism. There are 8 wine-growing regions and 11 tourist routes in the country. The Douro region is the oldest demarcated wine region in the world. Since the 18th century, Port wine has been world-renowned for its quality. This long tradition of viticulture creates a cultural landscape of exceptional beauty and opportunities for tourism development. Since 2001, the region has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Key words: Tourism, wine Porto, river Douro, Portugal.

JEL Classification: L83

INTRODUCTION

Portugal is in the southwestern part of the Iberian Peninsula and occupies about 1/6 of its area. It is a Mediterranean country by its nature, Atlantic by its location (Rebello 2000). For centuries, Portugal has been an agrarian country, specializing in the cultivation of vineyards and winemaking. In recent decades, with the development of the tertiary sector, it has become an increasingly popular tourist destination.

The subject of research is the possibilities for the development of wine tourism, and the subject of research is the wine-growing region of the Douro River. The purpose of the present study is to examine the cultural landscape created by viticulture in the Douro River region as an opportunity for tourism development. In Portugal, this topic is relatively poorly researched.

Exhibition

For the development of viticulture in Portugal, there are favorable agro-ecological conditions - suitable vertisols, the temperature required for ripening and acquiring high sugar content during the growing season, etc. The vine can also grow on less productive soils, on sloping terrain (such as the Douro river valley), under drier conditions. The peculiarities of the relief suggest the terracing of the terrain and the planting of the vines afterwards.

The existing traditions, production experience, wine industry, scientific research, etc. are also very important.

In this regard, Portugal has centuries of experience. The ancient Greeks, the Phoenicians (who planted the first vineyards), the Romans, even the Arabs and the various knightly orders in the Middle Ages made a significant contribution (Dimitrov 2010).

According to the Methuen Treaty of 1703, Portugal undertook to allow the importation of English woolen goods, and England undertook to tax Portuguese wines one-third less than they taxed other foreign wines. As an important consequence, the growing production of “Porto” wine was The growth of the vines was done solely for the purpose of exporting wine and this led to the almost complete monopoly of the English commercial offices over the

“Porto” trade. In 1756, the General Company of Viticulture in Alto Douro (Upper Douro) was founded to regulate production and trade with Porto (Dimitrov 2010).

In Portugal, there are eight wine-growing regions (Minho, Trás-os-Montes, Beiras, Alentejo, Algarve). There are also 44 regions with Designation of Controlled Origin, defined in the period 1988-1992 (IVV 1992/1993). Among the popular wines in Portugal are: Porto, Verdes, Madeira, Muscatel do Setúbal, “Dão”, “Alentejo” and others. (Gastronomia is Vinhos 2023).

Portugal is also a famous tourist country. The number of tourists in 2023 exceeded 30 million people, which is an increase of about 10% compared to 2019, the best tourist year ever. Revenues of around €25 billion represent growth of 37% compared to 2019 and 18.5% compared to 2022. 77 million overnight stays were also registered (INE 2024).

The most visited are Algarve 30%, Lisbon 25%, Porto and Sever - 20%, Beiraç - 15% of tourists. In addition to traditional, modern types of tourism are also well developed. Lisbon is one of the world's top 5 convention centers. The country has a large number of golf and tennis courses, and stadiums. Expo - 98 and Euro - 2004 attracted numerous visitors (Dimitrov 2010). There are many objects of spa tourism, of pilgrimage (Fatima), of culture, and recently wine tourism is also developing rapidly.

The consumerist approach in classical tourism only contributes to the enrichment of large external investors at the expense of the local population, which suffers partial or even complete economic and, above all, cultural collapse, social problems and conflicts. To reduce these problems, it is necessary to apply new practices in the industry, which have been imposed in recent years as new - alternative types of tourism (Patarchanov 2012).

Wine tourism is a type of specialized tourism in which the tourist is given the opportunity to: (a) become familiar with vineyards and viticultural practices (planting, grape harvest) from a given region; with the history, traditions and wine production of wine houses (cellars, workshop or winery); with different wines etc. high-alcohol beverages through tastings; (b) to participate in holidays, ritual practices and festivals related to wine and combined with rich folklore and animations (Stamov & Nikovska 2009).

There are 11 wine routes in Portugal (Gastronomia is Vinhos 2023), and the most interesting is the Douro River region, where the landscape, traditions, cultural-historical heritage and tourism are successfully combined.

The Douro River, which is the second largest in Portugal (and the third largest on the peninsula), rises from the Urbion Mountains in northern Spain, at an altitude of about 2,080 m above sea level, and flows into the sea near the city of Porto, Portugal. The total length of the river is 927 km, and only 213 km pass through the territory of Portugal (Gonçalves 1978). Considered dangerous and unpredictable, the Douro River served for centuries as the main route to the Douro wine region in northern Portugal. Thus, the development of the region becomes unthinkable without the use of the Douro River and the important port of the city of Porto. However, sandy shores, narrow stretches, strong undercurrents, and rapids make navigation extremely difficult for boats.

As early as 1502, during the reign of King Manuel I, attempts were made to facilitate navigation from the mouth of the river in the city of Porto to the city of S. João da Peshqueira, where the Casão da Valeria waterfall is located. This granite promontory, located 150 km from the mouth of the river and 50 km from Peso da Regua, hinders

upstream traffic and so contacts between the Douro region and the upstream areas are a major difficulty. Boats, once they reach S. João da Pesqueira, cannot continue because of Casa da Valeria. The destruction of this waterfall in 1792, as well as other obstacles, opened navigation possibilities all the way to the border with Spain, making the river navigable until the mouth of the Sabor River in 1809 and Barca de Alva in 1811 (Pereira 2001).

The most famous Portuguese wine, port, or as it is called "Porto", takes its name from the Portuguese port of Porto. The region of its production is along the course of the Douro River and its tributaries. This is a rather special place because the territory is made up of slopes, and even the steepest ones have a slope of 60%. In this area, the humidity is very high, and the annual amount of precipitation is between 400 and 900 mm. The climate is characterized by dry and hot summers and cold winters. In summer, temperatures often exceed 35°C.

The conditions are very suitable for the development of viticulture and were noted by David Ricardo in his Law of Comparative Advantage (Dimitrov 2010). The wine is produced mainly from the varieties Tinta Roriz, Touriga Nacional, Touriga Francesa, Tinta Cão, Tinta Baroka and Sousa. When it comes to white Porto, the varieties used in its production are Rabigata, Codega and Malvasia Fina. Porto wine is distinguished from other wines by its alcohol content (19-22%), its color and its sweetness. Today, the majority of port wines are produced using modern technologies. However, there are still some producers who use traditional production methods, some of which include pounding the grapes by stomping them with their feet (by men only) in special granite tubs, accompanied by music.

Ruby or red port wine is a young wine with a rich color and a fruity bouquet. Usually, this type of wine matures for a period of three to five years. Tawny, or dark yellow port wine, consists of wines of different ages. Some of them mature for at least seven years in wooden barrels, where they acquire a spicy aroma. Most of the wines from the Vintage category are aged in the cellars of Vila Nova de Gaia, a suburb of the city of Porto (IVV 1993/1994).

The production of excellent wines, particularly Porto, creates the region's international renown. The vineyards were expanded to produce this drink, which quickly conquered England, and then all of St. Such, despite the existing obstacles along the Douro River, the transport of Porto wine continued in small wooden boats called "Barco Rabelo" (Fig. 1), built to overcome the "rapid" to Porto, from where they are exported abroad.



Figure 1 Port wine transport with Barco Rabelo

Source: <https://www.visitportugal.com/en>

Despite the disadvantages of this route, it was not until the 19th century that investments were made in railway transport, which reached Peso da Regua in 1879. But the railway line did not completely replace the Barcu Rabelos due to financial reasons, as transport on it was quite expensive. Road the network was only expanded in the 1960s, which allowed the wine to be transported by road.

In 1985, the Douro River Navigation Office was established, replaced in 1994 by the Douro River Navigation Institute. The main objectives of the institute are the management of river traffic and the implementation of several projects aimed at the revitalization of riverbanks. In the 1980s, tourism provided new opportunities for regional development and economic prosperity. In the Douro Valley Tourism Development Plan 2007-2013 (Magalhães 2008) it is emphasized that “tourism is becoming a major factor underlying the recent revitalization of the Douro River and in all its different dimensions it also affects the cultural heritage around the river”.

In 1999, over 100,000 tourists traveled the river, in 2009 they were 350,000, in 2016 they were 600,000, and in 2023 the number exceeded 800,000 tourists. 28% of tourists come for wine tasting, 24% visit wine cellars, and 16% visit vineyards. There are the most tourists in September (21%), then the grapes are picked, August and July (17%). The age of 60% of tourists is between 35 and 54 years (Gastronomia e Vinhos 2023).

Cruise ships depart from Porto and visit Peso da Regua, Pinhão, Foz do Sabor and Posinho. Some of the tourists return by train, others again on boats, and others stay overnight on them. Combination trips are also available, as far as the Spanish city of Salamanca. Visitors enjoy magnificent landscapes, a rich architectural, cultural, and oenological heritage (Pina 2008). Although viticulture will always be the economic base of the region, other development opportunities are emerging (Pina 2010).

Along the banks of the Douro River, you can see a huge and diverse cultural and historical heritage, the City of Porto (240,000 people, with the suburbs 1/3 million people) is the second largest city in Portugal and a place where the river valley. Doru flows into the sea. It was originally called Portus Calais and later gave its name to Portugal. It is also world-famous for its Porto port wine, its bridges and architectural wealth, its historic center, classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site On the left bank of the Douro River is the suburb of Vila Nova de Gaia, where wine cellars were built to export wine “Porto”. Now 12 of them offer opportunities to visit and taste wine. Among them are “Calem”, “Croft”, “Sandeman”, “Ferreira”, “Fonseca” and others. (Fig. 2)



Figure 2 Quinta da Fonseca

Source: <https://porto-north-portugal.com/porto-guide/douro-valley-portugal.html>

The demarcated Douro region covers over 250,000 ha, of which 45,000 ha are covered with terraced vineyards offering unforgettable, diverse landscapes. In fact, it is the only technique that can overcome the steepness of the slopes around the Douro River, in a valley where slate and a Mediterranean microclimate allow the cultivation of specific, regional grape varieties producing excellent wines such as Porto. Classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001, the region was the first to be designated and regulated as a producer of this wine back in 1756 during the reign of the Marquis de Pombal. This measure led to major changes in the harsh landscape, where the forests lining the river disappeared to be replaced by a landscape carved with terraces and covered with vines. The Douro region is divided into 3 sub-regions: Lower Corvo, in the western part, Upper Corvo, the middle part where denser wines are produced, and Upper Douro on the border with Spain (Fig. 3).

Traveling up the right bank of the Douro river, XVIII th-century estates appear scattered along the hillsides, surrounded by vineyards and specializing in wine production. Quinta do Seixo is located in Upper Corgo, at an altitude of between 100 and 350 m. It covers an area of 90 ha, 75 ha of which are vineyards. In 2010, it received an award for the best wine tourism (Best of Wine Tourism 2010) (Pina & Cardoso 2017).



Figure 3 The demarcated Douro region

Source: <https://valedodouro.com/regiao-demarcada-do-douro>

The town of Vila Real (25,000 population), known for its magnificent scenery, is located on the Corgo River, a tributary of the Douro River, surrounded by the Marão and Alvão mountain ranges. Since the 1980s, there has been a demographic and economic growth associated with the founding of the Polytechnic University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro. With more than seven hundred years of history, Vila Real has many monuments, remarkable temples and mansions, among which stands out the famous Villa Mateus from the 1940s, located 3 km from the city. It is an excellent example of Baroque architecture in Northern Portugal, the work of the Italian architect Niccolò Nazoni (Pina & Cardoso 2017), and Villa Mateus adorns the label of the best-selling Portuguese wine of the 20th century - Mateus Rosé (Fig. 4). The nearby Marão mountain is part of the “Alvão” natural park, covering an area of 7,000 ha between Vila Real and Mondim de Basto.



Figure 4 Villa Mateus

Source: <https://www.visitportugal.com/en>

Of tourist interest is the city of Peso da Regua (10,300 population), called the “Capital of Porto Wine”, famous for its wine cellars and the Douro Museum (Dermendjieva, Pina & Dimitrov 2011).

The town of Torre de Moncorvo, often called simply Moncorvo (3,000 population) is located on the Corgo River, a tributary of the Douro River. With a long and rich history, the city received its charter from King Sancho in 1225. The architecture, mostly in the Manuelino style, includes architectural heritage from various historical periods.

With a rich cultural heritage and opportunities for the development of wine tourism is Villa Provesende, part of the demarcated region of the Douro. Its importance has been growing since the XVIII century (Pina & Carodso 2017). The area has architectural masterpieces, beautiful mansions and numerous wine cellars. One of them is Casa da Calsada (fig. 5).

On the left bank of the Douro River is Lamego (10,800 population), one of the 8 oldest cities in Portugal, dating back to Roman times. In this city, Afonso Henriques was hailed as the first king of Portugal. This episcopal city is filled with buildings of great architectural value

from different eras, among which the Church of Our Lady the Healer, the ancient center and the city museums stand out (Dermendjieva, Pina & Dimitrov 2011).

The surroundings of São João da Pesqueira (2,000 population) produce some of the best and most robust Porto wines, and the town is considered the heart of the Douro wine region. Steeped in history, the city abounds in architectural heritage and offers wonderful landscapes dotted with vineyards.

The Côa Valley Archaeological Park was established in August 1996. It was declared a National Monument in 1997 and has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1998. The Côa Valley is one of the most significant rock art sites in the world and the most important site of the open Paleolithic rock art.

Along the last 17 kilometers from the Côa River to the confluence with the Douro River, more than 60 rock art specimens have been identified, located on an area of 200 km². These rock monuments date from the Upper Paleolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Iron Age periods. The Douro International Natural Park is located between Miranda do Douro, the Douro River and its tributaries, located on the natural border between Portugal and Spain. Established in 1998, it is the newest natural park in Portugal.

It offers its visitors magnificent landscapes with almond trees, olive groves and vineyards. It has a rich variety of fauna and flora, as well as many species threatened with extinction.

Freixo de Espada Cinta (2,100 population), located almost on the border with Spain, is an integral part of the Douro Natural Park. The city has had an important political importance throughout the centuries. The fortress walls were built during the time of King Afonso Henriques I, and since the beginning of the c. the city has been a powerful military stronghold, surrounded by new walls and three towers. One preserved until today, called "Torre do Gago", is a unique architectural example for the Iberian Peninsula. In 1910, the castle was declared a national monument (Dermendjieva, Pina & Dimitrov 2011).

Conclusion

After the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism in Portugal is developing very dynamically and setting records. Alternative types of tourism are also developing, among which is wine tourism. Thanks to the existing centuries-old tradition of viticulture, a cultural landscape of incredible beauty and unique opportunities for the development of wine tourism has been created. This undoubtedly contributes to the revival of local identity in the Douro region.

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