

## WINE TOURISM. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF A WINE ROUTE NETWORK IN THE REGION OF THESSALY IN GREECE

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*Wine tourism is globally regarded as a traditional, yet at the same time dynamic form of alternative tourism. In this paper, the development of a Network of Wine Routes in the region of Thessaly, Greece is presented. Thessaly is a region where wine tourism could potentially increase the flow of tourists as well as improve their quality. More specifically, four routes are proposed and the conditions needed for the successful functioning of the network are presented. These include the establishment of visitable wineries, collaboration with tourism enterprises and synergy among all parties involved. The plan was based on international and Greek experience in wine tourism as well as on the results of primary research, studying the members of the "Wine Roads of Northern Greece" network, which are briefly summarised.*

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**Keywords:** Wine Tourism, Wineries, Wine routes, Wine Roads, Greece, Thessaly.

### INTRODUCTION

The scope of the present paper encompasses the planning of a network of wine routes in the Region of Thessaly and emphasizing the significant parameters essential to the successful organisation of this network. The development of wine tourism has only developed in Greece since the mid-90s and research in this field is limited. The plan was based on international experience in wine tourism as well as on the results of



primary research studying wineries which are members of the “Wine Roads of Northern Greece” network.

Travelling to regions with vineyards and wineries does not merely consist of visiting the wineries (buildings, machinery, cellars etc.) and wine tasting. It includes visiting natural sites, having contact with wine producers, tasting local products, local gastronomy and generally being exposed to the local tradition. Hence a trip to a wine producing region is essentially a simultaneous jaunt through nature and flavour. Wine tourism is clearly associated more with the entire journey than merely the wine itself. The wine becomes the vehicle with which one can relish the destination.

Wine tourism, the form of travel where the central theme of the trip is vineyards and wine, originated from the efforts of wine producers to promote their wines and bring consumers in contact with their environment and production methods. Subsequently, the wineries created specifically designed rooms where their guests would be given guided tours and accommodated. Visitable wineries then became part of vacation tours and are now included in tourist “packages” with other archaeological, cultural and natural sites. They are characteristically referred to as “Wine Routes”. According to the definition of the Winemakers’ Federation of Australia (1998), wine tourism is the *“visitation to wineries and wine regions to experience the unique qualities of contemporary Australian lifestyle associated with the enjoyment of wine at its source including wine and food, landscape and cultural activities.”* According to Carlsen (2004) this product-based approach has given rise to a range of studies of the many products and places that comprise wine tourism (Getz, 2000; Carlsen and Dowling, 2001; Williams, 2001). A market-based definition by Hall et al (2000) is that wine tourism is the *“visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and / or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors”*. This definition has informed a proliferation of consumer studies of wine tourists and wine festival visitors (Hall and Macionis, 1998; Foo 1999; Mitchell and Hall, 2001; Charters and Ali-Knight, 2002).

Wine tourism is not a new phenomenon. However, research into the many factors that motivate wine tourists as well as wineries and wine regions has yet to be fully developed. At the first Australian wine tourism conference in 1998, the parameters of wine tourism research were set and the potential synergies of the sectors of wine and tourism were explored (Dowling and Carlsen, 1998). The aim of those synergies was the

promotion of wine regions and events through tourism, increased cellar door sales to tourists, added value to regional production and new business opportunities in wine tourism. Some potential conflicts were also identified, not the least of which was the belief that wine tourism benefits tourism operators more than wineries. (Macionis, 1999; Hall and Johnson, 1999).

Market forces and demographic trends are important consumption-related factors impacting on wine tourism. A number of studies have indicated that wine tourists tend to include mainly those in the older age groups (40s and 50s) that have greater knowledge of wines and also tend to be more socially aware (King and Morris, 1998). Other studies (Taylor, 2004) and anecdotal evidence (Nixon, 1999) indicates that wine tourists are younger (30s). Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) found that wine tourism age demographics vary from region to region. Bruwer (2002) stresses the importance of the next generation of wine consumers to the growing number of small wineries that they choose to visit. *“Beyond the cellar door, there are number of studies of wine routes, wine regions, wine festivals and events and wine tourism strategies that have informed the production of wine tourism. There is also a small but growing amount of literature on the business dimensions of wine tourism including family owned wineries and small business networking in food and wine tourism.”* (Carlsen, 2004).

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF WINE TOURISM**

### **The History of Wine Tourism**

Since the beginning of the 19th century visitations to vineyards began to constitute a part of organized travel destinations which were a privilege of the aristocratic class and nobility of the time. From the mid 19th century onward, wine itself began to become the key motivating factor for travel and special tourist packages were organized. Notably, the legal protection of wines from certain appellations which gave wines an identity and made particular wine producing regions unique transformed them into tourist attractions. A prime example is the Bordeaux region in France, which became the most famous wine tourism destination for over a century after the official classification of wines in 1855 and the institutionalization of the region as a zone producing some of the most expensive and prestigious wines in the world. (Filippidis and Kyparissiou, 2002:181).

In Germany, wine trails constituted significant tourism activity for the country from 1920 onwards and encouraged the introduction of visitors to local wines and consequently boosted their sales. The “Wine Route” concept as it is known today started to materialize approximately a century ago. At that time, the wine villages along the Rhine, and later the Alsace region comprised a tourist attraction where the main motivation factors for visiting these destinations were the spectacular sight of the vineyards from riverboats, riverboat excursions and visits to the wine cellars and taverns of the region. Nowadays, all the wine producing regions of Germany have their own Weintrassen (Wine Roads) that traverse over 40 towns and villages.

In France, all the major wine producing regions offer at least one label which promotes them in various ways. From 1922 onward, with the support of the “Dionyssos” European program, the rate of wine routes established (such as those in Alentejo, Oporto, Sicily, Charente, Catalonia, Lombardy, Macedonia, etc.) has rapidly increased. Most organized Routes du Vin were developed in the Champagne, Alsace, Jura and Languedoc-Roussillon regions. In all of Europe, from the legendary chateaux in Bordeaux and the medieval farms of Tuscany to the modern wineries in the traditional wine producing regions of Spain, Portugal, Austria and elsewhere, wine producers have not only made their properties accessible, cooperate with each other, with hotel, restaurant and cellar owners and with the local authorities, but they have also created wine route networks and flavor trails.

Nowadays, wine tourism is globally regarded as one of the most significant forms of tourism and entire regions and countries of the New World feature it as their basic means of promoting the tourism industry. Prime examples of tourist destinations chosen specifically for their provision of particularly high standard wine tourism services are Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile, the Mendoza region in Argentina and California in the United States. Examples of the services they offer include luxury guest houses, gourmet restaurants, specialty museums, reception areas, avant-garde spas offering wine and grape therapies, excursions, alternative activities as well as a variety of sports such as horseback riding, golf, or cycling, all found in or next to the vineyards and wineries of modern design.

## **The Wine Tourism in Greece**

The cultivation of vineyards as well as the production and consumption of wine in Greece is directly related to the history and

cultural traditions of its inhabitants. The wine producing regions of Greece cover almost all the semi-mountainous areas and islands of the country, while vineyards surround practically all its archaeological monuments and natural beauty. The presence of vineyards is evident in all regions of Greece and along with its olive groves presents the image of a beautifully subtle Mediterranean landscape. Nevertheless, wine tourism only began to develop here in the 1990s. There are certain wineries in various regions that receive a great number of visitors either because of their unique architecture and rich history as for example the Achaia Claus in Patras, the Cooperative on the island of Samos or the Domain Mercouri of the western Peloponnesus or because of their location in or next to tourist destinations.

Nowadays, all modern wineries have special welcoming, wine tasting and dining areas and even accommodations for their guests. Hence, guests visiting the aforementioned tourist regions or other traditional or newer wine producing regions such as Attica, Naoussa, Nemea, Mantinea, Rapsani, Goumenissa or Drama or other wine producing areas can include tours of vineyards and wineries in their trip as well as wine tasting and wine purchases directly from their area of production (Tsakiris, 2003, Lazarakis, 2005, Hatzinikolaou, 2001). According to the results of a study in 2004 of 48 wineries<sup>1</sup> in Greece (Triantafyllou & Pitsaki, 2005), they reported that they had a total of approximately 520,000 visitors. Hotel groups and convention centres in Greece are still at an infant stage with some exceptions. The visit to wineries is seasonal and the busiest months are from May to September. As for the service visitors receive, 91.7% of the wineries have personnel which deals exclusively with the guests, of which 35% are oenologists. In terms of their functioning, most are open year-round except for some wineries in the island regions. Few wineries have prepared separate areas for special VIP guests and only 18.7% of the wineries reported that they have restaurant services on their premises.

The first organized and systematic effort, which also set the foundations for wine tourism in Greece, was the "Wine Roads of Northern Greece", which was made by the Wine Producers Union of Macedonia, Thrace and Epirus and which involved the synergy of wineries as well as restaurants, hotels and local organisations. The purpose of this effort was to promote the vintages, gastronomic and cultural traditions of each region visited by guests via the proposed routes. Wine producers of the Peloponnesus have adopted the same model, creating the Wine Producers Union of the Peloponnesus Vineyards in 1998 and the "Wine Roads of Peloponnesus". Their aim is also to promote and improve the image of their wines while sustaining the development and

tourism of the vineyards of the region and supporting the Greek cultural, wine and vineyard heritage.

Recently, there have been efforts for the development of new Wine Routes in other regions of Greece. In the island of Crete, the “Wine Route of Heraklion” is comprised of 16 wineries in the Prefecture and was established in 2007. The main goal of this effort was to encourage a relationship between Crete’s guests and the local products of the Prefecture as well as of the island as a whole and to reveal the true identity of the land. In April of 2008, 24 wine producers in Central Greece established the Wine Producers Union of the Central Greece Vineyards. By creating the “Wine Roads of Central Greece” the Union aims to promote the wine production and expect that the wine tourism will play a key role in the area’s tourism. Recently, the Wine Producer Union of the Attica Vineyard intends to create the “Wine Roads of Attica”, aiming at the exploitation of the specific Vineyard and its wines, the endorsement of cultural heritage and know-how about the Attica wine and the tourism development of the region through the Attica Vineyard.

### **Results of research studying the members of the “Wine Roads of Northern Greece”**

For the planning of the Network of wines routes in Thessaly, a study of the network of the Wine Roads of Northern Greece was deemed necessary in order to record the experiences of the network members. The Wine Roads of Northern Greece was the first form of organized wine tourism in Greece and acts as a model for its development and promotion. It was initiated in 1993 when 15 wine producers from northern Greece founded the Wine Producers Union of Macedonian Vineyards and the “Wine Roads”. Then the Union expanded with the participation of wine producers from Epirus and Thrace, thus developing the Wine Producers Union of Northern Greece. Its goal was the development of a system of receiving, welcoming, informing and serving guests with a common perception and attitude which in turn would have positive repercussions on each region. (Stathopoulos, 2006). Currently, in the Wine Producers Union of the Vineyards of Northern Greece named the “Wine Roads of Northern Greece”, 37 wine producers from the northern region of Greece participate. They offer 42 visitable (touristic) wineries on 8 routes which traverse Northern Greece. These routes are the Wine Route of the Olympian Gods, the Wine Route of Epirus, the Wine Route of the Lakes, the Wine Route of Naoussa, the Wine Route of Pella – Goumenitsa, the

Wine Route of Thessaloniki, the Wine Route of Halkidiki and the Wine Route of Dionysus (W.P.A.N.G.V., 2008).

Out of the 37 members of the association, 26 took part in the study. This number represents 70.3% of the total members. Research was conducted through personal interviews in February of 2007 and the most significant results are concluded below:

- ⇒ **Volume of visitors.** The number of visitors should be characterized as small since 50% of those interviewed had less than 1000 visitors per year, 34.6% had between 1000 and 5000 guests and only 15.4% (that is 4 wineries) had more than 5000 visitors per year.
- ⇒ **Seasonality.** Visitation was noted throughout the year, with a clear preponderance in the winter which indicates that wine tourism could extend the period of tourism and minimize the problem of pronounced seasonality which characterizes tourism in Greece. More analytically, the results indicate visitation in winter (57.7%), spring (38.4%), summer (34.6%) and autumn (15.3%).
- ⇒ **Charging.** In response to the question “Is there a charge for the visit, tour, tasting?”, 61.5% answered that “Entrance was free of charge” and the rest reported that it depended on the circumstance.
- ⇒ **Organization of visitation.** Guests travelled: (a) alone, 20%, (b) with general tour groups, 6.7%, (c) with wine tourism groups (wine clubs, gastronomy clubs, etc), 10% and (d) 63.4% responded all of the above. These numbers lead us to conclude that even though we are investigating the most organised network of visitable wineries in Greece, wine tourism is still in its early stages since the visitation presented is small and has the potential to increase greatly.
- ⇒ **Duration of visit.** Guests’ visits to the region lasted: 1 day at 46.4%, 2 days at 28.6% and more than 2 days at 25%. The length of the trips were very short since they were usually restricted to visits to a certain winery without including a comprehensive tour among wine and other tourist sites or a comprehensive wine tourism vacation package.
- ⇒ **Visitor Accommodation.** In response to the question of whether guests stayed in and ate at accommodations and restaurants in the region: 65.4% answered positively and the remaining 34.6% responded negatively. Evidently, the benefits of wine tourism are obvious to everyone involved in this tourist network (restaurant and hotel owners, etc.) However, a more systematic collaboration among members is necessary as well as synergy with new businesses as well.
- ⇒ **Parallel activities.** In response to the question of if their itinerary included visits to other sites of the region: 46.1% responded

positively, 50% said “sometimes” and only 3.8% responded negatively. These results indicate that the market is primarily targeted to visits to wineries and not to the whole gamut of tourist services offered possibly because of a lack of collaboration among the wine and remaining tourist industry.

- ⇒ **School Field Trips.** In response to the question “Do school field trips take place?” the answers were: (a) Yes, frequently (53.8%), (b) No (7.7%), (c) Occasionally (38.5%). The generally positive response to this question is one of the most optimistic messages about wine tourism. Education about wine and its culture will create responsible consumers in the future who will constitute a better market for the goals and values of wine tourism.
- ⇒ **Facilities.** Table 1 shows that basic services are provided. However these are not supported by other services of high additional value which could strengthen and upgrade the quality of the services offered in the network and attract more and better quality tourism.

**Table 1.** Facilities at Wineries researched

1. Special wine tasting room	92,3%
2. Wine Sales: Cellar door	92,3%
3. Specialised guide	38,5%
4. Video presentation	30,8%
5. Museum or exhibition of old equipment, tools, bottles etc.	26,1%
6. Wine tasting and oenology course	19,2%
7. Sales department: books, wine accessories, etc.	15,4%
8. Restaurant	15,4%
9. Outdoor activities	15,4%
10. Accommodation	7,7%

Source : Research results.

- ⇒ **Benefits from participation in the Network.** In response to the question regarding benefits procured from participating in the Wine Road network, the answers were:
  - a) The company’s image (16.7%)
  - b) Recognisability of their wine’s brand name(s) (10%)
  - c) Wine sales (0%).
  - d) The tourism in their area/region (10%)
  - e) All of the above (56.7%)
  - f) No particular improvement was noted in any of the above (6.7%)

The answers to this question generally show the positive outcomes of wine tourism in various areas, based on the opinion of the network participants, who have the potential to improve further.

## **Discussion of the Results**

The research was based on the experience of the first established Wine Road network in Greece, which was created in 1993. It has showed that the level of organisation in wineries was satisfactory, since the majority of the wineries in the network, comply with the specifications of a formally visitable (touristic) winery and are capable in supplying the needs of wine tourists. Moreover, the level of provided facilities is also satisfying. The weak points in the organisation of wineries are to be found mainly in the lack of specialised and educated personnel and in the lack of high benefits of added value that will strengthen and upgrade the quality of offered services of network and attract more quality tourism. Despite the satisfying organisation of the wineries and their networking, they still present low visitation, small volume of sales and the profits are generally small from the creation of visitable for tourist wineries.

According to the research results presented by Triantafyllou and Pitsaki (2005) which were conducted in wineries all over Greece, the higher recorded visits are found in tourist regions, meaning in tourist developed regions where the majority are foreign visitors. On the contrary in continental Greece the majority of tourists are Greeks. Research results show that the development level of Wine tourism in Greece is low and it depends on the tourist development of each region.

Therefore, Wine tourism should be connected with other forms of tourism, which is currently not the case in the “Wine Roads of Northern Greece” that are owned by small level Strategic business cooperations. This is also shown by the limited duration of tourist visitations in each region. Moreover, participation in package tours is very small and the majority of tourists individually visit the wineries and not in the form of a completed wine tour program or a touristic package tour.

The above results, as well as the problems faced by the Network, are taken into consideration in the proposals presented below.

## THE REGION OF THESSALY

### Characteristics and Tourism of Thessaly

The Region of Thessaly is located in central Greece and is divided into four Prefectures: the Prefecture of Magnesia, the Prefecture of Larissa, the Prefecture of Trikala and the Prefecture of Karditsa. Thessaly is surrounded by mountains; to the west lies the Pindos Mountain range, to the east, Mount Pilio in Magnesia and to the north, Mount Olympus, the tallest and most well-known Greek mountain. Thessaly is characterised by its fertile plains which are the primary source of agricultural farming for its inhabitants but also by its beaches in its eastern prefectures as well as the Sporades, an archipelago along the eastern coast of Greece. Thessaly has protected conservation areas. Apart from the Mount Olympus National Park and the National Marine Park of Alonissos (home of the Mediterranean Monk Seal – *Monachus monachus*), there are many extensive protected areas of great national importance such as: the Tembi Valley, the Ossa Forest Complex, the pine forests of Skiathos and the Meteora, one of the largest and most important complexes of Eastern Orthodox Monasteries which is also included on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It should be noted that 26 areas in the prefectures of Thessaly are listed on the Greek Natura 2000 network, a European Ecological Network of sites, which hosts natural habitats and species of community importance.

The hotel capacity in the region of Thessaly accounts for 3.9 % of Greece's total hotel capacity, of which 70% is recorded in the prefecture of Magnesia.

**Table 2.** Hotel Capacity in the Region of Thessaly in year 2007

Prefecture	Hotel units	Hotel beds	% of the Region
Karditsa	34	1488	5.5%
Larissa	47	2991	11.0%
Trikala	73	3786	13.9%
Magnesia	418	18930	69.6%
Region of Thessaly	572	27195	3.9% of Greece
Greece	9207	700933	

*Source: NSSG (2008).*

Thessaly's share of Greece's tourism is very limited and does not exceed 3% of the total annual nights spent. This is due mainly to the fact

that tourism from abroad plays a very small role in the tourism of Thessaly. Visitors from within Greece make up the greatest portion of tourism in this region at a rate of between 60 and 65%. Conversely, at a national level tourism from abroad makes up 75% of the total demand. Due to its seaside tourism, the prefecture of Magnesia receives the greatest share of tourism in Thessaly at a rate of 61%. The demand in winter is almost exclusively made up of Greek Tourists.

### **Vineyards and Wineries in Thessaly**

The vineyards and wineries in the region of Thessaly provide 6.1% of Greece's total production. This sector has unique advantages in Greece, even in relation to comparable sectors in other wine producing countries. These include a long tradition in Greece of vineyard cultivation and wine production, the large number of indigenous Greek varieties, the climatologic and soil distinctiveness of Greece, the cultural relationship of the Greek people and wine in all its expressions of human behavior but also the Greek nutritional prototype (the Mediterranean diet) where wine dominates and affords distinct benefits to human health. According to the EU (European) regulations, wines are divided into two categories; Table wines which also include Local Wines (Table wines with regional determination) and V.Q.P.R.D. wines (Vins Qualité Produits dans un Region Déterminé). The V.Q.P.R.D. wines that are produced in Thessaly are: MESSENIKOLA (Messenikolas Black, Syrah and Carignan grape varieties) from the Prefecture of Karditsa, RAPSANI (Xinomavro, Krassato, and Stavroto) from the Prefecture of Larissa and AGHIALOS (Roditis and Savatiano) from the Prefecture of Magnesia (Greek Ministry for Rural Development, 2007). Local wines of Thessaly with a distinct identity are the Kraniotikos local wine, the Tyrnavos local wine, recently (2008) the Meteora local wine (white and red), and the Karditsa local wine (white, rose and red). The Estimated Wine production in the Region was about 28325 tons. (27660 tons of Table Wine and 665 tons V.Q.P.R.D.) in 2004. About 70.6% of the production was in the prefecture of Larissa and 19.5% in the prefecture of Magnesia. When comparing the available data on the expanse of Greece's vineyards (132,000 ha) with its corresponding European Union members, it was found that Greece ranks low in comparison with the size of vineyards in countries such as Spain (1,210,000 ha) and France (978,000 ha). As for the geographical distribution of Greece's expanses, the largest number of vineyards (1996 data) is found in Crete with 29,348 ha followed by the

Peloponnese with 25,957 ha, the Prefectures in Western Greece with 19,580 ha and with Thessaly falling far behind with 6,233 ha.

An inventory of wineries and distilleries was taken after conducting primary research through an expedition in the Region of Thessaly and interviews with its wine producers. During the personal interviews, the eagerness of the wine producers to collaborate in the promotion of the local vineyards and their wines was evident as well as the desire of many of them to be included in a network of visitable wineries.

**Table 3.** Inventory of wineries and distilleries in the Region of Thessaly in 2007

Prefecture	Number of wineries & distilleries	Able to Visit	After Call Contact	Shortly able to Visit	No able to Visit
Larissa	21	4	7	2	8
Karditsa	8	2	2	0	4
Magnesia	5	1	2	0	2
Trikala	3	0	1	1	1
Region of Thessaly	37	7	12	3	15

## PLANNING OF THE WINE ROUTE NETWORK IN THESSALY

The planning of the wine route network includes proposals for four routes in the Region of Thessaly as well as a presentation of the fundamental requirements and measures needed to be taken for the successful functioning of the network. The conditions pertain to the creation and organization of visitable wineries, participation/inclusion in tourist packages and also on strategic business collaborations.

### Proposed Wine routes in Thessaly

#### *A. The Wine Route of the Olympian Gods*

This wine route will be an extension of the existing route, once new visitable wineries in Tyrnavos, Larissa and Elassona are included. Due to the geographic identity of Thessaly, it could potentially be the fundamental route in the Prefecture of Larissa. Moreover, its vital position which crosses sections of the national road is promising for the

future of the wine routes. Each passing visitor will potentially be given a tour of this area at some point in the future. More specifically, the route traverses the Mount Olympus region, an area whose vineyards are located directly above the Tembi Valley and comprises the Rapsani V.Q.R.P.D. wine zone. In terms of tourism, the region begins from the village of Ambelakia just before the Tembi Valley, continues to Rapsani, Pyrgetos, Krania and can end in Pieria (Agios Panteleimonas, Litochoro, Dion) or vice versa. Throughout the region, accommodations and sites to visit are available. Moreover, this route may also include the beaches of the prefecture of Larissa as well as Mount Kissavos.

With Larissa as their base, visitors can take wine tourism routes towards all the other wine producing regions in Thessaly such as (A) towards Tyrnavos, Damassi, and from there towards Tsaritsani, Elassona (and the junction between Velvendou with the Wine Roads of Northern Greece), (B) towards Trikala – Kalabaka, (C) towards Vounena, Karditsa, Messenikola, and (D) towards Aghialo, Volos, and from there towards the local sites of each area. Tourist sites of the greater area include the traditional settlement in Ambelakia, the Tembi Valley, Mount Olympus, Tyrnavos, Larissa, and Rapsani.

### *B. The Wine Route in the Land of Argonauts and the Centaurs*

Magnesia is a place which combines legends, beauty and history. It was named after the ancient Magnetes and quickly became renowned. Magnesia is the homeland of the mythical hero Jason who assembled a great group of heroes, known as the Argonauts after their ship, the Argo and began his quest for the Golden Fleece from there. It is also the home of the Centaurs and venerable Centaur Heiron who became the mentor of all the demigods and heroes and taught the art of medicine to Asklipios in old Pilion as Shakespeare called it. Its location in central Greece makes access for guests from different places by any means of transportation both easy and comfortable. The airports of Skiathos and New Aghialos are the gates which connect Magnesia to the rest of the world. Correspondingly, the Volos Port connects Europe and the Balkans with Asia and Northern Africa. Lately, there has been a creation of innovative wineries and an increased emphasis on wine. Up until recently, for thousands of tourists Magnesia has been a tourist attraction which was famous for its plentiful natural beauty however with little emphasis on its wines. Nevertheless, the development of wine roads may redefine and enhance the tourist product of the region. The Magnesia Wine Route could be comprised of wineries found mainly in the region of Aghialos –

Almiros combined with a tour of Pilio, the mountain of the Centaurs as well as excursions to the prefecture's beaches and the Sporades islands.

### *C. The Wine Route of the Meteora Monasteries*

Vineyard cultivation in Trikala is developed in the Meteora – Kalabaka area, which is already touristically developed. A Wine Tourism route could include this region, the city of Trikala, as well as a tour of the villages of Pili – Elati - Pertouli and Aspropotamos – Kalabaka. Pili have access to Mouzaki in the prefecture of Karditsa and from there to Argithea and Lake Plastiras. Kalabaka has access to two Wine Roads of Northern Greece – one via Grevena towards Naoussa and the other wine producing regions of Macedonia and the other via Metsovo, which essentially unites wine tourism in western and eastern Greece. Tourist attractions include the conglomerate rock and monasteries at Meteora, the Pertouli mountain range and ski resort, etc.

### *D. The Wine Route on the Agrafa Mountainside*

The primary vineyard cultivation zone in the prefecture of Karditsa is made up of vineyards in Messenikola, Mouzaki and Daphnospilia – Paliouri, namely in the semi-mountainous region of the Agrafa mountains which neighbor on Lake Plastira, an area particularly conducive to and known for its agro-tourism activities. The wine producing areas, the wineries and all the tourist attractions of the prefecture can easily be connected and make up a comprehensive wine route tour proposal with the natural Lake Plastira landscape as its base. Karditsa can act as the connection point with the other Wine Roads in the prefectures of Thessaly. Meanwhile, a portal connecting the Wine Routes of Thessaly and Central Greece can be created to the south via the new Smokovos Lake and neighboring Domokos. Apart from Lake Plastiras, excursions to visit the touristically “untouched” region of the villages of Argithea and the healing waters of the springs of Smokovos can be organized.

## **Creating Visitable Wineries**

A fundamental requirement in the development of a Wine Road – Network is the creation of visitable (touristic) wineries. The winery cannot merely consist of a wine cellar. It also needs to live up to its guests' expectations. These expectations may include: wine tasting opportunities, education in a friendly and entertaining environment, and

also opportunities to discover new wines which may also be purchased. A successful wine tourism enterprise identifies itself with a specific region and offers some basic enticements such as a brand name, easy access, good marketing and public relations a variety of tasty foods, a choice of accommodations and a range of activities for its guests. Only when the majority of these live up to the client's demands will a region attain the strong mass acceptance needed to become a tourist destination. Successful wine tourism enterprises have set "informing their potential guests and creating a yearning" before the upcoming visit as their leading commercial goal. This is more easily achieved when there are a number of wineries in a region rather than when one wine tourism agent tries to achieve the same result. (Jarvis, 2002).

In today's environment of enormous increases in wine production, increased global competition, and smaller profit margins in retail sales, direct cellar door sales in combination with sales of food, beverages and commercial goods make up a significant source of income for wineries. (Dodd, 1999:18). Quality wines, that are brand name wines or labels, will help in this area. A strong label will help the consumer appreciate the benefits of the product's use and become a regular client. According to a study by The Boston Consulting Group, in 19 out of 22 categories of products in the USA, the dominant market brands were the same in 1995 as they were in 1925 (Fuller, 2002:78).

The personnel also play a vital role at visitable wineries. Therefore, some wineries focus the training of their staff on their own exclusive products. As a result, the staff members may have exceptional knowledge of their products, but not the required qualifications to receive and serve their guests in the appropriate manner. According to Jarvis, (2002) the training of wine cellar personnel should include training in behavior towards the client, commercial knowledge, in-depth knowledge of the vineyard's products and knowledge of the region as well as in sales.

### **Networking and participation in package tours**

It is difficult for wineries to be marketed as a separate product in the tourism chain distribution since wine tasting experiences are usually free of charge and thus do not offer a commission. However, participation in a package offered with other tourist products allows for the opportunity to develop certain products and take advantage of the tourism industry distribution network. Package deals are a marketing strategy that involves offering several products for sale as one combined product with one combined price. An example of such a package could be an excursion to a

famous site (eg. Mount Olympus, Mount Pilio, the Meteora, Lake Plastira) which will include in its offer a visitation to a winery. Instead of regular wine tasting which is free of charge, they could prepare presentations and extend the chance to savor local products for a cost per person which will cover the price of both the food and wine.

Wine Tourism is a product which can convey a certain tradition and culture. It provides numerous motivation factors for visitations and is bound to its local history and identity. Thus, most of all, it becomes the vehicle to promote the regions' culture. Historical monuments in the Region of Thessaly, cultural events as well as the great archaeological, architectural and cultural wealth which is the legacy of the rich history of the area can support the formation and/or the reinforcement of Thessaly's tourist attractions. Beyond the sites and culture, the Region of Thessaly also offers potential for outdoor activities such as trekking, hiking, climbing, fishing, horseback riding, sailing, etc. depending on the area.

The purchase of group vacations can provide a substantial number of day trips and more lengthy excursions to wine producing regions, either separately or combined with some other form of tourism, as for example part of a convention, or even to enrich common tourist packages.

### **Strategic business collaborations**

It is important that the winery owners function within the same network as other tourism enterprises. In new and developing wine producing regions, it is essential that the collaboration and networking between wineries and other types of tourism companies, such as accommodations, restaurants, and sites, be developed. Moreover, shops which sell folk art (such as wood carvings, embroidery, knitting, ceramics, etc.) and local products (cheese, honey, traditional Greek spoon sweets, etc.) can use local providers, so as to preserve the traditional skills and techniques, as well as support the local industry. Networking aims for:

- The development of collaboration among enterprises.
- An exchange of guests among enterprises, such as between wine producers, hotels, restaurants and vice versa, exhibition rooms, museums and convention centers.
- Collaboration with local authorities and tourist information centres in order to promote the area, its businesses and their products.
- Seeking out related businesses whose services and products will enrich the guests' experiences.

- The organization of special wine and food visitations in cooperation with other businesses in the area.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS**

Wine Tourism is multi-faceted and comprises a wide gamut of activities. It includes wine appreciation, the combination of gastronomy with the use, consumption and sale of local traditional products, enjoyment of the natural environment and vineyard work, day trips or longer stays, many additional cultural or eco-tourism activities and an introduction to the local community, its history and way of life. (Askeli, 2006).

The establishment of a network of visitable wineries that will develop and function according to the example of major wine tourism markets abroad is the fundamental prerequisite for the development and promotion of wine routes. Wine Tourism in Greece is essentially a new tourist product which could potentially contribute to an extension of the tourism period an increased recognition of wines and their sales, connecting tourism with culture and the preservation and distribution of the local cuisine of each region. This can be accomplished through:

- The creation of visitable areas at wineries, which will provide basic wine tourism services.
- Upgrading the quality of wine, while putting an emphasis on local wines and brand named wines.
- Establishing a comprehensive wine map of wine routes, wineries and sites in Greece.
- Endowing the network with accommodations, dining areas, tourist agencies and other tourist services provided in the network.
- Quality control standardization which will approve the services of the members and cooperating bodies.
- Training the staff of the wineries that are in contact with guests.
- The cooperation of the network with comparable networks in Greece and abroad as well as the exchange of know-how.
- Connecting the network with the cultural map of Greece.

When the aforementioned measures are brought into effect, the development of a wine tourism route, in addition to the creation of a dynamic, superior quality tourism product, will be possible. Thus Wine Tourism as an alternative form of tourism, along with the comprehensive functioning of the network of visitable wineries, sets forth a new

proposition which will act as strong motivating for travelers to visit regions where the network is being developed.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Of the 48 visitable wineries, 10 were in northern Greece, 9 in Central Greece, 12 in Southern Greece and 17 on the islands (4 in Crete, 2 in Rhodes, 6 in Santorini, 1 is Samos and 2 in Kefallonia).

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