



**MASTER THESIS**

**WINE TOURISM PROJECT: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE CONCEPT OF  
WINE ROUTES IN MOLDOVA**

**TATIANA GILEA**

Internship developed at Moldova Competitiveness Project, Implemented by Chemonics International  
Inc.  
Chisinau, Moldova

Professional Supervisor  
Ana Efros

Academic Supervisor  
Antonio Paolo Russo  
URV University

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## **ABSTRACT**

Moldova is a small landlocked country located in Eastern Europe, yet with an enormous unexploited tourism potential. The country is capable to satisfy the most important visitor's needs, especially in the wine tourism industry. Recently, with the help of MCP funded by USAID, Sweden Embassy and UK Aid, the tourism sector in Moldova has developed considerably with 147,000 tourists in 2017, which is an increase of 19.6 % compared to 2016. Even though the number of tourists is high compared to previous years, it did not achieve the goal of increasing the number of tourists by 50% compared to 2016. For that reason, I believe that the development and promotion of a new wine tourism product in Moldova is needed.

The master thesis presents a project that focuses on the development and implementation of an innovative wine tourism plan in Moldova – the wine routes. The idea was developed and the first steps of the project were implemented during February – June, 2019 at MCP. MCP is a project mainly dedicated to invest in 4 key industries in Moldova, which include wine and tourism. MCP recognizes the need to develop new wine tourism projects in Moldova that benefit the industry, increase the number of tourist and make Moldova known abroad.

The project describes a plan of actions to be implemented in order to create a successful wine route in Moldova based on research, theory and case studies from other countries. The proposed project is a novelty in Moldova, has added value to the wine tourism industry from the country, and has certain innovative aspects compared to international wine routes

## **KEY WORDS**

**Wine Routes, MCP, PGI, Codru, Stefan Voda, Valul lui Traian**

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

**ANTRIM-** National Tourism Association from Moldova

**DMO-** Destination Management Organizations

**ICT-** Information and Communications Technology

**MCP** – Moldova Competitiveness Project

**ONVV** –National Office of Vine and Wine from Moldova

**PGI-** Protected Geographical Indication

**SWOT** – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

**TIC** – Tourism Information Center

**UNWTO** – United Nations World Tourism Organization

**USAID** – United States Agency for International Development

**WFTGA-** World Federation of Tourist Guide Association

## **1.INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Company description**

Moldova Competitiveness Project (MCP) is a 6 years project funded by USAID, Sweden Embassy and UK Aid, and implemented in September 30, 2015 by Chemonics International in Moldova (<https://www.chemonics.com/>). Chemonics International is an American development company that manages projects in developing countries, including Moldova. MCP focuses on developing 4 key industries in Moldova such as: tourism, wine production, light industry and ICT. The industries supported by MCP have key economic and social significance, are export oriented, and collectively account for 13 % of GDP and 40 % of exports (Nistor, Lazar, Burciu, & Efros, 2018). The team of the project mainly consists of Moldovan employees who are known for their leadership skills, creativity and productivity. Also, the team is primarily composed of local experts who can continue their work even after the project ends in 2021, so that the job performed remains sustainable.

MCP supports Moldova's efforts to promote a strong, diverse and export-oriented economy, by improving competitiveness and efficiency in 4 industries, thereby creating desirable well-paying jobs, reducing emigration and improving economic well-being of all Moldovans. In order to develop the mentioned above industries, MCP is focusing on the following objectives:

O 1: To increase the productivity and quality (better workforce and adopted innovation)

O 2: To expand market linkages

O3: To improve the sector environment and increase capacity

According to Nistor et al., (2018), some of the major achievements developed by MCP in wine industry are:

- the implementation of the wine industry brand, "Wine of Moldova- A Legend Alive";
- the creation of the ONVV;
- the implementation of PGI's in Moldova;
- the creation of "Association of small producers of wine";
- the assistance in trading Moldovan wine to Europe and other distant markets in Asia;
- the implementation of quality improvement programs in wineries by offering grants to invest in innovation and technology;
- the assistance in business growth which tripled the number of small family- run businesses and others.

As for the tourism industry, MCP developed the following projects:

- assisted Moldova in becoming the fastest growing emerging tourism countries from being the least visited in the world;
- created the national tourism industry brand "Discover the Routes of Life";

- promoted Moldova through exhibition in the targeted countries such as Romania, Poland and Italy;
- hosted in premiere the UNWTO 2018;
- opened the first TIC in 2017;
- supported local festivals, refurbished rural guesthouses, and others.

## **1.2 Internship activities**

The internship was completed during the 4th semester of WINTOUR course from February – June, 2019. Having practical and theoretical background in tourism industry in Moldova, I decided to return home and invest the knowledge gained during WINTOUR in the wine tourism industry from Moldova. Moldova is a small country with an old and rich winemaking tradition and a high potential to attract tourists. With that thought in mind, I decided to write my thesis on the territorial development, and more specifically to develop and implement the concept of wine routes in Moldova.

During the internship, I researched the wine routes literature reviews, academic information and also gathered information about MCP company and the country overall. After understanding the global concept of wine tourism, I saw a big potential in implementing the wine routes in Moldova. The main activities performed during 4 months were based on designing the wine routes and implementing the concept. Below are the main activities performed during the internship:

- Created the map of wineries, accommodations, points of interest and border passes in Moldova:  
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1XQArj595eAa2dFJMBvvL8y-LXaApXQWn&usp=sharing>;
- Conducted the market research in Moldova by visiting or contacting local suppliers in order to find out about their tourism offers;
- Created the wine routes concept and design;
- Organized WFTGA training for Moldovan guides;
- Organized the training “Wine Olfactory Analysis Training, Oenoflair Method” for professionals from the wine industry of Moldova;
- Invited the international wine tourism expert, Diana Isac, to provide consultation for wineries and improve their tourism products and services;
- Organized press trips and familiarization trips related to wine tourism in Moldova;
- Developed the country’s tourism website (Moldova Travel, 2017).

## **1.3 Master thesis basis**

Wine tourism is a recent phenomenon that is actively developing in the whole world. Lately, it is experiencing a growing demand; thus, the presence of wine-related activities became an attractive

factor in visiting a country. In Europe, wine tourism has evolved in official wine routes which link regions, tourist attractions and wine producers so that the value of the viticulture will increase through tourism (Hall, Sharples, Cambourne, & Macionis, 2000).

According to Nistor et al., (2018), Moldova is a touristic destination with a high potential in tourism, yet it is in the “start-up” stage. From the least visited destinations in the world, Moldova was declared among the fastest growing emerging tourism countries. For the third successive year, Moldova has seen essential growth in its overlooked tourism industry, recording 145,165 foreign tourists in 2017, 54% increase vs. 2015. Moldova is fortunate to have a handful of inherent and marketable tourism tools with which to work, such as wine, food, authentic village culture, city culture in Chişinău, and soft adventure. It also has a rich heritage, an old winemaking tradition, distinctive culture, and reputation for a warm hospitality.

The importance of wine in Moldova is beyond the product itself, it is part of the country’s history and culture. UNWTO recognized the fact that Moldova is a world leading wine producer and an important wine country, with endless rows of vines and a strong sense of community. Also, they claim that Moldova has rich culture, unique music, dance, food, architecture and artisanal goods which in combination with wine, this creates an authentic and unique experience for tourists. For that reason, UNWTO decided to organize the 3rd UNWTO Global Conference on Wine Tourism in Moldova since they believed that Moldova is the ideal host (World Tourism Organization UNWTO (n.d.)). Aside from hosting international events, Moldova is home to the world's largest winery and has the largest wine collection in the world (Moldova Travel, 2017). It also organizes many wine and food festivals and produces high quality wines that gained international recognitions, with over 1,000 awards at contests since 2016 (Nistor et al., 2018).

With that being said, in order to develop the wine tourism industry in Moldova and increase the number of visitors, 3 wine routes are created. The routes include activities such as accommodation options, transportation services, guides, wine related and non-wine related activities that satisfy the wine tourism segments: wine lovers, wine interested and the curious tourists.

#### **1.4 Proposal to be developed**

MCP’s aim is to develop wine and tourism industry in Moldova with the financial help of USAID, Sweden Embassy and UK Aid. The idea of creating wine routes in Moldova was approved by the prime-minister in 2004; however, it was never implemented since then (Tarlev, 2004). After joining MCP, I proposed to develop and implement the wine routes in Moldova, which was very much welcomed firstly by MCP and then by the 2 organizations, ANTRIM and ONVV, that will be responsible for launching, developing and consolidating the project after my internship.

As a starting point, the research on wine tourism literature was conducted. Also, the market research on the regional suppliers was necessary in order to see the big picture, to identify the wine

route actors and to create the regional network. Based on the information gathered and available resources, the objectives and strategies were defined. The project is divided into 3 Chapters. The first part describes the terms and scope of the project, the second chapter includes the literature review relevant to the project. This comprises the examination of the wine tourism concepts and design, the wine routes network creation, followed by wine tourism industry analysis in Moldova. The last chapter describes the strategic approach and wine routes product design in Moldova.

The work presented in this master thesis project is the result of 4 months' intense work at MCP implemented by Chemonics and funded by USAID, Sweden Embassy and UK Aid. The project is a long term investment which is expected to give visible results in few years. However, this master thesis plan will be presented to MCP, ONVV and ANTRIM in order to successfully continue the job after the end of the internship at MCP.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

### **2.1 Literature review**

According to Gets, (2000), wine tourism is a form of consumer behavior, a marketing chance for wineries to sell wine related products to consumers, as well as a strategy for local development. Wine tourism has been defined in many ways, but the most used definition is given by Hall et al. (2000), which says 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 primary motivation factors for visitors”. Visiting vineyards has been a practice since the times of Rome and ancient Greece, yet wine tourism became a specific travel interest in mid 19th centuries (Hall et al., 2000). The main reasons for the development of wine travel interest resulted from the following 3 factors:

- the development of the infrastructure, and more specifically the development of railways;
- the demand for quality wines from middle class during social revolution;
- the 1855 classification of wine of the Gironde region which gave Bordeaux region a destination identity, which became a famous wine tourism attraction (Hall et al., 2000).

Over time, a special interest in wine tourism was developed. The relevant findings regarding the concepts, design and network of the wine routes are presented in the following chapter.

### **2.2 Wine routes concept and design**

According to Thomas, Sandra, Rodriguez, (2010), the wine routes are a combination of physical attractions (wineries), natural attractions (scenery), vineyards, footpaths and marked roads. The mix of social, cultural and environmental features provide wine routes with distinctive character. Also, the concept is defined as “the integration of both existing and potential resources and services of interest to tourists in winemaking areas to form a single thematic concept, thus ensuring an authentic

experience. The aim of this is to develop a product that embodies the identity of the destination, whilst enhancing the marketing of local products in general and guaranteeing a high level of customer satisfaction, with a view to fostering the overall economic and social development of the area” (Thomas et al. 2010). According to Bruwer, (2003), the wine routes is one or several signposted itineraries that cover a well-defined area, unite wineries, wine tasting centers, vineyards, wine museums and rural accommodations, that connect different winery properties and wineries at a certain area. The main benefits that wine routes bring to a country are:

- support a sustainable social and economic development of the area;
- provide an improved quality of life;
- provide a complementary support to the economy by improving the local infrastructure and diversifying the seasonality of tourist visits in the area;
- make the country and local products known abroad;
- offer new job opportunities;
- increase the number of tourists in the region;
- increase in the direct sales of wines and other local products.

According to Thomas et al., (2010), in order to create a wine route product that meets the quality standards, 4 subsystems are required to be analyzed and implemented: planning and management, destination, marketing and tourism service. The initial step focuses on the organization of regional network and the wine route itself. This subsystem encourages the creation of a management body, investment through training, retraining and professionalization in human resources. The development of destination subsystem requires installation of road signs to the touristic attractions and availability of visitor’s centers. The third subsystem is marketing, and it involves the encouragement of a common promotional strategies as a network. The tourism service subsystem encourages new and existent businesses to join the network.

According to Spanish Ministry of Tourism, (2000), the implementation of wine routes is divided into 3 phases: launch, development and consolidation. During the launch phase, the wine routes network is created, as well as the wine routes concept and design. The launch phase ends when the wine routes get certified by the official institutions from the country. The second phase, the development phase, lasts 1 year and consists of the ongoing inspection of the service and product quality provided by the suppliers. In case the outcome of the wine route is satisfactory, it goes to the next stage. However, if the outcome of the wine route is negative, the routes lose their official status and the management body is not able to reapply for certification for 1 year. As for the last stage, the consolidation stage, consists of the continuous inspection of all the members involved in order to see if everyone meets the quality requirements. In case there are any negative evaluations, the route is given 6 months to improve.



As for the design, the itinerary has to involve a large number of stakeholders that offer different experiences and ideas for the wine route. It is important to include a large number of diverse wine related and non-wine activity providers so that the route does not rely on wineries' harvest season. Also, the itinerary has to be dynamic in order to engage all the wine tourism segments. An important option for the visitors is to have the freedom to personalize the wine route itinerary based on their preferences and the resources available in the region. For that reason, while developing and implementing a wine route, an important part is to build an inventory of resources and their description for visitors to be used while designing their route (Bras et al., 2010). According to Clemente- Ricolfe, Escriba- Perez, Rodriguez- Barrio, & Buitrago- Vera, (2012), the following sectors of activities are part of wine tourism and is advised to have them included in a wine route as well:

- Economic- purchase of wine and local products;
- Cultural- visits to museums, interpretive centers of wine and vine culture, tastings wine and local products;
- Tourism- participation in wine fairs and festivals, visit to wineries, cellars, vineyards, monuments, and natural heritage;
- Sports- horse riding, cycling, balloon rides, and extremes sports;
- Health and well-being, the consumption of wine and its derivatives, for therapeutic purposes as a component of wellness/ spa centers;
- Educational- visitors have the opportunity to learn something about wine and culture.

According to Getz, (2000), it is recommended to follow the checklist below in order to implement wine routes that sustain the development of local communities:

- The wine routes should be easily navigated;
- Maps, guides and place signs should be provided throughout the routes;
- Activities and resources should be associated to the routes in order to improve visitors' satisfaction (quality of accommodation, catering, animation, others);
- Usage of the routes should be facilitated by visitors and residents;
- The strategies of the activities, the equipment and services that belong to the routes should be integrated in the routes planning;
- The investors, public and private entities should be engaged in the wine route network;
- The tourist flow should be managed by avoiding the high concentration of visitors;
- The preservation of more fragile areas should be encouraged;
- The marketing strategies should be developed from the implementation of the route;
- A permanent monitoring of the wine routes should be established.

Before creating a wine activity, in this case a wine route, the profile of tourists must be known. Since there is little research about wine tourist profile, Hall et al., (2000) developed general views about the wine tourism segments. They argue that demographic data shows just a simple segmentation tool for tourist profile; however, they state that psychographic data refers to attitudes, lifestyle, values, interests, and include more important information. Hall and Macionis, (1998), classified the wine tourists in 3 segments:

### **Wine Tourism Segments and Description**

Wine Lovers	<p>Extremely interested in wines and winemaking;  Wineries are usually the main reason to visit a region;  May be working in wine and food industry;  Likely to have high educational level and high income;  Likely to be regular buyer of wines and food magazines;  Likely to have visited other wine regions;  Likely to purchase wine at the winery and add name to mailing list.</p>
Wine Interested	<p>Wine is not the only purpose of visiting a destination, however there is a high interest in wine;  University educated with moderate to high income;  Occasional purchaser of wine and food magazines;  The interest for visiting a region comes mainly from “word of mouth” and wine columns in newspaper;  Likely to have visited other wine regions;  Familiar with winemaking process;  Likely to buy wine at the winery and add the name to the mailing list;  Possibility to repeat the purchase of the wine from that winery.</p>
Curious Tourists	<p>Not familiar with wine making, however is moderately interested in wine;  Wineries are perceived as “another attraction”;  Moderate income and education;  May have visited other regions;  Curiosity arouse by seeing general winery product, tourism promotion or by drinking wine;  Opportunity for social interaction with family/ friends;  May buy wines at the winery, however will not join the mailing list.</p>

*Source:* adapted from Hall & Macionis (1998), p.217

### **2.3 Wine route networks**

Wine tourism has been defined in many ways, but most of the definitions provided above (2-2.2) are from countries and tourists' perspective. As from wine routes' strategies, it can be defined as a thematic path connecting different points of a region, a physical network managed by destination management organizations (Berti, Ara, Brunori, 2011). Also, they can be defined as a territorial marketing tool, that is a set of collective actions driven by both public and private actors in order to attract new economic activities, to favor sustainable development of local enterprises and to promote a positive image of an area (Texier and Valle, 1992). These 2 definitions emphasize the need for a network strategy where all the players work closely together to achieve a common goal. In order to have a successful and sustainable regional project, the interconnection between public organizations and private stakeholders has to be very strong. The partnership between these 2 organizations can bring mutual benefits such as knowledge and information exchange, community and economic activity for the region. Also, the collaboration between the involved actors enable the discussion and definition of actions for the long run, the creation of strategic measures, the development of a set of activities, and others (Baggio, 2018).

The implementation of a regional organizational structure, a wine route network, should involve destination management organizations (DMO) that unite all regional partners, public and private. The concept of DMO used to be associated with governmental and public bodies; however, nowadays these are liberal administrations that follow the economic market trends and increase efficiency, economic turnover and cooperation (Baggio, 2018). DMOs can be tourism boards, tourism authority, visitors' bureau and others. DMOs should be the most important body that provide necessary leadership and involve all public and private partners for joint decision making. Apart from that, a DMO is also responsible for the promotion and marketing of the region, for monitoring visitor's experience, managing crisis, evaluating workforce qualification, and also dealing with local issues through a high level of cooperation (Bras M., Buhalis D., Costa C., 2010).

While talking about the wine routes, a critical factor for the success is to have a regional network that is managed by a DMO. The main activities for a DMO in a wine route is to assume the leading role, to involve all regional partners and to constantly monitor their actions. The public sector's role is to promote and adopt policies, encourage the involvement of local actors in policies and proposed strategy. As for the private stakeholders, their most important functions are to provide quality services for tourists and follow the wine route's policies.

In order to have a successful network, Hall et al. (2000) identified a number of barriers for the development and management of networks in the wine sector that should be acknowledged and avoided. Thus, with good established objectives, a strong DMO and network collaboration, the implementation of wine routes will be successful, sustainable and the barriers will be avoided. Below are the factors to be prevented:

- the poor perception concerning tourism benefits for the wine industry;
- the perception that wine is a dominant and individual product;
- the lack of experience concerning the association of tourism development and wine production facilities;
- the lack of entrepreneurial, marketing and tourism product design skills;
- the physical barriers and the long distance to vineyards and wineries.

The literature review from section 2.2 and 2.3 shows a detailed process of a successful development and implementation of wine routes. The concepts are based on real case studies from other countries and on the previous research done on this topic. These include the detailed plan of creation with the 4 subsystems (2.2), the implementation of the wine routes that goes through 3 stages (2.2), multiple activities to be included in the wine route, and the regional network to be involved in the wine route. The mentioned literature is used in section 3 for developing a sustainable wine route in Moldova based on the available infrastructure.

## **2.4 Wine tourism industry analysis in Moldova**

With a population of less than 3 million people, Moldova is a small, but very beautiful country located between Romania and Ukraine. The capital of Moldova is Chisinau and the local language is Romanian, with Russian being widely used. According to tourists' feedback, the country has hospitable people and delicious food. Moldova is the ideal destination for travelers of all kinds, with wine tourism being the country's strength (Slonovschi, 2018). The following sections analyzes the wine and tourism industry in details, and concludes with Moldova's SWOT analysis.

### **2.4.1 Tourism industry in Moldova**

Small in size, but huge in opportunities, Moldova has an undeniable tourism potential (Nistor et al., 2018). After a constant fall in inbound tourism in recent decades, today the tourism in the country stands as a "start-up" industry compared to international tourism. With a strong tourism marketing strategy and action plan written by Huéscar, Nistor & Lazar, (2016), in just 2 years, Moldova became from "The least visited destination in Europe" into a "Must visit country" in 2018 (World Tourism Organization UNWTO (n.d.)). The country was also declared by Bloomberg.com as one of the top 10 fastest growing travel destinations in Europe (Ekstein, 2018).

Moldova's overlooked tourism industry is seeing vital signs of growth. In 2017, Moldova was visited by 145,000 tourists, which represents 19.6% increase vs. 2016 and 54% vs. 2015 (Nistor et al., 2018). The growth continued in 2018, with an increase of 12% in the first 2 quarters of the year. Inbound tourism is positioned as a niche tourism product, focusing on wine, gastronomy, rural, and soft adventure tourism. However, wine tourism is prevailing, with 60% of foreign tourists claiming that they appreciate wine and food experiences the most in Moldova (Slonovscki, 2018).

Moldova's tourism development strategy is to invest in sustainable rural areas since there is a high level of depopulation due to rural exodus and emigration. By attracting international tourists, the family-based small and medium-sized enterprises are motivated to retain and more jobs are created (Nistor et al., 2018). MCP implemented the "Go-Regional" tourism development program that was designed to stimulate and strengthen networks of tourism services and facilities, cultural events and tourism trails, as well as local destination management capacities. By enhancing the networks' capacity to attract and maintain tourists for longer periods, MCP enables them to become true economic engines in rural areas, driving the emergence of more small and medium-sized enterprises and resulting in more jobs (Nistor et al., 2018).

#### **2.4.2 Wine industry in Moldova**

Moldova is an old winemaking country that dates 5,000 years ago (Wine of Moldova, 2019). From ancient times, Moldova has been recognized as an agricultural and wine-producing region. Even nowadays wine production is the most important activity in the country. Moldova has the highest density of vineyards in the world, and wine is a key pillar of the country's cultural heritage (Wine of Moldova, 2019).

After 2 devastating embargos from Russia, in 2006 and 2013, Moldova's wine industry led to an extensive recession. The turning point in Moldovan wine industry was after the second embargo, when together with ONVV, MCP decided to change the strategy of exporting bulk wine to Russia. They started to reorient the exports to European countries and other distant markets in Asia, to invest in wine production which meets higher EU standards, and focus more on exporting bottled wine rather than bulk wine (Nistor et al., 2018). Also, MCP implemented the national wine brand, "Wine of Moldova – A Legend Alive" in 2013 and made it known outside the country. The national wine brand is guided by the following statement: "Our wine has been crafted by generations of winemakers in the largest winery in the world, appreciated by consumers in both east and west, and supported by legends that everyone can embrace". MCP also contributed to revitalization of the wine sector in the economy, which is an important source of income for approximately 50,000 farmers. Below are presented the most recent key facts about wine industry from annual report of MCP (Nistor et al., 2018).

- 167 winegrowing small and medium size enterprises registered in the national vine and wine registry;
- the number of tourist-friendly wineries increased from 9 in 2015 to 23 in 2019;
- 80% of total wine production is exported, which represents \$129 million or 5% of country's exports;
- Moldova has 100,000 hectares of vineyards, being one of the highest densities in the world;
- Moldova has 3 historic wine regions with EU-recognized PGI status: Codru, Valul lui Traian, and Ștefan-Vodă;

- the first wines branded with PGI status were released in 2016;
- 13% of Moldovan wines are PGI certified;
- since 2014, there was a high progress in quality of wines, with 1000 awards at international contests.

According to Nistor et al., (2018), an important investment in wine tourism development in Moldova was done by refining the wine culture, obtaining wine knowledge in hospitality sites, and connecting the local emerging winemakers to consumers. In 2018, MCP together with ONVV implemented the Wine Tourism Accelerator Program to support the development of new wineries, the implementation of wine and food festivals, and the installation of tourism signs in key wine regions. The same year, 15 new wine service professionals were accredited with the European Sommelier Certification, and over 20 food pairing educational events were held in local restaurants. Still, there is need for more training in the wine tourism hospitality sites (Nistor et al., 2018).

In regards to wine tourism, Moldova is very attractive for tourists. The country has a wide diversity of attractions, especially in rural areas, with wineries being the most valuable asset. In 2017, wineries hosted over 175,000 local and foreign visitors, who spent \$7.5 million in rural areas (Nistor et al., 2018). Moldova has the biggest wine collection in the world, with Milestii Mici winery having over 105 million bottles in its underground cellar, and being the world's biggest wine cellar with 200 km length and 80 meters' depth (Wine of Moldova, 2019). Also, Moldova has high-quality wines which are recognized with medals at international exhibitions. The small wine producers from Moldova are very attractive within the wine tourism industry since they offer personalized tours led by the winemakers or family representatives, and include tastings of limited edition wines. Other attractions are wine tasting rooms of uncommon architecture, cycling in the vineyards activities, driving in the underground winery caves, visiting exhibition centers, as well as enjoying health resorts with grape-cure and grape juice treatment. All these activities serve as a basis for the wine tourism products and provide a special potential for the wine tourism development in the country.

As for the wine events, Moldova welcomes thousands of visitors during events such as the bi-annual Wine Vernissage, Underland Wine and Music Fest, Mai Vin, Devin Degust festival, Wine Run, and many others. Moldovan National Wine Day is a key wine tourism event that attracts many visitors which book hotels and rural guesthouses at their full capacity. A record of 65,000 visitors visited Moldovan National Wine Day in 2018, which registered an increase of 46% compared to 2017. The guests were mainly from neighboring Romania, alongside tourists from the UK, Germany, Poland, and others (Nistor et al., 2018).

Moldova's positive international awareness as a wine producing country is growing. During 2018, the national brand "Wine of Moldova – A Legend Alive" was highlighted in 85 written publications of international media such as Decanter Magazine, Meininger Wein Business International, The Economist, and Washington Post (Nistor et al., 2018).

### **2.4.3 Research on tourist perception of Moldova as a touristic destination**

The research data about Moldova and its wine tourism industry is very weak. The few sources that contain most of the information about the country's key industries are MCP's annual reports. MCP conducts as much research as possible to make informed decisions in regards to projects' implementation. For that reason, one of the most recent research was on the foreign tourists' perception about Moldova as a touristic destination. The study was done on a sample of 1025 foreign travelers who were interviewed in several places from the country such as the airport, customs, festivals, touristic points, and wineries during October- November 2018. The data shows that more than half of the tourists coming to Moldova were adults aged from 26 to 45 years old, and roughly two thirds had a university degree. Approximately one in 4 visitors were from Romania, with the rest being from Russia, USA, Ukraine, the UK, Italy and others. Less than half of the travelers were visiting Moldova for the first time. According to the interview results, an average trip to Moldova lasted 10 days, and half of tourists preferred to stay in a hotel, which is higher among business and group travelers (Slonovschi, 2018).

Among the motivating factors to visit Moldova, most of foreign tourists chose wine as the most appealing. A share of 46% of visitors reported that they traveled to Moldova to taste Moldovan wines, 20% of the travelers wanted to see rural life, and the rest came to Moldova to see the monuments, festivals, and the Soviet Union atmosphere. Travelers were most satisfied with wines and the traditional food, and were least satisfied with the quality of infrastructure (Slonovschi, 2018).

The top sources of information about Moldova used by tourists were relatives and friends, websites, organizations, travel agencies, travel fairs, magazines, and others. As for the methods of organizing the trip around Moldova, about half of travelers stated that they organized their trip by themselves, while the other half organized it via a foreign / Moldovan travel agency. Approximately 50% of the respondents did not encounter any difficulties when organizing their trip to Moldova. For the rest, the main difficulties or inconveniences were the expensive air tickets/no direct transport, the language barrier, difficulty to find a hotel, the customs/much time waiting, and transportation. Finally, while asking to characterize Moldova in words and statements - "wine", "traditional, good food", and „landscapes, beautiful country" were among the most commonly associated with Moldova by the foreign travelers (Slonovschi, 2018). All the information regarding tourists' behavior is be taken into consideration in section 3.

### **2.4.4 SWOT analysis**

After analyzing the wine tourism industry in Moldova, the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of wine tourism in Moldova were identified and included in the a SWOT analysis.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5000 years of wine making history and cultural heritage</li> <li>• Quality wines and delicious food</li> <li>• Many wine related festivals and events</li> <li>• Unique attractions included in Guinness Book</li> <li>• Wine tourism friendly wineries</li> <li>• 3 PGI's</li> <li>• A rich and diverse natural environment</li> <li>• Local products, opportunity to visit local producers, farms, and gardens</li> <li>• Investment in "startup" businesses</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A "startup" development stage</li> <li>• Depopulation due to rural exodus and emigration</li> <li>• Lack of awareness of Moldova as a tourism destination</li> <li>• Weak service quality from some wine tourism industry providers</li> <li>• Inconvenient and poor system of public transport</li> <li>• Language barriers with Romanian and Russian widely spoken</li> <li>• Expensive airline tickets</li> <li>• Expensive hotel accommodation</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A country that is weakly explored by tourists/ authentic destination</li> <li>• Growing investments in promotion of Moldova as a wine tourism destination</li> <li>• Potential for becoming one of the top visited wine countries</li> <li>• Potential for becoming a member of European Union</li> <li>• Availability of external financial resources</li> <li>• Potential to attract tourists from different other countries</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar offers in wine regions of other countries that offer higher quality services and have a more successful marketing strategy</li> <li>• Economic instability</li> <li>• Political instability</li> <li>• Corruption</li> <li>• Climate change</li> </ul>



### **3. STRATEGIC APPROACH AND PRODUCT DESIGN**

The development of the wine route project in Moldova is an innovative idea not only at the country level, but also for the wine tourism segments such as wine lovers, wine interested and the curious tourists. The idea itself is not a discovery because there are many wine routes offered around the world. The implementation of wine routes is a novelty for Moldova, has added value to the wine tourism industry from the country, and has certain innovative aspects compared to international wine routes.

Firstly, the project is innovative for the country itself. Currently, there is no wine route that connects all the wineries from a single PGI and that combines wine related activities with non-wine related activities such as economic, cultural, tourism, sports, health, well-being and pedagogical activities. Also, there is no well-established regional partnership between private and public entities yet, which works together and creates a sustainable rural development. The implementation of the project is expected to bring Moldova a new and attractive wine tourism offer, and create a strong collaboration in the regional network.

Secondly, the project idea is expected to add value to the wine industry in Moldova by eliminating certain weaknesses from the SWOT analysis. With the implementation of the wine route project, a skillful work team is planned to be created through training, retraining and professionalization, thus offering a better service quality. Also, the rural areas are expected to develop and the country to attract more tourists.

Finally, the implementation of the project aims to position the wine routes as a unique product for international tourists. It gives the opportunity to discover a new wine country from Europe, to visit the world's unique resources- the biggest wine cellar and wine collection in the world. Also, guests have the chance to taste some sturgeon and brandy products made in an unrecognized state of Transnistria, and make traditional food and wine pairings from Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia. In addition, the tourists can personalize their wine route according to their preferences, or to join a special, pre-organized trip.

With all the above said, chapter 3 consists of the creation of wine routes in Moldova, and more specifically the strategic approach and product design of the wine routes. The used strategies are based on the research and concepts from chapter 2, as well as the information about Moldova's wine tourism industry. This section concludes with the wine routes design and financial feasibility of the project.

#### **3.1 Wine routes network in Moldova**

As mentioned previously, in order to implement and maintain the sustainability of the wine routes, the creation of an organized network is necessary. As discussed in chapter 2, the implementation of a regional organizational structure should involve a destination management organizations (DMO). The DMO unites all regional partners, the private and public entities in order to create a collective agreed

regional strategy, which lead to regional development. Here is the potential list of entities to be involved in the wine route:

DMOs:	ANTRIM and ONVV
Private entities:	Wine related service providers, non-wine related service providers, accommodations, transportation services, food and beverage services, tour operators, travel agencies, tourist guides services
Public entities:	Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure, The National Agency of Investments, other associations that are covering the wine and tourism industry
External entities	MCP implemented by Chemonics, funded by USAID, Sweden Embassy, and UK Aid as an external funder

For the wine routes, ANTRIM and ONVV are the DMOs, the 2 most important bodies for the development of the wine routes. ANTRIM, the National Inbound Tourism Association of Moldova, is one of the most important non-governmental organizations having as primary aim to stimulate the development of domestic and inbound tourism. ANTRIM works to collaborate with public and private stakeholders, to create and deliver high quality services and authentic experiences to tourists by supporting traditional Moldovan values of hospitality, culture, gastronomy and quality wine production (Asociația Națională pentru Turism Receptor din Moldova, 2014). ONVV is another association created on the basis of private and public cooperation with the aim of investing in wine industry development and promotion of Moldovan wines abroad.

ANTRIM and ONVV will be responsible for launching, developing and consolidating the wine routes. They will continue the implementation of 4 subsystems mentioned in chapter 2 starting from July, 2019 such as planning and management, invest in destination, marketing, and tourism services. The initial step focuses on creation of a skillful work team, the investment in human resources involved in wine routes network, the and the need for training, retraining and professionalization. The following step is the investment in destination such as development of a network of visitor's centers and in the region's road signs. The third step is marketing which involves the encouragement of common marketing and promotional strategies as a network. And lastly, the DMO's will invest in tourist services by encouraging the new businesses to join the network with innovative ideas and activities.

As for the private entities, the network involves a large number local service providers who can contribute with different ideas and experiences to the regional network. Some of the private entities are wine related service providers, non-wine related service providers, tour operators, travel

agencies, tourist guides services, accommodations, transportation and others. The involvement in the wine routes of non-wine related partners will overcome the market knowledge gaps and help economic development. Also, the private entities will benefit from the cooperation, communication, and interconnection within the network by receiving trainings in service quality, international promotion and will benefit financially by receiving more tourists.

Finally, the involvement of public and external entities is important for the development of the wine routes in Moldova. In order to improve the business environment, the legal framework and prospects of the sector, the DMO's will collaborate with public authorities, in particular with the Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure, The National Agency of Investments, and with other associations that are covering the tourism industry. In collaboration with public entities, the DMO's will define the long-term territorial development policies, especially in organizing some first-step actions. As for external entities, the funding and support activities will be provided by MCP, which is already involved in the wine routes project.

After analyzing the wine routes network in Moldova and each party's responsibilities, below are the specific objectives to be implemented by ANTRIM and ONVV:

- To launch the wine route during Moldovan National Wine Day in October, 2019;
- To continuously assess, monitor, and train the regional members;
- To evaluate, organize and qualify the tourism product;
- To encourage communication, cooperation, and interconnection within the network;
- To support all network (wine route) members;
- To invest in the destination by developing visitor centers and road signs;
- To establish partnerships, particularly with governments and enterprises from other sectors;
- To become self-supporting by creating revenues;
- To attract additional funds for the implementation and maintenance of the wine route;
- To promote the region in the domestic and major international markets;
- To develop new services and products to be include in the wine routes;
- To select new members or actors;
- To organize events and activities.

### **3.2 Wine routes proposal and design**

The proposed wine routes in Moldova are created on the basis of the literature findings from chapter 2 regarding wine routes design and information about Moldova. There are 3 wine routes proposed, each being in a different PGI from Moldova. Thus, one route leads to Codru wine region, another takes visitors to Valul lui Traian wine region, and finally, the 3rd route gives tourists the chance to discover

Stefan Voda wine region. The information about wine routes will be available on the national tourism website moldova.travel. The website will contain an inventory of regional stakeholders and the description of their services such as accommodation options, transportation services, guides, wine related and non-wine related activities. More information on the services included in the wine routes and their location on the map is provided on the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1XQArj595eAa2dFJMBvvL8y-LXaApXQWn&usp=sharing>. Each wine route includes at least few of the following economic, cultural, tourism, sports, health, well-being and pedagogical activities so that it can satisfy all wine tourism segments: wine lovers, wine interested, and the curious tourists.

There are 3 options for booking the wine routes: self- visiting, personalized itinerary, and pre-organized routes. For the first option, tourists can visit the website moldova.travel where all the regional players from the wine route will be included so that travelers can easily plan their itinerary by themselves. The second option is very dynamic as well, where visitors have the freedom to choose their activities available based on their preferences. Afterwards, they can ask a representative on the website to make a personalized itinerary for them and do the bookings accordingly. In regards to the third option, 3 pre-organized routes are offered: Codru PGI (Fig. 1), Valul lui Traian PGI (Fig. 2) and Stefan Voda PGI (Fig. 3). All 3 wine routes itinerary will be updated based on the events happening in the region, seasonality, or the new partners joining the network. The groups for the pre-organized tours allow a maximum of 8 people because of limited accommodation in some wineries, and will be organized once a week in each region. The prices for the pre-organized wine routes are presented in Annexes, and these cover the guide, transportation, accommodation, wine tastings and food services. The rest of the included activities in the itineraries are optional.

Regarding wineries, there are 23 estates included in the wine routes. The selection of the wineries was done by Alexei Burciu, the marketing expert and wine industry manager at MCP, and myself, wine tourism intern. The market research was done by visiting or calling the wineries and asking about their wine tourism offers. Based on that, the final list of wineries to be included in the wine routes was created, as well as the upcoming wineries from each PGI. Below is described each of the 3 routes in details:

**Codru PGI Wine Route** (Fig. 1) is located in the central part of the country with well aerated, light soils. It is covered by 61,200 ha of vineyards, has a fragmented relief of valleys and many small rivers. The microclimate of the region is influenced by the oak and linden forests which account for 25% of the territory. This zone is favorable for growing white grape varieties (Feteasca Alba, Muscat, Traminer, Chardonnay, etc.), fine red wines and sparkling wines (Wine of Moldova, 2019). While visiting Codru PGI, tourists have the chance to see the worldwide famous underground cellars such as Milestii Mici and Cricova, see the biggest wine collection in the world, taste some sturgeon and brandy in an unrecognized state, Transnistria, and also do some traditional food and

wine pairings during a cultural program in the guest house. As for now, there are 14 wineries that already offer wine tourism service, and 11 that will be included in the wine route by 2021. Below is the list of wineries included in the wine routes, as well as their highlights:

1. Mimi Castle - wine cellars, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, masterclasses, wine shop, restaurant, accommodation, events, wine lounge, wine spa, swimming pool, art gallery, museum.
2. Cricova Winery- one of the largest underground winery in the world, remarkable wine collections, guided tours and tastings, wine shop, restaurant, events.
3. Asconi Winery - wine cellars, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, masterclasses, wine making activities, wine shop, restaurant, accommodation, events.
4. Milestii Mici Winery - the largest underground winery in the world, the largest wine collection in the world, guided tours and tastings, wine shop, restaurant, events, museum.
5. Migdal-P Winery (Chateau Cojusna) - wine cellars, wine collections, brandy collections, guided tours and tastings, masterclass on local souvenirs, wine shop, restaurant.
6. Kvint Winery - wine cellars, wine collections, brandy collections, guided tours and tastings, wine shop, catering services, wine museum.
7. Chateau Vartely Winery - wine cellars, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, masterclasses, wine making activities, wine shop, restaurant, accommodation, events.
8. Pivnițele Branesti Winery - wine cellars in a stone, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, wine making activities, wine shop, restaurant, accommodation, events.
9. Mihai Sava Winery - wine cellars, guided tours and tastings, masterclasses, wine shop, restaurant.
10. Poiana Winery - wine cellars with sightseeing, wine collection, guided tours and tastings, fishing or boat trip on the lake, cycling activities, wine shop, restaurant, accommodation, events.
11. ATU Winery – urban winery, wine cellars, wine collection, guided tours and tastings, painting in wine activities, wine shop, catering, events.
12. Dionysos Mereni Winery - wine cellars, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, wine shop, restaurant.
13. Tronciu Winery - wine cellars, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, wine shop, restaurant.
14. Aghenie Tudor Winery - wine cellars, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, wine shop, restaurant.

Here is the list of upcoming wineries by 2021 in Codru PGI (11): Hincesti Winery, Mircesti Winery, Doina Vin Winery, Agrici Winery, Maurt Winery, Pomusoara Dulce Winery, Lius Crist Winery, Dealul Morilor Winery, Unicorn Estate Winery, Dac Winery, and Carpe Diem Winery.

**Valul lui Traian PGI Wine Route** (Fig. 2) is located between the 2 Traian's Walls that used to protect the Roman Empire from barbarians. It includes forest steppe plains and plateaus, with aerated and light soils, and limited productivity. It is covered with 43,203 ha of vineyards. The climate is warm, and ensures exceptional conditions for maturation, being mainly influenced by the Black Sea and the forests in the Tigheci Hill. The region is specialized in the production of red wines (60%) and liquorous wines (Wine of Moldova, 2019). While visiting the wine region, tourists have the chance to see some big and small wine producers, to discover the traditions of Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, their history, traditions, wine, and food. Also, tourists can practice kayaking, horse riding, bird watching activities and enjoy the evening with the grandma playing drums that performed at Eurovision in 2015. As for now, there are 6 wineries that already offer wine tourism service, and 5 that will be included by 2021. Below is provided the list of wineries included in the wine routes, as well as their highlights:

1. Vinuri de Comrat Winery- wine cellars, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, wine shop, restaurant, retro disco show, events.
2. KaraGani Winery- wine cellars, guided tours and tastings, museum of Gagauz life, masterclass, wine shop, restaurant, riding a cart with donkey, events.
3. Vinăria din Vale Winery- wine cellars, guided tours and tastings, wine shop, restaurant, biking activities, wine making activities, kayaking and birdwatching activities on Lake Belevu, events.
4. Vinia Traian Winery- wine cellars, guided tours and tastings, wine shop, restaurant, folk instrumental music.
5. Rumix Stil Winery - wine cellars, guided tours and tastings, catering, wine shop.
6. Kazayak Winery - wine cellars, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, wine shop, restaurant.

Here is the list of upcoming wineries by 2021 in Valul Lui Traian PGI (5): Fautor Winery, Gitana Winery, Novak Winery, Tomai Vinex Winery, and Podgoria Vin Winery.

**Stefan Voda PGI Wine Route** (Fig. 3) is located in the South-East of Moldova, at a low latitude, which includes the Dnister terraces, plains and elevations. The climate is moderately continental, with Black Sea influences. The 10,000 ha of vineyards offer balanced wines with a rich bouquet and particular traits. Rara Neagra is a local variety used to make the wine Negru de Purcari, yet other European varieties have been adapted perfectly to this terroir (Wine of Moldova, 2019). While visiting Stefan Voda PGI, tourists have the chance to visit Moldovan small wine producers and the oldest winery in Moldova, Purcari Winery, from which the Queen of England was ordering wine in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, tourists can have some traditional food and wine pairings, enjoy some sport activities and sleep in wine barrels. As for now, there are 3 wineries that already offer wine tourism

service, and 8 that will be included by 2021. Below is the list of wineries included in the wine routes, as well as their highlights:

1. Et Cetera Winery- wine cellars, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, masterclasses, wine making activities, wine shop, restaurant, picnic in the vineyards, cycling, accommodation, swimming pool, events.
2. Purcari Winery- wine cellars with sightseeing, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, masterclasses, boat and fishing activities, cycling, tennis, ping-pong, volleyball, paintball, archery, hiking, wine and souvenir shop, restaurant, wine barrel shaped accommodation, events.
3. Vinaria Gogu Winery- wine cellars, wine collections, guided tours and tastings, masterclasses, wine shop, restaurant.

Here is the list of upcoming wineries by 2021 in Stefan Voda PGI (8): Salcuta Winery, Leuntea Vin, Mezalimpe Winery, SA Agrofirma Cimislia Winery, Basavin Winery, Saiti Winery, Iurco Winery, Domeniile Pripa Winery.

### **3.3 The implementation of the wine routes in Moldova**

Once the wine routes concept and design was established, the wine route network and objectives were set, and the implementation started. The main activities for the implementation of the wine routes were focused on developing the 4 subsystems, and mainly on planning and management subsystem, which include the creation of the concept behind wine routes, the creation of management body with skillful work team, and investment in human resources involved in wine routes network. Below are the main activities performed during the internship at MCP:

- The map of wineries, accommodations, points of interest and border pass points was created. The main goal of creating the map was to see the big picture of the potential attractions to be included in the official wine route while visiting or calling to get the information. Also, the map facilitated the creation of the wine routes. Here is the link to the map:  
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1XQArj595eAa2dFJMBvvL8y-LXaApXQWn&usp=sharing>;
- The market research in Moldova was done. During 4 months, in order to analyze the potential attractions to be included in the wine routes and their tourism offer, 13 wineries were visited, 7 guesthouses, and most of the points of interest. As for the rest of wineries, interviews were conducted with the employees of the company during Wine Vernissage event in April, 2019. The main questions asked were regarding the infrastructure of the winery (if there is parking, wine production line, tasting room, restaurant, store and others.), tourist product (types of visits, reservation modes, working hours, product diversity), and personnel (qualification,

knowledge, foreign languages, communication skills). Together with Alexei, the final list of wineries to be included in the wine routes was created, as well as the list of the upcoming wineries from each PGI.

- The training for guides by the World Federation Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA) was organized. As it was addressed in chapter 2, an important part in wine routes creation is to have qualified human resources working in wine tourism industry. For that reason, in order to improve the professionalism of Moldovan tourist guides, a set of 2 weeks trainings under the auspices of WFTGA was organized. The training hosted a total of 24 participants who are members of local tourism guides associations from Moldova. The main objective of this activity was to initiate a complex professional development program for Moldovan tourism guides and to consolidate the tourism guides profession in Moldova. Moldovan tourism industry stakeholders have indicated that the quality of tourism services is not in line with Western standards, and that there is an increasing shortage of guide services due to the increased number of tourists flowing into Moldova (Nistor et al., 2018). WFTGA is a not-profit nonpolitical organization and an international network that sets trends and best practices for the profession in Europe and around the globe (WFTGA (n.d.)). At the end of WFTGA training, a PR event was organized for the award ceremony dedicated to the training. At the event, 10 different media were invited to write and share the information about the training. Please find all the articles in the Table 1 in annexes.
- The training for the wine industry specialists in Wine Olfactory Analysis- Oenoflair Method was organized. During one week in March 2019 (session I) and June, 2019 (session II), took place a certified program of practical training in olfactory analysis of wine aromas and defects. During the coursework, a total of 121 participants examined 152 wine aroma in practical and in theoretical classes. The special guest to teach the course was Richard Pfister, an international expert in oenoparfumerie, oenologist engineer, and perfume engineer from Switzerland. The need to invest in this course was detected by Diana Lazar, the deputy chief of party at MCP, while attending international wine fairs together with other wine professionals from Moldova. The Wine Olfactory Analysis- Oenoflair Method training was very valuable for the wine industry specialists since they improved their skills in analyzing wine aromas, and their ability to describe the wine in a professional manner. In order to gather participants' feedback regarding the wine olfactory analysis training, at the end of March session, a questionnaire was created. Most of the questions were based on the course evaluation, additional comments to improve the organization of the next course, and wine tourism related topics participants feel the need to get trained. As for the results of the questionnaire, 50.61% answers were gathered from a total of 81 participants. The responses



were positive, with the organization of the event being appreciated with maximum points and the information provided during the training very useful. When asked if participants are interested to participate in similar trainings, the response rate was 100% positive. The main topics participants are interested to learn more about are: biodynamic wines, more deep courses in wine aromas, food pairing, wine tourism, and others. All these comments were taken into consideration for the future trainings.

As for the PR part, several interviews were done with people involved in the training by 3 mass media institutions from Moldova. The information was released online and radio with the title “A Swiss oenoparfumeur instructed the managers of several wineries in the organoleptic characteristics of the wines “. More specific details are shown in the Table 2 from annexes.

- The last training activity organized during the internship was providing professional expertise to wineries. In order to offer professional consultations to wineries in need for improvement, the expert Diana Isac, the founder and CEO of Winerist, was invited. Winerist is an online travel business dedicated to bringing the best travel experience to wine enthusiasts worldwide, having the core mission to enable wine lovers and keen travelers to easily organize their ideal wine getaway. The wineries included in the wine route, as well as the upcoming wineries were invited for consultation with the wine tourism expert, Diana Isac, in order to improve their wine tourism offers.
- The marketing plan of the wine routes in Moldova was organized to be developed. A PR, marketing and development specialist in Moldova, Alex Crevar, was hired. Based on the concept and idea behind the wine routes in Moldova discussed with Alex Crevar, he will create a marketing plan for the project. The established deadline for the marketing plan is end of August so that the marketing strategies can be implemented before the launch of the wine route in October 2019. Few strategies to be included in the marketing plan were already implemented such as press trips, familiarization trips, and website development.
- The organization of familiarization and press trips were organized, since these are very essential activities for Moldova’s promotion abroad. During April- June 2019, 9 trips took place with international journalists, bloggers and master sommeliers from UK, Italy, Poland and Romania, as well as companies such as Winerist and Exotic Wine Travel from UK. During press trips and familiarization trips, MCP together with ANTRIM and ONVV were meeting the professionals and discussing further partnership with Moldova, and the potential for including Moldovan wine routes on their website or articles. From the past experiences of MCP, press trips and familiarization trips had an impressive return on investment in terms of

more travelers visiting the country and contributing to the development of local businesses, tourist activities and rural communities (Nistor et al., 2018).

- And lastly, the development of moldova.travel country website was done. During the internship, the information to be posted on the website about the local providers was gathered, the translation in 3 languages was done, and an appealing context to be posted on the official travel website of Moldova was created. The national website is the main source of information for the travelers where the details regarding places to visit and activities to do can be found. Also, the information regarding the wine routes, regional stakeholders and booking procedure will be placed on.

### **3.4 Financial feasibility of the wine routes**

The financial statement of wine route project is shown in Table 3 in Annexes. The projections are till December, 2019 and include the funding sources, expenses and revenues. The initial funding of the project was given by MCP, with a total of \$ 88,000. The amount of \$ 43,000 was invested in WFTGA training and Wine Olfactory Analysis Training. The rest of \$ 45,000 was spent on press trips, familiarization trips, and consultations for the wineries provided by Diana Isac.

The budget required for launching, developing, and consolidation of the wine routes project is expected to come from ANTRIM, ONVV, MCP and State Road Administration as well. After asking each member about the potential \$ amount to invest in the project, the total sum available till December, 2019 is \$137,000. The budget will be distributed for the following expected expenses: wages of a total of 12,000 € for 4 full time employees, 2 from ONVV and 2 from ANTRIM; marketing expenses such as promotion of the wine routes, exhibition participation fees, launching event and others with a total of \$70,000; and the rest of \$ 55,000 will be invested in destination, such as installation of road signs to the touristic attractions, visitor's centers or upcoming wineries.

The project is expected to become self-sufficient and bring revenues from private members of the wine route. Each service provider included in the network will pay an annual fee of \$ 500, and a one-time affiliation fee of \$ 100. Thus, according to the potential members to be included in the wine route, such as 23 wineries, 27 guest houses, 13 POI, 20 monasteries and 14 museums, the total amount of revenues consists of \$ 58,200. The DMO's will continuously try to increase the findings in order to further invest in the improvement for the wine routes.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the master thesis has shown that the implementation of a new wine tourism product in Moldova is expected to improve the quality of services, to develop rural areas, and attract more tourists in the country. The literature review provides a background to understand the concept of wine tourism in general. Also, it gives information regarding the wine routes in particular, a detailed plan for the implementation of successful wine routes, and an updated information regarding wine tourism industry in Moldova. The information accumulated from the different sources provide a solid basis for the development of wine routes concept in Moldova.

The wine routes proposed are carefully designed to satisfy the wine tourism segments, and to spread the tourists in 3 different PGI's from Moldova. The network involved include public and private organizations, which together create and deliver high quality services and authentic experiences to tourists by supporting traditional Moldovan values of hospitality, culture, gastronomy and quality wine production. The implementation of wine routes is expected to benefit all the players involved in the wine routes and the wine tourism industry in general. By investing in 4 subsystems such as management, destination, marketing, and tourism services, the customer service will be more professional, the quality standards will increase, the awareness about the country will be more visible, and the customer satisfaction will go up as well. Finally, the project presented is not only academic, but also practical since the implementation already started since March, 2019, and the further development will be continued by ANTRIM and ONVV starting from July, 2019. Currently, the project is in the developing stage, and the launching date is planned to be in October, 2019 during Moldovan National Wine Days.

Moldova is a small, but very unique country with huge opportunities in tourism, and wine tourism in particular. I want to believe that the work I did during 4 months at MCP will benefit the whole wine tourism sector from Moldova, encourage other wineries to believe that wine tourism is as important as wine production, and encourage private organizations to provide visitors with the highest quality experience.

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## ANNEXES

### A1. Wine routes itinerary

#### A1.1 Figure 1. Codru PGI



## Codru PGI Wine Route

### Day 1

TIME	ACTIVITY
-	Arrival to Chisinau
-	Check-in at Wine Hotel
18:00 – 19:00	<b>Welcome meeting at Wine.md Bar</b>
19:00 – 21:00	<b>Wine tasting and Dinner at Wine.md</b>



### Day 2

TIME	ACTIVITY
08:00 – 09:00	Breakfast at the hotel
09:00 – 11:00	<b>Wine walk city tour of Chisinau</b>
11:00 – 11:30	Transfer from Chisinau to Mereni
11:30 – 12:45	<b>Visit and wine tasting with the owner at Dyonisus Winery</b>
12:45 – 13:00	Transfer from Mereni to Puhoi
13:00 – 15:00	<b>Guided tour at Asconi Winery, gastronomic master-class (optional), traditional banquet accompanied by National folksongs</b>
15:00 – 15:30	Transfer from Puhoi to Bulboaca
15:30 – 17:00	<b>Excursion and wine tasting at Castel Mimi winery with Cristina Frolov- family member</b>
17:00 – 19:00	<b>Free time at Castel Mimi Resort wine spa/ swimming pool/ art gallery/ museum/ (optional)</b>
19:00 – 22:00	<b>Dinner with food &amp; wine pairing at Castel Mimi Winery</b>
-	<b>Overnight at Mimi Hotel</b>



### Day 3

TIME	ACTIVITY
08:00 – 09:00	Breakfast at the hotel and check-out
09:00 – 10:00	Transfer from Bulboaca to Tiraspol
10:00 – 11:00	<b>Excursion in Tiraspol - Back in URSS</b>
11:00 – 12:20	<b>Excursion, tasting of Moldovan brandy and wine at Kvint Winery. Visit the wine museum.</b>
12:20 – 12:30	Transfer from Kvint to Akvatir
12:30 – 13:30	<b>Excursion at sturgeon complex “Akvatir”</b>
13:30 – 15:00	<b>Lunch at Kumanek Restaurant</b>
15:00 – 16:30	Transfer from Tiraspol to Milestii Mici
16:30 – 18:00	<b>Wine tasting at Milestii Mici Winery Biking in the biggest underground gallery in the world (optional)</b>
18:00 – 18:30	Transfer from Milestii Mici to Chisinau
18:30 – 21:30	<b>Excursion, wine tasting, and Dinner at ATU Winery. Painting in wine activities (optional)</b>
21:30 – 21:45	Transfer from the winery to the hotel
21:45- 22:00	<b>Check-in at Casa Daca Boutique Hotel</b>



### Day 4

TIME	ACTIVITY
08:00 – 09:00	Breakfast at the hotel and check-out
09:00 – 09:30	Transfer from Chisinau to Cricova
09:30 – 10:30	<b>Visit by train the underground city of Cricova and wine tasting</b>
10:30 – 11:30	Transfer from Cricova to Orhei
11:30 – 13:00	<b>Excursion, wine tasting and lunch at Chateau Vartely Winery</b>
13:00 – 13:30	Transfer from Orhei to Branesti
13:30 – 15:00	<b>Excursion and wine tasting at “Stone Age” Branești Winery</b>
15:00 – 15:15	Transfer from Branesti to Butuceni
15:15 – 18:00	<b>Free time at Orheiul Vechi Archaeological Complex. Hiking and bird watching activities (optional)</b>
18:00 – 20:30	<b>Cooking master class and Dinner at Eco Resort Butuceni Guest House Cultural program and overnight stay</b>



## Day 5

TIME	ACTIVITY
08:00 – 09:00	Breakfast at Eco Resort Butuceni and check-out
09:00 – 10:00	Transfer from Butuceni to Cojusna
10:00 - 11:30	<b>Excursion and wine tasting Chateau Cojusna Winery. Masterclass on making local souvenirs (optional)</b>
11:30 – 12:30	Transfer from Cojusna to Codru
12:30 – 16:00	<b>Excursion, food and wine pairing at Poiana Winery. Fishing, boat trip, cycling activities (optional)</b>
16:00 – 17:00	Transfer from Codru to Costesti
17:00 – 19:00	<b>Excursion, wine tasting paired with traditional dinner at Mihai Sava Winery</b>
19:00 – 20:00	Transfer from Costesti to Chisinau
20:00 – 20:15	Check in at Casa Daca Boutique Hotel



Group of persons	Total tour price per person (EUR) based on TWIN/ DBL room type		
	Day 1- 3	Day 4 - 5	Day 1 - 5
4	427	354	781
6	376	302	678
8	352	277	629



## A1.2 Figure 2. Valul lui Traian PGI



### Valul Lui Traian PGI Wine Route

#### Day 1

TIME	ACTIVITY
-	Arrival to Chisinau
-	Check-in at Wine Hotel
18:00 – 19:00	<b>Welcome meeting at Wine.md Bar</b>
19:00 – 21:00	<b>Wine tasting and Dinner at Wine.md</b>



#### Day 2

TIME	ACTIVITY
08:00 – 09:00	Breakfast at the hotel
09:00 – 11:00	<b>Wine walk city tour of Chisinau</b>
11:00 – 12:30	Transfer from Chisinau to Comrat
12:30- 15:00	<b>Excursion and Gagauzian food and wine pairing with the owner at Vinuri de Comrat Winery. Gastronomic master-class (optional)</b>
15:00 – 15:20	Transfer from the Comrat to Besalma
15:20 – 16:00	<b>Visit at the National Gagauz History and Wine Museum. Traditional Gagauzian folclor performace</b>
16:00 – 16:30	Transfer from Besalma to Ceadir- Lunga
16:30 – 17:45	<b>Horse riding activities at At Prolin (optional)</b>
17:45 – 18:00	Transfer from Ceadir- Lunga to Cazaclia
18:00 – 22:00	<b>Excursion, wine tasting paired with traditional Dinner at Kazayak Winery</b>
22:00 – 22:30	Transfer from Cazaclia to Crihana Veche
22:30 – 22:45	<b>Check-in and overnight at Lazar Agro Tur Guest House</b>



### Day 3

TIME	ACTIVITY
08:00 – 10:00	Breakfast at the hotel and check-out
10:00 – 10:30	Transfer from Crihana Veche to Gavanoasa
10:30 – 12:20	<b>Visit and wine tasting at Vinia Traian Winery</b>
12:20 – 12:30	Transfer from Gavanoasa to Vulcanesti
12:30 – 14:30	<b>Excursion, wine tasting and Lunch at KaraGani Winery</b>
14:30 – 15:15	Riding a cart with donkeys from Vulcanesti to Valeni
15:15 – 15:30	<b>Check in at Gura Cuptorului Guest House</b>
15:30 – 18:00	<b>Walking to Beleu Lake in Nature Reserve. Kayaking on the lake and watching very rare birds activities (optional)</b>
18:00 – 21:00	<b>Walk to Gura Cuptorului and enjoy the Dinner with “Grandma playing drums” from Eurovision 2015</b>
-	Overnight at Gura Cuptorului Guest House



### Day 4

TIME	ACTIVITY
08:00 – 09:00	Breakfast at the guest house and check-out
09:00 – 09:10	Transfer from Valeni to Slobozia Mare
09:10 – 13:00	<b>Spend the first part of the day with the family from Vinaria din Vale. Excursion and wine tasting at the winery. Biking in the vineyards, walking around the winery and enjoying the nature (optional)</b>
13:00 – 14:30	<b>Lunch at Vinaria din Vale Winery</b>
14:30 – 14:35	Walk from Vinaria din vale to Rumix Still Winery
14:35 – 15:30	<b>Visit and wine tasting Rumix Still Winery</b>
15:30 – 19:00	Transfer from Valeni to Chisinau
19:00 – 19:30	Check in at Casa Daca boutique hotel
19:30 – 21:30	<b>Dinner and wine tasting at Casa Daca Wine Bar</b>



Group of persons	Total tour price per person (EUR) based on TWIN/ DBL room type
	Day 1 - 5
4	500
6	419
8	388

### A1.3 Figure 3. Stefan Voda PGI



## Stefan Voda PGI Wine Route

### Day 1

TIME	ACTIVITY
-	Arrival to Chisinau
-	Check-in at Wine Hotel
18:00 – 19:00	<b>Welcome Meeting at Wine.md Bar</b>
19:00 – 21:00	<b>Wine tasting and Dinner at Wine.md</b>



### Day 2

TIME	ACTIVITY
08:00 – 09:00	Breakfast at the hotel
09:00 – 10:30	Transfer from Chisinau to Causeni
10:30 – 12:30	<b>Excursion and wine tasting at Gogu Winery</b>
12:30 – 13:00	Transfer from Causeni to Cioburciu
13:00 – 17:00	<b>Visit and lunch at Mester Faur Guest House. Culinary master class, kayaking and fishing activities in the river (optional)</b>
17:00 – 17:30	Transfer from Cioburciu to Purcari
17:30 – 22:00	<b>Visit, dinner and wine pairing at Purcari Winery Bike tour through vineyards, boat and fishing, tennis, ping-pong, volleyball, paintball activities (optional)</b>
22:00	Overnight Stay at Purcari Winery in Wine Barrel Hotel



### Day 3

TIME	ACTIVITY
08:00 – 10:00	Breakfast at the hotel and check-out
10:00 – 10:00	Transfer from Purcari to Crocmaz
10:00 – 13:30	<b>Spend the first part of the day with Luchianov family from Et Cetera Winery. Excursion and wine tasting. Culinary master class, biking in the vineyards, walking around the winery and swimming in the pool activities (optional)</b>
13:30 – 15:00	<b>Lunch in the vineyards at Et Cetera Winery</b>
15:00 – 15:30	Transfer from Crocmaz to Stefan Voda
15:30 – 16:00	<b>Visit The Green Museum</b>



16:00 – 16:30	Transfer from Stefan Voda to Causeni
16:30 – 17:00	<b>Visit The Assumption of our Lady Church</b>
17:00 – 18:30	Transfer from Causeni to Chisinau
18:30 – 19:00	Check in at Casa Daca boutique hotel
19:00 – 21:00	<b>Dinner and wine tasting at Casa Daca Wine Bar</b>



Group of persons	Total tour price per person (EUR) based on TWIN/ DBL room type
	Day 1- 3
4	360
6	309
8	285

## A2. Events promotion

### A2.1 Table 1. WFTGA

Mass media institution	Media outlets	Language	Link
Realitatea	Online	RO	<a href="https://bit.ly/2JMn0Td">https://bit.ly/2JMn0Td</a>
Agro TV	TV/online	RO	<a href="https://bit.ly/2uuZzU5">https://bit.ly/2uuZzU5</a>
TVR Moldova	TV/online	RO	<a href="https://bit.ly/2JMFp2l">https://bit.ly/2JMFp2l</a>
Interlic	Online	RO	<a href="https://bit.ly/2WzkO3f">https://bit.ly/2WzkO3f</a>
Moldova 9	Online	RO	<a href="https://bit.ly/2OxHIF4">https://bit.ly/2OxHIF4</a>
Moldova 1	TV/online	RO	<a href="https://www.trm.md/ro/moldova-1">https://www.trm.md/ro/moldova-1</a>
Agora	Online	RO	<a href="https://agora.md/">https://agora.md/</a>
Privesc.eu	Online	RO	<a href="https://www.privesc.eu/">https://www.privesc.eu/</a>
Publika	Online	RO	<a href="https://www.publika.md/">https://www.publika.md/</a>
Logos Press	Print	RO	<a href="http://logos.press.md/">http://logos.press.md/</a>

### A2.2 Table 2. Wine olfactory analysis

Mass media institution	Media outlets	Language	Link
Radiochisinau.md	Online/radio	RO	<a href="https://bit.ly/2OGv3jf">https://bit.ly/2OGv3jf</a>
InfoMarket	Online	RO	<a href="https://bit.ly/2UbOSF7">https://bit.ly/2UbOSF7</a>
Moldova 9	Online	RO	<a href="https://bit.ly/2K92Hzs">https://bit.ly/2K92Hzs</a>

### A3. Table 3. Financial statement estimation

#### Financial statement

#### Initial Funding

MCP	\$ 88,000
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#### Expenses by July 2019

Trainings	\$ 43,000
Press Trip/ Fam Trips/Consultations	\$ 45,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 88,000</b>

#### Expected Funding

ANTRIM	\$ 25,000
ONVV	\$ 25,000
MCP	\$ 67,000
State Road Administration	\$ 20,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 137,000</b>

#### Expected Expenses

Wages ONVV & ANTRIM	\$ 12,000
Marketing	\$ 70,000
Investment in the destination	\$ 55,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 137,000</b>

#### Expected Revenues

Affiliation fee (private service providers)	\$ 9,700
Annual membership fee	\$ 48,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 58,200</b>