

# Research Paper

## Wine Routes: Development of Wine Tourism Destination and Local Communities.

### Post COVID Recovery

Developed by: International Center for Agribusiness Research and  
Education

Project: Promoting the Black Sea Region as a Wine Tourism  
Destination

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>I. Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>II. Objectives and research questions</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>III. Wine tourism in Armenia</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>IV. Literature Review</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Definition and characteristics of wine tourism .....	8
Wine Tourism: A Catalyst for Economic Development and Rural Revitalization, with a Focus on Armenia.....	10
Wine routes as a tourism product and their potential benefits for local communities.....	14
<b>V. The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Wine Tourism and Its Impact on Local Communities"</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Post-COVID challenges and opportunities for wine tourism.....	16
Crisis Management in Wine Tourism.....	18
<b>VI. Results and Analysis Of Research Study</b> .....	<b>20</b>
Objectives .....	20
In-Depth Interview and Content Analysis.....	21
Results and Discussions .....	22
<b>VII. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Summary of the main findings and contributions of the study .....	25
Limitations and future research directions .....	29
<b>VIII. References</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>IX. Appendices</b> .....	<b>33</b>

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## Abstract

Wine tourism has become an increasingly popular form of tourism worldwide in recent years. Wine routes have been developed to promote wine tourism destinations and encourage visitors to explore the local communities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on the wine tourism industry, resulting in significant economic losses for wine regions and local communities. The paper provides an overview of wine tourism, wine routes, and their economic and social benefits. It also examines the challenges faced by wine regions during the pandemic and proposes strategies to recover from the crisis. The study concludes that the development of wine routes can provide a significant boost to local communities in the post-COVID recovery period and contribute to the sustainable development of wine tourism destinations.

The focus of this study is on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural tourism related to wine routes developed in Armenia within the scope of the project “TheSeaofWine” funded by the European Union and will be co-implemented in 2020-2022 by the International Center for Agribusiness Research and Education Foundation (Armenia), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), Georgian Center for Agribusiness Development (Georgia), and Odessa National Academy of Food Technologies (Ukraine) in close collaboration with the Joint Technical Secretariat of the Black Sea Basin Joint Operational Programme 2014-2020, as perceived by those who supply services along these routes. A content analysis was conducted based on 47 interviews to determine how these stakeholders perceived the impact of the pandemic and their approaches to crisis management. The findings reveal that the pandemic has resulted in significant financial losses, negative emotions, and systemic effects on wine tourism businesses. The study also identified various uncoordinated strategies used to manage the pandemic. The perceived impact of the pandemic was found to be influenced by factors such as business profiles, regional context, crisis stage, and specific strategies employed. The paper concludes with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications for future tourism management, particularly in the context of wine and rural tourism, and emphasizes the importance of creating social capital, partnerships and product innovation to promote sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Wine tourism, wine routes, Armenia, local communities, post-COVID recovery, economic development, cultural preservation

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## I. Introduction

This document is developed as Deliverable Deliverable D.T3.5.2 within the GA T 3 activity in the scope of TheSeaofWine Project-Promoting the Black Sea Region as a Wine Tourism Destination implemented within the Joint Operational Programme Black Sea Basin 2014-2020 funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument. TheSeaofWine Project is 29 months project implemented in cooperation with 4 Project partners: ICARE Foundation (LB) from Armenia, Georgian Center of Agribusiness and Development (PP2) from Georgia, Odessa National University of Technologies from Ukraine (PP3) and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki from Greece (PP4).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the potential of wine routes as a means of developing wine tourism destinations and local communities of Armenia in the post-COVID recovery period. The paper begins by providing a brief overview of wine tourism and its economic importance. The paper then examines the experiences of selected wine tourism destinations and local communities in the development of wine routes and its application for Armenian wine tourism. Finally, the paper discusses the implications of the findings for the post-COVID recovery of the wine tourism industry.

The term wine tourism refers to the act of visiting vineyards, wineries, wine festivals, and wine shows, where the primary motivation for visitors is to taste or experience the attributes of a grape wine region. (This definition has been proposed by scholars such as Hall (1996) and Macionis (1996)). Wine tourism plays a significant role in both the wine and tourism industries. The connection between wine and tourism has existed for many years, but only recently has this relationship been explicitly recognized by governments, researchers, and the industries themselves. Wine is an important factor in the appeal of a destination and can be a major motivation for tourists. Wine tourism is also a crucial means for the wine industry to establish relationships with customers who can experience the charm of the grape firsthand. For many smaller wineries, selling directly to visitors at the cellar door is vital to their business success.

Wine tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years and has contributed significantly to the economic development of many regions. According to the World Tourism Organization, wine tourism has grown at an annual rate of 15% over the past decade and is expected to continue to grow in the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the wine tourism industry worldwide, with many wine tourism destinations struggling to recover. In this context, the development of wine routes has emerged as a potential means of promoting the recovery of the wine tourism industry and supporting local communities.

## II. Objectives and research questions

This research paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

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1. To investigate the role of wine routes in the development of wine tourism destinations in Armenia, including their impact on local communities, economies, and cultural heritage.
2. To assess the current status and potential of wine tourism destinations in Armenia in the post-COVID recovery period, including their development, promotion, and sustainability practices.
3. To identify the challenges and opportunities faced by wine tourism destinations in Armenia, particularly in the context of post-COVID recovery, and provide recommendations for their sustainable development.

#### Research Methodology:

This research paper employs a qualitative research approach, including a review of existing literature, analysis of secondary data, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the wine tourism industry in Armenia. The review of literature involves an extensive review of academic journals, books, reports, and other relevant sources related to wine tourism, wine routes, Armenia's wine industry, and post-COVID recovery in the tourism sector. The analysis of secondary data involves the collection and analysis of data from official statistics, reports, and other available sources on wine tourism destinations in Armenia, tourist arrivals, and other relevant indicators. In-depth interviews are conducted with key stakeholders in the wine tourism industry in Armenia, including winery owners, tour operators, government officials, and representatives of local communities. The interviews aim to gather qualitative data on challenges and opportunities faced in the post-COVID recovery period, and how wineries envision the future of wine tourism after the COVID-19 crisis. Data collected from the literature review, analysis of secondary data, and in-depth interviews are analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns.

### III. Wine tourism in Armenia

Wine tourism in Armenia is a growing industry that offers visitors a unique experience to explore the rich history and culture of winemaking in this ancient wine region. Armenia has a winemaking tradition that dates back over 6,000 years, making it one of the oldest wine-producing countries in the world. Wine tourism in Armenia allows visitors to discover the country's diverse wine regions, taste local varietals, learn about traditional winemaking techniques, and immerse themselves in the local culture and hospitality.

Armenia has several wine regions, including Areni, Vayots Dzor, Armavir, and Aragatsotn, each with its own unique wine production and grape varieties. Wine tours are available in these regions, offering visitors the opportunity to visit local wineries, vineyards, and wine cellars, and learn about the winemaking process from grape cultivation to wine production. Many wineries offer guided

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tours, wine tastings, and even hands-on experiences, such as grape stomping and wine blending workshops.

Armenia is known for its unique grape varieties, such as Areni, Voskehat, and Khndoghni, which produce distinctive and flavorful wines. Wine tastings are a popular activity in Armenia, allowing visitors to sample different local wines and learn about their characteristics, flavors, and aromas.

Many wineries and wine shops offer wine tastings, often accompanied by local cheeses, dried fruits, and other snacks. Wine tourism in Armenia offers visitors the opportunity to learn about the country's rich cultural heritage. Many wineries are located in picturesque rural areas where visitors can experience traditional Armenian village life, interact with local farmers, and learn about the ancient winemaking



techniques that have been passed down through generations. Visitors can also explore historical sites, such as ancient cave wineries, monasteries, and archaeological sites, which have played a significant role in Armenia's winemaking history.

Armenia hosts various wine festivals and events throughout the year, celebrating its winemaking heritage and culture. One of the most famous events is the Areni Wine Festival, which takes place in Areni village in the Vayots Dzor region and features wine tastings, live music, dance performances, and traditional Armenian food. Other wine-related events, such as wine competitions, vineyard picnics, and harvest festivals, also take place in different wine regions of Armenia, providing visitors with unique and memorable experiences.

Armenian cuisine is known for its flavorful and unique dishes, and wine and food pairing is a significant part of the wine tourism experience in Armenia. Many wineries and restaurants offer wine and food pairing experiences, where visitors can taste local wines alongside traditional Armenian dishes. These culinary experiences allow visitors to explore the harmonious relationship between Armenian wines and local cuisine.

Wine tourism in Armenia also offers opportunities for wine education. Many wineries and wine schools provide wine education programs, workshops, and seminars on topics such as winemaking techniques, wine tasting, wine pairing, and wine appreciation. Visitors can learn

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about the history of winemaking in Armenia, the unique characteristics of Armenian wines, and gain a deeper understanding of the local wine culture.

Wine tourism in Armenia is influenced by various socio-economic factors that impact the development, growth, and sustainability of the industry. Wine production and tourism have economic significance in Armenia. The wine industry contributes to the country's economy through employment generation, revenue generation, and export earnings. Wine tourism provides opportunities for local farmers, winemakers, and other stakeholders in the wine value chain to earn income and support their livelihoods. Additionally, wine tourism generates revenue for local businesses, such as wineries, restaurants, accommodations, and transportation, which boosts the local economy and supports economic growth.

This industry in Armenia promotes the preservation of local cultural heritage. The wine industry in Armenia is closely tied to its history, traditions, and local culture. Wine tourism provides a platform for showcasing Armenia's unique winemaking techniques, grape varieties, and traditional practices, helping to preserve and promote the country's cultural heritage. This can also contribute to cultural identity and pride among local communities, as well as raise awareness and appreciation among tourists.



Wine tourism in Armenia is part of the larger tourism industry, which contributes to the country's overall tourism development. Wine tourism can diversify the tourism offerings of Armenia and attract different types of tourists, such as wine enthusiasts, cultural travelers, and culinary travelers. This can contribute to the overall growth and development of the tourism sector in Armenia, creating a positive economic impact, generating employment opportunities, and promoting sustainable tourism practices.

International market accessibility and export opportunities have an impact on wine tourism in Armenia. Exporting Armenian wines to international markets can boost the country's wine tourism by increasing awareness and interest in Armenian wines, creating demand for wine tourism experiences, and attracting international tourists. Access to international markets can also facilitate knowledge exchange, technology transfer, and investment in the wine industry, leading to improvements in the quality and competitiveness of Armenian wines and wine tourism offerings.

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## IV. Literature Review

### Definition and characteristics of wine tourism

Wine tourism is a growing segment of the tourism industry, with an increasing number of travelers seeking experiences related to wine production, culture, and history. In recent years, there has been a significant amount of research on wine tourism, with a focus on understanding its economic, social, and cultural impacts.

The impact of wine tourism is not limited to a single location or attraction, as the complete experience has a positive and significant effect throughout the entire process - from pre-visit to post-visit - when visiting a wine region. Wine tourism involves the participation of a specific group of individuals known as wine tourists, who seek out wine-related experiences and wineries in wine tourism destinations. Wine tourists are predominantly wine consumers who seek out enjoyable experiences. It is commonly accepted and acknowledged that there are five stages to the tourist experience: pre-visit (anticipation), trip, destination/visit, trip in the place, and after-visit (revisit).

Tourists who seek out historical and cultural significance in iconic destinations, and value authentic experiences, often seek out wine-related activities such as wine tastings, vineyards, cellars, and the surrounding landscape. According to Hall et al. (2004), wine is increasingly appreciated as a unique and specialized element, which can make it an attractive attraction for tourists visiting wine regions. As such, wine can be sampled in various locations (prior to, during, and after visiting wine tourism destinations). The wine tourism experience is a multi-phase process that includes the anticipation phase, travel experience, participation in the destination, return trip, and collection phases, similar to many other tourism experiences.

In terms of experimental studies, the timing of the wine tourism experience has a significant influence. Seasonality is a crucial factor to consider in wine tourism regions, according to these authors. Mitchell and Hall (2003) discovered that visitors prefer to visit cellars at the end of summer and the beginning of autumn, coinciding with the wine harvest season. Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) argue that wine tourists' expectations differ from one region to another, depending on a set of critical success factors specific to each place, such as unique geographical and cultural differences.

The literature review on wine tourism experience studies highlights three essential aspects: framework factors, influence factors, and success factors. Framework factors pertain to the specific characteristics of the wine tourism experience. According to Getz (2000, p. 2), the wine tourism experience is a complete sensory experience that engages all five senses. These include taste, where visitors can sample wines, regional cuisine, and fresh grapes and products unique to the region. Smell is also engaged, with the fragrance of the land and grapes, fresh air from the countryside, aromas from wine fermentation, cellars where wine ages, cooking, and even roses

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and herbs from the garden. Touch is stimulated through experiences such as wine production processes, handling bottles and glasses, grape harvesting, and cooking with wine. Sight engages visitors with the picturesque vineyards against a backdrop of a blue sky, unique regional architecture, people having fun, traditional festivals, and the array of wine colors. Hearing is also incorporated into the wine tourism experience with sounds such as bottling, opening a bottle of wine, festive music, wine production equipment, cooking, and kitchen.

The wine tourism experience is a unique and culturally authentic experience that is closely connected to wine and food. It is viewed as romantic due to the belief that wine, food, and a beautiful atmosphere can promote romance. Additionally, the experience is seen as entertaining and educational as tourists seek to learn more about the local culture and wine culture. Wine tourism is not just limited to visiting cellars and wine tastings but also includes unique experiences that are grounded in the culture of the region or place, making the experience more authentic and unique. The wine tourism experience is total and unique due to various key factors identified by scholars such as Carlsen and Charters (2006) and Inácio (2010). These factors include authenticity, money value, service interaction, surrounding scenario and atmosphere, product offers, goods and services conceptions, information dissemination, personal growth, and lifestyle. Therefore, wine tourism offers tourists an opportunity to participate in a high-value social product, learn new things, and connect with a healthy, cultured lifestyle.

When considering the various factors that contribute to a total and unique wine tourism experience, it becomes apparent that there is a necessary synergy between all parties involved. This includes the various players, stakeholders, actors, and sectors that contribute to and benefit from an exceptional wine tourism experience. This synergy is important for those who manage, participate in, and partake in the concept of the experience. To develop and study wine tourism experiences, it is crucial to understand the influential factors that contribute to them. Such experiences can have a significant impact on wine sales, the number of visitors, and the amount spent in a region. The wine tourism experience is shaped by several factors, including the personal characteristics of the consumer, the location's characteristics, the visit's dynamic, the interaction with other elements of the experience (such as hospitality and lodging), and the characteristics of the visited region, including the landscape, cultural heritage, festivals and events, and local attractions. Several studies by Hall et al. (2000), Pikkemaat et al. (2009), and Cohen et al. (2013) have highlighted the importance of these factors in creating a successful wine tourism experience.

### Wine Tourism: A Catalyst for Economic Development and Rural Revitalization, with a Focus on Armenia

Over the years, wine tourism has emerged as a significant driver of economic development and rural revitalization in many regions around the world.

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One key theme in the literature is the economic impact of wine tourism. Getz and Brown (2006) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on wine tourism and found that it generates direct and indirect economic benefits through employment creation, revenue generation, and multiplier effects. Studies have shown that wine tourism can contribute to the economic development of wine regions and local communities, generating employment and business opportunities, and increasing revenue for wineries and other tourism-related businesses. Wine tourism can also contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions associated with wine-making.

Another important theme is the social impact of wine tourism. Wine tourism can provide opportunities for social interaction and cultural exchange between visitors and local communities, promoting a sense of place and cultural identity. Wine tourism can also contribute to the development of social capital, building relationships between visitors and local residents and enhancing community cohesion. Wine tourism has been recognized as a strategy to diversify rural economies. Many wine regions are rural areas that may face economic challenges due to declining traditional industries. Wine tourism provides an opportunity to leverage local natural and cultural assets, such as vineyards, landscapes, historic sites, and local culture, to create new economic opportunities. Studies have shown that wine tourism can contribute to the development of local value chains, promote entrepreneurship and innovation, and foster economic resilience in rural communities.

Wine tourism has the potential to revitalize rural areas by enhancing the quality of life for local residents. Wine tourism can create a sense of pride and identity among local communities, promote the preservation of local traditions and cultural heritage, and foster community engagement. Studies have shown that wine tourism can contribute to the revitalization of rural infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, and accommodations, by attracting investment and improving local amenities. Wine tourism has also been associated with increased social and cultural sustainability of rural areas, including the retention of local population and the promotion of social cohesion.

Wine tourism is often linked to the promotion of local wine products and sustainability. Wine tourism can raise awareness and demand for local wines, contributing to the growth of the local wine industry. Wine tourism can also encourage sustainable practices in wine production, such as organic and biodynamic farming, which can enhance the environmental sustainability of rural areas. Sustainable wine production practices can attract environmentally-conscious tourists who seek authentic and eco-friendly experiences, contributing to the branding and marketing of wine tourism destinations.

Another important theme in the literature is the environmental impact of wine tourism. Wine tourism can have both positive and negative environmental impacts, depending on the level of

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environmental management and sustainability practices implemented. Sustainable wine tourism practices, such as eco-friendly winery operations, responsible waste management, and use of renewable energy sources, can minimize the negative environmental impacts of wine tourism.

Here are some ways in which wine tourism contributes to these outcomes:

**Economic impact:** Wine tourism generates economic benefits by stimulating local economies through various channels. It creates direct employment opportunities in wineries, vineyards, tasting rooms, restaurants, hotels, and other related businesses, thereby boosting local job markets. Wine tourism also generates indirect economic impacts by creating demand for local products, services, and infrastructure, such as transportation, accommodation, food, souvenirs, and event planning. Additionally, wine tourism often involves spending by tourists on transportation, meals, accommodations, and other activities, which injects money into local economies, supporting local businesses and fostering economic growth.

**Diversification of rural economies:** Wine tourism can provide an alternative source of income and help diversify rural economies. Many wine regions are rural areas where traditional industries, such as agriculture or manufacturing, may face challenges. Wine tourism provides a unique opportunity to leverage the natural and cultural assets of the region, such as vineyards, landscapes, historic sites, and local culture, to create new economic opportunities. This diversification can help reduce the vulnerability of rural communities to economic downturns and create a more resilient and sustainable economic base.

**Revitalization of rural areas:** Wine tourism can contribute to the revitalization of rural areas by enhancing the quality of life for local residents. It can create a sense of pride and identity among local communities, promote the preservation of local traditions and cultural heritage, and foster community engagement. Wine tourism can also contribute to the revitalization of rural infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, and accommodations, by attracting investment and improving local amenities. As a result, wine tourism can help to reverse the trend of rural depopulation and contribute to the social and cultural sustainability of rural areas.

**Promotion of local products and sustainability:** Wine tourism often highlights local wine production, promoting local wineries and their products. This can help raise awareness and demand for local wines, contributing to the growth of the local wine industry. Wine tourism also encourages sustainable practices in wine production, such as organic and biodynamic farming, which can enhance the environmental sustainability of rural areas. Sustainable wine production practices can also attract environmentally-conscious tourists who seek authentic and eco-friendly experiences.

**Cultural exchange and education:** Wine tourism offers opportunities for cultural exchange and education, both for tourists and local communities. Visitors can learn about the history, traditions,

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and cultural practices associated with wine production, which can foster appreciation and understanding of local culture. Local communities, in turn, can benefit from the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experiences with tourists from different backgrounds. Wine tourism can also support educational programs, workshops, and training for local residents, enhancing their skills and capacity to participate in the wine tourism industry.

In conclusion, wine tourism can be a significant driver of economic development and rural revitalization. It generates economic benefits, diversifies rural economies, revitalizes rural areas, promotes local products and sustainability, and encourages cultural exchange and education. However, it is important to manage wine tourism in a sustainable and responsible manner, taking into consideration the social, cultural, economic, and environmental impacts, and involving local communities in the planning and decision-making processes to ensure that the benefits are shared widely and the long-term sustainability of wine tourism destinations is ensured.

Overall, the literature suggests that wine tourism has significant economic, social, and cultural impacts on wine regions and local communities. However, it is important for wine tourism stakeholders to implement sustainable and responsible practices to minimize negative environmental impacts and ensure the long-term sustainability of wine tourism development.

Armenia, a country with a long history of winemaking dating back thousands of years, has recently emerged as a promising wine tourism destination. Wine tourism in Armenia has been recognized as a potential driver of economic development and rural revitalization. Here is a literature review on wine tourism as a driver of economic development and rural revitalization in Armenia:

**Economic impacts of wine tourism in Armenia:** Research on the economic impacts of wine tourism in Armenia is limited, but there is evidence to suggest that it has the potential to generate positive economic benefits. Wine tourism can contribute to revenue generation through wine sales, tasting fees, and other tourism-related expenditures. It can also create employment opportunities in wineries, tasting rooms, restaurants, hotels, transportation, and other related businesses, which can help boost the local economy. Moreover, wine tourism can stimulate demand for local products and services, such as accommodations, food, and souvenirs, which can benefit local businesses and producers.

**Diversification of rural economies in Armenia:** Wine tourism has the potential to diversify rural economies in Armenia, which predominantly rely on agriculture. Wine tourism can help leverage local wine production and cultural heritage to create new economic opportunities. By attracting tourists to rural areas, wine tourism can stimulate local businesses, such as restaurants, accommodations, transportation, and handicrafts, which can contribute to economic diversification and reduce dependency on traditional agricultural activities. Wine tourism can also

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promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment in rural areas, which can foster economic resilience and sustainability.

Revitalization of rural areas in Armenia: Wine tourism has the potential to revitalize rural areas in Armenia by enhancing the quality of life for local residents. Wine tourism can contribute to the preservation of local traditions, cultural heritage, and craftsmanship, which can create a sense of pride and identity among local communities. It can also promote the development of local infrastructure, such as roads, accommodations, and utilities, by attracting investment and improving local amenities. Wine tourism can create opportunities for community engagement, cultural exchange, and social cohesion, which can contribute to the revitalization of rural areas.

Promotion of local products and sustainability in Armenia: Wine tourism in Armenia can promote local wine products and sustainability. Wine tourism can raise awareness and demand for Armenian wines, which can support the growth of the local wine industry and contribute to the branding and marketing of Armenian wines. Wine tourism can also encourage sustainable wine production practices, such as organic and biodynamic farming, which can enhance the environmental sustainability of wine production in Armenia.



Sustainable wine production practices can attract environmentally-conscious tourists who seek authentic and eco-friendly experiences, which can contribute to the sustainability of wine tourism destinations in Armenia.

Cultural exchange and education in Armenia: Wine tourism in Armenia can offer opportunities for cultural exchange and education, both for tourists and local communities. Visitors can learn about the history, traditions, and cultural practices associated with Armenian winemaking, which can promote cultural understanding and appreciation. Wine tourism can also contribute to the preservation and promotion of Armenian cultural heritage, including traditional winemaking methods, grape varieties, and local cuisine, which can benefit local communities and promote cultural sustainability.

### Wine routes as a tourism product and their potential benefits for local communities

The wine routes refer to marked routes covering a specific geographical area such as a region, province, or denomination, that brings together vineyards, wineries, wine tasting centers, wine museums, and rural accommodations, linking different wineries and winery properties within a

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specific area, according to Bruwer (2003). Wine routes are created through a collaboration of public and private interests to establish one or more routes that encourage visitors to explore the wines and attractions of a particular region. The wine routes offer the flexibility to travel by different means of transport, such as bicycle, horse, car, or others, and provide opportunities to experience the cultural and natural heritage of the region. Visitors can enjoy scenic vineyards, visit museums, sample local cuisine, and explore interpretive centers of wine and vineyards.

From the post-war era onwards, wine routes were expanded, particularly in all European countries that produce wine. The majority of the wine routes established in the "Old World" were usually initiated by the wine industry entities with a desire to enhance the promotion and sales of their products, and were aided by financial support from the European Community. Wine routes provide comparable experiences such as wine tasting and purchase, tours of wineries, vineyards, and museums, and specialized collections if available. Besides wine, visitors on the wine routes can relish the stunning natural scenery, farmland, and the plentiful historical, architectural, and cultural heritage, as well as indulge in the unique and delectable cuisine.

Even though wine routes seem well-structured and vibrant, they are not yet fully established as a tourist product. Only a limited number of wineries and restaurants have proper facilities and services to cater to visitors, such as clear signage, convenient visiting areas, wine tastings, and events, and staff members who are proficient in foreign languages. Often, the winemakers or their families conduct the tours of the cellars, and there are no dedicated employees who directly interact with the public. The wine routes are made up of a wide range of members, such as winegrower associations, cooperative wineries, warehouses, winemakers, producing farms, rural tourism businesses, restaurants, and other centers of interest related to winemaking. They are organized in a network, but their development and growth vary. Establishing wine routes can offer benefits to different levels, including winegrowers, wineries, wine-growing regions, and the local community. Typically, wine is recognized by its origin designation, which, like tourism, promotes particular regions and destinations. Wine routes can be viewed as a comprehensive destination that brings together the primary draws of wine, cuisine, cultural heritage, accommodations, event schedules, planned activities, and a range of essential territorial services to promote tourism in a wine-growing area.

Wine routes, also known as wine trails or wine roads, can be a significant factor in promoting tourism development in Armenia. Wine routes refer to designated routes or itineraries that connect vineyards, wineries, and other wine-related attractions, allowing tourists to explore and experience the local wine culture and heritage. Here are some ways in which wine routes can benefit tourism development in Armenia:

1. Enhancing tourist experiences: Wine routes can provide unique and immersive experiences for tourists, allowing them to discover the history, traditions, and flavors of

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Armenian wines. Tourists can visit vineyards, participate in wine tastings, learn about winemaking techniques, and interact with local winemakers, which can create memorable and authentic experiences. Wine routes can also offer opportunities for culinary tourism, as tourists can pair local wines with traditional Armenian cuisine, enhancing their overall gastronomic experience.

2. **Boosting local economies:** Wine routes can stimulate economic growth by generating revenues for local wineries, restaurants, accommodations, and other tourism-related businesses. As tourists visit wineries and purchase wines, tasting fees, and souvenirs, they contribute to the local economy and support local producers. Wine routes can also create employment opportunities in rural areas, such as vineyard workers, tour guides, and hospitality staff, which can help boost local employment rates and livelihoods.
3. **Promoting rural development:** Wine routes can play a crucial role in revitalizing rural areas in Armenia. Many wineries in Armenia are located in rural regions, and wine tourism can help diversify rural economies by providing alternative income sources. This can reduce dependency on traditional agricultural activities and promote entrepreneurship and innovation in rural communities. Wine routes can also contribute to the development of local infrastructure, such as roads, accommodations, and facilities, to support wine tourism, which can benefit local communities.
4. **Encouraging sustainable practices:** Wine routes can promote sustainable wine production practices and environmental stewardship. Many wineries in Armenia follow traditional and organic winemaking methods, which can be showcased to tourists on wine routes. This can raise awareness and demand for sustainable wines and contribute to the conservation of local grape varieties, landscapes, and ecosystems. Wine routes can also encourage responsible wine consumption and waste management practices among tourists, promoting sustainability in wine tourism destinations.
5. **Fostering cultural exchange and education:** Wine routes can provide opportunities for cultural exchange and education, benefiting both tourists and local communities. Tourists can learn about the history, traditions, and cultural significance of Armenian wines, which can promote cultural understanding and appreciation. Local winemakers can also share their knowledge, skills, and stories with tourists, preserving and promoting Armenian cultural heritage. Wine routes can foster cultural exchange, promote intercultural dialogue, and contribute to cultural sustainability.

In general, wine routes can be a significant factor in promoting tourism development in Armenia. By enhancing tourist experiences, boosting local economies, promoting rural development, encouraging sustainable practices, and fostering cultural exchange and education, wine routes

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can contribute to the growth and sustainability of wine tourism in Armenia, ultimately benefiting the overall tourism development in the country.

## V. The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Wine Tourism and Its Impact on Local Communities"

### Post-COVID challenges and opportunities for wine tourism

COVID-19, a novel coronavirus that emerged in China in December 2019 and rapidly spread worldwide, was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11th, 2020, affecting populations across the globe. The exponential increase in cases led to the implementation of measures to prevent its spread, including mandatory lockdowns and border closures in many countries, as well as closure of public spaces and businesses, resulting in immediate repercussions such as rising unemployment. Social distancing, wearing facemasks, and using sanitizers and disinfectants became the new norm for responsible behavior.

The pandemic has had unequal impacts on wineries in the Old and New World, as evidenced by empirical data. Over 83% of the surveyed wineries experienced negative impacts on their turnover, with 53% of them losing 50% or more of their income in 2020 compared to 2019. This has also affected their investments and poses challenges to the survival of small to medium-sized wineries in particular. The physical environment and physical presence-dependent experiences, such as guided tours, wine tastings, and special events, have been the most affected by the pandemic.

The pandemic has led to various travel restrictions, including lockdowns, quarantines, and border closures, limiting the movement of tourists and affecting international and domestic travel to wine regions. This has resulted in reduced tourist arrivals and visitor numbers, impacting wine tourism businesses.

Three key operational factors enabled wineries to resume on-site visits and potentially benefit their business: the implementation of a reservation system to capture customer data, hosting socially distanced seated tastings with customized service, and dedicated time allocations for an authentic and personalized experience with winery staff. Reservations and customized service can significantly improve winery efficiency and revenue by allowing for better planning of staffing and customer requirements, strategic use of data and feedback in customer relationship management (CRM) for targeted marketing strategies, and enhanced visitor satisfaction and loyalty leading to higher spending per customer.

The experience economy theory emphasizes the importance of creating an experience that captures customers' attention, time, and money. Filopoulos states that the attention, time, and money spent by guests at the winery and its region, and the impact of the experience, are key

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performance indicators, rather than just the volume and value of wine sold, as these factors have a longer-lasting effect beyond a single financial transaction.

Trends in wine tourism during the pandemic underscored the significance of collaboration, domestic visitors, open-air wine experiences, and digital innovations. Common marketing strategies employed by wineries, as identified in research conducted by Garibaldi, included increasing online sales, home delivery, virtual wine tastings, gift cards, and wine club memberships. These findings were corroborated by Loose and Nelgen, who found that wineries focused on intensifying online communication, direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales, creating new sales channels, implementing home delivery services, reducing costs, and utilizing public aid. However, a quantitative survey conducted by Ridoff [16] showed that despite the increase in online and DTC sales, revenue decreased due to the loss of gastronomy, export, and tourism channels.

Building customer trust through authentic messaging with a personalized touch was identified as a powerful tool during times of uncertainty, to make customers feel valued and connected to the business. Collaboration with local businesses and consumers was also considered important in nurturing enduring supportive relationships. A significant impact of the crisis was the accelerated digitalization of wineries. With limited or reduced physical visitors, wineries relied heavily on digital technology for online sales, advertising campaigns, and virtual events. Data became a valuable currency for targeting, segmenting, communicating, and selling to customers. Although shifting to virtual settings presented challenges, as highlighted by Carmer et al. in their study on the change of wine courses for sensory perception training from face-to-face to fully online, suitable solutions were found. Embracing virtual settings can positively impact wineries by increasing employee job satisfaction, saving time and providing work flexibility, reducing travel costs, and contributing to the reduction of greenhouse emissions.

Despite the significant impact of COVID-19 on tourism demand, there is a growing desire among individuals to travel again, particularly to rural wine tourism destinations that are perceived as safe and less crowded, offering contact with nature. The risks associated with wine tourism during a pandemic varies depending on the type of activities offered. Indoor activities, such as winery or wine museum visits, require careful social distancing measures, while outdoor activities such as walking or cycling through vineyards may pose less risk. However, certain activities like wine tastings, meals in wineries, and participation in winemaking activities may present challenges as visitors come into direct contact with products, equipment, and objects, and social interactions with winemakers are highly appreciated. Effective visitor management measures and coordination among different suppliers are necessary to ensure safe experiences throughout the wine tourism trip and maintain the destination's image. The findings of this empirical research shed light on the impacts of COVID-19 on businesses in rural wine tourism areas and the

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strategies adopted to address these challenges, providing valuable insights into the current situation.

### Crisis Management in Wine Tourism

Crisis management in tourism refers to the strategies, actions, and measures taken by tourism businesses, destinations, and stakeholders to effectively respond to and mitigate the impacts of crises or unexpected events that disrupt normal tourism operations. Effective crisis management in tourism involves proactive planning, preparedness, response, and recovery measures to minimize the negative impacts and facilitate the return to normal operations as quickly as possible. It requires a coordinated effort among various stakeholders, including tourism businesses, governments, local communities, industry associations, and other relevant entities.

Overall, effective crisis management in tourism requires proactive planning, preparedness, swift response, clear communication, and coordinated efforts among stakeholders to mitigate the impacts of crises and facilitate a speedy recovery.

Wine tourism businesses and destinations have had to implement crisis management strategies to address the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic.

Here are some key considerations for crisis management in tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Health and safety protocols: Implementing comprehensive health and safety protocols to ensure the safety of employees, visitors, and other stakeholders. This may include measures such as enhanced cleaning and sanitization, social distancing, temperature screenings, face mask requirements, and other preventive measures based on local health guidelines and regulations.
- Communication and information dissemination: Establishing effective communication channels to provide accurate and up-to-date information to employees, visitors, and other stakeholders. This may involve regular updates on the current status of operations, changes in policies or procedures, safety guidelines, and other relevant information to keep stakeholders informed and reassured.
- Flexibility and adaptability: Being flexible and adaptable in response to changing circumstances and regulations. This may involve adjusting business operations, modifying itineraries, offering flexible cancellation and refund policies, and exploring alternative revenue streams, such as virtual tastings or online sales, to mitigate the impact of reduced visitation and sales.

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- Collaborative partnerships: Collaborating with local authorities, other businesses, and industry stakeholders to coordinate efforts and share information, resources, and best practices. This may involve working closely with local health departments, tourism boards, wine associations, and other entities to align strategies and ensure a unified response to the crisis.
- Customer relationship management: Maintaining strong customer relationships and providing exceptional customer service to build trust and loyalty. This may involve proactive communication with customers, addressing their concerns and inquiries, and offering personalized experiences or incentives to retain customer loyalty and encourage future visitation.
- Monitoring and evaluation: Continuously monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of crisis management strategies and adjusting them as needed. This may involve analyzing data, soliciting feedback from stakeholders, and conducting regular assessments to identify areas of improvement and optimize crisis response efforts.
- Business continuity planning: Developing and implementing business continuity plans to ensure the long-term sustainability of wine tourism businesses. This may involve diversifying revenue streams, exploring new markets, strengthening online presence, and securing financial support or insurance coverage to mitigate financial risks.

In summary, crisis management in wine tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic is of paramount importance. The pandemic has had a profound impact on the global tourism industry, resulting in widespread disruptions, travel restrictions, health and safety concerns, and changing consumer behaviors. For this reason, developing an effective crisis management plan is essential for the survival, resilience, and sustainable recovery of the tourism industry amidst unprecedented challenges.

Innovation and adaptability in response to changes in the marketplace have enabled wineries to remain competitive and sustainable. This strategic approach is crucial in building resilience to effectively manage disruptions and maintain business continuity. Recent research has explored this concept in the context of wine tourism. The COVID-19 crisis presented an unprecedented and sudden challenge, requiring wineries to take swift action. Wineries that had already established resilient business strategies were able to respond more quickly, underscoring the importance of crisis planning for the wine industry. Disruptions can also be viewed as opportunities for businesses to explore and implement alternative operating models, such as virtual wine events and e-commerce, which emerged as viable sales channels during the pandemic. Initially developed as substitutes for physical visits, these virtual offerings have since been integrated as supplementary to cellar door sales as travel restrictions eased. This hybrid

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model of wine tourism has the potential to create a resilient foundation for sustainable business operations while catering to the needs of tourists. Investing in online wine tourism systems linked to e-commerce can be a powerful step towards building a resilient business that can thrive during both crisis and normal times, especially in attracting the next generation of wine consumers who are accustomed to online experiences. Previous research has highlighted the importance of building resilience in the tourism sector in general, particularly during economic recessions such as those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## VI. Results and Analysis Of Research Study

The primary data collection aims to provide valuable insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the wine tourism industry and the strategies that stakeholders adopted to cope with the disruption caused by the pandemic. The study's findings will be useful for wineries and other stakeholders in the wine tourism industry, policymakers, and researchers interested in the impact of crises on the wine tourism industry.

### Objectives

As mentioned in the literature review, the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst that brought about significant changes in the wine tourism industry. These changes were primarily related to digitalization, product delivery, and overall business strategy. In response to the sudden and profound disruption caused by the pandemic, wineries had to swiftly develop new strategies or expedite emergent strategies to adapt. As a result, three research questions (RQ) arise.

The first research question pertains to adaptation strategies and aims to investigate how wineries in the wine tourism industry responded to the lockdown measures imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, RQ1 seeks to identify the strategies and concrete initiatives that wineries adopted to cope with the disruption caused by the pandemic. Resilience, particularly during times of crises, is crucial, which leads to the second research question focusing on resilience-building strategies for wineries during the pandemic. Hence, RQ2 is framed as follows: "What strategies can wineries implement to build resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic?" Several studies, such as those conducted by researchers [36-38], have explored the impact of the pandemic on tourism in the past two years. To gather insights on post-COVID-19 trends, the third research question was formulated as follows: "How do wineries envision the future of wine tourism after the COVID-19 crisis?"

### In-Depth Interview and Content Analysis

Data were gathered and analyzed through ongoing in-depth interviews conducted with various wine tourism suppliers. The interviewees included wine producers who offer traditional wine tasting, sales, and winery tours, owners of accommodation units, restaurant managers, and companies that engage in two or more of these business types, all of whom were stakeholders of

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the wine routes developed within the scope of the the project “TheSeaofWine” funded by the European Union and will be co-implemented in 2020-2022 by the International Center for Agribusiness Research and Education Foundation (Armenia), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), Georgian Center for Agribusiness Development (Georgia), and Odessa National Academy of Food Technologies (Ukraine) in close collaboration with the Joint Technical Secretariat of the Black Sea Basin Joint Operational Programme 2014-2020.

In total 47 interviews were done in all marzes of Armenia. The interviewees were inquired about three main themes relevant to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3: firstly, their initial response to the disruption caused by the pandemic, including how they adapted their existing business processes and implemented new initiatives; secondly, the support and strategies that helped their business survive or thrive (resilience); and lastly, their short-term and long-term perspectives on wine tourism in their respective regions, as well as their predictions for the future of cellar door operations. Interviews, lasting 40 to 90 minutes each, were undertaken online or via telephone. The interviews were analyzed by means of content analysis using the software MaxQDA. For each research question, the quantifiable results of the survey have been summarized in the form of a table using frequency and valency analysis.

Table 1

Category	Number of interviews	Region
Wineries	20	Vayots Dzor, Ararat, Armavir, Aragatsotn
Owners of accommodation units	10	Lori, Vayots Dzor, Tavush, Syunik
Restaurant	10	Yerevan, Armavir, Aragatsotn, Shirak, Gegharquniq
Gastro yards	7	Lori, Vayots Dzor, Aragatsotn, Armavir
Total	47	

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## Results and Discussions

The first RQ focuses on the adaptation of wine tourism stakeholders in times of crisis, then documents initiatives. Table 2 summarizes the most important findings deduced from the interviews.

Table 2

Adaptation strategies	Wineries (n=20)	Owners of accommodation units (n=10)	Restaurant (n=10)	Gastro yards (n=7)
Leverage CRM database	10	5	3	1
Direct to Consumer Sales	7	N/A	5	0
Discounts, free delivery, value add	10	10	7	5
Optimize Digital platform	5	7	5	3

Most of the respondents displayed agile responses to the COVID restrictions, quickly pivoting to virtual approaches, offering take-away options due to limited visitation, and making rapid decisions. Some interviewees mentioned being proactive and implementing preemptive strategies as much as possible, while others faced challenges in keeping up with the constantly changing circumstances. The entrepreneurial spirit of embracing new opportunities and learning through practical experience, fueled by the progressive vision of owners, was identified as a compelling force that united staff and enabled not just survival, but also thriving during the crisis. When questioned about the new initiatives undertaken by wineries, nearly all participants acknowledged that customer relationship management (CRM) had been, or would have been, immensely beneficial during and after the periods of lockdown. Numerous research papers have substantiated the increasing significance of direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales, particularly in the context of wineries. Throughout the interviews, the majority of the discussion revolved around intensified marketing strategies aimed at promoting DTC sales, primarily on digital platforms, but also through conventional channels such as telephone, mailing lists, print, radio, billboards, and others.

A recurring theme expressed by many interviewees was the imperative to invest in optimizing and leveraging their digital presence and performance. This often involved hiring digital experts as

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needed, with the goal of expanding their reach and followership. It also entailed ensuring that their websites were mobile-friendly and generating engaging content across various social media platforms, all of which were seen as potential means to support online sales.

Many wineries reported that they experienced an increased number of local visitors and visitors seeking outdoor activities, which suggests that there are changes in visitor demographics that occurred during the pandemic and which will continue. This is an important change given that in Armenia, very few locals make wine tasting tours.

While in lockdown, the organizations implemented other programs that aligned with the changing needs of their customers. Most of them decided to offer free delivery for orders that have a lower minimum spending requirement. Several wineries opted to use their own employees for local deliveries, which provided a more personalized customer service experience, helped maintain staff employment, and ensured speedy delivery, unlike the postal service which was deemed less dependable.

RQ2 deals with new resilience strategies wineries used during the pandemic. The most frequently mentioned strategies that have been successful are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3.

Successful resilience strategies	Wineries (n=20)	Owners of accommodation units (n=10)	Restaurant (n=10)	Gastro yards (n=7)
Strategic CRM for DTC sales— phone and digital	15	3 (phone sell)	5	1
Wage subsidy schemes	20	10	5	4
Reducing costs	20	8	10	7
Use of own capital	10	4	7	0

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The surveyed organization as small- and middle-size firms in Armenia greatly benefited from the support provided by the government, associations, and other businesses during the rapidly changing events. This support was crucial in enabling these firms to adapt and remain viable. One of the most significant forms of government support across all businesses was a subsidized wage scheme. Almost all organizations surveyed were eligible for this scheme, which they found invaluable in retaining staff, ensuring business continuity, and providing an extra layer of security during uncertain times. The scheme gave these businesses time to adjust and reset their strategies. In addition, many interviewees also mentioned the availability of loans with no or low interest and payroll tax delays as essential forms of support.

Being able to swiftly shift to new modes of communication suggests that a company has prepared for resilience by being proactive and having made prior investments in CRM systems, technological infrastructure, and DTC sales. Interviews suggest that, before the COVID-19 disruption, very few companies prioritized CRM and DTC sales and recognized the significance of this strategy application during the pandemic period.

The significance of branding should not be underestimated as it plays a critical role in wine tourism. Certain wineries that adhere to more traditional practices have realized the importance of building their brand, with one acknowledging the need to enhance their image and adopt a more forward-thinking approach in promoting the brand. Furthermore, a broader digital strategy was also highlighted by another winery manager, which involved not only developing a basic website but also incorporating online sales, social media, and facilitating international accessibility for websites and online stores.

The crisis posed a number of pressing issues for the wider business community. One of the most critical challenges was the financial urgency for wineries and other stakeholder representatives to find new revenue streams and keep trading after many traditional sales channels were lost virtually overnight (including cellar door sales, wine tourism, events, hospitality, gastronomy, exports, airlines, and travel retail). For many wineries and gastroyards, tourism was only one aspect of their business. Most of the surveyed wineries, in particular, were heavily reliant on HoReCa (hotel, restaurants, and catering) sales, with most stating that staying afloat was their biggest challenge. To overcome these challenges, wineries had to diversify their sales channels, which proved to be the key to resilience. Only two of the respondents had already incorporated this strategy into their business model, while the majority of the interviewees, who faced lengthy lockdowns, had to return to focusing primarily on winemaking or food processing instead of being a tourism and event destination during this period.

Despite the lingering consequences of the pandemic situation, nearly all interviewees expressed a positive long-term outlook. During the pandemic, the focus was primarily on the local market due to travel restrictions, which had varying benefits for different regions. A relatively short

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lockdown during the first wave, and warm weather in the spring/summer that allowed for outdoor tastings, which helped generate much-needed revenue.

According to the views expressed by most of the interviews, wine tourism in the future will be characterized by qualitative and personalized experiences. They believe that the importance of mass tourism will diminish, as wine tourists seek unique and customized offers. Most of the stakeholders will also continue to focus on providing distinctive quality experiences to visitors to encourage them to return.

COVID-19 safety measures and practices were crucial in attracting visitors back to wineries. This began with showcasing images and information on their websites, COVID-safe logos, workers wearing masks, and welcoming photos of socially distanced experiences. The message of safety was paramount, as it provided assurance to customers, instilling trust, and backed up with significant investment in hygiene, staff training, signage, and contact tracing. Organizations understood that visitors were taking photos, sharing them on social media and writing reviews, which would encourage further visitation if people felt reassured.

It is clear from the responses that organizations have well-established wine tourism strategies with quality experiences as their primary focus, and they are prepared to operate through both physical and virtual channels.

## VII. Conclusion

### Summary of the main findings and contributions of the study

Armenia has a long history of wine production, dating back to 4100 BCE, making it one of the oldest wine-producing countries in the world. Despite this rich history, the Armenian wine industry has struggled in recent years due to political instability, economic challenges, and lack of marketing and promotion.

In recent years, the Armenian government has recognized the potential of wine tourism and has made efforts to promote and develop this industry. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of wineries and wine tours offered in the country.

However, there is still much room for growth and improvement in the Armenian wine tourism industry. Here are some recommendations for the industry's growth:

1. Improve infrastructure: The country needs to invest in its tourism infrastructure to make it easier for visitors to travel around and access different wine regions. This includes better roads, transportation, and accommodation options.

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2. Increase marketing and promotion: Armenian wineries need to work together to promote the country's wine industry to both domestic and international audiences. This can include advertising campaigns, wine festivals, and events.
3. Offer unique experiences: Wineries should offer unique experiences to attract visitors, such as blending and tasting classes, vineyard tours, and food and wine pairing events.
4. Develop wine trails: Wine trails are a great way to showcase the different wine regions of the country and provide visitors with a unique experience. The trails should include information about the history, culture, and production methods of each region.
5. Improve wine quality: The quality of Armenian wine has improved in recent years, but there is still room for improvement. Wineries should focus on producing high-quality wines that can compete with those produced in other countries.

In summary, the Armenian wine tourism industry has great potential for growth and development. By investing in infrastructure, promoting the industry, offering unique experiences, developing wine trails, and improving wine quality, the industry can attract more visitors and contribute to the country's economy.

While wine routes in Armenia may not be as well-known compared to other wine regions in the world, their existence can benefit the country in terms of various socio-economic factors. Here's an elaboration on this statement:

1. Economic Development: Developing and promoting wine routes in Armenia can contribute to economic development by creating opportunities for local businesses, such as wineries, restaurants, accommodations, and transportation services. Increased tourism to wine regions can generate revenue and stimulate economic growth, providing employment opportunities for local communities and supporting local economies.
2. Rural Development: Wine routes often pass through rural areas where vineyards and wineries are located, providing opportunities for rural development. Wine tourism can create jobs in rural communities, promote sustainable agriculture practices, and improve infrastructure in these areas. This can help to revitalize rural areas, prevent rural depopulation, and contribute to the socio-economic development of rural communities in Armenia.
3. Cultural Preservation: Wine routes in Armenia can also contribute to the preservation and promotion of local cultural heritage. The wine industry in Armenia is closely tied to its history, traditions, and local culture. Wine routes can provide a platform for showcasing Armenia's unique winemaking techniques, grape varieties, and traditional practices, helping to preserve and promote the country's cultural heritage. This can also raise

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awareness and appreciation among tourists, supporting the preservation of local customs and traditions.

4. **Tourism Diversification:** Wine routes can diversify the tourism offerings of Armenia, attracting different types of tourists and expanding the country's tourism market. Wine enthusiasts, cultural travelers, and culinary travelers may be drawn to wine routes, creating demand for wine tourism experiences in Armenia. Diversifying the tourism offerings can reduce dependency on specific tourism sectors and attract a wider range of tourists, contributing to the overall growth and development of the tourism industry in Armenia.
5. **International Market Access:** Developing wine routes can also enhance international market access and export opportunities for Armenian wines. Wine routes can raise awareness and interest in Armenian wines among international tourists, creating potential demand for Armenian wines in international markets. This can provide opportunities for export and increase the visibility of Armenian wines, leading to potential economic benefits for the wine industry and the country as a whole.

In conclusion, although wine routes in Armenia may not be widely known, their development and promotion can bring significant socio-economic benefits to the country. Economic development, rural development, cultural preservation, tourism diversification, and international market access are some of the potential advantages that wine routes can offer, contributing to the overall socio-economic well-being of Armenia.

The study research among Armenian Wine tourism stakeholders provides an introductory understanding of innovative sustainable wine tourism approaches that have emerged during these unprecedented times. It can be viewed as a significant contribution to support stakeholders in their efforts to prepare for unexpected events and improve their resiliency.

The main aim of this study was to address three research questions: RQ1 focused on identifying novel wine tourism initiatives, RQ2 aimed to uncover resilience strategies that were developed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, and RQ3 aimed to analyze future perspectives on wine tourism.

Based on the analysis of RQ1, the study found that the most significant wine tourism initiatives developed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 were related to CRM database management, promotion of direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales and digitalisation, and implementation of new product delivery methods. The findings confirm that digitalisation has been crucial in building tourism resilience during the crisis. Utilizing these initiatives were seen as the optimal approach to compensate for losses and maximize returns in both the short and long term.

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In terms of RQ2, the interviewed stakeholders shared the view that building a business based on CRM and DTC, as well as accessing wage subsidy schemes, were the main drivers of a resilience strategy. Only a few gastroyards highlighted the importance of the orientation towards direct sales and CRM systems, and they appeared to be solving the problem in their unique and individual ways. Most of the stakeholders acknowledged government support as key to maintaining staff and business continuity during the pandemic crisis.

According to the findings, the outlook for wine tourism in the future (RQ3) is positive. However, the form it takes may vary. Many interviewees were already adopting hybrid business models, combining virtual wine tourism experiences with enhanced onsite tastings. This accelerated digital approach aligns with the phrase "The Future is Now" from popular culture and the title of the UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2019. Majority of the interviewees agreed that local tourism is an important future trend. Additionally, wineries see personalized wine tourism experiences as a new tool for the future.

### Policy recommendations for promoting wine tourism and local development

Based on the results of the survey, some policy recommendations for promoting wine tourism and local development include:

1. Provide financial support: Government could provide financial support to wineries and other businesses in Armenia in the wine tourism industry to help them cope with the impacts of the pandemic and to build resilience for the future.
2. Enhance digital infrastructure: Government could invest in digital infrastructure, such as the ICT platform to promote the industry in Armenia, to enable wineries to expand their digital platforms and reach new customers through online sales and marketing.
3. Develop partnerships: Encouraging wineries to develop partnerships with other businesses and industry stakeholders to jointly navigate the challenges of the pandemic and to promote sustainable growth in the wine tourism industry.
4. Foster sustainability: To promote sustainable practices and eco-friendliness in the wine tourism industry to appeal to consumers who are increasingly interested in sustainable tourism.
5. Support local tourism: To promote local tourism and encourage domestic visitors to explore their own country's wine regions, which could help offset the decline in international tourism caused by the pandemic.
6. Provide training and development opportunities: Training and development opportunities for winery employees to enhance their skills and knowledge, which could help improve the quality of the wine tourism experience for visitors and support local development.

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Overall, these policy recommendations could help promote wine tourism and local development in Armenia in a sustainable and resilient manner in the post-COVID-19 era.

### Limitations and future research directions

There are several areas of future research that could be explored in the context of wine tourism, considering both global and Armenian contexts. Some potential research suggestions include:

- I. **Wine Tourists' Preferences and Behavior:** Investigating the preferences, motivations, and behaviors of wine tourists in Armenia. This could include studying the factors that influence wine tourists' destination choices, travel patterns, wine consumption behaviors, and satisfaction levels. Understanding wine tourists' preferences and behavior can help wineries, tourism organizations, and destinations tailor their offerings and marketing strategies to meet the needs and expectations of wine tourists, and enhance their overall wine tourism experiences.
- II. **Wine Tourism and Destination Branding:** Investigating the role of destination branding in the promotion of wine tourism, both globally and in Armenia. This could include studying how destinations brand and market themselves as wine tourism destinations, the effectiveness of destination branding strategies, and the impact of destination branding on wine tourists' perceptions and behaviors. Understanding the role of destination branding in wine tourism can provide insights into how destinations can effectively position themselves in the competitive wine tourism market and attract wine tourists.
- III. **Global Collaboration and Networking in Wine Tourism:** Studying the opportunities and challenges of global collaboration and networking in the wine tourism industry, both globally and in Armenia. This could include investigating the role of international networks, partnerships, and collaborations in knowledge exchange, technology transfer, and market access for wine tourism stakeholders. Understanding the benefits and challenges of global collaboration and networking in wine tourism can provide insights into how stakeholders can leverage international opportunities to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of wine tourism destinations.

In conclusion, there are various research opportunities in the field of wine tourism of Armenia. These research areas can contribute to the knowledge and understanding of wine tourism development, management, impacts, and sustainability, and provide valuable insights for wine tourism stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers to make informed decisions and foster the growth of the wine tourism industry.

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## IX. Appendices

### SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE:

**Research Question 1 (RQ1): Which strategies did organizations in wine tourism implement, and which initiatives have been introduced to deal with the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?**

1. Did your organization implement any specific strategies to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. If yes, please specify the adaptation strategies implemented by your organization during the pandemic.
  - a. Leverage CRM database
  - b. Direct to Consumer Sales
  - c. Optimize Digital platform
  - d. Discounts, free delivery, value add
  - e. Other(please specify)
3. How effective do you believe these strategies have been in mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your wine tourism activities?
  - a. Very effective
  - b. Somewhat effective
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Somewhat ineffective
  - e. Very ineffective
4. Did your organization introduce any initiatives to cope with the disruption caused by the pandemic?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. If yes, please describe the initiatives introduced by your organization during the pandemic. If yes please specify
  - a. implemented changes in its online sales and e-commerce strategies
  - b. introduced new or enhanced delivery or shipping options
  - c. implemented any changes in its safety and hygiene protocols
  - d. implemented any changes in its social media or digital marketing strategies
  - e. other, \_\_\_\_\_please specify

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6. How effective do you believe these strategies have been in mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your wine tourism activities?
  - a. Very effective
  - b. Somewhat effective
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Somewhat ineffective
  - e. Very ineffective
7. Have you noticed any changes in visitor demographics since the COVID-19 pandemic began?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
8. If yes, how have visitor demographics changed?
  - a. Increased number of local visitors
  - b. Decreased number of international visitors
  - c. Increased number of visitors seeking outdoor activities
  - d. Other (please specify)

**Research Question 2 (RQ2): What are the strategies for organizations to build resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

9. Did your organization implement any resilience-building strategies during the pandemic?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
10. If yes, please specify the most successful resilience-building strategies implemented by your organization during the pandemic.
  - a. implemented any cost-cutting measures or financial strategies
  - b. sought financial support from government programs, grants, or other sources
  - c. implemented any employee retention strategies, such as flexible work arrangements or training programs
  - d. explore partnerships or collaborations with other businesses or industry stakeholders to jointly navigate the challenges
  - e. other \_\_\_\_\_ please specify
11. Please indicate the importance of resilience for wineries during the COVID-19 pandemic
  - a. Not important
  - b. Slightly important
  - c. Moderately important
  - d. Very important
  - e. Highly important

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12. How important do you think sustainability and eco-friendliness will be in the future of wine tourism post-COVID-19?
- Not important
  - Slightly important
  - Moderately important
  - Very important
  - Highly important
13. How likely are you to leverage your winery's unique brand and identity to attract visitors in the post-COVID-19 era?
- Very likely
  - Somewhat likely
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat unlikely
  - Very unlikely
14. In your opinion, what will be the biggest opportunity for wineries in the post-COVID-19 era?
- Attracting new customers
  - Expanding into new markets
  - Diversifying product offerings
  - Other (please specify)
15. How important do you think sustainability and eco-friendliness will be in the future of wine tourism post-COVID-19?
- Very important
  - Somewhat important
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat unimportant
  - Very unimportant

**Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do wineries see the future of wine tourism after the COVID-19 crisis?**

16. Do you think wine tourism will shift towards more domestic visitors in the post-COVID-19 era?
- Yes, definitely
  - Yes, somewhat
  - Neutral
  - No, not really
  - No, not at all

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17. In your opinion, what are the biggest opportunities for the wine tourism industry in the post-COVID-19 era?
- Attracting new customers
  - Expanding into new markets
  - Diversifying product offerings
  - Other (please specify)
18. Please indicate your level of optimism about the future of wine tourism after the COVID-19 crisis:
- Not optimistic
  - Slightly optimistic
  - Moderately optimistic
  - Very optimistic
  - Highly optimistic
19. What changes, if any, do you anticipate in the wine tourism industry after the COVID-19 crisis?

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