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ENSURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE RURAL ECONOMY THROUGH TOURISM ACTIVITIES

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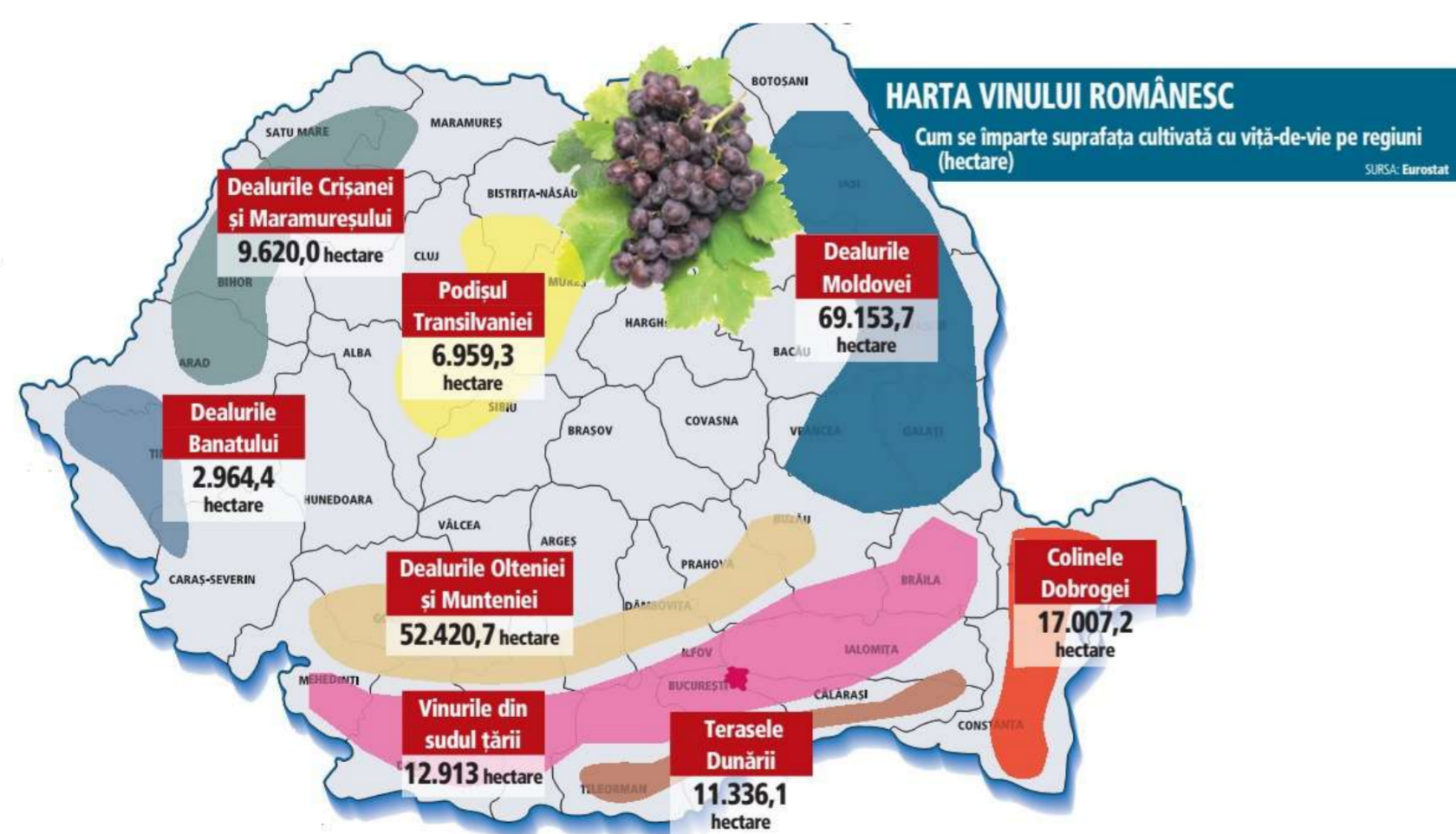
Abstract: Tourism is playing an increasingly significant role as a source of revenue in countries around the world, regardless of their level of development. Since the vast majority of rural communities in Romania possess natural and human resources, we believe that developing tourism in these areas, as a means of diversifying economic activities, would add value to the community, generate additional income for residents and the local community, and stimulate development and improved quality of life in rural areas, all of which would have a positive effect on the demographics of these villages, particularly in disadvantaged rural areas. In this context, the authors of this article believe that current policy makers at the community level in rural areas have an important role to play in that they must take into account, in their local development strategies, the diversity of tourism-related activities and the sustainable and efficient use of the local resources at their disposal.

• Introduction

Diversifying economic activities through tourism is one of the most effective ways to use local resources, especially in rural areas, where development opportunities are often limited. Regions with diverse natural, cultural, and agricultural resources have considerable potential to develop various forms of tourism, such as agritourism, ecotourism, or wine tourism. These forms of tourism do not merely involve visiting attractions, but offer authentic experiences based on local traditions, regional cuisine, and direct interaction with the rural environment.

Tourism is no longer merely a recreational activity, but has become a driver of local economic development. **The development of wine tourism** requires measures aimed at restructuring and converting vineyards, along with their modernization, to enhance the sector's competitiveness. Investments in processing, in the development of winery infrastructure, and in vine protection systems support production stability and reduce risks associated with climate change or specific diseases.

Although Romanian wines are known for their high quality, their visibility on the local and international markets remains limited. **The development of small, boutique-style wineries** presents a strategic opportunity. These wineries capitalize on the production of small vineyards, emphasizing quality, authenticity, and a personalized experience for the consumer. As a result, wine tourism plays a central role in revitalizing the rural economy. By attracting visitors to wine-growing regions, it generates additional economic activity that supports not only wine producers but also related sectors, such as local cuisine, lodging services, and traditional crafts.



• Material and method

The research methodology for this study is based on a comprehensive approach that combines theoretical and empirical methods, with the aim of analyzing the current state of vineyard areas in Romania, identifying opportunities to capitalize on local resources through wine tourism, and highlighting examples of best practices in Timiș County.

The first stage of the research involved theoretical research, conducted by reviewing the specialized literature, academic studies, and statistical reports published by institutions such as the National Institute of Statistics and European institutes. In the second stage, a quantitative analysis of statistical data on vineyard areas was conducted to highlight their distribution and the characteristics of agricultural holdings. Qualitative analysis was applied to identify the potential for wine tourism and examples of best practices through case studies from representative wine-growing regions.

• Results and discussions

Romania has approximately 180,000 hectares of vineyards, ranking the country fifth in the European Union and eleventh worldwide in terms of vineyard area. This ranking highlights significant agricultural potential, supported by favorable soil and climate conditions and a long tradition of vine cultivation.

Top 10 wine-growing areas in production in Romania's main counties

County	Area of vineyards in production (ha)	Percentage in total (%)
TOTAL Romania	176682	100
Vrancea	23791	13.5
Buzău	13735	7.8
Dolj	12425	7.0
Vaslui	11373	6.4
Galați	11242	6.4
Iași	10356	5.9
Prahova	8505	4.8
Teleorman	7936	4.5
Constanța	7837	4.4
Tulcea	7764	4.4
Total TOP 10	114964	65.1

Cherishing local resources and supporting community-level entrepreneurs through the implementation of coherent local development strategies can have a direct impact on increasing the number of jobs in rural areas. When resources are used efficiently, the conditions are created for revitalizing the local economy and diversifying economic activities. The development of small-scale businesses or other rural entrepreneurs contributes to the creation of new employment opportunities. The development of wine tourism in western Romania, particularly in Timiș County, is an increasingly important avenue for leveraging local resources and restoration of the rural economy. These areas benefit from natural conditions favorable to vine cultivation, as well as a long tradition of wine production. Timiș County stands out in Romania's agricultural landscape due to its diverse crop structure, having regions such as the Recaș area, Silagiu, and Jamu Mare.

A key factor in Timiș County is the emergence of boutique wineries and family-run businesses that emphasize authenticity and quality. These small-scale establishments are able to offer experiences and create a direct link between producer and consumer. They contribute to the diversification of the rural economy and help reduce dependence only on agricultural production.

• Conclusions

The development of wine tourism requires ongoing investment in infrastructure, promotion, and entrepreneurial education. The creation of well-organized tourist routes, promotion at the national and international levels, and the involvement of local communities are essential factors for fully realizing the existing potential.

Wine tourism in Timiș County represents an opportunity for sustainable development, based on local resources and authentic traditions. Wine tourism helps promote regional identity and strengthen the local brand.