WINE ROAD - AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE VALORISATION OF WINE TOURISM POTENTIAL
CASE STUDY: ALBA COUNTY VINEYARDS

Mihaela UNGUREANU*
University of Oradea, Department of Geography, Tourism and Territorial Planning
University St., 410087, Oradea, Romania, e-mail: umihaela59@yahoo.com

Abstract: The main aim of this study is to highlight the wine-growing and wine-making potential of Alba County and the way it can be valorised. Alba county has a rich wine-growing and wine-making heritage, a fact which is due to the long-standing tradition of wine-growing on these area, as well as to the characteristics of the natural factors (relief, geology, climate, soil), favourable for obtaining high-quality wines, the reputation of which has been acquired at national and international competitions. In order to render useful the wine tourism resources, the development of a specific infrastructure is needed, as well as the creation of complex tourist products, able to satisfy a wide range of tourist motivations. An efficient instrument to make productive the wine potential of a region is the "Wine Road" – a tourist trail which includes the tourist attractions of a delimited area, usually with a controlled designation of origin, and also a diverse range of tourist services (transportation, accommodation, catering leisure etc.). In Alba County, the "Wine Road" can be considered as a tourist attraction in itself, but also a means of harnessing the rich cultural-historical and natural heritage and, implicitly, the wine-growing and wine-making heritage.

Key words: wine road, vineyards, wine tourism potential

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INTRODUCTION
The predominant form of organization of wine tourism is the "Wine Road" – a tourist trail which includes the winemaking units and which offers to the tourists the opportunity of discovering the tourist attributes of a wine-growing region (winescape, the grape varieties, vine and wine museums, the characteristics of the terroir etc.).

Gatti (1997, p. 219) gives the following definition of the "Wine Road": "a signposted itinerary along a delimited area (region, province, area with controlled designation of origin), inviting tourists to discover the wine(s) produced in this area and the activities that can be related to this. This discovery is carried out directly in the farms (enabling the traveler to meet the producer) and/or in the spaces specifically organized to raise the profile of wine products (wine tasting centres or wine museums)".

According to Bruwer (2002), the main reasons for tourists to visit the wine roads in a certain wine-growing region are the following: visit the vineyards, the opportunity to taste and buy

* Corresponding Author
wines, the visit of a local museum which offers information about the tradition of winemaking and
the history of that wine-growing area, take part in wine-related festivals and events, the winescape
of the region, meet the winemaker, the opportunity of having a meal within the winemaking units.
Tourists can also find accommodation in agrotourism pensions and experience the local cuisine of
the region or buy specific products of the area.

The wine road can be considered an integrated system of relationships between the tourism
and the winemaking industries, by means of which tourists can get connected to the tourist offer of
a wine-growing region. Therefore, we can say that it has been designed to generate income by the
sale of goods and services. The question is: which are the means to interpret, organize and
coordinate the wine trail for the visitors? This is not always clear. At first glance, the wine trail
makes the connection only with the door of the cellar or the winemaking unit, and not with the
tourist attractions of the area.

A wine itinerary must be accompanied by a brochure with a map showing the tourist
attractions included on the trail, the accommodation, catering and leisure offers. This is a
particularly important factor as it can motivate the tourists to travel along a wine road (Gatti,
1997). This idea is endorsed by Isabelle Frochot (2000, p. 72-73), who considers that „a wine
route usually consists of a designed itinerary (or several) through the wine region, which is
thematically signposted as well as being marketed and interpreted via a free leaflet and map,
which notes the different vineyards and wine-makers and provides information on sites of
historical and other interest”.

Sophie Lignon-Darmalac (2009) analyzes the economic efficiency of wine trails in France
and finds out that in order to attract visitors, these trails have to represent a tourist attraction
themselves. The idea that the trail is indeed a tourist attraction and not only a marketing
mechanism is supported more and more by the increasing number of attributes having a tourist
value. For example, in France, the majority of wine tourism trails are designed as cultural heritage
trails, including many tourist attractions in their structure, and tourists can travel along them with
various means of access (car, bicycle, horse riding or walking).

Every wine road tries to highlight a series of regional characteristics (natural, cultural and
social ones) which confer a brand identity and a distinctive attribute (Moran, 1993) or something
that makes it unique in the tourists’ perception. This idea is sustained by Elias Pastor (2006), who
considers that the wine roads are multithematic areas where structural axis is wine, plus the
identity of each region.

The majority of the wine routes take the name of the wine-growing region, which, in most
of the cases, is officially limited by a controlled designation of origin (CDO) or by a geographical
indication (GI), such as: Bordeaux, Alsace, Provence, Champagne (France), Napa Valley
(California, USA), Rioja (Spain), Douro (Portugal), Dealurile Moldovei, Colinele Dobrogei
(România) etc.

The wine road in Europe bears the stamp of the tradition, culture and history, as the tourists
can enjoy the visits of the cellars, or the restaurants which promote the traditional local cuisine, as
well as the specific architecture of the visited area. Meanwhile, the wine routes in the countries of
the „New World” (Australia, New Zealand, USA etc.) are characterized by educational and
recreational themes, as there is an increased interest of the tourists for wine tasting, improving the
wine-related knowledge and using the winemaking units for entertainment purposes. In this
context, the specific wine tourism activities go hand in hand with the gastronomy, the cultural and
the rural tourism (Casanovas, 2008, quoted by Boschi, 2011).

The first wine road appeared in 1953, in Alsace (France); it now covers 170 km. In a short
time, the wine roads developed in Bordeaux, on the Loire Valley and the Rhône Valley. Germany,
Italy or Spain immediately followed the lead and created new tourist trails on the Rhine Valley, in
Tuscany or Castile. Countries which are not part of Europe (USA, New Zealand, Chile, Brazil etc.)
followed the trend and eventually, the wine roads have become tourist destinations per se in south-
eastern Europe as well – Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and the Republic of Moldova – being considered the best way of valorizing the origin designations (Vlachvei, 2009).

In Romania, the tourist project „Wine Road“ has been designed within the framework of the national program „Romania – Land of the Wine“ drawn up by the Ministry of Tourism and Regional Development in 2003. The wine road passes through the well-known vineyards of the counties Buzău, Prahova, Bacău, Iași, Vrancea, Vâlcea, Alba, Arad etc. The aim of such programs is the development of wine tourism, with all the investments and benefits that this type of tourism entails directly and indirectly.

Currently, there are 11 wine roads passing through the best known vineyards of the country, but none of them has a well-established structure or functioning system. Many of them lead nowhere, because there are no signposts showing the itinerary, the accommodation, catering and leisure offer. In terms of functionality, the best organised is the wine road of Prahova county. It goes through 11 wine estates (Tohani, Halewood Cellars, Budureasca Cellar, SERVE Cellar, LaCerta Cellar, Basilescu Cellar, Ceptura Cellar, Domeniile Săhăteni etc.), covering approximately 58 km and attracting 12 000 – 13 000 tourists every year. The wine road of Buzău County covers 60 km and starts from the National Road DN10, towards Pietroasele and Monteoro. The investment amounted to EUR 24 million, with EU funding (http://www.vinland.ro/).

In Vrancea county, the wine road passes through Panciu, Cotești and Odobești vineyards (Mănăilă, 2013), covering approximately 100 km; in Arad, the 60 km which go along the county roads DJ708B and DJ708C (which start from the National Road DN10) cross the Miniș-Măderat vineyard from north to south.

In Alba County, the wine road covers approximately 200 km and passes through Aiud, Alba, Sebeș-Apold and Târnave vineyards.

As far as the research on this subject is concerned, there are many studies in the international specialized tourist literature. Most of the studies in the anglo-saxon literature highlight the role that the wine routes play in the marketing strategies of the wine factories, as well as their economic effectiveness (Preston-White, 2000; Bruwer, 2002; Kirkman, 2010). In Europe, the wine routes are considered tourist destinations per se and the majority of the studies emphasize the elements of the cultural landscape, the reputation of the wines and of the terroir etc. (Gatti, 1997; Correia, 2006; Boschi, 2011).

In Romania, the research on this topic is still at an early stage and so is the development of this new form of tourism. There are a limited number of papers at the moment and the majority of the investigations are case studies. For example Ranca (2007) analyses the wine road in Dobrogea and considers that it represents a solution for the sustainable development of the local agrotourist potential. Most of the studies are descriptive (Popescu, 2000) and focus of the description of the attractions included on the wine road of a certain wine-growing region or vineyard (Mănăilă, 2013).

Other studies focus on the analysis of the wine-growing cultural potential and of the wine tourism potential on a national level (Soare, 2010).

To conclude, we can say that the research on the topic of the wine routes in Romania, implicitly of the wine tourism is yet at the pioneering stage. This paper aims to bring a small contribution to the specialized tourist literature of Romania, concerning the wine routes.

**METHODOLOGY**

In order to write this paper, we have used the classical research methodology, that is we have consulted the specialized bibliography related to tourism, from the international literature as well as the Romanian one, regarding our topic; we have studied as well the specialized bibliography having as subject the geography and wine-growing in the research area.

The data base has been completed with the information acquired from the fieldwork. Among the documentary methods used on the ground, we mention: the observation, the analysis, the investigation, and the mapping. The visits on the ground aimed to identify, localize, describe
and photograph the wine tourism resources from the vineyards of Alba county in order to integrate them in the tourist trail „Wine Road”.

Also, the visits on the ground have allowed us to obtain from the wine producers and the local authorities some information concerning the tourist circulation, the characteristics of the tourist products, the accommodation supply, the on-going projects etc. The spatial representation of some of the analyzed elements has been made by using a specialized software, named ArcGIS.

**WINE - GROWING POTENTIAL OF ALBA COUNTY**

**Framing the vineyards of Alba County on a regional and national level**

Alba county vineyards are part of the Transylvania Plateau wine region, situated in the centre of Romania. The grape plantations of this region are grouped in five vineyards, namely: Aiud, Alba Iulia, Sebeș - Apold, Lechința and Târnave, situated within the administrative borders of four counties: Alba, Sibiu, Mureș, Bistrița-Năsăud.

The grape plantations of Alba County are included in four of the five vineyards of the region, respectively: Aiud, Alba Iulia, Sebeș-Apold and Târnave (figure 1).

From a physical-geographical point of view, the grape plantations of Alba county are located between the piedmont of Trascău Mountains (to the west), Luduș Hills, at the southern extremity of Transylvania Plain and the Mureș river between its confluences with Arieș and Aiud rivers (to the north), the northern extensions of the Subcarpathian Hills at the foot of Șureanu and Cândrel Mountains (to the south), the southern extensions of the hills from the Secașelor Plateau (to the south-east), the hills from Târnave and Mureș basin (to the east and north-east) (figure 2).

![Figure 1. The vineyards and wine centers from Alba County](image1)

![Figure 2. The physical - geographical map of Alba County](image2)

From ecological point of view, the vineyard finds here good and very good vegetation conditions, especially in the south-western half of the Transylvania Plateau, in the Alba Iulia and Târnave vineyards, which bear the name „The Land of the Wine” (Cotea, 2008).

The reputation of the Jidvei, Ciumbrud, Alba Iulia and Târnave wines has transcended the borders of the country, a fact which is proved by the numerous medals won over the years at the
international competitions. On a national level, Alba County does not own a vast wine-growing surface. In 2013, the total wine-growing surface (vineyards and grape nurseries) of Alba county was 4,656 ha, representing 45.8% of Transylvania Plateau grape surface and 2.2% of the Romanian grape surface. 1

The cornerstone of the vineyards in Alba County is the white wines production, either table wines, or belonging to the Grand Cru category (Cotea, 2008).

**The vineyards of Alba County**

Due to the favourable conditions of the natural environment, the culture of vine has an ancient tradition on the territory of Alba County, being practiced here since very distant times. Târnave and Alba Iulia vineyards are among the oldest of Romania; wine-growing in these areas was attested by archaeologists and historiographers since the Dacian times (Martin, 1966; Macici, 1996).

Until the phylloxera invasion (1880-1884), wine-growing in this area and in fact, wine-growing in the whole Romania was in a continual progress under all aspects: economical, technological, biological. Phylloxera had a disastrous impact on the vineyards on the whole Romanian territory. The reconstruction of the vineyards was rather difficult, being replanted in two stages: the first began in 1884 and lasted until the end of the Second World War, and the second covers the socialist period. By means of a vast programme, on a national level, the vineyards which were old and unproductive were replaced by new plantations, either for wine grapes or for table grapes. The aims were to increase the grape surface and the production per hectare.

After 1989, together with the retrocession of lands and the establishment of the private property, the Romanian viticulture has entered in a downward spiral as a result of a poor management of the wine-growing stock.

Currently, the Romanian viticulture is going through a stage of deep transformations, that of the reconversion of grape plantations; thus, the old vines and those which have developed from hybrid varieties are being replaced with new plantations, with noble varieties.

In 2013, the total wine-growing surface of Alba county was 4,656 ha, out of which 3,860 ha were fruitful vines. Out of the surface planted with fruitful vines, 3,348 ha were grafted vines and only 512 ha were hybrid vines. The whole surface of fruitful vines belongs to the private sector, and 50% of them are individual exploitations. 2

**Aiud vineyard** is located in the west of Transylvania Plateau, north of Alba-Iulia vineyard, the grape plantations being scattered on the hills from both sides of the corridor of lower Mureș (Teodorescu, 1987; Macici, 1996). Aiud vineyard covers a surface of approximately 600 ha 3 and includes the grape fields of Ciumbrud, Sâncrai, Ocna Mureș, Mirăslău, Lopadea Nouă, Ciuguzel and Uioara (Popa, 2010). The largest grape surface is owned by SC Domeniile Boieru SRL, owning approximately 180 ha, followed by Logos Cellar, with 20 ha. The small producers own little surfaces, from several tens of acres to 3-5 ha. The ecological conditions are favourable for obtaining high quality white wines, most of them bearing a designation of origin (Oșlobeanu, 1991).

**Alba Iulia vineyard** locally named „The Land of the Wine“", is located on the hills at the eastern foot of the Apuseni Mountains, which spread on the right border of Mureș, between Geoagiu and Ampoi water streams (Teodorescu, 1987; Popa, 2010). The vineyard covers a surface of about 230 ha 4 and includes the wine centre of Alba Iulia, encompassing some famous grape plains: Ighiui, Cricău, Sârd, Țeclna, Craiva, Bucerdea Vinoasă and Sântimbru.

The ecological conditions are favourable for obtaining dry, semi-dry and semi-sweet white wines, table wines or bearing a designation of origin, as well as those wines which constitute the raw material for the Alba Iulia sparkling wine (Cotea, 2008).

Sebeș – Apold vineyard is situated in the south-west of Transylvania Plateau. The grape plantations are spread on the northern extensions of the hills at the foot of the Meridionali Carpathians and on the southern extensions of the hills from the Secașelor Plateau. Globally, the wine centre Sebeș covers about 625 ha and includes 11 grape plains, the best-known of which are: Călnic, Gârbova, Vingard, Spring, Daia Romană and Cut. The vineyard is the source of white wines, table wines or bearing a designation of origin.

Târnave vineyard is the largest and the most famous of Transylvania Plateau wine-growing region. The vineyard are situated in the hydrographic basin of Târnava Mare and Târnava Mică (Martin, 1966), at an average elevation of 270 m (Babeș, 2011), on slopes whose inclinations range from 5° to 15°, a fact which demands methods of combating soil erosion and landslides. Târnave vineyard spreads on the surface of three counties: Alba, Mureș and Sibiu and includes six wine centres: Mediaș, Zagăr, Târnăveni, Valea Nirajului, Jidvei and Blaj, the last two being situated in Alba county (Cotea, 2008).

As for the vineyards in Alba county, the largest surface belongs to Târnave vineyard (wine centres Blaj and Jidvei), with about 3 000 ha. In the wine centre Jidvei lies one of the most famous national wine brands: SC Jidvei SRL. The wine-making unit of Jidvei owns the largest grape area in Romania, approximately 2 300 ha. In the wine centre Blaj operate the Research Station of Viticulture and Enology Blaj, as well as Târnave-Blaj Cellar, with a grape surface of about 250 ha.

The ecological conditions of Târnave vineyard are favourable for obtaining dry white wines, different varieties of sparkling wines bearing a designation of origin (Târnave-Blaj, Târnave-Jidvei), as well as semi-dry or sweet white wines, liqueur and aromatic wines, which are obtained when the conditions for the development of the noble rot are met, especially from the following varieties: Fetească Albă, Fetească Regală, Traminer Roz, Muscat Ottonel, Sauvignon, Pinot Gris, Neuburger and Riesling italian (Macici, 1996; Oșlobeanu, 1991).

The grape production

In the vineyards of Alba County, there are significant variations of the total grape production (wine grapes and grapes for current use) from year to year, due mainly to the values of the climate elements in certain vegetation periods, as well as to the production of certain extreme meteorological phenomena (fog, drought, hail). As we can notice in graph of figure 3, the grape production recorded a strong oscillation between years 1990-2014.

![The total production of grapes in Alba county](http://www.insse.ro/)

**Figure 3.** The evolution of total production of grapes in Alba county (1990-2014)

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5 http://www.insse.ro/
6 http://www.insse.ro/.
7 Data source: Ioan Buia, manager of winemaking complex SC Jidvei SRL.
8 http://www.insse.ro/.
The lowest value of the grape production was recorded in 1998, namely 8,540 tons. In the period 2005 - 2007, the grape production was very low, between 11,000 and 13,000 tons, but increased significantly in 2008, to 24,173 tons. The year 2014 was the most productive, the production reaching 32,557 tons of grapes (29,895 tons, out of grafted vines and 2,662 tons, out of hybrid vines).  

**The wine varieties**

The cornerstone of the vineyards in Alba County is the white wines production, either table wines, or bearing a protected designation of origin (Cotea, 2008).

As far as the varieties are concerned, in the four vineyards of Alba County prevail the grape varieties for high-quality white wines, the majority of which bear a designation of origin, namely: Fetească Regală, Fetească Albă, Traminer Roz, Riesling Italian, Pinot Gris and Sauvignon Blanc, but also the variety for Muscat Ottonel aromatic wines (Macici, 1996; Popa, 2010).

As for the wine varieties and their sugar content, the wines which come from the vineyards of Alba county can be: dry, semi-dry, semi-sweet and sweet (Cotea, 2008). Together with these wines, we must highlight the sparkling wines from Târnave vineyards (Jidvei), Alba Iulia and Sebeș-Apold, considered to be some of the best of our country, a fact which justifies their ranking among the sparkling wines bearing a designation of origin (Macici, 1996). The Alba sparkling wine has been produced since 1969, and is obtained, in most of the cases, out of Pinot Gris and Fetească Regală (Cotea, 2008).

In recent years, in Târnave vineyard were introduced in culture the grape varieties for red wines (Pinot noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Fetească neagră, Merlot and Syrah). The red wines are produced by SC Jidvei SRL. In 2011, the company launched onto the market a Pinot noir from the 2009 vintage, intended for the super premium segment (about 100,000 bottles).  

In Aiud vineyard, at Ciumbrud, the conditions allow that, in some years, the grapes be infected with noble rot, which offers the possibility of producing some wines of an exceptional quality. One of the oldest wines produced in the vineyard is a blending named „Plebanos”. It is obtained, in most of the cases, out of Fetească Albă, Grasă and Muscat Ottonel (Macici, 1996). Currently, this wine is produced by Logos Cellar from Aiud.

According to the National Office for Designation of Origin for Wine (ONDOV), the wines of Alba county vineyards can have the following controlled designations of origin (CDO): Aiud, Alba Iulia, Sebeș-Apold, Târnave, Târnave-Blaj and Târnave-Jidvei.  

Table no. 1 includes the grape varieties out of which the wines with CDO are obtained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CDO Aiud</th>
<th>CDO Alba Iulia</th>
<th>CDO Târnave</th>
<th>CDO Sebeș-Apold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White varieties</td>
<td>White varieties</td>
<td>White varieties</td>
<td>White varieties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinot Gris</td>
<td>Pinot Gris</td>
<td>Traminer Roz</td>
<td>Neuburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscat Ottonel</td>
<td>Muscat Ottonel</td>
<td>Pinot Gris</td>
<td>Neuburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traminer Roz</td>
<td>Sauvignon Blanc</td>
<td>Fetească Regală</td>
<td>Fetească Regală</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauvignon Blanc</td>
<td>Chardonnay</td>
<td>Riesling Italian</td>
<td>Neuburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chardonnay</td>
<td>Riesling de Rhin</td>
<td>Neuburger</td>
<td>Fetească Albă</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riesling de Rhin</td>
<td>Muscat Ottonel</td>
<td>Furtint</td>
<td>Neuburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuburger</td>
<td>Merlot</td>
<td>Furtint</td>
<td>Furtint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fetească Regală</td>
<td>Chardonnay</td>
<td>Furtint</td>
<td>Furtint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fetească Albă</td>
<td>Riesling Italian</td>
<td>Furtint</td>
<td>Furtint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furmint</td>
<td>Riesling de Rhin</td>
<td>Furtint</td>
<td>Furtint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the surface planted with grape varieties for wines with controlled designation of origin (CDO), in 2011 there were 2 100 ha in Alba County (figure 4), with over 800 ha more than in 2007.  

![Figure 4. The evolution of the surface vineyards with CDO (ha), between years 2006 - 2011](image)

**Figure 4.** The evolution of the surface vineyards with CDO (ha), between years 2006 - 2011

**WINE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF ALBA COUNTY**

The wine tourism potential includes all the tourist attractions of a wine-growing region, either natural or anthropic: winemaking units, vineyards, wine centres, cellars, research stations, vine and wine museums etc., plus the accommodation and catering units, access infrastructure specific to wine tourism (tourist trails) and other tourist amenities which are necessary in order to render valuable the wine tourism resources. We should not forget the natural and anthropic tourist attractions (natural reserves and monuments, cultural, historical and religious tourist attractions) which are not directly linked to wine tourism, but can be harnessed by it, thus creating a wide tourist offer, able to satisfy a diverse range of tourist motivations.

On the whole, Alba county has a tourist potential harmoniously distributed on all its surface; to the west, in the mountain area, the natural tourist attractions prevail, followed by the cultural-historical and religious ones, and in the east-central part, the largest share belongs to anthropic tourist attractions, but also to wine-growing attractions (cellars, winemaking units, wine collections, castles etc.) (figure 5).

In terms of wine tourism attractions, in Alba County lies one of the main wine producers in Romania: the winemaking unit of SC Jidvei SRL, and also one of the most famous national wine brands. In the four vineyard of Alba county there is an impressive number of cellars belonging, most of them, to small producers (figure 6): Logos Cellars, Tamas Andras Cellar, Papp Péter Cellar (Aiud), Köble Tiberiu Cellar, Iepure Ioan Cellar, Vass Attila Cellar (Ciumbrud), Toth Csaba Cellar (Alba Iulia), Apoulon Cellar (Bucerdea Vinoasă), Țelna Cellar (Țelna), Viticola Gârbova, Rex Vinorum (Aiud) etc. (figure 6).

We must add to these SC Domeniile Boieru SRL, a medium-sized wine-producer, whose image capital becomes ever stronger. The quality of the wines of Ciumbrud, produced by Domeniile Boieru, has already been recognized by the medals won at the competitions in this field.  

Furthermore, two tourist attractions which cannot be omitted are the Reasearch Station of Viticulture and Enology Blaj, as well as Târnave-Blaj Cellar. As for the wine-related anthropic attractions, the castles have a special importance, due to their historical and architectural value.

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Some of them are already open for tourist purposes or there are on-going projects to achieve this. A good example is the Bethlen – Haller Castle (historical monument) of Cetatea de Baltă, which operated as a department for turning the wine into champagne, belonging to the Jidvei Company, until 2003, when restoration of the castle began. Currently, the cellar under the castle hosts wine tastings, together with local traditional meals or from the international cuisine. The castle may be visited only on request, with a previous programming, by organized groups or on the occasion of various events (symposiums, exhibitions). The image of Bethlen-Haller Castle is the logo of Jidvei brand.

Figure 5. The share of tourist attractions at the level of Alba administrative units
(Data source: the official websites of localities' Town-Hall; investigation on the ground, 2014)

Figure 6. The distribution of wine-producers and cellars in Alba county vineyards
(Data source: investigation on the ground, 2014)

In Alba County there is an impressive number of castles, many of which are placed in wine-growing localities, and that could be included in the tourist trails after specific developments. Here, we could mention the Bethlen Castle of the commune Cut, Martinuzzi Castle and Kendeffy - Horvath Castle (Vințu de Jos), Mikes Castle (Cisteiu de Mureș), Teleki Castle (Uioara de Sus), Kemény Castle (Sâncrai), Wesselényi Castle (Obreja), Esterházy Castle (Șard), Bethlen Castle (Sânmiclăuș), Kemény Castle (Gâlda de Jos), the castle from Botești etc. (Anghel, 1982; Stoica, 2009). ¹⁶

Another category of tourist attractions located in vineyards, which could be harnessed by means of wine tourism are the natural reserves and the natural monuments. The fact that they are placed in the close surroundings of wine-growing localities favours their inclusion within the wine trails. The main protected areas of local or national interest from Alba county, which might be included in the tourist trail „Wine Road“ are the natural reserves: „Pădurea Sloboda“ (Aiud),

¹⁶ http://patrimoniu.gov.ro/
"Tăul fără fund" (Băgău), "Pădurea Cârbugurea" (Blaj), "Pădurea de stejar pufos" (Quercus pubescens) of Mirăslău etc., and the natural monuments: "Teiul lui Eminescu" and "Stejarul lui Avram Iancu" of Blaj. A particularly important tourist attraction is "The Botanical Garden of Blaj", the oldest botanical garden in the world established near a secondary school (1881-1883) (Anghel, 1982). At present, the majority of the wine tourism attractions of Alba County are harnessed by means of a tourist itinerary called "Wine Road".

**"Wine Road" in Alba County**

The most effective way of putting to use the tourist potential of a wine-growing region is the so-called "Wine Road" – a tourist trail which includes natural attractions (winescapes, natural reserves and monuments), cultural tourist attractions (castles, mansions, vine and wine museums etc.), technical or industrial attractions (winemaking units, cellars), specific tourist infrastructure (roads and signposts enabling the tourists to arrive at the wineries, accommodation and catering units).

In Alba County, the tourist programme "Wine Road" started at the beginning of 2004, in the framework of a project initiated by Alba County Council, with a non-refundable European grant. Afterwards, the initiatives of the members of some professional and inter-professional wine-related associations and organizations added to this. Their common purpose was to create a tourist product which should combine the vine and wine-related tourist attractions and the cultural-historical and natural ones, for the promotion of the local wines, the increase of the direct sales, especially in the case of the small producers and, last but not least, for the national and international promotion of the general tourist offer of Alba county. Other objectives or the factors involved are: improving of the access infrastructure in the rural localities included in the wine road, setting up signposts and information boards, editing leaflets, brochures, guides etc., in order to promote the project, as well as organizing cultural and recreational events or activities, for the creation of a complex tourist offer, able to satisfy a wide range of tourist motivations.

The tourist itinerary "Wine Road" includes the most important wine centres of Alba County. The trail passes through scenic, historic and cultural interest areas, covering a distance of more than 200 kilometers (figure 7).

The wine tourism attractions are grouped along the National Road DN1 (E81), having the advantage of a quick acces to the four vineyards of Alba county. Thus, from the National Road DN1, which passes from north to south the vineyards Aiud, Alba Iulia and Sebeș, the National Road DN14B (Teiuș - Blaj - Valea Lungă) starts, allowing the access to Târnave vineyard, towards the wine center Blaj, then towards Jidvei, on the County Road DJ 107 (Blaj - Jidvei - Cetatea de Baltă).

Aiud vineyard represents the maximum concentration point of wine tourism attractions. In Aiud vineyard there is an impressive number of cellars that belong to the small producers: six cellars in Aiud and seven cellars in Ciumbrud, plus a winemaking company – SC Domeniile Boieru SRL (figure 8). All these small producers offer wine tastings directly in the cellar, and this is the moment when the tourist can meet the wine-producer and the whole history of the cellar and also the history of the wine, which can be purchased directly from the source.

In order to develop the tourist segment, Domeniile Boieru society intends to build a pension within the vineyard and a restaurant having a seating capacity of 120 seats.

In Aiud, the tourist can visit one of the oldest urban fortresses in Transylvania (13th - 16th centuries), and the Bethlen Castle within, which hosts the History Museum (Stoica, 2009). Near Aiud, we can visit some religious historical monuments, such as: the Church "Nașterea Maicii Domnului" (14th century) in Gârbovița and the Calvin Reformed Church (15th century) in Ciumbrud. The tourists who wish to visit the tourist attractions in Alba Iulia vineyard can follow the route Alba-Iulia - Șard of the National Road DN 74, then they can continue on the County Road DJ 107H in order to visit the cellars, as well as other tourist attractions from Ighiu, Țelna, Bucerdea Vinoasă, Craiva, Cricău and Gâlda de Jos.

17 http://patrimoniu.gov.ro/
At Blaj, a city which has played an important role in the formation of the national consciousness of the Romanian people, the tourists can visit the Reasearch Station of Viticulture and Enology Blaj, Târnave-Blaj Cellar, but also many other cultural and anthropic tourist attractions, such as: the historical monument „Câmpia Libertății”, the Metropolitan Castle, the
History Museum „Augustin Bunea” etc. From Blaj, the wine itinerary heads towards the fascinating vineyards of Jidvei. Here, the tourist can visit the winemaking department of the Jidvei Company, one of the most famous and appreciated Romanian wine brands. The Jidvei Company owns 4 cellars: Jidvei, Bâlcaciu (the first industrial-type cellar of Romania, built in 1958), the Bethlen-Haller Castle of Cetatea de Baltă (figure 9), built in the 15th century in Renaissance style (Sebestyén, 1963) and the Tâuni Cellar (built in 2014).

Information and tourist signalization infrastructure of this route includes trail signs bearing the inscription „Wine Road” and tourist documenting boards. They are placed in the most important points of the trail: at the entrance in every locality included in the „Wine Road”, in the centre of the localities and in the surroundings of the cellars / winemaking units (figure 9). The tourist information panels contain a sketch map with the „Wine Road“ (figure 10) and the wine-growing localities that it passes through.

In Alba County, these equipments are satisfactory, due to their density, as well as to their location. Their role is to inform continually the tourists that they travel along the „Wine Road” and

http://www.castelintransilvania.ro/).
about the leisure, accommodation and catering opportunities. As for the last element, we must mention that the tourist documenting boards do not contain information about the cellars or the wineries along the "Wine Road", the tourist attractions which can be visited or the catering and accommodation opportunities. For an efficient harnessing of the wine tourism potential, and not only, this aspect has to be improved. In order to visit the tourist attractions of an area, first of all, the tourist has to be informed that they exist, therefore, the tourist information and signalization infrastructure is essential for the valorization of the tourist resources of an area.

**Accommodation offer**

Alba county has a wide accommodation offer, more developed in the mountain area, due to the density and variety of the natural tourist attractions (Gozner, 2010; Avram, 2012), but also in the main urban centres, because of the high number of cultural-historical tourist attractions. Alba Iulia Municipality concentrates the largest number of beds – over 1000, distributed in two, three and four-star hotels, as well as in tourist pensions and villas.  

There is a close connection between the number of tourist attractions of an area and the degree of development of the tourist accommodation infrastructure. As we can notice on the map in figure 11, the localities which have a large number of tourist attractions also have a large number of accommodation offers. This aspect – the relationship between the density and the variety of the tourist attractions and the number of accommodation places – is particularly important for the localities included in the tourist trail "Wine Road". In the villages situated in vineyards, tourist pensions-type of lodgings have appeared during the last 3-4 years, as there is an increased interest on the part of the population, of the local authorities and of the cellars or wineries owners concerning the harnessing of the wine-tourism potential. In this respect, some cellars or wineries owners who organize wine tastings, wine-growing and wine-making tours, have established guest houses, as well as restaurants, with the purpose of providing a complete tourist package to the tourists. For example, Jidvei Company has introduced in the tourist circuit the Bethlen - Haller Castle of Cetatea de Baltă, by creating a wine tasting hall and eight rooms for accommodating the company guests.

The tourists who visit Jidvei can find accommodation at the only pension in the village – "Casa dintre vii", built in the year 2011, as a result of the integration of the locality in the tourist trail "Wine Road" and of the increasing accommodation demand. In fact, most of the tourists who visit Jidvei estate choose the lodgings of Blaj municipality. The majority of the accommodation places are in the cities Alba Iulia, Aiud, Sebeș, Blaj and Teiuș, situated on the "Wine Road". As for the accommodation offer in the rural areas included in the "Wine Road", the most of the places are situated in the communes Ighiu, Gârbova, Săscior, Spring and Pianu, followed by Jidvei, Stremt, Gălda de Jos and Cetatea de Baltă. According to the investigations made on the ground, the accommodation demand in the rural localities with a wine-tourism potential is much greater than the existing supply. But, at the level of the wine-producing units, there are projects concerning the building of "guest houses" (pensions) and restaurants. For example, SC Domeniile Boieru SRL of Ciumbrud (Aiud) intends to build a pension in the vineyard, exactly next to the winemaking unit, and also a restaurant having a seating capacity of 120 seats. For such a form of tourism, the tourist demand is made more of the foreign tourists and less of domestic demand, which demonstrates that Romanian tourists have not yet developed a culture of wine discovery, wine tourism being more addressed to a higher class of tourists. Wine-tourism attracts every year over 6000 tourists in the vineyards of Alba County. Following the interviews with the directors or the managers of the wine-production units and with a part of the small producers, we found out that the largest number of visitors per year come to the wine-making complex SC Jidvei SRL, that is 4000-5000 visitors. On the second place is situated Târnave-Blaj Cellar, which is visited annually by about 1000 tourists, followed by SC Domeniile Boieru SRL, of Ciumbrud (Aiud), with an average of 20 tourists per month.

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19 http://www.insse.ro/).
In Ciumbrud there are several cellars belonging to small producers, but the number of the tourists visiting them is very reduced, non-existent in some cases. The situation is the same in the cellars of the small producers of Aiud; unlike the others, the best known of them, the Logos Cellar, offers wine tastings, accommodation and the possibility to serve a meal in the „Două Sălcii“

20 http://www.insse.ro/.
hostel, but we do not have the data concerning the approximate number of tourists who visit this cellar every year. The situation is the same in the case of the other cellars of the small producers in Alba County; until now we cannot speak about a concrete tourist offer from their part and, therefore, we are not dealing with wine-tourism, but with wine-buyers who are offered the possibility of tasting the wines before choosing a variety for purchase. Jidvei Company is the only winemaker which has developed a concrete tourist offer, sold by means of travel agencies.

As for the origins of the tourists, the majority are Hungarians, Germans, Danish, French, Italians, Dutch and less Americans, Canadians and Israelis. As a percentage, 80% are foreigners and the rest are Romanians from different parts of the country. The majority of the tourists visit the winemaking units and the cellars between May and September. At Jidvei Company, in the summer months there are 1 - 2 tourists groups of 30 - 40 people every week.

CONCLUSIONS

In Alba County lie four of the oldest and most famous vineyards of the country, where there are traditional cellars, renowned for the quality of their wines, with particular touches of nobleness and originality. Throughout Alba County there is a balance of the tourist resources, the wine-tourism attractions being situated, normally, along the famous „Wine Road” (cellars, winemaking units, castles, fortresses, historical monuments, places of worship etc.)

The tourists who visit Alba County can take part in wine tastings or have the opportunity of visiting the cellars and the winemaking units in order to learn the wine-making process. For the tourists who are less interested in wine, the variety of tourist resources in Alba County offers the possibility of experiencing other forms or types of tourism (cultural tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism, agrotourism).

The data gathered during the investigation on the ground indicate the fact that wine-tourism takes more and more shape, being supported by the local authorities, in cooperation with professional organizations in the fields of tourism and wine-growing, and, by extension, by the wine-producers.

The interest of the local authorities to develop wine tourism is proved by the projects accomplished until now, such as: the „Wine Road”, the wine-related cultural events, fairs and exhibitions having a wine-growing related subject etc.

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