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The Role of Small Cellars in the Development of Wine Tourism

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Abstract: In the paper, the authors present the popularity of small cellars in the Kakheti region and their role in the development of wine tourism; several small cellars that contribute to the development of tourism in the region are described. The authors also note that the Government of Georgia and the National Wine Agency are actively involved in various incentive projects, which actually allow small cellars to enter the big arena. On their initiative, a new wine festival "Wine Expo" is held every year, where the owners of small wineries take part in Kvevari and Saperavi wine competitions. They bring sommeliers, experts, restaurateurs, distributors from different countries. They visit small wineries, choose wines of interest to them and sell them. In the paper, the authors also conclude that, despite numerous natural and financial problems, Georgia will never disappear from the world map in terms of wine tourism, and this is guaranteed by its rich past and history, as well as organic product and quality-oriented winemakers and small cellar owners, who are taking steps forward for the good of the country.

Key words: Cellars, Wine, Tourism, Kvevri, Festival, Culture, Business.

Introduction. Worldwide, wine is one of the most important drinks that express the country's identity and tells about its past. Accordingly, wine tourism appeared separately in the field of tourism and took an honorable place. Our small country is not exception. A country with eight thousand years of wine culture. With the development of this field of tourism opening the way for our history to be known around the world. In order to store wine, we go to another place loaded with meaning - cellar. Today, the development of small cellars is a prerequisite for the development of wine tourism, therefore it is interesting to get to know Kakheti, the most developed place in Georgia, and evaluate its potential.

The owners of large and small cellars in our country try to improve their quality every year and to please the visitors of the world. Most of them today focus on organic farming depending on demand. Therefore, wine tourism and with it the development of small cellars along with global and local demands is a very relevant and interesting topic.

Therefore, the **purpose** of our work is to determine and evaluate the potential of small cellars in the Kakheti region, which naturally leads to the existence of wine tourism.

Main Part: Kakheti is one of the strong corners of Eastern Georgia, in terms of economic, social, demographic, cultural and historical past, present and great future. The area, which even in the Middle Ages was significantly represented by the cultivation of arable lands. About 80 grape varieties are spread in the region, the most popular of which are Rkatsiteli, Saferavi and Manavi Green. Accordingly, the largest percentage of Georgian cellars and wineries are in this region.[1] Gastronomy, customs, exceptionally interesting culture of making wine in Kakheti and many other details make Kakheti a unique place, so more depth is needed to get to know this place.

The cellar is the building where the Georgian peasant stores the most important product for him, wine, that is why this place is also called the wine house. In the cellar itself, Kvevris are placed in accordance with all the rules, each inhabitant of Kakheti region has a stock of wine vessels with a capacity of about 5-10 thousand liters.

I think it will be very interesting to get to know the history of different cellars.

The number of wine cellars is increasing. If in 2012 this number was about 100, today it has increased almost ten times and is equal to 1000, most of them are small type cellars and the majority are located in Kakheti. Consider a few well-known and popular small wineries:

Lomtadze's Marani (small cellar), which is located in the village of Velistsikhe, is highly distinguished by its content, history and architectural appearance of the cellar. It is built in the 20th century, there are 24 Kvevris made in the years 1900-1905. The whole uniqueness of this cellar is that for more than a century, pressing and production of grapes has not stopped in this place. All of this takes place in the press decorated with brick ornaments left by the ancestors, which gives even more charm to the Lomtadze's wine cellar, because the small wine cellars focus on similar sensitive and important details. The family takes care of Saperavi and Rkatsiteli vineyards and produces high-quality wine with biologically pure products, which is aged using the traditional Kakheti method.[2]

Lomtadze's wine cellar welcomes visitors with many interesting activities. In addition to tasting the delicious wine, the tourist who comes here makes the churchkhela with his own hands, bakes Kakhetian long pointed loaf of bread in the bakery, prepares traditional Kakhetian dishes, participates in the harvest, wine pressing in autumn, and most importantly, looks at the ancient things left by the ancestors of Lomtadze family, as a result of which he gets to know more about the life of a Georgian peasant.

One of the biggest successes of Cellar is the grant received on April 16, 2022, which was received through the micro and small grant program of the "Produce in Georgia" agency. With the involvement of the Government of Georgia, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, as well as the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture, Lomtadze's Cellar received new and necessary inventory for the winery. Such programs allow small entrepreneurs to further develop their business and attract tourists.

Rostomaant Marani (Cellar). Irakli Rostomashvili is owner and inspiration of Rostomaant Winery. In 2013, he participated in the "Expo Georgia" wine exhibition. He noticed that foreigners showed great interest in small family-type wineries and decided to start his own small wineries, although he wanted to do it again in 2013. His ancestors and specifically Irakli's grandfather had a cellar and a vineyard in Akhmeta years ago, but after Sovietization this place was closed and lost its function. The biggest difficulty in this activity turned out to be that the grandfather did not have time to study this case for his grandson. Due to lack of information, the entrepreneur thought that growing, pressing and selling wine was the easiest, although, of course, these processes are the most difficult. Self-development and building everything from scratch turned out to be a motivation for the young winemaker. He went through a lot of training, master classes, got an education in this field and did all this step by step along with the production. Today, his wine is sold in Germany in small quantities, but with great approval, and as Mr. Irakli himself says, this is just the beginning.[3]

Gigo Papa's Cellar. In the village of Grem, Kvareli municipality, a small cellar of the eighteenth century is built, which is connected with the name of grandfather Gigo, because he was the first owner and traditional Kakhuri wine maker in this place. Today, fortunately, this historic winery is successfully functioning with the help of descendants. A few years ago, family of Iagorashvili restored the wine cellar in order to produce and finish the delicious Kakhuri wine from the time of grandfather Gigo. It is noteworthy that the family did not cover any walls, windows or floors with expensive materials. It is this antiquity that is unique to them, thus they feel the existence of grandfather Gigo even today in this centuries-old cellar.

With the involvement of the state, many family-type cellars were opened, with their own support, many of them received state funding and had financial resources to improve the infrastructure. There are many master classes, wine festivals, exhibitions where the owners of small wineries have the opportunity to compete and introduce themselves to foreign tourists. With such involvement, many of them have taken the name of our country in abroad. Despite numerous natural and financial problems, Georgia will never disappear from the world map in terms of wine tourism, and this is guaranteed by its rich past and history, as well as organic product and quality-oriented winemakers and small cellar owners who are taking steps forward for the good of the country.[5]

The Government of Georgia and the National Wine Agency are actively involved in various incentive projects, which actually allow small wineries to enter the big arena. On their initiative, a new wine festival "Wine Expo" is held every year, where the owners of small cellars take part in Kvevari and Saperavi wine competitions. They bring sommeliers, experts, restaurateurs, distributors from different countries. They visit small wineries, choose wines of interest to them and sell them. It is also interesting that a different kind of buyer goes to those exhibitions where large wineries are presented, and to the exhibitions where small wineries are mainly visited by restaurateurs, because they are looking for different and unique tastes for their establishments in different parts of the world. Thanks to this type of exhibition, one of the small cellar wines is presented in the London hotel and Copenhagen restaurant, which is among the top five restaurants in the world. It is very important to take our products outside the borders, in 2020, a natural wine festival was held in the city of Angers in France, which is organized every year. The owners of small Georgian cellars also took part in the exhibition. "Les penitents", "La Div Botei" and "Salon Salon" are the three exhibitions that hosted Georgian wine and we can say loudly that it received its taste qualities.[4] The country, which could not even be found on the map, is known today with great interest. Winemakers are invited to this exhibition by the organizers themselves, and then they spread the treasures of Georgian culture at their own expense.

Conclusion. Thus, on the example of our country, namely the Kakheti region, we can say that wine tourism has the greatest potential for development. An example of this is that many family-type cellars were opened with the involvement of the state, with their support, many of them received state funding and had financial resources to improve the infrastructure. The country's government also supports the development of viticulture and winemaking, both in terms of agriculture and wine tourism. Owners of small wineries try to establish themselves as much as possible with superior, different Kvevri wine on the markets of the USA, Japan-China, and European countries.

Despite numerous natural and financial problems, Georgia will never disappear from the world map in terms of wine tourism, and this is guaranteed by its rich past and history, as well as organic product and quality-oriented winemakers and small cellar owners who are taking steps forward for the good of the country.

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